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**COLLECTIVE MEMORY: KAZAKH EXODUS FROM ALTAY
MOUNTAINS***

Abstract: This paper examines the collective memory and identity processes of Kazakhs in Istanbul, Turkey, who settled there in the early 1950s. Now numbering around 20,000, these Kazakhs fled their homeland in the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region after failed uprisings against the Chinese government in the 1930s and 1940s. After a period in India, they were accepted into Turkey as migrants with Turkish ancestry. The study focuses on the Kazakh exodus during the 1930s and 1940s, emphasizing how this history shapes their present identity. The trauma of this migration remains deeply embedded in their collective memory, influencing not only their identity and political views but also their decisions in areas such as voting, political alliances, and even the naming of their children. The paper primarily draws on the findings from the author's PhD dissertation, which was defended in 2020.

Keywords: Kazakh exodus, Collective memory, Migration, Diaspora, Identity

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**ҰЖЫМДЫҚ ЖАДЫ: АЛТАЙ ҚАЗАҚТАРЫНЫҢ
КӨШІ**

Аңдатпа: Бұл мақала 1950 жылдардың басында Түркияның Ыстамбұл қаласында қоныстанған қазақтардың ұжымдық жады мен мәдени-этникалық бірегейлігінің жүзеге асу үдерісін қарастырады. Қазір саны 20 мыңға

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жуықтаған бұл қазақтар 1930–1940 жылдардағы Қытай үкіметіне қарсы сәтсіз көтерілістерден кейін Шыңжаң-Ұйғыр автономиялық ауданындағы атамекендерінен алыс елдерге көшуге мәжбүр болды. Алғашында Үндістанда біраз уақыт тұрақтап, артынша бауырлас мемлекет Түркиядан бассауға сұрайды. Олардың өтініші қанағаттандырылып, Түркия еліне «iskanlı göçmenler», яғни түркі текті және түрік мәдениетімен біте қайнасқан қоныс аударушылар статусымен қабылданды. Зерттеу 1930-1940 жылдардағы қазақтардың қоныс аударуына назар аударып отырып, олардың болмысына тарих қалай әсер еткенін көрсетеді. Қазақтардың Алтайдан көшуі ұжымдық жадында жарақат ретінде терең сақталған. Ұжымдық жадыда орын алған жарақат элементі олардың жеке басы мен саяси көзқарастарына ғана емес, сонымен қатар дауыс беру, саяси партияға мүше болу, тіпті балаларына ат қою сияқты күнделікті шешімдеріне әлі күнге дейін әсер етіп келеді. Бұл мақала негізінен автордың 2020 жылы қорғаған PhD диссертациясының нәтижелеріне сүйенеді.

Кілт сөздер: Қазақ көші, Ұжымдық жады, Миграция, Диаспора, Бірегейлік

Introduction

This study examines the collective memory and identity formation processes among Kazakhs who migrated to Istanbul, Turkey, during the early 1950s. Today their approximate number is 20.000. Kazakhs had to leave their historical homeland, Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region (Eastern Turkestan), after unsuccessful uprisings against the Chinese government in the 1930s and 1940s. After spending some time in India, they applied for asylum in Turkey. Here they were accepted as iskanlı göçmenler, i.e., as migrants with Turkish ancestry and closely affiliated to Turkish culture. The paper particularly focuses on the history of the Kazakh exodus in the 30s and 40s of the 20th centuries from Xinjiang. This is because learning about the historical background of Kazakh settlers in Turkey is essential to understanding their present identification processes. Historical experiences such as wars, migrations, revolutions, and religious or economic reforms constitute memorable events that are sustained in social memory and influence the decision-making of individuals for the next few generations. This is also true for the Kazakh community. The discussions in this paper evolve around the trauma and loss

experienced by Kazakhs after their exodus from their homeland, the Altay mountains. The arguments presented here intend to demonstrate how Kazakhs's trauma of exodus had been sustained in their collective memory and continues to be a driving force in shaping their identity and modern political views (Rakhimzhanova, 2020).

Methods and data

This work is based on the author's PhD dissertation defended in December, 2020 (Rakhimzhanova, 2020). For data collection the author used anthropological methods such as fieldwork, semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The fieldwork took place between April 15-August 01, 2019 in Zeytinburnu district, Istanbul. This location was chosen because Zeytinburnu constitute the biggest number of Kazakhs living in Turkey (Evren, 2006). Additionally, in the same year the author attended two cultural events organised by Kazakhs outside Istanbul, the first one is the Festival in Altay Köy, Ulukışla district, Niğde province and the second one is the Commemoration ceremony of Şirzat Doğru, a man who established Alash *kymyz*¹ farm in Kemalpaşa, İzmir. Overall data collection consists of 45-60-minute-long semi-structured interviews conducted with 25 individuals. They were selected purposefully because of their ethnicity and place of living. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face either in Turkish or Kazakh depending on the maximum level of comfortability that participants felt while using these languages. Later these interviews were transcribed and translated into English. Before initiating the research process, the author obtained ethical clearance from Hacettepe University's Ethics Committee. As a result, ethical requirements were met throughout the research process. All the participants signed informed consent forms before the interviews and were clearly informed that the research results would be disseminated in the form of publications and be used for research purposes. They were also assured that they were free to withdraw from interview at any stage for whatever reason, without any consequences. However, for this particular paper the author chose four interview transcriptions to analyse. They belong to 2 female and 2 male interviewees whose age were between 75-85. All these interviewees are living witnesses of Kazakhs' great migration from East Turkestan. To analyse the collected data the author used qualitative analysis including thematic and textual analysis.

¹ A drink made of mare milk.

ALTAY KAZAKHS: GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Central Asian peoples like the Kazakhs were subordinate people of neighboring powerful empires for approximately 150 years. In the 19th century, their lands were annexed by Russia and China through numerous invasions. Russian tsarist armies expanded eastward to claim Central Asian khanates, while China's Manchu rulers took control of the pastures in what is now the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region. In the 20th century, the successor states of both empires maintained control over Central Asia, dividing groups like the Kazakhs with new international borders that separated clans and even individual families along the Sino-Soviet frontier (Benson & Svanberg, 1998, p. 3). Before their migration, Kazakhs in East Turkestan lived a pastoral nomadic life, while the sedentary Uyghurs, who traditionally populated the oasis cities along the Silk Roads, were skilled tradesmen. The varied topography of Xinjiang and its relatively sparse population allowed Kazakhs and Uyghurs to coexist peacefully (Rakhimzhanova, 2015). East Turkestan was officially renamed the Xinjiang-Uyghur Autonomous Region in 1955, acknowledging the Uyghurs as its largest ethnic group. Kazakhs, the second-largest population in the region, began migrating to East Turkestan in the 18th century, settling on grasslands in the northern and central mountain ranges. These include the Tarbagatay Mountains in the north and northwest of Xinjiang, straddling the current border between Kazakhstan and China, and the Altai Mountains along the northeastern border between Xinjiang and Mongolia. While scholars suggest that Kazakhs settled in the Altai region only in the 18th and 19th centuries, local Kazakhs claim a much longer presence, asserting a history in Mongolia and Western China that dates back at least a millennium to the time of Chingiz Khan (Genina, 2015, p. 27). These sources underscore the significance of the Altai Mountains as a key element of identity for Mongolian and Chinese Kazakhs. But the critical inquiry here is: "What motivated the Kazakhs to depart from the Altai Mountains, a region deeply revered and cherished, and migrate to Turkey, the country thousands of kilometers away from their homeland?"

According to the historian Abdulvahap Kara (2019), the initial cause of Kazakhs' migration from East Turkestan was Sun Yat-Sen's Chinese revolution in 1911, which ended the existence of the four-century Manchu Empire and established tight control over East Turkestan. In the past, the Manchu dynasty intruded less into the lives

of people from this region, allowing them to have autonomous lives; however, after the revolution in 1911, the pressure and persecution from the central government hugely increased over the Uyghurs and Kazakhs. The situation worsened during the rule of the Chinese governors Jin Shuren (1928–33) and Sheng Shicai (Kara, 2019). The governor Shicai, in the sources, is described as one of the bloodiest rulers of Xinjiang. According to the rough estimations, during his ten-year rule in East Turkestan from 1934 to 1944, he imprisoned more than 120, 000 people with the pretext “potential rebel” and killed around 80,000 to 100,000 people (Benson, 1990; Islambek, 2017, p. 28).

During the republican era, the oppressive regime in Eastern Turkestan, combined with the establishment of Communist ideology in China, led both Kazakhs and Uyghurs to rebel and emigrate in search of freedom (Kuşçu, 2016, p. 383). However, the Kazakhs' migration to foreign countries did not happen all at once; it occurred in several stages. Scholars such as Kara (2019) and Kuşçu (2016) identify two significant waves of Kazakh migration from East Turkestan to Turkey. The first wave took place in the 1930s, and the second occurred in the early 1950s, with both migratory movements separated by approximately ten years, culminating in Turkey between 1952 and 1954.

The First Wave of Kazakh Exodus

The first wave of Kazakh migration from East Turkestan spanned more than seventeen years, from 1935 to 1952. Professor Kara (2019), who provided a detailed chronological account aligned with geographical locations, identified four distinct stages within this initial migration wave. Figure 1 illustrates the migration route undertaken by the Kazakhs during this period. The first phase of the migration began in 1935 with the imprisonment of prominent community leaders. In August of that year, Kazakh leaders from the Qumul and Barköl regions, including Eliskhan Tayci, Zayip Tayci, and Mazhen Shanya, convened a secret meeting. They resolved to relocate their people to Gansu, a region perceived as safer and under the control of Chinese Muslim General Ma Bufang. The Gansu region was predominantly inhabited by the Dungan people, Han Chinese Muslims. Despite armed conflicts with the forces of Governor Sheng Shicai, the group led by Eliskhan Tayci successfully reached Gansu in the spring of 1936. Subsequently, Kazakhs from the Altay region decided to undertake the same journey. Eventually, all three groups –

from Qumul, Barköl, and Altay – converged in Gansu, where they lived in relative peace for approximately two years (Gayretullah, 2017; Kara, 2019). Although the local Dungan community extended hospitality to the Kazakhs, their commander, General Ma Bufang, was unable to protect them from Sheng Shicai's forces. Faced with mounting pressure, the Kazakh leaders decided to migrate to India via Tibet, marking the second phase of their migration. The journey to India proved to be even more challenging than the earlier migration to Gansu. In addition to clashes with Chinese and Tibetan soldiers along the way, the Kazakhs faced extreme natural conditions. Many perished due to the cold and lack of oxygen in the high-altitude regions of Tibet. By September 1941, the Kazakh convoy had reached India, where they were placed in refugee camps. The total number of Kazakhs who arrived in India in 1941 was 3,039 (Altay, 1981; Oraltay, 2005). However, the conditions in the refugee camps were dire. Due to unsanitary conditions, malnutrition, and an unfamiliar tropical climate, thousands of Kazakhs succumbed to disease. Indian Muslims provided assistance during this time, helping to alleviate the suffering caused by the epidemic outbreaks in the camps. After relocating several times within India, the majority of Kazakhs eventually settled in the city of Bhopal. Following the partition of British India in 1947, the Kazakhs relocated and settled in Pakistan (Gayretullah, 2017; Kara, 2019).



Fig. 1. The first wave of Kazakh migration (Rakhimzhanova, 2020, p. 76)

The Second Wave of Kazakh Exodus

The second wave of Kazakhs' migration from Xinjiang is related to the Ili rebellion, or 'Three Districts Revolution', the Turkic people's revolt against the Chinese government between 1944 and 1945, which was backed up by the Soviet Army. It started on November 7, 1944, with attacks on the Chinese garrison stationed in Yining (Kulja), the principal city of the Ili valley, close to the Sino-Soviet border. Although Chinese troops outnumbered the Muslim rebels, they were able to gain control of the city and within a few days forced the Chinese troops to move towards the outskirts of the town. Following this, on November 12, 1944, the East Turkestan Republic (ETR) was established (Benson, 1990). These revolts spread mainly in the three northern regions of Xinjiang, which are Ili, Tarbagatay, and Altay. The Altay rebellion was led by Kazakh warlord Osman Batur, who was executed by the Chinese government in April 1951 (Jacobs, 2010). British journalist Godfrey Lias was one of the first authors who wrote about the events of the 1940s in Xinjiang and its leader, Ospan Batyr. In his *Kazak Exodus*, he used the stories shared by Kazakhs who settled in Salihli, Turkey. Qalibek Hakim was another Kazakh warlord who organized the battle in the Tarbagatay region, whose revolts began in June 1945 along the river Kyzyl ozen (Oraltay, 2005). These military confrontations lasted around six months. In the literature, Tarbagatay revolts are referred to as the battles of Manas and Sauan. After freeing the city of Sauan from Chinese military troops, Hakim became its governor. Moreover, Qalibek Hakim was the leader of the second wave of Kazakh exodus from Xinjiang in 1949 (Gayretullah, 2017). The armed conflict, which began as a rebellion in the Manas-Sauan region, lasted until Kazakhs gave up their weapons to the Indian government at the end of 1951 and received political refuge (Oraltay, 2005). Fig. 2 illustrates the migration route of the second wave of Kazakh exodus.

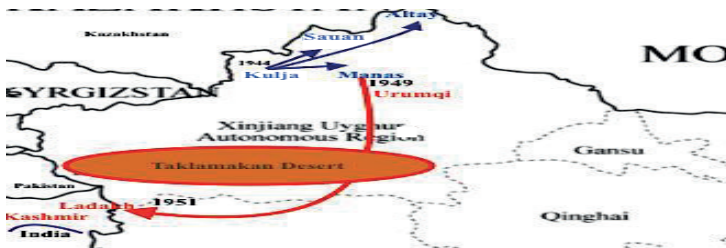


Fig. 2. The second wave of Kazakhs' migration from Xinjiang (Rakhimzhanova, 2020, p. 78)

Although the Ili rebellion was carried out with joint efforts of Russians, Uyghurs, and Kazakhs, Benson (1990) argued that “Kazak troops were the backbone of the 1944 anti-Chinese forces” (1990, p. 31). The national army of ETR continued to free Xinjiang from nationalist (Kuomintang) troops until the autumn of 1945 and came close to Urumqi, its capital city. However, in this stage the position of the Soviet Army towards ETR changed. Although initially it provided military and political support for ETR rebels, later the Soviets persuaded the ETR government to sign a peace agreement with Chinese authorities upon the Chinese government’s request. Thus, the sovereignty of the East Turkestan Republic was restricted. It is clear how the communist and nationalist political powers in the Chinese central government were competing over ruling Xinjiang, each trying to pull Turkic nationalist leaders to their own sides. The communist Mao Tse-dong proved himself stronger than his opponent, Chiang Kai Shek, who later fled to Taiwan. Since the leaders such as Qalibek Hakim and his companions did not want to submit to Mao Zedong’s new regime instituted by the Communist Revolution in 1949, they had no other choice than fleeing from the country (Gayretullah, 2017; Oraltay, 2005; Kara, 2019). The second group of Kazakhs experienced the same hardships as the first group while crossing the borders. Apart from fighting with Chinese military troops chasing them, they had to go through the desert Taklamakan and Himalayan Mountains, where they fought hunger, colds, and illnesses. In 1951, 174 Kazakhs from the Manas-Sauan region reached Ladakh, a town on the border with China and India, from where Indian officials took them by plane to Kashmir (Oraltay, 2005). The Kazakh group leaders were Qalibek Hakim, Delilhan Zhanaltay, Huseyin Teyci, and Sultan Sherif Teyci, and Uyghurs were under the leadership of Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bugra. The second group of migrants stayed in Kashmir for two years, and some even up to four years. After losing all their cattle on the way Kazakhs had to adapt to a new way of life and to survive in a new environment, they began to learn trading. Kazakhs from the first wave living in Pakistan at that time got in touch with the people from the second wave, and they mutually decided to emigrate to Turkey. There was no accurate accounting of Kazakhs who migrated from Altay Mountain slopes to the outer world. The approximate estimation could vary from 18 to 50 thousand people, and only 1,850 of them were able to reach Turkey. Kara (2019) argued that Turkey was not chosen as a random destination for migration; instead, Kazakh leaders acted strategically because, because of their shared language, culture, and religion, they saw a

friendly environment to preserve their national identity. This narrative is constantly circulated among Kazakhs. Although it seems like after Kazakhs' settlement in Turkey their hardships were over and their adventure had a relatively happy end, the exodus from homeland, whichever one, left a deep scar in the personal and social memories of Kazakhs. The exodus as a traumatic experience is so much imprinted in their memory that until now it continues to shape and inform the decisions of many Kazakhs. This can be seen and experienced through the conversations not only with elder members of the community but also with younger generations who have never witnessed the exodus but are knowledgeable enough about it because of the constant circulation of narratives within the community.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

Kazakh Exodus: Shared Loss and Trauma

Although the question of collective memory, its sustainment, and communication was addressed by different scholars, Paul Connerton's (1990) book *How Societies Remember* is an influential one. Connerton mainly defined social memory as a dimension of political power. He believed that controlling memory is related to power; thus, the use of data-processing machines to organize collective memory and the storage of data are not a mere technical matter but a crucial political action associated with legitimation, control, and ownership of information (Connerton, 1990, p. 1). As Connerton argued, our present-day experience essentially depends on our knowledge of the past. Furthermore, our experience of the present might differ depending on the different pasts to which we are able to connect. Thus, it is really difficult to separate our past from our present. Present factors not only may distort or influence our recollections of the past, but past factors also may influence or distort our experience of the present (Connerton, 1990, p. 2). This means that in the process of interpretation, memories respond to new circumstances and influences, undergoing constant changes. In this regard, Byrne (2010, p. 169) remarks, "Everywhere...cultures (societies) are inventive. Cultural identity is improvised partly by drawing on the past." Hence, cultural groups are free to create their own cultural representations of the past. Therefore, different generations evaluate and interpret their cultural legacy in different ways, and due to this fact, a variety of new meanings arise (Kahuno, 2017). It has become clear that our past shapes the perception of ourselves, that is, our identities.

In this regard, Elias-Varotsis (2006, p. 25) stated that cultural identity involves becoming as well as being. Since cultural identity is a transformation process, it belongs to the future just as much as it belongs to the past. That is why the role of collective memory is important in maintaining group identity. The social groups decide what is important to remember and what should be forgotten. Thus, collective memory is characterized by the selection of certain events to remember. The remembered narratives are transferred from one generation to another. They can be in the form of oral histories, songs, rites, and festivals. The textual analysis of the interviews indicated how much the Altay mountains are treasured by the Kazakh community in Turkey. Moreover, its name has become almost a synonym of the word 'homeland'. Therefore, usually Kazakhs in Turkey do call themselves as Altay Kazaktary (Altay Kazakhs). Hence it was not a mere chance that a small village in Niğde province in Turkey habited by Kazakhs is also called Altay village, which in July 2019 celebrated its 65th anniversary. The affection towards Altay was especially strong among the first-generation Kazakh settlers in Turkey. For instance, when the Kazakhs first arrived in Turkey, they did not use the concept of 'surname'. Most probably due to the tradition of orally reciting their genealogy. However, things changed when they settled in Turkey. In order to be registered as refugees, get social benefits, and receive passports, every member of the Kazakh community had to have a family name. This was the time when choosing the name for a baby was both an exciting and responsible moment, but instead people had to choose their surnames. Some Kazakhs approached this task quite seriously. For instance, surnames such as Altay, Canaltay, and Oraltay all refer to the Altay mountains. Hasan Oraltay (1930–2010), a Kazakh public figure in Turkey, journalist, and political activist, shared in his memoirs that he had decided to have the surname Ö-raltay, meaning high in Kazakh, but in the registration office it was miswritten as Or-altay. Here we can see people's attempt to commemorate and recollect their homeland through making specific choices and decisions in their everyday lives, even in the matter of choosing a name or a surname. The choice of surnames referring to the homeland and naming a village in Turkey after the homeland demonstrate the fact how Kazakhs try to sustain their past in many different ways. As a result, in this particular narrative, the mountain Altay has become the central element in Kazakhs' social memory. Altay Mountains also witnessed the hardships that Kazakh pastoral nomads experienced during Sheng Shicai's regime. One of the interviewees told me that his grandfather

was among those thousands of people who fell victim to his despotic ruling.

We had homeland, Altay; in 1934 different events took place there, our relatives were fallen victims of Chinese oppression, there was armed conflict, our leader Alip Tayci was beheaded, the place, where it had happened, now is known as Alip shapkan (Alip beheaded); we could not live there any longer, thus we moved to Manas, a place closer to Urumqi and lived there until the end of 1940s (male, 82).

This person was only a 5–6-year-old boy when the taxes for indigenous people increased and their lands and properties were confiscated. The Kazakhs were not allowed to study in their language, and severe punishments were applied even for the smallest crime committed by local people. All the attempts to rebel against this regime failed or had only short-term success because the Chinese governors' forces were much superior in number and weapons. Thus, for the Kazakh elders, mass migration became the only viable means to preserve their language, religion, and culture. While emphasizing their shared loss and trauma experienced during their exodus from East Turkestan, Kazakhs are reminded about their homeland. Thus, the trauma of exodus is a memory that Kazakhs collectively hold on to maintain and reproduce their cultural identities. While most of the Kazakh traditions disappeared and their language ceased to be practiced, the collective memory was the only tool in regulating Kazakh ethnic boundaries in Turkey. There are a few old eyewitnesses of that historical migration who can give testimony of that event. They are very treasured by the community members. One of them is Gayni Apa. She was a 5- to 6-year-old girl when her parents decided to leave Xinjiang in 1949. She recalls Kazakhs' arrival to Ladakh in the following way:

Indian city Ladakh, we reached on foot, someone was carrying blanket, some were carrying food, some people did not have anything to carry at all, some people were carrying drinking water in wooden barrels; We came to Ladakh and weapons were handed over. From there we were transported to Kashmir. My 2-year-old brother died after arrival to Kashmir.

Regardless her old age Gayni apa appeared to be vigorous and energetic woman. This was not the first interview for her. In one of her earlier interviews, she had gifted some of her family relics from

the time of exodus to the national museum in Astana, Kazakhstan. Gayni apa's mother was from a rich family, whereas her father was a mullah. When her uncle was killed by Chinese soldiers, without much thinking her father joined the migration leaders. Gayni apa shared the details of military clashes that she witnessed and described the passages through the Taklamakan desert, lake Lop Nor, and the Himalayas. In the middle of her speech about the crossing the Chinese border, she recalled farewell scene:

We finally were able to cross the border, we were on a safe side. Suddenly all people stopped and began to descend from their horses. Our mothers and fathers wept. They were grieving and lamenting. "Kayran, Otanymyz-ay, kayran memleketimiz-ai kosh endi, kosh endi dep, perizay mekenim kaldy-au dariga-ay. Soytip koshtastyk. Kazak soytip, perizay² mekenim kaldy-ai dariga-au, korem be eken dunya-ay dep jilap, sondai-sondai kunderdi otkizdik." (Alas, our homeland, alas our country, farewell, farewell, oh an angel, my homeland has been left, precious; We did say good bye in this way. Kazakhs said farewell, oh an angel, my homeland has been left, precious; Will I be able to see you again? Thus, those were the days that were spent with crying).

Gayni Apa stood up, waived her hand in the farewell gesture, and began to cry. The story of Gayni apa was touching. It is clear that the Kazakh migration experience constitutes a big part of her childhood memories. It is the only event that evokes deep emotions. This story becomes even more meaningful in the context of collective memory because, in collective memory, the narrative of one life does not work alone; instead, it functions as part of an interconnected set of narratives and is derived from the story of a whole group (Connerton, 1990). There are other people living in Zeytinburnu similar to Gayni apa who can testify to the events of their exodus. Some of them even wrote autobiographies. Those who shared their stories valued the importance of passing the history of their exodus to next generations to make sure that younger generations will not forget their origins. Reading chronicles about Kazakhs' migration and their hardships made me compare their tragedy to the Holocaust, except it was committed against Kazakhs. I could draw parallels of two tragedies where one race claiming superiority above the other exposed the other

² Possibly derived from Kazakh word *perizat*- fairy, beauty. I preferred to translate it as an angel.

to all the possible tortures, the biggest of which is the expulsion from homeland territory.

To my biggest surprise, British journalist Godfrey Lias (1956) also compared Kazakhs' expulsion to Jewish exodus. Being Jewish himself, Lias deeply sympathized with Kazakhs. He described many historical events that took place in the Altay mountains during the 1930s and 1940s. While referring to those events, he often made parallels to Jewish mythology. The exodus from Xinjiang and trauma associated with it had an immeasurable impact on Kazakhs' perception of their own history and enhanced the sense of solidarity within the group. In many conversations with Kazakhs from Zeytinburnu, it was easy to notice their emphasis on their challenging and thorny journey from the Altay Mountains to Turkey. In fact, many of them did not experience the hardships themselves; they were second, third, and some of them even were fourth-generation Kazakhs in Istanbul. However, most of them were eager to tell the stories of military conflicts with Chinese communist troops, crossing the Himalayas by foot, suffering from tropical diseases in India in refugee camps, and loss of all the livestock and material values on the way, etc. (Gayretullah, 2017; Lias, 1956; Oraltay, 1976; 2005). The profound advocate of social memory, Connerton (1990), underlined that our past does not only shape our present, but also our presence deeply affects, sometimes even distorts our perception of the past. Thus, this perception may affect how Kazakhs position themselves against different ethnic groups and states too.

How Does Past Influence Present of Kazakhs living in Turkey?

For some societies, beliefs about shared pasts do not really influence the everyday lives of people (Gamsakhurdia, 2017). But in the case of Kazakhs the loss and trauma of the past shape contemporary feelings and behaviour of Kazakhs if not daily but at least on regular basis. Partially, this is because some people who witnessed the migration are still alive, they talk about their experience to their children and other people. The researchers are told these stories, educated group of Kazakhs in Istanbul write and publish books on this topic and organise conferences. The narratives of the past among Kazakhs are vibrant and it is hard to imagine any of the collective ceremonies without the prayers and gratitude to the people who perished on the way coming to Turkey. For instance, during the Kazakh funerals and Friday prayers they have Koran recitations, at the end of which imams dedicate prayers to the people who perished in the long journey and

call them shehits, religious martyrs. Similarly, Kazakhs' past also affected the way they position themselves against Chinese government and people. An interviewee shared his personal story in the following way:

Once I was contacted by Chinese Embassy and told that they had been ready to give financial support for education of ten students from Kazakh families living in Turkey. As soon as I received this information, I tried to convince my acquaintances to send their children to study in China. But people reacted to my message with anger, and some of them even insulted me for easily forgetting our past. Nevertheless, I ended up sending my own son and niece to study in Beijing. The son already graduated from the university and works in Istanbul, whereas the niece still has couple of years ahead to finish her studies (male, 75).

From this example, it is possible to conclude that majority of Kazakhs rejected scholarship offer of Chinese government due to their historical loss and trauma. The action of rejection highlighted the culturally preferred and demanded identity of Kazakhs. In this context Kazakhs identify themselves against Han Chinese. As a result, they define Han Chinese as non-Muslim, cruel, fascist, communist, whereas Kazakhs are peaceful Muslims and Turks. This is the case when many actors eagerly pursue “prescribed” Kazakh identity conditioned with shared loss and trauma of Kazakhs. However, as it is clearly seen, this narrative did not restrain one Kazakh person to send his child and even more convincing his sister to send her daughter to study in Beijing. This in turn reminds us of the other side of the argument about actorhood, which is agency, the degree of control that individuals themselves can deploy over their identities. As the sociologist Meyer (1997) argued the rights, responsibilities, and powers of social actors today enormously expanded. Furthermore, he claims that the institutionalized view of the person changed because the whole social world depends on the choices and actions of the individual. This was seen through the action of the man who sent his son and niece despite the social pressure. Barth's claims about the negotiation of ethnic identities are also applicable here, because the man in the story chose the advantageous position for himself, thus sacrificing his collective identity conditioned with collective memory over his personal goals (Meyer, 2010). There are different ways how the loss and trauma of exodus affect Kazakhs' present experience. The elder generations prefer to write biographies recollecting the hardships of migration, thus to prevent its erasure from future generation's

memory. Oraltay (2005) in his autobiography titled *Elim-aylap Ötken Ömir* (The Life Passed by Mourning the Homeland) shared detailed personal recollections about how Kazakhs managed to overcome the human and natural obstacles on their way to freedom. In his book there were paragraphs dedicated to the description of the disease called high altitude sickness. People can develop altitude sickness, also known as acute mountain sickness (AMS), when they ascend to high altitudes too quickly. If left untreated, it can escalate into a medical emergency. The person may struggle to breathe due to reduced oxygen intake. In severe cases, altitude sickness can affect the brain or lungs. This condition, known locally as "yss," is particularly common in the Himalayan mountains, especially during the winter months. When the Kazakhs' caravan and their cattle reached a place called Essekbatty, many began to suffer from yss. Approximately 70 people were affected, and others started to die. A person afflicted with yss experiences difficulty breathing. Sometimes their skin would become very swollen, and while touching it, it would leak watery discharge. "Not only people, but also the cattle suffered from this disease. The cattle that served as food and transport on our way began to perish—sheep, camels, horses—their deaths made many people move on their feet. There was no cure for this disease. Some people believed that bear's gall or human's urine is helpful in treating this sickness" (Oraltay, 2005, p. 121).

In every family there was a person suffering from yss. ...One day ... I was awoken by the crying voice of my mother. My sister Nurkamal had passed away. This was my mother's third child who died. ...The night before with the hope for her recovery I brought her my urine and was forcing her to drink it: "Drink! If you don't drink, you will die!" Even though I tried hard, she did not drink it. I still remember how my departed mother looked at me and cried: "You said she would die, now she is dead". My father was also very upset with Nurkamal's death, but he tried not to show it. He instructed us to carry her body on camel's back until we find a proper place to bury her. For four days my poor mother was leading a camel with her child's dead body (Oraltay, 2005, p. 124).

Apart from Nurkamal, Oraltay lost his two other sisters for this disease, Maryam, the youngest one being only eight years old. Oraltay's niece Meryem Hakim, who is now professor at the Social Sciences University of Ankara, told me later that she and her two other cousins were named after her aunts who died tragically in the

Himalayas. It was her grandfather and uncle's will to name the three girls born away from homeland after the family members who perished during the passage in the Himalayas. This sole act of naming new-born babies after the martyrs of migration indicates to the fact how Kazakhs' past shapes their present today. Thus, this act of naming children can be interpreted as an occasion to recollect the trauma and loss of the past. However, I was able to see that the past trauma did not only define the way how some Kazakhs name their children or grandchildren, but also did influence their life-choices and professions even though sometimes it is enforced by elder generation regardless younger people's objections. For instance, a retired Kazakh imam said that he received religious education because his father planned it long time ago even before he was born. His father made a vow in the Himalayas, that if one day he would survive, he would make one of his sons *hafiz* as a gratitude to Allah's kindness and mercy. The imam shared that although in the beginning studying and keeping up with tough discipline in madrasa were difficult for him, he is now happy for making his father's dream come true. There are various stories which demonstrate how Kazakhs in Turkey today live and express their loss and trauma in their relationships and ethnic identifications. Every personal story is unique, but what is common for all of them is that when they are combined, they weave the fabric of one collective memory which focuses on the shared loss and trauma of exodus.

Conclusion

The Kazakhs' settlement in Turkey had a long background history. Their exodus from Eastern Turkestan were conditioned by such big historical events as the fall of Manchu dynasty in China, Chinese revolution in 1911 led by Sun Yat-Sen, the appointment of the cruel governors in the region of Xinjiang, 'Three districts' revolution', and conflicts between nationalist and communist Chinese powers in the late 1940s. These events made thousands of Kazakhs flee their homeland. The escape was very traumatic, because thousands lost their lives due to illnesses, cold and hunger. This experience is deeply etched in Kazakhs' collective memory so that until now it continues to shape the worldview of younger generation who has never seen the migration themselves, but do remember it well because of the narratives passed down from the elders. Moreover, the shared loss and trauma have uniquely shaped the Kazakhs of Istanbul and their future generations, setting them apart from other Kazakhs. While all Kazakhs may belong to specific tribal divisions and kinship

groups within the three Hordes and share a heritage as descendants of nomadic herders, only the Kazakhs living in Turkey have transformed their migration-related loss and trauma into a distinct ethnic identity marker. The exodus from their homeland not only left deep scars in their social memory but also radically transformed their lifestyle. Kazakhs from Xinjiang, who were nomadic pastoralists until the 1950s, became sedentary within a few years and started engaging in trade and seasonal work. In gratitude for the support of the Turkish government, the Kazakhs adopted a ‘model minority’ narrative, characterized by hard work, law-abiding behavior, and piety, which contributed positively to Turkish society and earned them a reputation as a model minority. Indeed, the Kazakhs have experienced considerable social transformations after residing in Turkey for over 65 years. However, terms like ‘acculturation’ and ‘assimilation’ do not accurately capture the Kazakh experience, as they have managed to compensate for the loss of traditional cultural practices with elements from their social memory. This ongoing process suggests that the Kazakh community in Zeytinburnu will maintain its coherence for at least another two decades. The cultural importance of the Zeytinburnu district for Kazakhs in Istanbul, where, despite some families relocating, the area continues to serve as a vital site for the preservation and expression of their cultural memory. Its convenient location and strong public transportation infrastructure further enhance its role as a practical and culturally significant Kazakh enclave. Future research should explore the self-identification of Kazakhs from mixed families and investigate Kazakh diaspora communities in non-Turkic/non-Muslim cultural environments, such as Germany and France. The paper once more underscores the profound impact of collective memory on shaping social and cultural identities.

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Öz: Bu makale, 1950'lerin başında İstanbul'a yerleşen Kazakların toplumsal belleği ve etnik kimlik oluşturma süreçlerini incelemektedir. Sayıları şu anda 20.000 civarında olan bu Kazaklar, 1930 ve 1940'larda Çin hükümetine karşı yapılan başarısız ayaklanmaların ardından kendi tarihi vatani Sincan-Uygur Özerk Bölgesi'ndeki anavatanı Altai dağlarını terk etmek zorunda kaldılar. Onlar Hindistan'da biraz zaman geçirdikten sonra Türkiye'ye iltica başvurusunda bulundular. Çalışma, 1930'lu ve 1940'lı yıllardaki Kazak göçüne odaklanıyor ve bu tarihin Kazakların bugünkü kimliğini nasıl şekillendirdiğini vurguluyor. Bu göçün travması, toplumsal bellekte derin bir şekilde yerleşmiş durumdadır; bu olayın Kazakların yalnızca kimliklerini ve siyasi görüşlerini değil, aynı zamanda oy verme, siyasi ittifaklar ve hatta çocuklarına isim koyma gibi günlük kararlarını da etkilediği görülmektedir. Makale esas olarak yazarın 2020 yılında savunulan doktora tezindeki bulgulardan yararlanmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Kazak göçü, Toplumsal bellek, Göç, Diaspora, Kimlik

(Aray RAKHİMZHANOVA. TOPLUMSAL BELLEK: ALTAY KAZAKLARININ GÖÇÜ)

Аннотация: В данной статье исследуются процессы коллективной памяти и этнической идентичности казахов Стамбула (Турция), поселившихся там в начале 1950-х годов. Эти казахи, насчитывающие сейчас около 20 000 человек, покинули свою родину в Синьцзян-Уйгурском автономном районе после неудавшихся восстаний против китайского правительства в 1930-х и 1940-х годах. После периода пребывания в Индии их приняли в Турцию как мигрантов турецкого происхождения. Исследование фокусируется на исходе казахов в 1930-е и 1940-е годы, подчеркивая, как эта история формирует их нынешнюю идентичность. Травма этой миграции глубоко укоренилась в их коллективной памяти, влияя не только на их идентичность и политические взгляды, но и на повседневные решения людей, при таких действиях как голосование, вступление в политическую партию и даже при выборе имен для детей. В статье в основном использованы результаты PhD диссертации автора, защищенной в 2020 году.

Ключевые слова: Казахская миграция, Коллективная память, Миграция, Диаспора, Идентичность

(Арай РАХЫМЖАНОВА. КОЛЛЕКТИВНАЯ ПАМЯТЬ: ИСХОД КАЗАХОВ ИЗ АЛТАЯ)

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