

The Uyghur Community in Turkey: Nostalgic Pan-Turkism, Ethno-Nationalism and Political Adjustments

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Abstract

This thesis explores the post-1949 Uyghur emigration from Xinjiang and the formation of the Uyghur community living in Turkey today. Based on multi-sited fieldwork in Turkey and Germany I focus on the gradual transformation and diversification of the community from the 1950s up to the present day.

I examine this multifaceted migration, its narration, and the changing political discourses and practices in Turkey against the background of the migrants' personal experiences. I focus on Uyghur agency in shaping diaspora identity based on their life stories in order to understand how the traumatic events they recall are transmitted to younger generations and shaped by subsequent experiences in Turkey. The emphasis on suffering ascribed by leading figures of the first generation in accordance to the political expectations of Turkey has been criticised by second and third generation Uyghurs. I will explore debates within the community on Uyghur collectiveness around concepts of Pan-Turkism, ethno-nationalism, victimhood, suffering and survivor's guilt.

In the heart of the lives of individuals and at the centre of political debates of organizations lies the East Turkistan Cause. But within the last decades contesting visions have emerged with shifting political aspirations. The disillusionment of pan-Turkic groups after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and developing Turkish-Sino relations led to an Uyghur ethno-nationalism that, to the displeasure of certain groups, renders pan-Turkic ideas obsolete and creates discursive fault lines within the community.

The transnational Uyghur political struggle, with its origin in Turkey, is evolving with these political changes. New debates on future strategies to promote the East Turkistan Cause are gaining momentum with influential groups being outside Turkey now. Within these developments I show how Turkey's role in the East Turkistan Cause has changed and how new perceptions within the community led to political adjustments in everyday life as well as in debates within the exile Uyghur organizations.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled ‘The Uyghur Community in Turkey: Nostalgic Pan-Turkism, Ethno-Nationalism and Political Adjustments’ has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of this thesis have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Human Ethics Committee, reference number 5201400554 on 12/08/2014.

Signed:

Date:

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Prologue

On one of my very first days of being a PhD student at Macquarie University, Sydney, I went to obtain a sim card from a telecommunication retail shop. I exchanged a few courteous words with the student working there. She said she was from China and asked me what I was doing in Sydney. I replied that I was writing a thesis on Uyghur migration from Western China to Turkey. She admitted that she has never heard of them, relating her ‘ignorance’ to the fact that she was from Eastern China.

‘Who are they? How many? And where exactly in China do they live?’, she asked. ‘They live in Xinjiang’, I said, ‘north of Tibet’, in order to locate and contextualize them in spatial, historical and political company with the Tibetans, another so-called minority of the People’s Republic of China. I found myself reciting factual knowledge – the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region forms about one sixth of the territory of the People’s Republic of China, and that their population is, according to official Chinese figures, almost 10 million. I told her that the Uyghurs are one of the 56 officially recognized minorities of China, that they speak a Turkic language and follow the Hanafi school of Islam. She looked puzzled for a few seconds, then she said: ‘Oh! So they really exist then? I have always thought that they were just dancing, making music and singing. You know, those musicians and performers playing at folklore events!’

Who could blame the girl for her perception, shaped as it was by discourses that represent the Uyghurs as a folkloristic accessory, and by her own biographical experiences that hasn’t involved any personal contact with them? It is no exaggeration to note that the subaltern Uyghurs don’t play a crucial role in the lives of most Chinese living in the east of China, unless they perform as entertainers or are blamed for acts of violence. By contrast, the role of Chinese politics in the lives of Uyghurs in Turkey is far from minor. Indeed it is magnified.

In January 2015, just a few weeks into another block of fieldwork, Ilham,¹ his Uyghur friend Kadir, and I were sitting in a small Uyghur restaurant in Istanbul, enjoying our tea after a sumptuous meal. Kadir rose to go, noting in leaving that he didn’t want to be involved in any kind of political activity in Turkey. After he left, Ilham was indignant:

How can he say this? There’s no escape from politics for us. There’s no escape from the Chinese, therefore there is no escape from politics. The Uyghurs can’t just withdraw from

¹ The names of these interviewees have been changed.

politics, even if they wanted to. We should think about our people in China, those who are still there. We have to maintain the East Turkistan Cause [Doğu Türkistan Davası]. Whether you hate them or even if you are pro-Chinese, they are in the fate of every single one of us, verbalized and experienced in one way or the other. Some say I don't meddle in political activities here [in Turkey], but in the next sentence they'd say that Chinese are like this and they treated us like that and we have to fight back. Uyghurs who assert that they are staying away from politics are just tricking themselves or the person they are talking to. They don't want to position themselves. The Uyghurs don't trust each other, and that's why there is no unity and that's exactly why we'll always be a Chinese colony.

As I was to discover over the course of my fieldwork, İlham alluded to a whole set of political issues that would reappear in numerous meetings with Uyghurs in Turkey. Phenomena such as ethnic repression and displacement can be responded to in many different ways, such as by avoiding anything political or by scapegoating everything that is Chinese. As I show in this thesis, the East Turkistan Cause constitutes a paramount part of the political activism of Uyghur foundations and associations in Turkey, as well as being significant, too, in Uyghurs' private lives. Yet the thesis shows, too, how being a Turkic group in exile in the Republic of Turkey also leads to multiple discourses of diaspora politics, even as Uyghurs find meaning in practices of shared significance with their own distinct ethnic narration. In brief, this thesis explores Uyghur immigration from Xinjiang to Turkey since 1949. The complexity of their migration, its narration, and the changing political discourses and practices connected to their leaving China and inhabiting Turkey will be unfolded against the background of migrants' personal life stories.

Introduction

Uyghur immigration to Turkey is not a recent phenomenon. For centuries pilgrims from Xinjiang have been going on the Hajj pilgrimage via Istanbul. Being the seat of the caliphate until 1924, imperial Istanbul was home to a number of Naqshbandi lodges from Central Asia. Kreiser (1990) for example mentions the Kâşgarî Tekysi in Eyüp in the 18th century and a shaykh named Abdullah from Kashgar who was its head at that time. In her work Can (2012) focuses on a whole network of Central Asian Sufis in Istanbul and takes a closer look at the interactions between the Ottoman state and Central Asians pilgrims from as far as Russia and China. One widely used route was through Russian Central Asia to Odessa and then crossing the Black Sea to Istanbul.

And there were Uyghurs who on their way to or back from Mecca found themselves in the midst of the Turkish War of Independence in the years from 1919 to 1923 and decided to fight against the Allies. A few men stayed after the end of the war and started a new life by marrying a Turkish woman. I met the children and grandchildren of one such Uyghur and heard about a few more.

Martin Hartmann (1902), a German Orientalist, describes how he tried to improve his Chagatai language skills in Istanbul in 1901 with a man from Aksu called Arif who, by his own account was a medical practitioner and was carrying a Chinese passport. They met in a lodge. The Ottoman state did not allow Arif to practice his profession, a problem that Uyghurs from Xinjiang a hundred years later are still facing.

In the late 19th and early 20th century Istanbul was the choice of destination for Uyghur students (or their parents who sent them). Mesut Sabri Baykozi, an Uyghur who played an important political role in Xinjiang in the 1940s is one prominent example. And, of course, there were merchants participating in an economy that covered Anatolia and Eurasia and extended all the way to China. Hacı Yakup Anat (1920–2001) narrates in his biography entitled *My life and my struggle* (Hayatım ve Mücadelem 2003) that he was born in the Turkish city Bursa in 1920 into a trader family from Yenisar in the district of Kashgar in Xinjiang. In 1929 his family went back to Xinjiang. But political instability made life difficult in Xinjiang. Growing up he became engaged in political activities and spent more than thirty years in Chinese prisons. In 1995 he managed to flee China and came back to Turkey where he worked for the Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) being paid a minimum wage. One political companion said in an interview that although ‘he devoted his whole life to

Turkey and Turkic Causes [Türkiye ve Türk davaları için ömrünü vakfetti], he couldn't become a Turkish citizen.'

Last but not least there was the unique case of Mehmet Rıza Bekin (1925–2010), called *Paşa* (General) for his military merits earned in different positions he held in the Turkish armed forces. When still a boy in 1934 he fulfilled the Hajj with his mother and other relatives. On their way back arriving in Ladakh via Karachi and Lahore they found out that political conditions in Xinjiang had changed and decided to go to Kabul, where they met his uncle Mehmet Emin Bughra (I will talk about him later in this thesis). His mother and his uncle concluded that it was not wise to go back to China and tried to find another country for Mehmet Rıza to go to. They send requests to the Turkish Embassy in Kabul and with the help of the Ambassador Memduh Şevket Esendal in 1938 Mehmet Rıza went to study at the Military High School in the district of Maltepe in Istanbul. After finishing in 1944 he entered the Turkish Military Academy and graduated in 1946. He joined the Turkish Army as an artilleryman. He fought with a Turkish brigade in the Korean War and was awarded a military decoration (Gazilik Madalyası). He retired with the rank of a brigadier general in 1977 (Bekin 2005). He spent most of his years as a pensioner in active roles for the East Turkistan Cause and became president of the East Turkistan Foundation in 1986, a position he held until his death in 2010. His career constitutes his perception of the role of Turkey in the East Turkistan Cause. In martial terminology he calls Turkey, 'the sole fortress of Turkishness and its only true military base' (Bekin 1993). Many Uyghurs refer to him in interviews as the Grand Man of the Cause (büyük dava adamı), his reputation coming from his achievements within the Turkish armed forces.

These people movements could be described as free migration. By contrast, the political shifts in Xinjiang in the second half of the twentieth century led to a coercive form of exile. The year 1949, with the Chinese Communist Party's People's Liberation Army taking control of China, saw major changes in Xinjiang that drove political figures into exile in Kashmir and eventually led to the existence of East Turkistani communities in Turkey. In 1961 about 200 to 300 people managed to leave China. They crossed the border to Afghanistan and by 1967 most of them were settled in Kayseri.

After the opening of China in the 1980s it became easier for Uyghurs to obtain a passport and leave China to visit friends and families in Turkey. Many of the Uyghurs would not use their return tickets and stayed in Turkey. This could be considered family reunion. Migration has been partially supported by Turkey's open immigration policy towards Turkic groups (İçduygu 2008). This third phase of migration was accompanied by the immigration of young

Uyghurs who wanted to study in Turkey, or use it as a stepping stone to other countries using family networks. Since 2010 there has been an ongoing migration of Uyghurs to Turkey who managed to flee China via Thailand and Malaysia. The modalities of the migration of these groups differ not only in time and place, but also in their formal characteristics. Due to the differing modalities, changes in China, as well as the changing host society, the responses of the Uyghurs to Turkey show a diverse variety. The lack of official numbers in Turkey leads to variance in the figures on migration, depending upon the source. Estimates from political activists in Istanbul and Kayseri varied between 20,000 to 250,000 Uyghurs. I would say that their number does not exceed 35,000, with 25,000 perhaps being a more realistic number.

Nevertheless, one central and integral part of Uyghur existence and social life in Turkey includes the East Turkistan Cause. This thesis examines the forces, discourses and practices behind its importance, considering the life worlds and experiences of people who have lived through these processes of migration and loss. The thesis also analyses the political positioning and shaping of contesting forms and manifestations of nationalism, each of which herald a change from territorial nationalism to an ethno-nationalism in the realm of Uyghur social and private engagements in everyday life within the host society. These changing orientations are constituted through a whole set of social activities, and shaped by personal and collective experiences and perceptions. The narration of an official Uyghur history in Turkey is opposed to the official Chinese version. Somewhere between them, the formation of a genuine Uyghur historiography is becoming more and more polyphonic. And as I will show in Chapter I among Turkish and Uyghur academics in Turkey there is a strong tendency to contextualize scholarly work on Uyghur history in a nationalistic conceptual synthesis that creates a coherent Turkic Islamic history as one component of a common genealogy within a political project.

Outline of the Thesis

Let me now sketch out the outline of the thesis, which is divided into four chapters. Chapter I begins with a brief history of Xinjiang that sets the scene for further discussions on Uyghur identity and nationality and draws attention to political changes that led to migration. In it I highlight the perception of certain aspects of Uyghur historiography written in Turkey to unveil what one of my interviewees described as the ‘onion-like nature of Uyghur nationalism, layer by layer it has been build up through the centuries with its modern version now surfaced.’ But there is no consensus on the modern version of Uyghur or East Turkistan nationalism (and identity) among the Uyghurs in Turkey.

In Chapter II I recount the first migration of Uyghurs to Turkey: introducing Isa Yusuf Alptekin and unveiling his role in the settlement of the Uyghur community in Turkey. His struggle to find a host country for the approximately 1,200 Kazakhs and 250 Uyghurs during the early migration of the 1950s, as well as in the internationalization of the Uyghur case, are explored in the light of his personal biography and his political work in Central Asia and in exile. ‘İsa Yusuf Alptekin is the East Turkistan Cause’ (İsa Yusuf Alptekin Doğu Türkistan Davası demektir) is a phrase that is still very common, although he passed away more than twenty years ago. I examine his political conceptualization of the cause within the broader global Islamic world and within the milieu of pan-Turkic and nationalist thinking in Turkey. Although I was unable to interview him, his two-volume memoirs (with a third volume on its way) and numerous articles have proven to be an excellent compensatory source. Countless meetings and interviews with his sons and companions, and attendance at commemoration gatherings helped me to get an idea of how people remember him and his political dedication to the Cause.

Further, it is important to address the question of why and how he is still perceived as an exemplary and charismatic leader in the eyes of many Uyghurs. Questions of leadership play an important role among the Uyghurs. I aim to explicate his level of recognition among the Uyghurs based on his actual work as well as on the Uyghurs’ perception. Although long dead, he lives on still in the minds of people. They remember his personality and his political work. But what are they telling us by doing so? His qualities as a leader are praised on the ground of the sacrifices he made to focus on the East Turkistan Cause, sacrifices nobody wants to make anymore. Imagination is with the Uyghurs, who, as I will argue, remember times of political independence and communal stability, and at the same time imagine a strong Uyghur leadership that is judged against Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s achievements.

In Chapter III I show how in the case of Uyghurs in Turkey, migration life is lived as a balancing act, mediating global processes with local realities and personal experience that form the horizon of multiple realities, exploring the question of how present generations consciously or unconsciously deal with the harm inflicted on their forebears and the humiliation and trauma experienced by ancestors. When in the early 1960s another group of Uyghurs managed to leave China for Afghanistan, Isa Yusuf Alptekin used all of his political connections to bring them to Turkey. In 1965 and 1967 they came to Kayseri in Turkey. They were settled in the Turkistan quarter (*Türkistan Mahallesi*) in housing provided by the Turkish state. Living in the spatial vicinity of just a few streets this group developed certain collective narrations of the migration based on their political experiences in Xinjiang, Afghanistan and Turkey. But their arrival also led to a political diversification, to

multiplicities of Uyghur realities. In Chapter III I explore how those narratives were shaped and re-shaped collectively with a few people being dominant within these spaces of negotiation. I will further show how within this rather small community discussions on discourses and political strategies would develop.

Discursive and political discord related to the intimate spatial connection between the private and political led to fault lines among the community, and even among families. I show how these were negotiated and argue that these contesting discourses are also developing into power-relations. The dominant narrative seems to be the one with the strongest resources. In addition to the dominant narration there are private life stories shaped in smaller relational units. I will complement the political voices with these other almost unheard ones.

Beside the multiplicity of political discourses, the thesis also addresses generational issues. ‘We are homeless!’ is a recurring theme, but many younger Uyghurs have developed various strategies to cope with a loss of a homeland only experienced through their parents. Their perspective on the East Turkistan Cause, I hypothesize, is conditioned by the way they learned to imagine it. The narrated and transmitted (traumatic) experiences from the first generation of Uyghurs in Kayseri are challenged by the second and third generations of Uyghurs in Turkey. But what seems to unite all of the generations is the fear of what I would call the curse of indifference. As I recount, the Uyghurs organize activities to keep the East Turkistan Cause on the political agenda and to remind people in Turkey that there are Uyghurs ‘who suffer from religious and political restrictions in China.’ One Uyghur man in his early thirties said that ‘Turks [in Turkey] tend to forget that there are their brothers who are still living under a foreign occupation. We need to be evocative of the Cause, also for the Uyghurs in China.’ The Uyghurs are trying to keep their voices heard. Remembering past events and reflecting on present affairs is a central act of their agency.

How are these issues, but also shared glories of the history of one group, transmitted by one generation to the next as a group endowment and how are they challenged in new environment, with new experiences and new horizons? Further, how do these representations of shared critical situations or traumas, along with defences developed against them, shared with a broader audience in Turkey?

In Chapter IV I address a new political space that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which began with initial high hopes (from the emergence of five new republics) for an independent East Turkistan and ended with disillusionment and new, globalized ways of promoting the East Turkistan Cause. The discussion of these spaces is at the same time a discussion of negotiations of Uyghur discourses, the formations of new concepts (or the re-

emergence of even older anachronistic ideas), the widening of the scope through disillusionment and breaking up with older traditions of narrations of the Uyghur cause within the context of an Islamic and Turkic conceptualization. The globalization of the Cause in a new, more contemporary framework, and without displeasing groups who want to stick with old ideas in a particular context, could be read as one form of discursive plurality that also addresses the aforementioned question of disunity and the need for a strong uniting leading figure. Events in the early 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the independence of the five Central Asian republics and the Turkish-Sino relations are explored and discussed. The question is how to deal with their own Uyghur nationalism, when umbrella terms like pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism, or Turkic brotherhood seem obsolete? The expansion of a Turkic identity with Turkey being its free headquarters came to an end. This on the other hand is creating a vital political challenge.

I furthermore focus on how the Uyghur migrant manages the political changes at a personal level. These range from both discursive and institutional aspects of the political Uyghur presence to individual life-worlds, as well as their consequences in everyday life. Migration requires a whole nexus of adjustments. I present how one woman expands her agency to cope with her personal and collective voicelessness by connecting national discourses to everyday activities. National discourses are not only shaped by foundations or associations, the daily reproduction of nationalism is crucial to its persistence. I argue that every day nationalistic practices are of significant importance in strengthening the unity of an abstract and diverse community. The focus of this chapter will be her way of positioning herself as a nationalistic writer of an Uyghur cookbook. This requires more than just hearing from important elders about symbols and stories of a common ethnic past to make it tangible. With her active encouragement of cooking modified national meals (for example according to health trends in Turkey), she develops some kind of embodied identification and self-representation at the same time. She also garnishes them with her way of perceiving Uyghur history through food. Her active role shows that women participate in the ideological practice of Uyghur nationalism.

In the last few years a number of Uyghurs managed to flee China via Thailand and Malaysia. I will explore how older migrant communities perceive these Uyghurs and approach them. With these immigrants the visibility of Uyghurness in public spaces in Istanbul is increasing. We see these changes not only in the visibility, but also in the context and practices these visibilities convey.



Figure 1. A little real estate office opened in 2014 run by old-established Uyghurs in the district of Zeytinburnu in Istanbul to facilitate finding accommodation for Uyghurs who arrived in Turkey recently. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

Fieldwork and Methodology

On my first visit to the East Turkistan Foundation (Doğu Türkistan Vakfı), located in the quarter of Şehzadebaşı on the European side of Istanbul, I was asked to write my name and phone number on a piece of paper. The man sitting behind a desk full of piles of paper was so busy that he didn't take his eyes off the screen. He was the executive secretary of the foundation at that time. It was not only my first visit to this place; it was also my very first encounter with an Uyghur person in Turkey. I planned to start my fieldwork at one of their official places and introduce myself and my research in order to meet people and get further contacts.

Walking in I could see that there was something that looked like a restaurant and I got excited thinking that it would be a good place to engage with people. The restaurant unfortunately was closed; it looked like it was in some kind of hibernation.

I was nervous and a bit disappointed that he didn't pay any attention to me. I wrote down my name, my telephone number and my email address, handed the piece of paper over his massive desk into the palm of his hand. I actually didn't expect him to look at it. I was about

to leave and began to think about a good way to say goodbye. Into this little moment of silence he said, ‘So, we are allies!’

I wasn’t sure if I understood him correctly and said, ‘Pardon me?’

‘Your people are against communism, and we are fighting communism, so we have the same enemy. That would make us allies.’ He said this without looking at me. After he briefly examined the piece of paper with my name on it, he focused on his tasks again, not a man to waste words. I was surprised that my Polish last name appeared an advantage in this rather impersonal exchange. It felt even more confused since I had never been to Poland and can’t speak Polish. I considered it to be a good start to my fieldwork, but didn’t want this to unfold on the grounds of a common enemy. My last name led him to the assumption that we shared a common political identity, but the manifest differences between us confounded this assumption. Confused by all of this, but also encouraged at the same time, I asked him whether there were any Uyghur restaurants in Istanbul. He gave me directions to a place called Silk Road Restaurant (İpek Yolu Lokantası) in the suburb of Zeytinburnu, Bus 93T. ‘It shouldn’t take more than 30 minutes,’ he told me.

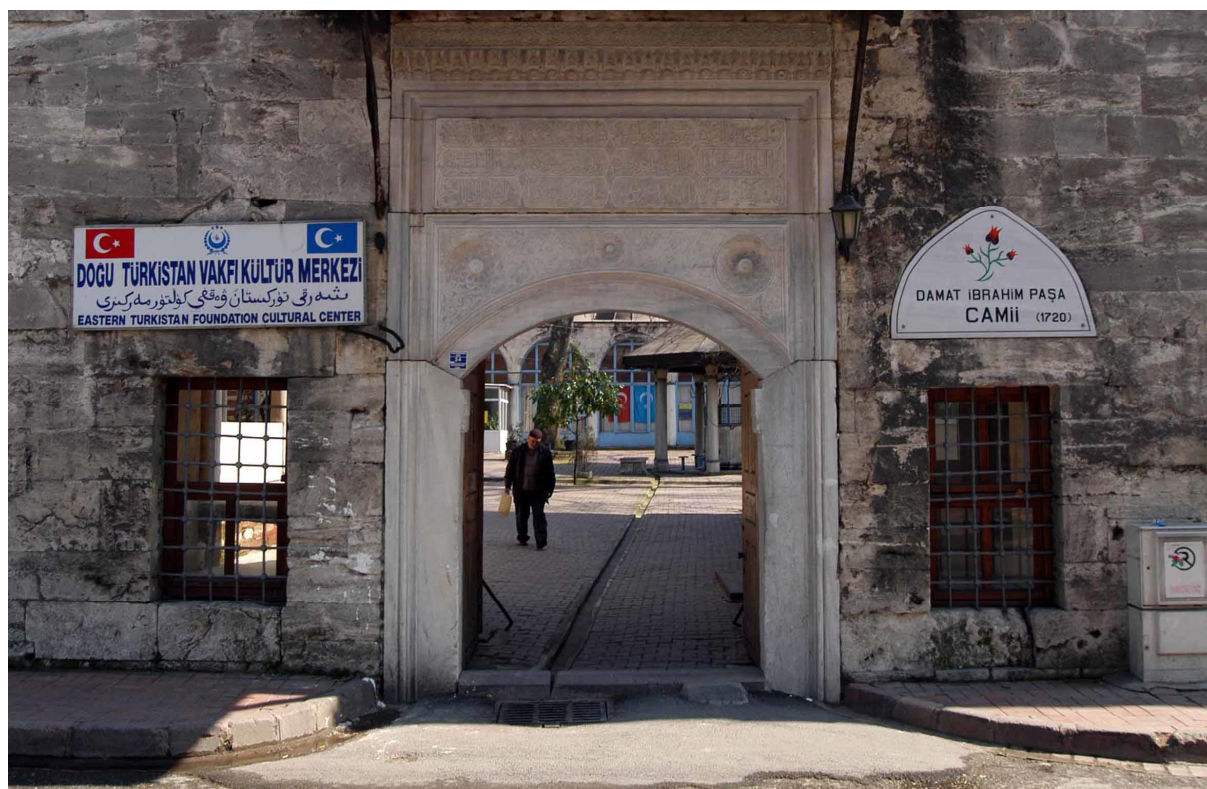


Figure 2. Entrance to the Doğu Türkistan Vakfı Kültür Merkezi in Şehzadebaşı, located in the Islamic-Ottoman social complex named after Damat İbrahim Paşa who funded this structure. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

After an exhausting two-hour bus drive, I found myself sharing a place with other Uyghurs decorated with musical instruments. I was happy with my fieldwork start, ordered food and made contacts. When doing fieldwork in Istanbul one has to be ready to experience the city in all of its extremes. A short trip that takes two hours, a closed restaurant that leads to other opportunities. As Henri Lefebvre has formulated, ‘To think about the city is to hold and maintain its conflictual aspects: constraints and possibilities, peacefulness and violence, meetings and solitude, gatherings and separation, the trivial and poetic, brutal functionalism and surprising improvisation’ (Lefebvre 1996, 53).

I did my main fieldwork in Istanbul, enduring its constraints. Meetings had to be postponed or even cancelled, and long travel to meet someone was normal. But I also benefitted from the potentialities Istanbul offered. By contrast, at the time of my fieldwork in Kayseri (my second site), there was not a single Uyghur restaurant in which to get to meet people. But the spatial alignment of Kayseri’s *Türkistan Mahallesi*, half way between the city centre and the airport, provided a different set of benefits to conduct fieldwork. The close proximity from one house to the other enabled me literally to jump over the fence to visit another family. Neighbours would get curious when they saw me in another’s family backyard. Being in one garden for some time led to further introductions to other people, whose invitations followed very soon.

In Istanbul numbers would have to be called, meetings arranged, and places reached in a city that was exhausting and demanding. What Simmel wrote about Berlin more than a hundred years ago reads like a valid account of exposure to contemporary Istanbul:

The psychological foundation, upon which the metropolitan individuality is erected, is the intensification of emotional life due to the swift and continuous shift of external and internal stimuli. [...] To the extent that the metropolis creates these psychological conditions – with every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life – it creates in the sensory foundations of mental life, and in the degree of awareness necessitated by our organization as creatures dependent on differences, a deep contrast with the slower, more habitual, more smoothly flowing rhythm of the sensory-mental phase of small town and rural existence’ (1903, 1).

This is true for both the researcher and the interviewee. I do not consider Kayseri to be a rural place, but the rather small *Türkistan Mahallesi* there has a rural touch to it. Branded as a city with emerging green or Islamic capital, part of a group of supposedly economically successful Turkish cities called Anatolian Tigers (Demir et al. 2004) and perceived as the stronghold of Turkish nationalism, its affordances and constraints were rather different. On that note, as much as my last name was an advantage in Istanbul, my first name in Kayseri proved to be a disadvantage, being perceived by some as Armenian. My being from Germany was received ambivalently. On a few occasions Uyghurs accused the German Government, Angela Merkel

or me of sponsoring the PKK. On the other hand others expressed their appreciation that Germany hosts the World Uyghur Congress in Munich and doesn't succumb to pressure from the Chinese Government (in contrast to Turkey's acquiescence).

Those two cities were my main field sites. I also spent a few weeks in Germany at the World Uyghur Congress in Munich and in various other cities in Turkey. To collect my data, I used participant observation, a misleading term, since one cannot be actor and audience simultaneously. These roles are usually played successively. At times I was just observing social engagements, like gatherings, political meetings, discussion groups and a whole range of other activities, private and public, and I was taking notes, recording or taking photographs when allowed. At other times I was participating in a broad area of activities, like preparing a meal, assisting in the preparation of life-cycle rituals, field trips, translating and editing for a magazine, in private as well as in public contexts. My first meeting with a group of young Uyghurs was to an *iftar* meal, when Muslims end their fast at sunset during Ramadan. At this occasion I observed what kind of activities the foundation was offering, how it was perceived and at the same time chatted with young Uyghurs. In Kayseri, for most of my visits, I stayed at the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği. They provide two rooms for newcomers or for Uyghur people who have temporary difficulties in finding a place to stay. I shared a room with a changing number of Uyghurs, mostly three or four. At other visits I was invited to stay at my interviewees' places.



Figure 3. Room for Uyghur people at the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği in Kayseri. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)



Figure 4. Room I stayed in and shared with two Uyghur asylum seekers for two weeks on my first visit in Kayseri. During a different visit when I was staying somewhere else, I could see that this room had been renovated. A heating system had been installed and the room equipped with three bunk beds to provide more sleeping space. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

In 2007, I started to meet Uyghur people and to collect written material. Due to the fact that I was working part-time at the Orient-Institut Istanbul and at other jobs, I wasn't able to conduct coherent fieldwork until 2015. In fact, there were years when I wasn't involved with the community at all, but would still see people once in a while. My PhD research officially started in 2015. I spent all of that year doing intensive fieldwork. My preliminary work, the networks I have established throughout the years and being in continuous contact with Uyghurs helped me to get into my fieldwork without any delay. My long-term research allowed me to do lots of follow-up interviews. I was able to meet with the same people in different environments and contexts at different times. Since I wasn't allowed to record interviews those follow-up meetings were a good chance to pick up where we stopped, sometimes take up new perspectives that seemed insignificant at the time of the first interview. Interviewees would take a new perspective, finding some time to reflect on my questions. Over the course of our discussions, I accompanied my interviewees through their journey to new angles and viewpoints, but also to new stages of their lives. Some got married, gave birth to children, others passed away. We could also see that not only our memory did play tricks on us, but also that the particular moment of the interview situation influenced our perception of it and that information was shared differently in more intimate relationships. Sometimes, and this was more often the case with women in Kayseri, the first interviews lasted just 10 minutes. They recalled their lives in a fairly short amount of time. It took months before I was able to talk to women alone, but the fact that a family member was present led to new observations about relational aspects I hadn't thought of. For example how much do family members, especially their children, now adults know about the lives of their parents or grandparents? How much do they know about life in China, beside the narratives of Chinese atrocities? How much do they interfere if the narration is not going a certain way?

I was only allowed to record some of my interviews. In total they comprise about fifteen interviews. In most cases I had to rely on my notes. I took notes while we were talking. But based on these notes, in the follow-up meetings we would pick up parts of the narration and discuss them in a more detailed way. Sometimes I would ask the interviewee to elaborate on a certain aspect, at other times the interviewee would have thought about something in the meantime and wanted to bring it up. The interviews lasted from one hour to up to five hours. The language most of my interviewees preferred was Turkish. When I talked to women in Kayseri, I saw that quite a number of women talked to me in Uyghur when narrating a painful memory or when getting excited about something in the present. People who had more recently arrived in Kayseri from South-East Asia asked me to use Turkish when talking to them, so that they 'can improve their language skills.' That really limited our verbal exchange

since they had a hard time to understand more complex questions and we continued in Uyghur. But, I have to add, this group was reluctant to talk and it took me quite some time to establish a basic dialogue with them. On the other hand I could observe that they were also reserved with the established community in Kayseri.

I did a total number of 70 long life story interviews. Most of them, about 50, were with males. In addition to that, I did innumerable informal interviews at meetings such as commemoration gatherings, symposiums, conferences, and poetry nights. But during those chats, the occasion of the meeting would be at the centre of our talks. If it was a commemoration meeting the remembered person was the focus of our talks. It might be due to the atmosphere of being in a public space, but these chats would usually not reach the realms of the private.

My interviewees were involved in a variety of political organizations. Well-known figures of the Uyghur political scene had no objection to me recording the interviews, whereas persons from marginal, smaller groups hardly ever allowed me to do so. The interviews with the former, experienced, articulate and refined in speech seemed in many cases like a reproduction of prepared texts. I came across identical phrases, expressions and arguments watching older video footage recorded by someone else and put up on the internet or reading interviews they had given. It took some time to get involved in their perception of things that lay outside the sphere of their faultless rhetoric.

The Doğu Türkistan Vakfı in Istanbul and the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği in Kayseri were at the time of my fieldwork trying to establish an archive of written material published on Uyghurs in various languages. They provided me access to these resources, and gave me a whole range of material used in past activities. Lack of monetary resources and staff that could set up the library kept it in a rather unorganized fashion. The library at the foundation in Istanbul was closed for most of the time due to renovation of the historical building. There was no audio-visual material. With the consent of my interviewees I left one digital copy of my recordings at the association in Kayseri. In three cases these audio files became the only recordings of some members of the community who subsequently passed away.

Naturally, I could only find a few of the Uyghurs who came in the 1950s and were still alive, but to get an idea about the migration and a different perspective on Kazakh–Uyghur relations, I also talked to a few Kazakhs who were in the same group.² Since most of them were quite old, their memories were fading and they were struggling to recall things or

² In my thesis I focus on the Uyghur migration. For the Kazakh migration see Svanberg 1989.

repeated the same stories a few times during a short visit. Sometimes their children or grandchildren warned me about the health conditions of their elderly and that would make a valuable interview not possible. When the family and the person I was about to talk to allowed I would still go and have a chat with two or sometimes three generations of Uyghurs. In one case, I received a very honest response to an email in which I expressed my request for an interview. Although I wrote in Turkish the family choose to write back in English:

Dear Mr. Tomas,

I and my wife would indeed be delighted to receive you here. However, We both are octogenarians, receiving medication to slowdown progress of Alzheimer. In terms memory and speech we are badly retarded. As such I would be hardly able promptly reply to your questions orally. I think, depending of the scope of your research, I might better helpful by looking through my digital files, and pass on to you any file or files relevant to your need, in the form of e-mail attachment.

With best wishes.

Remembering itself is an interesting phenomenon. We remember things not as they were or happened, but from the perspective of our position in the moment in which we are trying to recollect things. In my fieldwork I could see that one person remembered the same thing in various ways on different days. By thinking about the way things were remembered changed, or my questions triggered other memories. There are moments of misremembering or unsuccessful recollecting, or shall we say changing perceptions of the past depending on the form on the day. In the case of the family who sent me this email, remembering, something that is always presupposed, turns into something that is not working anymore.

Intra-Uyghur relations within a variety of political groups, as well as the disunity of the Uyghurs in general, sometimes lead to an atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty. This is fostered by the perception that the Chinese are collecting data on the Uyghurs abroad and that anybody could be working for the Chinese intelligence services. On an interpersonal level, one Uyghur, after I had briefly introduced my project and myself, asked me jokingly whether I was a Chinese spy. Right after he had said this, he remarked how I really didn't look like a Chinese spy and started laughing. It sometimes is a short way from ally to agent. He continued remarking: 'one would never know, we can expect everything from the Chinese.' 'But we can also expect anything from the Uyghurs', some of my informants would tell me. Here the words from one interviewee could stand as an example for various similar statements: 'I've experienced my biggest disappointments from my own people. Can you

imagine? Not the Chinese, or any random person, no, my own ethnic group betrayed me. How can I trust any of those guys.’³

In meetings I came across interviewees denouncing other Uyghurs for being close to China, doing business or working for the Chinese Government. Almost all of the people I have spoken to are convinced that there were Chinese spies, or Uyghurs, who had a pretty good idea of what is going on among the Uyghurs in Istanbul and Kayseri and reported so to Beijing. To describe the durability, the longevity and seriousness of these statements, I would like to share one story, which happened in 1949 and was retold during my fieldwork on two different occasions. Denouncing someone as a Chinese stooge is not, as we might imagine, a trivial or minor offence in this sensitive diasporic context.

During two separate interviews, talking about the day they left China in 1949, each party asked me to stop the recording. In both cases I was initially allowed to tape the interview, a request that Uyghurs would usually decline. After I stopped the tape recorder the voice of both persons, one male, the other female, changed and they created a portentous atmosphere. The following is a very small part of a longer narration, but with quite a serious trajectory.

In one account of 1949 a group consisting of Uyghurs and Kazakhs were waiting in Kashgar on the lorry bed of two trucks to be taken south in order to leave China for Kashmir. The two people who experienced this were teenagers at that time and were on different trucks with their families. The Chinese officials were doing a last minute check of their papers. They were also looking for valuables since emigrants were not allowed to take a huge amount of money or any other valuable objects with them. The father of one of the two parties was working as a factory director; the other one was a former functionary with some political influence. He had organized this flight and was also in charge of these two truckloads of people. While the police was checking, the director was forced to get off the truck, for no reason as it seems, but then the Chinese officials asked for money knowing that he was the director of a factory. The family expected the politically influential person to intervene, but he didn’t. ‘That was shocking for us’, my interviewee recalls the situation. The father was put in prison, but managed to leave with a different group of people a few days later.

The rival version varies on a crucial detail. According to its tellers, the functionary couldn’t intervene to stop the removal of the director, because the director had money and other

³ My interviewee used the Turkish term *ırk*. It literally translates as race, but in this example the person was referring to the Uyghurs as a distinct ethnic group. I translated the term *ırk* as race, especially when used in connection with blood (as for example in *Türk kanı*).

valuables on him he was supposed to give in order to cover the shared expenses for the escape. The director supposedly kept it, the Chinese officials found it, got angry and made him get off the truck and made him wait for another two days.

For the family of this man, this was a traumatic experience since it was not clear whether he could come after them. The time window for them to leave at that particular time was very narrow. For the family of the functionary it was clear that their father couldn't have done anything for this man at that point, because he was the one who broke the rules and betrayed the others. The politically influential leader had to think about the rest of the people. Despite this, his son adds, his father used his contacts to get the man out of prison and secured his departure from Kashgar a few days afterwards. But since then the other family had been badmouthing them.

It is not necessary (or possible) to know which version is right, but these two contesting stories have survived for more than sixty years and had an impact on the credibility of certain persons, even to the extent that these two narrations of one event have an influence on consequent political decisions. It makes a difference whether one is perceived as a betrayer or as a rescuer. This view is transmitted as a legacy to their children. The family of the director was never heavily involved in politics and has been living a quiet life outside of the Uyghur communities. I don't know if their decision to withdraw was based on this story.

For the family of the functionary this event was so important that they sent me an email a few days after our interviews with the subject heading 'response to accusations' (ithamlara cevap). It was bothering them and they knew that I would get to hear the other version at some point of my fieldwork. By 2016 there was only one person left alive who had witnessed this story. If other people retell this story they refer to it as a rumour (söylenti). But as Veena Das says, rumours have '(...) the potential to make us experience events, not simply by pointing to them as to something external, but rather producing them in the very act of telling' (2007, 108).

Although now marked as a rumour, through different versions of the initial narration certain aspects of an incident in the past are transported into a contemporary situation. And by getting actualized they imply a sense of continuity, with a certain person being insincere and not as helpful as they seem. Uyghurs bring up this story to claim that the functionary or his family might not be trustworthy – indeed, the fact that this rumour is still around makes people think there must be some truth in it. There are other rumours that lead to an environment of distrust. Enmeshed in personal and local histories these rumours are part of a semantic violence that discredits people for personal interests. Where a group becomes more and more diverse, as I could observe with Uyghurs in Turkey, gathering rumours of the past or picking up unproved

facts can create further fault lines within the community. I have seen this with the young Uyghurs and their families who most recently arrived, many of whom have been denounced as militant fighters who are on their way to Syria.⁴ Some people even think that China is behind all that, as part of a bigger plan to create unrest among the Uyghurs in Turkey. Most of the Uyghurs I have interviewed in Turkey were certain that there are Uyghurs among them who are collecting data for the Chinese Government and even shaping the political activities of the Uyghur communities in Turkey.

⁴ Rumours or misinformation of course don't necessarily only emerge from within the community.
<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n01/seymour-m-hersh/military-to-military> accessed July 15, 2016.

Chapter I

Xinjiang and East Turkistan:

Contesting Narration of Histories

It can be challenging to bring the efforts of historians and anthropologists together. In the following I not only aim to show how events in the past led to the present, in other words how historical processes in Xinjiang led to the migration of Uyghurs from China to Turkey, but furthermore I will insert the Uyghurs' interpretation of the past. I do this to show how the Uyghurs in Turkey shift to being political actors. I do this partly through the creation of a particular narration and interpretation of historical events. Narrating the past in their own interpretation or perception, using the work of historians empowers the Uyghurs to become political subjects of a distinct activism that is a vital aspect of their present. The key actors of a national historiography of the Uyghurs are writers, historians, journalists, intellectuals, academics, and activists.

In this chapter I highlight certain aspects of Xinjiang's history and touch upon the perceptions of historians who are evaluating the past with new perspectives, using new material as well as a whole range of conceptual and theoretical frameworks. From the perspective of Uyghur nationalism in Turkey, the significance of the interpretation of historical facts lies in the narration of it as an unbroken continuity and in the idea that the modern Uyghur nation is the lineal heir to its medieval counterparts. This is what Herzfeld (1997, 22) calls 'structural nostalgia, the longing for an age before the state, for the primordial and self-regulating birthright that the state continually invokes [...]'. A similar desire is connected to the designation of this particular province of China. Xinjiang and East Turkistan are disputed names. Following a short account of the geographical and demographical set up of Xinjiang, I will pick up the discussion of the changing meanings of the ethnonym Uyghur throughout the centuries and of the debates on Uyghur identity and the Uyghur nation.

Central elements of nationalism are the efforts to prove or better to narrate the antiquity of a certain nation, its golden age, as well as its decline caused by foreign powers (Özirimli 2000). For that reason, I will, despite the constraints of shortening into a few pages such a huge time span and such a vast region, try to focus on a few historical processes that significantly changed Xinjiang and played essential roles in the Uyghurs' perception of their own history in Turkey.

I also introduce three politicians, two of whom played central roles in finding a host country for the Uyghurs and who gained importance for the Uyghur community in Turkey.

Geographical Setting and Demography of Xinjiang

Xinjiang and East Turkistan are two names for the same place that carry a political standpoint. In my thesis I use the name East Turkistan when talking about the perspective of Uyghurs in Turkey, who refuse the usage of the term Xinjiang. Otherwise when referring to the administrative province of China I use the term Xinjiang. As I show, most Uyghurs in Turkey perceive East Turkistan to be part of a Greater Turkistan (Ulu Türkistan), bordering West Turkistan (Batı Türkistan) which covers the five republics that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. All of them except for Tajikistan are Turkic-speaking countries. As Millward (2008) explains, Turkistan is a term that medieval Islamic writers used for the lands in which the Turkic-speaking nomads lived in parts of Central Asia. With the coming of Tsarist power to Central Asia beginning in the 18th century they called the incorporated region Turkistan. European writers began to use the term Chinese Turkistan around the same time to refer to those parts of Central Asia that came under the control of the Qing dynasty in the 18th century. The term Chinese Turkistan emphasizes that this region has been part of the Turkic-speaking people of Central Asia, but also that it had close interactions with China. Although my Uyghur interviewees do not like to acknowledge it, Xinjiang is indeed both Turkic and Chinese now.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) lies on the north-western frontier region of China, and shares common international borders with Mongolia, Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India and with three of the former Soviet Central Asian Republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, although not bordering Xinjiang, are not far away. From Xinjiang's borders in the west and the south, as Starr (2004) remarks, Beijing is more remote than Bagdad and New Delhi. Old trade routes, in times unhindered by sharp borders, allowed traders and pilgrims to transport goods and ideas between these regions for centuries (Millward 2007).

Xinjiang's ecological extremes, prominently the Taklamakan Desert and the high mountains, have influenced settlement patterns. Almost sixty percent of the land is composed of uninhabitable land. The XUAR is divided into Zungharia in the north and the Tarim Basim in the south. These two major geographical regions are separated by the Tian Shan Mountains. Three mountain ranges, the Karakoram and Kunlun in the south, the Pamir in the southwest, and the Altai in the north-east determine Xinjiang's geography (Weggel 1987). These ranges appeared in the narrations of interviewees, where they had to be mastered, sometimes with

great personal and material loss. Zungharia and the Tarim Basin with the Altishahr (Six Cities) region also referred to as Kashgaria, form distinct histories and identities (Dillon 2004). The southern part, with Uyghurs inhabiting the fertile oases surrounding the Taklamakan Desert is seen by many of the Uyghurs in Turkey as their cultural heartland. This is a perspective that Uyghurs from the north, especially from Ghulja, would not necessarily share.

Xinjiang covers the size of Great Britain, France, Germany and Spain and if Xinjiang was a country (as the Uyghurs in Turkey aspire), it would be the world's sixteenth largest. With more than 1,600,000 square kilometres it is by far the largest administrative unit within the People's Republic of China covering one sixth of its total territory. It is located so far west of the Chinese capital Beijing that the informal local time is two hours behind Beijing time. Xinjiang works on Beijing time for government offices, long distance air and rail transport, but local people point out which time they use when making appointments. By using local time they try, as one Uyghur in Turkey told me, to emphasize the physical and cultural distance to the rest of China and to disapprove of Beijing's enforced time rhythms. Within China XUAR shares borders with Tibet, Qinghai and Gansu.

Despite its size, only 1.5 per cent of China's population lived there in the year 2000 (Millward 2007). The modern Uyghur people with a population of approximately ten million form the titular majority of this region. The ethnic composition of XUAR has always been particular complex,⁵ with heavy migration from eastern China in the last six decades changing the population profile dramatically. The variety of linguistic, religious and ethnic identities of the population shows that the cultural landscape of XUAR displays significant differences from China. The population, linguistically and in terms of common religious beliefs and practices, has much in common with its Turkic-speaking Muslim Central Asian neighbours, but has also been in close interaction with China for centuries, leading to a 'social and cultural hybridity or "in-between-ness" of the Uyghurs' (Bellér-Hann et al. 2007, 1).

A whole range of factors, including migration from other provinces due to the implementation of a national population policy and changes in the economic situation, contributed to the transformation of the population of Xinjiang. Before turning to the current distribution, a look at the numbers from the 1941 census will illustrate the profound changes. The 1941 census shows that the ethnic composition was 80% Uyghur, 9% Kazakh, and 5% Han, with 6% comprising other smaller ethnic groups like Tajik, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Russian and Mongolian,

⁵ For the ethnic composition and inter-ethnic relations see Thomas Hoppe (1995).

with the total number being 3,730,000 (Toops 2000). Despite Xinjiang being in a zone where Turkic, Russian and Chinese worlds overlap, the 1941 numbers show that the region predominantly consisted of ethnic groups classified today as Uyghurs and Kazakh.

According to Dillon (2007), official statistics published in 2001 shows the total population at 17,915,459 of which the Uyghurs comprise 46% (8,256,661), and the Han 39% (7,023,910). With the Kazakhs (7%), the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, 54% of the population are speakers of a Turkic language. Including the Tajiks and Hui possibly 60% of the population is Muslim (Dillon 2007). The accuracy of these figures might not stand up to scrutiny; but it at least reveals an idea about certain trends. The population of Han Chinese has increased enormously and now makes up almost 40% of the total population whereas the percentage of Uyghurs dropped from 80% to 46%. The total numbers unfortunately don't tell us much about the distribution of the Han Chinese in Xinjiang. As interviewees from Yarkent have pointed out, the ethnic composition of the South of the Taklamakan desert has been predominantly Uyghur, whereas other interviewees perceived Ürümqi, the capital of the XUAR and their home city as an entirely Chinese city.

This in-migration since the 1950s and the lasting changes it has caused have played a major role in inter-ethnic tensions, formulated in the fear of Sinification by Uyghurs in Turkey. I will discuss these issues in detail at a later stage of this thesis. There are also sizeable populations of Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as well as in Saudi Arabia,⁶ Europe, and the United States of America.⁷

Opposed Perceptions

Xinjiang is one of the five administrative units in China that hold the status of an autonomous region, but the Uyghurs in Turkey confirmed, as Millward points out, that people in Xinjiang are aware of the fact, that 'no one should mistake autonomy for independence'. The status of the XUAR as an autonomous region is closely related to the PRC policy towards the non-Han majority of the population. This policy, as Millward argues, fostered in the previous years

⁶ See Balci (2005) who writes that it is difficult to estimate their numbers, but the communities claim that there are 50,000 Uyghurs in Saudi Arabia. According to the estimates of the foundation in Istanbul there are at least 30,000 Uyghurs in Saudi Arabia. The aforementioned Mehmet Rıza Bekin describes in his memoirs that he met Uyghurs in Saudi Arabia, who settled there starting from the late 19th century (2005).

⁷ There are Uyghur communities in Central Asia with 350,000 in Kazakhstan, 47,000 in Kyrgyzstan, and 37,000 in Uzbekistan (Shichor 2003) as well as very small communities in Europe with 1500 in Germany, 1000 in the Netherlands, 900 in Norway, 800 in Sweden and 600 in Belgium (numbers provided by the World Uyghur Congress in Munich in 2015).

before the official declaration of the XUAR in 1955, was established to prevent separatism in this frontier region, as well as to dissociate the party from the assimilation policy of the Guomindang (2007, 243).

These official Chinese views are not shared by the Uyghurs in Turkey. One look at the back cover of the Kayseri published (by the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği) magazine *Gökbayrak* shows us that the aforementioned policy wasn't fruitful and that Uyghur perception differs enormously. This depiction of Xinjiang as East Turkistan and its geographical context portrays what most of the Uyghurs in Turkey take as a starting point for their political activism. East Turkistan is perceived (and written with blood red coloured letters) as under Chinese occupation and it is regarded as the 'Turkic homeland' of 35 million Muslims. (But as much as the official Chinese, so should the figures provided by the Uyghurs in Turkey be read cautiously.)



Figure 5. Back cover of the *Gökbayrak* magazine.

Interestingly the ethnonym Uyghur is not used in this depiction of what could be read as a visual resistance of the Uyghurs towards the official Chinese policy.⁸ In fact we have three references that, form one of the contesting discourses of Uyghurs in Turkey. Firstly, the territorial reference is to East Turkistan (with only hints to West Turkistan); secondly there is a reference to religion/Muslims; and thirdly, being a Muslim is also connected to the notion of a Turkic homeland. East Turkistan is the only country depicted on this map that refers to a territorial nationalism. In that image, we cannot yet see the narration of a specific Uyghur ethno-nationalism.

Uyghur People During the Centuries

The titular term Uyghur for XUAR, with its complicated processes, political and social precursors has been the focus of a growing scholarly interest. Placed in a whole variety of discussions about the discriminatory policies of the Chinese nation-state and the new expressions of ethnic nationalism that have evolved within interaction of nationality policy and socio-economic changes, the complex forms of the ethnogenesis of an Uyghur national identity have been described by a number of scholars. Due to their work we have some ideas about Uyghur self-perceptions and self-ascriptions.⁹ Although located in different contexts and analysed with a whole range of approaches, we can see that social interaction facilitates self-definitions and the drawing of boundaries between different groups (Bellér-Hann 2008). In my fieldwork I could observe that this relationality carries potentialities that can be resources for the expression of a certain identity in specific contexts, like in a perceived situation of exile. But these potentialities can also be mobilized and utilized in different ways according to changing contexts with a certain intentionality based on shared personal experience. The theoretical perspective that most takes account of individual experience is often thought to be phenomenological anthropology. As Ram and Houston elucidate in their recent study, ‘perception and experience contains many dimensions – sensorial, corporeal, cultivated, interactional, distributed, collective, political, ethical, and individual’ (Ram and Houston 2015). A temporal dimension of my analysis, unveiling how people’s perceptions, approaches, and concerns change over the years, will support this relational emphasis.

Notions of Uyghur people and identity have bridged today’s Uyghur with a nomadic Uyghur people from the steppes of pre-Islamic Central Asia of the eighth century located in today’s Mongolia. There is agreement that this identity has undergone major transformations through

⁸ Interestingly it also shows Tibet and Kashmir as independent countries.

⁹ Brophy 2016, Dillon 1995, Gladney 1990, Rudelson 1997, Smith 1999, Starr 2004.

socio-political developments.¹⁰ Gradual sedentism and interaction with dominating political powers fostered these socio-religious changes. The shamanistic Turkic-speaking Uyghurs were increasingly exposed to different religious practices. A great number of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups have shaped the formation of the people named modern Uyghur (Gladney 1990).

Early records of the nomadic Uyghurs date back to the sixth century as people living in the space between the Tang dynasty and the empire of the Turks. When the Turk empire, with whom they shared common linguistic features, collapsed in the eighth century the Uyghurs established their rule within a confederation with other tribes in what is now Mongolia (Mackerras 1968). The conquest of the Uyghur Mongolian capital Karabalghasun by nomadic Kyrgyz in 840 AD caused the Uyghurs to leave the Mongolian steppes and flee to the south and south west into different political domains. Some left for beyond the Great Wall and dissolved into the Northern Han population of the Tang dynasty (Sinor 1969). Others settled in the oases located in the south of the Taklamakan Desert (Mackerras 1972 and Shimin 1984). In these migration processes they merged with the local population and 'new loyalties emerged, and old ones were forgotten; certain existing ties became foregrounded at the expense of others; bonds of language, religion and other traits were challenged' (Bellér-Hann 2008, 50). From their neighbours they adopted Buddhism that led to a Turkic Buddhist civilization. One group formed a city-state based in Turfan (850-1250), adding Nestorian Christian beliefs to their Manichaean religious practices. With their gradual Islamization from the tenth century onwards, in the sixteenth centuries the last of the Uyghurs converted to Islam (Gladney 1990). The displacement of religious practices by an Islamic identity and its practices along with the expansion of the Turkic Qarakhanid rule in the 10th century led to ethnoreligious changes, so that by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the pre-Islamic traditions of the Uyghurs had been all but forgotten. The Qarakhanid were the first Turkic-speaking tribal formation with Uyghur elements that continued a royal Turkic tradition and embraced Islam (Golden 1992). As Bellér-Hann (2008) argues, these processes of Islamization and Turkification played important roles in the formation of a modern Uyghur ethnic identity as central features that could retrospectively be recognized as commonalities by the population of Xinjiang. For the Uyghurs in Turkey the dynasty was seen as a polity of significance for the conception of a Muslim Uyghur history.

¹⁰ For a detailed account of the complex ethnogenesis of the Uyghur people covering the period from the 8th century to the integration of Xinjiang into modern China see Gladney (1990), Golden (1992) and Shimin (1984).

On the other hand regional distinctions along dialects or various types of adherence of Islamic practices according to one's membership in Sufi organizations, or other types of affiliation like craft guilds, or political loyalties with changing political contexts led to further fragmentation (Bellér-Hann 2007).

Wars with Buddhists and resulting deaths of perceived holy warriors like Satuq Bughra Han, who was one of the first Turkic rulers to convert to Islam (Soucek 2000) and whose tomb is thought to be in Southern Xinjiang on the outskirts of Artush, shaped Uyghur conceptions of the past that have only gained more importance centuries later (Thum 2014). Depictions of Satuq Bughra Han are found in the galleries of ancestral national portraits in most of the Uyghur associations in Turkey (and also in Germany). Another famous cultural figure from the Qarakhanid period in the historiography of modern Uyghurs in Turkey is Mahmud al-Kashgari, a member of the ruling family. He studied at the Halik madrasa in Kashgar. A cosmopolitan, educated man he moved to the court of the Abbasid caliph in Bagdad, where he wrote his famous Compendium of the Turkic Languages (*Divanu lugat-it-Türk*) in the 1070s (Soucek 2000). Millward notes, that he exhibits a 'Turkic sense of self' and despite being educated in Arabic and Persian he describes 'Uyghur and Qarakhanid dialects as "the most elegant" and "purest" of the Turkic dialects because it had not mixed with Persian' (2007, 54). The Uyghurs in Turkey would certainly agree, since he also holds a special spot in the narration of Uyghur historiography in Turkey. In 2008 for example, on the occasion of Mahmud al-Kashgari's 1000th birthday, an Uyghur scholar claimed in his presentation that the local varieties of modern Uyghur spoken in Khoten are directly related to the language of the Divan. He supported a concise and continuous national Uyghur identity on linguistic grounds. With Yusuf Khas Hajib, who in 1069 wrote *Wisdom of Royal Glory* (*Kutadgu Bilig*) in Kashgar (Soucek 2000), they are celebrated as personified highlights of the golden era of Uyghur history.

As Brose (2007) shows, Mongols showed their fascination for Uyghur literacy¹¹ and took Uyghur scribes with them on their endeavours to conquer Eurasia. One person who served the Mongols gained significance in Anatolia and founded the Eratna Beyliği in Kayseri in the fourteenth century (Göde 2000). It is, of course, hard to say to what extent Eratna perceived himself as a member of a single ethnic group, but in the contemporary retrospectively written historiography of Uyghurs in Turkey all of these figures play eminent roles. Eratna's place in the narration of a continuity of Turkistan-Anatolian relations has major prominence.

¹¹ In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Uyghurs served in the Mongol empire. Brose (2007) describes Uyghur intermediaries in the multi ethnic society of the Yuan dynasty.

In the later Chagatay rule in the sixteenth century with its second wave of Islamization the ethnonym Uyghur, now affiliated with Buddhist and Christian bearings pushed to the margins of historical records (Golden 1992). But as Brophy remarks, it did not abolish all memory of Uyghurs despite its infidel association (2016).¹²

One narration, based on a cultural-primordial idea of an Uyghur national identity, published in the Netherlands in the special edition on Eastern Turkistan in a magazine called *Bitig*¹³ by an unknown Uyghur author reads as follows:

The Uyghur people of East Turkestan are heirs to an ancient civilization. [...] Even before embracing Islam in the 10th century, the Uygurs had a highly developed civilization and despite centuries of foreign invasions, the national identity remains fully intact. However, the current Chinese occupation of East Turkestan poses a great threat to the Uygur people and their culture. East Turkestan existed separate and distinct from China for thousands of years. [...] Beginning in 210 BC, the Uygur, together with other Turkic peoples, formed dynasties which controlled the region until 1759. The Chinese took advantage of occasional weaknesses in the dynasties by launching six major invasions into East Turkestan. Each time, the invaders were eventually expelled.

This perspective resembles the major themes of the official political discourses among the Uyghurs in Turkey. The history of Xinjiang written in Turkey reads like a reaction to the official history of Uyghur people in the PRC, where, as Bovingdon notes,

historical accounts provided an increasingly simplified, flattened, and distorted narrative favorable to the needs of the Chinese state. The new histories substituted for these inconvenient historical realities a seamless story in which the Uyghurs had been a member of the “great family of the Chinese nation“, and Xinjiang had been part of China “since ancient times”. (2001, 97)

Both Uyghur and the Chinese historiographies are based on static ideas of cultural and national identity whilst indirectly referring to the prevailing other. It indicates that there hardly has been any contact between the Chinese and the Muslims of Xinjiang. This little sequence shows that identities are emerging in a dialectical interaction between people who seek to define themselves and the local powers and their nationality policy. For the Xinjiang Turkic-speaking Muslims, Tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union, the Qing dynasty and the Republic of China have shaped their ethno-religious identities on a macro-level, but on a micro-level we can see contesting interpretations and acceptance to varying degrees.

¹² See Brophy (2016, Chapter 2) for further details on Uyghur culture holding a certain reputation in some places of the Islamic world.

¹³ Published by the Research Centre for Turkistan and Azerbaijan (S.O.T.A.) based in Haarlem in The Netherlands. *Bitig*, *Journal of the Turkish World*, Nr. 6, April 1993, p.16.

Uyghur Nation

In my thesis, I will explicate forms of relational Uyghur national positioning in Turkey whose foundation were not only shaped in the frontier regions of the Soviet Union and fast changing China from the 1920s to the 1949, but also in the broader context of the early PRC, and the newly established Republic of Turkey which, at the time of the arrival of the first Uyghurs, has just left the realm of being a one-party-state, but was still under heavy Kemalist influence (Zürcher 2004). In this period Istanbul became an intellectual home for pan-Turkic writers whose ideas emerged in the intersecting final years of the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia with their associations established there in the early twentieth century (Göksu Özdoğan 2001).

Discussions on the Uyghur nation are contested among the Uyghurs in Turkey. While introducing themselves to me, my interviewees would mostly use the term East Turkistani (Doğu Türkistanlı). There is ongoing debate on the proper designation of the people and the region. Although the denomination Uyghur has found its way into the name of the World Uyghur Congress most of the people I have talked to refrain from calling Xinjiang Uyghuristan.

The scholarly mainstream discussion places the creation of the Uyghur nation within the frame of the Soviet nationalities policy of the early 1920s (Gladney 1990, Rudelson 1997). Brophy argues that to limit the construction of an Uyghur identity and intellectual history of the Uyghur nation to a top-down structure within Soviet nationalities policy would neglect the wider social and political conditions and could not explain how this developing discourse converged with the Turkic-speaking Muslims of Chinese Turkistan (2016).

For a long time the re-emergence of the ethnonym Uyghur has been traced to the city of Tashkent in the year 1921. Turkistani intellectuals supposedly revived the ethnonym Uyghur as a general name for all the Uyghur people within the Soviet Union, who were not subsumed under a common name, but were referred to by a variety of names (Gladney 1990, Golden 1992, Rudelson 1997). Most authors suggest that there was a lack of a national identity until the Uyghur received official recognition in the mid-1930s by the Soviet Union and later in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. It is difficult to say to what extent a pre-modern Uyghur nationhood group cohesion existed, but some scholars discuss elements that could retrospectively be perceived as commonalities (Millward 2007, Bellér-Hann 2008, Thum 2014). Placing the discussion on Uyghur nationhood in a social realm beyond the study of Soviet nationalities policy, Brophy (2016) analyses the responses of people to imperial, national and revolutionary state politics, based on the lives of a diaspora of Xinjiang Muslims in Russia. He places the idea of a new Uyghur nationhood and the usage of the word Uyghur

in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, but also shows how these ideas found their way back to Xinjiang. He furthermore argues that the emergence of the idea of the Uyghur nation should be connected to the efforts of Russian Muslim and Ottoman intellectuals to rediscover a Turkic past. He calls it the work ‘of self-styled modernizers, who identified with the prerevolutionary cause of educational reform and the “Jadidist” tradition’ (Brophy 2016, 3).

Employing the postcolonial critique of nationalism that criticizes the idea that the nation concept has been transferred from Europe to the colonial world (Chatterjee 1993), Roberts argues that

or the Uyghurs, many of whom still struggle to assert their right to national self-determination, such assertions do not only represent a potential affront to their pride; they bring into question for others the validity of their existing claims to nationhood and sovereignty. (2009, 362)

The emergence of post-colonial national identities in the present world of nations as a product of colonialism should be seen as an act of agency in their resistance to colonialism itself (Chatterjee 1993). By neglecting the agency of the Uyghurs and placing the construction of the Uyghur nation in a mere top-down discourse within the Soviet nationality policy, we would not be able to understand the political activism of Uyghurs in Turkey and its anti-colonial currents. We would further neglect, as Roberts points out (2009), the agency of the colonized and the formulation of their own national identity that is anti-colonial.¹⁴ In the late nineteenth century the Muslims of Xinjiang were facing Qing colonial administration from the east and Russians entering the Ili valley in northern Xinjiang from the west. The Uyghurs of that region became subjects of both the Qing and Russian Empires. The ‘dual colonial encounter’ as Roberts (2009, 365) argues, fostered the Uyghurs collective political identity vis-a-vis their colonizers and because of the colonizers tendency to categorize their subjects. People divided by the Russian–Chinese border developed a stricter perception of their own cultural boundaries that was further shaped by cross-border familial and social ties.

There is an ongoing discussion whether referring to colonialism is appropriate, but for my case study, it is important that the Uyghurs in Turkey feel that they are colonized.¹⁵

¹⁴ The official narration of the People’s Republic of China repudiates the idea that the Uyghurs are autochthonous to Xinjiang. Xinjiang has been part of China since ancient times and could therefore not be colonized (Bovingdon and Tursun 2004).

¹⁵ For further discussion on whether Xinjiang is an internal colony and if Qing imperialism could be categorized as colonialism see Millward (1998), Roberts (2009) and Sautman (2000).

The pre-national group cohesion of Uyghurs has been discussed and addressed in a variety of, and sometimes mutually exclusive, ways. A common view is that the locals did not use the ethnonym Uyghur in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Instead, the population used various self-ascriptions according to their cities or oases, like Kashgarlik or Khotenlik. Some scholars have seen this as a form of regionalism of a weak nation that is in conflict with a modern national unity (Rudelson 1997). But there are scholars who put aside the lens of modern conception of the nation, and theories of nationalism that emphasize a strong link between ethnicity and the modern nation state. The absence of a modern label, as Newby argues, doesn't exclude a sense of community (2007). She further argues that it was at least clear that there was a decisive distinction (based on language and religion) between the Uyghur and the Chinese, and that this boundary was certainly stronger than that with any of their fellow Turkic-speaking Muslims (Newby 2007). Bellér-Hann (2008) mentions a whole set of common practices of communities that despite any local distinctness was a major aspect in creating a sense of 'we' regardless of a lacking consistent self-ascription used by everyone in this region. During my fieldwork I observed similar aspects within the Uyghur community in contemporary Turkey. In the interviews identities were unstable points of relational identification, not an essence, even if primordially formulated, but a situational positioning that wasn't rejecting overarching terms. Even the overarching terms influenced a contextual identity performed and formulated in a specific moment.

In most of the scholarly literature the wider acceptance of the ethnonym Uyghur both by the Soviet Union and the newly established Chinese nation is located in the 1940s (Gladney 1990). Today, the Uyghurs constitute one of the largest of China's *minzu*, a term translated as nationality, but more widely used as ethnic group. The PRC is composed of 56 ethnic groups of which the Han ethnic group is by far the largest. The Uyghurs received official administrative recognition in the 1950s within the Chinese project of ethnic classification that was inspired by the Soviet nationality policy (Mullaney 2011).

Mummies, Golden Ages, Invasions, Rebellions and Nationalism

The discovery of the 'Beauty of Loulan' in 1980, one of the so-called Tarim mummies buried in Qäwrighul near Loulan on the north-eastern edge of the Lop Nor Desert in eastern Xinjiang at around 1800 BCE (Millward, 2007),¹⁶ aroused great interest among the Uyghurs in Turkey. Turkish newspapers reported on the excavations and its findings. Either calling her the

¹⁶ For archaeological work on Xinjiang and for a prehistoric account of Xinjiang and its population see Mallory and Mair (2000) and Millward (2007).

paternal grandmother of Turks (Türkler'in babaannesi),¹⁷ or the maternal grandmother of Uyghurs (Uygurlar'ın büyükannesi),¹⁸ she became the focus of discussions on autochthony in Xinjiang. Despite the fact that she has been classified as of Caucasian origin, her non-Chinese facial features trouble Chinese officials (according to one of the two articles). It leads the author to the conclusion that the first settlers of this region were obviously not Chinese. According to him – a male journalist writing for the Turkish newspaper *Yeni Akit* – this should open up discussions on who the initial and original owner of these lands are. And it is not only about the ownership: this finding, so he claims, has to start discussions about the political pressure the Chinese Government is putting on the 40 million(!) ‘Uyghurs in captivity’. He ends his article with an interesting statement, noting that by revealing ‘this truth scholars show that the art of mummification has been invented by the Turks’. The Uyghur editors of the online version of the *Gökbayrak* magazine in Kayseri cited this article on their website and linked it to the original. This is just one interesting example of how journalists in Turkey use archaeological findings to advocate the Uyghur cause and to place it in the context of a broader cultural history of the Turks. Mummies are seen here as the starting point for the long road to liberation. The struggle to project this region to be the cradle of Turkishness connects, as I will show, Uyghur discourses on their prehistoric existence in Xinjiang to discourses on proto-Turks in Kemalist Turkey. My interviewees narrated archaeological findings in Xinjiang like going through a photo album of their ancestors. And I could see that they tried to eject the foreign ruler, in this case China, from the historical and archaeological narration of this region, based on a genealogical model of an imagined nation. Some premise their idea of the nation on territorial other on ethnic grounds. In both cases the main intention in their narration was to secede from the larger political unit of China using an ‘interutilization’ (Özirimli 2000, 183) of the terms nation and ethnic group. In their terms the nation comes before nationalism.

Although this thesis is primarily concerned with current questions of the Uyghur communities in Turkey, some consideration must be made about the history of Xinjiang. In order to understand the reasons for different groups of Uyghurs leaving China at various stages within the last seventy years, I will also briefly include the Uyghur perspective to give the reader an

¹⁷ http://www.gokbayrak.com/haber_detay.asp?id=3462 accessed May 2015. This article was initially published in the printed version of *Sabah* newspaper.

¹⁸ http://gokbayrak.com/haber_detay.asp?id=4821, accessed June 2016. The title of this online article was ‘The long and narrow road from the Beauty of Lolan to independency’ (Lolan Güzeli’nden Bağımsızlığa Giden Uzun İnce Yol!) Printed version of this article was initially published in the newspaper *Yeni Akit*.

impression of the Uyghur perception of the history of this region. A growing number of scholars now approach Xinjiang's history in broader global contexts.¹⁹

Share (2015) in his analysis places Xinjiang, also known as Chinese Turkistan, on the political and economic front of the Anglo-Russian conflict of interests and describes it as the region where three empires collide. Its geographical position in immediate vicinity with Russia, the radical political changes in China in the last 100 years, the British Empire and its colonies in the South all cohere to make this region a centre for dramatic transformations. During the nineteenth century the Asian front, where the Russian and British rivalry raged, ranged all the way to Xinjiang (Share 2015). Many images have been used for this region: the hub of the Silk Road, the crossroads of Asia, and the heart of the continent (Millward 2007). Owen Lattimore called it the 'Pivot of Asia' (Lattimore 1950). But as Brophy suggests, we must also include as political actors the Ottoman Empire and the influence of Russian Muslims and their ideas. Imperial Istanbul, capital of the Ottoman Empire, seat of the sultan and caliphate and refuge for Muslims from Russia, transit station on the way to the Hajj,²⁰ played an important role in the discourses of Xinjiang Muslims (Brophy 2016). In extending the scope of the region beyond Chinese borders Uyghur political activism in Turkey will be analysed against the backdrop of their personal lives, but also within the historical context of global developments and their local forms.

For Uyghur historiography in Turkey the golden era of their history, starting in the 10th century with the Turkification and Islamization processes of Qarakhanid rule, comes to an end with the Qing invasion and the creation of Xinjiang by the Manchu Qing state. In the eyes of the Uyghurs in Turkey the incorporation into the Qing dynasty marks the beginning of the ongoing dark age of Uyghur history with an enduring Chinese occupation (Alptekin 1992, Kaşgarlı 2004, Gömeç 2011).

Qing Administration, Yakub Beg and Ottomans

In the following section I will briefly highlight the period that led to 1949 and include the perception of Uyghur historiography in Turkey. In the middle of the eighteenth century Chinese control was established when Xinjiang was annexed by the Manchu Qing dynasty. The Han Chinese coming into Xinjiang were not homogenous (Bellér-Hann 2008) and their

¹⁹ See for example, Bellér-Hann et al. (2007), Millward (2007), Roberts (2009), Share (2015), and Brophy (2016).

²⁰ On Central Asian religious networks in Istanbul in the late 19th, early 20th century see Lale Can (2012).

migration, although described as a steady influx into the region after the Qing conquest, was characterized by major changes in migration policies and patterns (Millward 2007). For Western historians the modern history of Xinjiang begins in the middle of the eighteenth century. After a period of instability throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in 1884 Xinjiang was incorporated into the administration of the late Qing state. The region's political history in the nineteenth and early twentieth century could be portrayed by its many changes. Upheavals, turmoils, and periods of stability and power vacuums appeared in different times and different parts of Xinjiang (Millward 2007). However, the new province was now perceived as an integral part of China, together with Tibet and Mongolia (Dillon 2004).

For the period from the 'Manchu invasion' to the reign of Yakup Beg in 1864, Erkin Alptekin, son of the Xinjiang politician Isa Yusuf Alptekin, counts forty-two revolts initiated by the 'Turkic people' of East Turkistan (1992, 186). There have been no doubt quite a number of revolts carried out by different groups based on religious grounds that has been a factor in violence directed against Han (Kim Hodong 2004). For the Uyghurs in Turkey the historical account of these rebellions involves the creative narration of inevitable political links between these rebellions and the present. In Alptekin's phrase, Manchu control over Xinjiang is understandably perceived as an invasion. For Uyghurs in Turkey, whether political activists or otherwise, these rebellions are imagined as political events on the path of independence. In the Uyghur associations in Turkey and Germany, photos were even organized chronologically as if they were events of a single political Uyghur genealogy. The visual evidence of the grandfather of pre-modern resistance links the construction of modern nationalist discourses and symbols to that period. The case of the Yakub Beg's Islamic state,²¹ centred in Kashgar and in Yarkand, is particularly special because it links the creation of an independent Islamic Uyghur state to the Ottoman Empire. He declared his independent khanate in 1865 and extended his influence into northern Xinjiang. Yakub Beg's diplomatic negotiations with Russia and Britain extended his level of recognition even beyond the Islamic world. That makes him, as one Uyghur remarked, the 'first internationally recognized Uyghur politician',²² although he came from a Kokandi line (Millward 2007). Rabiye Kadeer, President of the World Uyghur Congress, calls him an 'Uyghur hero' in her book (2009, 6).

²¹ For detailed discussions on Yakub Beg see Millward (2007), and the extensive study by Kim Hodong (2002) and Brophy (2016).

²² 'İlk gerçek Uygur beynelmilel siyasetçi.'

We have no idea how far these newly established contacts would have gone if he hadn't died in 1877. But indeed the Istanbul–Kashgar connection was a remarkable event. He sent representatives to the Sublime Porte. Yakub Beg probably hoped that the Sultan-Caliph in Istanbul would be a more reliable source of strength and legitimation than local dynasties to deter the Chinese and Russians (Karpát 1991). Yet, as Brophy remarks, it wasn't until 1873, after failed attempts to integrate with Russia or Britain, that Yakub Beg officially declared his state to be subject to the sultan and send a delegation to Istanbul. In his interpretation Brophy argues that the interest of the Ottoman Sultan Abdulaziz was less out of pan-Islamic considerations, and more the result of the sultan's failure to protect the Muslims of Bukhara from Russian invasion (2016). Nevertheless, Istanbul sent a small group of officers to train Yakub's officers and to offer military aid (Millward 2007). Gömeç (1999), a Turkish scholar, argues apologetically that the Russo-Turkish war in 1877–78 was the reason why the Ottoman couldn't provide further help. Uyghurs in Turkey narrate that the *khutba* in Kashgar and the emirate's coinage demonstrated the sovereignty of Abdulaziz.

Yakub Beg brought Xinjiang to the global map, but during my fieldwork I heard a few people criticizing him, particularly for his attempts to punish practices he considered against Islamic law. They focus on the modernization of the East Turkistan Cause and also criticize the very fact that Yakub Beg is considered as a role model for an aspired independency. The critics follow a different path of genealogies and historical narratives and references based on ideas of nation. Their critique was directed to Yakub Beg's and his emirate's religious and political 'backwardness' (*geri kalmışlık*). For some he is a great statesman (*büyük devlet adamı*); for others just a Central Asian tyrant. The historical acknowledgement is approved, but they could not think about a worse model for Uyghur self-governance, perceiving him and his emirate as something obsolete and despotic. Advocating a kind of modernism that foregrounds schooling and a contemporary forms of Islam, their ideas could rather be linked to the East Turkistan Republics in the first half of the twentieth century.

Pan Movements, Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire

Before moving on a few words on pan movements. The ideology of pan-Turkism is a phenomenon that is expressed as the *raison d'être* for Uyghur political activists in Turkey. The main political figures, like İsa Yusuf Alptekin came across its ideas in the vast geography of Russian Central Asia. Although the Turkic groups were not contiguous geographically, some ideas were developed in areas close to the Ottoman Empire or in the empire itself. Most of the Turkic groups that today, in Turkey, are called Outside Turks (*Dış Türkler*), were living outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire in Czarist Russia. A few intellectuals prepared the

ground for pan-Turkism and nurtured it and managed to attract its followers from as far as Xinjiang. I focus on two persons, Ismail Gasprinsky and Yusuf Akçura, both of whose legacy is still prominent among Uyghurs in Turkey.

The main objective of a pan movement is to strive for unification of a geographic area, a linguistic or ethnic group, or religion. The term pan has been designated to a vast variety of dissimilar phenomena, like pan-Slavism, pan-Turkism, pan-Islamism, or pan-Turanism. Pan-Slavism and pan-Turkism could be considered nationalist movements of a racist type and in the case of pan-Slavism with an imperialistic character and pan-Islamism is seen as a reaction against colonialism (Özdoğan 2001, Landau 1995). The historical and political environments out of which they emerge, their aims, their organization, and ideologies have been quite diverse, making valid generalizations difficult, but we can see that some pan movements might have triggered others.

Pan-Turkism is generally discussed as a response to pan-Slavism and the Russification processes it brought with it. Although pan-Slavism was primarily directed against the Germans, the Ottoman Empire became a target with the idealization of a common ancestry with the Slavs of the Balkans under Ottoman rule. Turkish and German-Hungarian control stimulated the idea that the survival of the Slavs depends on their unification. Strategies, concepts and activities were often similar. Aid was provided for Slavic refugees from Ottoman Empire in Russia, and similarly for Tatar refugees from the Russian Empire in Istanbul. Intellectuals wrote anti-Russian or anti-Turkish propaganda pieces that were spread by volunteers. Although pan-Slavism lost most of its attraction in 1878, it doesn't come as a surprise that the Tatars, being under Russian rule for so long and subjected to heavy attempts of Christianization and Russification, were very active in propagating pan-Turkism (Landau 1995). Pan-Turkism provided a comfortable discursive basis and ideology for the developing Tatar bourgeoisie in Kazan to rival the Russians. The Crimean Tatars lived in proximity to the Ottoman Empire and in the immediate sphere of influence of political ideas. Merchants, students, pilgrims and travellers made it easy to distribute ideas from Istanbul all the way beyond the Russian-Chinese border into Xinjiang (Brophy 2016). Because the Turkic groups were not living in adjoining areas, other aspects, other than geographical, of similarities had to be foregrounded. One common ground was the linguistic similarity of the languages, one aspect that Uyghurs in Turkey often emphasize despite the major difficulties some Uyghurs have to make themselves understand in Turkey. Although just similar, but not identical, the intellectuals tried to communicate in some sort of 'High Turkish' (Landau 1995). But low literacy rates and local vernaculars were an issue. Consequently education, language reforms and journalistic propaganda became priorities. These focal points crystallized in the life work

of one of the most prominent representatives of Tatar intellectuals, Ismail Gasprinsky (1851–1914), or known as Gaspıralı in Turkey. A Crimean Tatar, who imbibed pan-Slavist views, like the superiority of race and language, to ideologically found a community. He studied in Russia, France and Turkey and battled against the Russian government and the Muslim mullahs. Albeit he imagined the union of Muslim people, his activities were directed at the education of Russia's Turkic groups to provide them a modern way of schooling that introduced the Turkish language with Arabic. Schools in Tatar centres took up his new system (usul-i cedit) of schooling and with elements of pan-Islamism met the demands of a nascent Tatar intelligentsia and became an export hit among some of the Uyghurs who came across his ideas in Russia. (Brophy 2016). The increasing availability of books and the substantial circulation of periodicals combined with developments in literacy offered new means for spreading pan-Turkic ideas. Gasprinsky's journal *Tercüman* (Interpreter), which he started in 1883 played a significant role. He advocated a secular nationalism that included distinct nuances of his pan-Turkism, which he expressed in his often-repeated phrase 'unity in language, thought and action' (Dilde, fikirde, işte birlik). (Landau 1995, 10) He also wanted to create a lingua *turca* based on the Turkish spoken in Istanbul and supported by ideas that Ottoman Turkish has been derived from the same root as other Turkic 'dialects'²³ like Uyghur or Kazakh. And with this assumed cultural unity based on language he thought that Turks, Tatar and other Turkic groups were one nation (ulus). (Özdoğan 2001) Isa Yusuf Alptekin adopted Gasprinsky's ideas of unity in language, thought and action to that extent that he printed them on the cover of *Erk*, the magazine he published in Ürümchi.

The younger generation of Tatar intellectuals like Yusuf Akçura (1876–1935) broke with pan-Islamism and emphasized Turkic nationalism and racism. He was born in Russia and migrated with his mother to Turkey at the age of seven. He entered the military college in 1895, but couldn't complete the course because of accusations of being a member of a seditious movement and was exiled to Libya. In 1899 he went to Paris where he became a strong supporter of Turkish Nationalism. In 1903 he returned to Russia and started to write on pan-Turkism.

In his article 'Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset' (Three Types of Policy) printed anonymously in the Cairo published journal *Türk* in 1904, he summarizes the purposes of pan-Turkism. He places the discussion around the position of the Ottoman Empire against the European forces and its ethnic composition. For him Turkist nationalism offers a feasible alternative to Ottomanism

²³ For the pan-Turkists the Turkic languages spoken outside of Turkey are only dialects of one language.

and pan-Islamism on the basis of a national unity and common identity of all Turks and supports the idea to abandon the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire. The union of all Turkish and Turkic people would have great support from the Turkic groups of Asia (Akçura 1991). He refuses multi-ethnic Ottomanism because ‘it minimised the rights of the Turks’ and criticized pan-Islamism ‘for antagonising non-Muslim groups in the Ottoman Empire’ (Landau 1995, 14). Akçura’s presentation of pan-Turkism takes it from the cultural level of Gasprinsky’s work to the political domain of concrete claims. Akçura pushed pan-Turkic awakening politics in Russia from 1905 to 1908. A number of Central Asia Turks found refuge in Istanbul around this period of 1908 due to the difficulties of maintaining their ideas in Russia where they influenced a number of *Young Turks*.

In the Ottoman Empire Akçura’s ideas gained stronger support after 1908 among the Young Turk intellectuals and from 1911 onwards the social and cultural organization Türk Ocağı (Turkish Hearth) provided a podium for the pan-Turkist movement. The journal *Türk Yurdu* (Turkish Homeland) became a widely read publication and intellectual force for the Turkish nationalist ideology (Üstel 2004).

Akçura defined the Turkish nation on purely ethnic even racist terms and was supporting the idea of kinship with other Turkic people who were outside the borders of the Ottoman Empire. His disapproval of pan-Islamism, and on this point he clashed with Ziya Gökalp (1876–1924), a political activist of Kurdish origin favouring Turkish nationalism, was based on his fear that it would hinder a secular Turkish national development. Pan-Turkist propaganda gained a climax with the outbreak of WWI. The Russian military draft among the Muslims in Central Asia triggered rebellions among the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. (Özdoğan 2001). Turkish agents were the driving force behind pan-Turk sentiments in Bukhara. The activities were even spreading to Xinjiang, but the efforts of agitation were of little success. The breakdown of the Russian Empire in 1917 was shortly followed with the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire in 1922.²⁴ From this point the pan-Turkists in Turkey were more engaged in contributing their ideas to develop Turkish nationalism and saving their own country than in any endeavours abroad (Landau 1995). Without the support from the Ottoman Empire or Turkey, and Central Asia being under Soviet control, the movement lost its capacities. In Turkey however, pan-Turkists contributed to modern Turkish nationalism and several aspects of the pan-Turkism of the late Ottoman Empire made it to the new ideology.

²⁴ One last example of members of the CUP being engaged in pan-Turkic activities in Central Asia was Enver Paşa, who died in 1922 near Dushanbe. Mustafa Kemal disapproved of his pan-Turkic utopian ideas, cut off ties with him and the CUP much earlier (Landau 1995).

The Turkish nationalism that Mustafa Kemal imagined, and that became state doctrine in the republic was slightly different in its orientation. Turkey's sovereignty within its national frontiers became the focal point of his considerations based on national interest. The renouncing of pan-Turkist ideas would furthermore help in establishing normalized relations with the Soviet Union (Landau 1995).²⁵ Even though the Turkish authorities during 1920s and did encourage Turks from other countries to emigrate to Turkey, they showed little interest in the areas inhabited by Turks that were outside the former Ottoman borders. There is little to no evidence that the government of Turkey officially supported pan-Turkic groups, on the contrary, they considered their manifestations as problematic. Akçura, still a wholehearted supporter of pan-Turkic ideas, proclaimed that the 'Republic of Turkey was the embodiment of all pan-Turkic desires' (Landau 1995). He had to, as by then he was a member of the Grand National Assembly and a professor of history, who identified with the new regime. The fact that he never had been a member of CUP made it easier for him to join the new regime and become a fervent Kemalist.

The *Türk Ocakları* (Turkish Hearths) underwent a similar process. They were established in the Ottoman Empire as an effective pan-Turkist organization. They had a period from 1920 to 1924 where their activities came to a halt, but Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver, who had never been a leading pan-Turkist, persuaded the *Türk Ocakları* to embrace the nationalist ideology that Atatürk turned into the state doctrine. Now, according to Tanrıöver, the main ambition for the *Türk Ocakları* was to preserve Turkish culture and defend Kemalism (Üstel 2004). Despite the commitment to Kemalism, pan-Turk tendencies were still manifest in the organisation and ideas expressed in articles published in *Türk Yurdu*. One central element of pan-Turkism, the irredentist motif of their political objectives, was avoided in this period.

The new nationalist ideology of Kemalism on the other hand shared similar interests in a historiography that highlighted the bright past of the Turks since their earliest origins with a focus on language, literature, history, geography and related fields. In this way the new Turkish nation would be provided with a history and past of its own and something to be proud of. The concept of a Turkish race and that the ancient Turks of Central Asia had already developed ideas of nationality contributes to the assumption that pan-Turkic ideas were absorbed into the official state ideology.

²⁵ For Landau (1995, 75) it seems to be no coincidence that Atatürk's rejection of pan-Turkism concurs with Lenin's withdrawal from pan-Slavism.

Despite these things pan-Turkism was less visibly active in the first two decades of the Republic of Turkey until the Second World War. New hopes emerged in pan-Turkist circles and among the Outside Turks. Pan-Turkists picked up their writings, although carefully so in the official arena and helped immigrants materially and culturally. Their main objective was to highlight the situation of the Outside Turks and to emphasize the bond these groups have. Sometimes political claims would be made. The government reacted and closed down most of the periodicals of the Outside Turks and banned their import from Europe. Most pan-Turkic magazines at that time were published in Europe by Turkic refugees from the Soviet Empire (Landau 1995).²⁶ During this first twenty years of the republic pan-Turkic writing did come to a complete halt. The Turkish émigrés from Central Asia were still actively writing in a whole range of periodicals. But also local pan-Turkists like Nihal Atsız pursued their writings. He wrote in the pan-Turk periodical *Orhun. Aylık Türkçü Mecmua* (Orhun: A pan-Türk Monthly) The term Türkçü referred to pan-Turkists or Turkists. The cover pages of several issues showed a map of Turks in Turkish lands, expanding from the Mediterranean through Central Asia almost up to the Pacific.²⁷ Nihal Atsız underlined this view by writing ‘All of Turkistan and all the Turkish lands are ours!’ (Landau 1995, 88). The racist orientation, the belief in Turkish superiority, became obvious in some of the periodicals mottos. *Ergenekon*’s motto was ‘The Turkish race above everything!’ The pan-Turkists of the 1930s and 1940s in Turkey were struggling with the self-centred state ideology of Turkish nationalism that neglected the Outside Turks and regions of heavy Turkic population. But both forms fostered notions of race and the emphasis that the strongest bond between the Turkish race is blood that covered all the Turks from the Balkans all the way to China.

Late Qing, New Ideas from Russian Central Asia and the Ottoman Empire

The following decades after the conquest in 1878 and the creation of Xinjiang as a province in 1884 is a period of intense Russian-British imperial rivalry known as the Great Game. This period saw a whole range of Chinese administrative, military and economic reforms to

²⁶ See for example *A Mosque in Munich. Nazis, the CIA, and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West* by Ian Johnson (2011) for the efforts of Nazi Germany (and the role of Turkologists) to establish a Turkistan legion consisting of Turkic soldiers who were promised help in their own national struggles once the war is over. He also shows how the United States of America tried to make use of the former Nazi soldiers in their attempts to spread anti-Soviet propaganda through broadcasting in the Turkic languages.

²⁷ See *Orhun*, vol 5, 1934.

prevent a future relapse into non-Qing rule (Millward 2007). In the late nineteenth century the Russians arrived at the threshold of the Qing Empire. Connections between provincial Xinjiang and Russia improved fast and the local Turkic population became attached, not only to commercial options, but also to the intellectual world of Russian Muslims. Russian trading communities in Xinjiang became home to Tatars with direct links to new Muslim intellectual influences coming from their centres such as Kazan. These ties strengthened old connections (based on the Hajj) to the Russian rival, the Ottoman Empire and fostered reflections on ideas of modernization (Brophy 2016). In the 1920s Istanbul became home to some of the Central Asian intellectuals with strong intellectual ties to Kazan and other parts of Soviet Central Asia. They were the first group of Russian Muslims who left for Istanbul and formed the first phase of Turkistani emigration. In Istanbul they founded organizations and worked on their own publications (Kocaoglu 2000). Ideas were probably going back and forth.

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century Qing Xinjiang Islamic education was available in the traditional institutions of the *maktap*. These were neighbourhood schools established in a mosque or its surrounding facilities, and had a primarily oral religious curriculum consisting of Quran recitations. Besides this, there were Chinese schools, which were thought of as an early attempt at Sinicization, since their pedagogical style was based on the same contents as in China proper (Millward 2007). Unsatisfied with both alternatives and inspired by similar developments in the Ottoman Empire and in Central Asia, Russian Muslims attempted to modernize the Islamic education by prioritizing subjects like mathematics and new forms of modern knowledge. In promoting the ‘new (or phonetic) method’ (*usul-i jadid*) they not only tried to reform the *maktap* but also conveyed some form of social criticism. These educational reforms were at first widespread among the urban mercantile Tatar middle class in Russia (Khalid 1998), but with the interest of Tatars living in Xinjiang, who were connected to these reforms, new method schooling entered Xinjiang and a few families started experimenting with these new forms. Brophy (2016) describes in great detail how these schools were established in Xinjiang and mentions the Musabayevs, a family from the town Artush in the south, who moved to Ghulja in the north and established themselves there. The social environment assisted further experimenting with reformed schools. Among the first students of this unstable endeavour was a boy named Mesut Sabri Baykozi. Mesut Sabri²⁸ later studied in Istanbul and became an important figure in Xinjiang politics. A man from Zharkent in Russian Turkistan was his teacher. That locates Jadidism in Xinjiang in close connection to Tatar innovations. For one group of Uyghurs in Turkey exposure to ideas like Jadidism

²⁸ His daughter and granddaughter are still living in Turkey.

emerging in this political and social spheres shaped their political discourses. The colonial context of Turkistan shows that Uyghurs had to engage in the delicate field of political transformations that lies between imperial authorities and their own communities (Brophy 2016). One might argue that the Jadidist Chinese and Russian Muslims' programs for cultural shifts shared views about progress and civilization with their colonizers, but they surely wouldn't want to maintain colonial difference (Khalid, 2009). And within in the communities of Xinjiang new ideas were not always welcomed. I could observe similar discussion in the community of Uyghurs in Turkey, where religious ideas and ideas of the modernization of the Uyghur nation were clashing.

Republican China and Muslim Turkic Insurgencies

The Qing Empire, after decades of domestic rebellions and international invasion collapsed in 1911 with the beginning of the Xinhai revolution. In 1912 the Republic of China was officially proclaimed. Yang Zengxin became Governor of Xinjiang until political rivals murdered him in 1928. During the uncertain years of the early republic, affluent and well-travelled merchants sponsored the creation of new method schools in various cities in Xinjiang (Millward 2007). In this context the links between Xinjiang and Istanbul depended on individual efforts. In 1914 Kashgari reformers founded the Society for the Promotion of Education and in a radical step, invited to Kashgar a Turkish teacher from Istanbul (Brophy 2016). Millward writes, that Hüseyin Musabayev, the son of the family patriarch, sent a delegation to Istanbul to ask for a teacher from Mehmet Talat. Mehmet Talat²⁹ was Minister of Interior Affairs and with Enver Pasha and Djemal Pasha one of the three leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) (Kreiser 2008). Turkish Nationalism, pan-Turkism, and Turanism heavily influenced their ideology. Pan-Turkism was at that time popular in a small circle of intellectuals in Istanbul within which Russian Muslims were quite prominent (Zürcher 2004). Talat sent Ahmed Kemal from Rhodes³⁰ and according to the introductory words of Yusuf Gedikli to the memoirs of Ahmed Kemal, he was one of Talat's closest men. After meeting Ziya Gökalp, the prominent ideologue of the Young Turk period, he became a strong Turkish nationalist (*koyu bir Türkçü*) (Kemal Ilkul 1999).

²⁹ An Armenian assassinated him for his involvements in the Armenian Genocide in Berlin in 1921, where he was living after he had to flee the Ottoman Empire in 1918.

³⁰ In his memoirs he writes that he left Rhodes for Istanbul with the 'occupation' of the Italians (Ilkul 1999, 53).

Several of the Turks who came with Ahmed Kemal to Kashgar worked in other cities of Xinjiang as schoolteachers. Their existence not only evoked criticism from the local *ulema*, but also worried the British and Russians (Millward 2007). In 1914 a number of suspicious Turks, five of whom belonged to Enver Pasha's intelligence organization, traversed Kashgar. They had to leave in April 1915. In the same year the Russian Ambassador officially complained against the school, which was then shut down. Yang Zengxin prohibited foreigners from teaching in the province and expelled Ottoman subjects (Brophy 2016).³¹

In the Republican period from 1911 to 1949 military men, characterized as warlords, dominated Xinjiang (Forbes 1986,³² Jacobs 2016). Provoked by the dissatisfaction with the Chinese warlord government and the increasing intrusion of the Soviet Union in economic and political spheres, several rebellions inspired by Turkic nationalism stimulated Jadidist-educated men (Millward 2007). But, as Forbes (1984) argues, political factionalism also played an important role, given the continuities of disagreeing political loyalties. Areas in the east of Xinjiang stayed closer to the Chinese. The Taranchi population in the north was under Russian influence. Kashgar in the south was supposedly the stronghold of conservative Islamic traditionalists opposing Chinese rule and everything socialist. At the same time in Central Asia the antireligious and anti-Jadidist tendencies that came with Stalin's approach of 'Socialism in One Country' led to further emigration to Turkey (Kocaoglu 2000). However, many of the leaders of the coming rebellions and independence movements had connections with the reformist educational new schooling (Millward 2007, Brophy 2016).

Under the administration of Yang Zengxin's successor, Jin Shuren tension between the Chinese administration and native Turkic Muslim leaders increased. In 1930 Khoja Niyaz Haci led the Kumul uprising, based on a blend of various political ideas directed against administrative changes introduced by Jin Shuren. A military campaign led by well-trained Sheng Shicai suppressed the rebellion (Klimeš 2015). In southern Xinjiang a rebellion started in Khotan by Mehmet Emin Bughra and his brothers, advocating an independent Muslim republic. Mehmet Emin Bughra was the son of a local Emir and a member of the Islamic scholarly community, but also sympathetic to the reform ideas of the Jadidists (Millward

³¹ The Ottoman Turks lost their diplomatic protection, provided by Germany, after China joined the Allies and broke relations with Germany in 1917 (Millward 2007). Ahmed Kemal finally was repatriated from Shanghai to Istanbul via Germany (Kemal Ilkul 1999).

³² Forbes's study is the only book specialized in Xinjiang I know of that has been translated into Turkish (Doğu Türkistan'daki 'harp beyleri'. Doğu Türkistan'ın 1911-1949 arası siyasi tarihi). The translator is an Uyghur from Ghulja, who migrated to Kayseri in 1967 and to Germany in the 1970s. He held various positions in the Uyghur associations in Germany.

2007). After taking control in Khotan they sent Sabit Damolla, an Islamic scholar whom he had met on their way returning from Mecca, to Kashgar where he met with progressive Uyghurs, émigrés from Soviet Central Asia and Turkey and founded the Independence Association (Brophy 2016).³³

In 1932 Sheng Shicai replaced Jin Shuren. In his memoirs Isa Yusuf Alptekin (2010, 231) describes him as ‘a man of political ambitions, egotistical, and greedy with longstanding contact with the Russians’. Indeed, Sheng Shicai’s policy can be described as Soviet oriented. Soviet-trained Uyghurs worked for his provincial administration and territorial autonomy was out of question for him (Forbes 1984). But with the founding of the ‘Uyghur Enlightenment Association’ in 1934 he supported ethnic equality between national cultures within tightly drawn political limits to promote a common culture without barriers between nationalities, following a concept that came from the Soviet Union and anticipated the province’s official national categories (Brophy 2016). Based on the idea of fourteen separate nationalities in Xinjiang Sheng Shicai favoured and advocated the term *Uyghur*, but local intellectuals like Mehmet Emin Bughra opposed this in favour of the term *Turki* (Benson 1991).

First East Turkistan Republic

After a series of insurgencies it was in Kashgar that the short-lived (Islamic) Republic of Eastern Turkistan of 1933 and 1934 was declared (Forbes 1984). According to Brophy, the Independence Association announced the East Turkistan Republic (2016, 244). The declaration of the republic was a milestone for the developing Uyghur nationalism at that time and is of enormous importance for contemporary Uyghur nationalism in Turkey.

Sabit Damolla, according to Alptekin an ‘enlightened religious scholar’, became the prime minister and Khoja Niyaz Haji, ‘the leader of the preceding Kumul Rebellion’ in 1931, was elected president (2010, 277). And according to Isa Yusuf Alptekin ‘a few West Turkistanian brothers came from West Turkistan’ and served in the cabinet. He even mentions a few Turkish people (Türkiyeli) attending the ceremony of independence. The news of East Turkistan’s independence spread and newspapers in Turkey, Europe, America and China reported on it (2010, 277). For the first time the world witnessed an independent East Turkistan, as Uyghurs in Turkey repeatedly say.

For some Uyghur scholars the multinational configuration of this government as described by Alptekin marked a decisive change towards pan-Turkist politics in Kashgar, but the

³³ Millward calls it the ‘East Turkestan Independence Association’ (2007, 198).

composition of the cabinet showed continuities with former reform efforts of the Jadidists (Brophy 2016). Not everyone accepts this interpretation. At a conference in Istanbul in 2012 a group of ten Uyghur booed a scholar who argued that the outlook of the first republic was clearly not Islamic. A loud argument between this group in the audience and a few members (among them also Uyghur scholars) of the panel broke out. For the disagreeing group it should be clearly called Turkic-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkistan (Doğu Türkistan İslam Cumhuriyeti). On another occasion one group blamed the lack of religious consciousness mirrored in the historical narration of the first Republic as specifically non-Islamic and the strong emphasis on pan-Turkism for the Uyghur's current atrocious condition.

Furthermore there are a few Uyghurs who portray President Khoja Niyaz Hacı as a betrayer. A 'heroic patriot indeed, but he was an uneducated man and in 1934 without the knowledge of our government he signed an agreement with the Russians that resulted in disunity and the end of our Republic'. In this respect Brophy stresses one incident that I haven't heard of in Turkey. He describes a meeting with Soviet officials to which Khoja Niyaz was called and where his trustworthiness was tested. The Soviets wanted him to apprehend Sabit Damolla, he made his choice and 'rendered the prime minister up to his executioners' (2016, 244).

Albayrak'tan Gökbayrak'a selam olsun!

In their narration interviewees used a perennial theme to highlight the ties between the First East Turkistan Republic and Atatürk's Republican Turkey in order to get recognition as well as to position themselves into a much larger union of linguistically and ethnically similar states and join their ethnic kinsmen on the global map of politics outside the present boundaries. The description of the events right after the proclamation of the East Turkistan Republic goes that a telegraph was sent to Atatürk carrying the words 'Gökbayrak'tan Albayrak'a selam olsun' (Greetings from the Blue Flag to the Turkish Flag). The story varied depending on who told it, in one telling it was the Republic's Minister of Foreign Affairs, a man named Kasimcan Hacı who sent it from Peshawar. In a different telling, it was an intelligence officer sent by Atatürk who formulated these words from either Karachi or Mumbai. But in all of the tellings the answer of Atatürk was supposedly 'Albayrak'tan Gökbayrak'a selam olsun!' This way, as one interviewee said, 'our brothers in Turkey officially recognized the East Turkistan Republic and secured material and monetary help, just as sultans did'. I was curious and wanted to take a look at the telegraph, but I couldn't find it and the people I've asked haven't seen it either. Isa Yusuf Alptekin only mentions a letter that Khoja Niyaz had sent to the Turkish Government on different matter on 3

September 1933, two months before the East Turkistan Republic was announced (Alptekin 2010, 32).

According to a few narrations it was Atatürk's advice that made the Gökbayrak the official flag of East Turkistan, which is still used today, the dimensions of both flags being identical. There is disagreement not only among the Uyghurs in Turkey, but also among scholars about how Islamic the foundations of the Republic were. One Uyghur scholar reckons that the Republic was not founded on the reforming elements and nationalistic ideals of the Jadidist movement with loose support of some of the *ulema*.³⁴ With no tangible support from the population the Republic struggled to survive. The Soviet Union disapproved of the Republic and the Guomindang in Nanjing refused to recognize it. Sheng Shicai won control of Xinjiang with heavy economic and military support from the Soviet Union and the Republic's remaining political leaders were forced to leave Xinjiang. Mehmet Emin Bughra managed to get to India, from where he left for Afghanistan (Benson 1991). Isa Yusuf Alptekin met him in Afghanistan for the first time (Alptekin 2010, 386).

In the following years Sheng Shicai enforced some kind of Stalinism in Xinjiang. As Stalin purged Turkic and Muslim intellectuals in Central Asia, Sheng launched his own campaigns against pan-Turkists, nationalists and 'imperialist spies'. Accused of being a Japanese spy, Khoja Niyaz was arrested and executed (Millward 2007).

From 1942 onwards Nanjing changed its Xinjiang policy and announced campaigns to develop this region. The Nationalist government promoted migration of officials and their families to Xinjiang. After a thirty-year gap and a period of instability and foreign intervention central Chinese control under the Guomindang was restored. The instability had devastating economic effects. The closure of the Soviet border, the increase of fees for official exit papers affected Uyghur and Turkic businessmen and cut off pastoral agricultural producers especially in the north. The situation for Kazakh tribes in the north and the central government not willing to change the situation led to frequent raids on Han settlements. With further relocation of troops into Xinjiang the population was about to witness more revolts (Millward 2007).

³⁴ A comment he made in a private conversation in 2015.

Three District Revolution and the Second East Turkistan Republic

In November 1944, eleven years to the day after the Kashgar based East Turkistan Republic was established, Islamic scholar Ali Khan Töre declared the Turkistan Islam Government. This Soviet-assisted second East Turkistan Republic (ETR) directly challenged Guomintang authority throughout Xinjiang, even beyond the three north-western-most districts of the province that gave the revolution its name. The ETR's war against the Guomintang was fierce and hostilities broke out in various regions (Millward 2007).

Diplomatic activity between representatives of the independent three districts and the Chinese Government (with Chiang Kai-shek, leader of Republican China addressing the Moslems of Xinjiang directly) led to a peace agreement signed in 1946, leaving the ETR in control of Ili and the Chinese over most of the rest of Xinjiang and its capital Ürümqi (Benson 1991). In the meantime the more secular and pro-Soviet Ahmetjan Qasimi took over.³⁵ The Soviet-educated leadership of the ETR defended the anti-Guomintang rebellion on the primordial grounds of Uyghur identity and relegated wider Turkic ideas and the significance of Islam to the background (Brophy 2016).

In 1946 the ETR and the Guomintang factions finally settled negotiations and arrived at a coalition administration. With the establishment of the Coalition Government in Ürümqi Zhang Zhizhong, the chairman of the Xinjiang Provincial Coalition Government, implemented a pro-minority policy. He was considered to be incorruptible and independent from factional considerations. He recognized the province's ethnic composition and acknowledged Uyghur aspiration for a degree of self-determination (Millward 2007).

The Three Efendis

Soon afterwards Mesut Sabri Baykozi, Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin, collectively known as the Three Efendi, were about to grow into the role of new Uyghur politicians of the new Guomintang administration. Zhang, before coming to Ürümqi, consulted with the three Uyghurs who had been living in the capital Chongqing (Benson 1991). Mesut Sabri Baykozi had already been in Turkey, while Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa

³⁵ His son told me in Istanbul that Ali Han Töre was kidnapped and brought to the Soviet Union because he wouldn't apply the policy dictated by the Soviets.

Yusuf Alptekin had to leave the country not long after their appointment and live the rest of their lives in Turkey.

Mesut Sabri Baykozi

How did the Three Efendi develop in their political careers? Mesut Sabri Baykozi, was, as mentioned before, one of the first students who graduated from one of the first experiments with Jadidist schools in Ghulja. According to his daughter, Gültekin Baykozi Pehlivan (G. Baykozi Pehlivan 2014, pers. comm.), he was sent to study in Turkey in 1904 due to the absence of high schools in Ghulja. She writes that the Chinese administration neglected education in East Turkistan and uneducated teachers taught most of the children in madrasas. She connects this form of schooling to the high percentage of illiteracy among Turkic people in China, which makes it easier for the Chinese administration to rule them. After Mesut Sabri finished high school in Istanbul he studied medicine at the prestigious Imperial University, the Darülfünûn-u Şahâne, now known as Istanbul University, from where he graduated in 1914. According to his daughter's memoirs the outbreak of WWI made it very difficult to send him money and he had to return to East Turkistan, without being able to work in a hospital and finish his specialization. He settled in Ghulja, where he worked from his own surgery and opened a pharmacy adjacent to it. He was also involved in local education and opened Jadidist-based schools. Brophy mentions that he recruited Turkish POWs as teachers for his school in Ghulja (2016, 170).

Millward (2007) writes that Yang Zengxin arrested Mesut Sabri in 1924. Benson (1990) narrates that after his release he supported political change in Xinjiang and ran his school until 1927. In the tumult following the assassination of Yang Zengxin in 1928, during the Jin Shuren governorship, Mesut Sabri moved to Aksu where he was an active supporter of the first East Turkistan Republic until its destruction. Like lots of other politicians he had to flee Xinjiang and managed to get to British India and from there he found his way back to China. According to Millward, he returned to China in 1934 and joined the Guomindang (2007, 218). Under the Chinese Nationalists he held a number of relevant political positions. In 1936 he became a member of the Party's Central Executive Committee. He lectured at the Central Political Institute, was Professor of the Border Area Research Institute, and Deputy Director of the Chinese Islamic Association. From 1938 to 1940 he joined the People's Political Council and in 1942 he was one of two Muslims in the 36-member board of the State Council of the Republic of China. His merits earned him the trust of the Guomindang who saw him as a politician who could unite Xinjiang with the Chinese state, being someone recognized by

the population of Xinjiang for showing his concerns for his own people in the preceding decade (Benson 1991).

Mehmet Emin Bughra

Mehmet Emin Bughra, who had led the Khotan rebellion in 1933, was linked to the madrasas and secret societies of southern Xinjiang, but with ties to Jadidists. He was the Military Commander of the East Turkistan Republic, and with the annihilation of the East Turkistan Republic in 1934 he fled to India, where he was taken in custody. After his release he left for Afghanistan where he was part of the exiled Xinjiang community. As a participant of former rebellions and as an official of the Turkistani movement in Xinjiang he was certainly seen as a leading member of this group. In 1939 he met with Isa Yusuf Alptekin for the first time who was in Afghanistan with a Chinese delegation. It was Isa Yusuf Alptekin who convinced the Guomindang to provide help for Mehmet Emin Bughra to come back to China in order to strengthen Guomindang influence in Xinjiang. With the help of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in India Mehmet Emin Bughra arrived in Chongqing in 1943, where he became a Xinjiang representative within the National Assembly (Benson 1991, Alptekin 2010³⁶).

Together with Isa Yusuf Alptekin they ran the Altai Publishing House in Chongqing. They published three magazines called *Altai* and *Voice of Turkestan* and one newspaper called *Erk* (Freedom). In their publications they promoted the Turkic background of Xinjiang. After their arrival in Xinjiang they continued to publish *Freedom*, which was printed in the newly established Altai Press.

In his memoirs Isa Yusuf Alptekin describes how they were fighting for their rights and insisted on their national demands (millî taleplerimizde ısrar) even against Chiang Kai-shek. Both Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin demanded national autonomy (millî muhtariyet) in Xinjiang and claimed that the central government should recognize Xinjiang's Turkic Muslims as one of China's major nationalities (Alptekin 2010, 417). His pan-Turkic approach becomes clear in a dialogue Isa Yusuf Alptekin recalls: he said that if he becomes governor, 'I will go back to my native land and I will try to inoculate a national consciousness. There is no such thing as Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz or Turkmen. There are Turks. This country's name is not Xinjiang, it's Turkistan' (Alptekin 2010, 430).³⁷ Both of them were in strong favour of a Turkic autonomy in Xinjiang.

³⁶ See Alptekin (2010, 426–428) for a personal and detailed account of Mehmet Emin Bughra leaving India and arriving in China from Alptekin's perspective.

³⁷ 'Millî şuur aşılamaaya gayret edeceğim.'

Isa Yusuf Alptekin

Isa Yusuf Alptekin was a Uyghur from the town of Yenihisar in the Kashgar prefecture. Unlike Mesut Sabri Baykoz and Mehmet Emin Bughra, his education included substantial time in Chinese schools. His father wanted Isa Yusuf Alptekin to become a religious scholar, but under the pressure of the Chinese authorities he agreed to move him to a Chinese school. In 1926 Isa Yusuf Alptekin went to West Turkistan where he stayed for six years working as a translator at the Chinese consulates in Andican and Tashkent (Alptekin 2010).

In 1932 he went to China proper for the first time. Until 1937 he spent a few years in Nanjing and then he lived in Chongqing. In 1936, according to his memoirs, he was elected as a member of the Chinese Nationalist parliament (Alptekin 2010, 298).³⁸ In 1939 he travelled – because of financial constraints only with his Chinese translator – to a number of countries in order to gain support for the Chinese nationalists and against the Japanese invasion. During his trips to India, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan he met influential people and established contacts that would help him at a later stage of his political life when in exile and dedicated to the East Turkistan Cause. On this travels he also visited the West and East Turkistan foundations in India (Alptekin 2010).

Benson (1991) writes that he supported a branch of the Xinjiang Provincial Association to establish contact between the 1500 Uyghurs and 3000 Kazakhs in India with the Chinese central government, as well as the refugee community in Afghanistan. After his return to Chongqing he continued to work for the party and the government. It was there that he met Mehmet Emin Bughra again. The years 1945–46 saw a politically active Isa Yusuf in both the Guomindang and on the level of national politics. He became a delegate to the National Assembly in Nanjing and even met Chiang Kai-shek personally a few times (Benson 1991, Alptekin 2010).

³⁸ According to Benson (1991) and Millward (2007) he became a member in 1939.

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Figure 6. Isa Yusuf Alptekin (front row, sitting in the middle) visiting Uyghurs in Kashmir in 1939. (Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

Political Legacy

Zhang Zhizhong, the chairman of the government of Xinjiang brought these three Uyghurs as advisers to Ürümchi. They requested that the government follow the program of autonomy for minority regions, implementing Dr Sun Yat-sen's policy in Xinjiang. They furthermore asked that the central government establish Turki as the language of instruction to be used in Xinjiang schools. Personal rights, such as freedom of religion, of speech, of assembly, and publication in the native tongue should be guaranteed (Millward 2007, Alptekin 2010). According to Isa's memoirs, Mehmet and Mesut and himself were invited by Chiang Kai-shek to express their ideas of political solution for Xinjiang, although without any results (Alptekin 2010). But he also describes how Zhang Zhizhong ensured their return to Xinjiang to help to resolve the differences between the central government and the representatives of the Second East Turkistan Republic. Given permission to return to Xinjiang, the three men finally came back to their native province in October 1945. They first went to Ürümchi where they met with a delegation from Ili. Mesut Sabri Baykozi, according to Alptekin, being from Ili, saw a lot of respect from the representatives of the East Turkistan Republic (2010).

The negotiations between ETR and the Guomindang lasted for months and in 1946 Zhang Zhizhong headed a coalition administration, with Ahmetjan Kasimi being the vice-chairman.

In 1947 Mesut Sabri became the first native born governor of Xinjiang. Each of Xinjiang's ten districts, including the three northern districts would get a portion of ministers. Uyghur and Kazakh, along with Chinese would be the official languages and education would be in the native languages. But Mesut Sabri's appointment was not only met positively. Violent confrontation between Chinese troops and Muslims surfaced. Isa Yusuf Alptekin mentions contesting views among the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Although they are all Turkistanis, some called them pro-Chinese, pan-Turkist and pan-Islamist: by contrast, 'for us it was an honor to be pan-Turkist or pan-Islamist', as he states in his memoirs. As a reaction he describes how people from Ili were called 'Red Tails' (kıızıl kuyruklar) (Alptekin 2010, 465).

The Guomindang offered these three politicians the best option to reunite and reconstruct Xinjiang (Alptekin 2010). They used their political careers within the framework of equality developed by Sun Yat-sen to advance Uyghur autonomy in Xinjiang. While doing so they were also working on their socio-political ideas about what being Turkic meant (Alptekin 2010). Their publication *Erk* sought to underline a linguistic unity among the Turks of Central Asia and heavily promoted the principles of Turkism (Alptekin 2010). But there were still differences in the perception of questions of history and identity between the ETR leadership and the Guomindang Uyghurs. As Brophy puts it, 'The GMD Uyghurs insisted on the historical accuracy of their Turkist position and highlighted the errors in the simplistic primordial view of the Uyghur nation that the ETR propounded' (2016, 270).

The decisive difference stemmed from two different genealogies of views of the nation. One view of the Uyghur nation was developed within the Soviet Union and was articulated with the Soviet nationality project. The other stream referred to a Turkic Islamic past. Both groups put different weight on their approach (Brophy 2016). For Alptekin there is one Turkish nation and Uyghurs are one branch or tribe of it (Alptekin 2010). But for the ETR supporters one way of seeing the Uyghurs was as one nation among the Turkish race, supporting the idea of calling this region Uyghuristan based on the existence of Uyghurs in this region for a long time (Brophy 2016). Discussions in Turkey developed along similar fault lines, with the Kemalists supporting the idea of a Turkish race (Türk ırkı) and its relation to Turkic ethnic groups. These ruptures and genealogical question are still seen among the Uyghurs in Turkey.

With Mesut Sabri Baykozi being the new Chairman, Mehmet Emin Bughra was Minister of Reconstruction and Isa Yusuf Alptekin was the Secretary-General of the Coalition Government. With their writing and publishing activities, Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin continued to outline their ideas of a pan-Turkic inspired Turki nationalism opposing a subdivision based on the Soviet model of Turkic groups in Xinjiang. They also

supported the full autonomy of East Turkistan within a Chinese state (Benson 1991, Millward 2007). These ideas were threatening from a Soviet perspective. Mesut Sabri also experienced political headwind from various regions, as some of the Uyghurs in the south saw in him ‘a corrupt stooge of the most thuggish GMD elements’ (Millward 2007, 222).

In 1947 Soviet-educated Ahmetjan Kasimi, who was a pre-eminent figure of the ETR, returned from Ürümchi to Ghulja. Although officially still being the Vice-Chairman of the Provincial Government he was basically Chairman of the ETR. The Coalition Government disintegrated. The Three Districts benefited from trade with the Soviet Union and renewed Soviet investment in the region. With other steps in education, health and agricultural developments the ETR regime became popular. The GMD regime in Ürümchi had to cope with ethnic tensions and economic hardships (Millward 2007). In 1948³⁹ Nanjing dismissed Mesut Sabri and replaced him with Burhan Shahidi, a Kazan born Tatar. Isa Yusuf Alptekin recalls him in his memoirs as a man of the Russians and describes how he had been threatened by him to stop his anti-Russian propaganda (Alptekin 2010). He also writes how he was replaced on the same day because, as it was explained to him, the policy they were following was too anti-Russian. This was dangerous for Xinjiang’s future. According to Alptekin (2010, 536), Mehmet Emin Bughra was offered the position of vice-chairman of the provincial government. The Three Efendis agreed that Mehmet Emin Bughra accept in order to have some influence.

Burhan’s administration managed the transition from GMD to CCP rule. Throughout most of 1949 the Nationalist government suffered big military losses, retreating from the Communist troops. Burhan and Zhang encouraged GMD forces in Xinjiang to surrender, but Chiang Kai-shek ordered them to fight the Communists. The Soviet Union offered help if Xinjiang was declared an independent republic. The garrison commander Tao Zhiyue enabled those who wanted to leave to get out of Xinjiang. Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin fled (Millward 2007). A life in exile was awaiting them. It wasn’t clear at that time that they would end up in Turkey. Mesut Sabri Baykozi stayed behind. According to Benson he was arrested and executed in April 1951 (1991). A different account (Vahidi et al. 1991) has it that he died 1952 in his own home in Ürümchi where he was kept because of his weak health.

In late 1949 the Chinese Communist Party’s People’s Liberation Army took control of Ürümchi. Ideas of a Soviet-backed Uyghuristan as hoped for by the ETR leadership as well as

³⁹ According to Alptekin it happened on 17 July (2010, 536). Millward (2007) instead dates it in January 1949.

hopes for a Turkistan within in the GMD government as imagined by Mesut Sabri, Mehmet Emin and Isa Yusuf Alptekin had to be buried.

In August 1949 a delegation of the former ETR was on its way to attend a meeting in Beijing. Mao invited representatives of non-communist parties to join the National People's Consultative Conference in Beijing. Five representatives from northern Xinjiang travelled to Almaty from where they were about to fly to Beijing. After the PLA had started to control northern Xinjiang, in December the Chinese authorities released the news that the plane had crashed near Lake Baikal in Siberia with no survivors (Millward 2007).

The Three Efendis are still an important feature of Uyghur nationalism in Turkey and commemorations in their name are still held in Istanbul.

In January 2015 I talked to a political activist in his late forties at the World Uyghur Congress in Munich.⁴⁰ He came to Germany in the late 1990s after he had spent a few years in Turkey. In our conversation he also summarized his perception of the role of the Three Efendis:

back in the days, the Three Efendis and their supporters would use their publications to spread their ideas about Islam, nationalism and Turkism. The newspaper *Erk* played a significant role in the awakening of patriotism and nationalism of the people of East Turkistan. The publications were also very important in the emergence of a certain number of intellectuals who grew up with a consciousness of nationalism and patriotism. These intellectuals, later on in their lives played important roles in 1980s in the struggle for democracy for East Turkistan. The seeds of Turkism and nationalism planted by the Three Efendis in the 1930s and 1940s started to come out in the 1980s. The strong influence of the Three Efendis on the East Turkistan Democratic Youth is a fact.

It is difficult to evaluate the Three Efendi's influence. A sixty-five year old man, who arrived in Kayseri with his family in 1965, told me that had never heard the name Isa Yusuf Alptekin in Xinjiang, since it was forbidden to mention him. But this might have changed throughout the following decades and the man in Munich in his late forties might have had access to a different knowledge. A few times Uyghurs in Turkey mentioned how they managed to smuggle 'anti-Chinese propaganda' into China. He might have been exposed to this material produced in Turkey by the Uyghurs who left in 1949.

⁴⁰ The interviewee asked me to not disclose his name.

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Figure 7. Invitation to a two day Three Efendi commemoration event held in Istanbul in 2005.

Conclusion

Most of my interviewees, political activists and Uyghur academics narrated the Uyghur history as a concise and coherent history of East Turkistan (Doğu Türkistan Tarihi). The historiography is based on the history of a region with the emphasis on the East Turkistanis being the only autochthonous group, completely neglecting Chinese (and Russian) existence and influences. The interviewees accentuated the antiquity of the East Turkistanis as having existed since time immemorial. They rejected everything Chinese, as being the cause for dark periods in the history of East Turkistan and as being a colonial power. This disapproval is accompanied by the affirmation of belonging to the Turkic world. This primordialism was highlighted through a genealogy based on blood (Türk kanı) making ‘all Turks brothers’ based on ‘linguistic, cultural and religious ties’. In their narrations Big Turkistan is the main reference with a special emphasis on Turkey. At conferences and meetings I could observe how the degree of Islam has been in the centre of discussions. For all of my interviewees Islam is an unquestionable central ‘feature of their identity’, but the extent of the importance of Islam in their political activism as well as the historiography is disputed. The discussions around Yakup Beg and the First East Turkistan Republic has shown that there is disunity on how to narrate East Turkistan historiography to an extent that led to fierce political debates on how to position the East Turkistan Cause.

But the strong emphasis of East Turkistan history in a pan-Turkic context is not only challenged by people who prefer a stronger religious context, incorporating other ethnic groups, but also by a small group that rather discuss the East Turkistan history on more specific ethnic grounds. As I will show in Chapter IV, there are discussions about whether East Turkistan should be called Uyghuristan.

Especially the two East Turkistan Republics play major roles in the East Turkistan nationalism in Turkey, with the Three Efendis (and notably Isa Yusuf Alptekin) dominating the narrations. They are very prominent in Turkey because very few members of the community knew them and kept their legacy for the East Turkistanis in Turkey alive. One of the three, Isa Yusuf Alptekin, his legacy and the first East Turkistan emigrants will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter II

East Turkistani Emigration and Finding a Host Country

This chapter explores the first East Turkistani mass emigration to Turkey and two of its chief protagonists.⁴¹ Two prominent political figures from Xinjiang shaped the political discourses of the Uyghur community: Mehmet Emin Bughra, often perceived as the intellectual mastermind; and Isa Yusuf Alptekin, described as the man of action. Given his greater significance, here I dedicate more space to Isa Yusuf Alptekin and his role in leading the Uyghur community in Turkey. To understand his endeavours in Turkey I examine his life prior to his emigration by taking a close look at six years in West Turkistan that left an indelible mark on his biography and political thinking. I argue that the ideas he acquired there shaped him and the direction of the discourses of the community in Turkey.

When using Isa Yusuf Alptekin's biographies in this chapter, I am aware of the fact that his personal narrative mediates his subjective involvement in past events (Ochs and Capps 1996). The recordings of interviews for the two volumes of his biography started in 1980, so his narrated self and his version of historical facts that are transmitted to his reader reflects his perspective of that time.⁴² And of course, he reflects on certain events from the particular perspective of that time by organising his experience along a temporal horizon that connects past and present and by his strategies of self-narration. I am looking at his narration as one way in which he and his followers referred to his biographies, rather than using it as a stand-in for history itself.

Furthermore, I analyse the decision-making processes of East Turkistanis migrating from China as the People's Liberation Army approached Ürümchi 1949. Many narrated the experiences that occurred during this flight as very traumatic. I discuss how individuals and groups differ in the way they experience, process and remember events. The distress emerging

⁴¹ I focus mainly on my interviews and the written or visual material provided by East Turkistanis. On earlier migration see also Godfrey Lias's book *Kazak Exodus. A Nation's Flight to Freedom* (1956, translated into Turkish in 1973 entitled *Göç*), and Halife Altay's *Anayurttan Anadolu'ya* (1981). Svanberg (1989) provided an anthropological study on Kazakh refugees in Turkey.

⁴² The first edition was initially published in 1985 (Alptekin & Taşçı 1985) and re-printed in 2010, edited by Ömer Kul, a Turkish academic who became Secretary General of the Doğu Türkistan Vakfı in 2014.

from a traumatic experience stems not only from the event as such, but also from the responses attributed to and the meaning ascribed to the experience (Erikson 1995, Garland 1998). The event that may cause a trauma response must be differentiated from the personal response to it and its narration. The emigration from Xinjiang affected individuals in different ways. Some events, regardless of how insignificant they might seem for some, will be perceived as of major importance for others. Lastly, I present some findings considering the East Turkistanis' search for a host country after their arrival in India. In both contexts I introduce the narrations of less prominent figures as well.

In order to gain an understanding of how Isa Yusuf Alptekin became so prominent among the Uyghurs in Turkey, I address the question of how his political authority was legitimized. I show how his efforts to find a country that would accept the East Turkistanis and his resumption of political activism in Turkey corresponds with a time when renewed pan-Turkic ideas enjoyed a resurgence after the decline in popularity in the first two decades of the Republic of Turkey (Landau 1995). In the 1950s the 'Outside Turks' (Dış Türkler) became a concern for pan-Turkic groups in Turkey, who discovered the issue of the Outside Turks under the 'communist yoke.' In the eyes of anti-Communist groups in Turkey, the arrival of the first East Turkistanis in 1952 meant the arrival of new allies who supposedly had first-hand experience of communism and who were legitimately qualified to promote anti-communist sentiment. Right wing and pan-Turkic groups embraced the East Turkistanis and also gave them an intellectual refuge.

I use the term East Turkistani to reflect the usage by Isa Yusuf Alptekin and the self-ascription of my interviewees. When writing about efforts to find a country for the people who left Xinjiang, Isa Yusuf Alptekin and his sons used the term East Turkistani (Doğu Türkistanlı). Generally speaking Alptekin did not favour ethnic ascriptions due to his pan-Turkic approach. In addition, most of my interviewees, especially from the group who left in 1949, called themselves Doğu Türkistanlı, based on the territory and less on specific ethnic grounds. When introducing themselves to me, they would tell me their name and say, 'Doğu Türkistanlıyım'.

Longing for an Idealist Leader: Remembering and Imagining

The auditorium of Istanbul University's Congress Centrum, that has a capacity for more than 420 people, was still more than half-full after a long day of scholarly presentations from Turkish and Uyghur academics and of personal memoirs from companions of Isa Yusuf Alptekin. The majority of the speakers had met him when he was still alive. For some of the Uyghur academics he was a 'mentor', for others, like his pan-Turkic fellow campaigners, he

was ‘part of the history of Central Asia’. Twenty years after his death the one-day International Isa Yusuf Alptekin Commemoration Symposium in December 2015 attracted a number of people interested in a range of topics covering Alptekin’s life and political work.

The final speaker was about to deliver his presentation entitled ‘Television Portrait of a Great Idealist’. The presentation was based on a series of meetings with Isa Yusuf Alptekin conducted in 1989 in order to prepare biographical documentaries on political figures of Turkey for the Turkish Radio and Television Corporation. The speaker had visited him in his own home (a place the speaker described as a ‘simple and modest working-class home’) and drawing from his observations he talked about his personality as well as his qualities as a political leader. His observations reflected similar descriptions I had heard from other people, but his was a condensed and mythologizing version of Isa Yusuf Alptekin, characterized as a monument of political self-sacrifice (fedakarlık) who gave everything for the East Turkistan Cause and its perpetual narration: he was ‘a great idealist’ as he called him numerous times.

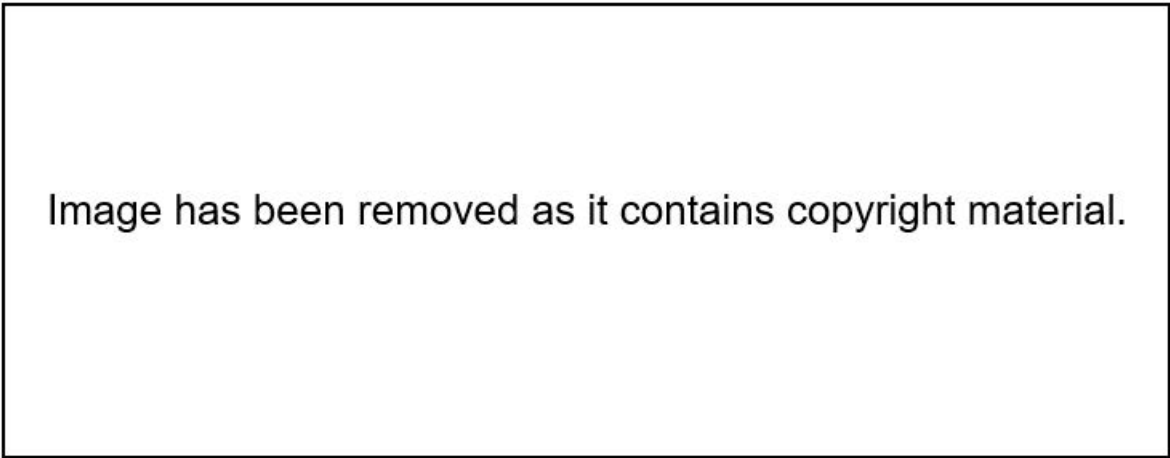


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Figure 8. Programme of the 2015 Isa Yusuf Alptekin Symposium.

The speaker spotted Erkin Alptekin in the audience who had come from Germany to attend the commemoration, and said, looking at him, that his father was ‘a leader that even neglected his family over complete commitment for the Cause. That’s real devotion and that’s what the Uyghurs are unfortunately lacking today.’ Then wild applause started, led by Erkin Alptekin.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin is clearly an important person still. The Uyghurs remember him frequently and celebrate his legacy on different occasions. Although he worked for the Guomindang Government in Xinjiang for only several years and spent most of his life outside of Xinjiang, his role is often narrated as if he had crucial political positions in the years prior to the institution of the communist-led People’s Republic of China. Most of my interviewees mentioned that Isa Yusuf played a major role in Uyghur politics, basing their narration on his minor roles in both of the East Turkistan Republics. The fact that he was educated at Chinese schools is hardly mentioned: when it was, it was to remark that ‘he saw the real face of the Chinese and he really knew them because he spoke their language.’ Interviewees often called him the only ‘genuine person of the East Turkistan Cause up to this day’ (*bugüne kadar tek gerçek dava adamıydı*). Trust in his exemplary qualities is high among the Uyghurs in Turkey, but as within any political group, there are also critical voices that question both his role in Nationalist China and in exile.

The commemoration meeting which celebrated one of the ‘Three Efendis’ in 2015, more than sixty years after the arrival of the first post-1949 migrants of Uyghurs in Turkey, revealed a number of perceptions of the current situation of Uyghurs in Turkey and its contextualization in the past, the present and in a potential future. Many Uyghurs do not only remember (and imagine) a glorious past, but they also imagine the future based on their experiences in China and Turkey. This is an imagination that to a large extent is judged against Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s political legacy as perceived by the Uyghurs. As Casey writes in his phenomenological study on memory, remembering and imagining are alternative but complementary processes of perception. They are also ‘comparable modes of operation (for example, imagining or remembering that something is the case; imagining or remembering how to do something)’ (Casey 2000, IX). The perception of the Uyghurs in Turkey of a certain past that is concentrated around Isa Yusuf Alptekin has a specific content, imagining a common glorious national past with independent East Turkistan Republics and a potentially bright future, which will commence as soon as they find a person with Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s qualities: a leader that could unite and guide the Uyghurs to liberation from the Chinese. These particular processes of remembering and imagining are based on the decisive spatio-temporal frame of the last sixty years of Uyghur existence in Turkey, antecedent events and narrations of Uyghur historiography. During my fieldwork I met only a handful of people

who didn't share this admiration for Isa Yusuf Alptekin. Just as at the commemoration, he is still a central, somewhat mythologized political figure of the Uyghurs in Turkey. Two decades is a good time frame for mythology to brew. Isa Yusuf Alptekin and his ideas, narrated, modified and updated, live on with these acts of remembrance and in the perception of his admirers. How and when did Alptekin started to stand out from the Three Efendis?

Dava adamları: Complementary Men of the East Turkistan Cause

Two of the Three Efendis made it to Turkey. In Chapter 1 I mentioned the fate of Mesut Sabri Baykozi in Xinjiang, the third Effendi whose photographs also hang on the walls of foundations and associations in Istanbul and Kayseri and in the World Uyghur Congress in Munich. He serves as an example of Turkish–East Turkistan relations, important in emphasizing the ‘brotherhood as well as the strong and historical connection between Turkey and East Turkistan. He brought new ideas of schooling from Turkey and showed us how great and strong the Turkish world is’, as one interviewee said. He is remembered as part of the Three Efendis, but his importance for the Uyghurs in Turkey is much less significant than that of Mehmet Emin Bughra or Isa Yusuf Alptekin.

The Intellectual Mastermind

By contrast, Mehmet Emin Bughra, who came to Turkey in 1951 and gained Turkish citizenship in 1955, played an active role in the East Turkistan Cause, and his work is considered by Uyghurs today as a ‘complementary intellectual contribution to Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s pragmatic political activism’.⁴³ Although he is not as prominent and visible as Isa Yusuf Alptekin, his work as a scholar, intellectual and man of letters is considered to be of great value by activists and scholars alike. His participation, as mentioned in Chapter I, in the First East Turkistan Republic added to his authority.

His early death in Ankara in 1965 after a sudden illness cut short Mehmet Emin Bughra’s career. Despite this, in the perception of Uyghurs in Turkey he is seen as the intellectual mastermind (fikir adamı) behind the East Turkistan Cause, the person who ‘feeds it with the necessary historic and intellectual foundation’. Yet we see that he also ‘vigorously participated in political actions’ during his lifetime (Shimizu Yuriko 2012, 18). He presented at conferences and spoke on a number of occasions on the East Turkistan Cause and Chinese colonization. His role as a founding member of the Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Derneği

⁴³ The quotes, unless stated otherwise, are from various interviews with Uyghur men, conducted in 2015. The information on his life is based on material provided by Yunus Bughra.

(Association for Eastern Turkistan Immigrants), established in 1960 in Istanbul, was of major importance. He published articles in newspapers and periodicals of the Turkistanis in Turkey. He was also one of the editors of the journal *Türkistan. İlmî, içtimaî, iktisadî ve kültürel aylık dergidir* (*Turkistan: a Scholarly, Social, Economic and Cultural Monthly*), published in Istanbul during 1953 with a clear pan-Turkic objective. The monthly *Türkistan Sesi* (The Voice of Turkistan) succeeded *Türkistan* and was published by Mehmet Emin Bughra in Ankara in the years 1956–57. The journal's political leitmotif was independence for Turkistan with the idea of gaining support for the cause from Muslims all over the world. The emphasis was also on Turkic cooperation, stating that all Turkic groups must unite and work together against Soviet and Chinese communism (Landau 1995, 124–125). One of his most important work is his monograph *Sharqî Turkistân Tārīkhî* (*The History of Eastern Turkistan*), written while he was in Kabul after he had to leave Xinjiang, completed in 1940 and published with great delay in 1947 in Kashmir due to financial problems (Shimizu Yuriko 2016).⁴⁴ I have seen copies of the latest 1998 edition, published in modern Uyghur in Ankara, on the bookshelves of many households of politically interested Uyghurs in Turkey.⁴⁵

‘We are doing it for the younger generation of Uyghurs in Turkey and for Turks who don’t know who Mehmet Emin Bughra is and for those who can’t read the Uyghur script in order to get them to read this book’, said the editor-in-chief of the *Gökbayrak* magazine when I was in their office, a room at the association in Kayseri, during their weekly meeting. They planned to publish the whole of *The History of Eastern Turkistan* in Turkish in their magazine, a few pages every month over a long time span. His statement implies that some Uyghurs didn’t know Bughra and that many younger Uyghurs in Turkey couldn’t read the 1998 edition published in modern-day Uyghur. I can partly confirm his statement. During my fieldwork when younger Uyghurs talked about their elders (büyüklerimiz), they would always mention Isa Yusuf Alptekin, whereas Mehmet Emin Bughra did not always appear in their narration. He was presented and described as a man of ideas and words. ‘Isa Yusuf Alptekin was the doer and Mehmet Emin Bughra the thinker—both equally important, but not equally present’, as one Uyghur in his mid-thirties summarized. The fact that Isa Yusuf Alptekin made it possible for Mehmet Emin Bughra to return to Xinjiang in 1943 in order to participate in

⁴⁴ According to both Shimizu Yuriko (2016, XXI) and to Yunus Bughra (personal communication) the publication was also delayed due to disputes over its content. The Uyghurs in Kashmir who financially supported the publication were unhappy with how some of the political figures were depicted in this account and wanted these sections to be changed.

⁴⁵ For more information on Mehmet Emin Bughra as an Uyghur intellectual, his scholarly work that has mostly been written in the period before 1950 and on various versions of his *The History of East Turkistan* see Shimizu Yuriko (2012, 2014 and 2016).

politics underlines his reputation as a person who ‘can achieve things’. Yet going through the material provided by the Bughra family in Turkey we encounter an equally industrious activist. Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s life outlasted the second Efendi’s career by thirty years, making him more prominent. In addition to that, Arslan and Erkin Alptekin, his sons, have been politically active, frequently publishing and in constant contact with the Uyghur communities all over the world, making it easier to spread and maintain his legacy. Mehmet Emin Bughra’s daughter Fatima and her husband Yunus Bughra, unlike the children of Isa Yusuf Alptekin, did not participate in political activities in Turkey, but instead were involved in academic research on his body of work.⁴⁶

Despite his relative obscurity, the life and work of Mehmet Emin Bughra has been commemorated in Turkey, either as one of the Three Efendis or in meetings dedicated to his scholarly output. On 7 October 2015 a symposium was organized in order to discuss his work. His literary importance was emphasized, as were his abilities in generating academic ideas, but none of the presenters characterized him as a charismatic leader.

Image has been removed as it contains copyright material.

Figure 9. Isa Yusuf Alptekin (first left) and Mehmet Emin Bughra (second right), according to my interviewee talking to international journalists in Turkey, probably late 1950s. (Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

⁴⁶ See the close collaboration with Shimizu Yuriko (2012, 2014 and 2016). During my fieldwork they were very helpful and responded to all of my requests and questions.

The Restless Performer

In the following section I discuss Isa Yusuf Alptekin's role in the political life of the Uyghur community in Turkey. But what is also of importance is the relational aspect of a leader, in particular with those who perceive him as a leader. One of the participants of the Isa Yusuf Alptekin Symposium said that one couldn't just become a leader; leaders are born (lider olunmaz, doğulur!). With Max Weber, we can say that charismatic authority disintegrates if it is not recognized. In this section I use Weber's ideas on leadership and charismatic authority (1968) to frame a discussion of Isa Yusuf Alptekin's political authority. In both, their presentations and in my interviews, people mentioned his authority that in their perception constituted him as a natural born leader. As I show below, Uyghurs' addressing and approving of his traditional, legal and charismatic authority indicates that he was affirmed (by most of them) as the leader of the Uyghurs in Turkey, based on the perceived 'exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him' (Weber 1968). As informants repeatedly said,

not everybody can become a leader, leaders are born, he did so much for us, no other Uyghur person could have achieved this. Most of his successors are failures, they were, unlike him, only interested in their own fame, not in the East Turkistan Cause itself.

In the eyes of many Uyghurs in Turkey, Isa Yusuf Alptekin constantly proved his charismatic authority and authenticity throughout his lifetime. It is not that the trust in the charismatic person is only connected to followers' perceptions of the person as proving himself, we can also say as Max Weber has, that 'pure charisma does not know any "legitimacy" other than that flowing from personal strength' (1968, 22).

Isa Yusuf Alptekin's exemplary qualities made him a charismatically qualified leader and he gained the personal trust of Uyghurs to that extent that his qualities were praised for all the sacrifices it takes to become a national hero and leader. But what historically and geographically distinct conditions contributed to his formation?

Rites de Passage in West Turkistan

If we go back to his years in China and Central Asia we recall that he was mostly educated in Chinese schools, but spent six years in West Turkistan working at the Chinese consulates, a period that shaped his political ideas and his perception of East Turkistan and could be called his formative years. The temporal conditions of character formation have to be taken into consideration. It is in West Turkistan that Alptekin acquired crucial knowledge about the

‘Chinese enslavement’ of East Turkistan and about Russian⁴⁷ imperialism in the Muslim Turkic sphere of Central Asia and the Caucasus. ‘When I went to West Turkistan I was a miscognizant person that for a diverse range of reasons was deprived of any knowledge about my country’s past, history and its current condition’ (Alptekin 2010, 78). There a revelation defined by its relation to others (Chinese, Russians, but also his West Turkistan fellow men) marked a new beginning. The six years he spent in West Turkistan entailed pivotal moments for the further development of his political ideas. In his words, by meeting nationalists from West and East Turkistan,

I gained an enlightened understanding that kept me from getting used to and even internalizing the Chinese oppression, and from becoming an instrument for the Chinese, as well as falling into the trap of Communism. I obtained information about my country’s glorious past, East Turkistan’s free and sovereign periods. Furthermore I got to know about the Chinese invasions that East Turkistan suffered from and the national riots that erupted against the Chinese policy of annihilation. I found out about the Chinese massacres that followed the national uprisings. (Alptekin 2010, 78)

Isa Yusuf describes how he imbibed an entirely Turkic nationalist outlook through the influence of Jadids. In his biography he constructed the narration at times as if Jadidist thinking goes hand in hand with anti-Chinese resentments, although Jadidists weren’t involved in anti-Chinese actions. In one of my interviews with his son Arslan Alptekin (1940–2011), he recalls that his father used to mention that he met with the ideas of Jadidism during this stay and how important those years were to him. In his memoirs Isa Yusuf Alptekin states that he came across books that had been published in Turkey and distributed under-the-counter in West Turkistan by Tatars. He underlines that these ideas had a big influence on him. In Arslan’s recollection of his father’s interpretation of these years, he says that his father at that point still saw China to be the lesser evil compared to Soviet Russia, which had already subjugated most of the Turkic Muslim world in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Isa Yusuf Alptekin mentions that new and modern ideas that came to East Turkistan couldn’t really become widespread and popular (2010). In this context Arslan Alptekin recalls that his father was always very impressed by ideas of a ‘modern and proper education’ in a Jadidist sense. As Landau remarks, Tatar intellectuals saw questions of education and the publishing of nationalist propaganda as focal issues (Landau 1995), and Isa Yusuf Alptekin discussed these issues with Tatars and other intellectuals while in West Turkistan.

⁴⁷ Isa Yusuf’s usage of the words ‘Russian’ and ‘Soviets’ seems to be a bit arbitrary. I have used it according to the original text.

In our interviews, talking about the ‘backwardness (geri kalmışlık) of the Uyghur people’, Arslan Alptekin became very critical of the Yakup Beg period, saying (quoting his father), ‘that there were lots of classes in madrasas, but no real science, no real education’. In Arslan’s opinion, his father would have agreed with the statement that Yakup Beg did a lot of damage to East Turkistan, firstly, for educational reasons, and secondly through the ties (and references like the military help from the Ottoman, the Khutba read and coins minted in the name of the Ottoman Sultan), that were established with the Ottoman Empire, at that time at war with Russia. These relations only increased the pressure of foreign powers on East Turkistan in order to repel any Turkish influence (Alptekin 2010). That’s why the East Turkistan Cause, and here Arslan reflects his father’s view, ‘should be collaborating with powerful and different states, like the United States’ implying that Turkey was not strong enough. In Arslan’s words, his father also tried to fight conservatism (muhafazakârlık), referring to Yakup Beg’s period in East Turkistan, in order to install a national consciousness. In the practice of pan-Turkists of Central Asia, their modern idea of education in order to foster a Turkic awareness was at the same time directed against the classic madrasa education, mostly held in Arabic.

I mentioned Alptekin’s ideas on Turkish nationalism in Chapter I, but I haven’t come across such a clear statement concerning the Yakup Beg period in Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s own work. On the contrary, in the second edition of his book *East Turkistan Cause* published in 1992, he is very affirmative of the Yakup Beg period. The regime is historically contextualized as a liberation movement against the second Qing invasion. He even mentions in one footnote how his grandfather was part of an army of 80,000 soldiers that Yakup Beg formed with men who came from Turkey and with the help of local teacher (Alptekin 1992, 126). But we have to consider the audience at that point. In this book, first published in Turkey in 1981, he writes about his ideas of a freedom movement that is legitimized through the antiquity of East Turkistan, but unfortunately has been completely neglected in Turkey (1992, Preface). He addresses the Turkish nation in this publication, trying to draw a coherent picture of rebellions in East Turkistan as united movements supported by all the people of East Turkistan with the goal of making the Chinese withdraw (Alptekin 1992).

But just a few years earlier in his 1974 publication *Doğu Türkistan İnsanlıktan Yardım İstiyor* (*East Turkistan Expects Help from Humankind*),⁴⁸ Alptekin formulated his disappointment on a broader level. He writes that to become a successful liberation movement, a national

⁴⁸ Translation provided by the publisher on the title page.

awakening has to be born (milli bir uyanışın doğması) and that this had to be done through schooling. Unfortunately this has been neglected in East Turkistan even by East Turkistanis.⁴⁹ A second crucial condition is the help and guardianship of other free countries. But it is a 'tragic picture', he writes, that 'the Turkish nation (Türk Milleti), the founder of great civilizations', had not received any help from any other countries of the world, and that includes the Muslim world (Alptekin 1974, 10). It is clear that his wording of *Türk Milleti* in this context covers the Turkic groups of West and East Turkistan; furthermore he sees it as a generic term for all the Turkic groups in Central Asia, the Caucasus, Siberia and the Republic of Turkey. But a few paragraphs later, perhaps to exempt Turks from the Kemalist Republic and to soften his criticism with gratitude, he writes that it is 'our national obligation to thank the Turkish government and our Turkish brothers' (1974, 10).

The awakening of a national consciousness through proper education was one of Isa Yusuf Alptekin's major concerns. When he first went to West Turkistan in 1926 he realized that living there were a few hundred thousand East Turkistan immigrants (muhacir). Some of them became citizens of Russia and others kept their Chinese citizenship in order to not lose their connection with their homeland. He recalls how he collected information by talking to the people from East Turkistan and listening to their sorrows. Most of them, according to Isa Yusuf, wanted the Chinese to leave and the Russians to stay out of politics in East Turkistan. East Turkistan should attain independence. According to Isa Yusuf their greatest fear was that the Russians would help East Turkistan in order to increase their own influence and install a puppet government. He also mentions another group who was thinking of seeking the help of the Russians to get rid of the Chinese and then throw the Russians out of East Turkistan (Alptekin 2010).

But he also remembers that while being in Andijan the fact that he was working for the Chinese consulate made pan-Turkists and nationalists distrust him. They were afraid that he would report them to the Chinese and stayed away from him. But he could understand them, as he writes in his memoirs, since they haven't seen any real nationalism emerge yet. But he knew that 'one day they will get to know me and with great patience and understanding I was waiting for that day, because I was sure that they will collaborate with me' (Alptekin 2010, 76). This day wasn't far away and in his narration Isa Yusuf proved that he was a sincere nationalist and patriot. From then on they met from time to time and he describes how they started to have expectations from him concerning the future of East Turkistan. Within these

⁴⁹ As I showed in Chapter I, he also used the phrase 'to vaccinate a national consciousness' against a perceived tendency of getting accustomed to be part of China (Alptekin 2010, 430).

six years he travelled a lot and he writes how this further opened his eyes and changed his world view (Alptekin 2010).

A Momentous Decision

In talking about the making of a subject, Caroline Humphrey writes that,

It is necessary to think about how a singular human being might put him or herself together as a distinctive subject adding to, or subtracting from, the possibilities given by culture as it has been up to that point, through the very process of taking action. (Humphrey 2008, 358)

For Alptekin it was events that he experienced in West Turkistan that made him take action. His situated knowledge was questioned by events that showed the diversity of actual configurations and heterogeneity of new truths.

In Alptekin's case, it wasn't an easy task to serve in East Turkistan, given that local Muslims were not in the position to demand their rights, to complain about injustice, to use their right to assembly, to publish or to open schools in order to educate local people. It was forbidden to 'wake up the people of East Turkistan, to commence any action in order to raise the national consciousness or to organize commemoration days'. In short the Chinese didn't allow the East Turkistanis any kind of activity. After he had spent time with the nationalist and patriotic people from East Turkistan, he decided that it was time to do whatever needs to be done to fulfil 'his duties for his land and his people' (Alptekin 2010, 79-80).

At this point in his memoirs he narrates a dialogue that he has with himself, that in retrospect reads as his turning point into becoming a political activist. He was already anticipating possible difficulties he would have to face. This passage reads as follows:

Hey Isa, you want to serve your oppressed, doomed, stray people, but what can you do in a situation like this? Your people, the nationalists and the intellectuals, can't do anything. The uprisings led nowhere, they all ended in further blood baths. The Russians don't want you to be freed, because they think if East Turkistan will be liberated it will affect West Turkistan. Our neighbour Tibet is very weak, a small country. The English, the possessor of India don't help you. Our other neighbour Afghanistan is very weak. Let's see if they would want your independence. Afghanistan doesn't want Turkistan to be free, they are afraid that if East and West Turkistan are liberated, they will be invading it, as it used to be. West Turkistan can't help, because they are under Russian occupation. You yourself, you are just a translator. Without any money what can a 25-26-year-old man do? Where to start? What should I give priority to? There are a thousand problems to free your people from Chinese captivity and to prevent the Russian plans to invade East Turkistan. Where are you going to start? Where? And how? Do you possess the qualities to be a man that can take a mission like that upon himself? Do you have the features that are needed in this battle? Can you stand the calamities that are waiting for you in this struggle? There might be

imprisonment, exile and death waiting for me. Can you put up with that? But after all these questions, the answer came from within: Whatever the cost is, I have to step into action. I am ready to face all the befalling calamities. It will be understood if I possess the necessary traits for this national service once I entered the lists. (Alptekin 2010, 79-80)

Being among people from East Turkistan in a West Turkistan that was under Russian occupation and incorporated into the Soviet Union after the Russian Revolution (and bordering Xinjiang where turmoil surfaced on a regular basis) shaped his perception of a hostile political environment. This particular kind of experience in these political conditions constitutes Isa Yusuf Alptekin as a political subject, kickstarting the advent of a new era in his life. This ‘decision-event’ (Humphrey 2008, 359) prioritized possible multiplicities of his life and shaped him as an individual person.

For Alptekin, the situation in China blocked any aspiration for autonomy and made it impossible to even perform basic steps, which is why unfortunately all the hopes of the people of East Turkistan lay in rebellion that only led to unnecessary and perpetual killings on both sides (Alptekin 2010, 79). He also found it difficult to distinguish who is a real patriot, who would really support real political measures towards independence from those who became puppets of the Soviets or the Chinese. This was a question that later played a role when deciding whether to leave China or to stay and fight (Alptekin 2010, 555). While discussing the constraints in China and political issues with the East Turkistan people in West Turkistan, one idea came to his mind. The crucial idea that would drive his activism was that things that can’t be done in China or in the Soviet Union had to be taken to the outside world. The East Turkistan Cause had to be widely known, through publications and conferences. Here he formulated an idea that for years became one aspect of promoting the East Turkistan Cause: ‘At the very least, it could be provided that the world feel sorry for East Turkistan (Hiç olmazsa dünyanın Doğu Türkistan’a acıması sağlanabilirdi)’ (Alptekin 2010, 81).

In his biography he writes how the idea to create an international public opinion that increased the pressure on the Chinese to enforce basic rights was born while he was in West Turkistan. This perceived hopelessness, based on the hard and unstable political situation in Xinjiang that made peaceful political changes difficult to achieve, led to a discourse that stressed the victimization of the people of East Turkistan. The victimization as Muslims and as Turks and the atrocities of Communism became integral parts of his narration, directed especially towards Saudi Arabia and Egypt with their Muslim audience, and towards Turkey and its nationalist and anti-communist audience. And considering Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s and others’ experiences in East Turkistan it doesn’t come as a surprise. Within its oppressive atmosphere Isa Yusuf Alptekin focuses on Muslim and Turkic groups as the only source of support for

liberation of the people of East Turkistan. On a global level he also tried to get the United States of America on board, but his main focus was the Muslim and Turkic world. Even decades later, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the discourse on victimhood gains new momentum, since the Uyghurs ‘unfortunately remain the only Turkic people without a state!’⁵⁰

Despite his internal dialogue, characterized as an internal feud (*iç hesaplaşma*), and his decision to commit to the Cause at all costs, at that time he didn’t see himself as a leader. He writes about how he tried to find a leader in West Turkistan, since that was the biggest deficiency the East Turkistanis were facing. He wanted someone that everybody loved and approved of, someone who was not after fame or money, and someone who would even face death. In his perception the tight political grip of the Chinese on Xinjiang didn’t allow anyone to show his potential as a leader. But Alptekin takes this argument further, writing that besides the political constraints there is no understanding of a national leader among the people of East Turkistan. It was difficult to unite the people around someone who could guide them, a trope that is still very common as seen at the commemoration event. He believed that there were national feelings and an understanding of a national struggle in the hearts of the people, but that they hadn’t discovered it at that time: they were not aware of it. According to Isa Yusuf the reason for this lies in the long Chinese occupation. Only the people who went abroad knew how a nation state could be. It is interesting that in his perspective, the Chinese colonization of East Turkistan didn’t lead to an emergence of East Turkistan national feelings. In his writing he thinks that he has to induce a national awakening (Alptekin 2010).

Alptekin goes on to say how he sought to find someone who could be a leader, travelling from Andijan to Tashkent and Almaty, but his search was not crowned with success. At one point he came across a few people, one of them a man who studied in Turkey, and is interested in opening modern schools in Gulja. It was Mesut Sabri Baykozi, who had a ‘moustache like Enver Paşa’ and was wearing the ‘Turkish Fez’ (Alptekin 2010, 134). But it needed a couple more years for a few potential leaders to crystalize. After the rebellions and proclamation of the East Turkistan Republics four persons surface, carrying the necessary traits: Mesut Sabri Baykozi, Mehmet Emin Bughra, Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Ahmetcan Kasimi. Isa Yusuf now saw himself as a leader based on his experiences in West Turkistan. The same is valid for the other three. Based on their experiences abroad and on their service for their country they were now qualified as leader. They had seen what happened to nationalist Turks in West Turkistan,

⁵⁰ A statement I have heard in almost every single interview.

but their most important quality was that they were pan-Turkists. Over the following years Isa Yusuf Alptekin's idea of a successful leader took shape, and in a statement he lists the features of a leader that would gain the support of the Turkish community (Türk toplumu): the leader must be 'kind hearted, patriotic, nationalistic, honourable, honest, and have an exemplary life'. But furthermore, the leader must be in the position to 'distribute money, award people, distribute rank and promotion, and to reward'. Last, but not least, the leader 'must be in power of a military force that scares any opposing power, be able to imprison, threat and punish' (Alptekin 2010, 138). The Uyghurs in Turkey attributed most of these features to Isa Yusuf Alptekin. But he was never in command of a military force, or in a very powerful position.

The idea of educating people in order to awaken national awareness for the East Turkistan Cause is a necessity that Isa Yusuf Alptekin always emphasized and tried to apply. His son Arslan remarks again, citing his father, that in Xinjiang no education was provided,

They [and it's not clear whom he is talking about] left us uneducated. In the madrasa [here a reference to classic Islamic education] students just had to memorize things, no real learning. This illiteracy ruined our homeland.

It was a major concern for Isa Yusuf to render proper education for Uyghur students in Turkey, although he was unable to secure proper education even for his sons, as Arslan Alptekin mentioned in one interview (genç Doğu Türkistanlılar'ı okula gönderdi, bizi bile okutamadı).⁵¹ The Cause was more important than his family.

Erkin Alptekin told me another story that supports the perception of Isa Yusuf's attitude that the East Turkistan Cause is more important than anything else. He shared a story with me, a recollection from his childhood in Ürümchi. A Chinese kid taught Erkin how to mount a bicycle. He enjoyed it and went home to ask his father if he can buy him a bicycle. But his father's answer did not satisfy him:

My son, the Chinese left our people for centuries illiterate and uneducated. We don't have schools, hospitals, educated personnel. We just started a campaign for financial support to install these things, what about if we donate the money for the bicycle to this campaign? That will be your contribution!

The concluding sentence seems true based on the memories and in the light of the narrated biography of Isa Yusuf Alptekin. In one interview Arslan mentioned that quite a number of

⁵¹ In one of the interviews, Arslan Alptekin showed me a photograph depicting Isa Yusuf Alptekin and a group of young men, supposedly students he had financially supported in order to be able to study. Arslan Alptekin said that some Uyghurs in Turkey spread slander, saying that Isa Yusuf Alptekin hadn't supported any students.

the students that Isa Yusuf Alptekin supported held positions in the Uyghur associations in Munich, Washington DC and Istanbul. That partly supports the statement of the man in Munich (stated at the end of Chapter I) that the Three Efendi planted the seeds of Turkism and Uyghur nationalism. At least the efforts in Turkey seem to have impacted people enough for them to maintain the Cause. ‘On the other hand’, Arslan Alptekin remarks, ‘actually, only a few of them are still involved in the Cause, just a small percentage compared to the total number of students my father supported’.

Leaving the Motherland for the Sake of the Motherland

Vatan için vatandan ayrılmak

In 1932 Isa Yusuf Alptekin made his first trip to China proper. He went to Nanjing as the representative of the Xinjiang people in an attempt to seek full autonomy for Xinjiang. He remained in the national Chinese capital, unable to return because of the region’s political disturbances. In 1939 he became a member of the Legislative Yuan, his first appointment in Nationalist China. In the same year he went on a Chinese goodwill mission to India, Afghanistan, Turkey and other Muslim countries. After his return he kept on working for the party and began his life long publishing activities. In 1945 and 1946 Isa Yusuf Alptekin became more involved in the Guomindang politics and in 1946 he became a delegate to the National People’s Assembly in Nanjing. In 1945, upon his return to Xinjiang, his first appointment was with the reorganized Xinjiang provincial government. With the appointment of Mesut Sabri Baykozi as chairman of the province in 1947 Isa Yusuf Alptekin became secretary-general, an influential position that he held with his Altai Publishing house. With the government falling increasingly into high-ranking Chinese hands and the People’s Liberation Army getting closer to Xinjiang, Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin Bughra decided to leave China (Alptekin 2010).

With the PLA approaching Ürümchi in 1949 an urgent decision had to be made. One thing, at least for Mehmet Emin and Isa Yusuf, was clear: they didn’t want to surrender to the Chinese communists. But fierce debate broke out about whether to join rebel groups in the mountains and keep fighting or to leave and continue the political work from a safer place and return when things had settled down. Discussion about where to go came up. Moving through this hostile landscape to cross to the border in late autumn with constantly changing weather conditions and snowfall about to start very soon meant travel had to be planned carefully (Alptekin 2010, 555). My interviewees informed me that some of them had a little knowledge about the traditional trade routes, but none of them had actually participated in or organized a

trek crossing the high mountain ranges. The routes are dangerous to use anyway, especially in unstable political conditions that increased the risk of running into hostile soldiers and bandits.

I was rather surprised when I first read the section of his memoirs, where he recounts meetings at which the decision to leave the country was weighed up against joining the rebels in the mountains and fighting against the Communists (Alptekin 2010, 555). Isa Yusuf Alptekin's account of the decision, with the PLA only days away, describes how it came down to discussion of two options. The heading of this short paragraph is *Hicret Kararı*, ('Decision to Immigrate') (2010, 554). This wording has a religious and political connotation. He chose to use the word *hicret* for migration, with its reference to the *Hijra*, the migration of the Islamic prophet Muhammed, over the Turkish word *göç*, to emphasize the coercive trait of this emigration.⁵²

One group suggests they join in their 'Kazakh brothers' in the mountains and pursue partisan warfare (*çete harbi*). But as Alptekin mentions during his stay in West Turkistan, they could not be sure who was a real patriot or who was working for another foreign power. A different group argued that their military strength wasn't good enough to fight anyway, and advocated crossing the southern border of East Turkistan:

Let's go to Pakistan or India crossing the southern border of East Turkistan. And from there let's go to a free country. Let's defend our country and our nation (people) from outside (of East Turkistan) and let's try to free it from foreign powers⁵³ (Alptekin 2010, 555).

In this quote one sentence stands out: 'Yahut oralardan sonra hür bir memlekete gidelim', (And from there let's go to a free country) (Alptekin 2010, 555). His word choice is noticeable. *Memleket* in Uyghur means country, whereas in Turkish it means motherland or homeland. This sentence could be read as if they suggested going to a country that they perceived as a motherland. But in my opinion *hür bir memleket* is rather referring to a country that is free (although the word 'free' could have a number of interpretations in this context). With the heading *hicret* he might be referring to either religious freedom, and/or political freedom, and with his narration of his eye-opening experiences in West Turkistan he probably means a country that is not occupied and not within the sphere of the two Communists regimes. But he is clearly not referring to Turkey.

⁵² Forty one years later his son, Erkin Alptekin (1990) published a booklet in Kayseri, titled *Doğu Türkistan'dan Hicretimizin 40. Yılı*. In this text he uses the word *göç*.

⁵³ Original text: 'Doğu Türkistan'ın güney sınırından Hindistan veya Pakistan'a gidelim. Yahut onlardan sonra hür bir memlekete gidelim. Yurdumuzu ve milletimizi dışarda savunalım ya da dış güçleriyle kurtarmaya çalışalım' (Alptekin 2010, 555).

That was rather unexpected for me, because during many informal meetings, when I introduced myself to the community, people would emphasize the linguistic, ethnic, cultural, and religious ties between Turks and Uyghurs. They gave me the impression that they weren't in exile, or that if their exile was an exile it was in their second homeland. This probably led me to my hypothesis that the Uyghurs intentionally chose Turkey as the country to where they wanted to immigrate from the beginning.

Some Uyghurs in Turkey do perceive Turkey to be their second motherland, as they claim they have two types of belonging: 'I have two motherlands, East Turkistan and Turkey' (benim iki tane memleketim var, hem Doğu Türkistan, hem de Türkiye). And it didn't matter whether they were born in China or in Turkey. They only applied the word *memleket* in its Turkish meaning. Some would only apply the Turkish word *memleket* to East Turkistan. A lot of Uyghurs in Turkey, merging notions of home, distinguished East Turkistan and Turkey as *ana vatan* (motherland) and *ata vatan* (fatherland, or country of ancestors), respectively. For some *ana vatan* was East Turkistan whereas for others it was Turkey.

In the end the group decided that it would be the best to leave and pursue the East Turkistan Cause from political exile, wherever it was going to be. The phrase 'vatan için vatandan ayrılmak' (to leave the motherland for the sake of the motherland) was supposedly then coined by Mehmet Emin Bughra. It remains unclear though, when this sentence was formulated for the first time.⁵⁴ It has become one maxim for the East Turkistan Cause in Turkey.

Escaping East Turkistan

The few Uyghurs I have met and talked to who experienced this migration were very young at the time of the emigration, and quite old when I was conducting my fieldwork. Their accounts vary. Even the written narratives from Isa Yusuf Alptekin and his son Erkin,⁵⁵ the only ones from an Uyghur perspective, differ in some details. The narrations, as with much recollected memory, become unclear at times or differently remembered at others. The traumatic character of these memories might also play a role in the varying expressions: as Marylin Charles says, 'trauma poses particular difficulties for memory and identity' (2015, 26). This thesis is less focused on verity than on how things are remembered and perceived in certain situations. Even without exact dates, we get an idea of what exile meant for the lives of the

⁵⁴ Erkin Alptekin also attributes this sentence to Mehmet Emin Bughra (1990, 27).

⁵⁵ See Erkin Alptekin (1990) and Alptekin (2007, 2010) for their account of the emigration.

ones who left. Trauma as a phenomenon is ‘based more on how something is experienced rather than what is experienced’ (Lombardi and Gordon 2015, 169).

Research on experience demonstrates how it is transmuted into memory that is remembered differently in various stages of our lives (O’Loughlin and Charles 2015). Experiences are also, as I found in my fieldwork, remembered in relation to those it is remembered with or who facilitated an attempt at recollecting things. It is impossible to remember it the way it was. In the following I show how the migration has been narrated, based on the written accounts of Isa Yusuf Alptekin (first edition published in 1985, second 2010) and Erkin Alptekin (1990), but I also add themes from unpublished interviews to offer a different perspective and give them a voice, too.

After they decided to leave for India, practical preparations for the dangerous journey had to be considered. Discussion started about how to move on, considering the fact that there were people among them who would have difficulties surviving the escape. The first thing one man in his eighties remembered when I asked him about leaving Ürümchi was how the pros and cons of the question whether to use motorized vehicles or horses were discussed:

We had to decide if we want to use trucks up to certain point and then horses, or if we should do the whole trip on horseback avoiding the main roads. With trucks we would reach the border much faster, but we had to stick to the roads, and the Chinese cars and trucks were much better than what we could afford. They could have caught up easily. But on the other hand, I was afraid that, if we did the whole trip with horses through the rugged landscapes of East Turkistan, our women and some of the men as well, who were not used to riding horses would fall off and that there would be more casualties.⁵⁶

The discussion didn’t last very long and with a ‘collective decision’, as Erkin Alptekin emphasizes (1990, 6), they decided to leave in three groups with trucks in order to meet in Kashgar and to attract as little attention as possible. The first group left Ürümchi on 11 September 1949.⁵⁷ The second group, headed by Mehmet Emin Bughra left on 17 September, and the group with Isa Yusuf Alptekin departed three days later on 20 September 1949. One man remembers how the local economy reacted, the prices of leather and felt increasing as soon as they started to stock up for the migration. In one night the prices tripled.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin calls this aspect of his departure ‘my separation from my existence’ (varlığımdan ayrılışım) (Alptekin 2010, 557). And considering his desire to promote pan-

⁵⁶ We find a similar section in Erkin Alptekin’s booklet (1990, 6).

⁵⁷ My interviewees said at times that they didn’t remember the correct dates. I refer to the dates given in Erkin Alptekin’s publication (1990).

Turkic ideas, his attempts to awaken the national awareness of people in East Turkistan through his newspaper *Erk* and to provide a modern education with the help of his publishing house, this was an existential loss. He had to leave tangible things, like the printing house equipment, his library, journals and newspapers. His political projects and goals suffered a setback. He writes that nobody wanted to take his printing equipment and his personal library for fear of the approaching communists finding it. He also couldn't sell it, it didn't feel right. The only option he had was to leave his equipment with Burhan Shahidi, in Isa Yusuf's eye a man supported by the Russians. Leaving his main means of communication to this man felt like a betrayal of his own ideas (Alptekin 2010). This separation from 'my existence' is, if not worded like that, a part of the narration of other Uyghurs and Kazakhs as well. They repeatedly narrate how they lost everything they were attached to. In terms of money, how they got only a very small sum in selling their belongings: 'we barely had any money when we left East Turkistan, we couldn't sell everything or we were forced to accept little money, we didn't know how to look after ourselves once and if we arrived in India, but we were determined to leave. We were really afraid of the Chinese Communists.' But also in terms of what their future lives would look like, they had no idea what to expect.

These personal traumatic experiences become a shared experience even if the details of the perception are different. One man expressed his fear of the consequences of another Chinese colonization, saying 'the same ethnic group [ayni irktan], but this time even worst, because they were communists. This completely damaged our relation to the Chinese, from that moment, I couldn't trust them anymore.'

Isa Yusuf Alptekin describes how the soldiers of the Communists and the Soviet backed locals wanted to arrest him. Friends warned him and he left Ürümchi just in time (Alptekin 2010). Finally the groups managed to arrive in Kashgar on 27 September, where they stayed for a few days to organize the dangerous crossing of the mountains to India. More groups joined them on their way, when they saw that some people were preparing to leave for India. Isa Yusuf Alptekin recalls how they had to get their passports and exit permits to be able to leave (2010, 555), and a few of my interviewees recalled with great thankfulness that Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin used their political connections to get everybody in these groups who wanted to leave Ürümchi the required documents and passports. But still not everybody had a passport. Some just tried their luck and left without the necessary documents, leaving them very vulnerable to Chinese and Indian officials. Erkin Alptekin, ten years old at that time, told me 'that even as an Alptekin, I didn't have a passport'. At the commemoration event mentioned above one speaker picked up the passport issue. He explained that Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin could have gotten their passports and exit permits, but according to him

they insisted that everybody in their group who wanted to leave Ürümchi would get their documents first. They didn't leave East Turkistan without the others. We can imagine how this added to people's trust in Isa Yusuf and shaped the perception of the younger generation today.

In his biography Isa Yusuf takes the perspective of a politician who on his way meets with the local governors and other people he knew from his political career. According to him there were a number of attempts to stop him from leaving, to make him stay to pursue the struggle in East Turkistan. Known as a politician he was arrested and separated from his family for a few days without knowing if he would ever see them again. He met with local governors and activists to evaluate other political options. Mehmet Emin and Isa Yusuf even decided to do the border crossing separately from their families in order to make it safer for them.

These political themes, of course didn't appear in the stories of all migrants. But the experienced fears were similar. Fears of what to expect with the arrival of the communists that made them decide to leave Xinjiang were accompanied by a fear of meeting hostile soldiers on their way to or at the border who would not let them out of China or into India. And although, my interviewees told me, there were people using routes to do trade with India, they themselves had no idea about how to find their way around, find safe places to stay at night, or how to survive the freezing temperatures. Geography represented another major threat, and problems with the altitude, dangerous paths along glaciers, and river crossings in ice-cold water were recurrent themes.

There were a few groups on different routes, and it is difficult to say who organized the escapes, but their experiences were similar. One interviewee from Hoten said that he was lucky, because he did the whole journey with his family on a horse. Although they had a horse, the remembered fear of losing their way or falling into a crevasse was similar, as 'horses and donkeys can slip, too'.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin writes that he arrived by car in Kokyar in southern Xinjiang on 13 October. He furthermore mentions that 'he didn't know how the situation for the groups that left after them was. Some were coming on horses, some on camels, others on donkeys, and some were even walking. But they were all struggling.' (Alptekin 2010, 566) This corresponds with an account of one of my interviewees who said,

we left Karghalik [a city half way between Kashgar and Hoten] after we've heard that Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin were leaving East Turkistan. We sold what we could and went after them towards the Indian border afraid of what is to come. There were others on their way too, we tried to help each other, but our opportunities were limited.

Three groups coming from Ürümchi and other, smaller and unorganized groups joined them on the way, as far as I can tell from the interviews, most of them from the southern part of Xinjiang, around Kashgar, Hoten and Yarkend. And most of them from the southern parts were Uyghurs. The first groups had their papers in order, most had passport and exit permits: the other groups on the other hand didn't have time to sort their document issues out.

Following Erkin Alptekin's account, the groups left Kashgar on 1 October and arrived in Kokyar, a small oasis town in the Hotan prefecture on 16 October. On 19 October they moved from Kokyar towards the border where they arrived on 28 October. From there they arrived in Ladakh, after a long journey ('uzun bir yolculuktan sonra'). Many people were unable to guess how long it took them. Some said it took them three months, some said only a week. Isa Yusuf Alptekin writes that he passed the border on 19 November and arrived in Ladakh on 11 December.

The narration of this emigration in the few interviews I could conduct with eyewitnesses was structured by a number of fears, both before and after the migration. The interviewees remembered the fear that made them leave East Turkistan in the first place, and of course the fear of getting caught before crossing the border. Two interviewees told me that they passed the final border checkpoint at night on a very dangerous detour over a frozen river resulting in the death of a man and the loss of a horse. But there was also the fear that Chinese officials might put pressure on the Indian Government to not let them in or to deport them back to China. A few people, as Alptekin records (2007), went back to their villages, afraid of the risk of the journey and of getting caught and deported back to China where their lives would be even worse. Then there was the fear of the 'force of nature' (tabiat'ın kuvveti). Whereas the fear of getting caught left internal wounds, the ice cold weather left many with frostbite. In a few cases amputations had to be carried out. As Waldram (2004) notices, trauma can be defined as an insult against a person's body or psyche. He furthermore writes that psychic trauma can have an etiology in multiple experiences. It could be a single event, or an accumulation of stressors over time. The people who left were exposed to distressing events for a long time, with single events sticking out. For some it was the constant fear about things that made it unbearable. For others certain smaller events, leaving one's beloved dog, or friends without being able to bid adieu, stuck out from their narration and was repeatedly told. The recollection of smaller details worked as a vehicle to narrate the story and cope with it. The experience of the death of people caused grief in every interviewee.

The perception and narration of time also differed. Some said that it was too long ago to be remembered properly. A few just said that they went over the mountains and arrived in

Ladakh after some time. For others the migration was retold as if it took them several months. Arslan Alptekin for example, who was nine years old at that time, made a few interesting references to food. He said the first thing his mother did when it was getting clear that they were to leave was to prepare as much bread as possible in their own tandoor oven located in the garden of their house. It was a bread he couldn't name, but he recalled that his mother had used just flour, water and salt. This bread could be dried and rehydrated later, just by sprinkling water on it. The dry form of the bread was perfect for long-term storage. His mother prepared as much as she could and they took all of it with them, rehydrating it when necessary. He also remembered how he ate garlic and dry plum to prevent altitude sickness. He suffered from the lack of oxygen at that height. And after a few days into the disastrous journey, everybody was getting very tired due to the lack of proper food and the exertion. He recalls how many people lost their lives at this stage, being very tired due to malnutrition and not concentrating while crossing icy paths. There was also no food left for the animals, so they started to eat the meat of horses that died on the way. He remembers how his group met one caravan coming from India (the only people they had met on the way), who warned them not to camp where they were going to set up their tents, showing them instead a little covered place that probably secured their survival on that particularly cold and snowy night. Others didn't recall anything about food. They wanted to talk about the harshness of the mountains and how difficult it was not to fall. Stories like this narrated through the interviews show how different experiences are remembered as traumatic.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin lost his seven-year-old daughter, who got sick on the way. She made it to Ladakh, but he had to take her to Srinagar for further treatment. She couldn't recover and died on 24 December 1949. His son Arslan lost five of his toes. There are alternative ways and resilient responses to deal with traumatic experiences. In the case of Isa Yusuf Alptekin, as he recalls, he renewed his personal commitment to pursue his struggle against Communism, but with the death of his daughter, who was now buried in Srinagar, he wanted to take 'revenge on the Communist Chinese who made him leave his country and who were responsible for the death of so many people, including my own daughter', even at 'the cost of my own death'. Although he could point out individuals who were responsible, in his eyes it was Communism that was to blame for what they had suffered (Alptekin 2007, 5). Isa Yusuf's wording is at times inconsistent. Sometimes he puts the emphasis on ideology, blaming Communism, sometimes on race or nationality, saying the Chinese are to be held responsible for what happened to him. At some occasions he combines political and ethnic markers, like in reference to the Red Chinese (Kızıl Çinli).

His traumatic experience with heavy personal losses transforms into political activism that is now partly founded on an idea of revenge. I can only hypothesize that the way he started to promote the East Turkistan Cause in India right away was partially one way to regain agency and to deal with the loss of his daughter. His complete devotion to the Cause, gaining a new momentum in the exile situation and neglecting his family, almost to an extent of detachment as one of his sons said, could be seen as another way to cope with the loss.⁵⁸ He pursued the Cause until the very last days of his life; nobody could take this away from him. But the Communist Chinese, as he writes, took his daughter. He also felt the expectations of the refugees, and the obligation to take this Cause to an international level to let everybody know what happened.

Image has been removed as it contains copyright material.

Figure 10. One group of migrants, mostly Kazakhs in Kashmir 1951. (Photograph provided by interviewee)

In Ladakh: Going a Long Way to Find a Host Country

One of the first things that Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin did upon their arrival in Ladakh was to prepare a list of the people who made it safely to India. According to Erkin Alptekin (1990), with the three groups from Ürümchi 852 individuals left Xinjiang and

⁵⁸ One of the presenters at the symposium recalls how Isa Yusuf Alptekin told him that he travelled so much, that his wife was often alone with the kids. A few of them were even born when he was travelling to narrate and promote the Cause.

798 made it safely to Ladakh. Fifty-four people lost their lives on the way. Forty-nine of the people from the list suffered severe frostbite that made amputation unavoidable.

Since there were other groups who left separately, it is not necessarily a precise figure, but it gives us a good idea about the number of people coming from Ürümchi. I met a couple that only stayed a few nights in Ladakh and moved on to Kashmir where they had relatives. One Kazakh man married to an Uyghur woman moved on to Peshawar in Pakistan, where he had relatives. His relatives emigrated there in 1931 when fighting during a smaller rebellion broke out. This couple came to Turkey at their own expense in the 1960s. Another man struggled on to New Delhi where his uncle lived and worked as a merchant.

Only five days after the loss of his daughter Isa Yusuf started his campaign that would become his lifelong duty, now against the backdrop of his experiences of personal loss. In Srinagar he talked to correspondents of Indian, English and American newspapers to report on what had happened and let the world know about their situation. He also visited the Turkistani Society (Türkistanlılar Cemiyeti) in Srinagar, the one he founded on his first visit to Kashmir in 1938. From there he tirelessly took action to improve the situation of the refugees from East Turkistan, and to find a place for them to go to (Alptekin 2007, 5).

One refugee described the way he dealt with his experiences. He described the situation of waiting. He said that they were happy to be in India, getting familiar with the surroundings, organizing their everyday life, waiting for what was about to happen next and most importantly recovering. As Ghassan Hage writes about waiting, ‘waiting indicates that we are engaged in, and have expectations from life; that we are on the lookout for what life is going to throw our way’ (Hage 2009, 1). Others on the other hand were not waiting, but paralysed. One man told me that they had to drag a family out of the room they were staying in to get them engaged in social activities, as they were afraid that they were going to hurt themselves.

With the experiences they had, they were also afraid of what was coming next, and for some people it was hard to be in a passive waiting position. They had to wait to see whether the Indian Government was going to send them back to China. Again Ghassan Hage gives waiting in these circumstances an eloquent wording:

The multiple and ambivalent forms in which agency takes shape in relation to waiting render it a particularly unique object of politics. There is a politics around who is to wait. There is a politics around what waiting entails. And there is a politics around how to wait and how to organise waiting into a social system. (2009, 2)

One woman narrated how they interacted with the locals in order to fit in, ‘We didn’t know how long we were going to stay, but their solidarity and help was overwhelming despite the

fact that they were pretty poor, too.’ The men tried to find work as day labourers, but there wasn’t much work available. Some used their handicraft skills and did little jobs on site; one interviewee for example, was a horologist in East Turkistan and used this skill to gain some money ‘although only a few people possessed watches’. Some of the Kazakhs had good skills as tanners and tried to sell handmade leather garments. Others organized some kind of schooling for the kids, ‘to keep them busy and their minds off things and forget the hardship of the migration’.

But waiting is also framed by those who are trying to provide whatever it is others are waiting for. And of course, here Isa Yusuf Alptekin steps into the scene. He did not only see that people had urgent needs, but he also saw their expectations, based on his experience as a political figure (2007). And he didn’t waste any time. With Mehmet Emin, Isa Yusuf identified the most essential issues that required some action. The first thing they tried to secure was food, accommodation and garments. Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin also didn’t neglect one of their biggest concerns, which was to provide education for school-age children. Although, the local and Indian governments were very helpful, they only granted them refuge for a transit period. They let the East Turkistanis into India under the condition that they move on to another country as soon as possible. The Indian Government wanted them to leave and refused other emigrants entry to India. There were still people on their way or waiting at the border. Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin tried to help refugees who were still on their way. They sent food and were applying for the necessary documents to secure their entry to India (Erkin Alptekin 1990).⁵⁹ All these urgent issues needed immediate action. Isa Yusuf started to get in touch with contacts he made on his first trip as a representative of Nationalist China in 1938 (Alptekin 2010). He sent innumerable letters to ask for help. Among the addressees were the Consul of the American Consulate in Ürümchi, Republican Chinese representatives in Taiwan and Chinese Muslim General Ma Bufang who was in Egypt at that time.⁶⁰

He sent one letter to the embassy of the Republican China, but with India recognizing the People’s Republic of China, this was unsuccessful.⁶¹ On the contrary this led to further problems with the incoming refugees. He decided to go to New Delhi where he visited the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The official in charge told him that relations with the PRC were

⁵⁹ A group of Kazakhs sought refuge in Tibet. They tried to come to India, but the Indian soldiers at the border post denied them entry. Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin tried to get permission by sending letters to the officials in charge (see Erkin Alptekin 1990, 8–9).

⁶⁰ See his memoirs for a meticulous account of his efforts (Alptekin 2007).

⁶¹ Erkin Alptekin published 25 documents covering various issues concerning this period; among the documents are also letters from the Kazakhs his father helped (1990).

damaged because India accepted the refugees. He furthermore told him that they wouldn't accept any more people from East Turkistan and wanted them to leave India sooner rather than later. After personal negotiations with the Afghan, Iraqi and Turkish Embassies in New Delhi resulted in no outcome, Isa Yusuf Alptekin decided to travel to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey. While he writes about these unsuccessful visits to the embassies in his memoirs, he also shared his impression 'that the Turkish Government doesn't want us to come to Turkey' (Alptekin 2007, 14).

Had Isa Yusuf Alptekin's first efforts after their arrival in Kashmir to find a host country that would accept the Uyghurs in Kashmir in the early 1950s been successful, the commemoration meetings in 2015 might have been held in Jeddah or Cairo. After I had read this particular section in Isa Yusuf Alptekin's biography, I asked the few people who were still alive to recall this decision-making process to describe which options they discussed. And to my surprise most of them recalled that Turkey wasn't their first choice. Some noted they didn't know anything about Turkey, saying 'I probably wasn't even able to locate it on the map. I was happy to stay in India, or with the political difficulties to go to Pakistan, at least to a Muslim country.' Some of my interviewees were too young at that time to remember and said, 'the elders made the decision, we just went with them'. Surprisingly, Isa Yusuf Alptekin decided to go to Saudi Arabia first and to Egypt afterwards leaving Turkey as the final destination of his trip (2007). These events were crucial for the future of the Uyghurs in India, the East Turkistan Cause's political direction and also for the perception of the Uyghurs of Isa Yusuf Alptekin.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin knew that there were people from East Turkistan in various Saudi Arabian cities doing business or working as merchants. I think that he assumed that they would be in the position to help out either with money or influence to make officials accept the refugees in Saudi Arabia. And for the refugees Saudi Arabia was the first destination they wanted to try to seek refuge in, since 'it is the most important country for Muslims', as one interviewee said. From this statement we can see that some of the Uyghurs thought of a host country based on their religious identity, and not on their Turkishness as implied in the interviews and as stated in publications in Turkey. A few had ideas about Saudi Arabia from relatives or friends who did the Hajj. From them they also heard that there were small Uyghur communities in some cities.

In August 1951, after the unsuccessful meetings with foreign diplomats in Delhi, Isa Yusuf Alptekin left for Bombay (now called Mumbai). In Mumbai he met sixty-six people from East Turkistan who had tried to do the Hajj to Saudi Arabia. But they had run out of money and

couldn't pay for the passage. He managed to get some financial help from local Muslim Indians and left for Saudi Arabia together with the stranded East Turkistanis on a boat that was carrying Muslims from the region on their way to pilgrimage (Alptekin 2007, 30).⁶²

After an eight-day long journey he arrived in Jeddah on 5 September. Turkistanis who were living in Saudi Arabia came to welcome them and let them stay at their place. Alptekin took the opportunity to talk to journalists to tell Muslims about 'the real face of Communism' (Alptekin 2007, 35).

On 13 September he met Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia, thanking him for the help he provided for the Turkistanis. The Crown Prince assured him of further support. On the evening of the following day he spoke at a meeting with 300 East Turkistanis in order to explain the reasons for his visit. This meeting lasted for five hours and according to his memoirs, the first reason he gave for his visit was to fulfil the pilgrimage, secondly he wanted to inform the Turkistanis living in the Hejaz area about the situation of the East Turkistani refugees and the attention that it needed.⁶³ Thirdly, he wanted to thank Saudi Arabia for their support and ask for refuge for the people stuck in India. One matter of personal importance was to talk about the threat that Communism presented to the Muslim world, sharing his personal experiences in West and East Turkistan. On 29 September he was finally able to meet King Abdulaziz and share his matters with him, giving him a written petition he had prepared beforehand (Alptekin 2007, 42). Erkin Alptekin (1990, 14) writes that despite the urgency of the matter and the effort his father displayed, Isa Yusuf was unable to elicit any response. In the meantime Mehmet Emin Bughra had sent him a few letters and telegraphs saying that more people had crossed the borders that needed help and that more than two hundred people had not been allowed to enter India and were waiting at the border. A few days later he said that he managed to get permission for them to get in, but that they needed to find a country as soon as possible (Alptekin 2007, 44–46). Getting no answer from the Saudi Arabian officials, he flew to Egypt on 22 October. He stayed two days at Mount Sinai and flew to Cairo where he was welcomed by Turkistanis and General Ma Bufang. The anti-British resentments and pro-Communist statements during protest rallies he heard during his stay made Isa Yusuf Alptekin hesitate to talk about the Chinese and Soviet atrocities. But despite the advice he got from

⁶² One of my interviewees who married an Uyghur girl from Saudi Arabia in 2011 told me that he heard a few similar stories in Saudi Arabia, and that Isa Yusuf Alptekin is known among some of the Uyghurs there.

⁶³ According to Erkin Alptekin the East Turkistanis living in Saudi Arabia managed to collect 2980 riyal, which equalled 14,276 rupees at that time without giving any further reference to other currencies. The Uyghurs distributed the money in India (1990).

people he shared what he had to say about his personal experience with Communism (Alptekin 2007, 51).

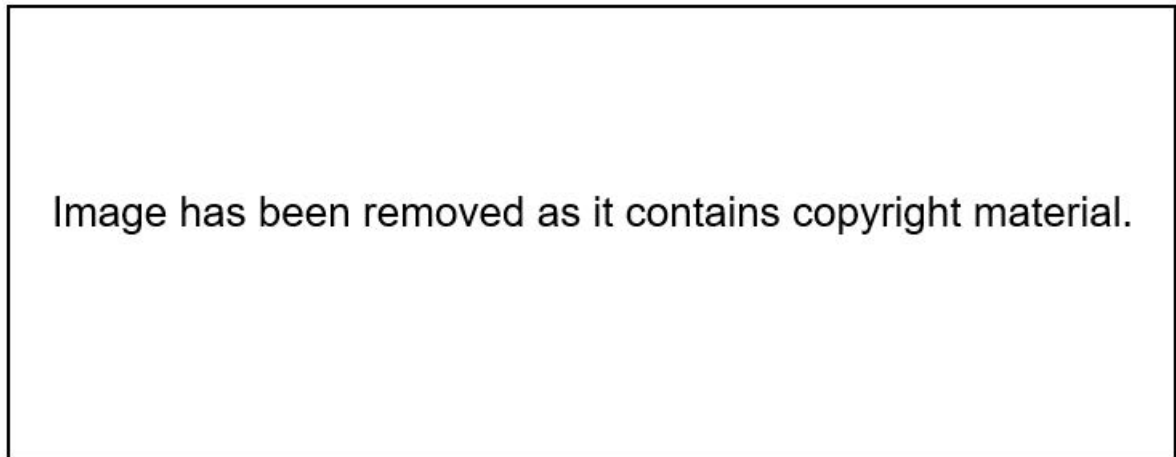


Figure 11. Isa Yusuf Alptekin with Ma Bufang (third from right) in Egypt trying to convince the Egyptian officials to take the refugees from India, 1951. (Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

On 4 November Isa Yusuf made his first visit to the Secretary General of the Arab League, the Egyptian Abdul Rahman Azzam. He asked the Arab League to send a delegation to inquire about the situation of the Muslims in the Soviet Union and China and, of course for help for the refugees. A few more meetings followed and according to him, many Egyptians wanted to know about his firsthand experiences from Soviet Russia. He finished his trip holding countless meetings with journalists and activists,⁶⁴ as well as receiving an invitation to the famous Al-Azhar University where was asked to give a speech (Alptekin 2007). Given Egypt's internal political developments, no positive answer was to be expected soon, so he decided to move on to his final destination.

⁶⁴ See Alptekin (2007, 55–56) for a list of people he met while in Egypt.

Finding a Home for their *ırkdaş*

On 6 January 1952 he took a plane to Turkey. Mehmet Emin Bughra came from Kashmir and arrived in Istanbul a few days before him in order to conduct their activities together. I asked the Bughra family why Mehmet Emin didn't accompany Isa Yusuf on his earlier travels.⁶⁵ During his exile in Afghanistan Mehmet Emin became close friends with the Ambassador of the Turkish Republic in Kabul, Memduh Şevket Esendal (Shimizu Yuriko 2012). Mehmet Emin's nephew, Mehmet Rıza Bekin moved to Turkey in 1938 to attend military school, so maybe he was thinking of Turkey as the country that they should put the emphasis on. But the Bughra family thought that it must have been due to financial constraints,⁶⁶ and the fact that Isa Yusuf had already contacts in Saudi Arabia and Egypt from his previous visits. Erkin Alptekin said in a personal conversation that they wanted a distribution of tasks. While Mehmet Emin stayed in India to take care of the Uyghur and Kazakh refugees who had already arrived or were still on their way, Isa Yusuf Alptekin agreed to go and find a host country.

As Isa Yusuf Alptekin recalls, Mehmet Emin Bughra came to the airport with a large group of thirty to forty people, among them East Turkistanis that lived in Istanbul, the editor-in-chief of the *Komünizmle Mücadele Mecmuası* (*Journal for Struggle against Communism*) Bekir Berk (a lawyer close to pan-Turkists and conservative Muslims),⁶⁷ members of the foundation of the same name, members of the Istanbul branch of the Milliyetçiler Derneği (Nationalist Foundation), the correspondents of a few newspapers (among others *Yeni İstanbul Gazetesi* and *Son Telgraf Gazetesi*) and the consul of Nationalist China (Alptekin 2007, 57-58). On the following days Isa Yusuf Alptekin was busy with giving statements and interviews to various newspapers. One of the headings used for an article with an interview in *Son Telgraf Gazetesi* published on 21 January 1952 was 'The East Turkistan Tragedy' (Doğu Türkistan Faciası), where he talked extensively about the situation of East Turkistan and the migrants' miserable conditions in India. He also translated into Turkish a declaration he had written in the Uyghur language entitled 'East Turkistan behind the Iron Curtain' to distribute to journalists and politicians.

⁶⁵ Mehmet Emin Bughra's memoirs unfortunately end with his arrival in Kashgar on 28 September 1949 (see Shimizu Yuriko 2012).

⁶⁶ Personal communication with Yakup Bughra.

⁶⁷ See Landau (1995).

In the interviews he summarizes the hopeless situation of the ırkdaş (racial brethren) of the Turks, and hopes that the negotiation with the Turkish Government will end in the acceptance of the now 1800 East Turkistani refugees stranded in India, as well as those who moved on to Pakistan and those who were stuck in Saudi Arabia without any money to move anywhere. The main theme of these interviews was the danger arising from Soviet Imperialism and the desperate situation of the Turks in Turkistan under the yoke of Communism. He stresses the racial and ethnic ties and the long history of Russian oppression of Turks, putting less importance on religion. Communism and its threat to Islam was the theme that dominated his visits in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, but in Turkey the racial component of Turkish solidarity becomes more apparent. He also describes the courageous journey of the 1800 refugees to India, and that they were now facing deportation to China. He underlines that he can't say how much longer they will be able to survive and action must be taken quickly to save them. He furthermore expressed his hopes that the Turkish Government could provide scholarships for the young people to attend schools and universities in Turkey.⁶⁸ He tried to raise awareness and directed the formulation of the needs of the Turks in India to address the public opinion. The aforementioned newspapers published a number of these interviews before İsa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra went to Ankara to meet with the officials of the Turkish Government.

Pan-Turkism, Kemalism and the 1950s in Turkey

In the 1950s a number of Turkists undertook the task of establishing an organization with the aim to fight Communism, establishing the Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği (The Foundation of Struggle against Communism) in the city of Zonguldak in 1950 (Özdoğan 2001). Turkey was just at the beginning of a multiparty democracy coming from a tumultuous transition period after the single-party period had ended in 1945. External pressure for democratization increased when Turkey signed the UN charter and committing itself to democratic ideals. The close relationship with the Soviet Union, one pillar of Turkish foreign policy during the 1920s and 1930s, came to an end with Turkey's neutral position during WWII. The Soviet Union did not renew the friendship treaty with Turkey in 1945. The Soviets came up with a number of 'corrections' to certain parts of the border including the return of areas in north-eastern Anatolia that had been under Russian control at times in the past. Turkey refused Soviet demands in conciliatory wording in order to avoid tension, and gradually the United States

⁶⁸ See his memoirs (2007, 58–59) and Erkin Alptekin (1992, 15–17) for a detailed list of his interviews.

became more supportive of the Turkish position. In 1947 under the Truman Doctrine the first substantial aid arrived in Turkey. The Marshall Plan envisaged financial help to boost Turkey's economy, sustain lucrative export markets for the US industry and to mitigate poverty as a potential hotbed for communism. The USA saw Turkey sharing long land borders and maritime boundaries with the Soviet Union as an anti-communist bulwark.

Turkey slowly changed its direction and brought forward national elections in July 1946. To no surprise the Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party, RPP) won, but the Demokrat Parti (Democratic Party, DP) managed to win 62 (of the 465) seats of the assembly. Considering that the electoral process was far from flawless this was considered a remarkable success. The effects of the Cold War were soon to be felt in Turkey with the DP and RPP accusing each other of being 'soft' on Communism (Zürcher 2004). In the years 1948 and 1949, when repression of the left began, prominent pan-Turkists like Nihal Atsız and Zeki Velidi Togan (a Bashkir revolutionary from West Turkistan) were rehabilitated. In the transition period from 1945 to 1950 political liberalization was granted to a certain degree. For the right-wing groups in Turkey that meant the end of the 'latent stage, (...) when Pan-Turkism was meaningfully active only in the capitals of Central and Western Europe' (Landau 1995, 111). Trials against right-wing political activists that had been charged with spreading subversive racist pan-Turkic propaganda and setting up groups to overthrow the government from 1944 were re-held in 1946/47 and the charges dismissed by the courts. Pan-Turkism became socially acceptable with the courts rehabilitating pan-Turkism (Özdoğan 2001). According to Landau, 'the public had been fed a large dose of pan-Turkic ideology, emphasising its strongly nationalistic character' (1995, 118). Hostler (1957) claims that Togan argued in his testimony that the pan-Turkists only attempted to awaken the government officials' interest in the destiny of the Turkic groups in the Soviet Union. The transition under the RPP provided a convenient political setting for pan-Turkic and anti-Communist groups. With this liberalization the RPP hoped to prevent the opposition of the DP. Celal Bayar, a former member of the Committee of Union and Progress, who was appointed by Atatürk as prime minister, was a member of the RPP until 1945. In 1946 he founded the DP and the party became an immediate threat to the electoral success of the RPP (Zürcher 2004). The RPP changed the press law, the law of association, removing the enactment that regulated the closing down of journals. The laws of association were liberalized and organizations became active again. But despite these reforms, the DP won the elections in 1950 and Celal Bayar became the third president of Turkey until the 1960 coup d'état (Zürcher 2004). The elections of 1950 were a turning point in Turkish history. Political organization had been in the hands

of an elite that shared power with a small bourgeoisie. With the introduction of a multi-party system in 1945 the parliament turned into a forum of debate (Keyder 1987).

During these transitions the now vindicated older Turkists and pan-Turkists began to publish in cooperation with younger members new Turkist periodicals in 1947. The Turkish Hearths (Türk Ocakları), shut down in 1931, relaunched its activities led by its former secretary-general Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver in 1949. Other organizations like the Turkish Culture Hearth (Türk Kültür Ocağı) and Association for Activities of Turkish Culture (Türk Çalışmaları Derneği) were founded in 1946. New periodicals appeared that showed much continuity in terms of content and names (Özdoğan 2001). A public image began to be presented that pan-Turkists were the only true nationalists, with the trials being their starting point and Communists, particularly local Communists, being the new threat. These ideas were widely published now that Turkey had given up its neutral position (Landau 1995).

Given this broader context, it was not only anti-Communism that brought these men to the airport. Kemalist and pan-Turkist claims that the Turks had migrated from Central Asia to Turkey had been recognized and propagated in school history textbooks since the early 1930s. In their romantic pan-Turkism, nationalists perceived Turkistan as the heartland of Turkishness where the first Turks came from and Turks from this region as real Turks (Özdoğan 2001). They came to welcome a 'Proto-Turk'! In this regard Isa Yusuf Alptekin's reception committee was a condensed who's who of the old and new pan-Turkists and anti-Communists in Turkey. Each side were interested in narrating the atrocities of Communism, an undertaking that Isa Yusuf Alptekin had gained experience in during his visits in Saudi Arabia and Egypt. In Turkey he spiced it up with a heavy emphasis on racial issues.

Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra in Ankara

To accelerate the political process concerning the fate of those left behind in India, they decided to go to Ankara and use their old contacts to see what they could do by meeting the politicians in charge personally. They arrived in Ankara on 14 January 1952. The next day they met the former Turkish Ambassador to Afghanistan Memduh Şevket Esendal, a friend of Mehmet Emin, whom Isa Yusuf had also met on his first trip to Turkey in 1939. Memduh Şevket Esendal was born in Çorlu in 1883 into a well-off farmer family. Due to the Balkan Wars the family had to move to Istanbul. Although they went back to Çorlu after the war the outbreak of WWI forced them back to Istanbul. The family lost their financial assets and he grew up in dire straits. Due to these experiences as a migrant in a war torn period, we might assume that he had a good understanding of the situation of the Uyghur refugees. He advised them to maintain strong relations with the United States of America and Taiwan in order to

gain financial support. On that day Memduh Şevket Esendal also invited to the meeting the Secretary General of the RPP, Kasım Gülek. In his house Mehmet Emin and Isa Yusuf talked about the Communist atrocities in all their details. Disappointedly, Isa Yusuf recalls that Kasım Gülek suggested that it would be better if the refugees moved to countries closer to East Turkistan. This way they wouldn't forget their traditions, practises, their alphabet. Neither would they forget their determination for the Cause while being a source of hope for the people in East Turkistan. But if they dispersed and moved to a place far away the Cause only would lose its persistency. To that Memduh Şevket Esendal replied, 'Turkey's doors are wide open for the coming Turkistanis' (Alptekin 2007, 62).

Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin were disillusioned, afraid that this time a third country would reject their request. Some sections of the political elite were not really interested in the East Turkistan Cause, an impression Isa Yusuf had already gained after his visit to the Turkish Embassy in New Delhi. Interestingly, Kasım Gülek argued that the Uyghurs might lose their cultural practices if they moved to a country far away. Most likely he was not interested in pan-Turkic ideas, since he implies that the Uyghurs might lose their traditions in Turkey and that there were better places to pursue the Cause. By contrast, pan-Turkists emphasize the similarities, perceiving Turkey and East Turkistan as being culturally similar, their languages just two dialects of Turkic. Uyghurs, too, always stressed the cultural similarities between them and their Turkish brothers.

Three days later they were finally able to meet with the Minister for Foreign Affairs Professor Fuat Köprülü, and presented their two requests. First, that the Republic of Turkey helps the people of East Turkistan with their struggle for independence against the Chinese and Russian Communists; and second that they accept the 1850 refugees from East Turkistan and support 200 students in order for them to study in Turkey. He notes that Professor Fuat Köprülü also asked whether they had been in contact with the United States of America, a repeatedly occurring question. In one interview his son Arslan remarked how important it was for his father to get the United States of America involved in the Cause, because in his opinion it would be the only state that would have the power and the interest in supporting the East Turkistanis against Communism. The questions by Memduh Esendal and Professor Fuat Köprülü also pointed in this direction. Isa Yusuf Alptekin had met with the US Ambassador in India and had sent letters to the US Consulate General in Ürümqi (Alptekin 2007). They all agreed that they should be in contact with representatives of the United States of America, because, as Professor Fuat Köprülü stated according to Isa Yusuf's memoirs, 'it will be the only country in the future that will be in the position to help us all' (2007, 63). By including 'they will help us all', he arguably referred to the convergence of anti-communist politics in

both Turkey and the United States, the internal anti-Communist efforts of McCarthyism as well as the anti-communism of the Cold War.

During their stay in Ankara they carried out a plethora of meetings with the President of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, ministers as well as activists from the pan-Turkic groups based in Ankara.⁶⁹ Among the people they met was Haşim İşcan, in charge of the Settlement Office, who had been involved in the resettlement of Turkish and Muslims migrants from the Balkans. Word had spread that the Turkish embassies of countries with Turkistani refugees were ordered to take care of them as soon as possible (Alptekin 2007). After these ‘frantic efforts’ (Erkin Alptekin 1990) Körprülü told them that the Council of Ministers would urgently discuss this issue very soon.

‘Public opinion’ in the pan-Turkic media asked: ‘Hey, what is there to think about? From eight million people 1500 survived, they are facing death, are hungry, miserable and wretched.’⁷⁰ While waiting for the final decision to be made, Isa Yusuf Alptekin recalls a meeting with West Turkistanis living in Ankara. At this meeting they discussed the question whether the West and East Turkistani communities in Turkey should unite their movements under one flag? Despite the discourses of pan-Turkism the two groups decided that it would create problems (which are not further explained) if they fused into one movement. They agreed to act separately, but to support each other in a brotherly manner (Alptekin 2007, 74). During my fieldwork I heard on a few occasions that the main cause for the unofficial discord was that China was supportive of the West Turkistan movement and was sending money to back them financially. Based on that, some of the West Turkistanis used the term ‘Chinese Turkistan’,⁷¹ much to the dislike of the East Turkistanis. Two persons specifically accused Zeki Velidi Togan of doing so. This might have been the reason for why the two Causes were kept apart.⁷²

⁶⁹ See Alptekin (2007, 65–69) for a meticulous recollection of the meetings.

⁷⁰ Osman Yüksel in his magazine *Serdengeçti*, no 15, 1952.

⁷¹ David Brophy mentioned in a personal communication that the Three Efendis certainly used the term Chinese Turkistan. However, in Turkey among the East Turkistanis there is a strong disapproval of this term and it’s not used.

⁷² I haven’t come across any written proof of that and also in the meetings with people from West Turkistan I haven’t heard anyone using Chinese Turkistan. Officially the relationships were great, but on the other hand, at least at the time of my fieldwork there was hardly any cooperation between these groups and also in the publication since the early 1990s the East Turkistan Cause has been contextualized in the frame of Chinese colonization, whereas the nation states that emerged in West Turkistan were busy with their own specific nationalism, neglecting the ideas of Turkistan.

On 13 March 1952 the Turkish Government announced that they would accept the refugees from India as *iskânlı göçmen*, as well as those who were in Pakistan⁷³ and in Saudi Arabia. The state supports migrants who are coming as *iskânlı göçmen* with housing and financial incentives. *Serbest göçmen* on the other hand are migrants who are coming at their own expense without receiving any support from the state.




Image has been removed as it contains copyright material.

Figure 12. Copy of the judgement provided by Arslan Alptekin, but see also Erkin Alptekin (1990, 41).

⁷³ Erkin Alptekin (1990, 17) remarks how his father added into his application for help the East Turkistani refugees living in the cities of Lahore, Rawalpindi and Peshawar who left East Turkistan in 1931. After his father came to India, he tried to get into contact with the Kazakhs there and offered them help.

Turkish Immigration into Turkey

The acceptance of the East Turkistani refugees from India, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia was the individual success of the tireless efforts of Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra, but the refugees certainly also benefitted from the immigration regime of the early Republic of Turkey. The Turkish immigration policy, based on the resettlement law number 2510 (İskân Kanunu) that went into effect in 1934 and had been valid until 2006 was solidly in favour of vaguely defined Turkish groups (Türk Soyu). In it ethnicity, and not religion, became an asset for candidates for Turkish citizenship. Article three of the Statute on Exemptions from Settlement issued in 1934 enables Turkish consular offices to issue visas without approval from the Ministry of Interior to ‘people who belong to the Turkish race’, if they were not in need of any financial help upon their arrival. In the same law naturalization processes were modified, so that those ‘who belong to the Turkish race, or those who share the Turkish culture, speak Turkish and know no other languages’ could receive their naturalization certificates without inspection (Çagaptay 2002, 74). In these terms ethnic Turks (such as the Crimean Tatars, the Bosnian Muslims or the Karapapaks, a Sunni Muslim community from Azerbaijan) would receive Turkish citizenship without any further inquiry.

The construction of the modern Turkish nation state has been deeply influenced by migration movements and its political implications. The early years of the Republic especially saw efforts to create a homogeneous state, but this process began decades before the institution of the Republic of Turkey (Çagaptay 2002). Turkish migrants came to Anatolia during the Balkan Wars. And during the Armenian Genocide in 1915, 1.5 million Armenians were either killed or deported (Dündar 2006, Kieser 2002). The second event transforming the ethnic balances of the population was the exchange between Greece and Turkey (mübadele) in 1923 (Arı 1995). The years between 1923 and 1965 were characterized by a ruthless Turkification and Islamification of the population, fostered through waves of (coercive) migration and expulsion (İçduygu and Sirkeci 1999). The emigration of the non-Muslim population and the organized immigration of Turkish and Muslim groups from the former domains of the Ottoman Empire, namely Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and former Yugoslavia, heavily changed the make-up of Turkey.⁷⁴ These migration movements further homogenized the population within the newly established Turkish nation state. Complementary to this international migration, internal legal measures of social engineering pursued the mass resettlement of the

⁷⁴ In the period from 1914 to 1927 the non-Muslim population dropped from 19% to 3% (İçduygu 2008, 24).

non-Turkish population. The resettlement law from 1934 makes it easier for migrants with a Turkish lineage to immigrate and hinders migrants who don't fit this category. The law furthermore regulates the assimilation of non-Turkish citizens in Turkey through resettlement actions. It allowed resettling people, for example Kurds with a different mother tongue than Turkish, or those with different religious practices, into certain areas where Turkish in speech and habits was dominant (Çagaptay 2002). This law was officially abolished in 2006 within the harmonization processes between the EU and Turkey.

These homogenization processes (especially in the 1930s) were concomitant with the rise of ethnic and racial nationalism in Turkey. Turkish nationalism was established through practices of the Turkish state based on Kemalist ideas that were developed with the discursive support of pseudo-scientific works like the Turkish History Thesis (Türk Tarih Tezi) and the Sun Language Theory (Güneş Dil Teorisi).⁷⁵ The 1924 Constitution of the Republic dealt with the diversity that was still part of Turkey, presenting the people of Turkey, 'regardless of their religion and race' (Çagaptay 2004), as Turks as far as citizenship was concerned. The government in Ankara tried to assimilate minorities into the Turkish nation and expected non-Turkish Muslim groups to Turkify. In 1931 the Kemalist regime introduced a policy that centralized power around the RPP. Independent organizations and associations joined the RPP and the RPP merged with the state. Kemalist nationalism began to play a bigger role than before in Turkish politics and in the redefinition of Turkish nationalism (Çagaptay 2002).

In the 1930s the notion of 'race' – in Turkish, *ırk* – became a primary marker of Turkishness and Turkish nationalism. In this political environment Atatürk instructed the Committee for the Study of Turkish History (Türk Ocakları Tarihi Tetkik Heyeti) of the Turkish Hearths to prepare work on Turkish history. In 1931 the committee was transformed into the Society for the Study of Turkish History (Türk Tarihini Tetkik Cemiyeti).⁷⁶ This organization would later establish a committee that conducted research on Turkish, called the Society for the Study of the Turkish Language (Türk Dili Tetkik Cemiyeti). That organization developed comparative studies that purported to prove that the Turkish language was influential in the development and progress of all world languages. The main responsibility for Society for the Study of Turkish History was to study and synthesize the main themes of Turkish history. In 1932 the society organized a congress where the delegates discussed questions of the history of Turkish

⁷⁵ See Ersanlı's (2007) study *İktidar ve Tarih: Türkiye'de 'Resmi Tarih' Tezinin Oluşumu (1927–1937)*, that deals with the Turkish History Thesis and Laut's study (2000) *Das Türkische als Ursprache? Sprachwissenschaftliche Theorien in der Zeit des erwachenden türkischen Nationalismus*, which deals with the Sun Language Theory.

⁷⁶ It was renamed Turkish Historical Society (Türk Tarih Kurumu) in 1937.

civilization, anthropological characteristics of the Turkish race, as well as language and literature (Üstel 2004). At this congress, discussing the Turkish History Thesis, Afet Inan, a Turkish historian and sociologist and one of the adopted daughters of Atatürk, stated the Turks were great and ancient people with roots in Central Asia, where they had lived for thousand of years and created a radiant civilization around an inner sea. But due to climate changes, they had to migrate and moved in all directions to civilize the world (Çagaptay 2004). This narrative carried the implications that the Turks civilized the lands they migrated to, and that they were the ancestors of a whole range of people, including of Indo-Europeans whose origins were in Central Asia. Furthermore, contemporary Turks not only inherited the glories of ancient Sumerian, Egyptians and Greeks, but were actually the owners of the earliest civilization in Anatolia, which made the Turks in Anatolia the original and autochthonous inhabitants (Üstel 2004). This historiography left no room for alternative interpretation; it turned the Greeks, Kurds and Armenians of Anatolia into Turks.

The First Turkish History Congress ended with the affirmation of the primordial idea of the Turkish nation with a special emphasis on race. According to the delegates, since their immigration the Turks had mixed with other races, but they were able to maintain their cultural characteristics, their language, their memory, indeed everything that is needed to be a nation. The main markers of Turkishness were made through a Central Asian language-through-ethnicity and race lineage. Islam was no major component of this type of Turkishness. In doing so, Kemalism pushed one former central element of a collective identity of the Muslim Ottoman population to the margins in the discourse on Turkishness (Çagaptay 2004). Following the History Congress the next important logical step was research on Turkish languages. As most of the major civilizations descend from the Turks, so were most of the major languages of Turkish origin, as stated at the Language Congress. The Sun Language Theory developed etymological arguments and was first publicised in 1936, mirroring the Turkish History Thesis on a linguistic level (Üstel 2004).

At the same time in the early 1930s association participants worked on language purification, to revitalize the ‘splendour of Turkish’ and to close the existing gap between written and spoken Turkish. To achieve this Turkish had to be reformed based on the spoken language and purified. The script was changed, and Arabic and Persian words were (sought to be) replaced by Turkish words. Thousands of new words were coined by the Society for Research on the Turkish Language (Türk Dili Araştırma Kurumu)⁷⁷ with the help of the government⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Later only called Türk Dil Kurumu.

(Çagaptay 2004, 91). As Brophy mentions (2016) this discourse of language purification also found its way into Xinjiang. In the 1940s the Three Efendis referring to the Kemalist discourse of Turkisms avoided Arabic terms and adopted Turkic words and names. In the course of this Isa Yusuf adopted the last name Alptekin (Heroic Prince). Erkin Alptekin traces the name back to the Turkic commander Alp-Tegin of the Samanid Empire who became Governor of Ghazna in 962 AD, but didn't provide further information in the interview if this was the inspiration for his father to embrace this name.

One element of the Turkish History Thesis became a central pillar of Uyghur discourse in Turkey. The fact that Central Asia was considered to be the ancient heartland of a Turkish civilization worked in their favour. Picking up this narration of Turkishness and using it as an opportunity, the Uyghurs were able to present themselves as coming from the cradle of Turkishness. On top of this regional aspect of an ancestral home, they added that they were the first Turkic tribe to give up a nomadic lifestyle and to settle down. This added to their significance within a more elaborated civilizational model. To prove this claim linguistically, many Uyghurs in Turkey told me that the word *Uyghur* was the root for the Turkish word *uygar* (civilized) and *uygarlık* (civilization). 'We were the first Turks to settle in cities and to give up nomadic practices, so the word *uygarlık* must be coming from the word Uyghur.'⁷⁹

These existing and developing historical and linguistic claims were helpful in facilitating Uyghur migration to Turkey. The letter below, in Figure 13, shows how a refugee from East Turkistan who with the help of Isa Yusuf Alptekin applied for a visa as a *serbest göçmen* in 1951. The letter is the response to his application asking the applicant to provide the necessary information whether he is of Turkish race and ancestry (*Türk ırk ve soyundan olup olmadığı*) and about his personal financial situation. I wondered how this question of proof to be from the Turkish race could be convincingly answered, and I asked him how he tried to prove it, but the interviewee said that he can't remember. He recalls that, as far as he can remember, his Chinese passport with a Turkish name stating that he was born in Ürümqi was enough to convince the officials at the Turkish Embassy to believe that he was of Turkish ancestry.

⁷⁸ See *The Turkish Language Reform. A Catastrophic Success* by Geoffrey Lewis for a detailed study about the language reforms (1999).

⁷⁹ Geoffrey Lewis (1999), although without giving any reference is also saying that the word *uygarlık*, 'an arbitrary coinage' (p. 122) that replaced the Arabic *medeniyet* is based on the name Uyghur.

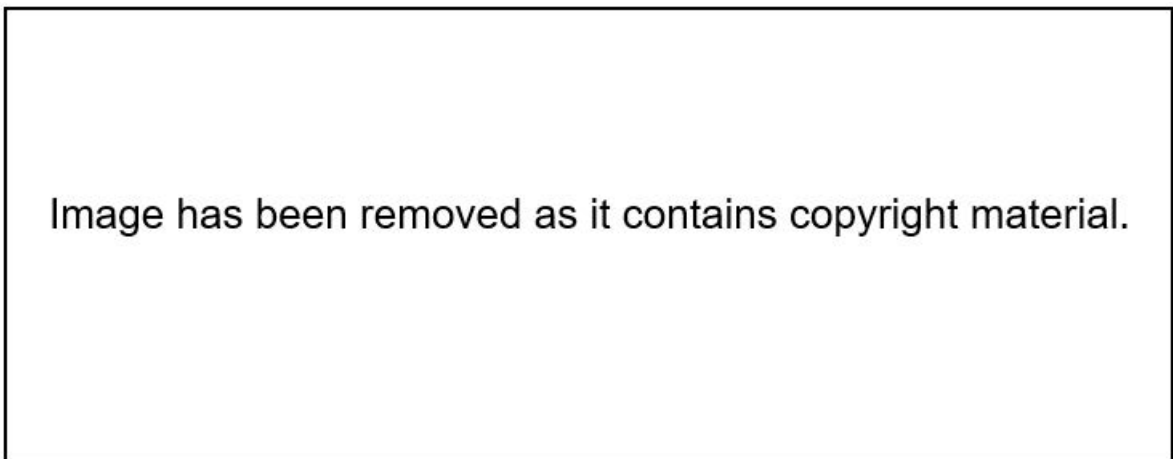


Figure 13. Letter from the Turkish Embassy in Delhi asking for further information concerning one applicant's ethnic background. (Document provided by interviewee)

Back to India to Organize the Emigration

With their acceptance secured, Isa Yusuf decided to go back to India to take care of the relocation personally, while Mehmet Emin Bughra opted to stay in Ankara.

Isa Yusuf arrived in Kashmir on 17 May 1952, visiting the refugees to get an idea about the condition they were in. A few people had passed away in the meantime. He thanked Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, the Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir for his help. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah replied that it was unfortunate that they couldn't have done more, but that their possibilities were limited. Interestingly Isa Yusuf recalls that Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah told him that he had offered the Kazakhs land which they refused. Alptekin answered that they wanted to wait and see if there is a country that would take them, because they probably would have stayed if they had accepted the land.

A few days later Isa Yusuf organized a meeting in his house to which more than one hundred Kazakhs and Uyghurs came to attend (Alptekin 2007). According to his memoirs, he informed them in a very detailed way about his trips to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Turkey and of the acceptance of the Turkish Government to allow them to immigrate to Turkey as *iskânli göçmen*. The next step they would have to take was to apply for visas as *iskânli göçmen* at the Turkish Embassy in Delhi in order to achieve the necessary travel documents. The Turkish embassies had been instructed to address their application with urgency, but he added that only those who could cover the travel costs from their own pocket would be allowed to move right away. According to his information, the applications of East Turkistan refugees would be evaluated like the cases of the Bulgarian Turks. In case of successful proof of their Turkish origin and a positive application they will receive some land and a loan of 5000 Turkish Lira with a low-percentage interest. Their transition would also be made easier with a little pecuniary help. He describes how he also wants to make sure that they realize that there might be some problems awaiting them. Drawing from his own experiences in Turkey he disclosed that the situation of some of the Bulgarian Turks was good, but that for some of them life is still difficult and full of hardships in Turkey: 'I told them that the decision is in their own hands'. Isa Yusuf even mentions that some of the people he met in Turkey shared the view that it would be better for the Cause if the East Turkistanis stayed in India. And that the Turkish Government had offered to get in touch with the Indian Government to make sure that they will be supportive if they wanted to stay. He enunciated clearly, that

I won't be giving any advice in this life-sustaining matter. ... If I advise them to go, they will make me responsible for any predicament that might occur. If I advise them to stay in Kashmir and international help is cut, they will be in a plight. (Alptekin 2007, 78–79)⁸⁰

One of my interviewees recalls the discussion that followed. Although he didn't mention this meeting in Alptekin's house specifically, he remembered the debate about what to do and how he felt after he had heard what Isa Yusuf had to say:

He [Isa Yusuf] shared all the information he got with us, I was a bit devastated that Saudi Arabia didn't want us, and that some of the officials in Turkey even seemed to be reluctant by trying to make us stay in Kashmir. But I knew we had to go, I could almost feel the Chinese pressure on the Indian Government. We were too close to China, what if they extradite us to the Communists? On the other hand, Turkey was so far away, I had no idea about Turkey, but at least there was the opportunity to apply and a little help promised.

Even though Isa Yusuf narrates in his memoirs that he didn't want to influence the decision-making process of the refugees, two interviewees recalled how he clearly advocated for Turkey. He reported that with the Turks being their brothers it would be a better place to maintain the East Turkistan Cause, using the argument that it would be too dangerous to stay in China since they didn't know which direction the Indian Government would take, and that while he was in Turkey he saw how strong its anti-communist tendencies were. This was no surprise after his experiences at the airport in Istanbul. Others supported the idea that staying in the vicinity of East Turkistan would be better for the Cause and it would be easier to go back when the political conditions are changing. In any case the refugees remained undecided for some time.

Isa Yusuf remembers how a few of the Kazakh notables (ileri gelenleri) came to ask for his advice again. He wasn't sure what to think about the Kazakhs who, according to his biography, asked him while he was in Turkey, 'please, send us to Turkey as soon as possible', but at the same time sent letters to the Nationalist Chinese Government in Taiwan saying, 'Isa and Mehmet Emin want to take us to Turkey, but we don't want to go and rather stay in Kashmir!' (Alptekin 2007, 79)

His interpretation was that their indecision stemmed from their assumption that Isa and Mehmet Emin preferred Turkey, but the Nationalist Chinese instead wanted them to stay in

⁸⁰ It is noticeable that after having done all the groundwork to ensure the immigration, he narrates his position in the decision-making process as almost neutral. Arslan Alptekin mentioned in one meeting that a few families did blame him for problems they faced in Turkey saying that actually it was Isa Yusuf's fault that they came to Turkey.

Kashmir. The Kazakh didn't know what to do and wanted to satisfy both sides. In response, Isa Yusuf Alptekin organized another meeting with the Kazakh and Uyghur notables and told them again that he closely followed the correspondence between Turkey and India, and that he would also take care of the visa applications and the necessary documents. One Kazakh said to him at that point that his tribe (*benim oymağım*) wanted to go to Turkey. The next day, the Kazakh wrote a letter to Mehmet Emin Bughra who was in Ankara, telling him that they wanted to come, but that they didn't have the money to pay for the trip (Alptekin 2007, 81).

In an interview one Kazakh man told me that they couldn't decide because the Nationalist Chinese kept asking them to come to Taiwan, but when one tribe decided to go, most of the others followed and we decided to go to Turkey. Among the Uyghurs I interviewed the decision making was narrated as a rather clear matter, as once Saudi Arabia and Egypt weren't options anymore, they wanted to go to Turkey. 'We wanted to be as far away as possible from China!' Despite this a number of the Kazakhs and Uyghurs stayed back in India, and some of them migrated to Saudi Arabia at their own expense.

Isa Yusuf barely mentions the efforts of the Nationalists at that point to persuade the Kazakhs and Uyghurs to come to Taiwan. Based on his archival research Justin Jacobs (2016) confirms this invitation from Taiwan to the Kazakhs in Kashmir and writes how the Kazakhs were reluctant to go, being afraid that the Communists may reach there.⁸¹ The perspective of Yolbars Khan, Governor of Xinjiang for Nationalist Taiwan, on the prospects for Xinjiang's future was slightly different to Isa Yusuf's and Mehmet Emin Bughra's. He could see Xinjiang's future only under the protection of China, whereas Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin believed in an independent Turkistan. The Nationalists failed to convince the two Uyghurs to operate from Taipei. The only other two remaining ex-politicians of Xinjiang were ethnic Han. They wanted Mehmet Emin and Isa Yusuf because they carried the necessary credentials to function as 'convincing ethnopolitical representatives' (Jacobs 2016, 205).

Yolbars tried to reach the refugees in Kashmir in order to make them migrate to Formosa and redirected some money to Kashmir (Jacobs 2016). According to one Kazakh interviewee they received letters or telegraphs from the Nationalist government in Taiwan. With the Kazakh's decision to go to Turkey, a breach between the Nationalists in Formosa and Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin Bughra in Turkey was unavoidable. After the Kazakhs and the Uyghurs decided to emigrate to Turkey, Isa Yusuf Alptekin prepared lists in order to get the

⁸¹ See Justin M. Jacobs' book *Xinjiang and the Modern Chinese State* (2016) for a detailed account of the Xinjiang Government in exile and the efforts to get Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin to Taipei, the competition over the refugees and global publicity.

applications to the Turkish embassy in New Delhi. To process them the refugees had to prove that they were of Turkish origin as shown in Figure 14.

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Figure 14. Letter from the Turkish Embassy in Delhi to Isa Yusuf asking for more specific information on an immigrants' background. (Document provided by Arslan Alptekin)

Figure 14 is a document concerning the refugees who were trying to migrate to Turkey as *iskânlı göçmen*. The letter from the Turkish Embassy in New Delhi refers to a list of names and applications Isa Yusuf Alptekin had sent and asks for further information concerning the migrants' origin and race, and whether they are refugees and have passports. I asked Arslan Alptekin about the question of proof and he answered that his father sent a long letter to the embassy explaining that they were all from the homeland of the Turks, and that would well prove their Turkish origin as well as their racial ancestry. That met the official's satisfaction.

The problem Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra were facing now was how to financially organize the journey. The Turkish Government stated in one letter to Isa Yusuf Alptekin that according to the legal system there is no chance to cover the expenses of the refugees up to the Turkish border. The refugees would have to come to the border at their own expense.⁸² Information regarding the expenses of the migration varied. In the interviews, Uyghurs said that the United Nations covered part of the journey to the Turkish borders. And we can see in the letter below (Figure 15) that Mehmet Emin Bughra tried to get the High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations to contribute to migrants' passage to Turkey. In it we also see what Alptekin mentions in his book, that the Turkish Government was not willing to pay the travel expenses.

A number of interviewees claimed that in the end the Turkish state paid. Isa Yusuf mentions in passing that the World Council of Churches bore the cost of the passage (2007, 84). His son Erkin, who went to the Irish Catholic School in India, mentioned in one interview that the biggest portion, more than 95% of the money, came from the World Council of Churches, and that they received nothing from Turkey. But as far as he can remember they also managed to get a little funding from Uyghurs in Saudi Arabia, who were financially not in the position to pay for all of the passage. It is interesting that despite the emphasis on Turkish brotherhood based on race and Islam, the money for their passage to Turkey came from a Christian source.

⁸² Alptekin (2007, 85) cites the letter from the Turkish Government from 1952, but he doesn't provide a photocopy of the original letter.

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Figure 15. Letter from Mehmet Emin Bughra to the High Commissioner for Refugees of the United Nations. (The Bughra family provided this letter)

On 26 October in 1952 the first refugees moved to Turkey, and by the end of 1953 according to Isa Yusuf approximately 1800 people had arrived (Alptekin 2007, 81). A few came later as *serbest göçmen*. For a few people problems arose. The Turkish Embassy rejected the applications of a few refugees based on rumours that they were Communists, but Isa Yusuf Alptekin became the guarantor for them and managed to get visas for them, too. One interesting thing Isa Yusuf Alptekin mentions is how he managed to send four promising students directly from India to the United States of America to study (2007, 82). Neither Isa

Yusuf nor Erkin Alptekin recount anything about their journey to Turkey. From one of the thank you letters of the Kazakhs sent to Isa Yusuf,⁸³ we can see that some of them stayed at a rest house in the suburb of Sirkeci at the European side of Istanbul. The interviews revealed that there must have been a few routes that the East Turkistan refugees took. One interviewee recalls that the refugees from Kashmir went to Mumbai. From Mumbai they travelled to Basra by ship. A second group migrating from Pakistan went to Karachi to embark on the journey to Basra. Both groups then took trains from Basra to the Turkish border, where Turkish immigration officers met them. One interviewee mentioned how they arrived in Adana and remembered how ‘the Turkish officials registered us, doctors came to do a health inspection and others gave us food. They even checked our teeth, we felt a bit awkward, like being in the horse section of the Sunday market in Kashgar’. From the border they travelled by train to Istanbul where they stayed and waited for some time to get their allocated housing. After they had spent a few days in a rest house, my few Uyghur interviewees recalled how they were brought to Zeytinburnu, a district in Istanbul just outside the ancient walls of the city,⁸⁴ which was one of the first *Gecekondus*⁸⁵ in Istanbul.

Interviewees remembered that after some time they were asked to attend classes to learn how to speak and write Turkish. Some additional vocational classes were added later on. ‘We tried to learn the Anatolian dialect of Turkish (Anadolu Lehçesi), but it was really hard, especially with the Latin alphabet. For me it was like a different language’, one woman recalled, musing about her own struggle with the language. Thinking it was just a dialect in the beginning, she realized that it was a different language. Some of the men found work in the leather industry in Zeytinburnu, while others opened up little stores using skills they had acquired in East Turkistan. The horologist for example tried to set up a small goods shop selling watches. One refugee named Polat Kadiri, who had been a historian in Xinjiang, managed to find a job as a lecturer at the Department of Sinology at the University of Istanbul. He worked there until 1966 when he moved on to Germany to work for the Uyghur section of Radio Liberty. He passed away in 1970 and was buried in Istanbul. Erkin Alptekin took over his position at Radio Liberty in Munich.

⁸³ See Alptekin (2007) and Erkin Alptekin (1990) for the thank you letters, sent mostly by Kazakh refugees. Arslan Alptekin showed me a few of the original letters written in Arabic script in a mix of Kazakh and Uyghur.

⁸⁴ See also Svanberg (1989) who mainly focused on the Kazakhs for some further information on the distribution in camps and resettlement of Kazakh families.

⁸⁵ *Gecekondus* literally means ‘built at night’. This term describes squatter dwellings.

The small number of about 200 Uyghurs among the refugees mostly stayed in Istanbul and surrounding places like Yalova or Tuzla. A few of them managed to travel to Germany as early as the late 1950s, while others went to the United States. Some managed to get the necessary resident permits for Saudi Arabia and settled there, realizing their first idea of a host country.⁸⁶ One Uyghur man who settled in Turkey remembers,

How difficult it was for us, the Kazakhs had their tribal connection, we were completely alone and had to find our way through these hard times. We were very happy to be here, but we were struggling a lot. The language was quite different, there were hardly any jobs, and housing was cold and mouldy. Turkey was a free country indeed, but also difficult to get by. And later on there were also lots of migrants coming from the eastern provinces of Turkey competing with us on the labour market.

With regard to the local population he said, ‘they didn’t understand us, and they looked at us in a weird manner. Nobody was interested in our Cause, or in East Turkistan, instead they all had their own causes, their cause was how to survive from day to day!’

He acknowledges Isa Yusuf’s efforts despite the hard times they had,

Now we are fine, and we might have been dead, if we had stayed in East Turkistan, or even Kashmir. Our children have a warm home now and are in free country that provides some good living conditions. We are really very grateful to Isa Bey.

Another interviewee emphasized a few times that

Isa Yusuf proved to be the only true leader of the people [halkın hakiki lideri], nobody else would have been able to bring so many destitute people, against all odds, from India to Turkey in the political conditions of that time and with those financial constraints.

As soon as economic conditions allowed it, my interviewees left Zeytinburnu and moved to other districts, like Ataköy, Bakırköy or Fatih.

In response to my question about how relationships with the Kazakhs were, one Uyghur remembered that their relationships were sometimes difficult to manage, ‘although we have been through so much hardship and extreme experiences together, they were cold to us, there was not much solidarity. They only took care of their own tribes, even between them there were big problems.’ For Isa Yusuf Alptekin this constituted a problem as well. He admits that there were animosities between Kazakh groups and also between Uyghurs and Kazakhs that continued in Turkey. In his perception the reasons for this lies in Kazakh tribalism, even though, ‘I put so much effort on getting rid of this tribalism. I even emphasized it in the newspaper I published by putting our motto “our religion is Islam, our race Turk, our

⁸⁶ See Svanberg for resettlement of the Kazakh refugees in Anatolia (1989).

homeland is Turkistan” on the cover’⁸⁷ (Alptekin 2007, 98). Another Uyghur just said that the relations were ok, full of respect, but not what he would call very close.

According to Isa Yusuf Alptekin, in India he found himself in the middle of disputes between Kazakh groups, but even though he helped most of them to come to Turkey, a few of them complained about him to the Indian Government. This was reason enough for him to leave India and migrate to Turkey. He moved permanently to Turkey in July 1954 and on 27 November 1957 the Turkish Government naturalized him. He states in his biography that it took him so long to become a Turkish citizen because he was still spending most of his money helping refugees who were still coming to Kashmir in very small numbers. He did some trade with Saudi Arabia, but he didn’t even have enough money to pay the little amount that was necessary to get the Turkish passport. (Alptekin 2007)

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Figure 16. According to Arslan Alptekin, depiction of Turkish Nationalists welcoming Isa Yusuf Alptekin on his arrival in Turkey, 1954. (Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

As is clear from their thank you letters, the Kazakhs and the Uyghurs expressed their gratefulness to Isa Yusuf and his tireless efforts and his accomplishment to bring the East

⁸⁷ He doesn’t specify whether he refers to internal divisions among the Kazakh or parochialism.

Turkistan refugees to Turkey; something, as one interviewee said, that ‘we would have never been able to achieve by ourselves, without him, even if we had his contacts, it was his personality that even got us a little financial help from Turkish state.’ In their letters based on Isa Yusuf’s success they address him as their leader (muhterem liderimiz). This gave Isa Yusuf Alptekin one type of authority that was based on his personal merits, but it is also based on his acquired authority as a politician in Xinjiang who could use his contacts even when he was already in exile. The contacts would reach as far as Jeddah, Cairo and Ankara. Those were cities that were completely out of reach for most of the refugees in Kashmir. Similarly the people he met were also out of their reach. He managed to meet with important figures of the Muslim world, and politicians of different countries. The Kazakhs and Uyghurs gave him great credit for that and accepted his leading role in the East Turkistan Cause based on these efforts that changed their personal lives. Isa Yusuf’s charismatic authority already stemming from his time as a politician became further strengthened; we can even say that these acknowledgements in the thank you letters can be read as a written acknowledgement of his charisma as a leader. Not only his charismatic authority got established, his legal authority was soon to be confirmed based on his charismatic authority.

The Hejaz Congress, the Formulation of the East Turkistan Cause’s Objectives

Now that Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin were in Turkey, they sought to give the East Turkistan Cause a new shape. Their ambition was that it should become a common and collective movement with everybody participating. But for that there were no political route maps. In his biography Isa Yusuf mentions the presence of Communist and Nationalist Chinese spies who were following the East Turkistanis in Turkey. He doesn’t elaborate what that meant, but I think that he implies that the Chinese Nationalists were still trying to get some of the Kazakhs to go to Formosa. A few of my interviewees vaguely mentioned it, but nobody recalled a meeting, a letter, or an invitation. But for Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin it was time to draw up their own political programme, to disconnect from the Nationalists and to approach the Cause from a more pan-Turkic and Muslim perspective, taking the expectations of the audience in Turkey and in the Muslim world into consideration. The first months in Turkey could be seen as the time when Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin Bughra placed the movement completely outside any Chinese context and discourse. This is also the time when the narration of the East Turkistan Cause became completely independent from the Nationalist China period. Interviewees and political activists in most of the cases omit the period when Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra were involved in Nationalist China’s politics. The Cause

is narrated independently from everything Chinese and also West Turkistan references don't appear very often despite the aspiration to create a greater Turkistan (Erkin Alptekin 1990, Alptekin 2007).

Accordingly Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin decided to organize a congress in Saudi Arabia in 1954, which was the first general assembly (Kurultay) of the East Turkistan people (Alptekin 2007, 100). I think he wanted to include the Uyghurs in Saudi Arabia and take advantage of the possibilities there. I assume that he also wanted to gain financial support for the Cause, which would be directed from Turkey. Or he thought that help would be easier to get from the Muslim world with Saudi Arabia as their base. In his writings he doesn't say anything about the reasons for organizing it in Saudi Arabia instead of Turkey. Without being able to confirm any numbers, we can only guess that the number of Turkistanis in Saudi Arabia was higher than in Turkey. Today, not everybody accepts that this meeting was the first general assembly – for some the first general assembly was a meeting held in Istanbul 1992.

Even though Turkey had been seen as the headquarters for the Cause, the founding of the organised movement still took place in Saudi Arabia. The first congress was held in the city of Ta'if, from 30 August to 6 September 1954. After a week of discussion about the issues of the people of East Turkistan, their grievances and their Cause, the attendees deputed Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin to be leaders in conducting the 'East Turkistan's struggle for liberty (Şarki Türkistan'ın istiklâl mücadelesi)' (Alptekin 2007, 99). The attendees signed a certificate of authority, saying that they voted for Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin to be leaders of the Cause (Alptekin 2007, 101). One interviewee claimed that there must be a document somewhere in Saudi Arabia with thousands of signatures on it from the Uyghurs living there. 'We [talking about the East Turkistanis in Turkey] were bound to him from Saudi Arabia (Suudi Arabistan'dan bizi ona bağladılar)'. None of my interviewees from Turkey, neither Kazakh nor Uyghur, went to this meeting and I haven't spoken to anyone who knew people who attended. It seems that it was mostly Turkistanis of Saudi Arabian residence who gave him the legal authority. This legal authority, in addition to his charismatic authority, legitimized Isa Yusuf, along with Mehmet Emin with the freedom to undertake decisions and set policy.

At the end of the congress a declaration was promulgated covering the main decisions addressing the East Turkistan national cause (Doğu Türkistan millî dâvâsı) and problems confronting the people of Turkistan (Türkistan halkı). In its wording the East Turkistan Cause is seen as a separate Cause, but the people of Turkistan and their problems are addressed as one group. As they decided in Ankara during their meeting with refugees from West

Turkistan, the Causes of West and East Turkistan should be pursued separately, but the people should be treated in a brotherly manner, as one unified group of Turkistani people.

The declaration consisted of the main objectives of the East Turkistan Cause that would set the tone for the struggle over the following few years. These objectives were as follows: that with their power of attorney, national leaders Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin will enter negotiations with the Nationalist Chinese Government in order to make them recognize the independence of East Turkistan. If the Nationalist China will not recognize it, the independence cause will be carried to the United Nations. From now on no one, whatever the reason may be, will be in touch with Taiwan, nor accept any money from them. The Saudi Arabian Government will be asked to send delegations to the wider Muslim world in order to narrate the problem of the people of Turkistan and their causes. One person was designated to manage the publication of the periodical *Türkistan'ın Sesi (Voice of Turkistan)*, a new publication to be printed in Turkish, English, Urdu and Persian. The expenses of this periodical will be covered by Turkistan refugees in Saudi Arabia. The Turkistan refugees in Saudi Arabia will also elect the advisory board of the magazine. The Turkistan refugees will help Turkistani Muslims on the Hajj in cases of emergency. The East Turkistan Cause and the benevolence of the Saudi Arabian Government will be narrated to Turkistani pilgrims in order to get support and raise awareness of the danger of Communism. And finally charity activities will be maintained. (Alptekin 2007, 100)

Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra became the two official leaders and decision makers of the Cause. The most important element of this declaration was that the movement cut the cord with Nationalist China even as the recognition of East Turkistan independence was demanded. By praising the Saudi Government their help was assured, and further promotion was planned through the publication of the periodical *Voice of Turkistan*.

In the written statement directed at the Turkistanis in exile, the Cause is presented as a united one:

our race is Turkish, our homeland is Turkistan, our religion Islam. We have a bright history. We will free our homeland and our people from the Chinese and Russian atrocities and we will establish an Islamic government in Turkistan. Turkistan is the biggest duty of the Turks. (Alptekin 2007, 103)

In the Saudi Arabian context he emphasized the religious aspects of a potential country.

This is a very pragmatic approach considering that this movement in exile was still in its infancy and that the first unsuccessful attempts to find a host country were based on their religious identity. And considering that it would be easier to promote the Cause in the context

of Saudi Arabia by leaving aside the question of East and West Turkistan and emphasizing the oppression by Communist powers on Islam. Another aspect might be, and Isa Yusuf mentions this very briefly in his memoirs, that he thinks that in Saudi Arabia itself there were people from Turkistan who were sent by the Russians to promote the reputation of Communism and to spread ideas of ethnic diversity among the pilgrims. He wanted to be sure that the pilgrims of Russian and Chinese Central Asia would be enlightened politically.

The conference was significant for a number of other reasons as well. Its leading figures were addressing potential supporters according to the context, and in that process the audience shapes its cadences as well as the context of the discourse. Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra completely break with the Nationalist Chinese. In this declaration a delegation from Formosa under Yolbars under the pretext of the pilgrimage is mentioned as is their efforts to ‘seduce’ the Turkistanis. According to the text their efforts were blocked and the Turkistanis protected from their empty promises.⁸⁸ Despite all the pan-Turkic and racist discourses in Turkey, in Saudi Arabia the emphasis was clearly on one big Turkistan and on the Islamic religion in order to gain further support. Isa Yusuf doesn’t mention it, but his son Arslan stated in one of the interviews that no one was seriously interested in helping fractured groups in Central Asia. The emphasis of one big Turkistan was a strategic thought still within the political ideas of Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin who had had pan-Turkic aspirations. At this stage of their efforts all political directions were still possible. And of course the promotion of the East Turkistan Cause needed financial support and funding. ‘Civil society’ groups in Turkey were limited in their ability to offer monetary help, and the Turkish state provided the discursive and legal ground for Turkishness, but pecuniary backing was out of question.

Further Globalizing the Cause: Efforts to Attend the Bandung Conference

With their emigration from Xinjiang the Cause already became international, and with the efforts of Isa Yusuf the Cause had been narrated to a broader audience in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. In Saudi Arabia, Muslims from all over the world were addressed and informed, as they were through the publications planned in various languages. And in Turkey the Cause had found people that were interested in it due to connections positioned around ethnic and racist ties. The political conditions facilitated this symbiotic relation, but Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin wanted to go further in globalizing the Cause by contextualizing it in the post-

⁸⁸ See Alptekin (2007, 102–117) for a detailed account.

colonial world, still hoping that East Turkistan would become an independent nation state soon. In front of selected audiences they formulated their hopes that there would be an Islamic Turkistan freed from Russian and Chinese colonialism. In any case the Cause had been moved closer to anti-Chinese and anti-colonial discourses with an emphasis on the Islamic and Turkic world. In the eyes of Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin, Saudi Arabia and Turkey seemed to be the places to maintain their aspirations, but according to his son Arslan Isa Yusuf knew that the potential political impact of Turkey was limited and thus he was looking for alternative and complementary stages.

In the first few years after Isa Yusuf and Mehmet Emin became official leaders they paid particular attention to take the East Turkistan Cause to the scene of global politics, as Isa Yusuf said years ago while still in West Turkistan. The first step of a further globalization of the Cause was Isa Yusuf's efforts to attend the Bandung Conference in 1955, a meeting of twenty-nine Asian and African countries that had gained independence a few years prior to this meeting. The conference took place in Bandung, Indonesia and is considered to be important for the establishment of the international Non-Aligned Movement. It is also considered to be opposed to any form of colonialism and to foster economic cooperation between Africa and Asia.

For Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra it was unacceptable that East Turkistan, Inner Mongolia, Tibet (which were all considered as Chinese colonies), as well as West Turkistan, North Caucasia, Crimea and Azerbaijan under Soviet rule were not invited to this conference. And in their perspective by inviting the People's Republic of China the organizers violated the main idea of this gathering. Under the name of National Centre for Liberating East Turkistan (Doğu Türkistan'ı Kurtarma Millî Merkezi) they sent memoranda to the presidents of the governments of the participating countries. They received an answer stating that participants were already agreed upon at the preceding Bogor Conference, and that therefore it was too late to discuss the participation of further participants.

They decided to send two persons to represent Muslim Turks under Russian and Chinese rule, one of them was Isa Yusuf. His plan was to at least confront Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai with the cruelties in Turkistan.⁸⁹ Isa Yusuf had to go to Karachi to apply for the visa, because in 1955 there was no Indonesian Embassy in Turkey. But Isa Yusuf hadn't obtained his Turkish passport yet, and his plans to oppose the Chinese premier led, according to him, to a negative

⁸⁹ See Alptekin (2007, 121–125) for the text he sent to participants of the conference. And see Alptekin (1974) for a collection of his memoranda from the years 1955 to 1971 and his communiqués from 1967 to 1971.

response for his visa application. This was a huge disappointment for him and perceived as a setback for the Cause. He nevertheless travelled to Pakistan and expressed his anger at not being allowed to go.

In 1957 Isa Yusuf went to Saudi Arabia, the Lebanon and West Germany to ceaselessly narrate the fate of East Turkistan and to secure further help. One particular strategy was to talk to pilgrims from West and East Turkistan in order to get information about the homeland and to discuss political issues with them. He again mentions in his memoirs that among them were agents, Chinese and Turkistanis who were spreading propaganda about the PRC (Alptekin 2007, 175). In Germany he visited friends who were working at Radio Free Liberty in Munich.⁹⁰ He describes how he was especially interested in the organization of the radio station and how it worked. At the station in Munich, where he met Turkistanis from the Soviet Union, he expressed the idea that their Causes should be advocated together. He met with a number of political figures of the ‘Outside Turks’, and at the end of this section in his memoirs he describes how he came to the conclusion that after traveling to most countries of the Islamic world of the Middle East, as well as to India and Pakistan, Turks can only expect beneficence from other Turks and Turkey. ‘Other governments only help if it works for their own interest.’ Interestingly he adds to this sentence that although Turkey doesn’t help them today, in the future they will help us in an unreciprocated way for racial reasons.⁹¹ By now he had placed all of his hopes on Turkey.

Nevertheless, despite this Alptekin continued to travel. In 1958 he travelled back to Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Lebanon. He was still very concerned about Soviet and Chinese agents in Saudi Arabia. He called them red Hajis (Kızıl Hacılar) and saw in them a real threat to the cause. He received an invitation to the 5th World Islamic Conference in Baghdad in 1962 and the 6th in Mogadishu in 1964/65. He was still trying to promote the Cause in a religious framework addressing Muslim countries and he expresses how satisfying the meetings were. Yet again there was no support beyond mere declarations. In 1969 he went on his final long world tour. In seven months he visited fifteen countries on three continents. He wanted the entire world to know what Communist China was doing to them and he wanted the

⁹⁰ See Johnson (2010) on Turkistani POWs working for the Americans in postwar Germany.

⁹¹ ‘8 senelik muhaciret hayatımızda bütün Yakın Doğu İslâm âlemiyle Hindistan ve Pakistan`ı dolaşıp edindiğim tecrübeye göre, Türk`e ancak ve ancak Türk`ten hayır olduğunu, başkasından hayır olmadığı kanaatına vardım. Çünkü yabancı devlet ancak bir menfaat karşısında bizlere yardım eder. Bugün Türkiye bizlere belki yardım etmiyor, lâkin istikbalde ırkî sebeple yardım edeceği zaman mutlaka karşılıksız yardım edecektir’ (Alptekin 2007, 212).

governments he visited to acknowledge it. His travels continued on a smaller scale until 1978 when he had a traffic accident and also due to his advancing age.⁹²

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Figure 17. Alptekin family in Istanbul: Arslan, Erkin and Ilgar standing (from left to right). (Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

But the East Turkistanis in Turkey appreciated these years of travelling and narrating of the East Turkistan Cause. A sentiment expressed by a few of my interviewees, was elaborated by one who said that,

this way the world takes notice of what is happening in our homeland. Nobody cares, but Isa kept on reminding the world about our situation, about our existence, about our sorrows. It felt good to have a voice, even if it's just heard the short time when it's used, but he used his tirelessly as the voice of our people. He knocked on every single door of world politics, he gave thousands of interviews, wrote hundreds of thousands of words. He gave us a voice.

⁹² See the second volume of memoirs for a meticulous account of his tireless efforts and travels (Alptekin 2007). It covers all of his international activities as well as writings in great length.

What strikes one about the writings of these years is that Isa Yusuf mostly talks about a liberated East Turkistan, a discourse that he maintained until 1970. In the late 1970 and in the 1980s the claims became softer and autonomy or self-rule became the focus of his political demands. He formulates demands for a complete independence from China less and less.⁹³ His son Arslan called it ‘the time when his father changed his objectives according to a perspective based on Realpolitik’. In the 1980s the change of Isa Yusuf’s formulated political aims from independence to self-government (muhtariyet) caused some of his critics to call him a traitor (vatan haini). His son remarked in one interview that his father became aware of the fact that under current international conditions demands for independence were not feasible. According to him Isa Yusuf wanted the United States of America and the European Union to be engaged in the struggle for more democracy and autonomy. Isa Yusuf saw that there wouldn’t be any help from other countries. In the interviews I could see that among the Uyghur political activists that were still advocating full liberation from China, this had been narrated as a step back by Isa back to his position when working for Nationalist China. Others instead thought that this was the only way of being able to get any support from other countries. I will come back to this discussion in the next chapter.

This is also one of the reasons why his sons stepped back from the Cause in Turkey. Erkin was in Germany and helped to develop relations with groups like Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). And a few of the people Erkin helped to come to Germany to work and study founded other East Turkistan Associations in Munich.

Reading his biography one gets the impression that he was mostly involved in narrating the Cause outside of Turkey, but he was very active in Turkey as well. In 1960 he founded, together with Mehmet Emin Bughra, the East Turkistan Emigrants Association (Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti), the first one of its kind established by migrants from East Turkistan. Isa Yusuf became the president of the association and was so for almost twenty years. Under the legal umbrella of the association it was easier to follow up on migrants’ paperwork. One interviewee told me that most of the participants were Kazakhs, who outnumbered the Uyghurs in Istanbul. His political mission to narrate the Chinese atrocities by including pan-Turkic discourses also dominated his Turkey-oriented activities. He thought that not enough people knew about East Turkistan in Turkey. My interviewees confirmed this, complaining about how the locals in Turkey didn’t know anything about East Turkistan: ‘one of my neighbours still thinks I am from Turkmenistan.’ He wanted to get more supporters in

⁹³ See Alptekin for his changing political demands (1972, 1974, 1981, 1991, 2007 and 2010).

Turkey, and more donations to promote the Cause. He organized information meetings, where they would talk about East Turkistan and its unique position in the Turkic world, being one of the first Turkish regions to establish a state in the 8th century. He placed the narration of Uyghurs into a long Turkish lineage with Turkey being its modern and only free country in the Turkic world. Turkey was the political role model, and the Uyghurs their prototype from Central Asia so to speak (Alptekin 1974).

But Isa Yusuf also pragmatically thought about practical help. He tried to help migrants who were coming as *serbest göçmen* financially; he supported students to be able to study in Turkey; he helped people in dire straits economically. I remember one interviewee recalling that when he was hospitalized in 1969, Isa came to visit and asked him whether he needed something. Isa Yusuf also emphasized communal activities, and initiated gatherings around religious holidays. Another interviewee remembered how he would go and visit ‘every single one of the East Turkistanis’ in Istanbul after Ramadan and the festival of sacrifice. He did a lot of integrative work to keep the community closer together. But his emphasis was still mainly on the political work. One member of the association who wanted to organize cultural activities, like exhibitions of the national dress of the Uyghurs or the *doppa* (a round skullcap worn by Uyghurs) or dance performances recalled Isa Yusuf’s response. He said, ‘of course, they are important and I urge you to organize them, but don’t expect any folklore enterprises from me, I am busy with the media.’

One interviewee who worked closely with Isa Yusuf mentions that Isa Yusuf was unhappy with the small numbers of Uyghurs who actively engaged with the association. But this was about to change with the immigration of the second groups of Uyghur starting in 1965. In the late 1980s and early 1990s Isa Yusuf also complained that there were Uyghurs who had companies and factories and who had become affluent, but that just a few of them would engage or donate money for the Cause. Isa Yusuf didn’t like this situation since their political work was always short of money and he spent most of his on the Cause. He wanted them to take an active role. He assumed that some of them were able to travel back to Xinjiang, bought property there, and had started to invest in small trade with China. They didn’t want to risk any of this for the Cause: in the words of the final speaker, ‘they were, unlike Isa Yusuf, only interested in their own benefits’.

By organizing little meetings where political events from the past were celebrated he created an *Erinnerungskultur*, a culture of remembrance that would bring the diaspora together, and sharpen collective perceptions and imagination about East Turkistan’s national history. He revived his political mission and the community’s political awareness through events like this.

Sometime in these years between 1960 and 1970 he used his famous words articulating the role of Turkey in his perception: ‘Gönül arzu eder ki, Türkistan meselesinin halledilmesi davasında öncülük şerefi, Türkiye'nin hakkı olsun.’ (One would wish that Turkey would be honoured with the leadership to solve the Turkistan Cause!)⁹⁴

Conclusion

Isa Yusuf Alptekin did an incredible amount of successful work for his community, travelled far to narrate their story, published a huge number of articles, gave hundreds, if not thousands of interviews, and organized countless meetings. Now he and his life are objects of commemoration meetings. On one of the first days of my fieldwork I was at a meeting of Uyghur students who had been invited to a big dinner by the Doğu Türkistan Vakfı in Istanbul. Its Secretary-General in Istanbul, an Uyghur who had arrived in 1967, showed the young Uyghurs a photograph of Isa Yusuf saying,

I know it's forbidden to use his name in East Turkistan, but he is the reason why we are all here tonight, this is the person who ensured that you are all here and can study in Turkey, he established those ties with the Universities you are studying at. He raised us for the Cause, and we are going to raise you so that you can transmit it to the following generations. He gave the stateless East Turkistanis a motherland, and he made homeless East Turkistanis home owners.

Isa Yusuf's ideas of education seemed to bear fruit. The attendees at the commemoration symposium shared the opinion that he dedicated his whole life, his existence, his money and morale for the Cause of his people. One speaker mentioned that he wouldn't talk about anything else other than the Cause, but this is what one would expect from a man like him, an idealist. The final speaker remembers the first sentence he heard from Isa Yusuf in the interview. He said that he talked about the history of his hometown by listing the Chinese atrocities there. The final speaker thanked Erkin Alptekin for his years of privation, but noted that his father was a real idealist, and that he couldn't have behaved any differently.

Most of the speakers bemoaned the lost Pan-Turkism represented by Isa Yusuf Alptekin. In their perception his pan-Turkist approach made the Cause successful and united the Turkistanis. The ethnification of the Turkic people made it easier for the Russian and Chinese to divide and rule them. In their opinion the pan-Turkist movement in Turkey had become frayed. A second problem was the disunity of the Turkic peoples: ‘if we call ourselves Uyghur, Kazakh or Uzbek, it is easier for foreign powers to swallow us’. This being the case,

⁹⁴ None of my interviewees could remember where he used these words for the first time, but they were often repeated in interviews and appeared in publications as well.

Turkey was the best place to pursue the Cause.⁹⁵ This pan-Turkist perspective of Isa Yusuf's supporters is not shared by everybody in the Uyghur community. Interestingly some of the East Turkistanis who came in the 1960s and for whom Isa Yusuf Alptekin made a special effort to immigrate to Turkey started to think differently about the best way to pursue the Cause, as I will show in the next chapter.

In his study of charismatic leadership, Max Weber (1968) describes how in times of crisis, when facing all kind of fears, people are more likely to embrace leaders who in their perception can provide security or at least a way into a secure future by making their fellow men feel like they are contributors and organizers of bigger mission to eradicate the current desperate situations. Isa Yusuf Alptekin fulfilled this hope through his exceptional efforts and qualities. His role in politics in China gave him historical authority, his efforts during the whole migration process gave him the charismatic authority that endured throughout his career by devoting everything to the Cause, and finally his election as leader of the Cause at the first Congress in Saudi Arabia, together with Mehmet Emin Bughra, provided him with some legal authority. He was and still is perceived as someone with extraordinary qualities and exceptional powers that are not accessible to the ordinary person. These qualities are regarded as exemplary and on the basis of them and his achievements Isa Yusuf Alptekin was treated as a leader. Now his successors are judged by their devotion to Isa Yusuf Alptekin. After his death, or to be more precise even in the years before his death, when he pulled back from the Cause due to his age, he left a huge gap and discussions about his successor divided the Uyghur community. But the community has been divided by his changing approach to the Cause as well. His political changes from full independency to self-government left Uyghurs questioning him.

At the very least, his role in bringing the East Turkistanis to Turkey (even if it wasn't their first choice) and in making the East Turkistan Cause globally known is to his credit. In 1965 with the immigration of another group of East Turkistani who were to inhabit a coherent neighbourhood in Kayseri not only the size, but also the diversity of perceptions and political ideas increased, based on the particular biographies of those who had lived in the People's Republic of China for more than ten years. The next chapter will take a look at their migration and the changes.

⁹⁵ 'Dava her yerde yapılmaz, en uygun yeri Türkiye'dir.'

Image has been removed as it contains copyright material.

Figure 18. Isa Yusuf Alptekin with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (who was metropolitan municipality Mayor of Istanbul at that time) at the opening of a park named after Isa in the historical neighbourhood of Sultanahmet in Istanbul. In the district of Zeytinburnu, home to a large part of the Uyghur community in Istanbul, a street is also named after him. (Photograph provided by Erkin Alptekin)

Chapter III

‘Welcome to the East Turkistan Embassy’

Twelve years after the proclamation of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) a group of 450 East Turkistanis, benefitting from the developing diplomatic Sino-Afghan relations, managed to leave Xinjiang and immigrate to Afghanistan. When conditions in Afghanistan deteriorated and they faced deportation to China they sought to leave for another country. The Turkish Embassy in Kabul and Isa Yusuf Alptekin in Turkey provided great support in facilitating the resettlement of the migrants as *iskanlı göçmen* in Kayseri, in housing provided by the Turkish state.

The spatial closeness of the houses in the quarter led to a coherent East Turkistani community in Turkey. Unlike the Uyghurs who were dispersed in Istanbul and surrounding areas, this group developed a collective narration of their migration based on their experiences in East Turkistan, Afghanistan and Turkey. Although they formulated a collective political narration of gratefulness towards the Turkish state, they still had to manage the destabilizing effects of migration, no matter how supportive the host society. Their arrival led to the multiplication of Uyghur realities, based on both their decade of experience with the minority policy of the PRC, but also on a chain of traumatic experiences. This group suffered extreme loss, humiliation and helplessness. These events combined with their lived experiences added to their personal identities and formed part of their perception and narration as a group. And these perceptions have been transmitted to following generations.

Further, their immigration was experienced in different ways according to the age of the people that left East Turkistan. The effects of migration on an adult who had a degree of choice to leave will be certainly different from the effects on a child who was exiled. The older East Turkistanis remembered the insurgencies as well as the East Turkistan Republics. The younger generation on the other hand, those who were very young when they left, or those who were born in Afghanistan or Turkey, don’t have memories of the political situation in China, but they have embodied certain narrations and images transmitted by the precedent generation(s).

In this chapter I examine the social, historical and political patterns that shape the ‘imagined community’, to use Anderson’s term (1991), of Uyghurs in Turkey. I show that there are many ways in which the imagination is constitutive of practices, processes (inclusive and exclusive), and institutions that have meaning and effects in the real world.

With a micro focus on the phenomenology of migration I look at the arrival, the lives and the adjustments of the East Turkistanis in Kayseri and how certain events shaped their perceptions as well as their political thinking. In observing Uyghurs' intergenerational discussions and in following how perceptions of homeland and of an imagined nation vary, I trace how traumatic experiences of suffering, loss and survivors' guilt are transmitted to the next generation and how meanings as well as political objectives change.

The section below explores how the East Turkistanis formed a community made by the narration of suffering due to Chinese Communism. However it notes how this narration is also maintained because it appeals to certain political groups in Turkey. One potential audience in the host society was those interested in atrocities against the 'Outside Turks'. The predominant discourse in Turkey sees East Turkistanis as 'pure universal victims' (Malkki 1997, 224), and ignores the ways individuals as well as groups seek to regain their agency. Within the community there are both occurrences of nostalgia and melancholy remembering life in the home country; yearning for a liberated motherland that could be interpreted as unfinished mourning or unfinished overcoming of traumatic experiences (Volkan 2007); and various ways of dealing with this situation actively in order to express themselves.

When I arrived in Kayseri I entered one of the houses provided by the Turkish state that has been turned into the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği. The seven men in the building welcomed me with the words 'Welcome to the East Turkistan Embassy!' I had heard from East Turkistanis in Istanbul that they called Turkey the military headquarters of the Cause (Karargâh), but I was surprised to hear the East Turkistanis in Kayseri welcome me, if only jokingly, to the embassy as if emphasizing a double extraterritoriality. East Turkistan was imagined as a nation-state separate from China and this building was seen as the extraterritorial space of an embassy in Turkey. And internally, within the community, the sentence underlined the importance of that place for the Cause. Over time the political diversification of the East Turkistan community led to new political spaces and actors that claimed leadership.

Xinjiang Post 1949: 'Peaceful Liberation' or Invasive Colonisation?

Let me begin by describing the historical changes that eventually led to the exile in Kayseri of this group of East Turkistanis. I do so through a combination of historical reconstruction and accounts from my interviews with interviewees and narratives that demonstrated the interviewees' attempts to find agency and balance in life. What the East Turkistanis in Turkey

unanimously perceive as the latest Chinese invasion finds its way into the official historiography of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as the 'peaceful liberation of Xinjiang'. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Xinjiang in 1949 and by December of the same year the Chinese authorities declared the new unified Xinjiang Provincial People's Government. In their political memory East Turkistanis remember The Three Districts Revolution that led to the Second East Turkistan Republic (ETR) as a historical event of a short-lived experience of independence. The communist authorities on the other hand narrate this event as an uprising of Uyghurs and Kazakhs against the rule of the Nationalist Guomindang (GMD) that prepared the way for the peaceful liberation of Xinjiang, a precursor to the seizure of power by the CCP (Dillon 2004).

To maintain the legacy of the ETR and the aspirations of a free East Turkistan Mehmet Emin Bughra and Isa Yusuf Alptekin emigrated. By contrast the CCP's efforts to deal with this period of Xinjiang's history were based on actions to eradicate any positive connotation with the ETR and the people involved. Through various, often violent political campaigns in the following two decades, many of the pre-PRC era Turkic leaders, particularly those linked to the ETR were eliminated, despite the fact that for the first few years the CCP and PLA hardly intervened and left former ETR officials in office (Millward 2007). But later the PRC replaced officials with its own personnel, often recruited from the local 'patriotic upper strata', and direct military control was established in most areas of Xinjiang (Bockman 1992, 188). To erode the power of local elites and landlords, and to secure the support of the poorer peasants against them, the PRC launched its land reform programme. The economic goals of the land reform in the early years were to redistribute land and lower rents. Political goals included enlarging of the state's local reach. By encouraging people to denounce former oppressors the most compliant could be won over as party members and government cadres. Collectivisation was the long-term goal in order to foster resources to create industrial development achieved through the mechanisation of agriculture. PLA work-teams held meetings against major landowners whom they called local despots and Islamic institutions, confiscating property and livestock from them and the religious establishment. Many farmers resisted these reforms, even as others (according to Millward) appreciated reforms that handed over land and livestock to the poorest (2007, 240).⁹⁶ Among the East Turkistanis I met in Turkey who lived through this period no one was supportive of the land reforms in the

⁹⁶ The situation for the nomad economy in the north of Xinjiang was different due to the social organisation of the Kazakhs and the weak Chinese presence. I focus on the impact of the political changes on the Uyghur speaking East Turkistanis who emigrated in the early 1960s. For the PLA attempts in the Kazakh dominated area see Millward (2007) as well as Benson and Svanberg (1998).

years after the establishment of the PRC: on the contrary, they named land dispossession as one of the main reasons for their decision to emigrate.

Additionally, besides expropriation and reforms directed against the religious establishment, the interviewees named organized Sinification as one reason for their frustration with the political changes and their desire to leave. Indeed, as Toops (2000) points out, the major part of Han Chinese migration into Xinjiang took place during the 1950s following the rail lines. Qumul in western Xinjiang was the end of the line in these years and the starting point from where trucks took Han migrants to Ürümqi and outlying regions.⁹⁷ It is not fully known to what extent Han migrants reached the southern parts of Xinjiang in the 1950s, but their numbers were certainly lower than in the northern parts (Toops 2000). Following the figures provided by Millward (2007, 263), between 1959 and 1961 some 890,000 voluntary migrants arrived. The figures give some idea about the enormous increase in the number of Han Chinese and shows why the East Turkistanis perceived it as project of Sinification (Çinileştirme) even in heavily Uyghur dominated areas in the south of Xinjiang. Although it is difficult to say, how much of this discourse has been developed after arriving in Turkey. Some of my interviewees who lived in Khotan and Yarkent in the 1950s didn't mention any Chinese migration, but did speak of the fear of Sinification.

Many interviewees in Kayseri mentioned the Bingtuan, a paramilitary organization as a conduit for this Sinification. They recalled the implemented land reforms and dispossessions of endowment landholdings as an existential disempowerment of their lives. Some interviewees described how coercive changes in the way they earned their livelihood transformed their habitual everyday life. Unlike the anticipated threats of the group who emigrated in 1949, these East Turkistanis lived through the changes. One man from Gulja recalls:

We were cultivating our own land and a lot of families, our relatives were living from that. From one day to the other, with the dispossession, we had to work in cooperatives. Money and food was far from being enough, everything in my life changed, the tempo and routine of my days, my engagement with the soil, I wasn't in charge of my life anymore.

In another man's words:

That was their aim, one step in the Sinification of East Turkistan was to make us a minority in our own land, the administration brings in soldier peasants and gives them

⁹⁷ The rail line was extended to Ürümqi in 1962 and this made more arrivals of Chinese migrants possible (Millward 2007).

land they took from us. And if there is the slightest sign of an unrest, they can just call them in.

Indeed, one ‘major institution for the ethnic Han (Chinese) colonisation of Xinjiang’, as Seymour (2000, 171) puts it, was the Production and Construction Corps (Bingtuan), the institution that administered migration and resettlement of Chinese in Xinjiang.⁹⁸ Demobilised soldiers from the PLA (103,000), and from the Guomindang (80,000) composed the first colonists (Toops 2000).⁹⁹ It is difficult to say to what extent the recruiting of Nationalist soldiers into the production and construction corps shaped the perception of East Turkistanis, but a few interviewees said in the interviews that

many Chinese, even our neighbours, although supporters of the Guomindang, became Communists shortly after the PLA took over. Even among the Guomindang there were many who just switched sides, the Nationalists betrayed us. First they were fighting with us, and the next day they were with the Communists. No Chinese would help us for our Cause anyway.

This is a slightly different issue than Sinification, because it refers to the collapse of GMD resistance and the idea of any alternative to the CCP in Xinjiang, but it has been narrated as part of the Sinification process. My interviewees narrated how their political, collective, interactional and individual perception changed in the first few years of CCP power. These first hand experiences led to a profound disapproval of everything Chinese. Anti-Chinese sentiments formulated by the East Turkistanis in Kayseri had their origins in this modification of political power in Xinjiang. Where Isa Yusuf Alptekin shortly after his emigration to Kashmir was still in contact with the Nationalists in Taiwan and considered working with them, the position of most of my interviewees who were old enough to experience the first years of post-1949 Xinjiang had a different opinion of the Chinese based on their experiences.

The Bingtuan officially started on 7 October 1954 under the orders of Mao Zedong (and is still operating). The official idea of the Bingtuan was to develop China’s new frontier region. The quasi-military work force of the Bingtuan has its own administrative authority, enterprises, institutions (schools and hospitals) and public security as well as judicial organs. The military capacities of the Bingtuan could be used to defend the frontier against foreign and domestic enemies. In Seymour’s view, throughout the 1950s they were essential for the

⁹⁸ As Millward points out the Bingtuans had predecessors in Xinjiang as early as the seventeenth century based on military farms (2007). On the migration of Han settlers and their motivations see Cliff (2016).

⁹⁹ With the Nationalist’s defeat some of the region’s defenders became prisoners. Some of them ended up in the Bingtuan (Seymour 2000).

colonisation process and part of a plan, the 'dual purposes of which were to ease eastern crowding and sinify the frontier' (2000, 173).

Changing classifications of class background had an impact on life opportunities. One man who worked as a religious teacher in one of the madrasas in Yarkent found himself working as a road sweeper, 'I lost my students, and my language and scholarly skills turned into my biggest disadvantage. On top of this I couldn't even practice my religion the way I was supposed to.' Besides the changes in the structural power relations and the political economy, we can see how through their lived experience new perceptions of the situation emerged, and how the narrated self adds to our understanding of these changes and consequences. As Michael Jackson puts it, the subject is 'the side where life is lived, meanings are made [...] determinations take effect, and habits are formed or broken' (1996, 22). The individual experiences in their particularity extend into the collective narrations in Turkey.

Besides the loss of livelihood and property the interviewees voiced repeatedly the restrictions of being able to practice their religion, practices with ultimate value for them, as a huge threat to their individual identity as well as to their social life. In the interviews they described how, especially in the second half of the 1950s, practice, worship, and observance became difficult. According to one man it started with the suppression of Islamic institutions and religious teaching in the madrasas. 'First, they took away our land and property, and then we couldn't manifest our religion or belief in teaching and at the end we weren't even able to maintain our own Islamic jurisprudence.' Not all of the interviewees criticised the Islamic jurisprudence issue. A single voice during my fieldwork, one man, who came to Turkey in the 1970s, remarked that 'at least it was good that they got rid of the shariah courts and raised the marriage age for Uyghur girls.'

In the narration of their personal memories regarding their lives in Xinjiang, the interviewees mentioned coercive changes in their religious practices, how even in everyday life drastic bans make it impossible for them to conduct simple life cycle rituals like circumcision parties, marriages, or other ritual celebrations. Although the full dimension of these changes were to be seen during the Cultural Revolution my interviewees emphasized that they experienced these dramatic changes in their lives as early as 1956.

Islam and Communism in Xinjiang with its non-Chinese speaking Islamic majority population were competing systems (posing challenges to each other) for influence in social, political and legal domains. The attempts of the CCP to ground in political practice its atheistic principles were delayed in view of the fact that they were facing a well-organized and established clerical organization with transnational links. Prior to the land reform efforts,

Xinjiang's Islamic institutions and its clergy formed an interweaving system of authority, which was financially based on the rents from the *waqf*, the endowment landholdings, tithe and alms tax. Through changes to the economic basis of the Islamic institutions their independency was threatened. The PRC prohibited tax collection in 1951 and abandoned shari'ah courts.¹⁰⁰ The income of the clergymen¹⁰¹ and of their households declined, and Xinjiang's Islamic clergy became part of the state-controlled administrative structure of the Chinese Islamic Association in Beijing (Millward 2007). My interviewees narrated how these changes paralysed their religious life. In two cases the interviewee told me that clergymen of his family were imprisoned because they didn't want to propagate the ideology of the CCP in the mosques and madrasas.

In October 1955, after the Chinese authorities already established autonomous regions, the province was renamed Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the PRC policy in Xinjiang became more and more assimilationist. In the eyes of most of my older interviewees¹⁰² this was a major blow for pan-Turkic aspirations since the younger generations started to adopt the official ethnonym Uyghur, although 'we are all Turks, the Chinese are doing this to divide the Turkic groups in order to be able to rule us'. Self-rule or autonomy existed only on paper, everything was under the over-arching control of the CCP, and the territories with large non-Han populations would remain an inalienable part of the PRC. The PRC began to identify groups that would qualify as minority nationalities by applying Stalin's definition of a nation.¹⁰³ The Nationalities Affairs Commission granted the Uyghurs the status of an official nationality.¹⁰⁴ Xinjiang furthermore has five autonomous prefectures for Mongol, Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Hui minorities (Millward 2007). As indicated by the interviewees, by 1956 differences between Xinjiang's Turkic and other nationalities and the Han Chinese started to get tense due to an increase in official intolerance and repression of many aspects of Turkic and Muslim life in Xinjiang.

¹⁰⁰ The PRC Marriage Law regulations were applied less strictly as a concession to local customs (Millward 2007).

¹⁰¹ The state paid the salaries of cooperative clergymen who used the pulpit to support party campaigns (Millward 2007).

¹⁰² Older in this context comprise the East Turistanis who were twenty years or older in 1955.

¹⁰³ Based on the idea that 'a nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture' (MacKerras 1994, 141).

¹⁰⁴ Fifty-six in total with the Han. The Commission acknowledged thirteen groups in Xinjiang: Uyghur, Han, Kazakh, Hui, Kirghiz, Mongol, Sibe, Russian, Tajik, Uzbek, Tatar, Manchu and Daur (Millward 2007).

The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution

In the mid-1950s deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union, and shifts in the domestic political and economic situation, led China to apply Maoist policies characterized by communist puritanism and class struggle that created an atmosphere of xenophobia and the rejection of symbols and expressions labelled as feudal. In the first few years after the revolution, relations with the Soviet Union remained close. The Soviet Union was Xinjiang's major trading partner and manufactured goods from the Soviet Union found its way into Xinjiang. But the Soviet Union was not only a source of technology transfer; it had an influence on Xinjiang's non-Han intellectuals and cadres (Millward 2007). In 1956 Chinese authorities even introduced a Cyrillic-based Uyghur script to facilitate communication with the Soviet Union (only to abandon it within a year) (Dwyer 2005).¹⁰⁵ But with conflict over ideological issues after Khrushchev's denouncing of Stalin's legacy, and economic ties that left Xinjiang in Mao's view as a Soviet semi-colony, Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated until there was a split. These changes to the Sino-Soviet relationship had major impacts in Xinjiang. Chinese authorities condescended to the minority cadres, accusing them of pro-Soviet sentiments and local nationalism. Anti-Chinese propaganda from the Soviets amplified the perception of the CCP that the formulation of ethnic nationalism was facilitated by foreign powers. The relationship completely soured and tensions grew (Millward 2007). The north of Xinjiang saw a number of (even violent) incidents that, according to Dillon (2004, 57) led to the flight of 56,000 Kazakh farmers, workers, herdsmen, but also government officials and party cadres into Soviet territory. In 1962 the borders were closed, Soviet Consulates in Xinjiang discontinued and the following years saw ongoing border clashes.

In the late 1950s the PRC launched a number of campaigns to further accelerate China's development. The disastrous period of the Great Leap Forward, lasting from 1958 to 1962 and the following Cultural Revolution spanning from 1966 to 1976 generated periods of economic, political and social chaos. In the late 1950s, due to a short experiment with free speech by Mao, non-Hans in Xinjiang articulated their dissatisfaction with the autonomy of Xinjiang, as well as with the way Han officials who basically held political power dealt with issues concerning the non-Han population. They furthermore expressed that the Han colonists were destroying Xinjiang's environment and that everybody was forced to learn Chinese.

¹⁰⁵ The usage of Cyrillic peaked between 1955 and 1958. It was used in some schools, officially introduced in 1956, but abandoned in February 1957, only to be reintroduced later that year (Dwyer 2005). Millward (2007) states that Soviet textbooks were collected and replaced by Chinese textbooks in 1957.

Beginning with the Anti-Rightist Campaign of 1957 those who formulated these criticisms were denounced as local nationalists and ended up in labour camps for thought reform (Millward 2007). Among my interviewees I had one person who had to leave his imprisoned father behind, who was demanding further rights for the Muslim population. He never saw him again.

The Great Leap forward was supposed to give China's development a new start by combining agricultural and industrial production. But utopian plans, which did not meet central directives, merged with inefficient industrial schemes to cause the death of an estimated 30 million people from famine in the years 1959–1962 in China. One interviewee, a man in his twenties during this period, described how officials tried to implement a very aggressive collectivisation covering even remote areas of Xinjiang. Besides this measure, 'official anti-Islamic sentiments rose and it was almost impossible to go on Hajj, which was difficult enough with the route through the Soviet Union being closed'. 'We were even forced to learn Chinese, the farming soldiers completely changed the environment, built barracks and took over our livelihood. We had nothing anymore, I couldn't even feed my family.'

After the catastrophic Great Leap Forward, Mao had to withdraw from his central political position while moderate Party members Deng Xiaoping and Liu Shaoqi attempted to restore the crushed economy. Mao opposed the economic policies by starting an era formally known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The political and physical assaults on organs and personnel of the party conducted by the Red Guards aimed at 'bourgeois' elements, or at those accused of trying to restore capitalism. Mao demanded that through a violent class struggle any revisionist should be removed from Chinese politics. The attacks were directed at anything anti-Mao, foreign or old (in terms of traditional) or anyone connected with these, such as artists, writers, performers, academics, people formerly associated with the Guomindang, or the Soviet Union (Millward 2007). The political key figures in Xinjiang were worried about a potential Soviet intervention and rebellions among the Turkic peoples triggered by the radical Red Guards. Supporters of the Cultural Revolution saw the characteristics of minority policies as nationalist, religious and counter-revolutionary, elements that hindered the progress of the Revolution. Xinjiang's Cultural Revolution was caught up in factional hostilities that impinged all levels of life. Even those who tried to stay out of the struggle were affected in their everyday life. As one of the last places to leave this military chaos behind, the bloody conflicts in Xinjiang subsided in 1968. With ideological incentives becoming more important than material incentives, the new policy had consequences for Xinjiang's non-Han population. Private land and livestock ownership was completely forbidden and the campaign to wipe out the 'four olds' (old customs, old culture,

old habits, old ideas) started, as non-Han populations were denounced as potential traitors and non-Chinese culture as backward. From 1965 the total numbers of non-Han people holding government positions in Xinjiang dropped by more than 30,000 people. People with connections to the East Turkistan Republic were treated as traitors and local historians report that some of them were tortured and executed (Millward 2007). Han chauvinism also attacked minority languages. Dwyer (2005, 8) shows how during the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution,

the linguistic egalitarianism of the Constitution was jettisoned in the name of Marxist revolution. The newly standardized form of northern Chinese [...] became the flagship language associated with the new China; minority languages and cultural practices were to be shunned, as they were associated with “feudalism” or worse.

When I asked one woman in her late 80s how difficult it was for her to study Turkish in a chat I had with her in 2007, she recalled jokingly that, ‘thanks to the Chinese, I could read the Latin alphabet, so for me it was at least easy to read’. She continued by counting the scripts she had to learn to be able to read Uyghur according to the political conditions in the 1950s. She mentions how she started with the ‘classic’ Arabic script, the script she learned how to read and write in. Later the Chinese changed this into Cyrillic. For a short period they used the Latin alphabet before the modern modified Uyghur script was adopted. She remembered how the Chinese conducted their propaganda relating to the prevalent script of a certain time in public spaces. In the first place, while she was just narrating the story she didn’t see it as big problem, although as she unfolds the story, she admits that ‘with every change of the alphabet we became estranged from our own language for a few days (tabii ki bir kaç gün boyunca kendi dilimize yabancılaştık)’. And then while giving it a little thought she added, ‘actually it was terrible, they wanted to cut us off from our holy book. They didn’t want us to be able to read the Koran.’ This little anecdote then turned into reminiscences about how the Chinese tried to weaken East Turkistanis’ religious commitment. Only later I would find out that only a few women could read and write when they arrived in Turkey,¹⁰⁶ and that this woman was an exception. One woman later told me how they went to her house when a letter from East Turkistan arrived to ask her to read it to them.

Among the interviewees who experienced the emigration in the 1960s and who are mostly from Yarkent, just a few talked about language issues. They remembered how the education continued in Uyghur, but one man mentioned how the Chinese authorities shut down the

¹⁰⁶ According to a handful of people from the mahalle in Kayseri, only very few women who came as adults in the 1960s were literate.

madrasas, a place he remembered as where he studied Arabic and Persian. Even if this didn't have an impact on Uyghur as a minority language, it still affects the language skills and educational preference of families in East Turkistan.

Although I only had a handful of interviewees who lived in Xinjiang throughout this period one theme particularly connected to the Cultural Revolution occurred in almost all of the interviews. It is worth mentioning that the East Turkistanis who left in 1960 didn't experience the Cultural Revolution, but in their narrations they placed the Cultural Revolution in the 1950s. Other interviewees narrated stories about the Cultural Revolution based on the accounts of relatives who would report what happened. They shared the following narration to express their anguish and as one interviewee who arrived in Turkey in 1980 said, to 'show how bad atheistic Chinese are and how disrespectful the Communist's attitude towards our religion, the foundation of our identity, is.' The misuse of religious and sacred spaces as sheds for animals was a big issue and a source for distress. 'They used mosques and madrasas as pigsties'¹⁰⁷ is one sentence that condensed the cruelty of the Cultural Revolution and the suffering of the East Turkistanis. Most of them said that they just tried to keep a low profile, but

everybody was effected, they closed down local bazaars, imprisoned imams, we could not even have a chat with a few other people on the streets without raising suspicion and the risk of getting arrested. I have even heard that they burned religious books.

My interviewees formulated resentments against the CCP and even against Chinese people that almost reached a point of no return. After these experiences most of my interviewees said that they couldn't live with Chinese people again, even if such a conviction was against their better judgement: 'it's not the Chinese people, I know, but we suffered a lot, it's hard to forget and distinguish between the Chinese people and the state'. With the Cultural Revolution the Chinese – East Turkistani relations reached a point where reconciliation seemed out of reach. And this was narrated by almost all of my interviewees that experienced the Great Leap and by the few who lived through the Cultural Revolution. Smith Finley and Zang in their introductory essay say that 'despite incidents, there were relatively few examples of direct Uyghur-Han conflict between 1949 and 1966' (Smith Finley and Zang 2015, 7). But as my interviews recalling the Great Leap period showed, even smaller incidents left traces on the East Turkistani community – it didn't require direct or large scale conflict for events to be perceived as violence directed specifically against an ethnic group. The pain of an individual victim almost constitutes the ethnic collectivity. The community expressed their forms of

¹⁰⁷ See also Millwards 'pigs in the mosque' (2007, 274) for the narration of a story from his research.

suffering they experienced while still in Xinjiang and this was amplified by experiences lived through during the flight. Against the backdrop of these experiences, based on physical and symbolic ethnic violence, the community formed. This is an important aspect of the narration of suffering and following Werbner (1997, 235), we can see that ethnic violence is directed at ‘the body, the body politic, material bases of physical and socio-political reproduction, and the emblematic representations of subjectivity, personhood and society’. The attacks of the Great Leap and the Cultural Revolution, folded into one history, have influenced the memory of common suffering, which becomes a shared resource for collective narration that formed the basis of the East Turkistan Cause in Turkey.

In brief, narrated memories of their lives in Xinjiang evolved in most cases around political developments after 1949, the attempts to sinify Xinjiang with the establishment of the production corps with a heavy influx of Han-Chinese from the eastern part, dispossession, and the communist disdain for non-Han languages and practices. The violent acts against religious practices and spaces increased the desire to emigrate, but the Sino-Soviet split and closure of the borders made it difficult to leave. But in 1959 an opportunity opened up that was connected to Sino-Afghan relations, a piece of paper, and letters in Persian.

A Piece of Paper Blown by the Wind

The biographical interviews with Kayseri residents were replete with stories of how to find a balance in this new colonial life in the world of Communist China and still retain some kind of autonomy. In their perception it wasn't the fear of an approaching PLA anymore, it was the hardship of everyday life in the political shadow of the communist campaigns. One narrative of how the people in East Turkistan in 1959 came to know that there might be a chance to leave China was striking. A few versions circulated in Kayseri, only narrated by people from Yarkent. Each teller had their own, modified version. I also heard similar narrations by younger people, which indicate that this story has been transmitted.

Let me repeat just two here, both from people who had passed away, one in 2011 and the main character of this story in late 2015. One person, introduced earlier as the road sweeper, was a scholarly person with an education from the madrasas in Yarkent and the imam of a local mosque in the vicinity of his home city. He said that the impossibility to practice any form of religious activities made life for him in East Turkistan unbearable and forced him to look for a way to get out. The other source claimed that the realization that there was no realistic chance to pursue any form of self-governance by East Turkistanis in China after 1949 made them start to look for alternative ways to promote the Cause. He used the motto *vatan için vatandan ayrılmak*, very likely coined earlier and picked up by him in Turkey to

emphasize the political dimension and aim. In both accounts we can see how life stories emerge in intersubjective life and metamorphose in the course of relationships with other people (Jackson 1998). The narrations of the East Turkistanis who came in the 1950s clearly had an influence in the way they narrated and politicised their stories. However, according to my interviewee the East Turkistan Cause could only be pursued from outside of China.

The starting point of his narration was some mandatory cleaning the person had to participate in, commanded by the Chinese authorities on a cold and windy day. During this activity the wind swirled a little piece of paper into the air a couple of times. The man saw the paper and was able to catch it, noticing that it was a ripped page from a newspaper. According to his personal narration East Turkistan Muslims regard paper and pen as sacred and when they see a piece of paper on the ground they pick it up to put it in a higher place. He briefly referred to the Pen Surah in the Koran, saying that 'stationery is holy for the East Turkistan Muslims'. For this reason he chased this piece of paper to make sure it didn't end up on the dirty ground. The paper was from a newspaper published by the CCP for its cadres, saying that the PRC and Afghanistan signed an agreement that allows some kind of population exchange¹⁰⁸ between these two countries under specific circumstances. Within the legal framework of this treaty, signed in 1959, those who could prove themselves to be of Afghan origin could immigrate to Afghanistan.

In the second account of the possibility to leave China, the interviewee narrated how an old classmate approached him in a quiet corner of the street and slipped a newspaper into his hands. Without saying a word the classmate moved away, because Chinese authorities were suspicious of two Uyghurs talking on the streets and might take them into custody. The newspaper turned out to be the official media organ that only senior officials were able to access. The interviewee moved on with the newspaper in his hand knowing that his old schoolmate was a Communist sympathiser. The paper was open at a certain page. He read the page reporting that Mao and the Prime Minister of Afghanistan Mohammed Daoud Khan had signed a far-reaching treaty. One aspect, the envisaged opening of the common borders, caught the man's interest and he started to think about leaving for Afghanistan to elucidate to the world the situation in East Turkistan.

These two versions convey different meanings. The second implies Uyghur solidarity even as people adhere to contested political views. It is a Uyghur who drew the religious person's

¹⁰⁸ In the interviews he called it *vatandaş mübadelesi*, literally translated as citizen exchange. The interviewees did not mention anything about Chinese citizens who were repatriated.

attention to this potential opportunity to leave. In the first version, it was coincidence that made the man pick up a piece of paper, but it was also Islam's respect for the written word and its medium, paper, that encouraged him to save it from the dirt. His scholarly and religious enthusiasm, taken away by the Chinese, helped him find this particular piece of paper in his hands with information that was not supposed to be for his eyes.

The PRC established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan in 1955, although Afghanistan recognized the PRC government in 1950. Zhou Enlai's visit to Kabul in 1957 was the first trip undertaken by Chinese leadership. Afghan Prime Minister Daoud visited Beijing in 1959 and released a communiqué saying cooperation between the two countries would be expanded. In 1960, also against the backdrop of the Sino-Soviet split and Sino-Indian border issues, Zhou Enlai signed a Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Nonaggression, followed by further border agreements (Ludwig 2013). I wasn't able to find specific information about whether the repatriation of Afghans from China was part of the signed treaties, but due to the agreements a little legal window opened with the improving Afghan-Sino relations that allowed people of Afghan origin to emigrate to Afghanistan.

The Proof of Origin

In both narrated versions the men had to be very careful with whom they confided, because of the information they were in possession. In their accounts interviewees described how they only shared this information with family members, and with relatives and close friends who either had ancestors in Afghanistan or were trading with Afghanistan and knew people there. A few people revealed in the interviews that some of their families actually came from Afghanistan. Interestingly enough, most of them are committed East Turkistan nationalists and it is not surprising that most of them were opposed to an ethnic Uyghur nationalism, preferring a territorial nationalism. In the interviews with the East Turkistanis in Kayseri I learnt that the ancestors of many families migrated to Xinjiang at different times. Within the narration of their family history, they mentioned that some came in the early 20th century, others as early as in the 18th century. A few claimed to be of Arabic origins (Arab kökenli), descendants of clergymen from the Arabic peninsula, without knowing from which part of the Arabic speaking world. Some said they had relatives among the Kyrgyz of the Pamirs, whereas others mentioned that part of their family were Uzbeks from Andijan. Others mentioned grandfathers and uncles who were merchants from Afghanistan and who married local Uyghur women while doing business in Xinjiang. Two very old men still could speak

Persian,¹⁰⁹ saying that they learned it from their grandparents and refreshed it while living in Afghanistan.

For people of Afghan origin the potential population exchange motivated them to take action. Those with family members who used to trade with Afghanistan when borders were open sought to prove themselves to be of Afghan origin. But one family also admitted, ‘we didn’t have any relatives from Afghanistan, nor were our ancestors from somewhere else, but we really wanted to leave and we tried to get a letter of proof from friends in Afghanistan whom I knew from trading with.’ To leave China, the Kayseri Turkistanis had to prove their ethnic origin, but this time they had to prove themselves to be Afghan, not Turkish. The merchants knew the trade routes as well as life in Afghanistan and gave this vague opportunity real consideration, weighing up advantages and disadvantages as well as potential risks. Without sharing any further details one man said that he had connections with Sufi religious orders in Afghanistan. For the East Turkistanis a whole range of existing connections, social, political as well as economic, could be revitalized after a period of political hibernation due to changes in China. In the planning stages the natural challenges of the dangerous route through the Pamir ranges seemed less of an issue. The knowledge of existing paths eased the tensions, but doing it with an inexperienced group posed difficulties.

Families with ties to Afghanistan secretly shared this information by word of mouth and a potential group of migrants took shape. They decided to send a letter to the Afghan embassy in China in order to confirm this treaty. Strikingly the road sweeper narrates how he used his Persian skills to write the letter. The advantage of knowing Persian gave him back agency to initiate a process that led to their departure from the country. Within a month they received an answer saying that this treaty exists, and that if they want to go they had to write a petition and send it to the embassy with a list of the people and their proof of Afghan ancestry. Upon receiving confirmation they covertly sent letters to their Afghan friends or relatives asking them to bear witness that they were of Afghan origin. Their relatives sent letters directly to the Afghan Embassy in China and the East Turkistanis prepared a list and mailed it to Beijing. They were afraid that the local authorities would find out about their activities and imprison them. In one interview a man recalled how nobody wanted to post the letters, being afraid that this might catch the attention of the local police or authorities. Nobody trusted the Chinese, but even among themselves prevarications over whether they would really go if the answer from the Afghan embassy was positive were rampant. In one recollection, a man got caught

¹⁰⁹ They called it either *Farsça* or *Afghan Farsçası* in the interviews, one word for *Dari* in Turkish.

by the police with the letter from the Afghan Embassy and was interrogated. After a while they let him go, 'because of the letter, the local authorities didn't want to risk the developing Afghan-Chinese relations'.

According to informants, the officials of the Afghan Embassy processed and passed the list and the letters of proof coming from Afghanistan to the Chinese authorities and asked them to repatriate the people mentioned on the list. The list was approved and sent to the local authorities in Xinjiang. A few weeks after that in 1961 (nobody could remember for how long this went on, but it probably took a few months) the local authorities told the East Turkistanis to get ready, for their departure had been approved.¹¹⁰

'We made a vow for those who couldn't leave'

Preparations to leave started immediately. According to most of the interviewees three groups from Yarkent were taken to the Chinese border outpost on different days. Another group emigrated separately from Gulja. As far as I could see, the groups left Xinjiang over the course of a year, starting in August 1961 with the last group arriving in Afghanistan in September 1962. The information provided about their numbers differ too, but from interviews I estimate that there were about 140 people in the first, 115 in the second and about 95 people in the third group. The fourth group consisted of approximately 230 people.¹¹¹ The majority of people were from Yarkent, with a handful from Kashgar. But there was one group that entirely came from Gulja. In an interview with a man from Gulja who is now living in Germany, he described how his grandfathers (grandfather and his six brothers) decided to benefit from the same legal option. He couldn't remember how they were informed about this opportunity. He told me that all of the families decided to go for two reasons: one was that the CCP forced them to become party members and the other one was to be able to go on the Hajj. The families of the seven men comprised of approximately 190 people. These families also left in 1961, but arrived in Afghanistan separately from the Yarkent groups.

¹¹⁰ There were also other groups getting nervous about the political situation in Xinjiang and looking for ways out. For the Kazakh exodus to the Soviet Union in 1962 see Benson (1988).

¹¹¹ Isa Yusuf Alptekin states in his biography that there were a couple of hundred people in Afghanistan (2007, 535) and based on the translation of official correspondence with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that around 600 people applied for permission to emigrate to Turkey (2007, 537). Their number rose because they added to that list East Turkistanis who were already in Afghanistan and a few people who came from Pakistan and India.

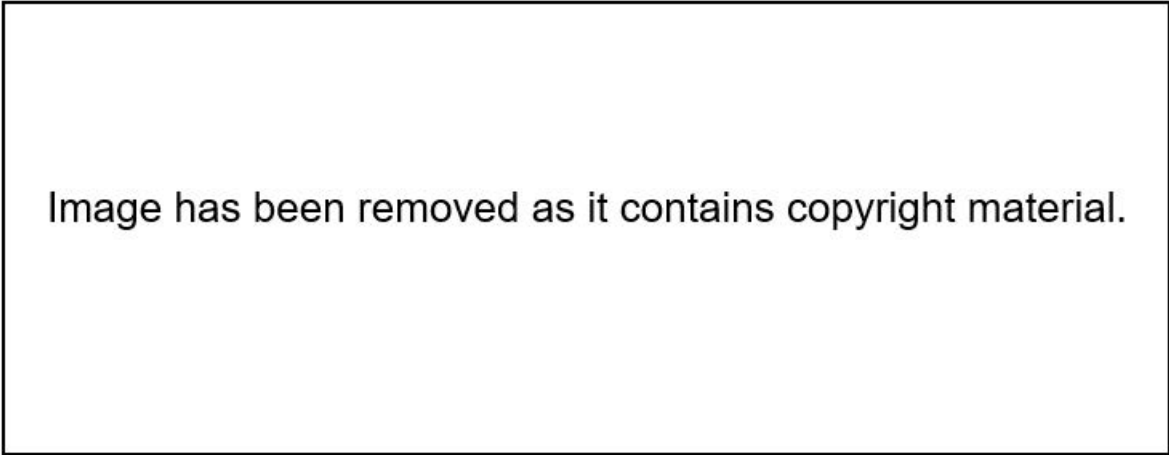


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Figure 19. Photocopy of one part of the letter from the Afghan Embassy (that got my interviewee arrested), stating that further information needed to be provided for their emigration to Afghanistan: name, name of the father and grandfather; time and way of entering Xinjiang; Afghan passport or certificate number and place of issue, place of residence in Afghanistan. (Document provided by interviewee)

People experienced similar issues to the migrants who left in 1949. They had to sell what was left of their possessions for little money or had to pay a lot of money for a pack animal. Some sewed little pieces of gold or jewellery into their clothing, which the Chinese soldiers forcibly took away when they found it. Some families managed to take a few things like carpets, or small pieces of furniture. The interviewees narrated the loss of personal possessions with great sadness. The fact that they had to leave behind certain physical objects within the setting of forced immigration was perceived as an experience of violence, especially when the person was young and exiled by their parent's decision to leave. They narrated how the loss of small things like marbles or little boxes was very distressing: 'I cried for days because soldiers took little objects away from me or I wasn't allowed to take them, because they were too big.' And even for people who were older and decided to leave, the loss of objects given to them by deceased family members caused pain. Even the loss of mundane objects associated with their lives in East Turkistan ruptured specific memories and were perceived as a disconnect in their subjective continuity.

But they also faced other problems: not everybody was granted the necessary documents, and even within families some members had to stay while others were allowed to leave. The interviewees depicted dramatic scenes where they bid farewell to ones who had to stay behind. But even those who were allowed to leave were conflicted about what to do. One man said in an interview,

People had two options, we could either join the group and leave our homeland, our tangible and moral existence behind or stay and face deadly struggles. Some of us had a past with connections to either the ETR or were religious people. They kept on calling us pan-Turkists. We knew that the Communists would conduct executions, send us to labour camps and use other means to educate us in their way.

Almost everybody I spoke to had relatives who were not on the list, even close relatives, like parents, children, or spouses. They left not knowing whether they would see relatives and friends again, and some of the persons who stayed were reported to have been arrested and killed in custody. There were families in Kayseri who haven't seen family members since 1961. We can only imagine the distress caused by leaving behind loved ones, familiar objects and the known environment (due to geographical dislocation).

Almost all of the interviewees emphasized how they suffered from the political campaigns and how afraid they were of fleeing into an uncertain future. Alongside this another element appears in all of the narrations. One woman recalls,

I was afraid of the Chinese, they were capable of doing anything. I even thought, that they won't let us go. And I was even more afraid of crossing the mountains into Afghanistan, I knew it was dangerous, and what would await us there? But then there was one more

thing, saying good-bye to friends and relatives. I knew I was privileged to be able to leave, and I felt bad about it. I looked at the people staying and it broke my heart.

As much as the East Turkistan community of this period was a community of suffering, we might add that a form of survivor guilt was expressed in many of the interviews. People felt guilty for being able to leave and live a safe life in Turkey. In the interviews they narrated how

we vowed that we will do everything we can to let the world know about the terrible political conditions of East Turkistan and swear by our lives to do whatever we can to change this situation. This was the only thing we could offer to those who couldn't come with us, to make a vow.

Indeed, without me asking, in the majority of the interviews at this point the interviewees added, 'we didn't run away, we are also not in exile, we were forced to emigrate' (*kaçmadık, sürgünde de değiliz, göçe mecbur edildik*) as if they felt that they had to justify that they had left East Turkistan. With this statement they also emphasized that they didn't think they were in exile. During the course of my fieldwork I understood that these sentences also addressed intergenerational discussions that were not unusual within the community in Kayseri. And my being in the age range of the second, Turkey-born generation of Uyghurs might have triggered this. I will return to this discussion later in this chapter.

The vow moved the East Turkistan Cause into the centre of their lives in Turkey, reminding them permanently about their relatives in Xinjiang. The term survivor guilt applies to victims of atrocities who were able to stay alive when others vanished and died (Wiseman 2006). In the interviews even younger Turkey-born Uyghurs referenced the vow and the death of relatives in Xinjiang. The feelings of guilt had been passed on, so much so that some younger Turkistanis perceive it as a burden now. The less they can do, the more paralysed they feel about the political situation as well as their personal guilt.

'We got so happy when we saw the Pamir Kyrgyz'

The interviewees narrated how the first sight of other humans since they left the outpost of Xinjiang brought great relief. After their traumatic farewell, Chinese officials took them from Yarkent to Kashgar where they had to wait for a few more days. Loaded onto lorries, Chinese soldiers then drove them up to the thin slice of mountainous territory where Xinjiang meets Afghanistan – the entrance to the Wakhan Corridor. Some reported that this took three days, until the Chinese soldiers pointed in the direction of Afghanistan saying, 'from here you are on your own', leaving the East Turkistanis to themselves. In some of the interviews people said that they walked the whole way to Afghanistan, other said they had donkeys they shared with the old and the young.

The narration of the emigration to Afghanistan was structured around a few themes and the forces of nature were a focus of the stories. One pious man interpreted the natural hardships of their migration as ‘god’s trial’ (Allah’ın sınavı) to see whether they would have the strength to keep the promises they gave to the ones they’d left behind. The interviewees narrated horrible stories of their journey over the passes of the Pamir range. Adding to their loss of bidding farewell to family members in East Turkistan, the death of members of the group during the migration were terrible experiences that made them question their decision. One man recounted that ‘people not only perished; because of the hard terrain we were not even able to bury them properly. The only thing we could do was do cover them with stones. This was against our religious practices, but there was nothing we could do.’ The natural conditions, the altitude, the cold, the snow and lack of resources to prepare properly led to further deaths. Unlike the East Turkistanis who left for Kashmir, no one kept a list of people who arrived. Once they reached the Pamir plateau and met the Kyrgyz things got a bit easier. They could obtain food from the Kyrgyz and they took them to the nearest villages where they could rest. When they met the first Afghan soldiers the former road sweeper used his Persian skills again to explain their situation. In the Badakhshan region they met up with traders they knew.

From the interviews it was evident that the East Turkistanis didn’t stay in one place, but formed a dispersed community. Some moved on to bigger cities, some went to northern areas with an Uzbek population hoping for help based on linguistic and ethnic ties. The experiences narrated in the interviews were diverse, depending on the personal biographies and skills. The people who could speak Persian found work quicker, while others started small businesses. Some couldn’t establish themselves and had to live by their wits. Some reported good relations with the local Afghan population; others on the other hand said, ‘although they were Muslims, they didn’t help us’. Their experiences were as manifold as their interpretations: one man said that the Afghans didn’t support them, because they thought they were communists, while others used the racist Turkish proverb, Türk’ün Türk’ten başka dostu yoktur (The only friends of Turks are Turks) to explain the Afghans’ approach. A few contextualized their experiences by noting that ‘in where we stayed the Afghans were very poor, they had nothing to share anyway’.

In general interviewees spoke positively about their time in Afghanistan, putting the hardship into an economic and political perspective. Quite a few of the current leading members of the association in Kayseri were either born in Afghanistan or arrived there when they were very young. They spent a good part of their childhood in Afghanistan and I could see that these years were formative years for them. To give an everyday life example: one day I was in the office of the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği and talking to the secretary-

general when kids on their way home from school knocked on the window. We could hear them approaching, because they were laughing and playing on the streets enjoying the end of the school day. They asked him to take a photocopy of a document since this was the only place with a photocopy machine in the quarter. He could be described as a stern, but genuine and sincere man. He was taciturn, very helpful and generous as I could witness on various occasions and committed to the Cause. I hardly saw him laughing over the course of my fieldwork. He took the photocopy and looked at the kids who were laughing and playing around on their way to their homes. Then he said kind of disapprovingly, ‘when I grew up there were no games, I had started working when I was a kid. They are fortunate, but they don’t know anything about why, about the Cause, the people who secured their comfortable lives’¹¹². I responded that they might get interested once they get older and he replied ‘we grew up with the Cause, it is part of the lives of our generation all the time. This generation will slowly forget, we already have a hard time to find young people anyway.’ And listening to his life story it wasn’t hard to imagine how his biographical experiences led him to this perception. He mentioned another striking detail. He was born in East Turkistan, but lived in Afghanistan from when he was four until he was nine. He lived through the ‘trauma of geographical dislocation’ (Akhtar 2011, 3); he lost a familiar social and physical environment and in Afghanistan he was exposed to different practices and habits. In passing he mentioned how he realized after coming to Turkey that he walked differently than the local-born Turkish youth. He said, that, of course if he wouldn’t talk, nobody could tell from his outer appearance that he wasn’t from here, but the way he walked and moved turned him into an outsider. ‘I moved like Afghan kids.’ He perceived an embodied difference that was beyond the verbal and distinguished him from the local youth, but also from the youth of East Turkistan and that also distinguished him from the East Turkistanis that came in the 1950s.

The East Turkistanis dispersed to various regions and cities in Afghanistan, the interviewees estimated their numbers at around 600 people, including those who came in the following years from India and Pakistan. Most of the people I spoke with wanted to stay in Afghanistan, despite its hardship. They wanted to be able to go back once things in East Turkistan changed. Most of them were not looking for another country to emigrate to, except for the families trying to leave for Saudi Arabia. A small number of men tried to be politically active and asked whether they could have some broadcasting time at the state radio, but the Afghan authorities declined saying, ‘We don’t want to upset China or the Soviet Union.’

¹¹² ‘Benim büyüdüğüm zamam oyun moyun yoktu, genç yaşta çalışmam gerekiyordu. Onlar çok şanslı, niye neden şanslı olduklarını bilmiyorlar ve maalesef davayla ilgilenmiyorlar.’

Rumours of Deportation

Three or four years after their arrival rumours started going around that the Chinese authorities had convinced the Afghan officials that they had been fooled about some of the migrant's identities. In one of the interviews a man, who lived in Badakhshan with his family recollected a scene where he was called to the police headquarters of the province and was shown a letter with the order to deport all of the people who came to Afghanistan in 1961 by 22 September 1964. The letter came from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Afghan Parliament supposedly approved the order. After he saw it he travelled to Kabul and went to the office of UNESCO¹¹³ asking for help. They responded that they couldn't help because they were not allowed to interfere with a country's internal matters. When he left the building he saw the sign of the Turkish Embassy opposite. They managed to meet an official, but his response was that there is nothing he could do, but they could try to see the border commander. They went to the Badakhshan province's border authorities and asked for help, saying 'Instead of sending us back, you could kill us right away, because death is awaiting us in China anyway.' The person in charge, in order to gain some time asked for another approval from the headquarters. The families living in Badakhshan started to move to Kabul to find a solution. In Kabul they met with the Turkish Ambassador and talked about the danger they were facing. According to the memories of the East Turkistanis, the Turkish authorities met with their Afghan counterparts and secured the East Turkistanis official documents, and the promise that they would get Afghan citizenship soon. The East Turkistanis still had their doubts and expressed their wish to immigrate to Turkey and asked whether he could help them. They went to his office where the Turkish official asked them whether they are all Turks. They answered in the affirmative. He told them that he would send a telegraph to Turkey and that they should come back in two weeks. It took one year for the answer to come, accepting 170 families living in Kabul. Families from other provinces started to apply as well. In the meantime, one man remembers that the Chinese, Soviet and American Embassies started anti-Turkish propaganda. According to a few people the Americans offered passage to Alaska, and China did everything they could for them not to be able to leave, because 'they were afraid that we'd tell the world about the situation in East Turkistan'.

But the propaganda was not without success: the East Turkistani community was disunited and many people wanted to go to Saudi Arabia. They went so far as to meet with Saudi Arabian authorities, who told them that they could take four families per year during the

¹¹³ In the interviews he repeatedly said UNESCO, but he might have meant the office of the United Nations.

pilgrimage season. When the community decided that they wanted to go to Turkey, according to a few people, a letter from the Taiwanese Embassy in Jeddah arrived, stating that they ‘get Taiwanese passports to live on in Saudi Arabia’. They decided to consult Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra. Both Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Mehmet Emin Bughra asked in their letters, ‘do you want to live in Saudi Arabia on a Chinese passport saying “I’m Chinese” or do you want to live in Turkey saying “I’m a Muslim Turk?”’ With this counter question taken as an advice to come to Turkey, they gave the Turkish Embassy a final list of names, even as a few families decided not to come. One group of people consisting of the East Turkistanis that were about to go and a few people from the Turkish Embassy went to the United Nations to explore the possibilities of a contribution to the travel expenses. The United Nations and the International Red Cross promised to fly them out from Kabul to Ankara. When I was asking one of the older people whether they received any travel documents, he responded that the United Nations issued them a yellow passport. When I said that I was surprised to hear that, he got it out of a drawer: it was a vaccination certificate. He had kept it as a memento, carrying the meaning of a travel document for him. They weren’t able to take many things from Afghanistan, suffering another loss of possessions they acquired in the few years of their stay in Afghanistan.

The United Nations set 8, 10 and 12 October 1965 as travel dates and a few men from the Turkish Embassy were supposed to accompany them. On the final travel date the group who decided to stay came to the airport and said that they were regretting their decision. The ambassador promised help and then they left for Tehran where they had a scheduled layover to refuel the plane. Part of the group who remained behind came to Turkey in 1967.

In his memoirs Isa Yusuf Alptekin (2007) tells us about his efforts from Turkey. He describes how he had been in contact with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Development and Housing to facilitate the immigration of the East Turkistanis as *iskânlı göçmen*. His main focus was on financial support, as he wanted to make sure that they would be provided with proper housing and monetary start-up support. He again referred to their Turkic origins and the life-threatening dangers Communism was posing for them if they weren’t able to leave Afghanistan. He signed his letters in his position as the President of the East Turkistan Migrant Society.

The first 243 East Turkistanis arrived in 1965, others followed in the same year, and a third group in 1967. In November 1965 a delegation of seven people under Isa Yusuf’s chairmanship went to Ankara to personally thank the involved people. They also met with Süleyman Demiral who had just become the youngest Prime Minister in Turkish history

(Alptekin 2007). The three groups had to master a few final little challenges before they finally arrived. A few persons of one group told me how the plane after their refuel stop had to fly back to Tehran due to a supposedly serious technical problem. ‘After all the problems we had, imagine, almost in Turkey, our plane crashed, that would have been bad, really bad luck’, one woman said jokingly. They arrived in Ankara, where they had to register officially.

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Figure 20. Photo taken upon arrival of the first group of East Turkistanis at the Ankara Esenboğa International Airport in 1965. (Photograph provided by interviewee)

Pan-Turkists and their Ideological Welcoming

In 1960, five years prior to the arrival of the East Turkistanis from Afghanistan, Turkey had experienced a military coup d'état. The colonel who read the declaration on the Turkish radio was Alparslan Türkeş (1917–1997), who was to become the founder and President of the Nationalist Movement Party (Milliyetçiler Hareket Partisi, MHP) in 1969. Called Başbuğ (an old Turkish word for commander or leader) by his devotees, he was the spearhead of the far right of the Turkish political spectrum and created a leader cult around his propagated ideology merging Turkish nationalism with pan-Turkism (Bora 2008). Many of the interviewees, even the younger ones, praised him during our chats on Turkish politics. As far as I could see many of the East Turkistanis still vote for the MHP, although the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP) was favoured.

In the declaration the justification of the military intervention was based on the allegedly unconstitutional acts of the DP government. Relations between the army and the DP had never been close, due to the close ties of the military's leadership with the old regime. In 1960 the army arrested all DP ministers and deputies, the Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was hanged in September 1961, Celal Bayar was sentenced to death, but his sentence was turned in life imprisonment. He was released from prison in 1964 due to his medical condition. The DP was dissolved in September 1961. The short-lived coup that displaced a democratically elected government led to a new constitution by referendum and within a year and half elections were held.

The referendum took place in 1961 and a new constitution was accepted with 61.7 per cent of the votes. Political activity was allowed again and elections were held in October 1961. İnönü's Republican People's Party (CHP) won 36.7 per cent of the votes but the moderate right-wing Justice Party (Adalet Partisi, AP), won 34.7 per cent, the Republican Peasants' Nation Party (Cumhuriyetçi Köylü Millet Partisi, CKMP, which became in 1969 under Alparslan Türkeş the Nationalist Movement Party, MHP) gained 14.0, and the New Turkey Party (Yeni Türkiye Partisi) 13.9 per cent.

The new constitution allowed a wider range of political activity (Keyder 1987, Zürcher 2004). pan-Turkists were still active throughout the 1950s, mobilizing against Communism and focusing on the Outside Turks, but one major organisational change took place. This was the takeover of the Republican Peasants' Nation Party by a group of acknowledged pan-Turkists. Pan-Turkism became part of the party's official tenets and found its way into the political mainstream in Turkey (Landau 1995). In 1964 Alparslan Türkeş, the former colonel became a member of the party and by August 1965 he was the chairman. That facilitated changes and in 1969 the party was renamed the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), which despite their mediocre political success remained a favourite of the East Turkistanis. Quite a few of the political gatherings I attended with younger East Turkistanis were organized by the party's ultranationalist youth wing called Idealist Hearths (Ülkü Ocakları) (also called Grey Wolves (Bozkurtlar)).

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Figure 21. Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Alparslan Türkeş during the Turkistan Congress in Istanbul in 1990. (Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

In the 1960s pan-Turkist societies took advantage of the liberal conditions and established numerous associations in cities all over Turkey promoting Turkish unity and facilitating help for the Outside Turks. One local example of the pan-Turkists, who were organized in smaller local branches, was a lawyer who welcomed the East Turkistanis from Afghanistan in Kayseri.¹¹⁴ Born in 1928 in Kayseri, he studied law at Istanbul University and there became closely acquainted with pan-Turkists and their ideas. While studying in Istanbul he coincidentally walked into the Türk Gençlik Teşkilatı (Turkish Youth Organization), and came across articles written by famous pan-Turkists like Nihal Atsız. In an interview he confirmed that many of these organizations were short lived and that there were also ongoing discussions about the orientations of these groups towards Islam. Some of their members promoted a rather secular form of pan-Turkism, whereas for others the motto was Rehberimiz Kuran Hedefimiz Turan (Our guide is the Koran, our goal is Turkistan).¹¹⁵

He opened a branch of the Türk Gençlik Teşkilatı in Kayseri, the first one in the city. Shortly after that, four associations in Istanbul united under the umbrella of the Türkiye Milliyetçiler

¹¹⁴ This information is based on two interviews I conducted with him in Kayseri.

¹¹⁵ See also Landau (1995, Chapter 5) on the new groupings evolving around varying platforms.

Derneği (Association of Nationalists of Turkey), but the DP closed it down due to problems with the usage of the word *Türkiye* in the name. They then opened the Türk Kültürü Derneği, simply changing the name while using the same statutes. The government then prohibited use of the word *Türk* and they renamed it the Kayseri Kültür Derneği. He later became the provincial chairman of the MHP in Kayseri and actively engaged with the migrants from East Turkistan.

In the interviews with him he presented his perspective as a pan-Turkist saying that the Outside Turks were his main interest. ‘One day we got instructions from the headquarters in Istanbul to take care of the incoming East Turkistanis and help them with whatever they needed help with.’ In the interview he reminisced about the arrival of the East Turkistanis and the practical and ideological help his association provided. They organized financial support to furnish the houses that were given to the migrants, as well as legal and administrative help concerning their registration, documents and papers. They also tried to find work for those who were not provided with a job by the local municipality.

Aside from the help they arranged, I also asked him about how the relations with East Turkistanis were. For him,

as someone who was interested in Turkism [Türkçülük] it was no problem at all, their values were the same, for example women didn’t work and were at home taking care of the house and children. And we in Anatolia support this, in Turkish culture women don’t work, it keeps them from giving birth to children and raising them properly.

In his narration neither the locals, nor the newly arrivals felt any foreignness (yabancılık) or strangeness (tuhafılık). He stressed the similarities of all Turkic groups by emphasizing the language:

there were no problems whatsoever, their traditions and customs resemble Anatolian culture, the languages are almost the same. The Turkish spoken in Anatolia is very close to their language, there were no misunderstandings. There were no complaints, the relations to the locals were very strong.

But he also implied some kind of self-imposed political mission towards the East Turkistanis (sounding like İsa Yusuf Alptekin) by saying that ‘because of the Communist regime, we had to heighten their awareness of the pan-Turkic consciousness and moral Turkish values and educate them.’¹¹⁶ And indeed, as also shared repeatedly in the interviews, the East Turkistanis expressed their gratitude especially towards the described lawyer and the help of the

¹¹⁶ ‘Komünist rejimden dolayı milli ve manevi değerlerini şuurlandırmamız gerekiyordu’.

associations. But the interviewees' narration of their first experiences and perceptions about the locals indirectly contested the MHP's insistence on their similarities.

Mainstream Media Reporting on their Arrival

The media also covered the landing of the first group. Probably briefed by Isa Yusuf Alptekin or pan-Turkist groups, the coverage reveals some interesting aspects of the 'public' perception on this matter.




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Figure 22. Front page of the daily Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* on 15 October 1965.(I received this photocopy from one of my interviewees.)

One of the major nationwide newspapers in Turkey, *Hürriyet* (Liberty) reported on their arrival with the headline ‘ ‘Finally, we are also going to breathe” 354 of the Turkistanis who

escaped Red China chose Turkey as their home'.¹¹⁷ It is worth taking a closer look at the paper's narration and visual depiction. In the right upper corner it declares that in 1870 Turkistan was subject to Turkey, referring to the Yakub Beg period and reflecting the *Zeitgeist* of that time in Turkey by not mentioning the Ottoman Empire. In the left upper corner the newspaper writes how the East Turkistanis draw attention to themselves by carrying all of the features of their race, slanted eyes and prominent cheekbones. But most noticeable is the photograph of the three women wearing the burka, with one having lifted it above her knees. And we can see that she wears high heels. The short text beneath the photo says that it is not their burka, but the dress of Afghan women, and that they are happy that now being in Turkey they can take it off. In my interviews the women didn't talk about any dress code imposed on them, and we might assume that not every Afghan woman wore the burka. That doesn't mean that they didn't have to wear certain garments. In any case for that group of migrants it does seem like an unusual dress. And showing her legs like this is unexpected as well. None of my informants could recall when this photo was taken and if they were East Turkistani women, but there was nobody else on the plane except for them. It conveys the message that they are in a free country now and can wear whatever they want. And as an act of liberation one woman pulls up the imposed cloth. The newspaper makes a historical alignment, showing that Turkey and Turkistan were politically connected, but interestingly the newspaper attributes to the newcomers distinctive physiological features that turns them into an exotic different race.

'Anayurttan atayurda'

The flashlights of the cameras, the questions of the journalists I couldn't understand, all the officials and people from the different associations welcoming us, it was overwhelming, we all cried, but this time they were tears of joy. Then the border official asked us about our genealogical tree and we had to tell them our family name, but we didn't have one.

While the border patrol officers took their personal details, the pan-Turkists launched their first efforts to boost their pan-Turkic awareness by helping them finding a family name.¹¹⁸ Surprised by the fact that they had to choose a family name, interviewees offered different accounts about how they responded. A few said that the East Turkistanis who came in the 1950s helped them. Others said that the people from the associations proposed names, while

¹¹⁷ Interestingly, a report published by the World Uyghur Congress in June 2016 carries a headline with a similar reference 'Seeking a place to breathe freely'.

¹¹⁸ The surname law in Turkey, that required all citizens to choose a fixed surname was only introduced in 1934 (Basak 2012, 61).

others reported that officials suggested names. In any case they ended up with names referring to Turkish mythology or that contained the word *Türk*, like *Ergenekon*, *Bozkurt*, *Göktürk*, *Turancı*, *Tümtürk*, *Cantürk*, *Türkten*, *Baturhan*, *Ilktürk*, *Türksoy*.

The group that arrived in Turkey, especially with their newly acquired last names officially registered, started to carry their proof of ethnic origin in their names (very unequivocally in the case of *Türksoy*). The allocation of family names could be seen as a ceremony producing a local subject within the framework of a broader Turkic context. This kind of Turkishness presented by the pan-Turkists offered them a space of belonging. And it is understandable why this was so appealing, taking into consideration the threats this group were exposed to in the wake up of their own identity formation.

We must also note how with the arrival of the East Turkistanis a clear ‘production of locality’ commenced, to use the phrase in Appadurai’s sense:

I view locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial. I see it as a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity and the relativity of contexts. This phenomenological quality, which expresses itself in certain kinds of agency, sociality and reproducibility, is the main predicate of locality as a category (or subject) [...] (Appadurai 1995, 208).

In addition to a locality, the East Turkistanis were now connected to a number of nation-states. With Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s post-1949 efforts, East Turkistanis in Saudi Arabia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and, even if the political ties were getting weaker, in Taiwan formed a global network. Over time they had built up complex social relations comprising a whole range of familial, social, religious, economic and political relationships that can be characterized as transnational (Basch, Glick-Schiller and Blanc 1994). With the arrival of the immigrants in 1965 a coherent community in spatial and familial terms was made that helped to make Turkey the most important place for the Cause for the following three decades. The interested and engaged pan-Turkist audience in Turkey helped to establish a mutual relationship with them that shaped certain narrations evolving around victimhood and suffering among the East Turkistanis. The production of locality occurred in the everydayness of East Turkistani existences in Kayseri in connection with a transnational scale that worked on a more abstract level of political imagination and longing for a nation-state.

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Figure 23. Group photo taken in a little park in Kayseri during the first visit of İsa Yusuf Alptekin. According to his memoirs he went to Kayseri on 5 November 1965 (Alptekin 2007, 546). (Photograph provided by interviewee)

For the first time in their lives they were able to migrate because of elements of their ethnic identity, and not be oppressed because of them. Journalists and the members of the association were interested in them because of the imagination of a certain identity that everybody interpreted differently. Among my interviewees some were happy because they were in a Muslim country now. I remarked that Afghanistan was a Muslim country too, to which they replied that it wasn't a free Muslim country like Turkey. And because of that, China could have easily put pressure on them to send them back. I could see that they felt welcomed within the pan-Turkic umbrella, because it also left them enough space to position themselves within the broad and vague spectrum of pan-Turkism. This positioning was contextual, as there was an imagined similarity with other Turks that was experienced to different degrees in everyday life based on the personal biographical experiences of the individual and their abilities to adopt to new situations. About fifty years after their arrival they said that 'it felt as if they came from their motherland to their fatherland'.

Towards the morning a few buses took the group from the International Esenboğa Airport in Ankara to Kayseri. The constructions of the houses in the *Türkistan Mahallesi*¹¹⁹ in Kayseri

¹¹⁹ The quarter is known as *Türkistan Mahallesi* in Kayseri. Feld emphasizes the affective meaning of place-names: 'Because they are fundamental to the description and expression of experiential realities [...] names are deeply linked to the embodied sensation of place' (1996, 113).

were not completed yet. The East Turkistanis were accommodated in three hotels in Kayseri, in the hotel Sivas, the hotel Meydan and the hotel Sakarya. I asked officials at the municipality of Kayseri about the decision to settle the East Turkistanis in Kayseri, but after fifty years they couldn't give me a comprehensive answer, saying 'most likely the Department of Housing and Development (İmar ve İskan Bakanlığı) considered Kayseri appropriate for them as it is a city known for its trade and commerce. That probably made the authorities think that it would be easier for the East Turkistanis to find a job.' And indeed Kayseri is known for its businessmen, families who started businesses as small-scale merchants that grew into large holdings. But more importantly, in 1934 the Turkish state established Sümerbank, a bank and an industrial holding company. In 1935 with a loan from the Soviet Union, Sümerbank's first textile factory opened in Kayseri. Kayseri had been connected to the railway system since 1924 and cotton was brought from regions in the south. Planned as a replica of Soviet cotton plants, the factory manifested a vision for further development in Turkey.¹²⁰ In the early fifties, now benefitting from the Marshall Plan, private manufacturers were encouraged and the sector expanded. By the 1960s the manufacturing sector grew by ten per cent per year (Koraltürk 1997).

The answers I received from persons active in the association were certainly more creative and showed political intentionality and an effort of creating a historic belonging. They claimed that Kayseri had an Uyghur past referring to the antiquity of the Uyghur existence in Anatolia based on the *Eratna Beyliği*, an Anatolian principality that lasted from 1328–1381 and was founded by an officer of Uyghur origin who served the Ilkhanid governor of Anatolia.¹²¹ They argued that Kayseri was the perfect city for East Turkistanis since some of the people here must be (technically speaking) of Uyghur origin. That would facilitate the East Turkistanis to feel like home.

İsa Yusuf Alptekin on the other hand was not content with the decision from the perspective of the Cause. 'If I had the financial resources [...] I would resettle all of them in Istanbul. But even if I did so how shall I feed them and where should I accommodate them?' His reason was that East Turkistanis in Kayseri wouldn't be able to participate in the foundation's activities and 'we wouldn't be able to benefit from them' (Alptekin 2007, 545). The main reason why he was so eager for them to come Turkey was to promote the Cause, to preserve the national culture, to make East Turkistan widely known and to develop a momentum

¹²⁰ See the report entitled 'Islamic Calvinists. Change and Conservatism in Central Anatolia' by ESI in 2005. http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_69.pdf, last accessed on 15 December 2016.

¹²¹ See Kemal Göde (1994) on the *Eratnahılar Beyliği*.

towards its liberation. He expresses his dissatisfaction with the situation of the first group of East Turkistanis (here also including the Kazakhs) being scattered around Anatolia or dispersed across Istanbul. He makes another point saying that the East Turkistanis from Istanbul really wanted to meet with the new ones from their homeland in order to fulfil one's longing and get news from home, but due to financial issues both of them wouldn't be able to visit each other on a regular basis (Alptekin 2007).

Imagined Similarities and Felt Differences

Among the MHP cadres, one repeatedly asserted similarity between Anatolian Turks and the East Turkistanis was language. The nationalists Turks, as well as most of the politically active East Turkistanis, saw the languages as two dialects of one language. When my interviewees narrated how they processed the overpowering experiences of migration, comments on language were very different among my interviewees and I could see that the perception of language is also gendered. In general, and this observation is based on about twenty interviews with women, I can say that the men's Turkish is better. Most of the women narrated the main part of their life stories in Uyghur after starting in Turkish. In quite a few cases, the woman would slip back into Uyghur and the relatives reminded her to continue in Turkish. A few of the women replied, 'What do you mean? I am talking in Turkish.' This could be because they perceived them as being very similar languages, or that their Turkish is less developed and when sharing emotional experiences they unconsciously favoured Uyghur. I wondered whether women had fewer contacts and spent less time with local Turks? This was partly the case, but in the first few months the Turkish Government provided language classes and many women worked in jobs with local Turks.

In their own perception almost every single person I asked said that the language wasn't an issue for them. But when retelling their everyday life experiences, I could see that language had been an issue. There was a disruption in language fluency. One man said that he didn't understand a single word in the first months in his new job with a road construction company. One woman mentions in passing that she didn't want to go to the market, because people didn't understand her. Here, her perception was striking, saying that language is not an issue, but she couldn't make herself understood. Another man also recalled how he realized after all the excitement of the arrival, that

although we came to a country where they speak a Turkic language, it was difficult to communicate with the local Turks and most of us couldn't read the Turkish alphabet. I thought it would be easier, but it took me a long time to be able to speak Turkish.

We have to take into consideration that the educational level of these people was different. A few people were polylingual and could speak Arabic, Persian and even some Russian. Some older people said that they had seen and read Ottoman texts. As far as I could tell none of them could speak Chinese. Some people picked up Dari in Afghanistan, but had forgotten it completely now.

For the next eight or nine months they had to live in hotels. Not only was the language foreign but also some culinary differences appeared. Taking into consideration that the relation between migration and food is central one (Hage 1997), according to my interviewees (male and female) one of the first things the East Turkistanis negotiated was how to get access to the hotel kitchen in order to cook their own food. Even on their very first day, a few people recalled how their first Turkish breakfast experience caused some bewilderment and challenged their gustatory and olfactory perceptions. The hotel served black tea, eggs, tomatoes, white cheese, bread and black olives. One man mistook the black olives for dried black plum (*kara erik*), something he knew from home, and was surprised and disgusted by their taste. The enthusiasm about the type of unknown cheeses served to them was rather muted too. Although there are some similar variations of food in East Turkistan and Turkey¹²² in their first everyday life experiences crucial matters like eating and speaking led to some confusion. Interviewees recalled how they managed to get time in the kitchen to prepare their own food, because ‘We couldn’t eat what they served and wanted to eat our own food.’ We can see that it was not necessarily only the taste of Turkish food, but the circumstances of being in a new environment that encouraged East Turkistanis to cook their own food to make a place feel more like home and ease anxieties. According to Akhtar, dislocated individuals have a tendency to only eat their own familiar food (2011).

During the course of the interviews we talked about their relations to the people of Kayseri and a few people on completely different occasions answered with an image that could be regarded as a reference to food and eating. One woman recalled in an interview in 2015 how the Turkish authorities provided educational courses, and among one of them was some kind of practical class where the teacher showed the East Turkistanis how to eat with a knife and fork. ‘They looked at us as if we were cannibals’ (*yamyammışız gibi bize baktılar*), she said. Years before in an interview in 2011 another woman used the same reference but with a different perspective to describe an interaction with the locals at the weekly market, saying ‘they looked at us like cannibals’ (*yamyam gibi bize baktılar*). Both times the sentences

¹²² Both places, Kayseri and Xinjiang also offer a whole variety of local foods. I am not assuming one national cuisine here.

contain a threat: in the first encounter the woman perceived that the local teacher's look implied as if she thinks that they were cannibals. In the second encounter, my interviewee perceived the locals as a threat. A few of the interviewees, male and female, told me how they felt as if the local Turkish people tried to civilize them ('bizi medenileştirmeye çalıştılar'), implying that they felt inferior or thought that the locals felt superior.

The official discourse of political activists in Kayseri accords Turkey an overwhelming gratitude based on its hospitality towards those of similar ethnic and racial ties. And after the suffering and traumatic experiences the East Turkistanis had been through, their gratitude was understandable, particularly considering the fact that they could migrate to Turkey based on their Turkic origin. Even if ethnic or racial ascriptions were not important to them, issues of ethnic identity became important matters of life and death. To thank the Republic of Turkey was considered a national obligation (*milli vazife*) and a conscientious responsibility (*vicdani sorumluluk*).

Nevertheless, ideological and politicised discourses and private perceptions often create paradoxical relationships. One interviewee who repeatedly emphasized the shared roots of all Turks, and their common history, traditions, practices and culture also narrated a period of his private life when he was married to a Turkish woman from another city in Western Anatolia. This marriage didn't work out and in his interpretation it was because of irreconcilable cultural differences between Turks and Uyghurs. He didn't attribute incompatibilities to the personal traits of the married couple, but to the essential differences of culture that politically he denies exist. In his view cross-cultural marriages pose difficulties.

Every migration has its hardships. While I was in Kayseri for interviews people would share a lot of stories like the ones above, remembering how difficult things were for them without blaming anyone while underlining that the locals did help. But often those who were politically active frowned upon such behaviour. I witnessed a few times the denouncing of a person as unthankful because they articulated some criticism, called a fouler of one's own nest. One woman put this into perspective by saying 'even if I had moved to Gulja, I would have had faced some problems'. She added, 'notwithstanding how warm-blooded the people of Kayseri are, they couldn't warm up the winds of separation'. Nevertheless, such hints of less than perfect hospitality did not only reference problems during and after the emigration. As I show below, ruptures developed along political fault lines that slowly fractured the growing numbers of East Turkistanis and their political ideas. Further, intergenerational differences appeared, based on different life worlds and experiences of the persons involved.

***Türkistan Mahallesi*: Embassy, Diaspora and ‘Old-fashioned Identities’**

In the *Türkistan Mahallesi* in Kayseri nationalistic symbols are visible in public spaces. At the entrance of the ‘East Turkistan Embassy’ are two flagpoles, one adorned with the *Gökbayrak*, the other one with the Turkish Flag. The left side of the vehicle registration plates of some cars where usually the Turkish Flag is located had a little *Gökbayrak* attached to it. Most of the houses were painted white with some patterns in the colour of the flag on the walls. Little *Gökbayraks* could be seen in the front gardens from the main street as well as the cars attached to the rear view mirror or as stickers on the trunk. This way the symbols are mobile.



Figure 24. The entrance of the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

The executive committee of the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği and a few members welcomed me in the main meeting room. In introducing themselves, to my surprise nobody used the ethnonym Uyghur. I wasn't sure if it was because the president introduced himself as *Doğu Türkistanlı*. After him every person did the same thing, some adding the city

they or their parents were from. Only two persons in that meeting were born in East Turkistan, and three in Afghanistan: the rest were born in Turkey. Even those born in Turkey would use the city of their parents as their home place reference, as in *Yarkentliyim*, *Gulcaliyim*. In one case where I was asked first where I was from, I answered that I had a German passport. In return my interviewee said that he is Turkish (*Türküm*). I said that I thought that he was from East Turkistan, he answered that this was correct, but that no such country exists and therefore he is a Turkish citizen. I can only assume that he responded to my initial answer, because in other meetings I heard how he introduced himself as *Doğu Türkistanlı*. In the course of my fieldwork, I could see that ethnic ascriptions were used in a relational manner, in a dialogue echoing the way Stuart Hall (1994) frames cultural identity: for him the usage of ethnicity was a positioning, a process more than fixed point.

To give a second example, when a young man in his mid-twenties walked me through the *mahalle* and introduced me to me to a handful of households we bumped into a few men on the street or met them in their houses and most of them introduced themselves as *Doğu Türkistanlıyım*, as those in the embassy did. Some would say *Türkistanlıyım*, and one said *Turki*. Later on I understood that he was referencing a greater Turkistan and assuming that all Turkic languages were mutual intelligible. And hearing that he could speak Kazakh and Uyghur (his father was Kazakh and his mother Uyghur) his language skills may have made him think that the languages were closer than they actually are. After another quite old man introduced himself as *Turki* and carried on with what he was doing, the young man held my arm and said, ‘did you hear that, what an old-fashioned (*eski kafalı*) and premodern way’. I wasn’t sure what he was referring to, but he immediately added that, ‘We are Uyghur Turks (*Uygur Türkleri*), but these old men are still thinking the old way.’ With *Uygur Türkleri* the young man used an ethnic ascription with the attributed broader term Turk. He talks about his specific ethnic group, but is still able to emphasize that they are Turks. Although the young man refused the regional term *Doğu Türkistanlı* for a set of political reasons, he still used it at different occasions. I have seen older Uyghurs from East Turkistan using this term when Kazakhs were around. It is used in order to distinguish them from other ethnic groups that are considered part of the Turkic family. As one person put it, ‘The word Turk is like a tree-trunk, and Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Uzbeks and so on are just branches of this tree.’¹²³ If older men were present some of them would say when hearing the word ‘Uyghur’ that, ‘the Chinese and Russians managed to erase the concept of Turk, that’s why the younger generation thinks this way, it’s all part of their assimilation policy’.

¹²³ ‘Türk kelimesi bir ağaç gövdesi gibi, Uygur, Kazak, Özbek vs. onun dallarıdır.’

Younger Uyghurs would say that there is vast region called Turkistan with distinctive groups inhabiting certain areas, and that these groups although connected have different cultures and should have their own states. Rejecting the tree analogy some referred to distinct regional ethnic islands within Greater Turkistan. But no one used ethnic ascriptions in a consistent way. According to the context and the persons they are talking to they would also use alternative ways.

This positioning enabled East Turkistanis to occupy different spaces from where to make their voice heard and constitute themselves as new subjects reacting to the changing circumstances and develop political claims from there. And with Hall (1994) we can say that diasporic identity is established within certain forms of representations and that these identities are names people use when they position themselves within a certain narrative in a dialogical manner. These identifications change as part of history due to the social and political framework. To give one rather extreme example, I accompanied one man who migrated in 1951 and introduced himself as *Doğu Türkistanlı* to me. We went to a meeting organized by the ultranationalist *Ülkü Ocakları* in the suburb of Maltepe in Istanbul and he delivered a presentation where he presented the Cause as the Turkistan Cause (*Türkistan Davası*) based on heavy racial elements of blood lines that made all Turks one nation that will be freed and united one day.¹²⁴ A few days later he asked me if I wanted to attend an interview with the correspondent of an English newspaper. In this interview he placed the Uyghurs within a narration about human rights and self-governance along with the Tibetans and Chinese dissident groups in China. Both representations were ways of positioning himself. And he did it according to the audience he was addressing, but this doesn't mean that one way is more valid than the other. He promoted the Cause in a very wide spectrum of opportunities.

I could observe changing forms of narrations, or modifications of an expressed identity, in smaller relational settings as well. Being with twelve men at a *meshrep* gathering in Munich, nobody said that they were *Doğu Türkistanlıyım*. They were all from East Turkistan and most of them had seen me before, so they referred to their hometowns while introducing themselves. There are plenty of similar examples, where even streets became the point of reference for their identification.

Introducing my research interest at the meeting in the embassy I used the term diaspora, which caused one man to say, 'Tomas Bey, we don't approve of the word diaspora.'¹²⁵ I

¹²⁴ In this presentation he used the Mongolian loanword *ulus*.

¹²⁵ 'Tomas Bey, diaspora kelimesini kullanmayıp onaylamıyoruz.'

hesitated to ask why, because following Safran's model (1991) I could see general features of a diaspora like strong ethnic consciousness, idealization of the homeland, interest in restoration, creation and prosperity in the homeland, the idea of returning one day, and attempts at political influence. I could even see the coercive emigration as the 'break event' and a collective memory as used by Cohen (1997, 54) to characterize victim diasporas. But he continued saying, 'in Turkey the word diaspora is only used in relation to the Armenian diaspora and we don't want to be associated with them'.

Although the East Turkistanis would fit into the definition of a diaspora, they always emphasized they don't feel like one. 'Turkey is our second motherland, we are not in a foreign country.' But things might have changed after my fieldwork. Just a few months ago, when the alleged suspect of the night club killing on New Year's Eve in Istanbul was announced to be a Uyghur in the Turkish media, I saw that the word diaspora was used for the first time by a man who was present at that meeting.¹²⁶

In private spaces, where I did most of my interviews, the *Gökbayrak* was prevalent, too. Due to the extended process of fieldwork, I was able to meet people a number of times. My interviewees usually narrated their life stories in the second meeting after we chatted about more random things in the first. In general, the narrations of women were shorter than those of men. Interestingly, when I asked about what they remembered about their lives in East Turkistan, men usually started with an account of the political history of East Turkistan, highlighting certain nationalist parts and narrating the various take overs of China as (almost personal) defeats and humiliation. Usually they started with how the Uyghurs (using the word *Uyghur*) were the first group that left the nomadic lifestyle, mentioning Yakub Beg and the two East Turkistan Republics or expounded a political economy about how the CCP changed everything in China. The order of this narration resembled, or in some cases was almost identical with the presentations given by officials of the associations at various occasions. Many people talked as if they had read Isa Yusuf Alptekin's publications. Many men were involved in some kind of engagement with the associations and foundations, so their narration was clearly shaped by their publications and discourses that sought to let the world know about East Turkistan contextualized in a global politics.

On the other hand, most of the women started with details about their everyday life, describing the places they had lived in, mentioning details about flowers in the garden and

¹²⁶ See Hürriyet online, accessed 10th of January, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/sevit-tumturk-reina-teroristine-uygur-diyen-40330072>

everyday activities, like baking bread in the *tandır* oven, or feeding the animals, before sharing their experiences of the migration and getting to their perceptions of the political changes. It took me five or six months before I was able to conduct interviews with women alone. In one case a woman finished her whole biographical narration in less than ten minutes and I wasn't sure if it was avoidance to not talk about certain parts her life. But after I asked her a couple of questions she admitted that this was the first time she had ever spoken about her life or that someone was interested in its mundane things and activities. Men's narratives could last for a few hours.

But with family members around I could observe how surprised some children or grandchildren were by the narratives of their relatives. In some interviews the male relatives learned as much as I did about the person's life and perception. In a few cases when the woman were talking about personal details, the male relatives tried to push her to talk about Chinese atrocities. 'Tell him what the Chinese did to you!' One woman replied, 'I haven't experienced any atrocities personally, but they made me leave my homeland and cut me off from part of my family.' She distinguished between the Chinese and the Chinese policy towards ethnic minorities. This situation caused a big discussion within the family whether the Chinese as an ethnic group/race were bad.

Creating Locality: 'From the Tian Shan to the Slopes of Mount Erciyes'

The Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği or the 'embassy' is based in one of the houses that the Turkish Government provided. After 8 months in hotels, in 1966 these houses became home for the East Turkistani families. Years after their efforts to establish new lives in Afghanistan were shaken by the threat of deportation they finally moved into their new places. One man apologetically explains why they had to wait for so long: 'the houses were built in winter and couldn't really dry out, we had to use the heating stove up to June. And there was still water running down the walls.'

One woman recalled how she encountered the quarter as unfamiliar and the architecture as featureless:

the houses all looked the same, the house numbers were still missing when we moved in. The houses were allocated by lot and sometimes, coming home from work or from the market, very tired, new to the quarter, without paying attention we would enter the wrong house. But it didn't matter, the smells of food were the same and most of the people were relatives anyway.

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Figure 25. A group of East Turkistanis praying in front of their new houses in the *Türkistan Mahallesi* in Kayseri in 1966. (Photograph provided by interviewee)

Later on they planted a garden, built a *tandır*, giving it a personal touch. On the other hand, when she described the topography of the area she articulated a familiarity in the surrounding landscape that reminded her of East Turkistan. ‘We came from the Tian Shan to the slopes of Mount Erciyes, for me they look alike, thinking of them I feel home’, said one woman in her sixties. We can say with Bachelard (1994, 120) that ‘often when we think we are describing we merely imagine’. Descriptions of the natural environment were often narrated as landscapes similar to East Turkistan. Perceptions, then, are intentional according to the person’s activities or concerns. Within these processes of turning alien space into their own place the East Turkistanis created a locality that is translocal in character, perceiving it as of full of memories, familiar, but also full of expectations and strange elements (Casey 1996). The changes they made transformed a spatial discontinuity into a familiar place, which is even named after the home region. It doesn’t neutralize the distance, but it creates a place with elements of both dwellings. In brief, migration is a balancing act, and, as we can see, it requires mediating global processes with local realities. New personal experiences form the horizon of multiple realities. The new enabling spaces, in a broad sense the political landscape of Turkey, as well as the local reality of a new environment and of a new home, carries both possibilities and limits.

The families expressed their concern at living in damp houses in the interviews but also tried not to give the impression of being ungrateful. The housing department provided food and the local associations financially helped to equip the house with white goods. But in addition to

the tangible support, one man remembered how moved he was when the local Turkish imam mentioned the East Turkistanis in the Friday sermon. 'Then I felt that I have arrived completely, as a Muslim and as a Turk.' The relationship between religion and migration is multifaceted and has a significant impact on the lives of migrants, especially when religious discrimination was one of the motives to leave. Faced with prejudice and hostility the East Turkistanis left because they were not able to practice their religion the way they wanted and here the imam even mentions them in the sermon, strengthening their sense of belonging.

In June 1966 the authorities handed over the certificates of ownership in a little ceremony and the East Turkistanis officially became homeowners. One man recalls that during the ceremony they were told that they had to stay in Kayseri for five years before they could move somewhere else, but this rule was responded to casually. The local authorities tried to facilitate the integration of the East Turkistanis into the local labour market by providing vocational training. Those who had a profession that was applicable in Turkey received help to find jobs or low interest loans to start businesses. The aforementioned road sweeper found a job based on his language skills in the library of the Department of Islamic Theology at the Erciyes University in Kayseri. The Sümerbank textile factory employed quite a few people, while other men worked in the construction sector and some worked as carpenters or shoemakers. A few of the younger ones who went to school afterwards found work at different departments of the local municipality or at banks. Among the group who came from Gulja were men who were tanners, but couldn't use their skills in Kayseri. They moved to Istanbul in the second half of the 1960s to work in the established leather sector in Zeytinburnu. Kazakhs employed them in their leather factories. My interviewees mentioned that Gulja was the centre of the leather industry in Xinjiang. According to the association in Kayseri ninety per cent of the families from Gulja left for Istanbul. From this group six or seven families migrated to Germany as *gastarbeiter*.

Although a few men revealed that they were not happy with their assigned jobs, I think we have to acknowledge the importance of work considering that fact that finding gainful employment with the benefits of superannuation is one of the major difficulties migrants face. The emotional impact of being unemployed, of not being able to gain a livelihood for the family can be harmful to the person's and his family's wellbeing. Considering work from a gender perspective, I could see in most of the interviews that the women did not do any paid work in East Turkistan, and it was the men that secured an income. In the diasporic context no man complained that their wives were doing a little work to support the household, but it was crucial to them that they were the main wage earners, and they mentioned how they started working shortly after they had arrived in Turkey. And even if some migrants did not manage

to resume their line of work (many of the younger adults were exiled while being in school and didn't acquire a profession in Afghanistan), there were many social benefits in working such as developing friendships with the local population and adapting to workplace related practices, thus getting to know the country of adoption better. All aspects are crucial to survive in the new environment and as Akhtar emphasizes, 'work is not merely a source of income but also a psychological necessity' (2011, 31).

The younger kids started going to school. One woman describes how all of the migrant kids were in one class, comprising a wide age range and 'sizes'. The following school year the kids attended classes according to their ages and state of education and were taught with local Turkish kids. Female interviewees narrated that the Turkish authorities emphasized handicrafts. A few teenage girls went to rug weaving classes while others learned how to sew. Those who attended all the classes would get a certificate and a little salary for their labour. Besides this, they all attended Turkish language classes to learn how to speak, read and write Turkish and the teaching of etiquette and good manners (perceived by one woman as getting civilized) were part of the classes, too.

Marxist Kurds and the Threat Within the *Mahalle*

Kayseri is known to be a nationalist and conservative city, but not all of its inhabitants are supporters of pan-Turkic approaches and despite the heavy homogenization measures of the Turkish Republic some ethnic groups do not embrace its imposed nationalism (Cagaptay 2006). The Turkish authorities were expecting more families from Afghanistan and built more houses than necessary. Even after the last families had arrived in 1967 some houses in the *Türkistan Mahallesi* remained unoccupied. Owing to the allocation policy of the housing department and the decisions of the Kayseri municipality, the East Turkistanis had to share the quarter with neighbours who politically couldn't be further apart. Creating a locality within the relativity of the Kayseri context the East Turkistanis had to handle a new inadvertent social immediacy. *Zaza* speaking Alevi Kurds from the Tunceli Province, called *Dersim* by its *Zazaki* name, were resettled to Kayseri in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As a number of Kurds said in interviews, 'they resettled us here, in the city that is the stronghold of Turkish nationalism, to break our political will. We found ourselves among right-wing fascists.' The perception of the East Turkistanis of their new neighbours resembled the opposite end of this spectrum, based on their fear of communism:

The fear of communism was deep inside all of us, we lost our motherland, our possessions and our property to the communists, we basically grew up against communism. We made all the sacrifices to come here and they put Maoist and Marxist Kurds right across the street, can you imagine? Look at the irony! We have seen it all,

who would believe in the communist slogans of friendship and equality? Only those, who have never experienced it, like the Kurdish brothers in our *mahalle*, they don't know what communism really is, how bad it is. They saw us as anti-communists and nationalists, which was what we were. There were lots of violent clashes between us and them, but this has settled long ago.

One family showed me two bullet holes in one door supposedly stemming from pistol fire by a Kurd in the heavy left-right clashes from the late 1970s. The relationship remained on a very basic level: one Kurdish woman who was born in Kayseri said that she has never set a foot in one of their houses and she assumed her friends hadn't either. One man recalls the only situation when they entered the private space of East Turkistanis was when they put up a TV set in the garden to watch a soccer game during the World Championship in 1986. Despite this, in 2015 I could see Kurds and East Turkistanis playing cards, backgammon or *okey* (a tile-based game popular in Turkey) in the coffeehouse of the *mahalle*.

I asked the East Turkistanis whether they didn't share a similar political destiny as these minorities, facing homogenization, issues with the use of their native language and religious practices, political discrimination based on ethnic grounds, and longing for some kind of autonomy. Most of the people answered my question with a strict no showing no identification and repeating the mainstream discourse of right-wing Turks: 'They are all terrorists and against the Turkish Republic, stirred up by foreign forces.'

Demanded Perpetual Narration of Atrocities

İsa Yusuf Alptekin, who maintained his enormous political and intensive travel activities up to the 1980s,¹²⁷ visited the East Turkistanis in October 1965 to gain an overview of their situation. But he also seized the opportunity with both hands and organized a gathering with the Kayseri branch of the Türk Kültür Derneği and made the East Turkistanis talk about Chinese atrocities. In his biography he recalls it was a great success as the large audience was visibly moved by the account of the Chinese atrocities. He describes how he utilized this moment by asking the locals for pecuniary support (Alptekin 2007, 548). His biography reads as if he assigned the East Turkistanis the role of narrating their victimhood. They should unfold the stories of Chinese cruelty and oppression as first hand witnesses and victims. He invited a delegation of three or four people to Istanbul to meet with members of the Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti. Before he left for Istanbul he met with a member of the

¹²⁷ For an overview of his global activities see Alptekin (2007). His son mentioned a car accident, and eye problems that caused İsa Yusuf to slow down.

Senate of the Republic of Turkey who was originally from Kayseri, asking him to engage with the migrants in the *Türkistan Mahallesi* because, ‘if they won’t succeed, there is the possibility that they might want to go to Saudi Arabia or Istanbul’ (Alptekin 2007, 549).

Although he mentioned earlier in his book that from the perspective of the Cause he wanted them to be in Istanbul, Isa Yusuf now stated a different opinion, saying that ‘they won’t be as successful as the preceding East Turkistan Kazakh Turks’. He offers an interesting explanation that gives us an idea how he perceived both of the groups:

The Kazakhs, mountain people, who have strong opinions, who work hard, no matter how tough their work is, without getting tired, became successful by making almost no expenses and saving most of their earnings. But it’s questionable whether the Uyghur Turks who are town people can adapt to this kind of working intensity and be happy in a place like Istanbul. (2007, 549)

This essentialised dichotomy between rural and urban that determines whether one is able to adapt and be successful through hard work is interesting. Isa Yusuf seems not to believe that his fellow Uyghurs are capable of hard work in the Istanbul environment. He didn’t pick this topic up again in his writing, but one wonders whether he was emphasizing the victim role of the Uyghurs or if he was worried about the Kazakh dominance in Istanbul?

The invited East Turkistanis went to Istanbul and stayed for a short period of time. The members of the Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti received them gladly, saying that ‘they brought a touch of their homeland to Istanbul’. The visitors from Kayseri were ‘honoured to meet Isa Yusuf Alptekin’ and Alptekin expressed how happy he was that they were in Turkey now. In the following days they met with people from the East Turkistan community in Istanbul and ‘it turned out that some of our group were even related to some of the Istanbul East Turkistanis’.

My interviewees remembered that due to financial constraints they couldn’t travel as much as they wanted to talk about the Cause. Especially the East Turkistanis who experienced Communist China for more than a decade became reliable authorities in narrating the Cause as first hand eyewitnesses.

As seen in Figure 26, the motto of this particular meeting was ‘see us and draw a lesson from us’. One interviewee from Kayseri who clearly agreed with Isa Yusuf Alptekin’s ideas summarised his approach in this way:

We wanted the whole world to understand that Communism is a big threat to the Turks. We have lived it and people should learn from us and see the real face of it. We also want the world to know that the Chinese have been humiliating us [bizi aşağılıyorlardı] for almost three hundred years!

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Figure 26. 'See us and draw a lesson from us'. East Turkistanis talking about their experiences. Isa Yusuf Alptekin sitting at the head of the table. (Photograph taken in Istanbul probably in 1967 according to the interviewee who provided it)

The political orientation of the first delegation from Kayseri resonated with Isa Yusuf's pan-Turkism. In an interview the final living member of this group accentuated that he sees himself as a Turk. 'The subdivision of Turks in different ethnic groups is part of the divide and rule policy of the Soviet Union and China.' It is difficult to say (and unnecessary) whether this post-migration political identity corresponded to his ideas in East Turkistan, because that's how he remembered it during the interviews. It is also hard to say to what degree the people in Kayseri developed their own political agenda in the first two decades. But as far as I can see up to the 1980s they were following and participating in activities designed and planned by the 'leaders' in Istanbul. The interviewees underlined that Isa Yusuf and the member of the Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti dominated the political activities as well as the discourses.

One member of the delegation recalled how,

Isa Bey was the man who brought the Cause to Turkey, he was the spokesman of the Cause. He knew the right methods of how to narrate the Cause, he was excellent in reading the circumstances. He brought the Cause to the world by being persistent and tirelessly repeating it, he condensed the Cause to a pill (hap haline getirdi) that everybody can easily consume and understand. I am very proud that I can work for him and the Cause. And I am proud to tell the glorious history of the Turks, because we are right from the cradle of Turkishness.

My interviewees constantly idealized East Turkistan and Turkish history and in the light of their experiences in China, with all the attacks on their narratives of a national history and on their identities, they now found a place from where they could make their voice heard, although the narration was expected to conform to certain parameters of suffering. On the other hand, considering the vow this group made, working for a known former East Turkistan politician using his existing network within a broad overarching identity that was not under threat must have felt like a blessing. The relocation to Turkey didn't put the group's identity as Turks or as Muslims under scrutiny: on the contrary their group markers gained a new dimension as coming from the cradle of Turkishness, and being the starting point of a long history of Turks, giving them pride. But especially in Turkey their experiences of helplessness and humiliation by the neighbouring Chinese became a major aspect of the group's narrated identity. But the positioning in between these two extremes, being the oldest Turkic settled civilization on one hand and narrating all these representations of humiliation by the Chinese on the other, made some of my interviewees oscillate in the interviews between a strong sense of pride, almost a superior arrogance, and strong feelings of shame. Some of my interviewees used two sentences, (others similar themes) in the course of one interview that illustrated it well. During the narration of East Turkistan history they would say, '*en büyük Türk*' (Turks are the greatest) only to say a few minutes later, when narrating political defeats, or the perceived colonization of East Turkistan by the Chinese, or the political problems of unifying Uyghur political activism, '*bizden adam olmaz*' (we are useless). The supreme and superior national narration could be interpreted as a compensation for the shame they experienced. These two poles of pride and shame were also perpetuated by the only audience that cared about the incoming East Turkistanis, by the pan-Turkist groups. The East Turkistani's shame could also be explained through their 'objectification' by the Chinese, in that political forces outside of their sphere of influence shaped their identity. And a similar process happened in Turkey. The pan-Turkist groups objectified their suffering and imposed an identity that was not necessarily welcomed by everyone, but eased their losses for some time. The grandiosity of sentences like *en büyük Türk* could be read as a cover for the losses they have experienced.

What becomes crucial, in what Volkan (2001, 79) calls 'chosen trauma', is the representation and narration of certain events that turn into a significant marker of this group. Of course, no group chooses to be traumatized, but it can choose which events they narrate and mythologize. Furthermore, in the context of the East Turkistanis in Turkey the audience with a special interest in certain political events perceived as traumatic by the immigrants further facilitated not only a 'perpetual' narration, but also played a role in linking the members of the group together. The pan-Turkists interest in the suffering of Outside Turks (Landau 1995)

corresponded with their chosen trauma, the humiliation, perceived and narrated as a long chain of traumatic experiences, that forms one marker of the identity of this group. And this chosen trauma is transmitted from generation to generation linking the members through its sharing. I could see that some Afghanistan- and Turkish-born men shared the representations of the group's massive trauma experienced by their ancestors in the last three hundred years, referring to the defeats in East Turkistan history by the Chinese, but also referring to events their parents experienced. They articulated feelings of hurt and shame, as well as mental defences to explain the humiliation. These representations of traumatic events linked trans-generational members of the group together and even worked as an entitlement to fight against everything Chinese, at least for the first generations of East Turkistanis in Turkey. And the perpetual representation certainly kept the East Turkistanis mourning the losses. That could explain their nostalgic almost melancholic feelings for the home region: the loss is permanently kept alive, it remained as an unfinished mourning (Freud 2001).

Politics and Folklore

The image in Figure 27 displays an East Turkistani protest against Communism during the Seventh Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers held in Istanbul in 1976. His son, Arslan, told me that Isa Yusuf sent a memorandum to the Turkish delegation in order to place East Turkistan on the agenda. He tried to attend, but the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation only accepted existing nation-states. He decided to make the East Turkistanis' voice heard and their presence felt and organized this gathering on Taksim Square in the heart of Istanbul. Some people from the *Türkistan Mahallesi* remembered this common activity as one of the few occasions when they went to Istanbul to participate in order to make a big impression.

The first official association in Kayseri was only established in 1989 almost twenty-five years after the first immigrants' arrival. Many interviewees narrated the financial hardships they faced in their first years as the main obstacle of getting organised earlier. The possibilities in Kayseri, despite the economic support by the local businessmen, were still rather limited. Nonetheless the local pan-Turkic groups funded smaller events, like traditional dance performances and exhibitions. In the years after the migration relations between the local political groups and the *Türkistan Mahallesi* seemed to happen on an irregular basis. 'They were doing their thing, and stayed among themselves. 'There wasn't much of an exchange, only if we organised something, there was some kind of exchange', said one woman. The East Turkistanis integrated the local Turks into their narrations about their lives in Kayseri, 'our contact was respectful, but reserved'. But there were public events where they would get together.

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Figure 27. Protest during the 7th Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Istanbul, carrying a banner saying 'Communism is the Enemy of Islam', Taksim Square, Istanbul, 1976.
(Photograph provided by Arslan Alptekin)

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Figure 28. Türkistan exhibition carried out with the Kültür Derneği in Kayseri, in the 1970s.
(Photograph provided by interviewee)

The name of the Türkistan exhibition in Kayseri, organised with the Kültür Derneği, indicates the prevailing political discourse of a greater Turkistan as narrated by the pan-Turkist lawyer and my interviewees. But these kinds of exhibitions were also important events for the community's cohesion and maintenance of various practices.

Although we spoke the Uyghur language at home and we prepared Uyghur food at home, the preparations for these exhibitions were very important for our older people, who could engage with certain practices from home. They now could teach us something about our own culture, how to dance, how to socialise. Outside we were like Turkish kids, we were growing up like Turks, spoke Turkish among ourselves but our parents they were a bit alienated, they kept it their way.

My interviewees hardly mentioned questions of specific cultural practices differing from the Turkish ones. The narration of the East Turkistan Cause in all its historical specificities and details occupied most of the interviews. 'Are you going to write about what the Chinese are doing to us, in which language, Turkish, German or English?' That was almost without exception one of the first questions I received when I introduced myself. 'You can be our spokesman for Germany' one man said jocularly. Only at points where the narration of a national history overlapped with cultural aspects did a few men say, 'A nation without custom and tradition, loses its characteristic as nation.'¹²⁸ The East Turkistanis also organized a range of folkloric exhibitions focusing on Uyghur material culture, displaying Uyghur clothing, musical instruments and highlighting performative features like dance and music. Narrating these events I could see that they were directed towards the local people, but also to invigorating the socio-psychological state of the community, an 'emotional refuelling' to use Akhtar's words (2007, 32). 'We couldn't go back to East Turkistan, but during these events, it was as if we were back', one woman summarizes. Exhibiting objects of the home region brought images back and people shared and refreshed memories. Despite the discourses on identicalness it was important for the East Turkistanis to do certain things without having to prove that they were somehow Turkish. And it doesn't surprise that they just wanted to maintain certain practices.

Interestingly I would have expected my male interviewees to bring up *meshrep* gatherings, but to my surprise they hardly appeared in the interviews. *Meshrep* is a Uyghur male bonding ritual that addresses multiple objectives. It functions as a rite of passage into manhood, while working as a platform to discuss and teach moral, religious and social questions in order to maintain a certain set of practices and values. In the exile situation of the East Turkistan

¹²⁸ 'Örf ve adeti olmayan millet, millet olma özelliğini kaybeder.'

community I expected a *meshrep* with more political functions as well.¹²⁹ But when asked, the older members of the community would recall that they used to do *meshreps* on a regular basis, but not anymore. During my fieldwork in 2015 I only attend two *meshreps*, one in Munich and one in Kayseri.¹³⁰ Both were dealing with very concrete questions. The main focus of the *meshrep* in Munich, held in the rooms of a restaurant called Taklamakan, and attended by twelve Uyghurs from all over Germany with Erkin Alptekin as the *Yiğit Başı* (the chairman), dealt with legal questions of asylum seekers in Germany. Accompanied with music (a young Uyghur asylum seeker who was a musician played some music), food and anecdotes, a specific case of a Uyghur man who wanted to marry, but was short of money was debated and some money collected. The second *meshrep* gathering in Kayseri was a meeting of local Turkey-born Uyghurs and young Uyghur men who recently arrived from South-East Asia in order to establish contacts, but these two groups had a difficult time bonding. The conversations were very reserved and evolved around practical questions of how to live in Turkey. No music was involved and it lasted only one hour and a half.

Other interviewees answered my questions concerning the *meshrep* by saying that,

We sometimes have *meshrep*-like gatherings but we don't follow the traditional set up, we let even very young boys join, we call it conversation [sohbet] or session [oturum], we don't call it *meshrep*. We are just meeting up and trying to fill the younger with enthusiasm for the Cause, and talk about basic issues. We hardly discuss moral, religious and social questions. If we would discuss those questions the younger [people] probably wouldn't join. And unfortunately at the moment we don't have anyone who can make music.

The women mentioned irregular meetings where they discuss practical questions of life. I briefly attended meetings of the women's branch of the association, where political and organizational issues, as well ideas of revitalizing traditional gatherings, were discussed. Both, men and women commented on the fact that they should try to organise more modern *meshrep*-like meetings to make second and third generations join.

Return and Belonging

Trying to describe how she felt going back to her hometown after more than thirty years in 1997, a woman who left East Turkistan when she was twenty years old conveyed the image of mutual alienation, 'I didn't recognise the place and the place didn't recognise me!' It is not

¹²⁹ See Roberts (1998) for his account of *meshrep* in Kazakhstan.

¹³⁰ I have heard about *meshrep*-like meetings on smaller scales among the Uyghurs in Istanbul, but I have never attended one.

unusual that the person finds that he/she changed and the country is no longer the same, a situation Maruja Torres calls the 'wound of return' (cited in Grinberg and Grinberg 1989, 185). But in the way my interviewee shared her feelings, it was as if the place had changed so much (as had she), that her former existence as part of the city's memory was gone, too. The city as a subject could not recognize her. I thought it was a powerful way to describe how difficult it can be to return. She had high expectations when she finally got the Chinese visa. She was very excited before she left for the two weeks train journey that took her from Istanbul to Moscow and from there to Kazakhstan. After lots of bribing they caught a bus to Ürümqi and another bus to Yarkent. 'It was almost as hard as our migration', she said. Even before leaving she wasn't considering moving back to East Turkistan, but she wanted to see her family before they all passed away. But it was hard for her: 'I thought the memories would come back as soon as I walked around, but I had to rely on my fading internal images, everything changed so much, I wasn't part of there anymore.' She realized that she was dissociated from her first community that clearly had changed a lot, but she also didn't feel that she completely belonged to the local community in Kayseri. 'I haven't become a full Kayserian (tam Kayserili da olamadım).' She displays what Knafo and Yaari call 'social denial' (1997, 231) in distancing herself from the local community, saying that she isn't a full Kayserian. But she admits that her experience in Yarkent helped her to close a chapter and properly arrive in Turkey. It was like a second immigration.

The question of return remained central to the community in the *Türkistan Mahallesi*. It is difficult to generalise as to what extent people from this group can travel back to China. Some of the political activists who had participated in a range of heavy protests in front of the Chinese Embassy in Ankara, and the Chinese Consulate General in Istanbul, were able to travel to China. Others said that they couldn't for political reasons. Some bought property in Ürümqi and were doing business. I couldn't see a pattern – perhaps it was in the hands of the Chinese authorities whether they issued a visa or not. The theme of travelling to China is a politically sensitive topic within the community, I will talk about it in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it seemed to be easier to get a visa for people whose place of birth wasn't in China. Some who travelled reported problems and being interrogated at the border. One of my Kayseri born interviewees who was married to a Uyghur woman from Ürümqi was denied entry without being given any reason. The biggest constraint for most was the travel expense however.

Return to the original homeland is more striking for immigrants than for exiles, who were forced to leave and can't go back (Akhtar 2011). The case of the East Turkistanis in Kayseri is somewhere in between: as legal immigrants they technically could go back, but their

political activities made it difficult for them to get a visa. Some of them say that they wanted to return, but they don't want to give up their lives in Turkey. 'My kids and grandchildren are here, I wouldn't leave for good.' A few pensioners go and stay there for a few months. Some interviewees placed the travel date of a complete return in the indefinite future, saying that they wanted to go one day and maybe stay, but as for now I haven't heard of any returnees.

From the accounts of people who travelled back, it seemed to me that the permanent return idea was more a fantasy that was never going to be fulfilled. Interviewees used political circumstances that are unlikely to change soon to postpone the fantasy: 'I don't think I can live with the Chinese. Maybe one day, when East Turkistan is liberated, I will go back.' Although they state that they don't feel like full locals here, statements like, 'when I was in East Turkistan I missed Kayseri and the way we are living there', indicated that they had developed attachments to Turkey. A few said that it would be nice to be buried in their hometowns, but probably too expensive to organise.

But I could see when visiting their homes that they tried to replicate what they had lost. In some cases the longing for the original homeland manifested in shrine-like little spaces adorned with ethnic artefacts, posters and photographs. The memory of the original home, the attachment to certain representations repeatedly articulated in some cases appeared as a stubborn nostalgia. And this nostalgia coexisted with the fantasies of 'return someday' hope. The idea of return and the acts of replication helped to manage the trauma of dislocation but also kept them from feeling completely local.

'Vatansızız, Vatansızız'

The children of immigrants encounter many challenges even if the host society is perceived as being linguistically and culturally similar. And the dilemma of being a child of foreign-born parents goes alongside 'normal' problems of childhood and adolescence. Local-born children have not experienced the trauma of geographical dislocation in a direct manner. But the members of the community in Kayseri who left East Turkistan at a very young age have in a direct way, even twice. There might not be emotional residue left if the departure happened at a very young age, but something remains in the psyche. And most of the children weren't even immigrants, they were exiled. They didn't decide to leave at a young age and they cannot decide to go back (Grinberg and Grinberg 1989).

In one interview with an older woman, her daughter, who was forty-two years old, constantly apologized for her mother's Turkish although I could understand her perfectly well and she could understand what I said. She had a heavy Uyghur accent and slipped into Uyghur at

times. Other local-born Uyghurs mentioned how they felt shame at having parents that were different from the parents of friends, that looked different and spoke with an accent. Being forced into situations where their children have to be the parent's translator or teacher is a common experience for immigrants (Akhtar 2011).

Expectations on socialization especially when it came to marriage were rather rigid. This theme didn't come up in many interviews, but younger people almost always said that their parents wanted an Uyghur spouse for them. In the first generation of Uyghurs, Afghanistan- or Turkey-born people, there were hardly any cross cultural marriages with Turkish women: many of the marriages were arranged within the community when more people from East Turkistan were allowed to come to Turkey in the 1980s.

Many Uyghurs told me how they experienced discrimination because of their different outer appearance, being called slant-eyed, or because of their country of origin. One man told me how the imam of a mosque in Kayseri threw him out, calling him a communist. Another man shared a situation at university in Istanbul where other students, leftist in the narration of the man, called him a racist when he said that he was from East Turkestan. The children of the East Turkistanis immigrants experienced similar prejudices and discrimination as children of migrants do in other parts of the world.

But the mourning over the loss of a home, or over the home country can be passed on to the next generation. Their perspective on the East Turkistan Cause is conditioned by the way they learned to imagine it and the defence mechanisms developed to deal with the fact of being a child to foreign born parents. The traumatic experiences narrated by the first generation of Uyghurs in Kayseri are challenged by the second and third generation. They also challenge their parent's political ideas and achievements, sometimes from a commitment to other political positions, sometimes as a rebellion on their way from adolescence to adulthood. At other times the young members of the community were challenging their parents and ancestors achievements.

'We have to face it, the younger generation is not very interested in the Cause', said one member of the association in Kayseri. But I have heard some younger Uyghur saying,

I would do something but the elders are so dominant and they want us to do whatever they are deciding. Also, I am tired of this suffering theme, and I am also tired of the ultranationalists, they can't and won't help us anyway.

On the other hand, I talked to one Uyghur man in his late twenties who complained about his father's opportunist voting for the AKP: 'The older ones just go with the party who is forming the government in the hope that they will do something for us, but the only party that cares for

us is the MHP.’ His father talked about *realpolitik* in the interview we did, stating that ‘Populist statements don’t take us anywhere, we have to be realistic, we have to do lobbying with the parties in power.’ And of course, talking about the first and second generations, the interviews confirmed that their political perspectives had changed. We see that the younger generation’s objection to the political views of their parents can have different reasons:

You know, my parents and my grandparents have always told me that we are homeless, but this is not true for me, my home is Kayseri, I am from here. Of course, I have an East Turkistan background, but I have never been there, I don’t even speak proper Uyghur. I speak the Kayseri slang. I can understand what they must have lost, but because of this we are homeless discourse, I feel as if I had no proper childhood, it was based on their suffering and that is how I remember it. At times I felt bad when I was happy.

This resonates with the words of James Hillman, a Jungian psychoanalyst who says that

our lives may be determined less by our childhood than by the way we have learned to imagine our childhoods. We are less damaged by the traumas of childhood than by the traumatic way we remember childhood as a time of unnecessary and externally caused calamities that wrongly shaped us. (1996, 83)

Perhaps this is particularly true for younger Uyghurs, who have been forced to develop various strategies to cope with the loss of a homeland only experienced through their parents or grandparents. But I have spoken to a few young men who became very radical because of the loss and suffering of their parents, seeing independence and separation from China as the only solution. A few even told me that every time they went to Istanbul they looked for Chinese tourists to pick a fight with, as ‘we hate them so much for what they’ve done to our parents’. Maybe their hate could also be interpreted as transference. One man said, ‘I don’t have anything against the Chinese anymore, we were so caught up in the hatred of our parents, that we couldn’t make up our own minds about thing.’

Managing Suffering and the Guilt

Maintaining a hatred of Chinese is one way of managing a guilt that has been induced by the parents. Perhaps this guilt has not been induced intentionally, but children of immigrants can often carry unconscious guilt. The parental-induced guilt could be felt as the burden of *vatan için vatandan ayrılmak* (we separated from the fatherland for the fatherland), in conjunction with the survivor’s guilt of the parents. ‘Our parents often said, “We came here to maintain the Cause, we owe this to the people who had stay.”’ And then there is also the aforementioned postponing of the return, as people say ‘We stay here because of our children.’ The children see that they are unhappy in Turkey and might be better off if they return. As Akhtar (2011) writes, children of immigrants can turn into the container of the deposited

parental guilt. This parental guilt is usually the result of leaving family members and friends behind and starting (a sometimes more affluent) life in a new country with a politically more stable environment.

Fonagy and Target (1997) argue that if the grief over leaving the home country and the related guilt is not ‘mentalized’ (expressed and come to terms with) it can be passed on, and in the Uyghur example we can see that the perpetual retelling of stories of suffering have become part of their identity.



Figure 29. ‘Our future national soccer team! Hopefully, one day they will play for the *Gökbayrak*.’ (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski in 2009 in the *Türkistan Mahallesi* in Kayseri)

Conclusion

I was watching with an Uyghur man in his late twenties, a bunch of kids playing soccer on a sandy pitch, when he said jokingly, ‘And this is the potential future national soccer team of East Turkistan’, referring to an independent state within the time frame of these boys becoming senior players while assuming that they would play for what would be the state of their grandparents. One of the kids overheard us replying, ‘I am going to play for Turkey’, even as the other kids picked the names of famous Turkish soccer players they wanted to be in the match. Did this episode underline the man’s earlier statement that the youngsters were not

interested in the Cause, or does it just show a stronger loyalty to the country they were born in. The years ahead will show whether East Turkistan will be able to compete in soccer tournaments as a nation-state, and whether and how the younger generation of Uyghurs in Turkey will develop an interest in their grandparents' and parents' heritage, politically, psychologically as well as in terms of customs and habits.

Based on the memories and experiences of my interviewees, I have shown in this chapter that the East Turkistanis in Kayseri with their chain of traumatic experiences, like the double loss of one's home form a traumatized community of suffering. The ruptures in the composition of their own identity, neglecting one's identity to be able to leave China and then receiving an exile identity that almost has been forced upon them, and marking them as pure universal victims has led to an unfinished mourning, that has been fuelled through the demand of the perpetual narration of Chinese atrocities and victimhood to promote the East Turkistan Cause.

The discourse as victims and stateless people has been challenged by the younger generations. The privilege to be able to emigrate legally, but at the same time to be forced to leave loved one's behind has led to a survivor's guilt that has been transmitted to younger generations. The Turkey-born Uyghurs developed different strategies to cope with this legacy, some showed even further far-right tendencies, others emphasized how they realized the empowering fact that they are from Kayseri.

I have furthermore argued that despite the narrated similarities between Turkey and East Turkistan, the adjustment to a new environment was accompanied by challenges and at times led to alienation. But my interviewees hardly externalized these hardships in order not to violate the embodied official discourse of gratitude towards Turkey.

Chapter IV

Flashbacks, Partly Fulfilled Hopes and Palatable Ethnic Discourses

‘The very young witnesses of the migration are now our *Aksakals*, the first generation has almost completely passed away’,¹³¹ said one woman in her sixties. The majority of the people I talked to were very young when they arrived in Turkey. Most of them didn’t choose to leave East Turkistan, as they were exiled as kids. In the interviews, expressions like ‘our elders made this decision and we complied’ were common descriptions of various events, like the emigration itself, or of political activism that was mostly orchestrated from Istanbul under Isa Yusuf Alptekin.

This chapter explores how the second and third generation of East Turkistanis in Turkey have gained agency. I see political thinking as an expression of relations between human subjects, between private and public, between generations, and between political opponents. As Hannah Arendt writes, ‘since action acts upon beings who are capable of their own actions, reaction, apart from being a response, is always a new action that strikes out on its own and affects others’ (1958, 190). In this chapter I explore how ‘the subjective in-between’ (Arendt 1958, 183), the space of interaction and human interest, led to new discourses and power relations (Foucault 1972) in the growing community, which is now organized by a new generation that not only inherited their parents’ emotional sufferings, but also had to navigate their way through changing political conditions. These included the military coup in Turkey, the diminishing importance of pan-Turkism, and the period of reforms in Xinjiang followed by years of heavy oppression. Much of this had to be managed against the backdrop of growing Turkish-Sino relations that were, at least in the perception of many East Turkistanis, not developing in a favourable way. Others Turkistanis, and that is the paradox of migration, benefitted from the growing economic ties between the two countries without restricting their personal protest activities in Turkey. And, of course, as a milestone there was the disintegration of the Soviet Union that initiated hopes of a greater Turkistan and was then followed by an even greater disillusion. In brief, East Turkistanis had to adjust to events of

¹³¹ ‘Göçün çiçeği burnunda genç tanıkları olan şimdiki ak sakallarımız!’

global politics and their local shapes and consequences, which caused a modification of their practices, discursive habits and intentionality.

For the first ten years after arrival in 1965 their political activities in Kayseri were limited. That was mainly because of the financial constraints. As Han (2010) points out, it can take migrants quite some time, sometimes even a generation, to consolidate financially and emotionally. But it was also due to the modality and possibilities to exercise agency. I have argued along with Max Weber in Chapter II how groups in times of crisis are looking for a leading personality. ‘We were so happy that Isa Yusuf Alptekin, one of our few statesmen, was in Turkey to guide us’, said one of the few witnesses. Even if their ascribed identity was based on their role as victims, that was at least a way to produce a voice. To be able to talk about the experienced trauma helped them regain some control over their lives. The older migrants remained in a state of nostalgia and yearning. The discourse and the world they have been thrown in dominated their lives. And based on their vow the East Turkistan Cause shaped their lives. Fifty years later, in 2015, Isa Yusuf’s idea of educating people and awakening their national consciousness in order to maintain the Cause in Turkey appears at least partly successful. Political activists from Kayseri hold important positions in Uyghur organizations in Istanbul, Munich and Washington DC. Their political activism, was defined by experiences and modes of presence of elders, but they also developed unique strategies and balances within the struggle of ‘being an actor and being acted upon’ (Jackson 2005, x).

Uyghur foundations and associations in Turkey try very hard to represent themselves as one united group, but major fractions exist. To give just one example, I will show how different groups’ approach and their assessment towards the influx of immigrants from Xinjiang in the last years was diametrically opposed to each other. The spaces of negotiation led to a diverse and lively discussion about what was perceived as counterproductive for the Cause. ‘Too many voices are not good. We have Rebiya Kadeer now, she is the leader of our people and represents us. We have to be united under her leadership’, said one man in his seventies in Kayseri. A younger man from Istanbul thought that

she is an American puppet, I don’t think she is good for us. We need more discussions and the Cause should be shouldered by many people, not just one leading person. I am a proud pan-Turkist, but I have to admit that Germany, or even the United States of America would be a better place for the Cause.

Yet he concluded with a conflicting reflection of the current situation.

During my fieldwork I had a few interviews with a Yarkent born woman who moved from Kayseri to Istanbul in 1993. She had been very active in promoting the Cause through various activities concerning material culture, such as organizing exhibitions of Uyghur garments,

headgears, and cooking utensils. She introduced me to a few female groups and I could see that those women were politically engaged even if they didn't hold official positions at the associations in Turkey. One day, after we had talked about Uyghur food, she gave me a cookbook she had written herself. Reading her book and talking with her about the writing process, I could see that not only was the connection between migration and food an essential one (Hage 1997), but also that the narrative of this book goes beyond mere recipes (Appadurai 1981, 1988). It became a way of telling Uyghur history through food. The discourse is representative of her generation, with all of their adjustments, even as it brings Uyghur nationalism into the realm of everyday life and the private. Writing a cookbook is surely not an everyday life activity, but an activity that draws heavily from everyday life. Connerton (1989) argues that embodied acts have significance in perpetuating memory and her book facilitates cooking that is garnished with nationalism, bringing back memories in a Proustian way by remembering events through smell and taste. With Billig we can add that 'nationalism has to be reproduced daily if it is to persist' (1995, 195).

Food plays a role in the last part of this chapter, where I look at the Uyghurs who have managed to leave China and have come to Turkey via Malaysia and Thailand in the last few years. These people comprise the latest wave of an intense migration to Turkey. In Kayseri I shared a room with two asylum seekers from Aksu and Kashgar. It was a few weeks after the Sacrifice Feast (Kurban Bayramı) and every morning they insisted in preparing *Suyuk Ash*, a handmade noodle soup, into which they cut slices of fat of the fat-tailed sheep, which has a very distinctive and strong smell, and was supposed to be good against Kayseri's cold winter. But even old-established families said, while preparing Polo (a famous Uyghur dish) in their garden, that they can't eat it because the taste is too strong for them. 'We are here for so long now, it might work in the climate back home, but here we are preparing Polo light.' They talked about a bodily adjustment that I was about to experience as well, but in the opposite direction. A few days after we started to have this soup for breakfast, I noticed a change in my olfactory identity. My room-mates and I were startled to note that we shared the same body odour. As anthropologists try to put themselves in the shoes of others, I managed to acquire a similar smell. I explore this commensality¹³² as a social activity between my interviewees and me, but also in the interaction between established and the newly arrived Uyghurs in Kayseri.

And especially within the last years, with the arrival of the latest groups, new restaurants have opened up in the Istanbul districts of Aksaray and Zeytinburnu. This is one way to gain

¹³² See Bloch (1999).

livelihood as an immigrant in a new environment. It is furthermore one way of addressing a certain political clientele in the restaurants run by Uyghurs. Restaurants and the surrounding businesses increase the visibility of Uyghurness in Istanbul. I will discuss this in the last section of this chapter.

The Shock of the 1980 Military Coup

Nobody wanted to come with me. Even my father said to me “My daughter, we have been in those kind of situations in China before. Believe me, it’s not a wise idea to go to the police.” I was looking around, but nobody wanted to accompany me to the police station. I was very young, you know, back then we got married at a very young age, I was eighteen or nineteen. Our families arranged this marriage, usually the young persons who will get married don’t get asked. And now, my husband was arrested, I was worried. I was afraid, but my parents were only frightened that Turkey would experience the dark days of East Turkistan when the communists came.

It’s striking how the arrest of the husband of my interviewee evoked such different emotions within the family. We can see how perception is individual, but it is also a collective and political process. She was worried about her husband, but her parents and other family members’ political concerns, shaped and constituted by their experiences in China caused them to advise her against going to the police station.

My female interviewee not only felt let down the Turkish State, but also by her family, who asked her to be understanding as to why they were unable to help her, by arguing that in this situation it would be better to keep a low profile. She didn’t give up and went to the police station with a few Turkey born East Turkistani friends she could mobilize to see her husband.

She recalls an interaction with the police officer at the station who asked her which place she liked better, East Turkistan or Turkey? The woman answered, ‘both places are my home, I was born over there, but grew up here.’ But the officer wasn’t happy with her answer saying ‘spare me diplomatic answers’ and humiliated her saying,

you guys left communism and came here freely, but if I had the opportunity I would send you all back, you are living off the government’s money while our people languish and are forced to deal with the violence you guys are part of.

Narrating this story she started to narrate another story that happened years earlier, but came to her mind right when she was giving the account of her interaction with the policemen. It was an event she experienced in school, the kids in her class criticised the East Turkistanis ‘for running away and leaving the homeland to the enemies. It was obviously easier for you to come here. You were too weak. We Turks, we fought and beat our enemies, thanks to Atatürk.’ The Turkish kids internalized the heroic stories of the Turkish Liberation War and

teased her, without knowing they hit on her emotions of shame and guilt. She remembers this incident while recalling the years of the military coup. She perceived this situation as disempowering. 'I felt so weak and helpless, I was brought here, and all the difficulties of the flight came to my mind. They had no idea what we went through', she remarked.

In the days after the military coup, one man was shot in front of the house that had operated as the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği since its foundation in 1978. A few Uyghur men were taken into custody, interrogated and occasionally beaten. My interviewees reported outbursts of violence with the use of firearms in the *Türkistan Mahallesi*. In their narration the East Turkistanis usually blamed the Marxist Kurds for the violence. They expressed their lack of understanding of how Kurds could be so ungrateful towards the state, but within their account of their lives during the military coup their perception changed. They took up new perspectives towards it. When recollecting those years, one theme appeared in most of the narrations: 'We were particularly careful because our statelessness (vatansızlık) caused heavy despair.' In the year before the military coup they felt stateless (although the Turkish State naturalized them shortly after their arrival in 1965); scared by political radicalization with the spatial outcome that they moved very carefully within the *Türkistan Mahallesi*. 'Even when we ran out of bread, we were afraid to go the neighbours' place, let alone to the grocery store.' With their houses shot at, they felt not wanted: 'We called the police and, of course, they came, collected the empty cartridge cases and just left. We only survived because God protected us and because the houses given to us by the state were made of solid bricks.' This interviewee blamed the police for not doing much, but praised the government for their choice of house material that saved their lives with the help of God. But their feelings for the state changed. What added to their new attitudes towards Turkey and fears that it would turn into another Xinjiang, was that they had to pull down the *Gökbayrak* that was raised in front of the association and that all work for the Cause in the frame of the association or foundation in Istanbul was brought to an end. 'The *Gökbayrak*, the brother of the Turkish Flag, can you imagine? We thought that this would be the end of our stay here and the end of the Cause. Where else than in Turkey could we pursue our Cause?', said one man in his seventies. There were a few Uyghurs from Kayseri in Germany working along with Erkin Alptekin who moved there in the 1970s, but in 1980 they were far from being an organized group.

With the help of the pan-Turkic lawyer her husband was released three days later. The third military intervention of September 1980 didn't lead to arrests of many well-known pan-Turkists, probably due to the marginal position of pan-Turkism in Turkey during the 1970s (Landau 1995). The East Turkistanis in Kayseri were known as radical nationalists (and pan-

Turkists), and experienced police violence once in a while, but it was certainly much less than what leftist and Muslim activists had to face. But violence and unjust state practices were amplified by the release of previous memories from Xinjiang.

The older people with memories from Xinjiang expressed their fear of losing another place, a place they call their second home. The younger ones on the other hand, like the husband of an interviewee in his early twenties at the time, were scared to pursue any political activities. In one interview he said, 'It took me a while before I wanted to get back to the association. I knew Isa Yusuf, I spent some time with him and the Cause carries essential meaning for me, but those years scared me.' In the course of the same interview he also displayed some form of inferiority complex, maybe caused by the words of the policemen or of children at school: 'You know we East Turkistanis are not so courageous, we'd rather avoid conflict. During the years of the military coup we stayed home most of the time. Maybe we could have stayed and fought the Chinese.'

Even though the East Turkistanis reflected on the state's role during their narration, they concluded by blaming 'leftist terrorists, like the Kurds from our quarter', for the outbreak of violence. They would often repeat the official narrative of the junta, claiming that the military had to intervene to protect the Turkish Republic from political parties and radicalized groups terrorising the streets. Contrary to the junta's account, Keyder (1987) contextualizes the military coup in the broader context of an economy that was highly dependent on foreign input, and on weak coalition governments, class rivalry and the radicalization of left and right wing groups. But on top of the deadlocked political system and a struggling economy¹³³ there were also clashes with Kurds, and a perceived threat of Islamic fundamentalism fuelled by the Islamic revolution in Iran (Zürcher 2004). The military coup brought martial law for three years and the authoritarian 1982 constitution, valid to the present day. Although there have been attempts to change the constitution in the past ten years, its main institutions, like the National Security Council or the Higher Education Council, are still in place.

For the aspirations of East Turkistanis in Kayseri this was a major setback. It took them nine years to reopen the association.

One man recalls the years prior to the military coup,

It was really unfortunate for us. Despite the economic difficulties we started to do some work. Some of the second generation East Turkistanis got enthusiastic, we had new ideas,

¹³³ My interviewees remembered how they had to queue up to buy food and often had to return empty-handed when everything was sold out.

and even the elderly [büyüklerimiz] were ready for new things. We started to work in an intergenerational way. We established meetings on a regular basis.

The political activism in Kayseri up to that point was rather narrow.¹³⁴ And one interviewee confirmed that the situation in Istanbul was similar. Compared to the very active 1960s, the activities in the 1970s almost came to a halt. He also mentions that ‘the Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti elected its second president, who managed to get some funding from Saudi Arabia.¹³⁵ We were ready to rejuvenate our activities in Turkey.’¹³⁶ With a few changes in the constitution of the Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti, they could commence their work in 1984. The Society was now working for the public interest (kamu yararı).

The MHP, the party with the strongest pan-Turkic sentiments, which had won 16 seats in the Turkish general election of 1977, was banned along with all political parties. Its chairman, Alparslan Türkeş, who read the declaration of the junta in the military coup in 1960 and was a figure of great interest for the East Turkistanis was arrested and released in 1985. In 1983 the party was reformed and appeared under the name of the Conservative Party (Muhafazakar Parti). From 1985 until 1992 when the party changed its name back again to the Nationalist Movement Party, it operated as the Nationalist Task Party (Milliyetçi Çalışma Partisi) (Landau 1995, Zürcher 2004). One Kazakh interviewee reflecting on his memories of the 80s said, ‘we were shocked, we were devastated. At that time there weren’t many political parties interested in our Cause at all. And then he [Alparslan Türkeş] got arrested.’ Later on in the interview when recalling life in Zeytinburnu¹³⁷ in the years that led to the military coup he said,

on the other hand, it all escalated. There were streets in Zeytinburnu that were no go areas. People got killed, the leftists thought that we were fascist. And we hated the Marxist, Maoists and all the other leftist groups. Someone had to intervene, but that they arrested Başbuğ [Alparslan Türkeş] was a shock for us.

¹³⁴ My interviewees in Kayseri mentioned a folklore dance group that performed on various occasions mostly in Kayseri. Considering the significance of the Cause for the East Turkistanis these performances were political as well. The Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti in their report from 1972 mentions another dance group consisting of fifty persons, that also couldn’t continue performing due to financial problems (Doğu Türkistan Göçmenler Cemiyeti 1972, 21).

¹³⁵ My interviewee couldn’t tell if it was money from Turkistanis in Saudi Arabia or if the money came from other sources.

¹³⁶ After a car accident in 1978 Isa Yusuf Alptekin had to withdraw from his activities and Osman Taşdan, a Kazakh became President of the Society.

¹³⁷ See Houston (2015) for a phenomenological account on perception of place and the remembrance of urban activism in Istanbul in the years immediately before and after the military coup.

The shocked perception of my interviewees was eased by little changes in China. ‘It felt a bit as if the tables would turn’, described one interviewee about his emotions in Istanbul under martial law and upon hearing spreading ‘rumours about China opening up’. The political situation in China did not completely change, but after Mao’s death the Chinese Government launched a reform programme with a less ideological approach.

Going Back after Decades of Exile and Family Reunions: Times of Hope and Setbacks

In 1980 and in 1983, more than thirty years after he was forced to leave East Turkistan, Erkin Alptekin was able to travel back to his ‘motherland’ (ana vatan).¹³⁸ According to Erkin the changing policy enabled him to travel back and in the interview he recalls how he was happy to meet his family and childhood friends in Ürümchi, Kashgar and Yenihisar: ‘I thought, I could never go back. And I was even allowed to move around freely. As far as I could see, there was no one “guiding” me.’ In the interview he remembered how the local East Turkistanis told him that there had been very recent improvements. He narrated that ‘after the death of Mao and the purge of the Gang of Four the Chinese developed a different approach towards the East Turkistanis. This was especially visible in religious and cultural questions.’ These impressions that are underlined by scholarly writing (Dillon 2004, Millward 2007). Erkin Alptekin further recalls how happy he was that

the Chinese now acknowledge that the people from East Turkistan are Turks. They were allowed to write their own books and I even saw Uyghur and Chinese translations of the Hadith. Religious teaching was still prohibited, but changes concerning religious freedom were formulated in the 1978 constitution.

Although he expressed his content about these developments, he critically recalled that there ‘was no political freedom, the Chairman of the East Turkistani Government had no real power. And we should not forget that fighting broke out regularly.’

Only a few East Turkistanis were lucky enough to travel back and visit relatives. The financial situation of most East Turkistanis didn’t allow it. In addition to that, according to my interviewees who tried, ‘The Chinese Embassy in Ankara would cause major problems for the

¹³⁸ Erkin Alptekin who was working for Radio Free Europe/Radio in Liberty in Munich at that time and narrated two trips in the interviews, whereas in his report published in the Central Asian Survey (see Alptekin 1985), he talks about a single trip. To my surprise he, as Isa Yusuf’s son, was granted a visa by the Chinese Embassy in Ankara, he mentioned that he was part of a ‘semi-diplomatic mission, that had to do with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the concerns it evoked in America and China.’ Then he asked me to turn off the dictaphone.

applicants with Turkish passports whose birthplace was in China.’ One of my interviewees was rejected four times. But their hopes were expanding in two directions. For while their hopes of traveling back were difficult to fulfil, travelling the other way round seemed to be easier. According to my interviewees in Kayseri for the first time in many decades, Chinese officials were issuing passports to East Turkistanis. Some families in Kayseri seized the opportunity with both hands and send invitation letters to the Turkish Embassy in Beijing. The East Turkistanis applied for two types of visa. Some applied for a visa with the purpose of a family visit, others applied for a transit visa to go on Hajj. ‘They came and then we decided that they should stay. We checked with the local authorities and it was fairly easy for them to get naturalized within a few months, or within a year at the most’, said one man who brought members of his broader family from East Turkistan.¹³⁹ By contrast, another member of the association recalled that it wasn’t easy at all to let them stay legally. In his opinion it was their biggest ‘achievement so far, that we managed to overcome the bureaucratic obstacles of naturalization of the Uyghurs’. He told me that they had to rely on personal connections of older members of the community to deal with these issues. He mainly referred to the Alptekin family. ‘Of course, we would have rather gone back, but at least we fulfilled our duty and didn’t forget those who had to remain’, said one interviewee, referring to the promise they made while bidding farewell to relatives in 1960.

During my fieldwork in Kayseri I met six families that came during the 1980s and had no problems in gaining Turkish citizenship, but I also met families that came in the early 1990s who had to wait for more than three years. None of them was expelled by the Turkish Government, but they told me, ‘we couldn’t work. We technically had to renew our Chinese passports, but we were too afraid to go to the Chinese Embassy. Our documents expired, we were illegally in Turkey and we lived in constant fear that the Chinese would put pressure on the Turkish Government.’¹⁴⁰ Narrating this time, the older officials of the associations were very apologetic, but the younger clearly expressed their anger, saying that ‘Turkey is nothing special for us anymore, because we are not special for them anymore. Ok, we are Turks, but they treat us like any other ethnic group.’

¹³⁹ The association in Kayseri could not provide me with an accurate number, but based on the estimation of my interviewees about ten families who came in that period stayed.

¹⁴⁰ The association in Kayseri articulated their discontent that a lot of people who came in the 1990s had to wait for a long time to get their Turkish citizenship. But they also emphasized that even when their papers were checked by the police they didn’t experience any problems, let alone deportation or other legal measures due to their origin.

After Mao Zedong died in 1976 and with the beginning of the Deng Xiaoping reform era the PRC began to reverse the policies of the Cultural Revolution. The 1980s Deng reforms, like the re-establishment of the Xinjiang Islamic Association and the restoration of the Nationalities Affairs Commission, led to periods of liberalism and limited self-determination for local ethnic groups (Millward 2007). Ideas of more autonomy for the non-Han areas were renewed and assimilationist policies condemned. Han administrators were sent back to China proper and replaced with locals. Uyghurs were granted new freedoms for religious practices, cultural activities and entrepreneurial endeavours. Uyghurs took these opportunities and started private businesses and (re-)built local mosques (Bovingdon 2010). Some of the interviewees, who advocated for autonomy over independence, remembered ‘renewed hope, because this period seemed to facilitate good prospects for the Uyghurs of becoming proper citizens with proper rights that would integrate the region into China proper based on equal terms, not on exploitation.’ But control remained in the hands of Han members of the party and by the late 1980s and early 1990s local freedoms were slowly reduced. New Han migration was encouraged (within the increasing economic liberalism) by supportive economic measures (Becquelin 2000). One Ankara based Uyghur academic, a man from Kashgar in his late forties who immigrated illegally to Turkey in 1997, positioned the PRC’s policies of economic liberalism and suppression of political expression in the early 1990s convincingly in the ‘context of a changing global world order. The Uyghur hero of the Tiananmen,¹⁴¹ the fall of Communism, the collapse of the Soviet Union with new Turkic speaking nation states emerging, scared the PRC. They were afraid of a new wave of separatism and that’s why they applied contradictory policies. I remember it very well, we were economically connected with China proper and regional economies, but felt completely neglected by and oppressed by the state.’

As Roberts (2004) showed, the opening of the borders had an impact on Uyghurs during this time: economically by the trading of all kinds of goods, on a personal level through intensive travelling for family reunions, and last but not least politically through seeing how other Turkic groups were living in nation states with their own sovereignty. The border crossing between Pakistan and Xinjiang via the Karakoram Highway enabled Uyghurs to travel to Pakistan (Millward 2007). Among my interviewees a few had travelled to Pakistan to study, affiliated with an organization called Maarif in Istanbul, which in most of the cases meant that they attended the local madrassas. They were exposed to life in an Islamic state, which was ‘a

¹⁴¹ He referred to Urkeş Devlet (in Turkish pronunciation), the Uyghur student leader of the 1989 protests at the Tiananmen Square. See Rudelson (1997).

great relief, after all the oppression of our religion in China'. In the interviews it became clear that it was there, in response to the strict PRC rule, where they started to favour religious over ethnic sovereignty. I will come back to this in a later section. Almost all of my interviewees who came during the 1990s used the route through Central Asia and Eastern European countries to immigrate to Turkey.

Here are a few words on changing migration routes. Despite the fact that Uyghurs who were associated with Maarif were rather reluctant to agree to interviews, there seemed to be a tendency that most of them came to Turkey via Iran. Uyghurs in Pakistan or Afghanistan left for Iran and managed to cross the border to Turkey. In one case an Uyghur man entered Iraq from Iran and came to Turkey via Syria (before the war broke out), whereas most of the Uyghurs during the 1990s used the Central Asia-Russia-Eastern Europe route to reach Turkey.¹⁴² The Doğu Türkistan Maarif ve Dayanışma Derneği (East Turkistan Association of Education and Solidarity) was founded in 2006 and according to one of its founders from Kayseri,

We set this up for our East Turkistanis who couldn't find a home at the foundation in Istanbul or the association in Kayseri. They had strong religious expectations, which we couldn't meet. But we still wanted to be in contact with them, that's why we founded Maarif.

One member of Maarif I could interview told me that,

Our association is for people who completed their education outside of China, most of them did it in Pakistan and who love their religion. Islam and Turkishness are inseparable elements of our culture, we want to educate people and provide a religious solidarity from which we will gain our strength.¹⁴³

I talk about Maarif activities in the last section of this chapter.

A couple of interviewees hinted at a trend in the early 2000s. They bought plane tickets for a country they wouldn't need a visa for with their Chinese passports, e.g. Dubai. They organized flights with a stop in a western country where they would destroy their travel documents in the transit area and apply for asylum. This way one Uyghur managed to get into the Netherlands. He recalled how airport officials couldn't find an interpreter. They came up with a man who spoke Turkish, but they couldn't really communicate. The route through Central Asia is not used anymore, one interviewee told me, since the Central Asian states now

¹⁴² According to three of my interviewees, a fake Uzbek or Kazakh passport cost 500 USD in 1995. 'But this passport would take us to the Belarusian-Polish border.'

¹⁴³ Both quotes based on personal communication in 2015.

work closely with the Chinese authorities. ‘It’s been too dangerous for a long time, these countries will definitely extradite us to China’, said one Uyghur immigrant. Migrants’ memories of their flight and their experiences along their way or in different countries surface, as I will show, in acts of political participation and apprehension in Turkey. In 2011 this practice of deportation to China was decried in the *Gökbayrak* magazine (see below). East Turkistanis in Turkey had discussed this issue for a long time, but with more Uyghurs leaving for neighbouring countries, they started a campaign against the extradition of Uyghurs to China.

Since the 1990s (and especially in 1996, when China launched its ‘Strike Hard’ campaign)¹⁴⁴ until the present day, there have been countless political responses from the Uyghurs to the restrictive Chinese policy, including violent resistance, and regular political protests. I briefly allude to two. Firstly, there was the Baren uprising, which Uyghurs in Turkey believed marked the beginning of violent clashes between the military and Uyghurs and put an end to the hopes of Uyghurs for travelling back. And secondly there was the July 2009 Ürümqi riots, which appeared to evoke responses in Turkey beyond the pan-Turkic clientele.

The Baren incident, according to Dillon ‘the turning point’ (2004, 62), broke out when a group of mainly Uyghur men began to protest after they had attended prayers at a mosque. They directed their protest against the CCP’s ethnic minorities policies, including the exploitation of resources to inland China, birth control and nuclear testing. These protests turned violent and the local government was occupied for a few days (Bovingdon 2010). What started as a spontaneous protest at the mosque after prayers was perceived by the authorities as a well-planned and highly organized double threat, both of separatism and Islam in the XUAR. The government intensified militarization of the region and launched further measures to maximise control by the state (Becquelin 2000).

¹⁴⁴ See Dillon (2004) and Becquelin (2000).

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Figure 30. Cover of the *Gökbayrak* magazine no 103, Sept/Oct 2011 titled 'Uyghur Hunt in Asia'.

The July 2009 ethnic riots in Ürümqi were crucial, since among the Uyghurs in Turkey they were perceived as a starting point when Xinjiang turned to heavy state surveillance and that was the climax of massive injustice (Emet 2009). A few of my interviewees argued that the riots were the cause for the continuing immigration of Uyghurs to South East Asian states and to Turkey. Some of my interviewees even argued that the beginning of Uyghur men joining militant groups in Syria had its roots in these events. On 5 July, a group of predominantly young Uyghur men marched in Ürümqi to protest against the authorities' passivity towards Han workers killing of Uyghur migrant workers in a factory in the south of China. The Han workers suspected the Uyghurs had raped two Han women. Reports about who started the violence were contradictory. The protest ended in a bloody conflict that lasted for several days

with Uyghur protestors, Han citizens and the police involved. Han citizens formed vigilante groups to attack Uyghurs. Being the fiercest ethnic conflict in Xinjiang in decades, the Chinese authorities accused the Uyghurs of starting the communal violence. Thousands of Uyghurs were arrested and more than twenty death sentences imposed (Amnesty International 2010).¹⁴⁵ The Uyghur community in Turkey in cooperation with non-governmental organizations conducted large protests that were reported in the mainstream media.¹⁴⁶



Figure 31. Protest against the Ürümchi riots on 9 July in Istanbul, organized by various East Turkistani associations and the Ülkü Ocakları. 'No genocide!' (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

During the protests on one of the most famous streets in Istanbul, the İstiklal Avenue, slogans like 'Stop the genocide against the Uyghurs' could be heard. Activists from the association in Kayseri gave numerous interviews on that matter.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ See Millward (2009) for further analysis of the 2009 Ürümchi riots.

¹⁴⁶ İlber Ortaylı, a Turkish Professor of History at the Galatasaray University and former Director of the Topkapı Museum who is not known for any pan-Turkic sentiments, said in an article in the daily Turkish newspaper *Milliyet*, that Turkey has to be ready for a wave of Uyghur immigration, and also that East Turkistan is in terms of language and culture very close to Anatolia. See <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/dogu-turkistan-dan-gelecek-goce-hazirlikli-olmaliyiz/ilber-ortayli/pazar/yazardetayarsiv/28.01.2010/1116585/default.htm>, last accessed 15 January 2017.

¹⁴⁷ See Emet (2009) for a detailed account of comments and actions taken during the protests.

During the protest some right wing groups were looking for Chinese tourists in retaliation for Uyghur casualties. Although most of my Uyghur informants told me, that they refrain now from any violence against the Chinese in Turkey, it seemed that this phenomenon of attacking Asian tourists gained some popularity among ultra-nationalist groups. Although, not directly connected to the Ürümchi riots, in one case in 2013 a group of Koreans erroneously mistaken for Chinese were attacked. One Korean in an interview responded to this attack, ‘We are not even Chinese’, as if it would have been OK if they were Chinese. In another incident a Chinese restaurant owned and managed by a Turk with an Uyghur head-chef was destroyed by a group of young men screaming, ‘We don’t want a Chinese restaurant here!’ It remained unclear whether the group didn’t want a restaurant in this slowly gentrifying neighbourhood, or if their aggression was directed towards the Chineseness of the restaurant.¹⁴⁸

These uprisings, riots and the response of the Chinese State have been the cause for worries among the Uyghur communities for a long time. But with new technology, and despite the difficulties in gaining reliable news from China, the community gets to know about incidents instantly. ‘Our hopes for a peaceful working and living together between Chinese and Uyghurs had long deteriorated, but now they are completely buried’, said a fifty-year old man. The awakening hopes of the 1980s certainly ended in an embitterment that only confirmed existing mistrust of everything Chinese. But the political events of the first two years of the 1990s led to a new hope among Uyghurs that was perceived as compensation for the years of the military coup. The expectations and hopes were now directed to ‘our brothers in West’.

‘We All Thought it Was East Turkistan’s Turn!’

We can only imagine what a glorious moment it was for Isa Yusuf Alptekin when he outlived the Soviet Union in December 1991. Certainly it wasn’t only him, as my interviewees recalled how the whole East Turkistani community developed new hope after the big disappointment of China’s reverting to suppressive policies in the late 1980s. But in the interviews the excitement of the narration of this time often gave way to expressions of shame and anger. Some interviewees even called to mind how their set of political values completely disintegrated. The 1990s were certainly formative years for the East Turkistanis, their political activism, and their nationalism. I argue that these moments of crisis transformed an apparently fixed set of political repertoire into new possibilities.

¹⁴⁸ See <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/tophanede-cin-lokantasin-tasli-sopali-saldiri-29433234>, retrieved 10 February 2017. Other incidents against art galleries and bars occurred in the same street, hinting to the fact that the aggression might have been undertaken for a different reason.

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Figure 32. Flyer distributed during the protests in Istanbul by the Doğu Türkistan Maarif ve Dayanışma Derneği. It says 'Bloodshed in East Turkistan. The world hasn't seen this ferociousness. First massacre, then organ theft. Chinese doctors steal the organs of killed Uyghurs.'

In 1992 the former Brigadier General of the Turkish armed forces M. Rıza Bekin, the nephew of Mehmet Emin Bughra, organized the Second East Turkistan National Assembly¹⁴⁹ in the premises of the Doğu Türkistan Vakfı (East Turkistan Foundation) in Istanbul that was founded in 1986 with the financial support of East Turkistanis living in Saudi Arabia (Bekin 2005).¹⁵⁰ M. Rıza Bekin recalls that,

We had to organize another assembly to redefine and adjust our political objectives according to the new political situation in Central Asia. We had a few meetings with East Turkistanis in Saudi Arabia to plan the assembly. A committee was elected and we had more than seventy delegates from fourteen countries.

In the interviews it became clear that the economic situation in Turkey wasn't in favour of the East Turkistanis and they relied on funding from Saudi Arabia.

At the East Turkistan Assembly Bekin made the opening speech, followed by Isa Yusuf Alptekin and Alparslan Türkeş. It was there that Isa Yusuf Alptekin, already in his nineties, and carried by his hopes for an independent country coined the words, 'It's East Turkistan's turn for liberation now.'¹⁵¹ This was a phrase that my interviewees recalled twenty-five years later, when the excitement of the institution of four new Turkic speaking republics had long disappeared. Isa's son Arslan remembered how his father 'thought that it's just a matter of time, that with the help of our brothers from the West, East Turkistan would be independent'. In his speech he expressed his wish that this assembly in the new global political context be a starting point for a stronger East Turkistan Cause that will eventually lead to liberation. But he also mentioned that East Turkistan is now the 'most desperate, most unfortunate, and most miserable place of the Turkish World, because it is still under Chinese occupation'. He reminded the audience that the Cause is a matter that concerns all of Central Asia and finished with the words, 'long live Turkish unity' (yaşasın Türk birliği).¹⁵² Unlike other speakers and interviewees who recalled this meeting, he may have anticipated that the collapse of the

¹⁴⁹ In a few interviews this East Turkistan National Assembly was considered the first one. During the interviews I could read a subtle critique of Isa Yusuf Alptekin's political leadership. Arslan Alptekin also dropped a hint about legal issues the Alptekin family had in the late 1980s with other members of the community that made Arslan temporarily withdraw from political activism. They even went to court over real estate matters, but he said: 'I am not begrudging, for the sake of the Cause I'd rather keep my animosities against those people for me.' But then he showed me a page from the *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* magazine where his head was scratched from a photo. The counting of this assembly can either be seen as a new start or it could be read as rejection of Alptekin's election in the 1956 assembly in Saudi Arabia.

¹⁵⁰ Information on Bekin mostly based on two personal meetings, partly on his memoirs.

¹⁵¹ 'Kurtuluş sırası Doğu Türkistan'da.' See *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* no. 36, pp. 9-10.

¹⁵² See *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* no. 36, p. 10.

Soviet Union would not necessarily have moved the Turkish world that ‘spans from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese Wall’, as one attendee hoped for.

The next speaker, Alparslan Türkeş, emphasized the importance of the East Turkistan Cause, and called for cooperation of all Turkish groups no matter where they are. He declared the 21st century to be the century of the Turks (Türk asrı). In order to achieve a greater Turkistan the Turks should not only help the East Turkistanis, but also other groups like the Tatars in Tataristan and in the Crimea. As his point of political reference he mentioned Gasprinsky and declared his classic slogan ‘unity in language, thought and action’ (dilde, fikirde, işte birlik) as the common motto of all Turks. Most of the speakers repeatedly addressed the people of the new republics and urged them to be supportive of Turks not liberated yet.¹⁵³ Obviously, they didn’t take for granted that Turkic solidarity would be the starting point of the East Turkistan Cause.

Almost all of my interviewees saw that the Republic of Turkey was completely unprepared for the changes in the Soviet Union. A quote from Atatürk that was used very frequently in the magazines around that time underlines this thought:¹⁵⁴

Today, the Soviet Union is our friend, neighbour and ally. We need this friendship. But no one can estimate what will happen tomorrow. Just like the Ottoman, and the Austro-Hungarian empires, they may also be disintegrated, fly into pieces. The nations they are holding with an iron grip today, may slip away. The world may reach a new balance. Then, Turkey must know what to do. We have brothers under the rule of this friend, with whom we share the same language, faith, and origin. We must be prepared to embrace them. Being prepared does not mean waiting quietly until that day. We need to be ready. How does a nation prepare for such an endeavour? By maintaining solid spiritual bridges. Language is a bridge. Faith is a bridge. History is a bridge. We need to go back to our

¹⁵³ See *Doğu Türkistan’ın Sesi* no. 36 for the speeches delivered at the assembly.

¹⁵⁴ For example see *Doğu Türkistan’ın Sesi* no.’s 36, 38, 40.

roots, and reunite what history has separated. We cannot wait for them to approach us. We must reach out to them.¹⁵⁵

The editor used this quote to express the idea that Turkey has to be ready for the East Turkistan Cause. ‘If the Soviet Union can collapse, why not China?’ was the common assessment of the situation. Furthermore they tried to emphasize a historical continuity of interest going back to Atatürk who represents a successful leader who liberated Turkey.

Besides the demanded readiness, both my interviews and the speeches reveal that the East Turkistanis also had other expectations from the Republic of Turkey. My interviewees expressed these expectations by attributing to Turkey a number of roles within the Cause. Some saw it as the castle of Turkishness (Türklüğün kalesi), others as its headquarters (Türklüğün karargahı) displaying either a perspective of defensiveness or expressing the offensive character it should play. A few saw in Turkey a place of reliance (Türklüğün istinatgahı), and a couple of people called Turkey the homeland of Turkishness (Türklüğün anavatanı). These perceptions of Turkey resembled the interviewees’ expectations as well as their needs based on their perception of the political situation.

Equipped with these expectations their disappointment and disillusionment must have been great. It was at this point in the interviews when the interviewees looked back and said, ‘actually I am ashamed how naïve I was at that time. Firstly I thought that the Kazakhs, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz would help us and secondly, I believed in a greater Turkistan.’ In my interviews many East Turkistanis clearly thought that Istanbul would be the centre for a united East Turkistani movement. Some interviewees recalled discussions where they debated whether Central Asia might be a better location for the Cause. The big communities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and the proximity to China strengthened the idea that this might be the beginning of a new period of East Turkistani action with a new epicentre in Central

¹⁵⁵ ‘Bugün Sovyetler Birliği dostumuzdur; müttefikimizdir. Bu dostluğa ihtiyacımız vardır. Fakat yarın ne olacağını kimse bu günden kestiremez. Tıpkı Osmanlı gibi, tıpkı Avusturya-Macaristan gibi parçalanabilir, ufalanabilir. Bugün elinde sınıksız tuttuğu milletler avuçlarından kaçabilirler. Dünya yeni bir dengeye ulaşabilir. İşte o zaman Türkiye ne yapacağını bilmelidir. Bizim bu dostumuzun idaresinde dili bir, inancı bir, özü bir kardeşlerimiz vardır. Onlara sahip çıkmaya hazır olmalıyız. Hazır olmak, yalnız o günü susup beklemek değildir. Hazırlanmak lâzımdır. Milletler buna nasıl hazırlanır? Manevî köprülerini sağlam tutarak. Dil bir köprüdür. İnanç bir köprüdür. Tarih bir köprüdür...Köklerimize inmeli ve olayların böldüğü tarihimiz içinde bütünleşmeliyiz. Onların bize yaklaşmasını bekleyemeyiz. Bizim onlara yaklaşmamız gerekli.’ Özkan (2000, 84). This quote is in all the East Turkistani sources identified with Atatürk. Supposedly he said it on 29 October 1933 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Republic in Ankara (Özkan 2000). I couldn’t find the original quote, that’s why I quote from the secondary source.

Asia. But the fraternal expectations from the Turkic people in Central Asia were not met and the political climate was not in favour for further political organization.

It is difficult to trace the exact turning point, but I found the first articles published as early as 1992 discussing whether the name East Turkistan should remain, or whether it should be called Uyghuristan.¹⁵⁶ These public responses in the magazines show that there had been debate even as the pan-Turkic dominated editor of the *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* only gave space to the writer that defended the contextualisation of the Cause in unity with all Turks of greater Turkistan. In interviews people dated the first attempt to rename East Turkistan as an ethnic based Uyghuristan to the mid 1990s. One interviewee, an East Turkistani from Istanbul, narrated his discontent (after he expressed his shame) with the Kazakh community in Istanbul, who in his words,

tried to dominate the association and foundation since after they gained independence. There is money coming from Kazakhstan, but they aren't even from Kazakhstan, they are East Turkistanis like us. They tried to turn the association into something that was based on their culture.

His discontent led him to a nationalist statement where he summarized thoughts common to other East Turkistanis/Uyghurs as well:

if we take it from that perspective, the Uyghurs are the majority (in East Turkistan) and we are people of the city, with a written culture. They are nomads, they don't even need a country. They need open borders to migrate to the best pastures with their livestock.

In response to the perceived domination of Kazakhs in the associations in Istanbul (based on money coming in from Kazakhstan and support for the Uyghurs was lacking), by emphasizing that the Uyghurs outnumber the Kazakhs in China, they referred to dichotomies of urban and rural, written and oral practices to narrate a superiority that could only lead to an Uyghuristan.

On the other hand most of the older East Turkistanis were advocates of the more inclusive name East Turkistan, arguing 'that this is exactly what the Chinese would want us to do, fighting each other'. Blaming the Soviet and Chinese nationalities policies for the disunity among the Turks in Turkistan is a perspective that still persists with pan-Turkic groups in Turkey. From my observation it seems that this stance is more widespread among Turkish pan-Turkists than among the Turkistanis.

¹⁵⁶ See for example *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* no. 33 and 35 (both published in 1992) and *Gökbayrak* no. 5 (1995) and no. 13 (1996).

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Figure 33. Second National Conference of Eastern Turkistan, held on 12-14 December 1992 in Istanbul. (Photograph provided by Erkin Alptekin)

One man who came as a migrant in 1997 via Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia reported (based on the experiences of his migration) how the ‘so called brothers’ treated him badly. ‘The catholic Poles provided more help than any other persons.’ I witnessed this kind of discussion quite often during my fieldwork, where ethnic groups other than one’s own was praised and their own heavily criticized. Herzfeld names this cultural intimacy, ‘the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment, but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality’ (2005, 3). Amongst themselves people excoriated other East Turkistanis’ behaviour, a critique that only they can express. ‘*Bizden adam olmaz*’ (We are useless) has to be formulated in the first person plural pronouns. ‘*Sizden adam olmaz*’ (You are useless) would be considered an insult. But both of the experiences, the migrants in Central Asia as well as the disillusionment, created in-between spaces (Arendt 1958) where new discursive practices are negotiated.

Anachronistic Pan-Turkism and Increasing Pressure from China

In the first years of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the foreign policy orientation pursued by the Turkish Government followed a pan-Turkic scheme based on commonalities of the Turkic people and a heavy anti-communism. Through this perceived affinity

preferential political and economic conditions were expected (Ersanlı 2014). Although the Central Asian Republics saw Turkey as a role model for its secular orientation and its developing economy, the Turkish Government and Turkish entrepreneurs soon had to realize that their approach was met by reluctance, as some of the Turkic republics perceived Turkey as another 'Big Brother' (Koknar 2005).

Starting as early as 1993 and initiated by the MHP and Alparslan Türkeş, congresses with representatives of the Turkic states and their communities met annually under the motto 'Friendship, Brotherhood, and Cooperation' (Ersanlı 2014). An Uzbek academic I interviewed in Istanbul was positive about them, saying 'that the congresses did bring together intellectuals, artists and politicians from Central Asia and Turkey, but we could also see that the political goals were quite diverse'. He also recalled how many intellectuals and academics rejected the 'almost arrogant leading role of Turkey and Turkish academics'.¹⁵⁷ Turkey provided scholarships for Turkic students who wanted to study in Turkey and sent academics to teach in Central Asia. Turkey furthermore opened state-sponsored and private schools¹⁵⁸ and universities in Central Asia and trained officials from various Central Asian countries in Turkey (Ersanlı 2014).

In the late 1990s relations with Uzbekistan started to deteriorate. The Uzbek state accused Turkey of supporting Islamist propaganda and expressed their displeasure that the Turkish Government harboured Uzbek dissidents. The other Central Asian republics followed, noting that Turkey's permissive environment for opposition groups was damaging their relations. Uzbekistan called hundreds of students home, worried that they would return infiltrated with unwanted ideas (Koknar 2005). One of my interviewees, an Uyghur activist from Aksu in his fifties who came in 1993, remembered that he got worried that the changes in the relations between Turkey and the Central Asian republics would effect Uyghurs' political activism in Turkey. In addition to that, when narrating this period East Turkistanis in Turkey expressed their concerns with the political situation of the Uyghurs in Central Asia. With the changing political climate for Uyghurs in Central Asia the community's concern only grew., According to Erkin Alptekin who frequently travelled to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan¹⁵⁹ in

¹⁵⁷ At one conference on Central Asia and Turkey that I attended in 2009 I observed how the academics from Central Asian countries spent their coffee and lunch breaks together speaking Russian excluding their Turkish colleagues.

¹⁵⁸ Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish preacher and religious order leader, very successfully ran schools in all of the Turkic republics and even in Russia.

¹⁵⁹ It was in Bishkek where he met Rebiya Kadeer for the first time in 1997 (personal communication).

order to connect the different Uyghur groups there, the Uyghur diaspora in Kazakhstan was facing a difficult time. A few political activists recalled the debates about shifting the epicentre of the East Turkistan Cause to Central Asia. With their diasporas and the proximity to East Turkistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were thought of as good places to pursue the Cause. 'But in the end, observing the political developments there, we thought that we should rather stay in Turkey', one activist remembered. But the fact that Turkey's influence in Central Asia never grew beyond minor importance was perceived 'as if the mother of Turkishness was losing its kids', as one interviewee put it.

The worries of the East Turkistanis in Turkey grew with China's involvement in Central Asia and Turkey. Their concerns reached another dimension with the foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001. China, only second to the Russian Federation, had long been establishing strong economic relations with the Central Asian republics, especially with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. But with the SCO cooperation this was taken to another level, with joint activities expanded to the fields of military cooperation, intelligence, defending the members' territorial integrity and sovereignty against terrorism and secessionism (Fredholm 2013). My interviewees interpreted this military assistance from China as directed towards Uyghur activities in those countries. They felt even more 'betrayed and threatened by the Turkish State' when in the 1990s China tried to restrict East Turkistani political activism in Turkey. Until the mid-1990s Turkey, with its aspirations for influence in Central Asia still alive, resisted Chinese overtures. But with China's economic growth and increasing political and military power Ankara could no longer defy the pressure (Shichor 2013).¹⁶⁰ And with the death of Isa Yusuf Alptekin in 1995 the East Turkistanis lost a person with strong connections to Ankara.

Chinese military advisers and commanders visited Turkey on numerous trips and even sold arms to Turkey – a NATO member (Koknar 2005). According to my interviewees Turkish support for the Cause had almost completely ceased in the 1990s anyway: 'they let us meet, but there was hardly any financial and bureaucratic support whatsoever. We completely fell off the political agenda.'¹⁶¹ Formerly granted cheap housing and citizenship, these issues too became a problem for the East Turkistanis. The Chinese pressure was furthermore directed towards dissidents from China seeking refuge in Turkey and Turkish authorities refused entry

¹⁶⁰ See Shichor (2009) for a very detailed analysis of the Uyghur dimension in Turkish-Chinese relations.

¹⁶¹ A repeatedly occurring theme was that the Turkish Government was busy supporting Chechens and therefore the East Turkistan Cause was thrust into the background.

to East Turkistani activists.¹⁶² For some interviewees the growing conflict in Turkey's southeast played a role, with China threatening to support Kurdish groups if Turkey didn't stop supporting Uyghur separatism. We do not know whether China supported the Kurds, but it would not be hard to believe that China used Turkey's domestic political issues to increase the pressure (Shichor 2009). Still, even today there are anti-Chinese protests organized by East Turkistani groups, and their publishing activities remain lively.

The distrust of some East Turkistanis with the current government dates back to when President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan visited China as Chairman of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in 2003. Before he became prime minister he headed a delegation of officials and businessmen trying to improve political and economic relations between China and Turkey. He pointed out that Turkey respects the territorial integrity of the PRC, recognized Xinjiang as an inseparable part of China and stated that he wouldn't allow any separatist activities in Turkey (Colakoglu 2015, Ergenç 2015, Shichor 2009). For the East Turkistanis this statement was an affront and some interviewees still take offence at it, saying that 'because of this I would never vote for him'. Others appear to have forgotten it, but the deepening of Turkey's political and economic relations as well as military cooperation with China in the 2000s made most of my interviewees think that the Cause might be better off if it shifted away from Turkey. On the other hand, Erdoğan's statement was petrol to the fire of pan-Turkic MHP supporters (who disliked the AKP), who argued that this was exactly what China wants: 'the disunity of Turks in Central Asia has its roots in the long Soviet occupation. Now, Turkey is more important than ever to bring the Turks together. We have to stay united and can't move the Cause to a non-Turkic country.' But in the eyes of most of my interviewees, although they would never express this in public, pan-Turkic ideas have become obsolete.¹⁶³ It seemed like an old, bad habit that the East Turkistanis cannot get rid of, despite the fact that for most of them it doesn't carry much importance. Perhaps it never did, as one Afghanistan-born interviewee implied:

We have to be realistic, especially after the incidents in the 1990s, we should stop dreaming, we won't achieve anything with pan-Turkic slogans. We will never be able to

¹⁶² Both Rebiya Kadeer, President of the World Uyghur Congress and Dolkun Isa, World Uyghur Congress Secretary, are banned from travelling to Turkey (personal communication).

¹⁶³ Attending conferences on East Turkistan organized by pan-Turkic groups I have hardly seen any members of other communities. And when I asked the East Turkistanis if they attend conferences on Uzbeks, Turkmen or other Turkic groups, they answered the question in the negative. One man who came in the early 2000s told me how surprised he was that pan-Turkic groups hardly have any influence in Turkey. 'They seem to be really unimportant and they are the only ones listening to their own discourse.'

unite all the Turkic groups, they have never been united anyway. But most of our people have believed in that lie for all eternity. We have to stop dreaming [Bu palavraya ezelden beri bizimkiler inanıyor. Hayalperest olmayalım artık]. Some groups say that they won't collaborate with the infidels. But we haven't gotten any help from the Islamic world. They only help Palestinians. We have to think about basic rights for our people in East Turkistan now.

Another Kayseri-born interviewee expressed his frustration with other Turkic groups by changing the proverb 'The only friends of Turks are Turks' into 'the only enemies of Turks are Turks.'¹⁶⁴ Both of these statements show a reaction to the changing political environment in Turkey as well as to global changes by interpreting the past in a different way. A new way of imagining a liberated East Turkistan appears in these discourses, based less on an imagined common genealogy, and more on human rights and autonomy. In the *Gökbayrak* and *Doğu Türkistan'ın Sesi* magazines the ethnonym Uyghur appears more frequently, usually with a connection with East Turkistan (as in *Doğu Türkistan Uygur*).

In 1993, as a result of increasing Chinese pressure, the Eastern Turkistan National Congress was relocated to Germany, where a small core of East Turkistanis¹⁶⁵ had established an organization in Munich in the early 1990s (Shichor 2013, Wilkoszewski 2011.)¹⁶⁶ I could even see that some younger people from the third generation, who still supported a pan-Turkic approach, preferred to call themselves East Turkistanis while accepting the fact that the Cause was heavily internationalized.

One occurrence at a symposium on migration organized by the Zeytinburnu municipality divided the community in Istanbul. The organizer invited a Chinese dissident who lived in exile in the United States. Before he presented his paper he stood up, bowed to the audience who were mostly East Turkistanis and apologized for the atrocities done there in the name of the Chinese people. I thought it was a very powerful and sincere gesture. It also required courage to do this in Zeytinburnu. The East Turkistanis sitting next to me, two Kayseri-born men in their thirties, were unimpressed saying, that they didn't believe his sincerity. By contrast, another group of young men said that they would accept his apology and it was good

¹⁶⁴ 'Türk'ün Türk'ten başka dostu yoktur değilse, aslında Türk'ün Türk'ten başka düşmanı yoktur.'

¹⁶⁵ Among them was Erkin Alptekin who replaced an East Turkistani named Polat Kadiri at Radio Free Europe in 1971 where he worked until 1995. Polat Kadiri was a famous historian from East Turkistan who passed away in 1971. He was employed as program specialist, assistant director to the nationality services, and senior research analyst. He later on became senior policy advisor. He managed to help a few East Turkistanis who emigrated to Turkey in 1965 to come to Germany. East Turkistanis who would lead the community.

¹⁶⁶ See Shichor (2013) on the Uyghur community, their activism and the history of East Turkistani organizations in Germany.

that there were Chinese who acknowledged that injustice had been done to them. Indeed, one went on to say that, 'I wouldn't mind living in East Turkistan with them, we just have to have the same rights.' The other group said, 'There is no way they should stay, it's independence for us and then they would have to leave East Turkistan.' Into this statement a Istanbul-born young Uyghur said, 'It has to be Uyghuristan, shouldn't we have a country named after our group?' From that point the discussion shifted into questions of Uyghuristan versus East Turkistan. I could observe similar discussions among the elderly, but they were mostly committed to pan-Turkic ideas. The locus of their discourses was still a greater Turkistan and with Bourdieu (1990) we can say that their operative agency had become a habit. Their contact with new ideas and their practical relation to the world of political activism was rather minimal.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union, China's pressure on Turkey combined with the debates of an obsolete pan-Turkism led to the further internationalization of the East Turkistan Cause. But also led to new political spaces, new in-betweens where new negotiations of political identities emerged allowing a discursive plurality as we can see at the Zeytinburnu conference. Disunity is still seen as problem, but for some it is also seen as a starting point for further discussion. A few East Turkistanis see political disunity more as reflecting variety than as a problem. But this perspective is still rather marginal. Pan-Turkism is still part of the discourse, but more as an old accessory, an element that is formulated, but not taken seriously by everyone anymore. I could see that there is an emphasis on ethnic identity.

In sum, with the dramatically changing experiences of people from Xinjiang who are living in Turkey now, political potentialities or objectives are changing. For some groups it doesn't come down to either full independence or nothing anymore. At one commemoration meeting I observed a situation where a girl who was educated in Mandarin, a *minkaohan*,¹⁶⁷ was introduced to a Kayseri based family. For whatever reasons the person who introduced her mentioned that she could speak Chinese. After they had talked for some time I overheard the East Turkistan and Afghanistan-born mother and father saying how sad it was that she was Sinified, whereas the children were saying that they wished they could speak Chinese, so as to be able to do business or work as a tourist guide. Although it is still quite unusual that the younger generation want to study Chinese, it shows that perceptions are changing.

¹⁶⁷ See Finley (2007) on *minkaohan*.

An Uyghur Cookbook Reflecting Political Adjustments

The adjustments of immigrants to new environments and the changing political objectives and identities of political exiles can find innumerable expressions. The discourses of nationalism find their way into the everyday life of the community, as they have to be reproduced in order to survive (Billig 1995, Certeau 1988). Even cooking certain foods can be a remainder of a commonality. Cooking food from one's home region has a great symbolic significance in the context of immigration, as dislocated people tend to eat their ethnic food in order to feel at home, as a catalyst of memories. It can be a source for ethnic rejuvenation (Akhtar 2007). If we consider that food is a substance with meaning beyond mere sustenance, we can see it as a system of communication,¹⁶⁸ a body of images and stories, a protocol of usage, a set of practices and behaviour, that distinguish one group from another, in a process of identification. Cesarò has convincingly shown how 'Chinese and Uyghur culinary worlds are bridged, [but] the dishes are also simultaneously marked as different, to make sure there is no confusion between what is Chinese and what is Uyghur' (2007, 200). Despite the relationship between Uyghur and Chinese food the refusal of food based on religious dietary requirements can mark a clear boundary. The political shifts towards an ethno-national approach of the East Turkistan Cause led to the formulation of a more specific Uyghur history. As Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) has pointed out women can be part of nationalist discourses as reproducers of boundaries of ethnic/national groups. They participate in the ideological reproduction of a group's collectivity and as transmitters of its practices that are important in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic and national categories.

During my fieldwork I came across an Uyghur cookbook that presents a series of recipes that index the author's experiences and adjustments as an immigrant in Turkey. In this part of the thesis I want to discuss this cookbook as a particularly revelatory object that brings together a range of Uyghur endeavours, experiences and perceptions in Turkey. In the Turkish context religious dietary requirements are not enough to distinguish Uyghur cuisine from other Turkic cuisines. I argue that the author on one hand possesses political-national consciousness, but on the other hand is organizing and exercising agency in order to cope with her exile situation. She participates in an essentialist nationalist discourse, writing in the preface that 'no nation-state, no group exists without its own national food' (Göktürk 2005, Preface), but

¹⁶⁸ See Cramer & Carlnita (2011) on food and communication and Curtin & Heldke (1992) on the transformative philosophy of food.

undermines her own efforts at authenticity in the course of the book. This conflict might be seen as exemplary for Uyghur nationalists in Turkey.

With Oakeshott (1967) I argue that a recipe book does not form ‘an independently generated beginning, from which cookery can spring’ (1967, 199). In contrast, cookbooks are abridgements of activities, summaries of practical knowledge of how to prepare meals. A recipe is more the outcome of an experience than the starting point. And in the example I present, I show how certain experiences and shifting perceptions are translated into a palatable discourse that goes beyond mere recipes and brings nationalism into everyday life.

In 2015 when I asked a fifty-eight year old woman about her earliest memories of her life in Xinjiang, she shared a story concerning how her mother didn’t want to breastfeed her because the Chinese officials imprisoned her father due to his profession as a religious teacher. She recounted that her mother didn’t want to raise her under these political circumstances and would have let her die, but other family members secured her survival by feeding her with goat’s milk. This was a startling beginning point for a life narration. She was too young to remember, but wanted to use this event as part of her biography. From previous meetings I knew that she was politically active. Her story showed a connection between food, politics (and Chinese atrocities) from the early beginning of her life that is of importance to her, no matter if it’s a story that she herself had been told.

At the end of that day, she started to prepare food and we talked about cooking. I assisted her in the kitchen. All of the sudden she left the room and came back with a book. It was an Uyghur cookbook. She told me that she had written and published it at her own expense with a little financial support from the East Turkistan Foundation in Istanbul. The title is *Traditional East Turkestan Uyghur Cuisine* (Geleneksel Doğu Türkistan Uygur Mutfak Kültürü), to my knowledge the first Uyghur cookbook published in Turkey. The title contains two references that are representative for a large number of Yarkent-born East Turkistanis who came in 1965 – the reference to the region East Turkistan and to the ethnic ascription Uyghur.¹⁶⁹ In the interviews she mentioned, like many others, that she usually uses ‘East Turkistani’, but that with all the ‘emerging ethnic importance she adds the she is Uyghur’. She was one of the exiled children. Over-idealization of the home region and expressions like ‘Oh my dear Turkistan, I am just one miserable [person] living you from afar’ (Göktürk 2005, preface) are distinguishing features of a diaspora (Cohen 1997). Two years after their arrival in Turkey the family left for Saudi Arabia. In the interviews it remained unclear whether they

¹⁶⁹ She doesn’t use the word Uyghur in the preface, she says ‘we are Turks and we are Muslims’.

wanted to permanently move there, or if it was planned as a temporary stay. The family returned in 1968. Interestingly, her son, a religious education teacher, went back to work in Saudi Arabia in 2011. He said that he wanted to migrate there, as he wanted to complete the family's dream of immigrating to Saudi Arabia (Akhtar 2011). In 2016 he was called back to Turkey and lost his job due to allegations that he was a member of the Gülen movement.

Cookbooks form a very special genre; they are more than just compilations of recipes (Appadurai 1988). In her book we find little stories, political discussions, a few sentences introducing a recipe. She claims authenticity and distinguishes Uyghurs from other Turkic groups to profess a specific historiography based on a unique Uyghur cuisine. Nur'âlâ is from Yarkent and claims in her book that people from Yarkent prepare the most genuine and authentic Uyghur food since it is the area of Xinjiang with the least Chinese influence. In her book she addresses Uyghurs in Turkey, who have forgotten how to prepare real Uyghur food as well as potential non-Uyghur brides who want to learn how to prepare these dishes. She sees this task of writing as her national duty as an Uyghur woman.¹⁷⁰

Nur'âlâ seeks to write about traditional Uyghur national cuisine (as stated in the preface). She begins by distinguishing traditional Uyghur food from Kazakh food by implying that their nomadic way of living did not provide grounds for any elaborate cooking and that the Uyghurs were the first Turkic tribe that settled, which led to its sophisticated cuisine. But she also distinguishes her way of cooking from the Uyghurs from the north of Xinjiang, places like Gulja, claiming that they have been far too long under Russian influence to know what traditional Uyghur food tastes like: in one interview she said that 'some of them are even communists'. Nur'âlâ claims that the Uyghur invented spaghetti. According to her, Marco Polo took the Uyghur national dish *läghmān* (a dish very common throughout Central Asia) to Europe, where it became spaghetti.¹⁷¹ This is an interesting case since another Uyghur friend of mine told me that there are no Uyghur words beginning with 'l' and that the name for this dish probably comes from the Chinese loanword *lamian*, which is also a noodle dish.¹⁷² I am not interested in authenticity, but Nur'âlâ uses this claim in her book to argue for the antiquity of the Uyghur nation, and based on this, the rightness of taking back her land from the Chinese occupation. By doing so she shows the Uyghur's importance on the gastro-political world map as the nation that invented a dish as popular as spaghetti.

¹⁷⁰ 'Bir Uyghur kadını olarak milli görevim.'

¹⁷¹ The direction pasta travelled and who invented it has long been at the centre of a lively ethno-nationalist discussion. See Cesarò (2007).

¹⁷² See Johanson (2006) on words with 'l' as the initial sound in Turkic languages.

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Figure 34. Cover of the book *Traditional East Turkistan Uyghur Cuisine* by Nur'âlâ Göktürk.

She prepared the famous *läghmän* dish with a spicy sauce, saying when we ate it that the Kyrgyz prepare it more like a soup dish. According to her, *läghmän* is not a soup dish and only develops its full effect in the human body with a spicy sauce. She draws from a medical knowledge that she claims has been transmitted orally for thousands of years in Yarkent (with Yarkent being a centre of traditional medicine). The reference to food and its medical effects

are subtle in the book, but she mentioned that only the Uyghur preparation of *polo* (a rice dish with carrots and mutton prepared in a *kazan*), *palov* in Uzbek, or *pilav* in Turkish, would turn it into a healthy meal. 'It is the order of the ingredients put into the *kazan* that is crucial. The Uzbeks lack this very specific knowledge and don't make the best and healthy *polo*.'

In the interviews she mentioned central features of Uyghur discourses in Turkey, saying that the Uyghurs are the only Turkic-speaking group that still hasn't gained independence. 'We are from the cradle of Turkishness yet still suffer under the yoke of communism.' She also relates her displeasure that there is no help from 'our brothers from the West. On the contrary they [talking about Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan] extradite Uyghurs to China.' A believer in 'greater [Ulu] Türkistan', she mentions these statements more subtly in her cookbook as well, saying that there is a greater Turkic world, but each group has its distinctiveness. And since the Uyghur people are the first who settled, most of the dishes of the Turkic groups stem from the Uyghurs. The long history of sedentarism is the reason for the elaborate Uyghur food compared to nomadic ways of preparing and eating food. She distinguishes Uyghur food from Kazakh food by placing it in an urban/rural dichotomy, saying that urban food is more sophisticated. When she speaks about food in West Turkistan she calls it food from our brothers. But when she mentions food from Turkey, she only speaks about Anatolian Turks, as if the degree of relationship changes with the geographical distance.

The part of the book where she describes kebabs, titled 'Uygur Mutfağında Kebaplar' is the only section of the book where she doesn't subdivide the food. Kebab is 'one common primeval food of the Turks' (Türk milletinin en kadim ortak yemek çeşitlerinden biridir, Kebap!) (Göktürk 2005, 44). She explains that the Turks are famous for their huntsmanship, which is why they have hardly any vegetarian dishes and why they are so delicious. While the author and I were going through the recipes a few relatives were around, joining us once in a while. As we came to the kebab part and she explained the outstanding hunting skills of the Turks, one man asked 'if we are such good hunters why can't we just beat the Chinese and make them go away from East Turkistan' drawing a connection between hunting and warfare. An embarrassing silence followed before she replied that good hunting skills would probably not be enough to make the Chinese leave. Even while looking at a cookbook a connection to the Chinese occupation was made.

Despite her claims to authenticity the book clearly shows the author's modification and addition of recipes. Any kind of cooking develops distinct ways of preparation depending on socio-economic, geographical situations and available resources/ingredients. And any kind of cooking undergoes changes through migration, as new ingredients might be added in a new

environment. She followed health trends, recommending the usage of olive oil – olives that caused so much excitement during their very first breakfasts in Turkey are now a recommended part of the diet. And similar religious dietary regulations make it easier to embrace food and recipes from Turkey. The Turkish classics *çoban* and *mevsim salatası* found their way into her book.

In coming up with a national cuisine while claiming authenticity for the Yarkent version Nur'âlâ indirectly opposes Uyghur food to any regional variety. She reacts to the political changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disillusionment of Uyghurs with pan-Turkic ideas by creating something decisively Uyghur that covers all of East Turkistan in distinction to Turkic groups in the neighbouring countries. She creates a national cuisine before the nation's state. Considering the diversity of Xinjiang and Central Asia and the fact that the food migrated too, being modified while keeping some of its local distinctness, this is a rather difficult task. By adding olives, various types of cheese, ketchup and mayonnaise to her recipes she creates a very contemporary and local version of (traditional) food, based on practical knowledge she gained from her mother. She garnishes it with her modified perception of the political situation. In addition to that she managed to write a book that helped her to 'do something for the Cause'. But she also did something for herself, gaining a voice. 'If I had stayed in East Turkistan I would have never written a book,' she said.

'We Might Have to De-radicalize the Newcomer'

Do you see these guys, those with the Salafist beards? Those are the ones who came from Malaysia and Thailand and they will probably go to Syria very soon. You can't talk to them, they only stay among themselves. They don't represent our culture at all.

This was said by one of my interviewees (who was loosely associated with the foundation in Istanbul) during lunch in an Uyghur restaurant that was well known for its connection to the Maarif association. More sympathetically, a man from the association in Kayseri noted that 'They may have experienced difficult things and might be a bit lost, that's why we have to be there for them, no matter how difficult it is to get through to them.'

It is difficult to say how many Uyghurs have come to Turkey in the last few years. The association in Kayseri estimates that more than 10,000 have arrived, while others talk about 2,000.¹⁷³ Most of the recently-arrived Uyghurs I met in Kayseri and Istanbul were reluctant to

¹⁷³ See the publication by the World Uyghur Congress, <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/wp-content/uploads/WUC-Seeking-a-Place-to-Breathe-Freely-June-2016-1.pdf> for a detailed account of the migration.

talk, but I could see that they comprised a very heterogeneous group. In the group I spent some time with in Kayseri there was a baker from Aksu who wanted to stay in Turkey, but also a goldsmith from Ürümchi who sold his business to come to Turkey and wanted to go to Canada. Both came with their families and said that they spent around 10,000 USD for the flight that took them more than a year. Then there was a young boy who told me that he studied Arabic rather than Turkish, because his family wanted to go to an Arabic speaking country. In Kayseri the association managed to settle a number of families in the old police lodgement in the district of Belsin, a fifteen-minute drive from the city centre. The houses were designated for demolition, but this has been postponed due to the efforts of the association. A second *Türkistan Mahallesi* occurred in Kayseri, settled by Uyghurs with a similar multi-country migration as the 1965 generation, but with very different experiences and motivations. From my interviews it seemed as if many of them didn't want to stay in Turkey. This may have been because of their unclear status. Unlike the earlier Uyghur migrants they were not granted Turkish citizenship, and hence their dwelling there was barely legal.

Both the East Turkistani communities in Istanbul and in Kayseri have found it difficult to engage with the Uyghurs who came from Malaysia and Thailand in recent years. But efforts made to include the newcomers by the association in Kayseri and the foundation in Istanbul differed dramatically. The urban environment of Istanbul might be taken into consideration making it more difficult to interact with the groups who recently arrived. On top of that there are other groups in Istanbul that court them.

One ongoing discussion in Istanbul and Kayseri, based on rumours, assumptions, unreliable information, but also on observations that evolves around the Uyghurs who came in the last five years, is that newcomers were potential fighters in Syria. The statements vary from 'there is a *Türkistan Mahallesi* in Raqqa [the capital of ISIS] with more than 5000 Uyghurs living and fighting there and there are buses going there from Kayseri and Istanbul', to 'only a few, if any, are going to Syria from Turkey'. In the course of my fieldwork I could observe a few things that were less connected with potential Uyghur terrorists, but more with interaction between older established Uyghurs and those who came recently. With these observations there were certainly hints that some Uyghurs had left for Syria, but I am not in a position to estimate how many. One evening I went to the apartment of a friend's friend in Zeytinburnu. A man told me to wait in the living room from where I could overhear how one of my interviewees and another man tried to talk a bunch of young Uyghur men out of going somewhere in the next room. I could only hear the two men talking, there were hardly any responses from the other men who I briefly saw when they left later on. 'We have no chance,

they receive money, either in China, on the way or here, we have heard that it's 5000 USD per person. And by accepting the money, they are agreeing to go', said one of my interviewees who tried to meet with Uyghurs who seemed as if they were going to Syria. They managed to organise a few meetings, but all of the young men they had talked too had left Istanbul at some point.

A restaurant in Aksaray is supposedly one of the places where potential travellers to Syria hang out. In it one can find a huge variety of religious propaganda in Uyghur provided by the Maarif association, an Uyghur association that unlike all other Uyghur associations in Turkey bases the East Turkestan Cause solely on Islamic grounds and is supposed to be run by Uyghurs who spent some time in Pakistan and Afghanistan. A big bookshelf provides books, covering religious topics, but also textbooks, pamphlets, Koran translations, and flyers.¹⁷⁴ The man who ran the restaurant is an Uyghur from the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan, a very pious man. I could see that the Maarif association based on a religious solidarity and monetary funding tried to provide further financial and moral help. While waiting for friends I took up an Uyghur textbook for kids and skimmed through it. In it a few things caught my eye, revealing something about their religious attitude.

In Figure 35 the letters b ((a) left page, second row) and t ((b) right page, first row) are introduced with depictions of a hand grenade and a pistol. The letter g as in the word *günah* (sin, (b) left page, second row) is depicted with a woman's hand holding a cigarette and wine glass. One full page is dedicated to how (obviously quite young) children should fulfil the prayers. I have seen this book in various households of the newcomers in Istanbul and Kayseri. Their interest in these books conveys an interest in a certain lifestyle. The Maarif association has long stood out with its strict political statements. On a protest march in Istanbul I saw that members of Maarif walked by themselves carrying martial banners. In the few interviews I did with them, the members acknowledged the World Uyghur Congress, but made clear that Islamic independence is the only the goal they strive for.

Not many older Uyghurs supported the migration of the newcomers. A Turkey-born man who hasn't experienced any form of migration and was from a group of hardcore pan-Turkists said,

They shouldn't come, the Turkish Government should not allow them in. I do feel bad about it, but if we don't stop them there will be more and more coming. They should stay in East Turkistan and protest there, start something. We [the foundation in Istanbul] can't do anything for them

¹⁷⁴ The owners of most of the other restaurants said that they refused to display material provided by the Maarif.

According to his argument it only serves the interest of the Chinese who would be able to stigmatize all Uyghurs as Islamic terrorists if they keep coming. And by not being able to take care of them, they will fall for the offers of Islamic groups. ‘They do not represent Uyghur culture’, he stated, refusing to accept that this group is one part of an existing Uyghur identity. He indirectly accused the association in Kayseri of being involved in the trafficking of Uyghurs from Thailand and Malaysia. A story I have heard a couple of times was that some people were making a fortune by flying them into Turkey on real Turkish passports. According to the rumours, officials from the Turkish Government are involved and making a profit too. This approach of not welcoming them drives people in Istanbul to the Maarif association, whose role is unclear and in the eyes of most of the East Turkistanis in Istanbul at least is very suspicious.

The East Turkistanis in Kayseri, based on their memories of how they were helped when they arrived with nothing in their hands, tried to organize meetings where older established people could get together with those that had recently arrived. Some third generation Kayseri-born Uyghur were excited to meet Uyghurs from the homeland, but were disappointed when the exchange remained on a very basic level. ‘The Uyghur culture we know from home is rather different from their way’, a younger Uyghur said, referring to the dress code the women followed and the beards the men preferred. During a religious holiday a field trip to a local waterfall was organized. Seven buses were chartered. ‘We wanted them to get out of their houses and see something else’, said a member of the association. I sat next to one of the Uyghurs whom I had known for some time. All of a sudden confusion broke out and I was made to leave the bus and get on another one. I thought that the Uyghurs who came recently were unhappy with my presence, but when I saw my friend getting on the same bus I knew it wasn’t only me. According to him, the women wanted a women and children bus only without any men. One East Turkistani woman, a woman I was only allowed to interview alone after a couple of months, said to me, ‘They are a bit backwards.’ As we can see, backwardness is also a relational term and perceived differently. At the waterfall the men prepared a barbecue – strictly single-gendered.

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(a)

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(b)

Figure 35. A few pages from an Uyghur textbook titled 'ABC', that also covers questions of morals, values and how to be a good pious child.



Figure 36. Uyghur woman carrying a banner during a protest meeting against China in 2015 saying 'liberation or death'. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

A few days later a trip to the Kayseri branch of the Turkish Hearths was organized 'in order to get them accustomed to the local nationalism', as one member of the association jokingly remarked. But there was some truth in it, as the association in Kayseri clearly rather wanted the Uyghurs to socialize with nationalist groups rather than be paired up with Islamist religious groups. Kayseri seems to be a place with fewer temptations in that regard and the efforts from the old established East Turkistanis were enormous. They would not admit that there might be radical people among the newcomers, but did acknowledge that they 'might have to de-radicalize some of them'.

Even when I was with the general secretary of the association in Belsin visiting the Uyghurs, the civil police at the gate interrogated me, asking me a couple of times whether I was a journalist. A postgraduate student fell into the same category and they followed me when I tried to talk to the people. That made the Uyghurs uncomfortable. When I was leaving, one of the policemen said that they had received bad press a couple of times, locally and internationally, and that 'they don't need anyone stirring up trouble'.

During my visit to the former police lodgement I saw a man I had first met in 2008, an East Turkistani asylum seeker who I had stayed with in the guest room of the association. After nine years he was still in Turkey, semi-legal, without any support except from the association,

waiting for an answer from the United Nations. He now lives with the Uyghurs who arrived recently. He told me, 'It's quite difficult, they are so different from the Uyghurs in the *Türkistan Mahallesi*.' Even if they have a roof over their head, I couldn't escape the feeling that they were somehow ghettoized with nothing to do. They don't have proper papers, which meant that they couldn't work and support their families. On the fieldtrip I had a chance to talk to a few of them. They said that wouldn't mind learning how to use weapons and go back to China to fight the communists. This was a theme that occurred a couple of times, that they would like to learn how to fight and use such skills against China.

On a small scale the association provides some work for a few men in the *Türkistan Mahallesi*. They brought a tandoor oven from China and during religious holidays three men baked bread and sold it to the locals.



Figure 37. Uyghur man baking bread in the *Türkistan Mahallesi*. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

This opportunity was well received and I could see that even a little interaction that occurred with locals when they came to buy their bread broke the ice and was appreciated. Unfortunately, an inspector from the municipality came because someone lodged a complaint that they were running an illegal business. It must have been someone from the *mahalle* since

it was a rather hidden place. The association paid the fine, but made a few phone calls in order to get permission to keep the business going.

Visibility of Uyghur Life in Istanbul

Especially within the last two years and with the arrival of hundreds of Uyghurs, a number of new restaurants have opened up in the Istanbul districts of Aksaray and Zeytinburnu, catering for different target groups. Some are full of young men looking for a cheap Uyghur meal, while others are popular with families. In some places it is their political orientation that influences potential customers. There are restaurants that advertised in three languages. The Silk Road Restaurant, shown in Figure 38, next to an American pizza chain restaurant, offers Uyghur and European cuisine in Cyrillic letters.



Figure 38. Uyghur restaurant run by Uyghurs from Uzbekistan called İpek Yolu Uyğur Sofrası with a restaurant sign in Turkish, Uyghur and Russian. The Cyrillic advertising Uyghur and European Food. Neighbourhood of Aksaray in Istanbul 2015. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

The owner (who is also the chef) is an Uyghur from Uzbekistan who used to work in Moscow and St Petersburg. This place is popular with Russian tourists who are shopping in nearby Laleli and Aksaray, as well as with Uyghurs.

While I was with a friend in an Uyghur restaurant in Aksaray, I heard people sitting on the next table speaking Chinese. I was quite shocked, because it is a situation that I thought would be unacceptable for the Uyghur restaurants in Zeytinburnu. I remember that I saw a sign at the door of an Uyghur restaurant in Zeytinburnu in 2011, that was run by an Afghanistan-born Uyghur, saying: 'Chinese not allowed' (Çinliler girilmez). It obviously was a statement directed towards the community and rather less against the Chinese, since throughout my fieldwork I had never seen any Chinese making their way into this part of Istanbul. And having heard all the traumatic stories from the Uyghurs, hearing Chinese in a restaurant really surprised me. The place with the Chinese tourists was run by an Uyghur woman from Uzbekistan. Her sons, who were both fluent in Russian, found Russian customers in Aksaray and Laleli, and one Uyghur girl who spoke Chinese and worked as translator and tour guide brought Chinese tourists to the restaurant. To my surprise the other Uyghur guests didn't seem to bother.

It wasn't easy to obtain information since some of the restaurants employed waiters and scullions illegally and were quite slack with tax issues, but as far as I could see most of the owners had come to Turkey within the last three to eight years. They were Uyghurs from different parts of Central Asia. Some were Uyghurs from Uzbekistan, one was from Kazakhstan, and some came from China. Gaining a livelihood by opening a restaurant is a common strategy of migrant groups (Han 2010). They are usually family-run businesses where the broader family put their savings into the business. They operate these restaurants to make a living addressing a variety of customers depending on their background, their language skills as well as their political orientation. And it appeared as if many of them didn't mind Chinese customers because they hadn't had any bad experiences. The diversity of Uyghur restaurants as a place for socialization for people from Central Asia creates a sense of belonging and political positioning. With the restaurants, a whole range of surrounding businesses like Uyghur butcher's shops and retail dealers selling dietary staples for restaurants, as well as for private households opened up and became more visible in the public domain. Uyghur butchers deliver to some of the Uyghur restaurants in Zeytinburnu and supply the local Uyghur population with meat.



Figure 39. Uyghur butcher in Zeytinburnu. (Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

Many of the Turkey-born Uyghurs can't read the Uyghur script. With the small population in Zeytinburnu there was no need to put up Uyghur signs, but with the growing community, the Uyghur population in Zeytinburnu probably doubled, and more and more Uyghur signs have become visible in public spaces. In this way the Uyghur script has found its way into the public sphere of Istanbul.

Equally interesting, certain Uyghur restaurants are now part of international gastronomy in Istanbul and have also found their way into Turkish and English gastronomy blogs.¹⁷⁵ They certainly add another layer of internationality to the world of cuisines in Istanbul and place Uyghur food on the food map. And it will certainly provide space for the political debates that we can expect from the growing Uyghur community in Turkey.

¹⁷⁵ See for example Vedat Milor. He is a Turkish academic as well as food and wine critic who also has his own TV food show, <http://www.vedatmilor.com/istanbulda-uygur-lezzeti/> last accessed February 2017. And for an English speaking blog see <http://culinarybackstreets.com/cities-category/istanbul/2014/turkistan-uygur-lokantasi/> last accessed February 2017.



Figure 40. Uyghur real estate agent and telecommunication retail shop in Zeytinburnu 2015.
(Photograph by Tomas Wilkoszewski)

Conclusion

Of course, I believe that I will see an independent East Turkistan. Nobody has guessed that the Soviet Union would fall apart and now we are seeing Turkic speaking republics in Central Asia. If I wouldn't believe in it, I would not be struggling for liberation.

I believe that China, as it is today, is going to collapse one day, and I do believe that we [the East Turkistanis] will reach independence, but I definitely don't think that is going to be the East Turkistanis who will achieve that.

The East Turkistanis in Turkey unite in their belief that they will have a liberated and independent nation state some day in the future. What disunites my interviewees is how this will be accomplished. They were also in disagreement on how to name a potential country if East Turkistan gains independence. One group opting for East Turkistan, another, smaller group supporting the term Uyghuristan, stressing the importance of having a country carrying their distinct ethnic name. The usage of ethnic terms is based on a positionality. As I have shown, the predominant majority of people used the term East Turkistani. The term Uyghur is not as widely used and has been used in contexts where further distinction was needed. As far as I could see, the immigrants who arrived recently are using the term Uyghur. One man told me, that the usage of East Turkistan and East Turkistani was forbidden in China. That might have led to more broader use of the term Uyghur.

The failure of uniting all East Turkistanis is a common discourse. 'Even though we are facing ethnic extinction we are caught up in internal struggles. Which group has liberated itself without forming an alliance?', was a common response to questions concerning the future of the Cause. The discourse was dominated by the question of the perfect leader. In the perception of the East Turkistanis in Turkey Isa Yusuf Alptekin set the standard with his selfless activism and exemplary qualities during the emigration and the search for a host country. His devotion to the Cause to an extent that it became his life is the reference that successors are judged against. Although heavily supported and promoted by Isa's son Erkin Alptekin and the President of the Doğu Türkistan Kültür ve Dayanışma Derneği Seyit Tümtürk (who is also the Vice President of the World Uyghur Congress) the current President of the World Uyghur Congress Rebiya Kadeer does not get the recognition from everyone in Turkey. Where the East Turkistanis praised Isa Yusuf for giving priority to the Cause, they criticise Rebiya Kadeer for giving too much prominence to herself.

One interviewee affiliated with pan-Turkic groups summarized his position,

Isa never said “I will take care of this or I will solve that”, he always said, “we will solve this”, he always included the people and he never showed himself as above the Cause. Rebiya Kadeer is the opposite; she thinks she is in the centre of all of this. She is a megalomaniac

This perception of her is mostly based on videos my interviewees watched. She can't address the East Turkistanis in Turkey personally, the Turkish Government still refuses her entry due to political pressure from China. But one sentence from her book *Dragon Fighter* that has also been translated into Turkish gave me an idea why people might see her as a megalomaniac. She writes, ‘I want to be the mother of all Uyghurs, the medicine for their ills, the cloth with which they dry their tears, and the cloak to protect them from the rain’ (Kadeer and Cavelius 2009, 4). This sentence feeds the East Turkistanis’ criticism that she is too self-centred. But the critique goes beyond her personality. Some East Turkistanis, especially those with a heavy pan-Turkic background think that the shift away from Turkey to Munich and Washington DC was a mistake. They perceive her as an American marionette based on the latest developments that have left pan-Turkic ideas out of the internationalisation of the Cause. One interviewee in Munich said in response to a question I asked considering the criticism from Turkey

as far as I am concerned she is the face of the Cause and less of a leader, the Congress comprise of Uyghur groups from all over the world, it's not possible to speak about one leader, we have an elected president. She is the East Turkistanis’ Dalai Lama and she is a woman. The West didn't expect this from a Muslim group. We need a person who is recognizable worldwide. We have to gain the public opinion and I think she is perfect for this.¹⁷⁶

As far as I could see, the East Turkistanis in Kayseri are affirmative of Rebiya Kadeer. The president of the association has been promoting her ideas, emphasizing that she has united the Uyghurs in the world. He remarked, with a reference to Isa Yusuf's devotion, that she has sacrificed a lot despite the pressure from China,

even her children who spent years and years in jail. To the dislike of some of the old self-enclosed pan-Turkic we have to see that her sphere of influence is much broader. She reaches organizations in the Western world we can't even dream of.

In the interviews with political activists in Istanbul there was a subtle, but noticeable dislike that the President of the World Uyghur Congress is someone who is not coming from the community in Turkey. The shift to Germany – although East Turkistanis from Turkey play a

¹⁷⁶ The Dalai Lama has written the introduction to her book (Kadeer and Cavelius 2009).

central role in Germany – has been perceived as another blow to the importance of Turkey. That is hard to accept for quite a number of people. Having lost its importance, some are worried that pan-Turkic ideas won't find their way into the conceptual grounding of the Cause. With money coming from other sources, pan-Turkism might sink into oblivion.

My fieldwork has shown that the debates in Turkey go beyond the discussions about the right leader. Having attended lots of political meetings, I think it's a question of accepting contesting political ideas. The efforts of pan-Turkic groups to maintain the Cause within the context of a greater Turkistan do not meet the political expectations of many East Turkistanis in Turkey anymore. Negotiating issues of national identity does not only occur vis-a-vis with the Chinese state, but also within their own community. The political aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union is characterized by a heavy disillusionment. And in addition, the developing Turkish-Sino relations – portrayed by many interviewees as a betrayal has turned pan-Turkic ideas to a nostalgic relic of a past era, that is still mentioned and referred to – but they don't form the main pillow of the Cause anymore. The politically active East Turkistanis in this regard show a high sense of positionality. Pan-Turkism belonging to a specific historical context is still addressed in Turkey (according to the audience), but the changing context is reflected in the efforts to position the Cause in a more complex debate that breaks up the strict objective of full liberation from China and cooperation into Turkistan. Questions of human rights, citizen rights, and anti-discrimination are discussed in order to achieve better political conditions for the East Turkistanis in China.

In these internal debates about leadership there are groups in Turkey, like the Maarif association who are placing the Cause on religious grounds. In one of the few interviews I was able to conduct with them, one man said 'Islam guides us, we don't need a leader.' At one point in the same interview he described his perspective on the Cause's goals as the choice between independence and death (*ya istiklal, ya ölüm*). This doesn't leave a lot of space for negotiations. The cooperation between the other groups and Maarif is kept to a minimum. In the eyes of some East Turkistanis the emphasis on pan-Turkism led to a neglect of religion that was filled by groups like Maarif that placed Islam in the core of their activism. And this group seem to attract more and more people especially from the Uyghurs who have arrived recently in Turkey.

The refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants who came from Malaysia and Thailand clearly identify objectives of the Cause based on their Muslim identity. In the few interviews they narrated, they expressed that their distress was caused by limits of religious freedom imposed

by the Chinese. With the financial support and religious backing they are providing, I can see that Maarif will gain supporters from this group of Uyghurs.

But we have to take into consideration that processes of adapting, recovering and finding new paths of recovery have their particularities. In this thesis I have shown how the East Turkistanis' experience has shaped their political identities, both individually and collectively. I have shown how Isa Yusuf Alptekin's formative years in Soviet Central Asia brought him into contact with pan-Turkic ideas that found continuation in pan-Turkic circles in Turkey. I have also discovered how the East Turkistanis surprisingly wanted to migrate to Saudi Arabia or Egypt. Their idea of an ideal host country was rather based on their religious identity than on their Turkic identity. Turkey wasn't their first choice, but it was the country that took them, based on an imagined common ancestry that formed the discourses in the first two decades of the Republic of Turkey, and based on an anti-communism that gained popularity in the 1950s.

Pan-Turkic groups embraced the immigrants who came in the 1950s and 1960s with an ideological welcome gift and designated identity. They were acted upon as if they were pure victims and had to perpetually narrate this in order to promote the Cause. I argue that this political environment combined with their traumatic experiences led to the formation of a community of suffering that wasn't able to mourn the losses. The unfinished mourning appeared in heavy yearning and an ongoing state of nostalgia that is characteristic of diaspora groups.

The main instrumentality for human beings making their lives is society. And as I have shown, sometimes there is a dialectic tension between what is imagined and how things are experienced. The East Turkistanis who managed to emigrate on two different 'officially proven' identities, first as Afghans from China, then as Turks from Afghanistan came into an environment that was narrated as very similar. And the East Turkistanis embraced the given discourse on Turkishness, but felt alienated at times and had to adjust. I have described the East Turkistanis' adjustments taking into account the experiences and actions of the individual despite the official narration that was based on imagined similarities and gratitude towards Turkey.

Within these adjustments and processes of recovering intergenerational differences appeared, based on the contradiction of the transmitted traumata from the parents and the perception of the children.

The younger generation challenged the discourse as victims and stateless people, and reflected their own experience, emotions and relationship with the host society. They became an active and creative subject rather than just an object. This generation developed strategies to cope

with the legacy of survivor's guilt. In some cases they became susceptible to ultra-nationalist groups, in other cases they developed an understanding of the political processes that don't find political representation in the East Turkistani groups in Turkey.

We can see that the political activism and its objectives can be identified around the concepts: of the territorial pan-Turkism based on a common Turkic genealogy and greater Turkistan; of the ethno-nationalist approach, that focuses on a decisive Uyghur nationalism that is taking shape with a good grounding in pan-Turkism; of religion through the one approach that clearly emphasises Islam as the common ground. The centre of the East Turkistan Cause is Germany now, with many of its activists having spent their formative years in Turkey. But their political work is certainly shaped by the time they have spent in Germany; one interviewee described his modification in Germany,

Munich definitely shaped my ideas and my approach. In Turkey I hardly thought of meeting with Chinese dissidents or Tibetans. I mean, there weren't any living in China, but we were also only focusing on Turks and the Turkic World. It was all about Turkistan, but now I see that there are smaller steps we have to take. Autonomy and minority rights are more important now.

He also mentions differences with some Turkish groups,

they [East Turkistanis in Turkey] think we are not strict enough in our demands, but I want my own country, why don't we have a country like the Kazakhs and Uzbeks. But to achieve that we have to start with smaller political steps.

I have shown how the changing political discourses find its way into the domain of everyday life. With the writing of a cookbook a woman found one way to share her experience and account of how she adjusted to her life in Turkey. She became a subject not only of the emerging Uyghur ethno-nationalism but also of the subject of a creative process. She created a (Yarkent based) national cuisine before the nation state has been created.

The fluidity of the migrants' lives provides an abundance of East Turkistani presence in Turkey. The experience of the Uyghurs who arrived recently is similar in terms of loss and hardships, but the changing political conditions in China as well as the personal experiences with the host society, with the East Turkistanis in Kayseri who might see them as radicals and try to give them a different identity, will certainly end up in adaptation processes that follow different paths.

The older East Turkistanis are worried about the fact that the young don't care about the Cause anymore. I cannot confirm that from my interviews, the mere fact that they don't place it in pan-Turkic contexts doesn't make it less valid. Among the young there is a strong interest in East Turkistan, but also in China. This interest definitely stems partly from their

parents, but some young Uyghurs see themselves as being a bridge between China and Turkey. Some voiced interest in doing business, some just in travelling. That is not very unusual, but there is ambivalence by the community towards Uyghurs who are doing business with China. They were seen as somehow losing their national path, not serving the national Cause. As far as I could see this changed when they secretly started to support the foundation or association. And there are a few East Turkistanis who don't want to be active in the foundations or associations in Turkey, thinking that they are harming Uyghur-Chinese relations.

For the East Turkistanis both places, East Turkistan and Turkey, were home. The terms *anayurt* and *atayurt*, motherland and fatherland, expressed an affinity and belonging to both places. My interviewees narrated that they wish to return, but so far I haven't heard of returnees. The present situation in China certainly makes the East Turkistanis prefer to stay in Turkey.

Despite the hardships every migration entrains, questions of exile hardly came up. Of course, I could see that East Turkistan was home to them, their *memleket*, their homeland, but Turkey wasn't perceived as a place of exile. Home wasn't some kind of essence for them that could be defined in a few words. They definitely felt at home in the Turkish world, considering their experience during the immigration it doesn't come as a surprise. The East Turkistanis have a lived relationship with Turkey, even if it was based on their identity as victims in the beginning. They responded to that and interacted.

It's hard to imagine that Turkey will gain its former importance for the Cause, but I assume that the association in Kayseri will become more important in the next few years. This is because of the strong connections of its president to the World Uyghur Congress, but also due to their efforts of embracing the Uyghurs who came recently, and in 'deradicalizing' them. Their response to a critical situation – Uyghurs being stranded and imprisoned in Thailand and Malaysia facing deportation – is by some East Turkistanis only seen as an act of creating a political image. From my interviews I can say that most of the immigrants were very happy that there was someone who took care of them, legally as well as just as morally.

At the moment there is little for Uyghurs to be too optimistic about, especially in China. Internally we will see, the East Turkistan Cause in Turkey has left the realms of being a cause of Turkishness (*Türklük Davası*) and has entered a new stage of complex discussions that address a political diversity taking into account the different experiences, perceptions and objectives. The uniqueness of certain ways of experience and the uniqueness of the scattered Uyghur communities might transform a handicap into an advantage. The pan-Turkic

discourse of perpetual narration of a victimhood combined with aspirations of a strong leadership hasn't facilitated political debates according to the changing political contexts and is therefore becoming slowly a nostalgic and anachronistic accessory of East Turkistani existence in Turkey. There is a shift towards an ethno-nationalism emphasizing the Uyghurness of the Cause.

In our first interview Erkin Alptekin said,

Our father raised us with four maxims: as an East Turkestani we should fight for the East Turkistan Cause. As a Turk we should fight for the cause of Turkishness. As a Muslim we should fight for the cause of Muslims and as human we should fight for the cause of humanity!

Towards the end of my fieldwork, when I was about to leave for Sydney, at our final meeting he said 'I think the order of the maxims has definitely changed for us.'

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Appendix (pages 243-244) removed from Open Access version as they may contain sensitive/confidential content.