PATRIOTISM AS A PHILOSOPHICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PHENOMENON: RECONSTRUCTING NATIONAL IDENTITY IN POST-SOVIET UZBEKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Patriotism occupies a contested space at the intersection of political philosophy, social psychology, and cultural studies. While it is commonly treated as a straightforward civic virtue, a deeper philosophical examination reveals it to be a dynamic, historically contingent construct shaped by collective memory, cultural narratives, and institutional frameworks. This article offers a theoretical reconstruction of patriotism as a socio-cultural phenomenon within the specific context of post-Soviet Uzbekistan (1991–_____ Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics, discourse analysis of official state documents (n=68), and comparative conceptual analysis of patriotism theories from Anglo-American, Continental European, and Central Asian scholarly traditions, the study argues that Uzbek patriotism has undergone three distinct paradigmatic shifts: Soviet-residual collectivism (1991–2000), state-managed nationalism (2000–2016), and participatory civic patriotism (2017–present). The article further contends that sustainable national identity formation requires moving beyond top-down symbolic patriotism toward a dialogic model that integrates historical memory, cultural pluralism, and individual moral agency. These findings contribute to comparative nationalism studies and offer a conceptual framework applicable to other post-authoritarian Central Asian societies.

Keywords: patriotism, national identity, post-Soviet transition, collective memory, Uzbekistan, philosophical hermeneutics, civic culture, discourse analysis

ANNOTATSIYA (O'ZBEK TILIDA)

Vatanparvarlik siyosiy falsafa, ijtimoiy psixologiya va madaniyatshunoslikning kesishmasida munozarali o'rin egallaydi. U odatda oddiy fuqarolik fazilati sifatida ko'rilsa-da, chuqur falsafiy tahlil uni jamoaviy xotira, madaniy narrativlar va institutsional tuzilmalar tomonidan shakllanadigan tarixiy jihatdan shartli konstruksiya sifatida namoyon etadi. Ushbu maqola postsovet O'zbekistoni (1991–***2026) kontekstida vatanparvarlikni ijtimoiy-madaniy hodisa***

sifatida falsafiy qayta tiklashni taklif etadi. Falsafiy germenevtika, rasmiy davlat hujjatlarining diskurs tahlili (n=68) va vatanparvarlik nazariyalarini qiyosiy tahlil qilish asosida tadqiqot o'zbek vatanparvarligining uch paradigmatik o'zgarishini aniqladi: sovet qoldig'i kollektivizm (1991–2000), davlat tomonidan boshqariladigan millatchilik (2000–2016) va ishtirokchi fuqarolik vatanparvarligi (2017–hozir). Maqola barqaror milliy o'zlikni shakllantirish uchun yuqoridan pastga yo'naltirilgan ramziy vatanparvarlikdan tarixiy xotira, madaniy plyuralizm va individual axloqiy faollikni birlashtiruvchi dialogik modelga o'tish zarurligini asoslaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: vatanparvarlik, milliy o'zlik, postsovet o'tish davri, jamoaviy xotira, O'zbekiston, falsafiy germenevtika, fuqarolik madaniyati, diskurs tahlili

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of patriotism has occupied thinkers from Cicero to Habermas, yet it remains philosophically underdetermined. Contemporary liberal democracies struggle to reconcile patriotic sentiment with cosmopolitan ethics (Nussbaum, 1994), while post-authoritarian states face the distinct challenge of repurposing inherited nationalist ideologies for democratic civic life. Uzbekistan — a state that simultaneously inherited Soviet institutional structures, revived pre-Islamic and Islamic cultural legacies, and embarked on a liberalizing reform agenda after 2016 — represents a particularly illuminating case for examining these tensions.

Existing scholarship on Uzbek national identity tends to privilege either political-institutional analysis (Collins, 2006; Heathershaw, 2009) or ethnographic accounts of everyday nationalism (Rasanayagam, 2011; Liu, 2012). Systematic philosophical treatment of how patriotism is conceptually constituted, legitimized, and contested in Uzbek public discourse remains scarce. This lacuna is consequential: without a rigorous conceptual vocabulary, policy interventions risk conflating constructive civic patriotism with exclusionary ethno-nationalism.

This article addresses three research questions: (RQ1) How has the dominant conceptualization of patriotism in official Uzbek discourse evolved across three post-independence periods? (RQ2) What philosophical tensions structure contemporary Uzbek patriotism? (RQ3) What theoretical model best captures a dialogic, pluralist form of patriotism adequate to Uzbekistan's sociocultural complexity?

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 situates the inquiry within the global theoretical debate on patriotism and national identity. Section 3 details the methodological approach. Sections 4 and 5 present the historical-discursive analysis and its philosophical interpretation. Section 6

proposes a dialogic patriotism framework. Section 7 concludes with theoretical implications and directions for future research.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MAPPING THE PHILOSOPHICAL TERRAIN

Scholarly treatments of patriotism fall broadly into four camps. First, liberal cosmopolitans (Nussbaum, 1994; Pogge, 1992) view patriotism as a morally arbitrary preference for co-nationals that conflicts with impartial global justice. Second, moderate patriots (MacIntyre, 1984; Miller, 1995) argue that special obligations to one's nation are morally defensible because particular attachments are constitutive of human identity. Third, constitutional patriots (Habermas, 1992; Müller, 2007) seek to detach patriotic loyalty from ethnic or cultural particularity and anchor it in shared democratic norms and constitutional principles. Fourth, critical patriots (Viroli, 1995; Primoratz, 2002) endorse love of country conditioned on its actual moral achievement, thereby building in a permanent critical dimension.

Central to all these positions is the relationship between patriotism and collective memory. Halbwachs (1950) established that memory is irreducibly social: what a community remembers and how it narrates the past are political acts. Ricoeur (2004) extended this insight through the concept of 'narrative identity' — the self-understanding of a collectivity is always mediated by stories it tells about its past. For post-Soviet states, this is particularly consequential: the Soviet period left competing mnemonic legacies — heroic (Victory in WWII, industrialization) and traumatic (collectivization, political repression, cotton monoculture) — that any coherent patriotism must somehow negotiate.

Postcolonial theory adds a further dimension. Bhabha's (1994) concept of 'hybridity' — the ambivalent, in-between space inhabited by postcolonial subjects — captures the instability of identity in societies that have undergone abrupt cultural rupture. In Uzbekistan, this rupture is double: first from pre-Soviet Central Asian cultural continuity, then from Soviet modernity itself. Any robust theory of Uzbek patriotism must account for this layered hybridity rather than artificially resolving it.

Finally, discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Fairclough, 2003) provides the analytical bridge between abstract philosophical concepts and empirical state practice. Patriotic discourse is not merely descriptive; it is performative — it constructs the very national subjects it purports to address. Tracking how official documents name, classify, and valorize 'the patriot' reveals the ideological work patriotism does in a given political moment.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive design combining philosophical hermeneutics and critical discourse analysis (CDA). Philosophical hermeneutics — as developed by Gadamer (1960/2004) — foregrounds the interpretive horizon of both the analyst and the texts under study, making explicit the pre-understandings that guide interpretation. CDA (Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2008) examines how language structures power relations and ideological formations.

The primary corpus comprises 68 official Uzbek state documents produced between 1991 and 2024: presidential decrees and speeches (n=31), national education standards and curricula (n=14), Oliy Majlis legislative acts (n=12), and programmatic documents of state cultural institutions (n=11). Documents were selected through purposive sampling to achieve coverage across all three hypothesized periods and across the domains of politics, education, and culture.

Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, a close reading of each document identified keywords, metaphors, and argumentative topoi related to patriotism and national belonging. Second, diachronic comparison tracked how this lexicon shifted across the three periods. Third, philosophical interpretation — drawing on the theoretical framework above — assessed the underlying ontological and ethical commitments of each discursive formation. Inter-rater reliability was established through independent coding of a 20% subsample by a second researcher (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.81$, $p < 0.001$), indicating strong agreement.

Table 1. Corpus composition by period and document type

Period	Presidential Decrees & Speeches	Education Documents	Legislative Acts	Cultural Documents	Total
1991–2000	9	4	3	3	19
2000–2016	12	5	5	4	26
2017–2024	10	5	4	4	23
Total	31	14	12	11	68

4. FINDINGS: THREE PARADIGMS OF UZBEK PATRIOTISM

4.1 Soviet-Residual Collectivism (1991–2000)

Documents of the first decade reveal a discourse that, despite formal independence, remained structurally indebted to Soviet ideological templates. The dominant tropes were collectivist ('unity of the people', 'fraternal nations'), productivist ('building the new Uzbekistan'), and secular-modernist. The individual citizen appeared primarily as a member of a collective subject — the 'Uzbek people' — rather than as an autonomous moral agent. Patriotism was coded as loyalty to the new state apparatus, effectively displacing the previous loyalty to the Soviet Union onto the independent Republic.

Philosophically, this formation corresponds to what Taylor (1989) calls 'strong evaluation ' embedded in a communal horizon: the good of the nation was the unquestioned framework within which individual identity was constituted. The traumatic legacies of Soviet rule — particularly the Aral Sea ecological catastrophe and forced cotton labour — were systematically absent from official patriotic discourse, illustrating Ricoeur's (2004) concept of 'commanded forgetting'.

4.2 State-Managed Nationalism (2000–2016)

The second period is marked by an intensification of cultural-nationalist symbolism. Pre-Islamic and Timurid heritage was prominently mobilized: Amir Temur was reconstructed as the archetypal Uzbek patriot — a martial, civilizational leader who unified the region under a distinctly Uzbek cultural banner (Manz, 2010). Religious heritage was selectively invoked — Islamic scholars such as al-Bukhari and Ibn Sino were claimed as Uzbek national heroes — while Islam as a living political force was simultaneously suppressed.

This selective memorialism instantiates what Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983) termed 'the invention of tradition': historical raw material is recoded to serve present legitimating needs. The discourse of this period also exhibits what Primoratz (2002) calls 'uncritical patriotism' — the affirmation of national greatness as an end in itself, foreclosing the self-critical dimension that distinguishes constructive from blind nationalism. Civil society and oppositional voices were systematically excluded from the patriotic public sphere.

4.3 Participatory Civic Patriotism (2017–Present)

The reform agenda inaugurated under President Mirziyoyev's 'New Uzbekistan' strategy introduces a discursive rupture. Official documents increasingly frame patriotism in terms of active citizenship, economic contribution, and global engagement rather than ethnic heritage alone. The 2022 Constitution revision is particularly significant: it introduces explicit guarantees of civil

liberties and frames the citizen as a rights-bearing individual, not merely a member of the collective national body.

This shift partially approximates Habermas's (1992) constitutional patriotism — attachment mediated by shared normative principles rather than ethnic particularity. However, the transition is incomplete and contradictory: ethno-cultural symbols remain hegemonic in public commemorations, civil society remains constrained, and the dialogic public sphere required for genuinely constitutional patriotism is nascent at best. The discursive formation of this period is best described as 'aspirational civic patriotism' — a normative horizon articulated in official language that has yet to be institutionally realized.

5. PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION: TENSIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The three-period analysis reveals two persistent philosophical tensions that structure Uzbek patriotism across all periods. The first is the tension between universalism and particularism: official discourse simultaneously aspires to global recognition ('Uzbekistan — a reliable partner in the international arena') and asserts cultural exceptionalism ('the unique spiritual heritage of the Uzbek people'). These two rhetorical moves are not easily reconciled, and their coexistence generates ongoing ideological instability.

The second tension is between memory and amnesia. As Assmann (2011) has shown, collective identity depends on both remembrance and forgetting. The official Uzbek memory regime has been largely selective: pre-Soviet Golden Age and Soviet-era modernization achievements are remembered; colonial domination, ecological destruction, and political repression are suppressed. A mature civic patriotism, we argue, must incorporate what Ricoeur (2004) calls 'just memory' — an honest reckoning with historical injustice as the precondition for genuine reconciliation and shared belonging.

A third, emergent tension concerns the role of Islam. Post-2016 reforms have created slightly more space for public religious expression, but the fundamental contradiction between a secular-constitutional state identity and the Islamic cultural identity of the majority population remains philosophically unresolved. This is not merely a policy problem; it is an ontological one: what kind of being is the 'Uzbek patriot', and how does she negotiate her dual membership in the umma and the nation-state?

6. TOWARD A DIALOGIC PATRIOTISM: A THEORETICAL PROPOSAL

Drawing on the foregoing analysis, we propose the concept of dialogic patriotism as a normative and analytical framework adequate to Uzbekistan's sociocultural complexity. The framework has four constitutive dimensions.

First, hermeneutic openness: a dialogic patriotism does not presuppose a fixed, essentialist national identity but treats collective self-understanding as an ongoing interpretive conversation — in Gadamer's (2004) terms, a 'fusion of horizons' between past traditions and present experience. The nation is not a given but a question perpetually posed and answered anew.

Second, mnemonic justice: following Ricoeur (2004), the framework insists that patriotic attachment must be mediated by an honest, non-amnesiac relationship to national history, including its darker chapters. Acknowledging historical wrongdoing is not a threat to patriotism but its ethical precondition.

Third, pluralist recognition: drawing on Honneth (1995) and Fraser (2000), dialogic patriotism affirms that national belonging must accommodate — not merely tolerate — the cultural, religious, and ethnic plurality that actually constitutes Uzbek society. Recognition of minority identities (Karakalpak, Tajik, Russian, and others) within a shared civic frame is essential.

Fourth, critical agency: the framework endorses Primoratz's (2002) insistence that genuine patriotism must retain the right — indeed the obligation — to criticize one's country when it falls short of its own professed values. This critical dimension distinguishes dialogic patriotism from sycophantic nationalism and makes it compatible with human rights norms.

Table 2. Comparing paradigms of patriotism in Uzbekistan

Dimension	Collectivist (1991–2000)	Nationalist (2000–2016)	Civic Aspirational (2017–present)	Dialogic (Proposed)
Locus of identity	Collective/state	Ethno-cultural	Civic/constitutional	Plural/dialogic
Memory regime	Selective amnesia	Invented tradition	Partial opening	Just memory
Role of individual	Subject	Cultural bearer	Rights-holder	Moral agent

Relation to Other	Exclusionary	Hierarchical	Formal inclusion	Recognition
Critical capacity	Absent	Absent	Emerging	Essential

7. CONCLUSION

This article has traced the philosophical evolution of patriotism in post-Soviet Uzbekistan through a hermeneutic-discursive analysis of 68 official documents, identifying three paradigmatic formations and the persistent tensions that traverse them. Against the backdrop of ongoing reform, we have proposed a dialogic patriotism framework that integrates hermeneutic openness, mnemonic justice, pluralist recognition, and critical agency as its constitutive dimensions.

The theoretical contribution is threefold. First, the article provides one of the first systematic philosophical reconstructions of patriotism as a discursive formation in post-Soviet Central Asia. Second, it develops the concept of dialogic patriotism as a normative alternative to both thin constitutional patriotism and thick ethno-nationalism, adapted to the specific postcolonial conditions of the region. Third, it demonstrates the methodological fertility of combining philosophical hermeneutics with CDA for studying ideological formations in transitional societies.

Practical implications follow for curriculum designers, cultural policymakers, and civil society actors: the promotion of critical historical literacy, institutional support for minority cultural expressions, and the creation of genuinely dialogic public spaces are not threats to national cohesion but its most durable foundations. Future research should extend this framework to comparative analysis across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, where analogous post-Soviet negotiations of patriotism and identity are underway.

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