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Oral History Interview with Aliakbar and Damirzhan Azimov

Muslims in Brooklyn oral histories, 2018.006.34

Interview conducted by Svetlana Kitto on September 10, 2018

at Lagman House in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn

KITTO: It's September 10th, 2018. This is Svetlana Kitto with Aliakbar and Damirzhan Azimov at Lagman House in Sheepshead Bay. And this is our first interview for the Brooklyn Historical Society's Muslims in Brooklyn Public History Project. And we're going to begin. So it's going to be me sort of toggling between the two of you, asking questions. But I thought we would start with your dad. So my first question is, if you could just -- if he could just tell me where and when he was born and a little bit about his early life -- where he grew up, what it was like, who his parents were, where they came from.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: So I'm translating directly, right? He said, "My name is Damirzhan Azimov." He was born in 1974 [date redacted for privacy]. He was born in the city of Jambyl, which is now called Taraz. And the city is located in the Kazakhstan -- Kazakhstan former USSR. [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: His mother's name is [inaudible] and his father's name is [inaudible] Azimov. They both were born in the same city where he was born, which is Jambyl in the former USSR. And till this day, they still live there. And what was the -- another question? Are you asking all the questions?

KITTO: Yeah. Thank you. That's good. Could you maybe ask him where his grandparents came from?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Okay. They were born in China, actually.

KITTO: Oh, they were? Okay.

A. AZIMOV: Yes. They were born in China and they emigrated from China to Kazakhstan.

And -- like the -- not Kazakhstan, but like a former Soviet Union.

KITTO: Yeah, before it was Kazakhstan.

A. AZIMOV: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: Right. So when it was just all the Soviet Union. Does he know the story of how they got from China to --

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yes. The -- in late 1800s, there was a slaughter -- like a manslaughter and they just -- like any of other Chinese -- like the Dungans, they also fled China from, like -- from being prosecuted. But it was, like, before -- basically around, like, the late 1800s. Like, probably, like, 1890s, maybe. Around that time.

KITTO: Did his grandparent -- did he know his grandparents? Do you know if he knew his grandparents?

D. AZIMOV: Yeah. [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian] He --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: He never saw --

KITTO: No?

A. AZIMOV: -- saw his grandpa. Like, but -- but the grandma is still alive [speaks Russian].

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yes, yes, actually. I'm sorry. They -- yeah, they know --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Oh, yeah, yeah. I think he -- there's a misconception. When you said the grandparents -- when you told me "grandparents," I said "great-grandparents," because they're, like, my great-grandparents.

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: So he told me --

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: -- the story of his great-grandparents. [speaks Russian] I'm sorry. So, the -- let me ask the question again. [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: But his grandparents are born in the same city as he was born. Basically, he was born there, his parents was born there, and his grandparents was born there.

KITTO: I see.

A. AZIMOV: In Kazakhstan. And -- but the grandparent -- his grandparents --

KITTO: His grandparents?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. Yes, his grandparents were also born in the same city -- same city, Jambyl. Yes. But the story I was -- I was talking about is -- was about basically great-grandpa -- his great-grandparents. But now, his grandma is still alive. And she's -- [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: She is 92. And the -- his grandpa had passed away, like, long time ago. Yeah.

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, the grandpa passed away 1980s.

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Hold on. Eighties then '90 -- yeah. Eighties.

KITTO: Okay. Did his -- do you know, even before you ask him, if his -- if there were any stories told in the family about what it was like to live in China and that -- because I've read about that uprising and it's possible that -- you know, that those memories were passed on to people -- to his -- to his grandparents, and I just wondered if he knew anything about the personal story around that.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Ah, okay. Those stories were not told at all because they grew up during like a Soviet time and you weren't allowed to speak a lot. You know that?

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. That's why they couldn't --

KITTO: So say it for the tape, though. They weren't allowed to speak their language?

A. AZIMOV: It's not about the language. They weren't allowed to speak overall like -- speech, limited speech. Like they couldn't --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. Like -- like my dad's parents might know it because they grew up during the -- like the -- there was a -- how do you call it, tsar?

KITTO: Mm-hmm.

A. AZIMOV: Tsar, right? And there were -- there were like less restriction. But my dad grew up during the Soviet time. So his parents -- or grandparents, like, never spoke about like how the experience -- like how they lived in China, like how people lived in China. They never spoke about it because they were afraid of, like -- you know, the -- how do you call it? There's this term. It's -- you're not allowed to speak, like --

KITTO: Like, censorship?

A. AZIMOV: Censorship, exactly.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Exactly. Censorship. So everybody was afraid, like somebody come in, you know?

KITTO: Mm-hmm.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. That's why they didn't disclose any information. That's just, they're not. [inaudible].

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: That makes sense. So when his parents were growing up -- when his parents were growing up -- so that would be your grandparents, were they growing up under Soviet rule or under Imperial Russia? I think under Soviet Rule, right?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. Under Soviet rule.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. But they might know it, but that's not hundred percent sure.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah. I'm just wondering.

A. AZIMOV: Because that's why they don't -- they don't -- they don't speak.

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah. And so I guess the next question would be, like, in terms of -- because my grandparents, for instance, are Jewish and they -- and they also grew up in -- in -- well, my mom grew up in the Soviet Union. And when she was growing up, she couldn't practice -- they couldn't -- they didn't practice Judaism anymore. They weren't allowed to. What was it like in these, like -- in central Asia in terms of -- because the whole reason why the Dungans had emigrated was to be able to practice Islam, right? And then --

A. AZIMOV: I -- I don't think it's quite practicing Islam. It's just overall being, I would say -- just avoid, like, the nationalism there. Like, so --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- so we lived -- in the beginning, we lived in China. Historically, like, lived in China. And, like -- you know, pure Chinese maybe, or some, like, natives, they don't like to mix -- others -- and they -- it was like everywhere, they --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- push out all the native -- non-native people. And it's -- I would say it's connected to the religion, but it's not directly. It's just who you are. Like --

KITTO: Who you are, right. Right. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. you know, like -- like -- this is like same thing, like, Jewish living in China --

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- and they don't like you. Like, just -- because you're not Chinese or something like that.

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: Sort of thing.

KITTO: So what -- did -- did his parents or grandparents have any relationship to religion or the practicing of religion? Can you ask him?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, so, like, they go to public -- you know, like big events -- like --

KITTO: Like holidays, or -- ? Holidays?

A. AZIMOV: Like, not -- you know the jummah?

KITTO: Uh-huh.

A. AZIMOV: You know what's jummah? Like a Friday -- Friday -- like the namaz. Like a prayer. So they do that, and they -- they pray every day, basically. But they don't do it in a very -- how do you call it?

KITTO: Organized way?

A. AZIMOV: Not that. They like -- they're not until -- [speaks Russian]

KITTO: A community?

A. AZIMOV: Yes. They're in a community. Like, they're part of a community, but they're not head of the community.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: What I mean is -- [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: You know how the Jewish people have the -- like the leaders? The [speaks Russian] -- how do you call them?

KITTO: Like rabbis?

A. AZIMOV: Rabbi, exactly.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: So --

D. AZIMOV: Rabbi, rabbi.

A. AZIMOV: -- rabbi, yeah. Like, we also have that, but they're not part of the, like, rabbis or something. Or like a board of rabbis, of rabbis and like --

KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- they're not --

KITTO: Yeah, Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- they're not like that. They just practice religion, go to the religious events, and be a part of the, like -- but not --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- like leaders. Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah. I -- I assumed as much. I just wondered if -- because when I talked to you on the phone, I think you said, like, that your parents' parents had been -- had had a kind of spiritual life, where they prayed and went to events.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: They do.

KITTO: That's what I meant. I just meant --

A. AZIMOV: They still do.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: They still do, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah. I just meant more, like, not leaders of the religious community, but just -

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah.

KITTO: -- under Soviet rule, did they still have -- was there a mosque? Were they able to pray like -- you know what I'm saying?

A. AZIMOV: Ah. Okay.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Okay. So when he was -- before '90s, when -- during the Soviet time, he said they couldn't do anything because it was not allowed. The -- there was no religion in the Soviet --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- time. But after the Soviet time -- Soviet, like, has fall apart, people started going to the -- like mosque and stuff. But not during the Soviet time. So it -- basically you're right.

KITTO: So not for most of his life, really.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, exactly. So they started doing it after --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- the fall of the Soviet part. Like it was probably --

KITTO: So was that in, like, '91 in Kazakhstan?

A. AZIMOV: After '91 -- yeah, after --

KITTO: After '91.

A. AZIMOV: Mm-hmm.

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Even like during the Soviet time when he went to school, it was written everywhere in schools, you know, the government agencies, there -- there are no God. There is no God, basically, it says.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Clearly state. Yeah.

KITTO: What did he think about that?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: He was very young, like --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. When the Soviet Union --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: It was forbidden, so nobody spoke about their religion at -- even at home. But he didn't really think a lot during that time because he was still young. When the Soviet Union fell apart, he was like 16, 17. So it's -- no not 15. Oh, yeah. Seventeen. He was -- he turned 17 when the Soviet fell apart, so he didn't really have that view of the religion yet. Like, he didn't really think of it as much.

KITTO: And how did that change after the fall of the Soviet Union? And also the -- how -- so how did that change after the fall of the Soviet Union?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: So it was kind of weird because for him, like, before he would say there's no God. But then after the fall -- after the Soviet Union fell apart, people started -- there was like -- religious leaders came to the -- and then they started speaking, like, about, you know, how do you call it? The religious speech? Like, religious --

KITTO: Like a sermon? Like a -- like he'd go -- would he go to services of some kind?

A. AZIMOV: Not -- not him personally, but just overall -- you know how the Martin Luther King gave speeches? So they were like similar type of speeches, but not in a, like, that big way. Like how religious leaders come -- come to like a village, and --

KITTO: Yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- they say oh, we are, like -- like, I don't know how they call it in English -- the rabbis -- like our rabbis.

KITTO: Imam, like --

A. AZIMOV: Imam.

D. AZIMOV: Imam.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, imam, yeah. So the imam start saying, like, "Whatever was been told in Soviet Union, it's not true. That God exists, and now we have the freedom to speak about it." And after the fall of the Soviet Union, like, imams spread the word to the younger generation -- basically like his age. But the older people already had the -- the

basic of the religion. And after -- after the fall, basically, younger generation started to learn about religion. [speaks Russian]

KITTO: Yeah. Did he say what his personal --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, he just said that it -- it was -- he was -- it was awkward for him. Like, it's -- it's just, growing up, he -- he would think there -- there was no religion, and then -- there's -- there's no God. But then all the sudden, he has been told there's a God. And he's just -- it just was, you know, weird for him. That's not --

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- not anything like really deep. It's just --

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah. Were his parents political? What did they think about the Soviet Union?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: I don't think he's answering the question, though.

KITTO: [laughter] Okay. Well, what did he say?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, so, I -- could you repeat the question so I can?

KITTO: Yeah. I said how was -- what -- how -- what were his parents' politics --

A. AZIMOV: Okay.

KITTO: -- and what did they think about the Soviet Union? And what did they say about it when it fell?

A. AZIMOV: That -- so they didn't speak about any -- they didn't have any --

KITTO: Politics.

A. AZIMOV: -- politics during the Soviet era because they --

KITTO: They were scared.

A. AZIMOV: -- weren't allowed to speak about it.

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Because you could get fired and you lose your job -- you know, anything like that. So they didn't speak about that. And -- but he said the good part during the Soviet part was that it's just -- had a -- stability. Which means, everything's consistent. You don't have to, like -- if you're working, you're fine. If you're not -- it's like everything is planned out. But after the fall, it's just -- you might into a crisis, you might go into, like - in different problems -- like, it's unstable. So that's why, like, the -- overall, the government -- right now, the current government -- what do you call it -- position is shaky. Like, keeps changing. Something drops, inflation, some, like -- so this -- so there's mixed thoughts. Mixed thoughts, basically.

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting.

A. AZIMOV: It was good -- the good part was that it was stable and everything was -- whatever you wanted, you can have it. It's just matter of time when you get it. But now, it's not guaranteed you're going to have it or anything. It's just -- even -- like before you had to wait in a line to get a car. Like a -- meaning, why -- like a year or two -- three years' wait to get a car, but now you can get a car -- it's just --

KITTO: But who can get a car. Right?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. If you have the money to get it --

KITTO: But if you have the money to get it.

A. AZIMOV: But before, you -- you're going to get it, it's just a matter of how long it's going to take.

KITTO: Right. So my next question is, what did his parents do for a living? Were they farmers as well?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: So basically, his parents -- or my grandparents, my grandma worked as like a sales rep. Sales rep at the -- like a rest -- not a restaurant, sorry. Like a big supermarket. So the -- you know, the -- maybe like selling stuff and, like, checking out, you know -- that type of job. And my grandpa was like a head of -- not a head -- maybe he was like a part of the, I would say, board of CEO, maybe of the MTA, I would say. Like, there's like an MTA?

KITTO: Yeah, like a transportation system.

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, he was a part of the MTA. Basically transportation, but he wasn't like driver or something. He was like on the top part. Yeah.

KITTO: And after the Soviet Union ended, did they have the same jobs?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: After the fall, like the MTA sort of stayed there, so my grandpa still worked there. And my grandma, she -- she got her own store. Not a big store. It's just like -- like a grocery store. And then she operated a grocery store.

KITTO: And so did he -- so he went to public schools growing up, and then did he go to college?

A. AZIMOV: Yes. Do I have to ask him, or if I know the information --

KITTO: No, if you know the answers it's fine.

A. AZIMOV: So he went to -- he went to public school.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like, there's only one school in his village, so he went to that school. And he also went to college. [speaks Russian] He went to college. Like --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: -- for four years. Went to university, basically.

KITTO: And in the -- in the school that he went to and in the village that he was in, that his family has been in for generations, it sounds like, were there -- was it just a -- was it a Dungan village, or were there other ethnic groups in the village?

A. AZIMOV: Yes. The -- in the village, it's all the minorities are -- they usually live in the village. Minorities.

KITTO: Like?

A. AZIMOV: Like 80 percent. Like Korean, German, Greek.

KITTO: Oh.

A. AZIMOV: Jewish people. Also, like, the majorities were not White [phonetic]. Korean, Greek, German, Jewish. Yeah.

KITTO: And that's like the -- that's where a lot of minorities live who -- in Kazakhstan, or --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, in -- like, it's not -- that's not the -- the only place that Jambyl -- like a part of the city -- is the small village called Zhalpak-tobe or, Dunganafka [phonetic] -- like the -- this is the -- where Dungans -- people live. But it's majority Dungan. It's like -- maybe like 70 percent, maybe. I'm making up a number, but majority. But the rest is like different small groups. But there are some other, like, minorities there in the city. It's just majority live in villages -- out, like away from the -- how do you call it -- dominant culture.

KITTO: So he went to college after growing up going to public school?

A. AZIMOV: Mm-hmm. He went to college after public school.

KITTO: In Kazakhstan?

A. AZIMOV: Uh-huh. Same -- same -- in the same city.

KITTO: In the same city?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Okay.

A. AZIMOV: Like, I mean, it's -- he live -- he lived in the village so, it was like -- maybe 10 miles away from his village, there was a university. He went there.

KITTO: And what did he study there?

A. AZIMOV: Where?

KITTO: What?

A. AZIMOV: Ah. [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Like, administration.

D. AZIMOV: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like, to be the -- yeah. Administration. Something like that.

KITTO: And you said that he became a farmer, right?

A. AZIMOV: And after -- yes. [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: So he couldn't find a job for -- for his -- using his degree.

KITTO: Degree. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: So he started doing random stuff, and which one of the stuff became was growing -- like a farmer, being a farmer. He grew carrots and onions. But in a big -- like, not that big, but I would say medium amount. [Laughter]

KITTO: Like, his own farm?

A. AZIMOV: He would rent out land, or he would buy land for like a year or two, and then he would farm it there. And then, after that, maybe somebody else takes over or he would move to the different -- different, like, land. Because after a couple years, it gets exhausted and he has to move on to a different place to farm.

KITTO: And he did that by himself?

A. AZIMOV: Farm -- like -- farm, meaning, not like a American farm, like you have a house and you have a -- like a -- you get out your house and you have a lot of farm. It's -- for us, it's a little bit different. For us -- so we have like a village, and around the village, or like, at the border of the village is, like, a lot of land -- empty land. Like, there's no buildings, nothing. That's the land they can use to grow stuff. So that's -- that's how they did it. Like, from house to the when -- it's like a 10- to 20-minute drive. Go there. But he didn't do it by himself, just like straight out. Like, he -- irrigated, he, like, no -- put the seeds. He always hired people. He hired people and people did it for him and then he financed -- he was -- he -- he paid people -- that's how he did it. Like, he -- that's like a -- having a business. He --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- he just -- he knows what to do, he just hires people to do it. He says -- he hires -- he buys some seeds from people, then he hires someone who has equipment. The guy with the equipment, you know, spread the seeds. And then he calls the other guy to irrigate it, and then he calls the other guy to -- like, the -- to gather the crops. Like that.

KITTO: And who -- who were the crop -- who did he sell the crops to?

A. AZIMOV: Crops? They usually -- crops, he would sell to usually people from Russia. From Russia, or different parts of the country come from. Like a big commute, basically. They -- like, maybe -- at least 500 miles away, people come into the -- to the city, look for vegetables, basically, because the village we grew up, everybody -- where my dad grew up, it's like a part where majority does that. That's how they --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- people come in there, and then they buy it and they leave. And like I said, majority goes to south of the Kazakhstan or Russia.

KITTO: So does that mean when you were growing up, like, food was a big part of your life? Well, you have a restaurant now.

A. AZIMOV: What do you mean food?

KITTO: Like, eating and food and cooking and -- like, is there like a -- do you -- does -- like, in the family, is there like a strong relationship to cooking and eating and --

A. AZIMOV: I mean, yes --

KITTO: -- recipes and things?

A. AZIMOV: Yes, we've -- like, we grew up in a -- in a society where woman stay home. Cook, clean.

KITTO: Did your mom do that?

A. AZIMOV: Yes. That's how we -- that's how we -- we grew up. Like --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- the housewives, basically.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Grew up -- I mean -- sorry. They -- they cook for the children, take care of the children and stuff. And the -- and the men make the -- make the bread. I mean that's how it's in the -- I think -- Islamic society -- that's how Islamic society functions.

Woman stay home, raise children, and man make the bread.

KITTO: And that's how it was in your --

A. AZIMOV: That how -- yeah.

KITTO: Was that how his -- it was for his parents? I don't think so, right? His mom was a -- his mom worked.

A. AZIMOV: Worked.

KITTO: His dad worked. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: For his parents --

KITTO: Do you want to ask him about that? How did it change, like --

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Okay. I think it's just some circumstance. It's -- grandpa wasn't making enough for the family and he kind of big spender. And my grandma forced to work to, like, raise her children and, like, provide some food for them.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Okay. So --

A. AZIMOV: I hope my answers are not too short, because [laughter] like, it gets kind of short -- I think you're expecting something like a really long story. Nah? Is it all right?

KITTO: No -- yeah, it's good. No. I mean some of it's longer than others, you know? But if there are other -- if you -- if as I'm asking questions, if there are, like, things that you know or remember from your dad telling you or from, like, you just being you and having grown up and seen what you've seen, then you can let me know that as well.

A. AZIMOV: Okay.

KITTO: Like, if you want to add to --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah. Sure. No problem.

KITTO: -- you know. Did you want to say something?

A. AZIMOV: Not really. Not for now. Yeah. I think I'm fine.

KITTO: Are you sure?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

KITTO: I don't want you to forget.

A. AZIMOV: I was going to say, it's -- I just know, like, growing up, my grandpa would prefer helping other people instead of his family. He's a public person rather than a family person.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: You know what I mean?

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: So for example, I make the money. Instead of bringing it home, I -- I give it to other people like my brothers, my siblings, or my, like, nephew. Like buy some gifts. Be nice people -- to -- be a nice person to others.

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: But not the family. That's how -- that's how my dad grew up. Like, seeing how his dad would spread the money to the outside, but not to the family. And my grandma would make the money for his family -- for, I mean, her family.

KITTO: Yeah. Did you meet -- did you meet your grandpa?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, I -- yes, he's still alive.

KITTO: Oh, he's still alive. Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, and then, they're still alive.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Both of my grandpas -- I mean, granddads are alive.

KITTO: Oh. Oh, your mom's side.

A. AZIMOV: They're still -- yeah, yeah, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: I mean, I still see them. They sometime can't -- my grandpa -- my dad's parent -- dad comes here sometimes. Actually, when we were just -- he was here. A couple months.

KITTO: Okay. I just want to think about the questions that I have to direct to him because then maybe, like, when we're done with your dad, me and you can just keep talking.

A. AZIMOV: Mm-hmm. Oh, and --

KITTO: You see what I'm saying?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So when we are done, is it okay --

KITTO: Like, I'm just -- I just want to, like, think about asking what -- asking the questions that only your dad would have the answer to --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, it's cool.

KITTO: -- and then, like, if he wants to leave or something -- yeah, you know what I'm saying?

A. AZIMOV: Oh, yeah, yeah. I was going to say that. Yeah, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like, you can --

A. AZIMOV: Make it faster, so -- yeah.

KITTO: Yeah, you can tell him that if you want.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: Mm-hmm.

KITTO: Okay, so --

A. AZIMOV: Sounds good.

KITTO: -- can he just tell me about how -- what led him to emigrate? Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

KITTO: The reasons.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

KITTO: What was going on?

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, so, he's like -- you know.

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: -- He says that I know. He wants me to tell it. So the -- so he want me to tell you.

So basically, he was pretty successful there. He was making good, decent -- what was it -- decent money? Like it was more than enough for our family to live there. But the -- after -- as farther it went from fall of the Soviet -- like, farther away meaning it's like 2012, 2015, it became more -- nationalism, like, became more prevalent. And you have limited rights. Not -- for us, though. Like for minorities. If you don't speak the language -- like, my dad would go to some place -- like government offices, he would -- he would have some questions about his passport -- like, change his passport, maybe get a new passport, right? They would just say -- they would speak you in their language, but --

KITTO: And what language is that?

A. AZIMOV: Kazakh.

KITTO: In Kazakh? Okay.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, language.

KITTO: Does he know Kazakh?

A. AZIMOV: No.

KITTO: Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: Because he grew up in Soviet times --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- and it was Soviet --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- Russian was international.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: It was like a language everywhere.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Second language. And so he was doing the -- after the fall -- obviously like a Russian language was second language. But you still go to government offices. If you speak -- you don't speak Kazakh, they don't even speak to you.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Or, like, when you try to speak to them, they -- they make it in -- look like in -- then -- you're not there.

KITTO: Even though they speak Russian.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. They just don't want it because --

KITTO: They just don't want to, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- they're like, "You live in the Kazakhstan, you have to speak Kazakh."

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, but it doesn't -- it doesn't make sense because, like, you grew up during Soviet Union. They don't teach you --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: The Russian language was universal for them.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And now they require, like, all those generation to speak it. It's like --

KITTO: Yeah.

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

KITTO: It's the -- yeah. It's the same all over Eastern Europe.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. And, like, when I went to school, it was like, you know, they would call me, like, different -- basically bully. Bullied me -- like, you know, they call me like small eyes and stuff like that, and yellow color -- skin tone. Every -- every aspect of the -- basically Asian stereotype. That's -- but --

KITTO: But did he experience that when he was growing up?

A. AZIMOV: No. Not him. During the Soviet era --

KITTO: Can you ask him about that? Just to make sure.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: He said --

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: -- there was no separation.

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, during -- during the Soviet time, there was a lot of people -- different nations living together. And there was no separation because it was too much -- like, you literally can't separate so much people -- so many people. Like, and kids were, like, growing up with different people. And nobody would care, like who you are. But after the Soviet fell, the Kazakhstan became -- like, the Kazakh part became Kazakhstan, and that's when it started -- like, national pride.

KITTO: But when you were growing up, were there still -- wasn't -- it was different? Like, there weren't lots of different people anymore?

A. AZIMOV: They were lots of people.

KITTO: Yeah?

A. AZIMOV: It's just -- [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Oh, so, he said after the fall, basically, there was a lot of, like I said, Ukrainians, Greek, German -- like, Azerbaijan --

KITTO: Chechnyan --

A. AZIMOV: Chechnyan, exactly.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And after the fall, there some -- there were some, like, government initiatives from those countries. They actually -- everybody went back to their countries.

KITTO: Oh.

A. AZIMOV: And majority left. And those who didn't leave, they stayed.

KITTO: So the -- and that wasn't the case, obviously for Dungan --

A. AZIMOV: Of course. Yes.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: We just stayed whatever --

KITTO: [laughter] Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. We just stayed wherever we were --

KITTO: So when you were growing up, it was more like there weren't as many minorities as there were when he was growing up.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. Yes.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like, we -- in the village, it's okay. Like, in the village -- if you're inside the village, it's okay. Everybody's like -- it's like living in a Chinatown. But outside --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- you go outside of the village, it's no longer Chinatown. It's like a -- it's more like a city, and people --

KITTO: Like a city, did you say?

A. AZIMOV: City -- like, what I mean is outside the villages, it's --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- the cities.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And it's the --

KITTO: Kazakh --

A. AZIMOV: All the Kazakh people --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- populated, because majority -- like, 80, maybe 90 percent of the workers -- government workers are Kazakhs. There's no minorities. They -- you rarely see them. And that's how --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Think we're drifting -- drifting away.

KITTO: Huh?

A. AZIMOV: I think we are drifting away from the question. Are we?

KITTO: No, we're not.

A. AZIMOV: Ah, yeah.

KITTO: No, it's really good.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah, so --

KITTO: That's interesting. I'll let you know. Don't worry about that.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah. So -- where did I stop?

KITTO: Well, you were saying --

A. AZIMOV: So I -- yeah, I --

KITTO: Yeah. You were --

A. AZIMOV: -- I drift away from my --

KITTO: I see.

A. AZIMOV: -- perspective, yeah, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah. Okay. So you were saying that the reason why you -- he had decided to leave was because it had become very nationalistic --

A. AZIMOV: Uh-huh.

KITTO: -- in Kazakhstan. You know, and you gave the example of, like, you going to school and being picked on.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like, when -- even when I spoke the language -- I -- spoke their language fluently, and they couldn't tell me -- they couldn't tell if I was their people or I was somebody else because I kind of looked like them. But then when I started saying, like, "Oh, I'm not -- I'm not Kazakh." Like, "I am -- I am, like, a Dungan," and they -- they would change their attitude towards me. They would totally be like, "Oh, Dungan. Oh, that makes sense." And then, you know, start picking on you then.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: More -- more. More, after they know you're -- like, even -- I used to -- for -- in my gym class -- like, my teacher -- gym teacher would used to make fun of me all the time. So I -- I can play the national instrument, and -- but -- and while we do some exercise, some of the exercise I couldn't do. And he would make fun of me, like, "Oh, why don't you instead play us some music on the instrument?" Like, you know, in front of the entire class. It was kind of embarrassing and, like --

KITTO: Yeah. What was your -- what -- did your dad experience something like that but as a grown up? Like what was -- what were -- what was -- do you see what I'm saying? Like, you were going through that. You were in school. He was working. He was -- was it in his dealing with --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, so like --

KITTO: -- like city --

A. AZIMOV: -- like I said --

KITTO: -- like in the --

A. AZIMOV: -- like, he would go to --

KITTO: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- government offices to do something, but they would say -- didn't want to speak to him or say something like, "You can't do this because you -- you are not our people." Like, for instance -- like, we -- we wanted to change our name. Like, different name. But -- but they said you couldn't do it because you're not part of Kazakh people. So you cannot do it.

KITTO: You wanted to change your last name or something?

A. AZIMOV: No, they -- yeah, change the -- my little sister, instead of naming after -- or little brother -- instead of naming after -- like our family name, like Azimov, they wanted to make it my grandpa's name. Like, my -- my grandpa's name, as a last name. But they said you couldn't do it. It's only for -- that right is only -- only for our people, which is Kazakh people.

KITTO: Was the name Kazakh? The last name? No.

A. AZIMOV: No --

KITTO: No.

A. AZIMOV: -- our last name is not -- like, our names are strictly -- like, how do you call it -- Islamic names, like --

KITTO: Islamic names, okay.

A. AZIMOV: -- Muslim names.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like, my name's Aliakbar --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- which is --

KITTO: But your last name.

A. AZIMOV: Azim? No, but Azimov -- "-ov" just means Russian --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- speaking people. But "Azim-" is also --

KITTO: Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: -- like, strict Muslim name, if you're familiar with it. Azim.

KITTO: Oh. Azim, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: yeah.

KITTO: Also, what -- at this period, like, when your dad is working -- maybe he's married at this point -- does he have -- what -- also what is it like to be Muslim in Kazakhstan? You know, like --

A. AZIMOV: It's not a big deal in Kazakhstan, because Kazakhs are also Muslim. So I mean, if you're Kazakh -- I mean, if you're any -- I don't -- I -- we didn't feel -- like, I think he -- he wasn't that religious, but I can say, like, he didn't feel any pressure because he was Muslim or something.

KITTO: Yeah. I see.

A. AZIMOV: Because everybody's Muslim there.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: I mean, not everybody. Majority.

KITTO: Majority Muslim, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: But there's some people who are, like, Buddhist, the Koreans --

KITTO: Right. Right.

A. AZIMOV: -- or, like, Christians. Or -- or Christian -- yeah, Christians or -- or Jewish.

KITTO: Or Jewish, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Okay. And just in terms of -- so he -- he made the decision that he wanted to come here.

A. AZIMOV: So he made -- so he made a decision to come here because one, there was no picking on -- whoever you are, it's just -- it doesn't matter what your background, as long as you're, like, person, you're fine. Like, here, there's no, like, a lot of saying, "Oh, you're this or you're that," or "Go back to country." And there's more opportunity.

There -- so, you know, they grew up in the same village, and, like, my -- my -- so basically, my great-grandpa was born there, my grandpa was born there, and my dad was born there. And it's like three generations in the same village. It's -- it's no movement. You know what I mean?

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: It's like -- until this day, like, my dad calls it -- let me see -- let me use it --

KITTO: Translate?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, translate.

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: It's not a swamp, is it? Something --

KITTO: Like a cesspool or something?

A. AZIMOV: I think it's swamp. Swamp. Like, you know what -- like a swamp?

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like -- the water that always stays in the same place and --

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- starts to stink? Yeah. That. He calls it a swamp.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like, you were born there, you die there, and your kids were born there, they die there. Everybody's like same thing, and you never see any movement --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- or opportunity.

KITTO: So what was -- can you just ask him what the process was around immigrating here?

Was it difficult? How did he do it? I'd love to hear it in his words.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: But do you mean, like, difficult there or here?

KITTO: To -- just to start the process -- like, to get -- to leave. What was the process?

A. AZIMOV: Ah, okay. The -- to leave -- to leave -- like, I -- it was pretty -- like I said, we -- we didn't start thinking of moving here. We just wanted to visit here.

KITTO: Oh.

A. AZIMOV: So the first year, two-thousand -- I think -- eleven -- for Christmas, we actually visited. We -- we made -- we got the visa -- U.S. visa. And my dad was pretty -- like I said, successful businessman. And it was no problem to -- to get visa for me and for him. So both of us -- me and him, we came here, 2011, for Christmas. And after that, you know, people were here, like, "Oh, you should" -- from Kazakhstan. People from Kazakhstan, like his friends said, "Oh, we should move here. Shouldn't be living there."

Then we -- we went back home and then we decided -- it's been like a whole year we've been thinking of moving and that. And, like, by the end of the year, my mom and my other four siblings also went to the embassy and got U.S. visa. And then we all moved here the same year -- October.

But like he said, it was very difficult for him to -- to leave everything. He had, like, family, friends. Also he had successful business. Like, there he -- he didn't have to worry about anything. He would just go hire people -- people do stuff for him, and at the end of the day, he gets -- he -- he makes money. But -- and then, he's been working for it for like 10 to 15 years to get there. But now, he just had to leave everything at once and come here. And he said -- he doesn't speak Eng -- like, no language.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And it's very difficult. We have a family of five kids and two parents -- seven, basically, and it was hard. It was difficult. You know how -- it's difficult to live in New York if you have such a big family. And no -- nothing. No -- don't know English.

KITTO: Did he -- did you -- did he get any help from, like, any organizations here?

A. AZIMOV: He didn't get help any -- from any organizations. We just did it directly through the word of mouth. Like, ask him where we can get a lawyer, where we can get house, where we can get that --

KITTO: Through people that --

A. AZIMOV: Through people -- yeah, from our -- like us. People with the same experience.

KITTO: Yeah. Like, so -- so people that lived here already?

A. AZIMOV: Yes. Who came here a long time ago. Or like maybe before us and went through the same stage. Asked them what to do, how to do it. Yes.

KITTO: Was this people that you met once you got here? Or were they people --

A. AZIMOV: Yes. People -- some people who we met -- my dad's classmate's here. He actually -- we -- we came to visit him first time. And second time -- and then we -- when we moved, he also helped out -- like, kind of helped out -- like, help us to, like, find some temporary place to live. And after that, it's just people who met -- who he met here. Yes.

KITTO: Is there a Dungan community here?

A. AZIMOV: Like, you know, people like -- or like a -- you mean the population-wise?

KITTO: Yeah. Like --

A. AZIMOV: Couple -- yes, we know couple people.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: It's just -- we know three, four families. That's all.

KITTO: Three or four families? Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. Like our uncle is here. My dad brought his cousin here.

KITTO: Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: There's some people from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan here living -- Dungans also.

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: But we -- we found out about them, like, after we lived -- like after three -- two, three years here.

KITTO: What was it like also -- so the immigration process once you're here? Like, dealing with getting your status taken care of and the city and --

A. AZIMOV: It was -- to getting the status was very difficult for us. Actually, we got the status like, this year. So it took us like six years to get a status. And before that, we had a limited -- very limited freedom -- like, overall. And like, opportunity -- or not opportunities --

KITTO: Access?

A. AZIMOV: Access to stuff. It was very stressful for us because, you know, some people got it in like a year, two. But we got it for six years -- when it was six years, and then we had a big family. It's very difficult. Yeah.

KITTO: Can you ask him about that too?

A. AZIMOV: About -- so how was the adaptation, right?

KITTO: Yeah, and, like, what's happened -- what happened in the past six years? Like, where did he work, how did the --

A. AZIMOV: Like, I answered a lot of questions because, like, in our family, I -- like, responsible. I'm the responsible one. Like, I handle the papers. I handle the immigration papers. I handle the passports.

KITTO: I see.

A. AZIMOV: Like -- and that's why I -- everything. I'm like his secretary, basically. And everything he does -- I know everything. Yeah. And -- but -- [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: So, yeah, like -- he said -- he said the same thing I said. It's kind of -- [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

KITTO: So yeah, I guess I just wanted to know -- I know that your father has to leave soon and it seems like you and I can talk about a lot of the other part of the story, but I just wanted to know a couple more things from your dad, which was just -- well, I guess a couple things is if he could just answer the question himself of, did -- what -- what, if anything, does his spiritual or religious life look like in Brooklyn versus what, if anything, it looked like when -- you know, post the fall of the Soviet Union.

A. AZIMOV: Okay.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: He -- he says, like -- he's not that, like, religious, meaning like a very -- so -- like for us, like what -- we have a -- like a separation between like radical religious people and --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- religious people who are just like follow everything, but not into like a really like radical -- you know what I mean, radical?

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: So he's like -- could you rephrase the question again, just to refresh my memory?

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was what does his religious or spiritual life look like today, if -- in Brooklyn?

A. AZIMOV: I mean, it hasn't changed a lot.

KITTO: Okay.

A. AZIMOV: He said it's just -- he just -- the same thing he used to do there, he still does it here. Like, deep inside, like he still believes in God, follow the -- you know, the -- the

rules, and, you know, like -- like that. But nothing like a -- nothing -- like, nothing -- there's no major, like, leap --

KITTO: Yeah, but you told me, like, he would go to events for -- like on Friday, and he would go -- yeah, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: I don't mean he would go. Like, it's -- I'm really sorry.

KITTO: It's okay.

A. AZIMOV: I meant my great -- no, my --

KITTO: Oh.

A. AZIMOV: -- grandparents would go.

KITTO: Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: My dad wouldn't go to there.

KITTO: Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: My dad wouldn't --

KITTO: Oh, I see.

A. AZIMOV: Usually for us it's like -- some people started young --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- but some people started late.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Like my -- I'm not sure if it's because of the Soviet party or -- but, like, my grandpa -- my grandpa started praying late -- later. Not -- late in their life, not in the young -- when they were, like, young.

KITTO: And then -- okay. Do you have anything else to say about that?

A. AZIMOV: No.

KITTO: Or did he? Okay. And then the other question I had was just -- so it -- so it hasn't changed since he came to Brooklyn is what you're saying. Like, his relationship to --

A. AZIMOV: Yes. Like, religion, it's that same view. Like, nothing more -- not --

KITTO: Like observant, like believes, but doesn't do a lot --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: -- externally. Like, it's like he prays at home or --

A. AZIMOV: No. Not like that.

KITTO: No?

A. AZIMOV: No. Not like that. Because a lot of -- it requires a lot of time and commitment for us. I mean --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- we have a very big family, and I think he's -- he's pretty limited with the time. And you need a lot of commitment too.

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: And like I said, it was -- it was very tough for us. Even till this day, it's kind of still -- it's hard for, like, all of us just to live and work our way up, basically.

KITTO: So, yeah, I guess my question for him was also to talk a little bit more about what you're talking about right now, which is so it's been hard. And what -- what did he do for work before the restaurant?

A. AZIMOV: Oh, okay. For the work, one of the first works he -- he has done was, like he mentioned he was the guy for the medical supply company. So like you know for the elders, they require someone to come -- pads, cleaning stuff. Like a wheelchair. Like, he was the guy who delivered them. But after that, he own a truck -- commercial truck, which has -- just take you know, the big, 52-feet? That -- he drove that for like three years. After that, he worked in Brooklyn as a TLC driver.

D. AZIMOV: Ambulette. [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, ambulette [speaks Russian], like -- like also pick up the elders who have like a dialysis appointment, right? He come -- he comes -- he comes and picks them up and then he take -- goes to the medical office and like that -- like that kind of job. And after that, I think it's all restaurant.

KITTO: What?

A. AZIMOV: After -- after the --

KITTO: Ambulance --

A. AZIMOV: -- being a driver --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- he opened up a restaurant.

KITTO: And how did that come to be? How did that happen? Who -- who in the family is the chef?

A. AZIMOV: In the family, chef -- I would say that's my mom -- my mom does everything cooking.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Cooking-wise, my mom everything does. And my dad helps out with the dough -- with the -- the kneading and like a -- because the -- with the restaurant, the noodle is very important part.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And the dough needs -- require -- requires separate attention. And he just -- he does the dough part. And he kneads -- he prepares and -- but my mom do all the cooking, like for stir-frying, preparing the sauces --

KITTO: She does the cooking in the -- in the restaurant?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: So whose idea was it to open the restaurant?

A. AZIMOV: Idea was my dad's idea. It was to --

KITTO: Can you ask him just to tell me and then he can go after this? Because I know he has to go. If you could just ask him about, like, where the idea came from and a little bit about the process of opening it.

A. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

D. AZIMOV: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: So he said there's no Dungan restaurant, like, in the state. Like, we haven't met any. So he wanted to open the, like, first Dungan restaurant here. And like introduce the culture -- the new culture. Because nobody knows about Dungan people and nobody knows the kitchen. And he just wanted to, you know, open up a new -- like a chapter [laughter] in Brooklyn, I would say. Yeah.

KITTO: That's exciting. Well, I think I can -- we can let him --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah.

KITTO: -- go at this point. Okay. So -- so how's it going with the restaurant?

A. AZIMOV: I think it's going pretty well. Not a bad -- not a -- not a bad start at -- at all.

KITTO: Not a what?

A. AZIMOV: Not a bad start at all.

KITTO: No.

A. AZIMOV: Yes. I think it's going good. And hopefully, it's going to get better.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. We've been seeing -- like, we were published recently -- like a month ago -- yes, month ago, we were published in *The New York Times*. And after that, it's like a pretty -- we see a lot of customers that come -- English speaking customers. And --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: [laughter] Have you had -- Dungan people come to the restaurant?

A. AZIMOV: I would -- Dungan, yes, not quite Dungan. Like, Chinese Muslim, but from China. Yeah, so we've seen couple people from there. Hui. They call themselves Hui people.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: So they came in -- some were very excited to see -- especially the -- like older generation was very excited to see. They -- some came from the Queens, some came from, like, Manhattan. They were excited to see the kitchen here. Dungan -- but we haven't seen any -- any -- anyone -- like a -- we don't know Dungan people. Like --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- like, the people who -- who we know, they came in here, but not -- no -- not -- no, like --

KITTO: New people?

A. AZIMOV: No new people, yeah.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: New Dungans, yeah.

KITTO: And what -- and do you -- do you all live around here?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, we live like 15 minutes away from here. It's like three miles. Yeah, we live in the Gravesend area.

KITTO: Oh, okay.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: And so, is this a Russian neighborhood?

A. AZIMOV: I would say yes, majority populated by Russians. It's considered Russian neighborhood, they say. But I see different ethnicity here walking around. You know, and visiting us too.

KITTO: Do you have a lot of Russian visitors to the restaurant?

A. AZIMOV: I wouldn't say exactly like Russian meaning people from Russia. I would say like Russian speaking.

KITTO: Russian speaking, yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yes. Like, before *The New York Times*, it was 80 percent Russian-speaking people. After *The New York Times*, it became majority of English-speaking people.

KITTO: Oh, wow. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. That's it.

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: And so what -- what -- what was your -- what has your life been like since you moved to New York? How is it different?

A. AZIMOV: For me, personally, in the personal level --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- I think [exhales] -- like opportunity-wise, yes, there's more opportunities. I've had more opportunities and like maybe had better hope for the future. But in a personal level, like, I kind of feel stressed about -- it's -- it's just that we have a big family. And everything is expensive here. And it's not that easy to make good out of a living here. Like, just to live well here, you have to be pretty successful. And like I said, like a big family, we need -- have a lot of -- how do you call it -- you know, the kids want this, the kids want that. We want to live in a house. Like, everybody want to have their

own room. But it's never kind of quite possible because it's -- it's expensive here, and we're immigrants and we can't make enough, like, money to live here well, or like even have our own rooms because -- I think --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- yeah. And, like, me, personally, like I've been running back and forth -- I go to university -- Stony Brook University. And I run back and forth. Every weekend I come back. I go back, I come back. I mean, I go to school, I come back. Go to school, come back. It's like so exhaust -- so much exhaustion going on.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: I kind of get tired mentally.

KITTO: [laughter] Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And physically.

KITTO: And you're working at the restaurant too.

A. AZIMOV: Yes. Trying to help.

KITTO: How often do you work here?

A. AZIMOV: During the summertime, I used to work like 70 hours a week. Now, I work, what -- let me see -- 12, 12, 12 -- maybe 40 [phonetic] hours a week. And -- so basically, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, I'm here -- no, no. I'm back in school. And Thursday night, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I'm here. So three days there, four days here. I -- I actually adjusted my schedule just so I can be here more often than -- than school. So to help out with the restaurant.

KITTO: What about, like, your community? Have you made friends here, and how does it feel like in comparison to where you come from? Do you miss Kazakhstan?

A. AZIMOV: I don't miss Kazakhstan because I haven't had any friends there -- a lot of friends because I kept switching -- like changing schools. And I never fit in with the people because -- you know, people make fun of me and stuff. I don't like. And that's why I don't, like, hang out with those -- I don't -- I don't want to be friends with those people.

And here, I think I also haven't made a lot of friends because I didn't really have a lot of time. Growing up, like -- I mean, not growing up -- going to high school here, I -- my parents didn't speak English, so I had to be doing stuff for them, like calling -- making calls -- maybe figuring out the papers, translating stuff. So I didn't go out with friends a lot. So I think that's why I haven't made a lot of friends. Even now, in college, I haven't made a lot of friends because I've been going back and forth -- back and forth and just -

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KITTO: It takes a long time --

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It takes a lot of time --

KITTO: -- to settle in a place.

A. AZIMOV: -- and effort, yeah.

KITTO: It takes a very long time. Yeah. What about -- do you have a religious or spiritual life?

A. AZIMOV: Actually, in college its -- it really depends. Like, I have some -- I actually, this -- I have some, like, people I know. Sometimes they ask me to -- if I want to come over -- like a Muslim society. So I -- I actually come over, like, because I have so much -- like, I try to engage in college more. So I actually come over and like -- like, there's a Muslim society --

KITTO: At Stony Brook?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: There's a Muslim society. And there was like a -- school just started, and there was like a global body meeting. First body meeting. So I actually showed up. Last semester, I also did like some -- I didn't come for, like, events, like holiday events. I -- but I went for prayers. The jummah prayers. I went like once or twice.

SPEAKER: [speaks Russian]

A. AZIMOV: Sorry. Okay.

SPEAKER: [speaks Russian]

KITTO: It's fine. It's fine.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, but I'm -- like, personally, I'm not that religious. Just --

KITTO: Cultural.

A. AZIMOV: -- I think -- it's not -- I'm not sure if it's the society, or, like -- I kind of lost some faith in God. Because we live -- we moved here six years ago -- six years ago and for us it was so hard. We felt like it's -- there's no God and nobody's helping us. I mean, to have such a big family and stuff. Things are so difficult. And even no fairness. So we just kind of lost some spiritual -- I -- I have lost some spiritual belief. Sometimes I do believe. Sometime I don't. Depends on my mood.

KITTO: [laughter] Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: But -- but I still follow the rules. Or if somebody tells me to come to the prayers, I -- I go to prayers. But not like I -- I walk around and like -- believing that God is always with me. Like that. You know what I mean?

KITTO: How does -- how has that changed over time? Like, how did you feel about God before you moved to the United States? And also, did you have more involvement with a community there in your village?

A. AZIMOV: I would say yes. I had more involvement with the -- doing the -- for the religious -- in the spiritual way. And --

KITTO: Can you give me some examples?

A. AZIMOV: Like, I would go to the -- I would go to mosque with friends or like cousins a lot -- much more than here. Like, here, I haven't gone to the, like, official mosque here. So the prayers we do is like usually on a -- at the big open field. There's a lot of people, so - but the mosques are pretty small, so you can't fit a lot of people there, so we went to those places, like prayers at the mosques. I mean, at the open fields. Not at the mosques. So technically I never visited mosque in States -- in the States.

But there, I visited mosque more. I actually celebrated the -- how do you call it -- Eid. This is like the three days for Eid for us. And back in the village, people would set up a table -- like all the sweets and desserts -- people come in, they read some -- something from Qur'an. And they get treats. So I used to do that when I was younger. Like when I

was like 12. From 8 to 12. But as I said, I haven't done anything. But, like, I moved here -- I haven't done that here. The only thing I've done is, like, pray at the big holiday -- Muslim holiday. But not on the casual basis. Yeah.

KITTO: Yeah. Well, I know you talked about just feeling a lot of stress about the family, and I guess I wonder, like, beyond that, what are you interested in? What do you want to do?

A. AZIMOV: You mean like for a living? Like working as someone?

KITTO: Yeah. Like what do you -- yeah, and what do you care about right now?

A. AZIMOV: Right now, all I'm thinking of, just to make sure, like, the family does well here.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: About my siblings and everybody. And --

KITTO: Are they younger than you?

A. AZIMOV: I have one older brother who is 25 -- 23. Who is 23. And I'm 20. And younger brother who is 15. Younger sister who is 13. And other one is eight. Turning eight this --

KITTO: Oh, yeah. They're young.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. That's why I'm trying -- so maybe to have a better, like, hope or like start to live in -- life in America than us. Yeah. And as older brother, I think I hold a lot of responsibility for them. I'm not the oldest brother -- I'm just older. And I feel like it's my obligation to, like, make sure they do well here.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And overall, my family -- like, not only them but also my -- my parents too.

KITTO: Do -- and -- but do you know -- what are you going to study at Stony Brook?

A. AZIMOV: So right now, I'm doing -- I'm on a -- I'm thinking of going for the medical program. So I'm studying -- right now, I'm just studying chemistry, biology, physics -- just to give a start for the medical program. So I don't -- I want to be like a doctor or like a surgeon. Yeah. That's -- [laughter]

KITTO: All right. I guess I just wondered also -- like, the food that is being served in this restaurant and stuff, is it stuff that you ate growing up?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, the -- all the food we serve here is all the food we ate at home, even here in Brooklyn -- we ate it here. And some of the dishes, we -- it's the food of -- yeah -- food of our -- like, my childhood -- like -- it's the food we grew up with. And some of the foods are very -- how do you call it -- luxury foods. Like, we usually make it only for like big celebrations, but --

KITTO: Like what?

A. AZIMOV: Like the soup dish -- like huashi -- like a soup dish, we only had it for like a really big celebration, like a -- a wedding or like a religious -- like -- how do you call it --

KITTO: Like a holiday?

A. AZIMOV: -- like not holiday. In Muslim society, like a -- if somebody passed -- passed out in our family, usually the -- like, within the first week, we make a family gathering and we read some -- like people read stuff from -- some prayer -- a couple prayers from Qur'an.

KITTO: Like a funeral?

A. AZIMOV: Yeah. It's -- it's like a funeral, yeah. I would say like a funeral.

KITTO: Yeah. Like a ceremony.

A. AZIMOV: Yeah, a ceremony, basically.

KITTO: Yeah. Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And we call it Swa [phonetic]. I'm not sure -- a Swa. Maybe it's Arabic word. But yeah. During those times -- but here, we just serve it on a regular basis.

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: It's kind of -- kills all the, like, excitement.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Before you had [phonetic] -- like before [phonetic] --

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: We just -- some people just excited for the wedding because they're going to -- like, I was excited to go to the wedding because I'm going -- I'm going to get to try the food, but not to see the wedding. [laughter]

KITTO: Right.

A. AZIMOV: But now it's just like the --

KITTO: It's just every day.

A. AZIMOV: -- stuff --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: -- stuff that's served here every day.

KITTO: Yeah. Do you have a favorite dish?

A. AZIMOV: Honestly, favorite dish? Not anymore. I used to have --

KITTO: [laughter]

A. AZIMOV: When -- before, when those food -- like, special food, like, we weren't served on a regular basis, those foods were my favorite. Like shi [phonetic] -- shi or like beef chive soup, it was like my favorite. But now it's just -- everything's the same. [laughter] I can have it whenever I want, so it's not -- nothing favorite now.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: All same. Maybe it's -- I just grew past that period when --

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: Everything is just the same.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: As long as we have food to eat. [Laughter] Yeah.

KITTO: Right. Well, is there anything else you want to say?

A. AZIMOV: Honest -- just -- not really. Just -- I don't -- I feel like I'm just tired today.

KITTO: Yeah.

A. AZIMOV: And my brain's not functioning because -- just driving -- I was like falling asleep when I was driving back to Brooklyn. So I -- I'm glad I made it -- made it -- made it here. [laughter]

KITTO: Thank you so much.

A. AZIMOV: Thank you.

KITTO: This was so great.

A. AZIMOV: Thank you.

KITTO: Thank you.