Home, Belonging, and Aesthetic: Perspectives from Uyghur Women in Diaspora

By

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Abstract

Ultimately, the intention of this research is to investigate and bring into academic light the methods of identity negotiation of Uyghurness through the investigation of cultural aesthetics. In the context of transnational global realities, the diasporic branches of Uyghur communities across the globe are undergoing a series of identity transformations, value shifts, and home attachments. Through the theoretical lenses of diaspora studies, gender studies, and cultural aesthetics, the stories of these women help us to understand the experience of diaspora and displacement. The specific categories used to discuss the roles of cultural aesthetic include: 1) objects, 2) music, 3) food, 4) language, and 5) behavior. These cultural aesthetic categories were explored through interview conversations with fourteen Uyghur diaspora women, as detailed in the methodology. After this primary data was collected, each interview was coded to located themes around identity negotiations. Based on this coding process, four primary themes were found relating to identity negotiations through cultural aesthetics: 1) negotiating home, 2) negotiating diasporic tensions, 3) negotiating gender, 4) negotiating Uyghurness. Faced with physical, and often psychological, distance from the homeland, it is seen that Uyghur women utilize cultural aesthetics as a form of cultural maintenance in order to actively remember and remain a sense of connection with the homeland.

Acknowledgements

First of all, gratitude to my mother. This work was born as a labor of love for her, my sisters, and my aunts, the most resilient Uyghur women I know.

I would also like to express my depth of gratitude to all the women who gifted me with their stories. I had so many profoundly impactful experiences as I sat across the table from many of you, and for this privilege of sharing your stories I am forever grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This research explores the ways in which Uyghur women in diaspora negotiate aspects of their transnational identity through their experience of cultural aesthetics, customs, and rituals. This study draws from the theoretical intersections of diaspora studies, gender studies, and cultural aesthetics. Diaspora communities, either on an individual or collective level, often engage with tensions between the past and the present, the adopted home and the homeland (Hall, 1990; Kaya, 2002). For many, aesthetics can be an often-subconscious means to articulate the transnational experience of home (Savaş, 2014; Turan, 2010; Werbner & Fumanti, 2013). Due to a multiplicity of socio-cultural and institutional factors, women often bear the greatest burden to maintain aesthetic practices in diaspora, such as managing food preparation, maintaining cultural traditions, and choosing decorations for the home; therefore, necessitating a gendered perspective for this study (Agnew, 2005; Bauer, 2005; Turan, 2010).

The political realities of the Uyghur homeland have contributed to multiple layers of ethno-cultural marginalization for the diaspora community. Because Uyghurs lack an autonomous nation-state, answering the question of "where are you from" or "where is home" can be even more complex than for other minority groups in diaspora. Within China, Uyghur ethnic identity faces barriers by state-sponsored cultural integration policies, thereby complexifying expressions of Uyghur culture, identity, or civilization. The distinction of a uniquely Uyghur identity is often overlooked abroad due to the absence of an internationally recognized geo-political homeland. These barriers to having an accessible articulation of "home" lends to alternate ways of manifesting cultural identity and differentiation, such as through dress, home decor, music, food, language, and religious traditions.

The context surrounding Uyghur identity is incredibly complex and has unfortunately been unduly marked with political meaning. Throughout this paper I have made efforts to remain apolitical. Even though the political realities of the Uyghur homeland are absolutely worthy of deeper academic inquiry, political analysis is simply not the focus of this project. This is a conscious choice made as a researcher in order to allow space for the stories of these Uyghur women to speak for themselves. An emphasis on such matters I believe would ultimately detract from the voices and self-representation of these women in narrating their own diasporic realities. Therefore, what I have chosen to include is intended to only highlight aspects of the socio-political complexities that are immediately relevant to the context of this study and the stories of these women.

It is also important to note that the heteronormative role of women within the domestic sphere necessitates a gendered perspective in the study of home and cultural aesthetics. For centuries, women have been the primary wisdom keepers in matters pertaining to the domestic space and aesthetic of home (Agnew, 2005; Bauer, 2005). Especially within Muslim communities, women perform much of the labor associated with home-making, including cleaning, cooking meals, decorating a home, and organizing social gatherings (Bauer, 2005). Therefore, in order to have an accurate understanding of the realm of cultural aesthetics and its connection to cultural identity and home, it is important to listen to the stories of women who largely inhabit that space.

Ultimately, this research looks for the ways in which "Uyghurness" is experienced by women in diaspora by observing how home, belonging, and identity are embodied through their environment and lifestyle choices. Other research has provided insight into the role of cultural aesthetics in similar diasporic communities as tools for identity negotiation (Agnew, 2005;

Bauer, 2005; Fortier, 2000; Tolia-Kelly, 2010; Turan, 2010), however none yet exists within the Uyghur context. This research extends the investigation to a relatively unstudied people group and opens the opportunity for more thorough and empowering understanding of the complexities of Uyghur cultural identity.

The following analysis builds upon these themes and is structured as following. First, I offer a brief overview of the historical context of the Uyghur homeland and relevant identity issues. Shortly following, I discuss relevant literature and my theoretical framework as a foundational structure for this research project. Then, I lay out the specific methodology by which I procured, conducted, and structured the interview process of my research participants. I then begin analyzing my interviews through the categorical lens of cultural aesthetics, discussing the roles that objects, space, and ritual play in the diasporic landscape. Finally, I discuss identity negotiation around the coded themes of home and belonging, sites of tension, gender, and Uyghurness. Throughout this paper, the stories connected to Uyghur cultural aesthetic practices can serve as a gateway to learn more about the diaspora experience, Uyghur womanhood, and negotiating home.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

Historical Context

The Uyghurs are a Turkic ethnic group of 10 – 15 million people whose homeland is located in the borders of northwest China, officially referred to as Xinjiang Autonomous Uyghur province. The Uyghur language overlaps with many other Central Asian languages, most similarly to Uzbek, and is written in a Persian-Arabic script. Uyghurs share many similarities with their Central Asian neighbors, many of whom are an ethno-linguistic group of Turkic peoples who speak related languages and share cultural similarities. Uyghurs strongly self-identify with their Turkic background, and this often-conscious choice to emphasize their Turkic-ness is often used strategically to contrast themselves against their Han neighbors, the majority ethnic group within China (Ercilasun, 2017; Erkin, 2009; Zang, 2013).

The region of the Uyghur ancestral homeland has long been a disputed territory, with Mongol, Turkic, and Chinese empires throughout history laying claims to power. However, the primary source of ethno-religious tension since the 1700s has been between local ethnic groups and Chinese political powers. Around the 1900s, British and the Soviet Union developed treaties and support with the Turkic forces, which led to border disputes with China (Bellér-Hann, 2008). After the fall of the Qing dynasty, Turkic Uyghurs from the Tarim Basin took advantage of the precarious political environment to establish their own nation-state of East Turkestan in the 1920s and 1930 (Dabbs, 1963). These attempts at establishing Uyghur political autonomy were later defeated by Mao Ze Dong's forces, and Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region was officially integrated as a province of Mao Ze Dong's Communist state in 1949 (Starr, 2004).

In addition to the long history of ethno-religious conflict in the Uyghur homeland, tensions between local Uyghurs and Chinese state powers has been exacerbated by conflicting

accounts of history and imperialist formations of ethnic identity. Prior to the fall of the Qing dynasty in the early twentieth century, Turkic Muslims self-identified by their oasis tribe that surrounded the Tarim Basin without a sense of a collective ethnic identity. The use of the term "Uyghur" to describe a unified ethno-cultural identity amongst these various groups was not established until the 1920s by Soviet sinologists, named after an ancient Turkic kingdom, the Uygur Khanate. This naming was done for ease of classification when the region became under dispute between Chinese, Soviet, and rising Uyghur forces (Bellér-Hann, Cesàro, & Finley, 2016). Because the formation of a collective Uyghur ethnic identity was born out of the influence of imperialist agenda and an artificial orientalist categorization of diverse local identities in Central Asia, it is difficult to trace an accurate history of the Uyghur people. The Soviet Union desired a monopoly in Muslim Central Asia, and thus supported Uyghur separatist movements (Bellér-Hann et al., 2016). This rival competition between Chinese and Soviet powers resulted in conflicting representations of Uyghur history based on vying political agendas. Chinese accounts emphasized the influence of the centuries of dynastic control, while Soviet accounts focus on legacy and power of an autonomous Uyghur civilization (Bellér-Hann et al., 2016).

Today, the Uyghur homeland is referred to as Xinjiang, East Turkestan, Uyghurstan, among others. Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, its official name has been Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. However, some Uyghurs and their allies believe that "Xinjiang" is a name established by Chinese colonialists and is representative of the historical violence against Uyghurs within their homeland. Therefore, those who contest with Chinese political presence in the area or who support Uyghur state-hood more commonly refer to the region as East Turkestan or Uyghurstan. However, these names are often political charged and are highly censored and criminalized within China due to their associations with Uyghur

separatism and nationalism. As a result, many Uyghurs, especially recent migrants, remain uncomfortable referring to the homeland in such terms. I have made attempts to refrain from inferring political connotations which do not accurately represent the views of my research participants, so I have chosen to refer to the region as the "Uyghur homeland" or simply, "the homeland." I believe the term "homeland" emphasizes the ancestral ties that connects the broader Uyghur community, which is of special importance in light of diasporic realities.

Placing Uyghurness

Since the Uyghur homeland exists within Chinese borders, Uyghurs face barriers in their cultural, linguistic, and religious expression (Kurmangaliyeva Ercilasun & Ercilasun, 2017). These barriers are transferred into diaspora, where Uyghur migrants experiences multiple layers of cultural, racial, and religious marginalization. In diaspora, they are subject to generalizations that misrepresent cultural identity through what Edward Said termed "Orientalism:" Western assumptions about Eastern peoples and cultures based on fictional or incomplete western-centric information and perception (Said, 1978). Cultural repression under Chinese nationalism renders the Uyghurs marginalized within their own country; inland Chinese either overlook the cultural and linguistic difference of Uyghurs, or the view them as primitive, exotic, and an "ethnic other" (Zang, 2017). Orientalism does the same harm, again, abroad, where host culture peoples assume that Uyghurs are from China, so they must be similar to the other East Asian races and cultures.

Understanding diaspora identity is a key component of being able to understand how elements of Uyghur culture, or "Uyghurness," are articulated outside of the homeland. Because the Uyghur homeland is not represented by national borders but by socio-cultural boundaries, Uyghurness is often constructed vis-a-vis Han Chinese identity, where Uyghurs narrate themselves not in who they are, but in who they *are not*. (Erkin, 2009; Zang, 2017). Even within

academic literature the Uyghur positionality is usually in direct relationship, either compared or contrasted with, Han Chinese or the Chinese nation-state (Kurmangaliyeva Ercilasun & Ercilasun, 2017). Therefore, there is a question of how Uyghur identity is conceived in diaspora without the contrasted mirroring presence of their Han Chinese neighbors.

Scholarship notes that much of Uyghur identity is constructed in contrast to Han culture (Chatterjee, 2017; Erkin, 2009; Mackerras, 2017; Zang, 2013). This dichotomous relationship is seen both in how Uyghurs self-identify and through academic literature representation. Early travelers to the region recorded the styles of hats, or *doppas*, as one of the primary indicators of cross-cultural influence. Because *doppas* differed based on region, town, and ethnicity, it served as a visible symbol of group affiliation (Ercilasun, 2017). In Xinjiang today, cultural affiliations are often expressed through consumer choice of Turkish or Russian goods, rather than Chinese, and shopping at Uyghur owned businesses (Erkin, 2009). Uyghur dress has also been a key component of cultural identity differentiation from Han culture (Ercilasun, 2017). However, under Chinese government censorship, current material signals of Uyghur religious identity are highly restricted. China's cultural censorship of Uyghurs is repressive even of basic language, religious, and personal dress choices (Mackerras, 2017). This limits opportunities and choices for cultural identity expression and contributes to a false dichotomy between Han Chinese and Uyghur cultures.

In diaspora, Uyghurs have more freedom to express and display their cultural aesthetics as a means of expressing an identity negotiation process. Bauer's (2005) research describes how Muslim-American women specifically make choices through their relocations to articulate the hybridity of their cultural experiences. In relation to material objects, specifically, there are choices in diaspora to choose alignment or disengagement with home culture or host culture

through home decor, food choices, personal adornment, and even utilitarian objects and tools. Cultural objects and personal adornment choices have consistently been used by minority groups as a way to denote both belonging and differentiation, acculturation and deculturation (Turan, 2010). In diasporic communities, such as in the U.S., the contrast between the adopted Western home and the homeland renders the negotiation work more visible and affords a unique opportunity for an examination of Uyghur aesthetics. In this context, this study explores what choices Uyghur women make about cultural aesthetics in diaspora as they construct their identities in relation to Uyghurness in a new space. Women adorn themselves, their homes, and their families with the sensory experiences of belonging, positioning them as key cultural agents and guardians of cultural memory (Agnew, 2005). These practices allow space and agency for a physical articulation of a marginalized identity for Uyghur women in diaspora. However, there is very little research done on issues facing Uyghur women, much less within a diasporic context.

Homeland and "New-Home"

Within the context of this research, there is a dialogue between the Uyghur and the diaspora identity components of these women. These two physical sites of home and belonging, the home of origin and the diasporic home, I refer to as the *homeland* and the *new-home*. I choose to use the phrase *new-home* as an alternative to the more commonly used term within diaspora literature: *hostland*. I believe that the term "host" denotes an impermanence, a short-term visitation in another community's space that occurs before returning to one's *real* home. This relationship can be problematic because it detracts the agency from the diaspora group to name their own belonging, attachment, and integration to their new home. If taken down to its most objective level, the relationship of a diaspora group to this "hostland" space is centered around its relative newness, especially in contrast to their ancestral region of origin.

Beyond this difference of ancestral heritage, which is inherently bound to the realities of linear time and its *newness*, one should be careful not to project any other qualifications of what is considered true "home." This is especially applicable for diasporic individuals whose relationship to the homeland is more distant or complexified, such as those who have faced persecution and have traumatic associations with their land of origin, or even second, third, and fourth generation diaspora who may not have a strong personal attachment to their ancestral homeland. For these individuals, their relationship to the "hostland" may contain stronger feelings of attachment than to the homeland. In these circumstances, using the term "hostland" may be a reductionist representation of the transformational processes of new home attachments, complexities of belonging, and the diverse expressions of agency within immigrant communities. Therefore, I believe that the term *new-home* is a more neutral representation that allows more space for the complexities of identity transformations, place attachments, and sites of belonging. Using the term new-home also allows for a nuanced experience of belonging and place attachment. As discussed in depth by both Bhabha and Brah, the attitudes towards both the homeland and the new-home can be filled with complex (dis)attachments (Bhabha, 1994; Brah, 1996). For some, there may be a strong sense of longing, idealization, or a desire for return. Others may feel apathetic, uncomfortable, or a stronger attachment to the new-home, and anywhere in-between.

Theoretical Frameworks

Diaspora

Diaspora studies builds up the grounding framework of this interdisciplinary study, whose purpose is to engage Uyghur women concerning issues pertaining to home, belonging,

and identity. Theories within diaspora studies explore the roles of transnationalism, migration, citizenship, hybridity, memory, home, and identity, to name a handful of concepts relevant to this study. There are many different ways in which diaspora has been conceptualized and defined. Certain theorists have focused on the transnationalism of diaspora and how these populations move across political boundaries of the nation-state (Collier, 2013; Sheffer, 1986; Vertovec, 1999). These theorists study the impact of migration on the political and economic realities of a globalizing world, and often inform governmental policy-making, lobbying efforts, and immigration reform.

However, this study draws from the vein of diaspora theorists who take into account the ambiguity of origin and experience, which are most relevant to the identity concerns of the Uyghurs. Theorist within this field acknowledge the constructions of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983), where the affinity of relationship to the "homeland" is the bond that connects the diaspora between time and space. Stuart Hall (1990) emphasizes that diasporic identity should account for both the similarities based on the essence of the homeland, and for differences of individual and cultural transformation. Additionally, he expounds on how diaspora identity is "positioned" in the memories and histories of the past, as a part of a dialectic relationship towards an imagine future (Hall, 1990). The transformational component of identity results in a complex relationship to conventional boundaries and binaries. It cannot be assumed that the entire diaspora community will have a homogenous experience (Khan, 2015), because there are vastly different and constantly changing factors for each individual that affect their choices in acculturation/deculturation practices in their new-home (Kim, 2002).

Diaspora studies provides the foundational premise that identity is multidimensional, such as "being" and belonging with community, and "becoming" as a transforming and continual

process (Hall, 1990). Diaspora identity negotiation is often experienced as "dualities and multiplicities of cultural affiliation" between a remembered home culture and the current host community (Bauer, 2005). The tensions of identity for people in diaspora are not between two simple binaries; as Hall (1990) explains, as neither "back home" or "new world" are fully able to accept and integrate the displaced person. Hall (1990) also explains that "diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland" and that diaspora identity cannot be understood through definitions or locations, but through personal choices of positionality towards the various cultures and pressures at play (p. 235). These choices in identity positioning, for people in diaspora, are part of the way they construct a self of self through an "imagined geography" in which past and present cultures can be portrayed as closer or farther depending on the individual's story and needs (Said, 1978).

Women and families in diaspora face a unique cultural tension in diaspora, especially if they have been operating as cultural, social, or linguistic minorities in their countries of origin (Agnew, 2005). Because of experiencing more than one cultural oppression and sometimes several simultaneously, there are multiple layers of identity constraints and tensions for many groups in diaspora (Hall, 1990). The lines between "home" and "host" or "oppressor" cultures are never fully clean cut (Bauer, 2005; Gyunsoo & Amie, 2012). Often the individuals in diaspora are pulled between "the desires or tendencies to be part of one group and yet be independent of it; to accept some aspects of the culture while disagreeing on others" (Bauer, 2005, p. 199).

Identity Negotiation

Individuals in diaspora live at the intersections of many cultural spaces and personal identities, what Gloria Alzaldua calls the "borderlands" (1987). Inhabiting this in-between space

requires a complex process of "becoming" and inhabiting one's cultural identity realities. Individuals in diaspora may choose to emphasize or de-emphasize certain aspects of their identity depending on their social environments. Certain motivations for this behavior could be to differentiate oneself or emphasize one's cultural background, to align with the new-home cultural social norms, or to reframe new-home attitudes towards homeland affiliations (Kim, 2002). These negotiation processes can be verbally explicit within the scope of conversation, or can be implicitly communicated through modes of language, behavior, and aesthetics. The result of this identity tension, which is often ongoing far beyond the initial resettlement period, is a kind of borderless, transnational, or third culture identity development (Bauer, 2005; Gyunsoo & Amie, 2012; Kaya, 2002). Because the individuals in diaspora may desire to maintain connection to their cultural heritage while also finding new ways of expression and belonging, they start to form "'dualities and multiplicities of cultural affiliation" (Bauer, 2005, p. 199). This new and emerging cultural identity is neither fully connected to their home culture nor fully aligned with their host cultures, creating a new site of belonging beyond the borders that previously seemed so fixed (Bauer, 2005; Hall, 1990; Samuel, 2008).

Diasporic realities of cultural hybridity is experience along a spectrum, primarily between factors of what Kim (2002) refers to as *acculturation* and *deculturation*, though scholars from other disciplines have other terms to refer to this relationship. Acculturation is "process of learning and acquiring elements of the host culture." This may include adopting modes of behavior, dress, speech, and values into their daily life. Deculturation is the "unlearning…of old cultural habits" where individuals forfeit aspects of their culture of origin. Migrants may also choose to resist both of these practices by differentiating from the new-home culture, which may include emphasizing or maintaining aspects of their cultural difference and/or cultural homeland.

The attitudes towards new-home culture may differ based on situational context, such as within one's private space, public social setting, and family context. These contexts can create a range of experiences and can vary over the course of an individual's life. It is important to note that regardless where one's experience falls along this spectrum or how variable or consistent it may be, it does not invalidate the authenticity of that very moment or the reality of their cultural experiences. Instead, the often-opposing values in which the diaspora must negotiate on an individual level is the exact site through which to work towards the imagination of home and belonging.

As individuals in diaspora try to fit the different parts of their identities into their new homes and complexified roles, finding tangible, experiential representations of home identity can become crucial (Kaya, 2002; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Saucier, 2011). Turan (2010) specifically discusses the importance of attaching to specific cultural objects or rituals for individuals in diaspora who do not have a recognized nation state to connect to, like Palestinians or Uyghurs. For displaced peoples of this category, cultural aesthetics can be forms of "'place attachment' [that] become critical for the continuation of cultural memory and cultural narrative for displaced peoples" (Turan, 2010, p. 45). Because the individuals in diaspora do not have the same access to native languages, eat familiar foods, or practice spiritual rituals with a community, these elements take on a new embodiment of homeland aesthetics (Mehta & Belk, 1991; Savaş, 2014; Turan, 2010). However, literature on diaspora identity demonstrates that understanding the choices and expressions around diaspora identity are complex and tense, that minority culture in diaspora may trend towards a variety of different directions in the new context (Bauer, 2005; Gyunsoo & Amie, 2012; Samuel, 2008).

Home and Belonging

One of the most pertinent areas of inquiry within diaspora studies is the concept of home. For a transnational community who has crossed political and cultural borders, home and belonging are in a constant state of renegotiation, both on a community and individual level. Since separation from the homeland is often physically and experientially irreversible, experiences of home and belonging occurs in the abstract, as captured in Benedict Anderson's portrayal of the diaspora as an ever transforming "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983). Therefore, the experience of home within the bounds of memory can lend itself towards nostalgia or romanticized memories of home, contributing to the "mythical memory" of the homeland (Safran, 1991).

Often, the more perceived distance there is from the homeland, individuals in diaspora can start to romanticize or idealize their home cultures, creating almost a mythic memory of a less complex identity or established sense of belonging (Agnew, 2005; Bauer, 2005; Hall, 1990; Wong, 2010). This constructed memory of the home culture is called "mythic . . . diasporic imagination" by Brah (1996). In these cases, the individual in diaspora finds ways to materially connect herself with a sense of the home culture that may flatten or simplify the actual nuances of that culture so that it is easier to fold a sense of home into their newly forming identities (Bauer, 2005; Wong, 2010). This can be temporary, and often manifests in cultural identity attachment to simple aesthetics embodied in objects, such as jewelry or a tablecloth, and cultural practices, such as taking off shoes at the door or eating with chopsticks.

Aesthetic practices can be used to create a landscape of memory in the separation from an ancestral homeland (Fortier, 2000; Tolia-Kelly, 2010). Once in diaspora, decisions about home decor, clothing, and lifestyle choices can suddenly become much weightier than before leaving

the home culture, and "an increased burden is placed on individual possessions for anchoring identity" (Mehta & Belk, 1991, p. 400). When an individual is separated from their homeland with limited access to cultural resources, they can then attempt to cultivate a sense of nostalgia and memory by purchasing or choosing possessions in their new space that simulate the feelings or quality of aesthetics back home (Savaş, 2014; Turan, 2010; Werbner & Fumanti, 2013). Turan (2010) explains that these types of aesthetic objects become a form of "social biography" and can be seen also as "material proof of their past experience" (p.54). This kind of material identity proof can be particularly important for individuals in diaspora whose cultural identity has been oppressed or censored within their homeland (Turan, 2010).

The reality of diaspora communities is that they develop roots in multiple lands. Homi Bhabha discusses the idea of "Third Space" where the migrant is in a perpetual state of being in-between homes and in a constant process of change (Bhabha, 1994). He further describes the experience a diaspora community as a hybridity of "forced co-existence of groups with different histories, from different places, in a shared space," not "one nor the other but something else besides, in between" (Bhabha, 1994). Bhabha acknowledges the ambiguity of origin and identity, that home in a sense is an ambiguous conceptualization that embodies a conglomeration of influences. In conceptualizing home, Avtar Brah (1996) offers two definitions: 1) the "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination" and 2) the "lived experience of a locality," where the "diasporic space" is the negotiation between these homes. Therefore, home embodies experiences that are transnational, transcending political and cultural borders to create a unique experience for each individual.

It is important to expound on the idea of "belonging" and how it differs from but also interacts with the experience of home within diasporic communities. Avtar Brah (1996) makes a

distinction between "homing desire" and a "desire for the homeland," acknowledging that "not all diasporas sustain an ideology of 'return'". Brah defines "homing desire" as a longing for an environment that offers "belonging," while "desire for the homeland" is the return to a specific geographical and cultural "home" of origin (Brah, 1996). Therefore, she distinguishes that the desire for belonging can be sought out for in relationship both to the homeland and within one's new home. Ann-Marie Fortier (2000) expounds on this idea, explaining that as new spaces of belonging are created, the borders of culture, citizenship, and spatiality are blurred. Diaspora identity is neither fully connected to their home culture nor fully aligned with their host cultures, resulting in nuanced experiences of home and belonging. These new sites of belonging transcend beyond the borders of culture which previously seemed fixed (James, 2007).

Gender

This study takes on a gendered perspective, integrating the influence of feminist theorists in order to understand the power dynamics that are intrinsically a part of a discussion on aesthetic, home, belonging, and diaspora. The pervasive nature of patriarchal hegemony has become intertwined with the very foundational functions of society at large. Immigrant and diaspora communities are subject to the patriarchal hegemony that affects both family dynamics and the neo-liberal socio-political environment in which they must navigate. Women, especially women of color, must face complex layers of social barriers. Chaudhry Mohanty describes the internalization of patriarchy, where even women of color have internalized false mindsets about themselves (Mohanty, 2003). The negotiation of the patriarchy can be engaged on a conscious or subconscious level. The goal of this study is that engaging with aesthetic can serve as a venue in which to observe the conscious and/or subconscious ways in which women engage with the institutional patriarchy of navigating immigrant life.

Gloria Anzaldua discusses the unique role of "bridge women," and how minority women have a unique power to engage and become agents of change and peace (1987). This is not a linear process, and is in a continual process of transformation, even on a daily basis. Anzaldua (1987) expresses border identity as "continually walking out of one culture and into another," held by women who embody "racial, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollination" (p. 107). Her discussion of bridge women, though in her case applied to the mestizo community of Southwest Texas, can be easily applied to the experience of Uyghur women. They are political minorities within their nation-state whose citizenship flattens their lived cultural reality, despite living within their ancestral homeland. Often, border women are moving "in and out of safe spaces, those which feel like 'home'" on a daily basis, and thus are creating around themselves a kind of third space that allows for people to create alliances through and with them (Malhotra & Pérez, 2005; Rowe, 2010). Quite literally on the border of their political nation-state, their gender and culture has been institutionally repressed by patriarchal systems of power.

However, it is important in discussions around "third-world women" for the researcher to not project oppression and instead allow these women to maintain agency over their voice of own processes (Mohanty, 2003). When engaging the tensions of difference, often non-white or non-women perspectives often hold the naive assumption that all female experiences of oppression are the same, or the assimilating of the dominant narrative that women are, in general, victimized and powerless (Mohanty, 1988). Within academic scholarship, there seems to be a natural tendency to group all others into a homogenous type, to think that "all third world women have similar problems and needs" (1988, p. 63). Resistance to the patriarchy can be expressed in many different forms of perceptibility, anywhere from the Black Liberation Movement to James Scott's (1985) observation of "peasant resistance," and is vital to allow a space for nuance. The

intent of this research is not to investigate how Uyghur women are "oppressed" or "at-risk," but to instead to hold conversations concerning their own authentic reflections over their experiential and cultural identity negotiation processes.

Cultural Aesthetics

The premise of this research is that the experiences of cultural identity negotiations can be better understood through the story-telling of aesthetics. I specifically define aesthetics as "relating to perception by the senses" which include 1) *visual markers* such as objects, clothing/jewelry, textiles, and even room arrangement, 2) *sensory markers* such as sound through music, taste through food and beverage, and smells 3) *embodied experiences* such as community gatherings, daily habits, and modes of dress and behavior. This conceptualization of cultural aesthetics allows for a more fluid and multidimensional approach to understanding an identity that exists in a transnational diasporic space. However, the theoretical study of aesthetics is influence by multiple theoretical perspectives in such fields as art philosophy, cultural geography, anthropology, and material culture.

The philosophical conceptualizations of aesthetics have roots in art philosophy, derived from intellectual thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Martin Heidegger, and Theodor Adorno. Aesthetics within this disciplinary context in most cases is has been used to conceptualize the nuances of art and objects that imparts emotional meaning to the viewer, which may include the visual form, quality, and beauty imbedded in a work of art. Aesthetics captures the underlying and often energetic message of a piece beyond its analytical form or function. However, aspects of philosophical aesthetics have been critiqued for being essentialist and reductionist attempts to quantify and capture "beauty." Beauty and form are culturally subjective, and to place a certain hierarchical standard of artistic value based on one's perspective without interrogating the

worldview from which it was derived results in an unequivocally culturally biased perspective. Because historically the male European gaze has had the most power, this perspective is the one that has had most influence on the standards of beauty and what is considered "art" versus "craft", a distinction fraught in elitist and Eurocentric biases (Kasfir, 1992). These perspectives have had great influence on the marginalization of African art in particular, where colonizers would travel through the continent looking for exotic artifacts to return home, often placing the pieces in archeological, or worse natural history, museums without credit to the author or artistic process (Blier, 1996; Kasfir, 1992). Patriarchal artistic norms also decide that as long as a piece has a function that it no longer is considered "true" art (Kasfir, 1992). This elitist distinction artificially divorces art from function, which disproportionately marginalizes domestic spaces, as well as the predominantly female-dominated artistic disciplines of ceramics and textile arts.

From a cultural geography standpoint, these aesthetic elements can be read as a cultural "landscape" that allows the underlying cultural conscious to be understood (Fortier, 2000; Tolia-Kelly, 2010). Cultural objects are used to construct an environment that matches an individual's identity, as influence by elements such as race, class, gender, etc., as well as being a visual symbol to others (Becker, 2006; Dant, 1999; Fortier, 2000; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Saucier, 2011). Aesthetics, objects, and ritual symbolize the visual and experiential landscape of memory for diaspora communities. Mehta & Belk (1991) discuss how personal objects that were perhaps once simply practical can become vehicles of cultural transportation for maintaining a sense of identity in the new host culture. For displaced peoples, material objects can be forms of "'place attachment' [that] become critical for the continuation of cultural memory and cultural narrative for displaced peoples" (Turan, 2010).

The disciplines of material culture have developed relatively recently, following the growth of consumerism in the 1980s. Theorists such as Daniel Miller (1987; 1998) have framed material culture primarily as a consumerist and economic phenomenon. He discusses how conspicuous (or inconspicuous) consumption serves as social cues that reflect a construction of values or self (Miller, 1987, 1998). Tim Dant (1999) looks at material culture as more reflective of a social identity, not simply and economic one. He discusses how elements of home, dress, and possessions serve as symbols of self which are constructed both consciously and subconsciously. Both Dant and Miller specifically discusses the potential for minority cultural objects to be isolated and commodified in a kind of cultural fetishing (Dant, 1999; Miller, 1987, 1998). This perspective can be argued to apply to the Uyghur context, where many elements of Uyghur aesthetics have been appropriated as means to justify cultural reductionism, orientalism, and political oppression. On one hand, Uyghur aesthetics have been criminalized under the Chinese state, and on the other they serve as "object fetishes" of the exoticized "ethnic other" (Dant, 1999; Zang, 2017). However, this does not exempt the Uyghur from maintaining agency over their own aesthetics or means of cultural production. Studies done with other ethnic minority groups show artisans using the cooptation of certain cultural objects to their advantage, producing objects, art, and aesthetics for their economic benefit or as an initial gateway to a more vocal platform of other pressing cultural issues (Becker, 2006; Jansen, 2016; Kaya, 2002).

The heteronormative role of women within the domestic sphere renders a gendered perspective when approaching diasporic aesthetic. Becker (2006) discusses how women have a unique relationship to aesthetics as creators and carriers of cultural art symbols. A gendered perspective is especially relevant within majority-Muslim communities. Women often feel the heaviest weight of responsibility to maintain connection to home culture and identity, for

themselves and their families (Bauer, 2005). Bauer's (2005) specifically discusses how Muslim women in Iranian-American communities face social and familial pressure to continue the key roles of cultural maintenance, including food preparation, leading of holiday rituals, and training of children in spiritual or religious practices. This can result in women becoming "emblems of community status" and doing "much of the work that keeps community networks alive" (Bauer, 2005). However, within the context of diaspora and their changing cultural contexts, women maintain agency in how they choose to engage with such expectations.

The Research Gap

While minority cultural and displaced identity studies are plentiful, even on other Central Asian minority peoples (Bauer, 2005; Samuel, 2008; Savaş, 2010, 2014; Turan, 2010), there is little academic research focusing on Uyghur peoples' culture, identity, or the conflicts within either of those due to the layers of repression and invisibility. There are likely many factors contributing to this gap. Where there is scholarship mentioning Uyghur identity, much of that topic is only mentioned in contrast to Han culture and given little attention for its own history, tradition, and complexity (Chatterjee, 2017; Erkin, 2009; Zang, 2013). Unfortunately, many Uyghur people have resigned to identifying themselves only within this dichotomy, which restricts the possibility of research by a cultural outsider unfamiliar with the unspoken cultural realities. Additionally, political tensions within the Uyghur homeland complicates the desire to even identify as Uyghur publicly, and definitely restricts willingness to risk disclosure or exposure through participation in research (VanderKlippe, 2017).

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Research Question

The core of this research project is looking at the following research question: *How do Uyghur women in diaspora negotiate their cultural identity through cultural aesthetics?* The interview process and data analysis seek to address the gaps in current academic literature at the intersection of diaspora studies, cultural aesthetics, and gender studies. Furthermore, there are three main analysis questions that help us understand Uyghur diasporic identity negotiations once Uyghurs leave their cultural homeland: 1) How are Uyghurness, home, and belonging being manifested and transformed in a new environment? 2) How do Uyghurs express their identity in apolitical, cultural aesthetic ways? 3) How do these stories, behaviors, and rituals travel in diaspora?

This research is primarily interested in the personal identity significance of cultural aesthetics for Uyghur women, and how the experience of such aesthetics correlate to conscious and/or subconscious attitudes towards cultural behaviors. These questions are investigated by speaking directly with Uyghur diaspora women about their cultural and aesthetic experiences. Elements of cultural aesthetics, such as object, performance, and ritual, can serve as an extension of self, and an analysis of these elements can provide a unique insight into the nuanced complexity of the individual cultural experience. Upon gathering these perspectives, the data can be used to understand how Uyghur women in diaspora view their positions within society and how categories are being challenged through their relationship to Uyghurness.

Personal Interviews

Considering the social tensions, cultural repression, and the very early stages of academic conversation around Uyghur identity, care had to be cultivated around questions of culture and

identity. The research data was collected through semi-structured interviews with Uyghur women living in various diaspora communities. As an underrepresented and understudied minority group with limited previous literature, especially in regard to women's issues and cultural aesthetics, the best insight available to understand Uyghur women's identity negotiation is through their personal narratives and observations of their environment. By choosing to interview the women one-on-one by asking questions that help them discuss their identity choices through objects, this research provides an approachable space for interviewees to discuss their cultural identity choices in a more political, spiritual, or even storytelling way.

Traditional research methods can be greatly enhanced by interpreting how cultural aesthetics transform into symbols of identity within diaspora. In comparison to alternative methods, in-person interviews provided the optimal quality of data required to answer my research questions. Interviews allow for the dynamic and direct investigation through the use of follow up questions, the exposure to physical environment, and allowed the participants narrative agency while still providing research value. Using survey methods would have limited the ability to make observations of the material objects themselves, and prevented any potential follow-up questions, providing only superficial data. There is very little literature concerning Uyghur diaspora women's attitudes towards material possession translated into English, which eliminates the potentiality of content or textual analysis. Oral histories or ethnographies would have required substantial time and investment beyond current resources. The storytelling of aesthetic elements that the interviewees associate with Uyghur culture reveal both the visible and the abstract qualities of aesthetics and identity.

Interview Process

The research data was gathered over the course of nine months from interviewing fourteen diaspora Uyghur women in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Turkey. The specifics of this research were approved by the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees all research projects involving human subjects. Participants were informed that pseudonyms would be used to protect their identity, and all IRB requirements were clearly communicated. The participants were primarily connected through my personal community network. However, a few reached out via social media platforms after hearing about this project. The interviews were either conducted in person or via skype, depending on accessibility and location. The interviews were conducted either within their home or via skype for around ninety minutes, so that direct observations and photographs could be made on aspects of Uyghur aesthetics. With the permission of the participants, photos were taken by myself, or shared by the interviewee at a later time, of specific objects and aesthetics that they discussed during the interview. After this primary data was collected, each interview was coded to located themes around aesthetics and identity negotiation; such as belonging, maintenance, hybridity, and tensions.

The demographics of the research participants included migrant women who had left the homeland as adults, as well as second-generation Uyghurs who were either born outside of the homeland or were brought by their parents during childhood, all who were over eighteen years of age at the time of the interview. Most women had families and children, although some were married without children or single. However, all the women had at least one immediate family member who was also living in the diaspora. Some of the women that were interviewed were family members, such as mother-daughter, sisters, or even aunt-niece relations. These women varied in ages from their early twenties to their mid-fifties. There were also varying degrees of

home attachment. Some women had lived in their new-home for over 10 years or had married

non-Uyghur men. Below is a table summarizing some of the general demographic data just

discussed.

Table 1: Demographic data

Location	8 - USA	3 - Canada	2 - Australia	1 - Turkey
Interview type	10 in person	4 via skype		
Generational	10 first-generation	4 second-generation		
Family	8 with children	3 married to non-Uyghur men	4 not married, have relatives	2 married, no children
Diaspora	8 lived in diaspora for 10+ years			

The basic interview structure was comprised of about fifteen prepared questions around

the following themes: 1) "Uyghurness" and diaspora, 2) home and belonging, and 3) identity

significance of cultural aesthetics. The interviews were loosely structured around these three

primary themes, each relating to more specific questions pertaining to the experiences of Uyghur

women. Because these were unstructured interviews, these questions primarily served as

guidelines to allow space for interviewee to naturally take the conversation. This was a conscious

choice made to allow agency for the women to engage in a manner where telling their own story

took precedence over specific questions that might not have been relevant or pertinent to their

experience. Below is an example of the interview organizational structure and possible questions

that were asked.

1. Framing the Uyghur woman diaspora experience
    a. How do you respond to the question, "Where are you from?"

b. How would you describe Uyghur identity? What does it mean to be

Uyghur?

c. What are some important aspects of Uyghur culture?

2. How are concepts of home and belonging experienced in diaspora?

a. What makes you feel at home? A sense of belonging?

b. Where is "home" to you?

c. Is there a difference between feeling "at home" and "belonging"?

3. What role do cultural "aesthetics" play in negotiating home, belonging, and

identity?

a. What are specific cultural aesthetics that you try to maintain in your new

home? (objects, foods, music, experiences, behaviors, etc.)

b. Why are these things important/not important to you?

c. What are some specific things that you miss?

The interviews were then coded to discover patterns in how aesthetics is used to negotiate an identity that is uniquely gendered, diasporic, and located within a Uyghur context. Thematic patterns were identified within interview responses. These interviews provided access to an in depth understanding on whether cultural assimilation or cultural preservation is valued, what are the symbols of Uyghurness, and if they are used to connect or disconnect from home.

Chapter 4: Analysis

In the context of transnational global realities, the diasporic branches of Uyghur communities across the globe are undergoing a series of identity transformations, value shifts, and home attachments. Ultimately, the intention of this research is to investigate and bring into academic light the methods of identity negotiation of Uyghurness through the investigation of cultural aesthetics. The specific categories used to discuss the roles of cultural aesthetic include: 1) objects, 2) music, 3) food, 4) language, and 5) behavior. These cultural aesthetic categories were explored through interview conversations with fourteen Uyghur diaspora women, as detailed in the methodology. After this primary data was collected, each interview was coded to located themes around identity negotiations. Based on this coding process, four primary themes were found relating to identity negotiations through cultural aesthetics: 1) negotiating home, 2) negotiating diasporic tensions, 3) negotiating gender, 4) negotiating Uyghurness.

Cultural Aesthetics

Within the context of this research, Objects, space, ritual, and performance together generates a "cultural aesthetic", which encompasses the visual, sensory, and emotional qualities of cultural-specific attitudes, behaviors, and values. An interdisciplinary investigation of these aesthetic elements can provide insight into the underlying values and attitudes that an individual may have in relation to her home attachments, cultural identity, and experiences of belonging. Specifically, this analysis of cultural aesthetics is looking at 1) the observable characteristics of the aesthetic element itself, and 2) the individualized feelings aroused by said aesthetic. This is in contrast to the study of objects, space, and ritual in isolation, which can lead to cultural essentialism. Instead, attention will be given individual perspectives by Uyghur women in diaspora, which will then be woven together to understand the implicit *meaning* and *significance*

attached to certain cultural aesthetics. As Uyghur women in diaspora negotiate the ways in which they blend their collection of cultures into their everyday lives, the use of objects, aesthetics, and rituals, and the patterns by which they choose and acquire new ones, can demonstrate attitudes towards one's migrant experience (Blunt, 2007; Erkin, 2009; Mehta & Belk, 1991).

On a visual level, cultural aesthetics can be observed or constructed, either consciously or subconsciously, through everyday objects, decorative arts, and home design. The presence or absence of such objects in the making of home environments can become a reflection of how individuals express their cultural identity (Savaş, 2010). Looking at objects in isolation, however, is an insufficient means of understanding identity. Factors of class difference affect access to goods, personal styles are variable, and cultural symbols is cannot be fully essentialized (Dant, 1999; Miller, 1998). Therefore, it is also important to look at a wider range of cultural expression such as cuisine, music, art, and literature, which are often referred to as "intangible cultural heritage" (Light, 2008). These aesthetic components may not be as viscerally concrete; however, their presence is intrinsically tied to an experience of cultural expression in diaspora. Lastly, cultural aesthetics includes elements cultural behaviors, including ritual, performance, and values. These behaviors are manifested through the embodiment of cultural customs, community gatherings, and daily habits. This can include simple practices such as language or accent code-switching, the preparation of an Eid meal, or even taking off one's shoes upon entering a home. These often-subconscious behaviors can be more delicate to quantify or analyze but are nevertheless an integral embodiment of a diaspora culture. A further inquiry of these cultural aesthetic elements of ritual and performance can provide insight into the most intimate spaces of the cultural identity negotiation process of Uyghur diaspora women.

Objects

The first layer of cultural aesthetic inquiry starts at the most visually accessible level: objects and physical environments. In the context of this research, cultural objects refer to any item that the respondent attaches cultural or personal meaning. These can include objects brought back from home, objects acquired in diaspora, or even the absence of an object desired. Cultural objects hold symbolic value for the owner in regards to personal, relational, or cultural meaning (Kaya, 2002; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Saucier, 2011; Turan, 2010). This is especially true for diaspora communities, where a diasporic "home" can be aesthetically curated to invoke qualities of belonging, familiarity, and cultural values (Blunt, 2007; Savaş, 2014; Turan, 2010). Objects also demonstrate the personal values that direct the use of resources and can demonstrate personal values in a nonverbal way for people in diaspora. As seen in the conversations surrounding Uyghur objects and their significance to the interviewees, there is a close coupling between cultural aesthetics and expressions of Uyghur identity.

Object Attachments

Objects often take on a "sacred" meaning in diaspora, developing new significance once removed from their original cultural context. This newly developed importance attached to objects and visual symbols can be due to its association with homeland traditions, its perceived scarcity, and the degree of nostalgia and/or personal attachment. An "ordinary" object from the homeland, such as a tea kettle, can be transformed into a symbol of the homeland due to personal and cultural significance, as well as its perceived scarcity in the new-home environment. Feelings of attachment can develop towards objects of personal significance, such as childhood keepsakes, family heirlooms, and ceremonial items. The ritual of acquisition can also affect object attachment, such as wedding gift from one's mother.

Image 1: Decorative janamaz [prayer rug] that belonged to Rushangul's mother

Passing on cultural objects is a means of cultural and familial heritage maintenance, a practice which was described by many of the interviewees. Rena talks about a *janamaz* [prayer rug] hanging in her daughter's room: "My dad brought it back when he came to visit me. I gave it to my daughter, from her grandpa." Jewelry in particular was a strong point of connection between mothers and daughters. In a separate conversation Rena's daughter, Reyhan, acknowledges the matriarchal connection in describing some of her favorite belongings, particularly "a lot of the jewelry that my mom has brought back, and jewelry that belonged to my grandmother or my mother from the homeland." Rena has a favorite pair of "lucky charm" *pulagan* earrings from her mother who "gave it to me on wedding. I wore it at my second

wedding too. I still wear them sometimes." Giving jewelry as a wedding gift is a common rite of womanhood experienced between mother and daughter. Jamila has three daughters, all currently under the age of ten. Prior to leaving the homeland, she purchased three gold bracelets that she intends to give to each of her daughters at their weddings. "My mom, when she passed away, left the rings and earrings to us to remember her by. So, I wanted to leave one for each of my girls, so I had three made." She chose yellow gold jewelry because, "Uyghurs love yellow gold. I didn't think it was important at first, but then since everyone was saying you need it I decided to get the gold jewelry." For Jamila, these bracelets were a way to eventually gift her young daughters with a symbol of Uyghur womanhood, as well as a way to honor her mother's memory.

Image 2: Jamila's collection of gold jewelry, including the bracelets for her daughters

Jewelry, particularly from one's mother or relatives, is one specific and highly sacred object for Uyghurs in diaspora. For many Uyghurs, jewelry is often passed from mother to

daughter, usually ritualized as a wedding gift. This passing on from mother to daughter serves as a form of matriarchal family attachment as well as a rite of womanhood. In diaspora, the importance and personal attachment of such objects is magnified, due to the experience of cultural, and often familial, scarcity. When asked why this phenomenon is such a common experience, Gulkiz explained, "Part of Uyghur culture is keeping belongings from deceased." Gulkiz talks specifically about a jade ring from her mother, who passed away when Gulkiz was in her mid-twenties, "She kept three rings for her three daughters. I lost mine, but I bought one just like it and pretend it's from my mom." Jamila, Gulkiz's sister, similarly used stones from her mother to make a new set of earrings. Therefore, jewelry in particular holds the weight of intergenerational and matriarchal connection that persists in the transnational spaces of diasporic communities. The connection and symbolism that such keepsakes carry transcends the object itself, entering into a symbolic and sacred realm.

Image 3: Gulkiz's replacement for her mother's jade ring

Image 4: As Gulkiz's sister, Jamila's also received a jade ring from their mother

Image 5: Jamila incorporated her mother's stones into a "modern" jewelry setting

Objects also have a strong attachment to memory and emotion. Photographs, as a visual encapsulation of a single moment in time, often evoke memories of time past. Aliye described

her desire for some of her mother's old photo albums, which, "Back then I thought it was boring, but now I really want them. I wish I could look at them because these days I miss home so much." Arzugul talks about how objects can carry abstracted meanings about her cultural heritage, "These things are from my hometown, connected to your parents, the feel the smell, and when you look at it you see your culture." The memories and emotions attached to these objects can be complex, associated with either positive or negative aspects of identity experiences. Rena explains how certain cultural objects trigger a complex set of emotions, "When you've left home and are in a strange [place], it just reminds you of your people and makes you proud… It makes me feel pride, joy, and sometimes sadness and loss." Rushangul specifically expressed the loss and longing she sometimes feels, "When I see some of them it really makes me feel homesick. It makes me miss my country, I miss my family, I miss all those Uyghur people." When asked if there was a specific item, she responded, "When I wear my mother's shawl sometimes it makes me cry because it still has my mom's smell. It just has a lot of good memories with my sisters and my mother." Ruhangul's mother's scarf encapsulates how certain objects, due to the perceived distance and loss from one's cultural homeland or family, can become conduits of complex emotional experiences such as longing, loss, and joy.

Making and Wearing Home

Objects such as clothing and personal accessories serve as a symbolic extension of self and can become an implicit way to render visible one's socio-cultural ties. Manifesting certain cultural qualities on the body publicly displays cultural affiliations (Gordon & Anderson, 1999; Mirza, 2013; Saucier, 2011). Women are able to "wear" their Uyghurness through cultural objects, allowing them to non-verbally signal their cultural affiliations without exerting the emotional labor of explaining the complexities of their identity. Reyhan, a second-generation

Uyghur, explains her relationship to her aesthetic is "a reminder of who I am. I take pride in it, in the aesthetic comfort." She attempts to integrate it into her life because "it helps me compensate for trying to shut it out for so long" when she was younger. However, "putting on" cultural aesthetics is not always practically accessible. Gulkiz explains that sometimes she misses out on getting to wear her Uyghur clothing, because "sometimes I don't have the opportunity to dress up [with Uyghur style] in America. In the Midwest mostly everyone just wears jeans." Nevertheless, Uyghur aesthetics are important to her. Gulkiz talks about how closely connected she feels like Uyghur aesthetics are to her personal identity: "[Uyghur aesthetics are] a part of my culture, a part of my identity, I belong to them and they belong to me, we match you know?" This integration of Uyghur aesthetics is important in both what she wears and how she decorates her home, "When you wear clothes, you want them to match. I'm Uyghur and I want to have matching stuff in my house." Gulkiz and Reyhan's perspectives exemplify how aesthetics can be intimately tied to personal expressions of cultural identity, used as a non-verbal signaling of cultural affiliations as well as personal identity integration.

Image 6: Reyhan's collection of Uyghur-like rings, including some from her mother

Cultural objects and visual aesthetics also serve as a means of cultural ambassadorship to new-home communities. As a second-generation Uyghur woman, Adila finds that the Uyghur cultural aesthetic is an accessible way to express aspects of her cultural identity. Her choice to "wear as much ethnic clothing as possible" is because "it's an easy way to say, 'Hey! There's another culture out there!'" The specific item that she primarily incorporates into her wardrobe are a pair of earrings from her grandmother, because "it makes everything slightly more ethnic." When Reyhan's friends ask about certain objects, clothing items, or her home aesthetic, she says "it's an opener, and a reflection of my identity and who I've always been." She welcomes this curiosity because it is an "avenue that I don't have to work that hard in... [When] people comment on how it's different and ask what it is, you can say 'It's my culture.'" The Uyghur objects and aesthetics then can become a point of conversation and connection with new-home communities. Jamila has rug she brought back from the homeland which often sparks conversations about her cultural background with friends, "When people come and say 'Oh, this is a good-looking carpet,' I immediately say, 'I brought it from Xinjiang.' I tell them this because I'm closely connected with my culture." Therefore, integrating Uyghur aesthetics is form of visually "showing off" one's culture within a new-home environment, which is also an easily accessible way to express cultural pride.

Image 7: Adila's earrings from her grandmother

In diaspora, there can be a feeling of attachment to the homeland aesthetic. Rena explains that after leaving the homeland, "You realize how much more you want to hold onto [Uyghur style]." She makes intentional choices to decorate her home in a Uyghur aesthetic because, "If you are outside and coming home you want to feel, 'Hey, I'm in Xinjiang again.'" This close attachment to her Uyghurness is reflected in the aesthetics within Seyyare's family, such as her home environment and family activities. When asked if her home was decorated in a more Western or Uyghur style, she responded "it's obviously ethnic" with "atlas everywhere." Additionally, her home has an outdoor kitchen in the backyard and a *tandoor*, a traditional Uyghur naan oven which built by her family. These cultural aesthetics, and the rituals tied to them, such as the process of baking the naan, help contribute to the feeling of being back in the homeland.

Image 8: Seyyare's family tandoor in urban Australia

When thinking about symbols of Uyghur culture, for Reyhan the "*atlas* pattern is hard to

ignore." *Atlas* is a traditional form of Uyghur textile weaving similar to Uzbek ikat, and is

frequently used as a cultural marker, or as Gulkiz puts it, "a part of showing my identity."

Seyyare describes her parents' home aesthetic as "Very traditional Uyghur. All the bedsheets and

everything is *atlas* patterned." In the case of *atlas,* the cultural symbolism is not dependent on

whether these objects were directly acquired in homeland or in diaspora. Due to the accessibility

of ikat inspired designs similar to *atlas* in many Western countries, it has become an easily

accessible way to incorporate Uyghur-like aesthetics into one's wardrobe or home décor. If

Gulkiz sees an *atlas* style item at the shopping mall, it "immediately catches my eye and usually

I buy it." For Gulkiz, *atlas* patterns can also become a point of connection across cultural

contexts, "If you see someone walking in the mall wearing it you feel connected." Reyhan

incorporates diaspora purchased *atlas* goods to fit with the theme of her apartment, "It's funny

because we got these boxes from Ross but they look like *atlas*." Mehrigul chooses to integrate

traditional *atlas* fabrics into her home as a way to connect to the homeland, "I have *atlas* fabric

from Hotan made by hand. I want to frame it and put it here to show that this is a Uyghur house."

The use of Uyghur *atlas* patterns, with both diasporic and homeland objects, show the ways that

visual symbols and patterns can be re-appropriated and transformed into cultural symbols
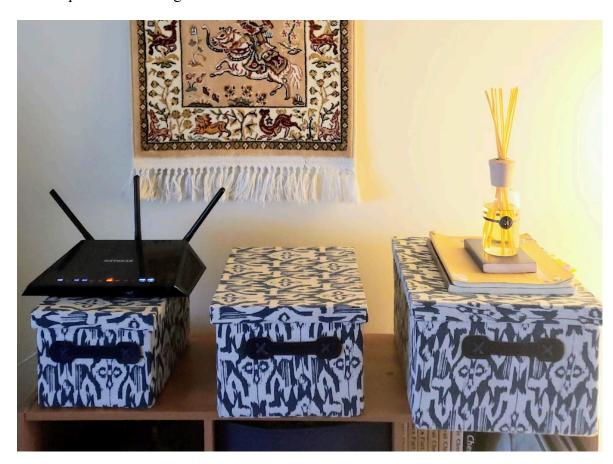
imbedded with personal meaning.

Image 9: Reyhan's atlas boxes from a local department store

Image 10: A pair of Mehrigul's earrings on her atlas tablecloth

Attitudes concerning cultural aesthetics can also reveal attitudes towards cultural hybridity and/or cultural maintenance. According to Gulkiz, "Sometimes it depends on personality. A friend of mine has atlas everywhere in her home, atlas table, atlas chair, atlas everything. Some people want to show things off, some people don't care as much." Speaking for herself, "To me, it's good and important to me, but it's not like I can't live without them. They are good reminders of who I am and what I am about. Different people have different feelings." Jamila explains that she prefers to "mix with the local style." To her, integrating Uyghur aesthetic pieces, as opposed to using a "pure" Uyghur style, is more integrative. She explains, "If you put on *atlas koynak* [dress] and *doppa* [traditional hat] people will think you are very strange. But if you put one piece of *atlas* or one piece of something then it just shows something special about your culture." The mixing of styles allows for visual communication without looking too "strange" or "out of place," which results in a type of continuity within the

new-home. Meriyem personally does not integrate very much of a Uyghur aesthetic into her home, "We don't have a lot of things. In the living room I only have that one painting." For her, it is a subtler expression as signaled by specific objects, "You don't feel like you are in a traditional Uyghur house, but in some rooms you will find objects, though I don't have many." Instead, she chooses to express her Uyghurness through lifestyle choices such as reading Uyghur news every morning, staying connected with Uyghur friends and relatives, and her studies and career path in human rights work.

Patigul, on the other hand, prefers a more explicitly Uyghur style for her own home. She had either brought herself or special ordered curtains, dishes, rugs, tablecloths, artwork, and home decorations directly from the homeland, "I could buy curtains in Toronto, but I needed to decorate as Uyghur's home as much as I can." However, there is a limitation to what an aesthetic can do to place home and belonging, "It doesn't help very much, but it does make me feel much better with who I am. Here reflects my other [Uyghur] identity as well." Making her home as Uyghur as possible is an intentional and explicit choice that she makes that is a subtle form of differentiating herself from within her new-home, "I am Uyghur? Yes. Is that a Uyghur's item? Yes. Nobody likes those colors; some people say it's too red. Okay, that's my goal. I didn't want to decorate my house like a Canadian." Patigul is staunchly recreating home as close as she could, "When I go home, I want it to be *home* home. Sometimes you can forget you're in Canada." This contrast between aesthetic choices shows the variability of authentic cultural aesthetic expression. Meriyem does not feel the need to inauthentically "perform" or "put on" her culture, instead finding other ways to express and embody her Uyghurness. Patigul, on the other hand is using Uyghur aesthetics to re-create a feeling of being "home" in the homeland in a way that is meaningful, authentic, and in alignment to her personal lifestyle.

Image 11: Some of Mehrigul's treasured books about Uyghur language and history

As seen, there is a wide spectrum of how cultural aesthetic is expressed, maintained, and valued. There is also a limitation to how much object aesthetics can contribute to feelings of identity integration or homeland attachment. Mehrigul listed some important items that she wishes she had brought back from the homeland, including her personal collection of Uyghur academic books and materials, and her artist husband's collection of original artwork. As for other items, "We also have the expensive carpets and things but these are just objects that I don't care about if I lose it." Her ultimate sentiment, however, was, "We don't care as much about our goods, we just miss our home a lot. If I can contact my parents and visit back and forth, that's enough." When asked where she felt most at home, Aliye waved around the room, "The place I feel the most belonging here is just this home, I've been in this apartment for five years. That's

why I decorate it so much, to make it feel like home." However, even though material objects

can serve at a form of comfort in face of loss from the homeland there are limitations. Aliye

continues, "I wish we could keep everything [from the homeland], we can fill it a little but we

can't fill that hole [inside] with the things we have here." Therefore, even though object

aesthetics can be a method of expressing cultural identity, there is a very tangible limitation that

personal aesthetics have on the diasporic realities of separation from the homeland.

Music

Cultural arts, an essential aspect of cultural aesthetic, takes on amplified meaning in

diaspora (Becker, 2011; Werbner & Fumanti, 2013). There is a rich body of music, poetry, art,

and literature that contributes to a broader understanding Uyghur cultural expression. Accessing

these intangible aesthetic art forms is a way in which to maintain a connection to the homeland

even within the diaspora. Cultural arts uniquely embody both a cultural aesthetic quality as well

as an expression of human emotion. Music in particular is attached to both the Uyghur cultural

landscape as well as the inner realm of emotion and memory. The memory, nostalgia, and

sensory experience of listening to music evocative of one's homeland plays a role in maintaining

cultural connection in diaspora. Rena talks about how after living in the United States for over

twenty years, music has become a primary way for her to remember and reconnect to the

memories of her homeland. Uyghur music is strongly associated with memories of her mother,

and to her is the "most beautiful music in the world." However, the emotions aroused by this

music can be complex, "When I listen to Uyghur music I feel so happy, but then suddenly I feel

so sad. I'm laughing, and then I just start crying." Music becomes a vehicle to transport to

another time and place, allowing Rena to revisit and remember the homeland within the scope of

inner consciousness, evoking the complex emotions that surround the realities of nostalgia, loss, and pride as a Uyghur diaspora woman.

Image 12: Uyghur instruments and doppa used as decoration in Jamila's home

Uyghur homeland cultural practices also reflect the importance of music, where many community gatherings, celebrations, and traditions are centered around music. The relationship between music and Uyghurness is seen in specific object aesthetics of domestic spaces. One most well known Uyghur paintings is the *Uyghur Muqam* by Ghazi Ahmet. The Uyghur Muqam is a UNESCO intangible cultural heritage recognized set of musical forms depicting Uyghur poetry, proverbs, and folklore, altogether lasting approximately 24 hours (Light, 2008). This painting is often displayed in Uyghur homes, as Meriyem observes, "I don't know any Uyghur

house that doesn't have that on the wall." Gulkiz wishes that she would have brought back such

an image from the homeland, "I wish I had a big *Muqam* rug that I saw, but did not buy because

it was too expensive. There are things you don't know you will miss when you leave." Within

the space of a Uyghur home there usually is some type of musical instrument, such as a *dutar,*

dap, or even a western guitar, hanging on the wall or in a corner. Rena specifically included

having a "Uyghur instrument on the wall" as an aesthetic element that made her feel like she was

in a Uyghur home.

Image 13: For the winter season, Meriyem places acorns with her Uyghur instruments

Music as a cultural symbol is a visceral way to connect to the homeland. Even though she

denies having a "sense of music," Seyyare still listens to "songs that I danced to as girl at least

two or three times a week" because "they make me happy." She fondly reflects on some of these

songs, "If you listen to the lyrics they're hilarious." When talking about aspects of Uyghur

culture she wants the next generation to maintain, Rena talks about the intrinsic tie between

music and Uyghur identity, "You have food and you have music; that's the Uyghur people." Her daughter, Reyhan, also echoed this sentiment maintaining connection to her Uyghur culture through music, "I'm trying to get as much of [Uyghur culture] as I can now. Learning how to cook, and listening more to Uyghur music, and talking to my mom about the culture." Meriyem says that even though, "I don't listen to Uyghur songs normally, they have a special place for me. Last year I got married and those songs *had* to be in my wedding." So even if Uyghur music is not integrated into daily life, it still serves as a reminder, connection, and symbol of the homeland.

Hybridity and the interplay of cultural influences is manifested through the consumption and production of music. For Uyghurs, technology plays a vital role in the accessibility of music in diaspora, particularly social media platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, or Facebook. Rena drives a three hour commute each week listening to Uyghur music, during which she is "so appreciative of Youtube." Subinur showed me videos on Youtube of her husband, who is currently studying music at university, playing both modern and traditional renditions of Uyghur music. One specific video shows him and a friend playing a mashup of *dutar* [a long-necked two stringed Uyghur instrument], beatbox, and acapella vocals. The merging of these musical elements creates a modern rendition of the traditional folk Uyghur love song. His performance integrates an array of musical styles through means of technology to portray a personal expression of cultural influences. This marriage of the modern and traditional, the homeland and new-home, all takes part in the creation of a diasporic soundscape.

Food

Food, at a basic level, is a biological necessity; however, it is also intertwined within the complex web of the human experience. Food can be intimately connected to a wide variety of

cultural attitudes, including religion, politics, gender, class, health, ritual, and heritage. Particularly for diasporic communities, food facilitates the expression and negotiation of the multi-cultural landscape of their cultural identities. Sidney Mintz observes that food is one of the primary ways in which the "locality" of the community is expressed, either through the hybridity, integration, or exotification of said cuisine within the broader new-home cultural environment (Mintz, 2008). Food choices that were perhaps once simply practical can become vehicles of cultural transportation. As one navigates in-between cultural spaces, food can become a site where cultural maintenance, integration, hybridity is expressed (Bailey, 2017; Lee, Jeanyoung, Kim, & Sunah, 2017; Mintz, 2008). For these communities, food is a site where multi-faceted cultural identities can be "consumed." It is often within the scope of food that one can observe cultural attitudes occurring in real time.

The role of food as an expression of identity is highly relevant to the Islamic practice of abstaining from consuming pork products. However, within the Uyghur context the practice of abstaining from pork has been embedded with more cultural, rather than religious, meaning. Even though Reyhan does not subscribe to Islam, she still refrains from consuming pork products as a cultural practice. Meriyem similarly has specific attitudes towards pork, "I ok with drinking and going out, things a Muslim girl 'shouldn't do' but with pork it's different." She goes on to tell a story about the relationship between pork and references to China:

> *One day my brother's daughter was watching a cartoon and there was this part that said "piggy." It was so interesting, me and my mom were like "change this" because for us "pig" equals "china." If I had a kid I would never show them this cartoon. But then I realized that my friends in other countries had pork and bacon, but they didn't change*

the perception of one country for me. I don't care if you eat it, I still like you and it

doesn't make you Chinese. But if I eat it, then I become too Chinese.

Meriyem's sentiment illustrates how attitudes concerning eating pork has become conflated with Chinese culture, even superseding religious fidelity. This shows that food choices can be selectively used to align/dis-align with certain social groups, political attitudes, and cultural practices.

Food is also a daily practice of connecting and "consuming" an aspect of one's cultural identity. Rena observed that for many of the Uyghurs she knew, "I think we all eat Uyghur food, at least once a week." When asked what aspects of Uyghur culture she thought were important to keep, Rushangul laughed and responded, "I have to keep our food." Rena further explains that Uyghur food culture is a vital aspect of cultural maintenance, "Your food, what you eat every day. I think that's what we need to pass on." This role of food as a daily form of cultural maintenance is evident for Seyyare, a second-generation Uyghur woman, who has "*nan-chai* in the morning for breakfast. I can't leave until I've had that and it's my only breakfast. That's my everyday life thing." In terms of cultural aesthetics, Meriyem, another second-generation woman, notes that for her the predominant aspect of Uyghur cultural aesthetics is "the food, I use food most in my daily life." Eating is a primal human way of "being" and "consuming" aspects of one's identity. For these women, the embodied experience of cooking and eating specific cultural foods is a daily ritual and performance of cultural maintenance practices.

Image 14: Seyyare's family making Uyghur naan in a traditional tandoor

Food is closely tied to the Uyghur cultural value of hospitality. Jamila explains the tie between food, hospitality, and community building as, "Uyghur culture is a people culture. Because of a pot of tea, we can spend hours together chatting." Food is also often an excuse to spend together with family, "We make nice food and call them over to come and enjoy together." Gulkiz, Jamila's sister, agrees that food is often a way to spend time with loves ones, "Our culture is fun and makes any single excuse to have a party. What's involved in the fun? Music and food." Seyyare observes, "Every time we had guests over we had to make a feast." When asked what it means to be Uyghur, Arzugul talked the Uyghur value of the "base level of simple hospitality" which includes "guests, neighbors, and strangers." Mealtimes then become venues of relation connections, "You have to sit together, eat together, and talk together. There is a lot of humor and sarcasm in Uyghur dinner conversation."

Image 15: Tea and fruit set out for guests in Seyyare's home

Culturally "hybrid" foods reflect the cultural conversations of the communities that create

them. Rena notes that Uyghur food is a combination of "Central Asian, Turkish, Russian, and

even Chinese" cuisines. Because food usually a communal and often sensorially pleasurable

affair, one can easily "consume" a cultural experience through a meal. Meriyem explains the role

of food as connecting cultures, "If you like the food of a certain country, then you start to be

curious about other aspects of the culture." Arzugul talks about this more specifically, saying that

"we have to put some things into that American frame so that it can be more easily accepted. If

you make things a little different then it is a pathway to learning about these things. Like making

Uyghur food not too traditional, but more accessible so people can try it and talk about it." She

often uses food as a means to connect to her new-home community as well as to share her

culture, "Sometimes my husband invites his colleagues over to see who we are." However, she

explains that even when trying to make traditional dishes, specific ingredients can be hard to

come by or the food "doesn't have the same taste." Uyghur food is a primary site of connection

of Rena with her American husband and his family, "He loves *polo* and *samsa*. For

Thanksgiving all his kids request Uyghur food." Rena's contribution of Uyghur dishes to an

American thanksgiving meal illustrates the capacity that food has to serve as a form of cultural

ambassadorship. Arzugul, who has two young daughters, said that in her family, "My kids eat

more American food. My husband and I still mainly eat Uyghur food." This difference in eating

patterns within one family illustrates the multicultural landscape of many Uyghur diaspora

households. Food, as a symbol of cultural affinities, can point towards patterns of cultural

hybridity, integration, and ambassadorship.

Food is closely related to memory, nostalgia, and home. Food is also often one of the

places where people turn to when feeling homesick, as it can offer the comfort and multi-sensory

experience of one's cultural homeland. As Aliye describes, "When you cook you feel at home,

using dishes that were sent by your mom." Because of its accessibility and ease of consumption,

food culture is often one of the ways in which cultural aesthetics is most easily maintained,

preserved, or passed down from one generation to the next. When asked how she would describe

Uyghurness, Reyhan, a second-generation Uyghur woman, laughed and responded, "Engaging

with food." Seyyare offered another second-generation perspective, "Food is a huge part of our

Uyghur culture. The only food I know how to make is Uyghur food. Food reminds me of home."

For both of these women who had limited exposure to their homeland culture as adults, food is

strongly associated with their experience of Uyghur identity and the embodiment of home.

Eating is also an innately social experience, thereby putting food at the center of many

community building practices. According to Gary Alan Fine, "the connection between identity

and consumption gives food a central role in the creation of community, and we use our diet to

convey images of public identity" (Fine, 1996). Smells, textures, and flavors all contribute to a

multi-sensory cultural performance, where family and friends engage in community-building

practices centered around a meal. This is especially relevant to the Uyghur context. As Gulkiz

describes, food is "one of the bigger parts" of Uyghur identity. Reyhan, Arzugul, and Gulkiz all

talked about the role of smell as evocative of memory and nostalgia. Smell is one that is most

closely associated with the memory center in the brain, and thus food can trigger a wide range of

cultural memory. When describing aspects of the homeland that she misses, Gulkiz specifically

reminisces over the "smell of kabobs" along the streets.

Mealtime is also often a community or family affair, where each family member often

plays their own role in the preparation of the meal. During her childhood, Rena's mother would

teach her a variety of domestic tasks, "but mostly cook, like *laghman*, *polo*, and *sangza*."

Reyhan, as a second-generation Uyghur woman, has distinct childhood memories of cooking and

mealtimes with Uyghur family friends. Tapping into those visceral memories, she makes

intentional efforts at making Uyghur food as a way to connect to her Uyghur heritage. Food is

created, experienced, and consumed, all contributing to a basic form of cultural maintenance and

hybridity within the Uyghur diaspora. Jamila talks about the role-playing and the cultural scripts

that occur during festivals or other large community events, where "woman have their part"

cooking and hosting. Especially during weddings and funerals, men and women will sit

separately, and each group has "people who serve, pour the tea, and brings the food." There is an

embodied performance, not dissimilar to a dance, in the cultural script of making and sharing a

meal.

Language

Language can carry implicit cultural values and meaning, connecting the speaker to a

specific socio-linguistic heritage in a form of cultural solidarity. Because of the prevalence of

language loss within second and third generation diaspora, there is a heightened sense of

responsibility towards maintaining language within the family (Liebkind, 1999) . The risk of language loss is especially relevant to ethnic minority groups, such as the Uyghurs, whose native tongue is different from the official governmental language. For Uyghurs in diaspora, there may not be an access to a broader Uyghur community beyond one's immediate family, thus decreasing the opportunity to speak one's language within a natural social setting. Liebkind (1999) conducts studies on the role of language acquisition and cultural change amongst English language learners and immigrant communities in the United States. She considers factors that may become barriers to the use of a native language within community, including 1) linguistic, socio-economic, and political "status", 2) "demographic strength" of the diaspora community, and 3) "institutional support" and language availability in the new-home. For Uyghurs, all of these factors are relatively low, thereby increasing the chances of language loss or hybridity. Therefore, unless family members remain vigilant, some form of language loss is likely to occur.

Language Maintenance

This feeling of scarcity, loss, or marginalization is compounded by changes in language education policy within the Uyghur homeland where more and more Uyghur schools are being closed, blocking access to formal Uyghur education. The push for Chinese language education and the resulting marginalization of the Uyghur language increases the attachment between one's mother-tongue and a broader cultural consciousness. As a result, Uyghur language education has become politicized and problematized by the Chinese government, increasing the urgency to preserve one's Uyghur mother-tongue. For many in diaspora, Uyghur language itself has become a symbol of one's Uyghur identity. Language use, functionality, and symbolism carries amplified meaning outside of the homeland.

Many of the women, especially those among the older generation, repeatedly stressed the paramount importance of speaking Uyghur in the home. They also expressed the uniqueness of this burden to their gender and were resolute in their assertion that language was integral to maintaining an understanding of Uyghur identity for future generations of Uyghur diaspora. Mehrigul says that as the mother, "I'm the one who teaches my son language," and notes that it is similar for other Uyghur diaspora families. Gulkiz's word of advice to younger Uyghur women was, "Do not ever give up your Uyghur mother-tongue. Uyghur language is the most important identity thing. Always try to speak Uyghur and try to teach your kids to speak Uyghur." Mehrigul and Gulkiz's perspectives show that women and mothers often serve as the primary gatekeepers and teachers of language. There is often a feeling of responsibility in the role of transmitting their native language and culture to their children, especially in the diasporic realities of raising second-generation Uyghurs who may have left the homeland at a young age or do not use Uyghur language outside of the home. Jamila, despite having a Canadian husband who also speaks Uyghur, still maintains a strong feeling of responsibility to her role as the primary cultural educator for her bi-racial children:

> *"I'm the key person. If it's going to happen it's me. The kids learned a lot in China, but because of their age moving back to Canada they'll forget many things. And I'm the person speaking Uyghur. In the future I don't know if they find a Uyghur wife or husband. It will be hard for them to keep this culture. I have seen our Uyghur people came to Canada and their children don't speak Uyghur at all, and culture slowly is demolished. Even when we were in Xinjiang, because I'm Uyghur and their dad is Canadian, other Uyghur people didn't see my children as Uyghurs. In their eyes my children are foreigners. But they have Uyghur blood."*

Jamila's narrative reveals the depth of responsibility that she feels as a Uyghur mother to do her part in ensuring that her children are connected to their culture and language through her parenting choices. To her, language is an essential component of Uyghur culture, and if not sustained will put Uyghur culture overall at risk of being "destroyed." Additionally, she staunchly maintains that her bi-racial children have an undeniable seat at the table alongside the rest of the Uyghur community, as connected through their family ties and ancestral lineage.

Mehrigul believes that actively teaching and speaking Uyghur language at home is the most important method of language maintenance. As a linguist, she understands "how language is created, developed, and how it disappears." If language education is suppressed, "it devolves into community languages, then it shrinks to family language only spoken at home, then later through the process of time, it disappears." In her family, Mehrigul maintains a Uyghur-only household where she teaches her young son how to read, write, and speak Uyghur. She says that her son "understands why we are here and what's going on back home and how important our mother tongue is," indirectly signaling her role in educating her son on Uyghur issues and values. She makes a point that if the Uyghur language is going to continue in diaspora, there needs to be unity in the Uyghur community in order to organize language and cultural schools. Only then can "our kids can grow up together and learn from the community." This has been the experience of Seyyare, who as a second-generation Uyghur woman is connected to an established Uyghur diaspora community, who places a strong value on language use, "At home, with elders in the community, we speak Uyghur, no incorporation of English words." Growing up she attended an after-school and weekend Uyghur language school. Due to this community support, she feels very connected to her Uyghur heritage and language, and often volunteers as a *Uyghurche* language tutor on the weekends at her alma mater.

Image 16: A few of Seyyare's Uyghur language textbooks

Language Hybridity

Once in diaspora, many first-generation Uyghur women face the realities of navigating a society in tongue foreign to them. As for second-generation women, some of whose first language may not be Uyghur, they must navigate the complexities of finding belonging to an identity that may be linguistically distant. Some of the first-generation women expressed how having an accent can sometimes be a barrier towards feeling integrated in their new-home communities. Gulkiz notes that there are challenges due to her accent and language barrier, saying that "people with prejudice will look down on you." Both Gulkiz and Rena, who work in healthcare fields, noted that on occasion they have felt hesitant to speak up at work due to their

non-native English speaker status. However, Gulkiz notes that sometimes her accent "gets some attention from people," which provides an opportunity to talk about her Uyghur background, "They ask questions and I want to tell them where I am from. An accent can make people ask, and then you make a friend." For Reyhan, on the other hand, not having "perfect" Uyghur can sometimes "feels like a barrier to belonging." These differing generational perspectives reveal how the value on Uyghur language learning, as previously discussed, practically play out in a diasporic context.

The language education system within the homeland affects linguistic attitudes and social markers even in diaspora. In comparison to Uyghur language educated individuals, Chinese educated Uyghurs often "code-switch" between the two languages or integrate more Chinese words into their everyday speech. This results in socio-linguistic differentiation between those who are Uyghur educated, *mingkaomin,* or Chinese educated, *mingkaohan.* Gulkiz explains that there can also be a perceived social advantage to being fluent, "If you don't learn Chinese, you'll be treated differently, you won't be able to get a job, you'll live forever as a lower class." Growing up in the 1970s, Gulkiz was one of the only Uyghur students in her Chinese elementary school. Even though she benefitted from the professional advantages that her education granted her, she says that there is difficulty in being disconnected from one's native language. "As I grew up I realized more and more how I was raised and treated and educated was unfair," also noting that "these days it's getting worse and worse" due to language education policies in the homeland. She explains that in some ways, as a *mingkaohan,* she understands the plight of second-generation Uyghurs, saying, "It's similar because I was educated in a different language. I knew Chinese better than my mother tongue, Uyghur." Even as a Uyghur woman who grew up in the homeland, she still felt a degree of disconnection from her mother-tongue.

Gulkiz's educational experiences affected choices around Uyghur language education for her own Uyghur-American children. Gulkiz's husband is an English language educator who maintained the primary role in educating the children. She says the choice to focus on English language and multicultural education is because, "I knew even when my kids were growing up in Xinjiang, they would come to America and this would be their citizenship and their dominant culture." Even though sometimes she wishes her children could speak better Uyghur, she does not regret her choices knowing that her children now have successful lives in America as well as access to a wider range of opportunities for their future. Instead, she points to the more intangible ways that her children have integrated key Uyghur values, such as hard work, determination, and resilience, all of which she held as ultimately more important.

Still others argued that an inability to speak the language fluently did not exclude members from inclusion in a Uyghur identity. Adila, who is connected with a community of Uyghur youth, talks about how "Uyghur kids struggle with the language because there's no real place to learn it," making it difficult to connect with the broader diaspora community. Seyyare, another member of the same community, notes that many of the youth "understand Uyghur language very well but can't speak it, which doesn't make them less Uyghur," further emphasizing that "you don't have to know the Uyghur language to be a Uyghur." Reyhan feels this tension, saying that language can feel like a "barrier to belonging." She makes an effort to continue to learn and practice, however she "doubt[s] it will ever be as perfect as I would hope, but I want to pass that down and not get lost at me." Instead she pointed to other, more intangible, markers of what she believed being Uyghurness, such as cultural values and respect of culture, and stressed the need for adaptability and acceptance of hybridity for the survival of the cultural understanding.

Behaviors

Cultural scripts, such as cultural attitudes, values, and behaviors, are an integral part of identity negotiations for diasporic communities. This category of cultural aesthetic encompasses the ways in which they can present themselves, interpret societal norms, and express conscious and subconscious behaviors within the contexts of their changing cultural environments (Goodman, 1999; Kaya, 2002; Saucier, 2011; Wong, 2010). Identity factors are not linear or consistently experienced and may fall in and out of internal conflict. It is through the negotiation of these cultural scripts that Uyghur women choose how to embody and perform the multiplicity of their cultural influences. These behaviors are used as a method of aligning/dis-aligning with alternating identity placeholders, such as "Muslim," "American," or even "woman." Individuals exert agency over these internal sites of tension through specific behavioral choices. The integration of specific cultural values into an individual's personal ethos can also be a method of cultural maintenance in lieu of more explicit cultural aesthetics. The methods and specific context in which these behaviors occur provide further understanding to the underlying attitudes and negotiation process that Uyghur women may have towards their multiple homes.

Personal Behaviors

Uyghur women in diaspora may emphasize/deflect certain aspects of their identity depending on the surrounding social context. These behaviors are often used strategically in order to highlight or downplay certain aspects of one's cultural identity. There are many reasons for engaging/refraining from certain cultural behaviors, such as resisting predominant social narratives, strategically aligning/distancing for personal identity integration, or even to feel connected or belonging with a collective cause or social group. These behaviors are not unlike what socio-linguists call "code-switching," where multilingual individuals will change the

quality and content of their language, accent, and even body language depending on their cultural and social context (Liebkind, 1999). Similarly, people in the diaspora will engage in what I call "cultural code-switching," where they will engage in different cultural behaviors, often subconsciously, depending on the surrounding social environment. During her week, Reyhan navigates the demands of living life as a young professional on the West Coast. However, within a Uyghur community context, she knows how to "put on" Uyghur modes of behaviors, such as the young Uyghur woman whose duty is to exhibit aggressive hospitality and to ensure that all the tea cups at the table are full. The methods in which these cultural performances and rituals are maintained in diaspora can indicate a quality of relationship to those often-prescribed cultural roles placed on women within the homeland.

For many Uyghur women, a common situation where they strategically align/dis-align with certain aspects of cultural identity is in explaining where they are "from." This is a particularly complex question for Uyghur people whose identity is not commonly known outside of the homeland. Questions around home can incite types of emphasis/deflection behaviors, often times in order to redefine predominant social narratives surrounding assumptions around race, religion, and citizenship. In response to the question of "where are you from," almost all of the women responded that there was a degree of complexity to the question that made it difficult to answer. To Reyhan, part of this complexity was due to not having a "defined land that politically belongs to us," as well as not wanting to self-identify as Chinese. Gulkiz, who first came to the U.S. in 1990, explained that when she first arrived, "I would say very proud I am Chinese from China. I would leave off the Uyghur part because everyone knows China but no one knows Uyghur," and then explain further if requested. However, recently her answers have changed, avoiding identifying her origins as from China. Rena, who has also been in the U.S. for over

twenty years agreed, "Before I say that I was from China, but now I don't say that." These types of "code-switching" identity behaviors in which Uyghur may either emphasize or deflect certain aspects of their identity demonstrate how women maintain agency over their self-representation towards the predominant cultures of their new-home.

Some of the women interviews discussed how their answer often depended on who was asking and the manner in which the question was asked. Seyyare explains that she usually emphatically answers "Australian" if the question is posed by a white person, knowing that they were most likely asking her what her ethnic background was. Reyhan, who grew up in the U.S., sometimes chooses to deflect answering directly, "Sometimes if I'm traveling and talking to someone who is originally from China, sometimes I don't bring up that I'm Uyghur and make up something." Sometimes she responds with "the Midwest," but on other days where she particularly tongue-in-cheek, she gives answers such as "Hawaiian." She expressed the emotional labor required to answer such an inquiry, "Often when I bring up I'm Uyghur it engages in a political discussion, and I'm not available for that." Despite some of these difficulties, "for the most part I love educating people about being Uyghur and what that means." Subinur also engages with the question in a playful way, and sometimes asks people to guess, "Sometimes they guess Russia, Kazakhstan. It's really good if anyone guesses Kazakhstan." These methods of engaging with a question that is potentially triggering of identity tensions show the creativity and agency in which Uyghur women choose to negotiate the emotional labor of explaining their Uyghur identity within a social context that is unfamiliar with the complexities and nuances of homeland realities.

Community Behaviors

It is within the scope of community gatherings that culture is mirrored to younger diaspora members. Seyyare is grateful for how being around a community of Uyghurs has been beneficial for her sense of Uyghur identity, "We've heard about how lucky we are for the community giving us this strong sense of identity as a Uyghur person." However, she realizes that not many other Uyghurs, both in diaspora or the homeland, have access to a community that supports their "sense of Uyghurness." Mehrigul sometimes worries about her young son's relationship to his Uyghur identity due to their isolation from a wider Uyghur community, "If we lived in the Uyghur community at home I would not worry about his education about who the Uyghur people are because he would grow up with it." Mehrigul recognizes that there are aspects of Uyghur identity that are more difficult to experience or internalize without the presence of a community.

However, despite experiences of isolation from a broader Uyghur community, there are methods in which these experiences can be remembered and continued within the scope of the subconscious. Reyhan did not grow up around an established Uyghur community, but she had distinct memories with Uyghur family friends, "I remember Uyghur friends coming over and roasting lamb in the backyard and eating kabob." These memories are important to her because "I don't engage with a lot of Uyghurs on the daily, so this [memory] is as close as I can get." Growing up in diaspora, memories of community gatherings become a form of connection between her two homes, "These are as much as possible reminders of the homeland, but in an American space." However, because these were more isolated memories, there is not as strong a degree of nostalgia attached to them. Instead, she chooses to derive a different type of meaning from them, "It's not really longing, but a reminder of how I can integrate this aesthetic into my

daily life." Rather than a form of nostalgia, these memories become a reminder of her value of cultural maintenance in diaspora.

Cultural behaviors are often manifested within a community setting. Gatherings with loved ones is a site where cultural behaviors and values are manifested in a basic form of community building. Cultural and religious celebrations in particular serve as a means to connect to memories of home as wells as a broader cultural consciousness. One of the community building practices that has continued in diaspora is *meshrep,* a community practice of disseminating elder (and often male) wisdom, frequently in conjunction with music, dance, and food. Seyyare's younger siblings are required to go to meshrep events because "it's the only way they'll learn about our language and our culture." At these *meshrep* gatherings in diaspora, community elders, through their very presence and example, model cultural behaviors and values to the youth. There is a collective solidarity and "togetherness" that is built amongst the community through the embodied movements, behaviors, performances, and rituals of making space together.

Community gatherings are a site of cultural experience. Adila, who was born in diaspora and only visited the homeland once, says that one of the ways that she felt connected to her culture during childhood was when "we did urban performances for *Nowruz*." The practice of celebrating this festival of the arrival of spring and the new year was a way in which to connect to both her community and her cultural heritage. Holidays and celebrations can be a time where the absence of family is strongly felt, as expressed by Rushangul, "Sometimes during holidays, like *Kurban Eid* or *Rosa Eid*, you just really miss home. I wish was there." However, she notes that these feelings are in constant negotiation, "Sometimes it's off and on and you think that you are so lucky to be here." It is within these community gatherings, such as during *meshrep,*

Kurban Eid, *Rosa Eid*, and *Nowruz*, that a microcosm of culture, a tangible modality of cultural maintenance, emerges. It is within these spaces that community members will cook food, sing songs, conduct prayers, host parties, and laugh, or *qak-qak,* with loved ones. These actions all contribute to a collective embodiment of memory, where culture, values, behaviors, foods, along with other modes of cultural aesthetics, are embodied within a scripted set of behaviors.

Cultural Values

Cultural customs, values, and attitudes also are aspects of how culture is performed or manifested. Two of the primary Uyghur values that were mentioned most frequently were respect for elders and hospitality. Rena notes some key aspects of Uyghur culture, "Uyghur people are very open, always very happy, friendly, hospitable, and respect the elders." Other traits included strong work ethic, value on education, modesty, and compassion. Reyhan sometimes catches herself subconsciously engaging in Uyghur-like behaviors which often have to do with respecting elders or hospitality, "At work I find myself doing Uyghur things like always helping the older colleague and always being the host." This is an example both of Reyhan's ability to "code-switch" between social settings, as well as her personal integration of Uyghur cultural values.

Perhaps one of the most consistent assertions of a Uyghur cultural custom, interviewees said that respect for elders was an essential part of what it means to be Uyghur. They talked about how, in the public sphere and in the home, upholding the face of the elder generation and showing them gratitude was cultural value that many Uyghurs understand. According to Rena, this respect of elders, or *hormet kilish*, includes specific behaviors such as, "don't smoke or drink in front of elders," and, "don't speak over the elders or correct them." Patigul talked about how in her nursing environment, it was a difficult transition to treat people based on job status instead

of based on age. She felt like it was almost "losing my morality." Seyyare, who lives in an established diaspora with community elders expresses her gratitude for how they have invested in her community, "We have the elderly telling us that we are doing so much more than they ever did. If they hadn't faced the struggles that they did as Uyghur migrants we wouldn't have this community because they started it for us." This strong connection between Uyghurness and respect for elders has been transformed into a cultural symbol for Seyyare, "Whenever I see the elderly that's one thing that I say, 'Yep, that's Uyghur.'" The elderly have also become a reminder of the homeland for Adila, "Some days I see older Mexican ladies, they look so similar to our old ladies, like someone I would see walking around my own hometown." The perspectives of these women show the intimate ways in which cultural values can be integrated into daily life and behaviors in diaspora.

Hospitality was another trait often brought up in association with Uyghur values. Hospitality and receiving guests warmly with a feast of delicious food is brought up as a core part of being identified Uyghur, and specifically as a Uyghur woman. Adila use the phrase, "*Memanchiliq*, being hospitable and welcoming" as a way to describe an essential trait of Uyghur people. Nearly all of the Uyghur women interviewed commented on the responsibility and pride connected to hosting meals in their home. Arzugul explains that, "We treat guests, neighbors, and strangers, well and make sure they are well fed and happy." This is an innately communal gathering, where "You have to sit together, eat together, and talk together. There is a lot of humor and sarcasm in Uyghur dinner conversation." Patigul talked more specifically about differences in cultural attitudes concerning hospitality between her new-home and the homeland. She said, "In Uyghur culture we all help each other." In Canada, however, volunteering is integrated into high school curriculums and job requirements. The reason why, she said, is

because in everyday life "people really don't take care of each other." To her, Canadians require "volunteering" to oblige people to "help each other." In contrast, similar actions of "volunteering" would have been considered a Uyghur person's moral duty due to the emphasis on community development and hospitality. Since being in diaspora, Patigul has been cooking more Uyghur food and expressing Uyghur hospitality, saying "I've become a super chef" and "I am paying for when I was in Urumqi and I wasn't cooking." To her, expressing the value of hospitality was important for her to maintain in diaspora.

Many women also expressed how cultural values should be maintained despite the hybridity that inevitably occurs in diaspora. However, many women expressed Patigul discusses some of the hopes that she has for her sons, she says that "personal morality is what I consider most important and want to protect." Even if they make different choices in regards to more explicit ways of "being" Uyghur, she most desires for her sons to make wise choices. Mehrigul explains that as the Uyghur diaspora continues to grow, there will be inevitable changes, and even without some aspects of cultural aesthetics discussed previously, what is most important is, "the common goal is to become a good person," and, "Don't forget your identity. You are Uyghur." These more intangible aspects of "knowing" one's Uyghurness and being a "good person" are emphasized. Jamila notes that it is through one's "lifestyle" that Uyghur culture is maintained and experienced in diaspora. However, she notes that integrating multiple cultural influences into one's lifestyle is to be expected, but "how we change doesn't change our Uyghur identity." Therefore, it can be argued that embodying Uyghur values is a key form of Uyghur cultural maintenance that supersedes the more specific modes of behavior, religion, or even language.

Identity Negotiations

Home and Belonging

Within the Uyghur context, the specific constraints of the realities of their community can affect the experience of identity negotiations in their new-homes. There are many factors can affect the quality of hybridity between the homeland, new-home, such as the cultural demographics of their surroundings, the presence of immigrant diasporic communities nearby, and access to cultural resources (Agnew, 2005; Liebkind, 1999; Mehta & Belk, 1991) . The quality of these different elements can affect the relationship towards integration toward the new-home culture or can provide external resources towards maintaining their homeland culture. Certain homeland cultural resources may include places of worship, access to cultural foods, access to media and literature in their native tongue, and the feelings of cultural comradery and/or isolation from others within their home cultural group (Liebkind, 1999). Even if an individual is no longer within their homeland, the presence of these cultural elements can help support their connection to and maintenance of their cultural origins. Within the conversations of this study, the specific places in which identity negotiations occurred was in relation to home, community, womanhood, and Uyghurness.

For some of the respondents, their definition of home was clearly a geographical one, often in reference to the Uyghur homeland. Within the homeland, there can be a comforting familiarity, a sense of belonging in a broader experience of society. One is surrounded by one's native language, has access to cultural foods, goods, and can navigate life within an implicitly understood set of cultural norms and behaviors. Many of the individuals expressed their relationship to home attachments patterns through their use of aesthetics. Some women maintained a strong affinity towards integrating a more explicit Uyghur aesthetic into their lifestyle, which reflected their attachment to the homeland. Other women who acknowledge that

the reality of adjusting to their new home as an immigrant required a cultural dialogue, reflected these attitudes in the hybridity of the cultural influences in their aesthetic. In response to the question of how she navigated her identity in a western culture Reyhan said, "Now, especially in terms of how I dress, I embrace more aspects of the Uyghur cultural dress aesthetic. I try to blend the two [Uyghur and American dress]." This "blending" attempts to present an authentic identity, while also allowing the flexibility in the realities of living in a diaspora community where mixing of culture and aesthetic inevitably occurs.

Defining Home

One of the questions asked within the interviews was, "What is home to you?". These women responded in a variety of ways, though almost all expressed a degree of tension to the question, echoing similar responses to the previously discussed "where are you from?" question. Many women responded with sentiments such as, "wherever my children are," or "with the people that I love." Interviewees expressed how the idea of "home" is strongly attached to connection to immediate family, whether that be parents, partners, or children. As expressed by Gulkiz, "Anyplace that has my family, that's home." Therefore, this indicates that home attachment is not just embedded with a specific place, but also within intimate relationships. She later pointed out "I think home is where we feel safe, were we enjoy relationship, were we feel free to act and speak." This concept of home contrasts to others who placed home in a geographical space, either in the homeland or in the new-home. An interesting note, however, is that in both cases, women would often casually refer to the home-land as "home," even if they felt more home-attachment in diaspora.

Choosing to refer to the home within the context of a specific geographical space showed a wide variety of home attachments. Patigul said when asked where she is from, "90% of the

time I say Eastern Turkistan." Mehrigul, on the other hand, feels at risk referring to her homeland in those terms, "Mostly I say Northwest of China. I could say Eastern Turkistan, but I really want to go back home someday so I don't want to get in trouble." Aliye responded in a way that was both attached to the geographical home and to her intimate family, "Unless I go back to my parents' place [in China], then no other place feels like home." Other women had stronger attachments to their new-home. Munire was on the few participants to answer without much hesitation, "Well I am from Canada." She describes that because she has lived in Canada for over ten years, her family and children were established in their lives as Canadians and "understand the Canadian culture." Rushangul was another woman who expressed attachment to her new-home, "For now America is my home. I went home last year, and I had a really bad experience. When I came back I said, 'Now America is my home.'" She felt that "they [China] don't want you anymore," and things had changed so much since she left that "even if I have relatives, sisters, uncles, aunts, I felt like that is not my home anymore." Thus, changes identity tension caused by homeland dynamics can contribute to a shift in home attachment, despite the presence of family members.

Despite the complexities of naming home as Uyghur women, many still found ways to negotiate sites of belonging in order to "feel" at home. Aliye, after talking about the difficulty of such a question, finally said, "The place I feel the most belonging here is just this home, I've been in this apartment for 5 years. That's why I decorate it so much, to make it feel like home." For Aliye, curating a Uyghur aesthetic that she come "come home" to at the end of her work day was a way to situate belonging and home attachment in diaspora. Due to the complexities of homeland/new-home attachments, women also found ways to describe home in more conceptual terms. Jamila expressed how home to her is ultimately a place where one feels freedom, ease,

and safety. Naming home as attached to certain type of abstract feeling allows space for transnational home attachments in diaspora. Mehrigul referred to home as such, "So this concept of home, I think that God give us places to live in this universe, and everywhere you go becomes a part of your home." Despite the ambiguity or tension in regards to naming home, Mehrigul recognizes that the core experience of home occurs in a subconscious and spiritual level, and does not need to be attached to external circumstances or environments.

New-Home Negotiations

Women find many ways to express the hybridity of their multiple homes through their aesthetic choices. Gulkiz points at a beaded American flag bracelet that she is wearing, "American-Uyghur is who I am now. I am proud to be American, but also I am Uyghur so I use both things to tell of my identity." Reyhan argues that any attempts to maintain a "pure" Uyghur aesthetic has limitations, because Uyghurs are inherently a "complicated mixture that has evolved and is evolving." It is important to allow room for hybridity and multiple ways of cultural expression because, "culture is going to always evolve." If there is no room for difference, "How else are we going to persist?" She describes some of the qualities of the Uyghur communities that she has come across, "Definitely, there is a lot of mixing, joining families with other cultures and keeping traditions the same. Not ascribing exactly to what you grew up with in the homeland." Giving an example, "I meet Uyghurs who are very Americanized, and you wouldn't be able to tell unless they opened their mouths." She says that this hybridity is "inevitable and I don't think it's such a bad thing." As a second-generation Uyghur, Reyhan has an intimate understanding of how culture is in a constant state of transformation and sees it as something that could be integrated into a broader understanding of Uyghur collective consciousness.

Image 17: Atlas bag and a stars and stripes scarf in Gulkiz's dresser drawer

Methods of new-home hybridizations also occurs in lifestyle and value choices. Rena gives an example of a way to adjust to being in America, explaining that Uyghur culture can be "very modest," and sometimes even "repressed." She continues, "Even though inside we know something is beautiful, on the outside we degrade ourselves. We need to change that, especially if we want to survive in the Western world." This often happens in the professional workplaces, where "White people can just go and ask for a raise, but we will not. We need to learn more of this White culture, to be more aggressive." Even if someone works hard, "Nobody recognizes you because you are quiet." This adjustment is difficult, "We can learn. It's not too late, but it's hard to overcome that mentality." She says that it is important to be open to adjustments because "I feel like you have to accept things you cannot change, and change the things that you can." She also shares these attitudes with her family, "I always tell my daughter, if it is something you cannot change, don't fight it. You don't have to follow it, just accept it." Specifically, she is

referring to, "We cannot change how somebody else looks at you as a foreigner." As an immigrant woman, Rena understands that it may be necessary to make compromises with the new-home culture. She has selectively chosen specific ways to adjust cultural values and behaviors in order to navigate life in her new-home as a Uyghur woman.

There were frequent references to the necessity of having a strong work ethic as an immigrant Uyghur woman. Patigul explained that, "Every single good life came after struggling and difficulty. No one jumps into the good life when they come to the US." Rena says that for Uyghurs in the U.S., and immigrants in general, "If you want to live well in this country, you have to assimilate. You need to watch the news, and keep updated, not just stay in your own circle." She says that even though the U.S. is "an immigrant's country," it is important to put in effort in both one's personal and professional life, "You have to try, otherwise you are going to fail." She emphasizes personal responsibility over victimhood, "This country is not obligated to do all that for you, you have to do it yourself. A lot of people will [complain], but I ask them, 'Did they invite you? No? Ok.'" Despite her assertion of personal responsibility to adjust as necessary to immigrant life, she still maintains that any changes that she makes to "assimilate" do not affect her Uyghurness, "Some people are afraid to assimilate, they will say 'Oh you are not Uyghur anymore.' It's not like other [American] people are going to look at me and say, 'Oh you are American.' I am still Uyghur. I am contributing to this society. I am doing my best. I am still preserving my culture, my food, my music, and my traditions." To Rena, her Uyghurness is such an intrinsic part of herself that any efforts that she makes to "assimilate" in order to build a successful life for herself and her family in diaspora cannot divorce her from her core identity as a Uyghur woman. Instead, her efforts at "contributing" to her new-home society as in absolute congruence with the Uyghur value of hard work.

Finding Belonging

For many of the interviewees, there are complexities with feeling a sense of belonging, which often is slightly distinguished from the feeling of "home." Mehrigul defines belonging as attached to the motherland, whereas home is connected to family. Adila expresses the differences in a more tangible way, "Home is more literal, the physical place. Belonging is less of a place and more of a community feel." Many interview respondents found ways to emphasize/de-emphasize certain aspects of their identities in order to feel connected or belonging with a collective cause or social group. Those who felt strong feelings of attachment and gratefulness towards their new-homes recognized the privilege and opportunities that they have in their new-homes. Even though "every country has good and bad," Rena is very appreciative of the opportunities she has as an American citizen, "I think everyone should vote. There is a privilege." There was a quality of freedom, autonomy, and exercise of citizenship within a diverse national community that they did not experience back home. They could vote, work, and experience a diverse community in ways that they may not have had previously, and which they recognized with gratefulness at their fortune.

These feelings of gratefulness were likely expounded by the circumstance of their friends and relatives back home, who do not have access to the same freedoms, autonomy, or opportunities that they have. These feelings can be coupled with a feeling and weight of responsibility, or even "survivor's guilt" for being the one who had the means to leave and start a new life. This responsibility and guilt may complexify their attitudes about home attachment. Rena says, "You feel guilty sometimes here. You have so much privilege." Another respondent explains about how hard it is to share struggles of her life in Canada, such as financial or emotional burdens, with friends and family in the homeland because of how hard it was to leave

them, as well as the difficult realities in the homeland. "Always you have to hide something. It's not easy," she said. Because she applied for asylum, "I'm already selfish enough, escaping from the homeland. Maybe it gave them more trouble for them, I don't know. I feel guilty." In order to deal with the possible repercussions of having a family member who had defected, "I told my family to say that you hate me and that I don't belong anymore, for their protection and safety." It is interesting to note, that despite this woman's application for asylum, which implicates that she will not be able to return to the homeland, her home had the most explicitly "Uyghur aesthetic" that I visited. Therefore, despite making a choice that would likely bar her from ever having the opportunity to return to the homeland, she still made explicit efforts to integrate Uyghur cultural aesthetics in her daily life.

Rena says that the choice to emigrate from one's homeland is often out of necessity, "If I had my own country, I would not come to this country. Lots of Uyghur people are the same." She goes further, saying that Uyghurs "are like *sanganda* [homeless]," and that even if Uyghurs wanted to return the homeland it is very difficult to get a visa. She explains some of the frustrations that she has towards some American attitudes, "It is so hard for immigrants. Mexicans, you call them this and that. Do you think they would want to come to your country unless it was unnecessary?" Instead, she calls on Americans to self-reflect, "You try to go to another country, then you will know." She says that if she felt like she could "live freely" and have "equal opportunity" in her homeland, she would not have felt the same need to come to America, "Who wants to come to another country? Of course, your home is always home." Despite living primarily in the U.S. since the early 1990s, she still feels intimately connected to her homeland. Last time she returned to the homeland, "Once the airplane landed and I saw the lights and I just cried and cried. I said, 'This is my home.'" Rena has a designated spot in her

family graveyard in the homeland, and "maybe one day I will be buried there. It doesn't matter where, but my heart is still there." Despite not having as many lasting family connections after being gone for so long, she feels intimately connected to the landscape, "My parents have passed away, but this is my land, I grew up here. My parents, my grandparents, they are all here, and one day I will belong here." Despite the opportunities and privileges that she has being in the U.S., she still has a feeling of loss and longing for her homeland.

Many of the women's responses also reflects the idea of the "mythology of return" (Brah, 1996; Safran, 1991). Rushangul, who has strong home attachment to the U.S., still feels this longing to feel "belonging" back home, "It's really hard. I really want to belong to where I was born." Even though she calls America her home, she still sees the homeland as a place that she will eventually return to be laid to rest, "I always think that one day when I am in really bad health situation, I always think that I will go back to my sisters where I can die there. I want to be buried there with my family." Arzugul also expressed the feeling of "wishfulness" when thinking about the homeland, "Sometimes we have dreams we are home, then we wake up to here." She has a husband and two young daughters, and feels grateful for being able to build a life in her new-home, "It's not like we don't like here, we love it and feel happy and lucky to be here, because a lot of Uyghurs dream of being here in another country." However, there is still a longing, "But also at some point we are missing home a lot. That feeling is hard to explain." Another one of the women still grappled with the feeling of temporal stay in her new-home, despite recently applying for asylum, "Still, I don't feel I belong to here you know? I don't know maybe after 20 years you should come back and ask the same question, I don't know." This sentiment even affects her young son, "Even my son, who is 9 years old, is saying 'Mom, I want to go back home.' He has that feeling too." Ultimately, she says, "So we are just temporarily

living here." For all of these women, despite the investment of building a life in their new-home, they still have an intimate connection to the "mythicized" homeland and maintain a hope for their eventual return.

Many women had difficulty defining sites of home and belonging and would even change aspects of their answer throughout the conversation. Rena's feelings towards sites of belonging are difficult to articulate, "Sometimes you miss it. Other times I feel like I just repress it, block everything out, and feel like I belong in this country. It is on and off." On occasion in her daily life, it can be hard to maintain connections to her Uyghurness, "I don't really know how to explain it, it's really complicated. Honestly, sometimes you just forget that you are Uyghur." Munire feels very connected to her Canadian identity, saying that she "understands their values." However, later in the interview, she expressed that she often felt some form of "identity crisis" in regards to her Uyghurness in relation to her Uyghur-Tatar heritage, complexifying an already difficult identity negotiation process. Reyhan, Rena's daughter, expressed the fluidity of home and belonging, "It's constantly changing for me, never one thing. Maybe home is the homeland but maybe not because we are scared to go back." Adila, who was born in diaspora, describes this search for belonging: "It's weird because you want to say [home and belonging is found in] East Turkistan, but then you've never actually been there. You only really know about it because of stories. I write poetry about this." To her, poetry is a method of both storytelling of her own grappling with her Uyghur identity, as well as a way to bring awareness to the plight of her people. This difficulty of belonging shows the complexities inherent in both Uyghur identity and migrant realities in navigating trans-national realities.

Sites of Tension

One of the most common experiences that weaved within the stories of these women was the feelings of being misunderstood and misplaced. Negotiations of diaspora identities often embody tensions and difficult negotiations. Certain areas of conflict become amplified in diaspora. This is often because strategies of cultural identity negotiations become stratified. These sites of tensions manifested a variety of cultural attitudes in their process of navigating life in their new-home. Many women expressed how they often strive to maintain connections to their Uyghur heritage through relationships, music, food, or other forms of cultural aesthetics. Defining the relationship between their Uyghur identity and their citizenship identity presented additional sites of tension. Some expressed those tensions, others regarded it as a non-issue, and still others expressed vehement support and gratitude for the opportunity to establish a new life in their adopted home. The nuanced variety of reactions reflect the complexity of an experience in diaspora, and how a wide array of experience weaves together an intricate tapestry of stories.

Navigating "Otherness"

The degree of perceived "otherness" is also a factor in attitudes towards new-home integration versus homeland cultural maintenance. The ways in which Uyghurs in diaspora choose to navigate the tensions of "otherness" seems largely dependent on the existence of larger, tight-knit, Uyghur community, as well as the degree of "cultural difference" from the new-home culture. Those that had access to Uyghur communities expressed more stability in navigating the "otherness" of their Uyghur identity in the new-home culture, while those who did not have the same access felt more isolation, and thus used other means to remind themselves of what it means to them to be Uyghur.

It's important to point out the importance of having some form of identity reinforcement and positive mirroring. This sense of belonging to an identity, as well as having it publicly legitimized, creates strong feelings of security towards one's cultural identity. There is a feeling of excitement to those who do not experience "being seen" very often, as expressed by Patigul who described her response to a co-worker during an interview, "I almost hugged and kissed her because she was the first person in both of my workplaces who called me Uyghur before I had to explain." The women who live in areas with larger communities of Uyghurs were able to have their own Uyghurness reinforced and mirrored back to them by their communities. However, women in areas with less connection and smaller communities of Uyghur diaspora, such as within the Midwestern United States, often expressed more isolation and feelings of "otherness".

Both Adila and Seyyare attended a weekend Uyghur language school with their peers and explained how that positively affected their relationship to their Uyghur identity. They participate in Uyghur awareness efforts and political activism alongside other Uyghur youth. Being from a large city with diverse immigrant populations, their ethnic Uyghur identity was at less odds with their national Australian identity. Therefore, due to the rare opportunity to have their Uyghur identities mirrored back to them in a positive manner, they did not experience as strong a sense of isolation, or even masking, that other Uyghurs may face in diaspora. Reyhan, on the other hand, grew up in a small Midwestern town and did not have the support of an established Uyghur community, leading to feelings of isolation and confusion regarding her Uyghur identity growing up. As for Meriyem, who grew up in Turkey, the degree of perceived "otherness" was also low due to closer similarities in language, culture, and history between Uyghur and Turkish peoples. Uyghur history is taught in Turkish public schools, and there is a long-established Uyghur diaspora in many of the large cities. She explains that in Turkey, "Pople

see you as a sister-brother, not like a stranger." Therefore, even though most of her extended

family is still in the homeland, her immediate family still maintains connections within a small

Uyghur community with whom she communicates in Uyghur. Her Turkishness and Uyghurness

could co-exist with relative ease, and the degree of tension she felt vis-a-vis her Uyghurness was
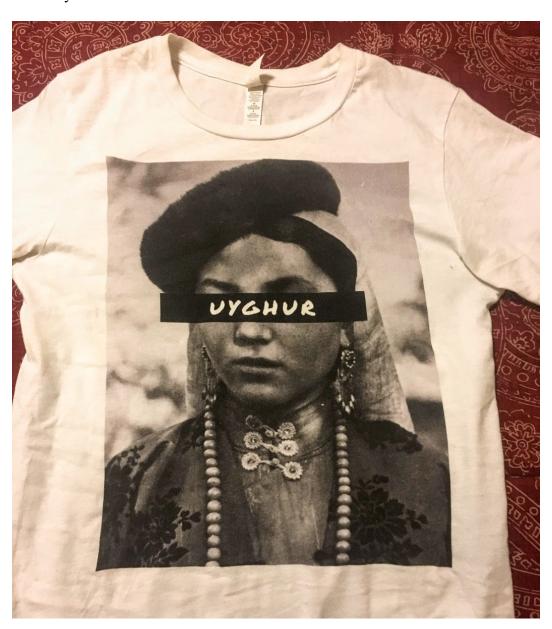
relatively low.

Image 18: One of Adila's Uyghur t-shirts

Community Tensions

Due the varying experiences that occur within diaspora, tensions can arise either between member of the diaspora community itself, or towards Uyghurs in the homeland. The Uyghur diaspora is relatively young, which means that a transnational Uyghur collective consciousness is still in its formative stages. Rena expresses how the Uyghur diaspora is still maturing, "I feel like Uyghurs have role confusion, we are still growing up. I feel like we are still teenagers right now." One of the primary sites of tension within the diaspora community was in response to religious attitudes. These fell along a spectrum of tension between being misrepresented as radical Islamic, and the desire to connect with religious and cultural heritage. While most women considered religion to be non-essential for Uyghur identity, others argued that more fully engaging with one's religious background is a method to reclaim a heritage that was censored from them in the homeland. In terms of sites of tensions towards homeland attitudes, women critiqued how many homeland Uyghurs put too much value on material possessions, status symbols, and "showing face." These types of comparative attitudes then become a relational barrier to maintaining friendships in the homeland.

Meriyem discussed her frustration with the portrayal of Uyghurs in public media being as a primarily Islamic, "If you google the Uyghurs or see a news article, it always says 'Uyghur Muslim, Uyghur Muslim.' You do not see 'Palestinian-Muslim.'" She claims that contextualizing the Uyghur issues as primarily centered around religious differences is not fully representative of the root of what is happening in the homeland, "because it's about more than just religion." Her perspective is that the over-emphasis of religion in regards to Uyghur issues is an intentional strategy used by the Chinese government, "because of the stigma it draws." Her

responses, in particular, voice a perspective of frustration that the over-conflation between Islam and Uyghur identity draws negative attention and feeds a narrative harmful to Uyghurs.

Women also explained that the resurgence of more orthodox Islamic religion has only occurred within the last couple decades, and that the majority of Uyghurs have historically bee nominal practitioners of Islam. Rena says, "When we grew up we were a secular nation," and that for Uyghur society, "religion and politics are separate." However, with the rise of global anti-Muslim sentiments, there has been a reactive resurgence towards more devout practice. Meriyem explains, "If someone oppresses you on an issue, then you are going to be more radical in that area." To her, religion is a "a personal choice" and even though is important, she "wouldn't put it as part of preserving Uyghur culture." She claims that one of the reasons that many Uyghurs "put religion as part of their identity" is because it is "something that differentiates them from the Chinese community." Mehrigul explains that within the last ten centuries of practicing Islam many aspects religion and culture have become intertwined, and "you can't divide it clearly." Even though she desires for young diaspora women to "not forget your nation's identity," she does not necessarily include religion as an imperative, "For religion some people may believe different religions, that's their choice and I don't care about that, but the common goal is to become a good person." To her, the core value is becoming a good person, which she attributes more the essence of being Uyghur than a particular religious practice.

Other women discussed how religion is as a key method in which to practice their ethnic traditions and to align within a larger Muslim, as well as Uyghur, community. Reconnecting with religious roots is a method to align with "traditional" Uyghur values, as well as resisting the long-standing Chinese censorship of Islam in the homeland. Adila explains that part of

improving a Uyghur community includes, "Religiously, we should follow proper Islam instead of just cultural Islam." The reason that many Uyghurs have a complex relationship towards Islam is because, "Islam wasn't taught well in our countries because there wasn't access." Seyyare explains that there is a multi-layered struggle of her experience as being both Uyghur and visibly Muslim, and that more often than not her identity as a Muslim is more of a site of struggle. She goes on to say that the "religious aspect" of Uyghur culture "sometimes gets misinterpreted," becoming a barrier to relational connections both in diaspora and in the homeland.

Even though there is a connection to people back in the homeland via their Uyghur identity, certain lifestyle choices and values have changed considerably during their time in diaspora. Diaspora creates space to view the communities back home in a different light, which results in some amount of critique about current or past value systems in the homeland. Many expressed criticism of Uyghur values that occurred back home in retrospect, such as the affinity towards materialistic goods, desire to accumulate wealth, or "showing face" without authenticity. Women strongly critiqued many people in the homeland for having a disproportionate value of status accumulation. Rena expressed how this has made it harder to relate to her old friends back home, saying that "they are just concentrated on money, clothes, gold, jewelry, car, nice home, that's what they talk about." This is because "China is more recently developed" which results in valuing wealth statuses, whereas in the U.S. "we've already grown out of it." Her statement illustrates the tension of having critical feelings about Uyghur home culture, though having a desire to maintain connection to the homeland. She desires connection to these people, but her differing values can be an obstacle to meaningful relationships.

However, there is space for Uyghurs in diaspora to formulate different values for themselves apart from the structures of their previous communities. Speaking about relatives

back home, Gulkiz talks about "showing face" through material acquisition. These attitudes are

shared by both men and women, "One thing they agree [men and women back home] is that

more expensive is more better in terms of home belongings. They want to show off." Women

also referenced the need to copy other women's purchases or home decorations. Jamila explains,

"One woman buys some nice clothing and other people like it, and before you know it every

woman copies it, whether it is good or bad or not." She critiqued valuing things based on their

expense over personal preference, "In their eyes, expensive is good. Even if it is good looking or

not, if they pay more money, that's considered better," This difference in values towards

showing face or not creates tension in these women as they continue to change apart from the

normative cultural influences they were raised in.

Gender and Womanhood

Women and mothers, particularly within a heteronormative family structure, often are in

the position to make food for their families, decorate the home, and take care their children. In

many places, it is also more societally acceptable for women to make expressive choices

concerning personal adornment, as well as aesthetic choices for the home. Many of the

respondents expressed a desire to continue maintaining their culture, either for themselves or by

passing along specific cultural elements to their children. These elements include language

education, cultural and moral values, and specific meaningful objects.

Some women are acutely aware that unless they actively engage with the cultural

education of their children, Uyghurness will be lost for both her family, and on a broader

symbolic scale, will be lost for all Uyghurs in the years to come. This cultural education and

maintenance work is innately gendered, both reflected within broader literature and within the

interviews. Many other world indigenous cultures have historically held women elders as the

keepers and teachers of cultural wisdom. These women often viewed themselves as responsible for passing on these elements and considered themselves as ultimately responsible for passing on these qualities to the next generation. However, other women argued that these are patriarchal expectations that disproportionally marginalizes women into domestic spaces.

Gender Roles

Some of the respondents described Uyghur women in terms of their personal style and aesthetic choices. Rena describes Uyghur women as, "We like to dress up beautifully," and that "We don't show anything, but we are still sexy, beautiful, and elegant. Just like our culture." Gulkiz notes the role of shame on this dynamic between "openness" and modesty, "It's modern, but not so open so as to avoid shame." Women also talked about the relationship between Uyghur women, domestic spaces, and beauty. Arzugul observes that "We love decorating our house as Uyghur women. Even if people have less money, they will save it buy these things. I think we love to live in that kind of beautiful surrounding." When asked why that is, she said "Because the women spend so much time making food in the home, they want to be surrounded by this kind of beauty I think." Therefore, a woman's attitude towards her cultural identity inextricably impacts the experience of the entire family.

Meriyem explains that one of the primary expectations that that occurs for Uyghur women is within their role in family structures, "Because of the patriarchal structure, once you become a mother, you have so many duties." She resists this expectation of mother-identity, saying, "I think that's why I didn't have a Uyghur boyfriend, because I hate that idea." She feels that this over-emphasis on gender-based expectations can be a barrier to her capacity to make choices for her future, "Even when you choose what you want to become, people always remind you that one day you will be a mother and there's more you need to think about." However, other

women, especially those who were older and first-generation migrants, supported gender-based "roles" within the family. Mehrigul noted that "Maybe our society is not as developed as the United States, we still believe there is a division of roles." She says that in the U.S. too many women "do everything individually" and "live in their own way," which she believes "is not good for a community." Even though conceptually she agrees that, "as women we should be independent," she still thinks, "men and women have a different function and everyone should operate to their function." Within these differing "functions," Mehrigul believes that a woman has a uniquely powerful impact in her family and community. According to her, "I feel women have more power to make the family a family." Because of the unique role of women within domestic spaces, "Women have more power to control and lead this family."

Many of the second-generation Uyghur women shared varying experiences of gender roles within their families growing up in diaspora. In Meriyem's family, "Both my parents were working. Whoever comes home that person cooks, it could be my mom or dad, and same with other chores." This behavior, however, contrasted with other families she was connected to. Seyyare observes how growing up her father was different from other men, "He cooked for us, planned trips, he was a part of our life growing up just as my mom. My mom definitely more, but compared to other men." As far as home aesthetics, "With decorations he plays a bigger role in than our mom, choosing the more traditional elements." She notes that part of this might have been due to how her parents adjusted when they came to Australia, "Overseas [homeland], Dad seemed to be the boss of everything, but in Australia, Mom is definitely the boss of everything. I know he struggled with this when we first came because my mom adjusted better." Adila notes that there were very few Uyghur role models for her growing up "other than my mom who was doing her studies and being an activist. So it was like people either like my mom, who were

activists, or they were housewives." Therefore, the gender-roles that may have more potency in the homeland are in a state of transformation in diaspora.

It is important to note that within these differing attitudes towards expectations for women and motherhood, both Meriyem and Mehrigul's perspectives can be interpreted in ways that are both negotiating their own agency. Meriyem's resistance is more explicit. She directly rejects gender-based cultural expectations and "struggles" based on her identity as a woman. Mehrigul, who is a proponent of gender roles, observes that sometimes women end up "leading" men who are more prone to be "selfish" and "mostly think about themselves," whereas women "mostly think about their family and kids, they don't think about themselves," making them more "powerful" in the family. To her, being a mother is "the most important role." Therefore, even within the realm of domestic space, Mehrigul emphasizes the ways in which Uyghur women show resilience, power, and sacrificial love towards their families, which ultimately will have a more tangible impact on the future development of the Uyghur diaspora. The home is a place where women exhibit their inherent power and leadership in shaping future generations, and thus the future of Uyghur society at large. Mehrigul encapsulates this sentiment through the translation of a Uyghur proverb about mothers, "In one hand you are moving the cradle, in the other hand, the entire world."

Negotiating Equity

Many women discussed how there are implicit expectations for women, both within diasporic settings and within Uyghur communities. In reflecting over her childhood in growing up in the U.S. Midwest, Reyhan notes that, "It's been a huge challenge assimilating into American culture with different standards for women and then being raised as a Muslim girl." She says that "regardless of culture," men have more freedom to "be whatever." Women, on the

other hand, are under more "social pressure to be a certain way." Within the Uyghur context, there can be a cultural expectation for women to engage in specific behaviors, such as "in the kitchen or serving." She says that, "There's still that divide of behavioral differences. It would not be appropriate to object, even if this is America."

Meriyem notes that because many places are "men dominated societies, and women are not free, just an oppressed group." Within a Uyghur-specific context, "I feel like within this group, women are double oppressed, on top of the Chinese oppression, this patriarchal system." This creates unfair expectations for women, who "Within all this, women have to be silent, and can't take initiative and can't fail things you try." However, she notes a difference when talking to women in other diasporic contexts, "Uyghur women in other western, more democratic societies don't feel like this," as compared to her new-home in Turkey. She's observed that when she has tried to bring up issues about gender equity in the past, "Some people will say, 'Oh it's because you are a woman so that's why you think this is wrong.' As soon as you care about an issue, a specific group issue, people think you don't care about humanity in general." However, she believes that taking differences into account is important because, "I think the experience is totally different and unfortunately men do not understand this." To Meriyem, taking into account women's voices is vital aspect of moving towards a more equitable Uyghur society and is one of the most tangible ways in which patriarchal systems can be resisted.

As a part of the Uyghur activist community, Adila has witnessed a growing representation of Uyghur women's voices, "As young Uyghur women we have more say now because people are giving more voice to us. So as Uyghur women we can get more support from media." Despite the increasing platform for women, she critiques how for many societies,

"Women somehow end up being the representative in each form of the country." This then puts Uyghur women's bodies under public scrutiny. She gives an example:

> *"My cousin is a hijabi and was a supporter of protests and giving speeches, and everyone was like, 'That's amazing!' But every now and then we get one person who says, 'She's doing such good for our country, but she should be wearing a skirt!' … Then it's the question of how Uyghur women should be presented? Should they be nice Islamically dressed modest girls? Or should it be hair in the braids and a doppa? How do we present the image of Uyghur women? It's embarrassing. We should be able to do whatever we want to."*

Adila's narrative shows the ways that women's bodies are disproportionately put as visual representatives of cultural values, including degrees of religious piety, traditionalism, and hybridity. Throughout history, the feminizing of non-Western societies has put women's bodies as objectified symbols of a larger group (Bauer, 2005; Blier, 1996; Kasfir, 1992). Therefore, how women dress and/or look becomes a reflection of society at large, and any deviance from prescribed cultural ideals is a justification of criticism and judgement.

However, Meriyem argues that there was a time in Uyghur history were there was gender equity. In terms of Uyghur symbols and objects, for Meriyem, "the most important thing for me is the yellow Uyghur state flag." She explains that, "During 1785-1850 the Uyghur flag has a man and woman standing together. It symbolizes equality." This imagery represented how "the state was run by both" because "people back then were nomadic, so equality was required to be able to move around more." The reason why she treasures this imagery of flag is because, "I want to believe in that Uyghur culture, that's where we come from. For me that's the gender role that Uyghur culture should present." This is the representation of Uyghur culture that she wants

to pass on, "That's the culture that I want to show my children." Meriyem expressed that even though "being a Uyghur woman is not easy," there are still "many strong Uyghur women figures in history" to look up to and find solidarity with. To her, these examples show the inherent strength of Uyghur women, which can be accessed to across time and space. She emphasizes the importance of maintaining a global sisterhood, "First, always be aware that you are a woman, then don't forget that you are a Uyghur woman. The focus on the women part first is going to be the struggle all around the world." Only through the support of each other voices and stories can there be true reconciliation.

Defining Uyghurness

When asked what Uyghur identity meant to them, interviewees often named attitudes and feelings about history, language, community, hospitality, and other intangibles were important aspects of a Uyghur identity. Several women noted that it was important to understand the history and lineage of the Uyghur people as a way of accessing one's Uyghur identity. The historical and cultural context of the Uyghurs is closely connected with other Central Asian people groups. Rena echoed this transnational aspect of Uyghur identity when describing the meaning of the word Uyghur, "Uyghur actually means 'union.' We were the union of a lot of people." Mehrigul notes that, "Uyghur is a nation with their own language, culture, and religious beliefs, and who belongs to Turkic people groups." Due to complex issues of border politics around the 1900s, Mehrigul says that outside powers artificially divided differing Turkic tribes, "saying that 'You are different peoples, not siblings,'" eventually giving "political borders to the area." However, she notes that there are "many other perspectives" to how this occurred. For a long time, people mostly identified by their local township and "didn't have a larger identity" and just "lived on the land." However, "later the borders changed, and the identity was given by

the outside." However, others believe that historical understanding has its limitations in understanding Uyghur identity. Reyhan acknowledges that "being Uyghur is complicated," which means that, "I just try now to focus on what I can connect to the current culture with and not focus so much on what I know or do not know about our actual history." This is partially due to the contending perspectives on Uyghur history, as well as the fact that cultures are in a constant state of transformation and thus engaging with present issues can ultimately be more impactful.

Other women referred to more intangible qualities of cultural attitudes and behavior were also important in understanding their own Uyghurness. Language, as a uniquely Uyghur-specific quality, was given specific importance by many. One of Gulkiz's description of Uyghur identity included, "Of course, you need to know the Uyghur language." The specific dynamics concerning language are given more specific attention earlier in this chapter. Women also discussed cultural values as an essential component of being Uyghur. Jamila notes that, "Uyghur culture is a people culture," thus emphasizing Uyghur values of hospitality and respect. Seyyare says that it is important to "be compassionate because I think that's what being Uyghur is about." To them, the Uyghur "way of living" as hospitable, compassionate, and kind where at the core of Uyghur life and values.

There was also an abstract quality when describing Uyghur identity. Because of its complexity, Gulkiz says that "each person has a different view of [Uyghur identity]." For her specifically, "Uyghur identity is you know you are Uyghur because you are born to Uyghur family, you grown up on Uyghur culture, Uyghur blood in your body." Others also echo the idea that one simply "knows" one's Uyghurness, that it is a deep internal experience that is difficult to specifically articulate. Aliye describes this feeling, "It's a part of you and you are used to it. You

can't really describe what's unique about it because when it all comes together, the quality of all of it, it's more subconscious." As said by Reyhan "Identity is about feeling Uyghur, then you are Uyghur." She outlined how there is personal agency in how one expresses one's Uyghur identity and that it is more than a genetic fact, "Having Uyghur blood could be it, but really it's up to the individual." Uyghur identity is an internal reality that comes from family, heritage, lived experience, but also choices as an adult.

The most consistent response from all the women was a sense of pride towards their Uyghurness. Seyyare says this most explicitly, "For me a Uyghur person is someone who is proud to be Uyghur." This was further expounded upon by Rena, "I remember my mother used to always say, "Uyghur people are like this: if you put it on your palm, you are so afraid you are going to drop it. You have to cherish it, it is so delicate." To her, Uyghur identity is something to be treasured, protected, and nurtured. She goes on to say, "You love this thing so much, you are afraid to drop it, if you do it will disappear." In a context of diaspora, this feelings of needing to "cherish" one's culture can be heighted, leading to a variety of methods in an attempt to maintain and preserve it. These objects, behaviors, and attitudes are continually adapted to keep this sense of "being Uyghur" alive.

Image 19: An old pair of earrings from Jamila's mother

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

Space for Difference

I believe it is important within any discussion over a study of personal narratives to allow space for ambiguity. It can be tempting within academic research, particularly within cultural studies, to simplify or flatten the nuances of individual differences for the sake of categorical understanding. It is vital within any form of identity research to account for differences as well as similarities since identities are in a constant state of intimate transformation. The Uyghur diaspora has been established relatively recently, which means that identity expressions and negotiations are still in the developmental processes of change and formation. This ambiguity of identity is evident within the context of these Uyghur women whose stories expressed wide spectrum of differences, often revealing both internal and external conflicts. The perceived tensions between the past and present, homeland and new-home, tradition and modernity, are in reality a manifestation of the authentic diversity within the cultural group.

Cultural research should not be an archival uncovering of a linear "truth", but an intersection of similarities, contradictions, and hybrid entities in a "particular time and geographical location" (James, 2007). Acknowledging complexity breaks down any connection between cause and effect, embraces ambiguity, and breaks down attachment to certainty. Instead of providing the answers, this perspective "gestures to (multiple) beginnings" (James, 2007). Therefore, the intentions of this project were not seeking to find a linear "truth" of a Uyghur diasporic experience, but instead to unpack the multiplicity of perspectives through which the complexity of the human is experienced as a Uyghur woman in diaspora. It follows from this that through the process of uncovering the nuanced differences in individual experience, we not only

gather a more rounded perspective of the current landscape of Uyghur diaspora, but also clues as to its possible futures.

Identifying a Cultural Aesthetic

Cultural aesthetics are rooted in the homeland, and then are globally transported and transformed through the members of the diaspora community. Within a Uyghur specific context, there is a tight control of the production, consumption, and engagement with Uyghur cultural aesthetics within the Uyghur homeland, which then complexifies their presence in diaspora. Many aspects of Uyghur cultural aesthetic practices have either been censored or state-controlled, such as in the cases of textile production, music folklore performances, language education, and religious practice. Because of the perceived scarcity of cultural aesthetics within the homeland, the impact and importance of these cultural aesthetics is heightened in diaspora. In other words, the less accessible a certain aesthetic element and associated producers and consumers are, the higher the potential emotional or "mythical" value it carries. If certain objects, foods, or rituals are scarce within the homeland, it increases the difficulty of these elements to be exported transnationally across borders. The Uyghur diaspora then has to engage with comparatively stronger effort to even attempt to recreate a cultural aesthetic environment in their new home.

Within the specifics of this research study, homeland realities affected their feelings of belongingness, and otherness. There is more a cognizant conceptualization of what Uyghurness *isn't* as supposed to what *is*. There were many examples of women discussing elements of Chinese or Turkish culture that were not "purely" Uyghur, but when asked to describe "pure" Uyghurness, they found some difficulty articulating what that meant to them. If we are to take away the contrasting mirror of what we are *not*, then what words are left to describe who we

really are? This becomes especially problematic in Western diaspora where the contrasting images of the Han Chinese and the institutional misportrayal of the radicalizing Muslim Uyghurs is more diluted within the broader host culture societies. Therefore, looking more directly at these sites of tensions reveals a variety of attitudes concerning their cultural experience. These different attitudes have contributed to tensions within the Uyghur diaspora community, with one group suspicious of the other for being too westernized, and the other for being too Islamic. Many of the interviewees reflected on conflicted feelings of longing to connect to other Uyghurs, but also an element of distrust to others who may not share the same views.

It is important to note that these negotiation processes also vary based on awareness and consciousness. Individuals may or may not be consciously aware of the implications of their choices towards cultural behaviors. However, personal consciousness or self-awareness is not a prerequisite for agency. Even if an individual is making choices that are subconsciously informed by social attitudes, such as a secular Islamic upbringing or a coming from a patriarchal home, the process of asserting choice, power, and de-victimization is not a linear process that can be quantified by a universal truth. The relativism of the varied consciousness of agency is in distinguished from the overriding presence of systemic oppressions, which influence how people perceive other and their own internal selves. However, resistance to these oppressive systems are varied, including both the subtle and the obtuse, and it is important to allow space for a variety of expressions.

The Complexities of Home and Belonging

Because the primary source of data of this project was procured through the process of personal narration and storytelling, the nuances of memory are very relevant to the implications of this work. Throughout this paper, interviews revealed how certain aesthetics often interact

with the individual's negotiation of memory, nostalgia, and the mythic past. This type of cultural aesthetic research work necessitates participant's engagement with their memory, along with the subconscious emotional processes that accompany it. Once separated from once place of origin, the homeland primarily continues to live within the context of memory as imbedded in specific cultural aesthetic elements, such as music, jewelry, or values. Home, people, place, and the landscape that comprise it, continue to live on in the memory, and belongings, of those who have left. However, memory is not a verbatim fact, it is a subjective imprint based on the unique perspective of the individual, and the elements that have impacted her life. Therefore, accessing such memories necessitates an engagement with their underlying attitudes, beliefs, and the factors that influence how they are remembered.

The concept of mythical memory within the Uyghur context is especially heightened given the dynamics of aesthetics engagement both in diaspora and within the homeland. Faced with physical, and often psychological, distance from the homeland, many diaspora groups utilize cultural maintenance practices in order to active remember and remain a sense of connection with the homeland. This may be of special importance to marginalized people groups whose cultures may be under political pressures within their homeland. The experience of marginalization can contribute to perceptions of "cultural scarcity" where continuation of cultural practices, language, and aesthetics can be seen as endangered. Therefore, this dynamic leads to an increase pressure and sense of responsibility for the groups in diaspora to maintain their cultural practices, both for themselves and for the next generations. Otherwise, the fear of loss is imminent.

The innate tensions imbedded within Uyghur identity can influence how memories are made and how identity is constructed. As stated, Uyghurs often experience a complexity of

emotions when reflecting upon their "Uyghurness," contributing to a form of communal identity

crisis. Over time, these sites of "crisis" are selectively brought in and out of consciousness which

can result in seemingly contradictory behaviors and attitudes. Individuals sometimes choose to

overly attach to their new-home identities as a means to comfort, or even avoid, the pain or

complexity associated with their Uyghurness. In some ways they have substituted the tragic loss

of homeland belonging with the longing for new-home acceptance. Others can remain in a

"nostalgic past," where they are perpetually attempting to re-create or connect to a "feeling" of

an unadulterated, pre-diasporic identity that no longer exists. Both of these modes of coping are

forms of retroactive censoring, a psychological phenomenon related to coping with trauma

and/or emotional pain. Agnew specifically discusses how second and third generation Sansei, the

Japanese survivors of the U.S. internment camps, still struggled with internalize pain and trauma

of an erased identity (2005). This could be mistaken with feelings of shame about one's identity,

which could have manifested itself as avoidance of self-identifying as Japanese, or as overly

compensating for what they experienced. However, when the instigator of shame is a result

collective identity trauma and abuses of power, then often the underlying emotion behind shame

is fear (Van der Kolk, 2014). Shame is often experienced as a secondary emotion, therefore,

underneath that initial response can lie primary emotions such as fear, anger, or grief (Taylor,

2015).

However, even within the context of these difficult realities, the narratives of these

women show the resilience in maintaining power and agency over their life situations. Despite

the pain, these women have found ways to cope and nurture themselves through engaging in a

wide spectrum of behaviors and aesthetic practices. They incorporate these elements into their

own lives, while also sharing with their families and communities. No matter the spectrum of

home attachments of identity negotiations, these women will always be connected to their Uyghurness. As expressed by Gulkiz, "My Uyghur root can never be erased from my identity, no matter where I go, where I live, I hold onto that root." These are the sentiments that build into a collective Uyghur cultural consciousness.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Globalization, in all of its complexities and failures, has become an imbedded reality into the social fabric of our world, transforming communities, cultures, and political realities. The primary concern is not necessarily to resist, but how do we work within the realities of globalization and alchemize it in a way that offers deeper meaning and opportunity for social transformation for the greater common good. The power of borders has greatly decreased, technology means that people and ideas are able to move across cultural and geo-political spaces with greater ease that ever before in history. How can we engage with these ideas in a way that offers transformation and embodied practice? How can we derive meaning from the intangible, while allocated space for nuance?

Clearly, there is more work to be done in terms of Uyghur identity research. As the political systems and global realities continue to shift and change, so will the Uyghur diaspora adapt. As seen within this study, having a supportive "mirroring" entity can positively contribute to the cultural maintenance of a diaspora, which includes having a library of quality academic literature on your people. Each sub-component of this project is deserving of an entire book on its own, and it is my hope that this research could contribute and inspire further study on Uyghur women, identity, and aesthetics.

My goal, first and foremost, is to have provided space for the voices and stories of these women, so that they can self-represent themselves with agency. These stories have largely remained underground, powerfully impacting communities but without larger scholarly representation. In a logistical sense, however, as the researcher any analysis and discussion is done through my own lens of interpretation. This is done through the use of intuition, and also utilizing my positionality as insider/outsider in a meaningful way. Ultimately, I am not speaking

"on behalf" of these women, it is my intention to provide an avenue for voice and story-telling. As seen within this research, the stories of these women are vibrant and complex, full of nuance, negotiations, and even contradictions. These are stories that are imbedded with power, carrying the values of resilience, strength, and long-suffering that have the transformative power to carve out spaces of home and belonging, for both their own families and communities as well as society at large. These stories offer lessons, insights, and meaning into the vibrancy of the human condition and the resilient pursuit of seeking to make one's community a better place.

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