

PATRIOTIC AND PRAGMATIC. TRANSNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT OF CURRENT AND  
FORMER INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS FROM KAZAKHSTAN IN THE US

ПАТРИОТИЗМ ЖӘНЕ ПРАГМАТИЗМ. АҚШ-ТА ОҚЫҒАН ҚАЗІРГІ ЖӘНЕ БҰРЫНҒЫ  
ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ СТУДЕНТТЕРДІҢ ТРАНСҰЛТТЫҚ ҚАРЫМ-  
ҚАТЫНАСТАРЫ

ПАТРИОТИЗМ И ПРАГМАТИЗМ. ТРАНСНАЦИОНАЛЬНОЕ УЧАСТИЕ НАСТОЯЩИХ И  
БЫВШИХ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ СТУДЕНТОВ США - ВЫХОДЦЕВ ИЗ КАЗАХСТАНА

by

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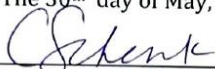
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## Abstract

International students are generally neglected as a type of migrating population in the literature. However, building on transnationalism theory in migration studies, the present thesis demonstrates that current and former international students resemble modern transnational migrants. They meaningfully connect the country of study and origin and involve themselves in transnational practices.

Studying the case of international students from Kazakhstan in the US, this thesis discovers that when in the country of study, Kazakhstanis enhance their patriotic sentiments and sense of belonging to their origin country. They sustain ties with their compatriots and recreate cultural activities from home in the US. The thesis also discovers that students' involvement in transnational activities does not end with their return to Kazakhstan. Their transnationalism becomes 'reversed' as it maintains ties with the country of study. For the returned students, patriotism becomes less important than pragmatic considerations related to their future jobs and careers. Therefore, the thesis argues that transnational involvement of the Kazakhstani students in the US is motivated by their patriotic feelings whereas transnational involvement of the returned students is driven by their pragmatic considerations.

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## Glossary

*Aktobe*: a city in western Kazakhstan; formerly known as Aktyubinsk

*Almaty*: the largest city and a former capital of Kazakhstan located in the southern part of the country

*Astana*: the capital of Kazakhstan located in the northern part of the country. Officially renamed Nur-Sultan on 23 March, 2019

*Baursak*: traditional fried bread

*Besbarmak*: a traditional dish made of boiled meat and noodles

*Dombyra*: Kazakh musical string instrument

*Karaganda*: an industrial city in central Kazakhstan located south-east of the capital Nur-Sultan

*Kazy*: sausage made of horse rib meat

*Kurt*: a traditional dairy snack in the form of small balls made of dried salty cheese

*March 8*: International Women's Day, an official holiday in Kazakhstan

*Nauryz*: a national holiday celebrated on 22 March which marks the beginning of a new year

*Semey*: a city in Kazakhstan, in East Kazakhstan Region; formerly known as Semipalatinsk

*Shai*: [Kazakh] tea

*Shezhire*: Kazakh genealogy

*Shymkent*: the third most populous city in Kazakhstan (behind Almaty and Astana) located in the southern part of the county

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

In today's highly globalized world, many people travel thousands miles away from home in pursuit of high-quality and internationally recognized education. This is possible because education, in particular, at tertiary level, has undergone considerable internationalization and marketization (Brooks & Waters, 2013; Hawthorne, 2012). Therefore, international students are sought-after consumers in the countries that follow these global trends. However, in the scholarly literature, international students have long been overlooked as mobile population or migrants (King, Findlay, & Ahrens, 2010). Although there are certain legal frameworks that allow international students to 'switch' their statuses and become permanent migrants (Robertson, 2011), few studies recognize the similarities between international students and modern labor migrants. Therefore, the present thesis aims to address this gap and demonstrate that international students to a certain extent resemble transnational migrants.

Building on transnationalism theory, the thesis illustrates the ways in which international students are transnational agents. It answers the following research questions: (a) What patterns of transnational connectedness do current and former international students from Kazakhstan sustain? (b) How is their transnational involvement different across geographical location and time? (c) What are their motivations for transnational involvement? Thus, focusing on how current and former international students from Kazakhstan experience connectedness with the country of origin and the country of study, it shows that connections with the country of study do not end with students' return to home country and argues that Kazakhstanis in the US (country of study) and in Kazakhstan (country of origin) involve themselves in a number of transnational practices, spurred by different aspirations and motivations. While in the US, Kazakhstanis sustain transnational ties with Kazakhstan

motivated by patriotic sentiments, whereas those who return to Kazakhstan engage in transnational activities driven by the pragmatic motives to go back to the US and build international careers.

There are particular ways in which international students relate to transnational labor migrants. For instance, international students, apart from acquiring academic knowledge, learn new socio-cultural environment and build substantial networks of friends and colleagues in the country of study through their engagement in numerous socio-cultural and economic activities. In addition, they frequently travel between the countries of study and origin as well as communicate and maintain social relationships across national borders with help of the Internet and communication technologies. As a result, they are able to preserve their social roles in their origin communities while becoming meaningful actors in the host societies. Thus, international students maintain multiple connections that transcend borders of the respective nation-states (Gargano, 2009). To better understand and conceptualize these connections in a broader context, this study applies transnationalism theory.

### **Theoretical framework**

Transnationalism is used in two interconnected ways in the literature: as an analytical framework and as a term to denote different processes and activities that take place across national borders. The present work applies both aspects of transnationalism. Transnationalism as an analytical framework urges scholars to abandon nationalist perspectives on social relations and think beyond boundaries in cross-border studies (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). The transnational perspective in migration studies emerged as a response to the methodological difficulties associated with the attempts to capture modern migrants' movements and lifestyles analytically. These migrants could not be conceptually categorized within permanent, return, temporary or sojourner

paradigms, nor could the term circulation, which was proposed as an alternative to migration, reflect the broader context in which population moves and relationships took place. However, transnationalism, as an analytical framework, reasonably addresses these complexities. It acknowledges the impacts of global capitalism on modern migrants and their social relations that facilitate the maintenance of cross-border connections occurring as a result of migration (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992).

The transnationalism lens in migration studies also suggests a move from an assimilationist and nationally-bounded perception of international migration to complex, multidirectional, and deterritorialized understandings (Basch et al., 1994; de Haas & Fokkema, 2011). In other words, the research employing this framework not only focuses on migrants' adaptation, assimilation and integration in destination countries but also seeks to explore the continuing connections of migrants with their home societies; these processes exist within nation-states and across their borders (Schiller et al., 1992; Levitt, 2001; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Such studies describe contemporary migrants as 'transmigrants' who create and sustain social relations, including but not limited to familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that link their sending and receiving societies (Basch et al., 1994). A later work (Tsuda, 2012) particularly emphasizes the simultaneous impact and dual engagement of migrants in two (sometimes more) nation-states, which distinguishes transnationalism from traditional and long-distance nationalism (Fouron & Schiller, 2001).

Transnationalism is also used as a term to denote the presence of relations between persons, networks and organizations across the borders of numerous nation-states which can range from little to highly institutionalized forms (Faist, 2010, p. 189). The term is also used to describe the condition in which certain types of relationships, in spite of the distance and all the laws, regulations and national accounts they embody, have been globally intensified (Vertovec, 1999, p. 447). In addition, it is applied to refer to the processes involving cultural

practices and experiences that are not constrained by territorially bound traditions, including the flow of material objects as well as subcultures and the practices that maintain them (Roudometof, 2011, p. 362). In migration studies, transnationalism as a concept is employed to concentrate on “the grassroots activities of international migrants across borders as being something distinct from the dense and continuous relations of macro-agents such as multinational or transnational companies” (Bauböck & Faist, 2010, pp. 13–14). These can be economic, political or socio-cultural cross-border activities (Snel, Engbersen, & Leerkes, 2006). Moreover, such activities happen on a regular basis and require significant time investments from the participants (Portes, 1999).

The regular activities of individual actors, rather than broader cross-border practices sustained by multinational corporations, states, and other politicized actors are referred to as ‘transnationalism from below’ (Portes, 1999; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). This grassroots form of transnationalism is often based on personal and family decisions of individual migrants; therefore, their transnational activities are more selective compared to the participants of massive and politicized migrations (Portes, 1999, p. 464). This view on transnationalism as sustained at individual and family levels is of particular importance for the present research endeavor as it studies individual experiences of current and former international students. Although some of these individuals might engage with established ethnic communities abroad, their moves across borders are more likely to be outcomes of individual and family decisions. Therefore, it is relevant to focus on transnational activities that take place among individual actors. On the other hand, we should not divorce international student migration and their transnational experiences caused by such migration from broader global phenomena (Basch et al., 1994) since transnational migration operates within the context of globalization (Levitt, 2001).

Transmigrants, by linking themselves, their places of origin and migration destinations, forge and reconfigure space within which cross-border activities happen. They form ‘transnational communities’ (Portes, 1999), ‘transnational village’ (Levitt, 2001a) ‘transnational social fields’ (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992), and ‘transnational social spaces’ (Faist, 2000; Schneider, 2013) that connect individual actors, networks and organizations. These transnational spaces serve as arenas for social relationships and practices that are established and reestablished cross-border (Basch et al., 1994; Gargano, 2009; Levitt, 2001b; Vertovec, 1999). Moreover, the formation and maintenance of transnational social fields within which transnational subjects sustain ties are dependent on contextual factors that are shaped by social, economic and political systems in the localities of migration (Levitt, 2001b; Roudometof, 2011; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). This, consequently, has a particular impact on their sense of belonging and makes them identify themselves with more than one place. Moreover, the multiple associations to the home country, to the broader ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991) and the host country they develop once abroad prove that their identities and sense of belonging cannot be captured by nationalist conceptualizations. Therefore, the concepts such as ‘transnational identity’ or ‘transnational identification’ are coined to refer to identities complicated by transnational experiences. These concepts are largely used to describe a simultaneous connection and sense of belonging to two or more nation-states (Tsuda, 2003) and more generally to compatriots outside the receiving state (Snel et al., 2006). However, Vertovec (1999) defines inherent to transmigrants sense of belonging as ‘diaspora consciousness’. Nevertheless, I would avoid using this term in order to prevent unintentional overlaps between ‘diaspora’ and ‘transnationalism’ concepts, in spite of the similarities found between them (Bauböck & Faist, 2010). On the other hand, diaspora and transnationalism define different kinds of migration. For instance, the term diaspora, in its old ‘victim’ understandings as well as broader modern formulations, is used to refer to more

historically established migrations from one place of origin to a great variety of places. In addition, the dispersion of diaspora is wider than that assumed by transnational communities (King & Christou, 2011, p. 456). In terms of migrant identities, diaspora studies treat migrants and their identities and belongings as 'fixated' on one place and society whereas transnationalism studies see migrants' attachments as 'flexible' and 'fluid' (Ozkul, 2012, p. 2). The 'fluidity' of transmigrants' identities include not only 'looking back' at home society but also reverse links to the places of migration which transmigrants construct once return to the source country. Moreover, these links can be both symbolic, based on feelings of solidarity, and instrumental, related to potential business or sources of income (King & Christou, 2011).

In the context of this study, it is quite relevant to look at the reverse links of former international students who returned back to Kazakhstan. Such an approach would help to illustrate that cross-border connections do not end with a return of an individual. This is because a former international student can preserve the double identifications with both home country and the country of study. Moreover, he or she might deliberately sustain relationships across national borders for practical purposes related to future careers and migration plans. Thus, the sense of belonging and identities of individuals who had transnational experience associated with migration and, I would argue, international education become complicated and flexible rather than committed to one national narrative.

International students and international student migration lack transnational inquiry. There are only a few studies which apply a transnational perspective and/or transnationalism concepts, or at all acknowledge international students as transnational subjects (Baláž & Williams, 2004; Bilecen, 2014; Brooks & Waters, 2013; Fincher & Shaw, 2009; Gargano, 2009; Robertson, 2013; Schneider, 2013). This might be explained by the fact that international students are often not recognized as migrants until they get permanent residency

(Brooks & Waters, 2013; Robertson, 2011; Robertson, 2008). Rather, they are perceived as sojourners (Oakman, 2010). Also, some authors find it problematic to categorize international students using the conceptualizations of well-studied migration types such as highly skilled/low skilled, temporary/permanent migration (Brooks & Waters, 2013; Collins, 2012). This is because international students can engage in low skilled jobs to cover expenses associated with the foreign education while pursuing a degree at higher education institutions. Moreover, their temporary status is defined by their academic program duration and student visa, which, in practice, does not prevent them from acquiring more permanent status by getting a job in a country of study or applying for permanent residency (Robertson, 2013). Nevertheless, the discussion below will suggest that despite these analytical complexities, international students as a certain type of migrating population can be better understood with help of transnationalism theory.

The extant literature that acknowledges the transnational character of international students' lives deals with a range of topics. In most cases, it investigates international students' identities that are complicated by their overseas experience and cross-border connections (Collins, 2012; Gargano, 2009; Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Moreover, the transnational processes international students engage with do not end with their return home. They continue to shape individuals' self-positioning in home societies and influence their post-study careers (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). Another example incorporating transnationalism in student migration analysis is Schneider's (2013) study of the transnationalization in the context of higher education institutions. The author adopts the constructs from transnationalism theory, in particular, the concept of 'transnational space' which she defines as "a set of cross-border processes... [which] addresses both the relationships between actors and structures within organizations and the relationships between networks of organizations across borders" (p. 487). More specifically, she studies

transnationalization which in the context of her work refers to the governmental and non-governmental processes that provide opportunities or restrict the migration of their nationals for foreign higher education. Here, she suggests that international students' cross-border moves are not central in transnationalization process. Gargano (2009), in contrast, engages with the more actor-centered discussion of international student flows. She suggests that international students comprise a migrating population that throughout several years, frequently travel between the contexts of origin and campuses abroad and thus, connect to multiple social spaces. Therefore, she argues for the use of 'transnational social field' concept in the international student mobility analysis since it conceptually incorporates the contexts of origin and educational locales abroad to define international student identity negotiations (p. 332). This approach, the author suggests, would help explain the multiplicity of identities in international student identity constructions (p. 340). Thus, these works demonstrate that it is important to look at both individual level and broader structural factors that facilitate and/or restrict international student moves as well as affect the transnational experiences of the involved individuals.

Often, international students are not the only actors who sustain transnational relations in the context of international education. Their families staying home also support and facilitate cross-border connections. Moreover, transnational families which relocate or split across international borders for educational aspirations, live out transnationalism on a daily basis, overcoming physical and emotional separation and distance (Brooks & Waters, 2013, p. 134). Voigt-Graf (2005), studying the relations between kinship, migration and transnationalism, found out that spatially separated kin tend to maintain the closest and most regular transnational ties compared to bigger transnational actors. He also suggests that the presence of kinship ties spanning borders predetermines the occurrence of transnational networks (p. 374). This generally supports the idea that transnational connections are based

on certain type of social relations among specific people (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Therefore, it is essential to consider ties between geographically separated kin because the present research, aiming to identify the patterns of connectedness that international students sustain cross-border, reveals transnational ties among family members since the age and social status of the students imply close and frequent interactions with their families remaining in home country.

Due to the emergence and availability of various communication technologies and the Internet, international students experience technological nearness to their families and contexts of origin (Brooks & Waters, 2013; Robertson, 2013). Collins (2012), for instance, suggests that the Internet is specifically germane in international students' connections across borders due to their age, education and economic status. The author proposes to focus research not only on the physical but also on virtual activities of international students that connect them to multiple spaces. However, the use of technologies does not necessarily explain the rise of transnational connections. Transnational connections emerge because of the need to produce and reproduce social relations across borders, and technologies only help to sustain them (Basch et al., 1994). Nevertheless, technologies certainly play a major role in such relations and therefore, are extensively discussed throughout the thesis as they not only mediate the transborder connections of international students but also served as a research tool for participant recruitment and data collection of the study.

Snel et al. (2006) suggest that the terms 'transnational social field' and 'transnational communities' are rather nebulous for empirical research. Instead, they propose to use the concept 'transnational involvement' which encompasses 'transnational activities' and 'transnational identifications', arguing that the former two focus on transnational process and the latter two, more importantly, on the extent to which migrants identify themselves with their co-nationals either in destination country or outside (p. 288). I find their approach useful

in the international student migration research, although I will not confine myself to the concept of ‘transnational involvement’ as they did. Instead, I would support Faist’s (2000) view that

whether we talk of transnational social spaces, transnational social fields, transnationalism or transnational social formations in international migration systems... [w]e do not mean occasional and fleeting contacts between migrants and relatively immobile people in the countries of immigration and the countries of emigration. Transnational social spaces and the other names we have given these phenomena are characterized by a high density of interstitial ties on informal or formal... levels (p. 189-190).

In other words, the transnational ties between persons or networks or organizations themselves are of more importance rather than their labeling. Nevertheless, taking into consideration all of the above discussion, I would like to develop my own conceptual toolkit for the thesis which will help to sustain consistency throughout the work and lessen the ambiguity around transnationalism concepts. First, I will use the terms ‘transnational activities’ and ‘transnational practices’ interchangeably to refer to the practices of international students which sustain links between their country of origin (Kazakhstan) and the country of study (the US) that would reflect the simultaneity of relations and the impact of such relations on multiple places. Next, I will employ the concept ‘transnational ties’ and ‘transnational connections’ to denote social relations that span borders and link contexts of origin and foreign education. And finally, I will use the term ‘transnational identity’ to define international students’ identifications and sense of belonging that are influenced by their abroad experiences. More generally, I will use the term transnationalism to refer to individuals’ transnational involvement, and in some cases, I will specifically refer to transnational involvement to emphasize the maintenance of transnational ties and engagement in any kind of transnational activities. I believe that these particular concepts will effectively illuminate the transnational experiences of the study participants, which in turn would help to

prove that international students both current and former who either stay in a country of education or return home are transnational agents.

Building on these concepts, I demonstrate that different motivations underpin transnational involvement of Kazakhstani students in the US and in Kazakhstan. Thus, I distinguish between ‘patriotic transnationalism’ driven by emotional attachment to homeland and aspirations to affirm national identities in the foreign environments and ‘pragmatic transnationalism’ which is motivated by aspirations to return back to the US and build international careers.

Throughout the thesis, my focus is on individualized transnationalism which results from individual and family decisions. I focus on international students’ activities as individualized activities that sustain social relations cross-border, connect multiple places and develop multiple solidarities and transnational identities. However, I would not separate international students’ experiences from broader phenomena which inevitably influence them. Therefore, the following section situates transnational practices of international students into the wider environment within which their transnationalism takes place as scholars of transnationalism suggest (Robertson, 2013; Schneider, 2013; Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). In particular, it focuses on internationalization of higher education and immigration policies that retain international students as highly skilled migrants to provide an essential background to the case of international student migration from Kazakhstan to the US.

### **Internationalization of higher education and migration**

Internationalization of higher education greatly facilitates student flows worldwide. As more and more young people leave their countries in search of higher education, most education providers strive to benefit from this trend and therefore, enter into international competition for students. Hawthorne (2012) suggests that institutions have to recruit

international students as full fee-paying students to compensate for decreased public revenue. Moreover, many countries regard student mobility and academic exchanges as crucial factors for knowledge sharing, developing intellectual capital and being competitive in the era of globalization (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). On the individual level, there is also a growing demand for acquiring education abroad as students try to secure better career options in labor markets that require foreign knowledge and skills. In addition, studying abroad allows individuals to get closer to the foreign employment opportunities usually presented by their countries of study (OECD, 2017; Robertson, 2013).

According to OECD reports (2017, 2018), the US, the UK, and Australia are among the top international student receiving countries. Among these three, the US is a leading student destination country. Nevertheless, as language of instruction represents a key factor in students' choices for study destination, countries with widely spoken languages such as Germany, France and the Russian Federation also attract foreign students. Other factors that influence students' choices include the recognition of overseas degrees, reputation of particular institutions and academic programs, tuition fees, and immigration policies (OECD, 2012). It should be noted that the latter is an important indicator of the relationship between education and migration (Robertson, 2013). For instance, immigration restrictions and complicated procedures associated with entering the country could discourage potential students from moving to the country (OECD, 2017). In contrast, clear visa regimes and opportunities for temporary or permanent migration facilitate inflow of international students (Baas, 2006; Hawthorne, 2012; OECD, 2017; Robertson, 2013; She & Wotherspoon, 2013). Therefore, some scholars suggest that the factors in destination countries that appeal to individuals as students are the same factors that attract migrants more generally, and thus may encourage international students to stay beyond their studies (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015). Often, this has to do with international students' professional aspirations and economic

motivations such as better prospects of employability in academia and industry sector, higher wages, opportunities for career advancement and further development in a specialized area of study (Alberts & Hazen, 2005; Tansel & Demet Güngör, 2003). Nevertheless, in the present highly globalized economy and culture, many individuals travel to the places they are exposed to through global media. Therefore, the Western world in general, and the US, in particular, receive more foreign nationals (Levitt, 2001b). In addition, physical and psychological distance becomes a less important aspect to consider as it can be reduced with help of communication technologies and social media that connect individuals to their family and friends remaining at home (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014).

There are also certain factors in home countries that stimulate young individuals to pursue higher education abroad. These include low education capacity and lack of facilities, especially at higher academic levels, high education costs as well as lower rewards for domestic knowledge and skills compared to those obtained from abroad (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Weisser, 2016). In addition, some developing nation-states sponsor their citizens to study abroad. They allocate governmental scholarships to their talented individuals so that they are able to study at advanced higher education programs in the world leading institutions. Thus, sponsoring nation-states purchase foreign education for their nationals, viewing it as a worthwhile investment in the country's socio-economic development associated with students' return home (Campbell, 2018; Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015).

It is notable that host countries also benefit considerably from international students. In the short-term perspective, local economies enhance their revenue as international student pay higher tuition fees than domestic students and incur substantial expenses associated with accommodation and transport. In the longer-term perspective, international students often contribute to the knowledge and innovation production through entering the host country labor force (OECD, 2017, 2018). Therefore, popular international student recipient countries

such as the US, Australia, and Canada are interested in retaining foreign nationals with their qualifications, preferably in science, technologies, engineering and mathematics (Hawthorne, 2012). This results in immigration policies that provide explicit or implicit student to worker pathways (Hawthorne, 2012; Robertson, 2013).

For sending countries, student migration often raises concerns associated with the brain drain phenomenon, which is thought to take place when international students stay in the country of study. Traditionally, the cases of students not returning to home countries are perceived rather negatively as the sending countries lose potential social benefits from well-educated youth (Baruch, Budhwar, & Khatri, 2007; Szelenyi, 2006; Tansel & Demet Güngör, 2003). Nevertheless, the brain drain concept becomes less applicable to modern flows of international students. Therefore, alternative concepts such as brain circulation or brain exchange have been coined. These concepts reflect a circular flow of human capital when student-migrants maintain professional ties with their home countries and thus, involve them into global knowledge networks (Grecu & Titan, 2016; OECD, 2017). Moreover, international students' strong interpersonal connections with compatriots remaining in home countries could lead to knowledge and technology upgrading as well as capacity building there (OECD, 2017).

The above-mentioned trends are of particular importance to the case under study. First, internationalization of higher education contributes to the student flows from Kazakhstan to the US, which stands among the top international student-receiving countries. Second, it creates a condition in which students relocating themselves become transnational agents. Also, as Chapter 2 will show, the US immigration policies have a particular impact on student's choices as to which country they should go and study. Also, international students from Kazakhstan study in the US tertiary education institutions either on a self-paid basis or sponsored by the state scholarship program 'Bolashak'. Thus, we could observe the influence

of the host country and home country policies on international students' movements. In addition, I would suggest that brain drain should not be given much concern because most of the state-sponsored students return to the sending country. Moreover, the study finds out that Kazakhstani students in the US have some patriotic aspirations to contribute to the development of Kazakhstan through either entering its labor market or establishing transnational connections with their colleagues working in Kazakhstan (Chapter 3).

### **Methodology**

The present thesis draws upon semi-structured interviews conducted during fieldwork in summer and fall 2018. In the period of four months, 40 interviews were carried out with Kazakhstani citizens who hold or are pursuing American qualifications. It was important to contrast experiences, thoughts, and opinions as well as opportunities and obligations of those who are in the US and those who returned to Kazakhstan. Therefore, the study population is comprised of three subsets: (a) Kazakhstanis who, at the time of fieldwork, were in the process of obtaining academic degrees from US higher education institutions, (b) those who remained in the US upon completion of academic programs, (c) and those who returned to Kazakhstan after their studies in the US. It comprised current and former students that financed their education independently or through private scholarships as well as state-sponsored 'Bolashak' students and alumni. This allowed observing that the location of individuals is an important factor that defines their transnational involvement. For instance, the group of participants who returned to Kazakhstan reflected on the same patterns of patriotically driven transnationalism practiced when they were in the US, although while in Kazakhstan they sustain transnational connections with the US motivated by more pragmatic considerations. In other words, while in Kazakhstan individuals are not concerned with their feelings of patriotism as much as they were in the US.

It is notable that only 'Bolashak' grantees were included in the group of returned students. However, this does not imply that self-funded students stay in the country of study and do not return home when they complete their academic programs. Nevertheless, it is difficult to suggest whether the experiences and migration plans of self-paying students who returned to Kazakhstan would be similar to those described in the study. On the other hand, the study did not focus on this question as it concentrated on transnational practices of the individuals. Therefore, it shows that transnational involvement constitutes a meaningful part of students' and graduates' lives in both country of study and country of origin.

The study does not suggest that international students' experiences are homogeneous either in the country of study or in the country of origin. Also, it is difficult to suggest whether the findings are representative of all Kazakhstanis in the US and Kazakhstanis with the American qualifications in Kazakhstan and whether they could be generalized to a bigger population. However, the study is based on the data derived from the research participants and its findings are consistent within the groups of participants. Therefore, the analysis presents valuable knowledge about the transnationalism of international students and graduates.

#### *Recruitment and sample*

As I aimed to recruit a majority of potential respondents who were in the US, the recruitment strategies were advertisements on social media and snowballing. The advertisements were posted on Facebook groups such as 'Alliance of Kazakh Students in the USA' and 'Kazakh American Association'. However, as they were often left overlooked, I started approaching potential participants by sending them messages privately. This was possible to do because the lists of group members were accessible for viewers. Also, many private profiles on Facebook indicated US universities in the education section in the personal information column. Therefore, it was easy to identify potential participants. In addition, I

observed friend lists of potential participants and recruited other participants from them. This was something resembling traditional snowballing when participants of the study recommend other individuals suitable to the sample selection criteria (Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton Nicholls, & Ormston, 2014). In a similar vein, I sent messages to the followers of ‘Kazakhs in the US’ Instagram account and asked whether they were involved in formal degree-seeking higher education programs in the US and whether they would like to participate in the research. In addition, I used my circle of friends and acquaintances to attract potential participants.

These recruitment strategies allowed attracting people of different age (ranging from 21 to 41), marital status, majors, level of higher education, and coming from different cities in Kazakhstan. Participants came from the following cities in Kazakhstan: Almaty, Astana, Shymkent, Aktobe, Karaganda, and Semey. Moreover, those who originated in other cities than Almaty and Astana studied at secondary schools or universities in these major cities of the country. The higher education institutions they attended in the US include top-ranked universities such as Harvard University, Columbia University, Cornell, University of Pennsylvania, MIT, Stanford, George Washington University, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Johns Hopkins University, University of California, Berkeley, as well as more affordable universities such as University of South Florida, Nova Southeastern University, Lynn University, and Santa Monica College. It is notable that ‘Bolashak’ program sponsors the studies at top American schools; so they are mostly represented in the study.

Ethnicity was not among selection criteria as was Kazakhstan citizenship. So the sampling did not focus on Kazakhs primarily. Moreover, the social media groups and associations used for recruitment purposes did not use the word ‘Kazakh’ in the ethnic sense since people of different ethnicities were among the members of these groups. Nevertheless, among 40 participants, 38 were Kazakhs, one Russian, and one Turkish-Russian. There were

23 self-paying or privately-funded students, and 17 'Bolashak' scholarship recipients. All 'Bolashak' grantees who participated in the study were Kazakhs, which might be an outcome of the program's selection process that requires knowledge of Kazakh language (Chapter 2).

### *Researcher position*

In general, researcher position or positionality can be examined using 'insider' and 'outsider' status of the researcher in relation to study participants (Ritchie et al., 2014). Some scholars suggest that in migration research, an 'insider' role is revealed to be quite important in migrant - researcher encounters since the differences in social status and generation become more acute for the researcher and the researched (Ganga & Scott, 2006).

On the one hand, although I was a short-term international student in Europe twice, I was an outsider in the research as I have neither been a degree-seeking international student in the US nor have I received 'Bolashak' scholarship. On the other hand, I was an insider, according to the Ganga and Scott's definition. These scholars define 'insider' migration research as a research in which the researcher and the participants share similar cultural, linguistic, ethnic, national and religious heritage and come from the same origin country (p.3). Therefore, my both outsider and insider position in the present research could have influenced the data collection as well as data itself. My outsider position enabled me to treat the participants as experts on US education, US immigration policies, 'Bolashak' program, and lifestyle in the US in general. This approach brought valuable information to the study.

At the same time, I assume that my insider position as a Kazakh and Kazakhstani, as well as a person studying in the university named after the first president of the country could have affected the participants as well. I suppose that my particular presence in the research influenced the data production in a way that participants often talked about patriotism and paying tribute to the motherland, although I did not expect them to bring this topic into

discussion. Perhaps, they felt that telling about their patriotic feelings to their compatriot would present them as full members of the community they originated from, despite their move to another country. This, in turn, would lessen their association with migrants - a category one might not prefer to identify with.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Most of the interviews were conducted via video or audio call. The primary means for that was voice over IP and instant messaging software that allowed video and audio calls. The individuals who gave their consent to take part in the research were asked to choose a software program for the interview as well as video or audio mode. Thus, the majority preferred 'Whatsapp' and 'Messenger' applications and audio calls. However, there were also four face-to-face interviews in Astana. The interviews usually lasted from 40 to 90 minutes and were conducted in Russian, except one which was in English. Due to the substantial time difference between Kazakhstan and the US, many interviews took place at night or early in the morning. The interviews were semi-structured so that the participants could share their opinions and produce new knowledge (Ritchie et al., 2014). Most of the interviews were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. Then, they were transcribed and coded using open and axial coding, which allowed eliciting essential categories and themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Important statements (quotes) that provided insights into the emerged themes were extracted. Thus, the analysis demonstrated the systematic differences between the descriptions of American experiences and experiences upon return to Kazakhstan. For instance, when describing experiences in the US context, the participants tended to talk about their national sentiments and emotional attachment to Kazakhstan as well as its people and culture. Whereas the experience of returned to Kazakhstan students expressed the feelings of attachment to the US as well as migration intentions based on their

pragmatic considerations of future jobs and careers. It is notable, that the group of returned students, reflecting back on their time in the US, described the same patriotically driven transnational experiences. Therefore, the geographical location denoting the country of origin and the country of study is indicated in the brief descriptions of the respondents, following their pseudonyms and age, such as in (Bernar, 23, US).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the analysis identified that transnational experiences of current and former international students related to their social relations that they sustained across the borders of the country of study or origin. Moreover, those in the US revealed regular engagement with their compatriots in both physical and virtual space while in the foreign land. In contrast, those who returned to Kazakhstan after several years of study in the US suggested that the US was still meaningful in their lives even though they were not physically there. Therefore, the transnationalism theory adopted in migration studies (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994; Levitt, 2001; Portes, 1999; Wimmer & Schiller, 2003) proved to capture these experiences best as it acknowledges that mobile people, in this case, international students remain tied to the countries they leave behind (Levitt, 2001a).

## **Conclusion**

Transnationalism as a theoretical and conceptual framework provides a useful view on current and former international students as transnational subjects. It helps to illuminate the social relations they forge and sustain, and identify the types of identities they construct. As transnationalism scholars suggest, transnational activities take place within broader global processes and structural frameworks imposed to individuals. Indeed, transnational involvement of international students occurs within internationalization of higher education and immigration frameworks that aim to attract and retain international students as labor

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<sup>1</sup> All names of the participants were substituted with pseudonyms to secure confidentiality

force. Moreover, as the data analysis shows, international education influences the identities of the students so that even when they return home, they feel solidarity and certain attachment to the country of study and become aware of their transnational identities.

However, though international students develop a particular sense of belonging to the country of study, they return to origin country because the structural factors such as US immigration policies and 'Bolashak' scholarship program often define their movements. Therefore, Chapter 2 discusses US immigration policies and 'Bolashak' scholarship conditionality and suggests how they influence the international student migration and transnational connections of Kazakhstani students. It shows that these structural forces facilitate and restrict student moves at the same time. The obligations to return to Kazakhstan and work there for five years also have a particular influence on transnational connections that former international students sustain with the US. Although the returned students observe that it is more economically profitable to work in the US or other developed countries with their qualifications and intercultural knowledge, they are obliged to stay in Kazakhstan and contribute to the national economy through their labor. Therefore, economically motivated but restricted in their moves for a certain period of time, they sustain transnational connections with the US to increase the opportunities for future migration and employment in the country of study. However, while in the US, Kazakhstanis strengthen their national identities as a response to the unfamiliar socio-cultural environment. They tend to engage in different activities with their compatriots in both physical and virtual space. Chapter 3 demonstrates that these activities as well as continuous identification with the origin country's community represent deterritorialized nationalism, which is characteristic of transnational migrants (Tsuda, 2003). It is notable that the participants of the study termed this as patriotism. Therefore, the chapter starts with the examination of patriotism as understood by the study participants and argues that students' and student-migrants' patriotism as a form of

national identity becomes more pronounced in the foreign context and thus, underpins the transnational involvement of the individuals. In contrast, Chapter 4 demonstrates that identities of the students who returned home are not concentrated on one national narrative because the individuals with overseas study experience reposition themselves at home and start identifying themselves with the country of study as well. This happens because throughout substantial years spent abroad, international students acquire host country values, beliefs, and therefore, feel different from the community they originated from. Along with host country cultural features, international students obtain friends and colleagues while studying. These relationships become a base for transnational communication. However, as the analysis shows, former international students preserve these transnational ties spurred by pragmatic considerations as they believe that their American qualifications would provide them with better jobs and higher salaries in the country of study or elsewhere in the developed world. Therefore, the chapter argues that pragmatic motives underpin transnational involvement of the Kazakhstanis upon their return to home country. Chapter 5 concludes the main points made in the work and reflects on their significance. It also suggests the areas for future research on international students' transnationalism.

## Chapter 2

### **International students, highly skilled migration, and transnationalism: The role of US immigration policies and ‘Bolashak’ scholarship**

Migration and transnationalism scholars suggest that a migration destination point presents a particular context of constraints and opportunities that frame the transnational linkages of migrants (Smith & Guarnizo, 1998). Therefore, it is important to consider structural factors such as international labor market and immigration policies that shape migrant flows and their transnational relations. In the case of Kazakhstani students in the US, immigration policies of the country of study and Kazakhstan’s scholarship program ‘Bolashak’ are of particular importance. These factors contribute to the stable flows of international students from Kazakhstan (20, 000 in 2004 and about 60,000 in 2014<sup>2</sup>) and define whether an individual could stay in the host country after studies and get employment. This, in turn, has a certain effect on Kazakhstanis’ transnational involvement. First, it encourages returned ‘Bolashak’ grantees, who cannot immediately migrate to the US because of their obligation to work for five years in Kazakhstan, to sustain ties with the US because they recognize the future opportunities for the graduates of American higher education institutions. Second, it creates opportunities for staying in touch with compatriot students in the country of study as the scholarship holders tend to enroll the same universities.

In the present work, decisions and behaviors to stay in the country of study upon completion of academic degree programs are considered as a part of a student migration process. As a rule, this process takes places under certain policy frameworks that view international students as a pool of potential highly skilled migrants. Although the immigration policies of many developed countries appear to function quite discriminatory by allocating more rights and protection to highly-skilled as compared to low-skilled migrants (Ruhs,

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<sup>2</sup> According to Migration and Mobility in Europe and Central Asia report (World Bank, 2017). This number includes both ‘Bolashak’ scholarship holders and self-financing students

2013), international students with higher levels of education and qualifications in certain fields benefit from this approach.

The association between highly skilled migration and international students is reflected in existing opportunities to remain in the country of study after the completion of educational programs. Although a temporary stay after the studies allowed by student visa regulations does not necessarily count as immigration, it is an outcome of the decisions that are similar to those made by transnational labor migrants in developed countries. These include expectations of higher wages, better opportunities for career advancement and higher standards of living among many other factors (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014). The participants of the study who stayed in the US upon acquiring degrees from the country's universities reported the attractiveness of the same factors. In addition, these factors also pull 'Bolashak' grantees who have returned to Kazakhstan to go back to the US.

It is notable that a considerable number of developed countries are dependent on foreign highly-skilled labor. For them, international students are more attractive than other foreign candidates as they already possess necessary language and cultural skills and easily integrate into the host society. Therefore, these countries design their immigration policies so that they enable student – migrant transitions (e.g. Australia, Canada) (Hawthorne, 2012; Tremblay, 2005). In addition, other OECD states have softened their immigration policies to facilitate temporary or permanent immigration of international students (OECD, 2008). The rationale for keeping international students as highly-skilled migrants include maintaining the number of working-age adults, balancing workforce maldistribution, and enhancing sectors of medicine, pharmaceuticals, science, and technology with young talents (Hawthorne, 2012; Lu, Zong, & Schissel, 2009; Tremblay, 2005; Ziguras & Law, 2006). Thus, the shortage of skilled workers is addressed in strategic and diplomatic ways (Ruhs, 2013; She & Wotherspoon, 2013).

Since the prospect of subsequent immigration often plays a major motivating role in young people's decisions to move abroad for studies, higher educational institutions have a particular advantage for attracting international students in the countries with explicit 'international student – permanent resident' pathways such as in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada (Baas, 2006; Hawthorne, 2012; Lu et al., 2009; OECD, 2017; Robertson, 2013; Ziguras & Law, 2006). In contrast, the US, even though being reliant on foreign talent in science, technology and ICT industries (Hawthorne, 2012), has a quite different approach in regard to highly-skilled migration, in general, and international students, in particular. It is notable that over different periods of time, this approach reflected the changing needs of the state.

### **US immigration policies**

The 1990s policies favoring highly skilled immigration allowed more international doctorates to stay in the US after completing their university degrees. However, post-9/11 changes in immigration policies and increased security concerns negatively affected international student migration to the US (She & Wotherspoon, 2013). However, despite the tightened immigration control since then, the US has traditionally been a top international student-receiving country along with other English-speaking countries such as the UK, Australia, and Canada (Brooks & Waters, 2013; OECD, 2017, 2018). As such, the US provides certain pathways to international graduates of American tertiary institutions, especially to those with science and technology qualifications, making international graduates more preferable than overseas applicants.

In general, highly skilled migration in the US operates within an employer-sponsored framework in which foreign-born professionals obtain temporary work H-1B visas.

According to Tremblay (2005), in 1996 and 2000 slightly more than one-fifth of foreign

professionals were former international students; although the field of specialization greatly varied. In 2004, the H-1B Visa Reform Act exempted up to 20,000 applicants with Master's or higher degree obtained from US higher education institutions from the annual numerical cap of 65,000 ("Report on H-1B Petitions Fiscal Year 2017", 2018; "USCIS Annual report 2004", 2006). This suggests that among those international students who remain in the US after studies, a significant number holds higher academic degrees.

In 2017, the US Senate introduced the RAISE Act (Reforming American Immigration for Strong Employment Act) which seeks to reduce the level of legal immigration to the country by cutting the number of refugees and eliminating Diversity Visa lottery as well as introducing a skills-based points system. In the newly-designed points system, young (aged 26-30), proficient in English with American qualifications in STEM are given prioritized positions. Thus, international students in the US would have more advantages over other applicants as they easily fulfill most eligible criteria ("S.1720 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): RAISE Act"). However, more restrictive measures are planned to be implemented. According to "Buy American and Hire American" Presidential Executive Order, more reforms in immigration policies should appear to ensure that H-1B visas are issued to only the most-skilled and/or highest-paid individuals. These measures are supposed to encourage employers to use the native workforce, instead of appealing to the relatively cheaper overseas workers ("Presidential Executive Order on Buy American and Hire American | The White House", 2017).

At the moment, the most concrete opportunity for international students to stay in the US post-study is Optional Practical Training program (OPT). This framework allows international students on their F-1 student visas to obtain work experience in the country during studies or upon completion. The program usually lasts 12 months per academic degree but can be extended up to 36 months for STEM and IT graduates provided that individuals

have paid part-time or full-time employment ("OPT for F-1 Students", 2019). Some migration scholars claim that OPT functions as a 'stepping stone' to foreign worker H-1B visa as employers have a right to retain foreign students after their training and sponsor them for the worker visa valid for 3 to 6 years (Robertson, 2013). Moreover, to qualify for H1-B visa an applicant has to hold at least a bachelor degree in the specialty occupation from a US higher education institution or equivalent ("H-1B Specialty Occupations", 2019). Through these mechanisms, international students educated in the US are given certain opportunities to legally stay in the country after their studies.

Thus, US immigration policies restrict and facilitate student migration at the same time. Both H-1B and OPT program, although not directly intended to, can serve as pathways to eventual permanent migration. However, under such policies, competitiveness among international students is unavoidable given the fact that those with higher degrees and limited types of qualifications have more advantages in the existing migration frameworks. Nevertheless, as the present study shows, migration opportunities offered to international graduates of US higher education institutions encourage individuals to seek employment in the country of study either immediately after their studies or some time later.

### **Kazakhstan's 'Bolashak' scholarship program**

Kazakhstan ranks among the top 15 nations in the world in terms of the number of students participating in tertiary education programs abroad (58,438 in 2011) (Perna, Orosz, & Jumakulov, 2015). And the state international education scholarship program 'Bolashak' since its inception in 1993 has made a significant contribution to this development. This program was established by Presidential Decree #1394 dated 11.05.1993 that stated the need to train young Kazakhstanis in leading universities abroad so that they contribute to the transformation of the national economy into the market economy model as well as the

expansion of international relations. During the years of program implementation, it underwent several changes to better correspond to the socio-cultural changes in the Kazakhstani society (Dairova, Jumakulov, & Ashirbekov, 2013). For instance, the first scholarships were awarded to economics and humanities applicants whereas when the country faced the need for engineering and technical staff, more applicants in the respective fields were admitted to the program competition ("History of the Program", 2019). To date, 12, 898 Kazakhstanis have received the scholarship and obtained Bachelor, Master's and Doctoral degrees overseas. Among them, 2,315 (18%) of scholarship recipients completed a course of study in the US ("Fact Sheet: The United States and Kazakhstan", 2019). This can be explained by the fact that 'Bolashak' program administrators rely on the international rankings of universities in which US institutions occupy leading positions. Thus, to ensure the program quality, from the very beginning of the program implementation, US higher education institutions have been listed in Priority Universities List along with British, German and French higher education institutions (Perna et al., 2015). Moreover, within the economic partnership between the US and Kazakhstan, American colleagues consulted the program administrators on the selection process and helped to extend the number of US universities participating in the program ("Fact Sheet: The United States and Kazakhstan", 2019). Only later on, as more contacts were established with other countries, the geography of the program expanded ("History of the Program", 2019). Therefore, it is pertinent to suggest that 'Bolashak' scholarship program generally facilitates the flow of international students from Kazakhstan to the US.

'Bolashak' which translates as 'future' from Kazakh, reflects the prioritized position of high-quality education in Kazakhstan. This, to a certain extent, relates to the mass outmigration of highly-skilled personnel during the first years of the country's independence (Dairova et al., 2013). The program is designed on the premises that foreign education as well

as the overseas experience of scholarship recipients' will lead to greater socio-economic development in the sponsoring state through their involvement in social change upon arrival (Campbell, 2018). Thus, the selection of applicants and the conditionality of the program reflect these assumptions. 'Bolashak' selection criteria restrict the participation in the programs to those citizens with highest academic performance (Perna et al., 2015) and those who fall under one of the following categories: (a) students admitted to foreign universities prior to applying to 'Bolashak', (b) public sector servants, (c) educational managers, (d) new graduates, and (e) applicants for internships (Dairova et al., 2013). The selection process has multiple parts and consists of several examinations. After application screening, there are foreign language, Kazakh language, and comprehensive subject tests (Dairova et al., 2013; "Program rules", 2019). In most cases, the program requires scholarship grantees to return to Kazakhstan and work for five years. To ensure the fulfillment of the imposed obligations, scholarship recipients must pledge a collateral of comparable amount to the scholarship costs (often real estate owned by the applicant's family) (Dairova et al., 2013; Perna et al., 2015). This consideration further restricts the pool of potential applicants to those who come from well-off families. As self-funded students who participated in the present study suggest, these particular requirements discouraged them from applying for the scholarship as they preferred not to be heavily restricted in their post-study choices. However, these provisions appeared only after some years of program implementation as a response to the problems. The major problems faced during the years of program existence are university drop outs (especially during the first years 1994-1997), non-return of program alumni to Kazakhstan, and the country's inability to provide the newly-made specialists with jobs in the respective fields. Although the program administrators provided employment of scholars in state organizations, the latter issue remains topical to this day. However, the introduction of the real-estate pledge requirement in 1997 quite successfully addressed the first two issues (Tomanova &

Zhumashov, 2014). The requirement to refund the full scholarship costs with a certain amount of interest, guaranteed by the pledged collateral, in the case when obligations to work in Kazakhstan for five years are not met decreased the number of students not returning to Kazakhstan (Perna et al., 2015, p. 91).

Starting from 2010, 'Bolashak' program has not been sponsoring undergraduate studies abroad. This measure was introduced to deal with the young individuals' 'unreadiness' to live and study abroad for four-five year periods (Dairova et al., 2013; Perna et al., 2015; Tomanova & Zhumashov, 2014). Some also relate this amendment to the establishment of Nazarbayev University that enrolled first students in 2010. The university receives a substantial amount of investment and is expected to contribute to the development of national science and research in general, and eliminate the need for foreign education, in particular (Perna et al., 2015, p. 90,92). However, 'Bolashak' program started awarding grants for short-term overseas education programs and internships for different categories of staff, including engineering, medical and teaching specialists ("History of the Program", 2019). Therefore, 'Bolashak' remains a key player in international education of the Kazakhstanis. The program contributes to the mass student flows from Kazakhstan to the leading worldwide universities, especially in American ones where tuition fees and travel costs are the highest for the Kazakhstanis. Therefore, as the participants of the study inform, this factor is decisive for university choices of scholarship holders.

It is interesting that despite the 'Bolashak' program conditionality; there are certain ways which allow Kazakhstani scholarship recipients to stay in the host country. Since this study investigates international student migration from Kazakhstan to the US, the following schemes are relevant to the US as a host country. Given the fact that immigration policies of the US provide foreign graduates with temporary work opportunities either under OPT program or on H-1B visa, 'Bolashak' grantees as other international students are tempted to

remain to obtain work experience, enhance their practical skills, build networks and earn money in the US. In fact, the participants of the study inform that some 'Bolashakers' do apply for a job and stay in the US under the OPT framework. In such cases, they apply for 'Bolashak' program extension, stating that the practical experience that could be gained in the US is crucial to their specific majors. If approved, an applicant, 'Bolashak' authorities and an American employer enter into a tripartite agreement to ensure the eventual return of the scholarship holder. This is a relatively new provision as the authorities recognize that a scholarship holder can bring back more added value to the country if she possesses both theoretical and practical knowledge ("Loopholes in 'Bolashak': How to Remain Abroad", 2018).

The participants of the study who were 'Bolashak' scholarship recipients also suggested that financial debt is the most powerful aspect that prevents them from not returning to the home country. Therefore, accumulating money to refund the program costs is a key task for those who desire to stay in the US. Some mistakenly believe that working in the country of study under OPT program could help to save the necessary amount of money due to the wage-differentials between the host and home countries and availability of jobs of different kinds in the US. Another hypothesized option that would free from scholarship obligations, as the study participants suggest, is to find a sponsor that might be an American spouse or employer who would refund the scholarship costs.

While it is rather difficult and risky to stay permanently in the US immediately after degree completion, many wish to go back to the US as soon as they fulfill work obligations in Kazakhstan. Firstly, this is because 'Bolashak' students as other international students develop certain solidarities with the receiving society and experience identity change throughout the years spent in the country of study. Secondly, the move to the US is perceived to be more economically beneficial for individuals. Moreover, proficiency in the language,

American qualifications and social networks established during the years of study are likely to ease their migration to the country. Therefore, 'Bolashak' grantees who aspire to go back to the US sustain transnational ties with networks there as it could facilitate their future migration (Chapter 4).

The networks of 'Bolashak' grantees in the US also include fellow scholarship holders. As there are certain universities that 'Bolashak' grantees tend to enroll, there is a high possibility for compatriot students to study and live together. This factor is quite important because there is a relatively small number of Kazakhstanis in the US tertiary education institutions. However, the presence of 'Bolashakers' could facilitate the transnational engagement among compatriot students in the country of study (Chapter 3).

Thus, the 'Bolashak' program, on the one hand, prevents Kazakhstani students from staying in the host countries; on the other hand, it contributes to the international student flows from Kazakhstan and facilitates the future migration of former scholarship holders. Moreover, with the first 'Bolashak' program alumni, the competition for lucrative jobs increased among the Kazakhstanis. Therefore, many people started investing in overseas education, which contributed to the expansion of student flows from Kazakhstan to the West (Holloway, O'Hara, & Pimlott-Wilson, 2012).

## **Conclusion**

US immigration policies restrict immigration to those who can perform high-skilled jobs in certain industries. However, international students are more easily admitted to the local labor market as they are given a legal opportunity for employment under OPT program. Although this program is temporary and does not explicitly turn students into workers, it takes advantage of foreign labor just as foreign-worker frameworks do. Moreover, this program gives individuals an opportunity for a prolonged stay in the country, which is often the desired

option for international students. 'Bolashakers' as other international students are tempted to take this opportunity for economic and professional reasons. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the 'Bolashak' scholarship conditionality imposes serious financial risks for those who might elude return to Kazakhstan, it acknowledges the importance of post-study practical training in the US for scholarship holders who are expected to positively contribute to Kazakhstan's development. In addition, the presence of a substantial number of Kazakhstani students, either the 'Bolashak' recipients or private, creates favorable conditions for their collective involvement which make their residence abroad more comfortable and nationally oriented (this will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter). Thus, structural factors such as US immigration policies and 'Bolashak' scholarship facilitate international education of the Kazakhstanis and influence student migration from Kazakhstan to the US. These processes, in turn, contribute to the establishment of transnational connections between Kazakhstan and the US.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Transnational involvement in the US: Patriotic transnationalism**

Aimed at studying transnationalism of Kazakhstani students and student-migrants in the US as well as returned students, the present analysis finds that different motivations underpin the transnational involvement of individuals staying in the US and those who returned to Kazakhstan. These motivations represent patriotism and pragmatism respectively. Therefore, the terms patriotic transnationalism and pragmatic transnationalism have been coined to demonstrate what motivates international students to sustain transnational activities. However, this analytical division does not imply that Kazakhstanis are patriots only in the US and not back home or that they are more pragmatic in Kazakhstan rather than in the US. Instead, it suggests that transnational practices of individuals are caused by different impetus and serve different purposes.

In the case of patriotic transnationalism, transnational activities address the longing for homeland and desire to be associated with the sending society. This can be explained by aspiration to affirm national identities as a response to the environment that is considerably different from which students originate. According to Tsuda (2003), such deterritorialized nationalism is inherent to transnational migrants who continue to associate themselves with the country of origin while abroad. In contrast, pragmatic transnationalism is economically motivated and sustained to address pragmatic considerations of individuals associated with a search for better jobs and higher wages. These aspirations arise from the rational considerations of opportunities, and given the fact that American qualifications are recognized in international labor market, international graduates of US higher education institutions are tempted to take advantage of them. Moreover, the networks built in the country of study are often perceived to facilitate migration endeavors; therefore, transnational ties acquire instrumental meaning when international students return to home country.

This chapter is devoted to the transnational practices Kazakhstani students and student-migrants engage with while in the US. It argues that national identities become more salient in the foreign environment and thus, motivate individuals to sustain transnational ties with the origin country in order to affirm their distinct cultural identities and national belonging. It is notable that the participants of the study referred to the notion of patriotism to reflect such kind of identities. However, patriotism was not among the topics I planned to discuss with the participants. This topic naturally emerged in the descriptions of American experiences. It is notable that the participants preferred not to talk about politics as much as they preferred to talk about patriotism. It might suggest that they related themselves to the country of origin in symbolic rather than political ways. They did not even talk about citizenship, although some scholars suggest that citizenship is a basic source of identity for migrants (Levitt, 2001a; Robertson, 2013). Given the salience of the topic, the present study was able to identify that patriotic feelings are more meaningful to the Kazakhstanis when they are in the US rather than in the country of origin; therefore, these feelings underpin their transnational involvement.

In order to better understand how national sentiments influence transnational involvement of the study participants, it is important to examine their understandings and representations of patriotism. During the interview coding, four major categories of patriotism emerged. These include understanding of patriotism as maintenance of ties with family and familial home, preservation of culture, association with Kazakh people, and the development of the nation-state. This division was made for analytical purposes only because for the respondents, there were no clear boundaries between these aspects; they were all intertwined in their understandings of patriotism.

The patriotism the participants talked about demonstrates their sense of belonging and identification with the origin society (Siegert, 2011). It also suggests how they construct their

identities in a foreign environment. The ways in which participants talked about patriotism roughly maps onto how scholars discuss migrant nationalism, which is often referred to as long-distance nationalism (Pryke, 2003) and deterritorialized nationalism (Tsuda, 2003). Nation, as Anderson (1991) defines, is a social unity imagined by people who conceive themselves as members of it. Such unity is based on imagined social relationships and shared historical past reinforced by mass media which serves as a source of information, exchange, and communication for community members (Anderson, 1991, p. 44). For migrants as well as international students, as I shall demonstrate, the conception of ties with an imagined community outside the context of their immediate residence foster the formation of transnational communities (Tsuda, 2003). Therefore, national or patriotic sentiments, as study participants refer to them, are worth studying for research objectives of the present thesis.

In general, patriotism and nationalism are both bases for group unity and forms of social identification with a nation (Qiong Li & Marilyn B. Brewer, 2004). However, for some scholars, the main difference between the two constructs lies in their relations towards other groups. Thus, patriotism is seen to reflect attachment and loyalty to one's own nation-state without negative attitudes to others whereas nationalism is seen to express positive attitudes towards one's own nation-state and negative to other, presuming the superiority and involving a desire for domination in the international arena (Druckman, 1994). In the Soviet lexicon, nationalism had negative connotations and referred to chauvinistic ideology (Tromly, 2009). Therefore, I would suggest that participants' preference for patriotism term results from the Soviet and independent Kazakhstan discourse on national loyalty and identity framed in patriotism terms (Kissane, 2005). Nevertheless, the participants of the study had their own understandings and articulations of patriotism which will be illustrated below. Then, the following part of the chapter will demonstrate how these patriotic sentiments

influence transnational involvement and underpin transnational practices of Kazakhstani students and student-migrants in the US.

### **Patriotism associated with family and familial home**

Most of the participants defined their sense of belonging in relation to family and familial home. They illustrated their place of origin as an ancestral land where they have strong 'roots'. This, according to participants' statements, creates a certain attachment to the homeland and underpins their sense of belonging. In addition, 'roots' make them feel the need to eventually return to Kazakhstan. For instance, Bernar, a 23-year-old software engineer, decided to stay in the US as he found a job under OPT conditions. However, he states that he would return to Kazakhstan because of his 'roots':

I would say that I have strong roots and in any case, I would return to Kazakhstan, no matter what. (Bernar, 23, US)

A dream of returning represents a sojourner identity and strong 'roots' as the main explanation for that constitute a part of belonging narrative (Wessendorf, 2007). Therefore, we can suggest that return intentions existing as a myth or leading to actual behavior embody individual patriotism. Mansur, a 28-year-old Bolashak grantee who spent five years in the US studying Electrical Engineering, suggests that 'uprooted' people, in contrast, are more likely to leave their homeland and not return from abroad:

People who are leaving [migrants], they are not tied to home. It seems that they do not have such an attachment to their roots. They do not have heredity, grandparents, ancestors, *shezhire*, and things like that. (Mansur, 28, KZ)

Often such attachment to 'roots' is described with references to a traditional upbringing that prioritizes family values and respect for the older generation. Moreover, some participants suggest that attachment and loyalty to the nation-state is not promoted from above but nurtured at home:

There [in the US], people often asked: “Would you like to return? Would you like to go home? I replied to this: “Of course, America is a good place, but I would prefer to die in the homeland”. Because I think that the issue [staying in the US] is related not only to social [status], but also to family upbringing and values. If a person can easily leave everything and stay [in the US], then it is his upbringing and the way he was raised. Therefore, this problem should concern individual family but not the state. (Dauren, 28, KZ)

Dauren, a Bolashak grantee who completed an undergraduate degree in Nuclear Engineering in the US, suggested that family upbringing instills respect and love not only to family members but to the state; therefore, he believes that inappropriate upbringing might cause students’ non-return to Kazakhstan. Therefore, family upbringing is seen to be responsible for developing an attachment to both family roots and origin country.

Thus, according to study participants, the notion of patriotism is understood as an attachment to the homeland to which they are tied by family connections and roots. This, to some extent, is a result of a family upbringing that relates the ideas of the ancestral homeland to the modern nation-state. Therefore, familial roots constitute an important part of the sense of belonging of the individuals.

### **Patriotism associated with culture: soft patriotism**

Family-oriented upbringing and instilled family values are also perceived as an important cultural feature that distinguishes Kazakh people from Americans.<sup>3</sup> In Bernar’s perception, American people are more individualistic and independent from their families compared to Kazakhs. This, in his opinion, complicates assimilation in the US society along with other cultural differences, even though he has been living there for five years:

No matter how hard I tried to become an American, I think that I would not become a hundred-percent American because the upbringing [in the US] is absolutely different. I and my American peers grew up very different. I mean language and culture are different. Here people are more individualistic, for example, no one lives with their parents - everyone leaves home when they turn 18. There are no such family ties. That is, the only common things we share are university experience and the things I learned

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<sup>3</sup> Almost all participants of the study were ethnic Kazakhs, except two.

here. So, I will not become an absolute American (laughs). Also, I do not want to lose my language and culture. (Bernar, 23, US)

In addition, this excerpt suggests that an attachment to the native language and culture represents a certain cultural identity which Bernar is not ready to abandon. Indeed, other participants also reported that language, culture, and food are the things Kazakhs miss most when they are in the US. These soft factors<sup>4</sup> play a central role in their definitions of the sense of belonging since Kazakhs in the US see themselves as belonging to a distinct from American culture. Therefore, these sentiments can be defined here as soft patriotism.

However, it was not clear what kind of culture or what particular language (Kazakh or Russian) participants implied. In their words, Kazakh, Kazakhstani and Central Asian traditions were tightly interwoven so that it is no longer possible to define which one they meant in particular. Nevertheless, the participants often contrasted the representations of their own culture to their representations of what American culture is, and thus, perceived the two to be quite disparate.

Damir received a Bolashak scholarship twice to obtain Master's and Ph.D. degrees in the US. Having spent a substantial number of years in the country and obtaining necessary cultural knowledge, he thought it was possible to assimilate in the US. However, then, he realized that he missed the things that were not available in the US: he missed Kazakhstan landscapes, gatherings with relatives and long talks over tea:

It is interesting that at the age of 30, I had a thought that I could easily assimilate in Western society and be an American. But by the age of 37, I got a sense that no, I miss our steppe, horses, I miss relatives, I miss all these *shai* and *baursak*<sup>5</sup> and kind of things (laughs).<sup>6</sup> (Damir, 40, KZ)

Since most Kazakh foods are unavailable in the US, the physical and emotional distance from home becomes more acute and therefore, many feel homesick. Nazira, a Bolashak

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<sup>4</sup> Siegert (2011) distinguish patriotism based on soft factors – language, history and so on as well as patriotism based on hard factors - consistent political/administrative system, common market etc.

<sup>5</sup> Kazakh: tea and fried bread. However, this might also imply table talks

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Damir was in English; however, sometimes, he explained things in Kazakh and Russian

grantee who was sponsored to get a Master's degree in IT from the US, told that she missed particular foods that were impossible to find in the US. This is the reason why she and other students who make frequent return visits to Kazakhstan brought back traditional foods and other products to the US:

I missed very much food, especially *kazy* (laughs). Also, I always took about 30-50 cans of stew from Kazakhstan. When my parents visited me, they also brought a lot of stew, *kurt*, and other national snacks. (Nazira, 24, KZ)

In Nazira's case, it is important to note that national snacks brought to the US from Kazakhstan acquire particular cultural meaning. First, bringing desired foods that is not available in the place of residence from overseas symbolizes parental love and care. Second, since particular foods are associated with a particular nation, food serves as an articulation of a distinct identity and attachment to home country (Coakley, 2012; Tsuda, 2003). Therefore, in many cases, nostalgia and longing for traditional foods could reflect international students' and student-migrants' patriotic feelings.

Similarly to national food, celebrations of national holidays reflect solidarity and alliance with the sending society and become a means for national identity articulation:

We organized the Kazakh Student Association because all the Kazakhs, who studied there [in the US] through 'Bolashak' and privately, tried to communicate and know each other. We celebrated *Nauryz*, New Year, and March 8. We had our foods as well - *besbarmak*, pilaf and things like that. Because as a Kazakh in a foreign land, you miss such events, cuisine, people, *dombyra* and so on. Also, I noticed that when you are abroad, you start watching and appreciating Kazakh films; although most of them are dull. Similarly, when you occasionally hear Kazakh songs, something inside you starts to tremble. There is something in it. Apparently, it is a craving for native land and for home. (Mansur, 28, KZ)

Here it is pertinent to suggest that homesickness among Kazakhstani students motivated them to gather and celebrate national holidays with traditional dishes and music in the US. These events not only help students to cope with homesickness, but also develop in-group solidarity between compatriot students and affirm continuing membership in the sending society (Levitt, 2001b). Also, the celebration of national holidays, as well as consumption of Kazakh music

and the media, serve as a marker of national and ethnic identities which become more pronounced in a foreign context (Hail, 2015). Once in a new sociocultural environment, migrants and international students, as the present analysis shows, are subjected to identity configuration (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). Their identities become more nationalized because local population associates them with their origin countries and ascribes nationalized categories to them. Thus, such externally imposed labeling or 'ascription' facilitates identity shift based on distinguishing from the receiving society and enhancing national self-consciousness (Sarna, 1978; Tsuda, 2003).

Patriotism is also understood as a desire to promote one's own culture. Zhibek – a third-year student at a US university took a semester off and was spending it in Kazakhstan at the time I interviewed her. She decided to make a creative project about Kazakhstan to defend it as a capstone project the following year. As she explained to me, she felt obliged to develop a project that would present the beauty of the country and its people to an American audience. This desire arose from the fact that she is the only Kazakh in her university, and few people have any ideas and knowledge about the country. In this case, Zhibek is making herself an empathic cultural ambassador. Moreover, the presentation of her origin country in a positive light would help her build a distinct (nationalized) identity she might be associated with further (Bochner, McLeod, & Lin, 1977).

When in the US, questions of belonging and identity become more salient because international students observe their distinctiveness in the new environment. National food, music, and celebrations take a special place in their identifications with the country of origin. Often serving for symbolic purposes, a transnational re-creation of cultural activities and their promotion outside the home country becomes a means to affirm cultural differences with the host society. This, in turn, fosters national sentiments and identities. The process when national loyalties become strengthened outside the territorial boundaries of the national state

is defined by Tsuda (2003) as deterritorialized nationalism (p. 156). Homesickness caused by attachment and nostalgia for food, cultural events and language creates a need to gather with a group of compatriots and associate themselves with a broader ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991), and deterritorialized soft patriotism provides a means to its fulfillment. Therefore, for the study participants, culture is an important characteristic in their definitions of patriotism and sense of belonging.

### **Patriotism associated with Kazakh people**

Some participants expressed attachment to Kazakh people,<sup>7</sup> taking solidarity between co-nationals for granted. For them, it is psychologically easier to be abroad if they are connected to people from their country and, on the contrary, they are more prone to depression if they don’t have contact with other Kazakhs. Nursulu, a Journalism student at a leading US university suggests this in the following excerpt:

When I lived in Turkey, I lived as if I were in Kazakhstan. I gathered all Kazakhs in Kazakh association and we met every week. I miss it [socializing with Kazakhs] a lot here in America. (Nursulu, 24, US)

Also, for some, the homeland is associated with people who share a common language and culture, and therefore, can be referred to as ‘your people’ [*svoi liudi*]:

I felt like a stranger because home is home, there are your people [*svoi liudi*]. And when language is different, culture is different, it is difficult to feel home, like in Kazakhstan. (Mansur, 28, KZ)

On the other hand, it is not so much the language and culture that matters, but the way of socializing that is difficult to adjust to in the US:

[...] you miss the kind of socializing, you miss Kazakh way of socializing, you know. It’s kind of, there is a symbolic trust among people, I mean, in the US you can get it but you should get a house in the neighborhood. (Damir, 40, KZ)

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<sup>7</sup> Although the vast majority of participants were ethnic Kazakhs, it is notable that they referred to their fellow-nationals in the US as Kazakhs, not Kazakhstani, which might imply the ethnic composition of student groups and associations. Nevertheless, Kazakh and Kazakhstani are used interchangeably to denote students from Kazakhstan in this work.

'Symbolic trust' between people in Kazakhstan is said to ease everyday interactions and help people reach mutual agreements since people tend to trust those from the same ethnic group and are less inclined to trust those from different groups because of different worldviews they are thought to have. Trust in fellow ethnic group members is a significant factor that facilitates cooperation and construction of a collective identity (Sharipova, Alpeissova, & Burkhanov, 2017). However, the same example demonstrates that symbolic trust can be achieved in the US provided that you are quite settled in a community, for instance, and have permanent housing.

In addition, for some participants, the perceived differences between Kazakh and American people caused unpleasant experiences:

Well, here [in the US], people are more individualistic, you know. For example, I have some good friends who are Americans, but a very large part of them are friends only when they need it, you know. (Bernar, 23, US)

Maya, a pianist who decided to stay in the US after studies, also perceived difference between American people and herself, which reinforced her Kazakh identity:

It is difficult to make friends with local Americans, they are different. One day I thought I learned them, but the next day I realized that I was mistaken (laughs). And it is interesting, it happened only here that I realized how much Kazakh I am, despite the fact that I was born in Russia. (Maya, 30, US)

Here, it can be seen that differing from others in the host country on the basis of ethnicity and worldviews facilitates the construction of a distinct, often nationalized, identity and enhances patriotic sentiments of individuals. However, it should be noted that the study participants tend to make generalizations about people and things in Kazakhstan and the US based on their personal experiences. This helps them to illustrate the perceived differences between the two cultures. Moreover, they oversimplify their descriptions in an attempt to interpret individual behavior in ethnic and national terms. Therefore, participants tend to utilize the commonality and difference in language, culture and socializing patterns as defining features. Thus, they tend to feel emotional connectedness to compatriots when immersed into a new and

unfamiliar environment. Consequently, being in touch with fellow nationals is seen as a relief, especially when individuals experience difficulties in establishing relationships with new people in a host country. This is one of the reasons why students from Kazakhstan in different US universities across the country form Kazakh student associations and organize gatherings and other events. These activities unite people of the same origin, build in-group solidarity and increase cultural awareness and ethnic consciousness in the host society.

### **Patriotism associated with the development of the nation**

In day-to-day conversation, citizens of former-Soviet states rarely talk about patriotism. Eshev (2014) suggests that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in successor states, patriotism gave way to more pragmatic values. Therefore, any claims for having aspirations to contribute positively to the nation-state might sound for some bombastic and unrealistic. Nevertheless, most of the participants expressed certain ambitions to contribute to the development of the nation since in the foreign environment they have realized how much they belong to it:

I understood that motherland is not a spot on the Earth, it is us. And we should think about the development of the nation. (Maya, 30, US)

Often, the participants of the study explained an idea of national development in terms of paying tribute to the motherland. For instance, some participants claimed that they have to stay in the US in order to acquire state-of-the-art knowledge and obtain valuable practical experience to further transfer it to Kazakhstan, and, as a result, develop their respective industries:

I stay [in the US] not for my own sake, but for the sake of my country. I have to get experience. If I come back young and green [inexperienced] to Kazakhstan, I do not know what I would do. In the US, I am able to gain experience and learn what kind of acting techniques and teachers there are as well as what kind of cameras and technology they use. I can bring this knowledge to Kazakhstan and train our youth, and thus, enhance the level [of cinematography] in Kazakhstan. It's my goal. Unless we do so,

who will help then, right? So, if there is an opportunity [jobs in Kazakhstan], I will develop my sphere and everything related to the arts. (Zhibek, 21, US)

Zhibek is not a Bolashak-sponsored student, but her understanding of overseas education and its value for the nation goes in parallel with the main premises and goals of the state program. She expands her professional aspirations to the broader public sphere, which, she believes, would lead to positive socio-cultural changes in her home country once she returns. Such endeavors to contribute to the development of the origin society arise from the intrinsic, often symbolic need to give back to the motherland through unpaid work and service (Darieva, 2017). On the other hand, Zhibek conceives that foreign knowledge would lend her higher social position back home, and therefore, she aspires to be a knowledge ambassador or development agent (Faist, 2008):

I would rather bring this knowledge than have our Kazakhs go [to the US] and spend huge money. I would bring this knowledge for free, for a small price, maybe I will just be engaged in charity. I'm still thinking about it, I do not know [how to implement that], but I am gaining experience. (Zhibek, 21, US)

Liza received a full scholarship from a prestigious music school in the US and has no formal obligations to return to Kazakhstan. Moreover, she does not see any promising career opportunities at home, and is, therefore, unlikely to leave the US soon after university graduation. However, she does not reject an idea of coming back to Kazakhstan some day and developing jazz music there:

I want to pay tribute to the motherland; perhaps, I would open a jazz school in Kazakhstan. (Liza, 25, US)

There are some who realize that it is not necessary to return to Kazakhstan and be physically present in the country to contribute to its development. For instance, Dias, a Physics Ph.D. student, believes it is possible to support the nation from outside through cross border cooperation with compatriots:

Even if you stay in America, it does not mean that you will not be useful for your country. For example, let's say I could not return to Kazakhstan [because there weren't

any job opportunities] and found a professor position and thus stayed here [in the US]. In such case, I would try to help those Kazakhstanis who want to study in the US to get admitted to the universities I work at. I would prepare and train them for that. Anyway, Kazakhstan would be closer to me than other countries if, for example, I chose students. Also, I could attract Kazakhstanis to conferences; allocate external funding to their projects. In other words, I am not a super patriot, but I have some patriotic feelings. (Dias, 23, US)

The solidarity with home country people and patriotic feelings toward the nation-state can serve as a foundation for transnational involvement, which would benefit all engaged sides. In this case, it would satisfy Dias' moral sense and support the academic endeavors of his compatriots. Thus, Dias would become a transnational development agent (Faist, 2008).

In general, international students who possess some patriotic feelings toward Kazakhstan and its people perceive staying in the US as not the ultimate goal. For patriots, staying in the US is a sojourn, temporary journey for experience and development, which might eventually end up in return to the home country. This perception of the American experience underlies their sense of belonging to Kazakhstan. On the other hand, we can observe that the participants' understanding of patriotism is different from the one that was imposed in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet times, patriotism was associated with unfaltering service to the state (Tromly, 2009), which to some extent implied not leaving the country where international travel was greatly restricted (Wojnowski, 2015). Today, in independent Kazakhstan, individuals believe that particular practices across the borders of origin country also represent patriotism. Moreover, they understand patriotism in cultural and symbolic rather than political terms.

Thus, patriotism the participants talk about comprises a part of their identity. Their loyalty to the home country, its people and culture reflect their sense of belonging. Moreover, in a new socio-cultural environment, represented by the US in this case, they encounter difficulties associated with different language and culture. For this reason, they tend to construct their distinct identities based on perceived differences between themselves and

Americans and commonalities with other Kazakhs/Kazakhstanis. Hence, their national (patriotic) sentiments revive and identities become more nationalized in the country of study.

### **Transnational involvement: cross-border communication with family**

Patriotic feelings represented by the attachment to 'roots' and Kazakh culture as well as a sense of belonging to Kazakhstani people underpin the transnational involvement of current international students and student graduates living in the US. This simultaneously enhances their national identities in the foreign environment and places them in transnational space as they maintain ties with Kazakhstan through cross-border communication with family members and keeping in touch with compatriots in both physical and virtual spaces.

As the above discussion illustrates, the closeness of Kazakh families is attributed to the cultural distinctiveness of Kazakh people. Nevertheless, their belief that it is necessary to stay with the family is more rhetorical than actual since a good number of study participants have left home at a young age and are still living in the US. However, this belief makes individuals take on a daily commitment of sustaining relationships with extended families. In general, due to modern information and communication technologies, international students quite successfully handle this task (Brooks & Waters, 2013; Collins, 2012; Robertson, 2013). Therefore, despite the vast distances, they manage to preserve emotional closeness with their loved ones, perform their social roles in the sending society, fulfill family obligations, keep track on what was going on in the country and obey cultural traditions which presumably make them different from the host country people.

Today, advanced technologies enable communication between geographically separated individuals. Instant messaging software that allow voice and video calls as well as exchanging images, video materials, and audio files between the users create a sense of nearness. This technological nearness to families and contexts of origin shape international

students' abroad experiences (Brooks & Waters, 2013; Robertson, 2013). In the present study, all three groups of participants reported using instant messaging software, in particular 'Whatsapp', to sustain relationships with their families and friends remaining in Kazakhstan. Most of the participants said that they called one of their parents a few times per week and had video calls with the entire family at least once a week using the same software.

Aiman got a job in the US after she completed an MBA program there. Now she holds a 'Green card', works full-time and continues her studies. When I asked her to choose an application for the interview from the available to both of us services, she chose 'Whatsapp' as did many other participants. She said that this mobile application was very important to her as she was able to keep in touch with her family:

Thanks to Whatsapp, I've never lost connections with the world. I communicate with my family a few times per week. That is, thanks to all the technologies, the world is becoming a little closer. Therefore, I manage to maintain close relationships with my large circle of relatives. (Aiman, 41, US)

Bekzhan has been working and living in California for a year since he finished his Master's studies in Boston. He said that he adapted to the time difference with Kazakhstan, which is 13/14hours,<sup>8</sup> so it does not impede keeping in touch with family and friends:

You get used to this difference [in time] with friends and relatives. So it is not difficult to communicate. However, it depends on who you communicate with. For example, if it is a girl, then there is no chance [for building relationships] (laughs). (Bekzhan, 25, US)

The frequent calls and message exchanges with relatives and friends help individuals adjust to challenges that geographical separateness presents; therefore, transnational communication becomes a part of their daily activities (Borisova, 2016; Brooks & Waters, 2013). However, according to Bekzhan, digital communication technologies could not help build new intimate relationships cross border because they usually require regular physical presence. Thus, conditioned by hindrances and opportunities available to them, transnational actors engage in

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<sup>8</sup> depends on Daylight saving time changes in the US

transnational practices to sustain certain kinds of social relationship between specific individuals (Smith and Guarnizo 1998).

Technologies not only allow individuals to keep in touch with relatives and friends, they also help to maintain social roles in the sending society (Basch et al., 1994). For instance, Bekzhan, as an older brother, monitors the academic performance of his siblings and gives them advice on schools and majors they should apply to. Moreover, his experience of studying in a top American university and earning good money in the US enhances his position in the eyes of his relatives and makes his advice more valuable than other's:

I have two younger brothers and a little sister. Now one of my brothers is graduating from secondary school and applying to universities. He always asks me what exams he should take, what universities he should apply to, which major he should choose and so on. And here, he does not consult with our parents but asks me for advice. I also insisted that my other brother needs to change schools, and our parents agreed with me. (Bekzhan, 25, US)

Families of international students represent transnational families that rely on communication technologies to be able to maintain their close relationships (Borisova, 2016; Brooks & Waters, 2013). Moreover, the traditional family values that are perceived to be a distinct Kazakh cultural feature motivate Kazakh students to preserve strong links with their families and actively participate in family decision-making. Thus, their sense of belonging to Kazakh culture and people underpin the transnational practices they involve in.

### **Transnational involvement: material exchanges**

Family relationships that international students sustain across national borders are not devoid of material exchanges. Moreover, for some family members split across borders, it is part of family obligations to support each other materially. International education and subsequent migration for most of the study participants were outcomes of family decisions. Therefore, many received substantial financial support from their extended families. Some international students also bear responsibilities to provide material assistance to their left-at-

home family members. For instance, Olzhas completed a Master's degree in the US, got a well-paying job afterwards and decided to stay in the country because he thought that he would have better opportunities support his family financially and fulfill his role as a breadwinner. Thus, remittances sent between transnational family members have both economic significance and cultural meaning (Tsuda, 2003, pp. 226–227).

Other material dimensions of cross-border family relationships include gifts and foods exchange. Dauren, a Bolashak grantee, spent one summer in the US and worked in a low-skilled job to buy 'American goods':

I spent the money I earned on things that I would not buy with the stipend. I sent my sister a MacBook [laptop] and bought myself an Ibanez Artcore electric guitar. (Dauren, 28, KZ)

The gifts Kazakhstani students buy in the US for their family members are thought to be a bargain as they are unavailable or more expensive in Kazakhstan. Also, these gifts acquire explicit symbolic meaning in transnational gift exchange. Once in Kazakhstan, it is not just a laptop, but an American product that can be associated with American progress and wealth. In addition, the symbolic meaning of this gift applies to Dauren as well, so he becomes associated with the success and prosperity. Such gift exchange process reinforces transnational ties and constructs new social positions in the sending society (Basch et al., 1994).

As it is mentioned above, foods brought to the US by visiting family members or by the students themselves acquire cultural meaning and transmit cultural images and thus, become nationally important. Therefore, 'Kazakh' food in a foreign setting serves as a means to distinguish oneself from the mainstream society as well as articulate national identity and attachment to home country (Tsuda, 2003). This suggests that the exchange of commodified meanings and images people attach to certain goods accompanies social relationships that connect contexts of study with the context of origin. These connections across national

borders are quite important for the Kazakhstanis in the US as they help to sustain a sense of family unity and emotional involvement with their transnational families (Borisova, 2016; Brooks & Waters, 2013) as well as assert their cultural images and identities of true Kazakhs who cherish family relationships and values. What we call here patriotic considerations influence the transnational involvement of Kazakhstani students and student-migrants in the US to some extent.

### **Transnational involvement: keeping in touch with compatriots**

In the current study, the sense of belonging to the sending society and association with its people proved to have national (patriotic) grounds and represent deterritorialized nationalism (Tsuda, 2003). Thus, as outlined above, the attachment to Kazakh people and desire to be associated with them constitute national identities of study participants which become more pronounced in the foreign environment.

Kazakhstani students reinforce their self-identification with Kazakhstan by sustaining ties with co-nationals in the country of study in both physical and virtual space along with sustaining ties with compatriots in Kazakhstan. In physical space, they socialize with Kazakhstani students in the US and engage with Kazakh ethnic communities. They celebrate Kazakh national holidays and take part in different events and gatherings in the cities with a large concentration of Kazakhstanis. This suggests that their enhanced patriotic feelings motivate this symbolic re-creation of home country cultural activities and help them affirm cultural distinctiveness in the host country (Tsuda, 2003, p. 79). It is notable that students' networks are not limited to nation-state boundaries. When I asked whether their socializing circles included only Kazakhstanis, the participants said that they communicate with other Central Asian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Chinese students on university campuses. However, they did not emphasize these contacts as much as the contacts with other Kazakhs in the US.

Also, driven by desires to be associated with Kazakh people, Kazakhstani students in the US maintain ties with each other and broader 'imagined community' with help of virtual groups on Facebook. Therefore, Facebook is used as a forum where the group members discuss themes related to the shared education and/or migration experiences, ask for practical advice, advertise their services, share and discuss news about Kazakhstan, and congratulate each other with national holidays such as Independence Day, Nauryz and so on. Thus, groups such as Kazakh American Association or Kazakh Society in the US on Facebook make imagined social relationships (Anderson, 1991) among the members of imagined community more 'real'.

Social media is also used to keep in touch with Kazakhstanis across national borders. One of such social media platforms is Instagram. For instance, Malika runs a blog on Instagram about living in the US. She obtained a Bachelor degree in Public Relations in the US and has been living in the country for more than 10 years now. She says that blogging is her hobby and it does not bring money, compared to other blogs on the same social media. Her audience, in general, is Russian speaking Instagram users from different countries, but she also addresses her compatriots specifically by writing in the Kazakh language. When I asked her why she blogs, she replied that she wants to practice her writing skills and be useful for her compatriots who might be interested in living in the US. Also, she believes that her blog helps her to get closer to the Kazakhstanis responding to the feedback she gets from the compatriot readers. Some other participants also said that they actively use Instagram to be up-to-date with their friends remaining in Kazakhstan and the country in general.

Youtube is also used as a means to consume Kazakhstani media and keep track of different developments in the country. Moreover, for some, the availability of Kazakhstani content on this media platform serves as an indicator of the country' progress:

Now many resources are appearing in Kazakhstan, for instance, TED, Kazakhstani Youtube has been developing finally. There are [on Youtube] many cool guys [from

Kazakhstan], and, a lot of interesting as well as dull things are broadcasted, but it is normal, it should be so. (Alim, 29, US)

Thus, social media enables maintaining ties with compatriots in both host and home countries. The communication with Kazakhstanis as well as consumption of home country media and information addresses the longing for homeland, its people and culture. Patriotically motivated students not only keep in touch with each other compatriots in virtual space but also engage in collective activities in the physical space. This helps them to assert their national belonging and develop in-group solidarity.

Also, technologies could help realize patriotic sentiments and aspirations to contribute to the development of Kazakhstan in transnational space. As one of the participants suggested above, cross-border partnership with compatriots and support provided from the US could help Kazakhstanis achieve their academic aspirations and thus, add to the development of their respective fields. And as Tsuda (2003) suggests, this engagement with compatriot community while outside of the origin country could contribute to the formation of transnational communities.

Thus, motivated by patriotic feelings, Kazakhstani students and student-migrants keep connections with their imagined community via different social media platforms. This transnational engagement with compatriots facilitates their national identity articulation, helps to keep up to date with their origin society and realize patriotic endeavors.

## **Conclusion**

To sum this chapter up, transnational involvement of Kazakhstani students and student-migrants in the US are to a particular extent influenced by their national identifications or, in other words, patriotism. Also, the present case shows that when individuals are placed in a new socio-cultural environment, their patriotic feelings strengthen and identities become more

nationalized. As Kazakhstani students and student-migrants tend to contrast themselves with the people from receiving society, their national identities become more meaningful to them. It is notable that they have their own understandings of what is patriotism and who are the patriots. They define patriotism and patriots as a state of being attached to their roots, origin culture and its people and as an aspiration to develop their nation-state. Motivated by these beliefs, they engage in a number of transnational practices that maintain close emotional ties with their families as well as address homesickness and attachment to Kazakh people and culture. Moreover, these practices are significant to the individuals as they can affirm their sense of belonging and national identities in the host society. Thus, the transnational involvement of Kazakhstani students and student-migrants in the US is underpinned by patriotic feelings and represent patriotic transnationalism.

Tsuda (2003) suggests that involvement in transnational activities does not necessarily develop transnational consciousness because transnational migration can develop national identities instead. This chapter, on the example of Kazakhstanis in the US, has supported this view. Nevertheless, the following chapter will challenge it as students returned to Kazakhstan after substantial years spent in the US observed identity transformation so that they are more transnational rather than national. Moreover, it will demonstrate that their transnational involvement in Kazakhstan differs from what it appears to be in the US since it is no longer patriotic feelings but pragmatic considerations that underpin transnational practices sustained in Kazakhstan.

## Chapter 4

### **Transnational involvement in Kazakhstan: pragmatic transnationalism**

Kazakhstani students and student-migrants in the US discover and reaffirm their national identities in the country of study. This, in turn, influences their transnational involvement so that it corresponds to their understandings of patriotism and satisfies their patriotic aspirations. Those, who have returned to Kazakhstan, in contrast, have different identity transformation and transnational experiences. This chapter argues that returned students develop dual loyalties to both Kazakhstan and the US, and engage in transnational practices which are not only caused by identity change but also motivated by pragmatic considerations related to their future. These pragmatic considerations arise from individuals' estimation of wage differentials in the host country and country of origin (Massey et al., 1993). Moreover, those who spent a substantial number of years in the US and obtained academic degrees from there are fully aware of the opportunities presented for them by the immigration policies of the country.

The following discussion shows that students' transnationalism does not end with their return to the home country. This happens for several reasons. First, while in the country of study they acquire host society's values, beliefs, and behaviors that add to their identity repertoire and consequently they develop dual identities (Vertovec, 2001). Second, individuals build substantial networks within the receiving community that upon students' return home serve as a base for the construction of transnational social fields (Gargano, 2009). The analysis of participants' responses finds that Kazakhstanis sustain transnational ties with people they met in the US for pragmatic purposes related to their international career aspirations and calculations of economic opportunities available to them in both Kazakhstan and the US. To illustrate these points, this chapter will start with an analysis of returned

student's changed identities. Then, it will proceed with the examination of their transnational practices.

### **Transnational identity: the US is always there**

Scholars propose that emigration is a rupture that often leads to redefinitions of the self and results in the construction of a transnational identity (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015). This is also true for individuals who migrate for educational purposes since international students build multi-local networks and develop multi-layered identities (Collins, 2012). As 'Bolashak' grantees represent the group of returned students in the present study, the evidence below will illustrate their experiences and points of view. It is notable that those 'Bolashakers' who returned to Kazakhstan observe identity transformation so that they are both foreign and local in Kazakhstan. They claim that they have acquired host country values, ideas, behaviors, and attitudes, which are not found in their home country:

When I came back to Kazakhstan I felt both foreigner and local. In the US, I learned to be skeptical and analytical and plan my day. Here [in Kazakhstan], when I made an appointment at 2 pm, people came at 2:15 or even later, and I could not do anything with that. I just had to get used to the fact that it is Kazakhstan and things work differently here. (Damir, 40, KZ)

Having spent about seven years in the US and acquiring host country values and attitudes, Damir had to reconcile these things in the home country and re-adjust to its culture (Christofi & Thompson, 2007). 24-year-old 'Bolashak' grantee Nazira reports a similar experience:

In the US, I learned time management and developed business intelligence, because it was very important to carefully manage time, work in teams and effectively present projects there. Here [in Kazakhstan], we lack these things. (Nazira, 24, KZ)

Thus, the participants believe that practices such as time management are valued among American people and, as they followed them in the country of study, they feel frustrated with people back home. The perceived differences between American and Kazakhstani socio-cultural environment become more acute upon students' return home. Their attempts to

meaningfully blend the two cultures often results in the development of ‘double consciousness’ (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). This double consciousness, or dual consciousness and identities as termed by other scholars (Tsuda, 2012; Vertovec, 2001), represent a combination of new experiences gained in the host country with a cultural knowledge obtained in the home country. This explains why international students who return to Kazakhstan articulate simultaneous affiliation with both the US and Kazakhstan more explicitly than those who are residing in the US. In contrast to those who are in the US, the participants who returned to Kazakhstan suggest that the US is always there and they cannot completely leave it. Amina, a ‘Bolashak’ grantee who returned to Kazakhstan with an undergraduate degree in Computer Science from the US went back there to continue her studies. She suggests that even in Kazakhstan, the US remains a meaningful part of graduate’s lives:

The US is part of your life even if you are in Kazakhstan. You always keep in touch and catch up with friends you met in the US via Facebook. You read all the news, New-York Times, for example. In addition, all the films and music that are popular in Kazakhstan are American. (Amina, 28, US)

This exemplifies the presence of transnational identity which allows simultaneous reference to both origin and host societies (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015; Tsuda, 2012). The association with and attachment to the US after leaving the country constitutes what King and Christou (2011) call ‘reverse transnationalism’. Although these scholars use the concept of reverse transnationalism to describe transnational connections of second-generation migrants with their parents’ places of origin, this term suits the explanation for maintaining ties of student-returnees with the country of study because these ties are similarly reinforced by return ideas of the individuals. And in this case, information technologies, the Internet, and global mass media as well as overseas networks of friends and colleagues facilitate keeping positions in transnational space.

We can observe that transnational identities of international students differ depending on their geographical locations. The analysis suggests that while in the country of study – the US, individuals discover and develop their identifications with the home country - Kazakhstan whereas upon their return to Kazakhstan, they observe how much they have changed during the years spent in the US. In particular, they acquire host country values, views and behaviors so that in the context of origin country they perceive the difference between the ‘locals’ and themselves. This, in turn, fosters their affiliation with the country of study. Nevertheless, it is important to note that this association with the US does not interfere with patriotic identities of the individuals because those who have returned to Kazakhstan also reported on enhanced national identities while in the US. However, it was more unexpected for them to observe that they would develop solidarities and affiliations with the foreign country, as compared to patriotic feelings which are thought to be inculcated in the family. Thus, dual or transnational identities of individuals sustain ties with the US. Nevertheless, as a deeper analysis of returned students’ transnational involvement shows, their engagement in transnational practices is motivated not just by abstract ideas or feelings but by rather rational considerations about their future. Therefore, the following section will illustrate how pragmatic considerations underpin the transnational practices while in Kazakhstan.

### **Pragmatic transnationalism**

For some, foreign qualifications and experiences abroad are the features that distinguish former international students and in particular, ‘Bolashak’ grantees from average Kazakhstanis as they often return home:

‘Bolashakers’ are not long-serving employees; they are trying to find themselves and they are very ambitious. When they receive small salaries, they immediately start looking for another job. When they see how the organization works and how it is structured, they quit. This is because they saw something different and thus, expect

something different. Moreover, they expect to receive high salaries and be valued, so that they make a real contribution. But this does not always happen, and basically, they are ordinary employees. (Mansur, 28, KZ)

Here, Mansur suggests that because ‘Bolashak’ grantees experience a different socio-cultural, economic and political environment in the US, they have different views and expectations on how particular spheres of life should operate. Another important issue he raises is that ‘Bolashak’ grantees are ambitious, implying that his fellow awardees believe that American experience and qualifications should immediately propel them to higher positions in the workplace, compared to other individuals who graduated from Kazakhstani universities and saw only ‘Kazakhstani’ life. Therefore, they are constantly searching for better opportunities that correspond to their higher demands and visions. However, this does not always happen in Kazakhstan; therefore, individuals eventually look for opportunities elsewhere. This is also reflected in the words of Abylay, a ‘Bolashak’ grantee who is pursuing a Ph.D. degree in the US:

Well, I have plans to return home and pay tribute to my motherland. I still have patriotic feelings (laughs), which, unfortunately, many people lose after studying abroad. Besides, I’m receiving the ‘Bolashak’ scholarship and have obligations. Therefore, I have to work [the money] off. After that, basically, I would like to continue working in Kazakhstan and living there. Of course, when you have Western education, opportunities open up, and if these opportunities are not in Kazakhstan, then, of course, I will look for foreign opportunities (laughs). (Abylay, 40, US)

Here, the important thing to consider is the idea that an American higher education promises a desirable, or at least satisfactory job, in the international job market. Damir, a returned ‘Bolashak’ student has the same opinion:

A degree from the US is a flying carpet. Perhaps, after 6-7 years you pack your belongings, get an offer from a global university and go there. So it’s a kind of ticket [to international job opportunities]. (Damir, 40, KZ)

Whereas Abylay and Damir conceive migration to an uncertain destination country, other returned students have an intention of returning to the US after the fulfillment of work obligations presented by the ‘Bolashak’ scholarship program:

Recently, I met with friends I studied with in the US. And absolutely all of them said that they would like to go back to the US. Some already have plans for how to migrate, some are thinking on that. (Daulet, 27, KZ)

Daulet himself appeared to have a clear idea of why to go back to the US and what he would be engaged in there. While studying in the US, he found out that it is easier and more profitable to run car sales business there rather than in Kazakhstan. Therefore, he plans to go back to the US once he is free from work obligations. Daulet, like Abylay and Damir, presuming that opportunities might be better somewhere other than in Kazakhstan and expecting higher wages and more productive labor outside the origin country (Massey et al., 1993), presents his plans in a rationalizing cost-benefit language.

Kazakhstan's economy, reliant on oil production and oil demand, expanded in the first half of 2017. However, the experts suggest that to achieve sustainable development and shared prosperity, the country should implement a number of structural reforms that would help to diversify the economy with non-oil tradable sectors and thus, provide more productive and better-paid jobs (World Bank, 2017). Also, according to the World Bank 2018 press release, there are certain hindrances for developing private business in Kazakhstan. These include a strong presence of state-owned enterprises in the state economy and corruption ("Kazakhstan Needs Robust Reforms to Boost Productivity and Growth", 2018). Therefore, Daulet's assumptions that it is difficult to establish a private business in Kazakhstan might be quite reasonable. His motivations to go back to the US often align with neoclassical economic theories (Morawska, 2007). These theories view migrants as rational actors who make choices based on their calculations of wage differentials in origin and destination countries and estimations of wages in the latter country that would recoup their migration investments. These include the material costs of relocation, the costs of maintenance while moving and looking for a job as well as costs associated with learning a new language and culture and adapting to a new labor market (Castles et al., 2014; Massey et al., 1993; Morawska, 2007).

However, the individuals who spent a good number of years in the destination country while pursuing academic degrees there have already gone through adaptation process as well as acquired necessary language and cultural knowledge. Therefore, it is easier for them to realize their migration plans as they meet most eligible criteria for entering a destination country labor market (Ziguras & Law, 2006). This selectiveness of international migration which draws upon individuals who possess certain socio-demographic and personal characteristics is explained by human capital theory - a variant of a neoclassical theory. Human capital theory also suggests that the main trigger of international migration is the lack of income-earning and socioeconomic advancement opportunities at home (Morawska, 2007). This is well illustrated in Abylay's statement above. These pragmatic considerations motivate returned students to engage in transnational activities, which sustain connections with their American friends and colleagues.

I actively communicate with my classmates from a Software Development course. We have a common chat on Whatsapp. We are completing one project and want to release it soon. In general, I would like to keep an eye on opportunities in Kazakhstan as much as possible while working off the 'Bolashak' scholarship in the country. And then, if there is nothing interesting here, I will go to the US. I have many acquaintances there; I can ask them to hire me. (Nazira, 24, KZ)

Here, it should be noted that the presence of transnational networks plays an important role in students' considerations for their future moves to the US. Students believe that these networks would help with their employment upon arrival to the destination country. This is one of the reasons why Kazakhstan-American graduates conceive primarily going to the US among the other options. Some authors (Massey et al., 1993; Morawska, 2007) suggest that transnational interpersonal connections with overseas networks of kin and friends from the shared origin country sustain a transnational flow of people between the countries of origin and destination. However, the present case illustrates that it is not necessary to come from the same origin to establish transnational connections. Often, it is the shared university experience that facilitates cross-border communication and influences the choice of destination. Thus, professional

networks don't include only other Kazakhstanis, but also include people from the US (and elsewhere) met during studies:

If I could come back, I would consider coming to the place where I'm now and the university I'm studying in because there is no point to go somewhere else in the country. (Amina, 28, US)

Amina suggests that it is easier to go back to a place that is familiar to you, and most importantly, where there are some acquaintances since now, she believes, it is more difficult to enter the country than some years before when she did undergraduate studies. Thus, the presence of networks in the US sustains cross-border communication of returned students. This represents reverse transnationalism and has a potential to positively contribute to the return of international graduates to the US. Therefore, this study suggests that sustaining interpersonal connections with people in the country of study addresses the intentions of Kazakhstani graduates to return to the US. Thus, their transnational involvement is influenced by pragmatic considerations associated with potential future migration to the US.

### **Conclusion**

Kazakhstani graduates of American higher education institutions return to the home country with transformed identities because throughout the years spent in the country of study, they develop new habits, acquire host society values, beliefs, perceptions and behaviors which make them 'foreign' and uneasy upon their return home. Therefore, when they try to conform their changed cultural repertoire to the lifestyles of the origin country, they become aware of their dual or transnational identities. These transnational identities push them to sustain emotional and social ties with the US by means of information and communication technologies, the Internet and social media. In addition, individuals associate themselves with the country of study and in some cases, apply its reputation to construct their personal images. In doing so, they expect to occupy higher positions and be valued in the workplace back in

Kazakhstan. If they become frustrated with the socioeconomic conditions in Kazakhstan, they start to search better opportunities elsewhere as economically motivated migrants usually do. The developed solidarities with the US and the presence of networks there push individuals to consider the option of migrating to the US for the first place. In this thesis, those who returned to Kazakhstan after their studies in the US are primarily 'Bolashak' scholarship holders who needed to fulfill their work obligations in Kazakhstan. Therefore, instead of staying in the US or going back there once they feel a need to, they have to defer their migration. Many 'Bolashak' graduates believe that their transnational connections would help them to keep up-to-date with the US and enhance the chances of employment in the country of study while staying in Kazakhstan. Therefore, they use social media such as Facebook and Whatsapp as well as consume American media. Thus, the chapter demonstrated that pragmatic considerations of returned students underpin their transnational involvement.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

Applying the transnationalism lens, this thesis demonstrated that former and current international students from Kazakhstan in the US are transnational agents who through their involvement in different activities sustain ties with more than one nation-state. International students coming from the same nation-state could be similar to ‘transnational villagers’ (Levitt, 2001a) to the extent that while in the US, their origin country just as the native village for ‘transnational villagers’ becomes a major source for identity construction, intergroup solidarity, and social support. However, in comparison with ‘transnational villagers’, the identification with the origin country and its people for former international students back home becomes less important as they often start identifying themselves with the country of study.

The thesis showed that when graduates of American higher education institutions come home, their transnationalism becomes ‘reversed’ (King & Christou, 2011) as they start to look back at the country of study. This happens because individuals, who spent several years abroad, develop transnational identities (Esteban-Guitart & Vila, 2015; Vertovec, 2001) and reposition themselves in the country of origin (Christofi & Thompson, 2007). They recognize the advantages of American education and seek for opportunities that would satisfy their economic and professional aspirations and recoup their investment in human capital. This often results in intentions to go back to the US or migrate elsewhere in the developed world. Their motivations to migrate are similar to the motivations of economic migrants that rationalize their migration in cost-benefit terms (Massey et al., 1993).

The choice of the US as a migration destination arises from the fact that the immigration policies of the state provide particular opportunities to its international students and graduates who can perform high-skilled jobs in certain fields. Moreover, besides

professional knowledge, they obtained necessary socio-cultural knowledge and work experience, developed linguistic skills, and built substantial social networks, which could facilitate their migration to the US. However, the 'Bolashak' scholarship grantees are obliged to work in Kazakhstan for five years by the program regulations, and therefore, cannot immediately realize their migration plans. Nevertheless, 'Bolashakers' hope for a successful migration to the country once they are free from work obligations and therefore, involve themselves in 'pragmatic transnationalism' that sustains ties with the country of study and social networks there.

Tsuda (2003) suggested that international migration could strengthen national identities of migrants. The case of Kazakhstani students in the US supported this observation. It demonstrated that individuals tend to contrast themselves with the receiving society, which has an effect on their identities. When in the US, Kazakhstani students and student-migrants enhance their patriotic feelings and articulate their belonging to the origin country even if for some, foreign education implies a temporary sojourn and eventual return home. Therefore, they communicate with the compatriots, consume Kazakhstani media, and involve themselves in a symbolic re-creation of cultural practices in the country of study. Therefore, the term 'patriotic transnationalism' was coined in this study to reflect the motivations that push individuals to involve in transnational practices.

It is notable that the participants of the study had their own understanding of patriotism, which did not encompass any political ideas. Patriotic feelings that constituted the national identities of the participants were related to the cultural factors such as ancestral home, language, food, holidays and aspirations to contribute to the socio-cultural development of their nation-state. There is a growing number of studies that link transnational migration to development, assuming that different kinds of remittances (economic, social, political) migrants transmit to their places of origin lead to certain positive changes there

(Faist, 2008; Henry, Mohan, & Yanacopulos, 2004). The aspirations to contribute to the nation-states that the participants reported in the study suggest that they might perceive themselves or intend to become development agents (Faist, 2008) for their origin society. Moreover, they understood that it is not necessary to be physically present in the country of origin in order to be helpful for their compatriots. Therefore, they suggested that the transnational networks established with the colleagues at home could satisfy their patriotic endeavors. However, it was beyond the scope of the present thesis to trace any socio-cultural, economic or political developments that international students as transnational agents could contribute to.

Situating the case of international student flows from Kazakhstan to the US in the context of internationalization of higher education, immigration policies of the receiving country and state educational scholarship 'Bolashak' of the sending country, the study suggested the general mechanisms that influence international student migration. Moreover, Kazakhstan's 'Bolashak' scholarship program, described in the work, illustrates how state-sponsored education programs that can be found in China, Malaysia, Vietnam and Chile among other countries (Ziguras & McBurnie, 2015) operate in general, and how they influence student migration from the sponsoring state to the receiving state, in particular. In addition, although the present work did not suggest any policy implications directly, it demonstrated that brain drain should not be given a great concern since transnational connections between compatriot professionals could compensate physical absence in the origin country and contribute to considerable developments in knowledge and innovation production, technologies, and arts.

In light of the above, certain points can be suggested for future research. The present study demonstrated that economic considerations are meaningful to Kazakhstanis with foreign qualifications; however, there is a lack of systematic studies that illustrate the influence of

economic factors on the Kazakhstanis' decisions to migrate to the US or other developed countries. Second, in some established migrant communities the motivations for transnational involvement are shared within the community (Pryke, 2003). Therefore, future research could investigate whether there are any collective motivations for transnational involvement among international students coming from major student-sending countries such as India, China, and South Korea among many other (OECD, 2017). Third, it is an assumption that lies behind state-sponsored scholarship programs that international students contribute to the socio-cultural development upon their return through transferring foreign country and universal values at home and incorporating their professional knowledge in technology and innovation building (Campbell, 2018). Also, this study showed that transnational involvement is meaningful for those individuals who aspire to develop their nations. Therefore, it would be interesting to trace the effects international graduates have on their origin societies back home and investigate whether (and how) they use transnational networks for development purposes.

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