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INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND
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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE
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THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN UZBEKISTAN:
IMPERIAL, SOVIET AND POST SOVIET POLICIES

MASTER'S THESIS

SAIDAKHROR MAKHSUDOV

İSTANBUL – 2025

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THESIS ADVISOR: PROF. DR. Zafer ÇELER

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ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

The defence date of the thesis titled “THE FORMATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY IN UZBEKISTAN: IMPERIAL, SOVIET AND POST SOVIET POLICIES” prepared by SAIDAKHROR MAKHSUDOV was made on 24.06.2025. It was accepted as the Master’s Thesis of the Department of POLITICAL SCIENCES & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS of the Graduate Education Institute of Istanbul Kent University by majority vote by the jury given below.

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DECLARATION

I declare that scientific ethics rules have been followed in writing this thesis, that in case of utilisation of the works of others, references have been made in accordance with scientific norms, that no falsification has been made in the data used, and that no part of the thesis has been presented as another thesis study at this university or another university.

SAIDAKHROR MAKHSUDOV

24.06.2025



PREFACE

I want to express my sincere gratitude and respect to my advisor, Prof. Dr. Zafer ÇELER, who has followed my work meticulously by embracing it during the writing phase of this thesis, for his valuable contributions and efforts. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zafer Çeler has been with me in every sense throughout the whole process and has never withheld his support and contributions. During the defence exam, the jury members made valuable contributions to finalising my work. On this occasion, I would like to thank all my professors and relatives who helped me during the final reading of my thesis. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my mother and family, whose efforts I will never be able to repay for helping me reach this day.

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ABBREVIATIONS

SADUM : Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia (Sredneaziatskoe Dukhovnoe Upravlenie Musulman)

SSR : Soviet Socialist Republic

USSR : Union of Soviet Socialist Republics



ABSTRACT

Istanbul Kent University Postgraduate Education Institute

The Formation Of National Identity In Uzbekistan: Imperial, Soviet And Post Soviet Policies

Saidakhror Makhsudov

Master Thesis

Political Science and Public Administration/Political Science and International Relations

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This master's thesis examines the historical processes that have shaped Uzbekistan's national identity, tracing its evolution from Soviet times to independence. The study begins with theoretical foundations and analyses nationalism through primordialist, modernist (Gellner, Anderson), ethnosimvolistic (Smith), and postcolonial approaches. After that, the identity policy of Tsarist Russia in Turkestan is examined, including Russification, religious control, and cultural resistance by the Jadids.

The Soviet period is analysed through the collapse of the Empire, the national policies of the Bolsheviks, and the strategy of "korenization" (localisation), which initially promoted local identity but later strengthened ideological subordination. During the national-territorial delimitation of 1924, the Soviet creation of Uzbekistan was presented as a top-down construction based on control and classification. Central concepts such as "friendship of peoples" and "socialist patriotism" served to integrate ethnic forms into a centrally controlled Soviet self.

Recent chapters explore post-independence nation-building processes. In a context where a popular nationalist movement did not exist, the ruling elite utilised nationalism for a new purpose to ensure its legitimacy. This included rewriting history, promoting the Uzbek language and Islamic heritage, and institutionalising selective memory. While formal rhetoric emphasised civic solidarity, nation-building often reinforced the dominance of ethnic Uzbeks and opposed inclusive pluralism.

In general, the dissertation emphasises that the national self of Uzbekistan is constructed through a combination of Soviet heritage and authoritarian rule, resulting in a hybrid, state-oriented self characterised by stability, centralisation, and ideological conformity.

Keywords: National identity, Soviet nationality policy, Post-Soviet Uzbekistan, Nation-building, Jadidism, Russification, Korenizatsiya, Invented traditions, Authoritarian secularism, Postcolonial nationalism



ÖZET

İstanbul Kent Üniversitesi Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü

**Özbekistan’da Ulusal Kimliğin Oluşumu: İmparatorluk, Sovyet ve Sovyet Sonrası
Politikalar**

Saidakhror Makhsudov

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Bu yüksek lisans tezi, Özbekistan’ın ulusal kimliğini şekillendiren tarihsel süreçleri incelemekte ve kimliğin Sovyet döneminden bağımsızlığa kadar olan evrimini analiz etmektedir. Çalışma, kuramsal temellerle başlayarak milliyetçiliği primordialist, modernist (Gellner, Anderson), etnosimvolist (Smith) ve postkolonyal yaklaşımlar üzerinden değerlendirmektedir.

Ardından, Çarlık Rusyası’nın Türkistan’daki kimlik politikaları ele alınmakta; bu çerçevede Ruslaştırma, dini kontrol ve Cedidcilerin kültürel direnişi incelenmektedir.

Sovyet dönemi ise imparatorluğun çöküşü, Bolşeviklerin ulusal politikaları ve başlangıçta yerel kimliği teşvik eden ancak sonrasında ideolojik bağımlılığı pekiştiren "korenizatsiya" (yerelleştirme) stratejisi üzerinden analiz edilmektedir. 1924’teki ulusal-territoryal sınırlama sırasında, Sovyetlerin Özbekistan’ı yaratma süreci yukarıdan aşağıya bir inşa olarak, kontrol ve sınıflandırmaya dayalı biçimde sunulmuştur. “Halkların dostluğu” ve “sosyalist yurtseverlik” gibi merkezi kavramlar, etnik biçimleri merkezi denetim altındaki Sovyet benliğine entegre etmeyi amaçlamıştır.

Tezin son bölümleri, bağımsızlık sonrası ulus inşa süreçlerini ele almaktadır. Popüler bir milliyetçi hareketin bulunmadığı bir bağlamda, yönetici elit meşruiyetini sağlamak amacıyla milliyetçiliği yeni bir araç olarak kullanmıştır. Bu süreçte tarih yeniden yazılmış, Özbek dili ve İslam mirası öne çıkarılmış, seçici hafıza kurumsallaştırılmıştır. Resmî söylem vatandaşlık temelli dayanışmayı vurgulasa da, ulus inşası çoğunlukla etnik Özbeklerin hâkimiyetini pekiştirmiş ve kapsayıcı çoğulculuğa karşıt bir yön izlemiştir.

Genel olarak tez, Özbekistan'ın ulusal benliğinin Sovyet mirası ile otoriter yönetimin birleşimi sonucu oluştuğunu; bu kimliğin istikrar, merkezileşme ve ideolojik uyumla karakterize edilen hibrit, devlet odaklı bir yapı olduğunu vurgulamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ulusal kimlik, Sovyet milliyet politikası, Sovyet sonrası Özbekistan, Ulus inşası, Ceditcilik, Ruslaştırma, Korenizatsiya, İcat edilmiş gelenekler, Otoriter sekülerizm, Postkolonyal milliyetçilik



INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The formation and development of national identity in Uzbekistan is the result of the complex interaction of historical events, imperial policies, and post-independence state-building processes. Located in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan has been the centre of attention of major empires for centuries due to its geopolitical significance, rich natural resources, and climate. As a result, the process of forming the country's identity primarily occurred under the rule of external forces, first and foremost, the Russian Empire, and then the Soviet Union.

For many countries, the path to nationhood has developed in a clear and consistent direction; however, in the case of Uzbekistan, this process was much more challenging. In it, ethnic relations of the pre-modern era, imperial classifications, experiments conducted through Soviet ideology, and political needs after independence are closely intertwined.

This dissertation precisely examines this historical complexity, analysing how the Uzbek national identity was formed from the period of Tsarist Russia at the end of the 19th century through the rule of the Soviet Union and finally the initial years following independence.

Relevance

The issue of national identity in Uzbekistan is regarded as extremely important, both historically and politically. Historically, the integration of Central Asia into the Russian Empire marked a significant turning point in the region's history, leading to profound changes in the formation of the local population's identity. Initially, religious or all-Russian-based identities were prioritised; however, a more specific separation policy based on "national" names was later reinforced. In particular, the Soviet national-territorial delimitation policy of the 1920s officially established ethnic categories such as "Uzbek" within administrative structures, thereby institutionalising them. This drastically altered the social and political structure of the region as a whole.

From a political standpoint, the recognition of Uzbek national identity serves as a key source of legitimacy for the modern state. In the years following independence, the political elite actively reinterpreted historical figures, language policies, and cultural symbols to bolster national unity and identity, utilising them to substantiate state power.

Additionally, Uzbekistan's path to independence differs from the experiences of other post-Soviet or post-colonial states. Independence in 1991 was not the result of either a mass national

movement or intense opposition pressure. Instead, the process was dominated by the elites formed in that system, following the weakening of the Soviet Central Power. It was the duration of these elites that had a significant impact on the shape of the new Uzbek state and its national identity policy. Therefore, the construction of the national identity in Uzbekistan is a state-dominated process, a situation that distinguishes it from many other countries.

The study of national identity remains significant today, particularly within the context of authoritarian rule. Under Islam Karimov's leadership, the state sought to maintain political stability by clearly defining and steering national identity. In doing so, the state controlled elements such as history, language, and religion, interpreting them in a manner that suited its needs. This approach restricted the expression of democratic values and diverse views. Consequently, the policy of national identity, executed within the framework of an authoritarian system, created a dissonance between state control and the individual's authentic self in society.

The degree of study and gaps in the literature

The scope of previous research on the issue of national identity in Uzbekistan is extensive, particularly in aspects related to politics and processes during the Tsarist Russian and Soviet eras. Scholars such as Adib Khalid, Terry Martin, and Edward Allworth have made significant contributions to the subject. They thoroughly analysed the policies of Tsarist Russia aimed at weakening and Russifying the population's identity in the Turkestan region, as well as the actions of cultural assimilation. The role of the Jadid movement in awakening national consciousness and shaping modern culture is also widely acknowledged.

Soviet-era policies, including the establishment of the Uzbek SSR through the national-territorial delimitation of the 1920s, issues of "people's friendship", socialist patriotism, language policy, culture and religious control, have received special scientific attention. These processes gave rise to a variety of approaches, on the one hand denouncing the Soviet Union as an “affirmative action empire” — that is, a nation-rights state, and on the other hand as a means of centralized control and ideological control. At the same time, post-Independence research on nationality policies focused primarily on issues of elite continuity, state-dominated national ideology, historical images, and reinterpretation of cultural symbols.

Nevertheless, some theoretical and empirical gaps remain in the literature. In particular, it has not been sufficiently studied how ideological changes are perceived at the level of ordinary citizens, how people understand, oppose or adapt to the state-defined self. In particular, the formation of the religious self within the context of secular regimes, as well as the conflicts between citizenship and ethnic-based nationalism, warrants a more thorough analysis.

Additionally, the discrepancy between the state's selective rewriting of history and the ordinary people's memories and informal narratives has not yet been sufficiently studied. These situations help to deepen our understanding of how the national self is formed and illuminate the internal complexities of modern Uzbek society.

Theoretical foundations

Several key approaches to nationalist theory in the study of national identity in Uzbekistan serve as an important methodological foundation. Each theory attempts to explain this complex concept from different perspectives. The primordialist approach interprets nations as ancient, natural communities. According to it, nations are enduring units with fundamental roots, such as a common ancestor, language, culture, or religion. Although this approach has faced significant criticism in modern academia, it can be observed in post-Soviet Uzbekistan that it has been employed to legitimise the current political order by emphasising historical heritage and "great ancestors." It manifests itself as a form of primordialist approach supported by the state (Smith, 1986; Hobsbawm, 1992).

Modernist theories, on the other hand, view nations as a product of modernity. Ernest Gellner links nationalism to the needs of industrial society, in which a single, standardised "high culture" acts as a unifying tool for the state (Gellner, 1983). Benedict Anderson, however, calls the nation an "imagined political community", explaining that its formation takes place through the media, the education system, and shared memory (Anderson, 2006). These theories are particularly suitable for the analysis of political projects carried out in Soviet times under the slogan "National form, socialist content". The nation is seen here as a concept established, governed by the state and transmitted through various means.

John Breuilly's interpretation of nationalism as a means of achieving political power is also helpful in understanding aspects related to the political nature of post-independence nation-building in Uzbekistan. This approach is fundamental to the state leadership's efforts to promote national unity through the use of national symbols, historical heroes, and language policies (Breuilly, 1993).

Anthony Smith's ethnosymbolic theory, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of historical myths, collective memory, and cultural symbols that existed earlier in the formation of nations. This approach enables an analysis of how the symbols of the pre-Soviet era (such as Amir Temur or Jadids) were reinterpreted in the construction of national identity in Uzbekistan (Smith, 1991).

Postcolonial theories, notably the approach of Partha Chatterjee, argue that the nationalistic models developed in the West do not always correspond to societies under colonisation. They explain how the formation of the national self occurs in local contexts, through the struggle with colonial heritage and external ideologies. Taking Uzbekistan as an example, this theory selects certain aspects of Soviet ideology, adapts them to the national discourse, and elucidates the strategies employed by Uzbek elites in constructing a new identity (Chatterjee, 1993; Khalid, 2015).

In general, the joint application of these theories—in particular, postcolonial views based on Constructivist and ethnosymbolic approaches—emerges as the most suitable method for analysing the state of Uzbekistan. While Anderson and Gellner's theories clarify the role of structure and institutions, Smith's model illuminates historical and cultural foundations, and the postcolonial approach addresses Indigenous perspectives formed in response to imperial legacies. Based on these approaches, it can be understood that Uzbek national identity is neither entirely newly created nor merely a complex social construct inherited from the past, but rather shaped by the interaction of historical, political, and cultural factors.

Research questions and objectives

Based on the relevance of the topic put forward in this study and the gaps that exist in the literature, the following main questions are posed regarding the process of formation of the national identity in Uzbekistan:

- How did Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union attempt to establish a collective identity in Turkestan and Uzbekistan through their national policies? What outcomes, including unforeseen consequences, arose from these policies?
- How did the local intelligentsia and elites — specifically the Jadid movement and later the post-independence political leadership — react to these policies? Have they adapted to or opposed them? And how did they contribute to the formation of Uzbek national identity in this process?
- What continuities and discontinuities existed in national identity politics during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods?
- How did the government of independent Uzbekistan, while promoting a unified national identity, take into account the ethnic and religious diversity of the region or manage such conflicts?

On this basis, the study sets the following goals:

- Analysis of the ideological foundations and practical aspects of the national policy of Tsarist Russia in Turkestan, especially the study of how these policies affected existing socio-cultural identities.
- The research explores how the Soviet regime understood and applied the concepts of 'nation,' 'nationality,' and 'people,' and analyses the formation of the Uzbek SSR through national-territorial delimitation, along with its policies on language, culture, and religion.
- Determining what strategies and tools the state has used to shape national identity in post-independence Uzbekistan, including the reinterpretation of history, national symbols, language policy, and control over religion.
- Comparison of the differences and similarities of the national identity policy in different periods (Tsarist, Soviet, independence), analysis of how the roles between the state and society have changed.
- Assessment of how the post-Soviet nation-building project, which was managed by the state in Uzbekistan, influenced the opportunities for democratic development and inclusion of diversity in society.

Scope and structure of research

The study's time frame commences with the conquest of Turkestan by Tsarist Russia in the 19th century. The focus centres on national policies that have been pursued since the mid-19th century. Following this, encompassing the entire Soviet period, the analysis will extend into the early years after independence, up until approximately the early 2000s.

The thematic circle centres on the formation and transformation of national identity. Special attention is given to the theoretical foundations, state policies of various political periods (Tsarist, Soviet, and independent Uzbekistan), as well as factors influencing this process, including language, religion, history, culture, and national symbols.

The dissertation is structured as follows:

- Chapter 1 (Introduction) — the relevance of the topic, a review of literature, provides basic questions, goals, methodology and structure.
- Chapter 2 will be devoted to the theoretical foundations of the concept of national identity. It discusses key approaches, including primordialism, modernism, ethnosymbolism, and postcolonialism.

- Chapter 3 analyses the initial formation of the national self through national politics, local social structures, and the Jadid movement during the Tsarist era.
- Chapter 4 examines the influence of concepts such as the "invention" of the nation, delimitation policy, cultural and religious policies, language reform, and "people's friendship" on national identity in Soviet times.
- Chapter 5 examines the politics of nation-building in independent Uzbekistan, analysing the continuity of Soviet elites, the national discourse led by the state, the use of historical figures and symbols, and the concept of "invented traditions".
- The conclusion summarises the main findings and links them to the processes of nation-building in post-imperial, authoritarian conditions, leading to broader theoretical findings.

Methodology

This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating the methodological frameworks of political science, history, sociology, and cultural studies. Historical and comparative analysis serve as the primary method. Through this approach, the study aims to explore how the national self is formed across different periods and political contexts.

The theoretical foundation of the study draws upon existing scholarly perspectives and debates surrounding nationalism. In this regard, secondary sources — including theories of nationalism, monographs on the national policies of Uzbekistan and Central Asia, scientific articles, and analytical reports from international organisations — were analysed as the primary sources.

As primary sources, however, historical documents (such as government decisions, decrees, and circulars) as well as literary works reflecting the ideological atmosphere of their time (including Alvido of a'zam Hoshimi and the novel *Fatherland*) are cited. These sources serve to understand the formal and informal interpretations of the national self, as well as the echoes of political decisions in society.

The study compares the official goals and practical means of public policy with the assessments given in the scientific literature. Through this, the contradictions between public policy and real experiences, as well as alternative approaches in society (including memories and identities that contrast with formal historical narratives), are analysed.

This methodological approach demonstrates that national identity in Uzbekistan is not only a product of state policy but also a dynamic social process formed through the interaction of historical conditions, cultural heritage, and individual experiences.

CHAPTER 1: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

1.1 Theoretical Approaches to Nation and National Identity

Although the concept of "nation" is at the centre of modern politics, it remains one of the most controversial and difficult to grasp in the social sciences. Unlike the state, which institutional and territorial criteria can define, a nation is shaped by historical narratives, cultural symbols, political aspirations, and subjective self-awareness—all of which complicate a simple classification. This conceptual ambiguity gave rise to many, often contradictory, theoretical approaches to nationalism. Primordialist theories view nations as natural, ancient communities rooted in common ancestors and shared cultural foundations. At the same time, modernist views emphasise that nations are a product of modernity, closely related to industrialisation, state-building, and mass communication. Ethnosymbolist thinkers oppose these two trends, pointing to the significance of historical myths and collective memories inherited from pre-modern ethnic communities. At the same time, postcolonial scholars question the commonality of Western models, emphasising how nationalist movements in non-Western societies adapt and change dominant paradigms. This chapter examines these competing viewpoints, outlines their main arguments and controversial aspects, while identifying the theoretical problems that continue to shape the field. Instead of approving a single definition, the goal is to study how different disciplinary approaches—sociological, political, anthropological, and philosophical—shape and debate a nation as both an idea and a reality.

1.2 The main difficulties and controversies in defining the concept of "nation"

Defining the term "nation" is a complex task (Adamová & Lojek, n.d.). In contrast to the definition of a state, a state is typically understood as a territorial unit with sovereign power within clearly defined boundaries, whereas a nation is not (Gellner, 1993). Scientists emphasise that there is no single "scientific definition" (Smith, 2010) and argue that the meaning of nationalism is variable, changing over time, and varies depending on culture, values, language, and geographical conditions (Anderson, 1983). The difficulty in identifying this is also confirmed by the long-standing debates on the explanation of nationalism, which have turned out to be very challenging to identify and analyse (Hobsbawm, 1990). Some consider this definitional uncertainty to be a sign that research in the field is not continuous (Kohn, 1944). Moreover, scholars often differ radically in their definition methods, especially in the criteria

regarding who should be included in the concept of a nation, for example, whether the majority of the population should participate (Smith, 2010).

One of the central debates is whether the nation is modern or ancient. While some viewpoints consider a nation a modern phenomenon, a product of its modern development, such as capitalism, bureaucracy, and secular exploitation (Gellner, 1993), others argue that it is not entirely modern and that the culture and identity of pre-modern eras have been preserved and transformed (Smith, 2010). The question of whether nations existed in some form before the modern era (perennialism) or whether they are entirely products of modernity (modernism) is one of the primary contradictions in the field (Hobsbawm, 1990). Those occupying the middle position assume a certain continuity between pre-modern ethnic units and modern nations (Anderson, 1983).

Another fundamental difficulty is the relationship between nationality and ethnic origin. Some viewpoints connect them closely, viewing the nation as an ethnic community or a self-aware ethnic group (Smith, 2010). Others, however, argue that equating ethnic origin with nationalism raises questions and overlooks the diversity within nations or the artificiality of ethnic origins (Kohn, 1944). The distinction between an ethnic community (ethnie) and a nation, as well as the relationship between ethnic identity and nationalism, is also a point of discussion (Gellner, 1993).

Additionally, identifying a nation involves understanding its diverse characteristics. Is it a cultural community primarily linked to origin, history, and language, or a political community based on territory, citizenship, and laws (Smith, 2010)? This dual situation, often presented as a combination of concepts of citizenship and ethnicity, complicates attempts to provide a single definition (Gellner, 1993). The main elements also include collective consciousness and a sense of subjective belonging or solidarity among members, which is challenging to capture in an objective definition (Anderson, 1983).

1.3 Approaches of different scientific disciplines

Various social sciences study the concept of the nation, each offering its perspective: Sociology approaches a nation as a social phenomenon and seeks sociological definitions (Smith, 2010). Sociologists analyse the social definition of a nation, its form as a community, and the individual's relationship with this community (Gellner, 1993). They can study the role of shared heritage, solidarity, culture, and consciousness, often using empirical methods such as statistics

(Hobsbawm, 1990). Sociological theories may focus on the social conditions that enable national identity and community to emerge and survive (Anderson, 1983).

Political science often focuses on the political principle that political and national unity should correspond (Kohn, 1944). Political scientists study a nation in connection with the state, state power, and political movements (Gellner, 1993). They analyse nationalism as a political doctrine, its goals (especially achieving and preserving the state) and its influence on interstate order and political conflicts (Smith, 2010). A political approach can view a nation primarily as a category of practice, an institutional form, or a random political event (Kohn, 1944).

Anthropology approaches a nation and related concepts, such as ethnic origin and tribe, from the perspective of cultural identity, shared norms, and collective self-understanding (Hobsbawm, 1990). Anthropologists can study how groups define themselves, their artistic expressions, cognitive schemes, and discursive frameworks (Gellner, 1993). Some anthropological perspectives, such as Clifford Girtz's, influenced debates about nations' "primary" character, focusing on cultural primordialism (Anderson, 1983). Benedict Anderson's work, written in an anthropological spirit, describes the nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson, 1983).

Philosophy deals with the nation by studying its moral, philosophical, and spiritual aspects (Smith, 2010). Philosophers consider the question of whether a nation is an end in itself or a means to achieve other values (Hobsbawm, 1990), analyse the concept of national identity and its connection with moral obligation and activity (Gellner, 1993), assess the compatibility of nationalism with other political ideologies such as liberalism and republicanism (Anderson, 1983), and discuss normative issues such as the right of national self-determination (Kohn, 1944) and the spiritual significance of national identity and its connection with territory (Smith, 2010).

The primary differences in these interdisciplinary directions stem from their respective focuses. Sociologists view a nation as a social structure or community, political scientists as a political unit or goal, anthropologists as a cultural group with a shared identity, and philosophers as a concept that raises moral and spiritual questions about collective life and individual freedom (Hobsbawm, 1990).

1.3.1 The key ingredients of Ernest Renan's definition

According to sources, Ernest Renan proposed an older sociological definition of a nation (Renan, as cited in Smith, 2010). He described it as a spiritual principle created due to two

events (Renan, as cited in Smith, 2010). These are: Joint identification with extensive memory inheritance (Renan, as cited in Smith, 2010). This refers to a common past, collective experiences, and historical narratives that unite people (Anderson, 1983). The desire to live together and form a harmonious community is expressed as consent (Renan, as cited in Smith, 2010). Renan famously described the existence of a nation as a "daily plebiscite," which signifies a constant affirmation of the will to continue an ordinary life (Anderson, 1983). Renan's point of view is often compared with more "objectivist" views that emphasise cultural markers such as language, highlighting the importance of subjective will and consent (Gellner, 1993).

1.3.2 Benedict Anderson's Imagined Community

Benedict Anderson defines a nation as an "imagined political community" (Anderson, 1983). He describes it as being conceived of as "specifically limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1983). In Anderson's understanding, nation and nationalism are "specific cultural artefacts" (Anderson, 1983, Smith, 2010). The concept of an "imagined community" implies that members of a nation, even if they are unaware of most of its members, have a general understanding of their community in their minds (Anderson, 1983). This general perception, facilitated by cultural means, creates a sense of community even among strangers (Anderson, 1983). (63).

1.3.3 Gellner's connection between nation, state, and high culture

According to Ernest Gellner, the nation is fundamentally connected with the era of nationalism, not vice versa (Gellner, 1993). Gellner's theory posits that nationalism is a political principle, and that political unity (the state) and national unity must be mutually compatible (Gellner, 1993). He argues that nations can only be identified from the perspective of the nationalist period (Gellner, 1993). An essential role in Gellner's theory is played by the emergence of "standardised, uniform, centrally supported higher cultures" (Gellner, 1993). In pre-modern, agrarian societies, a cultural gap often existed between the "high culture" of the ruling elite and the diverse "lower cultures" of the masses (Gellner, 1993). However, with the advent of industrial capitalism and modernity, social conditions laid the groundwork for these widespread high cultures (Gellner, 1993). These high cultures, often spreading through standardized education, replace old social structures and serve as a basis for people's voluntary and intense self-identification, making them "natural repositories of political legitimacy" (Gellner, 1993). The correspondence of the state and culture becomes a normative ideal, and deviation from this principle is considered "disgraceful" (Gellner, 1993). Thus, for Gellner, the rise of modern,

standardised high cultures is an integral part of the formation of nations and the principle of nationalism, which allows the state to encompass and express a culturally united population (Gellner, 1993).

1.3.4 Breuilly's definition of nationalism as a political doctrine

John Breuilly defines "nationalism" as a political movement that seeks or implements state power and justifies such actions with nationalistic arguments (Breuilly, 1982). For Breuilly, the nationalist argument is a political doctrine built on three central claims (Breuilly, 1982): There is a nation with a unique and inimitable character (Breuilly, 1982). The interests and values of this nation stand above all other interests and values (Breuilly, 1982). The nation should strive to be as independent as possible, which typically entails achieving political sovereignty (Breuilly, 1982). By defining nationalism as a political doctrine oriented towards state power, Breuilly aims to maintain a precise definition and emphasise the modernity of the phenomenon (Breuilly, 1982). He views nationalism as a response to the growing divide between the modern state and civil society (Breuilly, 1982). He attempts to bridge this gap by presenting the community as both a cultural and political "nation" (Breuilly, 1982).

1.3.5 Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolic approach

Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolic approach focuses on the ethnic roots and foundations of modern nations (Smith, 2010). This approach occupies an intermediate position between perennialism (nations are ancient) and modernism (nations are entirely modern). Smith argues that modern nations are often modified from pre-modern ethnic communities (called "ethnicities") or incorporate their characteristics (Smith, 2009). He emphasises the existence of a certain continuity between the pre-modern "traditional" and modern "industrial" periods, especially in the cultural sphere (Smith, 2009). The ethno-symbolic approach emphasises the vital role of cultural forms of feelings, attitudes, and views, especially those expressed and encoded in myths, memories, values, and symbols (Smith, 1999). These elements, taken from ethnic heritage, are considered adaptable to new conditions (Smith, 1999). According to Smith, these ethnic roots significantly determine the nature and boundaries of modern nationalism and nations (Smith, 2010). Elites trying to build or mobilise the population must respect this ethnic heritage (Smith, 2010). Although nationalism as an ideology and movement is viewed as a thoroughly modern phenomenon, the "modern nation" includes the characteristics of pre-modern ethnicities and has borrowed much from the concept of ethnic origin, which persists in many places (Smith, 2010). Thus, ethno-symbolism examines how existing ethnic groups, with

their own shared myths, memories, and symbols, provide the cultural framework and historical foundation upon which modern nations are constructed (Smith, 2009).

1.4 Key points of contention and disagreement among scholars

Scholars have different opinions on how to understand and study nation and nationalism. One of the main debates between them is the question of whether nations are a product of the modern era or an ancient unity. Modernists, for example, Gellner (1993), interpret nations only as products of industrial society. In their opinion, nationalism does not exist in underdeveloped societies. Opponents of this, perennialists, argue that the concept of a nation has existed since ancient times, only its form and expression have changed.

The ethno-symbolic theory (Smith, 2009), standing between these two approaches, recognizes the contemporary aspects of nations and notes that their historical roots, ethnic memory, and cultural characteristics also play an important role.

Another important issue is related to the essence of the nation. Some scholars see the nation as a naturally formed unit with an inner "original" (essential approach). Others interpret the nation as a socially constructed and "imagined" unit by people (constructivists) (Anderson, 1983). This debate reflects the contradiction between understanding a nation as a natural and rooted phenomenon and viewing it as a construct created through political and social processes (Smith, 2010).

Scientists also disagree on how to define a nation. While some understand national unity based on culture and historical memory, others propose to base it on civic, legal institutions, and political will (Smith, 2010). These differences are often characterized as ethnocultural and civic-political approaches (Anderson, 1983).

In addition, the relationship between the nation and the state is interpreted differently. Some theorists believe that a nation is closely connected with the state, that is, without a state, a nation cannot exist. Others see the nation as an independent community, separate from the state (Breuilly, 1993).

Another reason for theoretical differences is related to the approach of scientists to research. Some emphasize ethnicity, while others focus on political action or cultural expression (Calhoun, 1997). This complicates the direct comparison of theories. Methodological approaches also differ: some rely on causal, some on individual, and some on generalising

(reductionist) approaches (Özkırmı, 2017). Brubaker (2004) takes a critical approach to interpreting nations as rigid and permanent units, referring to this phenomenon as "groupism."

Different theories interpret nationalism in different ways:

Renan (1882) views the nation as a voluntary unit founded on shared memories and the desire for communal living. He refers to the nation as an "everyday plebiscite," describing it as the outcome of the collective will of citizens.

Anderson (1983) interprets the nation as an "imagined community." According to him, even if people do not see the majority in the nation, they imagine themselves as members of one unity through the press and other media.

Gellner (1993) sees nationalism as a necessity of industrial society. According to it, a population with the same language and education was necessary for building strong states. Therefore, he believes that nationalism creates a nation.

Breuilly (1993) sees nationalism as a movement for political power. He emphasizes that the idea of a nation is used to achieve political goals.

Smith (2009) argues that historical memory, myths, and ethnic symbols play an important role in nationalism. He explains that modern leaders use historical symbols and legends to strengthen their nation.

In general, these theories show that nationalism is neither entirely invented nor fully inherited. On the contrary, it is a complex process formed by the combination of imagination, memory, structure, and political forces (Calhoun, 1997; O'zkrımlı, 2017). Therefore, to understand nationalism, it is necessary to jointly analyze cultural, symbolic, and political factors.

1.5 The political nature of a nation and its relation to nationalism and the state

The concept of a nation is inherently political, as it is fundamentally connected to claims of political sovereignty and the desire for a state (Gellner,1999). Nationalism, as a principle, asserts that political unity (state) and national unity (nation) should coincide. This striving for a nation-state is the central driving force of nationalism, both as an ideology and as a movement (Gellner,1999).

The nation serves as the basis of political sovereignty (Gellner,1999). Nationalists argue that the nation is the source of political power, the right and destiny of a nation to achieve or defend its political sovereignty (Gellner,1999). The movement aimed at aligning state borders with

what was considered the nation's borders played a significant role in modern history (Gellner,1999).

Moreover, the definition and boundaries of a nation have frequently been the subject of political debate and contention (Smith1998). Different groups or elites may struggle to define communities and control the formation of attitudes toward state borders, whether physical, human, or cultural . Although seemingly straightforward, the concept of national self-determination raises complex political questions, such as determining the "self" that has the right to self-determination and managing situations involving multiple intermingled national groups (Gellner,1998).

Thus, a nation is not simply a cultural or social entity; its definition and existence are deeply connected with political goals, the struggle for power, and the modern state system (Gellner.1998). Nationalism is a political force that strives to make a nation the basis of political life and state legitimacy (Smith,1998).

1.6 Primordialist theories and modernist views

Primordialist theories of nationalism usually argue that nations are not a recent phenomenon but "natural" units of ancient and even human unification with deep roots (Smith, 1998, 1986). This viewpoint often views nations as politicized ethnocultural communities built on the principle of common origin (Smith,1998; Gellner,1998). Primordialists believe that national feelings and consciousness are fundamental elements of historical phenomena, serving as the basic principles of explanation (Smith,1998). Some versions of primordialism emphasise the biological basis, while others focus on cultural predisposition (Smith, 1998, 1986). They emphasise the "eternal" nature of nations and the power of common, seemingly innate characteristics such as language, religion, territory, and kinship in creating strong feelings of collective belonging (Smith, 1998, 1986).

Modernist views, on the contrary, argue that nations and nationalism are, in essence, products of modern phenomena, such as industrial capitalism, the bureaucratic state, urbanisation, and secularisation (Smith, 1998, 1986). From this point of view, nations are viewed as territorialised political communities or civil communities composed of legally equal citizens within defined geographical boundaries (Smith, 1998, 1986). Modernists believe that nations are not ancient or natural, but random and constructed (Smith, 1998; Hegel, 1975). The emergence of modernism in the study of nationalism was partly a reaction to the old, often hidden ideas of

scholars who adopted the foundations of nationalist ideologies and considered nations to be ancient and eternal (Özkırımlı,2000).

The main difference between these approaches lies in their views on the antiquity or modernity of the nation. Primordialists view nations as permanent, deeply rooted entities with a rich historical past, while modernists perceive them as a new creation of the modern era (Smith,1998,1986)

1.6.1 Criticism of primordialism by modern scholars.

Modern scholars, particularly those influenced by modernism, have criticised primordialist theories. They claim that "natural" nations is a myth (Smith,1998; Hegel,1975). Modernists believe nations are not organisms that develop over time, but relatively historically and logically random phenomena arising from specific conditions (Smith,1998).

Critics point out that, before modern times, collective loyalty was often multifaceted and local, whereas the nations we understand today were almost unknown (Smith,1998). It is also argued that primordialism struggles to account for the changing or similar peculiarities often encountered in the modern world, making it difficult to determine the exact characteristics of many nations (Smith,1998). Moreover, modernists question why, if national identity is primordial, it could have been asleep or "not awake" for centuries (Smith,1998).

Perennialist perspectives, which share some commonalities with primordialism by acknowledging the antiquity of collective cultural ties, are also criticised for failing to demonstrate that such ties are universal or "natural" (Smith, 1986). Critics argue that it is incorrect to equate the collective units and sentiments of antiquity or the Middle Ages with those of modern nations or nationalism without empirical evidence (Smith, 1986). Gellner, one of the leading modernists, openly rejected the notion that nations are a natural or God-given way of classifying people.

1.6.2 Gellner's theory of nationalism

Ernest Gellner's theory is a well-known modernist explanation that establishes a strong connection between the rise of nations and the processes of industrialisation and modernity (Gellner, 1993). His central and sometimes controversial claim is that nationalism creates nations, not the other way around, and considers identities to be constructed and chosen (Gellner, 1983). Gellner sees nationalism as an essential and specific component of modernization, especially the transition from an agrarian to an industrial society.

According to Gellner, industrial society requires geographically mobile, literate, and culturally homogeneous populations to work effectively in its bureaucratic and technological systems (Gellner, 1993). This makes an everyday, standardised, "high culture" accessible to all members a necessity (Gellner, 1993). From this perspective, nationalism is the process of establishing and preserving a universal high culture, replacing old, indigenous folk cultures associated with specific micro-groups (Gellner, 1993). It fosters an anonymous and impersonal society in which individuals are primarily connected by this shared culture (Gellner, 1993). Gellner argues that nationalism serves as a functional equivalent to previous forms of social solidarity, such as world religions in agrarian empires, and acts as a cultural sticker necessary for modern industrial states (Gellner, 1983).

1.6.3 Criticism and defence of Gellner's theory

Gellner's influential theory met with severe criticism: He is accused of being a very rigorous modernist, struggling to account for evidence indicating the existence of units or sentiments similar to those found in pre-industrial nations (Smith, 2010). Critics consider his approach reductionist, as it primarily links the rise of nationalism to the functional needs of industrialism, overlooking the autonomous roles of political factors, cultural traditions, and the ideas of nationalist thinkers (Breuilly, 1993).

The theory is criticised for its insufficient understanding of ethnic origins and their connection with modern nationalism, which limits its ability to explain the origins of specific nations (Smith, 2009). Some find his argument too functionalistic, which implies that the needs of an industrial society are the direct cause of nationalism (Smith, 2010). Gellner's theory is sometimes described as apolitical because it focuses more on socio-economic and cultural foundations than on the content of political struggles, state movements, or nationalist ideology (Calhoun, 1997). He especially rejected nationalist ideologies as philosophically weak or illogical (Calhoun, 1997).

However, there is also a defence of Gellner's theory, and it has undergone certain changes: Gellner himself acknowledged the criticisms and refined his arguments, for example, by saying that some pre-modern cultures could be better "materials" than others for the formation of modern nations, which, along with the invented "navels," gives rise to the idea of "true navels" (Gellner, 1997). He proposed conducting empirical research to determine the distribution of such species (Gellner, 1983). He tried to explain things that seemed to contradict his industrialist

orientation, such as early Greek nationalism, the spread of Enlightenment and romantic ideas, or the fact that industrialisation cast a "long shadow" on pre-modern societies (Gellner, 1993).

It assigned semi-independent causal roles to other factors, such as bureaucratic centralisation and "Protestant-type" religions, although it largely retained the dominance of industrialisation (Gellner, 1997). Proponents argue that the functional link between nationalism and modernity can be formulated even without strong functionalist determinism (Özkırımlı, 2017). According to some scholars, it is best to understand Gellner's theory not as a theory with explicit content, but as a valuable conceptual framework or ideal type that provides a useful starting point for comparative historical research (Calhoun, 1997).

1.6.4 Anderson's Imagined Team and Hobsbawm's Invented Traditions

Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined community" and Eric Hobsbawm's idea of "invented traditions" are influential in understanding modern and postmodern nations (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Both viewpoints are united in viewing nations and nationalism not as primordial units, but as constructs or cultural artefacts (Smith, 2010). They emphasise the role of cultural processes in creating a sense of nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Anderson's "imaginary team" emphasises cultural means that foster a sense of horizontal camaraderie and shared identity among a large number of people (most of whom never meet) (Smith, 2010). The nation is "imagined" because this sense of unity exists in the consciousness of its members and is formed through shared experiences and communication (Calhoun, 1997). Anderson particularly emphasised the role of print capitalism in standardising language and creating a general discourse that allows people to imagine themselves as part of a larger, limited community (Calhoun, 1997).

Hobsbawm's concept of "invented traditions" suggests that many practices, rituals, and symbols presented as ancient expressions of national identity were recently invented (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). These traditions are often built by elites to establish continuity with a corresponding past and legitimize national institutions and identities (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Hobsbawm believed that the construction of nations occurs "mainly from above," although he acknowledged the need to take into account "from below" – the hopes and interests of ordinary people (Calhoun, 1997).

While both view nations as constructs, Anderson's understanding is more inclined towards the imagined emotions and cultural processes that provide this feeling, Hobsbawm focuses more

on the conscious process of invention and the role of elites in creating symbolic connections with the past. They complement each other by emphasising different aspects of the construction of national identity: Anderson focuses on the inner, imagined sense of belonging, while Hobsbawm focuses on the external, symbolic expression of continuity through false traditions. Both of these approaches, derived partly from Marxist traditions, focused on cultural and symbolic domains for understanding nationalism (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

1.6.5 Comparative analysis, differences and criticisms of Anderson and Hobsbawm

Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm have remarkable similarity in their theory of nationalism, and in particular, they both see nations as new constructions instead of being old or timeless phenomena (Smith, 2010). Both scholars are embedded in Marxist intellectual traditions, but their works are informed by cultural and postmodernist thinking (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). All of these writers emphasize the central role of elites in the construction of national identity and have contributed significantly to constructivist approaches that debunk essentialist interpretations of the nation (Smith, 2010). In spite of these commonalities, their approaches are substantially different. Anderson essentially characterizes the nation as an "imagined community" and concentrates on those processes which enable this imaginative construction with particular emphasis on the contribution of print capitalism (Anderson, 1983). In contrast, Hobsbawm focuses on the motif of the "invention of tradition" and the ways in which invented historical accounts contribute to creating a sense of continuity and legitimacy for contemporary nation-states (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Whereas Anderson is interested in the psychological and cultural character of nationhood, Hobsbawm is interested in the political and social functions that traditions perform in national life (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). In addition, Anderson's empirical focus is postcolonial nationalism, especially in Southeast Asia, whereas Hobsbawm's analyses are centered on the European experience (Calhoun, 1997).

But their approaches have been subject to numerous criticisms. One significant one is that conceiving nations in terms of stories or social constructions first and foremost may neglect or marginalize other essential dimensions of nationhood, including rooted institutions, common traditions, and affective bonds (Brubaker, 2004). Additionally, some scholars argue that the heavy emphasis on textual and symbolic representations—especially among their followers—can detract from the need to provide material sociological or historical explanations of the rise of nationalism (Brubaker, 2004). While Anderson and Hobsbawm offer valuable insights on the constructed nature of national identity, their theoretical frameworks sometimes risk denying the

ontological reality of the nation as a social community that is experienced and lived (Anderson, 1983). Also, with their emphasis on creativity and innovation, their models have a tendency to minimize the importance of historical continuities or previous ethnic relations that frequently provide the foundation on which modern nationalist ideologies are built (Smith, 2009). In this, though their theories are very successful at deconstructing nationalist mythologies, they have a tendency to inadvertently conceal the more profound historical and cultural foundations under which numerous national identities are created (Anderson, 1983).

1.6.6 Smith's ethno-symbolic model

Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolic model aims to present an alternative perspective that mediates between radical modernism and perennialism (Smith,1998,1986). He does this by promoting the role of myths, symbols, memories, and traditions in the formation and preservation of nationalism (Smith,1998,1986).

According to this model, modern nations do not arise from scratch, but are significantly shaped by existing ethnic ties and sentiments-"ethnie" (Smith,1998,1986). While nationalism as an ideology and movement is recognized as a thoroughly modern phenomenon, it operates within and relies on strong cultural forms that emerged as a result of the collective experience of these previous communities (Smith,1998,1986).

Legends, symbols, memories, and values are seen as critical structural elements that define and distinguish nations (Smith,1998,1986). They can be adapted to changing conditions and acquire new meanings and functions, form collectively defined channels and cultural repertoires (Smith,1998,1986). These elements provide "ethnic roots," which significantly determine the nature and boundaries of modern nationalism and nations (Smith,1998,1986). Elites striving to mobilise the population to build a nation must respect and utilise existing cultural forms (Smith,1998,1986).

The search for a usable past, history, and destiny is at the centre of a nation's identity (Smith,1998,1986). This involves reconstructing "poetic spaces" and "golden ages" through disciplines such as archaeology and philology, often relying on myths of origin and lineage. This past and its myths are essentially ethnic, culturally limited and historically defined, based on a population, and necessary for the nation to have a sense of the future (Smith,1986). The ethno-symbolic approach asserts that the deep connections that people feel towards their nation are reinforced by a sense of continuity and roots in a reinterpreted ethnic past.

1.7 Postcolonial theories

Postcolonial theorists such as Partha Chatterjee propose a reinterpretation of the concepts of nation and nation-building, paying particular attention to experiences outside the Western context (Chatterjee, 1993). These approaches often resonate with the themes of cultural and political fragmentation in the globalised world (Calhoun, 1997; Smith, 1998).

Chatterjee's work examines how nationalist movements in Asia and Africa drew upon and adapted Western nationalist discourses that Anderson regarded as "modular" forms (Chatterjee, 1993). He argued that non-Western nationalism often developed by creating an "internal domain" of national culture, distinct from the "material" external world dominated by colonial powers (Chatterjee, 1993). This internal domain was created by local elites, who utilised a combination of Western and local traditional cultural elements, including language, art, and religion, resulting in the simultaneous emergence of modern and non-Western cultures (Chatterjee, 1993).

Chatterjee also emphasises the influence of excluded groups or "fragments" within the nation (e.g., peasants, women) on the dominant nationalist discourse, even if their specific aspirations are suppressed or normalised by the state-building project (Chatterjee, 1993). His analysis shows that the process of creating a nationalist culture often precedes the political resistance to colonial rule (Chatterjee, 1993).

Although postcolonial theories provide deep insights into the complex legacy of colonialism in shaping modern identity, fragmentation, and nationalism, they are often criticised for a lack of historical depth, focusing mainly on the contemporary or late colonial period and not thoroughly questioning the modernist explanations of earlier history (Smith, 2010). However, they significantly contribute to the field by opposing universal theories based mainly on Western models and promoting various non-Western experiences and perspectives (Chatterjee, 1993).

National identity is the primary legitimising principle in modern politics as a principle of state-building (Smith, 2010). Elites are often compelled to invent new myths and symbols to define emerging nations and establish a political culture.

To strengthen internal mobilisation and unity, observing genealogical myths (whether genealogical or ideological) is crucial for internal mobilisation and coordination, fostering a sense of unity and territorial connection (Anderson, 1983). National unity often requires solidarity, which is called "brotherhood," and a recognised territory or "homeland" (Anderson, 1983).

Through the rediscovery or invention of the past: History becomes central, the "rediscovery" or "invention" of the past is a matter of national significance and is used to define collective identity and mobilize for a nationalist project (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983).

Through the influence of the dominant ethnic group: In states with a dominant ethnic group, this core ethnic group can significantly influence social institutions and political life by imparting its views, myths, and symbols to the entire population (Smith, 2009).

To strengthen territorial nationalities without ethnic characteristics: Initially, territorial nationalities without ethnic characteristics may have to acquire them or give them "national character" to enhance their legitimacy (Brubaker, 2004).

Through the politicisation of the ethnos: An ethnos aiming to become a nation needs to be politicised to advance its claims in the state arena (Brubaker, 2004).

Nationalism will be effective in achieving its goals and justifying the diverse interests of these groups through the formation of mass support and the unification of various social groups (Özkırımlı, 2017). It performs important functions such as social mobilisation, political coordination, and ideological legitimisation (Özkırımlı, 2017).

Through the depiction and creation of collective cultural identity, Nationalism's ability to seize state power is closely linked to its pursuit of power based on specific cultural values (Smith, 2010).

The state operates through officially recognised and supported mass culture, utilising language, history, traditions, and customs (Gellner, 1993), which are necessary for the integrity of the political body, especially the liberal body (Gellner, 1993).

To ensure citizens' loyalty and commitment, Governments rely on the claim to represent the nation and protect its culture, thereby fostering loyalty and commitment among citizens (Smith, 2010).

By strengthening borders, the state aims to contribute to the public consciousness, presenting them as unquestionable features of public life. Thus, essentially vague and disputed borders are transformed into seemingly natural ones (Anderson, 1983).

Nationalism is a powerful source of patriotism (Calhoun, 1997). Leaders often turn to a broader national identity to unite the country and prevail over narrower loyalty (Smith, 2010). Nationalism is primarily a form of identity policy, often arising when a threat to collective identity is perceived (Brubaker, 2004).

1.8 How can nationalism serve as a force for social integration and harmony?

National identity is a crucial social integration element, providing a foundation for a sense of belonging and collective action. It strengthens inner unity through shared myths, memories, and symbols (Smith, 2009). Acquiring a national identity involves individuals' awareness of themselves as part of a collective being, enabling the moment of self-recognition (Brubaker, 2004). This shared identity gives citizens their place in the world and a shared perspective (Calhoun, 1997). In addition, national identity provides the necessary commitment to citizens and political institutions that are essential for a functional public life (Miller, 1995).

It encourages identification with the political community and a willingness to prioritize collective interests over private ones, even to a certain degree of participation (Miller, 1995). Nationalism can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the state and society that has emerged as a result of modernity, offering the notion of a community as a "nation" of equal citizens, both culturally and politically (Özkırımlı, 2017). It glorifies the community itself (Anderson, 1983) and addresses the fundamental human need for a sense of identity (Smith, 2010). The modern state, through its processes, forms identity and loyalty among the population (Calhoun, 1997).

Along with promoting integration, nationalism can also be a source of significant alienation and division. Many states include significant ethnic minorities and are deeply divided (Smith, 2010). The borders of these states often do not align with the boundaries of a single ethnic population's distribution (Smith, 2010). Ethnic minorities are frequently united against their will and may subsequently be exploited (Gellner, 1993). In such cases, the dominant core ethnic group may attempt to impose its traditions on the rest of the population, which can lead to separatist movements among minority groups, especially those with their historical traditions and resources (Connor, 1994). Multi-ethnic states, when widespread (Brubaker, 2004), are typically governed by a single strategic ethnos, which strives to unite or influence other groups (Brubaker, 2004). This dominant group may attempt to shape a broader political culture through assimilation, sometimes resorting to coercion, economic penalties, and institutional restrictions (Brubaker, 2004). While newly united groups may be offered citizenship and freedom of movement, this is often accompanied by the condition of assimilation and renunciation of their old loyalties (Brubaker, 2004). Although there is no striving for independent statehood, ethnic groups in such states are often forced to compete politically for resources, which inevitably leads to the politicisation of ethnic origin (Brubaker, 2004). A multi-ethnic state that claims to be homogeneous should foster considerable loyalty, but this is complicated by peculiar

uncertainties between the compulsory nature of the state and the social and cultural unity of the nation (Yiftachel, 1999). This dualism creates endemic instability and fragmentation in such states (Brubaker, 2004).

Within the framework of the dominant national culture, some norms often evaluate other cultures and subcultures, leading to the consideration of diversity as a deviation (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Some groups, such as Roma and Jews, have historically faced exclusion and marginalisation in many nations (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). Ultimately, national identity itself is considered a form of difference and therefore, by its very nature, a form of exclusion (Brubaker, 2004). While some nations may become open to new members through naturalisation, acquiring a new national identity is often difficult (Brubaker, 2004). In all forms of nationalism, there is a persistent temptation towards a form of closure based on ethnic or racial origin, which cannot be overcome simply by obtaining citizenship (Brubaker, 2004). Nationalism often exhibits a problematic characteristic, such as a preference for compatriots over foreigners (Calhoun, 1997), and has been used to justify the neglect of needs beyond national borders (Calhoun, 1997). It was often associated with the discrimination and disregard for representatives of other nationalities, the mobilisation of individuals for violence (Mann, 2005). When the state operates through a preferred mass culture, it can harm minorities whose identity is not publicly recognized and who feel alienated (Gellner, 1993). Discussions of identity politics and multiculturalism are at risk of reification and substantialisation of culture, which can exacerbate power imbalances and negatively affect minority groups (Young, 1990). In multi-ethnic states, various approaches are employed to manage ethnic differences, including assimilation, which can lead to the "ethnocide" of cultural homogeneity, as well as forms of "ethnic democracy" or "herrenvolk democracy," which characterise the exclusive dominance of the dominant ethnos (Yiftachel, 1999). Nationalist politicians can actively promote polarisation between different identity groups (Mann, 2005). In extreme cases, such strategies as ethnic cleansing were used to build supposedly homogeneous nation-states (Mann, 2005).

1.9 Potential risks and dangers of using national identity as a political tool, especially in multi-ethnic states

Using national identity for political purposes poses significant risks, particularly in diverse societies. An overemphasis on the traditions of the dominant ethnic community can be detrimental (Brubaker, 2004). Nationalism can be unstable and explosive, especially when it strives to reconcile ethnic groups with their respective states in a world populated with existing states (Mann, 2005). This movement is met with suspicion and hostility from powerful state

elites who have invested in the current order (Mann, 2005). In multi-ethnic states, there is frequent conflict between loyalty to the state and the ethnic unity of minorities that may aspire to statehood (Connor, 1994). The state often occupies a weaker position in this conflict, is perceived as distant by a policy that benefits the leading ethnic group, and can provoke separatism (Connor, 1994). An example is the opposition of groups such as the Bretons and Basques to official nationalism (Connor, 1994). In multi-ethnic states, cultural pluralism seeking political expression can exacerbate interethnic tensions, and language can sometimes serve as both a means of identification and a barrier or source of antagonism. A peculiar dualism and instability in the concept of a nation, characterised by a fluctuation between the poles of ethnicity and statehood, are endemic and fragmented in multinational states that claim national status (Brubaker, 2004). The state is a mandatory unity, although it requires considerable loyalty, whereas the nation is a complex and ambiguous social and cultural unity (Yiftachel, 1999). Relying on ethnic roots, myths, and symbols can be unstable and explosive, as they have the power to stir up the population (Özkırımlı, 2017). In multi-ethnic states, where one ethnic group seeks dominance, the development of restrictive regimes is more likely (Horowitz, 1985). Nationalism often manifests a tendency towards objectivity and "sacred egoism," in which nations make exceptions for themselves and overlook mistakes made by their nation (Billig, 1995). Attempts to consolidate cultural claims as unnegotiable rights through the language of rights can disconnect them from the necessary public discussion and compromise (Kymlicka, 1995). If national identity fails to provide ethical resources for state action, multiculturalism in multi-ethnic states can turn into a simple coexistence characterized by suspicion and hostility (Taylor, 1994). Historical examples, such as the former Yugoslavia, demonstrate how dominant groups exploit nationalism to instigate conflicts and foster reactive nationalism among oppressed groups (Hobsbawm, 1990). Determining a nation solely on ethnic or racial grounds is particularly dangerous, as it can violate the moral boundaries previously recognized in traditional societies in relations with outsiders (Smith, 2010). Moreover, the pursuit of a unified national identity can lead to the suppression of other identities, such as gender, religion, or minority cultural affiliation (Young, 1990). According to some views, nationalism as a political strategy for opportunistic elites can be easily manipulated to provoke passions and lead to potential violence (Mann, 2005).

The compatibility of nationalism with democratic pluralism and inclusive governance is a complex issue and is characterized by contradictions. The modern population can define itself as a nation based on ethnicity or as a nation of citizens, which "double encoding" affects, influencing inclusion and exclusion (Brubaker, 2004). The very concept of a nation is an

unfavourable mixture of civil-territorial and ethno-genealogical principles (Smith, 2010), which leads to a peculiar instability of national consciousness, which can fluctuate between inclusion and exclusion (Yiftachel, 1999). Although a nation needs elements of civic and ethnic identity for survival (Smith, 2010), their proportions differ, and even mono-ethnic states can experience tension between these aspects (Yiftachel, 1999).

Arguments for consistency often emphasise the potential for civic or liberal forms of nationalism. Some nationalisms, especially of the "citizenship" type, focus on territorial principles and civil rights and may be potentially more inclusive (Smith, 2010). The ability to accommodate various nationalisms (religious, racial, linguistic) demonstrates a certain degree of flexibility (Özkırımlı, 2017). In pluralistic societies committed to tolerance, elites can still create new national myths, which implies an attempt to integrate different groups (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). An alternative strategy involves building a new political culture from diverse ethnic traditions, seeking commonalities, and endowing the regional nation with inclusive characteristics (Brubaker, 2004). Some scholars advocate for a comprehensive understanding of nationalism, without distinguishing between "good" forms of citizenship and "bad" ethnic forms, and argue that even liberal principles can secretly rely on a nationalist basis (Kymlicka, 1995). Ultimately, it is argued that the distinction between ethnic and civil nations is a matter of morality and politics, rather than a predetermined historical destiny (Smith, 2010).

Arguments for incompatibility highlight a specific tendency toward exclusion and the challenges in achieving genuine inclusion. Nationalism often prioritises a dominant culture and potentially marginalises minorities (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). In all nationalism, there is a temptation for ethnic or racial closure (Brubaker, 2004). Historically, the civic model derived from the French Revolution has sometimes been intolerant of ethnic differences and prone to radical assimilation (Connor, 1994). The "plural" type of nationalism found in immigrant societies, while celebrating diversity, poses a risk of political instability (Connor, 1994). Dualism in the concept of a nation and endemic instability in multinational states pose challenges to sustainable, inclusive governance (Brubaker, 2004). Policies of identity and multiculturalism, if not managed carefully, can lead to the reification of cultural differences and the intensification of power imbalances (Young, 1990).

Despite the difficulties, models such as democratic federalism are proposed as ways to manage diversity in multi-ethnic states, which offer constitutionally protected autonomy for constituent entities (Mann, 2005). In such states, the ability of individuals to have multiple and complementary identities is seen as a key factor in ensuring democracy, provided that the

political leadership avoids the imposition of polarisation (Mann, 2005). It is necessary to contribute to the construction of such complementary identities actively and to seek political solutions that harmonize group and individual rights (Kymlicka, 1995). In the context of the nation-state, multiculturalism can be understood as the openness of the dominant mass culture to the influence of minority cultures, provided that minorities participate in public discussion and do not demand absolute protection of their cultures (Kymlicka, 1995).

Official state symbols, such as the flag, anthem, and national heroes, serve as powerful tools for the formation and consolidation of a collective identity. The dominant core ethnos often imprints its myths and symbols on the state, influencing its form and traditions (Smith, 2009). In the process of creating emerging nations, elites actively create new myths and symbols (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). These symbols and mythologies provide a prism through which the community's heritage is viewed, contributing to a sense of collective identity (Calhoun, 1997). National culture, with which the individual interacts to form their identity, exists partly through universally recognized symbols (Brubaker, 2004). The state operates through symbols and rituals that correspond to national traditions (Gellner, 1993). Nationalism uses specific symbols, images, and concepts such as "people," "homeland," authenticity, destiny, and autonomy, which are essential for its mobilisation appeal and orientation (Anderson, 1983). Without this image and representation, the political movement will not have a clear ideal of the nation that guides it (Anderson, 1983). Even in everyday life, there is "banal nationalism," in which symbols such as the flag are not actively displayed, but basic nationalist assumptions are deeply rooted and national sentiments are widespread (Billig, 1995). These symbols serve to describe the significance and uniqueness of the nation, making it clear and emotionally resonant for its members (Anderson, 1983).

Sources suggest that a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of national identity is possible, albeit challenging, and although it cannot be easily achieved. A peculiar tension between inclusion and exclusion is at the centre of the modern nation (Brubaker, 2004). However, existing national identities already allow for significant cultural diversity (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). The ability to distinguish between different types of nationalism, including artistic, religious, or linguistic forms, demonstrates flexibility (Özkırımlı, 2017). "Civil" nationalisms, which focus on general political and territorial aspects, although latent in their cultural aspects, are more inclined toward an inclusive model than purely ethnic nationalisms (Billig, 1995).

The development of a non-homogeneous, pluralistic national identity involves an understanding of cultural identity that supports the political structure, allowing for cultural diversity and openness to its influence (Kymlicka, 1995). This means that dominant mass culture should be viewed as susceptible to change, while minority cultures should actively contribute to this evolution (Kymlicka, 1995). The main conditions for this include:

Cultural groups require freedom to establish their associations, schools, and lobbying groups (Kymlicka, 1995). Governments can also play a role in encouraging and even financing these actions to help preserve minority identity (Kymlicka, 1995).

Minority cultures should contribute to ongoing debates and discussions about the meaning and significance of national culture (Kymlicka, 1995). However, this participation means that minority cultures cannot be completely protected from the consequences of these public discussions; they enter the sphere of politics and lose their protected status to a certain extent (Kymlicka, 1995).

The ability of individuals to have multiple, mutually exclusive identities (e.g., regional and national) is essential in the recognition and development of human capabilities in multinational democracies (Mann, 2005). Political leadership plays a vital role in fostering complementary identities, rather than forcing polarized choices (Mann, 2005). It is necessary to develop policy frameworks that effectively balance the recognition of group rights and the protection of individual rights (Kymlicka, 1995).

The implementation of constitutional arrangements, such as democratic federalism, can provide guaranteed areas of political autonomy to constituent entities while embedding regional or minority cultural identities within a larger state structure (Mann, 2005). Ultimately, achieving a pluralistic national identity requires conscious political and ethical efforts to accept diversity and facilitate development through the contributions of all constituent groups within national culture, moving away from the delusion of closure based on rigid ethnic definitions (Smith, 2010).

1.10 Applicability of National Identity Theories to the Case of Uzbekistan

Theoretical discussions surrounding nationalism and national identity provide essential tools for understanding the historical and political evolution of Uzbek national identity. The case of Uzbekistan exemplifies how various theoretical approaches—primordialism, modernism, ethno-symbolism, and postcolonial perspectives—interact and overlap in the formation of identity.

Primordialist elements are particularly evident in the post-independence era, where the political elite actively invoked ancient historical figures, territorial narratives, and Islamic heritage to legitimise the nation-state. The glorification of Amir Temur as a national hero, along with the emphasis on cultural continuity with pre-Soviet Turkic and Islamic traditions, illustrates the strategic use of primordial narratives in constructing a sense of timeless national identity (Smith, 2009; Brubaker, 2004).

From a modernist viewpoint, the Soviet period in Uzbekistan serves as a classic example of state-driven nation-building, which aligns with Gellner's focus on high culture, standardised language, and mass education (Gellner, 1993). The formation of the Uzbek SSR, the promotion of Uzbek as a literary language, and the integration of Uzbek identity within the Soviet ideological framework demonstrate how nationhood was engineered from above to meet the demands of a modern, centrally governed society.

Anderson's concept of the "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) resonates similarly with Uzbekistan's experience. Soviet institutions, such as state-controlled media, unified education systems, and curated historical narratives, contributed to fostering an imagined sense of Uzbek nationhood, even as the population retained diverse linguistic, religious, and cultural affiliations.

Ethno-symbolism further clarifies the formation of Uzbek national identity, particularly through the appropriation of historical myths, cultural symbols, and collective memory (Smith, 1999). The revival of pre-Soviet figures, such as Jadid intellectuals, the selective resurgence of Islamic traditions, and the emphasis on Uzbek linguistic and cultural distinctiveness exemplify how symbolic resources from the past were utilized to strengthen national unity.

Finally, postcolonial theory, especially Chatterjee's critique of Western-centered nationalism models (Chatterjee, 1993), is highly relevant to understanding Uzbekistan's trajectory. Although independence was achieved without a mass national movement, the Uzbek elite selectively adopted elements of Soviet modernity while simultaneously promoting an indigenous narrative based on pre-Soviet identity markers. This dual process reflects the hybrid, postcolonial character of Uzbek nation-building, where imperial legacies, Soviet ideological structures, and local cultural elements converge.

In summary, the formation of Uzbekistan's national identity cannot be explained by a single theoretical perspective. Instead, it reflects a complex, hybrid process that incorporates primordial references, modernist state engineering, symbolic continuity, and postcolonial

adaptation. The forthcoming empirical chapters will illustrate how these theories manifest across different historical periods, from the Russian conquest of Turkestan to the authoritarian nation-building strategies of independent Uzbekistan.

1.11 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the main theoretical approaches necessary for analysing the formation of national identity in Uzbekistan are considered practically. First of all, we observed that primordialist views interpret the nation as an ancient and naturally existing unit. This approach characterises a nation as an organic community rooted in common ancestry, a shared culture, and kinship ties. In contrast, modernist theorists such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson explain the nation as a result of the processes of modernisation, industrialisation, mass education, and state-building. Their approach perceives the nation as an invented, yet real social force.

Anthony Smith, a representative of the ethnographic-symbolic approach, also emphasises in his works the role and significance of historical myths, collective memory, and symbolic traditions in the formation of modern nations. His approach serves as a conceptual bridge between modernist and primordial perspectives. Additionally, postcolonial theories are considered. These approaches critically examine the models of nationalism developed in the West and study the mechanisms of national identity formation in societies with a colonial legacy, cultural imbalances, and social asymmetries. In particular, this approach serves as a crucial analytical tool in examining Uzbekistan's experience.

Each of these theories serves as an important theoretical basis for understanding the complex and multifaceted processes of forming and developing the Uzbek national identity. In particular, the attention paid by modernist views to institutional structures and means of communication is especially relevant in understanding the Soviet nation-building policy. Ethnosymbolist and postcolonial approaches show how pre-Soviet historical traditions and cultural symbols were selected and reinterpreted to emphasize national legitimacy and identity in the postcolonial context.

In conclusion, this theoretical chapter creates a solid analytical basis for the subsequent sections of the dissertation. It enables a critical examination of how nationalism was conceived in various periods and forms of government, as well as the political purposes for which it was formed. In the next chapter, using these theoretical foundations, the historical processes of the

policy of national identity implemented during the period of Tsarist Russia, particularly in the territory of Uzbekistan, are analysed.



CHAPTER 2: TSARIST RUSSIA'S NATIONALITY POLICIES

2.1 Ideological foundations of the Conquest.

According to the theory proposed by the British geographer and political theorist Sir Halford Mackinder in 1904, Central Asia is the strategic "heartland" of the world. Indeed, the temperate climate, rich natural resources, and favourable geographical location of the Central Asian region have attracted the imperialist states of Europe since the 19th century. In particular, the Russian Empire's interest in conquering Turkestan began to take shape much earlier, during the reign of Peter I. During this period, reports and perceptions regarding the resource wealth of Turkestan became increasingly widespread in Russian society.

Peter I made great efforts to modernise Russia politically, economically, and socially, following the example of advanced European states. According to Peter I, one of the main steps in this process of modernisation was Russia's need to acquire its colonies, following the example of the imperialist policies of European states. As practical proof of this policy, Peter I, during his lifetime, sent a military expedition led by Alexander Bekovich-Cherkassky to the Turkestan region. The expedition's primary objective was to compile geographical maps of the region, study the natural resources, and assess the military potential of the local states (Tillaboev & Zamonov, 2019).

The reasons for the Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia are interpreted differently in historiography. According to some scholars, the main reason for the aggressive policy was the demand for cotton. Other historians, however, point to the rivalry between Russia and Great Britain, specifically strategic interests within the "Great Game" (Hopkirk, 1992). However, neither theory's validity has been thoroughly proven (Khalid, 2014). Soviet-era historians mainly believe that economic interests played a decisive role in Russia's conquest of Central Asia. In Western historiography, the cotton factor is frequently mentioned. Indeed, during the Soviet era, the Central Asian republics became the main cotton-producing region. However, according to research conducted by Morrison (2020), cotton was never considered a primary factor in Russia's decision to conquer Central Asia. During this period, Russia imported most of the necessary cotton from the United States, while local Russian merchants purchased small quantities of cotton from Turkestan (Morrison, 2020). Moreover, it is difficult to confirm that this product played a decisive role in the policy of conquest, as historical data indicate that the cotton grown in Turkestan is of "low quality and has fine fibre" (Khalid, 2014).

Thus, the Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia was primarily driven by strategic and political interests, with economic interests and the cotton trade considered secondary factors. At the same time, there were also ideological aspects of Russian imperialist policy, which were especially pronounced in the ideology of Pan-Slavicism. One of the prominent representatives of this ideology, Nikolai Danilevsky, envisioned Russia's strategic dominance over the East as a counterbalance to Western influence (Danilevsky, 1869).

Along with studying the reasons for the Russian conquest of Central Asia - the Turkestan region, as its actual historical name is called, it is also advisable to briefly dwell on how many stages it took to conquer it, how long this process lasted, and how it was justified within the interests of the Russian Empire. Relations between the Slavic peoples and the peoples of Turkestan have a long history, dating back to the conquest of the Kazan Khanate and later the Astrakhan Khanate during the reign of Ivan the Terrible, specifically in 1552. Although these events paved the way for the Russian Empire to enter Central Asia, no historical information about Ivan the Terrible's plans to conquer the region is available. During his reign, diplomatic and trade relations were established with the Central Asian khanates of Bukhara and Khiva. These ties played a crucial role in developing bilateral relations and laid the groundwork for future expansion.

However, as mentioned above, it was precisely during the reign of Peter I that Russia began to implement its goal of colonising Central Asia through clear political and practical plans. The military expeditions sent during this period not only opened trade routes but also ensured the political and geographical study of the region.

2.2 Identity Policy of Tsarist Russia

The policy pursued by Tsarist Russia after the beginning of its conquests led to profound and prolonged changes in the identity of the people and peoples of the region, particularly through the policy of "forming nations" and their mutual separation. The people of Turkestan began to identify themselves under clearly defined "national" names, rather than by their religious or Turkic affiliations. The impact of these changes is still felt today.

After the conquest of Turkestan, Tsarist Russia attempted to establish its dominance by destroying the local peoples' political independence and social structures. Cultural assimilation and Russification also held a central place within this imperial policy, alongside political control and economic interests. In governing the peoples of Central Asia, the Russian Empire used a strategy of depriving them of common national or religious unity and dividing them into small groups.

About this policy, the acting Governor-General of Turkestan, Dukhovsky (1898–1901), wrote in his notes: "The Turkestan Krai, compared to other regions, requires special attention due to its historical past and ethnographic features" (Tillaboev & Zamonov, 2019). Nevertheless, in Russia's official policy, the peoples of Turkestan were characterised as culturally underdeveloped. In 1864, Russian Foreign Minister Alexander Gorchakov asserted in a diplomatic circular that it was the responsibility of "civilized states" to govern so-called "semi-savage and nomadic peoples" as a means to ensure stable borders and safeguard commercial interests. In doing so, Russia tried to justify its military campaigns in Central Asia on the international stage as a "cultural mission" (Khalid, 2015).

The cultural and political policies of Tsarist Russia reached their peak, especially during the reign of Alexander III (1881–1894). During this period, the Russian Empire intensified the policy of Russification by forcibly spreading the Russian language and Orthodox culture among the indigenous peoples. As a practical aspect of this policy, local languages were restricted, Russian schools were established, and Orthodox missionary activities were conducted (Scarborough, 2023). Russian-native schools, organised by the Governor-General of Turkestan, Konstantin Kaufman, became an important tool of this policy. Initially, the indigenous population did not pay attention to such schools, as they saw the danger of alienation from their culture and religious traditions through Russification and religious transformations (Khalid, 2015). However, at the beginning of the 20th century, due to the widespread use of the Russian language in state and official circles, the interest of local elites in such schools increased. This led to the formation of a new class of local intellectuals, mediating between the Russian and local authorities (Khalid, 2015).

The assimilation policy of Tsarist Russia was not limited only to culture and language. The Empire also redesigned the cities and territories of Turkestan. In cities such as Tashkent and Samarkand, Russian and local urban areas were created, separated by clear boundaries. Although wealthy local people also resided in the new cities constructed by Russia, the primary objective was to showcase the superiority of Russian culture and reinforce the colonial order (Khalid, 2015).

Another important strategy for the empire was to control Islamic religious institutions and undermine the local population's religious beliefs. During the reign of Catherine II (1762–1796), the Holy Quran was first published in Russia to strengthen loyalty to Russia among Muslims (Çalışkan, 2012). In the second half of the 19th century, the process of assimilation through religion intensified, especially in the territories of Kazakhstan. Missionary activities

organised in Kazan under the leadership of Nikolai Ilminsky were aimed at the Russification and Christianization of the local population (Çalışkan, 2012). In particular, there were cases where young people's names were changed and converted to Orthodox names.

Nevertheless, the empire's assimilation policy was not always successful. Cultural and political resistance movements emerged in response to this policy. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Jadid movement took shape in Turkestan. This movement, resisting the cultural pressure of the Russian Empire, put forward ideas of national revival, modernisation, and a new interpretation of Islam (Çalışkan, 2012; Khalid, 1998). The activities of the Jadids simultaneously served as a form of political resistance to Russification, as well as an important factor in the formation of national consciousness and modern identity (Khalid, 1998; Brower, 2003).

As a result of the national policy pursued by the Russian Empire, the peoples of Turkestan gradually distanced themselves from their previously common Muslim-Turkic identity and began to be recognised based on new "national" identities. These formed ethnic identities were later consolidated during the Soviet period and formalised in the form of national republics such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan (Morrison, 2020; Khalid, 2015).

Thus, the assimilation policy pursued by the Russian Empire led to long-term cultural and political changes in Turkestan. This process manifested itself as a decisive factor in the formation of modern national identity and the demarcation of state borders (Khalid, 2015).

The policy of Tsarist Russia in Central Asia was multifaceted and a complex strategic process, combining political, military, economic, cultural, and religious aspects. As a result of this policy, the historical and cultural identity of the indigenous peoples was weakened, replaced by new, politically constructed identities, which led to ongoing socio-political conflicts within society (Khalid, 2015; Morrison, 2020).

Although the historical consequences of Russian national policy in Turkestan are widely covered in separate studies, considering this process within the framework of imperial power strategies and in a broad theoretical context allows for a deeper understanding of the internal contradictions and essence of the Russian Empire's administration.

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Tsarist Identity Policy in the Empire

The Russian Empire's national identity policy is a complex and variable political process that varies across different periods, groups, and territories. Scientific sources emphasise this policy's

inconsistency and reliance on territorial-specific practice approaches. In this chapter, we aim to analyse the main aspects of the national policy of Tsarist Russia.

Adeeb Khalid argued that the Russian Empire was formed as a particularist empire that accepted differentiation as a natural state of affairs. Khalid writes: "The empire was a particularist empire that took difference for granted" (Khalid, 2015, p. 20). That is, the empire operated by accepting the existence of various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups within its composition and their manifestation of loyalty to the empire in different ways. In the author's opinion, preserving these differences was one of the primary factors that ensured the empire's stability (Khalid, 2015). Thus, instead of a universal and unified identification policy, the Russian Empire sought to maintain its existence through practices based on intergroup differences.

The second important aspect of the Russian Empire's national policy was its lack of consistency and pragmatic approach. The empire did not pursue a unified and consistent policy towards all its constituent groups and territories (Khalid, 2007). In particular, policies regarding Muslims and Islam differed significantly across time and space (Khalid, 2007). Although the policy of Russification was applied in different parts of the empire, its form and methods varied depending on the time of annexation and local conditions (Sochnikova, 2006).

Especially since the beginning of the 18th century, the imperial government has sought to rely on the principle of "pragmatic flexibility" about Islam (Kappeler, 2001, p.143). Such an approach prefers the implementation of a policy of non-interference, giving them a certain degree of independence, rather than the active integration of the Muslim population. At the heart of this policy was not an attempt to turn Muslims into "true Russians," but to ensure imperial loyalty while preserving their existing socio-religious structures (Keller, 2001, p. 252).

Another important aspect of the national policy of the Russian Empire is the initial repressive approach, followed by a policy of relative tolerance and distancing. Following the conquest of territories such as Kazan (1552) and Astrakhan (1556), the empire implemented a policy of severe repression against the Muslim population (Khalid, 2007, 2014). During this process, many mosques were destroyed, and religious institutions were suppressed. Especially at the beginning of the 18th century, repressive measures intensified, as the central authorities considered religious identity a crucial basis for political stability (Khalid, 2007).

However, over time, imperial officials realised they were deprived of the opportunity to control Islam fully (Tasar, 2017). As a result, especially in the Turkestan region, religious scholars began to express their readiness to recognise Russian rule as legitimate if Islamic rituals and

Sharia were permitted to continue in certain forms (Khalid, 2015). This encouraged the empire to adopt a more cautious, compromising, and distant policy.

Another important aspect of the national policy of the Russian Empire is reflected in its gradual tendency toward unifying the empire's diverse populations through cultural integration (Keller, 2001). Historically, the empire pursued a policy of tolerance towards cultural diversity, but in practice, subordinating these peoples to Russian culture and "cultural laws" remained one of its strategic objectives. Views on the policy of assimilation differed. However, a significant part of the Russian intelligentsia actively supported this process. For example, in 1820, Colonel Pavel Pastel, acknowledging that the presence of non-Russian peoples in the empire could be allowed to a certain extent, at the same time emphasised the necessity of promoting Russian cultural norms as a unifying force, if necessary, over the preservation of cultural diversity (Hosking, 1997, p. 178). Similarly, figures such as Ivan Ilminsky saw the policy of extensive Russification as the most effective means of preserving the stability and statehood of the empire (Keller, 2001). This approach was an integral part of the empire's strategy, aimed at political and cultural centralisation and the consolidation of governance. Beyond the overarching ideological principles and territorial conflicts, the Russian Empire's national policy manifested distinctly in specific areas such as education, language, and colonial administration, particularly within the context of Central Asia. These aspects will be examined in detail below.

2.3.1 The Doctrine of Official Nationality

As Keller cited, in the 1830s, Minister of Education Sergey Uvarov shaped the state ideology with the formula "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" (Keller, 2001, p. 10 et al.). Nationality denoted the natural and essential characteristics of the Russian people (Keller, 2001). This ideology aimed to integrate Russia into "European civilisation" while preserving its unique values (Zorin, 1998, p. 71). Those who did not fit this definition remained part of the empire but were categorised separately from the core Russian group (Keller, 2001).

2.3.2 Russification and Language

A Russification policy involving the assimilation of the Russian language was implemented (Sochnikova, 2006). *Inorodtsy* (a category for certain non-Russian groups) lacked the right to use their native languages in public and administrative spheres (Slocum, 1998). Consequently, they encountered legal and institutional barriers to fully participating in governance (Hirsch, 2005).

2.3.3 Education

The Tsarist administration generally did not interfere with the traditional Muslim education system (Sochnikova, 2006). However, educational policies for Eastern nationalities, such as the Ilminsky system, were closely linked to the broader goals of cultural integration and Russification (Keller, 2001).

2.3.4 Colonial Practices in Central Asia

In Central Asia, particularly from the 1850s onwards, Tsarist administrative practices exhibited similarities with European colonial governance. According to Sahadeo, these practices reflected a growing suspicion toward Islam and prioritised religion and ethnicity as central aspects of local identity (Sahadeo, 2007, p. 33). Unlike other regions of the empire, institutions such as a muftiate were not established in Central Asia to manage Islamic affairs, which some scholars interpret as indicative of the distinct administrative approach adopted in the region (Tasar, 2017).

2.4 The Role of Jadids in the Formation of Uzbek Identity

In the policy of Tsarist Russia in Turkestan, the question of national identity played a secondary role compared to economic interests. The empire's primary goal in its administrative policy for Turkestan was to utilise the region's economic resources and control key trade routes and strategic points. Although national identification policy has been important, it would be incorrect to consider it the primary or leading policy (Khalid, 2014, p. 201). Although the Russian government attempted to safeguard its interests by shaping and managing the identities of the indigenous peoples, these actions were primarily used to serve economic and political interests. Russification and assimilation policies contributed to the strengthening of the empire's economic policy by weakening the common unity of the indigenous peoples and dividing them into ethnic groups convenient for governance. In this regard, the priority of Russian colonial policy in Turkestan was, first of all, economic and geostrategic interests, and identity policy was used to realise these interests (Khalid, 2015). With the conquest of Central Asia by Tsarist Russia, not only did the infrastructure change, but also the lifestyle and worldview of the people. During this period, new scientific and cultural environments emerged, including the development of printing, newspaper production, and book publishing (Khalid, 2015). Initially built only for military purposes, the railways later gave impetus to a new worldview among the local intelligentsia. From this period, segments of the local population exposed to colonial rule began to view the world from a new perspective through Russian literature and the press. The

first printing press was brought to Central Asia by Governor-General von Kaufman. Although initially only books were printed, newspapers were later published. The first newspaper in Tashkent was published in 1870. Although this newspaper initially aimed to convey new knowledge, it also introduced new ideas and contributed to a transformation in the worldview of Central Asian peoples (Khalid, 2015).

Observing the rapidly developing European culture and technological achievements after the Industrial Revolution, the new intelligentsia began to invest significant effort and resources in educating the nation. Through newspapers, the successes of the Ottoman, Iranian, and European countries began to spread widely among the peoples of Turkestan. As a result, an intellectual movement aimed at understanding and reforming the cultural self – i.e. the Jadidism movement began to take shape (Khalid, 1998; Brower, 2003). The process of forming national consciousness among people living under the Empire's rule was complex and multifaceted. Typically, national identity is understood as a complex of everyday language, culture, history, and values that distinguishes a person from others. In Central Asia, where Russian and Soviet influence was powerful, the formation of national identity was complex and gradual (Allworth, 1990).

In this process, the Jadidism movement, which emerged in the Turkic territories within the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, became a significant turning point in the development of national consciousness and modernisation movements in the territory of present-day Uzbekistan (Khalid, 1998). While the primary goal of the Jadidism movement was to modernise education, culture, and society, the movement also promoted Islamic moral principles in their modern form. Initially, Jadidism was widespread among Crimean Tatars. Then, through Ismail Gaspirali, the prominent leader of the movement, he spread to Central Asia (Khalid, 1998). The term "innovation", when translated from Arabic, means "innovation" or "movement of renewal". This movement became especially widespread in the regions of Uzbekistan, and although initially limited to socially prominent individuals, it evolved into a political movement after the October Revolution. The primary objective of the Jadids was to enable the population to find its place and voice in the modern world through education.

Ismail Gaspirali conducted his activities with caution, as confronting the Russian government and the political elite could have posed significant obstacles to achieving his primary objectives. At the heart of his central idea lay the harmonisation of Islamic traditions with modern reform — a similar approach to that observed in the Ottoman period — and the pursuit of modernisation without abandoning traditions (Pierce, 1960; Khalid, 1998). Gaspirali promoted

the opening of new method schools based on the European model and the expansion of artistic works in Turkic languages. The "translator" newspaper he published played an important role in promoting these ideas (Pierce, 1960). A class of intellectuals forming in Central Asia widely supported Gasprali's ideas. Under his influence, Munavvar Qori, one of the leaders of the Jadids of Turkestan, opened the first Jadid school in 1901 (Pierce, 1960; Khalid, 1998).

Jadidism emerged in the second half of the 19th century, during a period of significant expansion in Russian colonial policy. During this period, the cultural and economic backwardness of Central Asia became evident, and traditional schools and madrasas were unable to provide access to modern knowledge and education. Therefore, the Jadids opened schools in a new way to teach modern subjects such as mathematics, geography, physics, chemistry and foreign languages (Allworth, 1967; Khalid, 2014). Ismail Gasprali's (1851–1914) new method schools formed the basis of this movement, introducing new teaching approaches to ensure that Muslim children acquire modern knowledge (Khalid, 2021). During these changes, it is natural to ask why the Jadids did not integrate with Russian-native schools or neglect them. The answer is explained by the importance the Jadids placed on native-language instruction in education (Khalid, 1998; Brower, 2003). Reflecting the ideas of Mustafa Chokay, the Jadids emphasised that education plays a crucial role in shaping collective identity, believing that children ultimately serve the society in which they are educated. Additionally, the cultural reforms of the Jadids primarily aimed at the social and intellectual revitalisation of Muslim communities. This movement aimed to initiate a new era through public enlightenment rather than direct political opposition (Khalid, 1998). The Jadids also viewed the printed press as a crucial tool for advancing their objectives. In 1906, Munavvar Qori published the newspaper *Taraqqiy* in Tashkent. Newspapers such as *Sadoyi Turkiston*, *Samarqand*, and *Oyina* also contributed to raising awareness about social reform, promoting literacy, and preserving cultural values (Khalid, 2014; Khalid, 2015). In these publications, special attention was paid to issues such as the people's literacy, critical perspectives on administrative policies, and the preservation of identity. The Jadids did not limit themselves to opening schools alone. They wrote new textbooks for their schools and sent talented students to study in cities like Istanbul, where scientific and political developments were active. Istanbul became a prominent centre for such students. By the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, served as an important intellectual and cultural centre for the dissemination of Turkic reformist ideas among Central Asian intellectuals and the modern educational model (Khalid, 2014, 1998).

After Ismail Gaspirali visited scientific centres in Samarkand and Bukhara in 1893, the movement gained widespread popularity in Central Asia. In the same year, the first Jadid school was opened in Bukhara. The average age of Middle Asian Jadids was also much younger. For example, in 1910, Makhmudkhoja Behbudiy, the eldest of the Jadids, was 36 years old and Chulpan, the youngest, was only 13 years old (Tillaboev & Zamanov, 2019).

The two major historical events of 1905-1907—the Russo-Japanese War and the Revolution in the Russian Empire—created favourable conditions for local reformers. These events ushered in a new era for the peoples of Central Asia and other Muslim inhabitants under the empire's control. As a result, nationalistic and constitutional movements intensified in countries such as Turkey, Iran, Egypt and Morocco. Reform-oriented intellectuals aimed to adapt to global change by preserving their cultural heritage (Peirce, 1960).

The socio-political reforms that emerged during this period developed and were sometimes surpassed by broad ideological movements, such as Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turkism, and Pan-Arabism. Central Asian intellectuals also became active participants in these intellectual and reformist movements, engaging in discussions of national consciousness, culture, and governance (Peirce, 1960). In shaping new forms of identity, the Jadids emphasised the importance of historical knowledge and the integration of secular sciences with Islamic scholarship. One of the central directions of Ismail Gaspirali's intellectual activity was the reevaluation of history, with a particular focus on the shared Turkic heritage (Gaspirali, 1905). To better understand his views on historical science, it is necessary to study his literary and political-literary works in depth. According to Gaspirali, history is not merely a means of narrating past events for humanity but a scientific field that enables understanding of future possibilities. He writes, "History is a science that illuminates the past and signifies the future" (Gaspirali, 1905, p. 110). In other words, careful historical analysis enables a more informed orientation toward future developments. Gaspirali also stressed that although historical events may contain brutal truths, they should be recorded objectively. His view resonates with the classical understanding of historical inquiry articulated by Ibn Khaldun. In *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldun writes: "Scientists with keen eyes know well that historical science is among the most respected and important sciences. All nations and generations embark on long journeys to learn from this knowledge and do not hesitate to spend their wealth and resources" (Ibn Khaldun, 1377/2023, p.12).

Gaspirali expresses the following opinion about the importance of historical science: "A person who writes history must be a historian, not merely a literary chelebi (in Turkish *çelebi*) (i.e., a

refined, educated gentleman known for polished expression rather than scholarly rigour)." (Gaspirali, 1906, p. 33) With these words, he emphasises that the primary task of historical science is to present the truth clearly, and the task of historians is to record events objectively. Thus, Ismail Gaspirali viewed history as a means of understanding national and common Turkic identity. From this perspective, his scientific and literary heritage is also significant. The science of history has often been shaped under the influence of prevailing political ideologies. Ibn Khaldun explains the causes of lies and falsifications in history as follows: "The main causes of lies and fabrications in history should be sought in matters of sect, nation, and tribe" (Ibn Khaldun, 1377/2023, p. 45). Gaspirali, in turn, maintained that historical science, when conducted independently of political interference, can offer a meaningful basis for the development of collective identity. Gaspirali and his contemporaries not only worked to address the socio-cultural conditions of Turkestan, but also engaged in a critical assessment of its historical trajectory. He writes about the state of Turkestan: "In our time, the state of Turkestan is declining..." (Gaspirali, 1906, p. unknown). According to him, the primary reason for such a political and social decline was that the existing education system in Turkestan, specifically madrasas and traditional home education, did not meet the requirements of the time. Gaspirali believed that only through new-method schools could a national awakening and a new national identity be formed in Turkestan. He expresses this idea even more clearly in one of his articles: "Where there is no knowledge, there is no independence" (Gaspirali, 1905, p. unknown). He suggested that intellectual empowerment is essential for social development and cultural self-definition. Throughout its activities, the Jadid movement faced strong opposition from traditional Islamic scholars. During the period of Russian rule, as religious authorities were allowed to continue their practices without significant interference, some traditional scholars maintained their influence through a policy of political quietism. Even after the Bukhara Emirate was abolished in 1923, the state's administration remained based on Sharia law. Some religious scholars tried to justify the Russian invasion by claiming that the Russian government was not interfering with religious worship (Khalid, 1998).

Many scholars viewed the Jadids as reformers who threatened religious education and declared their new schools as "bid'ah" (i.e., religious innovations considered contrary to traditional Islamic teachings) (Khalid, 2014). Even today, some scholars support this idea. Scholars believed secular subjects taught in new schools would weaken Islamic values (Khalid, 2014). At the same time, the Jadids criticised not only the madrasa and home education system, but also Russian-native schools. They regarded Russian-native schools as institutions designed primarily to train administrative personnel aligned with imperial objectives, rather than to

promote broader educational development (Khalid, 2014). However, the ulema opposed not only the Jadid schools, but also the reforms they carried out through the press and theatre. In particular, the "Turon" theatre, opened by Munavvar Qori in 1913, caused great controversy. Scholars considered such theatres "contrary to Islamic ethics." However, despite this, the Jadids also tried to develop national consciousness through art and literature (Khalid, 2021). The Jadids, at the centre of emerging cultural reform movements, used theatrical performances as a means to address public illiteracy and limited access to formal education. Because most of the population was illiterate, the Jadids tried to convey their ideas and thoughts precisely through theatrical stages, emphasising the importance of knowledge and social awareness. For example, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's drama, *Padarkush*, aimed to highlight the severe consequences of this ignorance (Khalid, 2021). Nevertheless, some scholars supported the reforms carried out by the Jadids. This was because among the Jadid leaders were Muftis like Behbudi and Quran scholars like Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov. Some religious figures, realising the need to develop Islam in the modern world, collaborated with the Jadids (Khalid, 2014). Nevertheless, the conflict between the Jadids and the ulama intensified at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The Jadids advocated for harmonising Islam with the modern world. Their main idea was that Muslim societies would lag behind progress until they mastered science and technology. They expressed this idea with Ismail Gaspirali's famous slogan: "In language—unity, in thought—unity, in deed—unity" (Khalid, 2014). The Jadids also supported expanding educational opportunities for women and encouraging their participation in public life, which drew criticism from more conservative circles (Khalid, 2021).

The Jadid movement played a significant role in the modernisation, national awakening, and social reform of Central Asia. Within the colonial context, they sought to cultivate national consciousness, modernise the educational system, and align Islam with the modern world. Despite existing antagonisms with the Ulama, the Jadids' reforms in education and culture had a profound influence on the development of later Central Asian societies.

This period also saw armed popular uprisings against the Russian government. However, these uprisings are difficult to classify as national liberation movements in a strict sense. Analysing the leading causes of the uprisings, we see that in most cases their main goal was not freedom or national independence, but local socio-political problems (Khalid, 2014). Nevertheless, such uprisings kept Russian officials in a constant state of alarm. For example, Ostroumov, who served in Turkestan for forty years, said: "If the troops leave Turkestan, the Russian authorities will not be able to stay here for a single day" (Tatishchev, 2001). Although such uprisings were fragmented and lacked a clear purpose, they compelled the Russian government to remain

constantly vigilant regarding the Turkestan question. An example of such uprisings is the "plague uprising" in Tashkent. When the plague spread to the city's population, public discontent intensified due to Russian officials failing to fulfil their promises, leading to an uprising (Khalid, 2014). Another example is the 1898 uprising in Andijan, the head of which, Muhammadali Eshon, has very limited archival information (Tatishchev, 2001). However, this uprising was also dispersed and did not cause much resonance. The largest uprising of this period was the Jizzakh uprising of 1916, initially against the Tsarist government's decision to involve the population in forced labour. Some scholars later interpreted this uprising as a broader expression of resistance, but it was ultimately suppressed by imperial forces (Khalid, 2014; Esanov, 2024). In conclusion, neither the modernisation movement nor armed uprisings were enough to liberate Turkestan from Russian rule. Munavvar Qori wrote about this situation in his article, "What Is Reform?" In his article, he wrote a striking observation: Munavvar Qori (1919) warned that all aspects of society—its actions, paths, words, educational institutions, teaching methods, and moral standards—had declined. He noted that without significant reform, the risk of marginalisation under stronger global powers would increase. These concerns of Munavvar Qori reflected a broader apprehension among reformists of the time. Although the Jadids tried to convey the concepts of national identity and the modern world to the people, the impact of their efforts was constrained by various internal challenges and external political pressures (Khalid, 2014). Consequently, the region remained under imperial rule for an extended period into the 20th century.

2.5 Social Foundations and Public Reactions to Nation-Building Policies During the Tsarist Period

The Russian Empire's approach to nation-building in Turkestan, encompassing present-day Uzbekistan, was primarily focused on achieving political control, implementing administrative restructuring, and exerting cultural dominance. The effectiveness of these policies was closely linked to the social structure of local society and the responses of various population groups.

At the time of the Russian conquest, Central Asian society—especially in the territories of the Khanates of Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand—was predominantly rural, Islamic, and hierarchical. The majority of the population consisted of sedentary farmers, pastoral nomads, and artisans, many of whom had limited exposure to modern secular education or nationalist concepts (Khalid, 2006). The urban elite, comprising religious scholars (ulama) and traditional rulers, held substantial authority, while the broader population remained socially fragmented, defined by tribal, clan, or religious affiliations.

The Tsarist nation-building policy did not foster an inclusive identity among the local Muslim population. Instead, it marginalised indigenous cultures, imposed the Russian language and administrative frameworks, and sought to control religious life. This approach elicited mixed reactions:

Many segments of the rural population chose to adapt passively to the new imperial order, focusing on daily subsistence rather than engaging in political resistance.

Traditional elites, especially Islamic scholars, defended their religious autonomy and opposed cultural assimilation, maintaining the authority of Islamic courts and educational institutions.

A small but influential group of modernising intellectuals known as the Jadids emerged, advocating for educational reform, cultural revival, and gradual modernisation. Their efforts represented an early form of national consciousness, although framed within broader Islamic and Turkic identities rather than ethnic Uzbek nationalism.

The most visible reaction was the 1916 uprising, driven by economic exploitation, forced conscription, and increasing resentment toward Russian colonial rule. Although this revolt lacked a coherent nationalist ideology, it reflected deep-seated social grievances and opposition to imperial domination.

Overall, the Tsarist state's failure to engage with the social realities of Central Asia—such as religious identity, local traditions, and the absence of a unified national consciousness—limited the effectiveness of its nation-building project. This led to fragmented and often contradictory public responses, which laid the groundwork for future contestations over identity and state power.

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, the ideological foundations of Tsarist Russia's national policy in Central Asia and its practical implementation were analysed using the example of the Turkestan region. This demonstrated that the Russian Empire's approach to regional governance was shaped by both strategic pragmatism and the ideology of the new empire, encompassing ideas such as the civilisational mission, Orthodoxy, and absolute power. Although direct assimilation was rarely used, the regime used administrative control, language policy, and the selective involvement of local elites in cooperation to establish dominance, often disrupting traditional identities in the process.

The central theme of the chapter was the inconsistency and mediating nature of Tsarist policy: although adorned with the language of modernisation and order, national policy primarily served military, political, and economic objectives. The imperial state did not aim to eradicate Islamic or Turkic identities completely, but rather to manage them in a manner that facilitated imperial control. From this perspective, the rise of the Jadid movement emerged as a critical reformist movement—this movement sought to revive Islamic traditions by mastering modern educational and cultural means to resist Russian domination.

The chapter also emphasises that the foundation established during the Tsarist period—particularly the administrative classification of ethnic groups and the erosion of religious authority—subsequently created conditions conducive to the formation of national identity during the Soviet period. The Russian Empire, which administratively and ethnographically reinterpreted the identity of the indigenous population, inadvertently paved the way for more systematic forms of national delimitation under Soviet rule.

In conclusion, the national policy of Tsarist Russia in Turkestan was not a project aimed at building a unified nation but rather a collection of various measures taken to maintain control. Nevertheless, his legacy played an important role, particularly in shaping the ideological environment and reform movements, thereby laying the groundwork for the national policy of the Soviet era, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: SOVIET NATIONALITY POLICY

3.1 Collapse of the Russian Empire

The fall of the Russian Empire was caused by several fundamental structural weaknesses, especially in terms of internal governance and economic fragility during periods of rapid social change. During a profound economic and social transformation, the Tsarist government tried to preserve autocracy without any reduction. The regime was based on hopelessly outdated principles (Figes, 1996). The defenders of the monarchy believed that the people should obey and follow, but the monarchists did not convince them (Figes, 1996). They did not have an ideology for mobilisation and were unaware of the need for it. Educated professionals, such as engineers, lawyers, and doctors, were needed to manage the new industry that arose from the construction of new factories. However, the Tsarist ministers feared the destructive power of education and refused to support universal education (Sunny, 2006). This hesitation differed sharply from other modernising countries, such as Japan (Sunny, 2006). Moreover, Russia lacked a tradition of representative governance, and civil society, autonomous social and professional organisations independent of the government, practically did not exist (Hosking, 2001). The country was largely illiterate and based on agriculture, with only a thinly educated stratum (Hosking, 2001). Industrial capitalism was still a "thin sprout" and only began to take root in the 1880s. The intelligentsia was considered incapable of governance, and the bureaucracy that ensured the state's functioning was loyal to the leader and his close associates (Hosking, 2001). Even after 1905, when the autocracy became a constitutional monarchy, Russia's attempts to modernise its legal order were insufficient to meet its needs (Riasanovsky & Steinberg, 2010). The events of 1917 can be understood as the collapse of two governmental systems—autocratic and liberal—emphasising a fundamental political crisis: how could Russia be governed? (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

3.1.1 The Role of the First World War in Accelerating the Collapse of the Russian Empire

The First World War was an important catalyst that remarkably weakened the Russian Empire and accelerated its collapse. The Great War is described as "the suicide of empires," and Russia was the first to fall (Figes, 1996). The war that began in 1914 was a disaster for Russia (Fitzpatrick, 2008). By the third year of the war, the Romanov dynasty had fallen, and by the fourth year, the empire had disintegrated (Figes, 1996). The war continued to consume the empire's human resources, economic power, and the psyche of its people (Sunny, 2006). The

military defeats of 1915 and 1916 contributed to the situation that led to the rise to power of revolutionary extremists (Riasanovsky & Steinberg, 2010).

The war had a significant influence on territories such as Central Asia, which were far removed from the front line (Khalid, 2021). The conflict imposed heavy economic demands on these regions (Suny, 2006), resulting in a rapid rise in the cost of living and a shortage of food and essential goods (Suny, 2006). The devastation of warfare across Europe further undermined the legitimacy of dynastic empires (Figes, 1996). War conditions in Central Asia contributed to the immediate causes of the 1916 uprising, including poverty, the struggle for resources, military demands, and increased taxes (Khalid, 2006).

3.1.2 The 1916 Central Asian Uprisings as a Mirror of Imperial Discontent

The Central Asian revolt of 1916 reflected the deep discontent and shaky relations between the Tsarist state and its non-Russian citizens. During the First World War, the regime's attempt to conscript Muslims for military service led to a significant uprising in Central Asia, which resulted in heavy casualties (Khalid, 2006). This rebellion reflected the difference between the state and its subjects throughout the Turkestan and Kazakh steppes (Khalid, 2006). The government's decision to abruptly abandon its long-lasting policy of exempting the indigenous population from military service caused panic. It allowed for the expression of hidden hatred, which was met with bloody revenge by the Russians (Kappeler, 2001). Despite any material benefits derived from Russian rule, sources indicate that most indigenous people regarded Russians as invaders (Kappeler, 2001). The uprisings demonstrate that neither the Imperial government nor the Russian people could gain the friendship and trust of Central Asian peoples (Kappeler, 2001).

In addition to the issue of conscription, the sources highlight the main reasons associated with poverty, the rivalry for resources between inhabitants and Europeans, and the general challenges of the war (Khalid, 2021). Tsarist administrations often pursued a policy of "ignorance" (neglecting the indigenous population) in Central Asia due to a lack of personnel and resources, and Islam was often seen as a sign of an inability to overcome alienation (Crews, 2006). However, there were some attempts to utilise education for integration following previous unrest, but officials were hesitant to implement this policy fully (Crews, 2006). The Tsarist administration's response to the 1916 uprising was brutal suppression (Becker, 2004). However, Tsarist rule ended in parts of Central Asia in the summer of 1916 and was not restored until the February Revolution of 1917 (Khalid, 2015). Thus, events in Central Asia demonstrated clear

complaints and the state's inability to maintain effective control and legitimacy in its diverse border regions, even through the use of brute force (Becker, 2004).

3.1.3 National and Ethnic Resistance to Imperial Rule in Muslim-Majority Regions

The Russian Empire was a vast and multiethnic state, with about half of the population not comprising ethnic Russians (Kappeler, 2001; Lieven, 2000). These national minority groups differed significantly from one another in terms of economic and cultural progress, as well as the level of national consciousness (Kappeler, 2001; Lieven, 2000). Until 1917, the national movements of these groups were primarily limited by their desire to achieve cultural autonomy (Kappeler, 2001; Lieven, 2000). However, the defeat of the Empire and the revolutions of 1917, together with the parochialism of the central authority, radically changed the situation (Lieven, 2000). As a result, the national liberation movement quickly became a powerful political force (Lieven, 2000).

At the beginning of the century, a cultural and political awakening had begun in Central Asia. While this awakening was initially inspired by Russian concepts, by 1914 it had shifted its orientation towards nationalist goals (Khalid, 2006). The Russian invasion gave rise to new reform ideas among Central Asian intellectuals. This new movement, called Jadidism, made them ask, "Why were we overrun?" and "How can Muslims live in a colonial context?", prompting them to reflect on the questions (Khalid, 2015). The Jadids sought to strengthen Islam by incorporating Western knowledge and eventually adopted the concept of revolution, viewing it as a means of national liberation and progress (Khalid, 2021). They saw the Bolsheviks as a possible ally in establishing a new world order, although their primary goal was not class, but National Liberation (Khalid, 2021).

During World War I, Muslim political elites in Central Asia expressed loyalty to the Empire, supporting the war, hoping for political concessions and full integration (Khalid, 2021). For example, the leaders of Kazakhstan wrote a petition requesting the release from mobilisation, the abolition of the status of a "foreigner," and the right to representation in the State Duma (Khalid, 2021). However, especially after the Ottoman Empire joined the war, the Russian government began to fear the dangers of Pan-Islamism (Khalid, 2021). Central Asians, on the other hand, have adopted Russian Orthodox rule as a policy against the multiethnic Muslim population (Khalid, 2006).

Many non-Russians viewed the 1917 revolution as an opportunity to rid themselves of Russian rule, and anti-colonial forces were hopeful of a Bolshevik victory (Martin, 2001). During the

interim government, the issue of nationality became an important source of political conflict (Kappeler, 2001). In 1917, the Bolsheviks openly supported national rights, unlike other Russian political parties. They viewed national disparities as a problem that paved the way for class struggle and considered propaganda conducted in local languages to be more effective (Martin, 2001). When the Soviets came to power, they promulgated a decree promising freedom and inviolability of Muslim faith, customs and institutions. With this, they aimed to demonstrate a new political path distinct from the Empire era (Martin, 2001).

However, this openness also allowed for the intensification of existing nationalist and religious movements (Khalid, 2015). For example, some Turkestan Ulama established the “Ulama Council”, which aimed to establish a sharia-based Islamic State. At the same time, short-lived national political entities such as the Alash Orda also demanded autonomy and the expulsion of Russian settlers (Khalid, 2015). The Provisional Government, on the other hand, was neither able to suppress nor agree with these growing national aspirations (Kappeler, 2001).

3.1.4 The direct political impact of the February Revolution of 1917 on imperial rule in Central Asia

Described as a spontaneous mass uprising, the February Revolution of 1917 led to the collapse of the monarchy and initiated a massive coup throughout the empire, shaking its constituent societies to the core (Figes, 1996; Suny, 2011). Hidden tensions between and within different societies came to light (Suny, 2011). In Central Asia, the revolution caused chaos, war, and famine (Khalid, 2021). Imperial rule effectively came to an end, creating a power vacuum (Khalid, 2015).

The region was politically fragmented (Khalid, 2021). In Russia's densely populated urban centres, a dual power system emerged between the Provisional Government and the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies (Khalid, 2021). However, this was only one of many competitions (Khalid, 2021). The rulers of the protectorate, such as Bukhara and Khiva, strived for immediate liberation from Russian rule, but at the same time faced internal problems (Khalid, 2021). With the disruption of order in Russia, the Emir of Bukhara tried to maximise his independence (Khalid, 2006).

Local actors, such as the Westernised Turkestan nationalists (Jadids), took advantage of the opportunity provided by the revolution (Khalid, 2015). A small group formed the Turkestan Autonomy in Kokand (Khalid, 2021). However, this temporary autonomy did not last long, as the military unit of the Tashkent Soviet, with the help of Joseph Stalin, destroyed the Kokand

government and the city three months later (Khalid, 2021). The revolution brought new groups to power and influence in Central Asia, but the situation remained chaotic, with various groups fighting for control (Khalid, 2021). The collapse of Russia in hostilities also opened up Ottoman ties for Central Asia and added another layer to the complex political landscape (Yavuz, 2011).

3.1.5 From Resistance to Collapse: The Role of Regional Revolts in Undermining Tsarist Rule

The Tsarist administration's responses to regional uprisings, particularly before 1917, were often ineffective in the long run, demonstrating the regime's weakness and lack of popular support. Although the government managed to maintain control through repression and concessions during the 1905 revolution (demonstrating the relative weakness and inexperience of the revolutionary groups of that time) (Figes, 1996), its methods sowed seeds of deeper protest. The officials were determined to suppress the revolutionary demonstrations that followed the 1905 revolution (Suny, 2011).

In Central Asia, the Tsarist government's response to the 1916 uprising was marked by cruelty and bloody revenge against the local population after the attacks on the Russians (Khalid, 2015). Although, like General Kuropatkin's cruelty, this act temporarily prevented the complete collapse of Russian rule in some areas (Khalid, 2021), it further alienated the local population and deepened the existing gap between the state and its subjects (Khalid, 2015). Sources clearly state that the 1916 uprisings demonstrated the failure of the Imperial government and the Russian people to win the friendship and trust of the peoples of Central Asia (Khalid, 2015). Most importantly, in the summer of 1916, Tsarist rule completely ended in some parts of Central Asia and was never completely restored until the February Revolution of 1917 (Khalid, 2015). This illustrated the Tsarist power's incapability to effectively recover its borders and control rebellious territories, weakening its overall dominance over the empire and signalling its approaching collapse. Disparities in colonial policy, such as relying on "ignorance" (Khalid, 2006), coupled with failed attempts at integration, further weakened administrative effectiveness and legitimacy in the face of problems. Revolution marked the end of imperial rule and ushered in a new political era (Khalid, 2014).

3.2 Formation of the Bolshevik government and initial nationalist policies

At the end of February 1917, the Russian Empire, weakened by war and uprisings, began to decay rapidly. In Petrograd on February 23, the discontent of working women over bread soon shifted to political demands, particularly the demand for the monarchy to abdicate. The

Romanov dynasty, which had ruled for three centuries, was unable to maintain its dominance in light of the unfolding events. Leon Trotsky symbolically described the condition as “the house shakes like rotten fruit” (quote from Khalid, 2014). This political coup began in winter and soon evolved into a social revolution. Some of the people residing in the multinational territory of the Russian Empire began the struggle for their independence.

When the Tsarist government was overthrown, a provisional government was formed. The period from February to October 1917 was marked by a significant political phenomenon in Russia, known as "two-powerism" (двойевластие). This situation deepened the country's instability, paving the way for the Bolsheviks to come to power (Service, 2009). Following the February Revolution, state power was divided between the Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet, which represented the interests of workers and soldiers. While Formal power was in the hands of the Provisional Government, a great power of influence among workers and the military belonged to the Petrograd Soviet (Figes, 1996). This constant conflict between the two power centres further exacerbated political instability (Fitzpatrick, 2008).

Although the Provisional Government, which came to power after the February Revolution, saw itself as a defender of the revolution, it began to pursue a strict and restrictive policy towards the national dreams of non-Russian nations. Initially, the government did not pay sufficient attention to this issue. However, political instability and increasing national pressure in remote areas of the Empire, particularly in Central Asia, compelled the government to revise its policies. On 28 September 1917, the Provisional Government published a declaration recognising the principle of national self-determination, but leaving the implementation of this principle to the future constituent assembly (Khalid, 2014; Dimanshtein, 1930). However, it was too late- the Bolshevik Revolution was imminent, while national groups were disillusioned with the Provisional Government (Martin, 2001). These groups became increasingly sceptical of the government's will to make fundamental reforms (Martin, 2001). In Central Asia, the February Revolution was met with mixed emotions. Although the 1916 uprising and the subsequent repressions weakened the local population's political activity, the government's collapse aroused cautious hope among them (Sabol, 2003). The collapse of the imperial administration generated limited but noticeable expectations for political change among some sectors of the population (Sabol, 2003). Although the population did not actively participate in the new political movements, the weakening of imperial rule increased the likelihood of the collapse of the colonial system. Created conditions in which imperial control appeared increasingly untenable in the region. In opposition to this process, Russian officials, clergy, and settlers sought to maintain Russian political dominance in the region (Keller, 2015).

The Provisional Government's hesitation and late confessions on national issues revealed its weakness. Delayed responses to national demands revealed its weakness. It was precisely the failure of national policy that made the Bolsheviks' ideas of "people's power" and "the right of nations to self-determination" attractive (Martin, 2001; Slezkine, 1994). As a result, neglecting the national question became one factor that accelerated the Russian Empire's collapse.

Inadequate engagement with national demands contributed to the decline in the legitimacy of the imperial system. As a result, the weakness of the Provisional Government and the strengthening of the Petrograd Soviet laid the groundwork for the Bolsheviks to seize power through the October Revolution (Read, 1984).

When international capitalism was in crisis, the emergence of communism was perceived by many anti-colonial intellectuals and marginalised groups as a potential alternative to the dominant capitalist order and a means of pursuing national liberation and modernisation (Khalid, 2014). Consequently, the centuries-old imperial system was replaced by a new regime that promoted a radically different ideological vision.

While Martin (2001) argues that the Soviet Union functioned as an 'affirmative action empire' promoting ethnic equality, others, such as Slezkine (2000), have suggested that this system was also a mechanism for centralised control, masked as empowerment. This term is usually applied to states that pursue special policies to equalise the rights and opportunities of ethnic or national groups within their borders. When applying this term to the USSR, Martin mainly refers to the Soviet policy towards non-Russian peoples during the 1920s and 1930s. The essence of this policy was to achieve unified socio-political unity by ensuring the equality of all nations, promoting their development, and integrating them into the Soviet system. "Difference-based governance seemed to have been abolished," said Adeeb Khalid.

Unlike traditional colonial empires, the Soviet regime officially rejected policies of Russification or suppression of national identities. Instead, it aimed to recognise and promote them through a policy known as *korenizatsiya* ("indigenisation"). Under this framework, individual republics were established for each nationality, and institutions such as schools, newspapers, and theatres were created in native languages. Local elites were also trained and appointed to leadership positions. Terry Martin (2001) characterises this approach as a form of "affirmative action," whereby the state granted preferential support to historically marginalised ethnic groups.

Such a policy distinguished the Soviet Union from other colonial states. For example, while the British or French empires often pursued assimilative or discriminatory policies towards the indigenous population in their colonies, the Soviets promoted an image of themselves as advocates for ethnic inclusion and equality. Especially in the early years after the revolution, the Soviet state promoted the recognition of the rights and freedoms of non-Russian peoples as a source of political legitimacy. The fall of Tsarist Russia raised new questions about Central Asia's position in the emerging Soviet order. As Adeeb Khalid (2015) notes, such sentiments were echoed by local intellectuals, including the Tashkent-based poet Mahdum Sidqi, who proclaimed: "...a line that captured the spirit of hope and reform envisioned by some segments of the local intelligentsia."

While the Bolsheviks promised the people the right to self-determination before seizing power, they did not stop there. Instead, they initiated a broad effort to implement socialism across the territory of the former multinational Russian Empire (Khalid, 2015). To achieve this goal, the Bolsheviks actively mobilised the means of force, local elites, local governing bodies, and existing social structures. Their greatest goal was to build a socialist society within the framework of a multiethnic empire. Although the Bolsheviks promoted the right of nations to self-determination before the 1917 revolutions, after consolidating power, particularly in Turkestan, the Soviets transitioned from rhetorical support for self-determination to a more centralised and utilitarian nationality policy driven by strategic economic and political interests (Hirsch, 2005). They recognised that resources such as Uzbek cotton and Caucasian oil were essential to ensuring the economic viability of the Soviet state (Hirsch, 2005). Therefore, the Bolsheviks, with the help of economists and ethnographers from the time of the former Tsarist Russia, drawing on pre-existing ethnographic classifications, institutionalised ethnic identities by officially categorising various groups as distinct nations (*natsii*) and embedding these identities into the administrative structure of the Union.

Most specialists studying Soviet history believe that the question of nations and national identity in the Soviet state was formed after the 1917 revolution. Francine Hirsch (2005) stated that the nationality question was not a Bolshevik invention after 1917. However, it had already emerged as a central debate, alongside the issue of class conflict, during the revolutionary ferment of 1905–1917. As the new rulers of former imperial territories, the Soviets faced two main challenges: managing the multilingual and multinational population and disseminating Karl Marx's socialist ideology across diverse regions. Even Marx himself did not provide a clear framework for applying his ideas to a territory as vast and complex as Russia (Hirsch,

2005). Nonetheless, the Bolsheviks believed that Marxist principles could serve as a foundation for building socialism in the Soviet context.

While many Bolsheviks had spent years in exile in Western Europe, other reform-minded groups remaining in Russia began conducting systematic research on the empire's various populations. Leading this effort was Sergei F. Oldenburg, Secretary of the Academy of Sciences. He maintained communication with Lenin and proposed employing ethnographers, linguists, and other specialists who had served under the Tsarist regime (Hirsch, 2005).

Oldenburg was one of the prominent scholars of his time, known not only as an orientalist and ethnographer but also as a political activist. He was a member of the Constitutional Democratic Party (Cadets) and considered himself a constitutional monarchist. Oldenburg did not leave the country after the revolution, although the Bolsheviks considered him and other liberal intellectuals politically unreliable. On the contrary, he and his colleagues chose to cooperate with the new regime, contributing their scientific experience to the country's modernisation, preserving academic institutions, and developing scientifically based governance. The continued presence of figures like Oldenburg allowed the Bolshevik leadership to combine ideological transformation with administrative continuity. These collaborations laid the groundwork for Soviet ethnographic and linguistic classification systems, which later became central to the state's national policy (Holquist, 2002).

After the 1917 Revolution, the Bolsheviks drew on the experience of pre-revolutionary ethnographers, such as Oldenburg and his colleagues, to develop a new administrative model for managing the USSR's multinational composition. They attempted to adapt Marxist ideology to incorporate aspects of European nationalist thought, particularly those emphasising culture and language as the foundation of national identity. According to the definition of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, a nation is based on a common language, tradition, and cultural memory - "Volk," which became the primary conceptual foundation of 19th-century European nationalism (Herder, 1784/2004).

In applying these principles to the Soviet context, the Bolsheviks sought to establish a modern, secular state founded on rational and materialist principles, rather than on religious or traditional authority. This approach, in turn, supported the development of a more centralised governance model across different nationalities of the former empire.

Now let us ask the following four questions:

What were nation and national identity according to Soviet ideology?

How did the Bolsheviks and reformers, Russian experts, define the concept of "nation"?

How did these ideas impact the population of Turkestan, particularly in Uzbekistan?

What was the "people" according to Soviet views?

We will answer these questions one by one.

3.2.1. What was the nation and national identity according to Soviet ideology?

In Soviet ideology, the concept of "nation" was considered not a permanent or natural social unit, but rather a variable category that emerged in specific historical and economic conditions (Hirsch, 2005). In his 1913 article *Marxism and the National Question*, Stalin defines a nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed based on a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture," and considers it a "historical category characteristic of the rise of capitalism" (Stalin, 1953, p. 300). In his opinion, national differences arise due to capitalist development, but these differences are expected to disappear with the formation of a proletarian consciousness. In this framework, national consciousness was seen as a temporary construct that would eventually dissolve with the maturation of proletarian consciousness, which was viewed as the ultimate ideological objective (Stalin, 1953; Hirsch, 2005).

According to Soviet ideology, national identity was considered the lowest component of the proletarian struggle and was subordinated to class interests. As Stalin emphasised, social democrats should defend the interests of the working strata, not the national ones (Stalin, 1953). Although this approach recognises the existence of nations, it sees them as a means of building socialism (Hirsch, 2005).

3.2.2. How did the Bolsheviks and reformist experts define the concept of "nationality"?

Although Bolshevik and reformist ethnographic experts often employed the same terminology when referring to "nationality," their semantic approaches differed radically. The Bolsheviks, particularly Lenin and Stalin, viewed the nation in class terms. For them, the nation was not a permanent entity, but a product of historical and economic factors (Hirsch, 2005). Stalin assessed the nation as a complex and temporary social unit, emphasising that it could only be supported within the interests of the proletarian class. Lenin, in turn, positively assessed specific national movements, particularly bourgeois-democratic movements aimed at overthrowing feudalism, as progressive forces (Hirsch, 2005).

In contrast, reformist ethnographers—Oldenburg, Schternberg, and others—have explained the nation through its cultural, linguistic, and anthropological characteristics. They used the terms "narodnost" and "natsionalnost" as scientific categories representing the historical, cultural and physical characteristics of the people. For example, Nadezhdin praises narodnost as the sum of the internal and external, spiritual and physical qualities of one people, seeing the basis of national identity in cultural identity (Layton, 1994). On the other hand, Lev Shternberg interpreted the formation of national consciousness in Indigenous peoples not as a natural process, but as a response to the expansion of the Russian Empire and colonial violence (Knight, 2000).

3.2.3. How did these ideas influence the population of Turkestan?

According to Soviet ideologues, national consciousness in Turkestan and other eastern regions emerged in response to the socio-political and economic disruptions caused by imperial Russian colonial policies. According to ethnographer Lev Sternberg, the Kyrgyz, Kazakhs, and Buryats did not initially perceive themselves as unified nations. Instead, their national consciousness emerged as a consequence of Russian colonial rule, particularly the loss of ancestral lands, access to water, and disruption of their traditional social systems (Sternberg, 1910)

The Bolsheviks assessed this process as the development of proletarian consciousness. They believe national movements were a temporary phenomenon, a social response to economic oppression. Instead of forcibly suppressing such movements, the Soviets preferred to integrate them in the form of "provincial autonomy." At the same time, the Soviets actively promoted the ideas of "people's friendship" and "class unity" in these regions, aiming to establish international proletarian solidarity rather than national consciousness (Hirsch, 2005).

This process illustrates how national identities in Turkestan were not merely revived or rediscovered, but actively constructed and institutionalised within the framework of Soviet ideological and administrative needs. Rather than reflecting organic historical continuity, these identities were shaped in response to colonial disruption and later codified through state classification mechanisms. (Hirsch, 2005; Khalid, 2015)

3.2.4. What was "people" according to the Soviet view?

The term "народ" in Russian means "people," but in Soviet ideology, this concept was redefined in a class-based context (Zorin, 1998). Historically, "narodnost" refers to the totality of a people's cultural, spiritual, and physical characteristics, which Russian ethnographers studied

based on language, customs, and anthropological traits (Anderson, 1991). However, the Soviets reinterpreted this concept in line with socialist ideas: now, "people" are claimed not as typical individuals, but as a "complex of working classes" (*toiling masses*).

In this approach, ethnography also changes its function: it becomes not just a study of people, but a tool that shapes class consciousness. In this way, the Soviets sought to purify the concept of "people" of its national foundations and replace it with class and ideological unity (Hirsch, 2005). This redefinition of "people" (народ) marked a significant departure from traditional cultural or ethnographic understandings, reflecting the Soviet attempt to engineer social categories in alignment with its ideological objectives. In doing so, the state restructured not only political authority but also the conceptual vocabulary through which populations understood themselves (Zorin, 1998; Hirsch, 2005). Thus, in Soviet Central Asia, national identity did not emerge as a natural expression of historical continuity, but rather as a consciously engineered outcome of state intervention, ideological strategy, and administrative categorisation (Martin, 2001; Khalid, 2015; Anderson, 1991).

3.3 Hope and Deception

According to Adeeb Khalid (2014), on March 13, 1917, approximately 30,000 people assembled at the Central Mosque in Tashkent—not for religious rituals but to hear explanations of the recent political developments in Petrograd. The event began a time of hope and expectations of change, represented by a political awakening in the local people.

Tashkent's important role in the life of Central Asia lies in its role as a centre for ensuring interaction between nomadic Turkic tribes and the local settled population. In this respect, it has become one of the most important strategic centers of the region during the transition period. Soon, newspapers published in the Uzbek language were filled with the excitement of the new era. This meeting in Tashkent marked the beginning of this surge (Khalid, 2014).

The 1917 revolution initially inspired optimism among the Muslim reformist elites of Turkestan. With its rhetoric of anti-imperialism and cultural autonomy, the new Bolshevik leadership appeared to promise the restoration of religious freedom, linguistic rights, and national development (Khalid, 2021).

The Bolsheviks introduced a policy that previous governments had not adopted, thereby gaining the initial support of a portion of the Central Asian intelligentsia. They saw these reforms as an opportunity for socio-political progress. The Soviet state financed the mass production of

books, magazines, newspapers, films, operas, museums, folk music ensembles, and other cultural output in non-Russian languages (Martin, 2001).

After the revolution, a widespread hope was ignited among the Uzbek intelligentsia. The leading Jadid intellectuals — Mahmudhoja Behbudiy, Abdurauf Fitrat and Munavvarqori — inspired by the Bolshevik promises of freedom from colonialism and cultural modernisation, viewed the new regime as an opportunity to modernise society through education and cultural revival. A'zam Khoshimi's "Farewell, Homeland!" illuminates these transitional complexities, including ideological changes and the emergence of new contradictions. The work helps the reader understand how the policies of the Soviet government and the aspirations of local intellectuals have evolved.

The initial stage of Soviet policy—korenization (localisation)—seemed to be in accordance with the aspirations of the Jadids. Adeeb Khalid (2021) refers to this period as the "age of hope and awakening," when intellectuals became more active and national culture was permitted. However, as Martin (2001) points out, this phase was a strategic compromise aimed at reinforcing Bolshevik control and legitimacy.

Azam Khoshimi's *Farewell, Homeland!* Work is deeply expressed through artistic language during the most complex and dramatic stage of Uzbekistan's history, namely the ideological struggle waged by the Soviets against national intellectuals, culture, and religion. This work is not merely the writer's memoirs, but a dramatic testament to a generation that experienced a spiritual and social collapse, written within the context of historical processes. So, who is A'zam Khoshimi, and why is this work so significant? While writing this scientific work, we encountered scientific works and books on Soviet policy that had been covered primarily by foreign scholars. However, Khoshimi's work is critical because it was written by a person who lived through that period and witnessed all the events firsthand. The work was written in the 1930s, the height of the period of deception we are discussing, and it contains strong evidence and truths. Therefore, this section is analysed against the background of *Farewell, Homeland*. Initially, the Soviet government presented itself as a revolutionary liberation force. Jadid intellectuals, progressive thinkers such as Mahmudhoja Behbudiy, Fitrat, and Munavvarqori, viewed the new regime as an opportunity to eradicate illiteracy, build a just society, and develop culture and language (Allworth, 1990). The *korenizatsiya* (indigenisation)—policy of the Soviets further strengthened these hopes: thanks to the granting of official status to local languages, the strong development of Uzbek literature, and the rapid development of theatre and the press, Uzbek intellectuals gained an area of activity at a level

previously unimaginable (Khalid, 2021). In Khoshimi's work, the external appearance of this period is also reflected—cities are being renovated, schools are being established, and people are striving for a modern life. However, the narrative gradually reveals ideological contradictions underlying these developments. The events depicted in the work, through characters, changes in the urban environment, social control, and Russification movements carried out under the guise of "renewal," lead to profound spiritual disorientation. Supporting Allworth's (1990) view that religion remained integral to Uzbek national identity, Hashimi records: "After the Bolsheviks occupied Turkistan, they prohibited the study of religious education; according to their ideas, studying and teaching religion was considered a major sin" (Khashimi, 1935/1999). This reflects the broader Soviet project of ideological purification, which involved suppressing religious and cultural practices. Khoshimi writes from the perspective of one of his characters: "We have been made to use both our pen and our language only to write their words" — a metaphor that suggests restrictions on expression and cultural autonomy.

Historical sources also confirm these events. Terry Martin (2001) describes the Soviet Union as an "affirmative action empire"—an empire that temporarily encourages local elites but ultimately destroys them through centralised control. Although the indigenisation policy appeared to grant autonomy to local populations, this freedom was contingent upon their adherence to Soviet ideology. Intellectuals identified with strong political and cultural views, including many Jadids, were increasingly perceived as incompatible with the goals of the regime and faced repression during the late 1930s (Allworth, 1994). Khoshimi reflects this process in his work through vivid imagery: teachers, writers, and scholars were systematically declared "enemies of the people," imprisoned without trial, and eliminated. Mosques were closed, children were alienated from religion, and religious belief was assessed as a "backwards force."

Khalid (2021) writes of Soviet cities: "They were a window of modernity when viewed from the outside, but doubt, fear, and control prevailed inside." Azam Khoshimi's *Farewell, Homeland*, clearly confirms this opinion. Behind the trams, modern buildings, and communist flags of Tashkent, the text depicts the mental suffering of the people, the forced transfer of children to boarding schools, the severance of family ties, and the fear of speaking the national language.

The work demonstrates that visible signs of progress in cities coexisted with feelings of alienation and cultural pressure within society. Martin (2001) also notes that the original

“nationalisation” policy later became a tool of Russification, meaning that local languages and cultures were only preserved to the extent that they served Soviet ideology.

This political pressure also had a strong impact on religious life. Çalışkan (2012) writes in his study that the Soviets viewed religion as an open enemy, abolished religious institutions, and imposed punishments on religious practitioners. In *Farewell, Homeland*, these cases are described through the demolition of mosques and the portrayal of imams as “traitors to the homeland.” The narrative recounts the story of socio-political and religious transformations in Turkestan during the late 1920s and early 1930s from a first-person perspective. According to the author, waqf properties were confiscated, religious education was banned, and religious buildings were heavily taxed. This led to the closure of mosques, which were later repurposed as warehouses, clubs, or destroyed.

Khoshimi writes that party offices promoting atheism were established, that religious practices were openly criticised, and that state permission was required even for ordinary economic activity. Religious individuals were kept under constant surveillance and, in some cases, repressed. Khoshimi’s emotional expressions align with historical facts, especially with the post-1927 Soviet policy of aggressive anti-religious campaigns (Çalışkan, 2012).

These ideological pressures were carried out under the guise of appealing slogans such as “progress,” “modernity,” and “humanism.” Khalid (2021) refers to this phenomenon as ideological deception. Khoshimi’s work presents vivid, real-life examples of this: although freedom of movement was proclaimed externally, fear prevailed in society; although freedom of the press was advertised, only one ideological line was permitted; and “those who spoke in the name of the people” were, in reality, acting within the centrally defined political framework. Ultimately, Soviet ideology transformed society from one of active participation to one of ideological subordination.

In 1918, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson advanced the right of peoples to self-determination in his “Fourteen Points” speech. The idea held great promise, especially in crumbling empires after the First World War, including the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian empires. Many colonised Muslim and Asian peoples believed that this principle would bring them freedom. In practice, however, it was selectively applied: Wilson granted this right only to European peoples, while largely ignoring the peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Muslim world. Even within the United States, racial equality was absent from Wilson’s policies (Manela, 2007).

In this respect, the principle of “self-determination” served not as a firm cornerstone of international politics but as a helpful slogan in a specific political context. While the Soviets formally adopted the slogan for their own benefit, they did not implement it deeply in practice. The Soviet Union primarily used it to gain support from local nationalities for revolutionary movements. Martin (2001) evaluates this slogan as a “short-lived political strategy,” rather than as a genuine “multi-ethnic governance model.”

In reality, the Soviet leadership under Lenin and Stalin only invoked this principle when it served their interests. Political and social life remained under strict central control, while “national forms” (e.g., flags, languages, schools) were maintained only to the extent that they supported Soviet ideology (Martin, 2001). Khalid (2021) describes this as the core contradiction of the Soviet nationalities policy: nationalism was permitted only to the extent that it reinforced Soviet ideology. Therefore, the principle proposed initially by Wilson was not adopted as a sincere framework by either the Soviets or its Western originators. Instead, it functioned as an ideological instrument—a tool for legitimising power rather than promoting genuine pluralism (Manela, 2007; Martin, 2001; Khalid, 2021).

In conclusion, Farewell, Homeland offers an artistic reflection on the complex Soviet period in Uzbekistan’s history. The work aligns with historical sources: the collapse of intellectual aspirations, the tightening control over cultural life, the limitations of promised modernity and freedom, and the suppression of religious institutions—all of which are confirmed in the works of Khalid (2021), Martin (2001), Allworth (1990, 1994), and Çalışkan (2012). Khoshimi’s perspective, rooted in personal experience rather than external analysis, serves as a significant contribution to historical and socio-political thought. The title "Farewell" symbolically captures a broader rupture—a farewell to national ideals, cultural continuity, and religious traditions—highlighting the profound, long-term impact of ideological transformation.

3.4 Soviet Nationality Policy and the Invention of Uzbekistan: Delimitation, Identity, and Control

The 20th century saw unprecedented changes and innovations in world history. This century witnessed a period of ideological wars, ranging from powerful nuclear weapons to the destruction of entire nations. In his article, Çalışkan (2012, p. 88) refers to the 20th century as "the century that took place on the soil of Muslim peoples." Of course, emphasising that it would be a mistake to ignore events in other parts of the world, he continues: "But if we imagine the entire century before our eyes, the intervention or involvement of Muslims was great in the

outcome of events and all other events, and it had the same impact on world history" (Çalışkan, 2012, p. 88). It cannot be denied that this century has been one of the most difficult for the people of Turkestan. The 20th century posed considerable socio-political and cultural challenges for the peoples of Turkestan. Regarding our significant lag behind other modern states at that time, Munavvarqori (1913) notes that as European peoples develop with science, we still face problems with beards and headscarves (Abdurashidkhanov, 1913). As we emphasised at the beginning of this scientific work, it is difficult to imagine the Uzbek people separately from Islam.

As noted earlier in this study, Islam has historically played a central role in forming the Uzbek collective identity. As can be seen from the above thoughts, we are trying to answer the question: Is independent Uzbekistan, a fragment of this turbulent period, a product of this period, or has there always been a particular territory called "Uzbekistan," that is, the "land of Uzbeks"? This raises the critical question of whether independent Uzbekistan emerged solely due to 20th-century transformations or whether its national identity is rooted in earlier historical and territorial continuity.

Although Uzbeks have long inhabited the territories of Turkestan, Uzbek ethnography remains a complex and confusing subject. Uzbeks played a crucial role in the Soviet state's policy in Central Asia, specifically in Turkestan. These people, who lived a settled way of life for several centuries before the conquest of Central Asia, had unique customs and ideas of life.

In the early days, the Russian government was interested in spreading the Uzbek way of life to a broader geographical area. Even though it was the 19th century, the goal was to "civilise" the steppe population, which still did not convert to Islam and lived according to the rules of cultural nomadism against the backdrop of the Uzbek peoples, and tie them to the Russian government (Khalid, 2014).

Russian imperial policy in the 19th century aimed to promote sedentarisation among steppe communities, contrast them with the already settled Uzbek populations, and to incorporate these communities more closely into the empire's administrative structure (Khalid, 2014). Uzbekistan's population, as part of the Soviet state and as a people with strong nationalist traditions, was considered one of Central Asia's most important political actors. The formation of the Uzbek SSR further strengthened this position (Çalışkan, 2012).

Even today, according to some Russian chauvinistic views, there are still Russian intellectuals who have not abandoned the view that the nation called "Uzbeks" was "discovered" by

Russians. Such claims continue to generate scholarly and public debate, particularly in digital media platforms. This issue also caused serious discussions on the Internet in 2024 between Uzbek intellectuals and Russian scientists.

So, when the issue of national identity was raised in Central Asia's most populous country, did the Uzbek nation and national identity emerge after territorial delimitation, or did they exist beforehand?

Of course, we partially answered these two questions above. However, we cannot say that national identity was born simultaneously when discussing territorial delimitation. In particular, in the book *Farewell, Homeland* by Azam Khoshimi, the following sentences are given place:

"When I leave home, let my mother tell the whole world about the condition of the Muslims of Turkestan, let other Muslim peoples understand how vulnerable they are."

This work mentions the events of the 1930s. Although territorial delimitation had already been carried out during this period, Khoshimi, leaving Fergana, was addressed by his mother not as "Uzbeks" but as "Muslims of Turkestan." This suggests that, at the time, a broader religious and regional identity, centred on Islam, continued to hold significant meaning, even before the spread of Soviet propaganda and the Jadids' idea of a modernised national identity (Khalid, 2014).

In one chapter of the work, the writer also quotes the following sentence:

"When I arrived in Samarkand, I bought a Samarkand-style *chapan* (traditional Uzbek quilted robe) and, wearing it, assumed the appearance of a Samarkand Uzbek."

This anecdote illustrates the coexistence of strong local and regional identities alongside a unified Uzbek identity, particularly before Soviet-led nation-building efforts and the introduction of formal borders.

Believing in the promises of the Bolsheviks who seized power, namely the policy of self-determination of peoples, local elites and peoples began to form independent republics in the territory of Turkestan, hoping for their admission to the federation (Askarov & Akhmadov, 2007). As a result of the overthrow of the Emir's government in Bukhara with the support of the Turkestan Republic, created by local intellectuals by the Soviet "model," and subsequently with the support of the Young Bukharans and the bloodshed of these movements, a new national liberation movement emerged — in Soviet terms, the "Basmachi" movement.

Although the Basmachi movement had the character of a national liberation movement, in many regions, it was led by former commanders of the khanates and also engaged in looting and violence against government forces (Khalid, 2014). Thus, the movement reflected a complex mixture of resistance, local leadership interests, and ideological diversity rather than a singular nationalist program.

The movement's most organised leaders are Kurbashi Ergash, Madaminbek, and Ibrahimbek Laqay, who fought with the Red Army for more than ten years to restore the Bukhara Khanate (Usmanov, 2016). The Basmachi movement played a significant role in Soviet nationality politics, particularly in implementing the "divide and rule" strategy associated with People's Commissar Joseph Stalin. It served both as a propaganda tool and a justification for consolidating power. It should also be noted that the Basmachi movement was not supported by either the Jadids or the Ulama (muslim scholars) (Khalid, 2014).

We have repeatedly emphasised that Islam was the main factor uniting the peoples of Central Asia. The Soviet state paid great attention to the issue of national identity. Although the Bolshevik leader Lenin advocated for the self-determination of peoples and the formation of the Soviet state from a union of federal states, he took the issue of nations seriously (Martin, 2001).

Although he wrote an article on the issue of nations in 1913, Stalin, who later served as chairman of the Commission of Nationalities, differed significantly from his mentor in his views on this matter. He increasingly emphasised the central role of the Russian nation in maintaining cohesion within the Union, often at the expense of the autonomy of other nationalities (Martin, 2001). The delimitation of Central Asian peoples remains a subject of controversy (Dilmaç, 2012). Despite achieving independence, some scholars and commentators argue that the boundaries drawn during the Soviet period were artificial, that national identities were constructed, and that the division of Central Asia was implemented without a coherent logic (Manz, 1994).

Although the Bolsheviks initially sought to demonstrate that the people did not oppose the creation of their national states, they disagreed with the establishment of a Turkestan state with a strong political foundation, a result of the Jadid reformers' political movement (Askarov, 2007).

Rather than promoting regional unity, the Soviet leadership prioritised a policy of division, arguing that smaller national units would allow for more effective cultural development and administrative governance. However, critics argue that this structure simultaneously facilitated

centralised control and limited regional political consolidation (Martin, 2001). According to another view, the new national borders of the Central Asian republics do not correspond to either historical logic or the ethnic realities of the region, since they separate peoples who share closely related languages and a common religious tradition, except the Tajiks (Akbarzadeh, 1997; Manz, 1994).

According to Bennigsen (1986), the Soviet policy of constructing distinct national identities for each republic disrupted a previously shared cultural and civilisational space in Central Asia. This perspective emphasises the extent to which imposed territorial and ethnic classifications altered regional coherence.

In the 1920s, the process of redrawing Central Asia's territorial borders along national lines was shaped not only by the ideological and administrative goals of the Soviet leadership but also by the aspirations of local elites to strengthen their positions. This dual dynamic—top-down central planning and bottom-up elite negotiation—occurred within the broader framework of Soviet nation-building, which some scholars interpret as an attempt to institutionalise ethnicity for purposes of control rather than cultural empowerment (Martin, 2001; Khalid, 2015).

Amid the broader chaos of the Russian Civil War following the 1917 October Revolution, the political and administrative structure of Soviet Uzbekistan began to emerge. During this time, several short-lived autonomous political entities were established under Jadid leadership, including the Turkestan National Autonomous Republic (1917–1918), the Turkestan Soviet Socialist Autonomous Republic (1918), the Bukharan People's Soviet Republic (1920–1924), and the Khorezm People's Republic (1920–1924). Each of these initiatives emphasised local self-governance and cultural autonomy, but all were eventually integrated into the centralised Soviet state structure (Khalid, 2015).

National communists, such as Mirseyid Sultangaliyev and Turar Risoqulov, tried to redefine the Bolshevik class struggle teaching in the context of their colonial experience. They promoted socialist solidarity with national liberation on the model of appealing to the "eaten peoples" (*natsii-ob'edennyye*) model that defined Muslims of the East as being oppressed nations in the past. These visions were undermined and repressed as the Soviet centre strengthened (Bennigsen, 1986).

In 1924, the USSR implemented national-territorial delimitation of Central Asia. It led to the formation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic and the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic. Tajikistan was, at the same time, declared both an autonomous region of the Uzbek Soviet

Socialist Republic and a fully independent republic in 1929. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Karakalpakstan were also formed as autonomous regions at this point. Karakalpakstan was also administratively included in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (Uzbek SSR) in 1936, which has produced political divisions that persist largely to this day (Roy, 2000).

These innovations were integral to the Soviet policy on nationalities, which aimed to construct the Uzbek nation as a bounded political-territorial entity within the overall socialist system. The state solidified the concept of an "Uzbek" identity by associating it with specific cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic characteristics. This process of nation-building contributed towards the reconstruction of historically rooted communities and the redefinition of territorial boundaries (Carlisle, 1994, 1995).

The Soviet delimitation retained, to some extent, the historic borders of previous pre-colonial states, such as the Bukhara Emirate, Khiva Khanate, and the Kokand Khanate. The Bukhara Emirate initially occupied most of the region between the Amu and Syr Darya rivers, comprising the Bukhara, Samarkand, and Zarafshan valleys. The Khiva Khanate governed the Khiva oasis while the Kokand Khanate exercised control over the Fergana Valley and its borders (Dilmaç, 2012). Just like the Balkan and Caucasian emirates, these states were semi-independent political entities before the Bolshevik Revolution (Wheeler, 2004).

The political and social reasons, as opposed to the mere goal of splitting people, characterised Central Asia's territorial divide. Ideologically, this change was oriented by the nation's Marxist-Leninist ideology. National differences were viewed by the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Stalin, as a historical phenomenon. They were accepted as a transitional yet essential stage in the construction of a socialist society (Khalid, 2015). Stalin envisioned a nation as a long-lived historical entity founded on common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up. According to Soviet ideology, governments were supposed to crumble progressively as socialism evolved, although they were officially acknowledged as significant social institutions during the transition period (Khalid, 2015).

The Soviet government also initially declared the right of nations to self-determination (Pierce, 1960). This principle applied to all peoples of the former Russian Empire, and the delimitation process in Central Asia culminated in one of the final stages of this policy (Khalid, 2015; Martin, 2001). This political idea held an important place in the Soviet state's foreign and domestic policies, which aimed to strengthen international communist legitimacy and engage national groups within a framework distinct from previous imperial models.

The policy of "corienization" was implemented as an important component of this policy. This policy aimed to develop the languages, cultures, and elites of the Indigenous peoples by establishing national territories. In turn, this policy enabled the Soviet Union to enhance the effectiveness of Its power at the regional level, foster public trust, and disseminate communist ideology in local languages (Martin, 2001).

In addition, Soviet ideology considered the nation a "post-feudal" unit, meaning a unit that had transitioned from the feudal system to the stage of modern socio-economic formation. Within this framework, the transition of the population from the tribal system to national units was assessed as a sign of their steps towards socialism (Khalid, 2015). By establishing national republics, the Soviets aimed to bring these territories out of the historically considered "backwards" stage and direct them towards modernity. The focus on the development of national languages, cultures, and regions was a crucial aspect of this modernisation project (Hirsch, 2005).

For political reasons, the Soviets sought to strengthen their control in this region by transforming traditional affiliations and broader regional identities (Hirsch, 2005). Instead of potentially unifying identities such as Turkestan, Pan-Islamism, or Pan-Turkism, small national units, including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, were formed. This administrative structure contributed to the fact that the Soviet centre – Moscow – managed the region more effectively in a fragmented form (Allworth, 1990).

Additionally, the Soviets sought to manage the existing ethnic conflicts in the region through the process of delimitation. It was believed that conflicts between nomadic and settled populations, as well as between different ethnic groups such as Uzbeks and Kazakhs, would be mitigated by creating relatively homogeneous ethnic territories through delimitation (Martin, 2001). According to the Soviets, it would be easier to identify class contradictions within national units and instil communist ideology (Khalid, 2015).

At the same time, the delimitation process was not solely controlled by Moscow from above. Local political elites, particularly communist leaders and former Jadid intellectuals of Turkestan, Bukhara, and Khorezm, actively participated in this process (Hirsch, 2005). They saw nationality as a means of cultural and economic modernisation, defending their claims on ethnographic, economic, and administrative grounds. In this regard, they drew lessons from the experiences of the previously formed republics of Ukraine and Belarus (Hirsch, 2005).

Some sources cite the perception that Uzbeks could become overly dominant in the region as one of the political reasons for this delimitation (Allworth, 1990). The Soviets may have aimed to isolate Uzbeks from other Turkic groups and organise them as a separate republic, thereby reducing their influence in Central Asia and facilitating more manageable regional governance (Allworth, 1990).

Although this process was primarily based on criteria established by the centre, the fact that local party leaders positively perceived the possibility of defining national territories suggests that they also took the initiative in the delimitation process (Allworth, 1990). They argued not so much about whether the territory should be divided, but rather how it should be divided.

In conclusion, although the process of delimitating Central Asia was formally based on the basic principles of Soviet ideology—the ideas of national self-determination, colonization, and socialist development—in practice, this policy was aimed at consolidating central control, limiting alternative political structures, and strengthening authority in cooperation with local elites.

Some researchers believe that viewing this process solely as a political map drawn in Moscow is a simplified approach. On the contrary, delimitation was a historical and political process that arose from the complex interaction of Soviet ideology and local political forces.

3.5 Formation of Soviet Identity: "Friendship of Peoples" and Socialist Patriotism

The Soviet government employed the concepts of "people's friendship" and "socialist patriotism" as its primary propaganda tool to unify the multi-ethnic population into a cohesive Soviet people (Martin, 2001). The concept of people's friendship created a formal vision that more than a hundred nationalities within the Soviet Union were living in peace. This ideology, while acknowledging national differences (e.g., clothing, food, language), presented them superficially, advancing the idea that all nations were united in the pursuit of a single socialist goal (Khalid, 2015).

In 1935, Stalin described the Soviet Union as a family of national republics and characterised friendship as one led by the Russian people. Researchers believe that, in practice, this policy served to ensure the superiority of the Russian language and culture; that is, it led to a secret Russification process (Martin, 2001).

Socialist patriotism meant loyalty to the state. While each nation was singled out, the main emphasis was on loyalty to the Soviet Homeland (Khalid, 2015). This loyalty was strengthened

through various public ceremonies, and the so-called "Soviet Union" was also an expression of the ideas of equality and justice rather than the name of a specific nation in itself.

In Uzbekistan, the Soviet state sought to foster a new "socialist identity" through education, culture, and the arts. The policy of "korenization" implemented in the initial years aimed to develop the Uzbek language and strengthen its culture (Sochnikova, 2006). Uzbek literature, theatre and cultural institutions were opened. All this was carried out on the principle that "in National form, in socialist content."

In Uzbek, the script underwent several changes: first from the Arabic alphabet to Latin and then to Cyrillic. These changes were made under the name of language modernisation and adaptation to Soviet society (Allworth, 1990).

Through historical narratives, the ancient history of the Uzbek nation was glorified, but independence and progress were often explained in terms of their connection to the Soviet regime (Sochnikova, 2006). Heroes and historical figures were remembered, but their achievements were often attributed to Russian assistance.

Socialist ideas were promoted through art and literature. While local nationalism was maintained, it was limited to Soviet ideology (Slezkine, 2000; Khalid, 2015). In Uzbekistan, a conflict arose between being a Soviet citizen and nationalism. Soviet policy aimed not to destroy localism but to maintain ideological control over it (Martin, 2001).

The formation of the Uzbek SSR in 1924 laid the groundwork for the territorial and political consolidation of the Uzbek national consciousness. However, the national consciousness that arose within the framework of "korenization" was under the control of the central government. The Soviet authorities promoted controlled nationalism to suppress ideologies such as Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism. According to the slogan "National form – socialist content," it seemed to pave the way for the development of culture, but it came at the cost of complete ideological loyalty (Khalid, 2014).

By the 1930s, especially under Stalin, Russification policies had intensified (Allworth, 1990). The Russian language was widely introduced, with the national expression being accused of being "bourgeois nationalism". Soviet centrist politics and Russian culture strongly influenced the formation of Uzbek national consciousness (Raeff, 1966; Hosking, 1985).

Assassinations under Stalin limited independent thinking and cultural activities (Allworth, 1990). Moreover, in the 1950s, particularly under Khrushchev, there was a brief period of relative freedom. During this period, a cultural revival emerged, yet it remained within the

framework of Soviet ideology (Khalid, 2015). National culture could be manifested, but only if it was suitable for Soviet purposes.

During the period of korenization, the local elites joined the Soviet system, but their authority was entirely subject to the decisions of the Central Party (Martin, 2001). They were mediators implementing the policy of "National form, socialist content" at the local level (Allworth, 1990).

Some intellectuals attempted to preserve national values in closed circles, but under Stalin, the opportunity for this was severely limited. Soviet Uzbekistan was formed by a balance between state ideology and local culture. Friendship and socialist patriotism served both to recognise national differences and to subjugate them to Soviet ideology.

Permitted cultural expressions also served ideological purposes. Although national differences were maintained in their external form, their content remained under strict control. Under Stalin, this control was somewhat softened during the Khrushchev era, although it remained in place. However, any local autonomy existed only as long as it was based on loyalty to the central authority.

3.6 Evolution of Official Soviet Identity Between 1939 and 1953

The political and ideological shifts of Stalin's regime had a significant influence on the development of the official Soviet identity in Uzbekistan between 1939 and 1953. The era was marked by intensified centralisation, pervasive political repression, nationalism imbued with militarism, and changing orientations on national identity. Official Sovietness was developed as a response to influential history. In locations such as Uzbekistan, it evolved from the complex interplay between Soviet ideological forces and the domestic interpretation of national identity (Johnston, 2011).

Prior to the war (1939–1941), notably after the termination of the Soviet-German Pact, there was a dramatic shift in the ideological structures of Sovietism. The Soviet Union's annexation of territory in Poland, Finland, the Baltic states, and Romania required the adaptation of its propaganda tactics. Established initially on an anti-fascist ideology, the Soviet press started to take on a reconciliatory attitude towards Nazi Germany, hence creating inconsistencies in government information (Johnston, 2011).

The founding of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic in the 1920s marked the start of the formalisation of Uzbek national identity in the Soviet context. In terms of the pursuit of

modernisation and systematisation of national categories, the Soviet state organised the process of establishing a literary standard for the Uzbek language and advancing an idea of Uzbek national identity as suited to socialist purposes. Several scholars have described this process as a state-led process designed to formulate identities to meet the Soviet state's ideological demands (Allworth, 1990). In the context of the *korenizatsiya* policy, attention was focused on promoting the Uzbek language, consolidating notable autochthonous cultural leaders, and recruiting chosen elites into state structures (Martin, 2001; Sochnikova, 2006). Within the framework of the German-Soviet pact (1939–1941), Soviet ideology took a more differentiated and ambiguous position, especially in those republics with a predominantly Muslim population. Historiography remains uncertain about the dominant Uzbek perceptions of Soviet rule during the transition period (Johnston, 2011), underscoring the need for further archive-based and comparative research.

The outbreak of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) marked the start of a deep transformation in Soviet understanding of identity. The war was not only presented as a moral fight but also as one of existential importance, with Soviet patriotism inextricably tied to the discourse on ideology and national cohesion. In addition, key historical figures, such as Alisher Navoi, were also subject to symbolic reinterpretation. The celebration of his 400th jubilee in 1941 was used to signify both Uzbek heritage and an important contribution to Soviet cultural heritage (Khalid, 2014).

The post-World War II period (1947–1953), in the backdrop of an intensifying Cold War, witnessed an unprecedented shift in the Soviet Union's self-image. The USSR adopted the "two camps" doctrine, distinguishing between capitalist and socialist systems, in the process earmarking itself as an independent superpower with an integrated ideology (Johnston, 2011). In the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, it was the period of increasing Uzbekization of Soviet discourse. The cultural and historico-symbolic elements were all consciously adapted to the state's ideology, allowing for the selective incorporation of Uzbek identity within the overall framework of socialist patriotism (Khalid, 2014).

Through the establishment of SADUM (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan) in 1943, the Soviet state sought to promote a form of Soviet patriotism that incorporated Islamic values within a controlled framework (Tasar, 2017). It was a sign of the strategic effort on the part of the state to mobilise religious feelings for the Soviet war effort against Nazi Germany during World War II, while maintaining ideological control.

However, this was also the period when increasingly strict restrictions were placed upon national expression. The inter-war policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenisation), which had encouraged cultural and linguistic development among the non-Russian nations, was progressively reversed. There was an increased focus on the development of a Soviet identity. Although native leaders remained in titular offices, their functions became increasingly symbolic, with their actions tightly controlled and directed by central authorities (Martin, 2001).

With such constraints in place, the intellectuals of Uzbekistan continued to try out the articulation of national identity within the available limits of Soviet rhetoric. This was reflected in heightened scholarly interest in topics such as Uzbek–Tajik relations, histories of narrative, and cultural heritage, but only now within an agreed-upon context of official ideology (Allworth, 1990).

In brief, the period from 1939 to 1953 was a pivotal phase in the development of Soviet identity in Uzbekistan. During this period, a state-constructed version of Uzbek identity was developed and reinforced, carefully aligned with the broader ideological and patriotic goals of the Soviet regime. This was achieved through the use of national symbols, language reform, and education. Still, expressions of a deeper cultural and national consciousness persisted, often subtly, within the ideological parameters set by the central leadership.

3.7 Language and Cultural Policy in Soviet Uzbekistan

The Soviet Union's language and cultural policy in Uzbekistan was gradual, multifaceted, and ideologically charged (Allworth, 1990). This policy was implemented, particularly through alphabet reforms, changes in the education system, and the adaptation of Uzbek literature and art to Soviet ideology.

3.7.1 Alphabet reforms and language policy

In the 1920s, the Soviet government announced the abandonment of the Arabic script in the Uzbek language and the transition to the Latin script (Sochnikova, 2006; Martin, 2000). This reform was implemented quickly, considering the high illiteracy rates in Central Asia's republics. Because "Latinization" was considered a convenient method of teaching literacy. The initial rejection of Cyrillic and preference for Latin was partly due to its association with the Orthodox Church and Russian imperial legacy, which reformers sought to avoid (Sochnikova, 2006; Martin, 2000). Latin script was promoted as a more neutral and modern writing system that supported broader goals of modernisation (Khalid, 2021). This process was

seen as a way to move away from Islamic traditionalism through the cultural revolution and "Western development," as well as to overcome "Eastern backwardness" (Martin, 2000).

However, in 1940, the Latin script was abolished and replaced by Cyrillic (Sochnikova, 2006; Allworth, 1990). This change strengthened the similarities between the Uzbek and Russian languages (Kenez, 1999/2006) and, according to some sources, facilitated the Russification of the Uzbek people. The Cyrillic script was adopted by many non-Russian peoples as the "Russian script" and was often interpreted as a symbolic marker of subordination to the Soviet centre (Martin, 2000).

The debates over orthography during the Soviet era were one of the important aspects of the Cultural Revolution (Khalid, 2015). Researchers argue that it would be incorrect to interpret these reforms solely as a negative policy of the repressive Soviet government, since some reformist groups within the party initially supported them (Khalid, 2015). However, the subsequent imposition of Cyrillic was increasingly aligned with the broader objectives of linguistic assimilation and ideological conformity (Sochnikova, 2006).

3.7.2 Education reforms and the status of the Uzbek language

The Soviets radically changed the education system in Central Asia. One of the most important goals was the eradication of illiteracy (Sochnikova, 2006). Thousands of literacy centres and special courses were established, leading to a literacy rate of 100 per cent (Sochnikova, 2006). Initially, there were schools in the Uzbek language, especially in rural areas. However, in cities, Uzbek children increasingly began attending Russian-language schools. Russian became the primary language in the party system, science, technology, public administration, and higher education (Sochnikova, 2006).

Shortcomings in the system of training teachers of the Russian language, the shortage of textbooks in the Uzbek language, and the lack of schools offering education in the native language accelerated the process of Russification. Although initially, the Uzbek language played a role in education and political life, this position weakened over time. For instance, Tajiks were deprived of the opportunity to receive education in their native language, leading to discontent with the party's policy.

In the 1930s, another turning point occurred: some national schools were closed, and a new policy based on the forced study of the Russian language was introduced (Sochnikova, 2006). In 1938, the Central Committee of the Communist Party adopted a resolution to make the study of the Russian language mandatory in all secondary schools (Kenez, 1999/2006). This decision

strengthened the view of the Russian language not as a simple means of communication, but as the main sign of Sovietness (Kenez, 1999/2006).

Also, the content of the textbooks has been Russified (Sochnikova, 2006). Uzbek readers were forced to study classics of Russian literature in translations into Uzbek (Namalov, 1980). Although some works by Uzbek writers were included in the curriculum, they were selected only if they aligned with Soviet ideology. Thus, Uzbeks were oriented towards assimilating Soviet ideology (Sochnikova, 2006).

3.7.3 Ideologization of Uzbek literature and art

Soviet cultural policy sought to adapt Uzbek literature and art to the principles of communist ideology (Khalid, 2015, 2021). To eradicate nationalist sentiments in advance, the Bolsheviks attempted to assimilate specific national cultural requirements into the framework of "Soviet construction." This strategy initially created space for artistic experimentation and innovation (Khalid, 2015, 2021).

However, after 1927, the "ideological front" (Khalid, 2015) opened up, and the party began destroying the Uzbek intelligentsia's independent thought (Allworth, 1990). Censorship was strengthened. Traditional cultural elements were reframed to align with Soviet ideological narratives (Allworth, 1990). For example, in 1941, the 400th anniversary of Alisher Navoi was celebrated, and in the Soviet context, he was presented as a hero of the Uzbek nation (Khalid, 2015). Alexander Yakubovsky's work, published within the framework of this celebration, played a crucial role in shaping a Sovietized historical interpretation of Uzbek heritage.

Although national culture was permitted under the principle of "national in form, socialist in content," its expression was consistently aligned with ideological objectives (Martin, 2000). Stalin sought to maintain national cultures under ideological control, ensuring they served the Soviet system. Representatives of the left opposition, opposed to this policy, assessed national culture as having a "bourgeois" (Martin, 2000) character and proposed promoting only international socialist culture.

Uzbek writers and artists were required to create works with ideological content. Cultural authorities encouraged compliance with "Party-assigned missions" in the creative sphere. Nevertheless, some writers later attempted to produce works beyond the constant ideological requirements and reflected their society's dreams, problems, and values (Allworth, 1990).

In conclusion, the language and cultural policy of the Soviet state in Uzbekistan was ideologically driven and unfolded in several distinct phases. Although the alphabet reform initially increased modernity and literacy, it became part of the Russification policy. Reforms in education improved literacy, but at the same time, the Russian language was given priority. While Uzbek literature and art were initially allowed to develop within the Soviet framework, they were later subjected to strict censorship and ideological control. Although nationality was preserved in formal terms, it was filled with socialist content and reformed to serve Soviet ideology.

3.8 Islam, Tradition, and Soviet Secularism in Uzbekistan: The Soviet policy of controlling Islam

The Soviet state pursued a comprehensive policy aimed at controlling the role of Islam in public life in Uzbekistan and gradually limiting it (Khalid, 2005). This was mainly achieved through direct repression during the early Soviet years: thousands of mosques were closed (Peyrouse, 2020), religious scholars were persecuted and executed, and Islamic manuscripts and literature were destroyed (Khalid, 2007, pp. 71-77; Peyrouse, 2020). Soviet ideology was based on "scientific atheism" (Komil-Burley, 2014), which viewed religion as a vestige of the past (Anderson, 1983, p. 27), hindering modernity. The state aimed to create a new Soviet citizen - a unified society without religious and ethnic differences. Russification through education became the primary tool on this path (Sochnikova, 2006). The Arabic script, a significant cultural symbol associated with Islamic heritage, was initially replaced by Latin and later by Cyrillic. Many Uzbeks were discontented with this change (Allworth, 1990; Luong, 2002).

Despite these measures, religious Uzbeks continued to practice Islam; however, these activities gradually began to be carried out mainly at home and in secret mosques (Sochnikova, 2006; Allworth, 1990). Although the Soviet state attempted to sever Islam from its ancient cultural roots, it was unable to achieve this (Komil-Burley, 2014; Khalid, 2007).

To regulate religious activity, the Soviet government established the ****Central Asian and Kazakh Muslim Spiritual Administration (SADUM)**** in 1943 (Peyrouse, 2020; Komil-Burley, 2014; Khalid, 2003; Olcott, 2007). It was one of four religious administrations established throughout the Soviet Union during the war as part of a policy of relatively lenient treatment of religion (Khalid, 2003). SADUM allowed for the reopening of some mosques and the revival of limited religious educational institutions, such as the Mir Arab Madrasah in Bukhara and the Imam Bukhari Islamic Institute in Tashkent (Khalid, 2003; Olcott, 2007). However, the clergy

in these institutions were required to be loyal to Soviet policy and support it within the framework of domestic and foreign policy. The fatwas issued by SADUM (religious rulings) were carefully monitored by party and state representatives, ensuring they did not contain politically dangerous content (Khalid, 2003, 2007).

3.8.1 The difference between formal Islam (SADUM) and informal (underground) Islam

Although SADUM was an official Islamic structure recognised by the Soviet government, "unofficial" or "underground" Islamic life was widespread throughout the Soviet era (Bennigsen & Lemercier-Quelquejay, 1967; Khalid, 2007; Tasar, 2017). This covert activity was often carried out in villages, in the shadows (Luong, 2002). Sufi orders, with their chain of scientific traditions, sometimes continued their activities secretly. In cities and rural centres, a network of informal scholars existed who taught Islamic knowledge outside of state control through cells—centres of secret religious knowledge exchange (Khalid 2003, 2007, 2014). These scholars sometimes had direct or indirect contact with SADUM, even utilising foreign religious sources that came through official channels (Khalid, 2007).

The content of education in official religious institutions differed from that of pre-Soviet madrasahs. Although the Quran and hadith were taught as the primary subjects, secular sciences and the Arabic language were also included (Khalid, 2003). Informal scholars often retained a deep Islamic tradition, sometimes sharing more in common with formal scholars. At the same time, they maintained a profound understanding of religious knowledge, distinct from the customary practices of Islam among the people (Khalid, 2003, 2007).

During the Gorbachev era, by the end of the 1980s, protests against the SADUM (Central Asian Muslim Religious Administration) system had emerged. Informal religious scholars and their supporters began to accuse SADUM leaders of corruption and excessive loyalty to the government (Khalid, 2003, 2007).

During this period, Islamic life became increasingly complex: debates between different schools of thought became more open, and new religious groups emerged that had not previously existed in this region (Khalid, 2003, 2007).

3.8.2 Formation of religious identity in response to the policy of Soviet secularism

The secular policy of the Soviets radically shaped religious identity in Uzbekistan. While the state attempted to eliminate religious beliefs, Islam adapted to these conditions and survived in a new form (Khalid, 2003, 2007). Islam increasingly merged with local customs and traditions

(Khalid, 2003, 2007; Komil-Burley, 2014). Central Asian Islamic practice, disconnected from the wider Islamic world and international Islamic scientific relations, has become a distinct sign of local identity. This separated the "local" (i.e., Uzbeks and other Muslim populations) from the "foreign" (primarily Russians and other Europeans) (Khalid, 2003, 2007; Komil-Burley, 2014). Islam and Soviet identity were not, nevertheless, opposing ideas; for numerous Central Asians, the two could peacefully co-exist (Khalid, 2003, 2007; Komil-Burley, 2014).

Collective discourse was often conducted in secular language. Islamic concepts were subordinated to statements about the nation, culture, and progress. Nevertheless, religious rituals persisted in society, even within Soviet institutions. This indicates the stability of religious practices (Khalid, 2003, 2007; Komil-Burley, 2014).

At the end of the Soviet era, a strong link emerged between national identity and Islam. The rediscovery of Islam and Muslim culture marked a significant step towards the restoration of national heritage (Khalid, 2003, 2007; Komil-Burley, 2014), which had been under Soviet occupation, and the reestablishment of ties with the Muslim world. This movement was primarily a social movement that arose from within the populace.

3.9 The Late Soviet Era: Glasnost, Perestroika, and Rising National Consciousness

The late period of Soviet history is mainly characterized by the policies of "Glasnost" (openness) and "Perestroika" (perestroika), which Mikhail Gorbachev pursued. Initially, these reforms were intended to strengthen the Soviet Union; however, for Uzbekistan, this period served as a path to strengthening national consciousness and ultimately led to independence. These reforms enabled the emergence of previously suppressed national issues, and long-repressed sentiments and demands resurfaced (Kenez, 2006; Khalid, 2007; Beissinger, 2002).

Glasnost, that is, the policy of political and information freedom, weakened the priority control of Soviet ideology (Kenez, 2006; Khalid, 2007). National demands and objections, previously unspoken, are now freely expressed publicly (Kenez, 2006). During this period, not only Uzbeks, but also many Russians began to see themselves as victims of the Soviet system. It was at this time that Uzbek intellectuals and the press began to express themselves more freely, albeit cautiously, on national themes (Kenez, 2006; Khalid, 2007, 2014).

However, these changes did not occur at the same rate in all regions of the Soviet Union. Reforms in distant and remote republics such as Uzbekistan have been implemented much more slowly (Komil-Burley, 2014). For example, Gorbachev, during his visit to Tashkent in November 1986, urged local leaders to intensify atheistic propaganda among the population

(Kendzior, 2006, p. 535). This situation suggests that the Soviet state maintained its hostile attitude towards Islam.

Perestroika, the policy of reforming the economic system, led to economic crises instead of the expected stability. This increased distrust of Moscow's central government intensified the desire for greater control over local resources (Kotkin, 2001).

In 1989, Islam Karimov was appointed First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. Initially, he, like many other Central Asian leaders, was not opposed to the integrity of the USSR (Raufkhon, 2014; Komil-Burley, 2014; Khalid, 2014). Even in the referendum held in March 1991, the population of Uzbekistan supported the preservation of the union (Khalid, 2014, 2015). This suggests that at that time, the idea of independence was not widespread among the general public or the elite, as economic ties with the centre and the subsidy system were considered beneficial (Kotkin, 2001; Khalid, 2014; Kenez, 2006; Peyrouse, 2020).

However, the weakening of the central government, especially with Russia's declaration of sovereignty in June 1990, changed the situation (Khalid, 2014). The military coup attempt against Gorbachev in August 1991 became a turning point for Karimov. Initially supporting this coup, Karimov quickly altered his position after the rebellion failed. Soon after, on August 31, 1991, Uzbekistan declared its independence (Khalid, 2007; Beissinger, 2002; Komil-Burley, 2014).

The existing communist elite also considers this step an attempt to adapt to the new political environment (Khalid, 2007; Beissinger, 2002). Karimov established himself as a "national leader who led the people to independence" and adopted some of the ideas put forward by opposition nationalist groups, particularly the "Birlik" movement (Khalid, 2007, p. 157; Beissinger, 2002).

Although the idea of independence was not initially a mass movement, during the Glasnost period, the strengthening of Uzbek national consciousness was clearly felt (Khalid, 2007). The intelligentsia played a decisive role in this process. In November 1988, writers and scientists founded the "Birlik" (Unity) movement. They put forward demands to make the Uzbek language the state language, to show respect for important figures in Uzbek history, and to seek greater autonomy for the republic (Khalid, 2007, 2014). During this period, there was a significant interest in restoring national history, reforming the Uzbek language, and re-illustrating previously prohibited historical events. Although this activity was often carried out

within the framework of Soviet nationality policy, it led to the emergence of new national claims and positions (Khalid,2007).

In October 1989, the Uzbek language was declared the state language. The communist government perceived this decision as a response to nationalist sentiments and aimed to adopt the national agenda to maintain in political control (Khalid, 2014; Beissinger, 2002). In June 1990, the government of Uzbekistan adopted a declaration of its sovereignty, which, although not complete independence, was a significant step towards autonomy (Khalid, 2014; Beissinger, 2002).

During the late Soviet period, ethnic conflicts intensified in Central Asia, but these clashes were not always directed against the Soviet regime (Kenez,2006). For example, although the 1986 Almaty events took place in Kazakhstan, they reflected national discontent throughout the region(McCauley, 1988).

The Fergana events of 1989 occurred directly on the territory of Uzbekistan. Here, the Uzbeks organised pogroms against the Meskhetian people. This situation revealed the tension in interethnic relations and the complex relationship between social, economic, and ethnic societal factors; the emergence of an environment of freedom created conditions for such contradictions (Kenez, 2006; Luong, 2002).

The economic reforms brought by Perestroika did not lead to stability. On the contrary, they exposed the weaknesses of the Soviet economic system(Kotkin,2001). The Central Asian republics were utilised as a raw material base(Khalid,2014), which intensified a sense of economic injustice towards them. As Soviet control weakened and the economic crisis deepened, even groups that had previously questioned full independence began to advocate for greater control over their resources. This, in turn, started to present the idea of political separation as an increasingly realistic path(Kotkin,2001).

The reforms of Glasnost and Perestroika implemented by Gorbachev created a complex and changing environment in Uzbekistan, as in other republics. This political awakening also catalysed the rise of national consciousness. Local intellectuals spearheaded this movement with their demands for linguistic and cultural reforms. Although the idea of independence was initially not widely supported by either the elite or the populace, due to economic pressures and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan declared its independence on August 31, 1991. This independence was largely achieved through the adaptation of the political elite to maintain their power (Khalid, 2014; Beisinger, 2002). However, the national identity that emerged during

Glasnost and Perestroika significantly influenced Uzbekistan's development in the years that followed.

3.10 The collapse of the Soviets and the new Central Asia: Changes and explorations in Uzbek identity.

The “fall” of the Soviet Union in 1991, besides being a geopolitical shift that produced new political maps, also launched a period of change that was multifaceted, complex, and peculiar for Central Asia in general and for Uzbekistan in particular. These transfigurations brought about searching questions of identity, place, and history. The crisis called for a reappraisal of the Soviet modernisation legacy and a new narrative of national, cultural, and historical identity.

As Adeeb Khalid (2021) observes, support for the regime has been eroding since the last years of the Soviet period. The economic inequalities, desiccation of the Aral Sea, the ecological catastrophe of the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing area, the worsening of the social services, and above all, the repression of religious practices all contributed towards undermining the moral foundation of the Soviet regime. Therefore, this led to a loss of trust between the people of Uzbekistan and the ruling powers.

The protests witnessed are a reflection of the rise of movements that worked independently from the government, as represented by the movement at Nevada-Semipalatinsk. The movement marked the onset of developing awareness in the people of Uzbekistan (Khalid, 2021, p. 434). The awareness was supported by an intersection of ethnic, cultural, and historical identity, coupled with ecological fears. At the same time, the Soviet-Afghan war created an increased tension between the government and the people. The war caused great disillusionment, especially in Uzbekistan, which was a Muslim-majority region. The absence of readiness by the soldiers of Uzbekistan and the complaints by them against the war reflected a sharp emotional gap between the people and the government (Khalid, 2021, pp. 417-420).

Another noteworthy aspect of this cultural renaissance is evident in the activities of intellectuals and writers. The works of writers like Abdulla Qodiriy, Abdurauf Fitrat, and Cho'lpon, previously suppressed under Soviet power, opened the way for their re-publication. The re-emerging trend of the publications offered a complementary vision of the past that challenged the Soviet version of the past and spurred a cultural awakening, especially in the ranks of the students (Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2021, p. 433).

Terry Martin (2001) described the Soviet Union's policy of nationality as an "empire of social equality"; however, during this time, the policy increasingly manifested itself through discussions regarding "national sacrifice" and "cultural compensation."

Economically, the country's dependency on cotton, along with the tradition of selling the crop to central authorities at reduced prices, made colonialism more apparent to local intellectuals (Carley, 1989; Khalid, 2021, p. 432). Cotton became more than just a symbol of economic oppression; it also created profound cultural significance. It was in this context that the desire for independence emerged and became an essential factor in the development of an emerging Uzbek national identity.

The first presidential election in 1990 in the newly independent Uzbekistan symbolized the desire of the people for political self-determination. With the fall of the Soviet Union towards the end of 1991, the political situation became more rooted in both legal frameworks and representative symbolism. The Declaration of Independence not only declared the creation of a new independent state, but it also symbolized a turning point towards the creation of a solid Uzbek identity. Throughout the first decade, there arose two different approaches to this: one school of thinkers proposed the creation of Uzbekism based on Islamic values, whereas the other approach, backed by the state, articulated a formalized and secular version of nationalism. Accordingly, the post-Soviet period did not mean the elimination of Uzbek identity, but it marked the beginning of the process of rediscovery. During this period, various historical, religious, and cultural elements underwent revitalisation. As a result, Uzbek national identity formation was complex and multifaceted, often giving rise to internal tensions. This developing identity had a significant impact on both the state-building process and the collective memory of people.

3.11 Social Transformations and Public Reactions to Nation-Building Policies During the Soviet Era

The Soviet Union's nation-building policies in Uzbekistan were unprecedented in scope and ambition, combining cultural engineering, political reorganisation, and socio-economic restructuring. However, these top-down projects were implemented within a complex and evolving social landscape, generating both acceptance and resistance among the population.

Social Foundations:

The Soviet regime inherited a largely rural, traditional society characterised by low literacy rates, strong Islamic institutions, and fragmented local identities. Early Soviet policies,

particularly korenizatsiya (indigenisation), aimed to create new social structures, including an educated Uzbek elite, standardised education, and the promotion of the Uzbek language (Khalid, 2015). Over time, urbanisation, mass literacy campaigns, and industrialisation transformed the social composition of Uzbekistan, fostering a nascent intelligentsia, an industrial working class, and expanding bureaucratic institutions.

Despite these changes, significant portions of the population, especially in rural areas, remained deeply attached to traditional religious and cultural practices. Social cleavages persisted between urban Soviet elites and the more conservative rural majority.

Public Reactions:

The population's response to Soviet nation-building policies was diverse, shaped by generational, geographic, and ideological factors:

- Initial engagement and disillusionment: Some segments of the Uzbek intelligentsia initially embraced Soviet promises of cultural autonomy and modernisation. However, the repressive turn of the 1930s, including purges of national elites and enforced ideological conformity, generated widespread fear and disillusionment (Martin, 2001).
- Passive compliance: For much of the rural population, Soviet nation-building efforts were met with passive adaptation, motivated by necessity rather than ideological commitment. Education, healthcare, and material improvements were welcomed, but deeper cultural assimilation often remained superficial.
- Religious resistance: The suppression of Islamic institutions and practices provoked both overt and covert resistance. While formal structures like SADUM were co-opted by the state, underground religious networks preserved traditional beliefs and practices, constituting an alternative space for identity formation (Roy, 2000).
- Mythical national identity and controlled pride: Through selective promotion of historical figures like Amir Temur and curated cultural symbols, the Soviet state fostered a controlled sense of national pride, aligned with socialist patriotism. This cultivated a hybrid identity, blending Uzbek cultural markers with Soviet ideological loyalty.

Overall, Soviet nation-building in Uzbekistan produced a complex and ambivalent social reality. While the state succeeded in constructing a standardised national identity at the institutional level, many Uzbeks navigated these changes pragmatically, blending formal compliance with the preservation of cultural and religious distinctiveness.

3.12 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter analyses the complex and evolving national policy of the Soviet Union in Central Asia, with particular emphasis on the formation and transformation of Uzbek national identity. It demonstrated that the early Bolshevik ideology, grounded in Marxist-Leninist class theory, regarded national identity as a transient and secondary category. However, in practice, the Soviet regime executed a grandiose project known as "building a nation from above." This project aimed to institutionalise ethno-national categories within the socialist system through administrative delimitation, localisation, and the development of national languages and elites.

The formation of the Uzbek SSR in 1924 marked a turning point in the development of Uzbek identity. This process was not rooted in pre-existing national unity, but rather as a political and ideological structure shaped by the needs of Soviet governance and control. The chapter illustrates how the Soviet definition of the concept of "nation" was implemented through ethnographic classification and territorial engineering, often leading to the historical division of entire communities. Although early policies permitted local cultural expression, these were soon supplanted, particularly under Stalin, by mechanisms of surveillance, repression, and ideological adaptation.

Importantly, the chapter traces the development of Soviet self-awareness policy from recognising multifacetedness to unifying control. Although the concepts of "friendship of peoples" and "socialist patriotism" were aimed at harmonising national diversity with a single Soviet identity, they ultimately led to the loss of true cultural independence. The forced introduction of the Russian language, the suppression of Islam, and the increasing role of Moscow-centric views in education and the media further alienated the local population.

The role of Islam in Soviet Uzbekistan, in particular, clearly demonstrates the regime's dual approach: direct repressions were combined with controlled institutionalisation (for example, SADUM). This situation created a basis for the concealment of informal, cultural Islam and its subsequent re-emergence as a sign of identity in the post-Soviet period.

In conclusion, the Soviet national policy in Uzbekistan comprised a paradoxical blend of nation-building and nation-limiting. It established stable categories of identity while simultaneously striving to subordinate them to the ideology of socialism and Russification. These contradictions resurfaced at the end of the Soviet era, when national consciousness emerged as a force for cultural revival and, ultimately, political independence. This dynamic will be examined in greater detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4: POST-SOVIET NATION-BUILDING POLICIES IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan's transition from the Soviet Republic to an independent state in 1991 was accompanied by a significant period of transition in its political and institutional structures. It was primarily shaped by the legacy of the Soviet era and the priorities of the ruling elite (Melvin, 2000). This continuity played a decisive role in shaping the nature of the new state, its legitimacy, and the process of forming a national identity (Melvin, 2000).

4.1 Soviet Legacy and the Persistence of Elites in Independent Uzbekistan

After independence, the majority of the political elite of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) remained in power (Komil-Burley, 2014). Those elites who controlled political and economic resources at the end of the Soviet era were not removed from power (Khalid, 2007). The procedure for hiring for government service or economic control positions did not change dramatically; that is, Uzbekistan was mainly ruled by the elites who held power in the last years of the Soviet era (Khalid, 2007).

This continuity in personnel structure had a significant influence on the development of the new state structure. After independence, most of the political structure remained essentially unchanged (Curtis, 1997). The initial aspiration for democratic governance was hindered by the inertia of strongly centralised leadership in the Soviet style (Curtis, 1997). Power was increasingly concentrated in the executive branch (Khalid, 2007). Almost unlimited power was concentrated in the capital of the republic, Tashkent, and in the President (Melvin, 2000).

These elites, rooted in the Soviet system, viewed politics and political decision-making through a regional lens, one inherited from their shared experiences during the Soviet era (Luong, 2002). They competed for political elevation and economic resources on a regional basis during the Soviet era, so their regional affiliation became their most important constituency (Luong, 2002). The transition process reinforced the need and expediency for these elites to reinvest in the regional patronage networks that formed the basis of their power (Luong, 2002).

The preservation of these regional political identities served as a mechanism for institutional continuity, and the common Soviet past of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan provided a channel for continuing to influence their further development (Luong, 2002). This was closely linked to the Soviet institutional heritage, which prioritised regional-based political affiliation (Luong, 2002). The advantages of the elite in areas such as the development of a new

electoral system stemmed from their interest in preserving regional identity in some form (Luong,2002).

To establish legitimacy in the newly independent state, the former communist leadership sought to present itself as a champion of the revived Uzbek nation (Melvin, 2000). Islam Karimov (Melvin, 2000, p. 5), who was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, adopted nationalism to justify his rule (Melvin, 2000, p. 5). Uzbek nationalism served as a key source of legitimacy for the regime (Melvin, 2000). The president's desire for a strongly centralised government focused on personal rule was portrayed as a continuation of longstanding traditions. (Melvin,2000). In official narratives, the emergence of the Uzbek state under the leadership of I.A. Karimov is frequently portrayed as a natural and inevitable historical development. (Melvin,2000). The creation of a historical narrative was a product of the use of state power to form a unified national narrative from a fragmented and contentious past (Melvin, 2000). The elites, whose status and power trace back to Soviet structures (Bell, 1999), selectively interpreted the Soviet legacy in recreating the iconography of Uzbek national identity (Bell, 1999). They prioritised the nationalisation of the state-party apparatus before attempting to redefine the cultural content of the Uzbek nation. This state-centred approach reflected the Soviet-era narrative based on the relationship between local elites and Moscow (Bell,1999)

4.2 Constructing Identity from Above: The Impact of the Absence of Mass Nationalism in Independent Uzbekistan

Unlike many decolonised nations, there was virtually no nationalist movement in Uzbekistan until 1991 (Kurzman, 1999, p. 79). The formation of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (UzSSR) and its subsequent independence were carried out not through mass nationalist mobilisation, but by order of Moscow (Kurzman,1999, p.78). According to sources, neither the creation of the republic nor its independence was particularly popular among the population (Kurzman, 1999). The transition process in Uzbekistan was unusual compared to other postcolonial or post-communist regimes, as it was never promoted by an opposition or pro-independence movement outside the state (Adams, 2010, p. 5). The republics of Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, attained independence somewhat reluctantly and spontaneously. (Adams,2010; Luong,2002, p.45).

In the absence of a pre-existing mass nationalist movement, nationalism in post-Soviet Uzbekistan was constructed by the state rather than in opposition to it. It emerged within the

institutional framework inherited from the Soviet era and was administered by officials who had previously served under the colonial regime (Kurzman,1999)

After independence, the state embarked on a continuous path of defining and restructuring its national identity (Khairi,2018). The Karimov regime sought to adapt to modern nationalist standards and consolidate its dominance by developing a nationalist ideology, drawing on elements of the Soviet past and the experiences of other decolonised nations (Kurzman, 1999). The regime rejected communist ideals and sought to develop historical, national, and cultural traditions (Khairi, 2018). This included the promotion of the Uzbek language (which was immediately declared the national language) (Khairi,2018), the replacement of Soviet symbols with traditional ones (such as the new flag, anthems, and holidays) (Khairi,2018), the promotion of Uzbek culture, and the creation of national history, which included the worship of historical figures such as Amir Timur (Melvin,2000).

Nation-building in Uzbekistan was a specific state-led political project aimed at uniting citizens and increasing state legitimacy (Adams,2010, p. 10). Political rhetoric emphasized the re-recognition of national identity (Komil-Burley,2023), which was based on such pillars as cultural heritage, state language, and state symbols (Adams,2010). However, this process was described as a politically imagined self-revival that modern Uzbeks had never experienced, based on neglected ancestors and suppressed religion (Komil-Burley, 2023). The state-centric approach prioritised the nationalization of the state apparatus before fully defining the cultural content of "Uzbekness" (Bell,1999).

The presence of artificial Soviet republics, which had established their governments and fostered a sense of national identity, created a framework for the emergence of new states. These republics also developed bureaucratic elites that were connected to their national communities, providing emerging nations with a foundation on which to build their own identities. (Roy,1997). From this perspective, national identity and nationalism were of greater importance to the intelligentsia and nomenklatura elites than to the broader society (Khairi, 2018), as these elites sought to actively influence the development of the new state through nationalist policies (Bell,1999).

4.3 State-Driven Nation-Building and the Tensions with Democratic Governance in Uzbekistan

In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, state-controlled nation-building, particularly under Islam Karimov, largely contradicted the principles of democratic governance, aiming instead to strengthen state control and stability.

Uzbekistan quickly transitioned to authoritarianism after gaining independence (Dagiev, 2014), emerging as one of the most authoritarian post-Soviet republics (Dagiev, 2014). Karimov's rule, which lasted until 2016, was described as authoritarian, contributing to stability but preventing full democratisation and marketisation (Ünal, 2018) even though the 1992 constitution provided for secular, multi-party democracy and human rights (Curtis, 1997, p.43), the state immediately began to persecute opposition representatives and restrict the media (Curtis, 1997, p.43). The elections were strictly controlled or falsified (Curtis, 1997, p.43), and the regime brutally suppressed any group or movement deemed a threat (Curtis, 1997, p.21).

The government openly argued that limiting personal freedoms and freedom of expression was essential for maintaining stability and achieving gradual change during the transition period (Curtis, 1997). This emphasis on stability, facilitated by Karimov's authoritarian rule (Ünal, 2018), was presented as necessary to prevent the conflicts observed in other former Soviet republics (Curtis, 1997). While this advantage provided stability over state control, it hindered significant institutional and regime shifts toward democracy. (Luong, 2002).

State-controlled nation-building reinforced a mono-ethnic vision of the nation-state, which indirectly raised concerns about the status of minorities (Melvin, 2000, p. 43). Although the government officially adopted the definition of citizenship as citizenship and reduced the requirements for the Uzbek language for government positions (Khairi, 2018), the process of cultural renewal and self-development, controlled from top to bottom by the state (Adams, 2010), sharply contradicted the open, inclusive dialogue expected in a democratic society.

The form of nationalism used by elites, defined as patrimonial nationalism centred around the president, was essentially a strategy of control and maintaining unity (Dagiev, 2014). This was an obstacle to democratisation driven by elite nationalism (Dagiev, 2014), which better explains the "stopped transition" than other factors, such as clan politics or Soviet regional heritage (Dagiev, 2014). The state's monopoly on ideology, inherited from the Soviet era, led to the

absence of alternative discourses, allowing the state to exert significant control over the form of culture (Adams, 2010).

In essence, the state's active and top-down control over nation-building strengthened the power of the post-Soviet elite and prioritised state stability and control over the development of genuine democratic institutions and political freedoms. The emphasis on strong, authoritarian power to manage the transition process (Warikoo, 2015) often manifested as post-totalitarian authoritarianism (Warikoo, 2015), which directly contradicted the principles of democratic governance that require greater participation, protection of rights, and limitation of state power. Although the goal was to build a democratic society based on universal values and national traditions (Warikoo, 2015), the methods employed strongly supported the continuation of centralised control and elite rule inherited from the Soviet era.

4.4 Language Policy and Nation Formation in Independent Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan's language policy after gaining independence in 1991 was a crucial element in the post-Soviet transition period, particularly in terms of national consolidation and identity, as it diverged from the Soviet heritage (Khairi, 2018). Even before independence, the development of the Uzbek language attracted the main attention of groups seeking independence (Khairi, 2018).

After independence, the government actively promoted the Uzbek language over the Russian language (Khairi, 2018; Melvin, 2000). Before independence, in 1989, the Law on the State Language was adopted, which aimed to gradually increase the use of the Uzbek language (Khairi, 2018; Melvin, 2000). Immediately after independence, the Uzbek language was declared the national language (Khairi, 2018; Melvin, 2000). The government implemented policies aimed at increasing the use of the Uzbek language in official and educational institutions. By 1997, civil servants were required to master the Uzbek language, and the administration planned to switch to Uzbek (Khairi, 2018; Melvin, 2000).

National consolidation and revival efforts were significantly linked to the promotion of the Uzbek language (Khairi, 2018, p. 265). Intellectuals and the nomenclature (elites) considered the Uzbek language an essential component in defining and reconstructing national identity (Khairi, 2018, p. 265). The elite of the state, many of whom were former communists, presented themselves as advocates of the revived Uzbek nation and actively promoted Uzbek culture and national history (Melvin, 2000, p. 43). Language policy was viewed as a means of establishing

a uniform structure of power and culture, consistent with nationalist theories (Dadabaev, 2016, p. 132).

The increased attention to the Uzbek language and the decline in the status of the Russian language also served to distance Uzbekistan from its dependence on Russia and limit its influence (Melvin, 2000, p. 44; Delanty & Kumar, 2006). This process of abandoning Russification involved replacing many words borrowed from the Russian language with Turkic or Persian terminology (Curtis, 1997; Delanty & Kumar, 2006). As early as 1988, student groups held demonstrations demanding an increase in the use of the Uzbek language in public life, including television, classrooms, street signs, and courts, as well as a reduction in the use of the Russian language (Khairi, 2018, p. 266). The celebration of the poet Alisher Navoi's birthday as "Native Language Day" was another symbolic act related to language and national identity (Khairi, 2018).

While the original 1989 law required public officials to know Uzbek and designated Russian as the language of interethnic communication, a revised 1995 law removed the requirement for public sector employees to know Uzbek and abolished the special status of the Russian language in the 1989 law (Melvin, 2000, p. 44). The official policy of the Karimov government stated that Uzbek was the state language, while Russian served as the secondary language. (Curtis, 1997). To obtain citizenship, individuals were required to learn the Uzbek language. (Curtis, 1997).

The promotion of the Uzbek language illustrates a broader trend seen in the Central Asian republics following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, where specific language laws were enacted to establish official languages as state languages. This initiative aimed to elevate these languages to the primary medium for administration and governance (Delanty & Kumar, 2006). This process is particularly sensitive, distinguishing between active citizens and passive ones (Roy, 2000).

4.4.1 The role of Latinization

The decision to transition the Uzbek alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin script was an essential symbolic change (Delanty & Kumar, 2006; Melvin, 2000, p. 46). Uzbekistan officially adopted the Latin alphabet in 1993. The transition was planned to be completed by 2000. (Curtis, 1997).

Symbolically, this movement served several goals related to decolonisation and national identity. This was a deliberate attempt to break free from past dependence on Russia (Curtis, 1997). Latin scripts, unlike Cyrillic scripts, serve as symbols of new post-Soviet identities

(Delanty & Kumar, 2006). The proposed Latin script was similar to the one used in Turkey, which could have indicated a connection with other Turkic-speaking nations. However, the latest adopted script included unique letters that distinguished Turkey from the Latin alphabet. This movement also had significant political implications, as it limited the influence of Muslim states that used the Arabic alphabet (Curtis, 1997).

Historically, the written Uzbek language was based on the Arabic script until the beginning of the Soviet era (Khairi, 2018, p. 268). In 1923, the revised Arabic script was adopted. Following the First All-Union Congress of Turkologists in 1926, the adoption of the Latin alphabet was officially decided (Khairi, 2018, p. 268). In 1940, the script was reverted from Latin to Cyrillic, partly to merge written materials with those of Slavic rulers and to prevent the development of a standard literature that could pose a threat to Russian control, similar to what was happening in Turkey (Khairi, 2018, p. 268). Therefore, the return to the Latin-based alphabet can be considered the abolition of the Soviet-era policy aimed at separating Turkic languages and bringing them closer to the Russian language (Curtis, 1997; Dickens, 1990).

Despite its symbolic significance and the short timeframe, the transition to the Latin script was a gradual process (Khalid, 2014). This was due to problems and a lack of resources in the development of the standard Latin script (Khalid, 2014). By the mid-1990s, the Russian language was still widely used in official and economic circles (Allworth, 1990). Although a rapid transition to the Latin script for street signs and official buildings was observed in cities, the Cyrillic script continued to be widely used for the Uzbek and Russian languages (Roy, 1997; Warikoo, 2015; Slezkine, 2000). Some publications, for example, continued to be printed in Cyrillic script, while others in Uzbekistan switched to Latin script (Slezkine, 2000). Changing the inscription caused a dilemma for Uzbeks, and for a long time, it was challenging to find a map of the city (Melvin, 2000).

The revised Language Act of 1995 did not provide for any rule for the study of the Arabic script, which existed until the 1920s and remained a potent symbol of Islam (Martin, 2001; Khalid, 2007). Although many Uzbeks, especially groups like Birlik, wanted to restore the original Arabic script (Khalid, 2007), official policy favoured the Latin script.

Language reforms have had significant consequences for ethnic minorities in Uzbekistan. The dominant native language, Uzbek, was essentially a product of the Soviet state, which standardised it and made it the official language for the Turkic population of the republic (Allworth, 1990; Curtis, 1997). However, the Russian language was simultaneously declared

an "international language" and prioritised in official use, which led to the penetration of many Russian words into the Uzbek language (Allworth, 1990; Curtis, 1997).

After independence, the preference given to the Uzbek language created difficulties for non-Uzbek speakers. The requirement for citizens to learn the Uzbek language led to a shift in the language landscape, although the next law relaxed it for public sector employees (Khairi, 2018; Martin, 2001; Melvin, 2000). Historically, knowledge of the Russian language was indispensable for achieving a career in the Communist Party, government agencies, and most professions, since documents were often in Russian (Khalid, 2007; Dadabaev, 2016). By the end of the 1970s, almost half of the Uzbeks (49.9%) claimed to speak Russian fluently, while only a small portion of Russians in Uzbekistan spoke Uzbek (Khalid, 2007; Dadabaev, 2016).

In the post-Soviet period, there was a tendency to consider knowledge of the Russian language necessary for work (Khalid, 2007). The structural necessity of switching to the Russian language in public life and attachment to the Russian language and culture led to the emergence of a group called Russians or assimilated: non-Russians, who mainly used the Russian language and adopted a lifestyle similar to Russian (Khalid, 2007; Khalid, 2014; Allworth, 1990; Roy, 1997). This group was often composed of political and intellectual elites educated by the Soviet education system (Khalid, 2014). In the post-Soviet period, although the general use of the Russian language decreased, a large group, including ethnic Uzbeks and Kazakhs, still considered Russian their primary language of contact or thought (Khalid, 2007; Alimova and Khan, 2011: 35). Among many intellectuals, the importance of the Russian language was closely tied to the quality and diversity of Russian-language publications (Kobyl, 2007). However, some argue that this was a consequence of the formation of Russian identity during the Soviet era (Slezkine, 2000).

The emergence of the Russian group and their interactions with local communities underscore the rifts created by Soviet ethnic policies, which many see as having transformed into a form of neo-imperial Russification. (Slezkine, 2000). This led to structural inequality, where Russian-speaking groups dominated knowledge-intensive sectors. At the same time, Uzbeks and Tajiks were more active in less knowledge-intensive service sectors by the end of the 1980s (Slezkine, 2000; Levada, 1992: 142).

Despite initial announcements regarding the definition of citizenship rather than ethnicity and laws facilitating citizenship acquisition, the emphasis on the Uzbek language effectively led to ethnic identification (Khairi, 2018; Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2014). The Soviet system influenced the definition of ethnicity, necessitating the declaration of "nation" in census forms, which often

relied on language. (Roy,2000). In Central Asia, ethnic identity (based on cultural factors such as language) is deeply rooted (Roy,2000). Although official rhetoric sometimes emphasised interethnic harmony, the promotion of Uzbek culture and national history, which focused on Uzbek personalities, posed a risk of bypassing other communities (Melvin, 2000). Despite the official rhetoric of pluralism, the state's acceptance of the essentially mono-ethnic vision of the national state left little room for non-Uzbeks (Melvin, 2000; Roy, 1997). For example, the exclusion of Russian speakers from certain cultural events can be seen as a deliberate confirmation of Uzbek superiority (Warikoo, 2015). Significant minorities in Uzbekistan, including Slavs, Tajiks, and groups historically integrated into the broader Uzbek identity, suggest that the pluralistic model may be more appropriate (Roy, 1997; Melvin, 2000, p. 47).

In the Soviet context, the concept of "nationality," often associated with language as the primary criterion, contradicted the concept of "citizenship" (Kappeler, 2001; Roy, 2000). Although all former Soviet citizens in Uzbekistan could officially demand citizenship, the concept of ethnic identity prevailed in administrative practice and public consciousness (Khalid, 2014; Roy, 2000). Unlike Kazakhstan, which adopted the term "Kazakhstani" for its citizens regardless of ethnicity, Uzbekistan rejected similar terms, meaning that every citizen of Uzbekistan is regarded as "Uzbek" (Khalid, 2014; Roy, 2000). This reinforces the belief that, despite the existence of minorities, the nation is identical with the dominant ethnic group (Khalid, 2014). A lack of knowledge of local languages limits opportunities for ethnic minorities to secure employment in the public sector (Martin, 2001). The disappearance of the Russian language also accentuated the differences between indigenous and Russian nomadic cultures (Martin, 2001; Melvin, 2000, p. 46).

4.5 Islam as Cultural Heritage: State Utilisation of Religion within a Secular Political Framework in Uzbekistan

After gaining independence in 1991, the government of Uzbekistan, headed by President Islam Karimov, recognised Islam as an essential component of national identity. (Khalid, 2007; Roy, 1997; Allworth, 1990). This public recognition not only allowed but also occasionally encouraged the growth of religious practices and symbols (Adams, 2010; Warikoo, 2015). Islam was incorporated into the National Independence Ideology, which replaced Soviet-era Marxism-Leninism (Warikoo, 2015; Dagiev, 2014). The government instrumentalised Islam as part of its nation-building strategies (Dagiev, 2014).

The government actively utilised the concepts of tradition and cultural identity to construct "legitimate Islam" as part of the unique heritage of Central Asia, referred to as the "Golden Heritage" (oltin davr) (Warikoo, 2015; Komil-Burley, 2023; Dagiev, 2014). This was used to counter what the state considered religious ethics influenced by foreign interests and political motivations. (Warikoo, 2015). The state celebrated Islam as part of the national heritage and appropriated historical Islamic figures as "great Uzbeks" (Khalid, 2014). In particular, Sufism was emphasised as "national" Islam, perhaps to avoid the influence of other forms (Khalid, 2014; Khalid, 2007; Dagiev, 2014; Warikoo, 2015). University academics rehabilitated Sufism as both a movement and a doctrine (Warikoo, 2015).

This emphasis on Islam as a cultural heritage allowed it to take pride in the absence of religious practice or even faith (Komil-Burley, 2023; Adams, 2010). Islam was often viewed as part of a cultural sphere associated with morality, which lacked significant spiritual significance or was not defined by strict adherence to its principles (Dagiev, 2014). However, along with this cultural appreciation, the state remained loyal to the secular political order (Khalid, 2014). The new constitutions retained the Soviet-era rules for separating religion from the state and education (Khalid, 2014; Dagiev, 2014; Adams, 2010).

In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, public discussion remained largely secular, with no attempts to directly legitimise state power from Islam (Khalid, 2014; Komil-Burley, 2023; Dagiev, 2014; Adams, 2010; Warikoo, 2015). Official rhetoric was entirely represented by secular terms, focusing on economic progress and social indicators (Dagiev, 2014; Adams, 2010). The term "secular" Uzbek is also associated with political pluralism, recognising many religious views and interethnic harmony within a state-controlled sphere (Khalid, 2014; Curtis, 1997). This approach reflects the dual strategy of the state: the assimilation of Islam along with its control (Martin, 2001). The state strives to define the boundaries of the religious and political spheres (Roy, 1997).

4.5.1 Reconstructing Traditional Islam: State-Led Adaptation for Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

The government of Uzbekistan actively sought to shape the interpretation and expression of Islam among its citizens (Rasanayagam, 2011, p.96). This effort extended beyond merely using Islam to legitimise or assimilate; the aim was to create "conditions of opportunity" for citizens to connect with Islam (Rasanayagam, 2011, p.97). The State established institutions, such as the Committee on Religious Affairs (later the Muslim Board of Uzbekistan), to oversee and

regulate religious matters (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 96). The IMU holds a near monopoly on Islamic publishing, ensuring that the literature aligns with the state-approved definition of Islam (Khalid, 2007, p.206).

The state promoted certain types of Islam, especially state-supported Islam rooted in Hanafi jurisprudence and Sufi principles. (O'Dell, 2017, p. 110). These were promoted as "national" and "true" heritage from the pre-colonial period of the region (Garagozov, 2005). This "national" Islam was clearly opposed to influences that were described as "alien" or "contradictory to true Islam," such as those perceived as fundamentalistic or Wahhabi movements, especially those opposed to Sufism (Roy,2000, p.159). The state defines "true" Islam and punishes those who violate the boundaries it sets (Khalid,2007, p.206).

Speeches and actions against the leadership or structure of the state on Islam were punished (McGlinchey 2007, 2011; see also Vera Exnerova's discussion of the Adolat Islami [Islamic Justice Movement], chapter 3, this volume). The government promoted "enlightened and tolerant" Islam as a key element of national identity speech (Asad, 1999, p. 186; see also, e.g., Rasanayagam, 2010). Islamic practices that opposed the government's "official Islam" were branded as "radical" or linked to "extremism" and were suppressed. (Kamil-Burley,2014).

The government determined which aspects of Islam were acceptable, ensuring their alignment with the state's views on national heritage, which effectively nationalised Islam (Khalid,2007). This contrasts with the pre-Soviet period, when Islam was organically embedded in social contexts and was not defined as a personal, objectified category. This form of state-permitted Islam, sometimes referred to as "official Islam," is under the strict control of the government and is obligated to facilitate the administration and control of Islam in society (Khalid,2007). Religious governance is built not on the institution's understanding of Islam, but on the institution's preference for what Islam should be (Khalid,2007).

4.5.2 Religious Revival under State Control: Authenticity and Autonomy in Question

Since 1991, interest in religious practice and Islam has grown, but under conditions of state-organised control and regulation (Khalid, 2007; Khalid, 2014). This control is often described as more restrictive, more comprehensive, and more aggressive than it was during the Soviet era (Khalid, 2015; Abramson & Tucker, 2017). The state attempts to control, limit, and ultimately engineer the religiosity of Muslims (Khalid, 2007; Louw, 2014; Kamp, 2014; Abramson & Tucker, 2017). Religious expression is strictly controlled, and Soviet structures for controlling and regulating religious activity have been preserved and modified (Rasanayagam, 2011, p. 95).

The state controls mosques and religious schools (Komil-Burley,2014). Religious leaders are required to cooperate with the government and promote the state ideology (Komil-Burley, 2014). This leads to a situation where official religious authorities are seen as less influential than "informal" or even global voices accessible via the internet (O'Dell, 2017; Fathi, 2006).

This control led to a more complex and hybrid reimagining of religious identity than a simple return to pre-Soviet Islam (Khalid, 2007,2003). People's experiences related to Soviet policy and current state control shape their understanding of religiosity (Fathi, 2006). The reduction of the state's integrative and regulatory functions regarding religion, as observed during the Soviet era, was partially adopted by the public, who viewed some policies (such as the removal of religious symbols) as liberating, while maintaining the communicative functions of religion through flexible strategies (Kamp, 2014; Dadabaev, 2010).

The suppression of independent religious expression provoked mass resistance in various forms (Ilkhamov, 2006; for details, see Gamza and Jones Luong, 2014). Unregistered Muslim religious leaders, despite strict registration requirements, existed even during the Soviet era, emphasising a "grey zone" where state control was not absolute (Tucker, 2013; Khalid, 2007; Tasar, 2017, p. 141). This continuation of "informal Islam" poses a challenge to state power (Khalid, 2007; Komil-Burley, 2014). State actions, including the violent suppression of certain forms of Islam, contribute to the dialectical radicalisation between the secular state and Islam (Hunter, 2004; Komil-Burley,2014). The state's persecution of religious advocates promoting reformist views also limits the autonomy of the Renaissance (Khalid, 2006; Abramson & Tucker, 2017).

The loss of religious knowledge resulting from the Soviet system and subsequent state control shaped the conditions for the emergence of what the state calls "extremism" (Khalid, 2007, 2014). The state's definition and classification of "radical Islam" and "extremism" are viewed by some as bolstering the government's efforts to seize and consolidate power (Hunter, 2004; Khalid, 2014). Religious revival is not merely a return to the past, as the legacy of the Soviet era, including the de-Islamization of public life and the formation of strong ethno-national identities, persists (Khalid, 2007; p. 117). The relationship between the state and Islam is intricate and multifaceted, demanding consideration of the historical, cultural, and political context (Khalid, 2014; Khalid, 2007). The Soviet era excluded Islam from the public sphere and diminished religious knowledge, yet it simultaneously fostered an educated population with ethno-national identities capable of embracing Islam as a heritage (Fathi, 2006; Khalid, 2003).

4.6 The Role of History in Nation-Building

After gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan actively began constructing a national identity by deliberately reinterpreting its history, particularly the pre-Soviet period (Khalid, 2007; Melvin, 2000). This process aimed to fill historical gaps and correct the negative portrayals of Uzbek heroes and historical events presented during the Soviet era (Khalid, 2015; Kamp, 2010; Allworth, 1990).

A central element of this reinterpretation was the elevation of historical figures from earlier periods to the status of national heroes (Khalid, 2007; Slezkine, 2000). Figures who had previously been portrayed negatively under Soviet rule were re-evaluated and celebrated (Allworth, 1990; Khalid, 2015; Kamp, 2010). For instance, Amir Temur (Tamerlane), who Soviet historians often depicted as a destructive feudal conqueror, became a central symbol of Uzbek national pride and identity (Khalid, 2014, 2015). He is presented as an ideal “just ruler” and state-builder, and his political legacy is used to legitimise contemporary governance practices (Melvin, 2000, p. 45; Khalid, 2015). His empire is often seen as an idealised past upon which new national narratives are constructed (Slezkine, 2000; Bell, 1999; Adams, 2010). Monuments to figures like Amir Temur and Alisher Navoi were erected in public spaces (Khalid, 2014).

The Jadid reformers—modernist, secular intellectuals repressed by Stalin for their nationalism—were also rehabilitated (Allworth, 1990; Roy, 2000; Adams, 2010). Their names and previously banned anti-Russian or anti-Soviet writings gained prominence (Khalid, 2007, 2014). Some were even posthumously awarded state honours for their contributions to modern Uzbek literature and national identity (Khalid, 2007; Dadabaev, 2004, p. 145).

The pursuit of “great ancestors” and the honouring of particular historical figures from ancient and medieval times helped highlight the ethnic and cultural continuity between earlier populations and the emerging nation, thus presenting national history in a more glorious light (Adams, 2010; Bell, 1999; Khalid, 2015). Central Asian literary and scientific figures such as Beruni, Navoi, and Ibn Sina are now considered primarily Uzbek (Melvin, 2000, p. 45). This emphasis on pre-Soviet figures reflects a state-sponsored primordialism that highlights ancient origins to legitimise the current regime. (Melvin, 2000; Allworth, 1990).

4.6.1 Selective Memory and the Erasure of the Soviet Past

Independent Uzbekistan’s approach to the Soviet past is characterized by a complex interplay of selective memory and deliberate erasure, often driven by the need to define a clear national

identity in opposition to Soviet rule (Khalid, 2007; Kamp, 2010; Adams, 2010; Melvin, 2000; Khalid, 2015).

One key strategy was the active removal of Soviet heritage from public spaces and memory (Adams, 2010; Khalid, 2014). This included:

- Removing Soviet and Russian statues (Kamp, 2010).
- Destroying books and magazines that included socialism and other Soviet principles (Kamp, 2010).
- Renaming places and streets previously named after Russian or Soviet heroes with national names (e.g., Lenin Square was renamed Independence Square) (Khalid, 2007; Kamp, 2010; Adams, 2010; Khairi, 2018; Roy, 1997,2000).
- Rejecting the “big Russian brother” trope that portrayed Uzbeks as culturally inferior (Kamp, 2010; Bell, 1999).

Alongside this erasure, the Soviet historical narrative was rejected and replaced with a national one (Khalid, 2007; Melvin, 2000). This new historiography often criticises the Soviet past while praising the post-Soviet societal reconstruction (Adams, 2010; Warikoo, 2015; Bell, 1999). It depicts the Soviet period as one during which religious and ethnic identities were suppressed and condemns the destructive policies of Russian and Soviet rule (Allworth, 1990; Khalid, 1998; Slezkine, 2000). The state mobilised historians to establish national foundations for the independent country, thereby accelerating the trends of historical revisionism that were observed in the late Soviet period (Dagiev, 2014; Komil-Burley, 2023).

However, this process was not a complete break from the Soviet era. Significant continuities and selective adaptations remained (Kamp, 2010; Bell, 1999; Melvin, 2000; Komil-Burley, 2023; Dagiev, 2014; Curtis, 1997; Ünal, 2018). The tradition of selectively restoring heritage and avoiding potentially controversial historical representations is identified as a Soviet legacy (Kamp, 2010; Curtis, 1997; Warikoo, 2015). Despite anti-Soviet rhetoric, strong methodological and institutional continuities with the Soviet past persisted, and Soviet cultural development models served as templates for nationalist elites (Kamp, 2010; Melvin, 2000; Dagiev, 2014). Some figures familiar from Soviet propaganda, such as Tamerlane and Rashidov (a post-1937 apparatchik), were revalued as national champions (Khalid, 2014; Khairi, 2018; Dagiev, 2014; Bell, 1999). The main storyline of national history, such as the idea that nations have always existed, often remained unchanged from the Soviet era, with only the details revised (Kamp, 2010; Khalid, 2015). Furthermore, the conceptual framework used to

understand and present cultural elements still originates from Soviet models (Warikoo, 2015). Assumptions about Uzbek national identity that formed during the Soviet era were left mainly unchallenged in the post-Soviet period (Bell, 1999).

Public assessments of the Soviet past are more complex and often differ from the official discourse (Adams, 2010; Melvin, 2000; Slezkine, 2000; Khalid, 1998). While the official narrative presents the era in a negative light, many who lived through the Soviet period recall aspects such as social welfare, stability, security, and interethnic harmony with nostalgia (Bell, 1999; Dagiev, 2014; Khairi, 2018; Khalid, 2015). This nostalgia is frequently linked to disillusionment with the post-independence period and involves a selective recollection of the Soviet past's positive features (Dagiev, 2014; Khalid, 2015). Public discussions are often more nuanced, recognising both the positive and negative facets of the Soviet era, sharply contrasting with the polarised official narrative (Slezkine, 2000). For many individuals, memories of events such as the “Great Patriotic War” or “building socialism” form the genuine basis of their social identity, even if these events have lost their context in the new official history (Roy, 2000, p. 162).

In post-Soviet Uzbekistan, this new identity and historical narrative can be viewed as an attempt to connect the present to an eternal, ahistorical past through the secular Soviet conceptual framework (Roy, 2000, p. 161). This entails a form of “closure of history,” particularly concerning the periods between the 16th century and the 1937 repressions—including the Jadids and early Bolsheviks—who are mostly absent from official narratives and public commemorations (Roy, 2000).

4.7 National symbols and ideological messages in Uzbekistan after independence

After gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan embarked on a process of nation-building, a key aspect of which included the creation and promotion of new national symbols (Khalid, 2007; Kamp, 2010). The establishment of symbolic elements of sovereignty, such as the national flag, anthem, and coat of arms, was the first goal of the newly independent state (Adams, 2010). These symbols were crucial in distinguishing the nation and legitimising its sovereignty (Khalid, 2014). They were actively built and distributed by the state to evoke a sense of unity and identity among the population (Melvin, 2000).

The design and promotion of these new national symbols represent a negotiation between the pre-Soviet legacy and practices inherited from the Soviet era. Uzbekistan has removed the Soviet past from its coat of arms and flag (Khalid, 2007). For example, the sickle and hammer

on the coat of arms were replaced by the legendary Humo bird, a symbol of nobility and happiness (Khalid, 2007), and Soviet symbols were substituted with national symbols (Kamp, 2010). The national flag incorporates elements such as blue and green parts, similar to those found in the flags of Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, as well as crescents associated with Islamic elements (Adams, 2010; Roy, 1997). Historical figures and symbols from the pre-Russian period are also utilised to establish a sense of continuity and legitimacy for the new regime (Bell, 1999). However, it has been argued that this process of using ancient symbols is deeply rooted in Soviet-era practices and policies to legitimise the current regime (Warikoo, 2015). Continuity from the Soviet period is evident in the state's ongoing practice of forming national identity through the selective restoration and promotion of historical symbols, reflecting Soviet strategies that emphasised historical figures and events chosen to serve the state's ideological goals (Bell, 1999; Dagiev, 2014). The creation of symbols often involved "assembling parts together," rather than a direct return to historical roots, partly due to the lack of a consistent set of historical data outside of Soviet historiography (Adams, 2010). The constructed identity is characterised as eternal and based on the archaic past through a secularised version of the Soviet conceptual matrix (Khalid, 2015). In cities like Tashkent, political elites selectively preserved, discarded, or rediscovered Soviet-defined elements of Uzbek identity while constructing their dominant nation (Komil-Burley, 2023). The reconstruction of the iconography of national identity required a rational and strategic reinterpretation of the Soviet legacy (Melvin, 2000). Soviet models of cultural development served as a guide for elites (Dagiev, 2014).

The contribution of state-sponsored symbolism to the mass internal acceptance of national identity is complex. Although the state actively promoted symbols to foster unity and identity (Melvin, 2000) and national symbols played a vital role in nation-building and identity formation (Dagiev, 2014), sources indicate that this process entailed significant state control and strategic manoeuvring by elites. The use of state-sponsored primordialism and symbols highlights the interaction between Soviet heritage and identity construction (Warikoo, 2015). The state aimed to unite citizens around national symbols (Adams, 2010) and sought to employ culturally rooted symbols for the internal acceptance of the proposed changes (Khairi, 2018). However, citizens are required to present themselves in accordance with the "Uzbek" government structure (Khairi, 2018), which implies a degree of conformity established by the state, rather than deep, widespread internal acceptance. It is noted that "national custom" developed in the non-verbal sphere (Roy, 1997,2000), which suggests that the formation of identity occurred at levels beyond the symbolism of the open state.

4.8 State control and cultural policy in independent Uzbekistan

The state of Uzbekistan actively managed cultural production to balance national revival with political loyalty. The new regime aimed to cultivate historical, national, and cultural traditions (Khalid, 2007; Khairi, 2018) while restoring suppressed legends (Adams, 2010). Local scholars and artists were officially encouraged to idealise the past in their works (Adams, 2010; Kamp, 2006; Warikoo, 2015). Prohibited Jadid leaders and nationalist figures were rehabilitated, with their anti-Russian and anti-Soviet writings gaining prominence; some even received posthumous state awards (Adams, 2010; Khalid, 2021). The state initiated the renaming of places and institutions and undertook the restoration of monuments (Adams, 2010; Kamp, 2006). Soviet-era holidays were replaced with national and cultural celebrations (Adams, 2010), while a focus on traditional Uzbek culture became a state priority (Adams, 2010). The revival of the language was also a key policy; following independence, the Uzbek language was declared the national language (Khalid, 2021; Fierman, 1998), and efforts were made to increase its usage in official and educational contexts (Fierman, 1998). By 1997, civil servants were required to have a perfect command of the Uzbek language (Fierman, 1998).

At the same time, the state maintained strict control to ensure political loyalty. President Karimov publicly emphasised the preservation of "interethnic and social harmony" and adopted a civic rather than ethnic definition of citizenship (Ilkhamov, 2006; Roy, 2000). The implementation of the State Language Act, which could offend minorities, was reduced for government officials and university students, allowing for regional flexibility (Ilkhamov, 2006). The state promoted a secular national identity and strictly controlled religious expression (Roy, 2000). It retained the Soviet-era regulations for separating religion from the state and education (Roy, 2000), resulting in public discussions that became largely secular (Roy, 2000). Although Islam was celebrated as part of the national heritage and historical Islamic figures were assimilated as great Uzbeks (Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2007; Khalid, 2021), the state determined which aspects of Islam were acceptable, ensuring conformity to its views and effectively nationalising Islam (Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2007; Khalid, 2021). Certain concepts of Islam, such as Sufism, were prioritised, possibly to limit the influence of other forms (Roy, 2000). State control extended to managing, limiting, and engineering the religiosity of Muslims (Roy, 2000), classifying and regulating all aspects of society, including what was considered religious (Roy, 2000).

Numerous models of cultural control during the Soviet era were often presented under the guise of independent nationalism. The state maintained continuity in its monopoly on ideology by

adopting the goals and assimilating the rhetoric of nationalist intellectuals (Khalid, 2007). Cultural renewal frequently involved a re-appropriation of Soviet interpretations, preserving elements such as heritage and universal values at the centre of the space, while forgoing socialist content (Kamp, 2006). Soviet models of cultural development became a template for emerging elites (Khalid, 2021). The state's approach encompassed the affirmation of Soviet nation-building and modernist internationalism (Roy, 2000), with the belief that Soviet institutions preserved and transformed traditional culture (Roy, 2000). The Soviet model of political "licensing" of historical heroes as symbols persisted even after the collapse of the USSR (Adams, 2010; Khalid, 2007). The utilisation of local community structures such as mahallas for governmental functions continued from the Soviet era (Kamp, 2006). The commemoration of historical dates to legitimise the regime is another practice rooted in Soviet precedents (Fierman, 1998). The nationalist literature employed by post-Soviet governments to justify their existence by emphasising Soviet oppression sometimes exaggerates discrimination through selective convenience, reminiscent of state propaganda methods (Ilkhamov, 2006). Even the promotion of Islamic scholars was conducted "in the Soviet way" from the perspective of being outside the Islamic tradition (Khalid, 2007; Khalid, 2021). Building a new independence utilised the conceptual framework of Sovietism, albeit secularised, to ground the present in the seemingly eternal past (Khalid, 2007). The distinction between "citizenship" (political) and "nation" (ethnic/language), reinforced by Soviet policy and the census, has become relevant (Roy, 2000). The state-centred approach to identity formation mirrors the Soviet-era narrative of Uzbek identity, which depended on the relationship between local elites and Moscow (Khalid, 2021). The state remains the main driving force behind the public landscape in Tashkent, continuing the pattern established in the Soviet era (Kamp, 2006). The imposition of uniformity on regional holidays also reflected Soviet control mechanisms (Fierman, 1998).

Conflicts emerged between formal narratives and lower-level expressions of identity. The formal acceptance of the definition of citizenship alongside an emphasis on interethnic harmony is accompanied by latent views of state-sponsored nationalism that appear mono-ethnic and may overlook minorities (Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2007). Although the state controlled and nationalised Islam (Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2007; Khalid, 2021), religious tendencies were deeply ingrained, and informal religious activities persisted (Khalid, 2021). Some even feared the revival of Islam as an alternative ideology (Roy, 2000). Among citizens, memories of the Soviet era vary; some highlight the suppression of language, religion, and culture, while others express nostalgia for the stability and social security of that period (Ilkhamov, 2006). Public perceptions of the Soviet past often navigate between official narratives that portray the Soviet Union as a

victim and those that portray it as a beneficiary (Ilkhamov, 2006). Social divisions resulting from Soviet policy, such as those between "local" Uzbeks and Russian-speaking "Russians," who were more integrated into the Soviet system, complicated everyday relationships (Roy, 2000). The state's construction of a unified "Uzbek" encounters personal self-awareness shaped by various signs of identity (Dagiev, 2014; Roy, 2000). The physical landscape in cities like Tashkent highlights the tension between places controlled by the state, which convey official identity, and locations such as mosques that embody alternative perspectives (Khalid, 2007). Although the state retained significant control over culture and ideology (Khalid, 2007), there was a renewed interest in Islam and a study of past repression that transcended the unconditional acceptance of Soviet-era identity schemes (Roy, 2000).

4.9 Applying theories to the nation-building of Uzbekistan; Invented Traditions (Hobsbawm)

According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), post-Soviet nationalism in Uzbekistan has been shaped in part through the strategic creation of symbolic traditions. This process involves reinterpreting historical narratives to serve the needs of contemporary political agendas. It includes the rejection of Soviet historiography (Khalid, 2007; Ilkhamov, 2006) and the establishment of national heroes, legends, and festivals (Khalid, 2021; Adams, 2010; Kamp, 2006; Roy, 2000). Statues of figures such as Amir Timur, Alisher Navoi, and Ulugbek were erected, while Soviet and Russian statues were dismantled (Kamp, 2006). This involves projecting a modern national identity into the past, attributing "Uzbekness" to historical figures like Amir Timur and Ulugh Beg, even though they were sometimes adversaries of groups presently considered to be Uzbeks (Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2007). Official histories are utilised to justify state structures and policies, including the rewriting of biographies of former communist elites ("class of the '38s") as national heroes, rather than Soviet heroes (Adams, 2010). Such selective use and reconstruction of the past correspond to the concept of invented tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983; Roy, 2000). The process of defining national heritage comprises the selective discarding, preservation, or rediscovery of Soviet-defined elements of identity in the Tashkent landscape (Kamp, 2006).

4.9.1 Imagined Teams (Anderson)

Although the term "authoritarian secularism" is not defined as a specific theoretical concept in the sources, the reality described in Uzbekistan aligns with its components: authoritarian rule (Kamp, 2006; Khalid, 2007; Ilkhamov, 2006) and a state that actively governs or controls

religion, particularly Islam (Adams, 2010; Khalid, 2021; Roy, 2000). For example, the Karimov government shaped its version of "Uzbekness" and cultural identity as a standard, attempting to transform existing social patterns into a means of governance (Roy, 2000). As part of his national ideology, he developed a state-controlled Islamic identity (Adams, 2010; Khalid, 2021), defining "good and bad Islam" and establishing a national spiritual heritage (Khalid, 2021). This approach, in which the authoritarian state seeks to regulate and utilise religion as a tool within its framework, reflects the extent to which the state's power over society extends to the definition and control of religious life, which contrasts with the purely secular separation of state and religion or the granting of complete religious freedom. The struggle between "radical Islamic groups" and the government illustrates the state's concern for maintaining control over religious expression to ensure stability (Khalid, 2007).

4.10 Concepts for nation-building in postcolonial authoritarian regimes

Strong Soviet legacy: The country's political borders and organisational structures were created by the Soviets during the period of "national delimitation" (Khalid, 2007; Hirsch, 2005). The Soviet nation-building project, though not entirely, laid the foundation for modern nationalism (Martin, 2001). Post-independence cultural renewal relied heavily on Soviet interpretations of Uzbek national culture and identity, removing only the socialist ideological content (Adams, 2010; Khalid, 2021; Kamp, 2006). This suggests that postcolonial authoritarian regimes, arising from former empires, can rely heavily on the coloniser's institutional and ideological legacy, even with an overt rejection of the past (Adams, 2010).

State-led nationalism is characterised by the statistical origin of nationalism in Uzbekistan (Roy, 2000) and a clear political project of building a nation through culture (Roy, 2000). It resembles the "official nationalism" of the Soviet era (Anderson, 2006). Political elites play a key role in developing forms of nationalist policy to consolidate their power and justify the state apparatus (Ilkhamov, 2006). This emphasises that in authoritarian contexts, nationalism is often a top-down project run by the ruling elite (Anderson, 2006; Ilkhamov, 2006; Kamp, 2006).

Post-hoc self-creation: The project is described as a post-hoc (after the event) creation of nationalist ideology following independence (Roy, 2000). This necessitates the construction of identities that contemporary individuals may not wholly possess (Adams, 2010), while manipulating and reconstructing historical, linguistic, religious, and cultural heritage (Hobsbawm, 1983; Anderson, 2006; Roy, 2000). This illustrates both the challenge and method

of a regime constructing national identity from above within deeply ingrained, pre-existing contexts that lack a national consciousness (Roy, 2000; Adams, 2010).

Cultural and historical legitimisation: New historiography, national symbols, and the reinterpretation of past personalities and events are central to justifying official policies and state structures, thus providing legitimacy to the ruling elite (Hobsbawm, 1983; Roy, 2000; Khalid, 2007; Ilkhamov, 2006; Kamp, 2006; Khalid, 2021).

Control over religion and identity: The state's active role in developing a specific, state-controlled religious identity (Anderson, 2006; Khalid, 2021) and defining acceptable forms of cultural identity (Roy, 2000) demonstrates how such regimes strive to manage potentially competing sources of identity and power.

4.11 Elite Continuity in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan: Theoretical Reflections

The continuity of Soviet-era elites in post-independence Uzbekistan is a significant aspect of nation-building that aligns with various theoretical approaches to nationalism and state formation. Unlike many post-colonial or post-Soviet contexts, where popular mobilisations challenged existing power structures, Uzbekistan's independence was achieved through elite-managed processes. This resulted in the persistence of political, administrative, and intellectual cadres from the Soviet era.

This phenomenon reflects John Breuilly's (1982) view of nationalism as a political doctrine utilised by elites to secure or maintain state power. In the absence of a mass nationalist movement, Uzbek political leaders reinterpreted national identity through state-sponsored symbols, historical narratives, and language policies, which allowed them to legitimize their authority while preserving authoritarian governance structures inherited from the Soviet period.

Furthermore, Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolic theory (2009) helps explain how elite continuity was facilitated through the strategic use of historical myths, cultural symbols, and collective memory. The revival of pre-Soviet figures, such as Amir Temur and the Jadid intellectuals, served not only as a source of national pride but also as a means for the ruling elite to consolidate their position. This created an illusion of historical continuity and cultural authenticity.

From a postcolonial perspective, Partha Chatterjee's (1993) critique of elite-driven nationalism is particularly relevant to Uzbekistan. The ruling class constructed a controlled, state-centric version of national identity that selectively integrated Soviet modernity with pre-Soviet traditions, while simultaneously restricting political pluralism. This approach reflects the hybrid

nature of postcolonial nation-building, where indigenous elites use national discourse to legitimize their authority, often at the expense of democratic inclusion.

Thus, elite continuity in Uzbekistan cannot be understood in isolation from broader theoretical frameworks. It exemplifies how nationalism can function as a top-down project orchestrated by political elites, employing historical narratives and cultural symbols to reinforce their power. At the same time, it highlights the limitations of state-driven identity construction in fostering genuine popular participation, as the national project primarily serves as a tool for elite control rather than grassroots mobilization.

4.12 Social Dynamics and Public Reactions to Nation-Building Policies in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan

In the aftermath of independence, Uzbekistan's nation-building project has been shaped by both the legacies of the Soviet system and the state's strategic efforts to construct a cohesive national identity. However, these policies have interacted with complex social realities and generated mixed reactions within the population.

Social Foundations:

The following key characteristics marked Uzbek society at the time of independence:

- The persistence of Soviet-era elites in politics, administration, and education (Collins, 2006).
- A socially fragmented population, with clear divides between urban centres and rural peripheries.
- The re-emergence of religious identity, particularly Islam, as a significant social force.
- Economic hardship, widespread unemployment, and high rates of labour migration, particularly to Russia and neighbouring states.
- A generally low level of civic mobilisation or political activism, rooted in decades of authoritarian governance.

Despite the state's emphasis on stability and control, these social conditions have created both opportunities and constraints for the nation-building process.

Public Reactions:

- **State-led identity construction and limited public engagement:** The government promoted an official narrative centred on historical pride, the legacy of Amir Temur, Islamic heritage framed within secularism, and the superiority of the Uzbek language. While this narrative resonated with certain segments of the population, especially urban elites and youth exposed to state media, genuine grassroots enthusiasm remained limited (Kandiyoti, 2007).
- **Religious revival and parallel identities:** The controlled religious sphere coexisted with underground Islamic networks, reflecting both a revival of faith and dissatisfaction with the state's secular national identity project. For many Uzbeks, religious identity emerged as an alternative source of belonging (Ro'i, 2000).
- **Economic pressures and pragmatic nationalism:** Economic challenges, including unemployment and migration, shaped how ordinary citizens perceived national identity. For labour migrants, identity often became fluid and transactional, with economic survival prioritised over ideological commitments (Schatz, 2004).
- **Passive adaptation and constrained dissent:** Authoritarian restrictions on political opposition and civil society limited overt resistance to nation-building policies. Nonetheless, informal critiques circulated through private discussions, diaspora communities, and underground networks.

Overall, post-Soviet Uzbekistan's nation-building efforts have been characterised by a top-down, elite-driven approach, with limited mechanisms for public participation. While formal symbols of national unity have been established, social fragmentation, economic hardship, and alternative identity narratives continue to challenge the state's ability to cultivate a deeply internalised national consciousness.

4.13 Conclusion

The experience of Uzbekistan after independence illustrates the complexity of nation-building in post-Soviet authoritarian regimes. The National Building policy pursued in the country after 1991 was primarily based on institutions inherited from the Soviet era, elite structure and ideological templates. This process was carried out not by a sharp break but by reinterpreting the selected elements of the Soviet model in a new context.

The state prioritised the formation of national identity. The government reworked historical narratives, language policies, and symbolic emblems, using them as a means of strengthening political legitimacy. In a context where there was no widely supported national movement

among the people, Uzbek nationalism was formed from a top-down perspective as a means to maintain the ruling elite and ideologically separate from the Soviet past. Islam and cultural heritage have also been transformed into a symbol of national unity under ideological control by the state.

However, such an approach deviated towards exclusivity (exclusion of certain groups) rather than inclusivity (all-round participation). The re-definition of the concept of "identity" on an ethnic, linguistic, and historical basis limited the identity of many minority groups. While state official statements referred to Civil-based national unity, current policies and cultural initiatives were geared towards building an ethnic-based nation. Substantial control over Islamic forms of expression, historical memory, and Culture Limited the formation of an open and multi-vocal society.

In conclusion, the nation-building model adopted during the post-Soviet period in Uzbekistan was rooted in Soviet heritage and characterised by authoritarian governance. This approach helped maintain cultural unity and political stability. However, it also presented significant challenges to democratic reforms, inclusive political participation, and the free expression of diverse identities. Consequently, this raises questions about the long-term prospects for stability and national solidarity.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has comprehensively examined the intricate historical processes that have profoundly shaped and evolved Uzbekistan's national identity. The research, spanning from the colonial policies of Tsarist Russia in the 19th century through the Soviet era to the post-independence period, establishes that the national identity in Uzbekistan did not emerge organically or naturally. Instead, it consistently arose as a constructed, engineered process, profoundly determined by prevailing political forces.

The Tsarist period laid the foundational groundwork by initiating the gradual segmentation of Turkestan's multifaceted and religiously based collective identities into distinct "national" categories. This policy aimed to classify the population along ethnic lines, thereby distinguishing them from broader "Turkic" or "Muslim" identities. Such actions primarily served to enhance imperial governance effectiveness, weaken resistance movements, and deepen social fragmentation.

During the Soviet era, this process intensified into an ideologically driven, centralised, and large-scale project of nation-building. The Uzbek nation was formalised and institutionalised through policies such as "korenization" (indigenisation), national-territorial delimitation, standardised language policy, and the principle of "national form, socialist content". Simultaneously, the Soviet regime actively suppressed alternative identities, including pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism. Throughout this period, national identity was largely delineated and confined within the frameworks of the Soviet system, defining the official contours of the Uzbek nation.

In the post-independence period, particularly under Islam Karimov's leadership, the formation of national identity was once again orchestrated under state guidance, albeit with a shifted ideological foundation. While the Soviet era was openly repudiated, many of its methods of state control, elite networks, and ideological strategies persisted. This involved a selective reinterpretation of national history and historical figures, such as Amir Timur and the Jadids, who were transformed into central national symbols. The Uzbek language was elevated to the status of the primary state language, and religious heritage was carefully embraced as a "cultural value," integrated into the national narrative in a politically controlled and often harmless manner.

The theoretical analysis undertaken in this dissertation indicates that the formation of national identity in Uzbekistan closely aligns with Gellner's modernist theory, which posits that nations

are a product of the modern era, intentionally created by the state. Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community" also proves instrumental in explaining how this process was fostered and disseminated through Soviet propaganda, education, and mass media. Furthermore, postcolonial approaches, particularly the preservation and adaptation of imperial heritage, as well as the careful reinterpretation of symbols and historical myths selected by the state, resonate strongly with Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist theory. The concept of "authoritarian secularism," while not explicitly defined as a specific theory in the sources, describes the observed reality of authoritarian rule actively controlling and utilising religion, reflecting the state's pervasive influence over religious life.

The dissertation also illuminated essential similarities and differences between the strategies of Soviet and post-Soviet nation-building. In both periods, a consistent pattern of top-down identity formation emerged, characterised by the manipulation of history and culture for political purposes, as well as policies aimed at maintaining tight control over religious and ethnic diversity. However, a key distinction emerged in the post-Soviet period: the official ideological foundations shifted dramatically, with Soviet ideology being explicitly rejected, and the foundations of Uzbek identity now relying on notions of ancient history, deep culture, and local "national values".

Despite the official interpretation of national identity serving as the primary legitimising tool for the government, this approach also resulted in various contradictions and tensions within society. While the state formally promoted a concept of civic nationalism in official documents, in practice, the dominance of ethnic Uzbek identity was consistently maintained. Islam, though acknowledged as a national heritage, was integrated into official circles and public life in a politically regulated and controlled manner. This dissertation demonstrates that national identity in Uzbekistan is not merely a product of linear historical development but a dynamic social construct, shaped within a complex political context and constantly evolving through the interplay of state policy, societal resistance, alternative narratives, and personal experiences.

Ultimately, this dissertation offers a significant theoretical and empirical contribution to the analysis of national identity formation and evolution in an authoritarian, post-imperial context, highlighting the enduring legacies of the past on contemporary state-building processes.

The key findings of this dissertation comprehensively examine the intricate historical processes that have profoundly shaped and evolved Uzbekistan's national identity. The research establishes that national identity in Uzbekistan did not emerge organically or naturally; instead,

it consistently arose as a constructed, engineered process, profoundly determined by prevailing political forces.

Here are the key findings organised by historical period and theoretical insights:

- Tsarist Period (19th Century): Foundational Groundwork
 - The Tsarist period initiated the gradual segmentation of Turkestan's multifaceted and religiously based collective identities into distinct "national" categories.
 - This classification along ethnic lines aimed to distinguish the population from broader "Turkic" or "Muslim" identities.
 - These policies primarily served to enhance imperial governance effectiveness, weaken resistance movements, and deepen social fragmentation.
- Soviet Era: Ideologically Driven Nation-Building
 - The process intensified into an ideologically driven, centralised, and large-scale project of nation-building.
 - The Uzbek nation was formalised and institutionalised through policies such as "korenization" (indigenisation), national-territorial delimitation (e.g., the 1924 delimitation leading to the Uzbek SSR), standardised language policy, and the principle of "national form, socialist content".
 - Alternative identities, including pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism, were actively suppressed.
 - National identity was largely delineated and confined within the frameworks of the Soviet system, defining the official contours of the Uzbek nation.
- Post-Independence Period (Under Islam Karimov): State-Orchestrated Identity
 - The formation of national identity was once again orchestrated under state guidance, albeit with a shifted ideological foundation.
 - While the Soviet era was openly repudiated, many of its methods of state control, elite networks, and ideological strategies persisted.
 - This involved a selective reinterpretation of national history and historical figures, such as Amir Timur and the Jadids, transforming them into central national symbols.

- The Uzbek language was elevated to the status of the primary state language, and religious heritage was carefully embraced as a "cultural value," integrated into the national narrative in a politically controlled and often harmless manner.
- The process was largely "constructed from above" due to the absence of a mass nationalist movement at independence.
- Theoretical Alignment:
 - The formation of national identity in Uzbekistan closely aligns with Gellner's modernist theory, which posits that nations are a product of the modern era, intentionally created by the state.
 - Benedict Anderson's concept of an "imagined community" is instrumental in explaining how this process was fostered and disseminated through Soviet propaganda, education, and mass media.
 - Postcolonial approaches, particularly the preservation and adaptation of imperial heritage, as well as the careful reinterpretation of symbols and historical myths selected by the state, resonate strongly with Anthony D. Smith's ethno-symbolist theory.
 - The dissertation observes the reality of "authoritarian secularism", where authoritarian rule actively controls and utilises religion, reflecting the state's pervasive influence over religious life.
- Continuities and Differences in Nation-Building Strategies:
 - In both Soviet and post-Soviet periods, there was a consistent pattern of top-down identity formation, the manipulation of history and culture for political purposes, and policies aimed at maintaining tight control over religious and ethnic diversity.
 - A key distinction emerged in the post-Soviet period: the official ideological foundations shifted dramatically, with Soviet ideology being explicitly rejected, and the foundations of Uzbek identity now relying on notions of ancient history, deep culture, and local "national values".
- Contradictions and Tensions within Society:

- Despite the official interpretation of national identity serving as the primary legitimising tool for the government, this approach also resulted in various contradictions and tensions within society.
- While the state formally promoted a concept of civic nationalism in official documents, in practice, the dominance of ethnic Uzbek identity was consistently maintained.
- Islam, though acknowledged as a national heritage, was integrated into official circles and public life in a politically regulated and controlled manner.
- National identity in Uzbekistan is presented not merely as a product of linear historical development but as a dynamic social construct, shaped within a complex political context and constantly evolving through the interplay of state policy, societal resistance, alternative narratives, and personal experiences.

Ultimately, the dissertation offers a significant theoretical and empirical contribution to the analysis of national identity formation and evolution in an authoritarian, post-imperial context, highlighting the enduring legacies of the past on contemporary state-building processes.

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CV

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