

**Learning to Become Uzbekistani: Schooling and Youth Discourses of National  
Identities through the Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**

by  
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**THESIS**

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### **Declaration of Originality**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no materials previously published or written by another person, or substantial proportions of material which have been submitted for the award of any other course or degree at NU or any other educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. This thesis is the result of my own independent work, except where otherwise stated, and the views expressed here are my own.

Author's signature:

Date:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized loop that starts with a small circle on the left, loops around to the right, and then crosses itself to form a large, elongated shape.

16 April, 2025

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*Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to all those who struggle with a sense of belonging, to those who feel they do not “fit in”. I hope for a world where there are fewer “others”.*

## Abstract

### **Learning to Become Uzbekistani: Schooling and Youth Discourses of National Identities through the Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**

Since 1991, Uzbekistan, a multi-ethnic Central Asian state where 60% of the population is under 30, has placed youth at the centre of nation-building. Intending to fill the void left by socialist ideologies, constructing a new national identity has become a political priority. As powerful state institutions where “official knowledge” is disseminated, schools have emerged as the primary channel to instil new national values and patriotism in youth. However, the relationship between education and national identity in Uzbekistan is largely underexplored, and empirical studies are almost non-existent. Notably, Uzbekistani youth perspectives on their national identities and their relationship to the nation remain unknown. To fill this knowledge gap, drawing upon empirical data, including participant observations, photo elicitations, oral history interviews, focus group discussions with university students from various social groups, and textbook analysis, this ethnographically informed study critically examines the role of school education in shaping youth national identities in a complex post-socialist setting. Informed by post-structuralism, which captures identity as non-substantial and shaped through differences with “otherness”, the study explores how school discourses construct national identity through “internal/external others”. It also examines the intersections of national markers such as ethnicity, gender, and religion. By privileging the diverse realities of Uzbekistani youth, the study further analyses how youth learn, perform, negotiate, and resist institutional discourses of national identity construction. The study reveals that school discourses promote positive self-national images of Uzbekistan by extensively drawing boundaries between “us” (Uzbekistan) and “them” (foreign countries and the socialist past). While these discourses do not promote any particular “antagonistic external others”, the “us/them” binary is mostly hierarchical, portraying Uzbekistan as superior. Furthermore, the study indicates the active promotion of ethnicity, gender, and religion as national markers in school discourses. Although some textbook discourses promote inclusivity and equity, these markers primarily centre around dominant social groups such as Uzbeks, men, and Muslims, establishing “internal others” who do not conform. Simultaneously, reflecting the state’s authoritarian secularism, Islam emerged as a complex national marker that youth navigated and negotiated. Despite a singular curriculum, Uzbek- and Russian-medium school practices differed in how they instil national identities, reflecting

the role of hidden curriculum in the complex post-Soviet environment. The analysis shows that for many Uzbekistani youth, particularly those from dominant groups, national identity discourses largely overlap with school discourses. However, tensions among youth from different social groups are underscored, especially along ethnic, gender, religious, and linguistic lines. Minority groups expressed frustrations and resistance towards school discourses, revealing discrepancies in their sense of belonging to Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the study shed light on the parallel worlds of students from Uzbek- and Russian-medium schools, who coexist with minimal interaction and distinct national identities. The study highlighted the key role of school education in shaping youth national identities. While acknowledging Uzbekistan's multi-ethnic and post-socialist context, it emphasises the importance of constructing national identities through less hierarchical "us/them" binaries that reinforce stereotypes of "external others". Reflecting the population's heterogeneity, the study calls for more inclusive school discourses, and given the discrepancies in national belonging and tensions among different social groups, less ethnocentric, patriarchal, and authoritarian national markers are crucial for social cohesion.

*Keywords:* ethnicity, gender, national identity, school education, religion, Uzbekistan

## Table of Contents

Declaration of Originality .....	ii
Acknowledgments.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Why National Identity Matters .....	1
My National Identities – Where It All Began .....	2
Why Uzbekistan? .....	3
Research Aims and Questions .....	4
Contribution .....	6
Definition of Key Terms .....	7
Structure of the Thesis Definition of Key Terms.....	8
Chapter 2: Research Context .....	10
Introduction.....	10
Historical Processes of “Making Uzbekistan” .....	10
<i>Evolving Notion of Nationhood</i> .....	10
<i>Geography</i> .....	15
<i>Ethnic Composition</i> .....	17
<i>Political Landscape</i> .....	18
<i>Language</i> .....	20
<i>Islam</i> .....	21
<i>De-Islamisation in 1930s</i> .....	22
<i>Proliferations of Islam in 1980s</i> .....	23
Youth in Uzbekistan .....	26
<i>Youth Demography</i> .....	26
<i>Youth Framing Policies</i> .....	27
<i>Youth Opportunities and Inequalities</i> .....	30
Education in Uzbekistan .....	38
<i>Education System</i> .....	38
<i>Curriculum and Textbooks</i> .....	41
<i>Language of Instruction</i> .....	43
Education in Uzbekistan Education and National Identity Construction .....	44
<i>Before Independence – Soviet Identity</i> .....	44
<i>Post-independence</i> .....	46
Conclusion .....	48
Chapter 3: Literature Review .....	50
Introduction.....	50

Conceptualising Identity .....	50
<i>Identity in Fluidity</i> .....	50
<i>Self-Regulated Identity</i> .....	51
<i>Constitutive “Other”: Deconstruction Binary Oppositions</i> .....	52
National Identity .....	53
<i>Unifying National Identity: Nation-Building Project</i> .....	53
<i>Cultivating National Awareness: Banal Nationalism</i> .....	54
<i>Hierarchised Binary Oppositions: Stereotyping “Others”</i> .....	55
Gender and National Identity .....	56
<i>The Discursive Construction of Gender: Beyond Binary Construct</i> .....	56
<i>The Agency and Constraints in Gender Performativity</i> .....	58
<i>The Gender National Beings: Dynamics of Symbolism, Social Positions and Power</i> .....	59
Ethnicity and National Identity .....	61
<i>Socially Formed Ethnic Boundaries: Deconstructing “Groupism”</i> .....	61
<i>Hybrid Identities: Process of Cultural Translation</i> .....	63
<i>Mimicry in Post-Colonial “Third Space”</i> .....	64
Religion and National Identity .....	65
<i>Religion: Boundary Marker of Internal and External “Others”</i> .....	65
<i>Secularism and Religious Hierarchies: Shaping Public and Private Spheres</i> .....	66
<i>Reframing Agency: Women’s Religious Practices and Identity</i> .....	67
Conceptualising Youth.....	69
Conceptualising Education .....	71
Education and National Identity .....	74
Empirical Research on Education and Youth National Identities .....	76
Summary .....	78
Chapter 4: Research Methodology.....	80
Introduction.....	80
Ontological and Epistemological Foundation: Post-Structuralism.....	80
Ethnographically-informed Research Design .....	83
Conducting Research in a Non-Native Environment.....	85
Cross-Language Research: Involvement of Interpreter .....	87
Youth Participants: Navigating the Recruitment, Retention and Loss .....	89
Research Methods .....	92
<i>Textbook Analysis</i> .....	94
<i>Participant Observation</i> .....	96
<i>Photo Elicitation</i> .....	97
<i>Oral History Interview</i> .....	98

<i>Focus Group Discussions</i> .....	100
<i>School Visits</i> .....	102
<i>Field Notes</i> .....	102
Data Analysis .....	103
<i>Analytical Processes</i> .....	104
<i>Foucauldian Post-Structuralism Discourse Analysis</i> .....	104
<i>Textbook Analysis</i> .....	106
<i>Photo Analysis</i> .....	107
<i>Oral History Interviews</i> .....	107
<i>Participants' Observations and Focus Group Discussions</i> .....	107
Navigating the Fieldwork: Inbetweeners' Positionalities .....	108
<i>Foreign and Eurasian Identities</i> .....	109
<i>A Lone Female Researcher in a Patriarchal Society</i> .....	109
<i>Ambivalent Non-Religiousness</i> .....	110
<i>Interpreter's Positionalities</i> .....	111
Trustworthiness of Post-structuralist Cross-Language Inquiry .....	112
Ethical Considerations .....	114
<i>Researcher-Teacher</i> .....	115
<i>Confidentiality</i> .....	116
<i>Consent</i> .....	116
Conclusion .....	117
Chapter 5: Constructing Uzbekistani Self through "External Others" .....	118
Introduction .....	118
High Morality .....	118
<i>Morality as National Values</i> .....	119
<i>Immoral West</i> .....	128
Peaceful Nation .....	133
<i>Conflict-torn Foreign Countries</i> .....	133
<i>Absence of Antagonistic "External Others"</i> .....	139
National Independence .....	144
<i>Disrupting the Soviet Past</i> .....	144
<i>Post-Independence National Prosperity</i> .....	149
<i>National Symbols</i> .....	156
National Glory .....	165
<i>Glories at International Arena</i> .....	165
Conclusion .....	170
Chapter 6: Becoming Uzbekistani through "Gendering" .....	171

Introduction.....	171
Hierarchised Gendered National Identities .....	172
<i>Invisible Women</i> .....	172
<i>Less Valued Women</i> .....	174
<i>Masculine National Pride</i> .....	182
<i>Gendered Social Positions</i> .....	188
Gendered Citizenry Duties.....	193
<i>Gendered Duties</i> .....	193
<i>Being a Man: From “Bad Boys” to Defender of the Nation</i> .....	199
<i>Being a Woman: Embodied National Culture and Honour</i> .....	207
Gendered Dress Code and Disciplines.....	211
<i>Gendered Dress Code</i> .....	211
<i>Gendered Disciplinary Practices</i> .....	217
Conclusion .....	225
Chapter 7: Reconceptualising Ethnicity: Uzbekistani and “Uzbekness” .....	227
Introduction.....	227
“Uzbekness” as a National Marker .....	228
<i>Uzbek National Heroes</i> .....	228
<i>Inter-Ethnic Harmony</i> .....	240
Various Uzbek and Russian Medium-Schools: Disparities and Tensions.....	246
<i>Diminished National Markers in Russian-Medium Schools</i> .....	246
<i>Hybrid National Identities</i> .....	253
Conclusion .....	256
Chapter 8: Navigating Uzbekistani Secularism and Cultural Islam .....	258
Introduction.....	258
Cultural Islam: Religion as Moral Values .....	259
<i>Religion as Regulatory Moral Foundation</i> .....	259
<i>Islam as a National Marker</i> .....	260
Negotiating Secularism and Piety .....	266
<i>Authoritarian Secularism</i> .....	266
<i>School as a Dilemmatic Space: Religion and Gender</i> .....	270
Conclusion .....	275
Conclusion .....	277
Introduction.....	277
Shaping the Concept of “Uzbekistani” in relation to “External Others” .....	278
<i>Balancing Interethnic Harmony with “Uzbekness”</i> .....	279
<i>Dual Pathways to Identity: Experiences in Uzbek- and Russian- Medium Schools</i> .....	280

<i>Construction of Gendered National subjectivities in Uzbekistan</i> .....	282
<i>Negotiating Faith and Secularism: The Role of Islam in Shaping Moral Values</i> .....	283
<i>Overall Findings: The Role of School Education in Constructing Uzbekistani Youth National Identities</i> .....	284
Contributions: What this Research Brings to the Field .....	286
Implications: Understanding National Identities amidst Global Uncertainties .....	288
<i>Future Research Directions: Expanding Explorations of Uzbekistani Identity</i> .....	290
Looking Back at My Research Journey .....	292
References.....	295
Appendices.....	318
Appendix A: Photo Elicitation.....	318
Appendix B: Oral History Interview Schedule .....	319
Appendix C: Focus Group Discussions Schedule .....	326
Appendix D: Script for Oral Invitation to the Research .....	332
Appendix E: Email Attachment for the Participants' Recruitment .....	336
Appendix F: Email Attachment for the Participants' Recruitment.....	338
Appendix G: Written Consent Form to Participate in Observation.....	344
Appendix H: Written Consent Form to Participate in the Photo Elicitation.....	353
Appendix I: Written Consent Form to Participate in the Interview .....	362
Appendix J: Written Consent Form to Participate in the Focus Group Discussions .....	372
Appendix K: Ethics Approval.....	383
Appendix L: CITI Training Certificate.....	384

### **List of Tables**

Table 1 <i>Youth Policies in Uzbekistan since Independence</i> .....	28
Table 2 <i>Estimated Number of Central Asians Participating in Conflicts in Syria and Iraq since 2011</i> .....	29
Table 3 <i>Female Ratios in Leadership Positions</i> .....	37
Table 4 <i>Provision of Children and Youth from Ministries during the Independence Day Celebrations</i> .....	47
Table 5 <i>Youth Definition across the UN Agencies</i> .....	69
Table 6 <i>Types and Purposes of Data Collection Methods</i> .....	93
Table 7 <i>Analysed Textbooks</i> .....	95
Table 8 <i>Youth in Participant Observation</i> .....	96
Table 9 <i>The Number of Participants Who Shared Photos</i> .....	97
Table 10 <i>The Number of Participants in the Oral History Interviews</i> .....	99
Table 11 <i>The Number of Participants in the Focus Group Discussions</i> .....	101
Table 12 <i>Moral and Behavioural Values as National Pride</i> .....	121
Table 13 <i>Morally Superior Uzbekistani</i> .....	124
Table 14 <i>Morally Inferior Foreign Countries</i> .....	126

Table 15 <i>Document Conflict-Affected Foreign Countries</i> .....	134
Table 16 <i>Victims of Sects Abroad</i> .....	136
Table 17 <i>Emphasis on Uzbekistan's Peace and Stability through "External Others"</i> .....	138
Table 18 <i>Military Class Practices</i> .....	141
Table 19 <i>School Discourses on the Soviet Time</i> .....	145
Table 20 <i>Document Islam Karimov as National Pride</i> .....	150
Table 21 <i>Contribution to Uzbekistan through Various Spheres</i> .....	154
Table 22 <i>Activities during Lineika</i> .....	161
Table 23 <i>Commonly Held School Celebrations around the National Symbols</i> .....	162
Table 24 <i>National Symbols Evoking National Pride</i> .....	163
Table 25 <i>National Pride in Sportsmen in the Grade 10 Textbook</i> .....	167
Table 26 <i>International Sports Competitions Evoking National Awareness</i> .....	168
Table 27 <i>Gendered Values Attributed to Mothers and Fathers</i> .....	176
Table 28 <i>Gendered Power Asymmetries in Uzbekistan: Youth Perspectives</i> .....	178
Table 29 <i>Gendered Values Attributed to Mothers and Fathers</i> .....	180
Table 30 <i>Gendered Historical Figures as National Pride</i> .....	185
Table 31 <i>Gendered Social Positions</i> .....	191
Table 32 <i>Textbook Discourses of Gendered Family Responsibilities</i> .....	194
Table 33 <i>Youth Discourses of Gendered Duties</i> .....	197
Table 34 <i>Youth Gendered Descriptions of "Good" Girls and "Bad" Boys</i> .....	201
Table 35 <i>Typical Dress Code at the Participants' Schools</i> .....	213
Table 36 <i>Typical Dress Code at the Participants' Schools Examples of Dress Code Inspections</i> .....	215
Table 37 <i>Terms Related to the Concept of Discipline</i> .....	217
Table 38 <i>Differences in Disciplinary Actions between Uzbek- and Russian-Medium Schools</i> .....	221
Table 39 <i>Differences Uzbek Historical Figures as National Heroes</i> .....	228
Table 40 <i>Exemplary Uzbek Historical Figures</i> .....	231
Table 41 <i>Participants' Religious Faiths</i> .....	265
Table 42 <i>Participants' Religious Practices</i> .....	267
Table 43 <i>Family's Roles in Learning Islam</i> .....	268

### List of Figure

Figure 1 <i>Uzbekistan and Neighbouring Countries</i> .....	16
Figure 2 <i>Conflicts in Enclaves</i> .....	17
Figure 3 <i>A Street Panel on "New Uzbekistan" in Tashkent</i> .....	19
Figure 4 <i>Population Growth by Broad Age Groups, 1950-2100</i> .....	27
Figure 5 <i>Location of Higher Education Institutions</i> .....	32
Figure 6 <i>Location of Higher Education Institutions Youth Ratios Accessing Higher Education in Uzbekistan in 2021</i> .....	33
Figure 7 <i>Students' Families Trying to Secure a Dormitory on Campus</i> .....	33
Figure 8 <i>Students' Families Trying to Secure a Dormitory on Campus Use of the Internet among Uzbekistan Youth</i> .....	34
Figure 9 <i>Unemployment rates in Uzbekistan per Regions</i> .....	35
Figure 10 <i>Prevalent Patriarchal Gender Norms</i> .....	36
Figure 11 <i>Wildly Accepted Physical Violence against "Disobedient" Wives</i> .....	37
Figure 12 <i>Wildly Reformed Education System in Uzbekistan since 2017-2018 School Year</i> ..	39
Figure 13 <i>Double-Shift Schooling in General Secondary Education by Region</i> .....	40

Figure 14 <i>School Textbooks Promoting Soviet Values</i> .....	45
Figure 15 <i>Ethnic Composition of Tashkent</i> .....	91
Figure 16 <i>Home Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis within the Power-Discourses-Knowledge Nexus</i> .....	106
Figure 17 <i>A Corridor Display: “Only a Healthy Nation and a Healthy Generation Can Build a Great State”</i> .....	123
Figure 18 <i>President Mirziyoyev’s Quote on Highly Spiritual Youth and National Values at School Entrance</i> .....	123
Figure 19 <i>Home Immoral Western Cartoons</i> .....	129
Figure 20 <i>Cartoons for the Exercises</i> .....	130
Figure 21 <i>Cartoons Goths Culture Described as Immoral</i> .....	130
Figure 22 <i>Conflict-Prone Foreign Countries and Peaceful Uzbekistan</i> .....	133
Figure 23 <i>Foreign Countries Affected by Extremism</i> .....	136
Figure 24 <i>Military Subject Textbooks during the Soviet Times</i> .....	140
Figure 25 <i>Pupils Wearing Gas Masks during the Military Lesson</i> .....	141
Figure 26 <i>Illustration of Opposing Westerners and Easterners</i> .....	143
Figure 27 <i>The Picture of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Along with Other National Symbols</i> .....	152
Figure 28 <i>President Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s Biography Next to the National Flag Picture in the Corridor</i> .....	152
Figure 29 <i>The 30 Most Mentioned Words in the G10 and G11 Tarbiya Textbooks</i> .....	154
Figure 30 <i>National Symbols Displayed around the Blackboard</i> .....	157
Figure 31 <i>National Symbols at the School Entrance Hall</i> .....	158
Figure 32 <i>“Uzbekistan - My Homeland Is Me!”: Description of National Flag, Emblem, and Anthem</i> .....	159
Figure 33 <i>National Symbols with Descriptions and Patriotic Messages Displayed in a Classroom</i> .....	160
Figure 34 <i>Phone Cases with the Uzbekistani National Emblem and Flag</i> .....	164
Figure 35 <i>Uzbekistani Boys Who Won at Olympiads in the STEM Field</i> .....	166
Figure 36 <i>Visual Representation of Gender</i> .....	173
Figure 37 <i>Gender Representation through Employments</i> .....	174
Figure 38 <i>Young Women with Disabilities in Low-Wage Sectors</i> .....	176
Figure 39 <i>Number of Visual Figures with a Medal or the Uzbekistani National Flag</i> .....	182
Figure 40 <i>Men Pictured with the National Flag and Medals</i> .....	183
Figure 41 <i>Women Pictured with the National Flag</i> .....	183
Figure 42 <i>Young Athletes with Disabilities</i> .....	184
Figure 43 <i>Involvement of Digital Devices in Male Islamic Radicalisation</i> .....	200
Figure 44 <i>Men Depicted as Criminals</i> .....	200
Figure 45 <i>Female Images in the Military Textbook</i> .....	202
Figure 46 <i>Mural Decorations in the Military Subject Classroom</i> .....	204
Figure 47 <i>Soldiers Who Lost Their Lives Displayed in the School Staircase</i> .....	204
Figure 48 <i>School Graduates Who Joined the Military Service Displayed in the School Staircase</i> .....	205
Figure 49 <i>Women Presented in Traditional Uzbek Fabrics</i> .....	207
Figure 50 <i>Female Pupils Dancing in Uzbek Traditional Clothes for Navro’z</i> .....	208
Figure 51 <i>Zulfiya with Her Five Grandsons</i> .....	208
Figure 52 <i>Gendered Clothing Rules</i> .....	212
Figure 53 <i>A Display of “Correct Uniforms” in Open School Space</i> .....	215
Figure 54 <i>Awarding a High-Performing Pupil during Lineika</i> .....	224

Figure 55 <i>Certificate Awarded to a High-Performing Pupil in a District Uzbek Language Competition</i> .....	224
Figure 56 <i>President Mirziyoyev’s Quote on National History at School Entrance</i> .....	233
Figure 57 <i>Entrance Uzbek Historical Figure’s Display at a School Entrance</i> .....	234
Figure 58 <i>School Trips to Historical Cities</i> .....	235
Figure 59 <i>Me Taking Pictures with the Statues of Amir Timur and Alisher Navoi</i> .....	237
Figure 60 <i>Tarbiya Textbooks Offered in Seven Different Languages</i> .....	240
Figure 61 <i>People in Traditional Clothes of Different Ethnic Groups</i> .....	241
Figure 62 <i>Disparities in the Stringency of School Uniforms in Uzbek and Russian-medium Schools</i> .....	250
Figure 63 <i>Frequency of Religion-Related Words in the G10 and G11 Textbooks</i> .....	260
Figure 64 <i>Illustrations Indicating Islam as Part of the Uzbekistani Society: Chapter “Family Values”</i> .....	261

## Introduction

### Why National Identity Matters

A nation can be understood as a socially and discursively constructed “imagined political community” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6), encompassing heterogeneous social groups distinguished by ethnicity, religion, language, sex, gender and class. Thus, the construction of national identity is indispensable for states to foster internal coherence. This process is especially significant in emerging states, including post-colonial contexts, where state formation often precedes the nation (Brubaker, 1996). In such contexts, states actively promote the construction of a unified national identity through state institutions, including education, which serves as a key domain for legitimising sovereignty and cultivating a new national awareness (Durrani et al., 2022).

Historically, Western social theory and philosophy have tended to view identity through a Cartesian lens, conceptualising it as a “self-sustaining subject” (Hall, 2011, p. 1). However, post-structuralism challenges this essentialist notion of a “true self” or a “substantive core behind identity” (Oksala, 1998, p. 42). It treats knowledge and “realities” as social constructs, asserting that identity lacks a stable existence. Instead, identity is fluid, empty, and perpetually in flux, embodying a “process of becoming” and not a static “being” (Hall, 1996). Thus, identity is continuously negotiated and redefined rather than being an inherent or essential category. Without a stable core, identity relies on discursively construed points of reference through which individuals can understand and define themselves within particular social and cultural contexts. Identity needs both material and symbolic frontiers to define what the “self” is; thus, it only can be shaped by marking “its ‘difference’ from its others” (Hall, 1997, p. 235). Nationalist discourses, therefore, often seek to establish internal coherence by dividing society into “us” and “them”, thereby forging a unified national identity in opposition to the “other” (Ozkirimli, 2020). In this process aiming at constructing positive self-national images, the “us/them” binary is most often hierarchical, with “others” being depicted as inferior, threatening, or stereotyped (Hall, 1996). This hierarchical distinction not only serves to solidify the national unity but also fosters exclusion and marginalisation of “others”, heightening tensions between different social groups.

School education, as a state institution that disseminates “official knowledge” (Apple, 1979), is a powerful tool for instilling national consciousness. By crystallising

socially constructed “truths” and “realities”, education naturalises the “us/them” binary distinction and constructs national identity (Carretero et al., 2012; Durrani et al., 2022). Schools, through both the official and hidden curriculum, including everyday school activities, serve as influential spaces where children and young people develop their understanding of themselves in relation to their and other nations (Apple, 2004; Giroux, 2005). The authoritative account of school discourses helps shape students’ perceptions of their social positions as citizens, aligning them with national political visions and contributing to the formation of the nation’s future. Understanding the role of schools in shaping national identity is therefore vital, as schools are key sites where both the nation and its citizens are constructed. In these spaces, young people are socialised into constructed norms and values that define social realities to which they are expected to conform. This process also influences their understanding of their relationships with “others”, both internal and external.

### **My National Identities – Where It All Began**

As half-Japanese and half-French, growing up in an intercultural family where contrasting cultural and societal values, norms, traditions, beliefs, and expectations intersected, the question of national identity has been a central theme throughout my life. While attending Japanese public schools, where non-Japanese students were almost nonexistent, a sense of discomfort grew, especially during my secondary education years. Although I was not fully conscious of my French identity then, highly homogenising and certain nationalistic school practices, such as military-style marching, singing the national anthem, and an overused ethnocentric expression of “we, Japanese”, alongside rigid dress codes, made me increasingly uneasy. Norms were presented as a singular epistemology and absolute reality without possible alternatives, and conformity for collective harmony was beautified. Over time, a profound sense of incompatibility with school discourses developed in me, gradually becoming frustrated, leading me to question and defy these norms, often being labelled as a “troublemaker” and facing punishment. Despite not encountering significant discrimination and generally having positive memories of my school, the relentless push to conform to “Japanese norms” by teachers and classmates left me feeling not being understood and suffocated. After completing my higher education and spending a decade living in France, my French identity grew, realising that my discomfort in school was not a reflection of my personality, as I had believed, but rather

the result of the normalising nationalistic educational discourses in Japan, which left no room for my French-rooted alternative epistemologies. Today, although I try to straddle both of my national identities, I often encounter challenges as people attempt to frame me within a singular national category, either Japanese or French. I still struggle to feel a sense of belonging to a nation that I can refer to as “us” without hesitation. In Japanese society, where I am constantly regarded as a foreigner, the highly homogeneous and nationalistic norms do not resonate with me. Simultaneously, after nearly a decade since I left France, I find it difficult to call it “home” as well. As the question of my national identity remains unresolved, my research topic, which explores the relationship between education and national identity, holds personal significance for me.

### **Why Uzbekistan?**

“Why Uzbekistan?” is probably one of the most frequently asked questions regarding my doctoral research. My first visit to Uzbekistan was nearly a decade ago, under the previous regime of the first president, Islam Karimov. During my months-long stay in a multi-ethnic rural area of the Ferghana region, situated in the eastern part of Uzbekistan and bordering Kyrgyzstan, I was struck by how openly, proudly and regularly young people expressed their Uzbekistani identity, something I had not experienced or witnessed in either Japan or France. In Uzbekistan, between my two home countries, I felt I might find answers to my lifelong questions about national identity. However, my time in Ferghana, while staying with a local family, gradually revealed more complex and multiple realities among these young people, who shared not only their pride, aspirations and hopes as Uzbekistani youth but also their struggles and frustrations while navigating nationalistic and normalising national discourses. Although the broader political, economic and social landscapes differed from those in my countries, I could not help but see some parallels between these young people, particularly those from minority groups, and my younger self.

In 2017, I conducted my first research in Ferghana for my master’s thesis, which focused on youth national identities in relation to school discourses in this multi-ethnic region. Through an ethnographic study involving two months of immersion within the community, I followed five young people aged 18 to 22, including both women and men, from different ethnic backgrounds: Uzbek, Tajik and Russian (Ozawa, 2017). The research revealed that compulsory education actively promoted national identity through different

subjects, particularly history. Participants' discourses on national identities highlighted the strong influence of educational discourses on their national identities, notably with the emphasis on moral and cultural values as their national markers, as well as their perceptions of foreigners, who were often regarded as morally inferior. Whilst all participants distinctly identified with their ethnic groups, the extent of their sense of national belonging varied. The national identities of Uzbek and Tajik participants largely aligned with the school discourses, whereas a Russian participant indicated discontent against the ethnocentric educational discourses of Uzbekistan, expressing his limited sense of belonging to Uzbekistan. Simultaneously, many Tajik-origin youth emphasised that they have become like ethnic Uzbeks. However, given that it was a small-scale, short-term, and my first research in Uzbekistan, I could not further capture my participants' discourses of national identities in-depth. Additionally, my philosophical stances and conceptual understanding of national identity were not fully developed at that time, leading to a lack of focus and somewhat limited qualitative comprehension of the relationship between school education and national identity.

Therefore, through my doctoral research, by building on my previous findings and methodological and conceptual understanding, I sought to explore Uzbekistani school and youth discourses of national identities more comprehensively. This time, I conducted a more in-depth ethnographically informed study grounded in a post-structuralist framework of national identity and related concepts. This involved examining not only how youth express themselves but also how they perform, negotiate, and resist school discourses as both subjects and agents of national discourses. Moreover, by underscoring the specific context of Uzbekistan, I explored nuances and complexities of national identity through the intersectionality of various national markers, including ethnicity, gender, and religion, all of which are intricately intertwined within power dynamics that shape national identity. Hence, by shedding light on the voices of Uzbekistani youth regarding their national identities, I hope to create a space where their voices and multiple realities are heard and acknowledged, an opportunity I wish I had 25 years ago.

### **Research Aims and Questions**

With 60% of the population under 30 (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], 2020), Uzbekistani authorities regard youth as vital in nation-building processes (Five Priority Development Areas 2017-2021), as the nation's future,

positioning school education as a key state institution for disseminating new national values and norms. However, national and state-endorsed discourses often promote asymmetric national images, where different social groups are represented unequally. Meanwhile, inequalities in youth opportunities persist, notably affecting ethnic minorities, women and devout religious believers (Chong, 2007; Rickleton, 2023; The World Bank, 2024; U.S. Department of State, 2016). Promoting asymmetric national images through institutionalised discourses potentially exacerbates inequalities, not only marginalising them but also fuelling grievances and creating drivers of tensions and conflicts among youth. In such context, the understanding of how schooling shapes youth national identities is crucial to ensure inclusive and cohesive nation-building. Nevertheless, although the political and economic dimensions of nation-building processes in Uzbekistan have been extensively studied, the education realm concerning national identity is largely underexplored. Furthermore, empirical research on the perspectives of Uzbekistani youth regarding their nation is almost non-existent. Therefore, to fill this existing knowledge gap, I decided to conduct an ethnographically informed post-structuralist study to explore the relationship between schooling and youth national identities in Uzbekistan. Considering the heterogeneity among youth, my research attempts to capture their different voices and experiences, highlighting the diverse realities faced by Uzbekistani youth, including their struggles and tensions. By doing so, I aim to identify potential areas for betterment that promote a peaceful, just and cohesive society. To achieve this purpose, my research was guided by the following research questions:

**Central question:**

How do Uzbekistani youth construct national identities through school education?

**Sub-questions:**

- In what ways do school discourses construct Uzbekistani national identities through differences from “others” and representations of self?
- In what ways do ethnicity, gender, and religion intersect school discourses of national identities?
- In what ways do youth learn, perform, negotiate and resist school discourses of national identity?

## **Contribution**

My research addresses the existing knowledge gap regarding the relationship between education and national identity in Uzbekistan, particularly within the context of the country's demographic dividend and the state's emphasis on youth development, including the construction of national identity. The voices of young people are particularly important since they represent the future of society, which will either become a trigger of social change for a better, cohesive, and inclusive society or exacerbate inequalities, creating further instability in society. There is a notable scarcity of empirical research exploring school discourses from the perspectives of youth, not only in Uzbekistan and Central Asia but also globally (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Silova, 2018; Sobe, 2018), and my study offers a significant contribution to this gap. While much has been written about the role of education in shaping national identity, studies which have specifically examined the outcomes of these school discourses from the viewpoints of the students themselves are still limited. Understanding how young people perceive and internalise the national identity messages conveyed in schools is crucial for a deeper understanding of the broader social and political impacts of these educational practices. By focusing on the lived experiences of students, my research provides valuable insights into the outcomes of educational policies and the ways in which they influence youth national identities. In doing so, it contributes not only to the academic field but also to our understanding of contemporary national identity formation in the region and beyond. From this perspective, this study also contributes to the post-structuralist analysis of identity construction in schools by critically examining the power-discourse-knowledge. It is important to note that youth struggling to develop a sense of belonging tend to isolate themselves from society (Tucker, 2018), making them particularly vulnerable to depression, suicides, and criminal activities, as well as religious radicalisation that provides a sense of belonging and a "feeling of self-importance" (Wali, 2016, p. 85). As Uzbekistan's new regime has undertaken extensive political and socio-economic reforms since 2017, prioritising youth development and well-being in response to the country's significant youth demographic, there is an urgency to understand how school education shapes youth national identities and addresses existing inequalities and injustices.

Given that Uzbekistan is a post-socialist, double landlocked, multi-ethnic country surrounded by all the other Central Asian nations and Afghanistan, and with the largest population in Central Asia, it is not immune to the broader regional dynamics shaping the

area (Seymour, 2019). In this unique geopolitical context, understanding the national identities of Uzbekistani youth is crucial not only for the country's internal stability but also for fostering broader regional peace. Moreover, the recent unrest in Karakalpakstan, where protests erupted against constitutional changes aimed at reducing the region's autonomy, highlights the urgent need to address internal challenges to national unity and social cohesion (International Crisis Group, 2022; Pannier, 2022). These internal complexities are further compounded by broader regional and global factors. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, for example, has significantly amplified nationalist sentiments in both countries, with ripple effects across the region (Beissinger, 2023). In this increasingly nationalistic climate, where education is often weaponised to stoke such sentiments and fuel tensions between nations, it becomes even more important to examine the role of school education in shaping youth national identities (Pherali, 2024). In light of these factors, my research offers valuable insights into how education contributes to the construction of national identity among Uzbekistani youth. Additionally, it explores how this process may reveal underlying social and political tensions that influence both the nation's internal stability and its position within the broader regional order. It also offers potential implications for how education can strengthen social cohesion and inclusivity.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

To facilitate the navigation of this thesis, below, I define the terms central to my research:

- *Discourses*—defined by Foucault (1975)—are practices that are not descriptive but instead productive. In other words, by talking about something, we create the object we speak of. Discourses, therefore, have constitutive power.
- *Identity* refers to one's sense of the self in relation to "others". We are defined as who we are according to what others are and are not. Identity involves processes of inclusion and exclusion and is constantly evolving in contexts through which one identifies, performs, negotiates and resists identity positions.
- *Nation* is not geographically bound but instead is a community of individuals who believe they have shared history, land, culture, values, economy and aspirations, and rights and duties (Smith, 1995). Furthermore, forging a sense of national belonging entails the imagination and circulation of national discourses.

- *Nation-State* is a political entity with a government and sovereign territory. It has a population conscious of their belongingness to the entity and their duties and rights. A nation-state must protect its territory and citizens (Dunne & Crossouard, 2020).
- *Power* cannot be possessed but is instead practised. Power is not held by one person and is operated in a top-down process. It is rather everywhere, constantly negotiated and changing its dimensions. Power is, therefore, intricately connected to resistance. All individuals practice micro-power, which is both fluid and contingent (Foucault, 1975).

### **Structure of the Thesis Definition of Key Terms**

Having provided an overview of the research in the introduction Chapter, the following Chapter 2 delves deeper into the research setting by examining the historical trajectories of nation-building processes in Uzbekistan. This exploration encompasses the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-independence periods, emphasising how these shifting political landscapes have transformed not only the concept of nationhood but also other dimensions that affect national identity, such as ethnicity, gender, and religion. This chapter also aims to enhance understanding of how youth and school education have been embedded within these evolving contexts, establishing the critical background for current nation-building agendas and examining how and why school discourses promote national identity, all of which are intricately linked to historical legacies.

Chapter 3 establishes the key concepts of the research, including identity, national identity, youth, and the relationship between national identity and education, as well as various national markers such as ethnicity, gender and religion. Since these concepts can be framed differently depending on the underlying philosophical perspective, the discussions in this chapter provide a foundation that guides the research in a specific direction. This foundational framework will inform the research design and methodologies discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Informed by my framing of key concepts, Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology. It details the research design and its underlying philosophy, post-structuralism, along with the research methods and data analysis processes utilised. The chapter also addresses ethical considerations and positionalities within the research. This chapter reflects on my fieldwork experiences and journey as a female foreign doctoral scholar in Uzbekistan. Through a reflexive approach, I critically examine the complexities

and challenges of conducting fieldwork, including ethical dilemmas and the growth that arises from navigating these realities.

In the following three chapters, based on the analysis conducted through the conceptual framework underpinned in post-structuralism, I examine how school discourses shape youth national identities while exploring the intersectionality of different national markers. Chapter 5, drawing upon the research concept of identity, discusses the role of “external others” in constructing national identity, while Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explore the role of gender, ethnicity and religion as key national markers in shaping Uzbekistan youth national identities, all of them in looking at how school discourses construct youth national identities, and how youth navigate these discourses. By doing so, I attempt to answer the research questions.

In conclusion, Chapter 9 summarises the overall findings of the research while addressing the research questions. It outlines how school discourses shape national identities among Uzbekistani youth and how these young people navigate these discourses, with the aim of bridging the existing knowledge gap in the field. Furthermore, drawing on the findings, particularly those reflecting youth perspectives, the chapter suggests potential areas for improvement within the current Uzbekistani education system to promote inclusivity. It also explores the broader implications of these findings, highlighting how education can foster social cohesion and sustainable peace in an increasingly nationalistic world where conflicts persist among diverse social groups.

## **Chapter 2: Research Context**

### **Introduction**

As a post-socialist country that gained independence three decades ago, Uzbekistan has experienced ongoing changes in its political, economic, and social landscapes, significantly impacting its citizens and their notions of nationhood. The evolution of Uzbekistani national identity is closely intertwined with continuous changes in geographical territory, demographics, language, religion, and gender dynamics, all shaped by historical developments. Understanding Uzbekistan's national identity involves exploring its past, present, and future visions. This chapter traces Uzbekistan's historical trajectory by closely examining three distinct periods: the Tsarist Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and the post-independence eras. It seeks to highlight the complexities and dynamics of nation-state-building processes in Uzbekistan, underscoring how the Tsarist colonial and Soviet socialist legacy continues to influence contemporary political processes related to national identity formation and the pivotal role of education within this framework.

### **Historical Processes of “Making Uzbekistan”**

#### *Evolving Notion of Nationhood*

Historically, the Central Asian region was organised around tribes and clans, and these notions around nationhood were introduced in Central Asia during the Tsarist era and further solidified under Soviet rule. These historical processes of “making Uzbekistan” (Khalid, 2015) continue to influence the dynamics of contemporary nation-building processes in Uzbekistan, making an understanding of these historical shifts crucial for studying contemporary Uzbekistani national identity.

#### **Tsarist Russian Empire's Occupation of Uzbekistan (1865-1917)**

Before the Russian Empire's expansion into Central Asia in the 19th century, Uzbekistan, without a defined border, was home to heterogenous ethnic groups, including Uzbeks, Tajiks, and others, whose communities were organised through various kinship networks around tribes and clans. While no defined notion of state existed, Central Asia was broadly divided into several khanates and feudal monarchies, such as the khanates of Kokand, Bukhara and Khiva. Governed by local rulers, Khans, these khanates were

politically dynamic, often making alliances or fighting with neighbouring khanates to maintain peace or expand their powers (Brubaker, 1994). However, the Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia during the latter half of the 19th century drastically reshaped the region's political, social and cultural landscapes. As Tsarist Russia expanded its power in the region, Tashkent was captured in 1865, the Kokand Khanate was annexed in 1876, and Bukhara and Khiva Khanates became Russian protectorates. This led to the official integration of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, under the Tsarist Russian colonial rule. Regional traditional feudal societies based on tribes and clans were hence transformed into colonial centralised governance structures.

### **Becoming the Uzbek Socialist Republic (1924-1991)**

After the Bolsheviks replaced the Russian imperial power in 1917, the Soviet period brought further profound shifts in the notions of nationhood in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan. Although the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union are closely linked in history, they were distinct entities with different approaches to governance and relations with local populations. The Russian Empire can be characterised as a colonial power driven by territorial expansion and the domination of resources and peoples (Khomyakov, 2020). While there is ongoing debate over whether the Soviet Union was merely a continuation of the Russian Empire's colonial legacy (Brubaker, 2014), the Soviet approach diverged significantly from "traditional" Western colonialism. The Soviet Union promoted the concept of "internationalism", aiming to unify diverse nations under a socialist ideological framework to foster solidarity and fraternity among them. Distinguishing itself from Tsarist and Western imperialism, the Soviet discourses extensively employed the rhetoric of "de-imperialisation" and "decolonisation" (Ayers, 2018). Instead, it emphasised the concept of "internal colonisation", portraying the bourgeoisie as the true colonisers of the working class, or proletariat, while positioning itself not as a colonial power but as a liberating force (Khomyakov, 2020). This rhetoric of equality and socialist unity, however, often concealed a more complex reality of unequal relations between the republics (Koyama, 2019). While the Soviet Union promoted the idea of all peoples being equal, the Russians were often regarded as "the elder brothers of the Soviet peoples" (Benningson, 2015, p. 151), with political and economic power remaining concentrated in the Russian metropolis. As a result, regions like Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, were often treated as peripheral to the core Soviet system

(Benningesen, 2015). Despite these contradictions, the Soviet model differed from Western colonialism in its emphasis on the ideological unity of the socialist bloc, even if it did not always live up to those ideals (Tlostanova & Thapar-Björkert, 2021).

In the early 1930s, the Soviet authorities introduced the policy of “indigenisation”, or *korenizatsiia* (коренизация) in Russian, to dissociate Soviet rule from the Russian Empire, disseminate socialist ideologies throughout Central Asia and construct a unified Soviet Union. *Korenizatsiia*, often described as affirmative actions, introduced national awareness in Central Asia by actively promoting ethnic identities, local cultures, languages and traditions (Martin, 2018; Ünal, 2018). While *korenizatsiia* contradicted Marxist ideologies that viewed the concept of the nation as an artificial byproduct of capitalism, concealing class inequalities and the struggles of the working class, the Soviet authorities were conscious of the distrust, frustrations and grievances that had developed among the Central Asia population towards the Tsarist colonial power (Martin, 2018). Therefore, to integrate the region under Soviet control without resistance, it was vital for local populations to “think of Soviet rule as their own. Soviet rule had to be indigenised” (Khalid, 2014, p. 65), ensuring that it would not be perceived as a new enemy. While significant resources and institutions were mobilised to advance *korenizatsiia* under the rhetoric of decolonisation (Martin, 2018), in 1924, the Soviet authorities implemented a border delimitation policy across Central Asia that drastically reshaped the region, introducing the notion of political borders, nationality and national identity. In 1924, Uzbekistan became a Socialist Republic, and by 1936, borders were drawn along ethnic lines among all Central Asian territories, establishing a total of six Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs), including SSRs of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Karakalpakstan. However, although these republics were established based on ethnicity, the territorial reorganisation often overlooked the complex social realities of fluid movements of diverse populations and disrupted the local historical and cultural continuity. Indeed, under the political philosophy of “divide et impera” (divide and rule in Latin), the territorial organisation aimed to mitigate the potential rise of Pan-Turk and Pan-Islamic movements and prevent uncontrolled intra-regional fragmentation that could threaten Soviet authority, allowing the Soviet regime to consolidate administrative control over the region and exercise power (Martin, 2018; Ünal, 2018). The Soviet authorities believed that fostering a controlled degree of nationalism was crucial for promoting national unity and building socialist internationalism (Darnell, 2020; Yalta, 2018). Indigenisation was, therefore, always within a socialist framework. This approach

aimed to create a unified yet diverse socialist federation, focusing on solidarity rather than ethnic or cultural separatism (Kotkin, 2017). Unlike Western or capitalist nationalism, which often fuelled separatism, Soviet nationalism was highly controlled and ideologically acceptable, seen as a means to strengthen the socialist project while maintaining unity within the federation (Fleming, 2019). Hence, while local identities were promoted, they embodied a paradox as they were “national in form, but socialist in content” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 36), requiring adherence to socialist ideologies. To further institutionalise national consciousness, the Soviet regime implemented various initiatives, including the promotion of education, while teaching local languages, histories and ethnic contents into school textbooks, as well as encouraging cultural practices that reflected traditional heritages through literature, music, and other forms of art (Adams, 1999; Ünal, 2018).

However, as local identities grew across Central Asia as a result of *korenizatsiia*, which ultimately aimed to integrate these local identities into a broader Soviet framework, starting in the 1940s, the authorities gradually shifted their emphasis to the construction of a “unified Soviet people” (*Svietsky narod*) and hence supra-national Soviet identity aligned with socialist ideologies (Brubaker, 1994). This movement intensified particularly in the 1960s when Soviet authorities faced political and economic struggles, and they were increasingly concerned about growing regional nationalist sentiments in SSRs that potentially threatened Soviet rule (Martin, 2018). A series of “Sovietisation” processes were implemented to affirm their leadership and power, during which local identities were overlooked and suppressed. These processes involved the extensive promotion of socialist ideologies across various forms of arts, including posters, literature, movies, and music (Khalid, 2014; Martin, 2018). Cultural venues, such as museums, theatres and opera houses, burgeoned throughout the region, while festivals and performances served as channels for disseminating Soviet ethos (Adams, 1999). The Russian language was promoted as the *lingua franca* of the Soviet Union, becoming crucial for accessing education and professional opportunities. At schools, as powerful state institutions inculcating Soviet values as societal norms, Soviet history replaced local histories, various school rituals were organised in alignment with Soviet ideals, and extra-curricular activities were designed to engage youth in socialist movements (Alpysbayeva, 2020). Urban planning was also mobilised for Sovietisation, as numerous monuments celebrating Soviet achievements mushroomed, and streets and squares were renamed after Soviet heroes (Ünal, 2018). While a unified Soviet identity was reinforced, any expressions of local identities and nationalist sentiments, including cultural and religious expressions,

were severely repressed, including arrest and imprisonment. Labelled as “enemies of the people”, many were sent to labour camps as the regime sought to eliminate any perceived threats to its ideology and authority (Martin, 2018). Such measures served to instil fear and discourage dissent, further forging the Soviet national identity at the expense of local identities.

### **Independence: Nation-Building since 1991**

Bolsheviks Uzbekistan’s independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a new chapter for its nationhood and national identity after over a century under Tsarist Russia and the Soviet authorities. Although ethnic identity had already begun to form during the period of *korenizatsiia*, it was largely a Soviet-envisioned construct that often overshadowed authentic local culture and was quickly suppressed in efforts to create a supra-national Soviet identity. In the post-socialist context, particular efforts were made to dissociate the new nation from Soviet influence, commonly referred to as “de-Russification” (Khairi, 2018; Kudaibergenova, 2018; Ünal, 2018). Since Uzbekistan gained its sovereign statehood for the first time in only 1991 and recognising that its contemporary political borders were established under the Soviet regime, Uzbekistani authorities sought to anchor their legitimacy and the new national identity in the pre-Russian and pre-Soviet era, providing them with a sense of historical continuity (Khairi, 2018; Laruelle, 2017; Olcott & Ziyayeva, 2008). Hence, a strong focus was placed on pre-Russian/Soviet history, including the revival and reinterpretation of national heroes, myths, culture, traditions and values. However, while the new national identity heavily drew upon pre-Russian/Soviet times, many of the political techniques employed by the Uzbekistani authorities echoed those used during the Soviet era, including the use of mass media campaigns, public holidays and celebrations, education, history, as well as arts and culture (Adams, 1999; Ünal, 2018). Furthermore, as part of “de-Sovietisation”, ancestral heritage was emphasised as national markers, simultaneously highlighting the legacy of *korenizatsiia*, which sought to construct ethnonationality, reflecting the complexities of building a new national identity in a post-socialist context (Laruelle, 2017).

Relatively soon after the independence, new national symbols replaced the Soviet ones, Uzbek was reinstated as the state language, a new alphabet was introduced, and streets and public places were renamed after historical and national figures (Ünal, 2018). As the first President, Islam Karimov underscored, “the names of objects that serve the old

order and communist ideology deflect the people from the concept of independence” (Bohr, 1998, p. 147), the new nation-building project primarily grounded on the de-Russification. A range of new national heroes was introduced, particularly Amir Timur (1336-1405), the conqueror of Eurasia and Asia, who was often depicted negatively during the Soviet era as a cruel and oppressive figure (Laruelle, 2017). Particularly during the Karimov regime, Amir Timur frequently appeared in the state discourses, and his monuments replaced those of Lenin and Marx across the country. Although of Mongol origin, he was born in Transoxiana, near Samarkand. By establishing him as a national hero, the authorities aimed to provide Uzbekistan with a sense of historical continuity and to evoke the strength and political authority that Amir Timur symbolised (Shafiyeva, 2016). As was the case during the Soviet era, Uzbekistani authority also established new national holidays commemorating historical events, national heroes, culture, and symbols, and widely organising public celebrations to reinforce national identity (Adams, 2010). Indeed, as part of the nation-building project, the government actively encouraged cultural revival, supporting traditional arts, such as music, dance and folklore (Adams, 2010). Overall, constructing a new national identity has been at the centre of Uzbekistan’s nation-building project, marked by efforts to dissociate from the Soviet past. By promoting national heroes, revisiting cultural traditions, and replacing Soviet symbols, the government aimed to inculcate a sense of pride and historical continuity among its citizens.

### ***Geography***

Located in Central Asia’s heart, Uzbekistan is a doubly landlocked state that shares borders with five countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan (Figure 1). The total length of Uzbekistan’s borders extends over 6,893 kilometres, with the longest border sharing with Kazakhstan at approximately 2,330 kilometres and the shortest with Afghanistan at around 144 kilometres (The Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2024).

**Figure 1*****Uzbekistan and Neighbouring Countries***

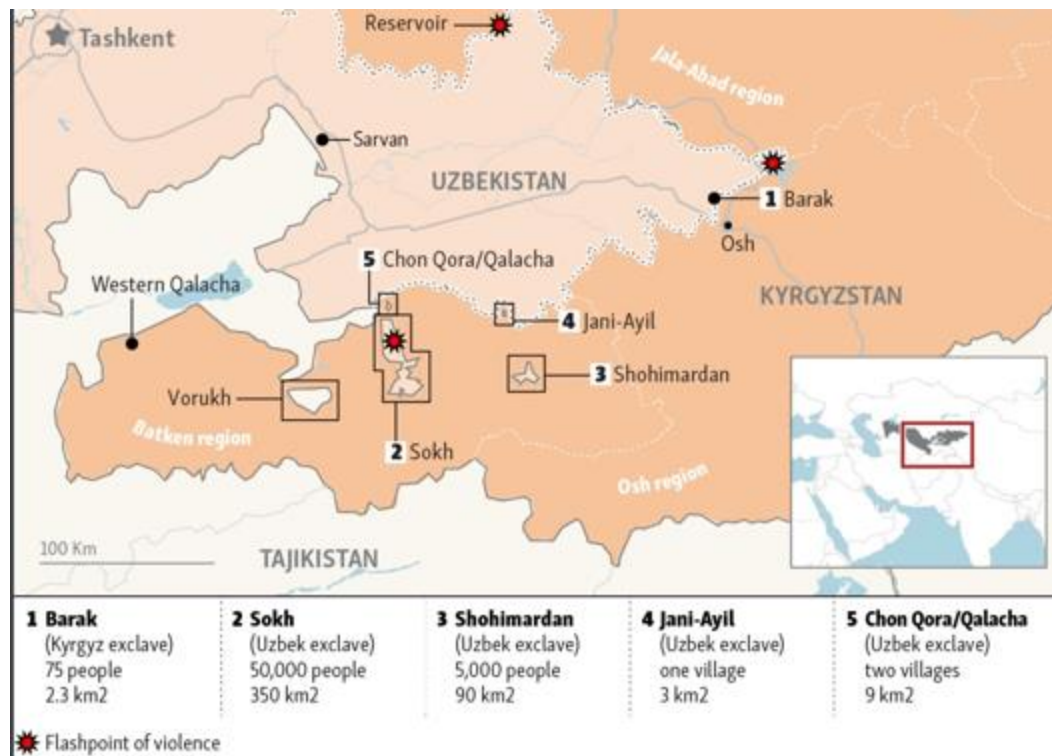
*Note.* Khalid (2014, p. 15), “Central Asia: Current political boundaries”.

The current borders of Uzbekistan are the result of Soviet border delimitation policies conducted in Central Asia during the 1920s and 1930s, which also brought Karakalpakstan under the Uzbekistani territory, which is now an autonomous region covering almost 37% of the country’s territory (CIA, 2024). However, this arbitrary border delimitation overlooked local historical and social contexts and led to the fragmentation of communities that shared linguistic, cultural, or social ties, creating complex demographic mosaics that continue to affect the region today. The borders established enclaves and exclaves, particularly in the Ferghana Valley, a region shared among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. This area includes several Uzbekistani enclaves within Kyrgyzstan and foreign enclaves within Uzbekistan. These enclaves present political and economic challenges, often sparking tensions over access to resources like water (Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty [RFERL], 2024; Eurasianet, 2020) (Figure 2). Indeed, the Ferghana Valley is a densely populated pastoral region, and Soviet borders did not adequately consider resource distribution issues. While people crossed borders easily during the Soviet era, the rise of nationalism following independence has led to increasing disputes over resources (Ozawa et al., 2024). Alongside these enclave issues, Uzbekistan shares a 1,312-kilometre border with Tajikistan, which remains partially unresolved,

another Soviet legacy (CIA, 2024). Moreover, in cities like Bukhara and Samarkand, where ethnic Tajik and Uzbek communities have coexisted for centuries, the construction of national identity is often fragmented, shaped by both ethnic heritage and state-driven national discourses (Ismailov, 2015; Zuercher, 2007). However, despite these challenges, both countries have made progress in resolving these disputes, with several kilometres of borders mutually agreed upon. This ongoing diplomatic effort highlights Uzbekistan's commitment to fostering regional stability and cooperation, which is vital for economic growth and security in Uzbekistan and the region.

**Figure 2**

***Conflicts in Enclaves***



Note. Hill (2021), “Tajik and Kyrgyz Border Clashes”.

***Ethnic Composition***

Central With a population of approximately 35 million people, Uzbekistan is the most populated state in the region (The World Bank, 2023). Today, more than 130 ethnic groups live in Uzbekistan, although Uzbeks, primarily of Turkic origin, represent the titular ethnic group comprising 83.8% of the total population. Ethnic minorities include Tajiks (4.8%), Kazakhs (2.5%), Russian (2.3%), Karakalpak (2.2%), Tatar (1.5%) and

other smaller groups (2.9%) (CIA, 2024). This ethnic diversity is largely the result of historical forces that have shaped the area, such as the ancient Silk Road trade routes, which facilitated exchanges of culture, ideas, and peoples, and the succession of Russian colonial power and Soviet rule that have reshaped the demographic flows and compositions. During the Soviet era, the demographic ratios between Uzbeks and Russians shifted considerably. While ethnic Russians once constituted about 31% of the population in 1989 (Tsyryapkina, 2023), today, the much-reduced community is primarily concentrated in urban areas, particularly in major cities such as Tashkent. In 2018, it was estimated that 45% of the Slavic ethnic minorities, a community rarely belonging to the Uzbek community, resided in the Tashkent region (Minority Rights Group, 2018a). Ethnic Tajiks, the biggest minority group, primarily reside in the eastern regions of Uzbekistan, especially in areas bordering Tajikistan, such as the Bukhara region and Samarkand, which has deep historical ties to Tajik culture, reflecting their historical and cultural connections to these culturally rich regions (Minority Rights Group, 2018b). This intricate ethnic mosaic reflects the interconnected histories of these groups while highlighting the ongoing challenges of unifying diversity within a modern nation-state, all while respecting the principles of inclusiveness. Grasping these dynamics is crucial for understanding the construction of national identity and social cohesion processes in Uzbekistan.

### ***Political Landscape***

Uzbekistan is a presidential republic that has undergone significant political transformations since independence in 1991. Until recently, Uzbekistan had known only one president since its independence, Islam Karimov, who held office from 1990 until he died in 2016. Karimov's regime was characterised by authoritarian rule, which tightly controlled political expression and suppressed dissent. Freedom House consistently rated Uzbekistan as "Not Free" throughout Karimov's presidency, often giving the country low scores on its political rights and civil liberties indicators. Meanwhile, the Polity Project, which measures the level of democracy and autocracy in countries, often ranked Uzbekistan as highly autocratic during Karimov's regime. Under his leadership, Uzbekistan experienced limited democratic processes, and a strong emphasis was placed on economic stability, national independence and security, often at the expense of human rights (Ünal, 2018). In 2005, following a relatively peaceful protest in eastern Uzbekistan against the government's corruption and injustices, armed forces fired at protesters,

causing hundreds and a thousand of deaths, although the exact death toll remains unclear, which is known as the Andijan massacre (Amnesty International 2015). Over the years, a climate of fear was fostered across the country, with regular crackdowns on political opposition, human rights defenders, civil society activists, independent media, and religious freedoms (Khalid, 2014). Similar to the neighbouring Central Asian states, a strong personality cult was also developed around Karimov. Not only were his portraits hung in all state offices, including classrooms, but also state university entrance exams, regardless of the studied fields, included questions on his dozens of authored books, with a strong focus on patriotism, independence, development and morality (Najibullah, 2007). On his death, schools organised commemorative ceremonies and classes (Eurasianet, 2016).

Following Karimov's death, Shavkat Mirziyoyev became president in December 2016, marking a pivotal shift in Uzbekistan's political landscape, as he introduced a series of mass reforms known as the "New Uzbekistan" initiative (Figure 3).

### Figure 3

#### *A Street Panel on "New Uzbekistan" in Tashkent*



*Note.* "In New Uzbekistan, Let's Live Free and Prosper". A picture taken by the author in Tashkent during the fieldwork.

Under Mirziyoyev, there have been noticeable attempts to liberalise the political environment, improve relations with neighbouring countries, and increase economic opportunities through market-oriented reforms. He has also taken steps to improve human rights conditions, such as releasing political prisoners and allowing greater freedom of expression (Human Rights Watch, 2017). Nevertheless, despite these efforts, Mirziyoyev's administration also maintained authoritarian practices. For instance, demonstrations are

typically suppressed, with security forces often intervening to prevent public gatherings perceived as politically threatening (Human Rights Watch, 2019), and opening a civil society remains particularly difficult (International Center for Not-For-Profit-Law [ICNL], 2024). In 2022, protests in Karakalpakstan over attempted constitutional changes were severely suppressed by the government, resulting in at least 21 deaths and numerous injuries, drawing both domestic and international concern over the government's handling of dissent and highlighting ongoing challenges related to political freedoms in Uzbekistan (US Embassy in Uzbekistan, 2022). The authoritarian index, while slightly improved since the Karimov era, in 2023, Uzbekistan was still rated as "Not Free", indicating ongoing authoritarian practices (Freedom House, 2023). Hence, while the political situation in Uzbekistan has shown signs of progress and openness under Mirziyoyev compared to the Karimov era, the government continues to maintain strict oversight of political activities, and the legacy of oppressive policies still influences the nation's dynamics (Human Rights Watch, 2019).

## ***Language***

### **During Soviet Time**

Under the Soviet regime, although Uzbek was acknowledged as the official language of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, Russian, as the lingua franca, was extensively used in administration, education, and media. The Soviet authorities implemented a series of language reforms, including the replacement of the Arabic script with the Latin alphabet in the 1920s and later with the Cyrillic alphabet in the 1940s, as part of a broader Soviet agenda to promote literacy and standardise languages among various ethnic groups, ensuring a smoother inculcation of socialist ideologies in the region. Simultaneously, the walking away from the Arabic was an approach to diminish Islamic influences and expand Soviet influence in the region. By the 1980s, about 70% of the urban population was estimated to speak Russian fluently, while only 25% identified Uzbek as their first language (The World Bank, 2013). This linguistic Russification reflected broader Soviet policies aimed at transforming Central Asian societies into socialist, facilitating the easier dissemination and integration of communist ideologies.

## **After Independence**

Following independence, the linguistic landscape began to shift again. The new government-initiated policies to promote the Uzbek language and reestablish its prominence as the national language. In contrast to its neighbouring country, Kazakhstan, which recognises Russian as the official language alongside Kazakh as the state language in its constitution, Uzbekistan does not accord any official status to the Russian language within its constitutional framework. Instead, Uzbekistan's constitution, adopted in 1992, establishes Uzbek as the sole state language, thereby limiting the institutional recognition of Russian. The Uzbekistani government has enacted various policies and laws to support the status and use of the Uzbek language. Notably, the Law on the State Language, passed in 1989 and reinforced after independence, outlines the rights and responsibilities of the citizens to use Uzbek in government, education, and the public sphere. Furthermore, the government has made the Uzbek language proficiency test a requirement for public service positions. The active promotion of Uzbek as the state language has been limiting non-titular ethnic groups' access to power, leading to the ethnic Uzbeks' power monopoly (Chong, 2007). Indeed, senior positions in the government and also private sectors are primarily occupied by ethnic Uzbeks (U.S. Department of State, 2016). In 1993, Uzbekistan began transitioning back to a modified Latin alphabet as part of a cultural revival and a move away from Soviet influence, emphasising Uzbekistan's Turkic roots. By 2006, the adoption of the new Latin alphabet was officially mandated, although Cyrillic is still used to some extent, including in shop signs in urban areas (Temirov, 2022). As for the population's language use, today, around 74% of the population speaks Uzbek as their first language, and 14% continue to use Russian as their primary language of communication (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] World Factbook, 2025). Nevertheless, the Russian-speaking community remains dynamic, particularly in urban settings, including state institutions as unofficial communications, contributing to a significant degree of bilingualism in Uzbekistan (Khalid, 2014). Overall, the current linguistic landscape in Uzbekistan reflects the intricate interplay between the Soviet legacy of the past and the aspirations of an independent state.

## ***Islam***

Although Uzbekistan is a secular state and no official records exist on citizens' religious affiliation, according to the state Committee of Religious Affairs, an estimated

94% of the population identifies as Muslim (Khalilova, 2024). Most Muslims in Uzbekistan adhere to the Sunni Hanafi school, known for its flexibility and adaptability in interpreting Islamic law, which allows religious practices to be integrated with local customs and traditions (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008). In this context, Islam in Uzbekistan is often referred to as “folk Islam” (Yerekesheva, 2020), a term that describes the blending of Islam with pre-Islamic local traditions, including animistic practices, Zoroastrianism, and various mystical beliefs and superstitions that are prevalent in the region. However, the position of Islam in Uzbekistani society has historically fluctuated, shaped by various political shifts, including the influence of Tsarist Russian colonial power, Soviet authorities and the post-independence regimes. Hence, often being politicised serving state interests (Khalid, 2014; Peyrouse, 2022), Islam in Uzbekistan has undergone several distinct phases, including de-Islamisation, atheist oppression, re-Islamisation, and authoritarian state secularism, whilst always playing a crucial role in shaping national identities through its different forms (Khalilova, 2024; Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008).

### ***De-Islamisation in 1930s***

Following the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the newly established Soviet authorities sought to spread socialist ideologies, including atheism, leading to the de-Islamisation of Uzbekistan. Notably, in 1930, religion was framed as incompatible with socialist principles, resulting in the forcible closure, destruction, or conversion of religious buildings such as madrassas, mosques, shrines, and other places of worship to non-religious uses throughout the country (Karagiannis, 2006). The construction of the Soviet Union involved the inculcation of loyalty to the socialist system, requiring adherence to its practices, beliefs, philosophies, morals, and cultural values. Since the Soviet strategy to construct the “Soviet people” centred on forging a close bond between the state and its citizens, constructing individuals who thought and acted as conformist socialists, pledging their loyalty to the state, religion was not recognised as a private matter (Van den Bercken, 1985). Therefore, religions that placed faith in God, not only Islam, but all religions, had no place within this socialist framework. Soviet atheism became a radical, state-led practice aimed at nationalising the population (Heller, 1979). Religious leaders were targeted and persecuted, with many arrested, sent to labour camps or executed (Khalid, 2014). Additionally, the Soviet regime portrayed traditional veiling practices as symbols of patriarchy, using them as a “hook” to politically justify its socialist agenda in Muslim-

dominant Central Asia in the absence of a proletariat class, advocating for the liberation of oppressed Muslim women (Northrop, 2004). Hence, by focusing on the de-Islamisation of women, the regime used women as a strategic leverage point in its efforts, utilising them as the “Surrogate Proletariat” (Massell, 1974). From the 1920s to the 1930s, the Soviet regime launched massive unveiling campaigns, “Hujum” in Uzbekistan, targeting veiled Muslim women and opposing their seclusion. However, the campaigns were far from peaceful and triggered reactionary violence among the locals, particularly men. Between 1926 and 1930, around 2,500 women associated with the unveiling campaign are believed to have become victims of honour killings committed by their families or religious hard-liners (Kamp, 2011). Although the Soviet regime’s actions triggered resistance and heightened Islam’s role as a marker of local identity against oppressive power, the aggressive and persistent policies of the Soviet authorities ultimately led to de-Islamisation in Uzbekistan (Karagiannis, 2006).

### ***Proliferations of Islam in 1980s***

Although Uzbekistan gradually became Sovietised as religious expressions were excluded from the atheistic public sphere, Islam continued to thrive in the private realm, particularly underground (Karagiannis, 2006; Khalid, 2014). Clandestine religious classes were organised by self-taught and self-proclaimed “mullahs” (religious teachers and leaders in the Muslim community) and “imams” (prayer leaders and scholars who guide religious practices and teachings) despite the risks of being caught and sanctioned by Soviet authorities (Khalid, 2014). These secretive lessons were referred to as “hujra”, a term derived from Arabic meaning a small room or chamber designated for religious instruction and community gatherings. However, during the 1980s, following the introduction of Mikhail Gorbachev’s “Glasnost” (meaning “openness” in Russian) policies aiming at increasing freedom of expression and reducing oppressive control, religious actors regained some autonomy (Khalid, 2014; Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008) Those trained in hujra began to teach Islam publicly, which led to a brief proliferation of unofficial religious education (Northrop, 2004). This period also sparked a renewed public interest in Islam in Uzbekistan, as many individuals sought to reconnect with their religious heritage after decades of imposed atheism (Karagiannis, 2006).

### **Post-Soviet Islamic Revival**

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there has been a significant counter-reaction to the long-standing Soviet suppression of religious expressions, and immediately after Uzbekistan gained independence, the demand for Islam surged (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008). The symbolic importance of Islam in Uzbekistan's nation-building processes was also evident in the political arena, particularly through President Islam Karimov. For instance, during his presidential inauguration, he held the Qur'an in one hand and the state constitution in the other, stating, "The Qur'an is our guiding light", underscoring the symbolic significance of Islam in Uzbekistan (Roy, 2000). Not only did he perform the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, in 1991, but in 1992, he wrote in his book entitled "Islam is the religion of our forefathers" (Karagiannis, 2006). As part of a dynamic Islamic revival in the early 1990s, thousands of mosques and madrassas were restored or constructed, and Islamic education rapidly expanded across the country (Karagiannis, 2006). Islamic literature became publicly accessible, and many young people travelled abroad to seek Islamic education in countries such as Turkey, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia (Khalid, 2014). Religious gatherings, such as iftar during Ramadan, were openly organised, and individuals began to express their faith by wearing religious attire, including the hijab for women and growing beards for men (Khalid, 2014; Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008).

### **Authoritarian Secularism**

While Uzbekistan embraced an Islamic revival soon after gaining independence in 1991, the 1992 constitution established the country as a secular state. Article 31 guarantees freedom of religious expression, and Article 61 explicitly separates religion from the state. However, despite this secular framework, given that around 94% of the population identifies as Muslim (Khalilova, 2024), the government implicitly acknowledges Islam as the national religion. Hence, to maintain a balance with secularism, since independence, the state has promoted Islam as an integral part of its cultural traditions and foundational moral values and spirituality rather than prioritising piety (Khalilova, 2024; Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008). By emphasising cultural heritage, the government has framed Uzbekistani Islam as a national tradition while distinguishing it from politically motivated religious groups, including extremist movements (Khalid, 2014). Moreover, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Uzbekistan, known as the Muftiate, was established in 1992, aiming to regulate Islamic activities within Uzbekistan, including the administration of

mosques and Islamic education, while balancing both the revival of Islamic practices and the state's secular framework. Currently, within Uzbekistan's secular framework, Article 48 of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations (2021) establishes a separation between state education and religion. Hence, the national school curriculum does not incorporate formal religious education. Instead, until 2021, the subject, the history of religions, was taught at schools, which provided basic information about various world religions and aimed to enhance students' understanding of religious diversity while fostering intercultural awareness (Khalilova, 2024). Since 2021, this content has been integrated into a newly established subject called "Tarbiya".

Despite the initial Islamic revival and the state's endorsement of it in the early 1990s, independent Islamic groups emerged, notably in the Ferghana Valley. A series of bombings occurred in Tashkent, which is suspected to have been done by a religious militant group, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). The attack caused 16 deaths and more than a hundred injured (US Department of State, 2001), prompting authorities to perceive Islam as a potential source of political opposition, leading to increasingly draconian authoritarian control over religious expressions (Khalid, 2014). By the late 1990s, the government had closed most madrassas and mosques in the country and mandated that all prayer houses be officially registered, and religious education had become strictly state-controlled (Karaginannis, 2006). Religious expressions, including prayers at mosques and the Hajj, have come under strict state surveillance (Olcott & Ziyaeva, 2008). The appearance of individuals, such as men growing beards and women wearing hijabs, could also provoke suspicion from state authorities of being radicalised (Karagiannis, 2006). Hence, despite operating under a different system, the Uzbekistani authorities kept utilising Soviet mechanisms to suppress and control religious expressions, and those who did not conform to state regulations faced severe punishments, including arrest, intimidation, and imprisonment (Roy, 2000).

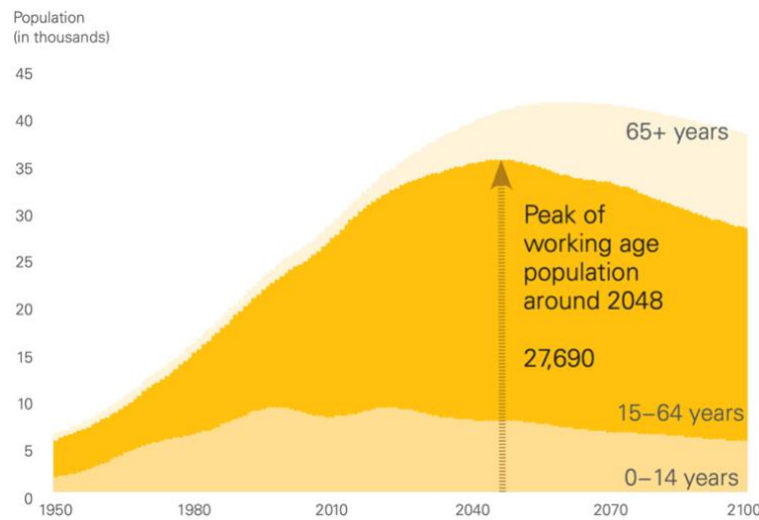
Since 2017, under President Mirziyoyev, several reforms have been aimed at liberalising religious practice restrictions. The administration has taken steps to improve religious freedom by releasing some prisoners convicted of religious extremism-related crimes and easing regulations on religious expressions (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Religious education has expanded with increased madrassas and other religious institutions as the government seeks to improve religious freedoms (Sheralieva, 2020). Consequently, there has been an increasing trend of individuals expressing their faith openly, with more people growing beards, wearing hijabs, performing Hajj, and praying at mosques (Saida,

2024). The number of women wearing the hijab has further grown over the last two years as some populations sought comfort in religious faith during the COVID-19 pandemic (Malikov & Djuraeva, 2021). However, in recent years, there has been notable “backsliding on religious freedom promises” (Human Rights Watch, 2023), with increased government control and the arrest of devout believers under the pretext of preventing extremism, reminiscent of the oppressive practices during Karimov's regime (Rickleton, 2023). Moreover, despite the lifting of the ban on hijab-wearing in public schools following the revision of the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in 2021 (Eurasianet, 2021), which allowed individual schools to set their own regulations regarding hijab, the issue is once again becoming a focal point of controversy (Mamalasurova, 2024). Hence, despite the more relaxed atmosphere compared to Karimov’s era, Uzbekistani authorities continue to exercise strict control over religious practices.

## **Youth in Uzbekistan**

### ***Youth Demography***

The population growth in Central Asia has been steady over the last three decades, with an average annual rate of population change of around 1.5% (United Nations [UN], 2019). The region can be defined as a young region as the segment aged 0-24 represents the region’s largest age group, accounting for 45.5% of the overall regional population (UN, 2019). Among the five Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan is particularly young as those under 30 constitute around 60% of the population (UNICEF, 2020). With a steady birth rate and a declining dependency rate, Uzbekistan is currently at a unique demographic juncture, described as a “demographic dividend” stage (UNICEF, 2020), highlighting the increasing share of young populations who will be the drivers and determinants of the subsequent decades of socio-economic development in the country. Following the current demographic trends, Uzbekistan is projected to have its largest working-age population by 2048 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4*****Population Growth by Broad Age Groups, 1950-2100***

*Note.* UNICEF (2018, p. 6), “Total population by broad age groups, 1950 – 2100”.

This youth bulge needs to be considered a double-edged sword. Whilst the youth bulge represents the potential to enhance the country’s socio-economic development, leading to poverty reduction and social cohesion, a failure to invest in today’s young populations equitably will result in not only the loss of economic growth opportunities but also poverty exacerbation, political and social tensions, and potential conflicts. Equitable investment in the well-being of young populations will pave the way for the nation’s development, including peacebuilding. Hence, state support in youth development and inclusion, including education, is indispensable.

### ***Youth Framing Policies***

The concept of youth is fluid and highly contextual, and hence varies across different countries, reflecting their unique socio-cultural landscapes. In Uzbekistan, the Law on State Youth Policy (2016) defines youth as individuals between the ages of 14 and 30. Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has recognised its youth as a critical component of its nation-building efforts. Official state discourses frequently describe its youth as the “strategic resource of the state”, underscoring their importance in shaping the country’s future. Shortly after gaining independence, Uzbekistan enacted the Law on Foundation of the State Youth Policy in 1991, paving the legal and institutional foundations for future youth policies. Since then, a series of state initiatives have been

implemented to encourage youth participation in political, social and economic spheres while also enhancing their rights, living conditions, opportunities, support and inclusivity, highlighting the authorities' recognition of youth's pivotal role in national development and their commitment to empowering them (Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Youth Policies in Uzbekistan since Independence*

Year	Policy	Focus
1991	Law on Youth Policy	Establishing a legal and institutional framework for youth policy
1996	National Programme for the Socio-economic Development of Youth	Addressing socio-economic issues youth face, including education, employment and health
2008	Youth Programme of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Enhancing youth participation in social and economic life
2010	Presidential Decree on Measures to Enhance State Support for Youth	Improving youth support systems
2014	State Programme for the Implementation of Youth Policy	A comprehensive plan to improve youth life, including living conditions, education, employment and health
2016	State Policy on Youth	Strategic direction for youth development, focusing on education, employment, health and civic participation

Among them, the State Policy on Youth (2016) is often regarded as the most significant, providing for the first time not only visions but also a comprehensive and practical strategic framework aiming at addressing interrelated and multifaceted needs and challenges faced by Uzbekistani youth. Notably, the policy emphasises areas such as education, employment, health, civic participation, and social protection, indicating its holistic approach. The development of several state frameworks, including the 2016 one,

involved several international organisations, including United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNICEF, the World Bank, European Union (EU), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and International Organisation for Migration (IOM) development on a global scale. Indeed, over the last three decades since the first youth policy, more than 40 laws and 30 international conventions on youth have been adopted by the Uzbekistani authorities. While Uzbekistan’s policies and laws set the foundations for fundamental youth development, their visions and aims go beyond the mere introduction of legal frames, as they also emphasise the need to inculcate youth moral and cultural values and patriotism. For instance, while the Law on State Youth Policy 2016 defines the development of cultural and moral values in youth as its priority, education is indicated as the vehicle to raise “model youth”.

Moreover, although the number is relatively smaller compared to other regions, Central Asia still represents 20% of individuals who joined the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (ISIS) as foreign fighters since 2012, and among them, around 1,500 are estimated be Uzbekistani (Lemon 2018; Lynch et al., 2016) (Table 2). Moreover, several terrorist acts have been committed by Uzbekistani nationals, including the Istanbul Airport attack in 2016 and the truck attacks in Berlin and New York City in 2017, resulting in over 50 deaths and hundreds of injuries in total (Aljazeera, 2016; Neumeister, 2023). Hence, the state has placed significant emphasis on preventing youth radicalisation, underscoring the necessity of instilling strong moral values in young people.

**Table 2**

*Estimated Number of Central Asians Participating in Conflicts in Syria and Iraq since 2011*

Country	Estimate
Tajikistan	1,899
Uzbekistan	1,500
Kyrgyzstan	863
Turkmenistan	360
Kazakhstan	350

*Note.* Lemon (2018, p. 5), “Taking up terrorism in Central Asia”. Those numbers are upper estimates.

The concern for the religious radicalisation of youth is also indicated in Article 5 of the Law on State Youth Policy 2016, “protection of youth against actions leading to blasting moral principles, the ideas of terrorism and religious extremism, separatism, fundamentalism, the cult of violence and cruelty”. In such a context, following the death of Islam Karimov, his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has increased national and international commitment to youth development since 2016. In 2017, he pledged to support youth development in his inaugural address to the 72nd UN General Assembly. By highlighting the youth’s vulnerability to radicalism and particularly describing youth as the primary source of crime, he framed youth as a threat to the peace and stability of the country:

The most important task is to fight for people’s minds, especially young people. Most of the crimes linked with extremist activity and violence are committed by people under the age of 30. ... The planet’s future and well-being depend on what kind of people our children will grow up into. Our key task is to provide conditions for the self-realisation of the youth and create a barrier against the spread of the “virus” of the ideology of violence. (Mirziyoyev, 2017, p. 3)

Furthermore, in 2017, the National Action Strategy on Five Priority Development Areas 2017-2021 was introduced. While the strategy addressed a wide range of sectors, youth development was also included as one of the state priorities, highlighting the importance of youth “spiritual and moral development and healthy lifestyle”. Hence, youth in Uzbekistan have been at the heart of nation-building processes, and whilst numerous policies have been enacted to guarantee their fundamental rights, the “model image” of Uzbekistani youth has also been portrayed through political discourses, emphasising the inculcation of moral and cultural values and patriotism in youth.

### ***Youth Opportunities and Inequalities***

Although Uzbekistan views youth as a “strategic resource” and actively engage in youth in the nation-building processes, various inequalities persist in Uzbekistani society, affecting youth opportunities in different sectors. While experiences and access to socio-

economic opportunities of Uzbekistani youth are heterogenous, typically ethnicity, geolocations, gender, religion, and socio-economic status are the main drivers of inequalities in Uzbekistan.

### **Ethnic Inequalities and Tensions**

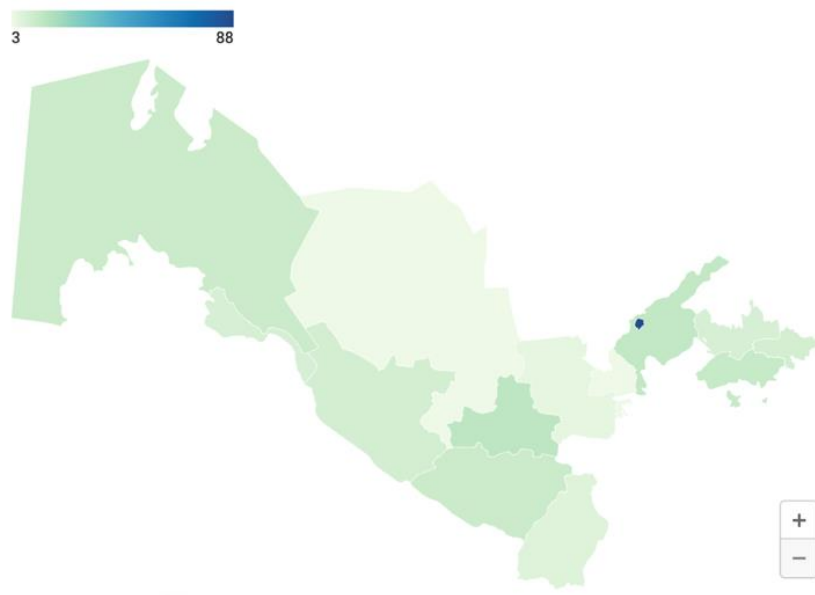
Despite official Uzbekistani national discourses, including the Constitution, which advocate for the inter-ethnic harmony and rights of ethnic minorities, new national images and identity are ethnic Uzbek centered. To give a timeless historical continuity and legitimacy to the statehood and authorities, there has been an extensive focus on the notion of ancestry roots in the Uzbekistani nation-building processes. This ethnocentric approach has led to the power concentration to ethnic Uzbeks, creating imbalances among different ethnic groups. Indeed, senior positions in the government and also private sectors are largely occupied by ethnic Uzbeks, affecting ethnic minorities' access to resources and power (U.S. Department of State, 2016; Chong, 2007). In terms of the Tajik ethnic group, they have often been associated by the Uzbekistani authorities with Islamic extremism, resulting in their discrimination (Ethnic Power Relations [EPR] Atlas, 2021; Minority Rights Group International, 2018b). For instance, in 1998, the Ministry of Education ordered the destruction of “ideologically incorrect” textbooks, and many books and textbooks in the Tajik language were destroyed in Samarkand and Bukhara (Institute for War and Peace, 2005). Moreover, books and publications from Tajikistan are often not allowed in Uzbekistan, and the Tajik Cultural Centre in Samarkand was shut down in 2013 (Minority Rights Group International, 2018b). Therefore, to avoid discrimination and have better socio-economic opportunities, many Tajiks are believed to have registered themselves as Uzbeks (EPR Atlas, 2021). While an official estimate in 2017 indicated 1,554,700 Tajiks in Uzbekistan, in reality, four to six million Tajiks are believed to be living in Uzbekistan (Minority Rights Group International, 2018b). Regarding ethnic Russians, who are primarily non-Uzbek speakers, the establishment of Uzbek as the state language and its promotion as the language to access power has been limiting ethnic Russian's access to opportunities, although Russian is still widely and unofficially practised at the state level (EPR Atlas, 2021). As a result, coupled with the authoritarian regime, since independence, a third of Russians are believed to have left Uzbekistan (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNCHR], 2005).

## Urban-Rural Divides

Around half of Uzbekistan's population, 49%, reside in rural settings (The World Bank, 2023), and the persisting urban-rural divides obstruct youth's opportunities to live to their full potential. During the Soviet period, higher education institutions were primarily established in Tashkent, and the situation remains unchanged. In 2023, among 210 higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, 102 are in the Tashkent region, with 88 located specifically in Tashkent city alone, indicating significant disparities in access to higher education across the country (Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2023) (Figure 5).

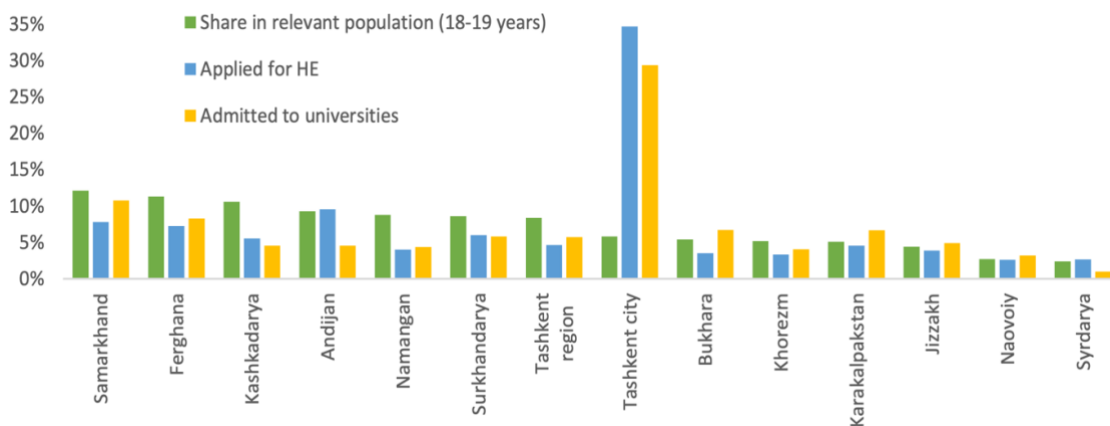
**Figure 5**

### *Location of Higher Education Institutions*



*Note.* Saida (2023), based on the data from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan. The blue dot is Tashkent city.

Although Tashkent's youth population (ages 18-19) makes up only 6%, which is lower than in other regions, the proportion of youth applying to or being admitted to higher education institutions is significantly higher than in other regions, at 35% and 30%, respectively, in 2021, highlighting regional disparities in access to higher education (UNICEF, 2021) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6*****Location of Higher Education Institutions Youth Ratios Accessing Higher Education in Uzbekistan in 2021***

*Note.* UNICEF (2021, p. 99), “Share of regions in population, applications for HE [Higher education] and admitted to HE”.

The concentration of higher education institutions in urban or regional areas significantly also disadvantages youth from rural regions, who typically require student dormitory rooms. In Uzbekistan, the recent increase in admission quotas for higher education institutions has led to a demand that existing dormitories cannot meet. While 37% of all state dormitories (95 out of 157) are located in Tashkent (Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan), in 2022, overall, only 47% of students needing dormitory accommodation were able to secure it (Jamiyat, 2022), and private housing in Tashkent remains unaffordable for many students, notably for those from rural areas (Figure 7).

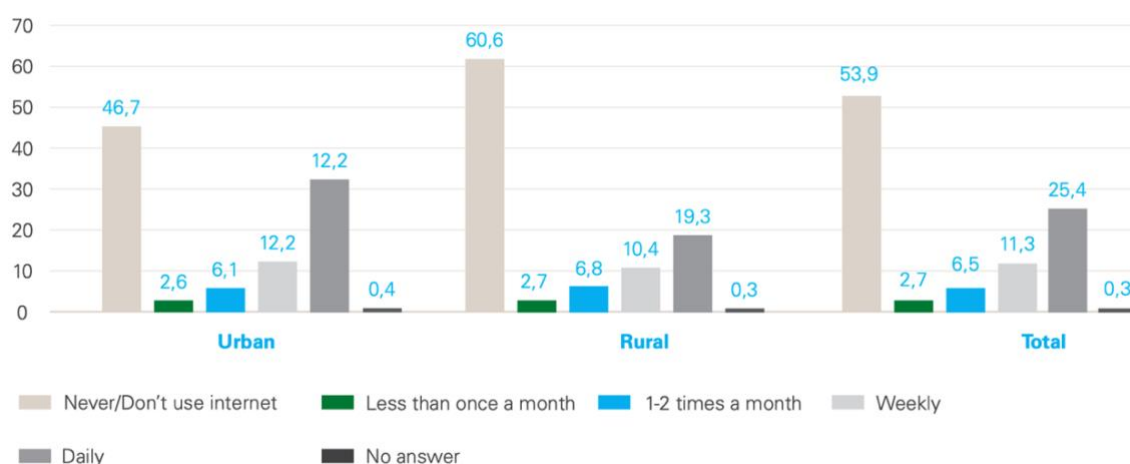
**Figure 7*****Students’ Families Trying to Secure a Dormitory on Campus***

Note. ГАЗЕТА.UZ (2022), Images of students' families looking for available dormitories.

Furthermore, disparities in available learning resources lead to unequal access to tertiary education for youth, particularly disadvantaging those from rural areas, where school infrastructures are often outdated, equipment is basic, and the quality of teaching tends to be lower (UNICEF, 2020). A study by UNICEF also indicated that internet use is slightly low among youth in rural areas (Figure 8).

**Figure 8**

***Students' Families Trying to Secure a Dormitory on Campus Use of the Internet among Uzbekistan Youth***



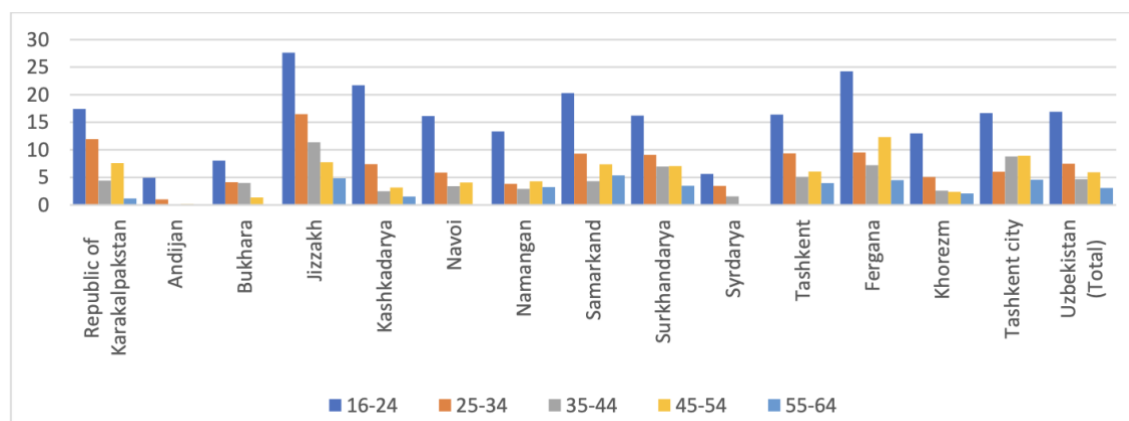
Note. UNICEF (2020, p. 114), "How frequently do you use the Internet? Disaggregated settlement type, age 14-30 y.o. [years old]".

Moreover, given the competitive tertiary education entrance and neoliberal education model, shadow education has become widespread in Uzbekistan; however, high-quality private tutors in rural settings are often limited (Hajar & Tabaeva, 2024). Unequal access to educational opportunities adversely affects employment prospects for rural youth (Chankseliani et al., 2018). Approximately 10% of Uzbekistan's GDP relies on remittances from labour migrants, primarily in Russia and Kazakhstan; they are mostly men from rural areas (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021), highlighting the difficulty for rural youth to secure employment. Furthermore, youth employment opportunities vary significantly across regions, with regions like Ferghana, Jizzakh and

Kashkadarya experiencing exceptionally high unemployment rates, underscoring the heterogeneous realities of Uzbekistani youth (Figure 9) (The World Bank, 2021).

**Figure 9**

***Unemployment rates in Uzbekistan per Regions***

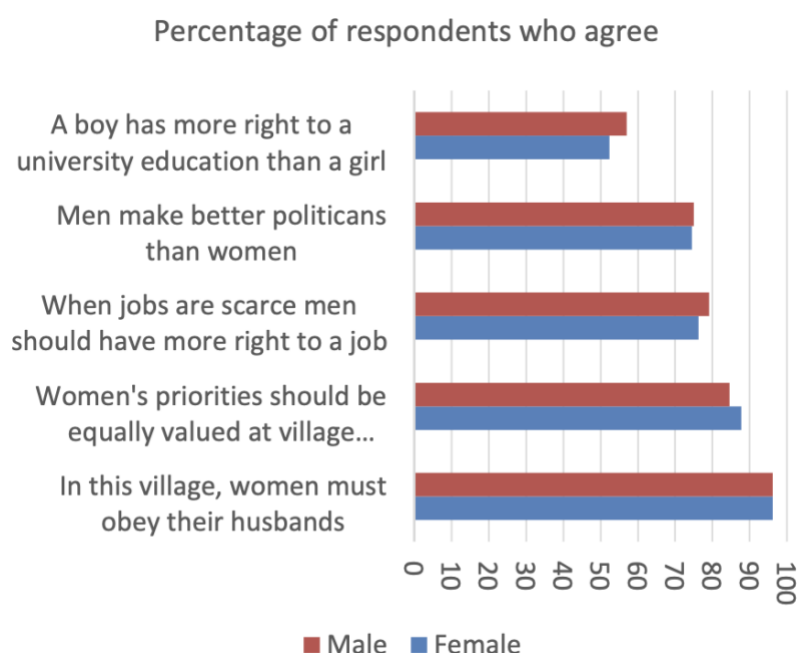


*Note.* The World Bank (2021, p.17), “Unemployment rate by region and age group (%)”.

### **Gender Disparities**

Women in Uzbekistan have historically been central to evolving nation-building agendas since the Soviet era, and their socio-economic positions have transformed over time as they have often been symbolised as the carriers and protectors of national traditions and values (Ozawa, 2022). While women in the Soviet Union were actively mobilised to participate in public life, these were somewhat artificial and even paradoxical as societal norms still expected women to bear the double burden of household duties and roles outside their homes (Chenoy, 2016). Gender equity issues went unaddressed during Soviet times, and in post-independence Uzbekistan, efforts to forge a new national identity by revisiting traditional values have reinforced patriarchal national discourses (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2014).

However, it is worth highlighting that recent reforms since Mirziyoyev took office have made strides in indicators measuring gender equality/inequality, such as the increased parity in higher education enrolment between women and men (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2023). Nevertheless, despite these advances, patriarchal gender hierarchies remain deeply entrenched in Uzbekistani society (The World Bank, 2024) (Figure 10).

**Figure 10*****Prevalent Patriarchal Gender Norms***

*Note.* The World Bank (2024, p 14), based on the survey conducted with 4,013 households

Access to higher education has improved, yet STEM fields remain predominantly male-dominated, with women comprising only 36% of graduates in 2022 (The World Bank, 2024). Women are primarily concentrated in low-wage sectors, such as health (77% of the sector) and education (74% of the sector), and pay gaps remain a significant issue, with women earning 34% less than men in 2022 (The World Bank, 2024). The World Bank survey in Uzbekistan (2024) revealed that 30% of respondents regarded it inappropriate for a wife's earnings to exceed husbands to maintain family harmony, while 75% viewed women's priority as family and household responsibilities, indicating prevalent gendered norms and power imbalances. The survey also highlighted that women in Uzbekistan spend an average of 5.27 hours daily on household chores, compared to 2.15 hours for men, a primary factor discouraging women's participation in the labour market (The World Bank, 2024). The study further indicated that the NEET rate for young women aged 15 to 25 is considerably higher than for men, at 42% compared to 8.8% in 2022.

Moreover, gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical concern in the country, with 21,871 protection orders issued in 2023 (UNPD, 2024), although the actual number of GBV is estimated to be significantly underreported (Amnesty International, 2023; The World Bank, 2024). Despite the criminalisation of domestic violence in 2023, a strong

culture of shame, “Uyat”, surrounding women and an emphasis on preserving family honour, which is prevalent throughout Central Asia, deter women from reporting abuse (Thibault & Caron 2022). Additionally, physical violence against “disobedient” wives is often perceived as justified in Uzbekistan (The World Bank, 2024) (Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

***Wildly Accepted Physical Violence against “Disobedient” Wives***



*Note.* The World Bank (2024, p. 14), Country Gender Assessment for Uzbekistan 2024.

Indeed, family members constituted 85% of aggressors in the reported GBV cases in 2025 (UNDP, 2024). Although there has been improved female representation in Uzbekistani politics since 2017 (The World Bank, 2024). The political landscape of Uzbekistan is still largely male-dominated (Table 3), which creates “male solidarity”, hindering women’s protection. Officials often suggest family preservation and advise women to reconcile with abusive partners (Amnesty International, 2023).

**Table 3**

***Female Ratios in Leadership Positions***

Position	2018	2022

Senate	20%	25%
Ministerial	2.9%	5.7%
Local community (Mahalla)	10%	13%

*Note.* The World Bank (2024). Country gender assessment for Uzbekistan 2024.

## **Education in Uzbekistan**

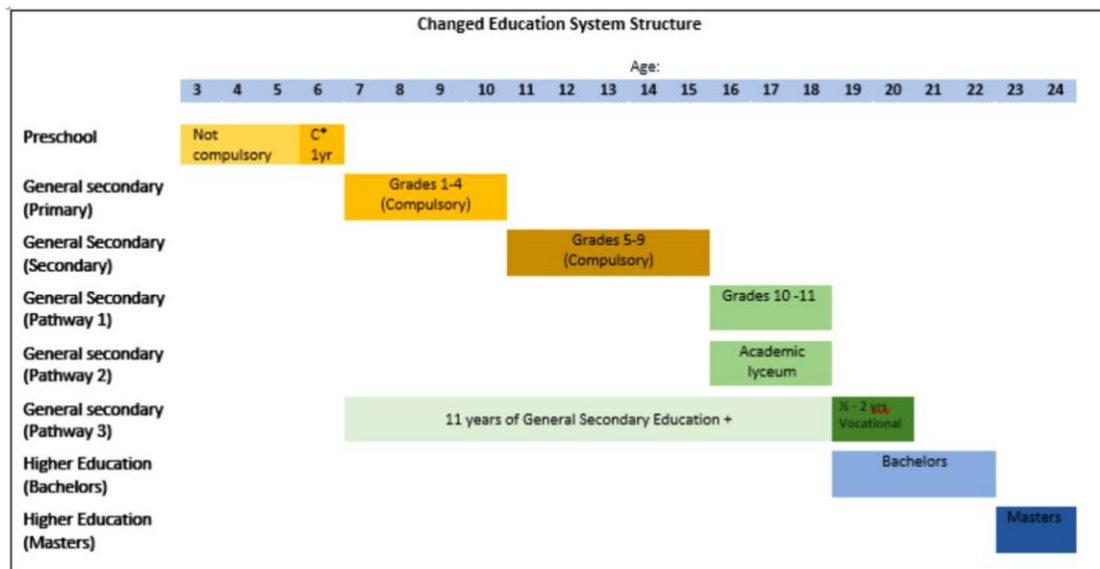
### ***Education System***

Education in Uzbekistan is centrally organised through two main Ministries, the Ministry of Preschool and School Education (The Ministry of Preschool Education and Ministry of Public Education were merged in 2022) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. Article 41 of the Constitution adopted in 1992 guarantees the right to education, which states, “Everyone shall have the right to education. The state shall guarantee free secondary education. Schooling shall be under state supervision”. This laid the foundation for free and compulsory primary and secondary education, reinforced by the Law on Education (1997, 2020). Under President Mirziyoyev, in recent years, Uzbekistan has embarked on large-scale political and economic reforms to transform outdated and isolated systems, including in the education field. The first Law on Education (1997) was largely based on Soviet Education Law (UNICEF, 2018) and remained unchanged for two decades until it was reformed in 2020. Given the significant youth demographic in Uzbekistan and their crucial role in nation-building processes, a range of new education policies and programmes have been implemented to prepare future generations for the market-based global system. Notably, following the introduction of the Development Strategy 2017-2021, which placed significant emphasis on education, profound education reforms have been implemented, resulting in a constantly evolving and rapidly transforming education landscape in Uzbekistan. As one of the most significant modifications, from the 2017-2018 school year, the compulsory General Secondary Education (GSE) was expanded from nine to eleven years from the 2018-2019 school year, and starting from the 2021-22 academic year, enrollment of 6-year-old children in pre-primary education also became compulsory (Figure 12). Although 11-year GSE operates as one system, Grades one to four are considered primary, and Grades five to nine are secondary. In the last two years of the GSE, Grades 10 and eleven, students’ paths diverge

as they have to specialise in either vocational or academic, influencing their access to higher education. Hence, currently, there are typically three different educational pathways students can choose: 1) eleven consecutive years in a GSE school, 2) nine years in a GSE school followed by two years in an academic lyceum, or 3) eleven years in a GSE school followed by additional six months to two years in a vocational college depending on the specialisation.

**Figure 12**

*Wildly Reformed Education System in Uzbekistan since 2017-2018 School Year*



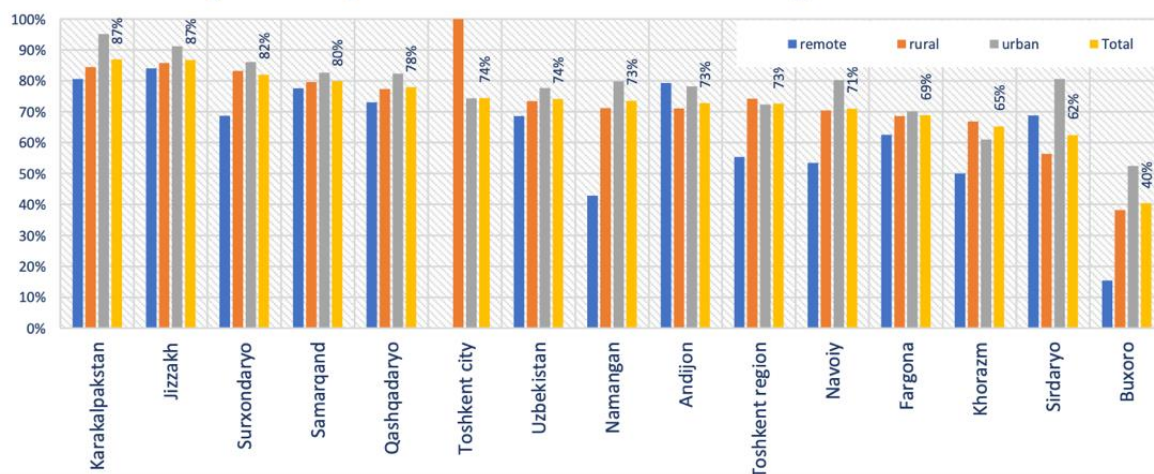
*Note.* Education Sector Plan [ESP] of Uzbekistan 2019-2023 (2019, p. 21).

Although primary and secondary level enrolment rates slightly decreased in the first decade following the independence due to the sudden collapse of the Moscow-centralised political and economic structures, the country maintained a nearly universal rate over the last two decades, partially due to the Soviet legacy which fiercely prompted universal school education as a key channel to inculcate socialist ideologies. In 2023, for instance, the overall gross enrolment rates for primary and secondary education were 93% and 87%, respectively (UNESCO, 2024). However, despite these rates, an estimated 641,136 children remained out of school that year. Moreover, the increasing youth demographic has posed significant challenges for the Uzbekistani education system in meeting the high demand for education. In the 2022-2023 school year, 6.3 million children attended schools, while the country had only 5.2 million available school places (Ministry of Preschool and School Education, Republic of Uzbekistan). The number of school-aged

children (7-17 years old) is projected to rise even further in the following years, with an estimate of 7.6 million by 2026 and 8.6 million by 2030, and the government aims to construct 1.2 million new school places by 2026 to address this issue (Ministry of Preschool and School Education Republic of Uzbekistan). However, the education system in Uzbekistan remains under significant pressure due to “crowding-in” (UNICEF, 2021, p. 61). In the meantime, to remediate the situation, around 74% of schools across the country operate in double or more shifts (UNICEF, 2021) (Figure 13).

**Figure 13**

***Double-Shift Schooling in General Secondary Education by Region***



*Note.* UNICEF. (2021, p. 75). Uzbekistan Education Sector Analysis.

It is to be noted that the education system in Uzbekistan is highly centralised, and as of the 2023-2024 school year, 97% of general secondary schools were state-run (The World Bank, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). However, due to extensive educational reforms in recent years, the number of private schools has significantly increased, rising fivefold in the last five years, from 58 in the 2018-2019 school year to 293 in the 2023-2024 school year (Saida & Khashimov, 2024), underscoring the rapidly growing neoliberal influence in Uzbekistani education sector, potentially adding a new layer to existing inequalities among youth. Moreover, since 2019, the Uzbekistani government has advanced the education of “gifted” students, aiming to “prepare the next generation of leaders to actively and positively contribute to the development of Uzbekistan” (Embassy of Uzbekistan in New Deli, 2023). Under Presidential Decree PP-4199, 14 presidential schools, nine creative schools, and 182 specialised schools have been established since 2019 (The Agency for

Specialised Educational Institutions, 2024). While they are free of fees, they are highly selective. Presidential schools feature the Cambridge curriculum for STEM subjects, which are taught in English and are staffed by both foreign and local teachers; creative schools place a strong emphasis on literature, linguistics and language studies; and specialised schools focus on in-depth teaching in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) subjects.

Higher education is another sector that has changed drastically and rapidly since the new presidency. Until recently, significantly low tertiary education enrolment rates have been one of the biggest education challenges in Uzbekistan, which has been only between 17% and 8% since independence (The World Bank, 2023) due to the state's centralised restrictive admission quota system. The higher education enrolment rate is annually decided as an admission quota through a presidential decree reflecting the state economy, which is determined through consultation with the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection and Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation. However, to transform the higher education sector to respond better to the market-based economy and enhance youth contributions to national development, Uzbekistan has drastically increased admission quotas in recent years, reaching 46% in 2023 (The World Bank, 2023). The Uzbekistan-2030 Strategy sets a target of achieving 50% by 2030. This rapid achievement is primarily attributed to a substantial rise in the number of higher education institutions across the country, nearly tripling in less than a decade. Today, there exist 210 institutions, compared to 77 in 2017, including 67 non-state and 29 international branch campuses (Minister of Higher Education of the Republic of Uzbekistan). In this effort to expand the state's education provision and integrate with global market dynamics, Uzbekistan has actively encouraged the privatisation of education and invited foreign investment. This initiative has led to the mushrooming of foreign higher education institutions operating within the country, making Uzbekistan the third-largest host of international branch campuses globally (Goziev, 2024; Wilkins & Muratov, 2023).

### ***Curriculum and Textbooks***

The school curriculum from grade one to nine is unified across public schools in Uzbekistan, except presidential, creative and specialised schools, where the national curriculum is “tweaked” and “personalised”. Since students advance to three different

pathways from grade nine, their curricula also differ. Nevertheless, the national curriculum in Uzbekistan is centralised and overseen by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education (MPSE), and schools cannot choose textbooks. Students do not buy school textbooks, which are instead provided through a state rental programme, a scheme introduced through the World Bank project in 2010, aiming at making textbooks affordable to all children. The borrowing became free of charge in 2022, a change implemented in response to the strong public resistance to significant fee increases (Vaib.uz, 2024). However, the government has recently announced the potential reintroduction of rental fees starting from the 2025-2026 school year for grades two to eleven (Vaib.uz, 2024). Curriculum and textbook development are managed by the Republican Education Centre, known as RTM (Respublika Ta'lim Markazi), which operates under the PMSE alongside the newly established Republican Scientific and Methodological Center for the Development of Education, created in 2023. After independence, a large-scale curriculum and textbook revisions took in the early 2000s through the support of ADB, particularly following the alphabet shifts from Cyrillic to Latin. In 2018, with the technical support of UNICEF, a standardised National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was created, followed by another series of large-scale curriculum and textbook revisions, with further involvement of other international development agencies, such as the United States Agency for International Development [USAID], ADB, the World Bank and the British Council. The mass-scale revisions were undertaken primarily to update decade-old teaching and learning practices, which were mostly inherited from the Soviet “banking” model. The goal was to transition to a so-called competency-based approach that reflects international standards and is more inclusive, notably for girls and children with disabilities (UNICEF, 2022). From the 2021-2022 school year, newly developed textbooks based on the revised curriculum were gradually introduced to schools, starting from grades one and two. Moreover, with the ongoing education reforms bringing the global market into perspectives, such as the government aiming for Uzbekistan to rank within the top 30<sup>th</sup> in PISA by 2030 (UNICEF, 2018), foreign textbook models, such as Finish and Singapore, have been gradually introduced in Uzbekistan (Education Alliance Finland, 2023). The textbook printing is commissioned by the private sector. For the first decade after independence, only one state-owned company, O'qituvchi, supplied textbooks. However, increasing demand for textbooks, particularly since the expansion of compulsory education to grade 11 and textbook revisions, has led to the participation of several companies in the tender processes (KUN.UZ, 2022). Republican

Education Centre, a department attached to the MPSE, oversees ensuring the quality of textbooks. Due to the gradual introduction of new textbooks, publishing companies differ for each grade, even those in the same subject. For instance, six different companies were involved in producing the renewed textbooks for grade three in 2022 (KUN.UZ, 2022). However, concerns have been raised about potential nepotism in the selection process, as one of the large contract-winning publishing houses is suspected to have ties to the Tashkent city governor (KUN.UZ, 2022). While clarifying these allegations is challenging, corruption remains a persistent issue in Uzbekistan, including bribing university admission, exams and diplomas (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], n.d.). According to the Corruption Perceptions Index, the country ranks 121<sup>st</sup> out of 180 countries, which represents a significant improvement from 168<sup>th</sup> out of 175 a decade ago in 2013 (Transparency International, 2023).

### ***Language of Instruction***

As the state language, Uzbek is the primary medium of instruction in Uzbekistan. However, recognising the country's multi-ethnic context, Article 6 of the State Language Act (1989) guarantees educational provisions in the languages of ethnic minorities. School education in Uzbekistan is thus provided in seven different languages, including Uzbek, Russian, Tajik, Karakalpak, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Turkmen. Although the curriculum is consistent across these schools, textbooks originally in Uzbek are translated into all other languages. Nevertheless, despite the diverse linguistic provision, given the dominant demographic predominance of ethnic Uzbeks in Uzbekistan and the emphasis on the Uzbek language in the nation-building projects, Uzbek-medium schools constitute 82.5% of total schools (The Government of Uzbekistan, 2019). As of 2017, Russian-medium schools made up 7.6% of the total, followed by Kazakh at 3.5%, Karakalpak at 3.3%, Tajik at 2.2%, Kyrgyz at 0.5%, and Turkmen at 0.4% (The Government of Uzbekistan, 2019). The distribution of these schools varies regionally, with Russian-medium schools concentrated in Tashkent. According to a UNICEF study in 2018, 44% of schoolchildren in Tashkent city were enrolled in Russian-medium schools in 2017. This study also highlighted slight performance disparities between these two school types, with Uzbek-medium schools excelling in reading while Russian-medium schools outperforming slightly in science (Government of Uzbekistan, 2019; UNICEF, 2018). The reading performance gaps are primarily attributed to differences in the proportion of students who

speak their school medium-instruction at home, 68% for Uzbek-medium schools compared to 42% for Russian-medium schools (Government of Uzbekistan, 2019; UNICEF, 2018). Conversely, the science performance gap may stem from the scarce availability of supplementary learning materials in Uzbek, which are mostly available in Russian or English (UNICEF, 2018). However, these disparities in learning outcomes remain small, although, in Uzbekistani society, the conception that Russian-medium schools offer better quality is still prevalent, most likely due to the Soviet legacy attached to the Russian language (O’Loughlin, 2001). Moreover, despite the widespread de-Russification observed across Central Asia, Russian retains its status as a predominant language of academia in the region (Bekmurzaev 2019), notably in STEM and medical fields (Bahry et al. 2017; Ozawa et al., 2024).

## **Education in Uzbekistan Education and National Identity Construction**

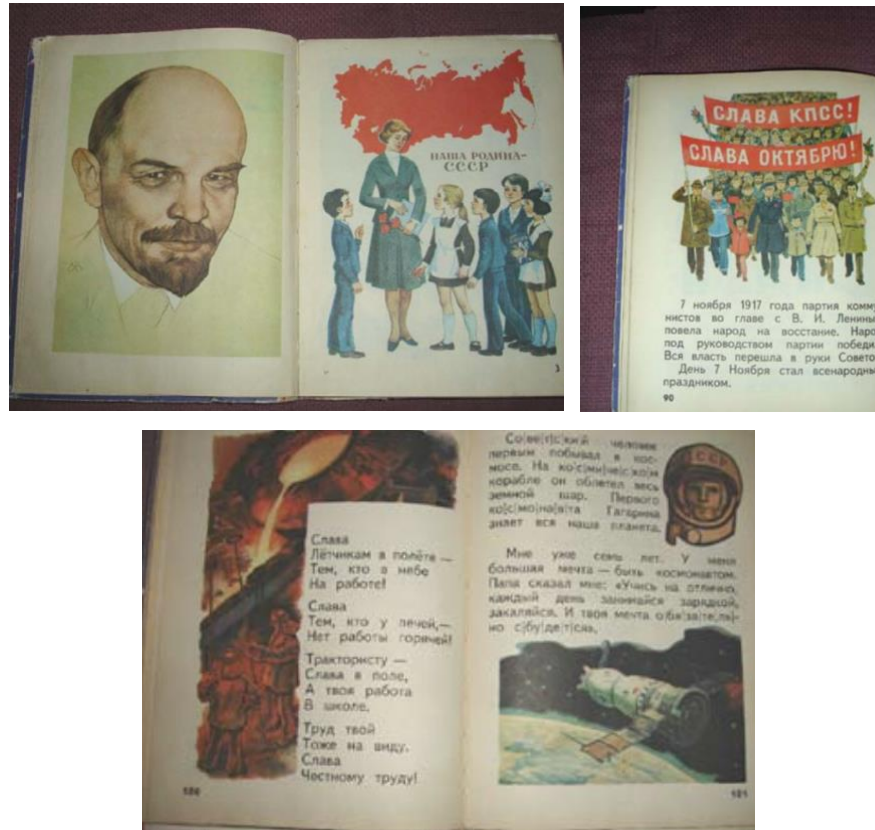
### ***Before Independence – Soviet Identity***

During the Soviet era, schools became central instruments of broader political indoctrination. As articulated in Article 25 of the USSR Constitution, “In the USSR ... guarantees the general education and occupational preparation of citizens, provides for communistic education and the intellectual and physical development of youth and prepares it for work and social activity”, schools aimed at instilling socialist ideologies among children and youth across the Soviet Union and constructing ideal and unified “Soviet people”, советский народ (sovetsky narod). To ensure the inculcation of socialist ideologies, the literacy campaign known as “Likbetz” was introduced, and education was made universal and compulsory for seven grades for all children. Education was provided in both Russian and local languages to cater to non-Russian speakers. Highly ideologised, school practices, ranging from textbooks, celebrations, decorations, uniforms, and extra-curricular activities, were meticulously designed by the central authorities to align with communist principles, effectively moulding future Soviet generations (Filippova, 2009; Shafiyeva, 2016). Stalin himself was personally involved in the development processes of school curricula and textbooks (Institute for Development of Freedom of Information [IDFI], 2019). Drawing heavily from Marxism and Leninism, school discourses actively promoted Soviet values, such as collectivism, patriotism, humanism, interethnic harmony, socialist “inter-nationalism”, equity, atheism, and non-tolerance to bourgeois ideologies.

Textbooks were encrusted with these values, and both textual and visual contents celebrated political leaders, Soviet achievements and holidays (Figure 14).

**Figure 14**

*School Textbooks Promoting Soviet Values*



*Note.* Filippova (2009). Up left (p. 31), Vladimir Lenin is on the left page, and a teacher and schoolchildren with the USSR map titled “Our Motherland – USSR” is on the right page. Up right (p. 33), Celebration of November 7th (Bolshevik Revolution). Below is Soviet space exploration.

Moreover, based on the socialist ethos, moral and social upbringing took on particular significance in Soviet school education, extensively focusing on youth character development and internalisation of the norms and behaviours expected in communist society, aiming to cultivate ideal patriots embodying socialism (Alpysbayeva, 2020; Shafiyeva, 2016). As part of this effort, for instance, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences introduced a teachers’ guide for moral education, outlining target behaviours and attitudes for each grade level (Zajda, 1988). In the 1980s, the “20 Rules for School Children” were introduced, listing specific children’s codes of conduct. In some cases, each child received a “pupil’s card” with these rules inscribed on the back, further institutionalising and

normalising a collective sense of “good” and “bad” within youth about what it meant to be an appropriate Soviet individual (The Atlantic, 1953).

To enhance socialist awareness and patriotism among youth, the official curriculum was supplemented by a range of extra-curricular activities, including school assemblies, celebrations and youth organisations. Large-scale youth organisations, such as Little Octoberists (aged 7-10), Young Pioneers (aged 10-14) and Komsomol (aged 14-28), were established. These organisations offered various free activities, such as art and sports clubs, and were directly affiliated with the Communist Party and closely coordinated with schools. Participation in these organisations was normative and prestigious for all children and youth (Alpysbayeva, 2020). They served as the most compelling socialisation channels, providing Soviet youth with an ideological and moral education that fostered features of “model Soviet youth” (Akyildiz, 2012). By 1986, around 3,265,000 Uzbek youth were members of Komsomol (Khodjayev & Mizhiritsky, 1987). Additionally, school uniforms played a significant role in inculcating Soviet values, symbolising what constituted a “good” and “appropriate” Soviet child. For instance, girls wore white hair bows (*bantsiki*) and young pioneers’ red neckerchiefs, which were emblematic of Soviet prosperity and ideologies (Millei et al., 2018).

### *Post-independence*

After independence, education has remained crucial in constructing a new national identity despite changes in national values and patriotic content (Adams, 2010; Dadabayev, 2015). Although post-independence, Uzbekistan has shifted away from communism and no longer centres its identity on socialist ideologies, the continuation of political leadership primarily composed of individuals who were educated and served under the Soviet regime has influenced its political approaches to using education to shape a new national identity (Alpysbayeva, 2020; Zadjia, 1988). Reflecting practices from the Soviet time, Uzbekistani school discourses emphasise patriotism, actively promoting history, morality and upbringing as key national markers in instilling new national values and norms and constructing new national awareness and, therefore, identity. While there is a scarcity of studies exploring the relationship between education and national identity in Uzbekistan, UNESCO and Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (UNESCO & MGIEP, 2017) noted that school textbooks across Central Asian states overwhelmingly emphasise national identity, patriotism and

nationalism. Uzbekistan has introduced various subjects, such as Feeling of Homeland (Vatan tuyg'usi), Fundamentals of Spirituality (Ma'naviyat asoslari), Etiquette (Odobnoma), Fundamentals of the State and Law (Davlat va huquq asoslari), and Upbringing (Tarbiya). As part of the de-Sovietisation process, contemporary Uzbekistani history textbooks portray the Soviet period as a time of suffering and hardship for Uzbekistan, during which “language, religion, culture and other aspects of identity and freedom” were suppressed (Dadabayev, 2015, p. 93). The promotion of collective memory, including the remembrance of past sufferings, is a common strategy in the construction of national consciousness. In many cases, particular discourses about the past are strategically selected, assigned national significance in relation to the present and future, and often dramatized to promote specific national images, fostering a sense of unity and pride (Wang, 2008). However, in this process, the pasts of certain social groups are often prioritised over others, aiming to shape a national identity centred around the dominant group, which controls the production of collective memory. Moreover, while reviving and reinterpreting national history, Uzbekistani school textbooks predominantly associate national symbols with the titular ethnic group, Uzbeks, indicating the somewhat ethnocentric nature of the new national identity (Laurelle, 2017). Other studies also show that national heroes in school textbooks are predominantly male with Uzbek ethnicity or historically associated with the contemporary territory of Uzbekistan, such as Amir Timur, Ulugh Bek, and Alisher Navoi (Suleymanov, 2018). Furthermore, as highlighted through these national heroes, Uzbekistani textbooks are highly gendered since national figures are predominantly represented by male figures (Norova, 2020). Moreover, similar to Soviet schools, celebrating new holidays and cultural and mass spectacles have become integral to school life, inculcating new national values. For instance, during national holidays, school children and youth are extensively involved in state-organised events where they are recruited by the authorities to dance, sing and wave the national flag, thereby fostering a sense of national pride among youth (Adams, 2010) (Table 4).

**Table 4**

***Provision of Children and Youth from Ministries during the Independence Day Celebrations***

Ministry	Provision	Purpose
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Public Education	1,200 technical high school girls	Background-placard mosaics
	150 each boys/girl in G3-4	Children's Block Theatrical performance, misc.
Higher/Middle Education	2,500 young women and 4,00 young men	Theatrical performance, misc.
Public Health	2,500 young women and 400 young men	Theatrical performance, misc.

*Note.* Retrieved from "Preliminary Plan of Assignment" issued by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, from Adams (2010). *The spectacular state: Culture and national identity in Uzbekistan.*

Additionally, moral values are recognised as fundamental markers of Uzbekistani national identity (UNESCO & MGIEP, 2017). According to Kawano's study on citizenship education in Uzbekistan, which analysed school textbooks in 2013, highlighted the important role morality played in shaping Uzbekistani national awareness through school discourses. This focus on morality was integrated across various subjects, including ethics, socio-political studies, constitutional studies, language, and history. Although the ideological framework has shifted away from socialism, the emphasis on morality and upbringing thus has remained a crucial aspect of Uzbekistan education. Article 3 of the Law of Education of Uzbekistan indeed underscores upbringing as one of the central concepts of national education, emphasising "the all-round development of the young generation based on a specific target-oriented and socio-historical experience, the formation of consciousness, spiritual and moral values and worldview". This indicates how moral and ethical grounding is viewed as vital for constructing Uzbekistani national identity and the crucial role of education in inculcating them in youth.

## **Conclusion**

Although Uzbekistan became a sovereign state only three decades ago, it has a rich historical background that has evolved through various forms. This historical evolution during the pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-independence periods has continuously transformed its political, social, and cultural dimensions, including the concept of nationhood. As

Uzbekistan seeks to shape a new national identity with a focus on de-Sovietisation, the enduring impacts of the past continue to influence contemporary nation-building processes. These processes encompass political strategies aimed at shaping a new national identity and the extensive use of education to instil national values related to history, ethnicity, morality, and more. In this context of nation-building, youth represent both the future of the nation and its largest demographic group. They are recognised as vital actors and a “strategic resource of the state”. Consequently, nurturing a sense of new national identity among youth has become a political priority in the post-Soviet environment, with schools serving as crucial instruments for promoting these new national discourses.

However, Uzbekistani youth face various inequalities in opportunities, and national discourses often remain asymmetric, frequently excluding certain social groups, such as ethnic minorities, women, and devoted religious believers. While the state projects an image of inclusivity, these asymmetrical discourses institutionalise existing disparities in socio-economic and political opportunities for diverse young people, potentially leading to grievances and tensions. Given that Uzbekistan is currently experiencing a “window of demographic opportunity” (UNICEF, 2018, p. 3), it is vital to gain an in-depth understanding of school discourses surrounding national identity, particularly how these discourses construct young people’s national identities as a result of compulsory education. However, despite the significance of this topic, empirical research on the relationship between education and national identity is limited, especially regarding youth perspectives on their nation. Hence, this research aims to address the existing knowledge gap in this area. By uncovering these discourses, the study seeks to promote an inclusive national identity while addressing inequalities and fostering social cohesion and sustainable peace.

## Chapter 3: Literature Review

### Introduction

This study explores how school discourses shape national identities among Uzbekistani youth from diverse backgrounds, with a particular emphasis on youth voices to understand the outcomes of their compulsory education in relation to national identity. In this chapter, I delve into the key thematic concepts of my research, including identity, gender, ethnicity, religion, youth and education. Whilst different schools of thought exist to understand those concepts, my research aims to capture school processes of national identity construction from youth perspectives with ontological and epistemological openness. Therefore, I draw on post-structuralism to develop my understanding of the concepts central to my research. As a part of the literature review, empirical research on the relationship between school education and national identities will also be discussed.

### Conceptualising Identity

#### *Identity in Fluidity*

Various approaches exist to conceptualise identity, which entails the awareness of self in relation to society. For a long time, the Cartesian understanding of identity as a “self-sustaining subject” (Hall, 2011, p. 1) has prevailed in Western social theory and philosophy. Emphasising rationality and autonomy, identity was considered an objectively standalone and conscious entity detached from the surrounding world. However, such an essentialist conception of identity came under critiques from post-modernism and post-structuralism in the mid and late-20<sup>th</sup> century, which consider knowledge as a social construct and rejects essential and universal truths, hence challenging the notion of “true-self” or “substantive core behind identity” (Oksala, 1998, p. 42). Therefore, identity has no stable condition of existence, and the concept of self is empty and vague. The emptiness of identity lacks specificity, which is described as a “floating signifier” (Souza, 2021). This concept of signifier originally stems from structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure (1974), who argued that language is a system of signs which consists of signifiers: representation and signified: concept. Whereas the structuralist understanding of signifier is specific, this notion of “floating signifier” within the post-structuralist lens “serves to create the conditions of possibility for many competing and complementary definitions, meanings and interpretations” (Kelly, 2014, p. 906). Hence, without a stable core, identity never

attains its totality and is in a continuous “process of becoming” and not “being” (Hall, 1996), constantly negotiated and redefined rather than an inherent, fixed, and essential category. In its flexibility, identity is fluid, contingent and even contradictory.

Furthermore, without a permanent centre, identity is materialised through discursive practices taking various positions, which permeate societies as “a priori social categories” and are made available to individuals who lack self-contained identities (Souza, 2021). As argued by Foucault (1975), discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak ... They do not identify objects, they constitute them in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention” (p. 49). Given the ontological flexibility and discursive construct of identity, these subject categories are specific to the social and cultural contexts in which subjects are located. Therefore, by adopting and performing social categories, individuals become subjects and develop identities.

### ***Self-Regulated Identity***

No subject categories are organic but socially normalised within power dimensions. Disciplinary power is central to the construction and “performativity” of the subject positions (Butler, 1990), as it involves individuals as active participants in a process termed by Foucault (2005) as the “technologies of self”, which consists of self-regulatory practices. Self-reflective individuals become their own “surveillance gaze” (Oksala, 1998, p. 40), internalise socially expected normative ideals of subject positions as inner truths, and conform to constructed categories. Hall (1996) described this performativity of subject categories through the disciplinary power grid as a suturing process to “chain the subjects in discursive flow” (p. 6) and highlighted the power dimensions and fabricated aspects of identity construction. Contrary to sovereign power, disciplinary power is productive as it produces subjects and their identities while integrating subjects as proactive actors within the process. Despite the instability of identity, which may bring confusion and disruption in the construction of self, the discursive effort to construct normative homogeneity in social categories and continual performativity of different subject positions provide temporary identities with a sense of coherence and permanence. Butler (1990) argued that the repetition and performativity of norms are fundamental in identity construction to produce and sustain its notion of stability and continuity.

### ***Constitutive “Other”: Deconstruction Binary Oppositions***

Since identity is a non-essential and flexible concept without a stable core and constructed through discourses, it requires a point of reference through which individuals can understand and define themselves within particular social and cultural contexts. Identity needs material and symbolic frontiers between what the self is. Identity thus can be understood only by marking “its ‘difference’ from its others” (Hall, 1997, p. 235), and without it, understanding of the “self” could not exist. Hall (1996, 1997) defined this relational “other” as a “constitutive other”. “Difference”, therefore, is an indispensable boundary marker between self and “others”, which carries messages and attributes the essence to self. Hence, identity is a process of differentiation and classification, which involves the inclusion of “what is” and the exclusion of “what is not”. Moreover, identity is constantly influenced by the fluid “other”, and individuals can develop several identities specific to time and space and thus continuously evolve.

The existence of “other”, however, simultaneously tends to construct a rigid structure of binary oppositions, crystallising self/other boundaries. Essentialised binaries, such as us/them, presence/absence, good/bad, and right/wrong, overlook heterogeneities, nuances and complexities of meanings, selves, subject categories and their interactions with societies, leading to a fixed concept of identity. Therefore, Derrida (1967) critiqued an ontologically enclosed understanding of social realities from a post-structuralist perspective and highlighted the importance of deconstructing essentialist and naturalised binary oppositions that most often exist in hierarchical relations. Indeed, Derrida argued that no such neutral binary opposition exists, as one term usually takes a dominant position over the other since realities and truths are socially constructed through inclusion-exclusion processes within which specific knowledge gains more legitimacy than others based on power structures. The deconstruction of fixed binary oppositions is thus an attempt to uncover the underlying power structures of hierarchical discourses, knowledge, realities, and identities and reveal the relational self/other binaries as inherently non-absolute while highlighting their non-mutually exclusive but co-dependent characteristics. “Difference” is therefore undetermined, and the “other” can be positive and negative at once, navigating through contextualised power dynamics (Hall, 1997). Capturing identity as flexible, contingent and complex, which requires a “constitutive other”, and as an attempt to deconstruct fixed meanings, Derrida (1967) employed the notion of “différance”, which is a neologism, made of two French words, “différence” (difference)

and “différer” (to defer). By challenging the Western philosophical tradition to privilege the concept of “being” as absolute, “différance” uncovers the absence of present in presence, highlighting the non-self-contained aspect of identity. “Différance” regards the self as incomplete since not only does it take place in relation with “others” (difference) but is also continuously postponed and thus changing (defer). Given the lack of a substantial core, “being” requires “space” and “temporalising” through which its meanings and essences are constructed. “Différance” is, therefore, a systemic play of differences, and a procedural system within which concepts are connected, referred to, and give meanings to each other. From this perspective, “being”, self, and identity are the “trace” of something external; in other words, they are shaped by “others”, which simultaneously reflects past and future elements. The trace of “others” is, however, invisible in “being” as it is dissimulated. This underscores the importance of deconstructing taken-for-granted realities, truths, and knowledge, which not only explores what presupposes and constructs our understanding of “being” but also opens alternative interpretations of identity, which is in flux, relational and contingent.

## **National Identity**

### ***Unifying National Identity: Nation-Building Project***

The construction of national identity is crucial for states, particularly in new states, such as those in post-colonial contexts, where state formation sometimes precedes nation formation (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). While a state is a political and legal entity with a clearly defined territory, a central government, citizens, and sovereignty (Hösle et al., 2019), a nation does not necessarily require a defined and sovereign territory. For instance, Basque, Chechnya, Kurdistan, Tibet, Palestine, Somaliland, and Uyghurstan can be regarded as stateless nations, among others. Still, it exists upon collective consciousness that a group of people who share key commonalities, such as language, ethnicity, religion, culture, history and aspirations, live together as a community (Hösle et al., 2019). In a nation, individuals recognise themselves as national members and feel connected with their fellows, though most have never seen or met each other. Although a nation thus can be stateless, it commonly aspires for territorial sovereignty and control over political institutions. Hence, a nation is an “imagined political community” (Anderson, 1983, p. 6) socially and discursively constructed. Each society, though imagined, constructs a system of signification through which specific meanings are ascribed to itself, and its relationship

with the external world is interpreted in particular ways, therefore shaping what is understood as “reality”. Within such a social imaginary (Castoriadis, 1987), ways of life, as well as our understandings of inter- and intra-group relations, along with associated symbols, values, and practices, are not arbitrary. Rather, they are purposefully constructed, often institutionalised, naturalised, and subsequently taken for granted. The ideal state formation is to become a nation-state where territory, sovereignty and population’s aspirations are in harmony. Still, most often, a state and a nation are different entities that do not automatically overlap since every state is composed of heterogeneous populations that do not necessarily share commonalities or aspirations. Therefore, the state, given the internal heterogeneity, seeks nation-building agendas to ensure internal unity and promote a singular national identity. By constructing “external others”, a state thus aims at flattening internal diversity within the territorial boundaries of a state and constructing a more uniform unified national identity (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020). This process of homogenisation aims to consolidate the nation-state, reinforcing a sense of collective belonging while downplaying internal differences

### ***Cultivating National Awareness: Banal Nationalism***

As a nation is an “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), national awareness needs to be cultivated and sustained by state institutions so that individuals can recognise and integrate national markers and construct national identity. Like any other identity, national identity construction involves inclusion and exclusion processes, which evolve around “constitutive others”. In the process of national identity construction, markers such as ethnicity, language, religion and gender are deployed by the state to create national boundaries between “us” and “them”. Hence, national identity requires imaginative work, and to turn national imaginaries into imagined “realities”, national markers are inculcated and performed both at macro and micro levels. To achieve this, societies engage in a process of self-institution, through which particular ways of life and symbolic systems are constructed. These frameworks assign specific meanings to objects and practices, evoking shared emotions, memories, and behaviours among members of the community (Castoriadis, 1987, 1997). In this way, each society creates a world of meaning, a social imaginary, comprising its values, symbols, norms, and representations. These imaginary significations are not mere illusions, as the term might imply in everyday language, but are creative and foundational constructs that shape how a society understands itself and

organises social life. Through ceremonies, rituals, holidays and celebrations, national markers are banalised, and “the symbols of nationhood – coins, banknotes, stamps become a part of our daily lives, turning the background space into ‘national space’” (Billig, 1995, p. 41). Those practices are repeated, ritualised, and normalised in different fabrics of mundane everyday lives that subtly permeate societies and implicitly foster a sense of national identity among individuals. Such mundane and taken-for-granted practices to raise national awareness are defined as “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995). School education plays a key role in banalising and naturalising national markers and constructing national identity (Durrani & Dunne, 2010, p. 219). Through the dissemination of state-endorsed “official knowledge”, education instils in students national markers and awareness, the way to symbolically understand and order societies, the distinction of binary oppositions between “us” and “them”, and thus construct national identity.

### ***Hierarchised Binary Oppositions: Stereotyping “Others”***

Whilst national awareness and identity are shaped through inclusion-exclusion processes and their distinction from “others”, the binary oppositions most often involve power relations establishing a hierarchy between “us” and “others”. Aiming at constructing an “imagined community” and unifying heterogeneous individuals under a single national identity, positive national images are promoted, and the binary hierarchy becomes a symbolic order within which “us” is positioned superior to “external others”. In this hierarchical structure where there exist power asymmetries between “us” and “others”, the latter is often represented in a generalised and essentialised manner and rendered to stereotypes. As discussed in Edward Said’s (1978) seminal work “Orientalism”, the construction of the “other” is intricately tied to power structures, particularly evident in colonial contexts; “others” are represented through distorted images as inferior, exotic and underdeveloped. Stereotyping serves as a fundamental “signifying practice” (Hall, 1996, 1997), institutionalising binary oppositions between “us” and “them”, thereby naturalising symbolic boundaries and establishing normalcy wherein “us” becomes normal, while “others” are cast as abnormal. Within these power asymmetries, the “other” is considered “polluted, dangerous, [and] taboo” (Hall, 1997, p. 258), evoking negative sentiments that necessitate symbolic exclusion to uphold the perceived “purity” of “us” (Hall, 1997). Drawing upon the nexus of power-difference-representation, “us” asserts hegemony, striving to mould societies according to their perceived “realities”. Stereotyping through

binary oppositions thus becomes a “practice of closure” (Hall, 1997), crystallising national differences and hierarchies. The representation of “others” as inferior consequently enables the construction of a positive national identity, justifying and perpetuating their dominance and hegemony over “others”. By marginalising “others”, internal heterogeneity is concealed, allowing for the cultivation of a unified and overarching national identity.

Although states aim to construct an overarching national identity under the rhetoric of internal unity, the promotion of a homogenous identity overlooks internal plurality and results in superficial inclusivity (Brubaker, 1996; Durrani et al., 2022). Moreover, while national markers serve as boundaries to construct distinctions between “us” and “external others”, they also reflect the perspectives of dominant groups, who establish norms and embody the nation. These markers are not only applied to differentiate the nation from others but also function internally, creating “internal others” (Green, 2020). Consequently, those who deviate from these national discourses become “unauthentic” and “internal others” (Fincham & Dunne, 2020; Hall, 1996). While dominant groups maintain access to power and resources, “internal others” face marginalisation. Moreover, when national identity is solely grounded in one marker, such as ethnicity or religion, it often further marginalises “internal others”, exacerbating grievances and tensions, leading to conflicts. This understanding of identity construction and its consequences draws upon post-structuralist insights, particularly from scholars like Foucault, who emphasised the productive nature of power and the ways it constructs subjects through discourses and practices. Additionally, Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity highlights how identity categories are not fixed but are enacted and reproduced through repeated actions within social norms and institutions. These perspectives challenge essentialist views of identity and highlight identity's fluid and contingent nature, especially in the context of nation-building and the production of “internal others”.

## **Gender and National Identity**

### ***The Discursive Construction of Gender: Beyond Binary Construct***

In everyday life, we often act based on the seemingly “natural” binary categories of women and men. However, post-structuralism contends that gender is not an inherent or fixed attribute but a socially constructed and continuously evolving concept. The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (1949) articulated this perspective, asserting that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (p. 283). Butler (1990), one of the most influential

gender theorists, expanded on this by rejecting the static ontological understanding of gender as “being” and instead viewing it as “doing”. Gender is therefore as a set of acts involving the performativity of socially designed and expected “normative ideals” specific to contexts (Butler, 1990, 1993). Considering identity as a process of becoming, which is constantly produced, reproduced and changing over time and context, performativity is a procedural sequence of acts repeated within a regulatory, societal frame through which our bodies become gendered. According to Butler (1990), “there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed’, but that the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed” (p. 195), meaning actions produce the subjects and not the other way around. Gendered performativity consists of “stylised repetitions of acts” (Butler, 1990, p. 191) in conformity with implicit social and cultural conventions or dominant discourses. Hence, gender is the repetitive performativity of norms within the social realm. Gender is not an inherent truth or representation of inner identity, but a cultural and social artefact produced through implicit collective agreement on the performativity of normative conventions. How we talk, behave, make decisions, and demonstrate preferences are not inherently imprinted in our bodies and minds but rather learnt performatives to fit social conventions and norms. Gender is thus shaped “through the stylisation of the body” (Butler, 1990, p. 191). Therefore, if girls prefer pink and boys like blue, if girls play with Barbies while boys play with cars, if women sit with legs closed while men with legs apart, and if women are in charge of house chores while men become breadwinners, these behaviours are not biologically predetermined but rather socially constructed. Nevertheless, while gender is a social artefact, it is not false either, since performative acts “naturalise” gendered bodies, disguising them as truths, which become our social lived realities. Since performativity involves conformity with social and cultural norms, non-compliance results in exclusion, marginalisation and punishment. Therefore, gender, encompassing both femininity and masculinity, is enacted through repeated actions, behaviours, dress, and language that align with social expectations, conforming to culturally defined norms of what it means to be “female” and “male” (Butler, 1990). From this perspective, gender operates as a rigid binary system that is inherently exclusionary, reinforcing limited and fixed categories while marginalising identities that do not fit within these norms.

Butler (1993) further argued that to be recognised and expected as a “proper” member of society, our sex, gender and sexuality need to be aligned. This means that society expects that if a body has XX chromosomes, it should have a female sex, behave with femininity, and be attracted to men, while a body with XY chromosomes should have

a male sex, behave with masculinity, and be attracted by women. Butler argued that fixed binary sex serves as a predetermined basis of gender and naturalises it as an absolute fact while concealing its socially and culturally designed regulatory frame. Whilst Butler acknowledges biological differences between bodies, she regards sex also as socially constructed and performative. Hence, Butler (1993) highlights the importance of disrupting the ontological absolute idea of sex so that gendered bodies are understood as social artefacts. This critical approach not only uncovers structural inequalities that underpin power asymmetries between women and men but also challenges the rigid heterogenous dimensions of sex, gender and sexuality. Doing so opens up a space for greater diversity and more unrestrained expression of self.

### ***The Agency and Constraints in Gender Performativity***

Although the disruption of the naturalised and dichotomous notion of gender is crucial, given that identity is a discursive social construct, it is important to underscore the constrained limits of gender performativity (Butler, 1990). There exists no identity outside the social realm, and gender is always performed within socially and culturally constructed frames, which regulates our “process of becoming”, conditioning what kind of gendered subjects we can become. Hence, gender cannot be completely free from the regulatory structure. However, although individuals are never independent agents in gender performativity since gender is an ongoing “process of becoming”, which is in constant “doing” and produced and reproduced, the undetermined characteristic of gender gives space for negotiation and resistance (1990). Indeed, identity and its markers, including gender, with non-fix ontologies and representations that are rather relationally and contextually shaped, and the active participation of individuals in the construction of subject positions enables individuals to practice their agency and navigate their identities. The dialogical process of identity and gender construction, therefore, deconstructs the zero-sum concept of us/them and women/men binary (Yuval-Davis, 1997). However, identity is a social artifact involving power relations contingent on time and space; agency is not the autonomous actions of sovereign individuals but a process of struggles and torment (Crossouard et al., 2020; Mahmood, 2012). Although within the regulatory frame, the ongoing process of gender performativity gives potential deviation from the norms, where individuals enact agency, negotiate, accept, and resist power relations and subject categories. By negotiating normalised ideals attributed to gender, individuals produce new

realities of subjectivities (Souza, 2021). They, thus, are in a “constant process of adaptation, subversion, the inscription of dominant discourses” (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 687).

***The Gender National Beings: Dynamics of Symbolism, Social Positions and Power***

While constructing a single national identity aims at unifying heterogeneous populations through overarching common national markers, the availability and attribution of subject positions and their associated performativity vary significantly between individuals, particularly along gender lines. Reflecting the politics of “stylisation of the body” (Butler, 1990, p.45) and the dichotomised concept of gender, national discourses are gendered, resulting in distinct experiences of nationhood for women and men who are assigned different roles, imageries and values (Yuval Davis, 1997). Being a state member involves becoming a gendered state subject, making national identity a gendered construct (Dunne & Crossouard, 2020; Durrani & Halai, 2020). However, although women and men both become gendered subjects through the performativity of contextualised social and cultural norms, women’s bodies are often the most affected by national gendered discourses and practices (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989).

Being the biological reproducers of the “imagined community”, women’s bodies become subject to state ideologies and legislations, controlling their reproductive capacities through measures such as forced sterilisation, criminalising abortion and limiting births. In societies where policies encourage birth limitation, boys are often more valued and given better access to socio-economic opportunities than girls, who are more likely to be affected by abortions or infanticide (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Moreover, women’s bodies are often socially expected to be protected and controlled in accordance with notions of modesty, purity, and the regulation of their sexual behaviour (Tsouroufli, 2021). This expectation subjects them to heightened scrutiny and critique, and when they fail to comply, women frequently encounter criticism, stigma, and affecting their respectability (Tsouroufli, 2018). Female bodies, thus, have biological significance for nationalist projects and carry national history, culture and values through which gendered roles and norms are formed (Butler, 1990). Foucault’s (1975) notion of biopolitics also highlights the political concern and management over the population’s lives and bodies. Moreover, women have been attributed significance to constructing and sustaining symbolic national boundaries through their reproductive roles, often being restricted from having sexual

relationships or marriages with men from other communities (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). This demonstrates women's symbolic role in constructing and sustaining national boundaries, or "national othering" (Dunne et al., 2017. P. 377). Women, symbolically representing national boundaries, are also often depicted as national subjects to be protected by men. Such discourses are particularly apparent in conflict-prone contexts, where protecting "our women" and their honours become central to national struggles and liberation efforts (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). Simultaneously, women are symbolic protectors of national culture, which is closely bound to the national markers (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Dunne et al., 2017). Furthermore, women, given the gendered role of primary caregivers, are often considered reproducers of ideologies and cultures. To sustain the "imagined community", they are expected to transmit culture, tradition and morality to future generations (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). Indeed, women are typically associated with roles of mother and wife, depicted as caring, hospitable, and pure figures located in the private sphere, while men occupy the public sphere as breadwinners and defenders of family and nation (Dunne & Crossouard, 2020; Durrani & Halai, 2020; Koch, 2011). Thus, while both women and men are given specific gendered duties and behaviours to perform as "proper" national members, women particularly bear the burden of being symbolic defenders of national culture, ethnicity, and morals (Yuval-Davis, 1997). In contrast, men are expected to physically defend the nation and demonstrate their strength and leadership.

Furthermore, through the binary opposition of women and men, gendered subject positions are mostly hierarchised, with women frequently integrated inequitably as state subjects (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). However, gender symbolism is normalised and deeply embedded in national identity, making gender inequalities background and invisible (Dunne et al., 2017). This paternalistic gender binary as "naturalised facticity" (Butler, 1990), reinforcing and naturalising distinctions between genders within the national context and perpetuating gendered power dynamics. Nevertheless, gender performativity involves agency, and women actively participate in the construction of gendered state subjects as much as men do. However, individuals are never fully autonomous and perform within social and cultural norms. It is also to note that the binary structure opposing women and men often homogenises, overlooking differences, such as age and socio-economic background, leading to the dismissal of inequalities among women.

## **Ethnicity and National Identity**

### ***Socially Formed Ethnic Boundaries: Deconstructing “Groupism”***

Ethnicity is primarily described as an innate feature acquired by birth, with traditional anthropology defining ethnic groups as communities sharing culture and language, emphasising historical continuity and “blood from the past” (Baumann, 2002, p. 19). However, as an identity marker, ethnicity is a social category, not an organic or static entity. Associating ethnicity with biological ancestry and genetics overlooks its complex social dimensions and reifies ethnic groups as substantial entities and fixed realities. Brubaker (2004) critiqued this reification of the ethnic group as taken-for-granted and homogenising “groupism”, arguing the necessity to regard ethnicity as a dynamic and fluid social product, which is contextually constructed and deconstructed through social, political and economic processes. Ethnicity, hence, has no self-perpetuating core but is a discursively constructed social category, externally bounded through differentiation and classification processes involving “others”. Cultural values are most commonly used as boundary markers separating one group from another. Through the inclusion-exclusion processes of ethnic boundaries, certain cultural qualities are produced and naturalised as distinctive and normative values and practices of the ethnic group, which individuals adopt to be recognised as members. Barth (1969) hence argued that the construction and maintenance of ethnic boundaries are more crucial than cultural content, implying that what defines ethnic groups is not cultural qualities but distinctions from “others”. Through social processes of interactions with “others”, ethnic boundaries are thus constantly constructed, sustained, negotiated and reinvented over time. Therefore, ethnicity is an ongoing process of “becoming”, highly contextual, reciprocal and in flux.

Although ethnicity is a social construct, due to its normalised association with the notion of ancestry and culture, ethnicity is often integrated into national discourses as a “natural” and inherent national marker to claim the legitimacy of a nation. However, since ethnic groups are shaped through boundaries separating us from “others”, when ethnicity becomes a central marker for national identity, national discourses tend to establish a hierarchy among ethnic groups. Notably, in a multi-ethnic context, “exclusive national history” (Fenton, 2011, p. 14) is promoted, through which only certain groups come to represent the nation. The attributes of the dominant ethnic group are associated with national markers, whilst ethnic minorities are excluded from the markers and become

ethnic periphery (Devos & Mohamed, 2014). Moreover, ethnicity can serve as a crucial axis of difference through which certain social groups assert their autonomy, potentially triggering separatist movements and challenging state authority. From this perspective, ethnicity can come to rival national identity, creating tensions that undermine the coherence of the nation-state. Ethnicity is often mobilised in ways that shape political identity and group boundaries, which can be at odds with the state's efforts to maintain a unified national identity (Brubaker, 2004). Consequently, many states, often led by the dominant ethnic group, seek to suppress or subsume ethnic differences into a homogeneous national identity, aiming to consolidate power and avoid fragmentation (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1991). This process of assimilation reinforces the idea of a singular national identity while marginalising those who do not fit the normative ethnic model, thus maintaining control over both social and political structures. Hence, different ethnic groups are unequally associated with the nation, and core and peripheral ethnic groups are constructed (Devos & Mohamed, 2014; Fenton, 2011; Green, 2020). Indeed, in the intersection with national identity, ethnicity is a marker of boundaries which produces not only “external others” but also “internal others” (Green, 2020). As the periphery, “internal others” are mostly encouraged to assimilate within the dominant ethnic group’s “cultural qualities”, which is promoted as the referential national identity (Green, 2020). As highly positioned in the social hierarchy, the ethnic core accesses the power and exercises ownership over national markers symbolically, including knowledge production and resources. Power dimensions and systems of structured inequalities are institutionalised and reinforce each other, and thus, status inequalities among ethnic groups are produced and perpetuated (Devos & Mohamed, 2014). Such institutionalised inequalities are banalised and deeply embedded in society as “truths” and are hence often unchallenged. Therefore, Baumann (2002) defined ethnicity as an intersection with national identity, describing it as a social process of reification to maintain the boundaries with “internal others”. Furthermore, in the hierarchised national discourses, ethnic minorities often face discrimination and social judgment, which fuel grievances, and thus, ethnicity becomes a cause of tensions (Green, 2020). According to Devos and Mohamed (2014), due to structured inequalities, the extent of the national attachment differs between dominant and peripheral ethnic groups. Whilst the ethnic identity of the dominant ethnic group positively overlaps with national identity, among ethnic minorities, there exists a clear distinction or conflict between their ethnic and national identities (Devos & Mohamed, 2014).

### *Hybrid Identities: Process of Cultural Translation*

Identity, ethnicity and culture are not static concepts but are fluid, dynamic and continuously evolving processes of “becoming”. They are shaped by continuous interactions, with individuals and groups constantly producing and reproducing their sense of self in relation to others. Homi Bhabha (1994) concept of hybridity provides significant insights, challenging essentialist views that perceive identity, ethnicity and culture as innate and isolated. Instead, hybridity reflects the dynamic translation of different cultural elements into each other. This process is not straightforward but involves constant interaction, negotiation, influence and transformation, resulting in hybrid and ever-changing cultures and identities. The formation of hybrid identities is a process of cultural translation, not merely a mixture, appropriation, or adaptation of different cultures (Bhabha, 1994). Hybridity entails the emergence of new identities bearing the imprint of multiple influences of “others”, involving a revaluation and revision of one’s own systems of references, norms, values and practices. Therefore, from this perspective, no such “pure” self-contained or unchanged culture or ethnic group exists.

As Derrida (1967) argued, the self is a constant “process of becoming” that carries the traces of “others”, which encompasses both past and future influences. The historical processes of identity formation are deeply intertwined with the power dynamics of social interactions. Notably, in post-colonial contexts, the legacies of colonialism significantly shape identities. The colonial encounter forced different cultures into contact, leading to complex cultural interaction and hybridisation processes. These historical legacies influence how contemporary identities are formed and understood in post-colonial contexts. Whilst history has “factual” material and symbolic effects, the processes of identity formation are not merely about recovering and being tied to the past, which would render identity static and stable (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 2015). Instead, they involve the construction of historical discourses and positioning ourselves within those discourses through negotiation, adaptation, resistance, transformation and rejection. This dialogical process is crucial in shaping identities, particularly in post-colonial contexts, as it reveals how they are influenced by both historical continuity/discontinuity and contemporary “realities”. Thus, the post-colonial context creates “heterogeneity of its national space” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 60) where hybrid identities are “neither the One, nor the Other but something else besides ... territories of both” (p. 28). This intermediary space is the “third space”, where different cultures are negotiated, translated and renewed. The concept of

hybridity is crucial in post-colonial contexts because it disrupts the dichotomous boundaries between us/them, making the boundaries blurred and nuanced. In settings where the cultures of colonisers and colonised inevitably interact and influence each other through historical and social processes, the overly simplistic binary opposition of colonisers/colonised overlooks the complexity of culture, ethnicity and identity.

### *Mimicry in Post-Colonial “Third Space”*

Although colonial discourses establish power asymmetries and hierarchies through the institutionalisation of binary oppositions such as West/Others, colonisers/colonised, and us/them, the fact that the notion of colonial superiority relies on the existence of the “other”, colonial discourses are non-monolithic and highly dependent on those they seek to dominate (Said, 1978). Hence, the very act of colonial domination through the establishment of symbolic dichotomous opposition simultaneously reveals its dependence on the colonised to legitimise their authority. This ambivalent nature of colonial discourses contributes to the formation of hybrid identities in colonial and post-colonial contexts (Bhabha, 1994). This paradoxical and inconsistent nature of colonial discourses, portraying the colonised as both inferior and indispensable, different and similar, creates space for resistance and subversion. This ambivalence leads to hybrid identities in colonial and post-colonial settings. Within what Bhabha (1994) termed the “third space”, where cultural meanings and practices are constantly negotiated and redefined, historical and contemporary “realities” continuously intersect. Identities in this space carry traces of both coloniser and colonised, becoming complex and layered. The historical and social processes of hybrid identity construction in colonial and post-colonial settings often involve “mimicry”, where the colonised subjects imitate the colonisers' culture, values, language, and behaviours. Fanon (1967) described this mimicry as wearing a “white mask” to fit in, be recognised, and navigate the colonial society and system. This mimicry is a survival strategy but also a form of violence, as the colonised individuals have no choice but to construct hybrid identities adjusting to the colonisers' culture. The “white mask” symbolises the internal conflict and alienation experienced by the colonised, who are caught between the identities of colonisers and colonised. However, mimicry is always partial, making the colonised “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86), as colonisers ensure the colonised remain inferior to them, maintaining power asymmetries and hierarchies. At the same time, mimicry exposes the arbitrary and constructed nature of

racial, ethnic and cultural hierarchies. By mimicking the coloniser, the colonised reveal the lack of inherent superiority in the coloniser's identity, challenging the legitimacy of colonial authority. Mimicry thus becomes a form of resistance, highlighting the non-essential and performative nature of colonial superiority. Therefore, hybrid identities in colonial and post-colonial settings are dynamic and ongoing sites of interaction, negotiation, resistance, and transformation, where agency is exercised, and identities are constantly redefined.

## **Religion and National Identity**

### ***Religion: Boundary Marker of Internal and External "Others"***

Identity requires interaction with "others"; religion is one of the most common referential identity markers used to create national boundaries between "us" and "them". Religion is a socially constructed system of belief that forms how individuals organise and understand the world (Faridi, 2019). Depending on the adhered religion, individuals have different "realities" of the world, interacting differently with societies. Religion, as a system of belief, defines morality and rightfulness, in other words, what is good and bad, and thus influences individuals' thoughts and behaviours, shaping their "truths" and "realities" (Agbibo & Okem, 2011; Ghaffari, 2020). State-promoted religion reflects state ideologies, primarily those of dominant social groups, which becomes a national marker establishing the distinction between "us" and "external others" and, hence forging national identity. Through institutionalised discourses and practices, religious values and morality permeate societies and are normalised through everyday lives, becoming naturalised regulatory norms (Dunne & Crossouard, 2020). As symbolised by religious practices, such as baptism, which "inaugurates his existence within the divinely sanctioned community of man" (Butler, 1993, p. 212), by performing and embodying religious norms, identities are thus materialised. Individuals are recognised as legitimate communal members, providing a sense of collective beliefs and belongingness (Faridi, 2019). Repetitive performativity of norms complying with a system of belief constructs fictive communal homogeneity and a notion of continuity. However, grounding national identity in religion is somewhat contradictory since while a state seeks to construct national identity within a given territory, the concept of religion usually transcends the state borders (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Nevertheless, Muslim identity can be referred to as either "Umma", a global community of all Muslims regardless of territorial borders or "Watan", a Muslim

community within a given specific territory or country (Badran, 2009). Whilst local cultural and historical contexts significantly influence the construction of Muslim identities, those local and global Muslim identities are interwoven and co-existing (Dunne et al., 2017).

Whilst religion superficially unifies heterogeneous individuals, since state-promoted religion is mainly associated with the dominant groups, the use of religion as the prominent marker of national identity establishes the distinction between not only “us” and “external others” but also “internal others”. Those who do not adhere to the state-promoted religion become identified as “internal others” and excluded from national discourses. Moreover, religious-based national identity tends to portray both external and internal “others” as inferior, bad and illegitimate through the hierarchical and exclusive binary us/others distinction (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Therefore, in the context where national identity is solely constructed upon the marker of religion, “internal others” who do not comply with the state-promoted religion are likely to be marginalised and even face violence (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

### ***Secularism and Religious Hierarchies: Shaping Public and Private Spheres***

Secularism is a state ideology that regards religion as a private matter and separates it from the public sphere, maintaining an inseparable relationship with religion. It is a political doctrine constructed in relation to the “otherness” of religion, often described as an incomplete stage of modernisation (Asad, 2003). Thus, secularism does not exist without the concept of religion, and in this sense, depends on it. By placing a binary boundary between us-secularism-public and others-religion-private, the secular state seeks to establish a regulatory framework for rightful value and guide the public concept of “acceptable” accordingly, involving the institutionalisation of laws and morality (Asad, 2003). Consequently, those who fail to conform to secularist values are likely to be marginalised and are subject to potential sanctions. However, although secularism presupposes the private nature of religion and regards its penetration into public life as problematic, there are always hierarchies among different religions. Butler (2020) argued that while some religions are classified as illegitimate and relegated to the private sphere, others, often those of the dominant group, remain and operate in public life as legitimate. Therefore, secularism, as a state ideology, is a social process of hierarchisation of religions, leading to regulatory homogenisation and normalisation of the concept of public

life and religion. This results in the marginalisation and discrimination of those who do not adhere to the legitimate religion. Therefore, depending on their adhered religions, individuals experience societies differently. Secularism is a non-stable and non-enclosed social construct shaped by the nexus of power and discourses involving the domestication of religions (Asad, 2003). Thus, it is crucial to deconstruct the rigid binary opposition of secularism and religion and uncover power structures which hierarchise religions and classify them in private and public spheres.

### ***Reframing Agency: Women's Religious Practices and Identity***

As national markers, religion and gender intersect in complex and often contentious ways, particularly around the concept of agency. Western scholarly debates frequently regard women in non-Western, particularly Islamic, societies as oppressed, usually viewing practices like veiling as symbols of their subjugation to male authority. As Said (1978) highlighted, the West constructs the Middle East and East as exotic, backward, and inherently oppressive, portraying women as “exotic others” who are submissive, inferior and victims of patriarchy, which was also the case in Central Asia when the Soviet regime advanced its socialist agenda. This perspective often sees Muslim women as passive victims needing liberation from their oppressive cultures. Such a view essentialises the cultural, social and historical dimensions of religion, gender and identities while also legitimising and reinforcing Western colonial practices and superiority. Therefore, the intersection of religion and gender needs to be understood more contextually, especially in non-Western settings, where Western epistemological norms cannot be universally applied.

Expanding the understanding of gender in non-Western societies beyond simplistic registers of submission and patriarchy, scholars like Spivak (1988) and Mahmood (2005) have argued for restoring women's voices and understanding them as active agents rather than passive and submissive beings. In Western notions, agency is often seen as synonymous with resistance to power, domination and norms, based on the assumption that individuals inherently seek freedom. This liberal viewpoint captures agency in binary opposition to subversion, underpinned by the desire to become autonomous beings with free will. However, considering the historical and cultural diversities across societies and thus the heterogeneity of social realities, agency and desire are not fixed concepts but are rather nuanced and mediated by contextual conditions (Mahmood, 2005). Furthermore,

drawing upon Foucault's notion of power, it is crucial to understand that power is not a possession held by a single individual exerting top-down control, rendering others completely submissive. Instead, power operates through a complex network of interactions, where individuals are integrated into the power dynamics and simultaneously exercise agency within these structures. However, their actions always remain within the web of power, meaning they are never entirely autonomous. Power and norms are not external forces imposed on subjects; instead, power is productive and integral to the formation of subjects who enact agency in return. Foucault (1977) described this ambivalent nature of power as the "paradox of subjugation".

By situating religious practices and desires in their cultural, historical and social contexts, women's participation in religious practices, such as wearing the hijab, can be understood as an agentic action. While the agency can be an act of resistance opposing social norms, it can also interact and engage with norms and religious practices (Mahmood, 2005). As Derrida's (1967) concept of "différance" and Butler's (1990) concept of "performativity" highlight, the incomplete nature of identity and gender, which is an ongoing process of "becoming", creates a space for potential deviation from the norms. Whilst identity is produced and reproduced through the intersection of gender and religion as a non-static concept, it never remains the same. Within the regulatory and normative frame, the iterative process creates margins where individuals enact agency, negotiate, accept, and resist power relations and subject categories, which are constantly redefined. Since multiple forms of desire exist in different contexts, religious practices, such as wearing the hijab, cannot be framed only through the lens of resistance to male authority. For Muslim women, wearing the hijab is a reflection of their aspirations and beliefs, becoming an embodiment of piety and adherence to religious norms through which they exercise agency. It is important to highlight that women's agency can be exercised differently in religious and secular contexts, but in both cases, women continue to assert their agency. For example, in a religious state like Iran, women's agency is constrained by laws mandating the hijab, which makes removing it an act of resistance. In contrast, secular states can also create oppressive structures that deprive women of the freedom to choose to wear religious attire. For instance, Tajikistan, a secular state with a predominantly Muslim population, imposed a hijab ban in 2024 (Dengiz & Emre Basaran, 2024). In this context, wearing a hijab becomes an act of agency in itself. Therefore, agency needs a broader scope and should be understood within and not against normative structures, where individuals "perform" religion and gender. Agential capacity entails not

only acts that resist norms but also ways to inhabit them, acting within norms while negotiating and navigating them. The intersection of religion and gender requires recognising situational specificity, allowing a more nuanced appreciation of how the agency operates in different contexts and enabling a culturally sensitive understanding of how women exercise their agency in relation to religion.

### **Conceptualising Youth**

Youth is a subject position shaped through power relations and hails individuals to perform associated “normative ideals”. In other words, the concept of youth is a discursive construct and an “identity project of becoming” (Van Dijk et al., 2011, p. 5) and entails an identification process. Since subject positions do not have fixed ontologies or representations and are discursively and contextually formed, the concept of youth is also ambivalent and has no universally agreed definition. However, since subjectifying individuals is a normalising process, the notion of youth is constructed around “normative ideals”, which are indicators to conceptualise youth (Dunne et al., 2017). Whilst youth is defined through several indicators, such as age and financial, physical and emotional autonomy, age is primarily employed to frame the youth category. However, ageing is not a linear nor consistent process that individuals homogeneously experience. Specific age range varies across organisations, even among UN entities, and the UN, UNESCO and World Bank age bracket, which defines youth as persons aged between 14 and 15, is widely used to categorise youth (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
*Youth Definition across the UN Agencies*

	Age
UN Secretariat/UNESCO/ILO	Youth: 15-24
UN Habitat (Youth Fund)	Youth 15-32
UNICEF/WHO/UNFPA	Adolescent: 10-19 Young people: 10-24 Youth: 15-24
UNICEF/The Convention on the Rights of the Child	Individuals under 18

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*Note.* UN (2010), Definition of youth.

Categorising youth age-wise is helpful to capture youth populations statistically and understand their socio-economic and physical status, such as school enrolment, attainment, dropout, malnutrition, poverty, and unemployment (Dunne et al., 2015). Organisations use age brackets as a common practice, as they help in making and implementing policies and strategies by providing a representative understanding of target populations (Bastien & Holmarsdottir, 2017). However, the concept of youth is highly contextual, fluid and diverse, and the linearity of these age frames often obscures the heterogeneous characteristics of youth. This misrecognition can be seen in the ways that youth are often homogenised in policy discussions, despite the fact that youth is a social construct, an evolving category shaped by various socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts (Furlong & Cartmel, 2020; Harris, 2019). The meaning of youth is not fixed nor universal and can vary significantly across gender, class, and location, with the youth period often being shorter for women than for men (Sana, 2020). Moreover, the Western concept of youth, defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 as a distinct period separate from adulthood that lasts until the age of 18 and is considered a special, protected time, may not be applicable in many Global South contexts. This emphasis on a separate, protected youth period overlooks local realities and power dynamics through which individuals in the Global South experience youth and perform youth identities (Lund & Smed, 2020; Morrow, 2018). Youth is, therefore, better understood as a fluid, ongoing process rather than a fixed state of life (Jenson & Harter, 2020; Tanner, 2020). While youth is recognised as a limited and in-between phase, its boundaries with childhood and adulthood are fuzzy. Furthermore, its span and transition timing largely depend on the individuals' socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts, and gender (Vargas, 2021).

With nearly 90% of global youth population located in the low- and middle-income contexts (UNESCO, 2023), the youth bulge has been increasingly attracting attention from policymakers and international organisations who frame youth as both positive actors improving social conditions and negative actors disrupting social order. Whilst the potential contribution of youth to socio-economic development, democracy and peace has been recognised, the gaze on youth has been mainly negative, capturing them as at-risk, vulnerable and violent (Dunne et al., 2017). Considering the concentration of youth in the

Global South, youth in the region are often regarded as political concerns and problems to be managed and solved, mainly in relation to unemployment and Islam (Dunne et al., 2017). The representation of Muslim youth, primarily men, has been particularly homogenised as vulnerable to radicalisation and often described as “looming terrorists” (Dunne et al., 2017, p. 5) and threats to national and international peace (Sommers, 2011). However, such homogenised stereotypes of youth and the demonisation of Islam (Dunne et al., 2017), often constructed by Western normative discourses, not only disregard the diversity of youth but also misrecognise and marginalise them. Therefore, particular youth groups, such as women, migrants, ethnic and religious minorities, and rural and disabled youth, are attributed normative representations and further marginalised and excluded from societies (Oksala, 2010). For instance, “normative ideals” attributed to young women and men differ, and the opportunities for women to perform them are considerably more limited than those for men.

### **Conceptualising Education**

Education is a fundamental instrument of disciplinary power as it observes, classifies, assesses, and normalises human bodies, thoughts and actions (Foucault, 1975). As Foucault described, disciplines are a new mode of power that differentiates from sovereign power, operating through judicial systems and corporal punishments. Whilst sovereign power takes an externally oppressive form, limiting and deducting individuals’ freedom, disciplinary power, on the contrary, penetrates people’s everyday lives, mainly through institutionalised discourses and practices, and education particularly contributes to disseminating such discourses (Ball, 2010, 2013). Foucault (1975) differentiated sovereign power from how power operates in modern times, arguing that power cannot be possessed by a person or an institution and exercised as a one-way, top-down practice. Modern disciplinary power encompasses micro-practices enacted through everyday social interactions by ordinary people who become simultaneously active and passive actors in power relations. Disciplinary power thus permeates people’s lives, making it omnipresent and invisible (Ball, 2019; Deacon, 2006; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). This active yet subtle involvement of individuals in micro-practices of modern power blurs the dichotomous distinction between oppressed and oppressor (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). The mode of power has shifted from the sovereign to the disciplinary one as society evolved, particularly since the development of the human and social sciences and mass

education in the nineteenth century. It brought new epistemologies to frame the world, including people and their relationship to societies.

According to Fendler (1998), being educated means being able to reflect on oneself objectively and being willing to conform to socially entrenched values and norms. Since knowledge is a social construct and practice, its construction and application systematically generate further practices and actions (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997), and the exercise of knowledge in the context of education involves the construction of self-disciplined individuals. Power relations and disciplinary practices in education operate as “everyday mechanics” (Deacon, 2006, p. 177) and, through discourses, inculcate individuals what to know, how to think, feel and behave (Thomas, 2008). This formation of self-disciplined individuals is described as the “technologies of self” (Foucault, 1988). The placement of “self” at the centre of disciplinary power practices and constructing “truths” is crucial since modern power is no longer based on the binary relationship of oppressor and oppressed. According to Thomas (2008), without the notion of self, more precisely self-governance, the power-discourse-knowledge nexus would remain incomplete as modern disciplinary power becomes effective only through individuals’ internalisation of socially constructed rules. Education is, therefore, a medium through which individuals internalise social norms while its disciplinary discourses and practices help conceal the power relations (Thomas, 2008). Education thus objectifies and regulates individuals as normative subjects to become governable subjects (Ball, 2010; Popkewitz, 1997). Therefore, the educational discursive practices construct the “system of ideas” (Popkewitz, 1997; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997) through which individuals learn the qualities of appropriate and rational self and how to regulate self to fit in the socially accepted and expected norms. Discursively constructed educational norms are not mere educational concepts but reflect social norms (Thomas, 2008). As described by Foucault (1975), “every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse” (p. 222). Doherty (2007), having explored the Foucauldian concept of power-knowledge, described policies as “commonly defined as a statement of government intentions” (p. 198) and underlined the non-innocent nature of educational discourses and its mechanism to inculcate selective knowledge as necessary to be learnt to become desirable members of society. Power and its institutional practices are, hence, the foundation of meanings (Ball, 2010). Whereas discourses are generated by power, they simultaneously carve social epistemologies by shaping how people understand and look at societies and interact with one another (Doherty, 2007). People thus consciously and

unconsciously become regulated and labelled by discourses. Whilst discourses are institutionalised and construct “truths” as socially embodied epistemologies through every fabric of people’s lives, educational discourses mainly disseminate and crystallise selective “superior knowledge” as “realities” and “truths”. In the teaching-learning structure, teachers and educators are given the status of experienced experts, scholars, and professionals, and thus have authority over knowledge and inculcate in learners power-endorsed knowledge as “truths”. Truths are hierarchised and differentiated through educational discourse, classifying knowledge as true-false, good-bad and normal-abnormal (Thomas, 2008).

Whilst normalising educational discursive practices would provide knowledge on socially desired normative individuals, such knowledge alone would not discipline individuals to become self-governed and normalised. Normalising education practices involve techniques that turn individuals into self-reflective and regulatory, which evolves around deviations: examination, classification and intervention. Whilst norms are constructed as good and appropriate, failure to meet the normativity is categorised as bad and often justifies interventions (Thomas, 2008). “Otherness” constructed in the process of categorisation and differentiation is either incorporated within the “system of totalising” through the interventions or marginalised, as the system does not attribute legitimacy to “otherness” (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). Such power practices of knowledge classification cause systemic inequalities as marginalised, non-normative social groups are usually given little representations and resource distributions (Goodson & Dowbiggin, 2010). Therefore, by highlighting the deviations in contrast with norms and attributing them a sense of negativity, which is a “pedagogical effect of guilt” (Deacon, 2006, p. 184), educational discursive practices inculcate in individuals the will to self-regulate and “construct docile bodies who are willing to think and behave within standardised social norms” (Thomas, 2008, p. 154). Foucault (1975) called this governance of people through state-led education of self-regulatory desires “governmentality”. The subjectification of individuals through educational discourses and disciplinary practices thus involves the control over knowledge and individuals’ bodies and minds. In relation to disciplinary power, Foucault (1975) described the political concern and management over a population’s lives and bodies as biopolitics, which operates through measurement, quantification, classification and evaluation. Such educational formation of “moral subjectivity” (Medina, 2011, p. 139) is considered personality education and politics of identity (Ball, 2019; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). Since educational normativity reflects

social norms, everyday practices of disciplinary power become constant, and individuals become continuously governed through self-regulation, which goes beyond the school environment, constructing the “educated-self” through educational discourses and micro-disciplinary power practices, thus making the boundaries between personal and social spheres indistinguishable (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997), and self-governance becomes a lifelong learning practice. From this perspective, the focus of disciplinary power practices is on moulding future subjects rather than punishing the past conduct, which sovereign power would do (Deacon, 2006).

Knowledge is a social construct with “no epistemic innocence” (Medina, 2011, p. 30). All individuals operate within given limited epistemologies, which are enforced through educational discourses. A sense of “freedom” is key in disciplinary practices so that individuals become active agents with the will to govern and be governed (Ball, 2019; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). The proactive integration of individuals in the power-knowledge dynamics is crucial since, while alienated individuals may grow discontent with the power and attempt to challenge it, integrated individuals with “free will” will become docile and conceal the power. However, it is worth noting that individuals operating within the power structure are never truly free since “claims to have liberated a subject could simultaneously be subjections to different forms of domination” (Thomas, 2008, p. 152). Self-governance is a product of disciplinary power, and it is never entirely intrinsic and always pressured by the “critical gaze of others” (Deacon, 2006, p. 184). Therefore, disciplinary practices in education are not about enhancing individuals’ obedience but are rather establishing strategies to incorporate individuals as active agents in the social structures.

### **Education and National Identity**

Considering a nation as an imagined community of heterogeneous social groups in terms of ethnicity, religion, language, sex, and classes, states seek to produce internal coherence by constructing national identity. Notably, in post-colonial contexts where the emergence of the state usually precedes the nation, the state actively promotes the construction of a unified national identity through state institutions, including education (Durrani et al., 2022). Since a nation is imagined, a state needs to institutionalise a sense of national belonging among its citizens. Therefore, across the world, education is widely utilised as one of the most important vehicles to naturalise the us-them distinction and forge national identity (Carretero et al., 2012; Durrani et al., 2022). Indeed, nationalist

discourses often seek to establish internal coherence by dividing the society into us and them and, therefore, constructing a unified national identity in relation to the “other” (Ozkirimli, 2020). However, given the diversity of the state’s members, who belong to various social groups, a homogenous nation is a fictive concept (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Internal plurality is downplayed in such processes, and national identity is rarely inclusive. Formal state-controlled education is a political instrument promoting selected knowledge and identities, which implies the exercise of power by the dominant social group (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Given the inclusion and exclusion processes of national imaginaries and national identity construction, which differentiate and hierarchise social groups, formal educational discourses reflect ideologies of the dominant social group, those with the most economic, cultural and social capital (Durrani, 2008). Therefore, national education is a powerful means to instill “official” national markers and shared national consciousness through the rhetoric of internal unity, although in reality, it often creates inequalities. Hence, nationalist discourses and ideologies promoted through education can be assimilatory (Smith, 1991). However, while school curricula and activities reflect the interest of the dominant social group, such practices are often subtle and unrecognised. Since the nation and national identity are constructed in reference to “others”, which requires inclusion and exclusion, knowledge is inculcated mainly through explicit, implicit and null curricula (Eisner, 1985). Whilst particular teaching and learning contents and objectives are explicitly presented through the curriculum, including textbooks, evaluations and pedagogies, others are deliberately excluded. However, the eliminated, in other words, null knowledge is as necessary as the included ones since national identity is constructed through the inclusion and exclusion processes. Education is not only about the written curriculum but also involves broader aspects, such as developing students’ opinions, attitudes, values, and identities. However, a very nuanced, implicit curriculum plays an important role in constructing children's and young people’s national identity. Hence, from this perspective, school curricula are not merely about teaching content but are also about indicating who students are and what nation they are members of (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

Among a wide range of subjects taught at schools, history education mainly influences the construction of national identity by establishing “the myths of origins” (Durrani et al., 2022) and informing the national past. Given the imagined nature of the nation, as a manifestation of the social imaginary, society is constructed within history—through which particular memories are selected to shape its members’ understanding of the

past and their perceived realities (Castoriadis, 1987). History is therefore not a neutral recounting of facts; rather, societies actively create history by selecting and organising events into meaningful discourses. These imaginaries shape how members of a society experience reality and remember the past. What is remembered or forgotten is structured through these socially instituted imaginaries. Furthermore, history gives a sense of continuity and stability to the nation and establishes the boundaries between us and them through historical narratives; it is extensively used to construct national identity (Zadora, 2017). Social studies are another school subject used for the construction of national identity, as it links the state's geographic space to the notion of civic and, thus, national identity (Durrani, 2008). While textbook, with their authoritative account of "official knowledge", is a powerful source for children and young people to establish their understanding of self in relation to the nation, other school activities have an equally significant influence on the development of national consciousness. Although often taken for granted, activities, such as school assemblies, ceremonies, celebrations and even mundane everyday interactions, significantly contribute to the construction of national identity as a practice of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995). Note that although school is a site for promoting homogenous national imaginaries, those messages may be received differently depending on students. Students have agency in constructing their national identities as they can selectively accept or reject educational discourses, and some national markers may resonate more with specific students who develop more pronounced identifications than others (Durrani, 2008).

### **Empirical Research on Education and Youth National Identities**

There is a significant gap in empirical research examining the relationship between schooling and national identities from the perspectives of children and youth (Bracey, 2006; Campbell-Thomson, 2013). Although substantial literature exists worldwide on how schooling shapes youth national identities, many studies neglect the voices of children and youth, overlooking their agency and subjectivity in the national identity construction process (Silova, 2021). In the context of Uzbekistan, research on youth discourses of national identities is nearly non-existent, and the relationship between school education and national identities remains largely unexplored.

Nevertheless, existing studies indicate that schools are vital settings where national identities are constructed. Empirical research across various countries demonstrates that

curricula and textbooks serve as powerful tools for promoting and normalising national markers (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Liu, 2015; Qazi, 2020; Qazi & Shah, 2019). For instance, in Central Asia, empirical findings show that history and social studies textbooks often contain nationalistic messages that foster a sense of national pride and portray internal and external “others” (Asanova, 2007; Bekzhanova, 2024; Blakkisrud & Nozimova, 2018; Dukeyev, 2023; Ismailova, 2004; Palandjian et al., 2018; Umetbaeva, 2015). In contexts where independence was achieved through armed conflict, such as Pakistan, empirical studies frequently depict opponents as antagonistic external “others” (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Qazi, 2020; Qazi & Shah, 2019). Furthermore, research shows that religion, language, culture, and gender are often used as key national markers to delineate boundaries. However, while establishing these boundaries with “others”, empirical studies reveal that the same markers frequently create internal “others”, often leading to the underrepresentation and marginalisation of minority groups in national discourses (Durrani & Dunne, 2010).

Research highlights that teachers play a crucial role in mediating these discourses, sometimes disseminating state-endorsed discourses that they may personally disagree with (Qazi, 2020). In addition, hidden curriculum, including daily school interactions, rituals, and practices, reinforce national values and norms (Adely, 2007; Shirazi, 2012). For example, empirical research shows that activities such as singing the national anthem and reciting patriotic slogans are regulatory, with teachers enforcing participation among students and promoting ideological homogeneity (Silova et al., 2018). Given that teachers are state employees, their practices reflect the “overriding influence of textbook discourses” (Qazi, 2021, p. 11). Consequently, the discourses that children and youth construct regarding their nations are often deeply rooted in the “official knowledge”, including national markers, disseminated in schools, which shapes their understanding of societal realities, including their national identities (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Durrani et al., 2022; Qazi, 2021).

However, while many students internalise these school discourses as unquestioned truths, empirical studies reveal instances in which they resist the national markers and values promoted in textbooks, for instance secularism, and privileged own markers, like Islam (Qazi & Shah, 2019). This resistance indicates that school education is not the sole influence on identity construction; other environments also significantly shape young people's national identities. Research focused on ethnic minorities shows that school environments can foster a sense of internal “otherness” and create tensions during national

identity development (Vadher & Barrett, 2007). Educational discourses that privilege the dominant social group can either assimilate or provoke resistance from minority groups, leading to feelings of grievance. Resistance has been observed in empirical studies focusing on daily school practices, such as assemblies where students must sing the national anthem or recite verses from the Qu'ran. In these instances, resistance manifests not as outright rejection but as modification, personalisation, and adaptation of school practices regarding national values and identity (Shirazi, 2012). Therefore, empirical studies have shown that young people develop complex, multi-layered identities based on diverse national markers provided through educational discourses (Campbell-Thomson, 2013).

Current studies exploring the intersection of schooling and youth discourses on national identities predominantly employ qualitative methodologies, reflective of the diverse, contingent, and contextual nature of national identities. Many ethnographic studies utilise triangulation, combining textbook analyses with school observations, interviews, and focus groups to deepen the understanding of youth discourses and their referential national markers (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Qazi, 2020). Although much of the research is conducted within school environments and engages with children, youth, and teachers, some studies extend beyond immediate school contexts, exploring national holiday celebrations and extracurricular activities (Adely, 2007). In these ethnographic investigations, methods like participant observation are employed. Researchers have even collected data by “hanging out” with youth to examine how schools construct official knowledge about the nation and national identity (Liu, 2015). In another approach, scholars have utilised autoethnography to explore Soviet childhood memories, providing insights into the connection between school uniforms and national identity (Millei et al., 2018; Silova, 2021). This method enables researchers to situate participants within a broader social context of the nation, enriching the understanding of how these dynamics influence identity construction.

## **Summary**

While different schools of thought exist to define identity, based on post-structuralism, my research conceptualises identity as a differentiation and identification process. Hence, the construction of national identity requires “others”, which are drawn by different referential markers, such as gender, ethnicity and religion. Identities can be

multiple and even contradictory. Therefore, national identity always intersects with diverse markers. Youth is conceptualised as diverse and contextual; therefore, both subjects and actors constantly perform, negotiate and resist their national identities. Education exercises institutionalised disciplinary power and disseminates normalising national discourses through which youth construct national identities. Empirical research revealed that schools are influential spaces where state-endorsed national images and patriotic messages are inculcated, and thus, youth national identities are constructed. However, studies exploring the relationship between schooling and youth national identities are limited, and such research in the Uzbekistani context is almost nonexistent.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The academic literature is largely built upon a tacit understanding of not being a space for exposing emotions, struggles, or dilemmas but rather demonstrating one's confident intellectual abilities and a smooth research implementation process (Gentile, 2013). However, the realities of research, particularly fieldwork, are by no means sterile or flawless as some methodological literature may describe, since fieldwork involves "real people in real places" (Daniel, 2020. P. 19), which unavoidably locates the researcher "within networks of power" (Pachirat, 2009, p. 144), triggering a wide range of emotional tolls and unpredicted incidents (Dall'Agnola, 2023; Robers, 2012). Indeed, fieldwork is not "neutral nor hygienic" (Coffey, 1999, p. 12). Whilst each context presents its own challenges, Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, involve particular hurdles due to their authoritarian and paternalistic environment (Dall'Agnola, 2023; Thibault, 2021). Far from being non-scholarly, exposing and sharing one's fieldwork struggles, subtleties, and obstacles thus enhances research trustworthiness as it reveals invisible facets of fieldwork and knowledge production processes while engaging researchers in a reflexive exercise (Thibault, 2021).

In this chapter, the term "methodology" is approached reflexively and not in a mere technical manner. Therefore, I first outline the philosophical stance underpinning my research and aligned research approach. This is followed by a reflexive section on my fieldwork journey as a foreign scholar and its methodological implications. Then, I present the research methods I employed and discuss the data analysis procedures. Subsequently, various dimensions of my positionalities and their relationship with the research and fieldwork are explored. Finally, trustworthiness, ethics and limitations are debated.

### **Ontological and Epistemological Foundation: Post-Structuralism**

I undertook this study from a post-structuralist philosophical approach and adopted its ontological and epistemological openness, which considers knowledge and reality as a social construct and challenges essentialist understanding of truth. Post-structuralist flexibility, focusing on understanding and uncovering rather than providing rational explanations of social phenomena (Sandu, 2011), allowed me to explore my participants' identities and "lived realities" as diverse, contingent, situational and dynamic. Post-

structuralism, having emerged as a response to structuralism in the 1960s, critiques the structural understanding of social phenomena framed in rigid structures and questions the foundation of humans. Whereas structuralism understands social phenomena through the assumption of underpinning binary and systemic human patterns, post-structuralism challenges fixed systems of truth and knowledge (Devetak, 2013; Humes & Bryce, 2003). Hence, ontologically and epistemologically contingent, post-structuralism rejects static, objective and self-contained “realities” and regards “truths” and knowledge as social constructs which are multiple, non-linear, contextual and complex. Such a paradigm challenging taken-for-granted knowledge thus enabled me to privilege the participants’ voices from non-essentialist perspectives.

Post-structuralism considers power as a central dimension in naturalising and crystalising “truths” as absolute and inherent. This concept of power was extensively examined by Foucault (1975), who explored its relation to individuals and societies and vice versa, particularly through the nexus of power-discourse-knowledge. According to Foucault (1975), “power and knowledge directly imply one another, that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (p. 27). Knowledge is not an inherent, organic standalone concept but is instead constructed and disseminated through institutionalised discourses. However, in societies, knowledge is hierarchised as certain knowledge is given legitimacy and authority as “truths” and is deemed important, while some others are omitted and even rendered the status of “false” or dangerous. From this perspective, knowledge construction is an inclusion through exclusion (Deacon, 2006) and, at the same time, a totalising and individualising process as it involves the homogenisation of knowledge through the differentiation and creation of others (Thomas, 2008). Therefore, the construction of discourses is a “process of differentiation” (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). Hence, post-structuralism aims at exposing the underlying structure of social phenomena as taken-for-granted truths (Barker & Galasinski, 2001), including thoughts, values, behaviours, and politics (Wright, 2003). Foucault called this hierarchical structure of knowledge a “regime of truth”, as “truths” and “knowledge” are not natural phenomena but instead created and sustained by power. Power-generated “truths” thus become “superior knowledge” and gain unquestionable a priori epistemic authority, permeate societies and consciously and unconsciously shape people’s minds and bodies as taken-for-granted epistemologies. However, although knowledge provides an illusion of transcending time and has always been there, it is power

generated and contingent and discontinuous (Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997). This power-knowledge structure leads to the potential marginalisation of “non-privileged” social groups excluded from dominant knowledge (Humes & Bryce, 2003). Identity, which requires the existence of “otherness”, is in constant power dynamics. Identity as a subject position involving the performativity of “normative ideals”, youth are constantly subjected to the idealised notions of what it means to be an Uzbekistani youth, which shapes their identity performances and emotional attachments. Post-structuralism aims to understand how power is operated and constructs social “realities”, including identity. Post-structuralism argues this “system of thoughts” (Fox, 2014, p. 4) is formative and conditioning since it disperses and normalises specific ideas, values and behaviours, regulating individuals and constructing their identity (Wright, 2003).

Based on the post-structuralist concept, Wright (2003) underlined that power is inevitable in social relationships. Power is not a top-down authoritative concept located in certain individuals or institutions but rather exists through practices at any and every layer of society, as micro-power among individuals at extremities of socio-political systems. Therefore, power is fluid, constantly negotiated and interwoven in societies. Post-structuralism further argues that power and resistance are intertwined as power is also regarded as a form of resistance. From this perspective, individuals are both objectifying and being objectified by social phenomena. Although power-knowledge is a dynamic nexus, the nexus alone does not impact societies and people, and discourses are understood as the conjuncture of power-knowledge relations, which institutionalises and normalises the nexus (Ball, 2010). The power-discourse-knowledge relation acts as a loop that continuously influences one another and ensures that power generates the relation, and at the same time, power is sustained by the relation. From this perspective, discourses are more than a mere system of signs and meanings which neutrally describe the world and its phenomena; they are instead constructed within existing social orders and shared ideas, possibly as an alternative form of ideologies that have already penetrated societies (Olsen, 2004; Popkewitz & Brennan, 1997).

Questioning how the self is established, post-structuralism captures the construction of the self as both an external and internal process; while individuals are unconsciously subjected to and conditioned by normalised discourses, they also actively mould themselves with their agency to meet social values, normalcy and expectations (Verdolin & Harper, 2013). Therefore, the “technology of the self” will regard youth identity construction as external and internal processes. This post-structuralist

understanding of self-construction will allow the research to capture youth as a subject and an agent of society. Post-structuralism aims to expose the underlying structure of “truths”, “realities”, and knowledge through their power relationship. It will help understand the process and axes of youth identity construction, how power is involved, and how youth negotiate power. Furthermore, this paradigm questions the “regime of truths” and intends to reveal social asymmetries caused by the “system of thoughts”.

### **Ethnographically-informed Research Design**

Considering identity construction as a complex process, which constantly evolves through non-static and situated micro-power relationships, my research required an in-depth understanding of the sociocultural aspects of the researched context. Furthermore, since identity involves performativity (Butler, 1990), without a contextual immersion over a lengthy period, it was very likely to reveal only the surface of participants' national identities. Hence, aligning with post-structuralist ontological and epistemological flexibility, I employed a critical ethnographic approach, which allowed me to immerse in participants' daily lives and privilege their voices. Whilst ethnography is widely used in social sciences, including education, its definition is far from being monolithic and unanimous due to philosophical and methodological diversity in research (Hammersley, 2018). The umbrella concept of ethnography includes various research aspects, ranging from ontological and epistemological stances to more methodical facets, such as data collection and analytical processes. While my research focuses on school education and explores how it shapes Uzbekistani youth's national identities, because of the complex issues in accessing schools as a foreign scholar, I decided to access participants outside their school contexts and work with youth who graduated from schools. Although I did not employ a “full-scale” ethnography, working with young people freshly graduated from schools enabled me to observe and examine their national identities as the outcomes of 11-year compulsory education. Moreover, this partial ethnography allowed me to understand their schools' processes in constructing national identities through their memories rather than my sole objective or subjective personal observations.

Regardless of approaches, nonetheless, ethnography allows researchers to fathom the depth and nuances of participants' experiences. Life is far from static, linear or unequivocal, but in constant movement filled with events and complex emotions; it is thus vital for researchers exploring social phenomena to portray the dynamics of participants'

lived realities, including their non-rational aspects (Guillon, 2016). Given that national identity is a social construct that individuals shape through power relations specific to time and space, the ethnographic methods helped me capture not only the contextuality and fluidity of the participants' national identities but also their performances, negotiations and resistance.

Whilst different approaches to ethnography exist, as highlighted above, its underpinning epistemological positions can also be diverse. It needs to be acknowledged, particularly myself as a scholar from the Global North researching the South, that ethnography was originally an imperialist and colonial Western practice, with Western researchers "exploring" the South and representing them as "exotic others" (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1990). In the othering process, the West is the reference point of knowledge as "us" and "the one", while the researched South becomes "others" and is reduced to a "mere object", serving the inquiries of the West. Said (1978) argued such West-based knowledge production as "Orientalism", through which the Global South is depicted as underdeveloped and uncivilised to be rescued by the North providing solutions (Spivak, 1990). Within this "civilising mission" (Ross, 2009, p. 386), southern knowledge is therefore regarded as insufficiently elaborated, naïve and non-conceptualised. As a result, southern epistemic authority is disqualified, leading to the Western-dominated hierarchical knowledge structure in which the South occupies an inferior position. Spivak (1990) critiqued such subjugating knowledge production as Western self-obsession and described it as "epistemic violence", through which the "reality" of the Global South is essentialised and appropriated. Given that knowledge is intrinsically power-laden, this imperialist hegemonic knowledge construction process is not a mere cultural production but the making of the world structure through which the North establishes the South as the third world and forges power asymmetries and structural inequalities between the South and North.

As a half-Japanese and half-French who was raised and educated in Japan, France and the UK, which are all former colonising states, it was thus crucial for me to acknowledge my positionalities and potential epistemic violence I may exercise and thus approach my ethnographically-informed research critically. Indeed, decolonisation is an unfinished project. Epistemic violence persists even in the post-colonial era since "imperial eyes" (Ross, 2009, p. 387) and "benevolent impulse" (Morton & Spivak, 2003, p. 56) have been deeply entrenched in our societies, which have been largely influenced by colonial legacies, including west-oriented modernisation, capitalism, and globalisation.

Academia is an institution of knowledge production and crystallisation. Western scholars are particularly likely to extract endogenous “realities” and systemise them into knowledge based on Northern epistemologies, and often even unintentionally and mostly imperceptibly. Therefore, to conduct ethnographically-informed research that does not “speak for” participants nor silence the endogenous knowledge, I adopted a critical ethnographic approach. Unlike “conventional ethnography”, which is purely descriptive and likely to objectify participants and silence local voices and thus perpetuate epistemic violence, critical ethnography privileges participants’ perspectives and captures social phenomena as heterogeneous. Whilst conventional and critical ethnography share methodological commonalities as both involve lengthy contextual immersion and observation, the latter, instead of focusing on the description of “what is”, places importance on “what could be” (O’Mahony et al., 2012). This implies that critical ethnography does not regard participants’ meanings as standalone phenomena or an end in itself but as social constructs. By situating individuals in broader political, economic and social contexts, critical ethnography examines beyond the appearing surface of the phenomena and, therefore, attempts to deconstruct underlying power structures that construct social phenomena, including different forms of inequalities and violence. Therefore, critical ethnography, by engaging in the examination of “broader political, social, and economic issues that focus on oppression, conflict, struggle, power, and praxis” (Schwandt, 1997, p. 22), questions the processes of the power system and challenges the status quo through the deconstruction of social structures. This critical approach is often employed in education ethnographies, querying the role of education in constructing social and cultural reproduction, gender, and racial and ethnic prejudices and inequalities (Beach & Vigo-Arazola, 2021). According to critical ethnography, “there is no absolute truth of interpretation, but value of account” (Tsoliidis, 2008, p. 271), and it challenges the power-knowledge relationship and prevailing normalcy (Naidoo, 2012). This approach, therefore, enabled me to critically approach educational discourses and explore the participants’ national identities on their own terms while also being self-critical of my epistemic influences.

### **Conducting Research in a Non-Native Environment**

Although a plethora of literature discusses how to “enter” and “exit” the researched context, the “field”, the notion of “enter” and “exist”, and thus “going there” is

controversial from critical ontology as such language does not recognise the tensions around coloniality and decoloniality (Guasco, 2022). The time and space-framed concept of field hence objectifies and reduces the South as a mere site to extract “raw data”, which are subsequently theorised and analysed through Western scientific methodologies and represented as Northern knowledge (Nhemachena et al., 2016). Therefore, rather than capturing the notion of the field through “flattened ontological and materialised frames” (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015. P. 633) and depicting it as a static space where researchers can go in and out, I approached it critically as a more complex, fluid and broader concept continuously shifting through social interactions (Booth, 2014). By doing so, “a sense of place... [becomes] as real to the place as it is to the experiencer” (Booth, 2014, p. 6), which thus acknowledges the agency of diverse epistemologies and realities, including endogenous perspectives. Nevertheless, whilst critically approaching the concept of the “field” as continuous and beyond exoticised space in the South, when researchers physically anchor themselves in the researched context, the “fieldwork” becomes their “special realities”, which I unpack in this section.

At the preparatory stage for my fieldwork, I came across literature describing fieldwork as “messy” and the importance of embracing the messiness (Mazanderani, 2018), which resonated with me due to my post-structuralist flexible yet critical ontological and epistemological lens challenging the essentialist normalcies and status-quo. However, it took until I started my fieldwork to fathom the actual scale of messiness and fuzziness. As Behar (1996) illustrated, “nothing is stranger than this business of humans observing other humans in order to write about them” (p. 5); contextual immersion engaging in human interactions inevitably involves a wide array of challenges, which varies according to the research themes, contexts and methodologies, and positionalities (Dall’Agnola, 2023). Notwithstanding that I have had different kinds of prior fieldwork experience in Uzbekistan as both a scholar and practitioner, my doctoral fieldwork revealed to be an eventful, breathless, and somewhat “bumpy” journey, particularly due to my foreigner status, although that status simultaneously became an asset. Indeed, while there exists no clear distinction between insider and outsider and such simplistic dichotomy overlooks the multidimensional, contingent and situated nature of researchers’ positionalities, foreign and local scholars face divergent advantages and disadvantages during fieldwork due to their different cultural and social obligations, expectations and familiarity to the researched context (Dall’Agnola, 2023; Thibault, 2021). Whilst my various positionalities and their implication to the research fieldwork are further discussed

in another section, in this section, I unravel my scholarly journey in a non-native environment and discuss practical yet crucial methodological processes, including dilemmas I navigated as a foreigner, such as finding and working with a local interpreter and youth participants. This section thus offers honest discussions of personal experiences as a foreign scholar in an attempt to reflect on my epistemological and methodical accounts regarding the site, gatekeepers and participants.

### **Cross-Language Research: Involvement of Interpreter**

I kept a digital field journal throughout my fieldwork to record my observations, feelings, questionings, and ideas, and within my four-month stay in Tashkent, 37 notes out of 233 included the keyword “interpreter”, indicating how importantly my interpreter occupied my fieldwork through methodological and emotional dimensions. Language is one of the most fundamental aspects and vehicles for understanding social phenomena, particularly in qualitative inquiry, including ethnography, evolving around in-depth human interactions (Kalocsanyiova & Shantnawi, 2020). Simultaneously, as my field journal alluded, language represents complexities for researchers as it is socially constructed and thus entails subjectivity and power dimensions. Particularly for foreign scholars in non-native settings who are “less than fluent”, as I was, the challenges are amplified since our research unavoidably necessitates interpreters, which then increases epistemological, methodological and ethical complexities. My cross-language research, which involved Uzbek and Russian-speaking participants and a local interpreter, indeed was far from effortless and required constant reflection, negotiations and flexibility. However, in the current academic literature, silence exists (Temple, 2002) on the role of interpreters in research despite their vital part (Gibb & Iglesias, 2016). According to a study conducted in 2009, among the reviewed 40 papers drawn upon qualitative cross-language inquiries, albeit the involvement of an interpreter, only 15% included reflective accounts and acknowledged their methodological implications (Squires, 2009). Such an indivisibility of interpreters is argued to be due to the apprehension that acknowledging the lack of researchers’ language proficiency and related complexities would question their credibility (Sepielak et al., 2019). Borchgrevink (2003) described this silence around interpreters as the result of the dearth of critical approaches in ethnography and the mystification and romanticisation of the realities of fieldwork with vague and immaculate images. Interpreters are mostly invisible in “conventional ethnography” and rendered to a passive,

values-free technical tool conveying information between researchers and participants, with the main concern of the accuracy and practical processes of language, thus eliminating linguistic mistakes (Bergen, 2018; Sepielak et al., 2019). However, such a “verbatim style” (Bergen, 2018, p. 2) disregards sociocultural dimensions of language and interpreters’ influence over knowledge production, and therefore, based on the critical paradigm of post-structuralism, I decided to work “with” my interpreter, rather than “through”, and recognise her role and reflect on her implications in my research. “There is no such thing as a neutral position” (Turner, 2013, p. 222), and interpreters systematically engage their subjectivity, including concepts, values and beliefs throughout research processes. Hence, it was vital to reflect on my interpreter’s positionalities, and not only mine, aiming at increasing my research trustworthiness, particularly as a Global North researcher focusing on the South, pertaining to the inclusion of endogenous epistemologies.

The recruitment of the interpreter was not an easy task; it took me nearly three months, starting before I arrived in Tashkent. Although I have a basic conversational level of Russian, which helped me navigate in Tashkent, due to the required in-depth interactions with participants and the presence of only-Uzbek-speaking participants, I hence involved a trilingual interpreter in my research, who was fluent in Uzbek, Russian and English. Although some cautioned that the similarities between interpreters and participants might lead to blindness and “taken-for-granted assumptions” (Williamson et al., 2011), I nevertheless sought my potential interpreter among local students who had similar age and social backgrounds as my participants, hoping it would facilitate discussions with participants. However, despite my criteria and efforts to find an interpreter through my acquaintances from a few months prior to my arrival in Tashkent, the process was long, fruitless and frustrating since many of them oriented me towards local credentialed interpreters. The introduced credentialed interpreters not only did not correspond to my criteria but also offered me their services at a rate ranging from 250 to 500\$ a day, which was simply out of my financial capacity. Budget constraints are also one of the most experienced hurdles among foreign scholars in finding an interpreter (MacKenzie, 2019). It took me until I arrived in Tashkent to finally find my interpreter through a job advertisement on a Telegram (a messaging application widely used across Central Asia) group of fourth-year students at a public university in Tashkent. By luck, two interested students came to the “job interview”, through which I hoped to grasp their linguistic proficiencies, and particularly their positionalities, including the atmosphere

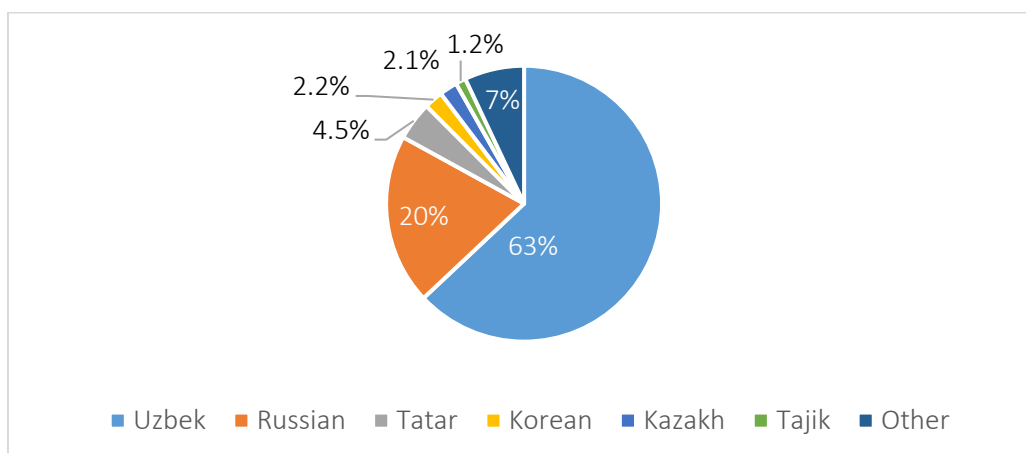
around them. For a critical inquiry working “with” an interpreter, the research-interpreter trust relationship is key as the researcher is generally expected to exercise greater authority over the research process than the interpreter. Whilst both were ethnic-Uzbek women, Muslim, and university students who originated from suburban areas of Tashkent and were fluent in English, Uzbek, and Russian, one feature distinguished them: expressions of religious faith. Although they were both Muslims, one of them was wearing a hijab, which triggered my attention due to my research topic, national identity, and one of the focused national markers, religion. Considering that my participants included both ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks and ethnic Russians whom I expected to belong to two different religions, namely Islam and Orthodox Christianity, I was afraid that the wearing of the hijab might make non-Muslim participants feel reluctant or hesitant to discuss Islam, which is an important national marker in Uzbekistan despite the state’s secular status. Moreover, in informal discussions with youth, on multiple occasions, non-Muslim participants, when among themselves, often portrayed hijabi girls in a negative light, frequently using harsh language. Therefore, from both an ethical and research perspective, I decided to work with the non-hijabi student, whom I will call Maftuna, in my study. However, I acknowledge that working with a hijabi interpreter may have influenced both the data collection and analysis processes, just as working with a hijabi or male interpreter could have influenced my research processes in different ways.

Since interpretation is not a mere linguistic process but requires epistemic negotiations along with practical and contextual considerations, and given that she did not have any prior research experiences and was unfamiliar with the central concepts of my research, I conducted several training sessions on methodology and ethics as recommended by several scholars (Bergen, 2018). I indeed comprehended the importance of ethics training when Maftuna stumbled on the question, “Do we need to obtain desired information regardless of participants’ comfort or feelings?” and answered, “Yes, of course. Isn’t it what we want?”

### **Youth Participants: Navigating the Recruitment, Retention and Loss**

Since my research interest lies in how state-sponsored education shapes youth national identities, ideal participants would have been those under 18 who were still enrolled in schools. However, given that the coming of age in Uzbekistan is 18 (Law on Foundation of the State Youth Policy, 1991) and due to complex ethical procedures

involved in studying the under-aged population and manifold social hierarchy and constraints of schools, pupils may not have been able to articulate their national identities openly. Furthermore, inherited from the “socialist surveillance culture” (Silova et al., 2017, p. 2), accessing public institutions, such as schools, in the Central Asian context, is unwieldy, requiring “cumbersome paperwork, negotiations and permissions from a range of people and institutions” (Jonbekova, 2020 p. 6). Gaining access to school is particularly arduous for foreign scholars with little local connections, as teachers and pupils are often reluctant and apprehensive to talk without a letter from the Ministry of Education (Chankseliani, 2017). To skirt such complex procedures, not to mention the time constraint of the fieldwork, I decided to recruit my participants from higher education. Hence, my participants were youth enrolled in the first and second year of bachelor programmes in Tashkent, mainly at public institutions, aged from 18 to 20, who had recently completed compulsory school education and whose memories of schools were still relatively fresh. To capture the diversity of Uzbekistani youth, yet considering the methodological practicality, I recruited three ethnic groups, Uzbek, Russian and Tajik, including both women and men. The choice of ethnic groups reflected the ethnic composition of Uzbekistan, and thus included the titular ethnic group, Uzbek and the second largest ethnic minority, Tajik. Additionally, I considered the ethnic composition of Tashkent and included the most significant ethnic minority of the city, Russian. Across the country, most ethnic Russians are located in Tashkent, a remnant from the Soviet period (Figure 15). However, as I conducted my fieldwork, an unexpected new social group emerged, namely Uzbeks who attended Russian-medium schools, who explicitly expressed and distinguished themselves from Uzbeks who attended Uzbek-medium schools. Hence, Uzbeks were divided into two groups according to their school language of instruction.

**Figure 15*****Ethnic Composition of Tashkent***

*Note.* Data retrieved from Minority Rights Group International (2022).

Having begun my fieldwork with no personal connections with adult-age youth in Tashkent, I relied upon my presence at a public university in Tashkent, where I previously worked as a development worker and taught English during my fieldwork, my interpreter and local acquaintances to identify potential participants, along with subsequent snowballing. Youth-involved research has its unique challenges, particularly in the practical and ethical dimensions, including issues around access, retention, and power differential. Whilst youth is diverse and contextual (Dunne et al., 2015) due to their “social realities”, securing their commitment over a lengthy period of time is complex. Working with university students who were occupied with their studies, extracurriculars and other activities, such as part-time jobs, and friends and family engagements, made the recruitment particularly demanding. Particularly, ethnic minorities, ethnic Tajiks and ethnic Russians were difficult to reach since the number of ethnic-Tajik communities is limited in Tashkent, and it turned out ethnic-Russian students were predominantly enrolled in private institutions, such as Russian university branches, and largely absent at public institutions, including where I was teaching. Furthermore, despite that my Northern and English speaker positionalities often attracted curiosity, my foreignness, lack of linguistic proficiencies and research topic, “national identity”, sometimes made the recruitment of youth complex. Due to its Soviet-inherited authoritarianism and state-controlled research culture, undertaking research in Central Asia, particularly those inquiring about political, gender and religious dimensions, has been considered sensitive and hazardous (Jonbekova, 2020). My topic indeed initially triggered reluctance among some gatekeepers who

regarded the topic as sensitive and hesitated to introduce me to potential participants. Therefore, I revisited my approach and decided not to use the term “youth national identity” but instead rephrase it as “young people’s self-identification and relationship to their nation”. Furthermore, I often highlighted my affiliation with a Central Asian university, which allowed me to lessen my “foreignness” and, therefore, eventual wariness among the gatekeepers and potential participants. Moreover, as is often the case for longitudinal studies (Foss et al., 2013; Schelbe et al., 2015), the participants’ retention was revealed to be particularly arduous. Indeed, in contrast to school-based research where the presence of children and adolescents is expected, conducting fieldwork with adult-age youth who were “freed” from their parental gaze for the first time and gaining autonomy and thus moving like free electrons involved constant last-minute cancellations, no-shows, dropouts and re-recruitments. In some cases, I offered monetary incentives, which is demonstrated to increase retention in youth research (Murray & Xie, 2024). Moreover, in an attempt to avoid accentuating the age and social status gaps between the participants and thus “blend in” with them and increase their retention, I usually wore simple clothes and no makeup. Hence, my fieldwork required constant adjustment, (re-)negotiations and flexibility. As a result, despite the initial plan to recruit a total of 12 participants, due to the newly emerged social group and the highly unpredictable and fluid participants, the total number of participants whom I observed, interviewed and included in focus groups swelled to 39, including those who dropped and joined mid-ways. Indeed, due to the difficulties in retaining youth in lengthy research and, therefore, their anticipated dropout, it is even advisable to recruit a bigger number of participants than ideal (Foss et al., 2013). Simultaneously, the recruitment and retention complexities I encountered led to the incorporation of a wider demography than initially planned, including some students from the second year and two from private institutions.

## **Research Methods**

I employed multiple data collection methods to understand the complexity of participants’ discourses and deconstruct the performativity of their national identities. Triangulation is often used in complex and potentially contentious research, as it explores multidimensional phenomena, facilitating thus an emic approach (Pike, 1954), which rejects generalising and a priori determination of social phenomena and explores the data in diversity (Turner & Turner, 2009). Since my research examined the relationship

between education and youth national identity construction primarily through youth narratives, data triangulation allowed me to better understand the relationship between school education and youth national identities and increase the trustworthiness of the data. Furthermore, data triangulation helped me to compensate for the potential “loss in translation” (Adhikary, 2019, p. 32) due to the involvement of an interpreter and enhance the data’s credibility. Hence, I used different methods of data collection, i.e., textbook analysis, participant observation, photo elicitation, oral history interview, and focus group discussions (Table 6).

**Table 6**  
*Types and Purposes of Data Collection Methods*

No.	Method	Purpose
1	Textbooks analysis	Gain an overall understanding of school curriculum and messages of national identity to make connections between participants’ national identities and education
2	Participant observation	Understand participants’ discourses and performativity of national identities in everyday lives
3	Photo elicitation/ Oral History interview	Access participants’ school experiences and memories to understand the influence of school education on their national identity constructions
4	Focus group discussion	Understand commonalities, differences in participants’ discourses, and the performativity of national identities and their relation to the nation. Observe potential tensions among different social groups in relation to their national identity

Data were collected gradually through different methods, from textbook analysis to focus group discussions, to accommodate the relatively young age of my participants and the sensitivity of the research topic and to secure enough time to build a relationship with and among the participants and the interpreter, thus letting them open up to her and me. I first analysed school textbooks, which gave me an overall understanding of what national messages schools promote and helped me facilitate communication with the participants. In the second stage, I observed the participants in their daily lives to explore their national

identities. This was followed by photo elicitation and oral history interviews to access participants' memories and experiences of schools and explore education processes of national identity construction. Photos were used as a springboard for discussions in the interviews. Finally, in the last stage, I organised focus groups through which participants' discourses and performativity of national identities were observed. The focus groups gave me the opportunity to explore the participants' national identities through the dimensions of ethnicity, gender, and religion, as well as identify similarities, differences, and tensions within and across social groups.

To privilege my participants' voices, participant observation, oral history interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded upon the participants' consent (Durrani et al., 2022). Since non-verbal cues could not be recorded but were also a part of participants' discourses of national identities, I kept observational notes and recorded participants' non-verbal expressions. Throughout the data collection processes, my interpreter, Maftuna, held the steering wheel as she facilitated the discussions in observation, interviews and focus groups while I was next to her. To facilitate the organisation of the observation, interviews and focus groups, I communicated with the participants through Telegram and sometimes created chat groups through which I communicated and arranged the meetings.

### ***Textbook Analysis***

Since I explored the relationship between schooling and youth national identities not through school sites but through participants' discourses, without understanding national discourses promoted through curricula, I may have overlooked the signifiers of national identities portrayed in the textbooks and those deployed by the youth, thus missing the relationship between schooling and national identity construction. Hence, I analysed school textbooks to gain an overall understanding of national markers and messages promoted through school discourses. By having an overview of the school curriculum as the "official" knowledge, which is considered one of the most frequently employed vehicles to promote national identities (Holmén, 2011), I could better capture participants' discourses of national identities, enabling me to have in-depth discussions with them. As in many empirical studies on education and youth national identities (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Liu, 2015; Qazi, 2020), the textbook analysis helps better capture participants' discourses of national identities in relation to schooling. While there

exists a wide range of subjects in Uzbekistani school education, I focused on those through which national imaginaries and identity are extensively promoted, namely Tarbiya, Upbringing in English (character development, ethics and morals) and History of Uzbekistan. Considering the limited amount of time and resources, I limited my analysis to G10 and G11, but both textbooks in Uzbek and Russian were examined to analyse possible disparities (Table 7). In total, I analysed eight textbooks. Note that my research's primary focus was not the curriculum or textbooks per se but on understanding the education processes in national identity construction in relation to youth national identities. School education includes a wide range of activities that influence the construction of youth national identities, and textbooks are only a part of them. Nevertheless, textbooks provided rich insights into school national discourses and practices, which helped me better understand my participants' discourses and the performativity of their national identities.

**Table 7**  
*Analysed Textbooks*

Subject	Title	Grade	Language	Publication
Upbringing	Tarbiya	10	Uzbek	2021
Upbringing	Воспитание	10	Russian	2021
Upbringing	Tarbiya	11	Uzbek	2021
Upbringing	Воспитание	11	Russian	2021
Initial Pre-Military Training	Chaqiruvga qadar boshlang'ich tayyorgarlik	10	Uzbek	2017
Initial Pre-Military Training	НАЧАЛЬНАЯ ДОПРИЗЫВНАЯ ПОДГОТОВКА	10	Russian	2017
Initial Pre-Military Training	Chaqiruvga qadar boshlang'ich tayyorgarlik	11	Uzbek	2018

Initial Pre-Military Training	НАЧАЛЬНАЯ ДОПРИЗЫВН АЯ ПОДГОТОВК А	11	Russian	2018
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### *Participant Observation*

Identity is a complex concept that cannot be understood in a short period or in artificially organised social meetings. Furthermore, given that the construction of identity is a social process shaped and performed through discourses, understanding my participants in their “natural settings” was important. As researchers spend time establishing their positions in the participants’ community and mutual trust grows, researchers gradually gain access to socio and cultural aspects that are invisible from a glance from outside (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Hence, I conducted participant observation with a total of 25 participants (Table 8), which involved me in their “daily lives, activities, rituals, and interactions” (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 67).

**Table 8**  
*Youth in Participant Observation*

Ethnicity	MOI	Woman	Man	Total
Uzbek	Uzbek	4	10	14
Uzbek	Russian	1	2	3
Russian	Russian	2	1	3
Tajik	Uzbek	1	4	5
Ground total		8	17	25

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Participant observation is often used in ethnographic studies since it allows researchers to understand participants in contexts and observe them directly without heavily relying on what people say (Mazanderani, 2018). Although I conducted the observation outside the compulsory education context and could not have direct access to school practices of national identity construction, it nevertheless gave me opportunities to observe participants' discourses and performativity of their national identities. I, therefore, followed and observed participants throughout their daily lives by "hanging out" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 84) together, including having lunch and dinner, tea, cooking, shopping, visiting amusement parks, and studying at the library. Since my research was not about higher education but rather about understanding the outcomes of school education, I did not observe the participants in their university classes. I did not include a pre-designed schedule for my observations, which often offered me unexpected insights and pointed to new areas of investigation, such as treating Uzbek students who attended Russian-medium schools as a distinctive group, which I could gradually explore through other methods. Given that I had a large number of participants who were not acquainted with each other, and the essence of participant observation was to observe them in their natural settings, I mostly met them separately, sometimes with their friends, following their individual daily routines and not gathering all participants artificially. Whilst the participant observation was intensively conducted during the first and second months of my fieldwork, I occasionally continued to "hang out" with some participants throughout my time in Tashkent.

### ***Photo Elicitation***

After around a month, I started my fieldwork, and before conducting individual interviews, I asked the participants to share their pictures from school time to access their experiences with school practices of national identity construction (Appendix A). Among those who took part in the participant observation, 11 young people shared pictures from their school days before joining the interviews (Table 9).

**Table 9**

#### ***The Number of Participants Who Shared Photos***

Ethnicity	MOI	Woman	Man

Uzbek	Uzbek	1	3
Uzbek	Russian	1	1
Russian	Russian	2	1
Tajik	Uzbek	-	2
Total		4	7

In the research context, where I did not have consistent direct access to compulsory education settings, the photos gave me insights into what practices schools use to construct national identity among youth and the participants' personal school experiences. Although I was nervous about whether the participants would share their pictures, it turned out to be less of an issue than expected, as many of them enthusiastically shared their pictures with me. While photos became a springboard for further discussions in oral history interviews, they were particularly used to analyse school practices, such as the display of national symbols, heroes, presidents, uniforms, and celebrations. Photo elicitation is a methodology often used for exploring individuals' past experiences and memories, particularly personal topics, including struggles and hardships (Joyce & Liamputtong, 2022).

### ***Oral History Interview***

After collecting pictures from the participants, I conducted oral history interviews with a total of 17 participants and further explored their school memories and experiences of school practices in national identity construction. A wide range of questions about their school lives was asked to understand how compulsory education promoted national identity and how they experienced it. Since 11 participants who initially joined the participant observation dropped out, I recruited four new participants for the interviews. Three of them were involved in the research exclusively for the interviews (Table 10). It is to note that about half of those interviewed - nine participants - shared their photos, mostly due to their last-minute availability for the interviews or because they had pictures in their hometowns.

**Table 10**  
***The Number of Participants in the Oral History Interviews***

Ethnicity	MOI	Woman	Man	Total	Newly recruited	Only interview
Uzbek	Uzbek	3	2	5	2	1
Uzbek	Russian	2	2	4	1	1
Russian	Russian	3	1	4	1	1
Tajik	Uzbek	1	3	4	-	-
Total				17	4	3

Considering the sensitivity of discussing national identity, participants' photos were used as a springboard for ease of discussion. While explaining their pictures, they often expressed nostalgia for their school time and how much they missed it, as well as homes for those who were from outside Tashkent. Oral history is grounded in participants' memories and reflections; hence, I explored the participants' personal stories in-depth and provided access to their lived school experiences (Chawla, 2017). This method is indeed often referred to as bibliographic interviews. Additionally, this approach enables participants to narrate their life stories in their own words, capturing their emotional experiences. It also serves as an effective tool for uncovering the power dynamics they have encountered, particularly for marginalised groups. Note that while oral history is anchored in the interview, it is often conducted as a guided conversation (Leavy, 2014). Therefore, although the same schedule was employed for all participants (Appendix B), given that participants' recollections of memories sometimes led to unexpected directions, my interpreter and I remained flexible and asked extended questions impromptu for further clarification. As for the organisation, I conducted interviews in a calm place where participants were familiar, often in a university classroom or café. The interviews

continued for about a month, and each of them lasted around one hour. My interpreter conducted most interviews, except five, which I conducted in English as the participants were comfortable talking in the language. The interviews conducted by my interpreter and I were influenced by our respective positionalities. Notably, my interpreter's local background often led her to refrain from asking further questions to clarify the underlying reasons behind some participants' opinions, as certain aspects were taken for granted, considered "normal", or shared within her own experience. However, her local perspective also allowed her to follow up on contextual details that I often missed. Additionally, as she confided in me later, her Uzbek ethnicity made her feel somewhat uncomfortable exploring the views of ethnic Russians or Uzbeks who identified as agnostic, as she did not share certain perspectives with them.

### ***Focus Group Discussions***

After completing the interviews, as the last data collection stage in the fourth month of my fieldwork, I conducted four focus group discussions to observe similarities and differences in participants' national identities. Whilst interviews explored their school experiences and memories, the focus groups explored their symbolic understanding of the nation; markers of national identities, including ethnicity, gender and religion; internal and external "others"; senses of belonging; and performativity of national identities (Appendix C). The participants had diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, including ethnicity, gender, religion and educational background. The focus groups enabled me to observe commonalities, differences and tensions in their expression of national identities, which were invisible through observation, interviews and photos (Hyde et al., 2005). Furthermore, the discussions enabled me to identify within and across groups not only the participants' recurrent discourses of national identities but also their disagreements and resistance to the school discourses (Robinson, 2020). Considering the national context of Uzbekistan, where de-Russification and Uzbekistan are the mainstays of state discourses of national identity, I organised the groups by ethnicity since interethnic focus groups may have made some participants, particularly ethnic minorities, uncomfortable discussing their national identities. As for the ethnic Uzbeks, those who attended Uzbek and Russian-medium schools were separated into two different groups. Hence, four groups were held, i.e., Uzbeks from Uzbek medium schools, Uzbeks from Russian medium schools, Russians and Tajiks. Although I originally designed the focus groups to have an equal number of

women and men, and those from urban and rural areas in each group, I soon realised the complexities of the participants' recruitment, and thus decided to form the groups flexibly based on the participants' availability. Nevertheless, to ensure diversity, each group was comprised of both women and men, mostly those from urban and rural settings, though their ratios varied across groups. In total, 17 youth, eight women and nine men participated in the discussions (Table 11). All focus groups were conducted in an empty university room or a quiet corner of a café upon the participants' request, commonly lasting for 90 minutes and were audio-recorded. While the groups with Uzbeks from Russian medium schools and ethnic Russians were facilitated in Russian, those with Uzbeks from Uzbek schools and ethnic Tajiks were conducted in Uzbek. To transcribe the data, which required a significant amount of time and a high level of English proficiency, I enlisted several students from Nazarbayev University. An ethnic Uzbek Kazakhstani student, fluent in both Uzbek and English, transcribed all the data sets in Uzbek. For the Russian-language data, my peers from the doctoral programme, who were proficient in both Russian and English, handled the transcription. As these transcribers had academic training and experience in transcribing data, the pseudonyms were generally transcribed accurately. To ensure each speaker was correctly linked to their pseudonym, I cross-checked the audio recordings with the transcriptions. Thanks to my basic proficiency in Russian, some knowledge of Uzbek, and my interpreter's real-time English translations during the interviews and focus groups, I was able to easily identify speakers within the transcriptions, which were already mostly accurately linked to their pseudonyms.

**Table 11**

***The Number of Participants in the Focus Group Discussions***

Ethnicity	MOI	Woman	Man	Total	Newly recruited
Uzbek	Uzbek	2	2	4	-
Uzbek	Russian	2	2	4	2
Russian	Russian	3	1	4	1

Tajik	Uzbek	1	4	5	1
				17	4

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Whilst the same research protocol was applied in all groups (Appendix C), it followed the groups' dynamism and stayed flexible. Focus groups thus offered an open space where participants could freely express themselves without being pressured to provide the "right" answers (Durrani et al., 2022). Hence, a focus group is a collaborative method to which participants can contribute (Cairns, 2013; Mazanderani, 2018).

### *School Visits*

Although school visits were not initially planned due to my methodological choice to explore educational processes of national identity construction through its outcomes, I had an opportunity to visit five schools, four with Uzbek medium and one with Russian medium in Tashkent. During the visit, I observed school and classroom decorations, several lessons, and school assemblies, and I also had some informal exchanges with pupils and teachers. The visits enabled me to better understand the school environment and atmosphere and contextualise the participants' school experiences and school processes of youth national identity construction.

### *Field Notes*

In the course of my fieldwork in Tashkent, I kept two different types of field notes, observation notes and a field journal, to record what I noticed, experienced, felt and thought, particularly issues around the methodologies, positionalities and ethics. My observation notes started from the participants' observation and continued throughout the fieldwork each time I met my participants and my interpreter, including the interviews and focus groups. Except for the discussions captured through the interviews and focus groups, which were audio-recorded, the participants' and interpreter's direct quotes and non-verbal expressions, including appearances that pertained to national identities and school experiences, were noted, which became the "primary aids to memory" (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011, p. 120). Although I initially considered taking notes during the observation, interviews and focus groups, I soon realised the practical difficulty of simultaneously

engaging with the participants and the notes, particularly during the observation, which often happened outdoors. Furthermore, while I tried to keep notes during the first interviews, I noticed that it was distracting the participants, who looked intrigued about what I was noting, which made me abandon the idea of “on-spot” notetaking but instead kept notes within the day. As the languages used with the participants were a mixture of Uzbek, Russian and occasionally English, my interpreter and I kept notes, which I later combined into one file, simultaneously allowing me to understand my interpreter’s perspectives and observational lenses. Separate from the observational notes, I kept a digital field journal each evening throughout my fieldwork. Thus, from my arrival date in Tashkent, the journal became a personal space where I could “let out” my thoughts and ideas, including joy, concerns, struggles, and frustrations I experienced during the fieldwork. This also became a self-reflective tool, enabling me to meditate on my methodologies and positionalities and find gaps and new questions in my notes so I could address them while still in the field (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

Whilst the distinction was somewhat blurred, the different sets of data were collected mainly from two dimensions: educational processes of national identity construction through textbook analysis, photo-elicitation and oral history interviews, and participants’ national identities through observation and focus groups. The data sets were initially analysed separately and then cross-analysed to have a holistic view of the relationship between educational processes and the participants’ national identities. All the audio-recorded data was transcribed and translated online through the Microsoft Office function due to the voluminous amount of dataset, which was then checked by my interpreter for disparities between the original recordings. Data analysis was a continuous process, particularly as I gradually collected the data from different methods, which informed each other and continuously provided me with new leads on themes to explore with my participants throughout my fieldwork. Data triangulation allowed me to cross and find connections among the different sets of data and gain insights into my participants’ national identities and educational processes. Aligned with my research paradigm, I employed post-structuralist discourse analysis to examine the data.

### *Analytical Processes*

Informed by post-structuralist flexible ontologies and epistemologies, the analytical processes adopted an inductive approach to privilege the multiplicity of the participants' "realities" and, thus, national identities. Hence, whilst I, as a first step, developed analytical codes pertaining to key thematic concepts of my research, i.e., education and different markers of identity, such as nation, ethnicity, gender, religion, and moral values, a range of additional codes emerged through textbook analysis, observations, interviews and focus groups. Once the initial codes were ready, I refined and assembled them into key themes.

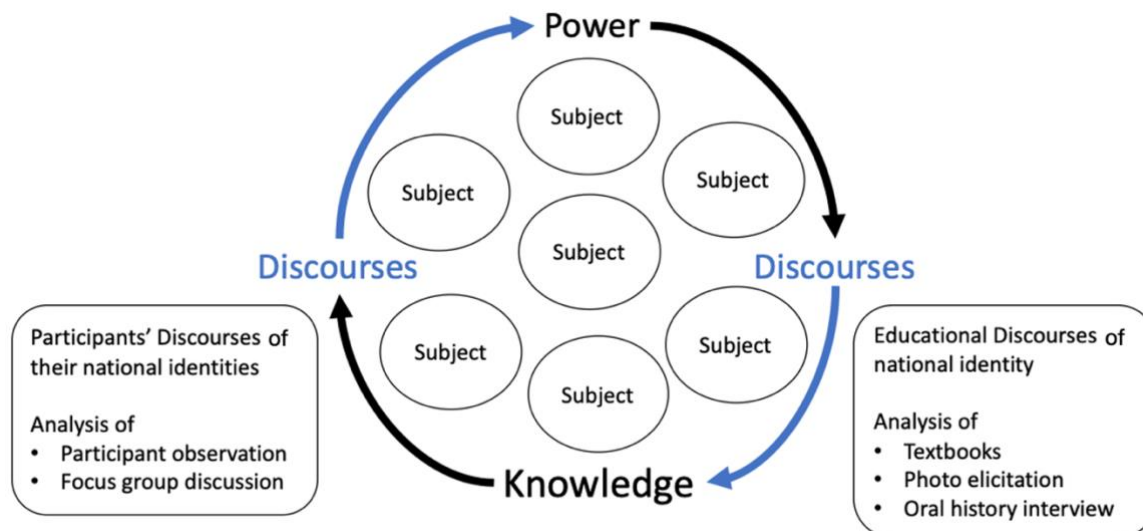
Given the voluminous volume of discourses that emerged through my four-month-long fieldwork, I employed a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, to facilitate the organisation and analysis of data. Although data collected through different methods were coded and thematised separately, once key themes were ready, I explored connections among them and analysed the data all together thematic-wise in the light of my research questions, literature review and conceptual framework drawing upon the Foucauldian concept of power-knowledge. By doing so, I explored how schooling shapes youth national identities, how national markers intersect, and how youth construct national identities. Mazanderani (2018) argued the importance of post-structuralist ethnographers embracing and exploring contradictions and inconsistencies instead of representing the data with artificial consistency. Hence, the inconsistency of the data underlined the complexity of national identity construction and the power dimensions within and against which youth perform, negotiate and resist national identities.

### *Foucauldian Post-Structuralism Discourse Analysis*

All my books ... are little toolboxes ... if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged ... so much better! (Foucault, 1975, 'Interview with Roger Pol Droit', cited in Paton 1979, p. 115)

Although Foucault (1975) did not articulate methodological guidance to unravel power-laden discursive processes in knowledge production, he provided critical lenses as "toolboxes", and post-structuralist discourse analysis (PDA) largely draws on his concept

of the power-discourse-knowledge nexus. Within the nexus, power produces discourses, which then construct knowledge and social exercises “that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1988, p. 18), and schools, as state-sponsored institutions exercising its authority play an important role in normalising discourses and thus circulating the nexus (Figure 16). Since post-structuralism rejects materiality and considers social realities as discursive constructs, the PDA aims to identify discursive patterns and explore the regulative institutional processes through which those discourses are constructed and normalised. Instead of focusing on the representative meanings of discourses, the PDA views the discourses and their meanings as actions and processes (Weninger, 2021). It is important to note that identifying dominant discourses and establishing them as the totalising “truths” leading to the imposition of power is not the PDA’s intent but rather to understand how certain discourses become more predominant over others through power-knowledge dimensions. By doing so, the PDA moves away from word-for-word semiotic analysis, grasping discourses as foundational and tracing structural logics and causations of meanings, thus attempting to capture multiple realities and create space for non-dominant alternative realities. Hence, in addition to merely questioning what and how meanings are made and represented, the PDA is further interested in why those particular meanings, in other words, realities, are made available in such a way that excluding alternative discourses and how they are sustained. Since post-structuralism regards nothing in itself as true and views truths as social constructs, it goes beyond the included and explicit discourses and analyses also the excluded ones (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

**Figure 16*****Home Post-Structuralist Discourse Analysis within the Power-Discourses-Knowledge Nexus***

*Note.* Figure created by the author.

***Textbook Analysis***

Following Foucault's (1975) argument that discourses encompass "the general domain of all statements", including spoken, written and visual communications, I treated textbooks as discourses and analysed their textual and visual contents. Given my limited understanding of Russian and Uzbek, I used an application on my iPhone to scan the textbooks and translate them into English. Given that my analysis aimed not merely to identify what educational discourses of national identity are in the textbooks and how they are represented but also to further deconstruct beneath structural meanings of discourses and examine how those meanings are constructed and sustained, both "manifest" and "latent" discourses (Tayyaba et al., 2022) were examined. Indeed, given the importance of the null curriculum (Eisner, 1985), the "non-said" discourses of national identity were considered. To navigate the textbooks, I was guided by my topical research foci and explored the national markers, such as national symbols, ethnicity, gender, religion, and moral values.

Furthermore, considering that identity construction entails an inclusion through exclusion process, discourses on internal and external "other" were also analysed. The

analysis followed an iterative process and several strategies to capture the manifest and latent discourses. Initially, visual and textual discourses were analysed separately, and the frequencies with which words and images related to each aforementioned national marker appeared in the textbooks were enumerated. Therefore, in addition to the numerical counts, the visual discourses were analysed. It is important to note that in Uzbekistan, the same national curriculum is implemented regardless of the language of instruction. Therefore, for each subject, I compared both Uzbek and Russian versions to examine possible disparities.

### ***Photo Analysis***

Photos were collected mainly to gain insights into the participants' school experiences and understand school practices of national identity construction and not the participants' expressions of their national identities per se. Therefore, considering the photos as educational discourses, similar to the textbooks, the visual contents indicating the notions of nation, national symbol, ethnicity, gender, religion, and moral values were analysed. This photo analysis complemented textbook analyses and thus informed the enacted curriculum on national identity construction.

### ***Oral History Interviews***

Although the interviews were conducted primarily to examine the participants' experiences in school practices of national identity construction, they simultaneously explored the participants' emotional aspects in regard to their experiences, which also informed their national identities. Hence, the discourses from the interviews were analysed through two dimensions: educational and participants' discourses of national identities. Whilst both dimensions were explored through the analysis of contents pertaining to nation, national symbol, ethnicity, gender, religion, and moral values, which were informed by my research questions, a wider range of national markers emerged through the interviews was also analysed.

### ***Participants' Observations and Focus Group Discussions***

Participants' national identities were analysed through a range of national markers that emerged through the observations and focus group discussions. Regarding behaviours as a communicative medium conveying knowledge, verbal and behavioural aspects

observed through the observations and focus groups were treated as discourses. Guided by the critical lens of the post-structuralist discourse analysis, which seeks to open space for alternative discourses and the plurality of realities, I applied an inductive approach to identify the participants' national markers to explore and analyse my participants' national identities from their perspectives.

### **Navigating the Fieldwork: Inbetweeners' Positionalities**

Whilst my research underpinned by the post-structuralist critical paradigm attempted to privilege youth voices, there exists no such "zero-point epistemology" (Davis & Walsh, 2020, p. 383) since knowledge is a social construct interrelated to power (Foucault, 1975), and researchers are not immune nor transcendent to structural power-knowledge systems. Indeed, researchers have multifaceted intersecting identities, namely, positionalities, which are deeply nested in our own socio-political and cultural systems and hence shape our worldviews and social realities. Thus, reflexivity is often considered a post-structuralist practice questioning power, knowledge and truths. Our positionalities, therefore, become an integral part of research and an epistemic filter influencing research processes, ranging from the thematic focus, methodological designs and knowledge production (Bilgen et al., 2021). However, it is worth noting that researchers' positionalities, as social products, cannot be rigidly "imported" into the fieldwork, which is another social context involving diverse human interactions and power dynamics. Positionalities are simultaneously shaped by and shape power relations and are thus situated, reciprocal and fluid, requiring constant negotiations (Henriksen & Schliehe, 2020). However, far from being hermeneutic, everyday realities of fieldwork are circumstantial, contingent, subjective and nuanced, and the processes often trigger methodological and ethical challenges and dilemmas (Millora et al., 2020). Hence, in this section, as a reflective account of my fieldwork, I unpack a few salient aspects of my multidimensional positionalities that influenced my relationships with the participants the most and how I negotiated my positionalities as well as how they influenced the methodological processes in the context of Uzbekistan, which includes my foreign, female and religious status. Additionally, given the involvement of my interpreter, who played a crucial role in knowledge production processes, I also explore her positionalities and how they influenced her relationship with participants.

### ***Foreign and Eurasian Identities***

As a half-Japanese and half-French, I needed to acknowledge and constantly reflect on the power and privileges of my background and their influence over my “intellectual bias” (Blackman, 2007, p. 700) and my interpersonal relationships. Despite the expectation of encountering difficulties in building trustful relationships with the participants due to the Uzbekistani authoritarian context with “shadows of socialist surveillance culture” (Silova et al., 2017, p. 2), some participants claimed to feel more comfortable discussing certain issues with me than to a local due to my foreign positionality, as often indicated by foreign scholars (Thibault, 2021). My interpreter and I were once invited to a male ethnic-Uzbek participants’ house, where I was told that they would never have invited me over if I was a local, and such a feeling was shared by my interpreter, who also asserted that she would probably not have followed me to the boys’ house if I was a local. Furthermore, my Eurasian background helped me to navigate my participants’ cultural diversity and find common grounds, either through my French or Japanese sides, to become an “eventual insider”. Often, for those who indicated strong Uzbek or Tajik social and cultural backgrounds, I put forward my Japanese-ness, which to some extent shared social-cultural values, while with those who demonstrated potent Russian backgrounds, I tended to emphasise my French side. Additionally, my linguistic skills, such as English and Japanese, also allowed me to recruit and retain participants who wanted to practice these languages. Whilst this “use” of my linguistic positionalities could be debated as a Northern power exercise in the Southern context and an accomplice to epistemic violence (Spivak, 2005), given their academic needs for those languages, I considered the “use” as a “give-back” to my participants. However, my foreignness was also a constraint and constantly reminded me of my “outsider-ness” as some youths refused to join my research since they were uncomfortable being with a non-Russian speaker or an interpreter.

### ***A Lone Female Researcher in a Patriarchal Society***

On the first night at my hostel in Tashkent, while cooking in the common kitchen, a red rose was silently and suddenly presented in front of my eyes, which was given by my soon-to-be participant. My “lone female researcher” (Johansson, 2015, p. 55) status constantly attracted a gaze, which, however, did not always bring me “rosy stories”, given the patriarchal context of Uzbekistan. Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered numerous disturbing and uncomfortable moments, including a potential male participant bursting into

my room at night asking my marital status, another one asking me whether I liked him or not, or a gatekeeper's family member, a married man, frequently calling me late at night, which at the end made me decide to wear a wedding ring to avoid unnecessary attention, a common practice among solo foreign female scholars (Dall'Agnola & Sharshenova, 2024), and never to meet male participants one-on-one. However, while my solo foreign woman status gave me unique challenges, it also gave me numerous advantages over male researchers (Cromwell & Tadevosyan, 2021; Tadevosyan, 2019). Foreign women to whom the local gender expectations do not apply are often considered as "third gender" (Schwedler, 2006) and are a threat to no one and thus welcomed among both women and men (Thibault, 2021). Hence, both female and male participants sometimes invited me home, hung out with me even without the interpreter, and quite openly shared with me their opinions and experiences on a range of topics, including gender and sentimental relationships. However, conscious of Uzbekistan's social and cultural context, mixing female and male participants in the same "hang out" was a practice I avoided unless they wanted to, except for the focus groups and my interpreter's presence. I also refrained from pushing their openness too far and discussing sexuality, including issues around LGBTQIA+, which was nevertheless once raised during a hang-out by male ethnic-Uzbek participants who then became extremely uneasy and gave homophobic comments. In Uzbekistan, sexual conduct between men (not women) is criminalised based on Article 120 of the Criminal Code. Throughout the fieldwork, which was drawn upon the approach to "privileged" youth voices, I found it challenging, unethical and thus dilemmatic not to interfere with the participants' occasional homophobic, sexist and racist comments.

### ***Ambivalent Non-Religiousness***

Fieldwork in Uzbekistan involved considerations of Islam, ranging from discussion topics to attention to my appearance. The concept of religion was an important aspect of understanding my participants and their identities better, as well as building rapport with them. My religious affiliation was often a question among the participants. Although I have a mixture of Catholic and Shintoist as well as Buddhist backgrounds and culturally practice them due to my French mother and my Japanese father, I identify myself between agnostic and gnostic theist. Hence, my ambivalent religious status somewhat helped me to be invited to my participants' discussions on religion regardless of their religious affiliations. However, since some of my Muslim participants often used to tell me about

the importance of religion in their lives, I tended to be more discreet about my non-religiousness and non-Islamic practices, such as dietary habits, with the non-Muslim participants. Whilst it was for fear of giving the Muslim participants negative impressions and losing them, who were already difficult to recruit and retain, I was sometimes confused if I was “othering” them and overthinking. Indeed, although my research was based on post-structuralist ontological and epistemological flexibility, I was religiously ambivalent since “there is no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself in order to say something at all” (Hall, 1990, p. 18) I needed to acknowledge the potential influence of problematic and controversial French secularism on me and constantly reflect on my relationship to religion. On the other hand, I often joined religious rituals, such as blessing after meals, with the Muslim participants, as they did not conflict with my beliefs. Nevertheless, I often felt guilty about my dual-hatted position when some non-Muslim participants harshly criticised Islam and youth in hijab, with whom I was also having in-depth discussions on their religious faith.

### *Interpreter’s Positionalities*

My interpreter, Maftuna, was a 22-year-old fourth-year ethnic-Uzbek student studying English at a public university in Tashkent who grew up in a rural town nearby Tashkent and dreamt of becoming a flight attendant for Uzbek airlines and was working in a language school as an IELTS instructor to finance her dream. While she lost her father when she was little and grew up in a moderate-income family, her mother and elder sister were school teachers, and her brother was in the Uzbekistani military and was respected in the local community. Throughout her relationships with the participants, her ethnicity particularly stood out as an aspect of establishing power relationships between the participants. Having attended only Uzbek-medium schools, she claimed never to have had ethnic-Russian friends and not know “them” well. While she often appeared comfortable with ethnic Uzbek and Tajik participants during interviews, she showed signs of nervousness with ethnic Russians, playing with her hands, holding a cushion, or having unnatural laughter, which she never showed with the former ethnic groups. At our first interview with ethnic Russians, she indeed first expressed, “Sorry in advance, I can converse in Russian, but not that perfectly”, something she never mentioned to Uzbek or Tajik participants with whom she also conducted interviews in Russian. On the other hand, despite her training in methodologies and ethics, she sometimes explicitly showed her

disagreement with the arguments of ethnic Uzbek and Tajik participants or openly corrected participants' information. However, this behaviour diminished over time. Such a somewhat authoritative attitude was probably due to her older status and also her teaching experiences with the participants-aged students. To better understand her positionalities and subjectivity, I conducted an exit interview with her, a method employed in cross-language research (Dunne et al., 2015), focusing on questions about her role in the research, perception of the research topics, impressions of the participants, encountered difficulties as well as what she learnt throughout the research.

### **Trustworthiness of Post-structuralist Cross-Language Inquiry**

My methodological choices of post-structuralism and the possibility of my interpreter altering participant voices through her “epistemic filter” inevitably raised questions about the rigour and trustworthiness of my study. Due to the intersection of my ethnographic approach and post-structuralist paradigm, which questions objective realities and describes knowledge as a social construct created within power relations, I was once challenged, “Why don't you write fiction?”. However, post-structuralism is not about denying truths but rather questioning the processes and structure of truth construction and hence, my research still captured the participants' “lived realities” and their realities of school experiences and national identities as diverse, contingent, and even contradictory on their own terms through post-structuralist ontological and epistemological openness. At the same time, Popoviciu et al. (2006) critiqued the disconnection between post-structuralist “epistemological privilege” (p. 407) and practical research processes. Indeed, data collection and analysis imply rationalisation of phenomena and truth production (Popoviciu et al., 2006), as there is no such “dream of transcending the discourses” (Upadhyay, 2014, p. 70) free from power-knowledge relations, particularly considering PhD processes within a neoliberal praxis of knowledge production. From this perspective, my interpreter's and my subjectivities being the research limitation, constant reflexivity on our positionalities throughout the research was important, enabling me to privilege my participants' voices as much as possible, and thus refraining from crystalising representational understanding of youth national identities (Dunne et al., 2017). Hence, I based the trustworthiness of my research not on the objective value of truths but rather on my participants' perspectives and their diversity, and as a Northern scholar researching the Southern context, such an approach simultaneously helped me to open space for

endogenous epistemologies. While it is impossible to convey youth voices fully and transparently, which is also my research limitation, the triangulation of a diverse data set generated through different methods revealed participants' voices in their heterogeneity and prevented representing them under normalising discourses, which my research aimed to deconstruct and unravel. The triangulation also allowed me to enhance the rigour of the data. Whilst there exist concerns around the quality of data generated with an interpreter due to the potential "loss in translation" caused by their subjective filters, searching for equivalence across languages is problematic since language is rhetoric and normed born within particular socio and cultural orders. Hence, positioning the researcher's language, English in this case, as the baseline and seeking immaculate translation from and into the local languages is likely to overlook the local epistemologies, which are then processed and classified in the Western knowledge system (Spivak, 2005). Indeed, as a Northern scholar with a critical paradigm in the Global South, it was important to question, "whose trustworthiness?" Whilst acknowledging potential filtered meanings that can be considered as a limitation, on the other hand, from the perspective that I was in a foreign context, it is also probable that my local interpreter acted as a "gatekeeper of meanings" (MacKenzie, 2016, p. 179) and enhanced the trustworthiness of my data by adjusting disparities in my Northern-filtered meanings and helping me navigate through the local epistemologies based on her contextual familiarity. Indeed, during my fieldwork, my interpreter occasionally provided additional interpretations of unspoken cultural codes, implicit meanings, or nuanced aspects of participants' comments. Therefore, while I was the primary researcher for this study, it could not have been realised without the involvement of my interpreter. When I conducted an exit interview with her to understand her positionality and implications in my research, she specifically described her role as a "cultural guide" (MacKenzie, 2016, p. 172), helping me navigate the interlinguistic and cultural context more effectively.

My first role was, of course, interpreting the languages. But the main role was to explain the boys' and girls' thoughts in English very well. To give their real thoughts, the exact and full explanations of their expressions, feelings, of what they were talking about. Not just interpreting, not just saying what they were saying to you. It was not only interpreting word by word but also telling about their feelings about the questions we gave them. (Interpreter, 2022)

Nevertheless, to avoid losing my research concepts between languages, I organised several short sessions and training on key themes, methodologies, and positionalities and thus negotiated our epistemologies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Contextual immersion, which involves human interaction, is inevitably shaped by power dynamics that both influence and are influenced by researchers' positionalities, raising ethical challenges and dilemmas. In my research, which involved youth from the contracted local university and hostel where I stayed, along with my older and foreign status, I often faced various ethical challenges. Additionally, my presence in the Global South as a Northern scholar, and conducting research in an authoritarian context with a long struggle for freedom of expression, my ethical challenges often revolved around power relations. To ensure ethical standards in the research, the fieldwork was conducted with prior approval from my institution's ethics committee. This approval encompassed mandatory training on ethical considerations, including how to protect participants' confidentiality, prevent stigmatisation and avoid privacy violations. The ethics review also included a thorough explanation of the research focus, methodologies, and research instruments, such as the recruitment letter, consent form, and the questions used during interviews and focus group discussions. While such a preparatory procedure served me as conduct and moral guidelines and to reflect on my positionalities, the fieldwork was full of dilemmas. Far from being hermeneutic, the everyday realities of fieldwork are contingent, fluid, subjective, and filled with grey areas, triggering methodological and ethical challenges (Lunn, 2014). Indeed, institutional ethical review often tends to become a "tick box" bureaucratic exercise and overlooks fieldwork's contextual and unpredictable nature (Millora et al., 2020). Nevertheless, although acknowledging inter-personal relationships and ethicalities as circumstantial, situated and nuanced, and the absence of straightforward one-size-fits-all answers, I navigated the "grey areas" of fieldwork and addressed ethical issues at my best through reflections. Moreover, as part of my ethical responsibility, despite the limited and informal platforms available, I took several opportunities to share my research findings in Uzbekistan. Notably, I had the opportunity to serve as a research consultant for a bilateral donor-funded education project in the country. During my visit to education stakeholders, including the Textbooks Development Department and the Research Institution focusing on Tarbiya, I briefly shared my findings, as well as to several

UN agencies in Uzbekistan. While these interactions were informal, I received positive feedback and was kindly invited to share my final findings at future events. I will endeavour to follow up on these invitations and disseminate my findings as widely as possible, with the aim of supporting education in Uzbekistan and promoting the positive role of education in fostering cohesive and just societies where everyone feels represented and included.

### ***Researcher-Teacher***

Out of the 36 participants I engaged with throughout my fieldwork, four of them, ethnic Tajiks, were my students from two different classes. The dual roles of the researcher-teacher are considered to be sensitive since not only may the researcher exert undue influence over the student-participants, but also the protection of participants' anonymity becomes challenging. In the teacher-student relationship, participants can become "captive audiences" and fearful of negative consequences on their academic evaluations. As a consequence, they may feel obliged to participate in the research or act "nicely" during the research to please the researcher (Caruana, 2015). At the same time, while ethics often mainly focus on the participants' comfort and safety (Lunn, 2014), researchers can also be captured in a "reverse power relation" (Sultana, 2007, p. 379). Indeed, facing difficulties finding and retaining ethnic-Tajik participants, I found myself vulnerable and incapable of warning them even when they were not engaging in lectures and assignments. Nevertheless, to waive pressure off the participants and protect their freedom, I initially and repeatedly, throughout the fieldwork, explained to them the nature, purpose, and procedure of the research; expected participants' commitment; use of data; and potential risks, as well as their rights, i.e., withdrawal; confidentiality; access to data; and data ownership. Additionally, I continuously mentioned that their involvement or non-involvement in the research did not affect their academic outcomes, asked for their consent throughout the fieldwork, and ensured that the participants became agents in their decision-making (Al-Hinai, 2018). Fortunately, my presence on the campus was temporary, which somewhat mitigated the participants' potential position as a "captive audience" and, thus, the extent of the power differential.

### ***Confidentiality***

While anonymity could not be completely attained in my ethnographically-informed research, I addressed the issue of confidentiality by using pseudonyms and omitting the names and identifying information of my participants, interpreter and host institution from the data (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018). However, the concept of confidentiality was new for my interpreter and participants, which sometimes made the ethical line “blurred”, particularly when “hanging out” with them. Once, during the observation, a participant briefly recorded me posting on his Instagram account to show he was with a foreigner. Moreover, some of the participants joined the research with their friends, with whom I blocked-scheduled their interviews; although I interviewed them separately, some came back to see their friends during the interviews. Those moments were dilemmatic as I needed to ensure confidentiality, as I was fully aware of my intrusion into their lives, which I requested to observe. Nevertheless, due to ethnical concerns, I explained them that I wanted to ensure their confidentiality and kindly requested them to do so as well. Indeed, in ethnographic studies, researchers need to acknowledge their position of “guests” invited into the participants’ private space (Millora et al., 2020).

### ***Consent***

The obtainment of the signatures on the written consent forms (Appendix G, H, I, J) was one of my primary ethical concerns, particularly due to my research topic, “national identity”, which sometimes frightened youth and made them decline to take part in my previous MA fieldwork in Uzbekistan several years ago. Although the authoritarian “surveillance culture” (Silova et al., 2017, p. 2) has eased, and the research environment has considerably improved over the last decade in the region, including Uzbekistan, since the arrival of the new President Mirziyoyev, foreign scholars still occasionally face difficulties. To avoid potential difficulties in obtaining the participants’ signatures, I initially sought their oral consent, a method often used in research in conflict-affected areas (Moss et al., 2019). Since my fieldwork lasted for four months, I, therefore, asked the participants to sign the forms only once we had established relationships and they were comfortable around me. To my surprise, the obtainment of the signatures was revealed to be less of an issue than expected, as all participants signed the forms without hesitation.

## Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach underpinning my research, grounded in post-structuralism. This theoretical framework not only shaped my research questions but also informed the design and implementation of the entire study, from data collection to analysis. Post-structuralism, with its focus on the fluid, contextual, and relational nature of identity (Hall, 1996), particularly through the lens of the knowledge-power-discourse nexus (Foucault, 1975), provided the foundation for exploring how national identities are constructed within both school and youth discourses. The methodological decisions I made were guided by both my philosophical stance and my positionalities, particularly as a female foreigner conducting research in a non-native context. The socio-political and cultural differences, including the authoritarian and patriarchal nature of the environment, as well as linguistic and religious distinctions, significantly influenced my research design. These factors shaped my choice of ethnographic methods, which included participant observation, photo elicitation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Throughout the research process, I remained mindful of the ethical considerations tied to my positionalities, recognising the importance of respecting participants' confidentiality and voices and navigating my dual role as both insider and outsider. This reflexivity was, therefore, central to maintaining ethical integrity, ensuring that I respected the voices and experiences of my participants. Furthermore, I paid particular attention to my relationship with my interpreter, as this dynamic could influence the trustworthiness and ethical rigour, as well as the epistemic issues of the research process. The methodological choices outlined in this chapter reflect a careful balance between philosophical underpinnings, ethical considerations, and practical concerns, all aimed at providing a nuanced understanding of school discourses and youth national identities within a complex socio-political context.

## **Chapter 5: Constructing Uzbekistani Self through “External Others”**

### **Introduction**

This Chapter examines the intricate construction of Uzbekistani national identity through educational discourses, highlighting how schools serve as critical sites for shaping self-perception by contrasting national markers with depictions of “external others”. The chapter focuses on how school curricula, particularly through the use of textbooks, classroom practices, and school displays, promote a sense of national pride and belonging among youth by emphasising core values such as morality, peace, and independence.

The analysis reveals that school discourses construct positive images of Uzbekistan while framing “external others” in a negative light, utilising stereotypes to foster a collective identity that positively distinguishes “us” from “them”. By exploring various national markers, including the celebration of international achievements and the display of national symbols, this chapter elucidates how educational discourses cultivate a cohesive sense of belonging and underscore the country’s stability and moral superiority.

Furthermore, the chapter highlights the role of hidden curriculum in embedding these discourses within daily practices, thereby normalising these concepts among students. It illustrates how the interplay between national self-images and the portrayal of “external others” is fundamental to the process of identity formation in contemporary Uzbekistan. Notably, the study underscores that discourses of youth often mirrored those promoted within schools, reflecting the internalisation of educational discourses and further institutionalisation of national identity.

### **High Morality**

Despite the often taken-for-granted notion of “being”, which Western philosophy considers the most fundamental question, it has an empty core (Derrida, 1967, 2009). Instead, the “being” or identity, including national identity, is a non-substantial entity which requires a reference point through which it gains meaning (Hall, 1996). National identity is not about inherent and distinct characteristics but about difference and is, therefore, a social construct shaped through continuous inclusion and exclusion processes in relation to “constitutive others” (Hall, 1996). Given that nations are “imagined political communities” (Anderson, 1983), national discourses aim to construct positive national images attributing various characteristics to the nation as national markers, which serve as boundaries with “external others”. Considering that the creation of states often precedes

nation formation (Anderson, 1983), particularly in a post-socialist context like Uzbekistan, a nation-building project is crucial to raise national awareness, providing a sense of “oneness” and legitimise and naturalise new “imagined communities”. However, this process of differentiation, aimed at constructing national identities, often represents “external others” in a negative and inferior light, ensuring that national images are portrayed positively and distinctly from “them” (Hall, 1996).

This chapter analyses the reciprocal relationship between the construction of “external others” and the construction of Uzbekistani national identity. It explores how school discourses promote different boundary markers, creating “us”-Uzbekistan versus “them”-foreign countries binary relations, and how these school-promoted “external others” shape Uzbekistani youth national identities. As boundary markers, morality, peace, independence as well as international victories are explored through which the “us/them” relational binary is created, resulting in the construction of Uzbekistani national identity and “external others”.

The analysed data for this and the succeeding three chapters on different national markers, including gender, ethnicity and religion, include two textbooks (G10 and G11 Tarbiya and Initial Military Training), participant observation, photo elicitation, oral history interviews, and focus group discussions. It is to be noted that all ethnic Russian participants were exclusively from Russian-medium schools, and all ethnic Tajik participants attended Uzbek-medium schools, while ethnic Uzbek participants were either from Uzbek or Russian-medium schools. To differentiate Uzbeks who attended Russian-medium schools from those from Uzbek-medium schools, the former are labelled as “Uzbek-R” in the analysis.

### ***Morality as National Values***

Whilst the analysis revealed a range of national markers promoted through different school textbooks, including the Tarbiya and Military textbooks, morality is emphasised as a critical national value passed down through generations and embodying the distinct characteristics of an ideal Uzbekistani. It is to note that this emphasis on the concept of upbringing – Tarbiya in Uzbek and воспитание in Russian - are also commonly observed across educational discourses of Central Asian states and is considered just as important as imparting knowledge in shaping new national identities (Asanova, 2007). For instance, the G10 and G11 Tarbiya textbooks present various moral values, illustrating

them as “right morality”, “noble qualities”, and “moral standards” that individuals need to cultivate. Moreover, the G11 textbook presents moral values in binary opposition, emphasising the necessity of developing the “right morality”:

Soon, you will enter into an independent life. Ahead of you are life’s trials, ups and downs, and amazing paths you have not yet explored. In life, good and bad, truth and falsehood, permitted and forbidden, go side by side. Because of this, life is diverse and mysterious. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 3)

The G10 and G11 Tarbiya textbooks frequently indicate the necessity to become a “good person” who understands universal values and “clearly realises and shares that halal is permissible and haram is unlawful” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 106). While this approach reflects educational efforts to guide young people towards positive life pathways and thrive and acknowledge the diversity of life, framing life as “good” and “bad” and “true” and “false” underscores the regulatory aspects inherent in national identity construction. This dichotomous framing overlooks the complexities and nuances of life, disregarding the space in-between, potentially marginalising those who do not conform to these norms.

Participants also noted that moral values were promoted as national markers not only in the Tarbiya subject, but also in national history, Uzbek language and literature. Social studies are indeed widely recognised as key subjects in shaping youth national identities (Durrani & Dunne, 2010), a practice also prominently observed in Central Asian schools, mainly through history and literature subjects (Asanova, 2007; Bekzhanova, 2024; Blakkisrud & Nozimoa, 2010; Dukeyev, 2023; Isaac & Polese, 2015; Ismailova, 2004; Umetbaeva, 2015). Since identity lacks a tangible core and always requires a “constitutive other” (Hall, 1997) to derive meaning, these binary discourses of the good/bad—while associating good morality with Uzbekistan as a distinctive national marker— imply a distinction from “external others”. Hence, even when “external others” are not overtly mentioned, by consistently portraying Uzbekistani morality as distinct and exemplary, school discourses hint at symbolic boundaries of othering, constructing the distinction between “us”-Uzbekistani and “them”-foreigners. Indeed, the embodiment of identity, systematically involving inclusion and exclusion processes through the creation of “others”, tends to establish a rigid structure of us/them polarity (Derrida, 1967; Hall, 1996, 1997). For instance, in the Tarbiya textbooks, hospitality and politeness are often taught as Uzbekistani moral and ethical norms distinct from other countries, and they are

simultaneously described as national values to respect and be proud of. Furthermore, participants noted that the most frequently mentioned characteristics as distinct qualities of Uzbekistan and Uzbekistani at schools included hospitality, industriousness, warmth, peacefulness, friendliness, politeness, generosity, innocence, trustworthiness, and respectability. Interestingly, overlapping with these school discourses, many participants described a range of similar moral and behavioural values as national values and their source of national pride (Table 12).

**Table 12**

***Moral and Behavioural Values as National Pride***

Value	Discourse
Respect for elders	“We have strong values in Uzbekistan. From a young age, they are on our minds at school ... You should always give your seat to elderly people, greet them on the streets, or help them in case they are carrying something heavy”. (Tajik3, male)
Helpfulness/ Friendliness	“Our values are to be civilised and behave ourselves in society, to help people despite their age as much as possible no matter where we are: in a metro, bus, or on the streets”. (Tajik5, male). “Our people’s nation’ is very good. Uzbekistan is so friendly, and everyone helps each other anytime”. (Uzbek-R1, female).
Honesty	“Integrity, honesty ... Value is like honesty, sincerity, and hospitality. What else? Kindness”. (Uzbek5, male)

The consistent narration of these school-promoted qualities as national values among different participants underscored deeply entrenched school discourses and participants’ positive national identities. As Foucault (1975) stated, “discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them, and in the practice of doing so, they make subjects” (p. 49); this process illustrates the nexus between discourse, knowledge, and power, where discourses not only shape knowledge and but also disseminate it as “truths”, ultimately constructing how youth perceive the world and Uzbekistan, and their positions within them. In this context, the repeated emphasis on specific moral values as national markers at schools serves to establish and naturalise dominant discourses that define Uzbekistan as a country with good morality and what it means to be an Uzbekistani.

School discourses as institutional power normalise specific national images and identities while drawing symbolic boundaries between “external others” (Durrani, 2018; Durrani & Dunne, 2010). By embedding these moral values as national markers into the curriculum, the state hence exercises power over the construction of national identity, guiding young people's perceptions of the state and their relations to the nation.

Moreover, advocating moral and behavioural standards as civic responsibilities and promoting the images of a “good model citizen”, the analysis highlighted that the cultivation of a “morally upright youth” holds an important place in the educational discourses of Uzbekistan. Drawing upon Foucault’s (1975) concept of discipline and self-regulatory identity, this educational approach promotes a standardised image of an “ideal Uzbekistani”, which not only shapes national identities but also instils self-discipline, encouraging individuals to internalise national ideals and self-regulate according to these prescribed national values. This process aims to shape individuals who embody the state-envisioned moral standards and behaviours, unifying heterogeneous individuals under a singular national identity.

The role of the teacher is central in relaying textbook messages and implementing the curriculum. Several participants underscored the role of teachers in instilling such moral values, ethics and codes of conduct:

The role of school in moral education is great. School is the place where you can get not only an education, but it *influences your behaviour* [emphasis added] too.

From the first grade to graduation, we are brought up at school. (Tajik3, male)

Participants noted that textbooks and school practices frequently depicted morality as a national marker, promoting “ideal Uzbekistani morality” to construct positive national self-images and foster national pride among youth. For instance, similar discourses were noticeable in diverse school displays, portraying, for instance, “highly spiritual youth” as individuals who cherish national values and “healthy youth” as the foundation of nation-building. The connection of these quotes with the Uzbekistani flag (Figure 17) and President Mirziyoyev (Figure 18) implies that moral and behavioural standards serve as national markers and their importance in moulding the youth’s national identity.

**Figure 17**

*A Corridor Display: “Only a Healthy Nation and a Healthy Generation Can Build a Great State”*



*Note.* A picture taken by the author during the fieldwork.

**Figure 18**

*President Mirziyoyev’s Quote on Highly Spiritual Youth and National Values at School Entrance*



*Note.* A picture shared by a participant. “Education of highly spiritual and independent thinking young people who have modern education and mastery of skills, consists of forming their sense of respect for national and general human values, and ideological immunity in the hearts and minds of our children. Shavkat Mirziyoyev”.

Therefore, various school processes are mobilised to foster national qualities and values. It is to highlight that the Tarbiya textbooks implicitly present the notion of “healthy” as love for the country and family and immunity to the moral decline of the “other” and external ideological threats, such as Western immorality and religious extremism, notably related to Islam and sects.

In alignment with school “othering” discourses, while various participants frequently cited moral and behavioural values as characteristics shaping their national identity and evoking their sense of national pride, they often highlighted the absence of such values in other countries. They emphasised the exceptionality of Uzbekistan, underlining the boundaries between foreigners, and hence the particularity and somewhat moral superiority of Uzbekistani. Among those values, helpfulness, politeness, and respect were primarily depicted (Table 13). In terms of respect, respect for family and parents was notably underlined.

**Table 13**

***Morally Superior Uzbekistani***

Aspect	Discourse
Helpfulness	<p>“Did you know that <i>only Uzbekistani</i> [emphasis added] tidy the guests’ shoes when they come?” (Uzbek5, male).</p> <p>Only we [Uzbekistan] have this habit. When guests are at home after they enter your house, we [host] arrange their shoes and only then go in ... <i>In other places</i> [emphasis added], the guests do it [arranging their shoes] ... <i>Compared to other nations, we are taught a lot about good manners</i> [emphasis added] by our family. (Uzbek2, female)</p> <p>“<i>Compared to other countries</i> [emphasis added], it seems to me that we really have more responsive people” (Uzbek-R5, male).</p> <p>“Qualities ... like, benevolence, hospitality, because many people say that <i>in other countries, it’s not like that</i> [emphasis added]” (Uzbek-R3, female).</p>

Politeness “Our strongest value is respectfully addressing people by saying ‘siz’. I *don’t think it exists in other countries* [emphasis added]. They can say ‘you’ impolitely [emphasis added], even to their parents” (Tajik1, female).

Our values are to be civilised and behave ourselves in society, to help people despite their age as much as possible no matter where we are: in a metro, in a bus, or on the streets. *In other countries, it is not so common* [emphasis added]. There might be cases of *not caring about elderly people, not respecting younger people, not helping people* [emphasis added] on the streets, and just passing by even if someone asks for help. ... Greeting people on the streets, no matter if they are older or younger ... It has become a habit. *It is not so common in other countries* [emphasis added]. (Tajik 5, male)

Honesty/  
Respect “In my opinion, Uzbekistan is a more honest country compared to others” (Uzbek6, male).

[In Uzbekistan] Everything happens through the parents. *It is different in other countries* [emphasis added]. Any person over 18 is considered an adult and free of their parents’ control. Plus, *they don’t care about their parents’ opinion. However, it’s different here. Our values are different* [emphasis added] ... *We are a nation where people appreciate their parents our whole lives. Relationships and kindness are strong here* [emphasis added]. (Tajik4, male)

As mentioned before, *in other countries, after people reach adulthood, they are not under their parents’ control and care* [emphasis added]. They have free will, and *they live however they want. It is not the same in Uzbekistan* [emphasis added]; children stay with their parents even after adulthood, up until their parents die. ... *The culture of young people in Uzbekistan differs from that of other countries.* [emphasis added] (Tajik5, male)

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If we compare Uzbekistan and other countries, let's take the example of one Uzbek family. If a child is born into a family, they are together all their life. If it's a girl, their parents take care of her and live together until she gets married. *It's different in other countries; if people are over 18, they have control over their lives, they can do whatever they want* [emphasis added] and marry whoever they want; they are on their own. And here, how to say ... until you die, you are with your family [emphasis added]. (Uzbek2, female)

In contrast with Uzbekistan, which was illustrated as caring and respectful to others, particularly elders, including parents and family, foreign countries were depicted negatively, implying their unexemplary behaviours and values, which are self-centred, careless, and thus somewhat immoral. National identity is constructed in relation to “external others”, involving inclusion-exclusion processes through which symbolic binary oppositions of “us” versus “them” are institutionalised. In this process, “us” becomes the norm, while “them” is rendered abnormal and inferior, resulting in the establishment of hierarchical relations between the two groups (Hall, 1997). This hierarchical categorisation of Uzbekistani and foreigners was often expressed by participants, who depicted certain countries and their citizens as morally inferior and undesirable (Table 14). Interestingly, a similar trend was also observed in a study involving Pakistani youth, who viewed themselves as morally superior to foreigners within a context where schools emphasised Islamic values as national markers (Qazi, 2021). Although Uzbekistani schools do not explicitly base moral values on Islam, promoting these values as distinct national markers can implicitly foster inferior images of “external others”.

**Table 14**

***Morally Inferior Foreign Countries***

Country	Characteristic	Discourse
A	Dirty	“We are different from [A] people <i>in our cleanliness</i> [emphasis added]” (Uzbek3, female).

- B Cannibal “If you hear that an Uzbekistani eats humans, you will be like, “Ew”. But [B] people can casually talk about eating embryos. If I say, ‘Do you want to try an embryo?’ you will be disgusted [in Uzbekistan]” (Uzbek3, female).
- C Rude “I *don't like [C] people because they are rude* [emphasis added]. Many Uzbekistanis go to Russia for work and pass by [C]. There, [C citizens] steal things from the train, so many people don't like them” (Uzbek16, male).
- D Unkind “*They [D citizens] don't have kindness* [emphasis added], for example, towards their children. They are enemies to each other, and I don't like that” (Tajik1, female).

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*Note.* The countries' names are anonymised since this research's aim is to foster social cohesion and not fuelling tensions

Notably, most “othering discourses” were not drawn upon personal experiences but rather on stereotypes, illustrating the power of discourses in constructing “realities”. This stereotyping of “others” in creating superior self-national images was also argued by Said (1987), who underscored the role of institutionalised binary oppositions of us/them in shaping the representation of distorted images of “others” as inferior and underdeveloped. Moreover, it is noteworthy that while some participants emphasised similarities among all Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, or acknowledged culture, tradition, and language as general differences without any hierarchical notions, others similarly depicted certain Central Asian states as “external others”, portraying Uzbekistan as morally superior, among other attributes:

I think Uzbekistani people are kinder to one another. They are not indifferent to one another, whether on the street or at home. Even if a neighbour is not feeling well, they quickly go to their house to see them. With their kindness, I think they stand out from other nations. *In other [Central Asian] countries, indifference has increased these days* [emphasis added]. (Uzbek2, female)

Nevertheless, despite “othering” foreigners as morally inferior, school discourses did not express hostility towards them. On the contrary, by highlighting the importance of moral

values as distinct national markers, pupils were encouraged to “behave well in front of foreigners and treat them with respect” (Uzbek12, male; Uzbek4, male). Moreover, while school discourses feed positive images of Uzbekistani and establish a moral hierarchy between them and foreigners, interviews with youth revealed that teachers often simultaneously described foreigners as intellectually superior to Uzbekistanis, albeit with some exaggerated stereotypes: “They [foreigners] were described as much more cultured, well-educated with a broad worldview and much more developed than Uzbekistanis” (Uzbek2, female). These stereotypical portrayals were often presented as a model to encourage students to become hardworking. A similar trend was also observed among participants, who expressed their willingness to study abroad to specifically gain knowledge, indicating their images of foreign countries as “smart”. This pattern of disconnecting morality from intellectuality and linking Uzbekistani value and pride primarily to the former while associating foreigners with the latter highlights the particular significance attributed to morality as a national marker in shaping the Uzbekistani self-perception. However, interestingly, it is noteworthy that the notion of foreigners’ intellectual superiority was mentioned exclusively by participants from Uzbek-medium schools. This suggests potential differences in the perception of Uzbekistani and foreigners, particularly regarding “othering boundaries” between those who attended Uzbek and Russian-medium schools. Indeed, the analysis revealed significant disparities in the expression of national identity, including national markers, between participants from these two types of schools.

### *Immoral West*

Whilst Uzbekistani school discourses emphasise moral values as national markers and highlight the distinctiveness of Uzbekistan’s morality, the analysis reveals that “external others” are often described implicitly or vaguely as a broad and unspecified group. However, the West, though not specified by individual countries, is particularly “othered” and implicitly depicted as immoral compared to Uzbekistan. This occurs even as several Western personalities are cited as exemplary for their success alongside those from Uzbekistan, thereby underscoring again the importance of morality as a national marker and distinguishing it from mere success or achievement. This highlights the construction of national identity through a systemic play of differences, where the symbolic boundaries of “us” and “them” are instilled. Drawing upon Hall’s (1997) notion of the “constitutive

other”, these binary oppositions shape national images and attribute meanings to Uzbekistani identity, defining what it means to be Uzbekistani and highlighting differences with Westerners.

Additionally, the depiction of the West as immoral illustrates Said’s (1978) concept of “stereotyping”, which, although initially discussed to explain colonial power marginalising the Global South, is also pertinent for understanding how Uzbekistani school discourses construct national identity by stereotyping “external others”. As Said (1978) argued, by portraying the “other” as essentially different and inferior, this stereotyping process reinforces hierarchical distinctions and constructs a positive national identity. In the Tarbiya textbooks, the immoral images of the West are mainly discussed through its cinematography and fashion. For instance, the Walt Disney movie “Snow White” is described as immoral, potentially exposing children to wrong practices, such as “kissing”. Referring to the movie, the textbook claims that “faith and shame are close to each other. When one of them is lost, so is the other” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 52), implicitly describing the movie as shameful. Following the discussions on Snow White, the G11 textbook further argues the necessity to “pay attention to the cartoons and movies your siblings are watching. Because, through such information, habits that contradict the rules of etiquette can become their way of life” (p. 52). These discourses, therefore, encourage the youth to regulate the conduct of younger youth, in other words, moral policing, as well as self-discipline. Although the textual discourses do not specify the type of cartoons and movies, the concerned page visually indicates Western cartoons, potentially implying that Western cinematography is immoral (Figure 19).

### Figure 19

#### *Home Immoral Western Cartoons*



Note. G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 52

Students are then asked to complete an exercise based on the provided images and indicate which images contain “ideas that contradict moral norms”, “ideological threats against national and religious values”, “scary scenes”, and “disturbing events that make people lose stability”. Additionally, students are encouraged to reflect on their songs, main ideas, the scene they like, and the characters involved (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 53) (Figure 20). In this exercise, although no textual discourses explicitly depict Western ideas as immoral, the indicated images are mostly Western cartoons, except the first one. Similarly, Western culture, such as Goths, is described as inappropriate and a threat to youth (Figure 21).

**Figure 20**

*Cartoons for the Exercises*



*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 53

**Figure 21**

*Cartoons Goths Culture Described as Immoral*



*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 87

It is important to note that youth is often regarded as both a potential asset and a challenge to society, particularly in the Global South, which often experiences “youth bulge”. Youth are expected to drive socio-economic development but are also seen as vulnerable and potentially violent, making them problems to be managed, especially in relation to unemployment and religious radicalisation (Dunne et al., 2017). While textbooks describe youth as the future and hope of Uzbekistan, they simultaneously depict them as fragile and vulnerable to ideological indoctrination, particularly highlighting external threats: “Today, we live in a rapidly developing era. There is an information attack from all sides, various distractions, and attempts to occupy the consciousness of our youth with inappropriate and dangerous information” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 87). Although the textbooks express care and happiness of youth as one of the primary reasons for the importance of their right upbringing, as illustrated by a prompt based on a story, “Can teenagers’ behaviour affect peace in society?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 46), the state’s concern for youth potentially becoming a threat to national peace and development is also evident.

Furthermore, participants noted that whilst teachers often conveyed national pride as a stand-alone notion, Uzbekistani morality was frequently illustrated through comparisons with Westerners, positioning the latter as “external others”:

One teacher told us during the lesson on Sense of Homeland that if you were invited to have a cup of tea in Europe, they would give you only a cup of tea, and in Uzbekistan, there would be a whole table. (Russian5, male);

Regarding family, they [foreigners] are not as responsible as the Uzbek people. For example, for Uzbeks, it’s time to get married at age 20. But for other nationals, it’s not a normal age. They start to get married at 30 or a bit later. It’s a normal lifestyle for them, they [teachers] said. (Uzbek9, female)

There was even a case in a school where a teacher explicitly discouraged pupils from becoming Westernised and argued to be proud of Uzbekistan. Interestingly, this occurred in a Russian-medium school with an ethnic-Uzbek teacher:

She [Uzbek teacher] used to say that we should not be influenced by Europeanisation. Because we are all Uzbekistanis, we must stand our ground. We should not be interested in Russians or other Europeans because we have our good

patriots; we have good things in our country both in the present and past. So, for a good future, she told us that we should not be interested in other sovereign countries. (Uzbek-R1, female)

Aligning with school discourses describing the West as immoral, illustration of Europe as morally inferior to Uzbekistan was salient among youth, primarily those from Uzbek-medium schools: “I heard that young people in Europe, unlike in Uzbekistan, don’t work hard thinking about the future, but they *think only about the moment and have fun going to party* [emphasis added]” (Uzbek18, male); “Take as an example, British people. We [Uzbekistani] drink everything: coffee, black tea, green tea. *Uzbekistani don’t want to cause discomfort to others by showing pickiness* [emphasis added]. A true British person drinks green tea, not coffee” (Uzbek3, female). Whilst the involvement of “constitutive others” is inevitable in constructing national identity, which relies on articulations of differences (Hall, 1997), the “othering process” primarily produces institutionalised hierarchical categorisations of binary oppositions, “us” versus “them”. When school discourses promote images of inferior “external others”, this may lead to prejudices, potentially shaping discriminatory attitudes and creating tensions among different social groups. For instance, in May 2024, violence erupted in the neighbouring country, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, following a clash between Egyptian students and locals. This incident led to widespread unrest and assaults against South Asian students, driven by nationalistic rhetoric and resentment towards foreigners (Globe, 2024). Whilst the root causes of this violence are intertwined with Kyrgyzstan’s complex political, social, and economic landscape, it also underscores the potential dangers of hierarchical boundaries between “us” and “them”, where stereotyping “external others” as inferior can fuel negative sentiments towards foreigners and become a catalyst for conflict. Therefore, considering school education as powerful state institutions where selected knowledge is transmitted and represented as official national values, and hence as “truths” (Apple, 1979), it is crucial to foster educational practices that downplay negative images of “external others” and emphasise shared values and inclusive discourses.

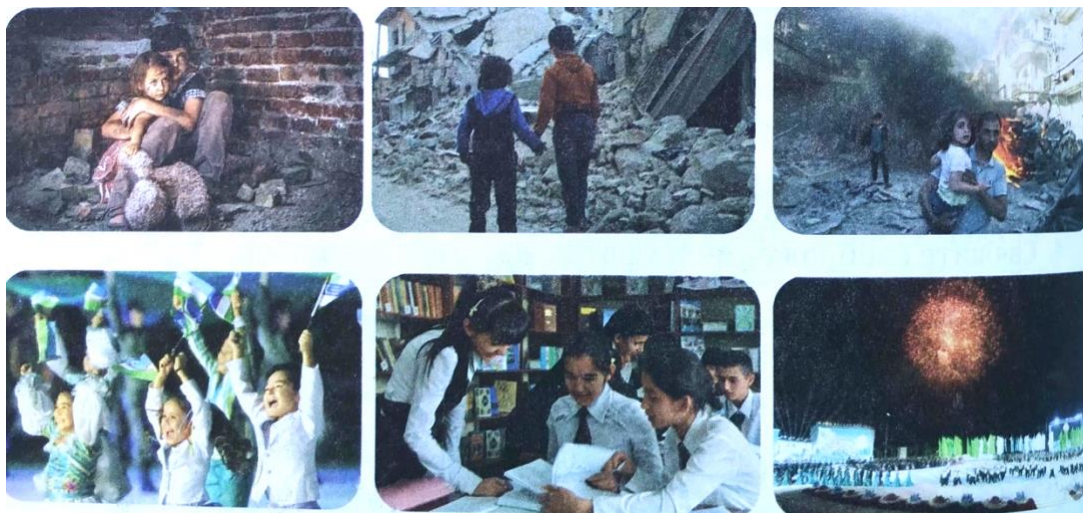
## Peaceful Nation

### *Conflict-torn Foreign Countries*

Another significant “othering” school practice that aims to attribute positive self-images to Uzbekistan by creating symbolic boundaries that construct “external others” is the discourse on national peace. The analysis indicated that textbooks often contrast Uzbekistan with foreign countries, portraying the former as peaceful and prosperous, where youth thrive, while depicting the latter as conflict-prone, where children are affected (Figure 22). School discourses hence attribute positive meanings to “Uzbekistani” as peaceful through contrasting portrayals with conflict-torn “external others” in a somewhat negative light, thereby defining what is and is not the Uzbekistani self: “Unrest, instability, and bloodshed in some regions encourage us [Uzbekistani] to realise that *peace and tranquillity in our country* [Uzbekistan] [emphasis added] do not happen by themselves” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 60).

**Figure 22**

### *Conflict-Prone Foreign Countries and Peaceful Uzbekistan*



*Note.* G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 62. These conflict-prone foreign countries are not named in the textbooks

Whilst a range of foreign countries are presented in the Tarbiya textbooks as conflict-prone “external others”, Islamic extremism and sects are indicated as the primary root causes of their instability. For instance, a table lists various conflict-affected countries, primarily

Muslim countries (Table 15), accompanied by additional information on these conflicts, such as the estimated number of victims. Notably, given that approximately 88% of the total population in Uzbekistan is Muslim, these “othering” discourses imply the notion of pluralism in practices within Islam, separating Uzbekistan from other Muslim countries. In other words, these discourses suggest that the practice of Islam in Uzbekistan makes Uzbekistan contribute to the country’s peace and stability, in contrast to the destructive practices in other Muslim countries. Given the difference is indispensable in materialising the “empty self” (Hall, 1996), the peaceful characteristic of Uzbekistan is highlighted as a distinct national trait by contrasting “our/their” Islam and hence emphasising their differences. At the same time, it underscores the secular context of Uzbekistan compared to these “external others,” which are depicted as conflict-torn and where Islam is officially recognised as the state religion, with Sharia law incorporated into their legal systems to varying degrees.

**Table 15**

***Document Conflict-Affected Foreign Countries***

Among representatives of different religions	Conflicts between Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in India, Muslims and Buddhists in Myanmar
Between believers of the same religion	Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Sudan
Conflict relations, struggle against the secular system	Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan

*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 70 translated in English

Moreover, as “constitutive others”, the textbooks also describe Yemen, France, New Zealand, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan as sites of both Islamic radicalisation but also Islamophobia, highlighting religious-related attacks that have occurred in these regions. Africa is also captured as a conflict-affected area, but vaguely as “African countries”, except for Sudan, which appears in the table above. Overlapping with these school discourses, some participants also depicted foreigners, including Europeans, as being Islamophobic: “Europeans think Muslims are terrorists and they are Islamophobic; I learnt the term [at school]” (Uzbek6, male);

When we say “Muslim”, *many foreigners understand it as terrorists* [emphasis added]. In the past, people used to perceive Muslims as terrorists. However, Muslims are not terrorists at all. This is incorrect. I can say and prove it anywhere. In the Quran, there is nothing about terrorism. There is nothing about killing terrorists or killing each other in any book: the Bible, Torah, or others. (Tajik2, male)

As underscored by one of the participants, who learnt the term Islamophobic at school, the influence of school discourses is apparent in not only shaping their images of foreign countries but also constructing youth understanding of societies, in other words, “truths”. Notably, this participant presented his image of Europeans as Islamophobic as a “fact” despite the presence of significant Muslim communities and non-Islamophobic populations within Europe. While discrimination against Islam in Europe does exist, this depiction underscores the power of school discourses in shaping “official knowledge” and creating homogenised inferior images of “external others”. Although in the nation-building context, the primary aim of producing “external others” is not their depictions per se, but to construct national identity; “othering discourses”, thus, systematically establish essentialist binary oppositions between “us” and “them”, simultaneously crystallising “others” (Hall, 1996, 1997). This structure tends to homogenise not only “us” but also “them”, creating enclosed and rigid ontologies that can potentially generate tensions among different social groups. Furthermore, as a prompt to pupils in the Tarbiya textbook underscores, “What kind of foreign aggressions can threaten our country [Uzbekistan]?” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 9), “external others” are not merely described as unstable but simultaneously depicted as threats to Uzbekistan. Indeed, reflecting on terrorist movements in the early years following independence in Uzbekistan and the involvement of some Uzbekistani youth in Islamic radicalisation, religious activity has been strictly regulated by the authorities, notably during the Karimov regime (Ozawa et al., 2024). Hence, youth radicalisation remains a significant political concern in Uzbekistan, as expressed by President Mirziyoyev in his address at the 78th session of the UN General Assembly in 2023, during which he emphasised the importance of education in counteracting extremism and radicalisation among youth. The Tarbiya textbooks are thus introduced as “a practical help and a life guide for you [young people] to be morally mature in today’s rapid globalisation processes and to face threats of various forms” (G10 Tarbiya textbook,

p. 4). The danger of radicalisation is often described throughout the textbooks and further emphasised through numerous visuals, mainly focusing on foreign states (Figure 23).

**Figure 23**

*Foreign Countries Affected by Extremism*



*Note.* G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 75. These conflict-prone foreign countries are not named in the textbooks

However, while sensitising youth about the risks of radicalisation is crucial, persistently portraying foreign countries as conflict-affected and contrasting them with Uzbekistan’s peaceful image not only reinforces an essentialist “us”/“them” dichotomy but also constructs a hierarchical dynamic that positions foreign countries as inferior. As discussed by Foucault (1972), discourses constructing hierarchies of knowledge render those who deviate from the norms strange and unacceptable, thereby positioning them as inferior. Essentialising differences and emphasising a superior “self” versus an inferior “other”, therefore, can foster and deepen prejudices, potentially leading to discrimination, marginalisation and tensions among different social groups (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Furthermore, missionary work and sects are also described as damaging as religious extremism in the analysed textbooks, and numerous countries in the Global North are indicated as affected by such movements, often through the number of sect-related death tolls (Table 16).

**Table 16**

*Victims of Sects Abroad*

Country	Description
Unspecified Foreign Missions	“If in 1970, there were 240,000 professional missionaries in 2,200 foreign missions, by 2000, there were already 420,000 missionaries engaged in propaganda in 4,800 foreign missions” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 43).

UK, Italy, USA	“Leading mission centres include Missions and World Christian Schools (Birmingham), Henry Martin Centre (Cambridge, UK), Gregorian and Urbanian Universities (Vatican), and Centre for the Study of Foreign Missions (New Haven, USA)” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 43).
USA	In the 70s of the twentieth century, in the city of San Francisco, USA, as a result of the activities of an organisation called the People’s Temple, which Jim Jones founded, 912 people died ... In the state of Texas, about 100 people became victims of the activities of the sect ‘Branch of David’, founded by David Koresh. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 49)
Japan	In March 1995, 12 people lost their lives, and more than 5,000 people were poisoned in various degrees as a result of a terrorist act committed by a sect that broke away from Buddhism – ‘Aum Sin Rikyo’ in the subway of Tokyo (Japan). (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 61)
Uganda	“More than 1,000 people – followers of the sect ‘Movement for the Revival of the Ten Commandments of God’ - committed suicide” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 49).

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Interestingly, although the G10 Tarbiya textbook contains a paragraph on religious status in Kazakhstan that “246 non-traditional religious groups and new congregations (missionaries) also operate in the country” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 59), the paragraph indicates no negative connotation to the missionary work, unlike those about the Global North. Indeed, the textbooks include several discourses highlighting friendship with Central Asian states and regional peace, indicating that school discourses do not promote other Central Asian countries as a prominent “external other” in constructing Uzbekistani national identity.

Reflecting school discourses that promote national images of Uzbekistan as peaceful, many participants also highlighted internal peace as a national characteristic and value, which simultaneously gave them a sense of pride: “We are not only *proud* [emphasis added] of our ancestors but also proud of being born in Uzbekistan. Not any other country, but specifically Uzbekistan. It is a peaceful country” (Tajik4, male). What stood out among the participants’ expressions of pride in national peace was the similar

“othering” processes found in school discourses. They often compared Uzbekistan to conflict-affected “external others”, emphasising Uzbekistan’s peace and stability in contrast to these countries (Table 17).

**Table 17**

***Emphasis on Uzbekistan’s Peace and Stability through “External Others”***

Country	Discourses
Other country	“Being an Uzbekistani these days, what to say is better compared to other countries. This is because we are living in peace” (Uzbek2, female).
Afghanistan	<p>“Afghanistan is a mountainous area and is not peaceful ... Uzbekistan is peaceful. [emphasis added] The density of the population is good” (Uzbek-R5, male).</p> <p>“I am very proud of being an Uzbekistani because <i>Uzbekistan is so peaceful, unlike other countries</i> [emphasis added], such as Russia, Ukraine, the USA and Afghanistan” (Uzbek12, male).</p>
Russia	In Russia, for example, [t]here is a war going on, and a lot of Russian people are being taken to battles. So many people might be like, “Thankfully, I’m Uzbekistani”, and many of them are returning to Uzbekistan. Why? Because <i>Uzbekistan is a peaceful country</i> [emphasis added]. (Tajik4, male)
Central Asia	<p>“<i>Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are conflict areas</i> [emphasis added], fighting with one another now. Uzbekistan is peaceful” (Uzbek5, male).</p> <p>“Nowadays, Uzbekistan is considered <i>the safest country in Central Asia</i> [emphasis added]. Living in Uzbekistan is really amazing” (Uzbek13, male).</p>

Moreover, emphasising the national image as peaceful, some participants also depicted Uzbekistan's multi-ethnic harmony in contrast to foreign countries, indicating their construction of positive national images through "external others":

For example, if someone speaks Russian [in Uzbekistan], almost 80-90% of people will understand and respond. In Germany, people won't even pay attention if you speak Russian. They understand you, but *they act as nationalists* [emphasis added]. We [Uzbekistan] don't have this. Everyone has equal rights. ... If our neighbouring countries need help, our country helps them. It's already in our blood. (Tajik4, male);

If they are Russian, for example, the image of their nation is their top priority. I mean, their nation stands higher [than others]. *This is not the case in Uzbekistan* [emphasise added]. People don't focus only on their nation. They [Uzbekistani] *don't discriminate against each other* [emphasis added]. It might happen, but it's rare. Russians, for example, put the Russian nation first; they will discriminate and look down [on others]. However, if Russians came here, *we wouldn't do something like that* [discriminate] [emphasis added]. (Tajik2, male)

However, it is to underscore that despite the youth depiction of positive national images as internally harmonious, the analysis revealed that many Uzbekistani youth from ethnic minority groups, such as Tajik and Russian, experience discrimination in Uzbekistan. Indeed, whilst constructing national identity fosters a sense of unity against "external others", it simultaneously downplays existing internal differences and hierarchies (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020; Fincham & Dunne, 2020). Given the powerful role of school discourses in shaping "realities" (Apple, 1979) and reflecting the presence of somehow negatively portrayed "external others" in the construction of participants' national images of Uzbekistan, it is vital for school discourses to alleviate the depiction of "external others", to avoid stereotyping them or depicting them as inferior to Uzbekistan, so power relations or tensions among different social groups can be mitigated.

### ***Absence of Antagonistic "External Others"***

Although Uzbekistani school discourses actively promote the images of some foreign countries as "external others" affected by religious violence and the West as

ideological threats, those countries are not illustrated as enemies of Uzbekistan. Instead, ideologies such as religious extremism, radicalisation, and immorality are depicted as threats from which Uzbekistani youth need to be protected. Nevertheless, reflecting the Soviet heritage in social and political systems in Central Asia, including education systems (Asanova, 2007; Blakkisrud & Nozimova, 2010), a subject, “Initial Pre-Conscription Training” (Chaqiruvga qadar boshlang’ich tayyorgarlik in Uzbek, НАЧАЛЬНАЯ ДОПРИЗЫВНАЯ ПОДГОТОВКА in Russian) is still introduced in the last two years of the Uzbekistani school system, in Grades 10 and 11, which is compulsory for both girls and boys. Military education in Uzbekistan is not a new practice but was already an integral part of the school curriculum during the Soviet era. A similar subject, then called “Initial Military Training” (Начальная военная подготовка), was introduced during the Soviet time in 1968, from Grade 9 (Figure 24), aiming at providing pupils with fundamental knowledge and skills related to military activities, including physical exercises, military tactics and defence. Reflecting the political ideologies and situations, the objective was to nurture Soviet identity and equip young people for potential military service, enhancing their readiness for eventual defence needs (Rapoport, 2012).

**Figure 24**

*Military Subject Textbooks during the Soviet Times*



*Note.* Pictures from an online website. <https://pedsovet66.irro.ru/?p=6737>

According to participants, military classes usually included reading textbooks and practices, such as manipulating firearms, emergency medical treatment, physical exercises, and defence (Table 18), (Figure 25).

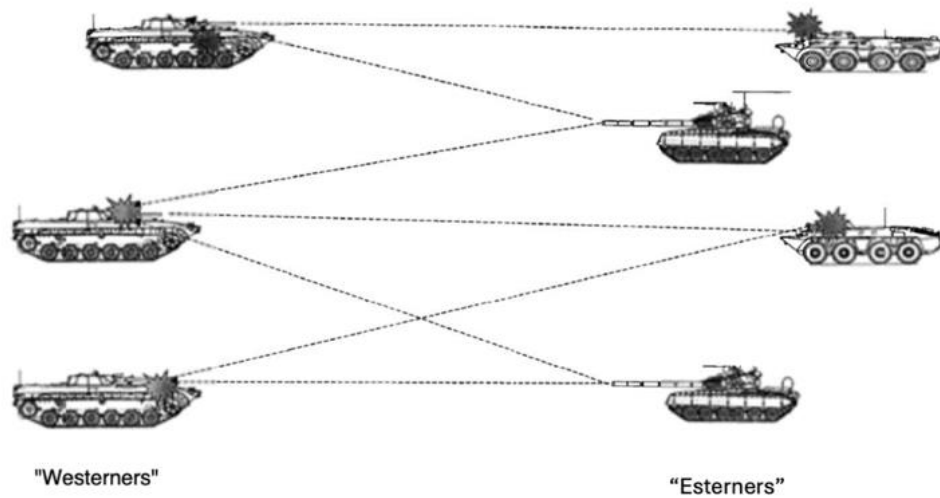
**Table 18*****Military Class Practices***

Category	Practice
Manipulation of firearms	<p>“We dismantled or assembled a Kalashnikov assault rifle” (Russian5, male).</p> <p>“We wore the military uniform while learning to use guns and had a special field for exercising” (Tajik2, male).</p>
Emergency medical treatment	<p>“We learnt how to heal injuries and give first aid to wounded people. We practised treatments between girls and boys” (Uzbek4, male).</p>
Exercises	<p>“Our teachers prepared us by exercising and participating in competitions like box kurash. Boys ran many distances” (Tajik2, male).</p>
Defence	<p>“We were trained to take shelter from nuclear and other explosions. We were also trained in chemical protection. We wore a gas mask in the classroom, and it was timed” (Russian5, male).</p>

**Figure 25*****Pupils Wearing Gas Masks during the Military Lesson***

*Note.* A picture shared by a participant.

However, despite the military-related exercises, aligning with other analysed school discourses, participants indicated that no potential enemy was explicitly mentioned in the military classes. This overall inexistence of significant “antagonistic others” as state enemies in school discourses in Uzbekistan highlights the absence of militaristic values in national markers, which is a significant divergence from some other post-colonial and post-conflict countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and North Korea, where former colonisers or war opponents are often identified in school discourses as antagonistic state enemies through which national awareness is strengthened (Durrani & Halai, 2020; Durrani et al., 2022; Qazi, 2021; Won & Huntington, 2021). In post-colonial contexts, nation-building frequently necessitates the creation of new national markers and, hence, “constitutive others” (Hall, 1997) to distinguish from colonial legacies (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020). Former colonisers thus serve as symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them”, marking an apparent rupture between colonisation and independence. However, unlike many former British and French colonies that experienced violent struggles for independence, Uzbekistan, along with other Central Asian states, gained independence relatively peacefully following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This relatively non-violent transition to independence underpins the absence of significant state enemies in their “othering” discourses. However, one participant suggested that teachers implicitly alluded to Western enemies, pointing to possible othering discourse in constructing Uzbekistani national awareness in youth: They [teachers] never specified the names [of potential enemies during the military classes], but it has always been implied that this is some kind of Western country from Europe or America (Russian5, male). This portrayal of the West and US as antagonistic “others” can be a Soviet legacy, since Soviet identity was constructed against the US and the West. Interestingly, the military textbooks portray Uzbekistan as an advocate for peace, and potential external threats, regardless of their nature, are always described under the vague terms of “enemy”, and no particular country is presented as an enemy, as an exception, one illustration in the G10 textbooks in Uzbek describes enemies as “Westerners” opposing “Easterners”; whereas it is translated in Russian as “Northern” and “Southern”, respectively (Figure 26).

**Figure 26*****Illustration of Opposing Westerners and Easterners***

*Note.* G10. Military textbooks, p.109

Only this illustration depicts the West as the enemy. Considering that Soviet school discourses and pedagogical approaches continue to partially persist in post-Soviet Central Asia, including Uzbekistan (Asanova, 2007; Blakkisrud & Nozimova, 2010; Sattorova, 2018), it is possible that the description of the enemy as “West” was taken from the Soviet textbooks, although such speculation needs further examination. Instead of illustrating particular countries as state enemies, similar to the Tarbiya textbooks, the military textbooks primarily depict potential external threats to Uzbekistan as religious extremism, which attempts to destabilise the national peace and tranquillity:

Due to the spread of international terrorism, religious extremism and fundamentalism in the Central Asian region, the countries of the region that have chosen the democratic path of development are becoming interested targets of sabotage centres seeking to turn them away from this path. (G10 Military textbooks, p. 9)

It is to note that while the threat to the national peace is illustrated as external, terrorist insurgencies conducted by the national Islamic extremist group, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the early years following the independence are also indicated in the textbooks as examples of the threat to the national peace. However, the detailed nature, including the name and motives of the group, are omitted, which is merely described as “a

group of militants” and “enemies”. By labelling a domestic religious extremist group as the enemy, the textbooks suggest that religious extremism is an external threat to internal cohesion. This distinction portrays Islam in Uzbekistan as peaceful, contrasting it with a more violent Islam abroad, depicted as “external others”, and thereby reinforces positive national images of Uzbekistan. Moreover, emphasising the ideological threats to Uzbekistan as mainly external, the textbooks highlight the importance of the national Armed Forces and its role as the protector of Uzbekistan from such radical movements: “For the reliable defence of the country from sabotage and terrorist forces, it is necessary to be always vigilant and in constant readiness” (G10, Military textbook, p. 4); “Changes in the system of international relations, the emergence of radical, new sources of conflict, and the intensification of various types of extremism and terrorism make issues of defence and security particularly relevant” (G10, Military textbook, p. 29). Aligning with the school-promoted national images as peaceful, the role of the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan is frequently depicted in the textbooks, which is based on the concept of defence rather than offence. The underlying philosophy of the national Armed Forces is notably described as drawn upon the “Defence Doctrine”: “The accepted Doctrine is purely defensive in nature; it is an expression of the peace-loving policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan” (G10, Military textbooks, p. 9). Therefore, despite the inclusion of the military subject in the school curriculum, the analysis revealed no evidence of a militaristic nature in the portrayal of national markers, and potentially reflecting such state-promoted school discourses, participants’ expressions of national identity did not reflect any emphasis on militarism either.

## **National Independence**

### ***Disrupting the Soviet Past***

Despite the absence of antagonistic “external others” in Uzbekistani school discourses, reflecting the post-colonial context, the analysis revealed that the discourses often “othered” the Soviet past, contrasting it with the socio-economic and political improvement in post-independence Uzbekistan. This “othering discourse” highlights the post-colonial and nation-building contexts of Uzbekistan, where Soviet identity needs to be replaced with a new national identity, and hence the indispensable role of “difference” in establishing boundary markers between “now” and the “past”. According to participants, school discourses often illustrated the Soviet Union as a period devoid of

educational opportunities and equality, suppressing Islam and traditions and marked by servitude, which was a hardship for Uzbekistan (Table 19). De-Sovietisation and the negative portrayal of the Soviet Union as a colonial oppressive power responsible for struggles are prevalent in Central Asian school history textbooks, which aim to construct new national images (Bagdasarova & Marchenko, 2017; Umetbaeva, 2015). In post-colonial settings, where the colonial past is negotiated and reinterpreted (Bhabha, 1994), new identities emerge through these distinctions from the colonial era. Indeed, given that identity is always deferred and influenced by traces of the “other”, including the past (Derrida, 1967) and that “politics of identity consists in anchoring the present in a viable past” (Friedman, 1992, p. 207), the Soviet colonial past remains an integral part of post-independence Central Asian national identities. Since identity and its “constitutive others” are fluid and relational (Hall, 1997), this dynamic “othering” process enables Uzbekistan to maintain a sense of continuity while simultaneously disrupting Soviet identity and constructing a new national identity, through which Soviet past is established as the “external other”.

**Table 19**

***School Discourses on the Soviet Time***

Area	Discourse
Education	<p>“Most people were forced to go to cotton picking regardless of the seasons. Most of their time was spent in fields picking up cotton. It was much more important than education, work, or anything” (Uzbek4, male).</p> <p>“Not all people could study” (Uzbek2, female).</p>
Equality	<p>“There was a lot of discrimination between rich and poor people” (Uzbek2, female).</p>
Life Quality	<p>“Russians conducted our life, daily lives. We had a lot of difficulties. How can I say ... we did not have enough food, other things, and clothes” (Uzbek2, female).</p>

“People’s daily life in the Soviet Union was very difficult. They had difficulties. For example, they took people as soldiers to war, and students picked cotton” (Tajik4, male).

Labour “During the Soviet Union, our nation was a slave. For example, when we picked all cotton, they were transported to Russia. They [Soviet] made Uzbek men join the War for Russia” (Uzbek4, male).

“We lived as slaves and labourers for the Russian Federation. We were made to go cotton picking even in winter, on cold days, especially teachers” (Tajik1, female).

Religion & History “Teachers said how, in the past, Soviet people denied God. They were taught that God didn’t exist” (Uzbek2, female).

“We learnt that during the Soviet Union, our ancestors, like Amir Timur and Alisher Navoi, were condemned” (Uzbek12, male).

Religion & History “Teachers said how, in the past, Soviet people denied God. They were taught that God didn’t exist” (Uzbek2, female).

“We learnt that during the Soviet Union, our ancestors, like Amir Timur and Alisher Navoi, were condemned” (Uzbek12, male).

Moreover, drawing upon those portrayals of the Soviet era as struggles, participants noted that school discourses often highlighted progress and improvement of post-independent life in Uzbekistan, underlining the differences between the Soviet times, instilling a sense of national pride through these achievements:

The lifestyle of Uzbek people became much easier than till the eve of independence. In 1991, Uzbekistan became independent, and it was an excellent chance for the Uzbek people to change politics and the currency and set the boundaries with the Soviet Union. (Uzbek4, male)

As Hall (1997) argued, the construction of inferior “other” indeed serves to solidify a collective sense of self and national pride, even though it simultaneously homogenises and crystallises the “us”/ “them” binary oppositions. Similarly, resonating with these school discourses, many participants indicated their sense of pride in post-independence governance, where citizens’ voices are heard, democratic responsiveness is emphasised, and particularly the opportunities available for youth:

Being Uzbekistani, we can do whatever we want ... In Uzbekistan, they [the government] will do everything, like providing a visa and even studying contracts. Our country is that great. If you say you want to go somewhere, if you get accepted to a programme, then you will be sent there. The government will send you. We can only be proud of this, with no regrets. (Tajik4, male)

Moreover, reflecting the positive national images of post-independence Uzbekistan, which were constructed by “othering” the Soviet era, participants noted that school discourses often depicted independence as something achieved through struggles and independence movements despite Uzbekistan gaining independence relatively peacefully following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, without significant independent wars or violent movements: “[Schools taught] How we gained independence. How many difficult stages we went through while gaining independence, and how many difficulties have we been through?” (Tajik2, male); Some historical events were described in these books. The event of Chiro, Tomariz, Incelo de Magibirde, Amir Timur. Because *all of these people fought for the country’s independence* [emphasis added] (Uzbek9, female). Sattorova’s (2018) study also observed that Uzbekistani social studies textbooks depict Uzbekistan’s independence as a significant national achievement, sometimes downplaying or reinterpreting the peaceful nature of the transition from Soviet rule. A similar trend of reinterpreting independence as the result of collective struggle and resistance, thereby reinforcing the nation’s identity and sovereignty, even in instances where the process was relatively smooth, has been noted across other Central Asian states (Kudaibergenova & Shin, 2018). Since the past is “constructed according to the conditions and desires of those who produce historical texts in the present” (Friedman, 1992, p. 207), states often strategically employ historical discourses to shape collective identities by selectively recalling and interpreting historical events, a practice particularly relevant in post-colonial contexts, where creating a sense of unity is vital (Hall, 1996). Thus, history is not merely a

record of the past but a powerful tool used to construct and reinforce national identities (Bhabha, 1994; Foucault, 1972). Especially in post-colonial nation-building efforts, which seek to homogenise diverse social groups under a unified national identity, emphasising an “external other” that inflicted past struggles helps to downplay internal differences and inequalities (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020; Fincham & Dunne, 2020).

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the concept of independence is frequently presented as the foundation of national peace in military textbooks. Given that school discourses promote peace as one of the key national markers shaping positive national images of Uzbekistan, this highlights the symbolic role of independence in constructing national identity. Indeed, the textbooks often present peace and national independence as concepts that cannot be achieved or maintained without one another: “Peace and tranquillity in the country are inextricably linked with independence of Motherland and freedom of the people” (G11, p. 97). Therefore, in addition to sustaining internal peace, protecting Uzbekistan’s independence is often emphasised as a primary reason for maintaining the national Armed Forces. This simultaneously implies the presence of an “external other”, a potential coloniser or invader, from which the country needs to be defended. Hence, as the bedrock of nation-building, protecting independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and defending freedom are illustrated as key roles of the Armed Forces: “People under pressure of dependence are unable to build a free and prosperous life. Therefore, we must always be ready to protect our country, maintain peace and independence” (G11, p. 97). Moreover, by explicitly illustrating independence as a non-achieved aspiration in the past, the textbook discourses implicitly indicate the colonial history of Uzbekistan under the oppressive Soviet regime, portraying it as an “external other”, further highlighting the importance of protecting the current national independence:

As noted by the First President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, I. Karimov, “A nation that does not value its freedom and independence, and is incapable of defending them, can never live freely and, I think, one should not forget the historical meaning of the words: ‘whoever does not maintain his own army will be forced to maintain the armies of other.’ These words not only have a deep meaning, but also a bitter truth”. (G10, p. 4)

Uzbekistan’s independence was also given particular significance by participants as their source of national pride: “I felt proud of our country that we are independent and we have

our national symbols that present how rich and great our country is” (Uzbek4, male); “I really appreciated being independent. I was happy that we are an independent nation, not a dependent one, so we are free. For example, choosing our religion and rights” (Uzbek9, female). However, it is to underscore that those who expressed pride in independence belonged to only Tajik and Uzbek ethnic groups, regardless of their medium of instruction (MOI) at schools, and no ethnic Russians shared such a perspective.

### ***Post-Independence National Prosperity***

Reflecting school discourses promoting independence as a boundary marker distinguishing from the Soviet era and constructing positive national images of Uzbekistan, the Tarbiya textbooks emphasise Uzbekistan’s recent economic and political achievements at both national and international levels as national pride. Particularly through the concept of *New Uzbekistan*, large-scale political and economic reforms were introduced in 2017 after President Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to power, and pride in recent reforms was promoted. According to the G10 textbook, “New Uzbekistan = strong economy + strong spirituality” will lead to the “Third Renaissance” succeeding the first (Enlightenment) and the second (Timurid period), alluding to the prosperous future of the nation. Interestingly, many participants identified the first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, as the primary contributor to post-independence national development (Table 20), despite the textbooks not directly associating him with this development. Similarly, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the current president, was also cited by a participant as a key contributor to post-independence national development in relation to foreign countries, highlighting the presence of “external others” in shaping national pride:

Our current president [Shavkat Mirziyoyev], since 2016, has put a lot of emphasis on medicine; he has elevated our medicine. We had been falling behind in medicine compared to other countries. Even for something like organ transplantation, in the past, we had to go abroad to do this procedure. However, nowadays, it is done in Uzbekistan as well. For example, even liver surgeries can be done here. He invested so much in medicine that when the coronavirus started, he built hospitals and prepared for it as if he knew it would happen. (Tajik4, male)

**Table 20*****Document Islam Karimov as National Pride***

Reason	Discourse
Post-independence development	<p>“He [Islam Karimov] raised Uzbekistan from the knees when the collapse of the USSR took place. He raised Uzbekistan from its knees to the bar on which Uzbekistan now stands” (Russian2, female).</p> <p>“In such a short period, it is not easy to reach the level he [Islam Karimov] did. For example, if we compare Tashkent during the USSR to what it is now, there is such a huge difference” (Tajik4, male).</p>
Independence	<p>“He [Islam Karimov] was the president until 2016. Everything became good; we had peace, which is the main thing, and we are developing until now” (Tajik3, male).</p> <p>“The founder of our independence was Islam Karimov” (Tajik3, male).</p> <p>“He [Islam Karimov] was really the person in the USSR who promoted it [Uzbekistan]. I watched Islam Karimov’s performance a couple of times in Moscow. As someone else said, he also partly contributed to our country’s independence” (Russian4, female).</p> <p>“Our most important historical figure is Islam Karimov. He withdrew us from the USSR. He gained our Independence as Uzbekistan” (Tajik4, male).</p>

While expressing a sense of pride and almost gratitude for the first president for the post-independence national development of Uzbekistan, participants simultaneously conveyed pride in Uzbekistan’s growing presence in international arenas, somewhat illustrating the involvement of “otherness” in constructing their positive national images:

“Although the name ‘Uzbekistan’ existed in the past, nobody knew what it was and where it was. He [Islam Karomiv] declared our independence and showed the world what kind of country it is. I admire that” (Tajik5, male).

Moreover, while Islam Karomov’s contributions to Uzbekistan’s post-independence socio-economic development are recognised, some participants also indicated that he withdrew Uzbekistan from the Soviet Union. This reflects a particular interpretation of the independence process following the collapse of the Soviet Union, underscoring the personality cults that have developed around presidents in Central Asian states (Dagiev, 2014; Isaacs & Polese, 2015; Laruelle, 2017). Political leaders remain prominently featured in educational discourses across the region, significantly shaping national images (Popova, 2019). Indeed, according to participants, the picture of the president (Islamov Karimov, and later Shavkat Mirziyoyev), sometimes including their quotes, was frequently displayed in school space (Figure 27). In some cases, the president’s picture was more visible than other national symbols, indicating their symbolic significance and power in constructing national awareness, as well as the role of school in inculcating broader social structures, including associated hierarchies and authorities: “The national flag was not in every class ... but we had a picture of our president in every room. We had to have it” (Uzbek3, female). In a school, the president’s picture was displayed with his biography next to the national flag’s picture in a corridor, highlighting again the significant position of the president in the nation-building processes and the authoritarian and patriarchal context of the state (Figure 28). It is noteworthy that although reading Islam Karimov-authored books has not been part of the school curriculum since 2017, presidents are still highly present in the educational discourses of Uzbekistan (Sattorova, 2018). For instance, *Tarbiya* (Upbringings) textbooks present some direct quotes of both Islam Karimov and Shavkat Mirziyoyev as “wise quotes”. These practices reflect the intertwined relationship between school discourses, power, and knowledge. Foucault (1972) argued that power and knowledge are not separate entities but co-constitutive, meaning that power relations shape and are shaped by knowledge production. In this context, the selective inclusion of quotes from political leaders in educational materials serves to perpetuate certain ideologies and legitimise the existing power structures. By embedding these “wise quotes” into the curriculum, the state reinforces its authority and subtly influences the formation of national identity and collective memory. The prominent displays of the president's image and ideology in public spaces, including educational institutions, as synonymous with the nation or the state is a common practice in

authoritarian contexts (Linz, 2000). Indeed, while Uzbekistan’s democratic rating has improved from 2022 to 2023, as reported by Freedom House, with the democracy score rising from 4 to 23 out of 100, the country continues to be classified as “Not Free”. Despite this progress, Uzbekistan still faces substantial challenges in overcoming authoritarianism and achieving genuine democratic governance.

**Figure 27**

*The Picture of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Along with Other National Symbols*



*Note.* A picture taken by the author.

**Figure 28**

*President Shavkat Mirziyoyev’s Biography Next to the National Flag Picture in the Corridor*



*Note.* A picture taken by the author.

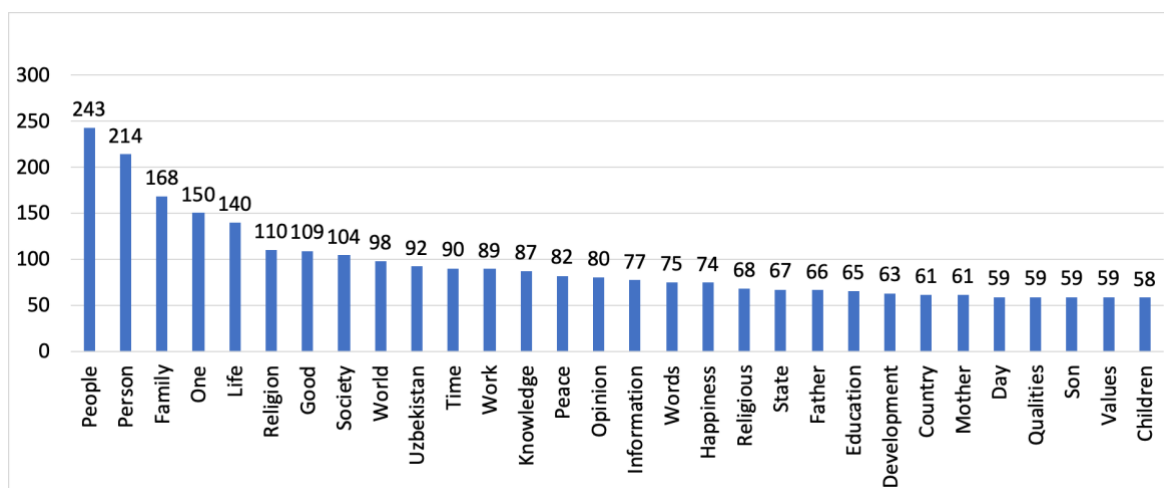
Linz (2000) further argued that promoting a personality cult portraying political leaders as charismatic figures embodying national aspirations, values, and strength makes the connection between these political leaders and citizens more direct and personal. This idea was echoed by participants who depicted the presidents as their idealised national icon and sources of national pride, reinforcing the leaders' authority as "unquestionable power". Authoritarian leaders, hence, often harness their "symbolic power" (Bourdieu, 1991) by using symbols and rituals to shape and influence people's perceptions, beliefs and behaviours, thereby reinforcing and legitimising their authority while sustaining social hierarchies. Furthermore, in the Uzbekistani context, the cultivation of a personality cult around the presidents, who are Uzbek men, may symbolically reinforce associations with Uzbeks and masculinity, potentially exacerbating power asymmetries in both ethnic and gender relations. Moreover, several participants noted that their schools organised a memorial ceremony following the death of the first president, Islam Karimov, in 2017, underscoring his authoritative power and importance as a national icon: "A special ceremony was dedicated to his [Islam Karimov's] death. We kept five minutes of silence, and some rooms had his pictures and biography" (Uzbek4, male). Therefore, reflecting the importance attributed to the first president through diverse school practices, many participants recalled his death as a significant and tragic historical event, underscoring his deeply ingrained image as a national icon among Uzbekistani youth: "I think for Uzbekistani people, [the Karimov's death was] the most tragic story. When I think about it, I want to cry that such a legendary person is gone" (Uzbek-R4, female). This portrayal is not merely a reflection of personal reverence but can also be captured as a manifestation of the power-discourses-knowledge nexus, where school discourses shape collective memory and identity, embedding specific figures and narratives into the national consciousness to reinforce its ideological and political orientations (Foucault, 1972).

Highlighting national pride in post-independence national development, the analysed textbooks also frequently urge youth to feel a sense of duty towards contributing to and perpetuating national prosperity. For instance, the G11 Tarbiya textbook opens with a sub-chapter titled "I Am Also Responsible for the Development of the Country", underscoring the importance of this topic. "Development" is among the most commonly used terms in the G10 and G11 textbooks (Figure 29). Discourses fostering a sense of duty towards the nation and patriotism among youth were also identified in Sattorova's (2018) study of Uzbekistan social studies textbooks. Similar themes of civic obligation and patriotism were observed in Kazakhstani school textbooks (Asanova, 2007), indicating a

consistent use of school education to construct national awareness among youth across Central Asia.

**Figure 29**

*The 30 Most Mentioned Words in the G10 and G11 Tarbiya Textbooks*



Indeed, according to a quote from President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, “Patriotism is the moral basis of the life of every state and is the most important mobilising force for the comprehensive development of society” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 8), and “each of us has our social duties in life” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 11). Questions directly addressing pupils regarding the degree of their responsibility and contribution to the nation are recurrent: “What is your contribution to the prosperity of our country?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 4). Pertaining to various topics, discourses calling for youth duties to the national prosperity are multidimensional, and youth are encouraged to contribute to the nation through different spheres, ranging from family, studies, work, economy, and the military (Table 21).

**Table 21**

*Contribution to Uzbekistan through Various Spheres*

Sphere	Discourse
Family	“Warm attitude towards relatives, exemplary behaviour and good neighbourliness prolong human life and contribute to the prosperity of the country” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 24).

“How can your knowledge and qualifications affect the development of the country?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 95).

#### Studies

“The younger people who have mastered knowledge and skills, the more peaceful the state, the position and prestige it holds in the world, and the welfare of the society” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 76).

#### Work

“How much do you think the profession you want to recognise in the future will affect the development of Motherland?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 4).

#### Economy

“If we take into account that the well-being of a person depends on the result of labour, then what impact does it have on the development of society?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 20).

“Dilnoza’s mother cheered up her daughter by saying: ‘If we buy a product made in Uzbekistan, the money will stay with us’” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 100).

Moreover, as a form of contribution to the nation, the concept of success is given particular attention, and an entire chapter in G10 and a sub-chapter in G11 are dedicated to notions of work and success, namely, “Hard work, Entrepreneurial and Professional Skills” and “Get Aspired and Strive Forward!”, respectively. Reflecting on the concept of New Uzbekistan, which gives importance to economic development, though academic success is also encouraged, the notion of success particularly focuses on professional achievements. The word “work” indeed appears 89 times in the analysed Tarbiya textbooks, situating it as the 13<sup>th</sup> most cited word (Figure 29). Note that while the concepts of spirituality and moral values constitute key components of the analysed textbooks, the pursuit of material wealth is also encouraged: “Material and spiritual life are not mutually exclusive. They are interconnected and complement each other. ... In order to realise his [sic] dreams and live happily, he [sic] connects his life to these two criteria” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 99). Since identity is not static but constantly evolving (Hall, 1996), this underscores the post-Soviet context of Uzbekistan, which is navigating not only the nation-building processes but also entry into the non-socialist global market where different values intersect. As Bhabha discussed (1994), national identities are hybrid, emerging from

various cultural influences and historical contexts, notably in post-colonial settings, leading to a blend of traditional and modern elements. Hence, in the nation-building context, national identity formation is a dynamic process shaped by cultural interactions and state-driven discourses, aiming to align the identity with broader ideological and development goals. Through different success stories of young Uzbekistani students, athletes, professionals, and international entrepreneurs, predominantly men, the significance of “willpower”, “productivity”, and “achieving goals” are thus stressed. Some discourses further argue that “if you successfully choose a profession, work and devote your soul to it, then happiness itself will find you” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 110), implying that happiness must be earned through productivity. Reflecting such school discourses emphasising the importance of being part of nation-building, many participants, mainly men, also expressed their eagerness to contribute to national development. Notably, their willingness to gain knowledge abroad and return to Uzbekistan for their contributions to national development stood out:

I want to study abroad to get skills and advanced knowledge. But after that, I want to return to Uzbekistan to contribute to my country’s and my hometown’s development. If we work and live abroad, we will contribute to the development of those countries. We need to contribute to Uzbekistan, and I will come back.  
(Tajik3, male)

Therefore, the Uzbekistani youth’s willingness to contribute to national development aligns with school discourses, suggesting the influence of school education in shaping their national awareness and identities. As identity is a continuous state of “becoming” (Derrida, 1979; Hall, 1996), these repeated school discourses play a crucial role in constructing youth national identities, giving them a seemingly naturalised and stable appearance.

### ***National Symbols***

Given the significance that school discourses attach to independence as a key event in constructing a boundary marker between “us”-contemporary Uzbekistan and “them”-Soviet Union, through which national pride is instilled, the analysis highlighted the important role of national symbols in further imbuing independence with meaning and raising national awareness and pride among youth. The interviews demonstrated a consistent trend in the display of national symbols in schools. According to participants,

the national symbols, such as the pictures of the national flag, emblem, and anthem lyrics, were omnipresent in school space and often hung around the blackboards of the classrooms (Figure 30). The constitution was also among other frequently exhibited national symbols. Since a nation is not merely a geographical entity but a socially constructed community imagined by its members, national symbols as tangible artefacts of the nation play a pivotal role in fostering national awareness among individuals (Anderson, 1983). These symbols are, therefore, instrumental in constructing and reinforcing national identity by providing shared references that help individuals imagine their place within the broader national discourses (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1996). Simultaneously, in the post-colonial context of Uzbekistan, these national symbols underline Uzbekistan's independence and create symbolic boundaries with the Soviet era. Indeed, the promotion of national symbols as representations of independence and, therefore, national markers was similarly observed in school discourses in other Central Asian states, such as Kyrgyzstan (Ismailova, 2004). Hence, according to participants, different national symbols were integrated into their schools' everyday decors and routines, playing a crucial role in representing and reproducing nationhood.

### **Figure 30**

#### ***National Symbols Displayed around the Blackboard***



*Note. A picture shared by a participant.*

Whilst in Uzbekistani schools, each classroom is generally dedicated to a particular subject, and so are their decorations, the interviews with participants noted the exhibition of the national symbols in almost all classrooms, underscoring their importance. Among them, classrooms related to Uzbekistan, including Uzbek History and Language and

Literature, Tarbiya (Upbringings), and other subjects now integrated into Tarbiya, such as Odobnoma (Etiquette), Vatan Tuyg'usi (Sense of Homeland), Milliy Istiqlol G'oyasi Va Ma'naviyat Asoslari (Idea of National Independence and Spiritual Basis):

In these rooms [for the subjects, Sense of Homeland and Idea of National Independence and Spiritual Basis], it was very important to hang the national flag, the national emblem of Uzbekistan and especially things about patriotism and information about the country's independence. In the back of the room, there were things related to the awakening of the feelings towards Motherland. (Uzbek4, male).

Moreover, according to participants, in many schools, the national symbols were also displayed in open spaces, including corridors, entrances and assembly halls. The national symbols' displays were often accompanied by descriptions and explanations to deepen the pupils' knowledge and give the symbols further significance, thus reinforcing the sense of national pride (Figure 31 & 32).

### Figure 31

#### *National Symbols at the School Entrance Hall*



*Note. A picture taken by the author.*

Figure 32

*“Uzbekistan - My Homeland Is Me!”: Description of National Flag, Emblem, and Anthem*



*Note. A picture taken by the author. National flag (left), national emblem (centre) and national anthem (right)*

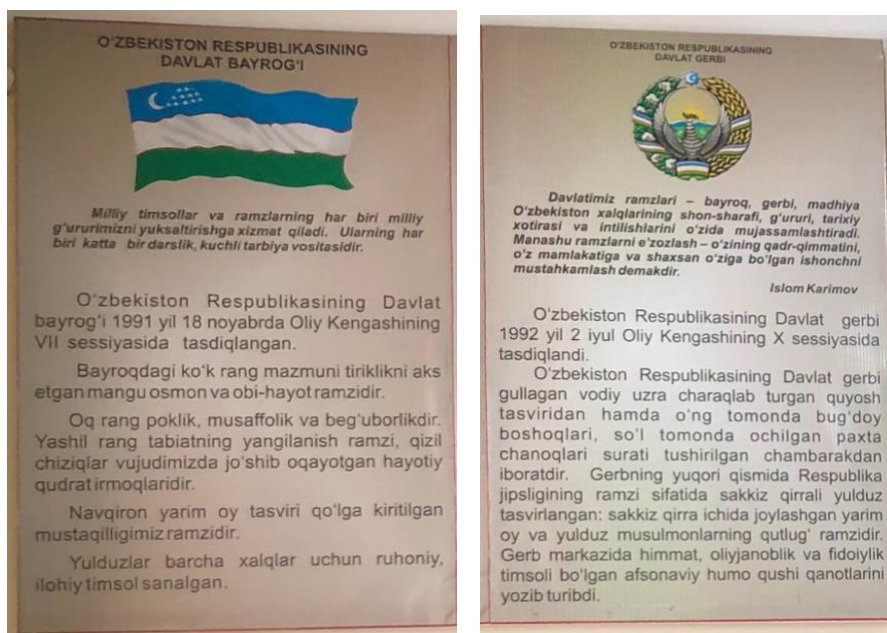
The analysis, therefore, illustrated mundane school practices in producing, reproducing, and instilling national meanings and awareness in young Uzbekistani. Indeed, given that “every day is generally the bedrock of social reality” (Chaney, 2002, p. 4), the taken-for-granted mundane daily practices play a significant role in producing and sustaining nationhood, particularly at schools, which are among the most utilised state institutions for inculcating officially approved knowledge (Billig, 1995). However, while Billig’s (1995) concept of “banal nationalism” remains relevant in the school context, where representation of nationhood is part of daily routines through different activities, not all school practices should be considered banal. The critiques of the concept indeed argue that school is an educational space where students overtly learn key aspects of their nation, and school practices that inculcate national awareness and identities are more explicit and blatant than banal (Benwell, 2014). In addition to making the national symbols part of the school decors, their meanings and significance were taught and reminded on multiple occasions:

We were told what they [national symbols] consisted of. The meaning of every symbol, every sign placed in every room. They told us their relation to us and why we should know them, and it seems to me that they raised our patriotic spirit.  
(Russian5, male)

As a school decor describes, “each of the national emblems and symbols serves to increase our national pride. Each of them is a great textbook, a powerful educational tool” (Figure 33); the teaching of the national symbols was not limited to a mere technical description but also involved inculcation of national pride.

### Figure 33

#### *National Symbols with Descriptions and Patriotic Messages Displayed in a Classroom*



*Note.* A picture taken by the author. Left (Figure 33a), right (Figure 33b): “The symbols of our flag, the emblem, and the national anthem embody the glory, pride, historical memory and aspirations of the people of Uzbekistan. Honouring these symbols means strengthening one’s dignity and confidence in one’s country and oneself. Islam Karimov”

Therefore, such repetitive inculcation of national symbols serves to naturalise these national markers, enabling youth to perform their national identities. Through this inculcation of “official knowledge” as an “authoritative account of the real” (Durrani & Dunne, 2010, p. 219), youth nurture their national awareness and thus construct their national identities.

As part of the repetitive inculcation of national markers and awareness, “Lineika” (Линейка) has also emerged through interviews as a crucial school practice. Lineika, a Russian term referring to a school assembly, has a historical root in the Soviet education system, where students gathered in the schoolyard or assembly hall for various activities, including singing the national anthem, school announcements, praising achievements, and celebrating special events (Samuelson, 2016). In Soviet schools, Lineika held a significant place in daily routine, typically held each morning before classes began, fostering a sense of unity and discipline while promoting political ideologies and patriotism among students (Linz, 2000). Reflecting the post-Soviet context of Uzbekistan and thus the influence of the Soviet education system, Lineika was revealed to be an integral part of Uzbekistani school practices. According to participants, the primary activities during Lineika were similar to those of the Soviet era, including rituals around national symbols (Table 22).

**Table 22**

*Activities during Lineika*

Category	Activity
National anthem	<p>“When we had the Lineika, we sang the national anthem” (Russian1, female).</p> <p>“For each Lineika, a grade was assigned to sing the anthem. For example, once the 7<sup>th</sup> grade sang, and other times, the 9<sup>th</sup> grade did” (Tajik3, male).</p>
National flag	<p>“The students who studied well and had high marks held our national flag in front of teachers and other pupils in Lineika” (Tajik3, male).</p>
Other	<p>“During the Lineika, we recited poems dedicated to the national symbols” (Tajik1, female).</p>

As a symbol of the independent state, the national anthem was prominently promoted as a significant national symbol, aiming at fostering students’ national awareness and identities. Participants noted that the national anthem was sung not only during Lineika but also practised in various classes, such as Uzbek language, Music, Vatan Tuyg’usi (Sense of

Homeland, now incorporated in Tarbiya), and Manaviyat (Spirituality, now included in Tarbiya). The national anthem was sung daily before the first class in several schools. In one school specialising in music, this ritual was given further significance: “Every day before entering, as also evident from its frequent display the school’s main building, every group sang the national anthem of Uzbekistan lively with the help of musical instruments” (Uzbek12, male). Furthermore, during different school celebrations, the national anthem was sung, the national flag was raised, and several celebratory events for national symbols were held, including the national anthem and national flag, during national holidays dedicated to these symbols (Table 23). In the Soviet school system, celebrations and rituals were actively used to promote Soviet identity and socialist values among students, indicating that similar education practices are also present in contemporary Central Asian contexts (IDFI, 2019). Participants described these celebrations as an opportunity to emphasise the significance of independence, further instilling national pride and reinforcing Uzbekistan’s self-images and these national markers:

I learnt [about Navro’z] that in the Soviet period, no one celebrated the holiday. Also, people who celebrated Navro’z were considered enemies of the government; Navro’z is a national Muslim holiday ... We celebrated Independence Day ... teachers taught us the life before and after the independence of Uzbekistan ... On the adoption day of each national symbol, information about the state symbols was taught, how it was created and so on. (Uzbek2, male)

Interestingly, Navro’z is not a Muslim celebration but rather a Zoroastrian one, and as such, it is not universally celebrated across all Muslim communities, unlike Eid or Ramadan. This highlights the blurred boundaries between nation and religion, and reflects the discourse that naturalises their amalgamation.

**Table 23**

***Commonly Held School Celebrations around the National Symbols***

Celebration	Date	Aim
National Anthem Day	Dec 10	Celebrating the adoption of the national anthem in 1992, symbolically representing the independence and sovereignty of Uzbekistan

National Flag Day	Nov 18	Celebrating the adoption of the national flag in 1991, symbolically representing Uzbekistan's independence and sovereignty
Independence Day	Sep 1	Celebrating the independence of Uzbekistan from the Soviet Union in 1991
Constitution Day	Dec 8	Commemorating the adoption of the constitution in 1992, symbolically representing the independence and sovereignty of Uzbekistan

Drawing on Anderson's concept of imagined communities (1983) and Billig's notion of banal nationalism (1995), daily school practices involving national symbols, such as singing the national anthem and raising the flag, hence serve to embed these symbols deeply into the consciousness of youth as national markers, thereby reinforcing a sense of national awareness and belonging. Additionally, by emphasising national symbols, schools symbolically establish boundaries with the Soviet past, which is somewhat "othered" in the process. Through actively promoting these symbols, schools highlight the new era of independence as a significant marker of national pride, thereby reinforcing the distinctiveness of the post-Soviet national identity.

Participants often referred to different national symbols when expressing their sense of national pride, and the national flag, anthem, and emblem were the most frequently mentioned (Table 24). For some participants, the national symbols were closely connected to the notions of glory and peace, evoking a sense of pride among the participants: "They [national symbols] are Uzbekistan's main symbols that represent our nationality. *They are our glory* [emphasis added]" (Tajik3, male). Interestingly, when discussing these national symbols, participants often associated them with their school memories, underlining the significant influence of school practices, including decorations, in inculcating national pride among youth.

**Table 24**

***National Symbols Evoking National Pride***

National Symbol	Discourse
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National flag	<p>“When I saw our flag on the top of the [school] building, I was very proud of it because it <i>means peaceful things</i> [emphasis added]” (Uzbek1, female).</p> <p>I liked the flag best because of the symbols of the flag’s colours. Each colour has its own representation; for example, the red one symbolises the blood of our great ancestors, the blue colour symbolises our country’s pure, clean, peaceful sky, and the green colour is the green nature of the country. (Tajik1, female)</p>
National anthem	<p>“I really liked our anthem because when it started to play, I felt something I can’t explain, even now. When I listened to our state anthem, I felt a sense of pride. I think we all have this feeling” (Uzbek2, female).</p>
National emblem	<p>“I was simply looking at the flag and the national emblem of Uzbekistan, and I had a strange feeling inside. It was like pride, but I didn’t realise it then” (Uzbek5, male).</p>

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The subconsciously nurtured national pride, as described by a participant (Uzbek5, male) above, highlights the taken-for-granted nature of mundane school processes in instilling national awareness among youth. This aligns with Billig’s (1995) concept of banal nationalism, which emphasises how routine practices subtly reinforce national identity and pride through their constant presence in daily life. It is noteworthy that I observed some participants carried everyday items adorned with national symbols, and such items were widely available across Tashkent, underscoring the banalised aspect of national symbols in youth's everyday lives within and beyond school environments (Figure 34).

#### **Figure 34**

*Phone Cases with the Uzbekistani National Emblem and Flag*



*Note.* Pictures taken by the author. Left: A participant's phone case; Right: Phone cases in a shop in Tashkent

## **National Glory**

### ***Glories at International Arena***

The analysed textbooks are encrusted with stories and information about the national glories of Uzbekistan, which constitute important national markers, inciting a sense of pride and internal unity. Numerous images and texts celebrate the victories of Uzbekistani nationals who won medals and prizes at international competitions, such as the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games and Olympiad, frequently presented in the Tarbiya textbooks. These success stories do not merely praise the accomplishments of Uzbekistani youth but also often include discourses that compare Uzbekistan to foreign countries, highlighting their “otherness”. Whilst these discourses primarily focus on Uzbekistan and do not directly depict other countries, the praise for Uzbekistani representatives who succeeded in international competitions implicitly suggests the presence of “others” against whom Uzbekistan triumphed. Such discourses reinforce national self-images of strength and victory. This presence of “otherness” is indeed crucial for constructing national identity (Hall, 1996). By emphasising national achievements, textbooks implicitly portray foreign countries as defeated and, hence, as “others”, reinforcing national pride and further strengthening a collective sense of identity. For

instance, the G10 Tarbiya contains a story about an athlete who won a gold medal at the Olympic Games and ends by illustrating how citizens act and feel when celebrating a national victory, further inciting national pride and unity:

We all stood up, put our hands on our chests and sang the anthem. When the hymn ended, we all had tears in our eyes ... tears welled up in my eyes; my lips whispered: “The land that made the world sweet”, and my heart was filled with pride. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 9)

Notably, in terms of Olympiads, those who won prizes in the STEM field are particularly frequent. Indeed, the importance of STEM in personal and national development is actively promoted throughout the analysed textbooks, and sometimes in relation to religion, discussing that “science and religion have always supported each other” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 45). Hence, textbooks present various young people who won medals at the Olympiad and made scientific achievements, celebrating them as national heroes. Similar to the athletes, their pictures are often displayed with the national flag of Uzbekistan (Figure 35).

### Figure 35

#### *Uzbekistani Boys Who Won at Olympiads in the STEM Field*



*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook p. 17 (left), p. 18 (middle), and p. 5 (right)

The military textbooks also include similar discourses that evoke national pride, highlighting Uzbekistani athletes who fought and won medals in various Olympic Games during and after the Soviet Union (Table 25). The glorification of those international

achievements is also underscored through a quote by Islam Karimov, indicating them as an important national marker, and instilling a sense of national pride among youth:

Supporting the thoughtful saying of our ancestor Amir Timur, the First President of our country said: “Today we can confidently say to all those who want to experience our power, let them pay attention and deeply comprehend the victories of the Uzbek heroes who achieve triumphant success in the arenas of world sports”.  
(G10)

**Table 25**

***National Pride in Sportsmen in the Grade 10 Textbook***

Olympic Games	Sport	Discourse
1976 in Montreal	Boxing	Our famous boxer Rufat Riskiyev won a silver medal at the 1976 Montreal Olympics and Sabir Roziyev (p. 166)
1980 in Moscow	Fencing	At the Olympics in Moscow in 1980, the famous fencer Sabir Ruziev proved the worth and ability of our athletes by winning prizes. (p. 167)
1992 in Barcelona	NA	17 athletes from Uzbekistan took part in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and returned with extensive experience in international competitions (p. 167)
1996 in Atlanta	NA	76 of our athletes participated in the competitions at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta (p. 167)
2000 in Sydney	Boxing	In 2000, at the Summer Olympics in Sydney, our compatriot Muhammadkodir Abdullaev won a gold medal in boxing and rose to the podium’s highest step. (p. 167)
2004 in Athens	Wrestling	In 2004, at the Olympics in Athens, our wrestlers raised the flag of Uzbekistan high. (p. 167)
2016 in Rio de Janeiro	Boxing	“In 2016, at the Olympics held in Rio de Janeiro, Uzbekistani boxers, having won gold medals, once again raised the flag of Uzbekistan to the highest level”. (p. 167)

The presence of “others” in national achievements, evoking a sense of pride, was also observable in participants’ discourses regarding international sports competitions in which Uzbekistani athletes have participated. The athletes’ victories over foreign competitors particularly triggered a sense of national pride among many participants, highlighting the role of “otherness” in constructing their national consciousness (Table 26). As illustrated by a participant, those international competitions were described as an opportunity to awaken and remind their national awareness as Uzbekistani, particularly due to the “battle” against foreign countries, underscoring the crucial role played by “external others” in shaping their national consciousness and, therefore, identity:

*In real life, you don't pay much attention to being Uzbekistani [emphasis added]. You just live; you're a human in the first place, so that's the primary thing on your mind. Maybe that's why I also didn't pay attention. Of course, you feel it in times like the Olympic games and when our country is battling other countries. I mean intellectual rivalry with "battle" [emphasis added] ... It's worth feeling Uzbekistani on such occasions. (Uzbek3, female)*

**Table 26**

***International Sports Competitions Evoking National Awareness***

Competition	Discourse
Olympic Games	<p>The Olympic games were recently held in Tokyo. Previously, Bakhodir Jalolov [boxer] said he'd win in the Rio de Janeiro games, but he lost. Then he promised Shavkat Mirziyoyev that he would get the gold medal in the next Olympiad [in Tokyo]. By the end of the match, he was in a very difficult condition. He reached the point where it was impossible to win. Nevertheless, he won the game. That time, I felt I was Uzbekistani and was happy about it. (Uzbek5, male)</p> <p>“When our sportsmen participate in the Olympic games, it gives special pride. Even though it does not benefit us, you wait for their victory, something to happen” (Uzbek3, female).</p> <p>“Our sportsmen boxers achieved great accomplishments, became champions, and brought medals to Uzbekistan” (Tajik3, male).</p>

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Other	<p>“Murod Khanturayev [Martial artist] also became a historical figure” (Tajik1, female).</p> <p>“Young football players team became champions in the world championship. It was a great accomplishment for Uzbekistan” (Tajik5, male).</p>
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This emergence of national awareness through international competitions highlights how national identity is defined in contrast to an “external other”, which serves as a necessary foil to unify people under a common external adversary (Hall, 1996, 1997), while flattening internal heterogeneity (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020; Fincham & Dunne, 2020). Interestingly, the Tarbiya textbooks also often referred to these boxers and their international matches at the Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo Olympic games, honouring their victories and contribution to national pride, implying the potential influence of school discourses in fostering the sense of national identity among youth. Moreover, the participants highlighted the emotions and experiences shared among the citizens during those international competitions as an important aspect in constructing unity and an overarching national awareness among citizens from different social groups:

I become so proud of being Uzbekistani when I see this on TV. There are competitions like boxing, martial arts, weightlifting, and chess. Just by watching these on TV, *the whole Uzbekistan's population feels that they're Uzbekistani, and they pray for the athletes to win* [emphasis added]. We don't gain anything from their victory. For example, I won't get money for that, but we feel pride and eagerness because those athletes are from Uzbekistan. Uzbekistani people are so compassionate that they feel sad and regretful if someone from here loses, for example. (Tajik4, male)

This collective national consciousness, where individuals share common emotions and experiences, underscores the notion that nations are socially constructed entities. As Anderson (1983) illustrated through his concept of “imagined communities”, a nation is formed through shared experiences, discourses, and symbols, often in opposition to an “external other”.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored various national markers that shape Uzbekistani national identity, revealing the pivotal role of school discourses in reinforcing national identity by constructing positive national images in relation to “external others”. The analysis highlights how school discourses frame national values, contrast them with “immoral external others”, and emphasise the nation’s peacefulness and stability as key national attributes. Although depicting “external others” as somewhat inferior to Uzbekistan, the absence of antagonistic “external others” allows for a positive differentiation rather than confrontation, fostering national images as peaceful and prosperous. Moreover, reflecting the post-colonial context of Uzbekistan, where forging a new national identity is crucial for distancing from the Soviet colonial past while legitimising the new state and unifying heterogeneous populations, school discourses celebrate national independence and prosperity through various school practices, ranging from textbooks to mundane school practices, such as displays of national symbols and assemblies, crystallising distinctiveness from past colonial influences, and forging a sense of national pride among youth.

Indeed, the analysis indicated a strong alignment between the positive national images, including “constitutive others”, promoted by schools and the perceptions of Uzbekistani youth, underscoring the power dynamics of school discourses in shaping “official knowledge” and national identity. By internalising the dominant school discourses, youth normalise and perform these discursively constructed national identities, further entrenching the regime of truth established by educational institutions. Overall, these educational discourses not only foster a cohesive national identity but also navigate the broader landscape of international relations and historical context. By emphasising positive self-image, national symbols, and historical achievements, these narratives consolidate a unified national identity and subtly delineate the boundaries between “us” and “them”. This multifaceted approach highlights the complex interplay between national “self” and “external others”, reflecting how educational discourses shape individual and collective understandings of nationhood in Uzbekistan.

## Chapter 6: Becoming Uzbekistani through “Gendering”

### Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, Uzbekistani school discourses promote positive self-national images and, hence, national identity through diverse “external others”. Gender, as one of the most prominent national markers, plays a crucial role in constructing national identity by shaping symbolic boundaries between “us” and “them”, notably through the reproduction of cultural and social norms (Yuval-Davis 1997). However, given that identity is about differences, this “othering process” through boundary markers simultaneously internally divides different social groups, creating “internal others” (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Indeed, in a socially constructed “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), which seeks to unify heterogeneous individuals through an overarching national identity, internal homogeneity is never completely achieved, and rhetorical unity remains superficial (Yuval-Davis 1997). Hence, while national discourses construct gendered national identities by attributing different values, norms, and expectations to men and women, the power dynamics within these discourses often position women as inferior within internal hierarchies, which becomes further naturalised through the repetitive gendered performative acts (Butler, 1990).

Schools teach students how to think and behave “appropriately” as girls, boys, women and men of the nation, leading to the construction of gendered national identity (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Durrani & Dunne, 2010). In Uzbekistan, as in other Central Asian countries, women have been drawn into the vortex of nation-building agendas since the Soviet time (Ozawa et al., 2024). As often observed in post-colonial states which seek to detach themselves from colonial heritage (Durrani & Halai 2020), there has been a trend across the region of re-engaging with cultural and traditional values, resulting in patriarchal hegemonic masculinity. The nation-building process in Uzbekistan has indeed reinforced traditional gender norms, positioning women as symbols of national heritage and cultural purity while limiting their participation in public and political life, reflecting broader patriarchal structures embedded in post-Soviet national projects (Kamp, 2011; Kandiyoti, 2007). In 2024, for instance, Uzbekistan was positioned at 108<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries on the Gender inequality index, indicating a range of gender inequalities Uzbekistani women experience (WEF, 2024). This chapter examines how gender intersects with Uzbekistani national identities, exploring the role of education in shaping

gender norms and youth-gendered national identities. First, I discuss hierarchised gender relations, where women occupy inferior positions, followed by gendered citizenry duties. Finally, I examine the role of dress code and discipline in shaping gendered national identities.

## **Hierarchised Gendered National Identities**

### ***Invisible Women***

Reflecting several international frameworks focusing on gender equality and women's rights, which Uzbekistan has ratified or participated in, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the analysed Tarbiya textbooks contain some explicit discourses promoting women's rights. Among them, discourses advocating the importance of girls' education, along with respect for women and women's participation in society, are particularly frequent, either through texts, stories or anecdotes around public figures, such as Malala:

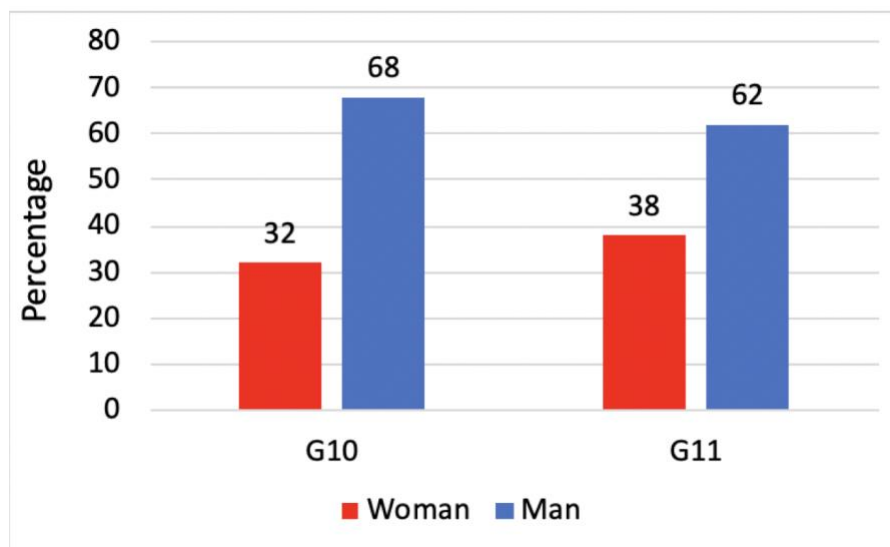
Malala Yousafzai is from Pakistan. She is the youngest Nobel laureate in history. She was awarded this award at 17 for her work promoting girls' right to education. Malala was particularly opposed to the Taliban's ban on girls being allowed to attend classes. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 121)

Malala, who symbolises girls' rights to education, is, for instance, presented over two pages in the G10 textbook, with an ending sentence, "What is gender equity?" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 122). Although the term "gender equity" appears only once in the analysed textbooks, it indicates a state-level awareness of the importance of women's participation in society, particularly their rights to education. Simultaneously, such explicit discourses advocating women's rights in the textbooks imply the existing issues around women's position in Uzbekistan, including gender-based inequalities and violence. The importance of education, regardless of gender, is actively mentioned throughout the textbooks and sometimes as part of religious values, notably Islam: "Every Muslim man and Muslim woman must seek knowledge" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 65). However, while girls' education is promoted, some discourses place an excessive burden on women for the upbringing of future generations: "Educating a boy will make one family literate and educating a girl will make a generation literate" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 30).

Furthermore, the root causes of structural inequalities and barriers that women face in accessing educational opportunities are often unacknowledged, with the blame instead placed on the individual: “Come on, daughter, tell me! Why did you stop learning? Did you learn how to read and write? Write me a letter by yourself” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 103). Although gender equity is addressed in the textbooks, the analysis reveals a significant underrepresentation of women, notably in quantitative terms. Overall, in the G10 and G11 textbooks, visual representations of gender show that male figures outnumber female figures by almost two to one (Figure 36).

**Figure 36**

*Visual Representation of Gender*



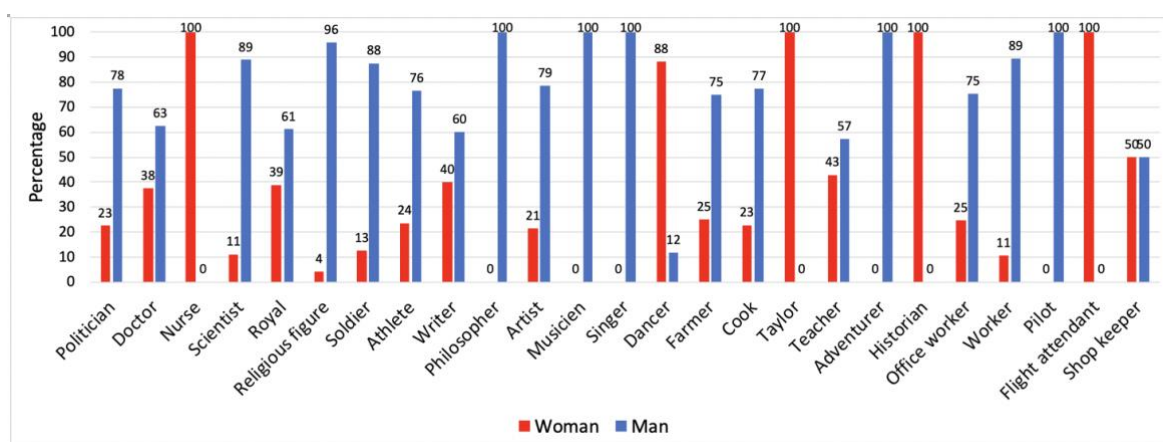
It is also noteworthy that this asymmetric gender representation is not unique to Uzbekistan but is also evident across various educational systems globally, where women are often represented by their absence (Bekzhanova, 2023; Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Durrani et al., 2022; Mustapha & Mills, 2015). Indeed, as Yuval-Davis (1997) discussed, the political processes that construct national beings assign different social positions and values to women and men, with national discourses often predominately shaped by male perspectives. In that process, although women are not entirely passive, they struggle and negotiate, and hierarchies are established where women are often rendered invisible or wield less power. However, as previously discussed, the Tarbiya textbooks by no means explicitly promote gender inequality; quite the contrary, they promote women’s rights. Yet, since discourses act as a nexus of power (Foucault, 1972, 1975) and gender is an

ongoing performance constructed and regulated by societal norms (Butler, 1990), educational discourses, as state-endorsed “official knowledge”, subtly and almost imperceptibly foster gendered power relations, crystallising these asymmetries as normalised social realities. Therefore, these school discourses inculcate specific notions of what it means to be Uzbekistani men and women, thereby defining and reinforcing the social order between them.

### *Less Valued Women*

Discourses aiming at constructing gendered national beings are observed in the Tarbiya textbooks, which attribute asymmetric values to women and men quantitatively and qualitatively, further reinforcing power hierarchies between them. For instance, while the G10 textbook frequently encourages youth to excel in future professions, stating, “One of the needs deeply rooted in human nature is the freedom to choose professions and their diversity” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 110), it still portrays employment in a gendered manner. Although women and men are associated with various social positions, men are predominantly depicted in power-vested, high-wage and “prestige” employment (Figure 37).

**Figure 37**  
*Gender Representation through Employments*



In contrast with men who occupy positions such as politicians, doctors, scientists, and pilots, women dominate low-wage and “less-privileged” jobs, such as nurses, flight attendants and tailors. Similarly, culturally and socially respected positions, such as religious figures, philosophers, writers, and artists, are male-dominated. Such hierarchical

and gendered depiction of occupations is also observed in other Central Asian textbooks, where women are portrayed in “stereotypically feminised” positions, such as teachers and nurses, while men are shown in higher-paid, more power-laden positions (Bekzhanova, 2024; Durrani et al., 2022; Palandjian et al., 2018).

Moreover, the G11 textbook’s “dress code” section, which addresses “appropriate” attire for work settings, dedicates four pages to men and only one page to women. Given that power is embedded in and perpetuated through discourses (Foucault, 1975, 1988, 2008), and gender norms and expectations are socially constructed through repeated performative acts (Butler, 1990), such gendered discourses that symbolically associate greater authority with men, institutionalise gendered social positions and power asymmetries. Moreover, these asymmetric gendered values are further promoted in the Tarbiya textbooks through “success stories” of young female and male Uzbekistani with physical disabilities. Whilst all their stories are presented as examples of determination, perseverance, will-power, and success, a man’s story belongs to a sub-chapter named “Get Aspired and Strive Forward!”, illustrating his triumphs at international athletic competitions, whereas women’s stories belong to a sub-chapter named “Earning Respect for Their Work”. Presenting women and men with disabilities in different sections, and the former in the section “Earning Respect for Their Work”, may allude that respect for women is not inherent but rather needs to be gained through work and success. Among the illustrated characters are three young women with disabilities, and while one of them is presented through her triumphs at international athletic competitions like her male counterpart, the other two are portrayed through their jobs in craftsmanship and tailoring. Although presenting stories of young people with disabilities indicates efforts for inclusiveness, the association of women with low-wage employment is still visible. Moreover, compared to those athletes with disabilities, women with disabilities in the low-wage sectors are facing down, and they are presented next to a picture of a person begging for money (Figure 38). Hence, the textbooks are embedded with gendered discourses, attributing asymmetric values to women and men. School discourses assign specific meanings to our bodies, reflecting state visions and shaping gendered national beings who perform and comply with discursively constructed social norms and expectations (Durrani & Halai, 2020). Such school discourses not only promote binary gender social positions but also normalise and sustain gendered power structures.

**Figure 38*****Young Women with Disabilities in Low-Wage Sectors***

*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 119

Further gendered discourses attributing asymmetric values to women and men are evident in the Tarbiya textbooks. For instance, while the terms “mother” and “father” are among the most cited, appearing 61 and 66 times, respectively (Figure 29), they are assigned distinctly different meanings and values (Table 27).

**Table 27*****Gendered Values Attributed to Mothers and Fathers***

Mother's values	Discourse	Father's values
Possession	“My father is my pride; <i>my mother owns me</i> [emphasis added]! Family is a foundation of happiness” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 5).	Pride
Love, Upbringing	“In the family, the father is a symbol of blessing and exemplary <i>the mother is a centre of love and upbringing</i> [emphasis added], and the child is the inheritor of a beautiful education” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 15).	Blessing, Exemplary
Kindness, Tenderness	“Glory and honour – from the father, <i>kindness and tenderness – from the mother</i> [emphasis added]” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, P. 7).	Glory, Honour
Love, Delicacy (Moon)	“Bow your head in front of your father. And <i>give your heart to your mother</i> [emphasis added]. Father is the sun, and <i>the moon is the</i>	Respect, Power (Sun)

*mother* [emphasis added]. They will lighten your path” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 15).

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Whilst the mother is mostly linked to the sense of love and gentleness, the father is associated with the sense of admiration and respect, and such depictions of womanhood and manhood are frequent in textbooks. Similarly, grandfathers are also portrayed as models, often sharing their wisdom and giving examples to their grandchildren. Though both mothers and fathers are portrayed as the object of respect, and at first glance, those attributed values seem merely different and harmless, from the perspective of power dimensions, manhood is linked to more authoritative notions than womanhood. Indeed, as state authority defines the nature of the national subject in relation to gender through what Butler (1990) described as the “stylisation of the body” (p. 45), it assigns different values to women and men, often positioning women as inferior (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Moreover, reflecting those discourses constructing gendered hierarchies, women are often given less attention in textbook stories where men are the main object of attention, admiration and hope, particularly in family settings, alluding to gender hierarchy: “Today, I [mother] went to the store and bought shoes for our son. ... I didn’t have money to buy a dress for our daughter because the seller cheated and did not give me the change” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 95);

Then, the father turned to the older children and stroked his hair with his palm. “My son, you have become a big boy! I am happy with you for taking care of your mother and brothers while I was away”. He turned to the younger one. “Here we are together again. I will take you to your evening sports training”. He pulled his little son closer to him. And then he carried a two-year-old girl and pressed her in his arms. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 23)

Considering that discourses shape knowledge, which then becomes crystallised as “truths” and social realities (Foucault, 1972, 1975), these school discourses promoting gendered values not only construct gendered national beings - inculcating specific notions of what it means to be an Uzbekistani woman or man - but also create and normalise asymmetric power relations between women and men. This process potentially influences young Uzbekistani national identities, further attributing importance and power to men. Indeed,

some participants expressed their admiration for their male family members, while such comments were absent for their female members:

The most admirable person for me is my dad. I wonder how he brought us up to this level, what difficulties he faced, and what he experienced. He worked with Internal Affairs; he spent much time at work when I was a child. Nevertheless, he used to find time to spend with me. His love and affection are priceless to me.  
(Tajik4, male)

The issue of the patriarchal gender hierarchy in Uzbekistan, including women's limited power, freedom and rights, was frequently raised by participants during my time spent with them. These concerns emerged consistently throughout observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Reflecting that men are attributed greater symbolic power while women endure more significant struggles within national gendered power structures, as underscored by the Tarbiya textbooks, the participants who expressed concerns about existing gendered power asymmetries in Uzbekistan were predominantly women. Female participants particularly highlighted the gaps between legally promoted gender equity and their lived realities as women, emphasising the patriarchal society of Uzbekistan and their frustrations: "We say gender equity, but it has not happened yet. There is [gender equality in the law], but it is not always followed" (Tajik4, male). Some female participants described Uzbekistan as a society with "very strong sexism" (Russian4, female) where "different sorts of molestations" (Russian3, female) towards women exist. The participants further discussed, often with discontent, a range of existing power asymmetries between women and men in Uzbekistan, as already observed in the textbooks. These included women's careers, women's servitude towards men, husbands' authority over wives, and parental control over girls (Table 28).

**Table 28**

***Gendered Power Asymmetries in Uzbekistan: Youth Perspectives***

Hierarchy	Discourse
Women's limited career	A businessman is always a man ..., and the director of a company is always a man because it seems that women are unworthy ... all mothers are always housewives ... a man is

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always a businessman, a prosecutor, a lawyer, a doctor.  
(Russian4, female)

Take any position, it is difficult [for women] to achieve something in life. Because in our country, they will say anything [to women] ... her husband is rich [so], she has achieved something ... everyone tells her that she has a good man, and you are doing something pleasant [sexual] for him.  
(Russian2, female)

“Has any woman become a governor until today? There was only one last year” (Tajik4, male).

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Women’s servitude towards men	“Our [Uzbekistani] girls have been taught since childhood that you have to worship men and almost kiss their ass. You have to do everything for them” (Russian2, female)
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“We [women] are taught they [men] are better” (Russian4, female).

Men’s authority over women	“There are some women whose fathers, brothers and husbands don’t allow them to study or work” (Tajik5, male).
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Parental control over girls	“I have a brother who walks outside as long as he wants, but I’m not allowed to stay outside for a long time ... There’s more permissibility [for men]” (Uzbek-R3, female)
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“As a girl, I am not permitted to go abroad easily and cannot work after midnight. But if I were a man, I could work at night without my parents’ permission” (Uzbek9, female).

Women's limited rights      “You [women] won’t have personal property after getting married. If, at some point, you get divorced or become a widow, you can’t do anything” (Uzbek4, male).

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Moreover, female participants expressed the difficulties and concerns of being a woman in Uzbekistan and their desire to be a man so their lives will be easier (Table 29). On the other hand, male participants, who are more privileged in the patriarchal structures, expressed no such concerns and had difficulties projecting themselves in women’s positions and imagining their potential struggles in Uzbekistan. This indicates the heterogeneous national experiences of Uzbekistani youth as women and men.

**Table 29**

***Gendered Values Attributed to Mothers and Fathers***

	Discourses
Women	<p>“This [gender hierarchy] is inculcated, and it is very difficult [to be women]” (Russian2, female).</p> <p>“It [becoming a man] is my dream [laughter]” (Uzbek-R4, female).</p> <p>“I’d like to change myself for a while, like my gender ... I’d like to be treated in the same way as my parents treat my brothers; there’s more permissibility” (Uzbek-R3, female).</p>
Men	<p>“I don’t know how much the position of a woman in our country differs from that of a man. As I listened to you [female participants], I was horrified. Do I definitely live in this country as well?” (Russian5, male)</p> <p>“There might be some differences [if I was a woman] in work ... I think everything [else] would be the same” (Tajik2, male).</p>

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Some participants, both women and men, echoed the gendered hierarchies depicted in the Tarbiya textbooks in their perspectives on the power relations between women and men.

However, despite the absence of a direct link between gendered power hierarchies and Islam in the textbooks, participants who supported patriarchal power asymmetries often based their arguments on Islamic values: “A Muslim woman should stand one step lower than a man” (Tajik1, female);

A Muslim man wouldn't want his woman to be a governor and speak in front of thousands of men on a stage. No matter if it's my wife or sister, I don't want them to stand in front of even four men ... I don't like it. I think it is inappropriate for Muslims ... Men and women are different in terms of authority. Muslim women should stand not only one level lower but on a significantly lower level. When they are in public or in a conversation, women should not interrupt men while they are speaking. Inside the family, she should strictly follow her husband's words. His words should be conceived as a rule, and she should follow his directions. Women, when in public, should behave themselves. (Tajik5, male);

There is a difference in their obedience. Men should obey only God, but women must also obey their partners. A man says that her wife should not leave the house when he goes on a trip. Even if her father dies, she shouldn't go to his funeral during that period. A woman should obey her husband 100%. (Uzbek3, female)

Participants drew their support for patriarchal structures from Islamic values, an approach absent in the textbooks. This underscores the influence of non-school environments in shaping gender and national identities. Thibault (2021) notes the resurgence of “traditional” gender norms, frequently associated with Islamic values, as a significant trend in Central Asia. This revival has contributed to reinforcing gender inequalities as part of the broader process of shaping new national values and identities. Simultaneously, as discussed by Mahmood (2005), this highlights the importance of the intersectionality of gender and religion as national markers and the multidimensional aspect of national identities. Nevertheless, given that educational discourses, particularly textbooks, represent state-promoted “official knowledge” and often exclude alternative understandings of society (Apple, 1979), the use of textbooks where women are underrepresented and assigned a lower value, while men are bestowed with symbolic power, ultimately fosters and perpetuates gender inequalities. Education, therefore, needs to be a catalyst for change and social justice. Particularly in a context where many participants acknowledge gender

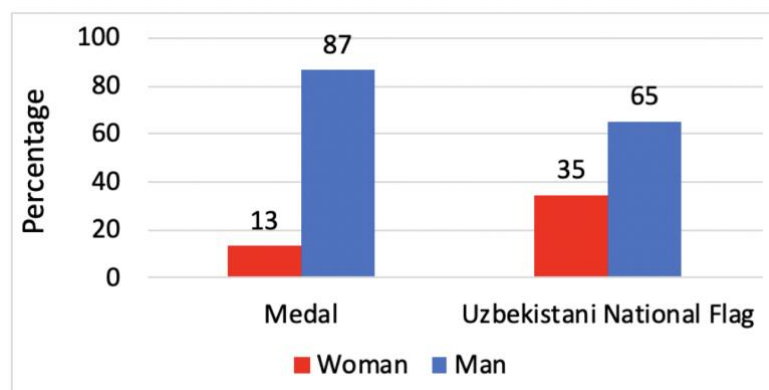
hierarchies in Uzbekistani societies, female participants express struggles and frustrations towards such gender hierarchies, and male participants are either unaware of female struggles or support female subordination, school discourses need to introduce more equitable representations of gender both quantitatively and qualitatively.

### *Masculine National Pride*

As discussed in [Chapter 5](#), the sense of national pride was frequently promoted in the Tarbiya textbooks, primarily through the victory stories of national delegates in international sports competitions and Olympiads. However, while a range of icons are associated with national pride, they are predominantly men. Furthermore, the figures visually presented in the textbooks with a medal or the Uzbekistani national flag are primarily men (Figure 39 & 40). In the rare times when women are presented along the national flag, they are mostly with men (Figure 41). Similarly, while the Tarbiya textbooks present various historical figures as national heroes, the analysis illustrates that they are predominantly men, highlighting significant gender imbalances in self-national images, a trend similarly observed in Kazakhstani textbooks (Bekzhanova, 2024; Durrani et al, 2022). This highlights the greater symbolic significance attributed to men as representations of national glories and pride; women are largely absent from these national discourses, fostering power hierarchies between women and men. Indeed, as Yuval-Davis (1997) argued, national identities are often constructed through gendered discourses that often privilege male contributions while marginalising women, whose roles are frequently overlooked or subordinated in national discourses.

**Figure 39**

*Number of Visual Figures with a Medal or the Uzbekistani National Flag*



**Figure 40***Men Pictured with the National Flag and Medals*

Note. G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 9 (left) and G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 116 (right)

**Figure 41***Women Pictured with the National Flag*

Note. G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 125



Note. G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 80 (left) and G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 116 (right)

Furthermore, while both female and male athletes, one each, with disabilities are featured in the Tarbiya textbooks, the male athlete is more frequently depicted and more prominently associated with national symbols. He appears in two images – one of him singing the national anthem and another wearing the national uniform emblazoned with the word “Uzbekistan” – while the female athlete appears in only one image with a less conspicuous national emblem on her outfit (Figure 42). This disparity implicitly conveys a greater sense of national pride to men than to women athletes. Therefore, such unequal representation reinforces gendered power inequalities, subtly suggesting that men’s achievements are more closely tied to national pride than those of women.

**Figure 42**

*Young Athletes with Disabilities*



*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 117 (left and middle) and p. 118 (right)

Echoing the active promotion of Uzbekistani victories in international competitions as national pride, some participants associated various athletes with a sense of national pride. However, similar to the representations in the Tarbiya textbooks, the athletes often referred to by participants as “our sportsmen” were exclusively men, highlighting the patriarchal nature of national pride in Uzbekistan and the gendered national images prevalent among Uzbekistani youth. This androcentric aspect of national pride was further evident in the types of sports mentioned by the participants, such as box, Judo, football, and hockey, which are stereotypically viewed as male sports: “Our classmate was good at boxing and won many medals and certificates. When he told us about his victories, we were really proud of him when he won against a boy from another country” (Uzbek3, female). Moreover, reflecting on male-centred historical figures prevalent in the Tarbiya textbooks, participants further noted that a range of historical figures, predominantly men, were also

displayed in their everyday school environments, including classrooms and open spaces. Capturing gender as a social construct shaped and naturalised through repetitive normative performativity (Butler, 1990), the constant display of male-dominated historical figures in mundane, taken-for-granted school spaces, which is exemplified by “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995) plays a crucial role in constructing gendered national awareness, reinforcing male-based national pride, and normalising gendered power hierarchies.

Given such an active promotion of male historical figures through school discourses, many participants, including women, described the same figures as their sources of national pride. This indicates the strong influence of educational discourses in shaping national consciousness and the gendered Uzbekistani-self-images among youth. The most widely valourised icons were primarily warriors, scientists, philosophers, and poets (Table 30). Among these figures, Amir Timur and Alisher Navoi were particularly valourised, notably for their strength, leadership, bravery, and intellect. Whilst the idealisation of these male figures illustrates youth view Uzbekistan in positive and heroic terms, it simultaneously suggests that these qualities are stereotypically associated with men rather than women, underscoring entrenched asymmetric gender norms among Uzbekistani youth. Simultaneously, the identification of warriors and conquerors as national heroes by youth, who are celebrated for their acts of fighting and conquering, reflects the normalisation and romanticisation of male violence (Bekzhanova, 2024).

**Table 30**

***Gendered Historical Figures as National Pride***

National icon	Traits	Discourse
Amir Timur (Warrior; Conqueror)	Strength Leadership Smartness	“Amir Timur was such a great figure ... When he conquered other places, he didn’t set fire there or do anything to people there compared to other leaders” (Tajik4, male).  “I think our hero, my hero is Amir Timur; I think. Because he was really strong and very smart, who had depths of knowledge about how to manage the government and manage wars” (Uzbek1, female).

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		<p>“I always liked Amir Timur. He had a strong personality. I liked him because he was able to unite so many people and rebuild so many things during his time” (Uzbek-R2, female).</p>
<p>Alisher Navoi Muhammad Yusuf Poet)</p>	<p>Intellect</p>	<p>“I liked Alisher Navoi because he was a great poet. I’m interested in poems” (Tajik3, male).</p> <p>“I liked Alisher Navoi and the 20th-century Uzbek poet Muhammad Yusuf. A. Navoi is considered a great poet of the 15th century, but Muhammad Yusuf is a great poet in the 20th century for me” (Uzbek12, male).</p>
<p>Al-Khwarizmi (Scientist; Mathematician)</p>	<p>Intellect</p>	<p>“We are the descendants of scientists; we are from their nation. Algorithms were created by Al-Khwarizmi based on those numerals” (Tajik4, male).</p>
<p>Ibn Sina (Philosopher; Doctor; Scientist)</p>	<p>Intellect</p>	<p>My favourite [national hero]? Probably Ibn Sina. Because ... Ibn Sina has the same significance for the East as Aristotle for ancient Greece ... Thanks to Ibn Sina and also to Al-Farabi, these two great people, Aristotle, remained in our memory (Russian5, male).</p>
<p>Mirzo Ulugbek (Scientist; Astronomer; Mathematician)</p>	<p>Intellect</p>	<p>“Ulugbek was great, that’s good. There was such a person, I understood ... When I studied history more in-depth, I realised that their merits are really great ... that’s a certain sense of pride that here” (Russian5, male).</p>

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Zakhiriddin	Intellect	“I mainly like Bobur and Al-Khwarizmi
Muhammad Bobur (Military leader; Stateman; Poet; Historian)	Leadership	... For example, as Bobur was a scientist of stars, till now, no one can count the stars as he could then” (Tajik2, male).
		At 12, Zakhiriddin Muhammad Bobur became a king after his father’s death. It was challenging for him to be a king. He didn’t have so many loyal people and friends with him ... Nowadays, if you tell someone to be the head of the country at 12, that boy or child won’t be able to manage it, but Bobur did it honestly. He managed to run the country from an early age. I was very proud of him. (Uzbek12, male)
Jaloliddin Manguberdi (Sultan; Warrior)	Bravery	“Mostly, I respect Jaloliddin Manguberdi because of his bravery. He never gave up while he battled. I especially look up to Jaloliddin Manguberdi as a young man” (Uzbek14, male).  “For me, he [Jaloliddin Manguberdi] has a big place in my life because he put much effort into our lives now” (Uzbek2, female).

Whilst the participants, including women, mainly cited male historical figures as their national icons, a few female participants described a female historical figure, namely, Tomyris, a Queen of the Scythians in the current Central Asian region around 530 BC, who was also a warrior and fought against the invading forces of Persians. However, while she was the only female national icon that emerged through the participants’ discourses, it is noteworthy that she was idealised for her “masculinity”. Indeed, all three female participants who mentioned Tomyris as their favourite national icon described her strength and bravery, features socially recognised as masculine, as the reasons for their admiration: “I liked Tomyris because *she was the first woman conqueror among men* [emphasis added]” (Tajik1, female);

Tomyris was my favourite one. Because she was *a woman who struggled with men* [emphasis added] to protect her nation from colonisers... She is *the most famous woman in history* [emphasis added]. She was brave. She wanted to be independent. *Her thinking was like men* [emphasis added]. I just liked her character. (Uzbek9, female)

Interestingly, the glorification of Tomyris's masculinity was also noted in Kazakhstani and Kyrgyz school history textbooks, where she is idealised for her "masculine" features (Bekzhanova, 2024; Blakkisurd & Nozimova, 2010). Therefore, even though some admired Tomyris, their appreciation was often tied to her masculine features, identifying her as a national icon who fought and thought like a man. This suggests that male-centred national pride is prevalent among Uzbekistani youth, indicating androcentric national pride, which is somewhat taken for granted. Whilst admiring, Tomyris's "man-like" characteristics were indeed simultaneously emphasised as unusual and inimitable for women: "*She won the war despite the fact that she was a woman* [emphasis added]. I learnt from her to be strong, genius, and to be kind" (Tajik1, female); "I wish I could have been like her [Tomyris], but she was *too strong* [emphasis added]" (Uzbek-R2, female). This "man-like" portrayal of Tomyris, along with female participants' willingness to emulate her characteristics, highlights that women are compelled to embody an ideal of "super-womanhood" (p. 17) and to perform heroism in order to attain recognition and inclusion within the prevailing patriarchy (Tsouroufli, 2018). Simultaneously, this underscores that gender itself is not inherent but rather an ongoing dialogical process. Although framed within social regulations, gender is not strictly binary, and qualities typically categorised as masculine can also be performed by women (Butler, 1990; Souza, 2021). Hence, this ongoing process of gender performativity allows some deviation from norms, underscoring the active and agentic nature of gender performativity (Butler, 1990).

### ***Gendered Social Positions***

As already evident in the portrayal of different national icons and their associated qualities, school discourses attribute distinct characteristics to women and men, constructing gendered national beings. In the Tarbiya textbooks, these discourses are conveyed both explicitly and implicitly through pictures, information, and stories, as well as prompts for pupils' class activities, explicitly suggesting that Uzbekistani girls/women

and boys/men are distinct national beings: “What is the behaviour of a girl or a boy expected among the neighbours [in communal events]?” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 43), “How do adults treat girls and boys in your family?” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 18). The formation of national identity indeed entails shaping individuals with “ideal” femininities and masculinities that align with the state’s vision. This process inevitably involves the “stylistic of bodies” (Butler, 1990), where social norms inform how gender is performed and embodied. In this context, women and men are assigned distinct characteristics that are not merely reflective of biological differences but are socially constructed to ensure that they fit into social positions within the “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983). These gendered features reinforce who is considered a legitimate member of the nation, subtly perpetuating the norms and expectations that sustain the national identity. Therefore, by attributing different characteristics to women and men, school processes naturalise gendered norms and inculcate binary meanings of being Uzbekistani women and men. However, the gendered portrayal of women and men with different features is not merely distinctive but rather hierarchised, as the symbolic meanings attached to these features vary significantly. National discourses often assign women more restrictive and subordinate values and positions, often rendering them invisible in national images (Yuval-Davis, 1997), thereby reinforcing imbalanced power relationships. For instance, whilst the Tarbiya textbooks frequently portray women as caring and loving, they are simultaneously depicted crying and mourning, features that are not associated with men: “Daughter, what are you talking about? Aren’t you ashamed to say that?! *cried the mother* [emphasis added]” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 48). Female vulnerability is frequently depicted in textbooks, associating women with fragility and naivety, particularly in the context of religious indoctrination. It is noteworthy that while men are also shown as susceptible to religious radicalisation, they are never portrayed as weak or fragile, unlike women, who are portrayed as easily deceived and vulnerable to scams, with their victimhood being emphasised: “From that moment, as if a veil fell from the eyes of his wife. She, sobbing, told how she got into the network of the False Christ” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 45);

After some time, S. offers her a lucrative job abroad and says, “How long will you suffer? Those girls whom I helped send to work abroad live in prosperity and have already bought a car,” she said in a tone of pity. R., who thought that her troubled

family - her mother and brothers - would need help, agreed to S.'s offer without hesitation. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 84)

Furthermore, reflecting female vulnerability involving fragility, women are often depicted as irrational and illogical, while men are never portrayed this way:

She began to feed her children raw oats and sprouted wheat and refused to give them meat, milk, or medicines. The children began to melt before our eyes - they began to get sick often, but my wife flatly refused to treat them. In addition, she announced that she would soon send them to a distant village to prepare for eternal life ... One day, the youngest son had a fever, and he began to be delirious. I called an ambulance. The wife, hugging her son tightly, begged him not to leave her. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 45)

In contrast, men are often associated with qualities such as bravery and courage, as seen in the depictions of fathers and historical figures, and are rarely shown as distressed, a portrayal that is more reserved for women:

Grandpa caressed the baby and said, "*May my boy grow up to be healthy and brave, the support of your father*" [emphasis added], and he began to pray. Zarifa, who was listening to him, said, "Grandpa, don't you call me brave too?" she said. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 18)

By attributing distinct characteristics to women and men, these school discourses not only shape gendered national identities but also institutionalise power asymmetries between them. Furthermore, through their fragile images, women are depicted as weaker or needing protection (Butler, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Indeed, women's dependent attitudes towards men, particularly within the context of wife-husband relationships, are observed in the textbooks. In these relationships, wives seek their husbands' affirmations and approval, while husbands hold authoritative roles. This dynamic reinforces power hierarchies between women and men, and heteronormativity:

*"I have no choice, father. I gave my word to your son-in-law* [emphasis added]."

Lowering her head, she continued. 'If I refuse, he will kick the children and me out of the house'" (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 48);

I did it without the knowledge of the hostess; maybe this sip was haram? *The husband, after listening to his wife's confession, said: "Yes, indeed. It's good that you realised it. Now go to that house, explain why you came [emphasis added]"*.  
(G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 109)

In line with school discourses, participants viewed women and men as social beings with different qualities, indicating their gendered national identities. Echoing the gendered qualities promoted through school discourses, participants described women as obedient, dependent and weak, while men were depicted as strong and protective (Table 31).

**Table 31**  
***Gendered Social Positions***

Gender	Character	Discourse
Women	Obedient	"Girls are taught to be modest and not to contradict adults in any case" (Uzbek-R2, female).
	Dependent	"Women can trust and rely on someone, but men always rely on themselves" (Uzbek2, female).  "Women say: I have my father, I have my husband, and they can resolve my problems. They [women] have someone to rely on" (Uzbek3, female).
	Weak	"I was born a woman, being weak" (Uzbek-R4, female).  "Women are more fragile [than men]" (Uzbek3, female).
Men	Strong	If they [men] feel stressed, they try not to show it to the family. As regards women, if they have some problems, they immediately talk to their mothers and sisters. They can let their feelings out, at least by crying. Men just keep it inside. (Uzbek2, female)

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“It’s difficult for men because of some stereotypes that the world imposes on them, that they shouldn’t show their emotions, they mustn’t cry” (Uzbek-R4, female).

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Protective “Men always try to help and protect their women”. (Uzbek3, female).

“If we were a woman in Uzbekistan, we would have our fathers, brothers, and husbands who protect and support us” (Tajik5, male).

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Hence, the participants’ understanding of national beings suggests gendered power hierarchical structures where women occupy a lower position. Moreover, although gender is not inherent nor natural distinction but is instead socially constructed (Butler, 1990), participants often portrayed gendered qualities in a dichotomous manner, comparing women and men, indicating their understanding of gender as binary, as promoted in school discourses. Therefore, the consistency in the description of gendered qualities between the textbooks and participants highlights the deeply entrenched gendered stereotypes and naturalised norms among youth, emphasising the influence of school discourses in inculcating gendered normative ideals. Since identity and gender are socially performed as subject categories embedded in discursive flow through repetitive acts (Butler, 1990; Hall, 1996), these school discourses play a significant role in shaping gender identities. However, it is also worth noting that since gender norms are social constructs rather than inherent qualities, they are also subject to contestation (Butler, 1990). During a casual gathering, a male participant expressed his views on female fragility, suggesting that women should avoid certain activities: “Women should not ride bicycles as it’s dangerous for them if they fall. Women are not supposed to lift anything above 5kg, and a bicycle is more than 5kg” (Uzbek5, male). In response to this “pathologisation of female body” (Tsouroufli, 2021, p. 7), a female participant showed her discontent by frowning and challenging this perspective, stating, “I don’t agree; I like riding bicycles”. She appeared quite upset and remained silent for a while following the exchange. Interestingly, while participants illustrated some features, such as female fragility, as innate, others, such as female obedience and male strength, were recognised as socially inculcated. Indeed, as

Foucault (1988) explored through the concept of “technologies of the self”, self-regulation plays a vital role in identity formation, where individuals monitor themselves and conform to socially prescribed normative ideals, internalising subject positions as personal truths. This highlights the participants’ awareness of the constructed nature of gender as a social artefact and the regulatory frames of gender norms that individuals must comply with. Given that identity is a continuous state of “becoming” (Derrida, 1979; Hall, 1996), by performing socially designed and expected gendered “normative ideals”, individuals become “proper” gendered national beings (Butler, 1990).

## **Gendered Citizenry Duties**

### ***Gendered Duties***

Reflecting the promotion of gendered characteristics that portray women as more fragile and dependent than men, the Tarbiya textbook illustrates women and men in distinctly different duties (Table 32). For instance, while both women and men are portrayed in family responsibilities, the former is often in charge of house chores, which men are rarely depicted in:

Once upon a time, a king wanted to get his son married. Then the son said: ‘Father, *I will get married, on the condition that a neat and tidy girl who knows how to keep a house is found* [emphasis added], ... The king, watching this process, *admired the girl’s simplicity, cleverness, honesty, and cleanliness and decided to make her his bride* [emphasis added]. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 68)

As a prompt from the textbook cites, “What are the fatherly duties?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 103), male positions in the family are described differently from the female ones, and they are often assigned protective roles. Indeed, in constructing gendered national identities, distinct subject positions are assigned to women and men, where the former is often associated with domestic responsibilities and nurturing, while the latter is linked to leadership and protection, institutionalising gendered asymmetric power relations. Moreover, gendered discourses that represent women in subordinate positions relative to men contribute to their “internal othering”, reinforcing and perpetuating hierarchical gendered symbolic structures (Irigaray, 1985). This internal “othering” entrenches women’s marginalisation by continuously portraying them as lesser national

beings in comparison to men, thus solidifying a symbolic order that maintains gender inequality (Irigaray, 1985).

**Table 32**

***Textbook Discourses of Gendered Family Responsibilities***

Gender	Duty	Discourse
Girls Women	Cooking	<p>“‘Can I serve plov on the plate?’ - is the voice of Dilbar’s <i>bride coming from the kitchen</i> [emphasis added]” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p11).</p> <p>“A wedding ceremony started in our neighbour’s yard. My dad said that we should go earlier and help the adults. My sister Shahista tied an apron around her waist and rushed to help” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 43).</p> <p>“I, as usual, went to the kitchen. There were my peers, and each clearly knew what to do. They did their job so smoothly as if an invisible force controlled them” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 93).</p> <p>“Have you noticed how your mother is always sighing in the morning when she prepares breakfast for you or your siblings, washes and irons your clothes?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 67).</p>
	Cleaning	<p>“The bride is sweeping the yard. Mother [said] ‘Gulshan, my daughter, go out and help sweep the yard’” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 18).</p>
Boys Men	Taking care of family; Determination	<p>“After all, a man’s decision to take care of his family is not a matter of his hopes, he said and wished me good luck on the way” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 24).</p>

Giving Financial Support	“My son went and recalculated and multiplied (my pension). Part of my pension will go to my credit card” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 27).
Protecting a Sister	“I have a sister here, I am an older brother, and I cannot leave her because I promised my parents to look after her” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 7).

Furthermore, highlighting the reproductive roles in sustaining the lineages, women are described in the Tarbiya textbook as the “symbol of tomorrow”: “Both the bride and daughter have equal rights in the family, *they both continue the dynasties, and they are both the symbol of tomorrow* [emphasis added]” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 30). Women’s reproductive roles are often integral to the nation, emphasising their ability to bear and raise children as a crucial aspect of national continuity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Such a perspective places a significant burden on women, positioning them not only as bearers of future generations but also as upholders of cultural and social values. This symbolic role often subjects women to increased social regulation and expectations, highlighting the intersection of gender and national identity.

Moreover, according to the participants’ experiences, overall, school practices were gendered, assigning different duties to female and male pupils. Such practices could be observed through different subjects, such as military and physical education (P.E.), and other school practices, particularly in Lineika and disciplinary measures. While both female and male pupils participated in subjects like military and P.E., which are part of the official curriculum and thus compulsory for all pupils, the class activities were often gendered, and female and male pupils were assigned to different exercises. In P.E. classes, female and male pupils often played different sports. Typically, while the former played volleyball, the latter played football. In some cases, although all pupils played the same sports together regardless of gender, they exercised separately, underscoring the gender-segregated approach in school practices, constructing the binary concept of gender. Moreover, some participants shared their experiences of gender-segregated classes, which were separately organised for female and male pupils, who were given different activities, where girls learnt cooking, sewing, and handcrafting, whereas boys learnt carpentry and manufacturing, reinforcing gendered stereotypes and social positions. Therefore, in forging

gendered national identities, although both female and male pupils were engaged in manual work, the former were more associated with house chores, emphasising their subject positions as family caretakers, such as mother, daughter and “kelin” (daughter-in-law in Uzbek). Considering identity as a social construct and gender as performative shaped by social norms and expectations rather than a fixed or inherent category (Butler, 1990), these school practices are crucial in inculcating gender binaries and norms. Youth learn that women and men are not only distinct national beings but also have specific expected positions and duties. National identity, intersecting with gender norms and stereotypes, prescribes specific roles, behaviours and imageries to women and men, which individuals perform to fit societal norms (Butler, 1990; Yuval-Davis, 1997). Furthermore, in some schools, Lineika (school assembly) was held separately for female and male pupils, and female-only meetings were regularly organised where female pupils were advised on marriage and family duties. In one school’s Tarbiya’s class, girls were recommended by their teacher to read an additional book on behaviour in marriage and family, thereby reinforcing their gendered social positions as caregivers within the private sphere:

In the subject [Tarbiya], our teacher recommended we read a book. Because that book would help us, especially girls, how to behave in a family, you know? After graduating from school or university, every girl gets married. This book is especially about girls and how they should behave in the family or with their husbands. How to behave after marriage. (Uzbek1, female)

Hence, the analysis indicates that school discourses aiming at constructing Uzbekistani self-images and youth national identities are highly gendered, underscoring the importance of gender as a key national marker. This reveals how gender intersects with other national markers to shape national identity, highlighting the intersectionality of different national markers in shaping national identity.

Participants also reflected similar gendered social positions and responsibilities, reproducing binary and hierarchical concepts of gender as promoted in the textbooks, highlighting the normalised gendered national identities of Uzbekistani youth. Similar to school discourses, in their discourses, women were predominantly portrayed as responsible for household chores and child-rearing, while men were depicted with more power-associated positions, mostly as the breadwinners (Table 33).

**Table 33*****Youth Discourses of Gendered Duties***

Gender	Role/Duty	Discourse
Women	House chore	<p>“You should wake up first and prepare breakfast for your husband” (Uzbek3, female).</p> <p>“We thought the bread cooker was a special present because she [our schoolteacher] was a woman” (Uzbek7, female).</p> <p>“He [husband] earns, and you [wife] should also help him cook something for him” (Uzbek-R4, female).</p> <p>“You [women] should prepare breakfast, [If a woman] you should clean [the house] daily” (Uzbek5, male).</p> <p>“You [women] do the housework all day” (Uzbek3, female).</p>
	Childcare	<p>“Women’s most important task is bringing up their children ... mothers and women are responsible for that” (Tajik4, male).</p> <p>“There is child upbringing; you [women] should teach your child extremely well” (Uzbek5, male).</p> <p>“Stay at home, it’s your [wife’s] duty to look after the children” (Russian2, female).</p>

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Men	Breadwinner	<p>“Fathers might be at work. During the day, they go to work. They don’t know what their children are doing and the kind of upbringing they are getting” (Tajik4, male).</p> <p>“Dads earns money and provides all the necessities for their children” (Uzbek5, male).</p> <p>“Men think they should work and try harder” (Uzbek3, female).</p> <p>“They [men] were taught to do this because they are going to feed a family” (Russian3, female).</p>
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Moreover, many participants’ frequent use of the term “should” underscored the social expectations and obligations associated with gendered subject positions. This again highlights the role of “technologies of self” (Foucault, 1988) in constructing national identity, illustrating the power of discursively constructed social gender norms, which are deeply entrenched among Uzbekistani youth. It is to note that reflecting that men were primarily portrayed as the breadwinner, they were often described as having much bigger responsibilities in life than women, implying power asymmetries between women and men: “Responsibility would be much lower for women ... women do not feel like ‘I have to build a house, feed my family and work’ ... they [men] have a huge responsibility” (Tajik4, male); “I would have more responsibility [as a man]. In the majority of Uzbekistani families, men are the heads of the family, they have more responsibilities, such as making money” (Uzbek3, female). Moreover, underscoring institutionalised gendered power imbalances, some female participants illustrated how men’s authority restricts women’s freedom to shape their futures and engage fully in public spheres compared to Uzbekistan:

They [women] get married and become someone’s slaves in a house ... they have such a worldview which is instilled from childhood: You don’t need to try in this life. You should know how to cook, clean and look after the child, that’s it.  
(Uzbek-R2, female)

Another female participant also expressed her concerns about the eventual impossibility of pursuing her career after university due to her female status, indicating the problematic entrenched patriarchal norms and constraints:

The worst part is that after five years, we'll get married and we'll be away from our family. It's true that we are studying, but it's certain that I won't be working. I'll get married in my village. For women, it's like this: they just stay home, look after their children, and take care of their families. (Uzbek2, female)

### ***Being a Man: From “Bad Boys” to Defender of the Nation***

As discussed in previous sections, the analysis indicated that Uzbekistani school discourses assign distinct gendered qualities to women and men, constructing and sustaining hierarchies that implicitly position women as inferior. However, although men are privileged within these power structures, they are also constrained by societal expectations to embody gender norms and perform “masculinity”. While the emphasis on hegemonic masculinity in post-independence Uzbekistani national discourses reinforces men's privileged status, it also imposes certain burdens and perpetuates stereotypes (Zhao, 2024). For instance, while gendered Uzbekistani school discourses portray masculinity as strong, normalising their violence through the glorification of historical male warriors and conquerors, they simultaneously associate men with religious radicalisation, primarily in relation to Islam:

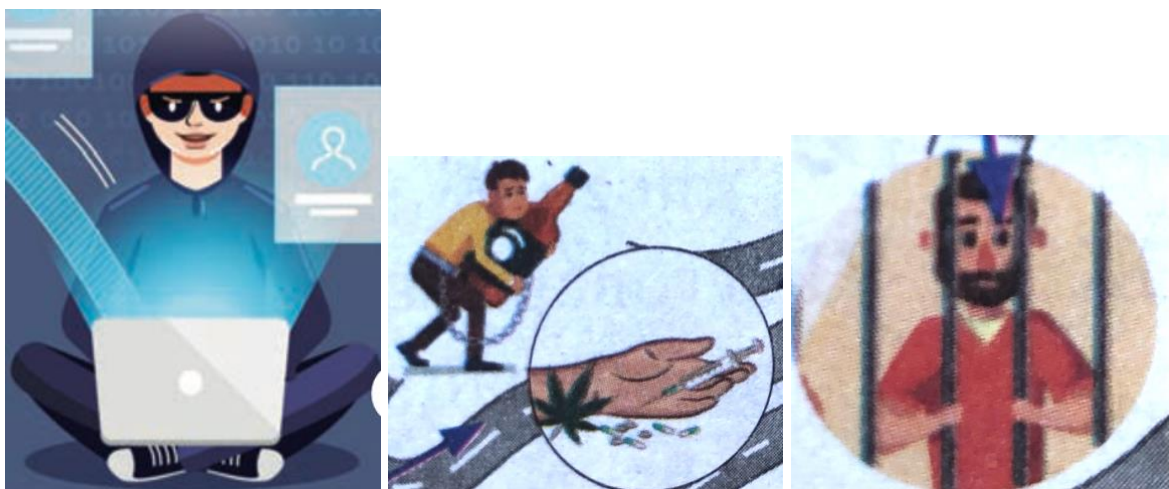
One day, I received a message on my cell phone saying, “You must perform Hijrah”. I did not understand what “Hijrah” was, so I searched for information about it. I found explanations about this in one of the social networks. Based on their long explanations, I began to prepare to participate in military actions in Syria. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 55)

Additionally, it is worth noting that the stories of male radicalisation in the Tarbiya textbooks often involve their presence abroad and the use of digital devices, which was rarely the case in the discourses of radicalised women (Figure 43). The ratio of men with digital devices in textbooks is considerably higher than that of women, at 72% and 28%, respectively.

**Figure 43*****Involvement of Digital Devices in Male Islamic Radicalisation***

*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 54 (left) and p. 55 (right)

Moreover, the emphasis of school discourses on normative masculinity as strong and somewhat violent is mirrored in the portrayal of criminal figures, who are predominantly depicted as men in both visual and textual representations, reinforcing stereotypical imageries of “bad boys”. Indeed, the textbooks contain numerous stories about immoral, disobedient, and impolite people who are predominantly men (Figure 44). In terms of imagery, among rude and immoral people, 24% are women, compared to 76% for men, and criminals are 100% men.

**Figure 44*****Men Depicted as Criminals***

*Note.* G10 Tarbiya textbook, 89 (left), and p. 93 (middle and right)

While school discourses intend to deter young Uzbeks from straying onto “wrong paths”, they simultaneously convey specific images of gendered behaviour. These behaviours, such as disobedience or naughtiness, are implicitly associated with performing masculinity. As schools actively produce and sustain gender norms and their associated behaviours (Durrani et al., 2022), the depiction of boys and men as “bad” systematically positions them as problematic. Similarly, reflecting these school-promoted male stereotypes, participants exploring their school memories often portrayed girls as well-behaved, whereas boys were depicted as naughty and disobedient and, therefore, “bad boys” (Table 34).

**Table 34**

***Youth Gendered Descriptions of “Good” Girls and “Bad” Boys***

Gender	Discourse
Girl	<p>“Our girls have always been more proactive and wanted to learn more. They always showed themselves and were always excellent students. For boys, it wasn’t really important” (Uzbek-R5, male).</p> <p>“Girls were much more active in lessons than boys. Boys usually didn’t come to lessons, came without uniforms, and had no interest in classes” (Uzbek4, male).</p>
Boy	<p>“On the Internet, it is said that boys grow up later [than girls] and they are irresponsible wrecks. And as a result, they were often scolded” (Russian1, female).</p> <p>“<i>As you know</i> [emphasis added], boys are naughty” (Tajik1, female).</p> <p>“In most cases, boys were more likely to cheat off girls who were studying, and when we had other tests, we often sought help from the girls” (Uzbek-R5, male).</p> <p>“There were always bad boys everywhere” (Uzbek1, female).</p>

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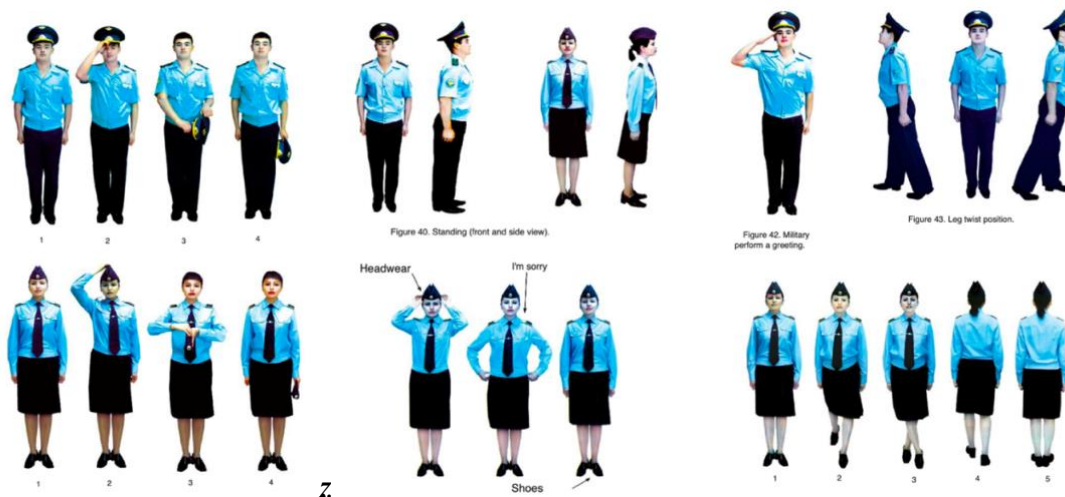
“Most of the boys were naughty, and after some time, they didn’t follow the rules again” (Uzbek2, female).

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At the same time, although men are portrayed as “bad boys”, reflecting their depiction as strong, brave and reliable figures for women and family, the Tarbiya textbooks present them also as defenders of the nation: “Seeing off his son to military service, the father raises him by the belt. This means that he wishes his son good health, spirit and strength in serving the Fatherland” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 23). Indeed, national discourses reinforcing gendered subject positions (Butler, 1990) often cast men as the defenders of the nation, such as soldiers, while women are depicted as in need of male protection, leading to power asymmetries between women and men (Yuval-Davis, 1997). This portrayal of men as protectors is especially evident in the military-related subject taught in Uzbekistan’s 10th and 11th grades. This subject, referred to as “Cahqiruvga Qadar Boshlang’ich Tayyorgarlik” (Initial Pre-Conscription Training) in Uzbek or “Начальная допризывная подготовка” (Initial Military Preparation) in Russian, is in relation to the conscription, which is compulsory for all male citizens between the ages of 18 and 27 for one year. Incorporating military education in schools can indeed instil national values, patriotism, civic responsibility, discipline, and unity among youth, fostering a sense of belonging and laying the foundation for national identity (Scherf, 2018). However, although the subject is compulsory for girls and boys, considering that only men are subject to conscription in Uzbekistan, the textbooks revealed to be highly gendered, primarily addressing and focusing on men. Therefore, the textbooks mainly represent men through visual and textual discourses. For instance, the images of women as military personnel are present only on four pages in the Grade 11 textbook, along with men, illustrating how to wear headgear and postures (Figure 45).

#### **Figure 45**

##### ***Female Images in the Military Textbook***



*Note.* G11 Military textbook, p. 80 (left), 81 (middle), 82 (right)

It is to be noted that although conscription in Uzbekistan is reserved only for men, the Armed Forces is also open for women, which is explained in the textbooks. Nevertheless, the textbooks mainly focus on men, including portraying men as the main defenders of the nation: “Upbringing comprehensively matures, brave, valiant, patriotic young men is a large-scale cornerstone task” (G10). Furthermore, by presenting certain sports in which “ancestors took part” (G10) and which are traditionally associated with men, such as wrestling and weightlifting, as national sports, the textbooks underscore the importance of physical training for men, framing them as protectors of the nation. This not only forges the image of men as defenders but also constructs gendered identities and power dynamics:

Great importance is attached to ensuring that every young person acquires the necessary knowledge in the field of physical education, knows his [sic] body from a young age and knows how to maintain it in order so that in the future, he [sic] will be ready for work and defence of his [sic] homeland. It is known that our ancestors took part in sports competitions at weddings and various holidays, including equestrian sports, kurash, rope games, marathons, weightlifting, and many other types of national sports. (G10, p. 165)

Moreover, the textbooks include explanations of the national regulations reserved for those who participated in the military service, facilitating their entrance to higher education institutions. Whilst those beneficial measures compensate for the time and efforts young Uzbekistani men provided to the nation, given that conscription is reserved for only men,

women are automatically excluded from benefiting from such privileges, potentially disadvantaging some young women's access to higher education, particularly for those from challenged socio-economic backgrounds.

As part of national discourses that often reinforce gendered norms, where men are portrayed as defenders of the nation (Enloe, 2000), as evident in the analysed textbooks, the portrayal of young men as the protectors of the state was also noticed in school decorations. In one school, for instance, a classroom dedicated to military education (Figure 46) was complemented by numerous military-themed pictures displayed in open spaces, such as staircases and corridors (Figure 47). Among these displays, photos of male graduates who joined the military were exhibited on a panel entitled “The pride of our school”, highlighting the honour associated with military service and reinforcing the idea of national defence as a male civic duty, as well as male-centred national pride (Figure 48).

**Figure 46**

*Mural Decorations in the Military Subject Classroom*



*Note.* A picture taken by the author. A Display hung over the classroom door: “Protecting the Republic of Uzbekistan is the duty of every citizen of the Pubic of Uzbekistan. Citizens are obliged to perform military or other service as the law provides. Article 52 of the Constitution of the Pubic of Uzbekistan”.

**Figure 47**

*Soldiers Who Lost Their Lives Displayed in the School Staircase*



*Note. A picture taken by the author. "The Memory of the Military Servants Who Gave Their Lives for the Defence of the Motherland Is Eternal"*

#### **Figure 48**

*School Graduates Who Joined the Military Service Displayed in the School Staircase*



*Note. A picture taken by the author. "The Pride of Our School"*

Furthermore, overall, the participants across different schools described the military classes as highly gendered. For instance, although all pupils, including girls,

attended them, teachers mainly focused on boys, disregarding girls. Not only were female pupils often excluded from exercises involving firearms, but their class participation mattered less: “In general, our teacher divided us in such a way that girls had to sit and simply watch, and boys would assemble the weapons” (Russian1, female). Furthermore, reflecting the gendered discourses, where men are portrayed as strong and protectors, whereas women are associated with the notion of love and care, in one school, female pupils exercised emergency medical treatments, while male pupils were involved in hands-on military drills:

We primarily learned how to give first aid to injured soldiers. Boys were taught how to use weapons properly, how to fix them, how to behave in the military service, how to act in emergencies and theories of those lessons, how to line up correctly in the military service, and the order of wearing the army uniform.  
(Uzbek2, female)

Interviews with the participants also revealed that school practices reinforce the ideal image of Uzbekistani young men as defenders of the nation through various school celebrations. For instance, Defender of the Motherland Day on January 14 and Victory Day on May 9 were prominent occasions. During these events, male pupils were celebrated as symbolic protectors and received gifts, emphasising their role as national defenders. It is noteworthy that these celebrations extend beyond the school environment as they are nationally celebrated as official holidays, honouring the military and those who have served in the armed forces, thereby recognising men as protectors of the nation. Celebratory practices indeed play a crucial role in shaping national identity in Uzbekistan (Adams, 2010) by embedding and reinforcing particular national images and, hence, identities. In this context, celebrating male pupils as protectors during these national holidays exemplifies gender performativity, a concept central to the construction and normalisation of socially constructed gender identities (Butler, 1990). Therefore, in contrast with female participants, male participants shared their experiences of engaging in various school practices in relation to the military. Whilst these gendered practices and the lesser importance attributed to female pupils reflect the Uzbekistani conscription, which applies exclusively to men, it also underscores the socially expected protective imageries of men. As Enloe (2000) argued, national discourses often perpetuate gendered subject positions by framing men as protectors and defenders, a portrayal that is reinforced through both conscription policies and educational practices. Schools play a significant

role in shaping and reinforcing gendered national identities by institutionalising these gendered civic duties through various discourses. These school practices not only crystallise gender norms but also trivialise and perpetuate the power imbalances between women and men.

### ***Being a Woman: Embodied National Culture and Honour***

Gender is a social construct that evolves as individuals perform distinct sets of social norms associated with women and men. As such, in the nation-building project, fostering diverse representations of women and men is crucial in shaping gender identities that align with national ideals and aspirations (Butler, 1990). Whilst the Uzbekistani school discourses actively promote men's images as protectors and heroes, women are assigned different national duties and are portrayed as symbolic protectors of culture, tradition, and honour. Indeed, through national discourses, women are frequently positioned as the reproducers of the nation, both biologically and culturally, assigned subject positions in protecting national honour, where they are expected to uphold traditional values and customs (Yuval-Davis, 1997). For instance, the Tarbiya textbooks often visually illustrate women wearing clothes with traditional Uzbek fabrics, such as ikat and adras, implicitly depicting them as the primer responsible for transmitting customs and traditions (Figure 49).

**Figure 49**

#### ***Women Presented in Traditional Uzbek Fabrics***



*Note.* G 10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 99 (left) and G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 97 (right)

Similarly, participants experienced school practices promoting women's image as culture carriers. For instance, during Navro'z celebrations, female pupils were primarily responsible for cooking and dance performances and often wore traditional clothing (Figure 50). The use of mundane activities, such as celebratory events, in inculcating gender norms underscores the practice of "banal nationalism" (Billig, 1995) and indicates the performativity of gendered acts. Youth learn and embody gendered roles through these activities, shaping gendered national identities.

**Figure 50**

*Female Pupils Dancing in Uzbek Traditional Clothes for Navro'z*



*Note. A picture shared by a participant.*

Furthermore, around the concept of honour as the symbolic national value attached to women, the G10 Tarbiya textbook introduces a story of a mother who lost her five sons in World War II, a character named Zulfiya (Figure 51).

**Figure 51**

*Zulfiya with Her Five Grandsons*



*Note.* G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 126

In contrast to men, who are depicted as protectors of the nation through idealised images of strength as warriors and soldiers, women's duties are hence portrayed through the symbolisation of mourning motherhood, who lost her sons defending the nation, as illustrated by figures like Zulfiya. As explained in the textbooks, she is a national symbol of devoted motherhood in Uzbekistan, and her statue was erected in "Victory Park" in Tashkent:

This is a statue dedicated to all mothers in Uzbekistan. This monument has become a welcome pilgrimage site for all our people, *a symbol of family, love, loyalty and devotion* [emphasis added]. The young people who come here (to see the statue) *realise the qualities that are in the blood of our nation* [emphasis added] and strive to live by appreciating them. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 126)

Similarly, the symbolic selfless womanhood is celebrated through the description of Zulfiya's daughters-in-law, who did not remarry and stayed with her out of devotion and are cited as "loyal". Zulfiya's story hence reflects the different forms of dedication expected of women compared to men, who are portrayed as mourning, enduring hardship, and caring for the family. As Yuval-Davis (1997) argued, although women actively participate in public domains, their contributions are often overlooked and undervalued within national discourses that operate within institutionalised gendered frameworks. The private sphere is thus often idealised as the domain where national values, culture and honour are preserved, primarily through women in nurturing and socialising children,

whereas men are associated with the public sphere as the primary actors of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Such patriarchal structures not only reinforce the construction of binary gendered national identities but also emphasise women's dependence on men (Durrani & Halai, 2020). Therefore, school discourses that promote women within the private sphere, glorifying their devotion and resilience, serve to reinforce gendered norms and power dynamics.

Reflecting the normalisation of women as symbolic bearers of national honour and purity, which place them under strict social and cultural surveillance to ensure they do not “dishonour” the nation or community (Yuval-Davis, 1997), participants indicated that in schools, female pupils were often subjected to notions of shame, particularly in their interactions with teachers: “They [teachers] said, ‘We can beat them [boys], but what can we do to you? You are girls, and you should be much ashamed of your behaviour’” (Uzbek2, female). When scolding girls, primarily for breaking the dress code or displaying disobedient behaviour, teachers often employed the word “Uyat”, shame in Uzbek, which was rarely used for boys. Teachers are also social beings who are gendered, influencing their interactions with youth. They convey their gender norms to young individuals, whom they expect to embody, perform, and comply with these norms (Tsouroufli, 2020). However, it is important to note that the concept of “Uyat” was mainly employed in Uzbek-medium schools. As Thibault and Carnon (2022) discussed, “Uyat” is a Central Asian concept that enforces traditional gender norms by imposing strict behavioural standards, particularly on women, ensuring their actions align with societal expectations of modesty. Closely tied to family honour, Uyat subjects women to severe social consequences for transgressions. This concept rigorously regulates women's behaviour, often their dress and social interactions, with deviations often resulting in public shaming or familial punishment. Uyat is often deployed within regulatory and societal frames, stylising women's bodies and behaviour as carriers of national honour (Yuval-Davis, 1997). This concept of shame, encompassing a sense of embarrassment, not only serves to remind women of societal norms about acceptable or unacceptable behaviour but also prompts self-regulatory action to conform to these expectations and become “proper” members of the nation. Thus, shame reinforces gender norms for women by instilling social expectations related to modesty, purity and obedience, which are often seen as integral to women's symbolic national duties in upholding national values and identities. Interestingly, some male participants acknowledged that women are often subjects of social scrutiny and regulation, portraying them as bearers of family honour and reputation.

This indicates that the expectation for women to defend family honour is widely normalised among Uzbekistani youth, mirroring gendered discourses actively promoted through school discourses:

I think our [men's] life is easier than women's. From a young age, girls are considered the pride and reputation of the family. It's a very difficult thing. It doesn't apply to men. They can do whatever they want, and nothing happens.  
(Uzbek4, male)

Similarly, underscoring the importance accorded to honour and purity of women, according to participants, female pupils were also often told “Uyat” when they were close to or having a relationship with male pupils, while male pupils were not: “If they [teachers] saw girls with boys, just hanging out, if they saw girls frequently with boys, they said ‘Uyat’ to the girls. To the boys, they didn’t” (Uzbek9, female). Reflecting the gendered subject positions assigned to women as bearers of national honour, whilst the Tarbiya textbooks encourage both women and men to develop various common “desired” and “good” characteristics, such as honesty, kindness and tolerance, modesty is primarily associated with women: “We went to visit my uncle for beshik-tui (a celebration in honour of the birth of a baby), *I dressed modestly, as my mother ordered* [emphasis added]” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 93), “She remembered her grandmother’s advice: ‘*A girl must be reserved* [emphasis added]; she should never reveal her inner feelings to anyone.’” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 68). Echoing school discourses, the idealisation of female modesty was also expressed by a male participant: “I want my future wife to be modest, wearing a long dress, bob hair, modesty is important, simple” (Uzbek-R6, male).

## **Gendered Dress Code and Disciplines**

### ***Gendered Dress Code***

Considering discipline and surveillance as pivotal in regulating bodies and behaviours to conform with social norms (Foucault, 1975), dress code serves as a powerful means to shape national beings. Schools utilise dress codes to enforce discipline and regulate behaviours. The analysis revealed that Uzbekistani schools actively utilise dress codes to inculcate gender norms, thereby shaping gendered national identities. However, given that women are often assigned subject positions of carriers of national culture,

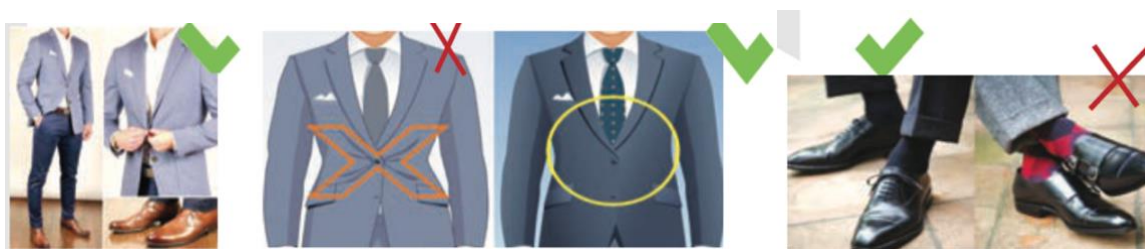
tradition and honour, they are more subject to the regulatory practice of dress code compared to men. In the Tarbiya textbooks, for instance, while the men's section gives recommendations on how to wear suits, uniquely focusing on their clothes, as for women, advice extends to their hair, bags and perfume, referring further to their charm and underlining the importance of appropriateness and cleanliness (Figure 52): “Another *small secret is hidden in the graceful appearance of women* [emphasis added]. It is an expression that emanates from them. The fragrance combines inner and outer beauty” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 86);

The golden rule! The most important thing is that the clothes should fit your figure, to be comfortable, *neat and orderly*. According to experts, women should use three types of perfume. These are office, circle of friends, for loved ones [emphasis added]. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 86);

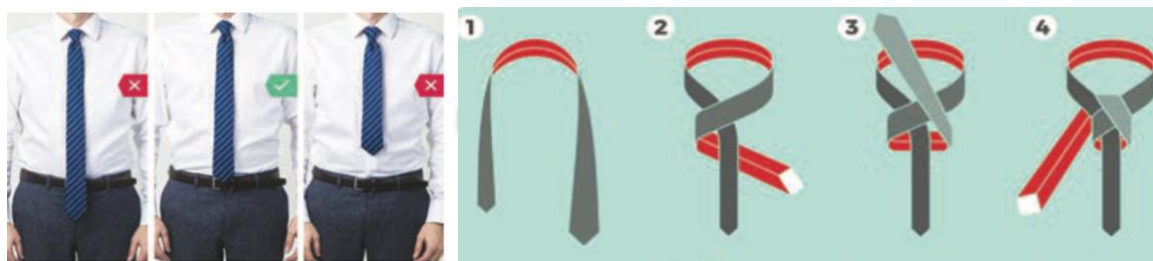
*Hair should be clean and neat, and grey hair should be dyed* [emphasis added] with a colour very close to your natural colour. The hairstyle should not be complicated but well thought out, and the hair colour should be natural. *Make-up should be modest* [emphasis added]; nails should be painted in light colours or transparent. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 86)

**Figure 52**

***Gendered Clothing Rules***



Note. G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 82 (left and middle), and p. 83 (right)



Note. G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 85



*Note.* G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 86

“Stylisation of the body” entails shaping individual appearances and behaviours to fit societal gendered norms and expectations (Butler, 1990); by regulating women’s attire, school discourses “stylise” their bodies and behaviours to align with national images, thus enforcing specific gendered national identities.

In Uzbekistan, while pupils have always been mandated to wear school uniforms, the introduction of nationwide standardised school uniforms remains incomplete. In 2018, the Uzbekistani authorities adopted a resolution “On measures to provide students at public secondary schools with a modern uniform”, outlining a gradual introduction of mandatory standardised uniforms at the secondary level by 2025. Meanwhile, every school enforces its own specific dress code, which students must adhere to. The interviews revealed that, despite slight variations, all schools had a dress code that was relatively similar and aligned with the guidelines outlined in the resolution on school uniforms issued by the Ministry of Preschool and School Education (Table 35). While a range of rules apply to both female and male pupils, there are notably more restrictions placed on the former, highlighting how women are subject to increased regulatory scrutiny through dress code, shaping them into ideal gendered members of the nation reflecting broader societal expectations and norms.

**Table 35**

***Typical Dress Code at the Participants’ Schools***

Category	Female pupils (Participants’ schools)	Male pupils (Participants’ schools)	Ministry of Education
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Uniform	-Dark-coloured skirt or dress (below the knees) -White top	-Dark-coloured trousers, vest and jacket -Tie -White shirt -No jeans (some schools allowed if black)	
Hair	-Tied (braid or pigtail)	-Short hair (3-5cm)	-No dyed hair in bright colours -No shaved hair (boy) -2-3 cm long hair (boy)
Other	-No trainers -No make-up -No big earrings (or no jewellery at all) -No rings or watch -No long nails -No nail polish -No hijab	-No trainers -No moustache	-No tattoo nor piercing on the exposed part of the body -No make-up (girl) -No more than one earring per ear (girl) -No rings (girl) -No long nails (girl) -No nail polish (girl)

To ensure the implementation of the dress code, in some schools, the picture of the “correct uniform” was displayed in the classroom and school’s open space (Figure 53), or its guidelines were distributed to the pupils:

We had a school guidebook that contained the rules for your behaviour. Every year, they [teachers] gave it to us to glue it to our notebook. Not very small; it was like an A4 format. This was at the beginning of the [school] year. If you were not wearing the uniform [correctly], teachers asked what was written, and teachers would read it to punish you. Three or four times a week, everyone would read it. (Uzbek3, female)

By enforcing the gendered dress code, schools instil specific gender norms through continuous regulatory practices. The dress code mandates repeated gendered performative acts, which in turn shape gendered national identities that align with broader societal expectations (Butler, 1990).

**Figure 53**

*A Display of “Correct Uniforms” in Open School Space*



*Note. A picture taken by the author.*

Moreover, to enforce the dress code, inspections were integrated into school routines, often conducted by teachers and school directors (Table 36).

**Table 36**

*Typical Dress Code at the Participants’ Schools Examples of Dress Code Inspections*

Inspector	Practice
Director	The director could come to us with a ruler and scissors. If it was more than three centimetres, then she could come to the class and check the hair length. They walked with a ruler, a simple ruler, and they went and checked every length. They approached each boy and checked their hair length. (Russian2, female)

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School Staff “There was even some kind of woman who constantly checked our attires in the classrooms. They would request us to stand up and check the clothes. The length of the skirt had to be at the knee level; everything had to be covered” (Russia1, female).

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Teacher

“Every Wednesday, teachers inspected. They inspected our appearance, cleanliness, hair, and nails” (Tajik1, female).

“After singing the national anthem daily, headteachers checked all pupils’ uniforms. Afterwards, pupils were allowed to participate in the lessons” (Tajik2, male).

“At school, in every class, we had our special teachers responsible for looking after the behaviour and appearance of every pupil. They regularly checked them” (Uzbek4, male).

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Pupil Two pupils were picked up to check other students’ uniforms. They had a notebook to write about the students who didn’t follow the dress code. Everyone put their hands and rings on the desk. Their nails, hair and ribbon were mainly checked. They made a table for the 9th, 10th and 11th-grade pupils and spent more time checking them. (Uzbek2, female)

“On one corner of the wall were the names of the pupils responsible for inspecting the pupils’ appearance, clothes, and books’ conditions”. (Tajik3, male).

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Although the frequency of the inspections varied among schools, pupils were checked regularly, sometimes daily, at the school gate upon arrival, during the Lineika, before the first lesson, or even randomly during classes. By regulating attire and defining what is appropriate for women and men to wear and how to behave, institutions exert control over bodies, attributing specific and distinct values to them, and reinforcing adherence to gendered expectations and broader societal norms (Foucault, 1988). Additionally, not only were certain teachers appointed as inspectors, but in some schools,

for instance, students themselves were also given the responsibility of inspecting their peers' attire. Indeed, considering power not as a top-down repressive concept but rather productive, intricately woven into the fabric of society and practised as micro-power among individuals, disciplinary power operates through constant surveillance and self-regulation (Foucault, 1975, 1988). Regular inspections and the appointment of students as inspectors make individuals aware of being under surveillance, instilling a culture of self-regulation and conformity to social expectations and reinforcing normed gendered national identities.

### ***Gendered Disciplinary Practices***

The terms “self-control” and “self-discipline” frequently appear in the Tarbiya textbooks across various topics, highlighting the significant emphasis placed on the concept of discipline in school discourses. The word used to describe the concept is not limited to “discipline” but also includes different terms, such as “unwritten rules”, “unspoken rules”, “special rules”, “unwritten laws”, “code of conduct”, and “obey oneself” (Table 37).

**Table 37**

#### ***Terms Related to the Concept of Discipline***

Term	Discourses
Discipline	<p>“The happiness and honour of every nation depend on its <i>internal discipline</i> [emphasis added] and harmony ... where the family relationship is based on strong discipline, the country and the nation will be strong and wise” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 10).</p> <p>“Peace and harmony are based on harmonious relations in the families of these people; this is done by the state and nation strong and <i>disciplined</i> [emphasis added]” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 23).</p> <p>“Three things are needed to be successful in life: focus, <i>discipline</i> [emphasis added], and action” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 17).</p>

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Unwritten rules	<p>“<i>The unwritten rules</i> [emphasis added] in the family are passed from generation to generation and become polished” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 5).</p> <p>“In the village, the autumn season would be a good time to do Xashar [voluntary collective communal work]. It has <i>an unwritten rule</i> [emphasis added]” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 39).</p>
Unspoken rules	<p>“Why should we follow <i>the unspoken rules of behaviour</i> [emphasis added] at a party?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 94).</p>
Special rules	<p>“From time immemorial, the family has been valued as a sacred abode. In the family, relatives, not only in everyday life but also in relationships, have always adhered to <i>special relationships and rules</i> [emphasis added]” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 22).</p>
Unwritten law	<p>“What do you mean by duties and obligations of family members that are <i>not written in the law</i> [emphasis added]? What do you think you should follow from this unwritten law?” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 26)</p>
Code of conduct	<p>“Develop a “<i>Code of Conduct</i>” [emphasis added] for your class with your classmates” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 63).</p>

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Furthermore, the subject “Odobnoma” (Etiquette), which was combined under the subject of Tarbiya in 2019, was mentioned by many participants as a key instrument in learning not only moral values but also inculcating a sense of self-control and discipline: “[It felt] Good [with Odobnoma subject] because we learnt *moral behaviours* [emphasis added], how to behave with older ones. It was a beneficial subject” (Tajik1, female); “[During Odobnoma lessons], I felt very shameful because of my naughty and immature character” (Uzbek4, male). According to the participants, behavioural standards were taught not only through the official curriculum but also through extra-curricular activities and a range of disciplinary actions. Discipline is a powerful state practice that operates through various institutions, such as schools, to shape individuals’ behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs so that

it moulds citizens, hence national identities, aligning with the state's visions (Foucault, 1972, 1975). To construct such individuals who comply with social norms, the state regulates them through "biopolitics" (Foucault, 2008), managing both bodies and the collective life process. My interviews with the youth highlighted the substantial role of disciplinary practices, particularly the dress code, in youth national identity construction in schools. As per the Ministry of Preschool and School Education of Uzbekistan (2021), strengthening the dress code and discipline is intended to:

Create appropriate conditions for their health, develop a spiritually and physically healthy generation ... to help students develop into well-educated, well-mannered, well-rounded individuals, create a sense of equality and *obedience* [emphasis added] to established procedures, and create conditions for their health.

Using the word "obedience" highlights the role of school discipline in moulding youth, conforming with the state's visions and thus "model" Uzbekistani citizens. Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Preschool of School Education advice (2021), parents not only should be part of the measures taken against pupils breaking the dress code but also are "responsible for ensuring that students comply with these requirements" (2021), reinforcing the notion of "Tarbiya", upbringing, including disciplines. Indeed, parents are often described in the Tarbiya textbooks as the model providing guidance to children. Rather than making decisions alone, pupils are strongly advised to get "consultation with parents in everything" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 24) and "get an education, get a profession and eventually get married with the consent of your parents" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 24). "Getting permission from the family" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 11) is hence described as a core moral value and a sign of respect towards parents, who are described as one of the pillars of New Uzbekistan, along with teachers, scientists and intellectuals, according to the textbooks I analysed. Respect for parents was indeed illustrated as a national value distinct to Uzbekistan by many participants, who also underscored the involvement of family along with schools in instilling moral values, ethics and codes of conduct: "As Tarbiya starts from family, my parents were the prominent persons who taught me those. Then, through school subjects, I deeply understood those values" (Uzbek12, male). Therefore, the complementary relation between family and schools in children's upbringing and disciplines, in other words, shaping identities, was highlighted. Moreover, in one Uzbek-medium school, religious representatives and police

officers sometimes joined the meetings to discuss how pupils should spend time after school, indicating community involvement in youth discipline. The involvement of the neighbourhood community, Mahalla, in youth upbringing is indeed discussed in the Tarbiya textbooks, which contain a sub-chapter focusing on the Mahalla, namely “Mahalla – Cradle of Values” and “The Spring of Nobility”. Along with family, the textbooks present Mahalla as a guardian preserving traditions, moral values and disciplines:

The Mahalla plays an important role in a person’s fate, his [sic] way of life and, most importantly, in education. A person’s life - his [sic] childhood, adolescence and maturity - passes in the Mahalla. The Mahalla institution is a force that strengthens friendship and solidarity and serves the prosperity of society; justice, selflessness, and spiritual purity prevail here. Mahalla initiates national rituals, observes traditions and customs, and organises hashers (joint work) and other events. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 25)

According to participants, parents were actively involved in the disciplinary measures at schools, and often, when pupils broke the dress code, teachers either warned that they would notify their parents if they were disobedient or immediately called their parents, even sometimes shaming them:

If we violated the dress code, we were checked in front of the entrance to the school, and there was security or someone from the headteachers. They just checked how we looked. If they didn’t like it, then at the same moment, they called our parents and scolded them that we were not properly dressed and that our parents were not watching us. (Uzbek- R2, female)

Dress code was therefore highlighted as crucial school disciplinary practices to construct youth identities, noting that rigorous measures were systematically applied to pupils who failed to comply (Table 38). Although the punishment varied depending on the schools and teachers, it typically included scolding, summons to the director’s office, writing a sorry letter, and sending back home. Disciplinary measures, demonstrating to pupils what are norms and what are not, and what are consequences for those who deviate, remind them that they are under constant surveillance, reinforcing self-discipline and

leading to the construction of docile bodies that internalise social norms and regulations (Foucault, 1975, 1988, 2008).

**Table 38**

*Differences in Disciplinary Actions between Uzbek- and Russian-Medium Schools*

Focus	Disciplinary Action
Uniform	<p>“She or he [pupil] couldn’t enter the class. Teachers said, ‘Go home and wear your uniform, then come to the lesson’” (Uzbek1, female).</p> <p>“If you wore trainers, you were sent back home to change into school shoes. It didn’t matter whether your house was far or not” (Uzbek3, female).</p> <p>“If you wore a short skirt, you were sent back home to change to a long one. If boys didn’t wear their ties, teachers made them go home and wear the ties” (Tajik1, female).</p>
Hair	<p>“When a boy had long hair, she [teacher] always told him to shorten it again and again. Then, if that boy didn’t cut, our teacher would get angry and cut that boy’s hair. She cut his hair when everyone was in the classroom” (Uzbek1, female).</p> <p>“They [teachers] threatened to shave our heads if we didn’t cut our hair. Of course, there were some students whose hair was shaved on purpose” (Uzbek3, female).</p> <p>“At the entrance, they first warned. Once the teachers left the gate, we went to the classroom. When teachers came back to check on us, male teachers cut four pupils’ hair, including mine” (Tajik2, male).</p> <p>“Teachers came and cut their [boys’] hair. They started cutting whenever they wanted in the classroom” (Tajik1, female).</p>

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Nail	“If pupils’ nails were long, they were cut on the spot. You cut your nails with your hands. If they [nails] were polished, you were scolded and needed to remove them with acetone” (Uzbek3, female).
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It is noteworthy that disciplinary practices, reflecting both strong and “bad boy” imagery and the notion of national honour associated with women as promoted in school discourses, were found to be highly gendered. For instance, while pupils who violated the dress code were subjected to labour or exercise, girls were predominantly assigned cleaning duties, whereas boys faced punishments that involved more physical work: “They [teachers] punished us. For example, most girls had to clean the bathroom, and most boys helped with garden work, for example, cutting trees” (Uzbek3, female). This “gender differentiated punishment” (p. 4) not only reinforces gender norms but also perpetuates power asymmetries where women and men are associated with different values (Tsouroufli, 2020). Moreover, while various disciplinary practices were employed to deter “disobedient pupils”, both girls and boys, from repeating their actions and to remind others to conform to societal norms, public displays of punishment, often involving a sense of embarrassment, were primarily directed at male pupils: “They [teachers] said something like, ‘Oh, a boy with long hair? Why? Wrong sexual orientation? You don’t want to be regarded like them [gay people]. Cut your hair, please” (Russian5, male);

We had one teacher who used to measure boys’ hair length. If the hair was longer than the rule, they were told to wear girls’ hair pins, and these words were really embarrassing for boys. Once in the class, one boy’s hair was very long, and his teacher took a ribbon and tied his hair. He was embarrassed in front of every other pupil, and some laughed at him. Mainly girls laughed at him. (Tajik3, male)

Through punitive school practices, such as these teachers’ discursive remarks, educators play a key role in shaping what is deemed acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for girls and boys. They signal to students the consequences of transgressing gender norms and institutionalise heteronormative ideals of femininity and masculinity among youth (Tsouroufli, 2021). Such practices contribute to the performative nature of gender, reinforcing social expectations and promoting gendered national identities (Butler, 1990). Indeed, youth are often homogenised in international discourses and treated as a uniform

group without consideration of their specific political, social, and cultural contexts. Additionally, the dichotomous construction of gendered national identities, frequently shaped in relation to “external others”, further reduces women and men to homogenised social categories despite the internal diversity and inequalities that exist within these groups (Durrani, 2008). This process not only supports the dominant gender norms but also marginalises those who do not conform to these expected norms, illustrating how institutional practices perpetuate and enforce rigid and binary gender identities.

Furthermore, Lineika (school assembly) was also noted as an opportunity not only to inspect school uniforms but, in some schools, to publicly punish pupils who did not comply with the dress code:

For example, for boys, if boys didn't go to the barbershop to cut their hair, they were punished. They [teachers] called a lot of boys. For example, ten or 30 boys went to the centre [of the assembly], and our director cut their hair. Not all the hair, but some. (Uzbek3, female)

It is to highlight that during Lineika, those who were publicly punished were predominantly boys, reinforcing their “bad boy” image. Meanwhile, the exclusion of girls from such public embarrassment suggests a “safeguarded image”, positioning them as embodiments of national honour. As previously discussed, the widespread portrayal of “bad boys” among Uzbekistani youth, particularly in school settings, illustrates how such performative acts of gender norms naturalise stereotypical gendered images. Furthermore, pupils who violated the dress code, mainly in Uzbek-medium schools, were subject to physical labour or exercise, whereas such a practice was absent in Russian-medium schools: “They punished us. For example, most girls had to clean the bathroom, and most boys helped with garden work, for example, cutting trees” (Uzbek3, female). These gendered disciplinary practices represent a “stylisation of bodies” (Butler, 1990) through which gender norms and broader social and political ideologies are instilled. By regulating attire, institutions, including schools, exert control over bodies, reinforcing compliance with gendered expectations and societal norms. It is worth noting that according to participants, Lineika was widely utilised across different schools to instil disciplinary norms, not only from gender perspectives but also to foster values like self-discipline, diligence, and productivity. During Lineika, highly achieved pupils were awarded in front of everyone (Figure 54), often with certificates (Figure 55) and gifts, such as a book,

notebook, or even money in rare cases: “Teachers would, for example, comment, ‘She is such a good student!’ and the teacher would praise good students with good grades in front of everyone. They praised how good it was!” (Uzbek-R1, female).

**Figure 54**

*Awarding a High-Performing Pupil during Lineika*



*Note. A picture taken by the author during the fieldwork. The school principal reads out the certificate, and students applaud.*

**Figure 55**

*Certificate Awarded to a High-Performing Pupil in a District Uzbek Language Competition*



*Note. A picture taken by the author. An honorary certificate was given to an 8th-grade pupil who participated in a district-level essay competition for the “October Mother Tongue and Uzbek Language Science Month”.*

However, while “good pupils” were publicly praised for their achievements during Lineika, the assembly simultaneously served as a platform to discipline “bad pupils”. Those with low academic performance, poor attendance, or defiant attitudes were typically reprimanded or warned in front of their peers. Therefore, this dual function of praise and punishment exemplifies the mechanism of discipline and control, as discussed by Foucault (1975, 1988), highlighting the underlying power dynamics at play. In this context, the dress code becomes a battleground where resistance to gender norms and normative societal expectations is confronted with disciplinary actions. Consequently, the dress code does more than regulate appearance; it embodies the intersection of power, control, and identity, illustrating how gendered identities are both shaped and perpetuated through institutional practices. As tools for enforcing socially constructed gender norms, the dress code is hence integral to the broader power framework that informs how gender should be performed and embodied. Deviations from these norms are disciplined, thus perpetuating gender identities (Butler, 1990, 1993).

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined how school discourses frame gender and promote it as a key marker in shaping Uzbekistani youth national identities. Given that gender is a social construct requiring constant and repetitive performative acts (Butler, 1990), the analysis revealed that Uzbekistani school discourses are highly gendered, attributing different values, qualities, norms, and expectations to women and men. Through such school discourses, not only a binary notion of gender is normalised, but hierarchical gender relations are also evident, often positioning women as inferior in both qualitative and quantitative dimensions. Reflecting the broader patriarchal structure of Uzbekistani society, the national images promoted in textbooks are overwhelmingly male-centred, rendering women invisible and less valued in national images. Hence, national pride and glory, promoted as crucial in constructing Uzbekistani national identity as discussed in [Chapter 5](#), are primarily associated with male figures, reinforcing symbolic hierarchies between women and men. As Yuval-Davis (1997) argued, such male-centred national discourses that overlook female contributions are common practices in nation-building processes. Furthermore, youth discourses on gender mirrored these school discourses, depicting women and men with distinct norms while perpetuating hierarchical power

dynamics. This underscores how school discourses instil “official knowledge” (Apple, 1979), shaping “truths” and social “realities” of youth.

However, although these gendered school discourses establish and naturalise power asymmetries, it is important to recognize that the concept of gender is established through the binary relations of women and men, both of whom are subject to gender norms. Further analysis indicated that not only women but also men are subjected to distinct gendered expectations. While textbooks typically depict women as weak, vulnerable, and dependent, men are portrayed as strong and protective. Drawing on the notion of masculinity, men are depicted as both “bad boys” and defenders of the nation, reinforcing “typical” male images and social expectations placed on men to perform these gendered roles. On the other hand, school discourses often portray women as carriers of national culture, traditions, and honour. Such female depiction was further reinforced through school disciplinary practices, where girls’ punishments were often linked with the notion of “shame” (Uyat in Uzbek), a notion not equally applied to boys. It is important to highlight that the enforcement of the dress code was revealed to be a crucial school practice in reinforcing not only gender norms but also self-regulation, shaping national identity in alignment with state-promoted gendered discourses, as emphasised by Foucault (2008) through his concept of “biopolitics”. Similarly, disciplinary actions were found to play a crucial role in inculcating gender norms and expectations distinct for girls and boys, further reinforcing the construction of gendered national beings.

Overall, Uzbekistani educational discourses engage with gender as a critical national marker, promoting gendered national identities. Gender, as a national marker, not only differentiates Uzbekistan from “external others” by constructing positive national images but also shapes “internal others”, positioning women as inferior within the hierarchical power dynamics between women and men. Moreover, through the overlapping gendered school practices and youth discourses, the power-discourse-knowledge nexus was found to play a pivotal role in constructing gendered national identities among youth, underscoring the critical role of schools in normalising gender norms and reinforcing binary national identities.

## Chapter 7: Reconceptualising Ethnicity: Uzbekistani and “Uzbekness”

### Introduction

Although ethnicity is often regarded as an inherent group with distinct cultural qualities emphasising “authentic” roots, blood and ancestors, as Barth (1969) argued, what constructs ethnicity is not distinct cultural enactments but rather social boundaries, which divides “us” from “them”. The construction and maintenance of the boundaries is indispensable to give a sense of continuity to ethnicity, so certain identity enactments become normalised and crystallised as “authentic” signifiers of the nation, forging national unity. Belonging to a specific ethnic group, therefore, involves ascription of particular features, such as language, religion, dress codes, life-style, and cultural and moral values. This is a dual process involving self-ascription as well as ascription by significant “others”, and ethnic identity, therefore, requires both intra- and inter-ethnic group social interactions (Barth, 1969). By exhibiting these features, individuals claim and distinguish their ethnicity while making boundaries with “others”. These features are not descriptive or fixed as they change overtime. Relevance of cultural features vary in time and place, so that ethnic boundaries are maintained accordingly, enabling the ethnic group to keep a sense of continuity (Barth, 1969). However, while constructing national awareness and distinction from “external others”, ethnicity can simultaneously create internal others, notably in a multi-ethnic context, like in Uzbekistan. Since ethnicity is a discursively constructed social group involving power dynamics, the promotion of ethnocentric national identity tends to concentrate resources around the dominant groups, leading to structural inequalities that push minorities to the periphery and potentially fuel grievances (Ozawa et al., 2024).

Uzbekistan is a diverse, multi-ethnic society, home to an estimated 130 different ethnic groups (United Nations, 2020). However, despite this rich cultural mosaic, national discourses since independence have increasingly adopted an ethnocentric approach, positioning “Uzbekness” as a key marker of the national identity, a trend similarly observed across Central Asia (Fumagalli, 2007). While such an emphasis on a dominant ethnic identity as a national marker may lead to the exclusion of ethnic minorities, my study also revealed interesting diverse relations of different ethnic groups engaging with this superimposition of Uzbek identity on Uzbekistani identity.

This chapter first examines how school discourses address inter-ethnic harmony and how Uzbek ethnicity is represented as a national marker. Furthermore, reflecting the post-Soviet context of Uzbekistan, the gaps in discourses on national identities between Uzbek and Russian-medium schools and tensions between identifications of youth who attended those two different schools are explored. By examining these discourses and perspectives, the chapter seeks to shed light on the complexities of nation-building in a multi-ethnic post-colonial society.

### **“Uzbekness” as a National Marker**

#### *Uzbek National Heroes*

The analysed Tarbiya textbooks are filled with historical figures portrayed as representations of national pride due to their contributions to various domains, such as science, physics, philosophy and literature. As part of Uzbekistani national history, these figures are often presented as national heroes and the embodiment of national values, aspirations, and pride, serving as role models for future generations. This active promotion of historical figures, involving symbolic figures, myths, shared history, and cultural representations, in constructing national identity highlights the discursive nature of nation-building (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1994). By glorifying certain historical figures and integrating them into national discourses, societies construct and reinforce collective memories and values that define the “imagined community”, in other word, the nation. However, while these historical figures in the textbooks are frequently promoted as national heroes, they are all ethnic Uzbeks or born in the current territory of Uzbekistan and exclusively men, highlighting the ethnic centered and gendered nature of Uzbekistani national pride (Table 39).

**Table 39**

#### *Different Uzbek Historical Figures as National Heroes*

Name	Profession	Description in textbooks
Abdulla Oripov	Poet	“Hero of Uzbekistan” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 6).
Abu Mansour Moturidi	Scientist	“In the works of the great scientist Abu Mansur Moturidi (870-944), religious tolerance and equal

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		respect for all religions were emphasised” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 74).
Abu Nasr Farabi	Scientist	The rapid development of our country, its strength and power, and finding its place in the world community, actually, initially depends on the degree of your spirituality, pride and dignity. In the IX-XII centuries lived scientists such as ... Abu Nasr Farabi who made a significant contribution to the development of world science, also flourished in Khorezm. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 99)
Abu Rayhan Beruni	Scholar	“Abu Rayhan Beruni, 500 years before Columbus travelled, expressed the opinion that beyond the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, there is a mainland” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 103).
Al-Khwarizmi	Scientist	“Without Al-Khwarizmi, there would be no modern technology” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 51).
Abu Ali Ibn Sina	Scientist	“Europe is currently studying medicine based on the works of Ibn Sina” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 51).
Khorazmi; Ahmad Fargani; Burhoniddin Marginani; Imam Bukhari	Scientist	“Made a significant contribution to the development of world science, and also helped the academy in Khorezm to flourish” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 99).
Mahmudhoja Behbudi	Writer	“Padarkush by Mahmudhoja Behbudi, who was the mufti of Samarkand, was the first Uzbek drama” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 56).

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Ulugbek	Scientist	“If Ulugbek were alive now, Uzbeks would have been the first to travel to the moon”. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 51).
Amir Temur	Warrior	“The contribution of Amir Temur, Mirzo Ulugbek, Alisher Navoi, to the development of science and culture is priceless” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 99).
Mirzo Ulug’bek	Sultan	
Alisher Navoi	Poet	

The promotion of historical figures as national icons in school discourses is a commonly observed practice across Central Asia, reflecting the construction of new post-Soviet national identities (Asanova, 2007; Bekzhanova, 2024; Blakkisrud & Nozimova, 2010; Ismailova, 2004). Soviet education promoted socialist ideologies and celebrated Soviet historical figures, and Central Asian historical figures had limited or no representations (Nurbayev & Kiyubek, 2023). Soviet heroes included political leaders like Lenin and Stalin, space programme members like Gagarin, and figures like Pavel Morozov, a 13-years-old boy who was celebrated as a martyr for allegedly sacrificing his life for the Soviet cause by denouncing his father’s anti-socialist activities (Tishkov, 1994), de-Sovietisation became vital for nation-building process and constructing new national identities. Hence, as Said (1993) highlighted, the reconstruction of historical discourses, including historical figures, is integral to decolonisation processes:

The post-colonial period, with its promise of decolonisation, has led to a new historical consciousness in which formerly suppressed voices and histories are beginning to be heard and acknowledged. This reconceptualisation of the past often involves re-evaluating and revising historical narratives to fit new national identities and cultural contexts. (p. 25)

Along with the Tarbiya textbooks, the military textbooks are similarly filled with references to these same historical figures who, based on their glories and achievements in battles, are frequently illustrated as “great ancestors”. These figures are celebrated not only

for their patriotism but also for their discipline and are closely associated with the Armed Forces of Uzbekistan (Table 40).

**Table 40**

*Exemplary Uzbek Historical Figures*

Historical figure	Trait	Discourse
Amir Temur; Jaloliddin Manguberda; Shah Babur; Shiraq; Tomiris; Spitamen; Mukanna; Mahmud Tarabi; Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur	Patriotism	<p>We must always be ready to protect our country and maintain peace and independence. Military oath. The history of the Military Oath starts from ancient times. For example, in the troops of Amir Temur, there was such a custom: each military leader, according to the rule, represented their unit to the ruler, and the soldiers swore allegiance to him. (G11, p. 97)</p> <p>“The troops of Jaloliddin Manguberda and Shah Babur also had the same customs. The soldiers swore: ‘If I violate this solemn oath, then let me be overtaken by the severe punishment of the laws and contempt of people’” (G11, p. 97).</p> <p>National heroes such as Shiraq, Tomiris, Spitamen, Mukanna, Mahmud Tarabi, as well as the great commanders Jaloliddin Manguberda, Amir Temur, and Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur, are used as examples to hold lectures and conversations. The purpose of these lectures, conversations, and meetings is to bring to people’s consciousness the comprehensive study of the rich heritage left by their ancestors for young people. (G10, p. 6)</p>

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Amir Timur; Tomyris; Spitamen; Jalaluddin Manguberdy; Zakhiruddin Muhammad Babur	Discipline	<p>It is known from history that great commanders introduced certain rules to control their troops.</p> <p>An example is the set of rules introduced by Amir Timur. In the second part of this code, Amir Temur draws attention to the maintenance of troops and their management. Many states of the world widely use Amir Temur's experience in government and army management. (G10, p. 34)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">If there is no discipline in the army, it will decline. Discipline is the basis of victories. The great commanders, Tomyris, Spitamen, Jalaluddin Manguberdy, Amir Temur, and Zakhiruddin Muhammad Babur, thanks to the discipline of their troops, always won battles. (G10, p. 46)</p>
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Illustrated as examples of devotion and loyalty to the land and troops, young people are encouraged to follow the paths of their “great ancestors”, nurture their patriotism and enhance their sense of duty to protect the nation:

From a socio-political point of view, it teaches soldiers selfless service to the Motherland, to be devoted to military duty and personifies the most worthy qualities of the people and high patriotic feelings, the traditions of great ancestors and devotion to their wills. (G11)

Given that ethnicity is a discursively constructed social category, it is often promoted as “blood from the past” (Baumann, 2002, p. 19) to give it substantial existence. This is illustrated by the frequent use of words such as “ancestor” and “lineage” in the textbooks, through which Uzbek ethnicity becomes naturalised and perceived as a timeless reality and continuity. Learning about these historical figures is, therefore, important for instilling national awareness, especially in nation-building contexts like Uzbekistan, where constructing a new national identity is crucial for legitimising the nation's sovereignty and

unifying its populations, while giving a sense of permanence to the nation. As highlighted by a quote from the chair of the Moldovan Parliament's National Security Committee in New York Times in 2022, "Many of us are inclined to believe that if there is a state, then it should have a history", promoting seemingly timeless ethnicity and its associated historical achievements as national markers helps shape a sense of continuity and collective memory, thereby forming the foundation of a new nation-state (Carretero et al., 2012). Hence, to assert the legitimacy of the nation and its origin, other Central Asian countries' school discourses also draw upon ancient history, promoting historical figures from the past as "great ancestors" and glorifying their historical legacy (Bekzhanova, 2024; Ismailova, 2004). Moreover, learning about history can instil a sense of pride and, therefore, a positive feeling towards the nation, potentially leading to patriotism and reinforcing allegiance to the nation (Durand & Kaempf, 2014). The Tarbiya textbooks, therefore, describe acquiring knowledge about those historical figures and their achievements as an important and national duty for Uzbekistani national identity construction, indicating Uzbek-based national images:

As a person realises one's identity and leans more deeply about one's lineage, the feeling of love for the Motherland takes root in and grows in the heart. The deeper the knowledge, the stronger the love for the country where one was born and grew up. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 99)

Furthermore, as evident in a quote by President Mirziyoyev (Figure 56), the promotion of historical figures as national heroes and the emphasis on the notions of "ancestors" and "lineage" as national markers were also noted by participants as mundane school practices. According to participants, images and quotes of these historical figures were displayed at schools, prominently in classrooms, especially in history and Uzbek literature classrooms. In some schools, they were also exhibited in open spaces, such as corridors and entrance halls, emphasising the symbolic importance attributed to these icons in instilling national pride in young Uzbekistani (Figure 57). Aligning with the textbooks, as the most displayed historical figures, participants noted Amir Timur, Alisher Navoi, Ulugbek, Ibn Sina, Mirzolukhbek, Bobur and Al-Hkhorazmiy.

### **Figure 56**

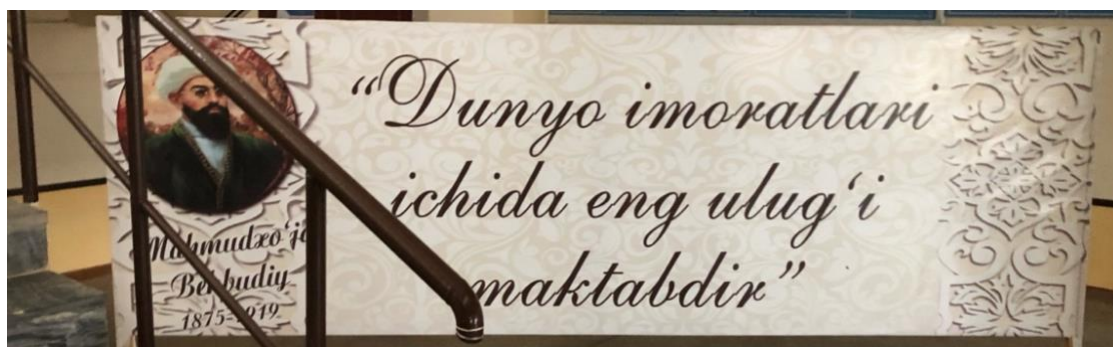
***President Mirziyoyev's Quote on National History at School Entrance***



*Note.* “We have a great history worth enjoying. We have valuable great ancestors, and we have valuable artistic treasures. I believe God will let us have a great future. Shavkat Mirziyoyev”

**Figure 57**

*Entrance Uzbek Historical Figure’s Display at a School Entrance*



*Note.* “The greatest building in the world is a school”, a quote by Mahmudihoja Behbudi, a prominent Uzbek intellectual, writer, and education reformer

In relation to these historical figures, schools frequently organised school trips to diverse sites, and “things about how, when and what people [of Uzbekistan] used to be was taught by ... teachers through history” (Tajik2, male). Whilst destinations, such as the State Museum of History of Uzbekistan and the Amir Timur Museum, were included, the most

visited locations were historical sites like Samarkand, Bhakra, Khiva, and Kokand (Figure 58).

**Figure 58**

*School Trips to Historical Cities*



*Note. Pictures shared by participants.*

During these trips, pupils visited various historical monuments and museums, learning about these Uzbek national historical figures, underscoring the accomplishments of Uzbeks, thus fostering national pride: “Once, I remember we went to an archaeological madrasa of Al-Hakim-at-Termiziy. I learnt at-Termziy was one of the great doctors of his period” (Uzbek12, male). Interestingly, ethnic minorities, particularly ethnic Tajiks, and even one ethnic Russian, considered Uzbek national heroes as their own:

We went to Samarkand to look at historical buildings. All I remember is the observatory of Mirza Ulugbek, which gave me a lot of information ... it was this trip [to Samarkand], thanks to this school, that made me understand how our ancestors studied the stars in those days. (Russian5, male)

However, while teaching how the nation developed through key historical figures and events provides a notion of continuity that reinforces a sense of belonging to a larger historical framework - a practice particularly relevant in new states (Carretero, 2012) - in the multi-ethnic context of Uzbekistan, focusing solely on ethnic-Uzbeks or individuals

born within the current borders of Uzbekistan as national heroes, and emphasising Uzbek ethnicity through terms like “ancestors” and “lineage” as national markers, may exclude non-Uzbek ethnic minorities from national representations. As Brubaker (1996) highlighted, post-independence Central Asian states have been characterised as “nationalising states” and in many Central Asian schools, this nationalising tendency is evident in the ethnocentric nature of historical discourses, where the titular ethnic group is often promoted as the primary symbol of national identity, leading to an “indigenisation” of history (Ismailova, 2004). Although promoting ethnocentric historical figures as national heroes aims to reclaim national identity from Soviet influences, which had emphasised an overarching Soviet identity that marginalised indigenous identities (Blakkisrud & Nozimova, 2010), in the multi-ethnic context of Uzbekistan, such discourses often reinforce the status of dominant ethnic groups while marginalising minorities, thereby exacerbating ethnic tensions and grievances (Ozawa et al., 2024). For instance, a study of Tajik textbooks highlights the extensive ethnocentric glorification of Tajik history, while portraying Uzbekistan as an “antagonistic external other” and depicting it as a national enemy (Ismailova, 2024). This is particularly sensitive given the history of violent conflicts between ethnic-Tajiks and ethnic-Uzbeks, which risks inflaming tensions and potentially destabilising the region. Such ethnocentric discourses can hence heighten tensions. It is to underscore that this ethnocentric national pride reflects the nature of ethnicity as a social artefact, defined and maintained through social boundaries between “us” and “them”, not necessarily by cultural qualities themselves (Barth, 1969). Through these boundaries, ethnicity becomes homogenised as a distinct group, with certain characteristics attributed and naturalised as norms (Brubaker, 2004). However, as ethnicity becomes crystallised and “grouped”, these boundaries establish not only other ethnic groups as “external others” but also “internal others” within the nation, leading to asymmetrical representations in national images and hierarchical orders between different ethnic groups. This particularly occurs when ethnicity is positioned as a central national marker, shaping national awareness based on symbolic boundaries within different ethnic groups. In multi-ethnic contexts, like in Uzbekistan, these boundaries result in the dominant ethnic group, such as Uzbeks, being perceived as “us” and becoming the representative of the nation. Meanwhile, ethnic minorities are relegated to “internal others” and thus pushed to the peripheries, leading to structural inequalities and potentially not only decreasing their sense of national belonging but also fueling inter-ethnic grievances and tensions (Devos & Mohamed, 2014).

Indeed, gaps in the sense of belonging were observed among participants from different ethnic groups, albeit to varying extents. For instance, in contrast to ethnic Uzbek and Tajik participants, who mentioned a range of school-promoted Uzbek historical figures as their source of national pride and took me to a Square (Amir Timur Square) and a park (Magic City Park) in Tashkent, so I can take some pictures with the statues of Amir Timur and Alisher Navoi (Figure 59), most ethnic-Russians, with one exception, demonstrated little or no interest in these historical figures: “The most beloved [national icons] for us? I don’t even know. ... But they [the school] told us about their biographies. In general, *their achievements are mostly much overestimated* [emphasis added]” (Russian1, female).

### Figure 59

#### *Me Taking Pictures with the Statues of Amir Timur and Alisher Navoi*



*Note.* Left: A picture taken by the author. Amir Timur (Amir Timur Square); Right: The author’s picture taken by a participant. Alisher Navoi (Magic City)

Moreover, compared to ethnic Uzbeks, both ethnic Tajik and Russian participants often indicated a weaker sense of attachment to their overarching Uzbekistani national identity. For instance, although they identified with Uzbek ancestors and icons, many ethnic-Tajik participants expressed their strong sense of belonging to their ethnic identity over the umbrella Uzbekistani national identity: “I feel more Tajik than Uzbekistani” (Tajik3, male; Tajik4, male; Tajik6, male). Regarding ethnic-Russian participants, although none of them indicated a strong attachment to their ethnicity, unlike ethnic Tajiks, and

many explicitly expressed that they felt “Uzbekistani” and described Uzbekistan as “my country” and “homeland”, they simultaneously often based their sense of belonging to Uzbekistan on the fact they were born and raised in Uzbekistan rather than national values, unlike ethnic-Uzbeks: “You can say that my homeland is Uzbekistan, like I grew up here” (Russian3, female). Also, one participant explicitly expressed that she felt more Russian and not Uzbekistani, indicating some disconnected feelings with Uzbekistan. Interestingly, many also underlined the important presence of ethnic Russians in Tashkent, making them feel not necessarily as a minority: “I wouldn’t even say that we are a minority at all. Oh yes, by the way, there are a lot of us [in Tashkent]” (Russian4, female). Furthermore, despite their awareness as Uzbekistani, a critical perspective towards Uzbekistan stood out among the ethnic-Russian participants compared to those from other ethnicities: “Although I do not agree with some of the situations in our country, I am still Uzbekistani. I can say that I do not respect the policy of our state to some extent” (Russian5, male);

Yes, yes, yes, this is your flag, this is your national emblem. These people, of course, are yours there, the president whom you did not directly elect. But what can we do? Well, he is still yours. (Russian3, female)

Furthermore, whilst participants from Uzbek and Tajik ethnic groups expressed a desire to study abroad and return to Uzbekistan to contribute to national development, ethnic Russians expressed no such desire. On the contrary, some ethnic Russians expressed a willingness to leave the country without any particular desire to return, indicating some gaps in the relations with Uzbekistan among different ethnic groups, even within ethnic minorities, such as Tajiks and Russians:

I can’t say they [teachers] helped [understand Uzbekistan and its values]. On the contrary, they made it so that I want to leave this country ... I want to leave from here [Uzbekistan], but I don’t know how it will turn out ... I just want to leave ... take my mother, take my sister, just leave. (Russian2, female)

It is also noteworthy that among participants, ethnic Russians were the only ones who expressed weaker ties with their families, with many wanting to leave their families as soon as they could. In contrast, ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks emphasised family as a national value, underscoring differences in values among different ethnic groups. However,

interestingly, the fluidity of national belonging among ethnic Tajiks and Russians was also noticed in discussions surrounding international sports competitions, which involved “external others”. My fieldwork in the fall of 2022 overlapped with the period of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup, and although many ethnic Tajiks expressed greater importance attached to their Tajik ethnic identity over Uzbekistani national identity, in the context of international competition involving “external others”, their national awareness as Uzbekistani became stronger: “If Uzbekistani and Tajikistani football teams will fight, I will, of course, support Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is my country” (Tajik3, male). This highlights the homogenising process of national identity construction, which seeks to unify diverse individuals under common markers, resulting in flattening “internal differences, rendering internal power hierarchies invisible” (Durrani & Crossouard, 2020, p. 315). Similarly, ethnic-Russian participants also describe the rise in their sense of national belonging during international sports competitions, highlighting the role of “external others” in constructing national awareness as Uzbekistani and the relational aspect of identity:

It’s so strange that if Russia is playing with someone else, then I’m for Russia, and if Russia is playing against Uzbekistan ... Well, it will probably be, yes, Uzbekistan. ... They’re [Uzbekistani players] more ours. (Russian4, female)

Nevertheless, the analysis revealed notable disparities in the sense of national belonging between Uzbek youth and their peers from other ethnic minorities. Given that school discourses predominantly promote ethnic-Uzbek male figures as symbols of national pride, emphasising concepts of ancestry and lineage, these disparities in belonging become more pronounced in a multi-ethnic context. It is crucial for school discourses to address these gaps, particularly as ethnicity is not an organic or inherent trait but a socially constructed concept (Hall, 1996, 1997; Bhabha, 1994). Drawing on Foucault’s (1972) ideas on power, discourse, and knowledge, it becomes evident that schools, as key institutions of knowledge production, play a central role in shaping national identity by normalising and internalising discourses and representations that students encounter. By promoting more equitable representation of ethnic minorities or reducing ethnocentric representation of national images, schools can foster a greater sense of inclusion that transcends these limiting constructs.

### *Inter-Ethnic Harmony*

Given that Uzbekistani school discourses actively promote a peaceful self-image, describing peace as a national value, the inter-ethnic national context is also discussed in the Tarbiya textbooks in relation to the concept of peace and harmony. As a multi-ethnic state, Uzbekistani textbooks emphasise the importance of inter-ethnic tolerance and cohesion and the state's commitment to diversity, albeit in a limited manner. Notably, discourses often highlight the accomplishment of Uzbekistan in maintaining peace despite its multi-ethnicity: "Uzbekistan is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country. Today, representatives of more than 130 nationalities and peoples live together in our country like one family with children" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 71). Interestingly, the analysis reveals that when inter-ethnic harmony in Uzbekistan is commented on, the word "tolerance" is often employed, such as "the long-standing traditions *of tolerance of our people* [emphasis added]" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 71) and "our work to strengthen interethnic and interfaith harmony and tolerance has reached a new level" (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 33). Although the word tolerance itself does not convey negativity, quite the opposite, in the context of multi-ethnicity and frequent association of Uzbek ethnicity with Uzbekistani national markers, it may allude to the dominant ethnic group (Uzbeks) -centred perspective, possibly implying that Uzbeks tolerating non-Uzbeks, and a potential hierarchy between the dominant and non-dominant ethnic groups. Nevertheless, despite the ambiguous nuance of the word "tolerance", explicit disclosures on ethnicity and multi-ethnicity are all positive, promoting peace and harmony. Furthermore, to underline the state's multi-ethnic inclusiveness, the G11 indicates seven different languages of instruction offered in Uzbekistan, displaying a picture of Tarbiya textbooks in Uzbek, Karakalpak, Russian, Kazakh, Tajik, Kyrgyz and Turkmen (Figure 60).

#### **Figure 60**

#### ***Tarbiya Textbooks Offered in Seven Different Languages***



Note. G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 29

The textbooks also contain some group photos of people, assuming Uzbekistani, wearing traditional clothes of different ethnic groups, highlighting inter-ethnic harmony in Uzbekistan (Figure 61).

**Figure 61**

*People in Traditional Clothes of Different Ethnic Groups*



Note. G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 60 (left) and p. 124-125 (right)



Note. G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 32

Whilst inter-ethnic cohesion is actively promoted, the textbooks simultaneously describe multi-ethnicity as a potential cause of internal conflicts, further emphasising the

importance of inter-ethnic peace. Several inter-ethnic conflicts have occurred in the Central Asian region since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Therefore, inter-ethnic cohesion is important both for Uzbekistan and the region. For instance, in 2010, a violent clash between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan caused 350 deaths and the displacement of over 100,000 people (McGlinchey, 2011). A border conflict erupted between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in 2020, and multiple Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflicts have taken place in the past. In the textbooks, students are asked to reflect on issues related to inter-ethnic harmony and security concerns: “What is the importance of inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony in ensuring security and stability?” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 57). At the same time, nationalism and chauvinism are described as negative, and inter-ethnic peace and harmony are promoted as a key national value: “The biggest danger to tolerant relations between ethnic confessions is aggressive nationalism and chauvinism. A society that falls into the trap of these vices and destructive ideas is doomed to perish” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 31). Similar to these school discourses, several participants illustrated Uzbekistan as a nation characterised by inter-ethnic harmony, emphasising the overarching Uzbekistani identity and expressing pride in the peaceful coexistence of various ethnic groups:

Uzbekistan is a friendly country. It is a country where more than 130 ethnicities live. Nobody in Uzbekistan discriminates against you, saying that you are Tajik, Uzbek, or someone else. Everyone is perceived as being equal in Uzbekistan. We don't have nationalism. (Tajik4, male)

However, despite school discourses promoting an inclusive national identity and inter-ethnic cohesion in Uzbekistan—values that participants from different ethnic groups also described as national values and sources of pride, my analysis revealed some disparities between these harmonious national self-image and participants' actual perceptions of ethnic minorities. Particularly, ethnic Russians were regarded as “internal others” by both ethnic Uzbeks and Tajiks: “For Uzbeks who go to Russian schools, they are still Uzbeks and the expectations and rules of Uzbek society still apply to them, not for ethnic-Russians” (Uzbek8, female). Notably, non-Muslim aspect of ethnic Russians was highlighted as a salient boundary marker to “other” them:

Those who study at Russian, Uzbek or Tajik-medium schools are all the same. However, for ethnic Russians, the only difference might be their religion. The rest are all the same. We are all the same regardless of our ethnicity, except maybe Russians due to our religious differences (Tjaik3, male).

Moreover, while gendered national discourses construct women as bearers of national tradition, culture, and honour (Yuval-Davis, 1997), ethnic Russian women were further described as “internal others” to whom different moral standards applied and who were subject to less scrutiny and surveillance by peers and society, notably due to their cultural and religious differences:

There are double standards for women of Russian and Uzbek backgrounds. While men judge and shame Uzbek women as “Uyat” based on how they get dressed, men do not even care how ethnic Russians get dressed. They do not even have negative judgmental feelings for them because they are Russians and not Muslims. (Uzbek9, female)

This ethnic Russians’ “otherness” at the same time implied that they were afforded certain privileges as a result of their perceived outsider status. Nevertheless, by internally “othering” ethnic Russian women and holding them to lower moral expectations and national values, they were also seen as less ideal Uzbekistani women. Therefore, although they were “off the hook” and privileged in some respects, they were simultaneously subject to some stereotypes: “There’s the stereotype that if you’re ethnic Russian, you’re *a whore* [emphasis added]” (Uzbek-R3, female). While various cultural features serve to signal belonging to specific ethnic groups, some hold greater significance as boundary markers that distinguish one group from another (Barth, 1969). Islam, therefore, played a key role in constructing an “us/them” divide, with ethnic Russians positioned as “others”. In this context, ethnic Tajiks, although also “othered” by ethnic Uzbeks, had another form of “otherness” that differed somewhat from that of ethnic Russians. Despite linguistic differences, the shared cultural and religious ties - both Uzbeks and Tajiks being predominantly Muslim - meant that the boundaries of “othering” were less pronounced for Tajiks compared to Russians. However, ethnic Tajiks were still often depicted negatively by Uzbeks, with stereotypical portrayals that reinforced these divisions: “I don’t like ethnic Tajiks, *I don’t know* [emphasis added], they are rude” (Uzbek7, female); “I don’t like Tajik

language, it sounds bad. *I don't know why* [emphasis added], but maybe because it is not Uzbek" (Uzbek-R6, male). Moreover, once, when an ethnic-Uzbek participant was asked whether she was ethnic Tajik, she replied, "Nooo!" with contempt, indicating her negative view towards ethnic Tajiks.

However, while ethnic Russians and Tajiks were "othered", their portrayals of ethnic Uzbeks were not negative, indicating some disparities among ethnic groups. Emphasising the importance of overarching Uzbekistani identity over ethnic distinctions, ethnic-Russians often argued that ethnicity held little or no significance in distinguishing people, placing more value on personalities: "If it's just ethnicity, it doesn't matter at all" (Russian3, female); "Our differences are not based on ethnicity but rather on personalities" (Russian2, female). Nevertheless, despite downplaying the importance of ethnicity as an identity marker, several ethnic Russians characterised ethnic Uzbeks as traditional and less expressive than themselves, subtly "othering" Uzbeks based on ethnic differences: "becoming friends with ethnic Uzbeks is difficult because they are more traditional" (Russian2, female). However, most ethnic Russians did not portray Uzbeks negatively, except for one participant who described them as ethnocentric, revealing underlying discontent and suggesting some tensions:

If we talk about Uzbekistan, then those Uzbeks who are deep in their ethnicity, who are like this, I would definitely not want to be so obsessed with any ethnic difference that if you are not the same, then you are bad. We have many of those; I wouldn't want to be like them. They have a very narrow worldview, and most people are not very smart. It's like those people who just have conservative views, that you're good [if conservative] ... if you're not like that, you're bad. I definitely wouldn't want to look at the world like that ... But if you look at it objectively, this is wrong. So you can't judge people by their ethnic race, that you're bad, you're good. Our ethnic group is the most normal. (Russian4, female)

Similarly, despite the negative depictions of ethnic Tajiks by ethnic Uzbeks, many ethnic-Tajik participants emphasised their sameness as ethnic Uzbeks: "Tajiks and Uzbeks are the same" (Tajik2, male); "The difference between Uzbeks and Tajiks is only the language, the rest is the same" (Tajik1, female). Furthermore, interestingly, while many ethnic Tajiks expressed a stronger attachment to their ethnic identity over Uzbekistani, they

simultaneously referred to the school-promoted historical figures as their “ancestors”: “*We are descendants* [emphasis added] of scientists [such as Al-Khwarazmi], we are from their nation” (Tajik4, male); “The red [of the Uzbekistani national flag] symbolises the blood of *our great ancestors* [emphasis added]” (Tajik1, female). This suggests the coexistence of ethnic and national identities, as ethnic minorities can maintain their ethnic identity while also feeling a sense of belonging to the nation. The promotion of interethnic harmony through school discourses, which highlight a variety of national markers not exclusive to Uzbek ethnicity, underscores the important role schools play in bridging divisions among different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, despite the positive national images of Uzbekistan promoted by schools, including inter-ethnic harmony, my analysis also reveals some gaps in participants’ friendship patterns. Many participants indicated, and this was also observed throughout my fieldwork, that they primarily socialised with individuals from only the same ethnic group and rarely mingled with others. This indicates yet-to-be-achieved inter-ethnic harmony within Uzbekistani youth and the limits of school education in shaping a unified national identity among youth.

Furthermore, reflecting some negative perspectives of ethnic-Uzbek youth towards ethnic minorities, several participants from ethnic minority groups reported experiencing discrimination. Once again, faith appeared as one of the important boundary markers constructing insiders and outsiders among youth from different ethnic backgrounds: “Everybody [ethnic Russians] was told this [go to your country] as well, anyone who doesn’t has a Muslim ethnicity” (Russian2, female);

Because I grew up in the oblast [region], I faced xenophobia in the regions when they found out that I was a Crimean Tatar; I was told to go to my country, to Crimea. And if I tried to speak Uzbek but was not good at it, it would not be my native language. I was told, “First, learn the language appropriately, then contact us”. It was mainly government agencies. That’s it, but I can’t say that the entire nation of Uzbekistan is all bad. [If I were Uzbek], There wouldn’t be this xenophobia, and no one would tell me, ‘Go back to Crimea’. (Russian5, male)

Moreover, an ethnic Tajik participant voiced concerns about the ethnocentric discriminatory systems in Uzbekistan, which privilege ethnic Uzbeks and perpetuate existing structural inequalities among different ethnic groups:

If I get into the government, I won't get promoted to higher positions just because I belong to another nationality. It is a real-life event: Almost 90% of the people in my village are Tajiks. There were people who worked in authority, but their positions did not change over the years. Their experience and volume of information increased, but it ended with that. What did they do? It is something that really happened. They changed their nationality from Tajik to Uzbek, got new passports, and only then got promoted. To work in authority, to work in high positions, for example, in governance, have you ever seen a governor who is Tajik? Or a president. Laws even state that the president should belong to the Uzbek ethnicity. That's why I would like to be Uzbek. (Tajik4, male)

This participant's comment highlighted institutional power imbalances between Uzbeks, the dominant group, and other ethnic minorities, which are also reflected in school-promoted ethnocentric national discourses. These school discourses, mirroring broader social, political, and economic contexts, often produce knowledge that aligns with and reinforces the interests of dominant groups (Foucault, 1972). This dynamic primarily positions the dominant ethnicity at the core, relegating others to the periphery (Devos & Mohamed, 2014), such as ethnic Tajiks and Russians, thereby contributing to power asymmetries and perpetuating structural inequalities among different ethnic groups (Apple, 1979). Moreover, reflecting such state promotion of Uzbek-centered national identity and recognising such Uzbek-centered structural inequalities, when asked if they had to belong to another ethnic group, which would they most like to be, not only did several ethnic Tajik participants indicate Uzbek as the desired ethnicity, but some ethnic Uzbeks also indicated Uzbek as the preferable ethnicity in Uzbekistan: "There are more privileges in Uzbekistan for Uzbeks, that's why I wouldn't change" (Uzbek-R4, female). Therefore, although promoting inter-ethnic harmony as a national value is important, school discourses, key channels through which national markers and identity are constructed, need to address these disparities.

## **Various Uzbek and Russian Medium-Schools: Disparities and Tensions**

### ***Diminished National Markers in Russian-Medium Schools***

In the preceding sections, while examining school discourses and practices related to national identities, some were predominantly observed in Uzbek-medium schools. The

analysis uncovered some disparities in how national markers were promoted across Uzbek and Russian-medium schools, potentially influencing the construction of national identities among Uzbekistani youth who attended these two different types of schools in distinct ways. However, it is important to note that in Uzbekistan, a single curriculum is introduced across all schools, regardless of the medium of instruction (MOI), and the analysed textbooks also did not indicate any major disparities in content between those in Uzbek and Russian languages, if not some disparities due to the linguistic differences, which are used in Uzbek and Russian-medium schools, respectively. Hence, despite the common formal curriculum, findings suggest some gaps in school daily practices, such as the hidden and extra curriculum, particularly in teacher-pupil relations between schools with the two different languages of instruction. Considering the nation as a discursive and social construct (Hall, 1996) and recognising teachers as active social agents, schools and educators, as mediators of curriculum, possess the agency to negotiate and resist the implementation of the state-designed formal curriculum (Durrani & Dunne, 2010; Qazi, 2021). As a result, the curriculum is not always implemented exactly as prescribed. This reflects how educational practices are shaped by the interplay of institutional power dynamics, including school environments and organisations, which influence the hidden curriculum and contribute to variations in how national identities are constructed and represented in schools. Primarily, the disparities were observed in the promotion of national history, icons, symbols and the enforcement of disciplinary actions, including the inculcation of gender concepts.

### **Alternative National History**

Given that symbolic figures, myths and history play an important role in constructing the nation (Anderson, 1983; Bhabha, 1994), Uzbek-medium schools actively promoted national history as a key national marker in fostering national awareness and pride. Notably, histories of the Soviet era, independence and post-independent development were emphasised as significant events, serving to create positive national images by “othering” the Soviet past and thus constructing a new post-colonial national identity. However, contrasting such historical discourses in Uzbek-medium schools, participants who attended Russian-medium schools revealed somewhat different discourses used at school despite using a similar official curriculum. Although teachers in both Uzbek and Russian-medium schools frequently compared the living conditions in

Uzbekistan during the Soviet era and the present, while the former tended to highlight the hardships and challenges faced by Uzbekistan under Soviet rule, according to participants, the latter schools portrayed the Soviet era in a more positive light: “Many people who lived in Russia came to us and continued their activities and work here. That’s why Uzbekistan is very developed; many people come to us from other countries” (Russian5, male). Moreover, in contrast with Uzbek-medium schools, which illustrated the Soviet Union as a period devoid of educational opportunities and equality, repressive of Islam and traditions, and marked by servitude, Russian-medium schools depicted the Soviet era as providing improved education and quality of life, equal opportunities, and contributing positively to Uzbekistan’s development: “We were told that it was very good in the Soviet Union. Everyone was treated equal”y (Uzbek1, female); “They [teachers] said it [Soviet time] was better. Because, at that time, there was Communism, and people somehow lived ... even with low salaries, they lived well” (Uzbek6, male). Despite using textbooks with the same content, similar disparities in teaching national history between Uzbek and Russian-medium schools were also noticed concerning the independence of Uzbekistan. Overall, while the former tended to depict independence as something gained through struggles underlining independence movements, the former captured it as having emerged following the collapse of the Soviet Union:

During the USSR, we belonged; we were not any republic; we just belonged to Russia. But after independence, our president ensured [emphasis added] that we somehow separated from Russia and had our own republic. (Uzbek5, male); We were taught when it [Uzbekistan] gained independence, what it gave to Uzbekistan, and how it rose after the collapse of the Soviet Union [emphasis added]. (Russian2, female)

Although Russian and Uzbek-medium schools are provided with the same curriculum, some participants from the former schools even mentioned that neither life under Soviet rule nor the period of independence was covered in their national history classes. Interestingly, according to participants, while Russian-medium schools portrayed the Soviet period positively, they simultaneously highlighted progress and improvement in post-independent life in Uzbekistan, although the pride in these achievements was more underlined in Uzbek-medium schools. These differences in historical discourses in the two

types of schools highlight the significant role of the hidden curriculum in inculcating social and cultural norms, hence shaping the national identities of young individuals.

### **Underemphasised National Icons and Symbols**

While my analysis revealed that schools promote ethnocentric national markers, participants indicated that displays of these Uzbek national icons were slightly more present in Uzbek-medium schools. It is to be noted that in Uzbekistani school education, the literature textbooks used in Uzbek and Russian-medium schools differ due to their distinct linguistic nature. As a result, the decoration of literature classrooms also varied between these two types of schools; Uzbek writers and poets were displayed in the former, and Russian ones were exhibited in the latter. Moreover, a participant from a Russian-medium school recalled the prominent display of a Russian icon across the school: “Dostoevsky, it seems to me that he is very famous, and his picture was hung almost everywhere [at school]” (Russian1, female). Conversely, a participant from an Uzbek-medium school noted the absence of Russian icons in the Russian language classroom. Similarly, whilst both Uzbek and Russian-medium schools held various celebratory events, a participant from the latter school mentioned experiencing a Slavic celebration – something no participants from Uzbek-medium schools noted. This again highlighted a subtle discrepancy in how national markers were promoted between these two types of schools: “We had a Maslenitsa holiday every year. Everyone bought many, many pancakes. We made a kind of competition, and then we all sat making tea and eating in class” (Russian2, female).

Moreover, the disparities in school displays between these two types of schools extended beyond historical figures but also national symbols. For instance, two participants from different Russian-medium schools mentioned that their schools did not display national symbols or portraits of the president, unlike Uzbek-medium schools, where national symbols were prominently featured in the school environments. Additionally, participants noted that singing the national anthem, a ritual symbolising national independence and fostering youth national awareness, was more frequent in Uzbek-medium schools compared to Russian-medium ones. Hence, these disparities in the promotion of national icons and symbols suggest potential gaps in the hidden curriculum across schools with different MOIs, highlighting the agency of schools in enacting the

formal curriculum, leading to different school processes of youth national identity construction in Uzbek and Russian-medium schools.

### **Less Rigid Discipline**

Whilst disciplinary actions, which aim at standardising individuals' behaviours, attitudes and beliefs aligning with social norms (Foucault, 1975, 1988, 2008), and therefore moulding "ideal citizens", were a commonly observed practice in both Uzbek and Russian-medium schools, the latter ones were found to be somewhat more relaxed in their enforcement. Notably, the dress code was less strict in Russian-medium schools, again highlighting differences in school practices when it comes to instilling moral and behavioural norms: "We didn't really have a strict uniform. We had purple polo shirts, and in winter we could wear trousers. And we were allowed to come in jeans, in any type of jeans" (Russian1, female). Reflecting the national discourses that often embody women as symbols of national honour (Yuval-Davis, 1997), as observed in Uzbek-medium schools, this more relaxed approach to dress code in Russian-medium schools (Figure 62) indicates their less active promotion of gender norms, resulting in a weaker reinforcement of gendered national identities.

**Figure 62**

#### ***Disparities in the Stringency of School Uniforms in Uzbek and Russian-medium Schools***



*Note.* Pictures shared by participants. While short skirts were banned in both Uzbek (left) and Russian (right)-medium schools, the rule was more relaxed in the latter.

Moreover, consistent with the disparities in dress code strictness between Uzbek and Russian-medium schools, the interviews further indicated that punishments for dress code violations were more severe in the former setting. Punishment plays a crucial role in defining what is accepted and not accepted, demonstrating the consequences for those who refuse to conform. Therefore, inculcation of self-discipline constructs “docile bodies” that internalise social norms and regulations (Foucault, 1975, 1988, 2008). For instance, although both schools sent back home pupils who did not comply with the dress code as part of the disciplinary practices, Uzbek-medium schools exercised this disciplinary action more frequently and systematically than Russian-medium schools. Similarly, while teachers in Uzbek-medium schools often cut boys’ long hair after several warnings, such a measure was observed only in one Russian-medium school where teachers usually limited their intervention to warnings: “They [teachers] threatened pupils to be careful, or they would be shaved bald. But it didn’t go beyond threats” (Russian5, male). Furthermore, pupils from Uzbek-medium schools who violated the dress code were subject to physical labour or exercise, whereas such a practice was absent in Russian-medium schools. Reflecting the less strict disciplinary practices in Russian-medium schools, interviews also indicated a significant gap in the frequency of Lineika between Uzbek and Russian-medium schools. Whilst participants from Uzbek-medium schools unanimously reported a weekly occurrence of Lineika, only one participant from a Russian-medium school mentioned the same frequency. The remaining participants from the latter school affirmed that it took place only once or twice a year, primarily at the beginning and end of the school year, highlighting different approaches to instilling moral and behavioural norms in those schools:

We had such a rule that every Monday, we would gather in front of the school, sing the national anthem, and then raise the flag of Uzbekistan. After signing the national anthem, we would lower the flag. We would go into the classrooms, and then every time a teacher came in the classroom, we would have to get up, put our hands on the heart, and say, ‘Assalam aleikum’. These were such rules. But in fact, on Mondays, we met only once, and then no one else sang the anthem; the national emblem and the flag were not raised. (Russian5, male)

Moreover, while female-male relationships were actively discouraged in Uzbek-medium schools, where teachers often shamed girls for being close to boys by invoking the

concept of “Uyat” (shame), such practices were uncommon in Russian-medium schools. This difference is also reflected in the less strictly monitored dress code in Russian-medium schools, indicating a less active inculcation of gender norms, particularly in constructing women as bearers of national honour. Consequently, in these schools, there was less “stylisation of bodies” (Butler, 1990), and the concept of shame was less frequently employed to enforce gendered norms among youth, notably for girls: “When girls and boys were close, they [teachers] didn’t say anything. Our teachers treated it normally. On the contrary, teachers encouraged students to be friendlier towards each other [girls and boys]” (Russian1, female). This gap in the inculcation of gender norms and female-male relationships, which accompanied the notion of shame particularly in Uzbek-medium schools, my study revealed the students, both ethnic Uzbek and Russian from Russian-medium schools were by far more progressive in gender norms, and also female-male relations. For instance, some participants took part in my research as a couple from Russian-medium schools, and they were not shy about showing they were together through public display of affection, which is culturally very rare in Uzbekistan.

Nevertheless, all participants, regardless of their ethnicity or the kind of school they attended, articulated gender norms, which mostly overlapped with gendered textbook discourses. However, interestingly, these norms were not always the same among youth. For instance, there was a notable contrast in the perceptions of values associated with housewives between ethnic Russians and ethnic Uzbeks from Uzbek-medium schools. The emphasis on women’s hardship as housewives and their portrayal as the carriers of family honour was primarily discussed among the ethnic Uzbeks. It is to note that ethnic Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools did not share any views on housewives, as this topic emerged spontaneously among other groups during the focus group discussions. Ethnic Russians described wives as lazy and husbands as hardworking due to the socially constructed gendered arrangements through which wives became under “hypertrophied care” (Russian3, female) and “look like accessories” (Russian3, female);

Women don’t want to work because it’s arranged in such a way ... maybe women don’t want it. Not all of them ... I don’t know a woman who would like to work like this [very hard like men]. A woman wants only Saturdays and Sundays, when she can get a manicure and spend some time for herself. (Russian4, female)

However, it is noteworthy that while this discrepancy in gender values between participants from the two types of schools reflected differences in the promotion of gender norms, particularly regarding women's values as carriers of honour between these schools, it also highlighted broader cultural and social expectations between the two ethnic groups that extend beyond the school context. For instance, among ethnic Uzbek and Tajik participants, many associated women's and men's social positions with Islamic values, indicating the intersection of gender and religion as national markers: "From the perspective of religious [Islam], men are responsible for feeding and providing all the necessities of the family" (Uzbek3, female); "Each of them [Muslim woman and man] has their own responsibilities: men earn, they must provide for their families, and a woman should give care, love and domestic chores" (Uzbek-R4, female).

### *Hybrid National Identities*

Reflecting disparities in the practices related to national values between Uzbek and Russian-medium schools, the analysis further revealed tensions among ethnic Uzbeks who attended these two types of schools despite being in the same ethnic group. Interestingly, similar gaps in the sense of patriotism and national identities were observed in Kazakhstan between Kazakh youth who attended Kazakh and Russian-medium schools, highlighting the complex post-Soviet contexts in which new national identities are constructed (Nam, 2024). Notably, throughout my time spent with participants, Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools frequently underlined their differences from Uzbeks who attended Uzbek-medium schools, primarily noting "mentality" as a key boundary marker between them: "We have two categories of people in Uzbekistan, two mentalities; closed and open, who are more Western-minded" (Uzbek-R5, male). Uzbeks from Russian-medium presented themselves as open-minded, emphasising their differences from those who attended Uzbek-medium schools and highlighting the influence of their school experiences on their character development: "I became an open-minded person with a more Western mentality due to the Russian-medium school I attended; it allowed me to become more open-minded not like those who went to Uzbek-mediated schools" (Uzbek-R5, male); "We [Uzbeks who studied at Russian medium schools] are more Westerners than Uzbeks ... We are more open" (Uzbek-R2, female). For Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools, being Westerners was viewed as a positive feature.

Given that identity formation involves a process of inclusion-exclusion related to “otherness” (Hall, 1996, 1997) and considering that Uzbek youth share numerous markers with each other regardless of the type of schools they attended due to their common ethnicity, the concept of “Western mentality” emerged as a boundary marker used to construct “otherness” and differentiate between the two groups. However, it is worth noting that ethnic Russians did not make such distinctions between themselves and ethnic Uzbeks from Uzbek-medium schools, nor did they portray themselves with a “Western mentality”. This is likely because they were already “othered” through various distinct markers, such as ethnicity, language, and religion, among others. Furthermore, this “othering” phenomenon among ethnic Uzbeks underscores the socially constructed nature of ethnicity, which is not shaped by inherent cultural characteristics but by the creation and maintenance of social boundaries, as discussed by Barth (1969). Moreover, as “othering” processes often involve the hierarchisation of different social groups (Hall, 1996, 1997), Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools, while highlighting their open-mindedness, depicted those from Uzbek-medium schools as closed and shy, often negatively depicting them as inferior, with a sense of contempt. Therefore, they looked down upon and othered their counterparts Uzbeks from Uzbek-medium schools: “Those who study at Russian-medium schools have a more mature mentality than those at Uzbek-medium schools” (UzbekR1, female); “[Male] Uzbeks [in Uzbek-medium schools] are behaving badly, smoking and aggressive, fighting. They kinda always want to show off their manhood” (Uzbek-R6, male);

Those who attended Uzbek-medium schools are just so naïve and shy. If I had attended Uzbek-medium school, I would have had the *mentality of the G9* [emphasis added] today. The future goal of girls who study at Uzbek-medium schools is to go to Uzbekistani universities, and then what they get out of that is the right to get married soon after. (Uzbek-R2, female)

Furthermore, reflecting the “othering” discourses of ethnic Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools and their portrayal of those from Uzbek-medium schools as inferior, Uzbeks from Uzbek-medium schools, in turn, expressed anger towards those from Russian-medium schools for their condescending attitude, highlighting tensions among Uzbek youth: “Those [Uzbeks] who studied in Russian schools think they are better than us who studied in Uzbek schools” (Uzbek8, female); “Those who studied in Russian

schools always look down on us. They *want to be Russians, they think they are Russians* [emphasis added], and they always look down on us; they think they are better than us” (Uzbek9, female). It is to be noted that their frustrations were directed to only ethnic-Uzbeks and not ethnic-Russians, due to their non “normed Uzbek-like” behaviours and sense of superiority despite that they belong to the same ethnic group. The internal tensions among ethnic-Uzbek youth from different school settings highlight the complexities of post-colonial identity formation. As Derrida (1979) argued, identity construction involves traces of the past, and therefore, in Uzbekistan, the development of a new national identity inevitably incorporates elements of the colonial legacy. Bhabha (1994) described this post-colonial environment as a “third space”, where the colonial past and post-colonial present intersect and new hybrid national identities emerge. The portrayal of Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools - a remnant of the colonial past where the colonial language is the medium of instruction - as “wanting to be Russian” underscores how youth navigate and construct hybrid identities that blend their colonial heritage with contemporary national aspirations. This aspect of “wanting to be Russian” also reflects the phenomenon of “mimicry” (Bhabha, 1994), where the colonised imitate the colonisers’ culture, values, language, and behaviours as a way to navigate the (post)colonial system, as Fanon (1967) also discussed. Moreover, although the Soviet Union and the West were historically opposing forces, the fact that participants associated Russian-medium schools with a Western mentality suggests that they somehow viewed Russia closely linked to the West, in contrast to (Central) Asian and Islamic contexts. This potentially indicates a complex post-socialist environment where the Soviet past, “Uzbekness”, and Western values intersect. Their self-portrayal as Westerners thus implied their self-images and negotiations with “Uzbekness”. Their hybrid national identities were, hence, complex. Indeed, while many Uzbek participants from Uzbek-medium schools expressed their pride and satisfaction in being Uzbekistani, those from Russian-medium schools often conveyed a more conflicted sense of national belonging, feeling a disconnect from their compatriots: “I don’t necessarily feel Uzbekistani, but more a Western-minded person” (Uzbek-R6, male). This reduced sense of patriotism among Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools potentially may reflect a diminished emphasis on nationalistic discourses within these schools while fostering a sense of superiority as they identified more closely with Western ideals. Similarly, in contrast with those from Uzbek-medium schools who expressed pride in school-promoted national markers, such as morality, history and icons, those from Russian-medium schools indicated little interest in

them and rarely expressed national pride: “I can’t be called a patriot, I love Uzbekistan. I love nature. I love that it is very calm and that people are kind, but still, I a bit don’t like the mentality” (Uzbek-R1, female); “I was not particularly interested in the history of Uzbekistan since it is related to the past. I didn’t really care about the history. We didn’t have any special interest in any national heroes in our school” (Uzbek-R5, male). This clearly indicates social boundaries and, hence, gaps in national identities between Uzbeks who attended Uzbek and Russian-medium schools. Hence, as Bhabha (1994) highlighted, hybrid identities in the colonial and post-colonial settings are ongoing sites of negotiation, resistance and transformation, where identities are continuously redefined.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter explored the role of ethnicity as a national marker in shaping Uzbekistani national identity and examined how school discourses centre the construction of positive self-national images around the notion of ethnicity. Reflecting Uzbekistan’s multi-ethnic context, the analysis revealed that textbooks actively promote inter-ethnic harmony, a value many participants identified as an important national marker that evokes their sense of national pride. This discourse on inter-ethnic harmony in textbooks is often linked to the portrayal of Uzbekistan as a peaceful nation, as discussed in [Chapter 5](#). However, despite such a positive portrayal of Uzbekistan, my analysis further indicated a strong emphasis on Uzbek ethnicity as a national marker in constructing national identity. This was particularly evident through the promotion of various historical figures, most of whom were either ethnic Uzbeks or originated from what is currently Uzbekistan.

The ethnocentric nature of Uzbekistani national identity was also highlighted through the emphasis on the notion of ancestors and lineage, reinforcing the centrality of “Uzbekness” in shaping Uzbekistani national identity. Moreover, despite the promotion of inter-ethnic harmony, several participants from ethnic minorities shared their experiences of discrimination outside schools, including structural inequalities they faced due to their non-Uzbek ethnicity. This suggests a discrepancy between the positive national images promoted in schools and the lived experiences of minority youth. Additionally, the analysis uncovered negative and stereotypical portrayals of ethnic Tajiks and Russians among ethnic Uzbeks, which contradicted the schools’ emphasis on inter-ethnic harmony.

However, while many participants, particularly those from Uzbek-medium schools, expressed national pride in school-promoted historical figures they considered national

heroes, my analysis revealed disparities in national awareness and sense of belonging between youth who attended Uzbek- and Russian-medium schools. Examination of school practices indeed showed disparities in the implementation of the school curriculum and the commitment to the nationalist project. These differences were particularly salient in discourses around national history, including the Soviet past and independence, the promotion of national icons and symbols, and the strictness of school disciplines. These disparities in school practices highlighted the importance of the hidden curriculum in shaping youth national identities. Furthermore, reflecting such gaps in school practices, the analysis further revealed tensions between ethnic-Uzbek participants who attended Uzbek and Russian medium schools. The latter group emphasised their “Westernised” aspects, portraying themselves as superior to Uzbeks in Uzbek-medium schools and therefore “othering” them. These tensions underscored Uzbekistan’s post-colonial context, where its colonial past intersects with multiple values and ideologies, including indigenous and Western ones, creating a complex “third space” where hybrid national identities are constructed (Bhabha, 1994) through which youth negotiate and shape their national identities.

Overall, while educational discourses promote inter-ethnic harmony, there exist some disparities in the representation of ethnic minorities in national images, which are predominantly constructed around the dominant Uzbek ethnic group, positioning it as a key national marker. Reflecting these gaps, although many participants illustrated Uzbekistan as inter-ethnically harmonious, mirroring school discourses, their national experiences revealed different “realities”. These disparities were further underscored by the gaps in the curriculum’s enactment between Uzbek and Russian medium schools, highlighting the post-colonial context of Uzbekistan and revealing the complexity of shaping national identities within the “third space” (Bhabha, 1994).

## Chapter 8: Navigating Uzbekistani Secularism and Cultural Islam

### Introduction

While a range of national markers intersect with national identity, such as gender and ethnicity, as discussed in previous chapters, religion also emerged as a predominant marker of Uzbekistani national identity. Like other identity markers, religion is a social construct, which is a system of belief, through which particular notions of morality, in other words, “right” and “wrong”, are defined and “realities” are shaped (Faridi, 2019). However, given its socially constructed nature, state-promoted religion primarily reflects the dominant group’s ideologies, constructing social realities aligning with their visions, which institutional discourses, such as schools, naturalise as regulatory norms (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). As a result, while religion as a boundary marker creates “external others”, it simultaneously constructs “internal others” who do not adhere to the dominant religion (Asad, 1993).

In Uzbekistan, as in other Central Asian countries, religion has played a central role in shaping identity before, during, and after the Soviet rule, serving as both a source of cultural continuity and contestation. During the Soviet era, Islam was heavily suppressed as part of the broader socialist efforts to promote atheism and secularism (Khalid, 2007). This suppression sought to redefine national identities in line with socialist values, leading to a legacy of enforced secularism that persisted even after independence (Northrop, 2004). Although Islamic traditions continued covertly, Soviet policies left a profound footprint on public institutions, embedding secularism as a state ideology. Following independence in 1991, Uzbekistan saw a revival of Islamic values as religion re-emerged in constructing a new national identity. Yet, this revival was carefully managed by the state, blending Soviet-inherited secularism with selective Islamic practices to balance national unity and state control (Epkenhans, 2016; Khalid, 2014).

This chapter examines how religion is framed within secular school discourses and its intersections with other national markers in shaping Uzbekistani youth national identities. Notably, in the post-Soviet context, where authoritarian secularism has intensified since independence and Uzbekistan has simultaneously experienced a revival of Islam as part of constructing a new national identity, the chapter particularly explores the intricate relationship between secularism and piety in school environments, focusing on how Uzbekistani youth from diverse faith backgrounds navigate and negotiate their identities within this complex post-colonial landscape.

## **Cultural Islam: Religion as Moral Values**

### ***Religion as Regulatory Moral Foundation***

Despite the fact that Uzbekistan is a secular state and the school's official curriculum excludes religious education, the word "religion" is the sixth most mentioned word in the G10 and G11 Tarbiya textbooks. Indeed, although secular, the analysis revealed religion as a key national marker promoted through school discourses:

We know well from the history of mankind [sic] that no nation and people of the world could imagine their personal and social life without a certain system of religion and beliefs ... At all stages of historical periods, the main sections of society relied on the principles of one or another religious belief to conduct their activities. This situation is characteristic of all peoples and nations. (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 46)

However, given secularism, the Tarbiya textbooks do not refer to religion in direct relation to piety but rather as moral values, which are also promoted as crucial national markers as discussed in [Chapter 5](#). Religion is notably presented as educative "in raising a perfect person" (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 49) and is often referred to as the foundation of "spirituality" and "goodness" and moral values, such as peace, tolerance, kindness, and honesty. Indeed, religion, as a socially constructed system of belief, defines morality by regulating what is "good" and "bad" (Agbibo & Okem, 2011; Ghaffari, 2020), thereby shaping "realities" and playing a pivotal role in constructing national identities. This regulatory form of morality echoes Foucault's (1995) concept of power and knowledge, where systems of belief are utilised to control and normalise behaviours, moulding individuals who fit dominant social orders. Moreover, in Uzbekistan, Islam is often characterised as "cultural Islam", where religious practices are intertwined with cultural traditions, customs and social norms rather than being strictly observed in a purely religious sense (Khalid, 2007). This form of Islam emerged from a blend of different factors in which Uzbekistan is embedded: the Soviet history, during which religion was excluded from public life (Khalid, 2007); the flexibility of Sunni Islam, to which Uzbekistanis adhered, in accommodating local customs alongside Islam (DeWeese, 1994); and the post-Socialist context, where the state sought the construction of a new national identity and Islamic values have been revived as national markers (Kamp, 2006).

These dynamics thus have shaped the development of “cultural Islam” in Uzbekistan, where religion is framed more as a set of moral values and traditions than religious piety, as reflected in school discourses (Finke, 2014).

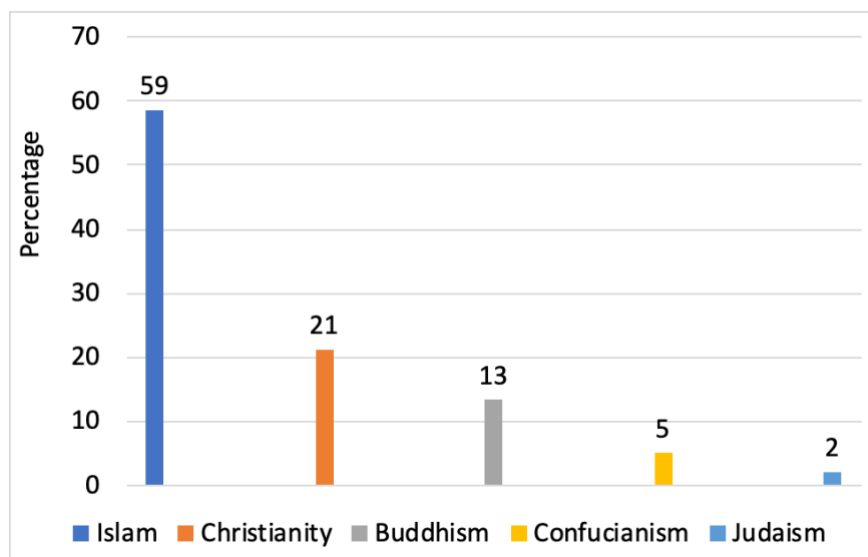
This concept of “cultural Islam” indeed could be observed among Muslim participants, for whom the distinction between Islam and Uzbekistani culture was blurred: “Islam is not religion but culture. While religion is not unanimous, culture is common. So, in Uzbekistan, Islam is a culture everyone shares” (Uzbek16, male). The Tarbiya textbooks, hence, highlight the regulatory role of religion in inculcating national values and constructing youth national identities: “Religion is important in preserving universal and national values and transmitting them from generation to generation” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 49); “Religion plays an important role as a factor in the formation and upbringing of young people’s thinking based on enlightenment” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 61). Through such school discourses framing religion as a gatekeeper of moral values and thus a national maker, “rightful” morality is institutionalised, which becomes crystallised as regulatory norms (Dunne & Crossouard, 2020).

### ***Islam as a National Marker***

Given that the Tarbiya textbooks have absorbed the former subject “History of Religions” (Din Tarixi in Uzbek), a range of religions, including Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, and Judaism, are presented in textbooks. The contents do not include in-depth knowledge but rather general information, discussing the evolution and main concepts of those religions. However, as Uzbekistan is a Muslim-majority country, with 88% of the total population identifying as Muslim (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2017), whilst the textbooks promote various moral values drawn from different religions, Islamic references remain the most prominent (Figure 63).

### **Figure 63**

#### ***Frequency of Religion-Related Words in the G10 and G11 Textbooks***



State-promoted religion, as a social construct, indeed often mirrors the ideologies of the dominant social group, becoming a key marker for shaping national identity in alignment with those ideologies (Foucault, 1977), which is Islam in the Uzbekistani context. As a quote in the G10 Tarbiya textbook indicates: “Religion regulates moral norms and defines what halal and haram [emphasis added], merit and sin are” (p. 48); references to Islam are frequent, even in discussions where the theme or concept of religion is not the primary focus (Figure 64), highlighting the prominent place of Islam as a national marker.

**Figure 64**

*Illustrations Indicating Islam as Part of the Uzbekistani Society: Chapter “Family Values”*



Source: G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 24

However, it is to note that while the analysed Tarbiya textbooks in Uzbek and Russian languages present identical contents, except the translation gaps, the Islamic terms “halal” and “haram” appear only in the Uzbek textbooks, which are translated as “permitted” and “forbidden” in Russian without religious connotation, potentially implying that Uzbek-medium schools are mainly expected to have Muslim-dominant pupils, while Russian-medium schools with non-Muslim pupils, such as ethnic Russians. Nevertheless, in a multi-ethnic and faith setting, such a prominent position of Islam in school discourses can be problematic, rendering non-Muslim Uzbekistani as “internal others” and potentially marginalising them. Given that religion regulates morality and “truths”, which are often rooted in the dominant group’s ideologies, the construction of national identity through religion establishes exclusive “us”/ “them” binary boundaries. As a result, those who do not conform to the dominant religion are excluded and marked as “internal others” (Dingley, 2013; Durrani & Dunne, 2010). Indeed, even in a secular context, where secularism as a state ideology is constructed in relation to religion (Asad, 2003) and influenced by the dominant social group, religion remains indispensable to secularism. It continues to exist within the public sphere, thereby marking the dominant religion as an integral part of secular society (Butler, 2020). Although secularisation processes confine religion to the private sphere, religion nonetheless remains a marker of classification and hierarchisation. In this context, the religion of the dominant group becomes the norm and remains influential in public space, whereas other religions are relegated as illegitimate (Butler, 2020). Nevertheless, since Uzbekistan is a secular state, the Tarbiya textbooks do not explicitly identify Islam as the state’s religion but do so rather implicitly, including referring to Presidential quotes: “We cherish *our sacred religion* [emphasis added] as the embodiment of our ancient values. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, President of the Republic of Uzbekistan” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 61);

We also need to inculcate in the heart of our children a healthy attitude toward the motherland - mother, rich history, and *the holy religion of our fathers and grandfathers* [emphasis added], so to speak, to strengthen their ideological immunity, Islam Karimov. (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 57)

These quotes of the current and former Presidents of Uzbekistan appear in the same sub-chapter named “In the World’s Religions and the Idea of Peace”, and although neither of them explicitly mentions Islam as Uzbekistan’s state religion, it is clear that “our sacred

religion” and “the holy religion of our father and grandfathers” imply Islam. Furthermore, in a few Uzbek-medium schools, Imams were invited to school to discuss pupils’ behaviour or Islam. Therefore, despite the secular setting where no formal Islamic education is provided and in-depth teaching on religions is absent, the analysis suggests that school discourses implicitly promote Islam as a national marker. This reflects Uzbekistan’s Islamic context, where secularism aligns with the dominant group’s construction of national identity, which also occurs within a post-colonial “third space” (Bhabha, 1994), where different values intricately intersect through which identities are negotiated.

Reflecting the promotion of Islam as the foundation of national values, for Muslim participants, religion was revealed to be an important marker in shaping their identities. Many of them indicated Islam as the basis of their moral and behavioural conduct, highlighting the regulatory role of religion in identity construction: “[Being Muslim] is always being honest. Feeling that you are always under observation (Uzbek5, male)”; “We always feel that we’re Muslim ... being Muslim means feeling that everything that you do has its consequences” (Uzbek2, female). The significance of Islam as an identity marker was also illustrated in the participants’ preference for their future partner: “It is important for my wife to be Muslim. I want my future wife to be a Muslim ... at least someone who believes in religion and respects other religions” (Uzbek-R6, male); “I will not get married to a non-Muslim man” (Uzbek10, female); “The nationality of my future husband doesn’t matter, but he needs to be a Muslim” (Uzbek9, female). Furthermore, Muslim participants, primarily ethnic Tajiks, illustrated sending their parents to Hajj as their dream, highlighting the importance they accord to Islam: “In five to ten years, I might not be able to let my parents go to Hajj ... I’ll try as hard as possible, I’ll certainly send them, but when the right time comes” (Tajik4, male). Furthermore, although limited and implicitly, Tarbiya textbooks include discourses “othering” other religions, describing Islam as outstanding: “Among the peoples of Central Asia, the religion of *Islam has also served the formation of high human qualities* [emphasis added]” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 45), “In the development of Europe in all fields, *the service of Islamic culture is incomparable* [emphasis added], and there are sharp works that greatly influenced the development of Europe” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 51). Echoing such “othering” school discourses, this distinctiveness of Islam was also illustrated by several Muslim participants, who expressed their pride in being Muslim. Other religions were hence depicted as “others”, through which the moral and faith superiority of Islam was implicitly and explicitly highlighted:

“For me, it [Islam] is a pride. I am happy to be a Muslim, I am very, very happy” (Uzbek-R3, female); “I am really proud of being Muslim because Muslims are clearly distinctive. Muslims are those who follow a righteous path” (Tajik2, male); “I think they [Christians] don’t respect their priests that much. Moreover, modesty and *ghirah* [Islamic concept of protective jealousy often associated with a sense of honour, dignity and responsibility in safeguarding moral or religious values] are not their top priority” (Uzbek2, female);

I would be a bit *ashamed of being a Christian* [emphasis added] in some respects, I mean about being Christian among Uzbeks. The reason is that even if they are great Christians, they don’t really care about modesty or *mahram*<sup>1</sup>. I would be a bit ashamed of such aspects. (Uzbek4, male)

Nevertheless, it also needs to be underscored that the Tarbiya textbooks discuss different religions respectfully, underlining the inter-faith tolerance as Islamic values, emphasising the concept of peace, aligning with the peaceful national images of Uzbekistan as discussed in Chapter 5: “The Muslim religious teaching forbids unjustly harming people who do not believe in Islam, in particular, harming their dignity, property or life” (G10 Tarbiya textbook, p. 46); “Glory be to Allah; you have been ordered to look at every sect with a pure heart and be fair to every sect and religion” (G11 Tarbiya textbook, p. 57).

However, reflecting that secularism is drawn upon the dominant group’s ideologies (Asad, 2003; Butler, 2020) in a national context where nearly 90% of the population is Muslim, and school discourses promote Islam as a key national marker to inculcate moral values and cultural norms, some participants described the challenges of being non-Muslim, notably agnostic, in Uzbekistan. My research included non-Uzbek participants as well as participants from both Uzbek and Russian-medium schools; not all participants were Muslim. Whilst all ethnic-Tajik participants were Muslim, ethnic-Uzbeks’ and Russians’ faiths were not homogenous, and among the participants who took part in the focus group discussions, more than half of those from Russian-medium schools identified as agnostic (Table 41).

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<sup>1</sup> An Islamic term referring to a person with whom marriage is forbidden due to close blood relation, breastfeeding, or marital ties. A mahram relationship allows for certain social and physical interactions that are otherwise restricted between non-mahram men and women in Islam.

**Table 41**  
*Participants' Religious Faiths*

Ethnicity	Muslim	Christian	Agnostic	Total
Uzbek (Uzbek-medium school)	4	0	0	4
Uzbek (Russian-medium school)	2	0	3	5
Tajik	5	0	0	5
Russian	0	1	4	5
Total	11	1	7	19

*Note.* The table includes only the participants who participated in focus group discussions.

One participant remarked, “It’s a bit difficult, of course, because some people don’t understand what it’s like to be agnostic” (Uzbek-R5, male), while another one shared, “Because our country is very religious ... it’s very hard to be an agnostic, and it’s not accepted by society” (Russian4, female). Since religion institutionalises morality and informs “acceptable” beliefs as norms (Asad, 2003), as non-conformist to the dominant religion, Islam, those agnostic participants hence indicated their somewhat internally “othered” position in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, despite these challenges and their somewhat marginalisation, participants expressed that they still found their own space in Uzbekistan: “The majority of people in Uzbekistan are Muslim, but we are okay, not feeling oppressed by that. We have our own space ... Even though we are living in an Islamic country, there are no religious barriers for us” (Russian3, female). Moreover, many ethnic Uzbeks who attended Russian-medium schools – who perceived themselves as having a “Western mindset” and distinguished themselves from their peers who attended Uzbek-medium schools – expressed a lack of faith and detachment from Islam. However, given their Muslim family backgrounds, they negotiated the influence of their upbringing, and hence “cultural Islam” in shaping their identities: “If my parents or relatives do some

religious rituals, per respect, I do it together, such as “Omin”. It is more like a habit, rather than religious practices” (Uzbek-R5, male);

I was brought up as a Muslim, and due to these upbringing experiences, now I can’t somehow change myself. It’s too difficult to change my beliefs because they are from childhood, but I’m a little different. From religious education [at home], I know only Amin ... I don’t even know the prayer that is read at the funeral or my mother tried to teach me in front of these graves, but I’m atheist, and I don’t believe, I don’t need to. (Uzbek-R2, female)

Their negotiations with Islamic values within the context of “cultural Islam” highlighted the hybrid, situational, and fluid nature of their national identities. However, this stands in contrast to the school-promoted singular national identity, which draws upon Islam as the foundation of “rightful morality” and risks excluding the heterogeneous social realities of Uzbekistani youth from different faiths. Drawing on Foucault’s (1977) concept of power and knowledge, school discourses regulate and normalise “truths”, reinforcing dominant social orders and hence marginalising those who do not conform. Furthermore, given that identity is shaped through difference, constructed by processes of inclusion and exclusion (Hall, 1996), the post-colonial “third space” (Bhabha, 1994), where different values such as secularism and Islam intersect, these dynamics further complicate the construction of national identity for diverse youth, who challenge the monolithic national identity promoted and normalised through institutionalised school discourses.

## **Negotiating Secularism and Piety**

### ***Authoritarian Secularism***

In Uzbekistan’s secular context, although the majority of the population identifies as Muslim and school discourses promote Islam as a national marker, religious practices and expressions are largely confined to the private sphere (Khalid, 2007). Portrayed as authoritarian secularism, Islam in Uzbekistan is tightly controlled by the government, a policy that was particularly enforced under Karimov’s regime until 2016, during which religious practices were subject to strict surveillance (Rasanayagam, 2011). Some participants recalled these restrictions in their experiences: “I started to go to the mosque when I was 15 or 16. Now, many people go to mosques, but not before 2016” (Uzbek16,

male). Given the authoritarian secularism, participants also noted slight differences in religious practices between Uzbekistan and other Muslim countries. Whilst differences in factions, such as between Sunni and Shiite, and distinctions between *Madhhabs* (schools of thought) were mentioned, participants often emphasised the more rigorous religious environments in other Muslim countries, including greater access to religious education, which contrasted with Uzbekistan's secular context. For instance, one participant noted, "There is a big difference. For example, in Arabia, people are so serious about religion that they can dedicate themselves to it all day. Religious studies are more common there" (Tajik4, male). Another marked, "Their education is more religious. They are usually taught at the madrassa. We also have madrassa, but there, everyone has religious lessons" (Tajik1, female). Reflecting these differences, while many participants felt a stronger connection to Uzbekistani Muslims (Watan) than to Muslims abroad (Umma), highlighting the secularism and "cultural Islam" in Uzbekistan, some other Muslim participants simultaneously expressed their discontent against the authoritarian secularism in Uzbekistan, especially during the Karimov time, indicating that such lack of religious education in the past became their drivers to study Islam: "I want to understand better Islam as I did not get the opportunity to study it at school, so I chose to study in my [religious] university" (Uzbek6, male); "I wish I could have studied religion at school, because school does not offer it, only as a general subject. Now I am free to study it" (Uzbek-R7, female). Indeed, many Muslim participants indicated their current various daily religious practices, such as reading the Quran, praying, and going to mosques, indicating Islam as a key identity marker for many Uzbekistani Muslim youth (Table 42).

**Table 42**

***Participants' Religious Practices***

Practice	Discourse
Reading the Quran/religious book	<p>"I am busy reading the Quran nowadays. I am learning the Arabic language" (Uzbek6, male).</p> <p>"I'm reading a book about our Prophet right now" (Tajik2, male).</p> <p>"I learned Arabic, so now I can read the Quran in Arabic" (Uzbek3, female).</p>

Praying	<p>“I pray five times a day. I wake up at 5 am and pray. If you pray five times daily, you cannot wear nail polish” (Uzbek7, female).</p> <p>“I pray mainly after meals, but it is difficult for me to get up in the early morning and pray five times. You cannot wear nail polish if you pray because you have to be clean when you pray” (Uzbek9, female).</p>
Going to mosque	“We go to the mosque on Fridays with others” (Uzbek11, male).

However, reflecting the authoritarian secularism under Karimov’s regime, where religious practices were strictly surveilled, and the scarcity of religious education opportunities in current Uzbekistan, many participants indicated the central role of the family in learning Islam and, therefore, their significant role in shaping youth national identities (Table 43).

**Table 43**

***Family’s Roles in Learning Islam***

Family member	Discourse
Parents	<p>“I learnt Islamic values at home” (Uzbek6, male).</p> <p>“I learnt [Islam] mostly at home. My mom always read me the Quran, namaz, and Islam-related books” (Uzbek1, female).</p>
Mother	<p>“Mostly, we learnt about it [Islam] at our home with our parents” (Uzbek1, female).</p> <p>“My mother told me how to wear the hijab, but also through YouTube” (Uzbek3, female).</p> <p>“We have our own religion; each family teaches its own religion. It is the mother who must, it is she who must teach the children. We are in Islam” (Uzbek-R1, female).</p>
Father	My dad is the biggest mentor because he attracted all our family to religion ... Dad always talks about religion ... [But] even if I’m told 100 times, I still won’t do it if I don’t want it myself. They [parents] do not force me” (Uzbek-R3, female).

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Grandmother	“My grandmother taught me Arabic directly in Arabic, how to read, and so on” (Uzbek-R1, female).
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Moreover, given that religious practice in public space was severely surveilled during the Karimov era and schools did and still do not offer Islamic education, Islamic education was provided privately within the community, sometimes secretly. A participant revealed that private gatherings outside school not only taught her Islam but also provided her advice on the wearing of hijab, which she could not obtain in her school environment:

We had different female teachers. We went there, we were taught, they taught at home, but it was already according to the rules ... This is such a place where women are taught, and after the course, they must receive a certificate. Some are given permission to be certified, some are not given, and this cannot be taught openly. We used to go to homes, but when there were inspections or checks, we just sat at home; such things were impossible ... When I studied, we all were in hijab. It was uncomfortable for me when I went there wearing the hijab. When I went out, I took it off. After one lesson, my teacher told me to stay after the lesson, and I stayed with her. We sat like that, and she told me. “Here you are studying Islam; our religion is to read the Qur’an. Why don’t you want to wear a hijab?” Then I said, “I don’t know, I’m not ready for this yet”. I thought about what my parents and their friends would say. (Uzbek-R1, female)

Therefore, the intersection of authoritarian secularism and religious identity in Uzbekistan reveals a complex landscape in which the predominantly Muslim population must navigate stringent government controls over religious practices and social censorship and regulation. Under Karimov’s regime, the emphasis on secularism resulted in a marked suppression of public religious expression, relegating these practices primarily to the private sphere. Participants’ reflections underscored the pivotal role of familial structures in conveying Islamic values and traditions, effectively compensating for the scarce religious education offered in schools. This dynamic not only highlights the significance of family influence in shaping religious identity but also emphasises the ongoing tensions between state-enforced secularism and individual expressions of faith in contemporary Uzbekistan.

### *School as a Dilemmatic Space: Religion and Gender*

Considering that Uzbekistan is a country where the majority of the population identifies as Muslim and the revival of Islamic values has been observed since independence to disrupt the Soviet atheist past and, therefore, construct a new national identity (Khalid, 2007), the interviews revealed that schools became a dilemmatic space, where pupils were caught between the state's enforced secularism and personal piety. Particularly, participants indicated tensions around the wearing of the hijab at school. In Uzbekistan, hijab was banned from public spaces, including schools, until recently. Only in 2022, following a period of political reforms under President Mirziyoyev, was the ban lifted as part of broader changes relaxing religious practices that had been strictly controlled during the Karimov era. This political transition coincided with many participants' school experiences, during which some female pupils started to wear the hijab, and the interviews illustrated the participants' experiences before and after the ban on hijab. For instance, a female Uzbek participant from a Russian-medium school shared the turmoil her school and fellow female pupils, including herself, experienced during the ban. She recalled that female pupils who came to the school wearing the hijab during the Karimov time were either forced to remove it or sent back home, which not only triggered conflicts between teachers and parents but also kept pupils out of school:

Before, we were not allowed to wear the hijab, and some girls were scolded [for wearing the hijab]. They [school administrations] talked to them [pupils], and they just took their hijab off. Some pupils were standing there, crying; their parents came, and they were taken away ... We had twin girls at school. When they studied, they were in the fifth and sixth grades. They cried for hours every day and stood there ... Their father didn't know about it. As soon as their father saw their daughters off, the vice-director came up to the girls and said, "Come on, take it [hijab] off", and the girls sobbed not to let their father know [about removing the hijab]. Because of this, they [their parents] took their children away and didn't let them go to school anymore. (Uzbek-R1, female)

Although the ban on hijab in schools was lifted afterwards, pupils who wanted to start wearing the hijab still experienced some difficulties. The participant who started

wearing it in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade initially faced mixed reactions from her teachers and peers, including discouraging comments, making the transition complex: “Teachers knew me, and they said, ‘you will remove everything in a month’, and so forth” (Uzbek-R1, female). This illustrated secular expectations within her school setting, where the wearing of the hijab was perceived as pre-modern and not as the norm or “appropriate”. Therefore, these girls’ choices to wear the hijab despite potential consequences and social prejudices underscored the agency behind their actions, through which they attempted to navigate their religiosity within a secular context. As Spivak (1988) and Mahmood (2005) argued, interpreting Muslim women through Western epistemologies often results in an essentialist view that portrays them as “exotic others” (Said, 1978) and passive victims of patriarchy, overlooking the importance of contextuality. Instead, in Uzbekistan, where there exist secular norms and the pressures of conformity within public institutions like schools, wearing the hijab becomes an agentic act embodying their piety, not as mere subordination but as a form of negotiation of religious and gendered identities. Moreover, considering Foucault’s (1975) concept of power, which operates not top-down but through micro-interactions, these agentic acts reflect the everyday ways power is exercised. Hence, this intersection between religion and gender illustrated layers of complexity in constructing national identity as these young women navigate the tensions between their faith and societal norms. Indeed, navigating the complex secular school environment required courage for those who chose to wear the hijab since, although the ban on the hijab was lifted in 2021, several Muslim female participants noted that they did not wear it in schools but began to do so only after entering university. At the same time, some expressed their regrets for not having been able to wear it during their school time, as well as their frustrations against secularism: “Although we are Muslim, it was quite difficult to wear the hijab at school, but I am at the university, I am free to wear the hijab, and I am happy” (Uzbek8, female); “There are some *bad people* [politicians] *in the government* [emphasis added] ... they could not let girls wear the hijab as the school uniform” (Uzbek15, male). Moreover, even though the authoritative surveillance of religious practices in Uzbekistan has been relaxed since 2017, a participant also faced some public control due to her hijab, indicating a still somewhat restricted secular environment:

Now, if you walk in such wide hijab, you are sometimes interrogated, even your passport is interrogated, they [police] ask about the [your] house. They ask for your

address sometimes, because I also have that kind of experience. I was also stopped there; then I was interrogated like that. (Uzbek-R1, female)

Therefore, the decision to wear or not wear the hijab was not a mere personal choice but instead a complex negotiation of identity shaped by the power dynamics within educational settings. By navigating the expectations surrounding officially legitimated femininity and religious piety, individuals thus redefine their identities within a secular context, emphasising that gender is not a fixed attribute but a fluid construct shaped through societal interactions (Butler, 1990). Discourses and power structures significantly influence this process, revealing that choices about religious attire are deeply embedded in broader socio-political contexts (Foucault, 1972).

However, reflecting the multi-faith context of Uzbekistan, opinions towards secularism, religion, and Islam differed among participants, underscoring the heterogeneous social realities of Uzbekistani youth. For instance, some participants, both Muslim and agnostic, supported the ban of “religious signs” in public spaces, including the wearing of the hijab at schools. This highlights the complex secular context of Uzbekistan, shaped by enduring Soviet legacies, as well as the diverse relationships Uzbekistani youth have with religion and their national identities: “It seems to me that faith is something that you should do at home, but in no way ostentatiously in society. No one should know basically what kind of faith you have until they ask” (Russian4, female);

I did not study religion at school as in Uzbekistan, there are different people living together, Muslims, Christians, and others. I think schools should not teach religion ... we should not teach any particular religion. I did not wear the hijab at school, and I don't think schools should allow the hijab ... there are different people in Uzbekistan, Muslims, Christians and others, so the hijab should not be allowed. It wouldn't be good. (Uzbek3, female)

Moreover, contrasting Muslim participants, agnostic participants, primarily those from Russian-medium schools expressed negative attitudes towards religion, particularly Islam, highlighting some tensions among Uzbekistani youth as well as disparities with school discourses which promote Islam as the moral grounds: “Those who are Muslims, they are too much into religion, they do and think based on religion” (Uzbek-R2, female); “We [agnostics] don't believe that religion somehow brings us closer together because there are

other religions that are also somehow trying to praise themselves. Religion is like marketing, this system, that system, promoting their products. It's a system" (Uzbek-R5, male). The agnostic participants particularly critiqued Islam as being patriarchal, indicating not only disparities in national identities but also some tensions among Uzbekistani youth:

There is a strong tendency for Islamisation in Uzbekistan, which is a big problem. Because Islam makes women secluded and limits their rights and actions, this is a problem. Men dictate to women in Islam. Islam is making women inferior, and they don't even realise it. (Russian-5, male);

I learnt that a girl converted to Islam for the sake of her husband, but what did she do? She obligated herself; she deprived herself of an opinion ... if a girl wears a hijab, she has no opinion; she has no right to say anything; that is, she is like a thing, and that's it. (Russian2, female)

In a secular environment where wearing the hijab is considered negatively by certain groups, those who decide to wear it can be seen as exercising their agency, following their faith despite the potential for criticism or judgement. Notably, the wearing of hijab sparked various opinions among the participants, primarily opposing agnostic participants from Russian-medium schools and Muslim participants from Uzbek-medium schools, underscoring complex secular school settings for expressing piety. The former group was sceptical: "It seems to me that people are sick; they want to wear headscarves" (Russian3, female);

Under the first president, it [hijab] was forbidden ... because we believed we emphasised the secular state ... especially in schools, it was strictly forbidden, and now it's just 90% of all girls accept this [hijab]. This is so strange. (Russian4, female)

By contrast, the latter group admired it. For instance, among the male-Muslim participants, the hijab was often illustrated as a part of the desired quality for their partners: "My girlfriend started wearing the hijab this year, and I like it. It is super good. If they wear the hijab, they are only for you and not exposed to other men" (Uzbek4, male); "I want my

girlfriend to wear the hijab later once we get married. Actually, she wanted to do it this year, but her father did not allow her to” (Uzbek13, male);

Please don't take me wrong and get offended by what I will say. Women with hijab are like a precious car. Not everyone drives an expensive and precious car, right? Well, you see, it is the same for women wearing the hijab; they are precious. Not for everyone. (Uzbek6, male)

Associating with the notion of exclusivity and preciousness, male Muslim participants regarded the hijab as a sign of a “virtuous woman”. The importance of hijab as a desired quality for their partners indicated the key role religion plays in their identities. It is important to note that, although opinions on the hijab differed between agnostic and Muslim participants, both groups treated hijabi women as “objects” or “representations” of broader cultural or ideological conflicts. Moreover, the idealised subjectivity of women as pure and virtuous highlighted the gendered norms applied to them as social expectations. Such a depiction of women as symbolic carriers of national culture, traditions, and honour is often observed in national discourses (Yuval-Davis, 1997). However, interestingly, other participants, both Muslim and agnostic, simultaneously shared some sceptical perspectives on the growing number of women wearing the hijab in Uzbekistan, contesting the wearing of hijab as a trend or a practical use and not for faith:

I have a negative opinion about the hijab because many girls today wear the hijab just to pretend they are good girls. So many girls delete their pictures with boys and vaping [e-cigarettes] on social media, and they start posting their pictures on religious quotes, Allah or something like that to showcase they are good girls. This is fake, so I have a negative opinion about the hijab. I don't want my future wife to wear the hijab. (Uzbek-R6, male);

Many people in Tashkent are not really religious. They are following Islam just for trends. Many girls wear the hijab these days, but they do not follow it from the heart or a religious point of view. (Uzbek13, male)

Given that women are often assigned the social positions of bearers of national honour, reinforcing the “us” versus “them” binary (Yuval-Davis, 1997), the hostile gaze directed at

women wearing the hijab highlights how they also become subjects of heightened scrutiny. This reflects the gendered dynamics in which women are more likely to be shamed and consequently externally and internally “othered,” further emphasising the intersection of religion and gender as national markers. Therefore, the wearing of the hijab in Russian-medium schools, in particular, was revealed to be especially complex - not only due to the long-standing ban, which was lifted only recently, but also because of scepticism from agnostic youth, who were predominantly found in these schools.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter examined how school discourses promote religion as a key national marker in constructing Uzbekistani national identity. In the post-socialist context, where secularism is the dominant social norm, yet the majority of the population identifies as Muslim, the analysis revealed a complex school environment in which piety is negotiated. Within this context, reflecting the idea of “cultural Islam”, schools notably promoted religion as the foundation of moral values, depicted as key national markers that shape “right” youth and their national identities. At the same time, as religion is a socially constructed system of belief primarily reflecting the ideologies of the dominant group (Foucault, 1977), Islam is particularly promoted as a national marker through school discourses, though implicitly given the secular context. Aligning with these discourses, Muslim participants expressed pride in their faith, underscoring the importance of Islam in their national identities. However, in the multi-ethnic and multi-faith context of Uzbekistan, non-Muslim participants, particularly those from Russian-medium schools who identified as agnostic, expressed feeling marginalised. These young agnostic Uzbekistani often felt misunderstood in a predominantly Muslim society, but agnostic ethnic Uzbeks also negotiated their identities within their Muslim families, illustrating the fluidity and relationality of identity in a complex cultural landscape.

Simultaneously, the legacy of authoritarian secularism, especially during the Karimov era, left many Muslim participants expressing frustrations and struggles in publicly demonstrating their piety, particularly girls who wished to wear the hijab. The analysis revealed that the hijab remains a contested symbol within secular school environments, with Muslim girls often facing prejudice and discouragement in wearing it, even after the ban on hijab was lifted. This dynamic was especially pronounced in Russian-medium schools, where many agnostic participants voiced negative views about

the hijab, reflecting the complexities of expressing personal piety in a secular environment. In this context, the agency of female students who chose to wear the hijab despite secular prejudices was highlighted. These young women actively navigated the tension between state-enforced secularism and personal religious expression. Therefore, the decision to wear the hijab was not merely a personal preference but rather complex interactions and negotiations with power dynamics within school environments. Hence, their wearing of hijab emphasised how women negotiated their identities, reforming the boundaries of what it means to be both Muslim and Uzbekistani women in a secular educational setting, underscoring the unstable nature of identity, which is constantly deferred (Derrida, 1979) and thus repeatedly performed (Butler, 1990).

Hence, the analysis indicated a complex tension within the school landscape, where secularism and personal piety intersect, and religion and gender serve as intertwined national markers. Indeed, while expression of piety was revealed to be complex in a secular setting, in the context where Islam is promoted as a national marker through institutionalised school discourses, simultaneously, women were symbolically positioned as carriers of national culture and values, with their modesty and purity both celebrated and expected, notably among Muslim male youth. Therefore, the analysis underscores the diverse faiths of Uzbekistani youth and their continual negotiations within a complex school landscape where secularism and piety intersect. This dynamic mirrors the post-colonial “third space” (Bhabha, 1994), where the country seeks to construct a new national identity by reinterpreting and renewing its national markers.

## **Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In the complex post-socialist landscape of Uzbekistan, where remnants of Soviet influence, rich local traditions, and Western ideologies intersect, this research aimed to explore how young people in Uzbekistan shape their national identities through school education. Grounded in post-structuralism, which views identity as fluid and shaped by difference (Hall, 1997) and constructed through the nexus of discourse-knowledge-power (Foucault, 1975), I conducted an ethnographically informed qualitative study. Over a four-month period in Tashkent, I engaged with young people who had recently graduated from school. My study examined multiple data sources, including participant observations, photo elicitation, oral history interviews, focus group discussions and textbook analysis (G10 and 11 History of Uzbekistan, Upbringing (воспитание), and Military). While investigating the role of schooling, my study notably explored how school discourses construct and promote national boundaries between “others” as well as national markers such as ethnicity, gender, and religion. To understand the outcomes of these school discourses, I also examined how youth internalise, negotiate, and sometimes resist these constructions of national identity. To achieve my research aims, my study was led by the following questions:

#### **Central question:**

How do Uzbekistani youth construct national identities through school education?

#### **Sub-questions:**

- In what ways do school discourses construct Uzbekistani national identities through differences from “others” and representations of self?
- In what ways do ethnicity, gender, and religion intersect school discourses of national identities?
- In what ways do youth learn, perform, negotiate and resist school discourses of national identity?

Overall, the study highlights the significant role of schooling in shaping youth national identities, particularly in its framing of “others” and its emphasis on national pride and self-image. However, it also reveals that these discourses often promote the key national markers, ethnicity, gender and religion through unequal representations of different social groups, including ethnocentrism, patriarchal structures, and authoritarian

secularism. In this context, my research captures the diversity of youth identities through their voices and experiences, revealing the struggles and tensions they face as they navigate and sometimes resist dominant school discourses. In this chapter, I summarise my findings, discuss the contributions of this research, its implications for understanding national identity formation in post-socialist contexts, and suggest possible directions for future research. Lastly, I reflect on my research journey before concluding the thesis.

### **Shaping the Concept of “Uzbekistani” in relation to “External Others”**

Reflecting the characteristic of identity which is shaped through difference (Hall, 1997), my analysis reveals that school discourses play a significant role in fostering Uzbekistani national identities by defining “external others” and drawing boundaries between “us” (Uzbekistan) and “them” (foreign countries and the colonial past). As a boundary marker distinguishing Uzbekistan from other countries, school discourses extensively emphasise morality as a cornerstone of national values and promote qualities such as hospitality, kindness, and respect as key to Uzbekistani identity. The high morality of Uzbekistan is often presented in contrast with that of other countries, particularly the West. Youth internalising these discourses often not only regarded high morality as national values of Uzbekistan but also frequently portrayed the West as an immoral “external other”, reinforcing their sense of pride in being Uzbekistani. Moreover, within school discourses, Uzbekistan is often depicted as peaceful and prosperous in contrast with conflict-ridden foreign nations, particularly those experiencing religious radicalisation. These “othering” discourses further cultivate a sense of national pride among youth, who also perceived their nation as one marked by peace, harmony and prosperity.

Furthermore, school discourses surrounding national independence play a pivotal role in shaping national awareness and pride among youth, as they actively “other” the Soviet past, illustrated as a time of oppression, reinforcing the significance of post-independence freedoms and autonomy. Participants often consumed these school discourses to nurture their sense of national pride, constructing narratives that positioned their contemporary lives as significantly improved compared to the Soviet era. This framing also alluded to the influence of their first president, hinting at the deeply entrenched personality cult that remains embedded around the presidents in national discourses. Similarly, school discourses celebrate post-independence national prosperity, emphasising economic and political advancements since independence that further foster a

sense of optimism and pride among youth. By celebrating different national symbols, such as the national flag and anthem, through diverse school practices, a sense of pride and responsibility towards their nation is forged among youth, who often expressed eagerness to contribute to the ongoing national development. Moreover, school discourses that glorify achievements in international arenas, mainly through the victories of Uzbekistani athletes, implicitly convey the superiority of Uzbekistan against “external others”. This further evokes positive national sentiments among youth, who often referred to these athletes as their national heroes. Hence, the national identities of Uzbekistani youth are profoundly shaped by school discourses that positively define and differentiate Uzbekistan from “external others”, allowing them to foster positive national awareness. However, since “othering” processes, which aim to construct positive national awareness, often accompany stereotyping and depreciation of “external others”, youth often depicted foreigners negatively, notably in terms of morality, positioning Uzbekistanis as superior and highlighting this distinction as a significant national marker

### ***Balancing Interethnic Harmony with “Uzbekness”***

Uzbekistani school discourses emphasising peace as a national characteristic simultaneously promote inter-ethnic harmony as a key national value, highlighting the importance of tolerance and diversity in its multi-ethnic context. The textbooks underscore Uzbekistan’s achievement in maintaining peace among over 130 nationalities and emphasise traditional values of tolerance. Many participants also expressed pride in Uzbekistan’s peaceful coexistence. However, the frequent use of the word “tolerance” may imply a hierarchical relationship, suggesting that ethnic Uzbeks are extending tolerance to non-Uzbeks. School discourses prominently feature Uzbek historical figures, mostly men, who are celebrated for their contributions to fields such as science, literature, and philosophy, whom many participants also indicated as their national heroes, expressing their national pride in them. While this emphasis on ethnic Uzbek figures highlights the ethnocentric and patriarchal nature of Uzbekistani national identity, in the post-colonial context, where national identity has been reshaped since independence, the glorification of historical figures reflects simultaneously a vital movement toward de-Sovietisation and the reclamation of indigenous identities. Often portrayed as “great ancestors” in school discourses, these Uzbek historical figures embody timeless national pride, serving to construct new collective memories. Centring Uzbekistani national identity around Uzbek

ethnicity, symbolic “blood from the past”, thus represents an attempt to naturalise national legitimacy as timeless continuity. However, in a multi-ethnic context, this focus on ethnic Uzbeks can sideline and marginalise non-Uzbek ethnic minorities. Youth from different ethnic backgrounds indeed exhibited varying levels of national belonging, with ethnic minorities, notably ethnic Russians, indicating weaker ties to the Uzbekistani national identity, including their sense of pride in school-promoted ethnic Uzbek historical figures, compared to ethnic Uzbeks. Furthermore, the study reveals that ethnic Russians are often regarded as “internal others” to whom different cultural standards, social expectations and privileges are applied compared to ethnic Uzbeks.

Moreover, my ethnic minority participants, including ethnic Tajiks and Russians, reported discrimination and xenophobia, highlighting the challenges they face within a system that privileges the dominant Uzbek ethnicity. Structural inequalities and power imbalances in governance were acknowledged by ethnic minority youth, with some stating that they face barriers to career advancement due to their ethnicity. Despite the promotion of an inclusive national identity through school discourses, the construction of ethnocentric national identity privileging ethnic Uzbeks hence institutionalises inequalities among different ethnic groups, marginalising ethnic minorities. However, interestingly, in the context of international sports competitions, youth from ethnic minorities, including Tajiks and Russians, expressed a heightened sense of national awareness and belonging when supporting Uzbekistani teams against “external others”, underscoring the characteristic of identity constructed through “differences”. From this perspective, sports were acting like a “glue”, flattening internal differences and bringing diverse ethnic groups together. Nevertheless, the analysis indicates that promoting a national identity rooted in Uzbek ethnicity may diminish the sense of belonging for other ethnic groups, ultimately reinforcing inequality and exclusion rather than fostering a shared sense of nationhood.

### ***Dual Pathways to Identity: Experiences in Uzbek- and Russian- Medium Schools***

In relation to fragmentation in the sense of national pride and belonging among different ethnic groups, the analysis of school discourses in Uzbekistan reveals significant differences in discourses of national identities circulated in Uzbek and Russian-medium schools. Despite both types of schools utilising a standardised curriculum, the daily practices and informal curricula differ notably, particularly in promoting national markers such as history, icons, and symbols. For instance, Uzbek-medium schools placed greater

emphasis on discourses of struggle and pride in gaining independence while negatively portraying the Soviet era, whereas Russian-medium schools often presented a more favourable view of that period, emphasising development and educational benefits, downplaying the struggles of the Uzbekistani people. This divergence in historical discourses was reflected in students' perceptions of their national identities, with those in Uzbek-medium schools generally fostering a stronger sense of national pride than their peers in Russian-medium institutions. Additionally, differences extended to the rituals around and displays of national symbols, with students at Uzbek-medium schools, for instance, singing the national anthem or organising school assemblies more often than in Russian-medium schools. Disciplinary practices in both school types demonstrated further divergences, with a more relaxed approach observed in Russian-medium schools. The enforcement of dress codes and disciplinary actions was notably stricter in Uzbek-medium schools, where conformity to traditional gender norms was often emphasised. In contrast, Russian-medium schools provided a less rigid environment, resulting in a weakened reinforcement of gendered national identities. These disparities highlight how the hidden curriculum can affect students' experiences of national identity construction, indicating that the significance of schools influences the representation and reinforcement of national values. As a result of disparities in the promotion of national values and markers in these two different types of schools, a complex dynamic arose among ethnic Uzbeks attending the two different school types, leading to tensions based on perceptions of "mentalities". The study indicated that Uzbeks from Russian-medium schools often viewed themselves as more open-minded and identified themselves with a "Western mentality", not only distinguishing themselves from but also "othering" their peers in Uzbek-medium schools as close-minded and inferior. Students from Russian-medium schools navigated between their ethnic identity and "external" influences, resulting in a more conflicted sense of national belonging. This suggests that identity is not a fixed entity but rather a site of negotiation and contestation, shaped by the interplay of language, culture, and power relations within the sociopolitical landscape of Uzbekistan. However, ethnic Russians, while often highlighting their differences with ethnic Uzbeks and expressing some scepticism towards Islam, rarely voiced explicit negative views of ethnic Uzbeks or tensions with those from Uzbek-medium schools. This highlights the existence of parallel social realities among Uzbekistani youth, notably between those who live in Uzbek and Russian environments, which present different cultural and social values, including a different sense of national markers, awareness, sentiments, belonging, and identities. The

study thus highlights not only the socially constructed nature of ethnicity, maintained through “us”/“them” divides, as discussed by (Barth, 1969), but also the emergence of hybrid national identities among ethnic Uzbek youth influenced by the complex colonial legacy and contemporary social dynamics. Therefore, the study underscores that while different ethnic groups coexist, some internal boundaries exist, creating parallel national identities and resulting in somewhat superficial inter-ethnic harmony.

### ***Construction of Gendered National subjectivities in Uzbekistan***

The study reveals that Uzbekistani national identity was promoted through school discourses to be highly gendered, attributing distinct values and roles to women and men, which were also often reciprocated among youth. This construction of gendered national identities, despite the explicit commitment to the importance of girls’ education, respect for women and their participation in society, simultaneously naturalises hierarchical power relations between women and men. Not only are women numerically underrepresented in the textbooks, but power-vested, high-wage and “prestigious” social positions, such as doctor, scientist, and politician, are primarily represented by men. Similarly, in school discourses, national pride and glory are predominantly associated with men, encompassing historical icons, national heroes, athletes and winners in international intellectual competitions. Furthermore, womanhood is often linked to love, gentleness, fragility and modesty, whereas manhood is usually associated with authority, admiration and strength, representing women as dependent on men, particularly in spousal relationships where wives are expected to seek affirmations and approval from their husbands. Internalising these school-promoted national gender norms, youth, both women and men, actively performed and reproduced these norms, which were considered Uzbekistani national markers. The study further indicates that these gender norms are also instilled through school social interactions, such as dress codes and disciplinary practices. It is a significant mechanism through which gender norms are perpetuated, through which girls face stricter scrutiny regarding their attire, with societal pressures accentuating the importance of modesty. These discursive and regulative practices at school legitimise and normalise these gender norms, leading both young Uzbekistani women and men to internalise and perform their socially sanctioned identity positions. While gender norms apply to both women and men, reflecting the patriarchal nature of national identity, female participants often found themselves constricted by societal expectations that dictated their behaviours

and appearances. While many women expressed a desire for more empowerment and agency, they were well aware that deviation from these norms could lead to shame or social reprimand. Simultaneously, participants recognised pressure for men to conform to societal ideals of masculinity that dictate strength and emotional restraint.

### ***Negotiating Faith and Secularism: The Role of Islam in Shaping Moral Values***

The analysis indicates that Islam represents one of the key national markers promoted through school discourses despite Uzbekistan being a secular state, presenting a complex landscape in shaping national identities. To balance secularism and faith, in the context where 90% of the population identify as Muslim, while no religious education is offered within the school environment, Islam implicitly and frequently appears through school discourses, referred to as a regulatory moral foundation, guiding Uzbekistanis' behaviours and societal interactions. Hence, religion is an integral part of school discourses, not as piety but rather as cultural values. As youth internalise these values as national markers, many of them indicate Islam as a moral principle while highlighting Islam as a cultural value. However, while Islam is integrated as a national value within school discourses in Uzbekistan, expressions of religious faith remain restricted due to secularism, causing challenges in navigating the intersection of secularism and religious expression for devout youth. Notably, the study reveals that some female Muslim youth experienced a sense of conflict regarding their identities in school spaces, which became sites of negotiation and contestation, where they faced challenges wearing the hijab. They recounted experiences navigating scrutiny from peers and teachers, creating a complex dynamic where expressing personal faith intertwines with the pressures of adhering to state-sanctioned secular norms. In these circumstances, wearing the hijab became an agentic act of resistance towards school discourses, negotiating their national identities. While there has been a gradual relaxation of restrictions on religious expression in Uzbekistan in recent years, such as lifting the hijab ban at schools, navigating Uzbekistani secularism and cultural Islam illustrates a complex tapestry of influences shaping youth national identities.

### ***Overall Findings: The Role of School Education in Constructing Uzbekistani Youth National Identities***

The study underscores the centrality of schooling in the formation of youth national identities in Uzbekistan, revealing how education functions as a mechanism through which national markers, particularly ethnicity, gender, and religion, are constructed, naturalised, and internalised. Grounded in post-structuralism, the research uncovers how school discourses not only define the “self” but also create boundaries with “other”, drawing a clear line between the normative national subject and those positioned as external, deviant or inferior. In this process, Uzbekistani youth are expected to perform a particular national identity, one that is intimately tied to an idealised vision of Uzbek ethnicity, gendered social positions, and a culturally defined Islam. These national discourses, however, are not monolithic or fixed; rather, they are constructed through the circulation of power-knowledge discourses that shape and regulate youth subjectivities. Moreover, while the study illustrates how school discourses promote a unified national identity, particularly through the promotion of inter-ethnic harmony, peace, and multi-faith values, ethnocentric, patriarchal discourses alongside restricted authoritarian secularism simultaneously expose the tensions and contradictions within these constructions. These school discourses, though presented as cohesive and inclusive, reveal underlying power dynamics and exclusions that challenge their apparent unity.

The research highlights the ways in which these school discourses are marked by an ethnocentric framing that privileges the Uzbek majority, marginalising minority ethnic groups such as Russians and Tajiks. This “othering” process not only reinforces the national boundary between the “insider” and the “outsider” but also produces distinct, sometimes conflicting, identities among youth from different ethnic backgrounds. For example, ethnic Russians in Uzbekistan, despite acknowledging their differences from Uzbeks and expressing some scepticism towards Islam, rarely express explicit negativity towards ethnic Uzbeks. Instead, they occupy a more ambivalent position within the national discourse, one that reflects a tension between integration and distinction, a space of negotiation rather than opposition.

Similarly, the gendered dimensions of national identity emerge as a significant site of power negotiation. School discourses present national identity as inherently gendered, constructing men as the primary bearers of national pride and leadership while women are relegated to nurturing and supportive roles. This binary framework not only naturalises

patriarchal power relations but also compels youth to perform gendered national subjectivities, often in compliance with state-sanctioned norms. The study reveals that despite the official emphasis on women's rights and education, the representation of women in national narratives is predominantly passive, reinforcing a hierarchical relationship between the genders. These gendered subjectivities are further produced and regulated through the hidden curriculum, social interactions, dress codes, and disciplinary practices, which serve to enforce normative gendered social positions, thus consolidating a patriarchal understanding of national belonging.

In the realm of religion, the research highlights a paradox inherent in the intersection of secularism and Islam in Uzbekistan's national discourse. While the state officially adheres to a secular ideology, school discourses often treat Islam as a cultural cornerstone, imbuing it with moral and ethical significance that aligns with national values. This formulation, however, exists in tension with the secular state apparatus, particularly when youth's expressions of religious faith challenge or deviate from the secular norms promoted in the school environment. Female students, especially those who adhere to a more visible expression of faith through the hijab, navigate this complex terrain of competing discourses, secular and religious, state-sanctioned and personal, often positioning their religious identity as a form of resistance to the state's secularism. These moments of resistance, however, are not acts of defiance in a traditional sense; rather, they are manifestations of a subjectivity that negotiates the power dynamics embedded within the school's discursive practices.

Ultimately, the study affirms that national identity in Uzbekistan is not a stable or homogeneous construct but is instead fragmented and contested. School discourses, while producing a unified image of the national subject, also generate spaces of resistance, negotiation, and differentiation, where youth actively engage with, reinterpret, and sometimes contest the identities that are imposed upon them. These processes of identity formation are fluid and multifaceted, shaped by intersecting systems of power and knowledge that produce multiple, sometimes contradictory, forms of belonging. The research reveals that the construction of national identity in Uzbekistan is a dynamic and ongoing process, one that reflects the complexities of ethnicity, gender, and religion and is marked by the continual negotiation of self and other. In this context, youth identities are not merely passive absorbers of state-imposed discourses; they are active agents in the production of meaning, challenging, reworking, and even subverting the national narratives that seek to define them.

### **Contributions: What this Research Brings to the Field**

While much of the existing literature has focused on the political dimensions of nation-building in post-socialist states, the role of education in shaping national identities has remained notably underexplored. This gap can be attributed to the politically sensitive nature of the topic within Uzbekistan's authoritarian context, which has historically made it difficult for both local and international scholars to engage with the issue. Furthermore, Uzbekistan's relatively young statehood, combined with the enduring influence of a positivist research culture rooted in Soviet traditions, has hindered critical examination of the complex relationship between education and national identity.

This study directly addresses these gaps by offering fresh insights into the ways education shapes national identity formation, particularly among youth in Uzbekistan. It demonstrates that educational discourses, both explicit and implicit, play a pivotal role in defining national markers and constructing notions of “otherness”. These discourses, embedded in both formal curricula and the hidden curriculum, significantly influence how students internalise and replicate national narratives, thus contributing to the formation of their national identities. Hence, a key contribution of this research lies in its exploration of the hidden curriculum, an area that has been under examined in studies of national identity. Beyond the formal content of textbooks, school rituals, activities, and symbolic displays of national pride serve to naturalise and normalise national identities. These often subtle practices shape students' sense of belonging and foster national awareness and pride. The study further reveals how different school environments, specifically Uzbek and Russian medium schools, create divergent experiences of national identity. This highlights the ways in which educational settings, even within the same national framework and official curriculum, shape distinct forms of national awareness among youth. The research also deepens our understanding of ethnicity in post-Soviet Uzbekistan, showing how ethnic identity is socially constructed and negotiated within educational contexts. Tensions among ethnic Uzbeks attending different schools illustrate that identity formation is not solely shaped by ethnicity but is also influenced by the educational environment. Ethnic Uzbek students in Uzbek medium schools align more closely with the Uzbek-centred national identity promoted by these institutions, while those in Russian medium schools navigate more complex terrain, balancing ethnic identity with national belonging. More significantly, the study revealed insights into the gendered nature of school discourses in Uzbekistan. It shows how both the formal and hidden curricula contribute to the

construction of gendered national identities, where both women and men internalise gender inequalities as societal norms. These gendered discourses, reinforced through school rituals, activities, and representations, play a central role in normalising power imbalances between women and men. The study further emphasises how practices such as school uniforms and disciplinary actions regulate students' bodies, styling them according to socially constructed gender norms. This process perpetuates inequalities in how youth perform their national identities. National icons and symbols also contribute to the construction of patriarchal national discourses, which youth absorb as part of their socialisation. These symbols often reflect a masculinised vision of the nation, focused on strength, authority, and leadership, thus marginalising more inclusive portrayals of national identity. As a result, male students are typically positioned as active agents of national progress, while female students are relegated to passive, supportive roles. In this way, national symbols reinforce patriarchal structures and expectations. The research also explores the role of Islam in national identity formation, particularly within the context of Uzbekistan's official policy on secularism. While Islam is presented as a moral foundation, its practice is constrained by the state's secular policies. This creates a contested space, especially regarding practices such as wearing the hijab. Despite the state's secular stance, some students continue to wear the hijab as an act of resistance, asserting their agency and negotiating their religious and national identities within the school environment. This tension between religion and secularism adds a new dimension to our understanding of how national and religious identities intersect in an authoritarian, secular context. This study fills a critical gap by examining the role of education in shaping national identities in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. It offers a nuanced analysis of the tensions between visible and hidden educational discourses that contribute to youth identity formation and highlights the fluid, situational nature of national awareness. It also underscores how gendered discourses within the school system not only shape youth as gendered national beings but also normalise power inequalities between men and women. Through these contributions, the research advances the scholarship in the area of education's role in nation-building in post-socialist contexts and provides a nuanced view of how national identities, gendered social positions, and power dynamics are constructed, contested, and transformed within educational settings.

Beyond its thematic and contextual contributions, this research also offers a methodological contribution. Conducting research on such a sensitive topic, particularly given the politically charged nature of education in an authoritarian state and my status as

an international researcher, presented unique challenges. However, through innovative methodologies like photo elicitation and oral history interviews, this study demonstrates how sensitive research can be conducted while minimising political sensitivities and maintaining scholarly rigour. This approach contributes to a growing body of research on social justice issues in contexts where such topics are often discouraged or overlooked. By showcasing the feasibility of research in politically restrictive environments, this study offers a pathway to overcoming challenges that typically hinder the exploration of crucial yet underresearched social justice issues. In doing so, it opens possibilities for future research in contexts where the need for these insights is most urgent but where access remains limited.

### **Implications: Understanding National Identities amidst Global Uncertainties**

In a context where the state frames youth as a “strategic resource” for future development, this research brings opportunities to rethink the ways national identities are shaped and to explore how these identities can be reimaged to foster more inclusive and equitable forms of belonging. Recognising the diversity of youth national identities, it is crucial to consider how education can offer a more flexible and inclusive understanding of national identity, one in which young people from varied backgrounds feel fully integrated and recognised as equal citizens within the Uzbekistani state.

For policymakers, whose educational framework often prioritises the inculcation of morality and patriotism, it is important to acknowledge existing gaps in school discourses. Current ethnocentric, patriarchal, and overly restrictive religious frameworks that feature prominently in the national discourses could be reconsidered. Similarly, the tendency to portray foreign nations negatively as “others”, particularly in moral or religious lines, requires careful scrutiny. If such discourses remain unchallenged, they risk reinforcing binary distinctions between “us” and “them”, which could fuel nationalism based on othering rather than nurturing diversity and coexistence. Addressing this will be vital to avoid perpetuating potential tensions or divisions between social groups. Textbook authors should be attentive to the ways in which their materials might reflect and reproduce these discursive power dynamics. A more nuanced approach is needed, one that moves beyond the rhetorical promotion of inter-ethnic harmony, inter-faith tolerance, and gender equity. A broader, more diverse representation of ethnic and gender identities will be crucial to achieve sustainable social cohesion. This involves not only revising the textual content but also the visual depictions of different social groups, ensuring that minorities are fully

represented and included in a way that challenges the dominant hierarchical national discourses.

In schools, national identity is shaped not just through the formal curriculum but also through the hidden curriculum, the implicit messages conveyed through school practices, rituals, and displays. These practices play a key role in normalising specific types of national identity while marginalising those who do not conform. It is, therefore, crucial to reflect on how certain school practices, such as the emphasis on Uzbek-centred or gendered national markers, might inadvertently establish hierarchies between different social groups. Gender norms are a particularly significant part of this dynamic. School uniforms, assemblies, and disciplinary practices often reinforce specific gendered expectations, promoting a model of masculinity and femininity that can limit the diversity of how young people experience and perform their national identities. These practices may subtly construct and reinforce gender inequalities by creating normative expectations around how youth should behave, dress, and express themselves.

Teachers play a critical role in both reinforcing and challenging these discourses. It is important for teachers to be aware of the different ways national identities are constructed in the classroom and school environment and refocus their attention on the promotion of values that regard differences as richness. Teachers should be sensitive to how ethnic minorities are represented or misrepresented in the national discourse and to how gendered norms are shaped by everyday school practices. More importantly, teachers must also recognise how stereotypes of “others” are constructed and normalised within the curriculum and broader school environment. Whether these stereotypes relate to ethnic minorities, foreign nationals, or gendered roles, teachers need to be vigilant in addressing them and fostering an atmosphere that challenges exclusionary practices. By doing so, they can create a more inclusive and equitable environment where all students feel equally represented and empowered.

Finally, it is important for all stakeholders in the education sector to recognise the distinct ways national identities are formed in Uzbek- and Russian-medium schools. These schools are not neutral spaces, but they each contribute to different constructions of national identity, often shaped by their distinct educational environments. The tensions between Uzbek youth attending these schools should not be overlooked. By engaging with these differences, education can serve as a platform for dialogue, where national identities are seen as dynamic and multiple rather than fixed or hierarchical. In addressing these tensions, Uzbekistan can better navigate the process of constructing a new, inclusive

national identity while also negotiating with its complex past. Such engagement offers an opportunity for a more nuanced understanding of national belonging that reflects the diverse experiences of its citizens and supports the broader goal of unity within diversity.

Several humanitarian crises and conflicts erupted globally and continued since I embarked on this PhD journey, including the COVID-19 pandemic, Hong Kong protests, racial tensions in the US following the killing of George Floyd, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, escalating inhumane Israeli violence in Palestine, and the increasing popularity of far-right movements in countries such as France, Italy, Germany, and the U.S. These events have fostered a climate of rejection towards "others" and have exacerbated the marginalisation of already vulnerable groups such as ethnic, racial, religious and linguistic minorities, women, and other marginalised communities while heightening tensions among various social factions. In light of these dynamics, utilising a post-structuralist approach, my research interrogates how "us"/"them" boundaries are naturalised, how specific knowledge becomes crystalised as truths, and how hierarchies are normalised among internal and external social groups, uncovering the structural inequalities and power dynamics that render these constructs seemingly inherent and natural. Through my research, I observe how perceptions of one's nations, social groups, and "others" are often viewed as innate despite being primarily socially constructed through discursive power aligned with dominant groups. These discourses are not unique to Uzbekistan but are prevalent in societies worldwide due to the socially and discursively constructed nature of nation, identity and knowledge through power dimensions, highlighting the relevance of my research in today's global context, where education is increasingly politicised and weaponised. Amid ongoing instability and conflicts among diverse social groups worldwide, it is vital to understand the root causes and role of school discourses in these conflicts and inequalities. Promoting peace through education is crucial for Uzbekistan and post-Soviet countries, as well as broader global dynamics. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to broader scholarly debates on addressing grievances and tensions among diverse social groups while promoting social cohesion through critically analysing educational discourses.

### ***Future Research Directions: Expanding Explorations of Uzbekistani Identity***

This research critically explored the role of school education in shaping Uzbekistani youth national identities, employing an ethnographic approach and utilising a

diverse range of data. However, since it was conducted exclusively in Tashkent, within a limited length of time, four months, and few school visits, to capture a more comprehensive understanding of the role of schooling in shaping youth national identities, it would be necessary for future research to expand the focus beyond Tashkent to include regions with varying social realities. Similarly, during my fieldwork, I encountered several young people from Karakalpakstan who expressed interest in my research and emphasised their distinct identity separate from mainstream Uzbekistani culture. Although I could not incorporate their perspectives into my findings, they shared feelings of being overlooked and marginalised within the national discourses. The complexities surrounding Karakalpakstani identity are particularly pronounced, especially following the unrest in the region in July 2022 against the Uzbekistani authorities, which attempted constitutional changes affecting the autonomy of Karakalpakstan. Given that school textbooks are translated into Karakalpak and schools in the region also follow the national curriculum, understanding the national identities of Karakalpak youth is key within the Uzbekistani context.

Moreover, while I could not engage with policymakers in school education during my fieldwork, I later had opportunities to interact with public officials from the Ministry of Preschool and School Education of Uzbekistan and those involved in developing the *Tarbiya* textbooks. I also later connected with personnel from the Kare Niazi Research Institute, which has been dedicated to research on *Tarbiya* in relation to school education since a new presidential decree in early 2024. Although these exchanges were brief, these officials highlighted the construction of national identity and patriotism as key aspects of Uzbekistani school education. Further engagement with policymakers in future research will be crucial for better understanding school discourses within a broader national framework.

Additionally, while the tensions between ethnic Uzbek youth in Uzbek- and Russian-medium schools emerged as one of the key findings of my research, since this dimension was not anticipated before my fieldwork, my research could not delve into this dimension in-depth. Given the post-socialist context and still deeply entrenched Soviet legacy in Uzbekistani society, as well as apparent tensions among ethnic Uzbek youth from these two different types of schools, disparities between these schools are an important area for further investigation. Considering that their parents and family backgrounds largely influence the kind of schools Uzbek youth attend, such future research will require engaging with them to understand youth national identities better.

Also, teachers from both school types could provide valuable insights into these differences. Interestingly, a similar phenomenon is also observed in Kazakhstan, where ethnic Kazakh youth in Kazakh- and Russian-medium schools often experience tensions (Nam, 2024). This highlights a shared post-Soviet historical context that suggests the relevance of conducting comparative studies in these two countries, or potentially beyond, to understand better the role of Russian-medium schools in shaping post-socialist youth hybrid identities in the region.

Lastly, the insights gained from this research regarding the role of school education in constructing youth national identities can extend beyond Uzbekistan and Central Asia. As highlighted through my research, school discourses play a significant role in shaping national identities by constructing official knowledge and norms about societies and their people, crystallising “us”/“them” boundaries. Hence, education can simultaneously exacerbate conflict and promote peace. Thus, while my research approach could be effectively applied in various contexts, it will be particularly relevant in regions affected by crisis, tensions, and conflict, where root causes of inter- and intra-social groups’ grievances and inequalities need to be uncovered and fostering social cohesion and positive peace is crucial.

### **Looking Back at My Research Journey**

This doctoral research has been a transformative process, reshaping not only my academic practice but also my philosophical and intellectual positioning. At the outset, my conceptualisation of identity was somewhat “stuck”, influenced by my earlier work that approached national identity. My previous research on the role of education in shaping youth national identity constrained my ability to deconstruct identity as a dynamic, fragmented, and relational construct. It was through engaging with post-structuralist theory that I began to understand identity as fluid, contingent, and decentred, shaped by discourses that are constantly in flux.

A critical moment in this intellectual shift occurred when I began to explore gender as an intrinsic marker in the construction of national identity. Initially, gender was not a central focus of my research. However, by adopting a post-structuralist framework, I began to understand gender not as an additional layer but as a key and naturalised dimension within the broader process of identity formation, embedded in power relations and performed as norms. Equally significant was my engagement with the concept of

positionality, which profoundly reshaped my approach to research. Post-structuralism challenges the notion of the neutral, objective researcher, emphasising how power and subjectivity are woven into the research process. Reflecting on my own positionality, both as a foreign researcher and as someone situated within specific epistemic and social frameworks, allowed me to understand how my interpretations were inevitably shaped by my social location and power relations. Recognising these dynamics led me to adopt a more reflexive and critical approach to my research design. Furthermore, I realised the limitations imposed by my foreign status, which prevented me from conducting ethnographic research in schools. This realisation forced me to rethink my methodology, leading me to incorporate photo elicitation and oral history interviews. These methods allowed youth to share their experiences on their own terms, empowering them to present their memories and school experiences in ways that were more authentic and aligned with their subjectivity. Fieldwork itself became a site of negotiation and transformation. Accessing participants was a slow and arduous process, underscoring the relational and contingent nature of research relationships. There was no single, dramatic shift in my research, but rather a series of small, gradual evolutions. One of the most significant turning points occurred when I met my interpreter, a university student in Tashkent, whose connections enabled me to access a network of youth that would otherwise have been closed off to me. Her family's ties to the education system provided me with crucial insights into school environments, and her friendships with potential participants helped me break through the barriers that initially seemed insurmountable. Another pivotal encounter came when I met a Karakalpak student of Uzbek origin who studied in a Russian-medium school. His candid reflections on his Karakalpak identity and the influence of the Russian-medium school on his sense of self disrupted my existing framework of analysis. He articulated how ethnic Uzbeks from different school environments navigated their national identities differently. This conversation led me to expand my research to include youth from Russian-medium schools, a group I had initially overlooked. This decision to engage with this group was a direct result of my increased awareness of the contingencies and tensions that exist within the national discourse, which cannot be understood through a monolithic lens.

Furthermore, my intellectual journey was significantly influenced by my relocation to Kazakhstan, which enabled me to immerse myself in a broader post-socialist Central Asian context. This move brought me into contact with local scholars who challenged my assumptions and encouraged me to rethink my research. These interactions were critical in

deepening my understanding of the complexity of national identity in Central Asia. Through engaging in discussions on language, ethnicity, religion and the role of history in shaping national discourses, I was able to reflect on my own epistemic position within the research. I began to recognise the need for a more nuanced understanding of Uzbekistani national identity, one that considers the contradictions and complexities inherent in post-socialist societies. Ultimately, this research has been an exercise in constant reflection, negotiation, and deconstruction. By acknowledging the multiple, contradictory, and contingent ways in which national identities are formed, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how education, ethnicity, gender, and religion interact to shape youth identities in post-Soviet contexts.

In an increasingly fragmented world, where anxiety, uncertainty, and the desire to protect the “self” are growing, tensions between social groups intensify, often resulting in conflict. Within this context, the importance of my research becomes evident. It uncovers the idea that what we perceive as “truth” and “reality” is not inherent but socially constructed. National identities, along with the distinctions between “us” and “them,” are not fixed entities but are discursively created and naturalised. These constructs become so deeply ingrained that they are internalised and accepted as self-evident, rarely subjected to critical questioning. Looking ahead, I aim to expand this inquiry into the role of education in shaping national identities beyond the specific context of Uzbekistan. In particular, I seek to explore how the discursive, contingent and relational nature of national identity can be constructed to foster peace and social justice. By examining how these processes of identity formation are shaped, I hope to shed light on how more sustainable forms of social cohesion can be built, ones that challenge the discursive boundaries which divide and alienate.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Photo Elicitation

#### In English

Please share pictures from your school days which indicate the following topics.

1. Typical school day
2. School celebration, i.e., Independence Day, Navro'z, etc.
3. Classroom
4. School uniform

#### In Uzbek

##### Fotosurat mavzusi

Iltimos, quyidagi mavzularni yoritib beruvchi maktab kunlaringizdagi rasmlar bilan ulashing.

1. Oddiy maktab kuni
2. Maktabdagi bayram, Mustaqillik bayrami, Navro'z va h.k.
3. Sinf xona
4. Maktab formasi

#### In Russian

##### Тема: извлечение фотографий

Пожалуйста, поделитесь фотографиями из ваших школьных дней, которые обозначают следующие темы.

1. Обычный школьный день
2. Школьные праздники, т.е. День Независимости, Наурыз и т.д.
3. Класс
4. Школьная форма

## **Appendix B: Oral History Interview Schedule**

### **In English**

#### **Based on photo 1**

1. When was it taken?
2. Describe in detail what is happening in the photo.
3. Tell me about your typical school days.
4. Describe to me your school assembly? What did you like the most/least about the school assembly?
5. How were the roles/activities of girls and boys different during the assembly, lessons, sports and other activities organised by the school?
6. What did schools teach you about the history of Uzbekistan?
7. What did schools teach you about Uzbekistan during the Soviet Union?
8. What did schools teach you about the independence of Uzbekistan?
9. Which national heroes were the most portrayed in textbooks?
10. Through which school subjects and activities did you learn the most about the values of Uzbekistan/ your sense of pride in Uzbekistan?
11. What did schools teach you about the values of Uzbekistan?
12. In what ways did teachers help you to understand Uzbekistan and its values?
13. Describe the moral education you had at schools.
14. Describe religious education you had at schools.
15. How did schools portray citizens of Uzbekistan?
16. How did schools portray non-citizens?
17. Did you go on excursions? Where? What did you learn?

#### **Based on photo 2**

1. When was it taken?
2. Describe in detail what is happening in the photo.
3. Tell me how you felt during this event.
4. How was this celebratory event prepared at school?
5. How was this celebration day unfolded at school? What was the programme?
6. Who were the people involved in the event?
7. What was your role in the event?
8. What did schools teach you about this national event?

9. What were other national events celebrated at schools?

**Based on photo 3**

1. When was it taken?
2. Describe in detail what is happening in the photo.
3. How were classrooms generally decorated?
4. What national symbols were displayed at schools? Which ones were your favourite and why?
5. Did you have any rituals surrounding those symbols at schools?
6. What did schools teach you about those symbols?
7. Which national figures were the most displayed at schools? Which ones were your most favourite and why?
8. What did schools teach you about those figures?
9. How did the symbols and pictures of national icons make you feel?

**Based on photo 4**

1. When was it taken?
2. Describe in detail what is happening in the photo.
3. Describe school uniforms for girls and boys.
4. What were school uniform dress codes for girls and boys?
5. What did happen if you defied school uniform dress codes?
6. In what ways girls and boys complied with or defied the school regulations regarding uniform/dress codes?
7. Did you have any other dress codes for special events?

## **In Uzbek**

### **Og'zaki suhbat mavzusi**

#### **1-rasm asosida**

1. Fotosurat qachon olingan?
2. Suratda nima sodir bo'layotganini batafsil tasvirlab bering.
3. Oddiy maktab kunlaringiz haqida gapirib bering.
4. Maktabdagi yig'ilishlar haqida gapirib bersangiz.
5. Unday yig'ilishlarda sizga eng ko'p/kamroq nimasi yoqardi?
6. Maktabda tashkil etilgan yig'ilish, dars, sport va boshqa tadbirlarda qizlar va o'g'il bolalarning roli/faoliyati qanday farq qilardi?
7. Maktablar sizga O'zbekiston tarixidan nimani o'rgatardi?
8. Sovet Ittifoqi davrida maktabda O'zbekiston haqida nimani o'rgaishgan?
9. O'zbekiston mustaqilligi haqida maktabda sizga nimani o'rgatardi?
10. Darsliklarda qaysi xalq qahramonlari ko'proq tasvirlangan edi?
11. Qaysi maktab fanlari va faoliyati orqali O'zbekiston qadriyatleri/O'zbekiston bilan faxrlanish tuyg'usi haqida ko'proq bilib olgansiz?
12. Maktab sizga O'zbekiston qadriyatleri haqida nimani o'rgatdi?
13. O'zbekiston va uning qadriyatlerini tushunishga o'qituvchilar qanday yordam berishardi?
14. Maktablarda olgan axloqiy tarbiyangizni aytib bering.
15. Ask what they learnt through the subject "Odobnoma & Tarbiya"
16. Ask how they felt about the contents of "Odobnoma & Tarbiya"
17. Maktablarda olgan diniy bilimingizni tasvirlab bering.
18. Maktablarda O'zbekiston fuqarolari qanday tasvirlangan?
19. Ask what they did and learnt through the subject "Chaqiruvga qadar boshlang'ich tayyorgarlik".
20. Ask how they felt about the contents of "Chaqiruvga qadar boshlang'ich tayyorgarlik"
21. Maktablar fuqaroligi bo'lmaganlarni qanday tasvirlagan?
22. Ekskursiyalarga borganmisiz? Qayerga? Borgan joylardannNimani o'rgangansiz?

#### **2-Fotosurat asosida**

1. Fotosurat qachon olingan?

2. Suratda nima sodir bo'layotganini batafsil tasvirlab bering.
3. Ushbu tadbir davomida o'zingizni qanday his qilganingizni aytib bering.
4. Ushbu bayram tadbiri maktabda qanday tayyorlandi?
5. Ushbu bayram kuni maktabda qanday o'tkazildi? Qanday dastur edi?
6. Tadbirda ishtirok etgan shaxslar kimlar edi?
7. Tadbirda sizning rolingiz qanday edi?
8. Ushbu milliy tadbir haqida maktab sizga nimani o'rgatdi?
9. Maktabda yana qanday milliy tadbirlar nishonlanardi?

### **3-Fotosurat asosida**

1. Fotosurat qachon olingan?
2. Suratda nima sodir bo'layotganini batafsil tasvirlab bering.
3. Sinf xonalar qanday bezatilgan edi?
4. Maktabda qanday davlat ramzlari aks ettirilgan? Qaysi biri sizga yoqdi va nima uchun?
5. Maktabda o'sha ramzlar bilan bog'liq marosimlaringiz bo'lganmi?
6. Maktab sizga ushbu belgilar haqida nimani o'rgatdi?
7. Qaysi milliy siymolar (buyuk insonlar) maktabda ko'proq namoyish etilgan edi? Qaysi biri sizga ko'proq yoqdi va nima uchun?
8. Maktab sizga bu insonlar haqida nimani o'rgatardi?
9. Milliy ramzlar va buyuk insonlar sizda qanday tuyg'ularni uyg'otardi?

### **4-Fotosurat asosida**

1. Fotosurat qachon olingan?
2. Suratda nima sodir bo'layotganini batafsil tasvirlab bering.
3. Qizlar va o'g'il bolalar uchun maktab formalariga ta'rif bering.
4. Qizlar va o'g'il bolalar uchun maktab formasi kiyinish qoidalari qanday edi?
5. Agar siz maktab formasi kiyinish qoidalarini buzsangiz nima bo'lardi, qanday chora ko'rinardi?
6. Ask about Uyat for boys and girls about uniform. Were girls told "Uyat" more often?
7. Ask about Uyat at school generally. Were girls and boys treated differently? Were girls told "uyat" more often than boys? What about relationship with boys and girls, did teachers tell "Uyat" about it?

8. Ask what they did during the assembly, did they give present to good students? What about bad students? Who were bad students? Boys or girls? Did they cut students' hair if it was too long both for boys and girls?

9. Qizlar va o'g'il bolalar qanday yo'llar bilan maktab formalarini kiyishga oid maktab qoidalariga rioya qilishardi yoki ularni buzishardi?

10. Maxsus tadbirlar uchun boshqa kiyinish qoidalari bormidi?

## In Russian

### По фото 1

1. Когда это было сделано?
2. Подробно опишите, что происходит на фото.
3. Расскажите мне о своих обычных школьных днях.
4. Опиши мне свое школьное собрание? National anthem? Stand up at the beginning of the class? Etc.
5. Что вам больше всего/наименее понравилось на школьном собрании?
6. Чем отличались роли/деятельность девочек и мальчиков на собраниях, уроках, спортивных и других мероприятиях, организованных школой?
7. Чему вас учили в школе по истории Узбекистана?
8. Чему вас учили в школах об Узбекистане во времена Советского Союза?
9. Чему вас научили в школе о независимости Узбекистана?
10. Какие национальные герои больше всего изображались в учебниках?
11. Благодаря каким школьным предметам и занятиям вы больше всего узнали о ценностях Узбекистана/вашем чувстве гордости за Узбекистан?
12. Чему вас учили в школе о ценностях Узбекистана?
13. Как учителя помогли вам понять Узбекистан и его ценности?
14. Опишите нравственное воспитание, которое вы получили в школе.  
Ask what they learnt through the subject “Азбука этики & воспитание”  
Ask how they feel about the contents of “Азбука этики & воспитание”
15. Опишите религиозное образование, которое вы получили в школе.
16. Как школы описывали граждан Узбекистана?
17. Ask what they learnt through the subject “Начальная допризывная подготовка”
18. Ask how they feel about the contents of “Начальная допризывная подготовка”
19. Как школы описывали не граждан Узбекистана?
20. Вы ездили на экскурсии? Куда? Чему вы научились?

### По фото 2

1. Когда это было сделано?
2. Подробно опишите, что происходит на фото.
3. Расскажите, что вы чувствовали во время этого события.

4. Как готовилось это праздничное мероприятие в школе?
5. Как проходил этот праздник в школе? Какая была программа?
6. Кто были люди, участвовавшие в событии?
7. Какова была ваша роль в мероприятии?
8. Чему вас научили в школах об этом национальном событии?
9. Какие еще национальные праздники отмечались в школах?

### **По фото 3**

1. Когда это было сделано?
2. Подробно опишите, что происходит на фото.
3. Как обычно были оформлены классы?
4. Какие национальные символы были вывешены в школах? Какие из них были вашими любимыми и почему?
5. Были ли у вас в школах какие-либо ритуалы, связанные с этими символами?
6. Чему вас научили в школе об этих символах?
7. Какие национальные деятели больше всего выставлялись в школах? Какие из них были самыми любимыми и почему?
8. Чему вас научили в школе об этих деятелях?
9. Какие чувства вызвали у вас символы и изображения национальных икон?

### **По фото 4**

1. Когда это было сделано?
2. Подробно опишите, что происходит на фото.
3. Охарактеризуйте школьную форму для девочек и мальчиков.
4. Каков был дресс-код школьной формы для девочек и мальчиков?
5. Что бы произошло, если бы вы нарушили дресс-код школьной формы?  
Ask about Uyat for boys and girls about uniform  
Ask about Uyat at school generally; boys; girls; were they different?
6. Каким образом девочки и мальчики соблюдали или нарушали школьные правила в отношении формы/дресс-кода?
7. Были ли у вас другие дресс-коды для особых мероприятий?

## **Appendix C: Focus Group Discussions Schedule**

### **In English**

#### **General**

1. What does it mean to be an Uzbekistani?
2. How are Uzbekistanis different from people from other Central Asian countries?
3. How are Uzbekistanis different from other nationals across the world?
4. What are the values of Uzbekistan?
5. What do you do to show you are an Uzbekistani?
6. What makes you proud to be an Uzbekistani?
7. When do you feel you are an Uzbekistani?
8. Is there anything that does not make you proud to be an Uzbekistani?
9. What are the most important historical events in Uzbekistan?
10. Which Uzbekistani do you admire the most? Why?
11. If you were not an Uzbekistani, which nationality would you most like to be? Why?
12. If you were not an Uzbekistani, which nationality would you least like to be? Why?

#### **Religion**

13. What does it mean to be a Muslim/Christian?
14. When do you feel you are Muslim/Christian?
15. Are Uzbekistani Muslims/Christians different from Muslims/Christians living in different countries? How?
16. In what ways is being an Uzbekistani Muslim/Christian different from being an Uzbekistani Christian/Muslim?
17. Do you feel closer to Uzbekistani Christians/Muslims or Muslims/Christians from other countries\_
18. Imagine yourself as a Muslim/Christian, how would your life in Uzbekistan be different?
19. Does your Muslim/Christian identity ever conflict with your Uzbekistani identity?

**Gender**

20. Imagine yourself as a woman/man, how would your life in Uzbekistan be different?
21. How is it different from being a Muslim/Christian man compared to a Muslim/Christian woman?
22. Does your female/male identity ever conflict with your Uzbekistani identity?

**Ethnicity**

23. Imagine yourself as an Uzbek/Russian/Tajik, how would your life in Uzbekistan be different?
24. If you had to belong to another ethnic group, which would you most like to be? Why?
25. If you had to belong to another ethnic group, which would you least like to be? Why?
26. What is the most important language for you?
27. Does your Uzbek/Russian/Tajik identity ever conflict with your Uzbekistani identity?

**Other**

28. Imagine yourself from an urban/rural setting, how would your life in Uzbekistan be different?
29. How do you imagine your life in 5 to 10 years' time?

## **In Uzbek**

### **Fokusli guruh jadvali**

#### **Umumiy savollar**

1. O'zbekistonlik bo'lish nimani anglatadi?
2. O'zbekistonliklar Markaziy Osiyoning boshqa mamlakatlari aholisidan nimasi bilan farq qiladi?
3. O'zbekistonliklar dunyoning boshqa millatlaridan nimasi bilan farq qiladi?
4. O'zbekistonning qadriyatlari nimalardan iborat?
5. O'zbekistonlik ekanligingizni ko'rsatish uchun nima qilasiz?
6. O'zbekistonlik ekanligingizdan nimasi bilan faxrlanasiz?
7. O'zingizni qachon (tadbir, hodisa va hk) o'zbekistonlik deb his qilasiz?
8. O'zbekistonlik ekanligingizdan g'ururlanmaydigan nimadir bormi?
9. O'zbekistondagi eng muhim tarixiy voqealar nimalardan iborat?
10. Qaysi o'zbekistonlikdan ko'proq hayratdasiz? Nega?
11. Agar siz o'zbekistonlik bo'lmaganingizda qaysi millatga mansub bo'lishni ko'proq hohlar edingiz? Nega?
12. Agar siz o'zbekistonlik bo'lmaganingizda qaysi millatga mansub bo'lishni xohlamagan bo'lardingiz? Nega?

#### **Din**

13. Musulmon bo'lish nimani anglatadi?
14. Qachon o'zingizni musulmon deb his qilasiz?
15. O'zbekistonlik musulmonlar turli mamlakatlarda yashovchi musulmonlar farq qiladimi? Qanday?
16. O'zbekistonlik musulmon bo'lish o'zbekistonlik nasroniy bo'lishdan nimasi bilan farq qiladi?
17. O'zbekistonlik musulmonlar yoki boshqa mamlakatlardagi musulmonlar bilan yaqinroq his qilasizmi?
18. O'zingizni xristian sifatida tasavvur qiling, O'zbekistondagi hayotingiz qanday bo'lardi?
19. Musulmon O'zbekistonlik kimligingizga zid keladimi?

**Jins**

20. O'zingizni ayol/erkak sifatida tasavvur qiling, O'zbekistondagi hayotingiz qanday bo'lardi?
21. Musulmon erkak bo'lish musulmon ayoldan qanday farq qiladi?
22. Sizing ayol/erkak identifikatingiz O'zbekistonlik kimligingizga zid keladimi?

**Etnik kelib chiqishi**

23. O'zingizni rus OR tojik deb tasavvur qiling, O'zbekistondagi hayotingiz qanday bo'lardi?
24. Agar siz boshqa millatga mansub bo'lishingiz kerak bo'lsa, qaysi biri bo'lishni xohlar edingiz? Nega?
25. Agar siz boshqa millatga mansub bo'lishingiz kerak bo'lsa, qaysi biri bo'lishni xohlamadingiz? Nega?
26. Siz uchun eng muhim til qaysi?
27. O'zbek kimligingiz o'zbekistonlikligingizga zid keladimi?

**Boshqa**

28. O'zingizni shahar/qishloq muhitida tasavvur qiling, O'zbekistondagi hayotingiz qanday bo'lardi?
29. 5-10 yildan keyin hayotingizni qanday tasavvur qilasiz?

## **In Russian**

### **Расписание фокус-групп**

#### **Общий**

1. Что значит быть узбекистанцем?
2. Чем узбекистанцы отличаются от жителей других стран Центральной Азии?
3. Чем узбекистанцы отличаются от граждан других стран мира?
4. Каковы ценности Узбекистана?
5. Что вы делаете, чтобы показать, что вы узбекистанец?
6. Что заставляет вас гордиться тем, что вы узбекистанец?
7. Когда вы чувствуете себя узбекистанцем?
8. Есть ли что-то, что не заставляет вас гордиться тем, что вы узбекистанец?
9. Какие самые важные исторические события в Узбекистане?
10. Кем из узбекистанцев вы восхищаетесь больше всего? Почему?
11. Если бы вы не были узбекистанцем, какой национальности вы больше всего хотели бы быть? Почему?
12. Если бы вы не были узбекистанцем, какой национальности вы меньше всего хотели бы быть? Почему?

#### **Религия**

13. Что значит быть Christian/Agnostic?
14. Когда вы чувствуете себя Christian/Agnostic?
15. Отличаются ли Christian/Agnostic Узбекистана от Christian/Agnostic проживающих в других странах? Как?
16. Чем узбекский Christian/Agnostic отличается от узбекского мусульманина?
17. Вы чувствуете себя ближе к узбекским Christian/Agnostic или Christian/Agnostic из других стран?
18. Представьте себя мусульманином, как бы изменилась ваша жизнь в Узбекистане?
19. Ваша Christian/Agnostic идентичность когда-либо противоречила вашей узбекской идентичности?

#### **Пол**

20. Представьте себя женщиной/мужчиной, как бы изменилась ваша жизнь в Узбекистане?

21. Чем отличается мужчина-мусульманин/христианин от женщины-мусульманки/христианки?
22. Ваша женская/мужская идентичность когда-либо противоречила вашей узбекской идентичности?

### **Этническая принадлежность**

23. Представьте себя узбеком, как бы изменилась ваша жизнь в Узбекистане?
24. As an ethnic minority in Uzbekistan, do you have any moments you feel frustrated or have difficulties? When? Why?
25. If a national sport team of Russia and Uzbekistan play, for example football national team, which team will you support?
26. Если бы вам пришлось принадлежать к другой этнической группе, кем бы вы больше всего хотели быть? Почему?
27. Если бы вам пришлось принадлежать к другой этнической группе, кем бы вы меньше всего хотели быть? Почему?
28. Какой язык для вас самый важный?
29. Ваша русская идентичность когда-либо противоречила вашей узбекской идентичности?

### **Другой**

30. Представьте себя в городской/сельской местности, как бы изменилась ваша жизнь в Узбекистане?
31. Как вы представляете свою жизнь через 5-10 лет?

## **Appendix D: Script for Oral Invitation to the Research**

### **In English**

#### **Oral Invitation Script**

I am currently a 3<sup>rd</sup> year PhD candidate at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan, and looking for some participants who can take part in my research.

My research aims to explore how education in Uzbekistan shapes youth national identities. Given that 60% of the population is aged under 30 and Uzbekistan is the youngest country in terms of population, you are the future of the nation and essential actors in nation-building. This is why I want to understand the Uzbekistani youth from your perspectives and in diversity. My research therefore will explore Uzbekistani young people's relation to Uzbekistan and to each other and what it is like to be a young person in Uzbekistan, particularly focusing on your school experiences and memories.

As my research focuses on school education, I am looking for those who have just graduated from school, aged 18 or 19.

The fieldwork will last for about three months, and for those who agree to participate in my research, I will observe, ask to share some pictures from your school time, interview and organise discussion groups.

As for the observation, for about three months, I will observe you through your daily lives by hanging out together, i.e., having lunch or tea together, and participating in extra-curricular activities they are involved in, participating in their off-campus lives, shopping, going to the market, coffee shop, and park, playing sports, attending public events, etc. Regarding the photo, I will ask you to share with me a couple of pictures from your school time to understand your school memories and experiences. In terms of the interview, I will later organise an interview individually, focusing on your school memories and experiences. Then towards the end, I will organise a discussion focus group with other participants to understand better what is like to be a young person in Uzbekistan and your relation to Uzbekistan and societies.

It is okay if you do not speak English well since I will be accompanied by an interpreter who will assist us in Uzbek and Russian.

Please note that if you decide to participate in my research, I will keep your identity, e.g., name, affiliated institution, confidential.

In return for your participation, I will organise an English discussion group every week, so you can practise your English with other participants and me. However, your participation is not compulsory.

Your participation is voluntary based, and I will arrange my schedule according to your availability, so please do not feel overwhelmed. If you are interested or need more information about my research, please come to see or contact me ([vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) or +910053585).

## **In Russian**

В настоящее время я учусь на третьем курсе Назарбаев Университета в Астане, Казахстан, и ищу участников, которые могли бы принять участие в моем исследовании.

Мое исследование направлено на изучение того, как образование в Узбекистане формирует национальную идентичность молодежи. Учитывая, что 60% населения моложе 30 лет, а Узбекистан — самая молодая страна по численности населения, вы — будущее нации и важные участники в развитии нации. Поэтому, я хочу понять узбекскую молодежь с вашей точки зрения и в многообразии. Поэтому мое исследование будет посвящено изучению отношения узбекской молодежи к Узбекистану и друг к другу, а также к тому, что значит быть молодым человеком в Узбекистане, уделяя особое внимание школьному опыту и воспоминаниям.

Поскольку мое исследование сосредоточено на школьном образовании, я ищу участников, кто только что закончил школу в возрасте 18 или 19 лет.

Исследование продлится около трех месяцев. Я буду исследовать участников исследования, попрошу поделиться фотографиями со школьной жизни, проведу интервью и организую дискуссии в фокус группах.

Что касается наблюдения, то в течение примерно трех месяцев я буду наблюдать за вашей повседневной жизнью, проводя время вместе, т. е. вместе обедая или пить чай, и участвовать во внеклассных мероприятиях, в которые вовлечены участники, участвовать в жизни участников за пределами кампуса. Ходить вместе по магазинам, на рынок, в кафе и в парк, заниматься спортом, посещать массовые мероприятия и т. д. Что касается фотографий, то я попрошу вас поделиться со мной парой фотографий из вашего школьного времени, чтобы понять ваши школьные воспоминания и переживания. Что касается интервью, я позже организую индивидуальное интервью, сосредоточив внимание на ваших школьных воспоминаниях и опыте. Затем ближе к концу я организую дискуссионную фокус-группу с другими участниками, чтобы лучше понять, что значит быть молодым человеком в Узбекистане и каково ваше отношение к Узбекистану и обществу

В случае, если вы плохо говорите по-английски, меня будет сопровождать переводчик, который будет помогать нам с переводом на узбекский и русский языки.

Обратите внимание, что, если вы решите принять участие в моем исследовании, ваше имя, название института будет конфиденциальным.

В обмен на ваше участие, я каждую неделю буду организовывать клуб английского языка, чтобы вы могли практиковать свой английский с другими участниками и со мной. Однако ваше участие в исследовании не является обязательным.

Ваше участие является добровольным, и я организую свое расписание в соответствии с удобным вашим временем. Если вы заинтересованы в участии в исследовании или нуждаетесь в дополнительной информации о моем исследовании, мы можем назначить встречу или можно связаться со мной по следующему и-мэйлу или номеру телефона (vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz или +910053585).

## **Appendix E: Email Attachment for the Participants' Recruitment**

### **In English**

Dear XX,

As you know, I am currently a 3<sup>rd</sup> year PhD candidate at Nazarbayev University in Astana and looking for some participants who can take part in my research.

If by any chance you know anyone who fits in the participant description and might be interested in participating in my research, please share my research information and contact ([vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) or +910053585). I will be very happy to meet the person and explain more details about my research.

I am attaching the general description of my research (Appendix F).

Thank you.

Kind regards,

Vanessa Ozawa

**In Russian**

Уважаемый ХХ,

Как вы знаете, в настоящее время я учусь на третьем курсе Назарбаев Университета в Астане и ищу участников, которые могли бы принять участие в моем исследовании. Если вы случайно знаете кого-то, кто подходит под описание участника и может быть заинтересован в участии в моем исследовании, поделитесь информацией о моем исследовании и моими контактами (vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz или +910053585). Я буду очень рада встретиться с потенциальным участником и объяснить более подробно о своем исследовании.

Прилагаю общее описание моего исследования (Приложение F).

Спасибо.

С уважением,

Vanessa Ozawa

## Appendix F: Email Attachment for the Participants' Recruitment

### In English

- **Research Aim:** My research aims to explore how education in Uzbekistan shapes youth national identities. Given that 60% of the population is aged under 30 and Uzbekistan is the youngest country in terms of population, they are the future of the nation and essential actors in nation-building. This is why I want to understand the Uzbekistani youth from their perspectives and in diversity. My research therefore will explore Uzbekistani young people's relation to Uzbekistan and to each other, and what it is like to be a young person in Uzbekistan, particularly focusing on their school experiences and memories.
- **Age:** 18-19, ideally enrolled in the 1<sup>st</sup> year of a bachelor's programme or a similar programme
- **Composition:** To understand the young people in diversity, I want to recruit young people from different social groups, as indicated in the following table.

	Woman		Man		Total
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	
Uzbek	1	1	1	1	4
Tajik	1	1	1	1	4
Russian	1	1	1	1	4
Total	3	3	3	3	12

- **Data Collection Methods:** The fieldwork will last for about three months, and for those who agree to participate in my research, I will observe, ask them to share some pictures from their school time, interview and organise discussion groups. Their participation is voluntary based, and I will arrange my schedule according to their availability, so please tell them not to feel overwhelmed.
  - **Observation:** observe them through their daily lives by hanging out together, i.e., having lunch or tea together, and participating in extra-curricular activities

they are involved in, participating in their off-campus lives, shopping, going to the market, coffee shop, and park, playing sports, attending public events, etc.

- Photo elicitation: I will ask them to share with me a couple of pictures from their school time to understand their school memories and experiences
  - Interview: I will organise an individual interview later focusing on their school memories and experiences
  - Focus (discussion) group: I will organise a (discussion) focus group with other participants later to better understand what is like to be a young person in Uzbekistan
- 
- **Period:** Three months
  - **In return:** The participation is voluntary-based. In return for their contribution to my research, I want to give them back at my level, so, I will organise English discussion groups every week for them so they can practice their English.
  - **Confidentiality:** Please tell them that if they decide to participate in my research, I will keep their identity, e.g., name, affiliated institution, confidential.
  - **Language:** It is okay if they do not speak English well since I will be accompanied by an interpreter who will assist us in Uzbek and Russian.

## In Uzbek

- Tadqiqot maqsadi: Mening tadqiqotim O'zbekistondagi ta'lim yoshlarning milliy o'ziga xosligini qanday shakllantirishini o'rganishga qaratilgan. Aholining 60 foizini 30 yoshgacha bo'lgan yoshlar tashkil etishi va O'zbekiston aholi soni bo'yicha eng yosh davlat ekanini inobatga olsak, ular millat kelajagi va davlat qurilishining muhim ishtirokchilaridir. Shuning uchun men o'zbekistonlik yoshlarni ularning dunyoqarashi va xilma-xilligi bilan tushunishni istayman. Shuning uchun mening tadqiqotim o'zbekistonlik yoshlarning O'zbekistonga va bir-biriga bo'lgan munosabatini, O'zbekistonda yosh bo'lish qanday ekanligini, xususan, ularning maktab tajribasi va xotiralariga e'tibor qaratadi.
- Yoshi: 18-19, ideal bakalavr yoki shunga o'xshash dasturning 1-kursida o'qishga kirgan
- Tarkibi: Yoshlarning xilma-xilligini tushunish uchun men quyidagi jadvalda ko'rsatilganidek, turli ijtimoiy guruhlardan yoshlarni jalb qilmoqchiman.

	Ayol		Erkak		Jami
	Shahar	Qishloq	Shahar	Qishloq	
O'zbek	1	1	1	1	4
Tojik	1	1	1	1	4
Rus	1	1	1	1	4
Jami	3	3	3	3	12

- Ma'lumot to'plash usullari: Dala ishi taxminan uch oy davom etadi va mening tadqiqotimda ishtirok etishga rozi bo'lganlar uchun men kuzataman, ulardan maktab vaqtidagi rasmlarni baham ko'rishlarini, intervyu va muhokama guruhlarini tashkil etishlarini so'rayman. Ularning ishtiroki ixtiyoriydir va men jadvalimni ularning mavjudligiga qarab tartibga solaman, shuning uchun ularga haddan tashqari tushkunlikka tushmasliklarini ayting.

- Kuzatish: birga dam olish, ya'ni birga tushlik yoki choy ichish va darsdan tashqari mashg'ulotlarda qatnashish, kampusdan tashqari hayotlarida ishtirok etish, xarid qilish, bozorga borish, qahva qilish orqali ularni kundalik hayotlari davomida kuzating. do'kon va park, sport o'ynash, ommaviy tadbirlarda qatnashish va h.k.
  - Fotosurat: Men ulardan maktab xotiralari va tajribalarini tushunish uchun maktab vaqtidagi bir nechta rasmlarni men bilan baham ko'rishlarini so'rayman.
  - Intervyu: Men keyinchalik ularning maktab xotiralari va tajribalariga e'tibor qaratgan holda individual suhbat uyushtiraman
  - Fokus (muhokama) guruhi: O'zbekistonda yosh bo'lish nima ekanligini yaxshiroq tushunish uchun men boshqa ishtirokchilar bilan keyinroq (munozara) fokus-guruh tashkil qilaman.
- Davr: uch oy
  - Buning evaziga: Ishtirok etish ixtiyoriy asosda. Tadqiqotimga qo'shgan hissasi evaziga men ularni o'z darajamga qaytarishni xohlayman, shuning uchun men har hafta ingliz tilini mashq qilishlari uchun ular uchun inglizcha muhokama guruhlarini tashkil qilaman.
  - Maxfiylik: Iltimos, ularga aytingki, agar ular mening tadqiqotimda ishtirok etishga qaror qilsalar, men ularning shaxsini, masalan, ismi, filiali, maxfiyligini saqlayman.
  - Til: Ingliz tilini yaxshi bilishmasa yaxshi bo'ladi, chunki menga o'zbek va rus tillarida yordam beradigan tarjimon hamrohlik qiladi.

## In Russian

- **Цель исследования:** Целью моего исследования является изучение того, как образование в Узбекистане формирует национальную идентичность молодежи. Учитывая, что 60% населения моложе 30 лет, а Узбекистан является самой молодой страной по численности населения, они являются будущим нации и важными участниками в развитии нации. В связи с этим мне бы хотелось понять точку зрения узбекской молодежи и в многообразии. Поэтому мое исследование будет посвящено изучению отношения узбекской молодежи к Узбекистану и друг к другу, а также к тому, каково быть молодым человеком в Узбекистане, уделяя особое внимание их школьному опыту и воспоминаниям.
- **Возраст:** 18-19 лет, зачисленные на 1 курс бакалавриата или аналогичной программы
- **Состав:** чтобы понять молодых людей в многообразии, я хочу набрать молодых людей из разных социальных групп, как указано в следующей таблице.

	Женщина		Мужчина		Всего
	Городской	Сельский	Городской	Сельский	
Узбек	1	1	1	1	4
Таджик	1	1	1	1	4
Русский	1	1	1	1	4
Всего	3	3	3	3	12

- **Методы сбора данных:** Исследование продлится около трех месяцев, и те, кто согласится участвовать в моем исследовании, я буду наблюдать за ними, просить их поделиться некоторыми фотографиями из школьных времен, проводить интервью и организовывать дискуссионные группы. Участие является добровольным, и я организую расписание в зависимости от удобного времени участника.

- **Наблюдение:** наблюдать за их повседневной жизнью, проводить время вместе, т. е., вместе обедать или пить чай, участвовать во внеклассных мероприятиях, в которых они участвуют, участвовать в их жизни за пределами кампуса, совершать вместе покупки, ходить на рынок, в кофейню и парк, заниматься спортом, посещать массовые мероприятия и т.д.

- Подбор фотографий: я попрошу их поделиться со мной несколькими фотографиями из школьных лет, чтобы понять их школьные воспоминания и опыт.
  - Интервью: позже я организую индивидуальное интервью, сосредоточив внимание на их школьных воспоминаниях и опыте.
  - Фокус-группа (дискуссия): позже я организую фокус-группу (дискуссию) с другими участниками, чтобы лучше понять, что значит быть молодым человеком в Узбекистане.
- Период: три месяца
  - Взамен: участие является добровольным. В обмен на их вклад в мое исследование, я каждую неделю буду организовывать для них клуб английского языка, чтобы они могли практиковать свой английский.
  - Конфиденциальность: сообщите им, что, если они решат участвовать в моем исследовании, их данные, например, имя, название института будет конфиденциальным.
  - Язык: В случае, если они плохо говорят по-английски, меня будет сопровождать переводчик, который будет помогать нам с переводом на узбекский и русский языки.

## **Appendix G: Written Consent Form to Participate in Observation**

### **In English**

#### **Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**

My name is Vanessa Ozawa and I am a researcher from Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan who is studying how school education shapes Uzbekistani youth national identities. I invite you to take part in an observation. More details are described below.

#### **What is this study about?**

The group discussion is part of my doctoral research affiliated to Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. I am hoping to understand how school education shapes Uzbekistani young people's national identities and the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, and religion.

#### **What will happen during the observation?**

I am interested to understand your daily lives as a young person living in Uzbekistan and your interactions with others. Any daily life activities can be observed. We will find a time that works for you and where you feel comfortable with my observation. I would like to see your normal interactions with your friends, families and others. I will simply "hang out" and spend time with you for observation and take notes, i.e., having lunch or tea together, and participating in extra-curricular activities they are involved in, participating in their off-campus lives, shopping, going to the market, coffee shop, and park, playing sports, attending public events, etc.

#### **Who will have access to the research information (data)? How private is it?**

The notes I take during the observation will be stored safely in a locked room and will be destroyed when my research data analysis is complete. Your name will be coded and will not be identified to others, instead compiled with other information to provide a composite understanding of interactions. The data will be used for my research, in a composite form in presentations and publications of the results.

#### **Are there any risks to doing this study?**

There are no major risks in your participation, only minor risks of discomfort such as feeling shy or saying something potentially embarrassing. There is no requirement to participate.

To help you feel more comfortable, you always will have a choice to not answer any question you are unsure of, or are uninterested or uncomfortable answering. You will never be pressured

to answer and can choose to stop the interview and/or participation in the study at any time without me being upset.

**What benefits will I have if I participate in the study?**

It is unlikely that there will be direct benefits to you, however, by better understanding the topic of education and national identities, researchers and others may be able to help support education policies and practices that will improve education and society.

**Do I have to participate?**

The participation in this study is completely voluntary. I respect your decision to be observed or not. I will not share if you chose to participate with anyone else. There will be no negative consequence for choosing not to participate, just as there will be no positive result for participating.

**Can you change your mind?**

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequence. All data relating to your observation will be removed if you choose to stop the study.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**Who do I speak to if I have questions about this research?**

If you would like more information or have any problems with this research, you can call or message Vanessa Ozawa on her cell phone at +910053585 or email [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**What should I do next?**

If you want to be involved in this study to have your class observed, you can sign the statement of consent below.

**Informed Statement of Consent.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project entitled, “Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion”. The study has been explained to me and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my right to withdraw from

participating or refusing to participate will be respected and that my responses and identity will be kept confidential. I give this consent voluntarily.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Uzbek**

**Yozma rozilik shakli**  
**Kuzatuvda ishtirok etish**

**Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xoslik haqidagi nutqlari:**  
**Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishuvlari**

Mening ismim Vanessa Ozava va men Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti tadqiqotchisiman, u maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini qanday shakllantirishini o‘rganmoqda. Men sizni kuzatishda ishtirok etishga taklif qilaman. Batafsil ma'lumotlar quyida tasvirlangan.

**Ushbu tadqiqot nima haqida?**

Guruh muhokamasi Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universitetiga qarashli doktorlik tadqiqotimning bir qismidir. Men maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini hamda etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning o‘zaro bog‘liqligini qanday shakllantirishini tushunishga umid qilaman.

**Kuzatish paytida nima sodir bo'ladi?**

O‘zbekistonda yashovchi bir yosh sifatida kundalik hayotingizni, boshqalar bilan muloqotingizni tushunishga qiziqaman. Har qanday kundalik hayot faoliyati kuzatilishi mumkin. Biz sizga mos keladigan va mening kuzatishlarim bilan o'zingizni qulay his qiladigan vaqtni topamiz. Do'stlaringiz, oilangiz va boshqalar bilan normal munosabatingizni ko'rishni xohlayman. Men siz bilan shunchaki “o‘rab turaman” va kuzatish uchun vaqt o‘tkazaman va qaydlar olib boraman, ya’ni birga tushlik yoki choy ichish, ular ishtirok etadigan darsdan tashqari mashg‘ulotlarda qatnashish, kampusdan tashqari hayotlarida ishtirok etish, xarid qilish, bozor, qahvaxona va park, sport o'ynash, ommaviy tadbirlarda qatnashish va h.k.

**Tadqiqot ma'lumotlariga (ma'lumotlariga) kim ega bo'ladi? Bu qanchalik shaxsiy?**

Kuzatuv davomida olgan qaydlarim yopiq xonada xavfsiz saqlanadi va tadqiqot ma'lumotlarim tahlili tugallangandan so'ng yo'q qilinadi. Sizning ismingiz kodlanadi va boshqalarga identifikatsiya qilinmaydi, buning o'rniga o'zaro ta'sirlarni umumiy tushunishni ta'minlash uchun boshqa ma'lumotlar bilan to'planadi. Ma'lumotlar mening tadqiqotim uchun, kompozitsion shaklda taqdimotlar va natijalarning nashrlarida

qo'llaniladi.

### **Ushbu tadqiqotni o'tkazishda xavf bormi?**

Ishtirok etishingizda katta xavf yo'q, faqat noqulay his-tuyg'ularni his qilish yoki uyatchan narsa aytish kabi kichik xavflar mavjud. Ishtirok etish uchun hech qanday shart yo'q.

O'zingizni qulayroq his qilishingizga yordam berish uchun siz doimo ishonchingiz komil bo'lmagan yoki qiziqmagan yoki noqulay javob beradigan savollarga javob bermaslik tanloviga ega bo'lasiz. Siz hech qachon javob berishga majburlanmaysiz va men xafa bo'lmasdan istalgan vaqtda intervyu va/yoki tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni to'xtatishingiz mumkin.

### **Tadqiqotda qatnashsam, qanday imtiyozlarga ega bo'laman?**

Siz uchun to'g'ridan-to'g'ri foyda bo'lishi dargumon, ammo ta'lim va milliy o'ziga xoslik mavzusini yaxshiroq tushunish orqali tadqiqotchilar va boshqalar ta'lim va jamiyatni yaxshilaydigan ta'lim siyosati va amaliyotlarini qo'llab-quvvatlashga yordam berishi mumkin.

### **Men ishtirok etishim kerakmi?**

Ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etish butunlay ixtiyoriydir. Men sizning qaroringizga rioya qilish yoki qilmaslikni hurmat qilaman. Agar siz boshqa birov bilan ishtirok etishni tanlagan bo'lsangiz, men baham ko'rmayman. Ishtirok etish uchun ijobiy natija bo'lmaganidek, ishtirok etmaslikni tanlashning ham salbiy oqibati bo'lmaydi.

### **Fikringizni o'zgartira olasizmi?**

Siz istalgan vaqtda hech qanday oqibatlersiz tadqiqotdan voz kechish huquqiga egasiz. Agar siz tadqiqotni to'xtatmoqchi bo'lsangiz, kuzatuvingizga tegishli barcha ma'lumotlar o'chirib tashlanadi.

### **Tadqiqotni kim ko'rib chiqdi?**

Ushbu tadqiqot Nazarboyev universiteti institutsional tadqiqot axloqi qo'mitasi tomonidan ko'rib chiqildi va tasdiqlandi. Boshqa har qanday savol yoki tashvishlarni Nazarboyev universitetining institutsional tadqiqotlar etika qo'mitasiga, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) yoki professor Naureen Durrani [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) yoki doktor Zumrad Kataevaga [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz) manziliga yuborishingiz mumkin. [nu.edu.kz](http://nu.edu.kz).

### **Agar ushbu tadqiqot bo'yicha savollarim bo'lsa, kim bilan gaplashaman?**

Agar siz qo'shimcha ma'lumot olishni istasangiz yoki ushbu tadqiqot bilan bog'liq muammolarga duch kelsangiz, Vanessa Ozawaga +910053585 raqamiga qo'ng'iroq qilishingiz yoki uning mobil telefoniga xabar yuborishingiz yoki [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) yoki professor Naureen Durrani [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) manziliga

elektron pochta xabarini yuborishingiz mumkin. edu.kz yoki doktor Zumrad Kataeva zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz manzilida.

### **Keyin nima qilishim kerak?**

Agar siz o'z sinfingizni kuzatish uchun ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni istasangiz, quyidagi rozilik bayonnomasiga imzo chekishingiz mumkin.

### **Axborotlangan rozilik bayonoti.**

Men, \_\_\_\_\_ “Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlari milliy o‘ziga xosliklari haqidagi nutqlari:” nomli tadqiqot loyihasida ishtirok etishga roziman. Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishishi”. Tadqiqot menga tushuntirildi va savollarimga meni qoniqtiradigan javoblar berildi. Ishtirok etishdan voz kechish yoki qatnashishdan bosh tortish huquqim hurmat qilinishini hamda javoblarim va shaxsim maxfiy saqlanishini tushunaman. Men bu rozilikni ixtiyoriy ravishda beraman.

Ishtirokchining imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

Tadqiqotchi imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Russian****Форма письменного согласия  
для участия в наблюдении****Школьное образование и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной идентичности: Пересечения Этничности, Пола и Религии**

Меня зовут Ванесса Одзава. Я исследователь из Назарбаев Университета в Казахстане, изучающая, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи. Приглашаю вас принять участие в наблюдении. Более подробная информация описана ниже.

**О чем это исследование?**

Обсуждение в группе является частью моего докторского исследования, связанного с Назарбаев Университетом в Казахстане. Я надеюсь понять, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи и пересечение этнической принадлежности, пола и религии.

**Что будет происходить во время наблюдения?**

Мне интересно понять вашу повседневную жизнь, живущего в Узбекистане, и ваше взаимодействие с другими людьми. Любая повседневная деятельность может наблюдаться. Мы найдем удобное для вас время, когда вы будете чувствовать себя комфортно во время наблюдения. Я хотела бы видеть ваши взаимодействия с друзьями, семьями и другими людьми. Я просто буду проводить с вами время для наблюдения и заметок, т.е., вместе обедать или пить чай, а также участвовать во внеклассных мероприятиях, в которых они участвуют, участвовать в их жизни вне кампуса, делать покупки, ходить на рынок, кофейню и парк, заниматься спортом, посещать массовые мероприятия и т.д.

**Кто будет иметь доступ к исследовательской информации (данным)? Насколько это личное?**

Заметки, которые я буду делать во время наблюдения, будут надежно храниться в запертой комнате и будут уничтожены, когда анализ данных моего исследования будет завершен. Ваше имя будет закодировано и не будет идентифицировано другими, вместо этого оно будет объединено с другой информацией, чтобы обеспечить общее

понимание взаимодействий. Данные будут использованы для моего исследования в презентациях и публикациях результатов.

**Существуют ли какие-либо риски для проведения этого исследования?**

В вашем участии нет серьезных рисков, только незначительные риски дискомфорта, такие как застенчивость или высказывание чего-то потенциально неловкого. Требований к участию нет.

Чтобы помочь вам чувствовать себя более комфортно, у вас всегда будет возможность не отвечать на любой вопрос, в котором вы не уверены, или на который вам неинтересно или неудобно отвечать. Вас никогда не будут принуждать к ответу, и вы можете прекратить интервью и/или участие в исследовании в любое время, и я не расстроюсь.

**Какие преимущества я получу, если приму участие в исследовании?**

Маловероятно, что это принесет вам непосредственную пользу, однако, лучше разбираясь в теме образования и национальной идентичности, исследователи и другие лица могут помочь поддержать политику и практику в области образования, которые улучшат образование и общество.

**Должен ли я участвовать?**

Участие в этом исследовании является полностью добровольным. Я уважаю ваше решение быть наблюдаемым или нет. Я не буду делиться, если вы решите участвовать с кем-либо еще. Не будет никаких отрицательных последствий для отказа от участия, так же как не будет положительного результата для участия.

**Можете ли вы передумать?**

Вы имеете право отказаться от исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий. Все данные, относящиеся к вашему наблюдению, будут удалены, если вы решите прекратить исследование.

**Кто рецензировал исследование?**

Это исследование было рассмотрено и одобрено Комитетом по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета. С любыми другими вопросами или опасениями можно обращаться в Комитет по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета по адресу [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz), профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу

naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz.

**К кому мне обратиться, если у меня возникнут вопросы об этом исследовании?**

Если вам нужна дополнительная информация или у вас есть какие-либо проблемы с этим исследованием, вы можете позвонить или написать Ванессе Одзаве на ее мобильный телефон по телефону +910053585 или по электронной почте vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz или профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**Что я должен делать дальше?**

Если вы хотите принять участие в этом исследовании для наблюдения за вашим классом, вы можете подписать заявление о согласии ниже.

Информированное заявление о согласии.

Я, \_\_\_\_\_ соглашаюсь участвовать в исследовательском проекте «Школа и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной идентичности: Пересечения этноса, пола и религии». Исследование было объяснено мне, и на мои вопросы были даны ответы к моему удовлетворению. Я понимаю, что мое право отказаться от участия или отказаться от участия будет соблюдаться и что мои ответы и личность будут сохранены в тайне. Я даю это согласие добровольно.

Подпись участника: \_\_\_\_\_ Свидание: \_\_\_\_\_

Подпись исследователя: \_\_\_\_\_ Свидание: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix H: Written Consent Form to Participate in the Photo Elicitation**

### **In English**

#### **Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**

My name is Vanessa Ozawa and I am a researcher from Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan who is studying how school education shapes Uzbekistani youth national identities. I invite you to take part in a group discussion. More details are described below.

#### **What is the study about?**

The photo-elicitation is part of my doctoral research affiliated with Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. I am hoping to understand how school education shapes Uzbekistani young people's national identities and the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, and religion.

#### **What will happen during the photo-elicitation?**

If you choose to participate you will be asked to share with me some photos from your schooling time. But if you do not wish to take part in the research, you do not have to.

#### **What questions will we ask in the photo-elicitation?**

No questions will be asked in the photo elicitation.

#### **Who will have access to the research information (data)? How private is it?**

I will keep the information you provide during the photo elicitation, meaning I will not tell other people who are outside of the study. I will also work to maintain privacy by masking your identity and will not use identifiable information in presentations or publications. Information used that could identify will not be published or shared unless we have your permission. Any data from this research that will be shared or published will never have your name on it, instead a pseudonym, or pretend name, will be used, or it will be combined with information across many participants.

Data will be kept stored in a private space. I will remove all data at the conclusion of the study to be stored on a password-protected computer for a minimum of three years to be potentially reviewed by the Ethics Review Board at Nazarbayev University.

#### **Are there any risks to doing this study?**

There are no major risks in your participation, only minor risks of discomfort such as feeling shy or saying something potentially embarrassing. There is no requirement to participate.

To help you feel more comfortable, you always will have a choice to not participate or answer any question you are unsure of, or are uninterested or uncomfortable answering. You will never be pressured to participate or answer and can choose to stop the discussion and/or participation in the study at any time without me being upset.

**What benefits will I have if I participate in the study?**

It is unlikely that there will be direct benefits to you, however, by better understanding the topic of education and national identities, researchers and others may be able to help support education policies and practices that will improve education and society.

**Do I have to participate?**

The participation in this study is completely voluntary. I respect your decision to provide me with photos or not. I will not share if you chose to participate with anyone else. There will be no negative consequence for choosing not to participate, just as there will be no positive result for participating.

**Can you change your mind?**

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequence. All data relating to your observation will be removed if you choose to stop the study.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**Who do I speak to if I have questions about this research?**

If you would like more information or have any problems with this research, you can call or message Vanessa Ozawa on her cell phone at +910053585 or email [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**What should I do next?**

If you want to be involved in this study to have your class observed, you can sign the statement of consent below.

**Informed Statement of Consent.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project entitled, “Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion”. The study has been explained to me and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my right to withdraw from participating or refusing to participate will be respected and that my responses and identity will be kept confidential. I give this consent voluntarily.

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Uzbek**

**Yozma rozilik shakli**  
**Fotosuratda ishtirok etish**

**Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xoslik haqidagi nutqlari:**  
**Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishuvlari**

Mening ismim Vanessa Ozava va men Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti tadqiqotchisiman, u maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini qanday shakllantirishini o‘rganmoqda. Men sizni guruh muhokamasida ishtirok etishga taklif qilaman. Batafsil ma'lumotlar quyida tasvirlangan.

**Tadqiqot nima haqida?**

Fotosurat Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti bilan bog‘langan doktorlik tadqiqotimning bir qismidir. Men maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini hamda etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning o‘zaro bog‘liqligini qanday shakllantirishini tushunishga umid qilaman.

**Fotosurat paytida nima bo'ladi?**

Agar siz ishtirok etishni tanlasangiz, sizdan maktabda o'qigan vaqtingizdan bir nechta fotosuratlarni men bilan baham ko'rishingiz so'raladi. Ammo agar siz tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni xohlamasangiz, unda ishtirok etishingiz shart emas.

**Fotosuratda qanday savollarni beramiz?**

Fotosuratda hech qanday savol berilmaydi.

**Tadqiqot ma'lumotlariga (ma'lumotlariga) kim ega bo'ladi? Bu qanchalik shaxsiy?**

Men siz taqdim etgan ma'lumotni suratga olish jarayonida saqlayman, ya'ni tadqiqotdan tashqarida bo'lgan boshqa odamlarga aytmayman. Shuningdek, men sizning shaxsingizni yashirish orqali maxfiylikni saqlashga harakat qilaman va taqdimotlar yoki nashrlarda identifikatsiyalash mumkin bo'lgan ma'lumotlardan foydalanmayman. Sizning ruxsatingiz bo'lmasa, aniqlanishi mumkin bo'lgan ma'lumotlar nashr etilmaydi yoki baham ko'rilmaydi. Ushbu tadqiqotdan olingan har qanday ma'lumotlar almashiladi yoki chop etiladi, unda hech qachon sizning ismingiz bo'lmaydi, buning o'rniga taxallus yoki ism qo'llaniladi yoki u ko'plab ishtirokchilar haqidagi ma'lumotlar bilan birlashtiriladi. Ma'lumotlar shaxsiy makonda saqlanadi. Nazarboyev universitetining axloqni tekshirish kengashi tomonidan ko‘rib chiqilishi uchun kamida uch yil davomida parol bilan

himoyalangan kompyuterda saqlanishi kerak bo'lgan tadqiqot yakunida barcha ma'lumotlarni o'chirib tashlayman.

### **Ushbu tadqiqotni o'tkazishda xavf bormi?**

Ishtirok etishingizda katta xavf yo'q, faqat noqulay his-tuyg'ularni his qilish yoki uyatchan narsa aytish kabi kichik xavflar mavjud. Ishtirok etish uchun hech qanday shart yo'q. O'zingizni qulayroq his qilish uchun siz doimo ishtirok etmaslik yoki o'zingizga ishonchingiz komil bo'lmagan yoki qiziqmagan yoki noqulay javob berishni tanlash imkoniyatiga ega bo'lasiz. Siz hech qachon ishtirok etish yoki javob berish uchun bosim o'tkazmaysiz va men xafa bo'lmasdan istalgan vaqtda muhokamani va/yoki tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni to'xtatishni tanlashingiz mumkin.

### **Tadqiqotda qatnashsam, qanday imtiyozlarga ega bo'laman?**

Siz uchun to'g'ridan-to'g'ri foyda bo'lishi dargumon, ammo ta'lim va milliy o'ziga xoslik mavzusini yaxshiroq tushunish orqali tadqiqotchilar va boshqalar ta'lim va jamiyatni yaxshilaydigan ta'lim siyosati va amaliyotlarini qo'llab-quvvatlashga yordam berishi mumkin.

### **Men ishtirok etishim kerakmi?**

Ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etish butunlay ixtiyoriydir. Menga fotosuratlar berish yoki bermaslik qaroringizni hurmat qilaman. Agar siz boshqa birov bilan ishtirok etishni tanlagan bo'lsangiz, men baham ko'rmayman. Ishtirok etish uchun ijobiy natija bo'lmaganidek, ishtirok etmaslikni tanlashning ham salbiy oqibati bo'lmaydi.

### **Fikringizni o'zgartira olasizmi?**

Siz istalgan vaqtda hech qanday oqibatlarsiz tadqiqotdan voz kechish huquqiga egasiz. Agar siz tadqiqotni to'xtatmoqchi bo'lsangiz, kuzatuvingizga tegishli barcha ma'lumotlar o'chirib tashlanadi.

### **Tadqiqotni kim ko'rib chiqdi?**

Ushbu tadqiqot Nazarboyev universiteti institutsional tadqiqot axloqi qo'mitasi tomonidan ko'rib chiqildi va tasdiqlandi. Boshqa har qanday savol yoki tashvishlarni Nazarboyev universitetining institutsional tadqiqotlar etika qo'mitasiga, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) yoki professor Naureen Durrani [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) yoki doktor Zumrad Kataevaga [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

### **Agar ushbu tadqiqot bo'yicha savollarim bo'lsa, kim bilan gaplashaman?**

Agar siz qo'shimcha ma'lumotga ega bo'lishni istasangiz yoki ushbu tadqiqot bilan bog'liq muammolarga duch kelsangiz, Vanessa Ozawaga +910053585 raqamiga qo'ng'iroq

qilishingiz yoki uning mobil telefoniga xabar yuborishingiz yoki vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz yoki professor Naureen Durrani naureen.durrani@nu manziliga elektron pochta xabarini yuborishingiz mumkin. edu.kz yoki doktor Zumrad Kataeva zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz manzilida.

### **Keyin nima qilishim kerak?**

Agar siz o'z sinfingizni kuzatish uchun ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni istasangiz, quyidagi rozilik bayonnomasiga imzo chekishingiz mumkin.

### **Axborotlangan rozilik bayonoti.**

Men, \_\_\_\_\_, “Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xoslik haqidagi nutqlari:” nomli tadqiqot loyihasida ishtirok etishga roziman. Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishishi”. Tadqiqot menga tushuntirildi va savollarimga meni qoniqtiradigan javoblar berildi. Ishtirok etishdan voz kechish yoki qatnashishdan bosh tortish huquqim hurmat qilinishini hamda javoblarim va shaxsim maxfiy saqlanishini tushunaman. Men bu rozilikni ixtiyoriy ravishda beraman.

Ishtirokchining imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

Tadqiqotchi imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Russian**

**Форма письменного согласия  
на участие в фото выборе**

**Школьное образование и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной  
идентичности: Пересечения этничности, пола и религии**

Меня зовут Ванесса Одзава. Я исследователь из Назарбаев Университета в Казахстане, изучающий, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи. Приглашаю вас принять участие в обсуждении в группах. Более подробная информация описана ниже.

**О чем исследование?**

Фото выбор является частью моего докторского исследования, связанного с Назарбаев Университетом в Казахстане. Я надеюсь понять, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи и пересечение этнической принадлежности, пола и религии.

**Что будет происходить во время фото выбора?**

Если вы решите принять участие, вас попросят поделиться со мной фотографиями из вашей школьной жизни. Но если вы не хотите принимать участие в исследовании, вы не обязаны.

**Какие вопросы мы будем задавать в фото выборе?**

Никаких вопросов не будет задано в фото выборе.

**Кто будет иметь доступ к исследовательской информации (данным)? Насколько это личное?**

Я буду хранить информацию, которую вы предоставили во время сбора фотографий, то есть я не буду рассказывать другим людям, которые не участвуют в исследовании. Я также буду работать над сохранением конфиденциальности, скрывая вашу личность, и не буду использовать идентифицирующую информацию в презентациях или публикациях. Используемая информация, которая может идентифицировать, не будет опубликована или передана, если у нас нет вашего разрешения. Любые данные из этого исследования, которые будут переданы или опубликованы, никогда не будут содержать ваше имя, вместо этого будет использоваться псевдоним или вымышленное имя, или они будут объединены с информацией многих участников. Данные будут храниться в надежном месте. По завершении исследования я удалю все

данные, которые будут храниться на защищенном паролем компьютере в течение как минимум трех лет для возможного рассмотрения Советом по этике Назарбаев Университета.

### **Существуют ли какие-либо риски для проведения этого исследования?**

В вашем участии нет серьезных рисков, только незначительные риски дискомфорта, такие как застенчивость или высказывание чего-то потенциально неловкого. Требований к участию нет.

Чтобы помочь вам чувствовать себя более комфортно, у вас всегда будет возможность не участвовать или ответить на любой вопрос, в котором вы не уверены, или вам неинтересно или неудобно отвечать. Вас никогда не будут принуждать к участию или ответу, и вы можете прекратить обсуждение и/или участие в исследовании в любое время, и я не расстроюсь.

### **Какие преимущества я получу, если приму участие в исследовании?**

Маловероятно, что это принесет вам непосредственную пользу, однако, лучше разбираясь в теме образования и национальной идентичности, исследователи и другие лица могут помочь поддержать политику и практику в области образования, которые улучшат образование и общество.

### **Должен ли я участвовать?**

Участие в этом исследовании является полностью добровольным. Я уважаю ваше решение предоставлять мне фотографии или нет. Я не буду делиться, если вы решите участвовать с кем-либо еще. Не будет никаких отрицательных последствий для отказа от участия, так же как не будет положительного результата для участия

### **Можете ли вы передумать?**

Вы имеете право отказаться от исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий. Все данные, относящиеся к вашему наблюдению, будут удалены, если вы решите прекратить исследование.

### **Кто рецензировал исследование?**

Это исследование было рассмотрено и одобрено Комитетом по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета. С любыми другими вопросами или опасениями можно обращаться в Комитет по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета по адресу [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz), профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

К кому мне обратиться, если у меня возникнут вопросы об этом исследовании?

Если вам нужна дополнительная информация или у вас есть какие-либо проблемы с этим исследованием, вы можете позвонить или написать Ванессе Одзаве на ее мобильный телефон по телефону +910053585 или по электронной почте [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

### **Что я должен делать дальше?**

Если вы хотите принять участие в этом исследовании для наблюдения за вашим классом, вы можете подписать заявление о согласии ниже.

### **Информированное заявление о согласии.**

Я, \_\_\_\_\_, согласен/на принять участие в исследовательском проекте «Обучение и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной идентичности: Пересечения этноса, пола и религии». Исследование было объяснено мне, и на мои вопросы были даны ответы к моему удовлетворению. Я понимаю, что мое право отказаться от участия или отказаться от участия будет соблюдаться и что мои ответы и личность будут сохранены в тайне. Я даю это согласие добровольно.

Подпись участника: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

Подпись исследователя: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix I: Written Consent Form to Participate in the Interview**

### **In English**

#### **Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**

My name is Vanessa Ozawa and I am a researcher from Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan who is studying how school education shapes Uzbekistani youth national identities. I invite you to take part in an interview. More details are described below.

#### **What is the study about?**

The interview is part of my doctoral research affiliated with Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. I am hoping to understand how school education shapes Uzbekistani young people's national identities and the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, and religion. In the interview, we will sit and talk about your school experiences and memories.

#### **What will happen during the interview?**

If you choose to participate you will be a part of an interview. But if you do not wish to take part in the research, you do not have to. During the interview, I will ask you a few questions. The discussion will take about 45 minutes to one hour.

#### **What questions will we ask in the interview?**

I will ask questions about your school experiences and memories. I will ask these questions in the language you prefer Uzbek or Russian, and you are free to answer our questions in the language comfortable to you.

#### **Who will have access to the research information (data)? How private is it?**

I will keep the information you provide during the interview confidential, meaning I will not tell other people who are outside of the study. I will also work to maintain privacy by masking your identity and will not use identifiable information in presentations or publications. Information used that could identify will not be published or shared unless we have your permission. Any data from this research that will be shared or published will never have your name on it, instead a pseudonym, or pretend name, will be used, or it will be combined with information across many participants.

The interview will be audio recorded with your permission to keep the accuracy of words in the interview. Data will be kept stored in a private space. A translator, who will accompany the interview will transcribe the audio files but there will be no identifying information on the

transcript to connect the audio back to you or your institution. I will remove all data at the conclusion of the study to be stored on a password-protected computer for a minimum of three years to be potentially reviewed by the Ethics Review Board at Nazarbayev University.

**Are there any risks to doing this study?**

There are no major risks in your participation, only minor risks of discomfort such as feeling shy or saying something potentially embarrassing. There is no requirement to participate.

To help you feel more comfortable, you always will have a choice to not answer any question you are unsure of, or are uninterested or uncomfortable answering. You will never be pressured to answer and can choose to stop the interview and/or participation in the study at any time without me being upset.

**What benefits will I have if I participate in the study?**

It is unlikely that there will be direct benefits to you, however, by better understanding the topic of education and national identities, researchers and others may be able to help support education policies and practices that will improve education and society.

**Do I have to participate?**

The participation in this study is completely voluntary. I respect your decision to be observed or not. I will not share if you chose to participate with anyone else. There will be no negative consequence for choosing not to participate, just as there will be no positive result for participating.

**Can you change your mind?**

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequence. All data relating to your observation will be removed if you choose to stop the study.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**Who do I speak to if I have questions about this research?**

If you would like more information or have any problems with this research, you can call or message Vanessa Ozawa on her cell phone at +910053585 or email [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**What should I do next?**

If you want to be involved in this study to have your class observed, you can sign the statement of consent below.

**Informed Statement of Consent.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project entitled, “Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion”. The study has been explained to me and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my right to withdraw from participating or refusing to participate will be respected and that my responses and identity will be kept confidential. I give this consent voluntarily.

I give my permission to audio record the interview: Yes  No

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Uzbek**

**Yozma rozilik shakli**  
**Intervyuda ishtirok etish**

**Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xoslik haqidagi nutqlari:**  
**Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishuvlari**

Mening ismim Vanessa Ozava va men Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti tadqiqotchisiman, u maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini qanday shakllantirishini o‘rganmoqda. Sizni intervyuda ishtirok etishga taklif qilaman. Batafsil ma'lumotlar quyida tasvirlangan.

**Tadqiqot nima haqida?**

Suhbat Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti bilan bog‘liq bo‘lgan doktorlik tadqiqotimning bir qismidir. Men maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini hamda etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinining o‘zaro bog‘liqligini qanday shakllantirishini tushunishga umid qilaman. Suhbatda biz o‘tirib, maktab tajribangiz va xotiralaringiz haqida gaplashamiz.

**Suhbat davomida nima bo'ladi?**

Agar siz ishtirok etishni tanlasangiz, siz intervyuning bir qismi bo'lasiz. Ammo agar siz tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni xohlamasangiz, unda ishtirok etishingiz shart emas. Suhbat davomida men sizga bir nechta savol beraman. Muhokama taxminan 45 daqiqadan bir soatgacha davom etadi.

**Suhbatda qanday savollarni beramiz?**

Men sizning maktab tajribangiz va xotiralaringiz haqida savollar beraman. Men bu savollarni o'zbek yoki rus tillarida sizga ma'qul bo'lgan tilda beraman va siz o'zingiz uchun qulay bo'lgan tilda savollarimizga javob bera olasiz.

**Tadqiqot ma'lumotlariga (ma'lumotlariga) kim ega bo'ladi? Bu qanchalik shaxsiy?**

Suhbat davomida siz bergan ma'lumotni maxfiy saqlayman, ya'ni tadqiqotdan tashqarida bo'lgan boshqa odamlarga aytmayman. Shuningdek, men sizning shaxsingizni yashirish orqali maxfiylikni saqlashga harakat qilaman va taqdimotlar yoki nashrlarda identifikatsiyalash mumkin bo'lgan ma'lumotlardan foydalanmayman. Sizning ruxsatingiz bo'lmasa, aniqlanishi mumkin bo'lgan ma'lumotlar nashr etilmaydi yoki baham ko'rilmaydi. Ushbu tadqiqotdan olingan har qanday ma'lumotlar almashiladi yoki chop

etiladi, unda hech qachon sizning ismingiz bo'lmaydi, buning o'rniga taxallus yoki ism qo'llaniladi yoki u ko'plab ishtirokchilar haqidagi ma'lumotlar bilan birlashtiriladi. Suhbatdagi so'zlarning to'g'riligini saqlash uchun sizning ruxsatingiz bilan suhbat audio yozib olinadi. Ma'lumotlar shaxsiy makonda saqlanadi. Suhbatga hamrohlik qiladigan tarjimon audio fayllarni transkripsiya qiladi, lekin audioni sizga yoki muassasangizga ulash uchun transkriptda aniqlovchi ma'lumot bo'lmaydi. Nazarboyev universitetining axloqni tekshirish kengashi tomonidan ko'rib chiqilishi uchun kamida uch yil davomida parol bilan himoyalangan kompyuterda saqlanishi kerak bo'lgan tadqiqot yakunida barcha ma'lumotlarni o'chirib tashlayman.

### **Ushbu tadqiqotni o'tkazishda xavf bormi?**

Ishtirok etishingizda katta xavf yo'q, faqat noqulay his-tuyg'ularni his qilish yoki uyatchan narsa aytish kabi kichik xavflar mavjud. Ishtirok etish uchun hech qanday shart yo'q.

O'zingizni qulayroq his qilishingizga yordam berish uchun siz doimo ishonchingiz komil bo'lmagan yoki qiziqmagan yoki noqulay javob beradigan savollarga javob bermaslik tanloviga ega bo'lasiz. Siz hech qachon javob berishga majburlanmaysiz va men xafa bo'lmasdan istalgan vaqtda intervyu va/yoki tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni to'xtatishingiz mumkin.

### **Tadqiqotda qatnashsam, qanday imtiyozlarga ega bo'laman?**

Siz uchun to'g'ridan-to'g'ri foyda bo'lishi dargumon, ammo ta'lim va milliy o'ziga xoslik mavzusini yaxshiroq tushunish orqali tadqiqotchilar va boshqalar ta'lim va jamiyatni yaxshilaydigan ta'lim siyosati va amaliyotlarini qo'llab-quvvatlashga yordam berishi mumkin.

### **Men ishtirok etishim kerakmi?**

Ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etish butunlay ixtiyoriydir. Men sizning qaroringizga rioya qilish yoki qilmaslikni hurmat qilaman. Agar siz boshqa birov bilan ishtirok etishni tanlagan bo'lsangiz, men baham ko'rmayman. Ishtirok etish uchun ijobiy natija bo'lmaganidek, ishtirok etmaslikni tanlashning ham salbiy oqibati bo'lmaydi.

### **Fikringizni o'zgartira olasizmi?**

Siz istalgan vaqtda hech qanday oqibatlersiz tadqiqotdan voz kechish huquqiga egasiz. Agar siz tadqiqotni to'xtatmoqchi bo'lsangiz, kuzatuvingizga tegishli barcha ma'lumotlar o'chirib tashlanadi.

**Tadqiqotni kim ko'rib chiqdi?**

Ushbu tadqiqot Nazarboyev universiteti institutsional tadqiqot axloqi qo'mitasi tomonidan ko'rib chiqildi va tasdiqlandi. Boshqa har qanday savol yoki tashvishlarni Nazarboyev universitetining institutsional tadqiqotlar etika qo'mitasiga, resethics@nu.edu.kz yoki professor Naureen Durrani naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz yoki doktor Zumrad Kataevaga zumrad.kataeva@nu manziliga yuborishingiz mumkin. edu.kz.

**Agar ushbu tadqiqot bo'yicha savollarim bo'lsa, kim bilan gaplashaman?**

Agar siz qo'shimcha ma'lumotga ega bo'lishni istasangiz yoki ushbu tadqiqot bilan bog'liq muammolarga duch kelsangiz, Vanessa Ozawaga +910053585 raqamiga qo'ng'iroq qilishingiz yoki uning mobil telefoniga xabar yuborishingiz yoki vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz yoki professor Naureen Durrani naureen.durrani@nu manziliga elektron pochta xabarini yuborishingiz mumkin. edu.kz yoki doktor Zumrad Kataeva zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz manzilida.

**Keyin nima qilishim kerak?**

Agar siz o'z sinfingizni kuzatish uchun ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni istasangiz, quyidagi rozilik bayonnomasiga imzo chekishingiz mumkin.

**Axborotlangan rozilik bayonoti.**

Men, \_\_\_\_\_ “Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xosliklarga oid nutqlari:” nomli tadqiqot loyihasida ishtirok etishga roziman. Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishishi”. Tadqiqot menga tushuntirildi va savollarimga meni qoniqtiradigan javoblar berildi. Ishtirok etishdan voz kechish yoki qatnashishdan bosh tortish huquqim hurmat qilinishini hamda javoblarim va shaxsim maxfiy saqlanishini tushunaman. Men bu rozilikni ixtiyoriy ravishda beraman.

Suhbatni audio yozib olishga ruxsat beraman: Ha  Yo'q

Ishtirokchining imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

Tadqiqotchi imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Russian**

**Форма письменного согласия  
на участие в интервью**

**Школьное образование и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной  
идентичности:**

**Пересечения этничности, пола и религии**

Меня зовут Ванесса Одзава. Я исследователь из Назарбаев Университета в Казахстане, изучающий, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи. Приглашаю вас принять участие в интервью. Более подробная информация описана ниже.

**О чем исследование?**

Интервью является частью моего докторского исследования, связанного с Назарбаев Университетом в Казахстане. Я надеюсь понять, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи и пересечение этнической принадлежности, пола и религии. Во время интервью мы поговорим о вашем школьном опыте и воспоминаниях.

**Что будет происходить во время интервью?**

Если вы решите принять участие, вы станете участником интервью. Но если вы не хотите принимать участие в исследовании, вы не обязаны. Во время интервью я задам вам несколько вопросов. Обсуждение займет от 45 минут до часа.

**Какие вопросы мы будем задавать на собеседовании?**

Я буду задавать вопросы о вашем школьном опыте и воспоминаниях. Я задам эти вопросы на том языке, который вам более удобен, на узбекском или русском языке.

**Кто будет иметь доступ к исследовательской информации (данным)? Насколько это личное?**

Я буду хранить информацию, которую вы предоставите во время интервью, конфиденциально, то есть я не буду рассказывать другим людям, которые не участвуют в исследовании. Я также буду работать над сохранением конфиденциальности, скрывая вашу личность, и не буду использовать идентифицирующую информацию в презентациях или публикациях. Используемая информация, которая может идентифицировать, не будет опубликована или передана,

если у нас нет вашего разрешения. Любые данные из этого исследования, которые будут переданы или опубликованы, никогда не будут содержать ваше имя, вместо этого будет использоваться псевдоним или вымышленное имя, или они будут объединены с информацией многих участников.

Интервью будет записано на аудио с вашего разрешения, чтобы сохранить точность слов в интервью. Данные будут храниться в надежном месте. Переводчик, который будет сопровождать интервью, транскрибирует аудиофайлы, но в транскрипции не будет идентифицирующей информации, позволяющей связать аудио с вами или вашим учреждением. По завершении исследования я удалю все данные, которые будут храниться на защищенном паролем компьютере в течение как минимум трех лет для возможного рассмотрения Советом по этике Назарбаев Университета.

### **Существуют ли какие-либо риски для проведения этого исследования?**

В вашем участии нет серьезных рисков, только незначительные риски дискомфорта, такие как застенчивость или высказывание чего-то потенциально неловкого. Требований к участию нет.

Чтобы помочь вам чувствовать себя более комфортно, у вас всегда будет возможность не отвечать на любой вопрос, в котором вы не уверены, или на который вам неинтересно или неудобно отвечать. Вас никогда не будут принуждать к ответу, и вы можете прекратить интервью и/или участие в исследовании в любое время, и я не расстроюсь.

### **Какие преимущества я получу, если приму участие в исследовании?**

Маловероятно, что это принесет вам непосредственную пользу, однако, лучше разбираясь в теме образования и национальной идентичности, исследователи и другие лица могут помочь поддержать политику и практику в области образования, которые улучшат образование и общество.

### **Должен ли я участвовать?**

Участие в этом исследовании является полностью добровольным. Я уважаю ваше решение быть наблюдаемым или нет. Я не буду делиться, если вы решите участвовать с кем-либо еще. Не будет никаких отрицательных последствий для отказа от участия, так же как не будет положительного результата для участия.

### **Можете ли вы передумать?**

Вы имеете право отказаться от исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий. Все данные, относящиеся к вашему наблюдению, будут удалены, если вы решите прекратить исследование.

#### **Кто рецензировал исследование?**

Это исследование было рассмотрено и одобрено Комитетом по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета. С любыми другими вопросами или опасениями можно обращаться в Комитет по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета по адресу [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz), профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

#### **К кому мне обратиться, если у меня возникнут вопросы об этом исследовании?**

Если вам нужна дополнительная информация или у вас есть какие-либо проблемы с этим исследованием, вы можете позвонить или написать Ванессе Одзаве на ее мобильный телефон по телефону +910053585 или по электронной почте [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

#### **Что я должен делать дальше?**

Если вы хотите принять участие в этом исследовании для наблюдения за вашим классом, вы можете подписать заявление о согласии ниже.

#### **Информированное заявление о согласии.**

Я, \_\_\_\_\_, согласен/на принять участие в исследовательском проекте «Обучение и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной идентичности: Пересечения этноса, пола и религии». Исследование было объяснено мне, и на мои вопросы были даны ответы к моему удовлетворению. Я понимаю, что мое право отказаться от участия или отказаться от участия будет соблюдаться и что мои ответы и личность будут сохранены в тайне. Я даю это согласие добровольно.

Я даю разрешение на аудиозапись интервью: Да  Нет

Подпись участника: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

Подпись исследователя: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix J: Written Consent Form to Participate in the Focus Group Discussions**

### **In English**

#### **Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion**

My name is Vanessa Ozawa and I am a researcher from Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan who is studying how school education shapes Uzbekistani youth national identities. I invite you to take part in a group discussion. More details are described below.

#### **What is the study about?**

The group discussion is part of my doctoral research affiliated with Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan. I am hoping to understand how school education shapes Uzbekistani young people's national identities and the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, and religion. In the discussion, we will sit and talk with a group of young people.

#### **What will happen during the group discussion?**

If you choose to participate you will be a part of a group discussion with other young people. But if you do not wish to take part in the research, you do not have to. During the discussion, I will ask you a few questions. The discussion will take about an hour and a half.

#### **What questions will I ask in the group discussion?**

I will ask questions about what is like to be a young person in Uzbekistan and your relation to Uzbekistan and other societies. I will ask these questions in the language you prefer Uzbek or Russian, and you are free to answer our questions in the language comfortable to you.

#### **Who will have access to the research information (data)? How private is it?**

I will keep the information you provide during the discussion confidential, meaning I will not tell other people who are outside of the study. However, as this is a group discussion there will be other members present too, and I cannot control other participants to keep confidential things discussed during the focus groups. I will let all participants know before starting the discussion that it is intended to be a private discussion. I will also work to maintain privacy by masking your identity and will not use identifiable information in presentations or publications. Information used that could identify will not be published or shared unless I have your permission. Any data from this research that will be shared or published will never have your name on it, instead a pseudonym, or pretend name, will be used, or it will be combined with information across many participants.

The focus group discussion will be audio recorded with your permission to keep the accuracy of the words of each member who participates in the discussions. Data will be kept stored in a private space. A translator, who will accompany the focus group will transcribe the audio files but there will be no identifying information on the transcript to connect the audio back to you or your institution. I will remove all data at the conclusion of the study to be stored on a password-protected computer for a minimum of three years to be potentially reviewed by the Ethics Review Board at Nazarbayev University.

**Are there any risks to doing this study?**

There are no major risks in your participation, only minor risks of discomfort such as feeling shy or saying something potentially embarrassing. There is no requirement to participate.

To help you feel more comfortable, you always will have a choice to not answer any question you are unsure of, or are uninterested or uncomfortable answering. You will never be pressured to answer and can choose to stop the discussion and/or participation in the study at any time without me being upset.

**What benefits will I have if I participate in the study?**

It is unlikely that there will be direct benefits to you, however, by better understanding the topic of education and national identities, researchers and others may be able to help support education policies and practices that will improve education and society.

**Can you change your mind?**

You have the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequence. All data relating to your observation will be removed if you choose to stop the study.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been reviewed and cleared by the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Any other questions or concerns may be addressed to the Nazarbayev University Institutional Research Ethics Committee, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**Who do I speak to if I have questions about this research?**

If you would like more information or have any problems with this research, you can call or message Vanessa Ozawa on her cell phone at +910053585 or email [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) or Professor Naureen Durrani at [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) or Dr. Zumrad Kataeva at [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**What should I do next?**

If you want to be involved in this study to have your class observed, you can sign the statement of consent below.

**Informed Statement of Consent.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in the research project entitled, “Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion”. The study has been explained to me and my questions were answered to my satisfaction. I understand that my right to withdraw from participating or refusing to participate will be respected and that my responses and identity will be kept confidential. I give this consent voluntarily.

I give my permission to audio record the interview: Yes  No

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **In Uzbek**

### **Yozma rozilik shakli Fokus guruhida ishtirok etish**

#### **Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xoslik haqidagi nutqlari: Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishuvlari**

Mening ismim Vanessa Ozava va men Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti tadqiqotchisiman, u maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini qanday shakllantirishini o‘rganmoqda. Men sizni guruh muhokamasida ishtirok etishga taklif qilaman. Batafsil ma'lumotlar quyida tasvirlangan.

#### **Tadqiqot nima haqida?**

Guruh muhokamasi Qozog‘istondagi Nazarboyev universiteti bilan bog‘liq bo‘lgan doktorlik tadqiqotimning bir qismidir. Men maktab ta’limi o‘zbekistonlik yoshlarning milliy o‘ziga xosligini hamda etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinining o‘zaro bog‘liqligini qanday shakllantirishini tushunishga umid qilaman. Munozarada biz bir guruh yoshlar bilan o‘tirib suhbatlashamiz.

#### **Guruh muhokamasida nima bo'ladi?**

Agar siz ishtirok etishni tanlasangiz, siz boshqa yoshlar bilan guruh muhokamasining bir qismi bo'lasiz. Ammo agar siz tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni xohlamasangiz, unda ishtirok etishingiz shart emas. Muhokama paytida men sizga bir nechta savol beraman. Muhokama taxminan bir yarim soat davom etadi.

#### **Guruh muhokamasida qanday savollarni beraman?**

Men O‘zbekistonda yosh bo‘lish qanday, O‘zbekiston va boshqa jamiyatlarga munosabatingiz haqida savollar beraman. Men bu savollarni o'zbek yoki rus tillarida sizga ma'qul bo'lgan tilda beraman va siz o'zingiz uchun qulay bo'lgan tilda savollarimizga javob bera olasiz.

#### **Tadqiqot ma'lumotlariga (ma'lumotlariga) kim ega bo'ladi? Bu qanchalik shaxsiy?**

Muhokama paytida siz bergan ma'lumotni maxfiy saqlayman, ya'ni tadqiqotdan tashqarida bo'lgan boshqa odamlarga aytmayman. Biroq, bu guruh muhokamasi bo'lgani uchun boshqa a'zolar ham ishtirok etadilar va men boshqa ishtirokchilarni fokus-guruhlar davomida muhokama qilingan narsalarni maxfiy saqlashni nazorat qila olmayman.

Munozarani boshlashdan oldin barcha ishtirokchilarga bu shaxsiy muhokama bo'lishi kerakligi haqida xabar beraman. Shuningdek, men sizning shaxsingizni yashirish orqali maxfiylikni saqlashga harakat qilaman va taqdimotlar yoki nashrlarda identifikatsiyalash mumkin bo'lgan ma'lumotlardan foydalanmayman. Sizning ruxsatingiz bo'lmasa, aniqlanishi mumkin bo'lgan foydalanilgan ma'lumotlar nashr etilmaydi yoki baham ko'rilmaydi. Ushbu tadqiqotdan olingan har qanday ma'lumotlar almashiladi yoki chop etiladi, unda hech qachon sizning ismingiz bo'lmaydi, buning o'rniga taxallus yoki ism qo'llaniladi yoki u ko'plab ishtirokchilar haqidagi ma'lumotlar bilan birlashtiriladi.

Muhokamalarda ishtirok etayotgan har bir a'zoning so'zlari to'g'riligini saqlash uchun sizning ruxsatingiz bilan fokus-guruh muhokamasi audio yozib olinadi. Ma'lumotlar shaxsiy makonda saqlanadi. Fokus-guruhga hamrohlik qiladigan tarjimon audio fayllarni transkripsiya qiladi, lekin audioni sizga yoki muassasangizga ulash uchun transkriptda aniqlovchi ma'lumot bo'lmaydi. Nazarboyev universitetining axloqni tekshirish kengashi tomonidan ko'rib chiqilishi uchun kamida uch yil davomida parol bilan himoyalangan kompyuterda saqlanishi kerak bo'lgan tadqiqot yakunida barcha ma'lumotlarni o'chirib tashlayman.

#### **Ushbu tadqiqotni o'tkazishda xavf bormi?**

Ishtirok etishingizda katta xavf yo'q, faqat noqulay his-tuyg'ularni his qilish yoki uyatchan narsa aytish kabi kichik xavflar mavjud. Ishtirok etish uchun hech qanday shart yo'q.

O'zingizni qulayroq his qilishingizga yordam berish uchun siz doimo ishonchingiz komil bo'lmagan yoki qiziqmagan yoki noqulay javob beradigan savollarga javob bermaslik tanloviga ega bo'lasiz. Siz hech qachon javob berishga bosim o'tkazmaysiz va men xafa bo'lmasdan istalgan vaqtda muhokamani va/yoki tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni to'xtatishni tanlashingiz mumkin.

#### **Tadqiqotda qatnashsam, qanday imtiyozlarga ega bo'laman?**

Siz uchun to'g'ridan-to'g'ri foyda bo'lishi dargumon, ammo ta'lim va milliy o'ziga xoslik mavzusini yaxshiroq tushunish orqali tadqiqotchilar va boshqalar ta'lim va jamiyatni yaxshilaydigan ta'lim siyosati va amaliyotlarini qo'llab-quvvatlashga yordam berishi mumkin.

#### **Fikringizni o'zgartira olasizmi?**

Siz istalgan vaqtda hech qanday oqibatlarsiz tadqiqotdan voz kechish huquqiga egasiz. Agar siz tadqiqotni to'xtatmoqchi bo'lsangiz, kuzatuvingizga tegishli barcha ma'lumotlar o'chirib tashlanadi.

### **Tadqiqotni kim ko'rib chiqdi?**

Ushbu tadqiqot Nazarboyev universiteti institutsional tadqiqot axloqi qo'mitasi tomonidan ko'rib chiqildi va tasdiqlandi. Boshqa har qanday savol yoki tashvishlarni Nazarboyev universitetining institutsional tadqiqotlar etika qo'mitasiga, [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz) yoki professor Naureen Durrani [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) yoki doktor Zumrad Kataevaga [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz) manziliga yuborishingiz mumkin.

### **Agar ushbu tadqiqot bo'yicha savollarim bo'lsa, kim bilan gaplashaman?**

Agar siz qo'shimcha ma'lumotga ega bo'lishni istasangiz yoki ushbu tadqiqot bilan bog'liq muammolarga duch kelsangiz, Vanessa Ozawaga +910053585 raqamiga qo'ng'iroq qilishingiz yoki uning mobil telefoniga xabar yuborishingiz yoki [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) yoki professor Naureen Durrani [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) manziliga elektron pochta xabarini yuborishingiz mumkin. yoki doktor Zumrad Kataeva [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz) manzilida.

### **Keyin nima qilishim kerak?**

Agar siz o'z sinfingizni kuzatish uchun ushbu tadqiqotda ishtirok etishni istasangiz, quyidagi rozilik bayonomasiga imzo chekishingiz mumkin.

### **Axborotlangan rozilik bayonoti.**

Men, \_\_\_\_\_ “Maktab va O‘zbekiston yoshlarining milliy o‘ziga xosliklarga oid nutqlari:” nomli tadqiqot loyihasida ishtirok etishga roziman. Etnik kelib chiqishi, jinsi va dinning kesishishi”. Tadqiqot menga tushuntirildi va savollarimga meni qoniqtiradigan javoblar berildi. Ishtirok etishdan voz kechish yoki qatnashishdan bosh tortish huquqim hurmat qilinishini hamda javoblarim va shaxsim maxfiy saqlanishini tushunaman. Men bu rozilikni ixtiyoriy ravishda beraman.

Suhbatni audio yozib olishga ruxsat beraman: Ha  Yo'q

Ishtirokchining imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

Tadqiqotchi imzosi: \_\_\_\_\_ Sana: \_\_\_\_\_

**In Russian**

**Форма письменного согласия  
на участие в фокус-группе**

**Школьное образование и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной  
идентичности:**

**Пересечения этничности, пола и религии**

Меня зовут Ванесса Одзава. Я исследователь из Назарбаев Университета в Казахстане, изучающая, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи. Приглашаю вас принять участие в обсуждении в группах. Более подробная информация описана ниже.

**О чем исследование?**

Обсуждение в группах является частью моего докторского исследования, связанного с Назарбаев Университетом в Казахстане. Я надеюсь понять, как школьное образование формирует национальную идентичность узбекской молодежи и пересечение этнической принадлежности, пола и религии. В ходе обсуждения мы сядем и поговорим с группой молодых людей.

**Что будет происходить во время обсуждения в группах?**

Если вы решите участвовать, вы примете участие в обсуждении с другими участниками. Но если вы не хотите принимать участие в исследовании, вы не обязаны. В ходе обсуждения я задам вам несколько вопросов. Обсуждение продлится около полутора часов.

**Какие вопросы я буду задавать в групповом обсуждении?**

Я буду задавать вопросы о том, каково быть молодым человеком в Узбекистане и о вашем отношении к Узбекистану и другим обществам. Я задам эти вопросы на удобном вам языке, узбекском или русском.

**Кто будет иметь доступ к исследовательской информации (данным)? Насколько это личное?**

Я буду хранить конфиденциальную информацию, предоставленную вами во время обсуждения, то есть я не буду рассказывать другим людям, которые не участвуют в исследовании. Однако, поскольку это групповое обсуждение, будут присутствовать и другие участники, и я не могу контролировать других участников, чтобы они не

разглашали то, что обсуждалось во время фокус-групп. Я сообщу всем участникам перед тем, как начать обсуждение, что это будет закрытое обсуждение. Я также буду работать над сохранением конфиденциальности, скрывая вашу личность, и не буду использовать идентифицирующую информацию в презентациях или публикациях. Используемая информация, которая может идентифицировать, не будет опубликована или передана без вашего разрешения. Любые данные из этого исследования, которые будут переданы или опубликованы, никогда не будут содержать ваше имя, вместо этого будет использоваться псевдоним или вымышленное имя, или они будут объединены с информацией многих участников. Обсуждение в фокус-группе будет записано с вашего разрешения, чтобы сохранить точность слов каждого участника, участвующего в обсуждениях. Данные будут храниться в надежном месте. Переводчик, который будет сопровождать фокус-группу, транскрибирует аудиофайлы, но в транскрипции не будет идентифицирующей информации, позволяющей связать аудио с вами или вашим учреждением. По завершении исследования я удалю все данные, которые будут храниться на защищенном паролем компьютере в течение как минимум трех лет для возможного рассмотрения Советом по этике Назарбаев Университета.

#### **Существуют ли какие-либо риски для проведения этого исследования?**

В вашем участии нет серьезных рисков, только незначительные риски дискомфорта, такие как застенчивость или высказывание чего-то потенциально неловкого. Требований к участию нет.

Чтобы помочь вам чувствовать себя более комфортно, у вас всегда будет возможность не отвечать на любой вопрос, в котором вы не уверены, или на который вам неинтересно или неудобно отвечать. Вас никогда не будут принуждать к ответу, и вы можете прекратить обсуждение и/или участие в исследовании в любое время, и я не расстроюсь.

#### **Какие преимущества я получу, если приму участие в исследовании?**

Маловероятно, что это принесет вам непосредственную пользу, однако, лучше разбираясь в теме образования и национальной идентичности, исследователи и другие лица могут помочь поддержать политику и практику в области образования, которые улучшат образование и общество.

**Можете ли вы передумать?**

Вы имеете право отказаться от исследования в любое время без каких-либо последствий. Все данные, относящиеся к вашему наблюдению, будут удалены, если вы решите прекратить исследование.

**Кто рецензировал исследование?**

Это исследование было рассмотрено и одобрено Комитетом по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета. С любыми другими вопросами или опасениями можно обращаться в Комитет по этике институциональных исследований Назарбаев Университета по адресу [resethics@nu.edu.kz](mailto:resethics@nu.edu.kz), профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**К кому мне обратиться, если у меня возникнут вопросы об этом исследовании?**

Если вам нужна дополнительная информация или у вас есть какие-либо проблемы с этим исследованием, вы можете позвонить или написать Ванессе Одзаве на ее мобильный телефон по телефону +910053585 или по электронной почте [vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz](mailto:vanessa.ozawa@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Наурин Дуррани по адресу [naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz](mailto:naureen.durrani@nu.edu.kz) или профессору Зумрад Катаевой по адресу [zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz](mailto:zumrad.kataeva@nu.edu.kz).

**Что я должен делать дальше?**

Если вы хотите принять участие в этом исследовании для наблюдения за вашим классом, вы можете подписать заявление о согласии ниже.

**Информированное заявление о согласии.**

Я, \_\_\_\_\_, согласен/на принять участие в исследовательском проекте «Обучение и узбекские молодежные дискурсы национальной идентичности: Пересечения этноса, пола и религии». Исследование было объяснено мне, и на мои вопросы были даны ответы к моему удовлетворению. Я понимаю, что мое право отказаться от участия или отказаться от участия будет соблюдаться и что мои ответы и личность будут сохранены в тайне. Я даю это согласие добровольно.

Я даю разрешение на аудиозапись интервью: Да  Нет

Подпись участника: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

Подпись исследователя: \_\_\_\_\_ Дата: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix K: Ethics Approval



53 Kabanbay Batyr Ave.  
Nur-Sultan 010000  
Republic of Kazakhstan  
Date: 4<sup>th</sup> Nov, 2022

Dear: Vanessa Ozawa

This letter now confirms that your research project titled, “Schooling and Uzbekistani Youth Discourses of National Identities: Intersections of Ethnicity, Gender and Religion” has been approved by the Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee of Nazarbayev University.

You may proceed with contacting your preferred research site and commencing your participant recruitment strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Naureen Durrani

**On behalf of:**

Dr Matthew Courtney, *PhD*  
Chair, GSE Ethics Committee  
Graduate School of Education  
Nazarbayev University

Block C3, Room M027  
Office: +7 (7172) 70 6659  
Mobile: +7 708 274 9564  
email: [matthew.courtney@nu.edu.kz](mailto:matthew.courtney@nu.edu.kz), [gse.irec@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse.irec@nu.edu.kz)

**Appendix L: CITI Training Certificate**



Completion Date **22-Sep-2022**  
Expiration Date **21-Sep-2025**  
Record ID **51316930**

This is to certify that:

**Vanessa Ozawa**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher**

(Curriculum Group)

**Social & Behavioral Research - Basic/Refresher**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Nazarbayev University**



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