CORVINUS UNIVERSITY OF BUDAPEST

MEGA-EVENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN (1991-2017): POWER LEGITIMACY AND UNINTENDED/INDIRECT NATION-BUILDING

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Attempts of regime survival, in particular a continuous re-election of the ruling regimes, is a common pattern in all post-communist states of Central Asia and beyond. Therefore, for the ruling elites acquiring legitimacy, especially in states with weak governance performance capacity to which most of post-communist states belong, is a major concern. In post-communist Kyrgyzstan, once famously labelled as "island of democracy", the thesis argues that the incumbent political regimes largely relied on state-sponsored invented mega-events or performative projects which celebrate historical commemorative dates and/or mark the national culture. Namely, I look into the following mega-events: Osh City's 3000-year anniversary in 2000, Kyrgyzstan's 2200-year anniversary in 2003, Manas Epic's 1000-year anniversary in 1995 and the World Nomad Games (WNG) introduced in 2012. The study thoroughly examines the socio-economic and political contexts under each of these projects between 1991-2017 and concludes that nation-wide mega-events were discursive devices in the hands of regimes in power to legitimate their power. The thesis considers state-led celebrations of anniversaries and games foremost as power legitimacy-building tools for the elites, whereas major existing literature on Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia interprets celebrations and cultural events merely as nation-building initiatives (see Adams 2007, Adams and Rustemova 2009, Adams 2010, Megoran 2017, Ismailbekova 2016, Wachtel 2013, 2016, Hvoslef 2001, Marat 2016, Straube 2008). Having said that the thesis asserts that Kyrgyzstan's nation-building, which is a central unit of analysis of the thesis, was mostly indirect or unintended because cultural events run by the state were primarily targeted to legitimate regimes in power. The study skips the transition period of 2010-2011 under rule of Otunbaeva, because the term of Presidency of Otunbaeva was pre-agreed to a one-year fixed term and, therefore, it does not apply to the study which is interested in nation-building and legitimacy-making in lasting regimes. The thesis is a qualitative in-depth case study which aims to balance omnipresent state-centred approaches to nation-building by stressing role of micro actors or non-state actors in shaping national identities. More importantly, the thesis revises if not criticizes earlier published works on Central Asia which primarily reproduced the Western scholarship on nationalism studies and did not seek for alternative local models to explain nation-building in non-Western societies, the task which the thesis aims to bring into a scholarly attention.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The 'political' in Central Asia, overview of the study's concepts and arguments

Nation-building in Central Asia (CA) has been studied from various perspectives. Some earlier literature has examined a 'nationalizing state' pattern in these states as part of larger institution-building or state-building processes in the newly emerged states (see Brubaker 1994, 1996a, 1996b, Kolstø 2000, Dieger and Hagen 2013). At the same time these state-led policies and activities were studied as genuine identity formation processes (see Kolstø 2003, Chotaeva 2004, Fierman 2009, Ferrando 2011, Blakkisrud and Nozimova 2010, Diener and Hagen 2013, Cummings 2013, Megoran 2017). A separate body of works has provided a more critical approach to state-led policies by examining nationalism as a source of control and power legitimacy (see Akbarzadeh 1999, Matveeva 1999, 2009, Cummings 2002, 2009, March 2003, Suleymanov 2004, Marat 2008, Murzakulova and Schoeberlein 2009, Cummings (ed.) 2010, Isaacs 2010, Polese and Horák 2015, Isaacs and Polese (ed.). 2016, Kudaibergenova 2017, 2020, Laruelle 2021). Nevertheless, despite various argumentations proposed by these scholars, the study of nationalism in CA has been dominated by state-centric or modernist perspective which emphasizes the role of the state and the political elites in nation-making. These works emphasize top-down tools in nation-building, such as nation-formation through new language policies, architecture, ideologies, re-writing history text-books, etc.[2]

In line with the modernist approach to the study of nationalism, the majority of studies on post-Soviet nation-formation has analysed various state-designed celebrations, anniversaries and other events[3] as authentic nation-building projects (see Hvoslef 2001,

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[2] For role of language see Kolstø 2003, Chotaeva 2004, Fierman 2009; for processes of re-writing history text-books see Ferrando 2011, Blakkisrud and Nozimova 2010; for interpretation of post-Soviet new architecture as nation-building see Diener and Hagen 2013, Cummings 2013, Fauve 2015b, for ideologies see Murzakulova and Schoeberlein 2009.

[3] The Central Asian republics underwent several waves of celebrations marking important historical dates or anniversaries of national heroes, ancient cities and myths after gaining their independence. In 1995, the 1000-years anniversary of the epic Manas was celebrated in Kyrgyzstan. In 2000, the Kyrgyz state marked Osh city's 3000-years anniversary, and in 2003, the country celebrated its 2200-years of statehood. In a similar manner, in 1996, the 660-years anniversary of Tamerlane was celebrated by the Uzbek state. Between 1997 and 2007 the Uzbek authorities celebrated a series of anniversaries of several cities. In the same way, in 1999, the Tajik authorities celebrated the 1100-years anniversary of the Samanid empire – which became the central figure of the Tajik statehood. The Tajiks also celebrated Arian civilization in 2006 along with the 2700-years anniversary of the city of Kulob, a native region of the president Emomali Rahmon. Finally, in 2000, the Kazakh city of Turkestan celebrated the city's 1500-years anniversary, and two years later, another Kazakh city Taraz marked its the 2000-years anniversary.

Adams 2007, 2010, Straube 2008, Adams and Rustemova 2009, Murzakulova and Schoeberlein 2009, Adams 2010, Abashin 2012, Wachtel 2013, 2016, Ismailbekova 2016, Marat 2016, Militz 2016, Megoran 2017). These studies had emphasized a nation-building function of the state-led celebrations, anniversaries, as well as other mega-events and sporting events (see Thomson et. al 2006, Adams and Rustemova 2009, Denison 2009, Adams 2010, Abashin 2012, Rojo-Labaien 2018, Horák 2020). State-sponsored anniversaries in Soviet Central Asia too were widely-analysed as part of the Soviet nation-building policy (see Ubiria 2016). Most of post-Soviet studies in line with this tradition had examined state-led celebrations as an ingredient of nation-building process. For instance, Sergei Abashin wrote that the Uzbek authorities used city anniversaries: "in 1997, 2,000 years of Khiva and 2,500 years of Bukhara; in 2002, 2,500 years of Termez; in 2006, 2,700 years of Karshi; in 2007, 2,750 years of Samarkand and 2,000 years of Margilan" to shape national history and identity (2012: 154-155). In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan too, Manas Epic's anniversary celebration in 1995 was argued as a national identity shaping event along with its cultural tourism agenda (see Thomson et. al 2006, Gullette 2010, Wachtel 2016). In their chapter Elena Kim and Elena Molchanova (2018) claim that the Kyrgyz government invested its resources to reinforce its national identity through ethnic sports. The authors write that state-led nomadic events such as Manas-1000 celebration and the World Nomad Games were performed to enhance national identity (ibid.). Others mentioned other celebrations, such as Nooruz celebration and Independence Day celebration as a means to construct a meaning of a nation (see Adams 2010).

Despite the value of these studies, they are reductionist at the same time because they fail overall to provide a comprehensive analysis behind the politics of celebrations in Central Asia. Few works are important in this sense. Namely, Erica Marat (2008) observes that the Manas Epic celebration in Kyrgyzstan benefited the president Askar Akaev's re-election, and the Kyrgyz statehood celebration was a preparation for another presidential election in 2005. Marat (2008) also notes that similar celebration misuse followed in Tajikistan prior to the presidential election in 2006. Svetlana Jacquesson (2020) explains post-2010 rise of 'Manasification' in Kyrgyzstan not by the attempt of the state to strengthen its national identity but by its fear of losing the Manas Epic to China in the UNESCO's list of Intangible Heritage. Based on this, I support the idea that nation-building

is dependent on context and does not have a universal formula of making a nation (Connor 2004, Isaacs and Polese 2016). I argue that various contexts, especially the political and socio-economic, under which state celebrations and anniversaries are implemented should be carefully studied and state-sponsored celebrations or sports events should not be examined as merely nation-building initiatives, rather they should be treated as complex and multi-purpose political phenomena. In my study I argue that state-sponsored celebrations in Central Asia were also political events rather they were planned national identity projects. The state-sponsored events had indirect nation-formation outcomes largely due to the efforts of non-state actors, such as businessmen, entrepreneurs, individual politicians and community members. Differently put, national identities following these mega-events were shaped without the direct participation of the state.

At the same time the thesis does not reject the idea that state-led celebrations and anniversaries were crucial events to represent the Kyrgyz nation both domestically and internationally. As a matter of fact, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, newly emerged CA states, like other nations, needed to claim ethno-cultural roots for nationhood and if they did not possess them they had to invent them (see Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Smith 1999, Mellon 2010). However, the aim of the thesis is to analyse state-funded cultural and sports projects in the former Soviet space beyond a 'fixed' nation-building framework prevalent in post-Soviet nation-building literature. The correction the thesis proposes is that in contexts like Central Asia nation-building and legitimacy do not exist as separate processes because they are intertwined and interdependent, and therefore the state-funded celebrations should not be treated as pure nation-building projects.

Why do the Central Asian leaders invest much in celebrating? What makes CA politics distinctive in this respect? Similar to other Third World countries, which are largely labelled in the literature as 'weak states', the Central Asian states generally fail to perform fundamental state functions and lack a political legitimacy thereof. To outline the anatomy of the state in CA, however, instead of the 'weak states' notion, I suggest a term *ashar-stan* – *ashar* meaning a traditional collective action in CA (see Reeves 2017 and Sheranova 2021), and *stan* – is the well-known suffix of the five post-Soviet CA states. There were earlier attempts to conceptualize the notion of 'the state' and 'the political' in the Central Asian setting, of particular importance are the works of John Heathershaw and Edward Schatz (eds.) (2017), Pauline Jones Luong (2002, 2004), and Madeleine Reeves (2014) which have conceptualized the Central Asian states' weaknesses. Jones Luong (2004) framed them 'paradoxically strong–weak states' because of Central Asia's strong autocratic

leaderships, on the one hand, and a poor governance and state performance, on the other hand. In a similar way, Reeves (2014) observed a weak presence of the state in border areas of Central Asia and noticed a strong presence of local strongmen (Reeves 2014: 10, 218). Finally, Heathershaw and Schatz pointed out to the 'state weaknesses' in CA in carrying out their primary tasks and in "satisfying" own citizens, they wrote that "State weakness exists when a state *does not generally perform the tasks expected of it*." (emphasis in original) (2017: 9) These works, however, generally remain state-centric because they in a similar way underline both the state's weaknesses and strengths, and by doing so they diminish or ignore the role of non-state actors or communities in making and unmaking the state. Therefore, the use of the concepts of 'weak state' and 'strong state' could be problematic in the Central Asian context because they both ignore a crucial communal or collective effort in maintaining and in running the state's important functions. The need for a new language in defining the state not only in the CA but in the post-communist Eurasian region, in general, has been increasingly argued within academia (see Magyar and Madlovic 2020). As the authors claim, this distinction is important because these states do not represent the Weberian ideal-type states (ibid.).

The recent growing literature theorizing on the notion of 'political' in the Central Asian setting also does not address the societal aspect (see Kudaibergenova and Buranelli 2021, Isaacs and Frigerio 2019). For example, in the special issue edited by Diana Kudaibergenova and Filippo Costa Buranelli (2021), the contributors avoid general conceptualization of the power and the state in CA, in contrast they focus on country-specific understandings. In the edited volume by Rico Isaacs and Alessandro Frigerio (2019) the concept of the 'incomplete' states which the volume introduces (see Chapter 12 by Akchurina) fails to stay away from 'weak' and 'strong' dimensions of the state capacity as it claims because it remains in between these two concepts. Despite the author's admission that weak and strong state categorizations do not suit CA states, she does not elaborate on the role of communities (Akchurina 2019).

In contrast, in the *ashar-stan* the role of non-state actors is emphasized in supporting the state's critical public services (such as public healthcare, public schooling, public infrastructure, etc.). Due to collective efforts or *ashar* tradition, the state's basic foundations are not shattered and the state remains robust and functional despite its actual poor performance. In other words, in the *ashar-stan* a collective response from its citizens to support the state's functions in delivering state services eventually keeps the state's organization robust and strong. Thus, the Central Asian states might be seen as weak states

on the surface but indeed they are not because they are constantly retained by their communities through the *ashar*.

A volume by Madeleine Reeves, Johan Rasanayagam, and Judith Beyer (eds.) (2014) questioning how the state has been produced in everyday life in Central Asia is especially exemplary in demonstrating the collective action or *ashar* logic which I emphasise in the thesis. The contributors argue that the state is performed and is produced through various communal actions, such as participation in local elections, poetry competitions, function of traditional courts of elders and others (see Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer 2014). The 'blurring boundaries' between the state and the societies in Central Asia was also stressed in other works (see Luong Jones 2002). The term *ashar-stan* is in particularly inspired by the study of Madeleine Reeves' on the *ashar* act of voluntarism (2017). Reeves (2017) framed Kyrgyzstan as 'the ashar-state' in the edited volume titled *Paradox of Power. The Logic of State Weakness in Eurasia*. Building on Spencer's idea of 'moral investment' Madeleine Reeves examines how "collective care," "moral responsibility," "communal commitment," "voluntarism," and "social obligation" keep the functioning of the school education in rural Kyrgyzstan (ibid.: 220). Reeves (2017) focuses on how and when is the state being made and explains that weak states persist due to these communal practices of voluntarism (ibid.). According to Reeves these acts of voluntarism cultivate "hope," "pride," and "awareness of membership of a community of mutual help" (ibid.: 222). In addition, Joel Migdal's works on state-society relations (1988, 1994, 2001), namely his emphasis on 'strongmen' – the individuals who possess a social control and have a capacity to challenge the state – had provided with helpful insights to further the agency of non-state actors in the Central Asian *ashar* context. The *ashar* logic in theorizing the nature of the state in Central Asia is pivotal because it captures omnipresent communal input which state-centric perspectives largely omit. Recent studies which emphasize the agency of informal in strengthening the state or formal institutions (see Akchurina 2019, Sheranova 2020d) also point out perspectives beyond the state-centric direction. Thus, the *ashar-stan* concept of the state in the Central Asian context is a helpful framework to understand the state not as a single and dominant actor, but rather to understand it as a blend of multiple actors participating in making/unmaking the state. The *ashar-stan* framework which the thesis proposes further emphasizes the role of communities in maintaining the state functions and contributes to the earlier literature on the agency of people in making the state (see Reeves 2017; Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer 2014).

Apart from strengthening the state, the *ashar* tradition makes the political leadership in Central Asia vulnerable too. It is commonly accepted in literature that the state's shortcomings in providing basic services increase public discontent and erode political legitimacy of the leadership (see Lipset 1959, 1981; OECD 2010; Holmes 2016). Central Asian leaders are not exception, as Matveeva (2009) puts CA leaders experience 'weak legitimacy'. Isaacs and Frigerio (2019: 8) also agree about "a constant necessity in Central Asia towards justification." The *ashar* tradition can undermine political legitimacy of the ruling elites because of public criticism about lack of effective governance. Only in Kyrgyzstan the political leadership had changed three times[4] since its independence because, as Morgan Liu (2014: 261) noted, the leadership 'turned out to be different' than expected by the ordinary residents. Widely referred within the CA scholarship the terms "Kyrgyz chaos," "Uzbek violence," and "Kazakh dynasty" coined by McGlinchey (2011) each speak out about the existing vulnerabilities within these three distinct governance styles. The Central Asian leaders tend to pursue various means to look legitimate, including the control of symbolic power production (see Matveeva 2009, Cummings 2010). To this dynamic that unfolded after the fall of the Soviet state Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer referred as the "moment of creativity" (2014: 22). The Central Asian rulers have been creative to fabricate *imaginaries of development* in order to get re-elected. As I illustrate through the Kyrgyz cases in the thesis, the cultural mega-events (celebrations, anniversaries, sports events) have the capacity to generate *imaginaries of development* and by doing so legitimate the political leadership. I borrow here what Morgan Liu (2014: 261) had framed as 'imaginary' of political to define public sentiments, perceptions, assumptions, thoughts and feelings about the state. He writes that imaginaries are "about how the state is both conceptualized and lived under, and the connections between thinking, feeling, and enacting the state." (ibid.: 270) Accordingly, by ***imaginaries of development*** I mean public perceptions and feelings about assumed state development and supposed caretaking functions of the state therein.

The idea of the state as a main 'caretaker' is important in the post-socialist context of contemporary Central Asia because of the Soviet legacy of welfare state (see Yurchak 2005, Heathershaw and Schatz 2017 (Introduction), Reeves 2017). The Soviet state was a main guarantor of public welfare and wellbeing due to its planned economy, the Soviet state used

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[4] The Tulip revolution in 2005, the April upraising in 2010, and the October uprasing in 2020 which led to power changes.

to provide Central Asians with employment and social benefits (Abdurazakov and Imanaliev 2014). A present-day Soviet nostalgia is a longing for "comfort," "well-being," and "well-furnished common space of living" which is lost (Yurchak 2005: 8). After the fall of communism, the post-Soviet CA states had failed to provide with social welfare, in some instances "local businesses and [Islamic] charities" had replaced the state in doing so (McGlinchey 2011: 13). This was especially painful for the Kyrgyz state which lacked hydrocarbon industries (ibid.). In non-industrialized Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, much of the population was forced to leave own hometowns as labour migrants (Reeves 2017). The 'caretaker' logic could be one of possible answers to explain why many of the latest Soviet generations in Central Asia are still nostalgic about the Soviet state. Nostalgia is expressed through the miss of 'good old days' and the 'certainty' in the future (Dadabaev 2015). Thus, in Central Asia, a 'caretaker' function is essential and it has been a challenging task for the CA states to provide with. Hence, in order to look legitimate and to remain in power, the political leaders of post-communist Eurasia have sought for other creative ways of state performance which would generate public *imaginaries of development* and eventually would legitimize their leadership (see Persson and Petersson 2014, Dubuisson 2014, Kudaibergenova 2015, Menga 2015, Militz 2016, Akulov 2019, Arnold 2021).

In the *ashar-stan,* I suggest these creative ways of state performance are carried out through the 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), mass mega-events (Roche 2000) and sports events (Arnold 2021). For the sake of convenience, I refer to them all as *invented mega-events (mega-projects) or performative projects*. **Invented mega-events (mega-projects)** or **performative projects** are state-sponsored mass cultural or sports events which are designed with a political purpose to create the imaginaries of development because they highlight the state achievements and omit to mention about the state failures, they serve as a platform to communicate about the country's bright future, and overall contribute to imagined competent leadership. These performative events had become a sort of cultural legitimation strategy for the political elites due to their mass mobilization capacity and spectacular shows which produce a public support and create *imaginaries of development* (see Sheranova 2022). In the thesis, based on Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) and Maurice Roche (2000), I examine three major state-sponsored anniversaries during the Askar Akaev era (1991-2005)[5] and the latest Kyrgyz project titled

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[5] Akaev-led mega-celebration of Manas Epic's 3000-years anniversary in 1995, mega-celebration of Osh City's 3000-years anniversary in 2000, and mega-celebration of the Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary in 2003.

"The World Nomad Games" (further the WNG) as *invented mega-events (mega-projects)* or *performative projects* interchangeably. The Kyrgyz state-sponsored cultural events are 'formalized' and 'ritualized' traditions with reference to the past (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:4) while some are repetitive (such as the World Nomad Games which were designed to be held once in two years). As Roche wrote, mega-events include big events, such as Expos or sports games, they also can represent mass 'public culture' events (2000: 21-22). According to Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) the 'invented traditions' mainly are traditions which were brought from the past into modern states. In the thesis, I expand the use of Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) 'invented traditions' into the context of progressive innovations too, such as state modernization programmes, and other globalized mega-events. As I claim, the ruling elites in the *ashar-stans* tend to regularly fabricate imaginaries of development, therefore any state-run mega-projects, including innovative ones could be examined as 'invented' to some extent. Put differently, in Central Asia, other examples of modern 'invented' projects or performative projects include various state initiatives, such as anticorruption campaigns, digitalization projects, state strategies or programs, such as Kazakhstan 2030 strategy in Kazakhstan (Kudaibergenova 2015), police reform initiatives in Kyrgyzstan (Lottholtz and Sheranova 2021), higher education and globalization initiatives in Kazakhstan (Fauve 2015a) and other global mega-events in Eurasia (see Rojo-Labaien 2018, Makarychev and Yatsyk (eds.) 2016, Militz 2016). The invented mega-projects in the ashar-stans are crucial because they create the imaginaries of development and by doing so, they legitimate the incumbent regime. In other words, the invented mega-events are cultural performance legitimation projects for the ruling elites.

Engaging with key literature on the nexus between legitimation, culture, mega-events and sports in the post-communist region (Marat 2008, Matveeva 2009, Militz 2016, Arnold 2021, Sheranova 2022), I propose that political elites in the *ashar-stan* tend to use a **cultural performance legitimation** mode because so-called 'traditional' sources of legitimation (such as economic and social output-based means) are lacking or too weak in these states (see von Soest and Grauvogel 2015). ***The cultural performance legitimation mode*** – is a self-legitimation mode of the ruling regime which includes a legitimation through state-sponsored cultural activities, such as performances, celebrations, anniversaries, mega-events and sports events. By serving as a platform for communicating for the domestic and external audiences about the country's and the country leaders' achievements or imaginaries of development, these state-funded invented mega-events persuade their audiences in the rightness of their policies and their authority. The political

elites have to invest in mass cultural projects because they regularly fail to meet output-based claims of legitimacy. As widely noted in the literature, the political regime is legitimate if it delivers public goods and addresses most of public needs (see von Soest and Grauvogel 2015). This definition of legitimacy is also referred as performance legitimacy or economic performance legitimacy (see Lipset 1959, 1981). While legitimacy is a static term, legitimation is a term used to denote a process: "the terms 'legitimation' and 'delegitimation' imply the more active processes by which legitimacy is created and maintained or eroded and lost." (Ansell 2001: 8706)

The claim of cultural performance legitimacy is supported by other studies examining why politics and culture go in hand with each other. According to Pierre Bourdieu, a domination can occur in case of appropriation of "the field of cultural production" (2013: 184). Culture and politics together as Alexei Yurchak puts create "avant-garde" and produce a "positive power" (2005: 11) which is justifiable. Together they are a "creative force" (ibid.) Rituals play a crucial role in producing and reproducing state discourses and they also allow citizens to be a part of this production process (Yurchak 2005). Ritualized practices and mass participation allow the state leaders to create a state discourse and a support basis (ibid.). Myths and rituals legitimate hierarchy or power relations (Bourdieu 2013: 165). On the example of age and gender, for instance, Bourdieu explains how social illustrations present in the society due to the system of myths and beliefs contribute to maintain 'the social order' and 'the power relations' in the interest of the dominant group: "social representations of the different ages of life, and of the properties attached by definition to them, express, in their own logic, the power relations between the age-classes, helping to reproduce at once the union and the division of those classes by means of temporal divisions tending to produce both continuity and rupture. Thereby, they rank among the institutionalized instruments for maintenance of the symbolic order, and hence among the mechanisms of the reproduction of the social order whose very functioning serves the interests of those occupying a dominant position in the social structure, the men of mature age." (2013: 165) In a similar way, the cultural events, including the sports, by serving to the interest of the dominant ruling class aim to maintain and to strengthen the existing system of the power relations and the social order. The appropriation of culture and the use of culture becomes vital in maintaining the power or legitimating the power of the ruling elites.

As mentioned earlier, nation-building is dependent on context and does not have a universal formula of making a nation (Connor 2004, Isaacs and Polese 2016), therefore,

invented mega-events in the former Soviet space with political regimes facing legitimation difficulties suggest non-traditional nation-building patterns. Put differently, in the *ashar-stan*, nation-building is implemented by non-state actors or at the community level without a direct participation of the state. A similar attitude is supported by a growing body of literature on the region which had examined post-Soviet identity from the perspective of 'everyday life' (see Isaacs and Polese 2005, 2016; Morris 2009; Polese 2014; Laruelle 2021). These works are mainly inspired by Michael Billig's idea on everyday nationalism (1995) and other influential works (Eriksen 1993, Giddens 1984, Antonsich 2015). This body of works had challenged the predominant trend in the literature of state-centric views on nation-building and had advocated for non-traditional or non-state-centred nation-building. Despite its variety, the existing scholarship on non-traditional nation-building (see Isaacs and Polese 2015, 2016; Morris 2009, Polese 2014, Polese et al. 2018a, 2018b, Laruelle 2021) omits similar processes in Kyrgyzstan, and the thesis aims to fulfil this gap and contributes to further theorization in the direction of nation-building from below. Through the Kyrgyz case the research also aims to balance the over-emphasized role of the state in nation-building[6] by stressing an alternative role of non-state agents (such as community leaders, Kok-Boru game players, businessmen and the World Nomad Games performers) in nation-making process. I agree with the statement that "traditional tools and approaches are not sufficient to understand the variety of practices that construct the nation through actions and modes which are not always or necessarily initiated by the political elites." (Polese et al. 2018b: 8)

Following these works, I argue that in the *ashar-stan*, invented mega-events produce **unintended nation-building**. In a model of unintended nation-building which the thesis proposes I underline how the political elites' mass performative projects or invented mega-events designed for their legitimation indirectly lead to a process of national identity formation largely due to the efforts of local non-state actors (such as private entrepreneurs, businessmen, philanthropists, politicians and individuals). In the literature these actors are also known as strongmen because of their strong influence within communities (see Migdal 1988, 2001; Migdal et al 1994; Reeves 2014). Throughout the thesis under **strongmen** I mean wealthy actors, such as businessmen, private entrepreneurs, philanthropist and individual politicians. In my study, however, I am not limited only by strongmen, instead, I also examine the role of ordinary citizens or individuals in nation-building. The notion of

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[6] See Brubaker 1994, Isaacs 2010, Kolstø 2000, Roy 2000, Kuzio 2001, 2002, Smith 1998.

unintended nation-building is, in particularly, inspired by Abel Polese's and Slavomir Horák's (2015) work on 'spontaneous' nation-building. These authors initially referred to the spontaneous nation-building outcome of state policies in Turkmenistan which were primarily designed for other purposes (ibid.). The similar phenomenon of unintended nation-building was also mentioned by Pål Kolstø (2014: Introduction) when he described three waves of nation-building. The idea of 'spontaneous' nation-building was further elaborated in the edited volume by Rico Isaacs and Abel Polese (2016) titled *Nation-Building and Identity in the Post-Soviet Space. New Tools and Approaches*. As the authors defined in the introduction to the volume:

> "The word spontaneous refers to the fact that these tools and approaches display one of the following characteristics. Either they have been conceived at the central-institutional level as a political measure that was not originally intended to influence identity construction, this is the case with elections, opposition movements, mega events, or they have not been initiated by the state but instead have originated from the people themselves, for instance the construction of national identity through the perpetuation of national songs, popular art, singing and dancing." (ibid.: 3)

The thesis furthers this argument by emphasizing a nation-building outcome of Kyrgyz state-sponsored mega-events which were predominantly designed for political legitimation as I will further illustrate in the empirical chapters of the thesis. However, I refer to this phenomenon as 'unintended nation-building' but not 'spontaneous nation-building' because it is generally confusing to name nation-building as 'spontaneous.' Sovereign states do have official or top-down nationalisms (adopted by the state as national 'traits', official languages, national symbols, such as flags and coat of arms etc.) which are not spontaneous. Therefore, unintended nation-building could be a softer alternative term to denote certain state projects not related to nation-building which ended up as nation-building projects due to communal efforts. The term unintended nation-building also does not undermine the role of a state in nation-building. What it does instead, is that it proposes that after the official nationalism produced by the state (i.e. following the adoption of state symbols, languages, etc.), nation-building can occur indirectly as part of other state initiatives without the state's intention to do so. As Isaacs and Polese (2016) suggest nation-building is a continuous and complex process, and identities are not fixed categories (see Brubaker 1996). Therefore, national identity formation occurs at any time with or without state's intention to do so after the establishment of official nationalism. In the ashar-stan where the political leadership is worried about its regime survival, nation-building can be

neglected by the elites despite a weak nation-building is detrimental for the state's long-term development. Thus, unintended nation-building is a helpful framework to examine nation-building efforts from below which occur as a consequence of state policies designed for other purposes, often self-legitimization purposes, as the case study of Kyrgyzstan illustrates. This framework is important in order to have a multifaceted and a complete picture about the complex nature of nation-building in the post-Soviet space. Together with the existing scholarship on state-centric or top-down nation-building, the unintended nation-building model allows us to better understand and theorize about nation-formation processes in and beyond Central Asia.

To summarize, the thesis proposes **three main arguments**. **The first argument** is that the *invented mega-events* or *performative projects* (the celebrations, the anniversaries and the games held between 1991-2017 in Kyrgyzstan) were used by the incumbent regimes for political purposes, in particular for acquiring a power legitimacy by creating *imaginaries of development*. Political legitimation of the incumbent regimes was based on culture, i.e. it was a **cultural performance legitimation process**. Invented mega-events were powerful because they generated imaginaries of development which secured political support.

The second argument is that the nation-building under these invented mega-events was rather *unintended* outcome because national identity markers fostered by these celebrations, anniversaries and games were mainly bottom-up or from below. Put differently, the non-state actors themselves actively produced and promoted some of the identity markers or ideas staged during these invented mega-projects, while the state elites were passive in this process. The state elites had other aims behind the mega-projects, mainly political and economic objectives as the political and economic contexts under the mega-events suggest. The process of shaping or reshaping national identity in Kyrgyzstan during and aftermath these invented mega-events can be defined as **unintended nation-building** which underlines how spectacular cultural mass projects of the political regimes indirectly lead to a process of national identity formation by the efforts of local non-state actors and strongmen (private entrepreneurs, businessmen, philanthropists, individual politicians, citizens).

The third argument relates to a broader study of nationalism and asserts that in the *ashar-stans* with poor state delivery the political elites tend more to focus on legitimation strategies in order to justify their stay in power. The study argues that in contexts like

Central Asia where the state underachieves its core duties, nation-building and legitimation are indivisible and inter-related processes and should not be studied separately.

1.2 The relevance of the study

This topic is important to study and to analyse for two reasons. Firstly, from the practical point of view, the understanding of nation-building processes in Kyrgyzstan is significant because the country did not fight for its independence, instead Kyrgyzstan inherited the independence after the fall of the communism. As the famous Kyrgyz/Soviet diplomat, Ishenbai Abdurazakov asserted, right after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Frunze (now Bishkek) like other Central Asian states waited for the Moscow's command and did not believe in the fall of the Soviet rule (see Abdurazakov and Imanaliev 2014). The Soviet peripheries, such as Central Asia became 'unwanted children of Moscow' or 'betrayed orphans' (ibid.). The Soviet Kyrgyz, similar to other Soviet nations, did not believe in the fall of the Soviet state and they never expected it (Yurchak 2005). The confession of an Ethnic-Kyrgyz high-rank diplomat suggestions that the independence in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan was unwelcome if not unwanted. As scholars warn, the lack of national consciousness is problematic for the state's long-term development (Kolstø 2005). In Kyrgyzstan, a weak national ideology could be one of root causes for many pitfalls the country faces today, such as regional divisions, tribalism/nepotism, other social cleavages, clientelism, corruption, illicit economies, lack of rule of law, and defective democracy. Therefore, on a practical level, the research on nation-building is central in understanding the nation's past and the present and in shaping the nation's future. Paradoxically, most of present-day policy research and policy recommendations in Kyrgyzstan do omit the value of national identities and national loyalty in the country's long-term development and democratization process. This research is an attempt to understand how many and what kind of nation-formation processes had Kyrgyzstan underwent since its independence.

The important academic contribution that the study makes within the existing scholarship on nation-building in post-Soviet Central Asia is that the study provides an alternative account on the major state-pushed projects not as intended nation-building projects but also as political devices used for the regime survival and legitimation purposes. This study, unlike other works mentioned earlier, argues that invented mega-projects in the form of state celebrations, anniversaries and games in Kyrgyzstan were also designed by the Kyrgyz government to respond to the domestic crises and eventually to acquire the

power legitimacy; whereas, national identity formation process was rather a chaotic process, it was accomplished from the bottom due to efforts of non-state actors. I suggest that the state-sponsored celebrations, anniversaries and games in Central Asia should not be taken for granted as nation-building efforts because they are much complex than they seem and are also politically symbolic activities. This study, by discussing the case of the Kyrgyz leadership's invented mega-projects between 1991-2017, contributes to the existing literature and sheds a new light on the relationship between the invented mega-events or performative projects, the power legitimacy and nation-building in Central Asia in the following manner:

The research challenges a prevailed idea in the literature of nationalism in CA that interprets every single cultural or ethno-historical project adopted or implemented by the state after the independence as a project designed for nation-building without a thorough study of political contexts under which these projects were adopted or implemented (see Hvoslef 2001; Adams 1999, 2004, 2007, 2010; Straube 2008; Adams and Rustemova 2009; Murzakulova and Schoeberlein 2009; Abashin 2012; Wachtel 2013, 2016; Ismailbekova 2016; Marat 2016; Militz 2016; Megoran 2017). In contrast to the existing works, the thesis emphasizes the political function of these performative projects.

The study contributes to the recent scholarship which challenges the prevalent state-centric view. Examining Kyrgyzstan's state celebrations, anniversaries and games, namely the World Nomad Games, as an empirical study, the research contributes to the growing non-traditional nation-building scholarship which proposes diverse understanding of nation-building process by focusing on micro-level accounts (see Isaacs et al. 2016, Polese et al. 2018a, Polese et al. 2018b). As empirical findings in this thesis suggest, national identity markers aftermath the World Nomad Games were produced actively by non-state actors, whereas the state was a rather passive actor in that respect.

Finally, this study is important because it suggests a local interpretation of the concept of state in the Central Asian context: the ashar-stan which underlines the role of ordinary citizens in making and maintaining the state. Cultural performance legitimation mode is also suggested in the study as alternative mode of political elites' legitimation strategy in the post-Soviet context in Central Asia and a broader Eurasia, as it provides with a legitimation framework in contexts which face challenges in output legitimation (legitimation through economic performance). Finally, imaginaries of development are useful categories to understand local perceptions about state development and state caretaking functions.

1.3 The roadmap of the thesis

The outline of the research is two-fold. Firstly, the study examines the socio-economic and political contexts in Kyrgyzstan between 1991 and 2017 under which the state celebrations, anniversaries and games were held, and it describes fundamental political reasons behind promotion of invented mega-projects. In the second part of the thesis, I illustrate how these invented mega-projects indirectly contributed to the formation of the national identity or led to a process of unintended nation-building which is the study's central argument. The unintended nation-building aspect of these invented mega-projects is illustrated in the thesis based on a field data collected between December-2020 and July -2022 about the impact of the World Nomad Games on national identity at the societal or individual levels.

Followed by this introduction chapter, in the second chapter of the thesis, I introduce the socio-economic and political context of Kyrgyzstan after the fall of communism. I discuss the inner perception of the fall of communism and the outcome of the statehood it had generated, I pause on the state nation-building challenges by emphasising prevalent sub-national identities and informal politics it had contributed to. Then, I briefly pause on the political system, and three power transitions the country underwent since the independence, and move on to the state macro and micro-economic indicators and I discuss labour migration and informal market (bazaar) as two main survival strategies. Finally, as a conceptualizing departure to the next chapters, I propose the concept of *the ashar-stan* to illustrate state inefficiencies and to stress the role of communities in maintaining the state.

In the third theoretical chapter, I survey key literature on political legitimacy, legitimation and sources of legitimacy. Then, I review works on performance politics (politics of celebrations), mega-events with focus on instrumental use by the elites. Finally, I discuss key approaches to the study of nationalism and nation-building. Based, on the surveyed literature on legitimacy, nationalism and cultural events on Eurasia and beyond, I propose a *model of unintended nation-building* and *cultural performance self-legitimation* mode of the elites. In the fourth methodological chapter, I explain why and how do I apply discourse analysis and interview methods, and I explain the country case selection.

In the fifth and the sixth empirical chapters, I focus on official discourses of the invented mega-events in Kyrgyzstan between 1991-2017, namely on Askar Akaev's three mega-events (celebration of the 1000-years anniversary of the epic Manas, Osh City's 3000-years anniversary and Kyrgyzstan's 2200-years anniversary), and Almazbek Atambaev's the World Nomad Games mega-event. In these two chapters, first, I describe

each mega-event, then I analyze the presidents' speeches in relation to these mega-events, finally, I examine the political and economic contexts of each mega-project, and based on this, I argue that these invented mega-events were also politically-driven.

In the seventh chapter, I illustrate how the World Nomad Games, while officially aimed at different objectives, had indirectly produced a new nomadic identity which is present in domestically popularized mass consumption and production of *Kok-Boru* game and ethno-fashion in Kyrgyzstan. On the examples of public *Kok-Boru* federations and private fashion designers, I show how state-sponsored mega-events shaped a new identity around nomadism due to the efforts of non-state actors, such as businessmen, entrepreneurs, individual politicians and others. The chapter exemplifies the patterns of unintended nation-building in Kyrgyzstan.

In the conclusion chapter, I go back to the study's three main arguments. First, I pause on the Kyrgyz elites' performative projects and the imaginaries of development which they generated to legitimate the incumbent regimes (*cultural performance legitimation process*). Then, I discuss how the nation-building under these invented mega-events was unintended (*model of unintended nation-building*), I stress how the non-state actors themselves actively produced and promoted nomadic identity markers or ideas staged during the mega-projects, while the state did not. Here, I also map out how many and what kind of nation-formation processes had Kyrgyzstan underwent. Finally, I conclude that in the *ashar-stans* or post-communist Eurasia, nation-building and legitimation are indivisible and inter-related processes and should not be studied separately.

Note on transliteration:

I use BGN/PCGN system for transliteration of the Russian Cyrillic alphabet, exceptions are made for words where another spelling is commonly used, for example *tzaar*.

Note on translations:

All translations from Kyrgyz and Russian into English in the thesis are mine.

CHAPTER 2: SETTING THE LOCALE OF KYRGYZSTAN: THE ASHAR-STAN

2.1 Fall of communism and independence

After the fall of communism, the Central Asian union-states woke up in five independent states divided by international frontiers. The CA countries did not fight for their independence and received it as a 'gift' after "[a] whole civilization was swept away" (Gleason 2018: 3). Unlike other communist member-countries of the USSR, Central Asian states were in the "slow lane" to sovereignty (Suyarkulova 2012: 148), and were out of "the ultimate decision-making process" as their fates towards independence were decided without them (Roy 2007: xiii). In the western literature the post-communist Central Asian states are referred as states which lack the so-called 'national consciousness' usually when they are compared to former communist Baltic states (see Hirsch 2005, Roy 2007, Gleason 2018). For instance, Olivier Roy asserts that CA states lacked a "historical memory of a nation lost" (2007: xiii). Gregory Gleason (2018: 1) also writes that the fall of communism and the independence aftermath generated "conflicting emotions" such as "surprise, resignation, and despair mixed with relief, elation, and celebration." The author summarizes this process in the following lines: "Independence did not arise in Central Asia as a result of indigenous forces. The Central Asian states were not "catapulted" to independence, they were subjected to it. It is true that independence initially came with some nationalist euphoria and flag-waving, but its most profound aspect was disruption." (ibid.: 3)

Available domestic insights on the fall of communism and the independence also provide additional accounts by raising an important question: how did the Central Asian states feel about the independence? The book by Ishenbai Abdyrazakov and Muratbek Imanaliev titled *Neokonchennyi dialog* (2014) in the form of a dialogue between two high-rank diplomats of the Soviet (then the Kyrgyz) state is representative in this sense because it gives us accounts about observations and personal feelings of the last generation of the Soviet-Kyrgyz elites and intellectuals. The volume discusses the period of the Soviet Union's collapse through the inner view. They argue that the fall of the Soviet Union was driven by Moscow itself, and consequently, the emergence of the new Central Asian states was also driven by Moscow. In the CA region, and in Kyrgyzstan, in particular, which is the focus of the book, the authors note that there were neither nationalist movements, nor nationalist sentiments prior to the collapse of the Union. In contrast, as the diplomats put, Kyrgyzstanis along with state employees were embarrassed and felt frustrated by the forceful decision on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the

Commonwealth of Independent States on December 8th in 1991 at *Belovejskaya Pushcha*. The fall of the Soviet state was unexpected by many as other sources also prove and the fall of communism was followed by mixed feelings (Yurchak 2005). The dissolution of the Soviet Union was also not expected by the Soviet Kyrgyz. There were minor signals from the above that the Union "was failing" and will probably end its existence in the upcoming years because there were Kremlin-based experts stating that the USSR should be re-framed into the Confederation of Free and Independent states or the union similar to the Commonwealth of British Nations (Abdurazakov, Imanaliev 2014: 10). The authors maintain that probably the CA states did not wish to become independent (ibid.). Abdyrazakov writes that there was not even a minor desire to gain the state independence among the masses in Central Asia because there was a predominant consciousness about colonial domination with passive positions, such as: "we do not decide, the *tzaar* is the one who does, the general secretary and so forth." (ibid.: 24) Even if among some people there was a desire to become independent, this was done in "an unconscious manner, like an impulsive emotional outburst" they continue (ibid.). Likewise, the authors write that the CA people did not aspire the independence per se because they lived fortunate lives in the Soviet Union, they had nothing to blame Moscow about their lives and people did not know what to do with independence (ibid.). Both authors conclude that the national understanding of the independence among the Kyrgyz people is lacking even today, because people are still divided into tribes and regions, and there is no symbol of a national dignity (2014).

Hence, based on these domestic and external sources we can assert that the independence of CA states became a result of the Soviet collapse, but not a product of grass-root independence movements or "inherent unity of the people" as Gleason frames (2018: 15). Gleason notes: "No powerful, charismatic, heroic leaders were swept into power with a moral mandate to oust a corrupted, quasi-colonial political elite." (2018: 10) The lack of grass-root national sentiments as noted in the literature were not only because these nations lacked national memories but because they were pleased with the Soviet welfare system and they accepted the Soviet state as a legitimate one. The fall of communism was accepted by the new states as a challenging experience because each of CA states had to undergo important "political," "economic," and "psychological" changes ahead (Gleason 2018: 3). This experiment was difficult in Kyrgyzstan, like in most Central Asia. As I further discuss in the sections below, it had led to challenges in the country's nation-building and democratization; it had resulted in informal politics, political turmoils, economic troubles, ineffective governance, and limited economic opportunities for citizens. Kyrgyzstan was

among the first CA states to declare its independence in 1991 on August 31ˢᵗ and take a turn towards market liberalization and privatization. Kyrgyzstan adopted its Constitution in 1993, according to which the power was divided between the President, the Parliament and the Judiciary system. The country took a confident course towards democratization in the 90s and became widely labelled as "an island of democracy" in Central Asia and in 2000s its democratic course began to erode.

2.2 Sub-national identities and informal politics

Central Asians still maintain pre-modern sub-national identities which are referred in the literature as tribes, clans, kinship, patronage networks, regional divisions or solidarity groups (see Roy 2000, Junusaliev and Ploskih 2000, Luong 2002, Hardenberg 2009, Collins 2004, Jacquesson 2010, Ismailbekova 2017). The scholarly terminology to denote sub-national identities is disputed. Political scientists suggest terms such as "clan" (Collins 2004, 2006) and "tribalism" (Junusaliev and Ploskih 2000). In response, anthropologists argue that the term "clan" is distorted from the local reality and they propose instead referring to "kinship and lineage" networks and "patronage" (Hardenberg 2009, Jacquesson 2010, Ismailbekova 2017). While others propose the term "regionalism" (Luong 2002). The purpose of this section is not to engage into this conceptual debate on defining this phenomenon, although I argue for use of a local terminology *uruuchuluk* (see Ismailbekova 2018) for a more accurate report of patrilinear kinship identity. Instead, the intention of this section is to demonstrate the prevalence of sub-national identities which signal about challenges in nation-building and point out to the prevalence of non-state or informal institutions and informal politics in the region. In general, I will refer to them throughout the thesis as sub-national identities, i.e. identities existing despite and beyond official national identity.

Sub-national loyalties had also survived the Soviet nation-building experiment. As Francine Hirsch writes during the pre-Soviet times "people [in CA] claimed several identities at once," because often "[e]thnic, linguistic, religious, clan, and economic divisions did not coincide" (2005: 165). The early Soviet censuses in 1920 and 1926, revealed the Central Asians' strong loyalty towards their tribes, clans and religion, especially in rural nomadic and semi-nomadic settlements (Hirsch 2005). However, by the 1930s, following Stalin's nationality policies, Central Asians began identifying themselves in terms of a nationality (*narodnost'*). The top-down projects of the Soviet rule, such as the establishment of administrative divisions in CA, termed by the author as "border-making",

and "census-taking" carried out by the Soviet leaders, were key elements in transforming sub-national identities in the region into modern nations and the indigenous population "learned that they were supposed to define themselves as members of an official nationality" (ibid: 145-146). However, despite the Soviets' efforts to modernize the region, pre-modern identities of clans, tribes and other regional identities had survived and had been incorporated into the Soviet system of local and regional governance (Roy 2000). "Solidarity groups" as Roy frames were adapted to the Soviet bureaucracy and the Communist Party system: old identities became "mediators" between the individual and the state and led to the establishment of a new *kolkhoz* tribe (a collective farm tribe) (2000: xii). According to him, pre-modern identities challenged neither the system nor the state, but the state became a "referee" to mediate a competition between various solidarity groups (ibid).

Sub-national identities are also political categories. As Nancy Lubin observes "Muslim and atheist, Soviet and Asian, Turkic and Slav, clan and regional" identities in CA are applied by people "depending on context" (1993: n.p.). Roy too notes the "recomposition of identity" in Central Asia is shaped merely by political settings (2000: 17). According to him, the Central Asians "for reasons of 'status'" tend to change their own identity (ibid.). He argues that clans appear both in "everyday life" and "political life" because they are a key political mobilization principle (2000: 12). For instance, after the independence, different loyalty groups in Kyrgyzstan competed against one another to get access to state resources on national, regional and local levels (Temirkoulov 2004). Namely, patronage or kinship groups were crucial in maintaining political leadership. According to Ismailbekova (2017), kinship is key in ensuring political support in Kyrgyzstan.

There are about forty tribes divided historically into three groups: *ong* (right), *sol* (left) and *ichkilik* (central), which contribute to a political competition between the southern and the northern political elites, known as the north-south cleavage (see Ryabkov 2008). Tribal groupings are recorded and kept in the genealogical tree called *Sanzhyra* (transliterated also as *sanjyra* or *sanjïra*) (Ismailbekova 2017, Sheranova 2020b). Historically, Kyrgyz tribal or kinship system had replaced the functions of the modern state. During the pre-modern times, similar to other nomadic societies, the Kyrgyz nomads could not imagine their lives outside their tribes because tribes provided with security and care. Consequently, a tribe was an essential part of the Kyrgyz identity, and those who did not know their seven forefathers within their patrilineal lineage were perceived as not pure Kyrgyz (Ibraimov 1992: 66). Today, yet, Kyrgyz are not too attached to their tribes, they still continue to

chronicling their seven forefathers, and continue to seeking for a support from extended kinship family during the economic hardships and local or national elections (see Ismailbekova 2017, Sheranova 2020a, 2020b).

Despite, Kyrgyzstan is a formal democracy, the political parties during their creation had relied much on regionalism or tribalism principles (see Luong 2002, Torogeldieva 2010), and as scholars put, political parties were "restricted to a specific geographical area" (Kartawich 2005: 7). This led to a high number of political parties in Kyrgyzstan. For example, in 2016, there were 203 officially registered political parties according to the OSCE/ODIHR report (see OSCE/ODIHR 2016). Likewise, the Kyrgyz electorate is inclined to support 'own' candidates (Ismailbekova 2017, Sheranova 2020a, Sheranova 2020b) often representing native regions or 'native sons' (Ismailbekova 2017). Scott Radnitz's observations are also distinctive: "one's village of origin remains with a person for life and people readily assume that somebody from their region who gets elected will represent their interests" (2005: 417). Ismailbekova (2017) explains that patron-client relationships are important in the political life of Kyrgyzstan because the elected candidates act as patrons, while voters act as their clients. In brief, in Kyrgyzstan, like in other CA states, sub-national loyalties are still present and play a crucial role in local and national politics, thereby making democratization difficult (see Suny 1993, Roy 2000, Collins 2006, Marat 2008, Cummings 2012). Sub-national identities along with informal politics resulted in challenges in post-independence nation-building too.

2.3 Political system and three power transitions

Kyrgyzstan has a vibrant post-independence political history because the country had experienced three political unrests in 2005, 2010, and 2020, which all resulted in the change of the ruling power. Two out of three power overthrows occurred after the parliamentary elections. The *Jogorku Kenesh* – the Kyrgyz Parliament is the highest legislative body consisting of 90 elected members for a term of five years. Members of the parliament are elected based on proportional and mixed electoral systems. Between 2010-2020 Kyrgyzstan was formally a parliamentary republic, although in practice the President remained a central figure. According to the Constitution modified in 2010, the President was elected for a fixed one term of six years of service. Between 1991-2010 Kyrgyzstan was a super-presidential republic with the President enjoying the impressive list of presidential mandates and the Constitution allowing re-election of the acting president. Therefore, in the thesis under the terms 'political elites', 'ruling regimes' or 'incumbent regimes' I mean the Presidents of

the Kyrgyz Republic, not the Prime-Ministers and not the Parliament. Under political regimes following Magyar and Madlovics (2020) I mean ruling elite which "collude" with the state (2020: 75). In the following sections I briefly pause on each popular uprising.

2.3.1 The Tulip Revolution in 2005

In March 2005, public demonstrations started in Osh and Jalalabad[7] in response to Askar Akaev's[8] clan-based governance and falsified parliamentary elections in February the same year. Akaev's presidential rule was the longest in the history of post-independent Kyrgyzstan. Akaev was elected as the President three times in 1991, 1995 and 2000. International accounts praised Akaev for his pro-liberal democratic views. Akaev's domestic politics was ethnically balanced and was characterized as a civic-centered nationalism policy in the country (Elebayeva 2000). Akaev aimed to build the Kyrgyz state in the spirit of internationalism where the state does not "privilege the state's titular owners" (Wachtel 2013: 973). Despite his famous progressive and civic-centered nationalism policies, Akaev's regime was blamed for excessive power usurpation and several attempts to introduce a family rule.

The opposition movement led by Kurmanbek Bakiyev overthrew Akaev's regime on 24th of March 2005 by mobilizing thousands of dissatisfied people, predominantly from the south of the country. Following the turmoil, Akaev and his family left to Moscow. The protest was "a grassroots people's movement," therefore, "no political force could lay an obvious claim to power" (Matveeva 2010: 2). Shortly after a power transition, the south-north power-sharing "tandem" between Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Felix Kulov[9] was established: Bakiyev became the President and Kulov was appointed the Prime-minister.

Akaev's overthrow was widely termed in the literature as *the Tulip Revolution[10]*. The international observers grouped the Kyrgyz revolution into the waves of *Color Revolutions* which occurred between late 2003 and mid 2005 in Georgia and Ukraine (Mitchell: 2012). The international community welcomed the Tulip Revolution with "euphoria" following the

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[7] The third largest city in Kyrgyzstan, located in the south of Kyrgyzstan, a home town to Bakyiev

[8] Kyrgyz President (1990-2005), the first President of Kyrgyzstan

[9] The former Akaev's ally, he was jailed by Akaev when his popularity grew

[10] Others considered 2005 revolution as a shift between the south-north political elites. For instance, Matveeva (2010) writes that during the upraise the southerners were in a leading position to take most of the key state offices. She notes that "it appeared fair that supreme authority should rotate in favour of the South" (Matveeva 2010: 3).

Ukrainian and the Georgian regime shifts in the post-Soviet space (Pannier: 2010). It was believed that Color Revolution-states could "reshape the political terrain of the former Soviet Union," as new governments seemed to be "pro-democracy" and "pro-Western" (Mitchell 2012: 1). However, by 2010, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan did not demonstrate its potential for democratic shift and changes, similar to Georgia and Ukraine. In 2010, shortly after his re-election in 2009, Bakiyev was overthrown and was forced to flee to Belarus.

2.3.2 The 2010 April Revolution and the June inter-ethnic violence in the south

On April 7th 2010, Kyrgyzstan was pulled into the second power change. This time, Bakiyev's regime was seized by the opposition and the former was forced to flee to Minsk. Because Bakiyev was brought to the power by the celebrated Tulip revolution, the West has been silent to his undemocratic policies (Pannier: 2010). Similar to Akaev, Bakiyev was accused for clan-based system of governance, nepotism, corruption, repression of the opposition and power usurpation (Chernyaev 2010). Bakiyev's family had enormous access to the state resources, they managed to privatize major state companies, and raided political opponents' properties (ibid.). In addition, Kurmanbek Bakiyev took control over the security sector by appointing his younger brother Janysh Bakiyev as "a chief bodyguard" to the head of the Intelligence Service (International Crisis Group 2010: 17). The uprising in April in comparison with the March revolution of 2005 was violent, leading to the killing 77 people and wounding of around a thousand people. The violent nature of the April revolution is explained by the composition of demonstrators, according to Matveeva (2010). During the 2005 revolution, women were major actors and were less violent, while in 2010, young men dominated among the demonstrators and they resorted to violence by burning, beating and destructing (Matveeva 2010).

Chernyaev (2010) argues that the 2010 revolution was not a public revolution like the Tulip revolution was. The 2010 revolution was a set-up of inter-clan relations as it was driven by Bakiyev's ex-teammates who mobilized the population (Chernyaev 2010). Because of that, he writes, the Interim government had a trouble in gaining a large support of the southerners (ibid.). Very soon after the Interim government led by Roza Otunbaeva took the power and declared itself the interim executive and legislative power until a new Parliament and a new President are elected and a new government is formed, in the south of the country the violent inter-ethnic conflict began on June 10th 2010. The Kyrgyz ethnic majority and Uzbek ethnic minority groups residing in Osh and Jalalabad cities clashed with each other. In June 1990, during the transition period Kyrgyzstan had also experienced a similar inter-

ethnic conflict. According to some, the violence in 2010 was believed to involve also great powers (see Megoran 2014). The interim government blamed Bakiyev and his close family for the instigation of the violence. Later, the International Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission (KIC) established per Roza Otunbaeva's request assessed the conflict as a crime against humanity (Commission 2010).

The major reform that the Interim government succeeded to implement after the conflict in the south ended, was a new project of the Constitution according to which Kyrgyzstan declared itself as a parliamentary republic. The major changes in the new Constitution were the following: i) the President was elected for six years with a fixed one term presidency, no more terms were allowed, ii) the country became a parliamentary republic, and the members of the Parliament could impeach the acting President, iii) a ten-year term to prohibit amendments to the Constitution was set in order to prevent possible attempts of power usurpation. In 2011, the Interim government was dissolved after a new Parliament was elected and Almazbek Atambaev (2011-2017) was elected as a President.

2.3.3 The third revolution following the October 2020 parliamentary elections

In 2017, following the peaceful transition of power by President Atambaev to the newly elected President Sooronbai Zheenbekov (the successor of Atambaev); in October 2020, Zheenbekov was forced to voluntarily resign from his presidential duties as a result of the political turmoil. Zheenbekov's anti-corruption programs which he declared in the beginning of his Presidency did not achieve a significant result, because he closed his eyes on large-scale corruption cases. Investigative journalists from independent mass media releazed resonant materials about corruption schemes within the Kyrgyz Customs Service involving the high-profile management of the institution. According to the journalists' investigations, the ex-deputy head of the Customs Service, who was in Zheenbekov's informal circle, was in charge of money laundering from Kyrgyzstan. Shortly, series of youth-led protests #Re-Action in the capital city Bishkek were held claiming the President to react and to jail the ex-deputy head of the Customs Service. However, the major catalyst for the third revolution in Kyrgyzstan were again falsified outcomes of the parliamentary elections held on October 4th 2020. Two political parties, one linked with Zheenbekov and another funded by the notorious ex-deputy head of the Customs Service won the majority of seats in the Jogorku Kenesh. The next morning, political parties and youth dissatisfied with the results began to protest in the main square of Bishkek demanding annulation of the election results. The same evening the protesters seized the White House (the main

government building) and released jailed ex-president Atambaev and other political opponents, including Sadyr Zhaparov, a former member of the parliament. On October 15th after protests led by Zhaparov, the President Zheenbekov was forced to resign and Zhaparov stepped as the acting President and the acting Prime-Minister. On January 10th 2021, Zhaparov was elected as a new president. The same year a new Constitution was adopted according to which Kyrgyzstan turned back to presidentialism.

The intention of this section was to introduce in brief the political context of the country under the study, below I pause about the socio-economic dimensions.

2.4 Socio-economic situation: state performance, survival strategies and access to social infrastructure

Kyrgyzstan's economic condition after the fall of communism was catastrophic (Gleason 2003). The industries and factories inherited from the Soviet Union were bankrupted because majority of them were dependent on complementing supplies and items coming from other Union republics (ibid.). Having the fall of the USSR, each republic was cut and isolated from one other. However, Kyrgyzstan was the first CA country to successfully adopt its own currency – the Kyrgyz som (KGS) and leave the rouble zone in 1993, and launch liberal economic reforms (privatization). These steps were decisive enough to secure international loans and grants from the Western world and save the country from the hunger in 1991-1993 (see Gleason 2003, Ibraimov 2015). However, Akaev's privatization policies and international loans did not result in a long-term sustainable economy. International aid mainly profited Akaev's inner circle but not communities (Radnitz 2010: 63, McGlinchey 2011: 96). Political unrests in Kyrgyzstan between 2005 and 2010 had yet more hampered the country's economic development resulting in volatility and uncertainty for business sectors and foreign investment. The country remained highly dependent on the international support. Yet, Kyrgyzstan is rich in water resources and has enormous hydropower potential, however, it is dependent on foreign investment to develop this sector. Kyrgyzstan had adopted the law on foreign investment in 1997, a year before it became the World Trade Organization member.

Since its independence Kyrgyzstan has a scanty state budget. Earlier detailed accounts on the budget are absent in the public access, however, according to open data from the National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic (further the National

Statistics) for the period between 2006-2019, the state budget faced a huge deficit (except in 2007 and 2008). The table below (Table 1.) details the state budget for this period.

Table 1. The state budget for 2006-2019, in million KGS (Kyrgyz Som). Source: http://stat.kg/ (compiled by the author)

Years	Deficit	Surplus	Years	Deficit	Surplus
2006	218.1	-	**2013**	2330.5	-
2007	-	129.1	**2014**	1875.5	-
2008	-	1565.6	**2015**	6149.3	-
2009	2958.8	-	**2016**	20888.9	-
2010	10768	-	**2017**	16476.2	-
2011	13663.7	-	**2018**	6188.9	-
2012	20232.3	-	**2019**	431.7	-

As a result of persistent deficit in the state budget, the Kyrgyz government had to issue debts multilaterally and bilaterally. For instance, the National Statistics reported that the state debt had increased from 82,381.7 million KGS in 2006 to 319,474.6 million KGS in 2019 (see Chart 1.):

Chart 1. The state debt, in million KGS. Source: http://stat.kg/ (compiled by the author)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
State debt	82 38	80 86	91 42	117 7	131 5	143 1	156 7	167 4	214 7	289 1	281 4	311 8	311 8	319 4
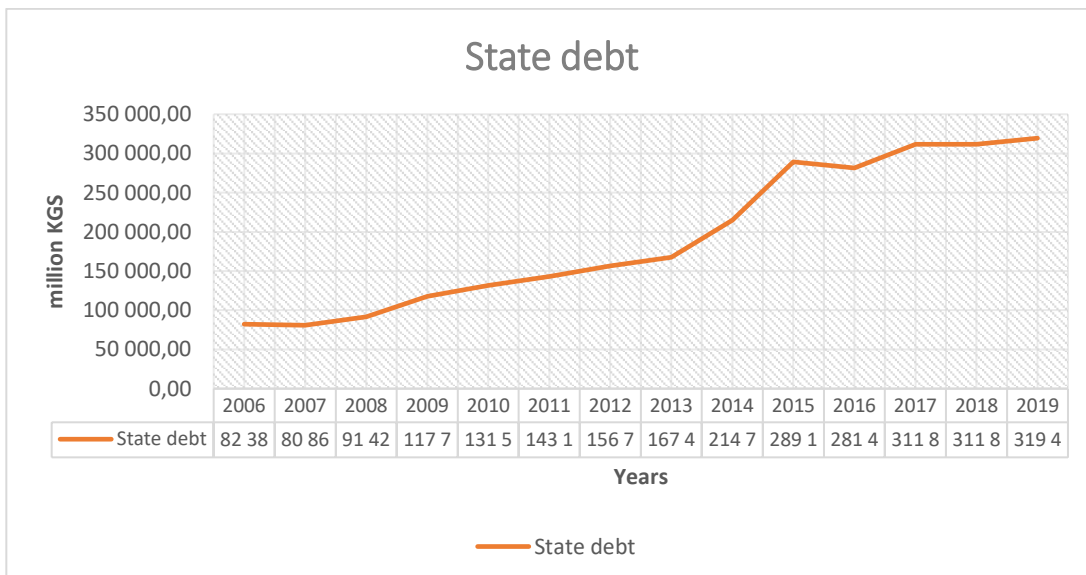
According to the National Statistics the country's GDP in 2014 made 7,428.7 million USD. In 2015 and 2016, it decreased to 6,633.4 and 6,864.4 million USD respectively. In 2017

and 2018, the country GDP increased to 7,700.5 and 8,276.0 million USD respectively. It reached its peak in 2019 and made 8,453.3 million USD.

Major shares of the Kyrgyz Republic's GDP have been made up of labour migration and mining, namely the Kumtor gold mining company. It was in the Soviet era, when gold deposits at Kumtor in Issyk-Kul *oblast*[11] were discovered by geologist in 1978. Gold ores were not developed then because they were estimated as "costly" and "extraction methods" available during that time would bring harsh damage to the environment (Gullette 2014: 28). In 1992, a Toronto-based Canadian company the Cameco Corporation got a license to extract gold ores. In 2019, the Kumtor Operating Company's (known also as Centerra) contribution to state GDP was 9.8%.[12] The Kumtor Company is also a source of political contestations (as it will be further discussed in the thesis, the Kumtor issue became one of the central opposition discourses which led to the fall of Akaev's rule in 2005).

2.4.1 Labour migration and informal market (bazaar) as two main survival strategies

Recent scholarship in poverty studies focuses more on survival strategies of households and individuals in underdeveloped societies rather it emphasizes problems within welfare state institutions (Fontaine and Schlumbohm 2000). Economic and social insecurity and vulnerability, uncertainty about the future and risks shape various survival strategies within communities, such as several occupations, seasonal labour, labour migration and other strategies. Survival mentality especially is high in weak and under-developed states. In the absence of the welfare state, individuals seek for alternative non-state community-based welfare guarantors, such as extended family networks, kinship, regional or tribal networks, patron-client networks and strongmen (ibid.). Inglehart (1997) notes that "survival" and "well-being" are two important notions which differentiate traditional societies from advanced ones. He writes the following: "The difference between feeling secure or insecure about survival is so basic that it has led to a wide-ranging but coherent syndrome of changes, from the "survival" values that characterized agrarian and early industrial society, to the "well-being" values that characterize advanced industrial society." (Inglehart 1997: 42-45) observes that in insecure societies survival values prevail, while in secure and advanced societies well-being values and postmodern values prevail.

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[11] A local term for province

[12] Kumtor Kg: Contribution to the economy, n.d., https://www.kumtor.kg/en/contribution-to-the-kyrgyz-economy/ (accessed 7 December 2020).

Following the Soviet collapse, in poor countries of Central Asia, a labour migration became an alternative survival strategy for the large share of the population (see Murzakulova 2020). Nation-wide poverty level had meaningfully decreased due to labour migration.[13] According to the latest official estimations around 1,200,000 Kyrgyzstanis work in the Russian Federation (Russia).[14] Around 277,000 children nation-wide are left with other relatives because their parents are working abroad.[15] Kyrgyzstan had turned into a labour-exporting country: remittances play a sufficient role in the country's macroeconomic equilibrium. In 2019, according to the World Bank data, about a quarter of Kyrgyzstan's GDP (28.5%) were remittances from labour migrants.[16] In 2018, the remittances transferred to Kyrgyzstan amounted to USD 2,685,000,000.[17] The remittances mainly come from Russia, because labour migrants prefer Russian-speaking countries. Yet, for the last few years, there has been a considerable labour migration patterns to non-Russian speaking countries, like Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and other English-speaking destinations. As the World Bank reports,[18] during the presidency of Askar Akaev (1991-2005) the remittances' share in the country GDP raised from 0.088% in 1993 to 12.732% in 2005. During the presidency of Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005-2010) the remittances peaked in 2008 and made 23.799% of the country GDP.[19] During the presidency of Almazbek Atambaev (2011-2017) its shares ranged from 25.272% to 32.271%[20] in the country GDP.

In 2015, after the inclusion of Kyrgyzstan into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (the EAEU),[21] most of the restrictive regulations for Kyrgyz labour migrants were

[13] Azattyk: Как мигранты спасают статистику по бедности [How do migrants save statistics on poverty], 12 June 2017, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28542739.html (accessed 9 December 2020).

[14] Azattyk: Боз-Адыр: миграция баккан айыл [Boz-Adyr: the village sustained by labour migration], 5 December 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZIYkp8K1kI&feature=emb_logo (accessed 7 December 2020).

[15] Azattyk: Боз-Адыр: миграция баккан айыл [Boz-Adyr: the village sustained by labour migration], 5 December 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZIYkp8K1kI&feature=emb_logo (accessed 7 December 2020).

[16] The World Bank: Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) - Kyrgyz Republic, n.d., https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=KG (accessed 8 December 2020).

[17] Azattyk: Боз-Адыр: миграция баккан айыл [Boz-Adyr: the village sustained by labour migration], 5 December 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZIYkp8K1kI&feature=emb_logo (accessed 7 December 2020).

[18] The World Bank: Personal remittances, received (% of GDP) - Kyrgyz Republic, n.d., https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=KG (accessed 8 December 2020).

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Other EAEU member-countries are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation.

cancelled. For instance, the Russian Federation cancelled Russian language and Russian history exams, patents and work permissions, and Kyrgyz university diplomas became acknowledgeable by the Russian government. Under new the EAEU formalities, only a job contract was required. Terms for stay of labour migrants without registration were prolonged because of the free flow of labour within the union. Kyrgyz labour migrants were also granted social benefits for retirement and access to state social welfare system in Russia. For example, Kyrgyz migrants working in Russia under the new regulations could claim for pensions from the Russian Federation upon their retirement.

Since the early independence labour migration has been the major source of income for most rural families in Kyrgyzstan. Labour migration has been dramatically raising since 1993. The National Statistics reports that in 1991 there were only 136 unemployed people officially registered in Kyrgyzstan. As the Chart 2. below illustrates, the number of registered unemployed people has been sharply increasing during the presidency terms of all three presidents under the study. To note, these are only the official numbers of unemployed people while unofficial numbers are believed to be substantively higher. According to the International Republican Institute (IRI) annual National Opinion Polls available from 2006, the respondents noted the following three issues were the most important for Kyrgyzstanis: unemployment, lack of economic development and corruption.[22] The respondents believed that unemployment was the first priority issue. As their responses suggest, percentage for unemployment ranged from 39% to 61% in the poll periods between 2006-2019.[23]

Chart 2. Number of unemployed people (1991-2018). Source: http://stat.kg/ (compiled by the author)

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[22] IRI: Kyrgyzstan National Opinion Polls, https://www.iri.org/country/kyrgyzstan (accessed 9 December 2020).
[23] Ibid.
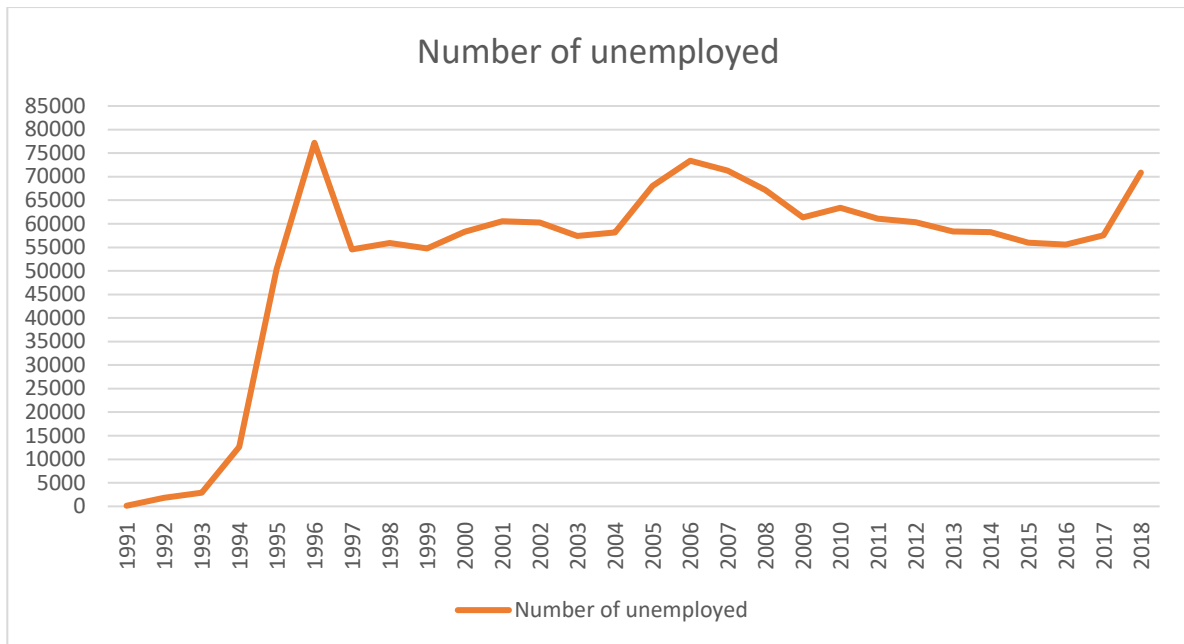
Another economic survival strategy is connected to re-export of Chinese goods in local informal markets or *bazaars*. Kyrgyzstan's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO) since 1998 allowed the country to become a leading re-export country in the region due to its comparatively low import duty. Kyrgyz entrepreneurs used to buy Chinese and other foreign goods and re-export them to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia. "Unemployed people began trading" to feed their families (Hasan Karrar 2018: 282). Shuttle trading in bazaars became a crucial economic survival strategy for many Kyrgyzstanis, especially women (ibid.). According to various estimates, around 20-30 million people became shuttle traders in the former Soviet space (ibid.).

2.4.2 Key social infrastructure: access to potable water and sewage, education, healthcare and road connections

Key state services, such as education and healthcare had suffered as a consequence of tight state budget. Important social infrastructures, such as potable water systems, sewage and road connections remained unaddressed. This was especially true for the rural areas because the state funds had barely reached out rural peripheries of Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, local budgets were not enough to renovate or construct important social infrastructure. Eric McGlinchey aptly described the situation in the following lines: "The Kyrgyz state has all but disappeared at the local level. Government-run enterprises are closed; public schools are shuttered for lack of heat, supplies, and teachers; and Kyrgyzstan's large cities Bishkek and Osh, are in the dark four or five hours a day because of the state's inability to provide steady electricity." (2011: 14-15) Local and national governments became increasingly

dependent on international loans or grants in order to deliver public infrastructure. The "political and economic aid" included "health aid, agriculture aid, education aid, technical assistance" (ibid: 12). According to the Global Economy data, on average annually Kyrgyzstan had received 307.67 million USD between 1992 and 2019 as a foreign aid and development assistance aid.[24] As Roza Otunbaeva, the interim-president of Kyrgyzstan (2010-2011), admitted in 2020 around 20% of the Kyrgyz state budget is made of international grants and aids.[25] According to Otunbaeva, the international grants cover local transport and roads, energy sector, education and healthcare. International development bodies, such as USAID or UNDP, carry out multiple programs to support rural infrastructure, education and healthcare.

In 2018, according to the National Statistics, the total share of population in Kyrgyzstan, which had access to sewage system was 31.5%, while access to potable water made 91.8%.[26] Only the capital city – Bishkek has 100% access to potable water and 96.5% access to sewage system.[27] For example, in Boz-Adyr village in Batken *oblast* potable water is available for villagers only for an hour per day.[28] Most rural settlements lack access to sewage system and have limited access to potable water.

The Kyrgyz state was not able to properly maintain most of its schooling infrastructure inherited from the Soviet Union, namely kindergartens and schools. During Akaev's privatization policies, most of the state-run kindergartens were privatized. Back then, not only provinces had lacked kindergartens, but urban areas were in a high demand for them. As the chart below illustrates (see Chart 3.), in 1990, before the fall of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan run altogether 1,696 kindergartens. In 2001, this number had decreased to the critical point: 402 kindergartens. The demand vacuum was soon filled by private kindergartens. International organizations, like the UNICEF and others had also addressed the deficiency of kindergartens in rural areas since 2006.[29] Secondary schools built during

[24] The Global Economy: *Kyrgyzstan: Foreign Aid*, n.d., https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Kyrgyzstan/foreign_aid/ (accessed 15 January 2021).

[25] Kaktus Media: Роза Отунбаева: Кыргызстан может остаться без внешней помощи [Roza Otunbaeva: Kyrgyzstan could remain without external aid], 20 November 2020, https://kaktus.media/doc/426321_roza_otynbaeva:_kyrgyzstan_mojet_ostatsia_bez_vneshney_pomoshi.html (accessed 7 December 2020).

[26] Stat.kg: Уровень жизни [Level of life], n.d., http://stat.kg/ru/opendata/category/20/ (accessed 9 December 2020).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Azattyk: Боз-Адыр: миграция баккан айыл [Boz-Adyr: the village sustained by labour migration], 5 December 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZIYkp8K1kI&feature=emb_logo (accessed 7 December 2020).

[29] UNICEF Kyrgyzstan: Early childhood development and learning, n.d.,

the communism era remained out of maintenance. According to the Bulan Institute for Peace Innovations, in 2017, 193 schools out of 2,222 were in ruinous condition.[30] Most of these schools were constructed by the communities themselves through the voluntarily act of *ashar* about which I explain in the following final section of this chapter.

Chart 3. Number of state and private kindergartens (1990-2019). Source: http://stat.kg/ (compiled by the author)
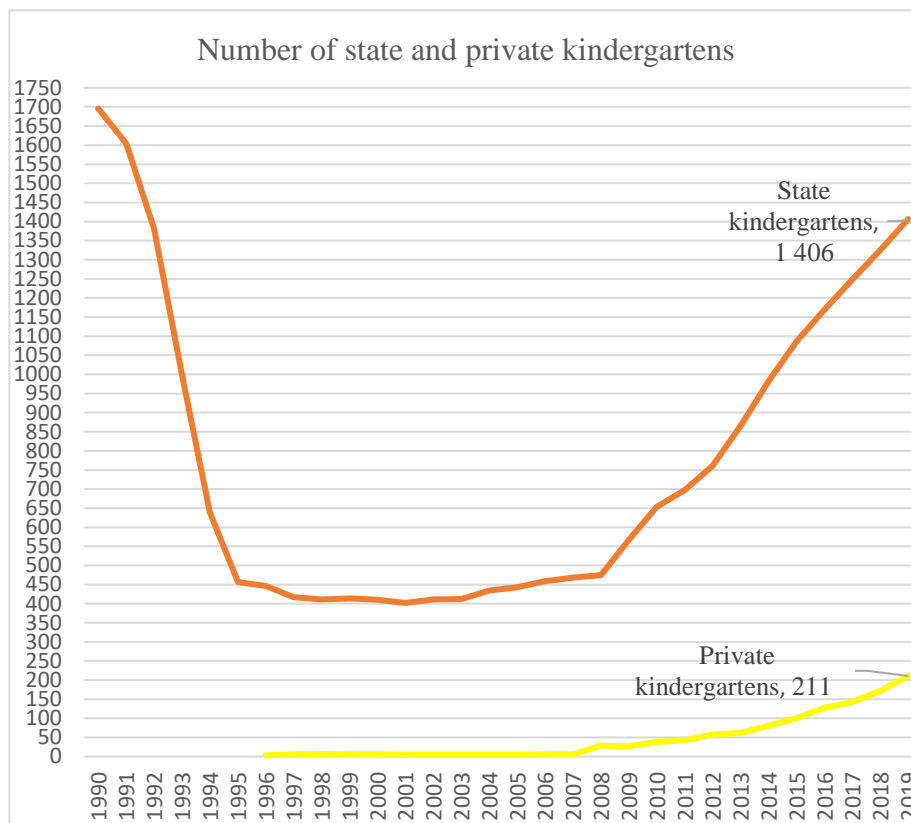
Thus, the Kyrgyz state was limited in delivering its key services and public infrastructure. After the collapse of the Soviet Union a newly established Kyrgyz state was not able to provide with proper welfare and survival strategies for its constituencies. Instead, informal institutions and informal practices had prevailed and in some extend they had replaced the state institutions and bureaucracy. More and more individuals had turned to kinship, illicit economies, traditional institutions and Muslim charities as alternative means of welfare and status (see McGlinchey 2011, Ismailbekova 2017). Recent works on informal institutions in the south of Kyrgyzstan indicate about the prevalence of traditional sources of authority within international aid programs too (see Sheranova 2020d). Ismailbekova's study also

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https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/early-childhood-development-and-learning (accessed 10 December 2020).

[30] Azattyk. 2017. *V Kyrgyzstane predlagayut zapretit' stroitel'stvo shkol metodom ashara* [In Kyrgyzstan they suggest to ban construction of school by ashar method]. Available at: https://rus.azattyk.org/a/28572933.html Accessed: 2021.10.26

suggests how traditional kinship system had substituted the state in Kyrgyzstan, she writes that "kinship replaced the state as the people's caretaker" (2017: 35). These tendencies are especially true in most parts of Kyrgyzstan where *ashar* tradition had become a solution to address state downfalls.

2.5 From weak/strong state to ashar-stan

The Turkic term *ashar* (*Aşar* or *Öşür*) denoted 'one in ten' of a tax collection practice during the Ottoman era (see Ihsanoglu 2001 p.576). The Ottoman rulers collected 1/10 or 5/10 proportion of agricultural crops from its population as tax (ibid.). *Aşar* tax was collected from all agricultural crops, fruit and vegetables. Modern-day *ashar* does not relate to taxation, however it semantically means an individual or group share for common good. Individuals who participate in ashar jointly share a cost of work. The cost can be measured both in material and non-material forms (in-kind form, labor or volunteering). There is another common term in Russian language to denote ashar - *metod ashara* (ashar method) – which is used interchangeably along with the term *ashar* in the region. Thus, ashar is informal collective activity of citizens to help each other and to solve common issues. Mostly ashar is performed in rural areas where relatives and neighbours call each other for help. Ashar has become a popular method in rural areas to rehabilitate and to construct public outdated Soviet infrastructure (such as roads, power lines, kindergartens, schools, bridges, irrigation canals and others) not only in Kyrgyzstan but also in other Central Asian states.

Empirically based on the practice of ashar and inspired by scholarly works which emphasize the agency of the people in making/unmaking state (Migdal 1994, 1988, 2001; Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer 2014; Reeves 2017), in my study, I propose the concept of **ashar-stan** to define Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states. The concept *ashar-stan* underlines the role of communities in maintaining the state, namely in running its most important services, such as healthcare and education, and providing with key public infrastructure as listed earlier. In the literature the third world countries, including the Central Asian states are largely labelled as 'weak states'. Therefore, before introducing the concept of *ashar-stan* it is important to pause what weak/strong state is and why the use of the concept 'weak state' in relation to the CA is problematic.

2.5.1 Weak state and strong state

In the literature several terms are used to describe state's weak performance depending on their degree of underperformance: fragile state, failed state, dysfunctional state or collapsed state. Stuart Eizenstat, John E. Porter and Jeremy Weinstein measure state performance through the following criteria: security provision, delivery of basic services and quality of civil liberties (as cited in Lemay-Hébert 2009: 24). Earlier Karl Deutsch also (1986) famously wrote that the state has two main functions: to enforce decisions and to provide services. The "*service state*" or "production state" he said is the state which builds, maintains public infrastructure and provides its citizens with "public health, education and pensions and other forms of income maintenance" (1986: 209-210 emphasis in the original).

According to the institutional approach developed by Migdal et al. (1994), Migdal (1988, 2001), Rotberg (2003, 2004) and Fukuyama (2004) a state is weak when it is unable to provide all or some of its public goods. Robert Rotberg writes strong states and weak states can be differentiated according to their performance or "the levels of their effective delivery of the most crucial political goods" (2003: 2). According to him, "political goods" are important state responsibilities, such as human/community security, medical care and healthcare, schooling and education, local social infrastructures (potable water, roads, railway connections, etc.), economic opportunities, GDP per capita, etc. (ibid.: 3). The author describes strong states in the following way:

> "Strong states offer high levels of security from political and criminal violence, ensure political freedom and civil liberties, and create environments conducive to the growth of economic opportunity. The rule of law prevails. Judges are independent. Road networks are well maintained. Telephones work. Snail mail and e-mail both arrive quickly. Schools, universities, and students flourish. Hospitals and clinics serve patients effectively. And so on. Overall, strong states are places of enviable peace and order." (2003: 4)

Weak state is the opposite of a strong state: infrastructure is poorly maintained or out of service, schools and hospitals are left without a state care or under-funded, economic indicators are falling (Rotberg 2003). In weak states "Citizens, especially rural parents, students, and patients, slowly realize that the state has abandoned them to their own devices and to the forces of nature." (ibid.: 7) In weak states economic opportunities are limited and usually are concentrated around the ruling elite and the state's responsibility "to maximize the well-being and personal prosperity of all of its citizens is conspicuously absent" (ibid.: 8). For Francis Fukuyama (2004) weak state is a political body which lacks institutional

capacity to implement its course of actions. Joel Migdal too differentiates between strong and weak states based on the following state capabilities: "the capacities to *penetrate* the society, *regulate* social relationships, *extract* resources, and *appropriate* or use resources in determined ways." (Migdal 1988: 4, emphasis in the original) Strong states have capacity to accomplish the above-listed tasks, while weak states do not have capacity to accomplish them. Migdal (1988) writes that even if the state fails to accomplish one of its tasks in a small village, this failure affects in general the state's integrity and weakens it.

Similarly, Heathershaw and Schatz (2017) in their volume titled *Paradox of Power. The Logic of state weakness in Eurasia* discuss state's limitations or 'state's weaknesses' in a wider post-socialist region. According to them, the concept of a weak state was widely applied in describing most of post-colonial states (Heathershaw and Schatz 2017). Heathershaw and Schatz defined state weaknesses in the following way: "State weakness exists when a state *does not generally perform the tasks expected of it*. By *generally*, we signal that even many well-consolidated strong states at times fail to perform crucial functions; conversely, only states of very great weakness are wholly lacking in institutions for distributing goods." (2017: 9, emphasis in the original) The authors continue that by the word *perform* they mean (1) the process of implementing its duties, and (2) the state's function of 'satisfying' its society (Heathershaw and Schatz 2017: 9).

Equally, international organizations agree about importance of implementation of state basic functions. For instance, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report defines state fragility as "a lack of capacity to perform basic state functions" (2010: 15). Under 'capacity' the report means the following: "(a) organisational, institutional and financial capacity to carry out basic functions of governing a population and territory, and (b) the state's ability to develop mutually constructive and reinforcing relations with society." (ibid.: 15) The report continues that the Western idea of statehood does not apply in many contexts: the distinction between the public and the personal or private spheres are not present in non-Western contexts (OECD 2010). It states that formal rules do not work and state bureaucracy is not impersonal: "access to resources depends on exclusive personal ties, not on open economic and political competition. Distinctions between public and private spheres are blurred." (ibid.: 8) The states with weak political institutions are formally liberal democracies which function based on formal rules, however in practice they are functioning on informal rules, or formal rules co-exist with informal ones. OECD report summarizes that: "Nominally many are liberal democracies operating according to formal rules (rational-legal political orders). But they coexist with

other, competing forms of socio-political order that have their roots in non-state, indigenous social structures ("traditional" political orders, although these are being constantly reinvented and influenced by Western ideas)." (ibid.: 8)

Most of literature agree that the classic Weberian state is "the institution by which the ruling elite of a people exercises the monopoly of legitimate use of violence to extract, manage and distribute resources within the borders of a certain territory" (Magyar and Madlovics 2020: 73). Max Weber, a German sociologist, in his influential volume called *Economy and Society. An outline of Interpretive Sociology* defined the state as administrative organization which "successfully upholds the claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order" (1968: 54, emphasis in the original). A major difference between the Western or the Weberian and non-Western or non-Weberian states is that the spheres of political, economic and societal are not separated or blurred (see Weber 1968, 1978; Magyar and Madlovics 2020). Joel Migdal (2001) too notes that the Weberian ideal-type state does not fit in most of Third World countries. According to him, these states are "deviations" or "corrupted versions" of ideal states (Migdal 2001: 14). The problem with Weber's definition is that state is viewed as autonomous and static (Migdal 2001). In contrast, Migdal's definion of state is more compound. According to him state is "a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) *the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and* (2) *the actual practices of its multiple parts.*" (2001: 16, emphasis in the original). In other words, state is examined as a changing and dynamic entity, because its institutions and rules change depending on the situation and various interest groups. For Migdal, the state is "constructed and reconstructed, invented and reinvented" by social forces (2001: 23). Thus, Migdal (2001) argues that state is made of multiple actors. Migdal's argument is pivotal here because it can question the existing categorizations of the state capacity, such as weak and strong state. As I argue below these categorizations do not adequately fit in the context of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states because in CA states are not weak because the state institutions are constantly maintained and supported by communities.

2.5.2 Ashar-stan and Strongmen

The anatomy of the state in Central Asia can be better explained by a term *ashar-stan* – *ashar* meaning a traditional collective action in CA (see Reeves 2017 and Sheranova 2021), and *stan* – is a renowned ending of five CA states. The *ashar* logic in theorizing the nature

of the state in Central Asia is key because it captures the omnipresent communal input which state-centric perspectives largely omit. Recent studies which emphasize the agency of informal in strengthening the state or formal institutions (see Akchurina 2019, Sheranova 2020d) also point out to perspectives beyond the state-centric direction. The *ashar-stan* concept is a helpful framework to understand the state in CA not as a single and a dominant actor, but rather to understand it as a blend of multiple actors participating in making/unmaking the state. A volume by Madeleine Reeves, Johan Rasanayagam, and Judith Beyer (eds.) (2014) questioning how the state has been produced in everyday life in Central Asia is especially exemplary in demonstrating the collective action or *ashar* logic which I emphasize in the thesis. The contributors argue that the state is performed and is produced through various communal actions, such as participation in local elections, poetry competitions, function of traditional courts of elders and others (Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer 2014). The 'blurring boundaries' between the state and the societies in Central Asia were also stressed in other works (see Luong Jones 2002).

The term *ashar-stan* is in particularly inspired by Madeleine Reeves' work on the *ashar* act of voluntarism (2017). Reeves (2017) framed Kyrgyzstan as 'the ashar-state' in the edited volume titled *Paradox of Power. The Logic of state weakness in Eurasia*. Building on Spencer's idea of 'moral investment' Reeves examines how "collective care," "moral responsibility," "communal commitment," "voluntarism," and "social obligation" keep the functioning of the school education in rural Kyrgyzstan (ibid.: 220). Reeves (2017) focuses on how and when is the state being made and explains that weak states persist due to these communal practices of voluntarism (ibid.). According to Reeves these acts of voluntarism cultivate "hope," "pride," and "awareness of membership of a community of mutual help" (ibid.: 222).

There were earlier attempts to conceptualize the notion of the state and the political in the Central Asian setting, in particular important are works of John Heathershaw and Edward Schatz (eds.) (2017), Pauline Jones Luong (2002, 2004), Madeleine Reeves (2014) who had conceptualized the Central Asian states' weaknesses. Jones Luong (2004) framed them 'paradoxically strong–weak states' because of Central Asia's strong autocratic leaderships, on the one hand, and a poor governance and state performance, on the other hand. In a similar way, Reeves (2014) observed a weak presence of the state in border areas of Central Asia and noticed a strong presence of local strongmen (Reeves 2014: 10, 218). Finally, Heathershaw and Schatz pointed out to the 'state weaknesses' in CA in carrying out their primary tasks and in "satisfying" own citizens, they wrote that "State weakness

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exists when a state *does not generally perform the tasks expected of it*." (emphasis in the original) (2017: 9) These works, however, generally remain state-centric because they are in a similar way underline both the state's weaknesses and strengths, and by doing so they diminish or ignore the role of non-state actors or communities in making and unmaking the state. Therefore, the use of the concepts of 'weak state' and 'strong state' could be problematic in the Central Asian context because they both ignore a crucial communal or collective effort in maintaining and in running the state's important functions. The need for a new language in defining the state not only in the CA but in the post-communist Eurasian region, in general, has been increasingly argued within the academia (see Magyar and Madlovic 2020). This is important because the CA states do not represent the Weberian ideal-type states as noted earlier (ibid.).

The recent growing literature theorizing on the notion of 'political' in the Central Asian setting also do not address the societal aspect (see Kudaibergenova and Buranelli 2021, Isaacs and Frigerio 2019). For example, in the special issue edited by Diana Kudaibergenova and Filippo Costa Buranelli (2021), the contributors avoid general conceptualization of the power and the state in CA, in contrast they focus on country-specific understandings. In the edited volume by Rico Isaacs and Alessandro Frigerio (2019) the concept of the 'incomplete' states which the volume introduces (see Chapter 12 by Akchurina) fails to stay away from 'weak' and 'strong' dimensions of the state capacity as it claims because it remains in between these two concepts. Despite the author admits that weak and strong state categorizations do not suit CA states, she does not elaborate on the role of communities (Akchurina 2019).

In contrast, in the *ashar-stan* the role of non-state actors is emphasized in supporting the state's critical public services (such as public healthcare, public schooling, public infrastructure, etc.). Due to collective efforts or *ashar* tradition, the state's basic foundations are not shattered and the state remains robust and functional despite its actual poor performance. Say in other words, in the *ashar-stan* a collective response from its citizens to support the state's functions in delivering state services, eventually keeps the state's organization robust and strong. Thus, the Central Asian states might be seen as weak states on the surface but indeed they are not because they are constantly retained by their communities through the *ashar* act of volunteerism.

The power of the agency of non-state actors in the Central Asian *ashar* context was also inspired by Joel Migdal's works on state-society relations (1988, 1994, 2001), namely his emphasis on 'strongmen' – the individuals who possess a social control and who are

capable to challenge the state. Migdal (1988) writes that in web-like societies "a mélange of fairly autonomous social organizations" or networks dominate (Migdal 1988: 37). Therefore, a social control is multiple and is not centralized, and the state is challenged by local social forces, so-called 'strongmen' (ibid.). Strongmen possess a social control and power (ibid.). According to Migdal, state leaders can rely on political support only if they have provided their constituencies with "viable strategies of survival" (1988: 208). As Migdal notes strongmen are skilful mediators between the state and the public in delivering survival strategies. Migdal describes the relationship between strongmen and the population in the following way:

> "In proffering their strategies of survival, the strongmen have used a share of the state resources at their disposal to bind the population to them. Added to their land, credit, and jobs – the other elements upon which they have based the strategies of survival they offer their clients – are the bountiful, at least in local terms, resources of the state. Local leaders have become brokers for the contracts, jobs, goods, services, force, and authority that filter through the bureaucratic tentacles of the state." (1988: 255)

Migdal (1988) wrote that "as long as strongmen continue to offer viable strategies of survival to those of their villages, ethnic groups, urban neighbourhoods, and so on, states can marshal only limited public support" because of lack of public motivation to support them (1988: 210). And on the contrary, he wrote where strongmen are weak "state leaders have had greater opportunities to apply a single set of rules, the state's rules, and build channels for widespread, sustained political support." (ibid.: 257) In societies dominated by strongmen, the latter become key agents both for the population and the state because both sides become dependent on them: "Local strongmen, through the social control they exercise, have performed critical functions for state and party personnel. They have turned out the vote (where there are elections), they have maintained stability, and they provided access to constituencies. In turn, strongmen have received special benefits from the officials." (1988: 244)

As was noted earlier despite Kyrgyzstan is a formal democracy with established institutions, such as political parties, parliaments and regular elections, in practice state institutions cannot provide with proper welfare and survival for its constituencies, and similar strongmen tend to undermine or to replace major state functions and state institutions. For instance, strongmen elected to the Parliament lobby interests of their regions to allocate funds to build or renovate key local infrastructure, or alternatively (very often), provide own funds to build or repair local social infrastructures (Sheranova 2020c).

It is often common in the Kyrgyz Parliament to observe how elected deputies lobby interests of own constituencies. Their voters in exchange provide strongmen with political support or political protection (see Luong 2004; Radnitz 2010). Electorate in Kyrgyzstan prefers to support strongmen or 'native sons' (Ismailbekova 2017) who provide them with local social infrastructure which is not provided by the state. Jones Luong (2004) in her study concluded that regional leaders are main competitors to central leaders (the state) in post-Soviet CA. Her study findings suggest that in Kyrgyzstan regional leaders' commitment with regional interests is foremost (97%), while a region of origin is the main source of political support for regional elites (93%) (Luong 2004: 160).

In the peripheries, as noted earlier, the Kyrgyz state had failed to provide access to key social infrastructure, schooling and healthcare. Most of these social infrastructure is inherited from the Soviet Union and outdated. Including strongmen, the infrastructure is maintained by the efforts of labor migrants or international projects. For example, there are public foundations established by migrants in Russia, which send money to their native villages to renovate schools, to build mosques and to support kindergartens.[31]Another recent example of weak state capacity, has been inability of the Kyrgyz state to address Covid-19 crisis without support from citizens, labor migrants, businessmen and strongmen who organized and equipped mobile-hospitals with necessary medical equipment and medicine. Due to *ashar* efforts the Kyrgyz healthcare system did not completely fail and was able to tackle with the pandemic. In my thesis, apart from strongmen, I also consider a role of ordinary citizens or individuals in nation-building. Thus, the *ashar-stan* framework further develops ideas about the role of communities in maintaining the state as also noted in Reeves (2017) and Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer (2014).

2.6 Conclusion

The aim of the chapter was to introduce the context of Kyrgyzstan, namely, to conceptualize the Kyrgyz state as ashar-stan. Before doing it, I briefly paused about the Kyrgyz political system, post-communism and independence, informal politics and sub-national identities. Having explained the socio-economic context of the country and after reviewing the existing works on weak/strong states, I argued for the importance of a new terminology in

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[31] Azattyk: Мигранты не забывают малую родину [Migrants do not forget their native villages], 1 August 2016, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27892206.html (accessed 9 December 2020).

defining the state in Central Asian context. I argued that weak/strong state concept does not fit in well to describe the nature of the state in CA because it is neither weak nor strong.

The Kyrgyz leadership since 1991 has been continuously lacking an "art of balancing" between own survival and economic development, which in fact led to series of violent power transitions in 2005, 2010 and 2020. As forthcoming chapters of the study demonstrate, the Kyrgyz leadership since the independence was mainly occupied with the regimes survival, and, as a consequence of lack of economic development the leadership sought for sources of legitimacy. Failure of public goods delivery by the state made people independent from the state and made them "more susceptible to appeals by non-state (economic and political) entrepreneurs" and threatened "the legitimacy of the state while providing opportunities for new actors to win popular support." (Radnitz 2010: 7) As Radnitz (2010) claims strongmen in Kyrgyzstan rose as a result of domestic policies aimed at the regime's survival, namely Akaev's economic liberation and privatization policies. Strongmen in Radnitz's view are 'Wealthy actors and political aspirants who are not part of the regime' (2010: 4) or 'independent elites' (2010: 5).

Similar to the leaders of weak states, in ashar-stan the political leadership seeks various means to secure legitimacy or regime survival. The leaders think of measures to mitigate any forces that can threat their tenure (Migdal 1988). According to Migdal, these measures could involve the following: political appointments and removals from the office (re-appointments, rotations, switching positions); non-merit appointments; and dirty tricks (ibid.: 214-226). Personnel appointments and re-appointments are devices "to assure the tenure of the top state leadership." (Migdal 1988: 217) Usually these appointments involve kinship, patronage and personal loyalties (such as common region, school connections) ignoring professional competences: "the most popular method here has been to appoint top agency officials having deep personal loyalties to the state leaders." (1988: 217) Finally, dirty tricks include such measures as illegal imprisonment, deportation, torture and elimination of opponents (ibid.). As Migdal continues, dirty tricks speak about "a lack of confidence in state institutions" because laws are used as "weapons" against the opposition (1988: 225). Apart from these measures, national cultural celebrations: *invented mega-events (mega-projects)* or *performative projects* are other ways to legitimate the leadership, as I further conceptualize in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK and LITERATURE REVIEW: CULTURAL PERFORMANCE LEGITIMATION AND UNINTENDED (INDIRECT) NATION-BUILDING

"The sacred king once had to make the crops grow and provide victory in battle. The government must now defend national security and enlarge the GNP[32]."

Schaar 1981: 24

The overall objective of the chapter is to set a theoretical framework of the study. First, I examine existing works on political legitimacy, legitimation and discuss sources of legitimacy. Then, I propose cultural performance legitimation mode through mega-events, sports and performances. Second, I survey key literature on nationalism and nation-building in general and those related to Central Asia. Finally, in this chapter I frame out the relationship between regime legitimacy and nation-building and suggest a model of unintended or indirect nation-building in ashar-stans. In particular, emphasis is made on how the attempts of the regimes to remain legitimate indirectly led to a process of national identity formation, which I refer in this study as unintended nation-building. In the model of unintended nation-building, I argue that in ashar-stans the elites do prioritize regime survival, whereas maintenance and fostering of national identity is rather a collective activity – in particular, strongmen (private entrepreneurs, philanthropists and individual politicians) and communities play a crucial role.

Modern ashar states are represented by most of post-communist Eurasia, Central Asia, in particular. Legitimacy-building in any state is as important as nation-building, especially in states where the rulers seek for survival of their regimes. The political elite in ashar-stans often monopolizes and abuses the power, it enriches itself and often fails to deliver security, rule of law, justice, employment and important state services to the public, such as healthcare, schooling and social infrastructure (schools, kindergartens and hospitals). In other words, the ashar-stan does not adequately perform its basic functions. As a consequence, ashar-stans chronically lack of political legitimacy and the political elites often need to be creative in order to look legitimate. In ashar-stan, the state fails to deliver its most important functions and, hence, the state leaders pursue various means to preserve

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[32] Gross National Product

own power and to look legitimate (see Migdal 2001, Heathershaw and Schatz 2017). Instead, so-called 'strongmen' replace the functions of the state (see Migdal 2001). Thus, regime legitimacy or political legitimacy is an important issue especially for political elites in ashar-stans. The political elites seek for legitimacy using creative tricks. Alternatively, some prefer using coercive power instead of gaining legitimacy, they use pressure and violence to restrain their societies. However, physical oppression is often counter-productive, whereas policing is expensive; therefore, very few states seek alternative for legitimacy.

3.1 Political legitimacy and sources of legitimacy

Political legitimacy has drawn attention of most of political scientists. Margaret Canovan (1966) has convincingly argued that a state needs the support of its population in order to survive in the long term. Polities must be able to maintain some degree of unity: "A polity which cannot successfully command the loyalty of its members, will sooner or later be replaced by one that can" (Canovan 1996: 22). The rulers need legitimacy in order to exercise authority (Arendt 1972, Weber 1968, Friedrich 1972). A more power is legitimate, it is more durable and enjoys a public support (ibid.). Samuel Huntington (1968) and Francis Fukuyama (2004) argue that legitimacy is rooted in democracy, while legitimate states are strong states. On the contrary, Robert Dorff writes that lack of legitimacy is a common root-cause of failed states or weak states (as cited in Lemay-Hébert 2009: 28). Lemay-Hébert makes a conclusion that legitimacy in studying weak states is as crucial as studying its institutions (2009: 28) Therefore, we can assume that lack of legitimacy is in particular relevant to the states which underperform their core functions. The process of legitimation, in particular, is important during the economic decline these countries face (see von Soest and Grauvogel 2015).

In ashar-stans, as noted earlier the political elites fail to perform basic tasks and instead they focus on their political tenure by all means. The politics of the regime survival dominates over "efficient administration" and prevents any "rational forms of administration in terms of efficiency in implementing policies." (Migdal 1988: 225) Under these circumstances, other socio-economic issues concerning the public remain unaddressed and unresolved: "Engaging in the politics of survival within the state organization has meant that state leaders have limited the ability of state institutions to provide the population with important elements for its strategies of survival." (Migdal 1988: 229) Despite the state leaders enter politics with social agendas, the politics

of regime survival becomes the dominant issue in their minds once they are in politics (Migdal 1988). Economic performance of the state is important to minimize risks of social unrest and to provide survival strategies for the population. The political survival of the state leaders, on the one hand, and, economic performance, on the other hand, are together inter-connected tasks for the state entrepreneurs, what Midgal terms as "art of balancing" (1988: 236). In particular, in ashar states lack of legitimacy is a crucial matter. As Rotberg observes:

> "When the rulers are perceived to be working for themselves and their kin and not for the state, their legitimacy, and the state's legitimacy, plummets. The state increasingly is conceived as being owned by an exclusive class or group, with all others pushed aside. The social contract that binds inhabitants to an overarching polity becomes breached. Various sets of citizens cease trusting the state. Citizens then naturally turn more and more to the kinds of sectional and community loyalties that are their main recourse in time of insecurity and their main default source of economic opportunity. They transfer their allegiances to clan and group leaders, some of whom become warlords. These warlords or other local strongmen can derive support from external as well as indigenous supporters." (2003: 9)

3.1.1 Political legitimacy and legitimation

Among the founding scholars who wrote about legitimacy was a German sociologist, Max Weber. In his influential volume called *Economy and Society. An outline of Interpretive Sociology* (1968), he defined state as an institution which successfully claims legitimacy. Domination of power and obedience of people is a focus of Weber's theory (1978). According to Weber, legitimacy is "the subjective belief of individuals and groups in the normative validity of a particular political order." (as cited in Malesevic 2002: 85) Domination, Weber (1978) says, can be of two types: a domination by the quality of monopoly and a domination by the quality of authority or power. The domination by the monopoly is related to domination in the market and is rooted in ownership and control of economic goods and resources. The domination by the authority is political notion and is rooted in social control and obedience. According to Weber legitimacy is a public belief that allows power holders to dominate and make people obedient, in other words it is "a reliable basis for rule." (Weber 2019: 339) Locke and Russo also discussed about "social contract" between the society and the state, which can be considered as a form of legitimate

rule because the contract expresses a consent for the power and control, and sets rules between the society and the state (Friedrich 1972).

Despite there is no a common definition of political legitimacy, there is a longstanding agreement in the literature that political legitimacy relates to justification, oughtness, legality, belief, acceptance or consent. According to John Schaar (1981: 20, 22), definition of legitimacy had evolved from rule and right to claim, and later to belief and opinion, and at the present time to stability and efficiency. Schaar writes that for the power in order to become legitimate it has to derive from "democratic consent" and target to "common good" or "public interest." (1981:23) Schaar notes that public interests are as "always meant" – "security and material abundance." (1981: 24) For Bruce Gilley, a rule is legitimate if "holds and exercises political power with legality, justification and consent." (2009: 8) Some write that legitimacy is "the right to rule" (see Peter 2009: 56). Most agree that political legitimacy is "a matter of accepting" the power as "right" (Zelditch, cited in Gilley 2009: 3) and "maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society." (Lipset 1960: 64). Finally, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines legitimacy in the following way: "A political order, institution or actor is legitimate to the extent that people regard it as satisfactory and believe that no available alternative would be vastly superior." (2010: 7) Informed by these key definitions, I agree on the following definition of legitimacy: **the regime is legitimate if it delivers public goods and addresses most of public needs in exchange for their further support and obedience**.

While legitimacy is static term, **legitimation** is a term used to denote a process: "the terms 'legitimation' and 'delegitimation' imply the more active processes by which legitimacy is created and maintained or eroded and lost." (Ansell 2001: 8706) Because legitimacy is both a belief (by public) and a claim (by the rulers) legitimation is a two-sided process (ibid.). One the one side, legitimation is "acceptance, even approbation, of the state's rules of the game, its social control, as true and right. ... It indicates people's approval of the state's desired social order through their acceptance of the state's myths." (Migdal 1988: 33) On the other side, legitimation is a process where the rulers 'explain' and 'justify' their rule and political order (Ansell 2001: 8706).

The quotation below from David Smith nicely sums up the relationship between legitimacy and power: "legitimacy looks like one of a number of resources that can be used to control behavior." (as cited in Tyler 2007: 30) Smith continues that more the people believe that implementation of authority and procedures are fair, more the people believe

in the legitimacy of their authority (ibid.). Thus, legitimacy is central in holding and performing a power, because it is about convincing the public that the rulers are the 'right' people to govern, they are competent and deserve to stay in power, to dominate and to make decisions on behalf of the population. Legitimacy is central to politics of any state as illegitimate regimes "erode very quickly" (John Jost and Brenda Major 2001: 4).

3.1.2 Mainstream approaches in the study of legitimacy

There are three classic approaches in the study of legitimacy. The first is the Weberian school. Max Weber underlined three "pure" types of legitimacy or legitimate rule: rational-legal, traditional and charismatic (1978: 954). Rational-legal type of legitimacy relies on legality of rules and laws: "Obedience is thus given to the norms rather than to the person." (1978: 954) A society is organized in a bureaucratic and impersonal order with a hierarchical structure of trained personnel who are believed to be the most capable. Traditional legitimacy is based on sacredness of pre-modern and pre-bureaucratic traditions and legitimizes traditional leaders. As Weber writes tradition "prescribes obedience to some particular person." (1978: 954) Traditional legitimacy is obtained in two ways: when a tradition sets the rules, or when a tradition is interpreted by the rulers. Weber's analysis suggested several kinds of traditional legitimacy: patriarchalism, patrimonialism, and feudalism. Patriarchalism implied a rule by the eldest members of a society who is better aware of holy traditions. This type of rule is collective not personalist. In patrimonialism, in contrast, the rule is personalist, non-hierarchic and non-bureaucratic. In Weber's view patrimonialism rests in "the treatment of the office as a *personal* right and not, as in the bureaucratic state, from *impersonal* interests" (1978: 1029). Feudalism is estate-type rule which is based on the rule by groups or individuals who personalize some types of power or economic assets. Finally, Weberian charismatic legitimate rule represents a rule by a leader with charisma – "specific gifts of body and mind" or "supernatural" personal characteristics (Weber 1978: 1112). Weber wrote that charismatic legitimacy is not a long-lasting one and therefore it has to be replaced later with traditional or rational-legal types (ibid.).

Another school of thought is a Marxist. Based on Karl Marx's definition of a state as an instrument of class oppression and a tool of the ruling class, several authors developed Marxist thinking on legitimacy. For instance, Miliband (1969) wrote that in a capitalist society mass media along with education system are fundamental ways of building a legitimation. Mass media is important to take ideological control over society and to

depolitize it. In a similar way, education is designed to legitimate power by producing class differences and controlling knowledge. In contrast, Offe (1984) suggested that economic growth is key in building a legitimacy in a modern capitalist state. According to Offe (ibid.) there is an expectation in a democratic society that the government should be providing with a welfare system, although as the author acknowledges it is a difficult task.

The third school in the study of legitimacy is called pluralist or liberalist. This approach defines legitimacy as a manifestation of the popular wish, in other words as a liberal democracy. In contrast with other schools, the pluralist school focuses on individuals, and defines state as a structure designed to carry out individual goals. Lipset (1959) is one of main representatives of this school. According to Lipset, legitimacy can be obtained only through liberal democratic government because in this form of government conflicting interests can be negotiated and can find legitimate agreement. Lipset (1959) classified four possible types of states based on his legitimacy and efficiency criteria: (a) states which are high on legitimacy and efficiency; (b) states which are high on efficiency and low on legitimacy; (c) states which are low on efficiency and high on legitimacy; and (d) states which are low on both. According to Lipset (1959), legitimacy is essential in keeping the political system stable, while legitimacy is possible with economic growth. He writes that legitimacy crises are modern occurrences and usually appear during the time of transition or change. Lipset too notes that public holidays or rituals are indicators of whether the order is legitimate, because they represent a common "political culture" (1959).

3.1.3 Sources of legitimacy: economic performance and cultural performance

Another question that interested scholars was an issue of so-called 'legitimacy crisis' and consequently the ways legitimacy could be obtained. Degree of "moral support" for the rulers or political legitimacy throughout the history was a "practical concern for the stability" of any regime (Gilley 2009: 1). "Legitimacy crisis" in modern democracies, writes Gilley are related to incompetence of the governments to address "economic slowdown" and "social alienation" (2009: 1). Indeed, state capacity and legitimacy are inter-linked because lack of state capacity weakens legitimacy, while lack of legitimacy damages state capacity (OECD 2010: 8).

Let us now turn to the sources of legitimacy. For Weber (1978), as also noted above there were three major sources of legitimacy: charisma, tradition and bureaucracy. Merriam listed external security, internal peace, welfare, justice and freedom as legitimacy sources (as cited in Gilley 2009: 30). Gilley mentioned the following sources of legitimacy:

particularistic, sociological, developmental, democratic, and bureaucratic (2009: 31). Gilley wrote that governments or states which are seeking for legitimacy "must perform well." (2009: 5). A positive correlation between political legitimacy and the wealth was also noted by Lipset (1960) and Merelman (1966). They both stated that rich countries tend to be more legitimate. Merelman (1966) studied political legitimacy through the stimulus-response psychology too. Merelman's model suggested that political legitimacy can be gained through symbols, which policy-makers generate and manipulate. Among examples of political legitimacy symbols the author lists 'rule of law', 'equal opportunity', 'fairness' (1966: 553). According to Merelman, symbols are subject for continuous production because "no single symbol of legitimacy is likely to remain" and new "legitimacy symbols must be generated to handle new policy sequences." (1966: 554) Merelman (1966) concluded that symbols are sources of legitimacy both in centralized and de-centralized systems of governance, whereby a centralized one has more control over the manipulation of symbols.

Finally, there are four sources of legitimacy according to OECD report: process legitimacy (approved formal rules), performance legitimacy ("the performance, effectiveness and quality of services and goods"), shared beliefs (traditions, religion and charismatic leaders), and international legitimacy (recognition by external actors) (2010: 23). Since much of contemporary knowledge of legitimation sources come from Weber's seminal work (1978), I agree on the following lines that: "The forms of domination occurring in historical reality constitute combinations, mixtures, adaptations or modifications of these "pure" types". (Weber 1978: 954)

Legitimacy is difficult to measure, however several attempts in measuring this complex phenomenon are available in the literature. Attitudinal indicators of legitimacy measure people's attitude to the power, to the system. Among behavioural indicators used in Foreign Policy magazine, the author lists elite corruption, protests, civil discontent, increase of crime and falling tax collections (Gilley 2009). For example, Gilley (2009) suggested a measurement of legitimacy based on its three components: legality, justification and consent. His study which measures legitimacy in 72 countries uses nine indicators to evaluate legitimacy: three for legality component (confidence in Human Rights performance, confidence in the police and confidence in the civil service), four for justification component (the attitude towards the existing political system, the attitude towards the existing political institutions, the attitude towards the existing political leaders within government/regimes, and occurrence of use of violence during protests) and two for

consent component (voter turnout and willingness voluntarily to pay taxes) (2009: 14). Gilley's study found that state's performance and efficiency was crucial reason for legitimacy (2009: 22).

In general, major literature on legitimacy emphasizes about 'economic performance legitimacy' or 'performance legitimacy' mode which denotes economic growth and a state's capacity to effectively deliver public goods (see Lipset 1959, 1981). In some literature this is referred as 'eudaemonic legitimacy' (see Holmes 2016). Many agree that economically developed countries are politically stable because they get legitimacy through positive economic development, delivery of public goods and social welfare (see Ahrens et al. 2016: 55). While economic performance legitimacy works for economically stable countries, how do then regimes with poor or lack of performance self-legitimize? Previous research also acknowledged inconsistency of economic performance legitimation in Eurasia because of poor records (see Holmes 2016). Others also found performance-based legitimacy a "high-risk strategy" for Central Asian rulers (cited in von Soest and Grauvogel 2015: 23). Before answering above-posed question, it is important to pause on the question: why do Central Asian autocracies bother with self-legitimation?

In the literature, Central Asian states are defined as autocracies with patronage politics (McGlinchey 2011) and corrupted elites (Engvall 2016, Cooley and Sharman 2015). Therefore, legitimacy claims in CA are important in order to maintain stability of authoritarian and patrimonial rule (see von Soest and Grauvogel 2015, Brusis et al. 2016). For Schatz (2006: 269), legitimacy claims in CA contexts are very crucial because "colonial-era life have been replaced by profound postcolonial uncertainty about the legitimacy of the ruling elite, of internal administrative boundaries, of external borders, and of cultural communities." Significantly, Brusis et al. (2016: 4) write that in post-Soviet Eurasian space because of fake elections and post-election protests the state leaders became worried about "sustaining the legitimatory function of elections." In other words, elections turned out to be not 'single' means of political legitimation. Electoral malpractices (Sheranova 2020a) along with bad governance endanger stability and legitimacy of these regimes (Brusis et al. 2016). Alternatively, an option of a repressive or coercive rule which is characteristic to most autocratic regimes neither is not a workable alternative to post-Soviet countries because it undermines their 'international legitimacy' (ibid.). This is especially true for external donor-dependent Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These countries lack sufficient economic resources and do not properly deliver public goods for its citizens. As a collection of essays led by Brusis et al. had concluded for post-communist regimes

legal-rational and economic performance modes of legitimation are "problematic" and had suggested that these states are "in a legitimation crisis" (Brusis et al. 2016: 242). Thus, authoritarian strong regimes are not that strong as they seem rather they are vulnerable and state leaders tend to shift between various legitimation modes to sustain legitimacy (see Brusis et al. 2016). According to scholars three factors are important in transforming existing legitimation strategies in the post-Soviet region: civil wars, street protests and power changes or successions (see von Soest and Grauvogel 2015). To remain in power, the political leaderships of these states apply several legitimation strategies available from the 'legitimation catalogue' depending on socio-economic and political context. Legitimation strategies of Central Asian rulers also change over time. For instance, Kazakhstan in the early years of its independence relied more on external legitimation practices in order to maintain its domestic legitimacy because it failed to build legitimacy around the frames of Kazakh identity, pre-Soviet statehood imagination or economic performance (see Schatz 2006). However, few years later the Kazakh authorities invested into Nazarbaev's Nur Otan political party as alternative source of power legitimation (see Del Sordi 2016).

Returning back to the posed question: how do poor performance-based CA regimes self-legitimize? How does the 'legitimation catalogue' of Central Asian rulers look like? Current literature on legitimacy strategies in CA gives several explanations, namely they elaborate on various types or modes of legitimation. In contrast to a classic typology of legitimacy given by Weber which are rational-legal, traditional and charismatic (1978: 954), studies on post-Communist regions suggest more complex typologies of legitimation. For example, von Soest and Grauvogel (2015: 6) in their study on legitimation strategies in post-Soviet region between 1991-2010 propose six dimensions of legitimation: (i) ideology, (ii) foundational myth, (iii) personalism, (iv) international engagement, (v) procedural mechanisms, and (vi) performance, i.e. production of certain social and economic results or outputs. Likewise, Holmes (2016: 226) distinguish eight domestic and three external legitimation modes: domestic – old traditional, charismatic, goal-rational, eudaemonic, official nationalist, new traditional, contrasting with the past, legal-rational; and external – formal recognition, informal support and reliance on an external role model. Brusis et al. note that post-Soviet leaders in Central Asia and Eurasia primarily opt to the following to remain in power: "socioeconomic performance, goal rationality, nationalism, ideology, the construction of contrasts with a negative past and legitimation through external support or international engagement." (2016: 10) In a more global perspective V-Dem research (2019)

proposes four legitimacy claims which various political regimes claim to have: ideology,[33] leader, performance and rational-legal. The paper examines regime legitimation strategies in 179 countries between 1900-2018, including CA region (ibid.). The authors under 'performance' denote economic growth, poverty reduction, effective and non-corrupt governance, and/or providing security (ibid.: 9, Table 1). Despite the V-Dem paper had proposed a rich data and innovative measurement which is compatible across period and space, it fails to provide with a detailed account on cultural events which neither Holmes (2016), Brusis et al. (2016) and von Soest and Grauvogel (2015) do. Firstly, these studies create ambiguity by combining and excluding in their categorization and analysis of legitimation modes relative concepts such as foundational myths, nationalist ideology and official nationalism. This point was also made in the chapter by du Boulay and Isaacs (2019). Secondly, these classifications of legitimation strategies omit spectacular mega-events or sports events which are not necessarily nationalist in nature although they often feature specific cultures or traditions. Therefore, informed by these key typologies in the literature on legitimacy and legitimation, I suggest **cultural performance legitimation mode** as a broader analytical category which embraces mega-events and sports events along with cultural performances, celebrations and anniversaries. This conceptualization is helpful because it allows us to avoid existing conceptual ambiguity and creates a legitimation framework which includes a wide range of cultural events, mega-events and sports events which are prevalent in weak democracies. Use of culture, sports and mega-events for political legitimation during the Soviet and post-Soviet era is supported by the existing scholarship. Christel Lane (1984) stressed that Soviet authority was based on socialist rituals and holidays, such as the October revolution, the Victory Day, mass parades and symbolism. Graeme Gill (2011) also noted that Soviet societies relied on myths, heroes and symbols when seeking for legitimation. Other authors also agreed that the past and memories, mass spectacles used in nation-formation process of post-communist transition countries had a direct relation to power maintenance and keeping power stable (Mink and Neumayer 2013, Adams 2010).

While I agree with Rigby and Feher (1982) and others that political elites can rely on combination of legitimation sources at the same time, the purpose of this section was to introduce cultural performance legitimation mode as an alternative legitimation mode for

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[33] The authors further categorize ideology into nationalist, communist/socialist, conservative/restorative, religious, and/or separatist (see Introduction of the V-Dem working paper (2019)).

the Central Asian rulers who face economic performance challenges. Why would states with weak economic performance consider the cultural space as alternative sources for political support and legitimation? Firstly, weak economies cannot afford coercive means of obedience, such as punitive measures, policing, oppression and surveillance because these are expensive means of order and obedience[34] (von Soest and Grauvogel 2015). Secondly, idea of a state as a main 'caretaker' is especially important in the post-socialist context of contemporary Central Asia because of the Soviet legacy. The Soviet state was a main guarantor of public welfare and wellbeing: due to its planned economy, it had provided Central Asians with employment and social benefits. According to McGlinchey (2011) post-Soviet Central Asian states failed to provide with social welfare. This was especially true for the Kyrgyz leadership because of lack of hydrocarbon industries (ibid.). Even today, the elder generation of Central Asians are nostalgic about 'good old days' because of Soviet welfare system and certainty in the future (see Dadabaev 2015). This is true for Kyrgyzstan too, as it is not an industrialized economy – tourism, agriculture and natural resources are seen as main economic income sources, along with labor migration. Therefore, for the Kyrgyz political leadership economic performance as such has been a challenging task. Kyrgyzstan unlike other industrialized countries failed to provide its citizens with employment, social economic benefits and failed to provide its basic services (schooling, nursing, social infrastructure, healthcare). Hence, to remain in power, the Kyrgyz political leadership had to be creative and sought for other non-economic ways of state performance, in particular, acting as the spectacular state, inventing traditions and hosting mega-events (we pause about each in the next section).

3.2 Performance politics: the spectacular state, invented traditions and mega-events
3.2.1 State performance, performance politics and imaginaries of development

A concept of 'performing politics' or 'state performance' was proposed in the volume *Ethnographies of the state in Central Asia: Performing Politics* edited by Madeleine Reeves, Johan Rasanayagam and Judith Beyer in 2014. The volume notes the following in relation to the state and the population in Central Asia: "The state constantly has to be performed into being – it takes shape through a host of actions, mundane and spectacular,

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[34] Even for Uzbekistan, the most surveillant state in the region, punitive measures were impractical. As McGlinchey (2011) claims in Uzbekistan they were even counter-productive.

in which ordinary people are enlisted as both audience and actor." (Reeves et al. 2014: 4) The contributions claim that politics and the state are "performed" by ordinary residents (ibid.) By performance the volume defines "a mode of communication that includes but is not restricted to ritualized and public speech practice." (ibid.: 11)

Performance in Central Asia was studied via lenses of symbolic power (Cummings 2010). It is acknowledged in the literature that performances which have an important message to the auditory do create legitimacy: "The dialogical moment in these performances creates legitimacy as it happens in front of and in relation to other people." (Reeves et al. 2014: 13) Heathershaw and Schatz (2017) also agree with Reeves et al. (2014) that in CA state is performed with the help of different rituals or activities that "serve to objectify the state." (Heathershaw and Schatz 2017: 20) They refer to the example from rural Kyrgyzstan, which demonstrates how a community-funded activity of charity produces presence of state in everyday life (ibid.). Thus, the approach of 'performing politics' is helpful to understand and analyze the Kyrgyz elite's charm with state celebrations and anniversaries.

In Kyrgyzstan, as I illustrate further in the thesis, state-sponsored mega-events have important messages to the public on their agendas, often these celebrations and anniversaries are ritualized and performed. Based on Reeves et al. (2014) I define 'performance politics' as the practice of reviving and inventing traditions in the form of mass and spectacular mega-events. 'Performance politics' is how the Kyrgyz politics could be defined because of its regular use of mass and spectacular mega-events in times of political re-election or crisis (as the subsequent empirical chapters of the study illustrate). Kyrgyzstan's performance politics with its mass mobilization and spectacular shows have a capacity *to create* an image of a 'functioning state' and to establish a public ***imaginary of development***. I borrow here what Morgan Liu (2014: 261) had framed as 'imaginary' of political to define public sentiments, perceptions, assumptions, thoughts and feelings about the state. He writes that imaginaries are "about how the state is both conceptualized and lived under, and the connections between thinking, feeling, and enacting the state." (ibid.: 270) Accordingly, by ***imaginaries of development*** I mean public perceptions and feelings about assumed state development and supposed caretaking functions of the state therein. Imaginaries of development which the state-funded mega-events generated were key in re-election of the political leadership in Kyrgyzstan while cultural projects did indirectly affect the economic sector by attracting foreign investment and tourism.

3.2.2 The spectacular state

Laura Adams (2010) seminal work on performing state to which she refers as a 'spectacular state' is a useful conceptual framework to be mentioned. She defines a spectacular state as a state "where, more than in most countries, politics is conducted on a symbolic level, promoting the state's domination over the shared meaning of concepts such as heritage and progress." (2010: 5) Adams (2010) examines production of culture in Uzbekistan during two national holidays: Navro'z and Independence Day. Adams notes that spectacles create a dominant discourse: "Spectacle monopolizes discourse by privileging the definition of truth and reality belonging to the elites and by using technology such as the mass media to create a one-way flow of communication, speech without response, which isn't really communication at all." (2010: 3) Adams writes that "These kind of spectacles enchant and persuade" the masses (2010: 3).

For Adams modern performances in Uzbekistan remind both the Soviet propaganda tools and a globalized show (2010: 4). As Adams (2010) writes in Uzbekistan, policies are based on celebrations, while celebrations themselves are not part of larger state policy but the outcome of Presidential decrees. Adams is concerned how in authoritarian states ideology is used for legitimation and control (2010: 4). Adams claims that the same officials who were involved in building communism were involved in building a new Uzbek nation, she terms this phenomenon as "institutional continuity" (2010: 6). She states that because of institutional continuity "Soviet discourses, practices, and cultural forms" were reproduced and maintained (2010: 6-7). For Adams, Uzbek post-independent culture was a "reappropriation of Soviet interpretations of Uzbek national culture and identity." (2010: 7) She believes that the success of post-independent Uzbek nation-building was due to the Soviet continuity, namely because the new Uzbek national culture was largely the Soviet inherited one: there were Soviet-shaped Uzbek traditional values and principles of internationalism (ibid.). Yet, Adams believes that these spectacles were mainly aimed at nation-building: "to create an ethnically based national identity (with civic elements)" (2010:8), she acknowledges that Amir-Timur as a national symbol was used to legitimate most of political and cultural projects of the Uzbek government (see Adams 2010).

Spectacles have a direct relation to power maintenance, and similar to coercive means of power, such as surveillance and repression, they are essential in keeping power stable. Adams gives a very good account on that: "Spectacular states may imagine that they can lower the cost of maintaining their power by engaging in expensive but occasional spectacles rather than engaging in extensive mobilizational or surveillance and repression."

(2010: 98) According to Adams, the Uzbek ex-president Karimov preferred outdoor mass events or performances instead of military parades because he liked them, while the Soviets more preferred military parades (ibid.). Mass events were a suitable format because they enabled to dominate and to control a meaning and also they served as propaganda and agitation tool (Adams 2010). For instance, in Uzbekistan during celebrations of Navro'z and Independence Day a special accent was made on "massive scale, special effects (many forms of balloons and lighting effects, most notably), and a breakdown of the show into annually repeated thematic blocks." (Adams 2010: 93) For ordinary citizens these celebrations were not occasions to learn about Uzbek ancient history and to acquire patriotism but were "a waste of money" she argues (Adams 2010: 76). She found that these celebrations were more aimed toward "an imagined audience" and international fellows (ibid.). For instance, Olympic format of celebrations in Uzbekistan were adopted because it represents a global format of celebrations (Adams 2010). In particular, these events were important for cultural elites and the government: they provided a space for international acknowledgment of Uzbek cultural elites' work worldwide, and these celebrations allowed the government to take control over the cultural elites and over the cultural meaning (ibid.: 77).

Similar to Adams (2010), other global literature on cultural studies emphasize the 'theatricality of politics' (Yeandle et al. 2016: Introduction), some inspired by Antonio Gramsci's 'cultural hegemony' point out to 'institutional theatre' and 'institutional performance' (see Schlossman 2002: Introduction). These works suggest that culture is a platform where political and ideological contestations are carried out. Another school within sociologists called symbolic interactionists also claim that artistic worlds are political ones because 'insider' artists engage with 'outsiders' (the governments and the rest of society) in the process of construction of the 'social world' and creation of a dominant political discourse and representation (see Schlossman 2002: Introduction). To cite: "artistic practice, including performance, can be deployed, intentionally or unconsciously, to reinforce or resist the social order." (ibid: 8)

3.2.3 Invented tradition

In their influential volume called "The invention of tradition" Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) present number of examples of invented traditions and rituals in Europe and Africa. Hobsbawm writes that traditions "which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (1983: 1). The authors use a term 'invented

tradition' in the following meaning: "It includes both 'traditions' actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period – a matter of a few years perhaps – and establishing themselves with great rapidity." (1983: 1) They write that invented tradition is symbolic in its nature and it is aimed to indoctrinate or encourage "certain values and norms of behaviour" among societies through an act of "repetition" (ibid.). According to Hobsbawm 'invented traditions' are "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition" (ibid.: 2). Inventing traditions is "a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past" (ibid.: 4). The authors separate a tradition from a custom. A very illustrative example is provided by them to illustrate this distinction: "'Custom' is what judges do … 'tradition' … is the wig, robe and other formal paraphernalia and ritualized practices" (ibid.: 2-3).

As per Hobsbawm there are three kinds of purposes of inventing traditions: a) founding national cohesion or nation-building, b) institution-building or legitimizing institutions, c) socialization (ibid.: 9). Hobsbawm writes that history is "a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion" (ibid.: 13). He observes that political actors, various movements and factions historically used to invent fake or semi-fake historic past, not only for nationalism purposes. By history Hobsbawm means "the people's past," "heroes and martyrs," and "memories" (ibid.: 13). Hobsbawm also emphasizes instrumental function of invention of tradition by noting the following: "where they are invented, it is often not because old ways are no longer available or viable, but because they are deliberately not used or adapted" (ibid.: 8). It is established that invented tradition is also a source of legitimacy for the rulers, especially if they are used with reference to the past. Legitimation through the past, memories, history and invented tradition are other possible legitimation ways for political regimes.

Hobsbawm observes that it is the "constant change and innovation of the modern world" that pushes the governments to "attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant" (1983: 2). In other words, it is a wish of the rulers to maintain some 'traditions' static and fixed, not impacted by modern patterns, which make the rulers interested in keeping traditions. Hobsbawm observes increase of inventing of traditions in the era of a "rapid transformation of society" (ibid.: 4). He writes about use of "ancient materials" in inventing traditions "of a novel type for quite novel purposes" (ibid.:

6). Among new traditions for novel purposes Hobsbawm (1983) lists national symbols, such as flags, anthems which are new inventions.

In the thesis, I expand the use of Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) 'invented traditions' into the context of progressive innovations too, such as state modernization programmes, and other globalized mega-events. As I claim the ruling elites in the *ashar-stans* tend to regularly fabricate imaginaries of development, therefore any state-run mega-projects, including innovative ones could be examined as 'invented' to some extent. Put differently, in Central Asia, other examples of modern 'invented' projects or performative projects include various state initiatives, such as anticorruption campaigns, digitalization projects, state strategies or programs, such as Kazakhstan 2030 strategy in Kazakhstan (Kudaibergenova 2015), police reform initiatives in Kyrgyzstan (Lottholtz and Sheranova 2021), higher education and globalization initiatives in Kazakhstan (Fauve 2015a) and other global mega-events in Eurasia (see Rojo-Labaien 2018, Makarychev and Yatsyk (eds.) 2016, Militz 2016). The invented mega-projects in the ashar-stans are crucial because they create the imaginaries of development and by doing so they legitimate the incumbent regime.

3.2.4 Mega-events

Another useful framework for analysis of state celebrations and anniversaries (in particular sport games) is suggested by Maurice Roche (2000). In his book the author analyzed two mega-event formats which were popular in the 19th and the 20th centuries – World Fairs (also referred as Expos) and Olympic Games. Roche (2000) writes that mega-events such as mass sports and Olympics are parts of 'invented tradition' famously framed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Roche defines mega-events in the following way: "'Mega-events' are large-scale cultural (including commercial and sporting) events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance." (2000: 1) According to Roche, these events are ways of expressing 'public culture' (2000). Mega-events involve various 'performance genres', such as "ritual, ceremony, drama, theatre, festival, carnival, celebration, spectacle." (Roche 2000: 9) Mega-events also hold "a high political profile" (Roche 2000: ix).

Roche notes that people acquire some identity or cultural markers from these mega-events (even if temporary) and get an idea of a nation-state: "people do the same sort of identity-work using mega-events as temporal and cultural markers." (2000: 5) He writes that spread of international mega-events contributes to "the growth and spread of

'modernity' and nation-state consciousness." (Roche 2000: 6) Roche (2000) classifies three types of mega-events: i) modern/non-modern; ii) national/non-national; and iii) local/non-local. Modern mega-events are secular, 'progressive', innovative (aimed at development of science and technology), while non-modern mega-events are those that promote pre-modern or post-modern content (ibid.: 9). National mega-events are "invented traditions" or "official versions" in a host-state and therefore have divisive characteristics in relation to minorities (ethnic, class, etc.) (ibid.). Non-national mega-events are international ones, they are "cosmopolitan" and "global" in their nature (ibid.). Non-national mega-events can be also "supernational" because of privileged rights of a host-state of the events (ibid.). Local mega-events are localized events within particular cities or locations, while non-local events are events which are "mediated" or promoted in mass-media (ibid.: 10).

In his book among multiple levels of analysis of mega-events, Roche applies three approaches in analyzing the mega-events (2000: 11-19). They are the dramatological level of analysis, the intermediate contextual level of analysis, and the 'event horizon' level of analysis. Last two levels of analysis are grouped by Roche as "contextual" or "contextualist" (2000: 14-15). The dramatological level of analysis is helpful to examine "the meaning of the event as a drama, a performance" and to look at them as "occasions for particular symbolic political actions and communications" by political elites or other public figures (ibid.: 12). The intermediate contextual level of analysis referred also as a critical political sociological perspective includes rational instrumentalism.[35] According to the intermediate contextual level of analysis, the analysis is focused on "the relationship between events and their medium-term production and impact cycles," and "the development of forms and institutions of cultural citizenship and cultural inclusion" (ibid.: 12). The 'event horizon' level of analysis is also referred as the macro-context dimension. According to the 'event horizon' level of analysis, the analysis is focused on "pre-event" and "post-event" processes connected to the event (ibid.: 12). Roche notes that this level of analysis is useful because it allows us to analyze "changing power struggles", "aspects of the development and politics", "'inclusion' and 'exclusion'" (ibid.: 12-13). Roche also

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[35] "Event organisation requires at least the appearance of instrumentally rational attitudes by the politicians and professionals involved ... But similar attitudes are also evident in the uses of major cultural events made by various communities and social categories among the general public … Rational instrumentalism applied to individuals explores the variety of personal reasons people have for 'using', 'consuming' or otherwise participating in great public events, reasons which may relate to such things as the pleasure, leisure or tourism interests of individuals, families or groups of friends." (Roche 2000: 14)

claims that the context under which the mega-events are held and their impact on public are critically important, to cite:

> "Thus the primary perspective is that of a contextual analysis, a critical political sociology of particular mega-events or series of mega-events, or mega-event movements. This typically involves giving an account of the intermediate political and economic processes, the actions involved in the production, and the impacts of these mega-events, which helps to provide a contextual understanding of them and of their implications for public culture and aspects of cultural citizenship." (ibid.: 13)

Mass participatory format of cultural activities were central in the Soviet and the Nazi regimes (Roche 2000). Both totalitarian regimes preferred "mass theatre of festivals and rituals" (ibid.: 103). Another important role mega-events also played for the Soviet and the Nazi rules was their performing or staging as "significant resources in their conduct of foreign policy." (ibid.: 104) In the Soviet era, for instance, the third anniversary of the Socialist Revolution was celebrated by staging a "mass dramatisation" of the marching towards the Winter Palace in 1917 by Bolsheviks (Roche 2000: 104). Another mass event engaged 18,000 Soviet athletes performing gymnastic activity in 1920 in the Red Stadium in Moscow.

The Soviet Union was "a sporting powerhouse" while sport competitions held served as a set for the Soviet and American rivalry during the Cold War era (Arnold 2021: Introduction). The Soviet mega-events were mainly targeted towards the foreign auditory, while also had domestic implications (Roche 2000). As the analysis of Roche suggests, most events hosted by the Soviets either fully coincided or were staged one year after the Western events (2000). For example, in 1925 (a year later the Paris Olympic Games), the USSR held a big sport activity. In 1928, on parallel with the Amsterdam Olympic Games, the USSR held the first Spartakiad sport event, with a mass spectacular opening ceremony staging 30,000 athletes with posters parading through the Main Red Square in Moscow. In a similar way, in 1932, the second Spartakiad was held on parallel with Los Angeles Olympic Games. As such, Moscow-initiated sport events could be named as "mass political festivals" (ibid.: 106), because they were participatory by involving many participants during performances and had important political messages both to domestic and international observers. Domestically sport in the Soviet Union was a means to "integrate" society into the regime and instil a Soviet national identity (as cited in Horák 2020: 251).

On the other side of the continent, in the Nazi Germany, Hitler adored 'propaganda' function of the Olympic Games in 1936. First, Hitler was not passionate to hold the Games

in Berlin. Soon after realizing the symbolism of the Games, Hitler saw the opportunity for the Nazi propaganda via the Olympic Games and gave a priority support:

> "The Olympic project allowed the Nazis to appeal to a number of different constituencies simultaneously. It enabled them to appeal to the popular culture of the German working class through the mega-event's spectacular, competitive and festival aspects. … it could be assumed that the Olympic event would appeal to both classes [working and upper classes] through its theatrical and ritual aspects, and thus its resonance with Wagnerian culture and with the populist taste for these sorts of displays which had long been a part of German nationalistic culture and tradition." (Roche 2000: 116-117)

Roche also highlights a legitimation function of the Games for the Nazi regime by writing the following:

> "In these crucial early years of the Nazi revolution, as with any revolution, the legitimacy and authority of the new state was vulnerable and conceivably it could have been short-lived. However, the coming of the Olympic event, when the eyes of the world would be on the new Germany, together with the production of the facilities, and preparation and rehearsal of its organisation, were significant factors in legitimising and popularising the regime internally and in legitimising and sanitising it internationally." (2000: 117)

A modern-day instrumental use of sporting mega-events is omnipresent in autocratic and authoritarian regimes. A recent collection of essays in Arnold eds. (2021) provides an excellent insight into the relationship between power and sports in Russia. The domestic and international political implications of the 2018 FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) World Cup were properly analyzed in the volume (Arnold 2021). The volume emphasizes a link between sport, domestic politics and international politics. Hosting of FIFA 2018 games in Russia were domestically interpreted as a representation of Russia as an important international player and a great power (Arnold eds. 2021). Arnold (2021: Introduction) writes that the 2018 World Cup was a source of legitimacy and partially contributed to Putin's re-election in March of 2018 with 76.7% of support. Indeed, Putin's speech at the opening event of the 2018 World Cup where he announced the pension system reform sounded more like Putin's electoral campaign (Arnold eds. 2021). On the international level the 2018 World Cup was a means to gain "soft power" and its geopolitical influence (ibid.). To cite Arnold: "The festivities confirmed that Russia was back at the center of world politics and generated new respect for the country …" (2021:

Introduction). Another volume of essays edited by Rojo-Labaien et. al (2020) examined a political importance of sport and significance of sport in nation-building on the example of post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The volume's third part, in particular, emphasizes a symbolic power of sporting mega-events in politics (presidentialism) and nationalism. For example, Horák's essay on Turkmenistan is important to highlight here (2020). Slavomir Horák writes that sport in autocratic regimes is "a top-down" process led by the state and sport is believed "an important component of state propaganda." (2020: 251) These regimes are interested in holding sporting mega-events "to convey their level of advancement." (ibid.) Authoritarian regimes like Turkmenistan tend to spend a big share of their national budget for hosting even minor sporting competitions, the authorities cut budgets for other social needs and even force local businesses to contribute to sports events (Horák 2020). Horák writes that sport in Turkmenistan became a device to portray and to cultivate the state leader's image and the national image:

> "Sport politics in Turkmenistan has become firmly entrenched within the system of authoritarian rule in the country, with the president as its key determinant. In this setting, sport has two important goals for the regime: promoting the country's image both outside and inside the country; and legitimising, confirming and celebrating the role and the successes of the president." (ibid.: 252)

President Berdimuhamedow's public engagement in sport in Turkmenistan, such as cycling days and horse-races underline his domestic personality cult (Horák 2020). In general, all domestic tournaments and achievements of Turkmen sportsmen abroad are used to praise the regime and the president:

> "Celebrations of Turkmen athletic victories (even at marginal tournaments) are also contextualised within the sport politics of the regime, with the president portrayed as the epicentre of the success. Sporting events within the country have developed into impressive shows, with the obligatory presence of Turkmen citizens (particularly students and state employees). Professionally organised mega events, as well as the inauguration of monumental sports facilities provide spectacles praising the regime and its leader." (ibid.: 252)

As a result of such a personality cult-oriented approach in Turkmen sport Horák (2020) concludes that Turkmenistan had failed to develop impactful sport on the global arena.

Finally, Roche (2000) observed a nation-building aspect of mega-events, as he stressed how mega-events could affect a public culture, which meant also a national cohesion or nation formation. He wrote that Olympic Games in the Western part of the

world since the late 19th century greatly contributed to development of 'public cultures' or 'official' versions of nations or "collective identities" in the 'world of nations' (2000: 21-22). Roche observed that mega-events foster identity in multiple ways:

> "there is the experience of embodiment and special place thereby conveyed by the practices of 'dressing up' and preparation for the public 'presentation of self', the active consumerism and sociability involved in eating and drinking at the event site, and the embodied responses to public performances and displays." (Roche 2000: 224)

Later, Roche corrected that mega-events became "globally mediated" or globally televised events of post-national nature (2006: 28). He noted that if earlier mega-events were part of a "popular culture" connected with nation-building of the 19th century, today mega-events became a part of 'post-national' culture where a theme of globalization was highlighted (ibid.: 29). The author compared a televised Olympics games with "a 'global village' in which 'the whole world watches' games played on the 'global commons'." (ibid.: 32) He wrote that contemporary mega-events promote "universalistic values", contribute to a "cultural standardization" and characterize a disappearance of "space-time" dimension because world citizens watch the same event at the same time and thus become "co-existing" and "co-presenting" auditory (ibid.). Thus, Roche in his later work claims that mega-events have more to do with post-national globalization and cultural standardization rather than with nation-building or promotion of nationalism.

Based on Roche's works (2000, 2006) the thesis analyzes mega-events in Kyrgyzstan as activities promoting both national identities and global or universal values; mega-events are examined also as political regime legitimating sources. To examine mega-events' legitimating function I found Roche's (2000) "contextual" event analysis model useful, which implies a close examination of "pre-event" and "post-event" processes connected to the mega-event (see the detailed pre- and post-event analysis of the Kyrgyz mega-events in the empirical chapters). Mega-events in Kyrgyzstan are "mass political festivals" as they used to be during the Soviet era, because they involve many participants and have important political messages both to domestic and international observers.

3.3 Nationalism, nation-building and nation-building tools
3.3.1 Classic theories in the study of nationalism
The question of when and how do nations come to existence has long been a central inquiry of the study of nationalism. One answer is that a nation appeared after a state, another is that a nation existed a long time before the establishment of modern state. Ernest Gellner

put that nationalism is a culture which is worshipped (1987: 16). There is one state and one culture principle according to him (ibid.). Nationalism is a justification of the rule and domination of one culture over other cultures (ibid.). He famously defined nationalism as a "political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent" (1983: 1). Nationalism has three main goals: "national autonomy, national unity and national identity" and should have to some degree all of these three goals (Smith 2001: 9). According to Anthony Smith nationalism has several meanings: "(1) a process of formation, or growth, of nations; (2) a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation; (3) a language and symbolism of the nation; (4) a social and political movement on behalf of the nation; (5) a doctrine and/or ideology of the nation, both general and particular" (2001: 6). In the thesis the term nationalism is used to denote a process of formation of a nation, a sentiment of belonging to a nation, symbolism of a nation and ideology of a nation.

There are several forms of nationalism as distinguished by scholars: voluntarist and organic kinds of nationalism, ethnic and civic nationalisms, Western and Eastern nationalisms, old continuous nations and new deliberately created nations (see Smith 2001). The mainstream paradigms of nationalism discussing the origins of ethno-cultural groups or ethno-nations are (i) modernist-constructivist, (ii) primordial, (iii) perennial and (iv) ethno-symbolic. By now the modernist-constructivist school in the study of nations and nationalism has been a central and dominant explanation to the rise of nations. Its main argument is, in contrast to the others, that the nation as such is a relatively modern invention and concept, and it is not in existence since the time immemorial as perennialists argue. In contrast to primordialists, modernists argue that nationalism grew in response to historical developments of civilizations but was not natural or organic. The modernists stress among key factors contributing to the rise of nations the following ones: industrial revolution, modernization, urbanization (see Gellner 1983, Anderson 1991). Consequently, the modernist school, in general, stresses the role of elites, state intellectuals in these socio-economic processes. Therefore, modernist-constructivist paradigm can be summarized as a top-down, elite-driven and socially constructed process. Its main rival, the primordialist idea on nationalism, also referred as *organic* or *nationalist* nationalism has recently been on decline. While the primordialist school claims that nations are organic, perennialists argue that nations are not modern, but existed since the time immemorial (Smith 2001). Currently the ethno-symbolist approach in the study of nationalism remains the most referred along with the modernist one, which stands in between the two rival approaches, and makes corrections to both primordialism and modernism, by highlighting another

missed popular nationalism or internal side of nationalism (by looking at emotions, myths, symbols, etc.) (see Smith 1986). According to the ethno-symbolic approach nations are modern inventions, however they are rooted on pre-modern culture or ethnicity which are re-interpreted in a new way. Below we briefly pause on each of nationalism schools.

3.3.1.1 Modernist-constructivist paradigm

Modernist view on nationalism lays a foundation for understanding the political aspect of nationalism, which is helpful to understand why and how the politics drives the elites to re-visit the national past. Modernism comes in two forms: chronological and sociological (Smith 2001). Chronological form states that nationalism is a recent phenomenon. While sociological claims that nationalism is an innovation, not an "updated version of something far older. Nothing like it existed before." (Smith 2001: 46). Not nationalism is only 'modern', "so are nations, national states, national identities and the whole 'inter-national' community" (ibid.: 47). As Smith (2001) pointed modernism was born due to novel conditions which can be grouped into: socio-economic, socio-cultural, political, ideological and constructionist.

The scholars who emphasize socio-economic conditions (such as industrial capitalism, regional inequality and class conflict) in rise of nationalism and nations are Nairn (1977) and Hechter (1975). Socio-cultural conditions in emergence of nations are stressed by Gellner (2006, 1997). Gellner divides the history of the mankind development into three stages: "the pre-agrarian," "the agrarian," and "the industrial" (2006: 5). A defining principle in these stages is presence of division of labour. In the first stage, a state's existence was not important, because "hunting and gathering" was trivial and did not require a system of order-enforcing. Whereas, in the second stage, a state's existence is crucial, and in the third stage – is "inescapable" (ibid.: 5). During "the agrarian" stage literacy emerges, that establishes clerisy and "cultural and cognitive storage" (ibid.: 8). The society is divided into the ruling class (minority) and peasants or agriculture producers (majority) (ibid.). In contrast, in the industrial society division of labor is continuously changing because of demand in sustained economic growth (ibid.). He continues, that the mobility in labor makes the society egalitarian (ibid.). Mobility and ability to re-train in order to fulfil economic demand in the industrial society were important (ibid.). In addition to them, the content of professional education delivered by a *communication* becomes important (ibid.). Gellner argues that sub-units, such as tribes or kin are "no longer capable of self-production in industrial society":

"The level of literacy and technical competence, in a standardized medium, a common conceptual currency, which is required of members of this society if they are to be properly employable and enjoy full and effective moral citizenship, is so high that is simply *cannot* be provided by the kin or local units, such as they are. It can only be provided by something resembling a modern 'national' educational system, a pyramid at whose base there are primary schools, staffed by teachers trained at secondary schools, staffed by university-trained teachers, led by the products of advanced graduate schools. Such a pyramid provides the criterion for the minimum size for a viable political unit." (2006: 34)

In the industrialization era "readjustments" of political and cultural boundaries gave a birth to nationalism (ibid.: 40). Thus, according to Gellner, nationalism is evolutionary process into "the organization of human groups into large, centrally educated, culturally homogeneous units" (ibid.: 35).

Among scholars who pointed out political conditions of emergence of a nation are Anthony Giddens (1985), John Breuilly (1993) and Paul Brass (1991). Breuilly defines nationalism as "political movements seeking or exercising state power and justifying such action with nationalist arguments" (1993: 2). A nationalist argument is described as a belief based on (a) the uniqueness of a nation, (b) the importance of a nation's interest and values over others, (c) and the necessity of political sovereignty (ibid.). According to Breuilly, nationalism is best explained as "an especially appropriate form of political behaviour in the context of modern state and the modern state system" (ibid.: 1). He criticizes the idea that nationalism is based on national identity. He also challenges thoughts on nationalism as a demonstration of social structure or a cultural formation. According to him these ideas are not enough to understand the nature of nationalism in general, because they all disregard the important detail that nationalism is "about politics and that politics is about power" (Breuilly 1993: 1). Breuilly continues that "[t]he central task is to relate nationalism to the objectives of obtaining and using state power" in modern states (ibid.). Crucial is to understand why nationalism had a key role in achieving the objectives of reaching the power in modern politics. A central argument from Breuilly based on pre-modern writings, namely of Europe, is that nationalism as such must do only with modern states, while it should be termed differently in relation to pre-modern times. Breuilly also notes symbols and ceremonies as sources of nationalist ideology in his work. He states that all nationalist movements and political forces use symbols and ceremonies to strengthen their positions and "express the solidarity of the nation" (1993: 64). With the help of symbols nationalists

"celebrate" themselves and symbols makes them successful (ibid.). He discusses the force of restoring the past as appealing agenda for masses: "the central motif of restoration of a past state in which the nation was most fully itself has an enormous appeal and in part accounts for the impact of nationalist ideology and symbolism" (ibid.: 69). Like Hobsbawm, Breuilly states that nationalism is engendered on "existing values and practices in a *new* way" (ibid., emphasis added). According to him, the nation-state is the government or the elite, and the government is the one that can portray to masses the nation either in a political sense or in a cultural meaning (1993). For instance, the independence can be described both in political and in cultural terms. This "perpetual ambiguity", as noted by Breuilly allows the elite to manipulate on the former depending on context: "it enables the nationalist to construct from a wide variety of practices and sentiments prevailing among the population of a particular territory the idea of a national community, and to transform this into a political claim" (ibid.: 69). Breuilly notes that national engineers tend to select from the available national values and practices only those which are politically relevant for them. Breuilly concludes that it is important to keep in mind a crucial task of nationalism that of fusing 'modern' and 'traditional' (1993: 228).

Paul Brass's work on the competition of elites provides an instrumentalist interpretation of ethnic identity development (1991). In his work he similarly highlights the centrality of the elite, especially in causing an ethnic conflict. According to his opinion, the elites in competition for power and resources may trigger conflict within communities along ethnic lines: "[t]he cultural forms, values, and practices of ethnic groups become political resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage" (Brass 1991: 15). What is interesting in his arguments is that the conflict itself is not caused by purely "cultural values", but merely by "broader political and economic" conditions (Brass 1991: 13). He continues that political and economic conditions may reason elites "to downplay or discard" the "symbolic manipulation of cultural forms, values and practices" (ibid.: 16). He also notes about the invention of "cultural congruities" between other linguistics or religious groups where they do not exist for political convenience of the elites (ibid.). Brass also discusses the process of "transforming cultural forms, values and practices" into "political symbols" (ibid.: 15).

Ideological conditions of emergence of a nation were raised by Elie Kedourie (1960). Kedourie (1960) argued that nationalism was a product invented in Europe by intellectuals, a consequence of the Enlightenment. He claimed that nationalism is European concept, that proved to be unsuccessful in other non-European states (ibid.). He stated that

"nationalism was a movement of alienated youth, a 'children's crusade'" (as cited in Smith 2001: 63.) Kedourie highlighted a role of ideas and will, while Gellner argued that ideas are not so powerful (Smith 2001). Finally, socially constructed character of nations and nationalism within the modernist school was raised by constructionist, such as Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Anderson (1991). Hobsbawm and Ranger's work on 'invented traditions' was already mentioned above. Benedict Anderson (1991) described nation as 'imagined' political community which fills "the void left by the decline of cosmic religions and monarchies at the point where new conceptions of time and 'print-capitalism' made it possible to imagine nations moving through linear time" (as cited in Smith 2001: 48).

3.3.1.2 Perennialism and primordialism

According to this paradigm nation had existed since the time immemorial (see Hastings 1997). Perennialists argue that "even if nationalist ideology was recent, nations had always existed in every period of history, and that many nations existed from time immemorial" (Smith 2001: 49). The important for perennialists is "a belief, founded on some empirical observation that nations – or at least some nations – have existed for a long period of time, for whatever reason" (ibid.: 50). There are two forms of perennialism: 'continuous perennialism' – "the longevity and continuity of specific nations" and 'recurrent perennialism' – nations decline, reappear in various stages of history (ibid.: 50). As Smith wrote perennialists were inspired by the notion of "social revolution" where stages of development and gradualism are key (ibid.: 50).

Perennialism should not be confused with primordialism – that is "a naturalist conception of the nation" (ibid.: 50). Primordial school in contrast believes in organic, natural essence of nations. Smith defined two forms of primordialism: "socio-biological" which states that "nations, ethnic groups and races can be traced to the underlying genetic reproductive drives of individuals and their use of strategies of 'nepotism' and 'inclusive fitness' to maximize their gene pools." (ibid.: 52). According to them co-ethnics treat each other as their kin (ibid.: 52) The second form of primordilaism is "cultural" one, and it argues that "ethnic groups and nations are formed on the basis of attachments to the 'cultural givens' of social existence" (ibid.: 53). These authors pointed that even in secular, industrial and modern societies ethnic or kin ties were important on personal level (see Geertz 1973, Shils 1957).

3.3.1.2 Ethno-symbolism

This paradigm seeks to focus on 'subjective' or 'inner' side of nationalism, such as memory, sentiments, myths and symbols. Anthony Smith – the founding father of the school wrote: "my approach has focused on the way that prior, and often premodern, ethnic ties and ethnies have influenced, and in some cases formed the basis for, subsequent nations and nationalisms" (2001: 60). Ethno-symbolism contributes to other paradigms, especially modernism, by moving away exclusively from 'elite-oriented' kinds of analysis. In contrast to modernism, ethno-symbolism stresses the relationship between various elites and the people. Smith (2001) argues that nationalism is a two-way process. He writes that: "The non-elites, partly through their cultural traditions and partly in consequence of their vernacular mobilization, influence the intelligentsia, political leaders and bourgeoisie, by constraining their innovations within certain cultural parameters and by providing motifs and personnel for their cultural projects and political goals" (ibid.: 57.) Ethno-symbolists agrees with perennialists, that a long-term observation of nation is important. In contrast with modernists, it states that "earlier forms of collective identity [especially of *ethnies or ethnic communities*] may influence the rise of nations, while allowing for the many ruptures and discontinuities of the historical record" (ibid.: 58). Ethno-symbolists regard the problem of collective passion and attachment as a key problem for understanding ethnicity and nationalism: "ethno-symbolists propose historical and/or sociological explanations which address the reasons for the continuing emotional attachments of so many people to their ethnic communities and nations, and for their capacity for fanatical terrorism and self-sacrifice on their behalf" (ibid.: 59). Ethno-symbolic approach can also help to track the endurance and transformation of cultural groups due to inner side of analysis of nationalism: "with the popular, moral and emotional dimensions of ethnic and national identities, ethno-symbolist approaches can help us to grasp both the persistence and the transformations of these collective cultural identities" (ibid.: 59)

In brief, ethno-symbolist focus their analysis on cultural factors and explain rise of nationalism with culture, namely symbols, memory, myths and traditions (Smith 2001). Their analysis totally omits socio-economic, political or biological factors (ibid.). The ethno-symbolist school is an important corrective to existing paradigms, and it importantly bridges two other rival schools: modernist-constructivist and primordial. As Smith put in his book, the ethno-symbolic school "can inspire alternative explanations of the intensity and contents of current ethnic conflicts to the usual economic and political accounts" (ibid.: 59)

3.3.2. Nation-building

3.3.2.1 Key concepts: nation and national identity

There is no a common agreed definition for nation. Objective factors of nation include language, religion, customs, territory, institutions.[36] Subjective factors of nation include attitudes, perceptions, sentiments.[37] However objective factors are always exclusive, as rightly pointed by Weber (1948). While subjective definitions of nation are too easy to separate from tribe, city-state or empires. The solution is to stay between a subjective-objective definition. Ernest Renan who developed a concept of voluntarist nationalism, claims that it is a will which is a basis for nationalism. Renan stated that membership in a nation is anonymous: "A nation is a large collection of men such that its members identify with a collectivity without being acquainted with its other members …" (as cited in Gellner 1987: 6). Connor (1978) writes that nation is not the same as state. It is difficult to define nation because of "a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it", while the state is a judicial and territorial unit (1978: 379). According to Connor nation is "self-defined" than "other-defined" grouping (ibid.: 380). He continues that nation is a "self-aware ethnic group" (ibid.: 388). Nations may lose or replace some or all of their markers (such as language, culture, etc.) that does not necessarily mean lose of their uniqueness unless it is present in their minds (Connor 1978: 389). Finally, for Smith "a nation is not a state and it is not an ethnic community" (2001: 12). Nations are "felt and lived communities whose members share a homeland and a culture" (ibid). The nation has a "a named human community occupying a homeland, and having common myths and a shared history, a common public culture, a single economy and common rights and duties for all members" (Smith 2001: 13). The definition of **nation** by Smith is the most suitable for the thesis: "the nation is a form of public culture and political symbolism, and ultimately of politicized mass culture, one which seeks to mobilize the citizens to love their nation, observe its laws and defend their homeland." (2001: 35)

The term national identity had replaced other terms, like national consciousness and national character or collective character (Smith 2001: 17). Smith defined identity in the following way "identity denotes sameness in an object over time, persistence of a specific pattern over a finite period" (Smith 2001: 27). There are two levels of identity: individual

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[36] For instance, a definition of Stalin in 1973
[37] For instance, a definition of Anderson (1991)

and collective (Smith 2001). Smith points out that the collective identity based on cultural elements, "as in the case of castes, ethnic communities, religious denominations" is stronger than any other type of collective identity, such as classes and regions (ibid.: 19). **National identity** is defined by Smith as "the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identifications of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements", and the thesis uses this definition (ibid.: 18).

3.3.2.2 Defining nation-building: a state-centric and a popular one

Before we proceed to overview nation-building approaches, nation-building tools and features of post-Soviet nation-building, let us define what nation-building is. There is no a commonly agreed universal definition. Various scholars had proposed different definitions. For example, Connor (1994) defined nation-building as a sort of 'national awakening'. Karl Deutsch emphasized "the process of social mobilization" as a key factor in nation-building (1966: 188). According to Deutsch modernization is important in forgetting pre-modern loyalties: "leaving these traditional groups weaker, more stagnant, and easier to govern" (as cited in Connor 1972: 324). Deutsch argues that social mobilization goes in hand with development of markets, mass communication, education and industrialization (1966). However, in his later works he points out to an important chronological relation between the two (assimilation or nation-building and mobilization): Deutsch stresses that the process is stable if assimilation precedes mobilization, whereas if "mobilization is fast and assimilation is slow" the process is unstable (as cited in Connor 1972: 325). Walker Connor criticizes Deutsch stating that with progress of modernization, ethnicity is not declining referring to Western European countries experiencing ethnic clashes, "the doctrine that modernization dissolves ethnic loyalties can be challenged on purely empirical grounds" he puts (1972: 327). He summarizes that "increased communications" contribute to development of ethnic consciousness, while "increased social mobilization" lead to increase of ethnic tensions (Connor 1972: 331-332). Connor also criticizes scholars that omit value of ethnic identity in nation-building (1972). He argues that a right term should be "nation-destroying, "but not "nation-building," while the issue of ethnic identity is a "true nationalism" (Connor 1972: 336). Connor argues that terming a phenomenon of having loyalty to state as nationalism is the "error" (1978: 378). He claims that ethnic loyalty and loyalty to the state are not "naturally harmonious" (Connor 1972: 321). In other

words, Connor believes that nation-formation is a *process*, which also can be reversible (lead to nation destruction).

Nation-building is considered as one of major tasks that mainly the newly formed states face as noted by Edward Shils (1963). Shils uses the word modernization to describe state (state institutions) and nation-building processes. Another definition stressing inclusionary and exclusion aspects of nation-building is offered by Clifford Geertz (1994). For him, nation-building is "the formation and maintenance of collective self-images," "the inclusions and exclusions of the social "we"" (1994: 1). Another definition has been elaborated by Pål Kolstø (2005), according to which nation-building is a set of measures or strategies implemented by a state aimed at fostering a "common nationhood", "sense of unity", "common values and common allegiance toward the same state institutions and symbols", and a feeling of a common nation "in order to survive in the long-run" (2005: 7).

There are mainly two approaches to the study of nation-building: a state-centric one and a popular one. According to the first approach, nations appeared after the emergence of a modern state. This group of scholars – representatives of modernist-constructivist paradigm – maintain that nation-building is state-centric and top-down process, where a nation is a product of state bureaucrats' efforts. For instance, Gellner (1983) writes that nationalism develops where a state is present. "The existence of politically centralized units, and of a moral-political climate in which such centralized units are taken for granted and are treated as normative, is a necessary though by no means a sufficient condition of nationalism." (Gellner 1983: 4) For Gellner (2006) nation-building is a top-down process implemented by the state, the elite. He believes that nations can be constructed by re-visiting their past: "nationalism uses the pre-existing, historically inherited proliferation of cultures or cultural wealth, though it uses them very selectively, and it most often transforms them radically" (2006: 55). John Breuilly (1993) too defined nation-building as governmental nationalism. Breuilly looks at nationalism merely as a form of opposition politics, and suggests three possible outcomes: "separation", "reform" and "unification" (ibid.: 9). Finally, Kolstø too accepts the central role of the elite by stating that "*nation-building* is an active process pursued by state leaders, intellectuals, educators … who try to give a state the qualities of a nation-state" (2005: 8).

The second approach is the opposite to the first one, and argues for a popular nationalism and diminishes the dominant role of a state in nation-building. They claim that the role of a state is minimal, instead they highlight so-called micro-level or everyday nationalism (see Billig 1995, Giddens 1984, Antonsich 2015, Isaacs and Polese 2016). Both

approaches are complementing each other and together better explain nation-building process. In general, I accept that nation-building is a complex process, implying both top-down and bottom-up processes. I accept that a multiple range of actors have a crucial role in shaping, fostering and maintaining national identities, although the role of the state could be central in the early stages of nation-building after the independence, as it happened in most of post-Communist states. However, in the thesis, the focus is made on the local nation-building processes. Because in the literature there is no a broad definition of nation-building which accepts it as both state-centric (top-down) and popular (bottom-up) process, based on Kolstø's (2005) state-centric definition of nation-building, I broadly define **nation-building** as a set of measures or strategies implemented either by state or non-state actors aimed at fostering a shared and united nationhood with common histories, myths, traditions, values and symbols and a common national future. Nation-building should be regarded as a continuous process, but not a static product, because nation-building has a beginning but has no ending (Isaacs, et.al. 2015). Therefore, the study considers nation-building as a continuous process.

3.3.2.3 Main nation-building approaches and three waves of nation-building

The study of nation-building became a wide-spread research field after decolonization processes in 1960s. Newly established states were referred in the literature as 'new' states. Number of comparative studies emerged which compared national question in old and new states (see Deutsch and Foltz 1963). Among the most-cited works dedicated to nation-building one can find of Karl Deutsch and William Foltz (1963). Authors aim to compare and analyze nation-making patterns in their seminal book called "Nation-building" (1963). According to Deutsch, there are three approaches to study the process of "the making and breaking of nations" (1963: 2) depending on which angle the phenomenon is discussed from. The first is historical approach studying the "growth of nations," the second is a political approach stressing "nation-building", while the third is a sociological approach studying it as "national development" (ibid.: 3). The historical approach is evolutionary or "organismic", it suggests "stages" towards biological "maturity" (ibid.). The political approach, in contrast, is "architectural", "mechanical" and implies the process of construction (ibid.). Whereas the third approach of "national development" combines both "mechanistic and voluntaristic aspects" of nation-building (ibid.). Deutsch wrote that: "a nation can be built according to *different* plans, from *various* materials, *rapidly* or *gradually*, by different *sequences of steps*" (ibid., emphasis added).

Pål Kolstø (2014) differentiates three waves of nation-building: (1) 'old' European states, (2) nation-building of 1960s during decolonization period, and (3) post-communist nation-building in the 1990s. The second and third waves of nation-building were merely connected to "socioeconomic and political *modernization*." (Kolstø 2014: 4, emphasis in the original). Despite, modernization patterns of nation-building were more applicable to the Soviet Union (such as Central Asia), the same modernization logic followed in already modernized Baltic states (Kolstø 2014). Kolstø stresses 'architectural' nature of the third wave of nation-building: "state leaders do indeed to a large extent design deliberate and active strategies aimed at building a sense of solidarity and common identity among the population." (2014: 4) Kolstø (2014) maintains that nation-building is a process and it applies various tools to form a nation-state. According to Kolstø (2014) nation-state is the only format which allows the modern state to function, represent the people and take legitimacy. The leaders outline national policies and symbols to run the state, however often national symbols represent major culture or ethnicity and omit minorities (Kolstø 2014: 2). A fourth wave of post-war nation-building was added by Polese (2011) who emphasized increasing role of external actors, such as US and other great powers in state-building and nation-building.

Importantly, Kolstø contributes to differentiate nation-building from state-building. According to Kolstø (2014) state-building is administrative, institutional element of a state, or "the hard" construction". On the other side, nation-building is "the soft" construction such as shaping and forming a shared identity, state ideology, state symbols. In other words, nation-building is strengthening of a civic loyalty or the loyalty for the state, aimed at diminishing of existing in the society sub-national divisions (religious, ethnic, regional or kinship). To cite:

> "We reserve 'nation-building' for *strategies of identity consolidation within states* and distinguish it from 'state-building'. The latter term, as we use it, pertains to the administrative, economic and military groundwork of functional states – the 'hard' aspects of state construction. Nation-building, in contrast, concerns only the 'softer' aspects of state consolidation, such as the construction of a shared identity and a sense of unity among the population." (2014: 3, emphasis in the original)

Despite of this important technical differentiation between these two concepts, it should be stressed that state-building and nation-building are mutually reinforcing and contributing processes. They both should be implemented in order to have more sustainable national development. Nicolas Lemay-Hébert argues that in order to achieve a successful state-

building nation-building should be incorporated into this process: "To be effective, statebuilding has to take into account not just the rebuilding of state institutions, but also the complex nature of socio-political cohesion, or what some refer to as nationbuilding." (2009: 22) Thus, following Kolstø (2014) in this study I maintain that nation-building and state-building are distinct but complementing concepts, despite Kolstø (2014) notes that robust state institutions do not necessarily result in a strong national attachment.

3.3.2.4 Nation-building tools

Isaacs and Polese (2016: 12) define the following actors as the main ones in the nation-formation process: state (institutions), political elites, international actors, civil servants and people. The authors in their volume distinguish between 'traditional nation-building tools' and 'new tools' or non-traditional nation-building tools (ibid.). To the first group of tools they list nation-building tools which were "since time immemorial" – such as language, religion, historical memory or symbols (ibid.: 2). In the second group of nation-building tools they refer to construction works, cinema, elections, popular art, singing and dancing, national songs and mega-events (ibid.: 3). The authors also refer to indirect or spontaneous nation-building in the second group they suggest (spontaneous nation-building will be further elaborated below in this chapter). According to them, the mentioned above activities (namely, construction works, cinema, elections, popular art, singing and dancing, national songs and mega-events) indirectly ended up as nation-building, therefore they defined them as spontaneous (ibid.). In the volume, some of the examples of spontaneous nation-building are the use of film as a nation-building device by the Kazakh elites, the Turkmen personality cult, the construction of a water dam in Tajikistan and the Eurovision event in Azerbaijan (ibid.). All of these nation-building devices are defined as non-traditional by the authors (ibid.).

The conceptual division of nation-building tools into traditional and non-traditional as suggested by Isaacs and Polese (2016) is itself a useful framework for a better analysis and a more comprehensive and multi-level understanding of nation-building process, because the traditional nation-building tools primarily are state-centred (they emphasize the role of the state, the elites), while non-traditional ones are primarily non-state-centred and stress the role of ordinary people in the process of nation-building. According to them, nation-building process is continuous given that it has not defined ending timeframe, and it requires participation by the 'people'. They claim that currently prevailing approach of a top-down nation-building is imperfect model because (a) the outcomes of policy

implementation and policy making can be misinterpreted or misled, (b) people should not be considered as "passive" or "policy-takers" given that they can resist or negotiate state-originated markers of identity in formal or informal ways (2018: 7).

In the thesis, I emphasize, on the one hand, the unintentional role of the national initiatives, namely state-led celebrations and mega-events (celebrating the past, the history and the symbols) aimed at building political legitimacy in the nation-building process. On the other hand, I emphasize a more tangible role of non-state actors, namely of local strongmen – private entrepreneurs, businessmen, philanthropists and individual politicians – and also the ordinary people, in the process of maintaining and strengthening a national identity in Kyrgyzstan. Before elaborating on the framework of unintended nation-building which I propose in the thesis to explain nation-building patterns in Kyrgyzstan between 1991-2017, below I brielfly describe nation-building in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia to give a broader picture.

3.3.2.5 Nation-building in Soviet Central Asia

Post-Soviet nation-building in Kyrgyzstan, which is the central focus of this study, is the first self-constructed nation-building. As noted above there are claims that because Kyrgyzstan practiced some type of *modern* nationalism during the Soviet era, after gaining the independence it has borrowed "the Soviet logic of creating nations" in a top-down manner, by re-writing and re-inventing its own history (Roy 2007: xxi). Nation-building projects in five "stans"[38] commencing after the Soviet demise are still on-going projects in CA (Isaacs, et.al., 2015), and they are studied predominantly using a top-down and state-centered approach inherited from the Soviets (see Akbarzadeh 1996; Akbarzadeh 1999; Kurzman 1999; Roy 2000; Hirsch 2005).

Although the thesis focuses on the post-Soviet nation-building in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), for a better understanding of the topic, revisiting to the main schools in studying Soviet nation-building in Central Asia will be helpful. Studies note that the first nation-state model was introduced to Central Asia by the Soviets during the 1920-1930s (see Hirch 2005; Roy 2000; Suny 1991). As noted earlier, prior the Soviet Union period, Central Asian society was not organized within states, but existed in proto-state models: within tribes or clans, within inter-tribal or inter-clan unions. It is important to note that,

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[38] In the literature it has been common to name collectively all CA states as five "stans," which stand for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan

some important literature on post-Soviet nation-building does interpret post-Soviet nation-building as a continuation of Soviet 'practices' of nation-building. Therefore, before reviewing the current state of the debates about post-Soviet Central Asian nation-building below, Soviet nation-building approaches are briefly summarized.

Three key debates could be identified in the study of nation-building in Soviet Central Asia: (1) the "Soviet ethnos theory" approach developed by the Soviet ethnographers (Julian Bromley 1989), (2) the "constructivist" approach (Hirch 2005; Roy 2000; Suny 1991) and (3) the colonial approach (Strakes 2006). According to the "Soviet ethnos theory" approach, nation-building in Central Asian states was a process of a gradual development from tribal societies into modern nation-state models. The "Soviet ethnos theory" is resumed by G. Smith as a process made of several stages: (1) a step to "primordialize" a nation and to portray ethnicities as homogeneous, (2) a step to "historicize" a nation and to depict ethnicities as very old by salutation of their "golden ages" and its national heroes, and (3) a step to "totalize" a nation and to describe a person as a "collective personality" (as cited in Abashin 2006: 58).

In contrast, the "constructivist" approach claims that Central Asian countries were not created as a result of ethno-genesis process, as described above, but were "artificially created" during the Soviet period (Abashin 2006: 59). As Suny notes, CA states were put in the framework of nation-state model in order to go through the stages of "nativization", which was the first step towards becoming *assimilated* to turn into a *sovetskii narod* (Soviet people) or *homo soveticus* (1991: 66). Identically, Hirsch claims that the Soviets pursued a "double assimilation" policy, that included a preliminary assimilation into a nationality or *narodnost'* (the 1st stage) classification, and a subsequent assimilation into a Soviet people or *sovetskii narod* (the 2nd stage) (2005: 146). Finally, Roy states that nationalism in Soviet CA was established by the "administrative, cultural and political habitus installed by the colonial power" by creating its historical, ethnographic and linguistic foundations (2000: x). The Soviet administration was the first to define national borders and to give official names, to re-invent histories and it played a key role in shaping state languages (ibid.). As Abashin writes, Central Asian countries were not created because of natural ethno-genesis process, but instead were "artificially created" during the Soviet period (2006: 58-59). In comparison to Benedict Anderson's "imagined community", in CA, colonial apparatus was "re-inhabited by a traditional society" and "the intellectuals did not care to give a real content to the concept of national culture", the content was rather Soviet (Roy 2000: xi). According to Roy, the construction of nations was merely a "temporary step" therefore it

should not be too real in a sense (ibid.: xiv). Overall, Suny (1991), Roy (2000) and Hirsch (2005) argue that the ultimate aim of the Soviets was the establishment of the Soviet identity, while architectural creation of CA nations was a medium or a necessary step to build a bigger Soviet loyalty.

On the other hand, the colonial approach considers nation-making in Central Asia by the Soviets via prism of colonial 'conquer and divide' pattern. According to this claim, formal administrative institutions were "externally imposed" and sought to obtain legitimacy by indigenous people (Strakes 2006: 88). Nation-building processes in CA predominantly were aimed at colonial regime's legitimization through a "model of Central Asian political management" made of clan politics and "reliance on traditional social organizations" such as kinship networks and regional loyalties in order to strengthen ruling regimes (ibid: 89). In other words, the colonial logic of creation of nations was aimed at ruling and controlling the 'colony'. A brief turn to the Soviet past was necessary here to understand how nation-building historically evolved in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Now we turn to post-Soviet nation-building in CA, which is a central topic of this study.

3.3.2.6 Nation-building in post-Soviet Central Asia

Central Asian states after the collapse of the Soviet Union launched own nation-building programs. Abashin (2006) observes that overall nation- or identity-building was particularly important for CA countries to symbolically make stronger national borders they had inherited from the Soviet era and to maintain civic loyalty to respective countries. In addition, nation-building was crucial in order to maintain a status-quo of disputed borders, especially to minimize kin-mobilizations that would shatter the political integrity of the neighboring states. CA states were divided into republics in the 1920s not taking into account ethnic and territorial congruence, therefore numerous disputed border conflicts had emerged after the independence (Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan borders). The idea which Gellner famously put stating that "the political" and "the national" boundaries should be congruent (2006: 1) was applicable to post-Soviet CA too. Lack of congruence led to rise of violence, nationalist movements, and increase of nationalist sentiments (Gellner 2006).

A literature on post-Soviet nation-building in CA is diverse, however, they could be grouped into three approaches: critical, anti-colonial and constructivist approaches. A critical body of literature on nation-building policies in CA examines the nexus between nation-building and politics. For example, Suleymanov (2004) highlights regimes'

legitimation through nation-building. In her study highlighting a role of national symbols, Cummings (2009) looks at the relationship between symbolization and regime types in CA. Matveeva (1999) studies the nexus between democratization, legitimation and political change. Other literature also argues that the early post-Soviet nation-building in CA was an instrument for legitimation of the Communist ruling elites to stay in power after the independence (see Akbarzadeh 1999, Cummings 2002; Peyrouse 2011 Kudaibergenova 2020). Kudaibergenova puts that nation-building is "a battlefield of ideas, interests, aspirations, discourses, and power struggles among the power elites in the country" (2020: 11). CA nation-building is also studied through the anti-colonial lenses, although very few literatures stated it. For instance, Abashin mentions about a new anti-colonial discourse or "national independence" approach opposite to predominant "artificially created" nationalism literature (2006: 61).

In contrast, there is a prevailing literature examining nation-building as a socially constructed product. They study how nation and identity are imagined or shaped, produced and interpreted. According to the first group of scholars within the constructivist approach, in post-Soviet nation-building the role of state or political elite is highlighted as important factor in constructing what a nation is (Brubaker 1994; Kolstø 2000; Kuzio 2002; Roy 2000). For example, Roy (2000) argues that CA states continued the 'Soviet logic' of top-down nation-building, stating that regimes "are pursuing to the utmost the Soviet logic of creating nations and differentiating them from their fellow republics. The statement of nationhood is made in relation to the external world: we are independent, look at our flag" (2000: xv). He continues, after the Soviet demise, Central Asian states had no names, borders, languages other than those taken over from the Soviet era (ibid.). A very similar concept highlighting the role of the state is provided by Brubaker (1996a, 1996b) in his concept of *nationalizing state*, particularly targeting newly emerged post-communist states. Rogers Brubaker states that a nationalizing state is "the state of and for a particular ethno-cultural 'core nations' whose language, culture, demographic position, economic welfare and political hegemony must be protected and promoted by the state" (Brubaker 1996a: 431). Brubaker distinguishes between nation-state and nationalizing state (ibid.). According to his view, the nation-state is the ultimate aim of the state: "the state what it is properly and legitimately destined to be", whereas the nationalizing state is the state as an "unrealized" nation-state (ibid.). Thus, among two main characteristics of nationalizing states Brubaker notes that state-run programs are used to promote the dominant nations' concerns. For him, in the Soviet successor states, nationhood and nationality were

"institutionalized" and continue to exist in two conflicting poles: (a) territorial and political (nationhood), and (b) ethno-cultural and personal (nationality) (1996b: 23). Similar to Roy (2000), Brubaker (1996b: 54) notes that post-Soviet CA states continued their Soviet logic of existence or *raison d'etre* and "sense of political ownership" and launched *nationalizing* policies by promoting titular culture, language and political domination.

Among other authors who emphasized a socially constructed nature of nation-building are Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen (2013) who explain nationalism with the help of post-socialist urban policies and practices in post-Soviet capitals, such as renovation projects (replacing monuments, buildings, architecture) and renaming of geographic names (street names, city names). According to them, Central Asian post-socialist states applied "forgetting" policies, by relocating, revising, re-naming urban spaces. The authors also point that construction of mosques in post-communist urban spaces symbolically elevated new identity. A similar study by Suleymanov (2004) records the intentional re-writing of national histories for nation-building purposes by the state leaders. Through the example of two historical heroes Tamerlan (also known as Amir Timur) and Manas, the Uzbek and the Kyrgyz authorities respectively had applied history as a means of power legitimization, ethnic consolidation and promotion the author states (Suleymanov 2004). Alternatively, Nick Megoran pointed out to gendered prism in the studies on nationalism in Central Asia when the government used an image of females to communicate about nation (1999). Juliette Cleuziou and Lucia Direnberger similarly analyzed the interrelation between gender and nationalism, namely on "re-traditionalizing" process or restoring pre-Soviet social traditions of hierarchy between genders after the demise of communism (2016: 196). They note about gender roles according to which *the private* accepted is as feminine, and *the public* as masculine matter. Finally, some studies on CA nationalism mention Central Asian nationalizing projects as inter-state competing programs which was achieved through expropriation and juxtaposition of symbols, cultures, histories, heroes and languages. Francesc Massansalvador notes that collapse of the USSR required "a new consolidation of these identities … in rivalry with neighboring identities" (2010: 6). Reuel Hanks also analyzes the rival ethno-symbolism in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The Tajik state narrative of Aryanism and the Samanid Empire by linking Tajiks to the Europe had challenged the Uzbek neighbors, who also decided to benefit from the Arian descents narrative (2015: 123). Overall, top-down nation-building produced by a state or a political elite could be summarized as *traditional nation-building* or "political dimension" of nation-building (as

discussed in Isaacs and Polese 2016), which is usually a discursive process (see Kudaibergenova 2020).

On the contrary, the second group of literature within the constructivist approach highlighted the opposite: the role of people in shaping identities or "bottom-up" way of nation-building, especially as re-negotiation of identities imposed by the state. These studies point out to informal (Eriksen 1993) and *non-traditional* tools of nation-building (Antonsich 2015; Isaacs and Polese 2015; Polese et al. 2018a, 2018b). These authors claim that there is an essential gap between "imagined" nationalism imposed by a state and "real" practiced nationalisms by non-elites (Isaacs and Polese 2015: 375). A collection of studies edited by Polese et al. (2018) note, for instance about the role of national food, everyday music, folklore and gender (namely masculinity) in nation-building or shaping a perception about the 'national' in everyday life. The book represents a collection of studies on nationalism "beyond state-centered accounts" by looking at the understudied everyday identity construction in the post-socialist world (Polese et al. 2018b: 2). The authors, borrowing the concepts developed by recent studies on banal nationalism, argue that national identity is re-negotiated by ordinary people as they can introduce alternative 'non-state-originated' markers vis-à-vis 'state-originated' ones. The cases illustrated in the book discuss the ways how everyday life experiences re-formulate their self-imagination as a nation. The collection highlights the role of "ordinary people and their agency" in "interpretation and renegotiation of their symbolic value" in everyday life and communication with the state. The authors conclude that public experiences of self-imagination are important part of nation formation because they are key factors in understanding 'the very essence' of nationalism (ibid.). Megoran too notes that in a post-classical approach to nationalism scholars questioned not when the nations emerged, but "how nationalism is invoked as a form of social consciousness, and how do individuals become national in everyday contexts?" (2017: 16) Inspired by the seminal work of Michael Billig "Banal Nationalism" (1995), a new generation of post-classical works on CA nationalism appeared (see Adams 2010; Fauve 2015a; Ó Beacháin and Kevlihan 2015; Isaacs and Polese 2015; Polese et al. 2018a, 2018b; Megoran 2017). Billig (1995) defined banal nationalism as an everyday expression of nationalism which is aired through the use of flags during sports events, singing of national anthems, etc.

Finally, nation-building in CA is also studied as spontaneous (Polese 2009; Polese and Horak 2015). Initially, based on others works, Polese and Horak define spontaneous nation-building in the following way:

"the construction of national identity through the perpetuation of national songs, popular art, singing, and dancing despite the possible lack of support from state authorities and institutions …. Second, just as nation-building measures might not have the desired effects and impact on a given population, there might be some measures that, conceived of at the central level, were not intended to primarily influence identity construction – this is the case of elections, opposition movements, and mega events … but nevertheless end up strongly affecting identity in a country" (2015: 458).

In their study on the Turkmen nation-building, Polese and Horak look at how personality cult of the Turkmen leaders contributed to nation-building process in the country: "the production of Turkmen symbols is mostly associated with the present and they are constructed around the figure of the president" (2015: 472). In their view, this experience led to the creation of de-ethicized civic nationalism in Turkmenistan in comparison to other CA states (Polese and Horak 2015). Isaacs and Polese (2016) in another volume of essays dealing with non-traditional or innovative tools and approaches in post-Soviet nation-building further develop the idea of spontaneous nation-building. Later other three edited volumes address partially this idea (see Polese et al. 2017; Polese et al. 2018a, 2018b), which thematically gradually evolves from 'spontaneous' into 'everyday' and 'informal' nationalism (Polese et al. 2017; Polese et al. 2018a, 2018b). Polese et al. (2017). By 'everyday' or banal practices of nation-building they mean activities undertaken by non-state or informal actors in nation-building (ibid.).

3.3.3. Unintended nation-building in ashar-stans

Here I present a concept of unintended nation-building in ashar states which I propose based on the reviewed literature on political legitimacy, sources of legitimacy, performance politics, nationalism and nation-building. A model of unintended nation-building in ashar-stans emphases how the attempts of the regimes to remain legitimate indirectly led to a process of national identity formation, which I refer in this study as unintended nation-building. In the model of unintended nation-building I argue that in ashar-stans the political elites do prioritize regime survival, whereas maintenance and fostering of national identity is rather a collective activity – in particular, strongmen (private entrepreneurs, businessmen, philanthropists and individual politicians) play a crucial role. I define unintended nation-building as an unintended outcome of activities (i.e. state-led celebrations and mega-events

implemented in Kyrgyzstan) originally designed for other purposes (i.e. political and economic).

The term *unintended nation-building* is, in particularly, inspired by Abel Polese's and Slavomir Horák's (2015) work on 'spontaneous' nation-building. These authors initially referred to the spontaneous nation-building outcome of state policies in Turkmenistan which were primarily designed for other purposes (ibid.). The similar phenomenon of unintended nation-building was also mentioned by Pål Kolstø (2014: Introduction) when he described three waves of nation-building. The idea of 'spontaneous' nation-building was further elaborated in the edited volume by Rico Isaacs and Abel Polese (2016) titled *Nation-Building and Identity in the Post-Soviet Space. New Tools and Approaches*. As the authors defined in the introduction to the volume:

> "The word spontaneous refers to the fact that these tools and approaches display one of the following characteristics. Either they have been conceived at the central-institutional level as a political measure that was not originally intended to influence identity construction, this is the case with elections, opposition movements, mega events, or they have not been initiated by the state but instead have originated from the people themselves, for instance the construction of national identity through the perpetuation of national songs, popular art, singing and dancing." (ibid.: 3)

The thesis furthers this argument by emphasizing a nation-building outcome of Kyrgyz state-sponsored mega-events which were predominantly designed for political legitimation as I will further illustrate in the empirical chapters of the thesis. However, I refer to this phenomenon as 'unintended nation-building' but not 'spontaneous nation-building' because it is generally confusing to name nation-building as 'spontaneous.' Sovereign states do have official or top-down nationalisms (adopted by the state as national 'traits', official languages, national symbols, such as flags and coat of arms etc.) which are not spontaneous. Therefore, unintended nation-building could be a softer alternative term to denote certain state projects not related to nation-building which ended up as nation-building projects due to communal efforts. The term unintended nation-building also does not undermine the role of a state in nation-building. What it does instead, is that it proposes that after the official nationalism produced by the state (i.e. following the adoption of state symbols, languages, etc.), nation-building can occur indirectly as part of other state initiatives without the state's intention to do so. As Isaacs and Polese (2016) suggest nation-building is a continuous and complex process, and identities are not fixed categories

(see Brubaker 1996). Therefore, national identity formation occurs at any time with or without state's intention to do so after the establishment of official nationalism. In the ashar-stan where the political leadership is worried about its regime survival, nation-building can be neglected by the elites despite a weak nation-building is detrimental for the state's long-term development. Thus, unintended nation-building is a helpful framework to examine nation-building efforts from below which occur as a consequence of state policies designed for other purposes, often self-legitimization purposes, as the case study of Kyrgyzstan illustrates. This framework is important in order to have a multifaceted and a complete picture about the complex nature of nation-building in the post-Soviet space. Together with the existing scholarship on state-centric or top-down nation-building, the unintended nation-building model allows us to better understand and theorize about nation-formation processes in and beyond Central Asia.

A model of unintended nation-building argues that in political settings where the state performance is poor, i.e. the state underperforms in socio-economic sense, the state leaders opt to legitimacy-building projects which are performative and spectacular mass-events and are based on historical past, historical myths, memories and traditions (often stress the nation's past greatness), whereas national identities which these mass-events produce are community-based or developed by the efforts of strongmen. These spectacular mass events tend to create illusions or imaginaries of development and legitimate the rule. For Central Asian countries performances are important because these states do not perform or function well. As Reeves puts in Central Asia "ritualized performance on national holidays or grandiose building projects" correspond with or take away attention from "empirical failures in state provision" (2017: 218).

A model of unintended nation-building in weak states stresses how local strongmen and communities can define, popularize national identity markers and can replace a state in shaping and fostering a national identity, whereas a state can become a silent observer or passive participant, in most cases not participating in the process of nation formation as such. The state does so because it is primarily busy with "performing" itself as a 'functioning state'. The ashar state is "performing" and staging itself as a productive state in front of its constituencies despite its inefficiencies on the ground.

In highly industrialized, bureaucratized and economically developed countries modernization theories suit the best to describe nation-building patterns. Unlikely, in agrarian or non-industrial contexts with weak economies and bureaucracies where pre-modern traditions dominate, nation-building and legitimacy making patterns overlap. The

relationship between the culture and politics is well-established. As Inglehart wrote culture is not neutral: "in virtually every society, it legitimates the established social order – partly because the dominant elite try to shape it to help perpetuate their rule." (1997: 26) As I demonstrate in Kyrgyzstan's case the political regimes are interested in legitimating themselves through festive performative spectacular mega-events, while nation-building is maintained by strongmen. Unintended nation-building is vernacular, decentralized as it is performed on community level.

The thesis is a critical study of nation-building in a political setting where a state under-performs in socio-economic sense. It is a valuable corrective to existing classical Western theories and approaches in nation-building and nationalism studies applied to explain post-Soviet nation-building. In the existing literature as revealed above, the elite or the state motivations behind national celebrations and anniversaries were not critically studied, on the contrary they were interpreted as nation-building projects (see Introduction). Studies on the Kyrgyz elite's motivations behind national celebrations remain unaddressed and are even rarer. Informed by the literature above, the study critically examines how state celebrations and anniversaries designed to create imaginaries of development and legitimate the power also resulted in 'unintended' national identity formation among its citizens due to grass-root efforts – activity of locals and strongmen. The concept of unintended nation-building and understudied role of strongmen in nation-building process itself is worth further studying and developing in order to better explain nation-building and nationalism in non-Western contexts.

3.4 Conclusion

The purpose of this theoretical chapter was two-fold. First, the aim was to understand what political legitimacy is and what are main sources of legitimation. I proposed cultural performance legitimation mode which underlines legitimation through mega-events and sports events along with cultural performances, celebrations and anniversaries. This conceptualization is helpful to avoid existing conceptual ambiguity in the literature and to embrace a wide range of cultural events, mega-events and sports events which are prevalent in weak democracies. In Kyrgyzstan, the role of the past, traditions, customs, rituals, symbols and mega-projects, including sports-events tend to be the most suitable ways in obtaining legitimacy. Firstly, legitimation through culture is a post-Soviet tradition, and, secondly, cultural performance legitimation mode has the capacity to replace economic performance legitimation mode. Many studies pointed out how past, history and memories

are used (misused) by political leadership to enhance own rule and to weaken political opponents. In particular, they become instrumental in newly formed states. As Mink and Neumayer (2013) put, reference to the past and memories in nation-formation process also legitimize political governance. They term it as memory games: "The concept of memory games encompasses the various ways by which political and social actors perceive and relate to certain historical events, according to the identities they construct, the interests they defend and the strategies they devise to define, maintain or improve their position in society." (Mink and Neumayer 2013: 4-5).

The second aim of the chapter was to introduce the concept of unintended nation-building. Before doing so I reviewed mainstream nationalism theories and the existing scholarship about nation-building in Central Asia. Unintended nation-building model based on Polese's and Horák's (2015) work on 'spontaneous' nation-building is proposed as the best suited framework to explain ongoing nation-building in Kyrgyzstan. A model of unintended nation-building argues that in political settings where the state performance is poor, the state leaders tend to sponsor performative and spectacular mass-events related to the historical past in order to increase own political support, whereas national identities which these mass-events produce are developed by the efforts of strongmen or ordinary citizens. The remaining part of the thesis empirically illustrates cultural legitimation mode and unintended nation-building framework following the methodology chapter below.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

The research examined all major mega-events conducted in Kyrgyzstan between 1991-2017, namely the following state-led projects:

-    Manas Epic's 1000-year anniversary in 1995,
-    Osh City's 3000-year anniversary in 2000,
-    Kyrgyzstan's 2200-year anniversary in 2003,
-    World Nomad Games (WNG) introduced in 2014.[39]

The period under the study is limited by the first and the third presidents: Askar Akaev 1991-2005 and Almazbek Atambaev 2011-2017. Analysis of Kurmanbek Bakiyev's rule (2005-2010) is omitted because of lack of grand mega-events under his term. The interim-government period after the second revolution led by the interim-president Roza Otunbaeva (2010-2011) is not examined also because of a similar reason.

The World Nomad Games (WNG) were selected as an illustration case to examine how state promoted mega-events in Kyrgyzstan unintentionally or indirectly contributed to development of national identity or nation-building. WNG were selected because this event is on-going mega-project and is accessible for close observation and study. A field observation of the 4th WNG in Turkey in 2020 was planned as part of the research, however because of the Covid-19 situation worldwide the event was postponed.

4.1 Methods of data collection and analysis:

I used the method of interviews, document analysis (books, official documents, official databases, international reports, newspapers and media sources and social media) and ethnography between December-2020 and July-2022 to collect data for the research.

4.1.1. Interviews

Between December-2020 and March -2021 I conducted in total twenty structured elite interviews in on-line format[40] with Kyrgyz politicians, such as ex-ministers and ex-MPs; advisors/experts of the ministries and other state representatives. I have prepared a list of

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[39] The World Nomad Games are hold biennially, i.e. every two years since 2014, the 2020 WNGs were scheduled to be held in Turkey, however they were postponed for 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

[40] Most of interviews were held in on-line format due to Covid-19 pandemic travel and quarantine restrictions.

about thirty key Kyrgyz politicians who were involved as MPs, ministers, state advisors and heads of state bodies which were related to celebration of four mega-events between 1991-2017 (such as the the WNG Secretariat). Then, I individually approached to each politician through e-mails and social media channels. Eventually, only twenty of politicians agreed for interviews which I conducted in on-line format. I had prepared a list of similar questions which I asked during the interviews with each of my informants.

Another round of fifty semi-structured interviews in on-line format with participants or eyewitnesses of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd World Nomad Games in 2014, 2016 and 2018 throughout Kyrgyzstan was conducted between December-2020 and March -2021 to understand how the nomad games impacted public attitude towards the government and to understand how the games had influenced their national identities. Some participants, such as Kok-Boru players and other eyewitnesses were selected based on snow-ball sampling technique because it was difficult to access these communities. I selected fashion-designers for interview using a random sampling technique because most of contemporary fashion houses in Kyrgyzstan took part in WNGs. I interviewed the Kok-Boru Federation representatives in Bishkek and the regions because they represent a single official body regulating this sport.

Finally, between June-July 2022, I held two group interviews with twenty Osh State university students about the World Nomad Games and nomadic identity. I interviewed students of the arts faculty who took part in the activities of the WNGs and other similar festivals after 2017. Also I took three personal interviews from Kok-Boru players in Osh. Thus, to summarize, in total 93 structured/semi-structured interviews in person/on-line format with Kyrgyz politicians, advisors/experts, state representatives, the WNG participants/eyewitnesses, Kok-Boru players and federations, and fashion designers were held. I used zoom, Facebook and WhatsApp (video and audio calls) platforms for on-line interviewing. Structured/semi-structured interview method was chosen as data collection method because it allowed a comparison between the informants' answers and allowed to follow-on with clarification questions. Later, a group interview method was chosen due to time constrains. Some interviews were recorded upon the consent from interviewees on a device for personal use only; in most cases I took notes in writing. I conducted interviews in Kyrgyz and in Russian languages. On average each interview lasted for 40-60 minutes.

4.1.2. Document analysis and Ethnography

In the thesis I analysed written speeches (texts) of the presidents of the Kyrgyz Republic delivered on the occasions of mega-events between 1991-2017. In my analysis of the published texts of the speeches I focused on implicit in the text based on the detailed contextual picture (political and socio-economic developments) under which the mega-events were conducted and endorsing speeches were delivered. My primary aim in analysing texts is to understand the official reasoning of importance of these mega-events and to understand what central themes the speeches raise and why the political leadership emphasizes these themes. So, the questions I will be asking in analysing presidential speeches are the following: *How did the presidents communicate to the nation why celebrating mega-events are important for Kyrgyzstan in particular timing and context?* I underlined words and phrases which are rhetorically or frequently used by the presidents and I defined central themes based on frequently used words and phrases.

The President Askar Akaev's keynote speeches during three mega-events were published in the state newspaper *Erkin Too* and his book titled *Menin elimdin uluulugu – Velichie moego naroda: Tandalmalar, Izbrannye rechi* published in 2003. Other books written by the President Askar Akaev were also included for analysis. The President Almazbek Atambaev's and Sooronbai Zheenbekov's speeches were accessed at the President's official web-page at www.President.kg. Presidents are considered in the thesis as central political figures, as power-holders and agenda-setters, therefore their speeches and discourses they frame are very important for the analysis.

Among other sources, I relied on Osmonakun Ibraimov's book (2015) titled *Istoriya kyrgyzskogo gosudarstva. (postsovetskiy period)* because he was Akaev's state secretary and was one of key organizers of three mega-events. During the interview in 2021 for Azattyk media Ibraimov acknowledged that he was the one who proposed to Akaev all three mega-events.[41] I used various domestic and foreign media articles, newspaper articles and the official data from the National Statistics Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic at www.stat.kg – a centralized database. I used the International Republican Institute (IRI) annual National Opinion Polls available for the period between 2006 and 2019 because it comprises a complex data on the politico-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan. I also got access to the Kok-Boru Federation's documents, photos and video materials which I used for my study.

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[41] For details see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7LsSOqXsI0

However, texts also have limitations: they are open to various interpretations as some warn (Fairclough 2003: 11). To avoid a risk of multiple interpretation or misinterpretation, in the thesis I also examined political and socio-economic contexts under which the mega-events were held and the speeches were delivered. This allowed me to safeguard an objective interpretation of texts. At the same time, Fairclough wrote that to "research meaning-making" a researcher needs to provide micro and macro accounts: "To assess the causal and ideological effects of texts, one would need to frame textual analysis within, for example, organizational analysis, and link the 'micro' analysis of texts to the 'macro' analysis of how power relations work across networks of practices and structures." (2003: 15-16) Therefore, contextual or 'macro' details (by which I mean political and socio-economic contexts) of the mega-events and subsequent presidential speeches serve as a basis for framing and interpreting social and political meanings of the Kyrgyz mega-events.

Finally, I did on-line ethnography by studying live-stream videos of the opening events of three World Nomad Games. By doing so, I believe, I am in line with Fairclough's recommendations on this account. He suggested ethnography as a complementary frame to analyse texts (2003). Roche too acknowledged importance of ethnographic observation in study of events, he wrote: "ethnographic form of textualism is in turn compatible with, and indeed could be argued to be a necessary descriptive precursor to, the various contextualist and political approaches to event analysis …" (2000: 15).

4.2 Discourse analysis method

Informed by Bourdieu (2013)[42] that the reality is socially constructed, we accept that discourses play a crucial role in shaping the social world and or supporting/challenging existing power relations. Discourses are language and texts as well as non-verbal components which shape our understanding of the social world. Discourse "reproduces" social reality (SAGE 2019: 1). Scholars noted how language and texts maintain and change ideologies (see Van Dijk 1998). Ideologies in their turn are important in founding, strengthening, altering relations of power and domination (Fairclough 2003: 9). Therefore,

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[42] Bourdieu wrote that "Each agent … is a producer and reproducer of objective meaning." (2013: 79) According to him political actors can shape a dominant "social world" which is "undisputed" (Bourdieu 2013: 164). The social world and the system of power relations are produced through the production and dissemination of knowledge or discourses (Ibid.). He wrote that a social domination can occur in case of appropriation of "the field of cultural production", put differently, it can be achieved through elite-led discourses and narratives (2013: 184).

Norman Fairclough suggested that a textual analysis should also look at how power relations are affected as a consequence of language (ibid.). Fairclough wrote that discourses are often featured by metaphors: "metaphor is one resource available for producing distinct representations of the world." (2003: 131-132) According to Fairclough (2003) social practices communicate discourses (language) and other non-verbal components. For Fairclough (2003) language is an essential element of social life which cannot be ignored in social research.

I used discourse analysis method to analyse the Kyrgyz presidents' speeches (opening keynote speeches), official press-releases and state media outlets about performed state mega-events between 1991-2017. Discourse analysis is a method to analyse usage of the language. Vivienn Burr (1995) highlights the central role of language and argues that social phenomena are constructed with the help of various discourses. She claims that discourses form people's identities (ibid.). Studying discourses, she makes an inquiry on why some discourses are considered as 'truth' while others are less successful. As a response, she proposes a relationship between power relationships and discourses (ibid.).

Discourse analysis can be used to analyse both written and oral language, video recordings and interviews. The social world is made of various discourses and some discourses can be dominating ones depending on the positions of the ones who produce them:

"I see discourses as ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world. Particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, so we are generally in the position of having to consider the relationship between different discourses. Different discourses are different perspectives on the world, and they are associated with the different relations people have to the world, which in turn depends on their positions in the world, their social and personal identities, and the social relationships in which they stand to other people. Discourses not only represent the world as it is (or rather is seen to be), they are also projective, imaginaries, representing possible worlds which are different from the actual world, and tied in to projects to change the world in particular directions. The relationships between different discourses are one element of the relationships between different people – they may complement one another, compete with one another, one can dominate others, and so forth." (Fairclough 2003: 124)

Fairclough (2003: 26) suggested three ways how discourses can be expressed: genres, discourses and styles. Fairclough differentiated between 'textually oriented discourse analysis' and non-textual approaches (2003: 2). He wrote that texts: "can bring about changes in our knowledge (we can learn things from them), our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth. … texts have causal effects upon, and contribute to changes in, people (beliefs, attitudes, etc.), actions, social relations, and the material world" (2003: 8) He wrote that the so-called 'meaning-making' of the language is made of both explicit and implicit in the text (ibid.). Fairclough (2003) wrote that while analysing texts as part of specific events researchers do two interrelated activities. First, they examine texts through three "aspects of meaning" which are 'Action', 'Representation' and 'Identification', they look at how aspects of meaning are achieved in texts, for instance, they look at vocabulary and grammar (ibid.: 28). Second, researchers build a link between "the concrete social event" and "more abstract social practices" (ibid.: 28). To do so they examine genres and styles used within texts, they analyse how various discourses, genres and styles expressed simultaneously in texts (ibid.).

Discourse analysis can emphasize various uses of language, such as intentionality, acceptability, informativity and intertextuality (SAGE 2019: 2). Intentionality focuses on what are intentions of speakers, acceptability means how the auditory meets and engages with a speech (ibid.). Informativity looks at how novel the delivered information is and how is it contextualized to the current timing (ibid.). Finally, intertextuality concerns with relations of the delivered speech with other speeches or texts (ibid.).

4.3 Case selection justification

Kyrgyzstan has been categorized as a "soft" authoritarian regime based on its rankings on freedom of political opposition, election practices, freedom of media, activeness of civil society and power distribution (see Treacher 1996, Schatz 2006). The economy of Kyrgyzstan from the early days of independence largely relied on international support, namely on international development and liberalization grants and aid programs with their democratization agenda. As experts claim, the Kyrgyz government was open to liberalization and democratization projects in order to marketize itself in front of the international donors (McGlinchey 2011). A political life of the country is very vibrant, and

sometimes is described as divided into the north and the south.[43] The country to overcome pre-modern regional tribal loyalties and clan-based rule in 2010 declared itself as a parliamentary democracy, however in April 2021, with a new regime brought to power by so-called 'third revolution' in October 2020, the country 'returned' to presidential form of governance. The country underwent several violent power transitions since its independence (in 2005, 2010 and 2020).

Except its status of the first parliamentary country in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan can be noted for its strategic geographical location and participation in regional integration organizations. Kyrgyzstan is a member to two parallel economic integration projects: The Russia's Eurasian Economic Union, and the China's Belt and Road Initiative. Located in the center of Central Asia, despite its landlocked-country status, the country housed two foreign military bases.[44] Economically, the country has a negative trade balance, the country is the second over-indebted country in the region after Tajikistan. The country's economy is mainly based on agriculture, tourism, a Canadian Kumtor gold-mining company's profit-shares, re-export of Chinese goods to other CA states and Russia, and heavily relies on labor migration remittances (mainly from Russia).

Thus, Kyrgyzstan has been selected as a case study because of the following reasons (listed in order of importance):

(i) The country had extensively carried out state celebrations and anniversaries since the independence;

(ii) The state's underperformance (negative economic indicators, increase of state debts);

(iii) Kyrgyzstan went through three political transitions and instabilities, which undermined state capacity and legitimacy;

(iv) Despite official status of an "island of democracy" and parliamentary form of governance, the country underwent authoritarian, clan-based and president-centered rule;

(v) Data accessibility (open data resources and ability to travel to the country).

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[43] Kyrgyzstan has been culturally and geographically divided into the south and the north. The southern Kyrgyzstan is located in the Ferghana valley, which shares cultural ties with Uzbeks and Tajiks living there, and speaks a southern Kyrgyz dialect. During the Tsarist Russia and the Kokand Empire, the south of Kyrgyzstan was in composition of one *viloyat* (province) with Fergana valley Uzbeks and Tajiks. Identically, the northern part of Kyrgyzstan has a common history and culture with Kazakhs. Because of the lack of interaction due to geographical remoteness, the south and the north cleavage had survived even the Soviet era. On the contrary, the Soviet government supported status-quo by shifting the power between the southern and northern political elites in order to create the south-north political balance. The shift between the south-north political elites was also a case in post-soviet independent Kyrgyzstan. See Matveeva 2010 and Wachtel 2013 on political cleavage in Kyrgyzstan.

[44] Russian military base is located in Kant since 2003, American military base to support its mission in Afghanistan was located in Manas airport between 2001-2014.

CHAPTER 5: OFFICIAL DISCOURSES OF MEGA-EVENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN DURING AKAEV AND POWER LEGITIMATION

In this Chapter I examine anniversaries held under the rule of Askar Akaev (1991-2003). Here I discuss official discourses of state-led celebrations and explain how Manas Epic and history of Kyrgyz nation modelled Akaev's legitimation style to secure own power. In the literature Akaev's celebrations have been analysed as merely nation-building projects. However, the Chapter demonstrates that Akaev's mega-events were more complex in design and were multi-functional. Based on socio-economic and political contexts under these celebrations, the Chapter argues that mega-events implemented a legitimacy-building function too, namely aimed at Akaev's re-election.

In the first section of the Chapter I describe Akaev's festive celebrations of Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary in 1995, Osh City's 3000-years anniversary in 2000 and Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary in 2003. In the second section of the Chapter I analyse the President Akaev's speeches delivered during these mega-events. Finally, to support my argument, in the third section of the Chapter I also discuss other political and socio-economic factors which contributed to the invention of these mega-events in particular timings and political settings.

5.1 Akaev's festive mega-events

5.1.1 The epic Manas

Manas Epic is Kyrgyz oral epic which was narrated and passed from one generation to another for centuries (Wasilewska 1997). Manas teller – the one who recites the poem – is called *manaschy*.[45] There are around 70 versions of Manas Epic.[46] According to others, there are more than 80 versions.[47] However, the versions of *manaschy* Sayakbai Karalaev and *manaschy* Sagymbai Orozbakov are considered as two fundamental versions. The longest documented version of Manas consists of 553,000 lines.[48] Since 2013 the epic

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[45] For a detailed information about Manas Epic and manaschy see (Van der Heide 2008)

[46] Azattyk: Каныбек Иманалиев о пяти гениях кыргызского народа [Kanybek Imanaliev speaks about five geniuses of the Kyrgyz nation], 28 January 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuRz-yQdQ3Q (accessed 10 December 2020).

[47] Sputnik: Призраки, испанский город и Рерих – 15 фактов об эпосе «Манас» [Ghosts, Spanish city and Rerikh – 15 facts about the epic Manas], 19 November 2015, https://ru.sputnik.kg/culture/20151119/1020235063.html (accessed 11 December 2020).

[48] The Moscow Times: UNESCO recognizes Kyrgyz epic of Manas, 8 December 2013, https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2013/12/08/unesco-recognizes-kyrgyz-epic-of-manas-a30280 (accessed 10 December 2020).

Manas is listed among the UNESCO's intangible heritage list.[49] The epic in print has three volumes which narrate the tale of a hero named Manas and his offspring Semetei and Seitek. Manas, a mythical hero, was allegedly born in Talas region of Kyrgyzstan, became a prominent leader and warrior who could unite disunited Kyrgyz tribes during tensions with Chinese and Kalmyks (Wasilewska 1997). Manas is viewed as a founder of the Kyrgyz nation (Wasilewska 1997, Hanks 2005, Marat 2008, Gullette 2010). Manas Epic is both "imagined" and "real" history (Marat 2008: 35). The main character Manas is "the ideal and collective image of what it means to be a male, warrior, defender of the motherland, exemplary son, husband and father" (ibid.).

One of the first sources that mention the epic Manas belong to Saifaddin Aksykenti's works dated back to the 16th century (Akaev 2002: 40). The first translation of the epic from Kyrgyz to Russian language was made by Chokhan Valikhanov, a prominent Orientalist scholar and explorer (ibid.). Kasym Tynystanov, a Soviet Kyrgyz writer, was among active intellectuals who devoted many efforts to popularize Manas Epic. In 1925 Tynystanov delivered a report on Manas Epic, and later a suggestion was made to publish Manas Epic (ibid.). In 1935, the intellectuals could organize the first Union-wide scholarly conference on Manas Epic, however, shortly after that the organizers and the presenters were repressed by Stalin. Manas Epic became associated with Islam (Wasilewska 1997). Only in the 50s, Manas Epic was further studied and efforts were made to maintain the tradition of Manas. Manas Epic was translated into Russian in 1946 and was even performed in opera in Moscow. In 1952 for the first time the epic was issued in print, while in 1956 (after the death of Stalin) scholarly conferences again were launched and studies on Manas were continued.

After the fall of communism, monument of Lenin located in Bishkek's central square Ala-Too was replaced with a roughly 18-meters high monument of Manas Hero. In total four monuments of Manas were erected nation-wide since the independence. One of central streets in Bishkek and the biggest airport in Kyrgyzstan are named after Manas Hero. Manas medal – the highest state award was introduced in 1996. Manasification re-emerged after 2010, as Jaquensson argues mainly because of China's increased quest for appropriation of Manas. In 2011, a special "Law on Manas Epic" was signed by president

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[49] UNESCO: Kyrgyz epic trilogy: Manas, Semetey, Seytek, n.d., https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kyrgyz-epic-trilogy-manas-semetey-seytek-00876 (accessed 10 December 2020).

Roza Otunbaeva[50]. According to it, the epic Manas received a state support for the maintenance, popularization, research and development of the national epic. The Law states that the state will support the activity of *manaschy*, school and university instruction of Manas Epic in Kyrgyzstan and its diasporas abroad. Finally, the Law states that respect for Manas Epic is a patriotic duty of every Kyrgyz citizen. In 2017 a special banknote valued 2,000 KGS featuring Manas and a citation from the epic was issued by the National Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic. Issue of Manas banknote was initiated to mark two events: the 25th anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's independence and the 25th anniversary of the national currency – the Kyrgyz som. In 2019 there were also suggestions to rename the Kyrgyz capital-city Bishkek into Manas[51].

The Day of Manas is marked nation-wide on December 4th annually. Since 2015 Manas day celebrations are usually accompanied by 7-days of non-stop Manas performance by a team of *manaschy*, including youth *manaschy*. Manas reciting events are organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Kyrgyz Republic (further the Ministry of Culture), international foundation "Sayakbai manaschy" and private businessmen. In 2020, the Ministry of Culture organized 24-hour non-stop performance of Manas Epic dedicated to the day of Manas in Manas-Ordo complex in Talas. As the Ministry of Culture informed, the event was supported by businessmen and no state funds were allocated for this event. Today Manas is recited on various national holidays, public ceremonies and high-level receptions of foreign delegations. The epic is not only performed on the national level, but also during celebrations or ceremonies arranged by regional administrations, and during different village events. Due to activity of local and international foundations or unions of *manaschy* and the efforts of the state in implementing the Law on Manas Epic, Manas reciting became popular among children. For example, on December 4th 2015 the Mayor's Office of Bishkek city organized a city-wide contest on Manas performance among kindergarten and primary school children.

Manas Epic also became a focus of Kyrgyz and Chinese bi-lateral relations. For centuries Manas Epic and Manas performance was also identity cornerstone of ethnic Kyrgyz living in China. Ethnic Kyrgyz fled to Xinjiang region of China during Urkun

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[50] The Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic: Закон Кыргызской Республики об эпосе «Манас» [Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on "Manas" epic], 28 June 2011, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/203303?cl=ru-ru (accessed 11 December 2020).

[51] Azattyk: В Кыргызстане предложили переименовать столицу Бишкек в Манас [In Kyrgyzstan suggested to rename its capital Bishkek to Manas], 24 March 2019, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/29838840.html (accessed 11 December 2020).

(exodus) in 1916 in order to avoid Russian tsarist punitive measures. *Manaschy* Jusup Mamai, ethnic Kyrgyz born in China, played a crucial role in popularization of the epic and preservation of Manas performance among ethnic Kyrgyz in China. In 2014 Jusup Mamai published own version of Manas Epic in China and facilitated bi-lateral cultural interaction between the two countries. In 2017 the Beijing staged Manas opera in Chinese language based on Jusup Mamai's epic version. The event was initiated by the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the Chinese National Opera Institute. In 2018 the opera Manas was staged for the second time during then president Sooronbai Zheenbekov's official visit to Beijing. The opera was attended by Zheenbekov, who thanked the Chinese government for respecting Kyrgyz culture and invited Chinese actors to Kyrgyzstan to perform the opera Manas. A year later Chinese troupe travelled to Kyrgyzstan and staged the opera Manas to the Kyrgyz auditory the latter received the opera with high enthusiasm.

In post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan Manas Epic is remembered or mentioned by the government and individual politicians during some political tensions or hardships because Manas is always associated with national unity and statehood. Manas also has a mobilization power therefore it is manipulated by some politicians. For instance, after the October turmoil in 2020 in Kyrgyzstan, some activists organized Manas performing by *manaschy* Doolot Sydykov at Ala-Too square in Bishkek with an aim to register in the Guinness Book of Records for the longest Manas performance (14 hours 27 minutes of non-stop epic reciting without taking a break, water and food). Another important reason for performing Manas was maintenance of unity and stability after the October turmoil. *Manaschy* Sydykov told the following to one of news outlets: "You know well that on the main square many [political] events do happen, therefore it was decided to recite the epic near the monument of Manas in order to call the people for union and peace."[52] During Sydykov's meeting with Zhaparov (the acting president of Kyrgyzstan), Zhaparov interpreted Manas as a source of unity and strength for the Kyrgyz nation:

> "The epic Manas is the brightest embodiment of spiritual and cultural heritage of the Kyrgyz nation. During hard times the image of the hero [Manas] inculcates strengths to the Kyrgyz nation through the art of *manaschy*. Today [after the third revolution]

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[52] Kloop: Манасчы рассказывал эпос «Манас» более 14 часов. Об этом снимут документальный фильм для регистрации в Книге рекордов Гиннеса [Manaschy performed the epic "Manas" for more than 14 hours. A documentary film will be recorded for its registration in the Guinness Book of Records], 25 November 2020, https://kloop.kg/blog/2020/11/25/manaschy-rasskazyval-epos-manas-bolee-14-chasov-ob-etom-snimut-dokumentalnyj-film-dlya-registratsii-v-knige-rekordov-ginnesa/ (accessed 11 December 2020).

everyone has own position and own vision about the country's further development, own world outlook, however when we speak about Manas, we all stay unified."[53]

The epic Manas became a central ideology of the first president Askar Akaev to shape the Kyrgyz nation after the fall of the Soviet regime (Marat 2008). After Akaev's fall Manas is still present in the public and private lives of the people, however Manas is not as ritualized as it was then.

5.1.2 Akaev and the epic Manas

Among all presidents of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev was the only one who wrote several books on history of Kyrgyzstan and personally was attached to the epic Manas. Akaev was an intellectual and a scholar of physics prior becoming president of Kyrgyzstan. Chingiz Aitmatov, a prominent Soviet and Kyrgyz writer, was the one who suggested his candidacy for the position of president in 1991. Chingiz Aitmatov was Akaev's admirer and Aitmatov was also one of key figures who played a crucial role to leverage Kyrgyzstan's mega-events on the international level (as it will be further noted in this chapter).

Askar Akaev appealed to the epic Manas very often. As noted in Askar Akaev's book called "Kyrgyz statehood and a folk epic Manas" (2002) the epic is more than a cultural element of Kyrgyz nation, but also is a means of a spiritual, political and state life. He strongly urged that Manas should be a guideline for the state's further development because it is a story of a big dream of the ancestors who dreamed and fought for the independence and statehood. Akaev wrote that historically Manas Epic was a prototype of a Constitution, a system of legislation, the code of honour and morality, and the instruction to the future generations (2002: 420). For Akaev Manas was not a mythical character rather he was a real person (2002: Chapter 1). He wrote that "Manas in the consciousness of Kyrgyz was always a real historical figure." (2002: 404) Akaev described Manas as a national symbol and embodiment of the Kyrgyz nation. He believed that Manas, in particular his name, had a quality to 'mobilize' the Kyrgyz nation (2002: 404). Manas is almost elevated to the level of divine and sacred in Akaev's writings (Akaev: 69). According to Akaev each individual has own path leading to Manas, the path which truly can be compared to a faith: "Each of us, when grown-up and experienced by years, has own

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[53] Sputnik: Манасчи-рекордсмен рассказал о проблемах Садыру Жапарову. Что он ответил [Manaschi-records holder informed Sadyr Japarov about existing issues. What did he respond], 13 November 2020, https://ru.sputnik.kg/culture/20201113/1050424388/manaschi-rekord-pravitelstvo-sadyr-zhaparov-epos.html (accessed 11 December 2020).

path to "Manas". He believed that only after facing with the Kyrgyz "path to Temple' connected with the name of Manas, one could realize its greatness and the place it has in communal life of Ala-Too[54]." (2002: 405)

Akaev is convicted that Manas Epic shapes the Kyrgyz nation's past, present and future. Manas Epic as a past reminds the Kyrgyz nation about important lessons and warns the future generations. Manas Epic as a present displays the dream of ancestors for statehood and independence and unites the nation. Manas Epic is equated to the Kyrgyz statehood because the epic and the nation are extremely intertwined: "The epic underwent with its nation a centuries-old path… [a long path to statehood]" (Akaev 2002: 410). Therefore, the epic Manas is the symbol of the Kyrgyz statehood for which the nation fought twenty-two centuries (Akaev 2002: 513). Manas teaches the Kyrgyz about unity and cohesion: "The epic in the current version powerfully demonstrates that the power of the Kyrgyz is in their unity. Unity, consolidation of all forces in fighting with a common threat led the Kyrgyz warriors under Manas' leadership to a victory over Chinese and Kalmaks." (Akaev 2002: 419)

Akaev (2002) in his book made also an example on how Manas Epic had in fact shaped the Kyrgyz statehood. According to him, Usup Abdrakhmanov (the Soviet Kyrgyz statesman) was involved in border-making of Soviet Central Asia. Abdrakhmanov suggested the commission to settle the nations residing from the Aral Sea to the Yssyk-Kol lake under one territorial-administrative division. However, the commission members in Moscow were against and queried what except the common name "Kara-Kyrgyz"[55] did the people unite residing in this territory. Abdrakhmanov replied immediately that it was the epic and hero Manas: "All sing and tell about him [Manas] and in Karakol, and in Pishpek[56], and in Osh counties!", Abdrakhmanov exclaimed. (Akaev 2002: 425) The epic is also connected to the future of the Kyrgyz statehood in Akaev's discussions. Akaev writes that the epic Manas will always accompany the Kyrgyz nation: "The strive for the statehood and the great spirit of Manas were always accompanying the Kyrgyz… The great spirit of Manas, which had saved and inspired the Kyrgyz in the long past, always will be with us and will be lighting our path to the future." (2002: 520)

The epic Manas was also mentioned to promote democracy. Addressing young people in the concluding chapter of his book Akaev wrote that Manas Hero is an inspirational

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[54] Ala-Too is another folk name for Kyrgyzstan
[55] Older name for the Kyrgyz ethnic group
[56] Older name for Bishkek

example for the youth, taking the lessons from the history the young people would better understand own place in building democracy in Kyrgyzstan (2002: 519).

However, Akaev was not the first one to introduce Manas Epic. Since the establishment of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic researches on the origins of Kyrgyz nation took place (Gullette 2010). One of ways of studying Kyrgyz nation was through studying Manas Epic. According to the Soviet version of interpretation of Manas, the epic was propagated in the Soviet Kyrgyzstan to contribute and support a loyalty to the Soviet Union and to strengthen friendship between the nations within the Union (Akaev, 2002).

5.1.3 Akaev's nation-building projects: Manas' Seven lessons and Kyrgyzstan is our common home.

In 1995, during the celebratory event commemorated to Manas Epic's 1000-year anniversary, Akaev introduced Seven lessons based on the epic. Manas' seven lessons were a major nation-building project of Askar Akaev. These rules became displayed everywhere: in kindergartens and schools, in universities, in administrative buildings and even in hospitals. Omnipresent banners and boards with Manas' images and lessons in all state buildings served to 'discipline' the Kyrgyz nation according to the values developed in the epic Manas. According to Gullette, Akaev used Kyrgyz genealogy and the Manas Epic as a way to "train" and to teach moral for a nation (2010, p.127). Spirituality in Manas is a central part of Akaev's message to its citizens (Gullette 2010). Akaev is eager to discipline and to guide Kyrgyzstanis in line with seven lessons or maxims (Gullette 2010: 140): "Knowing the importance of the ancestors and their virtues needs to be continued to maintain the independent state, which, in the official history, the ancestors struggled to create." In other words, Akaev's national discourse is aimed to emphasize that "people must look to the past for guidance" (Gullette 2010: 143). Especially, Askar Akaev referred to Manas Epic as "a source of national resolve" when they faced difficulties in nation-building (Kort 2003: 157). Seven maxims as part of the official state ideology were developed based on Manas Epic and were promoted in all state institutions and public spaces. The president Akaev in his official statements had always referred to Manas, seven maxims and highlighted importance of Manas.

The Seven lessons of Manas comprised the following ones:
1. *Unity and Cohesion*
2. *International agreement, friendship and cooperation*
3. *National pride and patriotism*

4. *Hard work and education – are basis for development and welfare*

5. *Humanism, generosity and tolerance*

6. *Harmony with the Nature*

7. *Strengthening and defence of the Kyrgyz statehood.*

Unity and Cohesion – is a central lesson from Manas. Akaev by using artistic stylistic methods in his writings wrote that when not in unity: "Then the success left the Kyrgyz, their star was out." (2002: 421) *International agreement, friendship and cooperation* – is another important lesson, which teaches the Kyrgyz about the importance of international friendship. Akaev asserts that "our sacred duty – is to do everything in order to let the sons and the daughters of various nations who by fortune reside in the Kyrgyz land to feel truly at home, amid beloved ones, to become faithfully citizens of Kyrgyzstan, who are sincerely cheering for own country. We have to always welcome development of friendly relations with all countries – far and close ones …" (2002: 421) *National pride and patriotism* – this lesson teaches us to sacrifice our own lives for the wellbeing of our country (ibid.). *Hard work and education – are basis for development and welfare* – today in Kyrgyzstan hard work, education and technology should be major directions of the state's development (ibid.). *Humanism, generosity and tolerance* – humanity and love to human-beings is central theme in the epic (ibid.). *Harmony with the Nature* – a nomadic culture of Kyrgyz generated a gentle treatment of the nature and the ability to live in harmony with it, which we need to continue (ibid.). *Strengthening and defence of the Kyrgyz statehood* – "today our sacred duty is to defend our statehood and our democratic achievements." (2002: 423) Akaev also explained why he suggested seven lessons: seven – is a sacred number for the Kyrgyz people (ibid.). According to Ibraimov, the epic Manas was brought back by Akaev when the question about the national unity of all Kyrgyzstanis was raised (2015). Ideas of the hero Manas about unity and freedom became very important ideological envisage (ibid.).

Some interpreted Manas Epic and its celebration in 1995 as a "cornerstone of …[Kyrgyz] ethno-national identity" (see Gullette 2010:137). However, we can say that, on the other hand, Manas Epic's ethno-national narrative was harmonized with Akaev's parallel nation-building ideology called "Kyrgyzstan is our common home." The slogan "Kyrgyzstan is our common home" was widely famous and endorsed during the Akaev's presidency. Akaev remembered well lessons taken from the violent inter-ethnic conflict in Osh in 1990. Akaev and the government issued several decrees in order to create conditions for maintenance and development of minority languages, to ensure representation of

national minorities in governance, etc. As Osmonakun Ibraimov, Akaev's state secretary, remembered: "This slogan was simple and clear enough to everybody, but it was quite effectively working and helped to reduce accumulated tension, and people stopped feeling themselves aliens, "outsiders", but full-fledged and meaningful citizens of this land." (2015: 127)

During Akaev's country-wide meetings with national minorities, the latter thanked Akaev very much for his policies towards other ethnicities (ibid.). Under Akaev's inter-ethnic harmonization policies Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, Kyrgyz-American University, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University and Kyrgyz-Turkish University were opened (ibid.). Akaev could also institutionalize inter-ethnic relations by establishing the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan. Akaev's domestic politics despite many accusations was believed to be at least an ethnically balanced one, and there was a civic-centered nationalism policy in the country (Marat 2008). Akaev aimed to establish, "on the basis of the Soviet imperial model," a state in the spirit of internationalism where state does not "privilege the state's titular owners" (Wachtel 2013: 973).

With the fall of the Akaev's regime in 2005, Manas Epic's nation-wide ideology, namely the Seven lessons, and dynamic use of the epic had faded away. There was no previously present state-pushed agenda and narrative on Manas Epic as a national ideology. Manas Epic became again very communal and local: the people continued to perform Manas during concerts or other events, the Manas-tellers continued to get state funds to support the cultural heritage of Manas Epic, however the epic was no longer the state's central narrative. With the ouster of Akaev's regime the ideology "Kyrgyzstan is our common home" was also forgotten. In post-Akaev Kyrgyzstan, many attempts to develop new ideologies were made, however none of them fairly succeed (Ibraimov 2015).

5.1.4 Celebrations of 1000-years anniversary of Manas Epic

In 1995, Kyrgyzstan celebrated 1000-years anniversary of Manas Epic by attracting a massive international attention. 1995 was also announced by the UN as international year of Manas Epic. Around 80 official delegations arrived to Kyrgyzstan to witness celebrations the epic, and dozens of international mass media channels were sent to Kyrgyzstan to cover the event. The event received an international recognition because the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) supported the Kyrgyz state's initiative on celebrating 1000-years anniversary of Manas Epic. The UN adopted the resolution on Manas Epic celebration on December 19th 1994 during the 92nd plenary

session. According to the UN resolution UNESCO becomes a leading organization to celebrate the epic world-wide along with the Kyrgyz government. The international acknowledgment was achieved by the efforts of the Kyrgyz government and the Kyrgyz diplomacy because they made a timely request to UNESCO as Ibraimov, Akaev's state-secretary, recalled (2015). For Mellon the celebration of Manas Epic was presented not only as part of the Kyrgyz cultural heritage but rather presented as the world heritage in order "to convey a commitment to values of internationalism" (Mellon 2010:139). Apart from this, there were attempts to represent Kyrgyzstan as a country committed to democratic values: "The ideas of the Epic which were strongly emphasised during official celebrations around the country, were those of unity for all people as well as bravery and hardship which eventually would lead to the recognition of Kyrgyzstan as one of the most democratic countries in the world." (Wasilewska 1997: 1993) On the other hand, the newly independent country was building its international image in order to attract essential international investments and international support of its ongoing reforms. As Ibraimov wrote, Kyrgyzstan was "very young Asian republic which firmly chose a path towards democratic reforms" and "we had a unique opportunity to declare about ourselves to the world as a nation with ancient culture, history and deep spirituality." (2015: 138) Manas Epic celebrations were held during the times when each former Soviet republic in CA tried to demonstrate to the international community own national and cultural wealth (ibid.). According to Ibraimov, most of CA states wished to invite international guests and delegations and celebrate something national (ibid.). However, Kyrgyzstan was the only country in CA to celebrate its national culture under the support of UNESCO (ibid.). As will be further noted in this chapter, the Kyrgyz government succeeded to apply for additional three UN resolutions – in 2002 for celebrating 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood, in 2003 for declaring the International Year of Mountains and in 1998 for celebrating Osh City's 3000-years anniversary.

The initiative of Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary was suggested to Akaev by the scholars of the National Science Academy.[57] Akaev liked the idea very much especially because of his personal interest to the epic and the national history. The initial preparatory steps by the order of the president Akaev already took place in 1992. A special state

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[57] Sputnik: Акаев байгесине автоунаа коюп … «Манас» эпосунун 1000 жылдыгы кантип өткөн [Akaev put his car as a prize … How 1000 years anniversary of the epic Manas was celebrated], 30 August 2020, https://sputnik.kg/culture/20200830/1049469512/manas-ehposunun-1000-zhyldygyn-belgiloo-fakty.html (accessed 14 December 2020).

directory was established to organize preparations; the Kyrgyz intellectuals were in charge of programmatic part and overall preparations took around three years. Thousands of ordinary citizens were engaged at Manas celebrations' various mass events, starting with high-ranking positions and ending with ordinary university students. As a playwright and a writer, Beksultan Zhakiev recalled during Manas Epic's concluding spectacle in Talas many people were involved in performing: "Under the open sky in a vast field there was a theatrical performance involving stunts, actors, students, local residents, nation-wide employees in the sphere of culture. We did not even count how many people were involved."[58]

The programme of Manas Epic celebrations included series of cultural events, theatrical performances, national sports games, exhibitions and other scholarly events (see Photo 1.). According to some sources, Akaev had personally contributed a car as a prize for national sports games competition.[59]


Photo 1. Performances during the Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary celebrations in Talas in 1995 and exhibition of Kyrgyz boz ui. Source: Sputnik/Alexander Fedorov

Enormous state funding was spent for the anniversary. The government built a museum in Talas, a historical and cultural complex Manas Ordo (settlement of Manas),

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[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

ethnographic centre Manas Ayil (village of Manas), academic foundation Muras (Heritage) and the state directorate Manas-1000. The complex Manas Ordo itself comprised a museum about Manas Epic, the Gallery of the president, two ritual sites, Kumbez mausoleum (grave of Manas Hero), a mosque, a park, a hippodrome, a performance scene with seats and a hotel for the guests. In parallel, in the capital city, Bishkek, the ethno-village of Manas or Manas Ayil was organized. The state also ordered to produce films about Manas, promoted publication of books on Manas Epic. Key celebration activities took place in Talas region, where Manas was buried. 1500 pieces of *boz ui* (known also as *urta* in Russian) were installed in Talas which welcomed international guests.

Finally, a scholarly conference was organized which was attended by around 150 scholars from 40 countries, the UN, the World Bank and other international agencies (Ibraimov 2015). Around one hundred works about Manas were published in Kyrgyz and foreign languages, the epic was translated into 50 world languages: UNESCO supported a translation of the epic into English. UNESCO also funded four projects related to Manas: the organization trained local hotel staff, airport officers, interpreters and tourist guides. The epic was registered in the Guinness Record book as the longest oral epic.

Akaev in his writings tried to highlight a role of international actors, namely the UN, in deciding the fate of celebration of 1000-years anniversary of the epic. For instance, he wrote: "One thousand year since the creation of this epic was celebrated word-wide in 1995 by the decision of the UN and UNESCO." (2002: 282) In this way, we can observe how Akaev also tried to distance himself from the epic. However, this does not say that Akaev personally did not play a significant role in promoting Manas to the Kyrgyz nation and to the world during his presidency terms. As was mentioned earlier in the chapter, Akaev, as a scholar, personally was attached to the epic and to the history of Kyrgyzstan in general. Later he wrote: "When taking the duties of the President of Kyrgyzstan in 1990, I was inwardly fully prepared to take energetic measures in order to promote the heroic epic "Manas" to a deserving place not only among the Kyrgyz nation and friendly to us nations in the post-soviet space, but also within the international community." (2002: 409)

The epic celebration had a strong national consolidation force. According to some outlets, ordinary citizens in a short time collected 800 thousand KGS to support Manas Epic's celebrations.[60] Ibraimov also recalled how the epic's anniversary played a "consolidating" role: "it has contributed to a collective spiritual growth, has served a rich

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[60] Ibid.

ideological foundation and support during a socio-economic and political transition [in the early years of independence]. Manas Generous was recognized by everyone as integrator and ancestor, a symbol of collective unison, as a national ideology during a period of a difficult state-building." (2015: 138)

5.1.5 Celebrations of Osh City's 3000-years anniversary in 2000

Osh City is the oldest city in the entire Central Asia. In 2000, Osh City celebrated its 3000-years long history. Since then, each year the Day of Osh City is celebrated on the city level on October 5th. On October 4th 2000 for the occasion of anniversary president Askar Akaev issued a decree which declared Osh City the second capital[61], and issued a medal "Danaker" (Peacemaker) to Osh City. Osh City's anniversary was similarly supported by UNESCO through the issuance of the resolution. The city's claim for its 3000-year-old history was scientifically proven by local and international scholars. In particular, the Russian historian Yuriy Zadneprovskiy was the one who found a settlement in Osh together with a local archeologist Elena Druzhinina. Zadneprovskiy coined the idea about Osh City's 3000-year-old history in his writings. He was the one who promoted a historical significance of Osh City during international conferences and stressed a need for celebrating its 3000-year-old past.[62] Zadneprovskiy wrote that historical artefacts found in the Suleiman Mountain belonged to the Bronze era and scientifically proved presence of the first settlements in Osh 3000-years ago.[63]

Preparations for the anniversary celebration started already in 1996. On 25th of August 1996 Askar Akaev signed a decree "On celebration of Osh City's 3000-years anniversary". Four international conferences were held under the support of the president Akaev in 1997-1998. Another nation-wide scholarly conference was held in 1999. The Directorate "Osh-3000" under the Kyrgyz government and the National Organizational Committee on Osh-3000 celebration were established in 1996 to accomplish the celebration. All the preparations for the celebration were under personal control of president Akaev. During the working meeting of the Organizational Committee he told that

[61] Osh is also known as the southern capital of Kyrgyzstan. The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on the status of Osh City was passed later in 2003 and signed by Akaev, according to which Osh became a city of republic importance.
[62] Ekho Osha newspaper: Заднепровский Юрий Александрович [Zadneprovskiy Yuriy Alexandrovich], Akmataliev T., et al., № 78, 1999, 28 August, p.3.
[63] Ekho Osha newspaper: Сколько же лет Ошу? [How many years old Osh is?], Zadneprovskiy, № 44, 1997, 17 April, p.2.

celebration of the anniversary of Osh City was the second largest and crucial celebration after Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary in 1995.[64] In 1996 a special commission comprising prominent scholars and academics was formed in order to develop the concept "Osh-3000" (further the Concept). The authorship of the "Osh-3000" ideological concept belonged to a group of historian-scholars: Nurunbetov B., rector of Osh State University Beshimov B., the general-secretary of the National Academy of Science branch in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan Sarykov T., and Uzbekov U.[65] The "Osh-3000" ideological concept for the period of 1996-2000 years was approved on 25th of October in 1996 by the Osh *oblast* governor. The Concept mentioned about the importance of international attention for the city's grand-celebration, namely they suggested to put "Osh-3000" project to UNESCO's agenda because Osh City was an important connection road between the East and the West, and served as a central cultural and religious site ("The second Mecca") for the entire Central Asian region. The Concept noted that the celebration was important in the process of development of national spiritual values and national ideology, in upbringing the youth to love their motherland and to respect their history.[66] The Concept authors wrote that the anniversary would have a political, ideological, academic and practical importance for young Kyrgyzstan.[67] The Concept stated that Osh-3000 celebration would become an important part and continuation of Manas-1000 celebration held in 1995 and help to popularize Manas' Seven Lessons – "the basis of our development".[68] The Concept noted that the event was important because the ancient history of Osh would teach how to develop in the future and how to undergo socio-economic problems the young Kyrgyzstan was facing.[69] To quote it: "Spirituality and economy do not conflict with each other, but complement and reinforce each other, develop through interaction with each other. This is the path to national welfare."[70] The Concept listed a number of historical and urban sites and other social infrastructures in Osh to be reconstructed and constructed for the celebration date (such as the Suleiman Mountain site, museums, monuments, roads,

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[64] Open.kg: Ош -3000 [Osh-3000], 29 November 2019, https://www.open.kg/about-kyrgyzstan/cities/osh-city/osh-3000/35313-podgotovka-k-prazdnovaniyu-yubileya-3000-letiya-goroda-osh.html (accessed 24 December 2020).

[65] Ekho Osha newspaper: Ош – 3000: Юбилей века. Научно-обоснованная идеологическая концепция «Ош -3000» [Osh-3000: The jubilee of the century. A science-based ideological concept "Osh-3000"], Nurunbetov B., et al., № 130, 1996, 5 November, p.2-4.

[66] Ibid.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

parks, etc.). The Concept stressed that the celebration of the city should not remain merely as one-day event, but as a sustainable state program designed to support the city's long-term urban development, and in general to advance tourism and foreign investments to the country.[71] Among other practical justifications for celebrating "Osh-3000" the Concept noted the following important geopolitical and insecurity developments in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan: separatism issues occurring in neighbouring states and geographical proximity of Osh City to other instable regions of Central Asia. The Concept recommended to relocate some important state bodies or ministries to Osh.

For the celebration of Osh-3000 anniversary 813 million KGS, including foreign investments, were planned to be spent.[72] Total expenses for the event made around one billion KGS.[73] In total five big projects were realized as part of preparation activities for Osh City's 3000-years anniversary: 1) Osh-3000, 2) Osh-3000-Suleiman mountain, 3) Osh-3000-The Great Silk Road,[74] 4) Osh-3000-Ak-Buura, 5) Osh Bazaar. Since 1996 one hundred socio-cultural infrastructures had been constructed and reconstructed for the "Osh-3000" celebration date in 2000. According to the Osh oblast governor more than 750 million KGS were spent for reconstructions[75], private entrepreneurs contributed to the event 274 million KGS.[76] Newly erected buildings included: a television and radio center, oblast museum-reservation area of history and architecture, Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, Children physical culture and health centre and others. Among the reconstructed infrastructures were: oblast concert hall, city stadium, the international airport, the Suleiman mountain site, city hippodrome and others.

Nine million KGS were spent for the celebration day itself.[77] Gala celebrations of the 3000-years anniversary lasted for two days. On October 4th cultural events, such as international symposiums, exhibitions and cultural events were conducted. On October 5th major festive events took place with participation of official delegations from more than 30 countries and representatives of 25 international organizations. 500 decorated *boz ui* with a

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[71] Ibid.
[72] Open.kg: Ош -3000 [Osh-3000] …
[73] Ibid.
[74] Uzbekistan too referred to the Great Silk Road in its official narrative of the nation's great economic role in connecting the routes of the Road. The Uzbek authorities used the Great Silk Road to stress Uzbek nation's economic history in the past and its economic future (see Adams 2010).
[75] Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper: Ош-3000 [Osh-3000], Khamidov M., Khamidov O., № 189 (7609), 2000, 3 October, n.p. (e-version).
[76] Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper: Пожалуют ли президенты? [Will the presidents like?], Slavin.V., № 190 (7610), 2000, 4 October, n.p. (e-version).
[77] Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper: Ош-3000 [Osh-3000], Khamidov M…

special reception programme[78] were installed for the celebration of the anniversary which welcomed international guests. The Kyrgyz drama-theatre hosted the official meeting dedicated to the anniversary. On the same day in the city hippodrome national sports games were performed and the city stadium hosted special theatrical performance and festive concert which lasted until midnight and was closed under celebratory fireworks. Thousands of local students and schoolchildren took part in the mass performance at the city stadium and the central square.

5.1.6 Kyrgyzstan's 2200-years anniversary in 2003

In 2003 the Kyrgyz Republic's independence day, 31st of August, was a special occasion because the independence day celebration was accompanied by 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood. Akaev issued a Decree on the celebration of the Kyrgyz statehood anniversary on August 1st 2002. The Decree stated that the anniversary was needed in order to please increasing interest of the community to learn about its past, to raise the youth and to promote among them pride for its great history.[79] Similar to other celebrations this event was supported by a special resolution of the UN (UNESCO). The Kyrgyz government argued about 2200-years-old history of Kyrgyz based on historical works of Chinese historian Sima Qian and other Russian and local historians. The UN resolution on Kyrgyzstan's 2200-years-old statehood was adopted on December 20th 2002. As part of international celebration of Kyrgyzstan's statehood, the American channel CNN broadcasted for half a year short video about Kyrgyzstan (Ibraimov 2015).

Throughout 2003 numerous scholarly activities such as conferences and workshops were held to honour the anniversary, and books on history of Kyrgyzstan were printed for the occasion of the anniversary. In summer of 2003 Lenin monument in the main square of Bishkek was replaced with monument 'Erkindik' (Freedom) which was dedicated to the country's 2200-years anniversary. Lenin's monument was moved to the old square of the city. Osmonakun Ibraimov, the press secretary of president Akaev and a chief ideologist of the Kyrgyz Republic was the author of this idea. As Ibraimov recollected it was necessary "to give" the center of the city to a new symbol which reflected a national idea about national statehood (2015: 207).

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[78] Traditional dances and songs

[79] The Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on preparation for the year of the Kyrgyz statehood, 1st August 2002, http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/3835?cl=ru-ru

The main square in Bishkek hosted a generous celebration on August 31st to mark 2200-years old history of the Kyrgyz nation. The military parade opened the celebration and was followed by public march where representatives of different ethnicities and professions in a festive mood held posters with slogans, such as "Unity is our strength", "2200-years of Kyrgyz statehood", "Kyrgyzstan is a state ruled by law" and others. The event was attended by international delegations and guests, as well as Kurultai delegates. The same day city hippodrome hosted the President's Prize Game of *Kok-Boru* – a national sports game on horse. For the occasion of the anniversary several performances were held throughout Kyrgyzstan: Barsbek spectacle in Bishkek, Kagan Balasagyn spectacle in Tokmok, Manas opera and Youth Festival "Young Talents of 2003" in Talas. Another event directly linked to Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary was the Second World Kurultai (Assembly) of Kyrgyz held in Yssyk-kol (Cholpon-Ata city) on 29-30th of August 2003. The event attracted many prominent Kyrgyz writers, scholars, artists and politicians, including Chingiz Aitmatov and 170 delegates from 21 countries attended the event.[80] As part of Kurultai the Kyrgyz government funded a trip to the mountain ranges on the border with China to commemorate remnants of Kyrgyz who died on the way to China in 1918.[81] Kurultai for Yssyk-kol region was something similar to Osh-3000 celebration for Osh because to support Kurultai event the region's infrastructure was sufficiently upgraded, namely an outdated airport in Tamchy village was reconstructed into modern international airport, Cholpon-Ata's issue with garbage was resolved, and the city became more attractive to tourists, as Akaev stated. He also added that the Japan government issued a grant totalling 1 million USD to develop international tourism in Yssyk-Kol. [82]

A year earlier, in 2002, another initiative of Kyrgyzstan was supported in the UN. It was the initiative on announcing 2002 – International Year of Mountains. Kyrgyzstan as a mountainous country which was facing economic difficulties sought for any means of attracting international attention and funding. The UN resolution promoted sustainable development of mountainous regions and encouraged international organizations, including the UN bodies, to prioritize the problems of underdeveloped mountainous regions. As

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[80] Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper: Добро пожаловать, гости дорогие [Welcome, dear guests], Semenyak O., №163 (8339), 2003, 27 August, n.p. (e-version).

[81] They were forced to flee because of Tsarist Russian troops following them. The event is known in the history as Exodus.

[82] Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper: Иссык–Куль расправляет крылья [Issyk-Kul spreads its wings], Bezborodova O., Aleksandrov Yu., №151 (8327), 2003, 11 August, n.p. (e-version).

Ibraimov recalled International Year of Mountains was an important image-building project for Kyrgyzstan (2015: 193). In 2002 Akaev's phrase "Kyrgyzstan is Switzerland of Central Asia" became internationally popular (ibid.). Kyrgyzstan's international image again was crucial for the country to attract more tourists and more investments, especially after tragic events in Aksy which is elaborated in the final section of the chapter.

5.2 Analysis of Akaev's speeches during the mega-events

In this part of the chapter I analyse Akaev's speeches addressed to the nation and international guests during the celebration of 1000-years anniversary of Manas Epic, Osh City's 3000-years anniversary and the Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary. In my analysis of the published texts of the speeches below I will focus more on implicit in the text based on the detailed contextual picture (political and socio-economic developments) under which the mega-events were conducted and endorsing speeches of the mega-events were delivered. My primary aim in analysing texts, that is presidential speeches delivered at the opening ceremonies of the mega-events under the study, is to understand the official reasoning of importance of these mega-events and to understand what central themes the speeches raise and why Akaev emphasizes these themes. So, the questions I will be asking in analysing presidential speeches are the following: *How did Akaev communicate to the nation why celebrating mega-events are important for Kyrgyzstan in particular timing and context?* Below I underline words and phrases which are rhetorically or frequently used by Akaev and which I highlight from the speech as central themes.

5.2.1 Akaev's speech during the celebration of 1000-years anniversary of Manas Epic

Askar Akaev delivered a keynote speech in Kyrgyz on 28th of August 1995 during Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary celebration event in Bishkek. The speech was delivered in the presence of international guests and transmitted through television and print. Below I analyze a text of Akaev's keynote speech documented in his book dedicated to the 2200-years of the Kyrgyz statehood published in 2003 (Akaev: 11-33).

Strong metaphors are used in the introduction part of the speech, such as "Kyrgyz nation racing with the wind in the Eurasian space", "sometimes its [the nation's] star fell down from the sky", "scattered like wheat" and others (Akaev 2003: 11-12). Akaev cites lines from the epic, which make his speech very impressive. Throughout the speech there are excerpts from the epic which are used as illustrations and climax of the speech: "made

a domestic bird from a wild hawk, made a nation from split tribes", "scary is the fire from gut, scary is the enemy from kin", "the companion during a travel, the devotee during a trouble, the defender during an enemy invasion" and others. Akaev throughout his speech used pronouns "us", "we", "our" in order to underline the unity, common history, common values and traditions, and common duties and responsibilities.

The speech starts with underlining the ancientness of the Kyrgyz nation and reference to historical sources dated back to 2000 years which mention for the first time about the Kyrgyz nation. Akaev admires to ancient Kyrgyz who despite lack of own state could keep their identity. He says that during hardships heroes like Manas appeared to save the nation in order to please spirits of the ancestors who fought for centuries with foes. Then Akaev speaks about Manas Epic. He says that the ancestors because of living conditions lost their written literacy and for centuries shared own knowledge with their children through oral stories – epics and tales. Manas is the greatest among them. It is a non-comparable epic. Akaev explains why Manas Epic is important for today's Kyrgyzstan in the following way: "It is fair to say that today by celebrating "Manas" epic, by worshiping to the name of Manas the Generous we remember our nation's two thousand years old history and recall our heroic ancestors who fought for the freedom and the future, we get strengths from their spirits and care about the tomorrow of our nation." (2003: 13)

He stresses that Manas Epic is a unique source for Kyrgyz nation – it is encyclopaedia because it contains and teaches everything - the culture, mythology, religion, spiritual wealth, traditions, medicine, ethics, politics, international relations. Akaev compares Manas Epic with the Bible in order to state that the epic is a "national sacred book" and national ideology (2003: 14). Akaev compares Manas with other world epics and says that the epic is not only the most voluminous but also the deepest in its meaning. The epic is not only a folk novel, but a meaningful source. The function of Manas is great because the epic "for many centuries [it] taught Kyrgyz about themselves, united the people during the hard times in our history, gave the spiritual strength, served as a national motto and a national flag, and played a role of holy force." (2003: 15) Akaev says that Manas is a tale, a sorrowful melody and a sacred book about the nomadic civilization, nomadic culture and nomadic spirit.

After a persuasive and touching portrayal of the epic, Akaev moves to state some historical facts. Illustrations in the epic match with the historical facts and dates – from the era of Huns to the XIX-XX centuries. He notes the first sources which mention Manas Epic. Then Akaev mentions and thanks the Soviet and modern scholars and writers who dedicated

themselves to revive and to advance Manas Epic. Akaev with his admiration makes a special remark to a talented *manaschy* of the past and the present who are crucial in preserving the epic. He describes *manaschy* as the ones who make the epic 'alive' and unique phenomenon because due to *manaschy* listeners can engage with the epic, the epic characters and the events during a performance: "*Manaschy* while performing "Manas" are in a certain degree the authors of this great drama, the film-makers, the actors who play in it …" (2003: 18)

Then Akaev switches to the Soviet ideological repressions: Manas Epic was a victim of the regime. The idea to celebrate Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary was raised already in 30s and 40s, but realization of this idea was possible only <u>today</u>. Akaev also questions why did Kyrgyz loose own state in the past? Why could not they build it again? Akaev asserts that "Manas" epic helps to find answers to these questions, helps <u>to determine a path</u> and <u>a direction of development</u>. Akaev states that Manas is <u>a guide</u> for the country: "Thus, when we ourselves are building own *boz ui*, building relations with close and far away countries, and getting ready to step to <u>the third millennium</u> – <u>we look back</u> at <u>historical experiences</u> and <u>spiritual heritage</u> of <u>our ancestors</u>, there are many <u>things we learn</u> from "Manas" about great <u>ideals</u>, treasured <u>models</u>, tragic <u>lessons</u>." (2003: 22)

Afterwards, Akaev moves to inter-ethnic relations within the epos. The Kyrgyz nation is a hospitable, a tolerant and a friendly nation. Manas narrates about friendly and close diplomatic relations with other neighbouring cultures. 40 soldiers of Manas are not only ethnic Kyrgyz, there are soldiers from other ethnicities. A wife of Manas – Kanykei is an ethnic Tajik. By stating these Akaev wants to underline importance of <u>inter-ethnic harmony</u> in modern Kyrgyzstan. Speaking about Kanykei and other females from the epic Akaev also wants to underline important <u>role of females</u> in Manas Epic and in modern Kyrgyzstan. Then Akaev switches to betrayers of Manas from the close surrounding. Another important theme in Manas is a theme of relations between a farther and a son – Akaev emphasizes <u>respect to elders</u>.

Resuming his speech Akaev once again accentuates <u>importance</u> and <u>relevance</u> of Manas in the life of modern Kyrgyz citizen: "<u>Today</u> we have to directly <u>apply</u> "Manas" in our life because we acknowledge it as an <u>immense spirit</u> passing from one <u>generation</u> to another <u>to unite</u> the nation, <u>to motivate</u> for <u>tomorrow</u> and <u>future</u>." (2003: 30) Here Akaev suggests Seven Lessons taken from Manas Epic to be observed by a modern Kyrgyz citizen and underlines their <u>relevance</u> in today's life:

"Today, after one thousand years, the Kyrgyz nation in its history for the second time received its independence and itself became owner of its destiny. It means a rebirth of Manas the Generous, a reincarnation of once-great Kyrgyz state built by him. Therefore, today our 4-years of the independence looks like a toddler in front of three-thousand-year history of the Kyrgyz nation, protection and development of which is a sacred duty of each of us. … I considered the number seven as sacred, I also generated seven lessons from "Manas" tale, seven maxims. Each of us should keep in our hearts these seven lessons, seven maxims inherited from the Father Manas, similar to Muslims who observe five pillars we should also responsibly observe them, if so, I think, our future will be prosperous. … In times when we enter the third millennium we should take a great lesson from the experience our nation faced thousand years ago." (2003: 32-33)

Akaev underlines that the Kyrgyz nation will continue a dream of the Father Manas: "Today descents of Manas should carry on example of the Generous Father, should keep in their hearts a sacred image of the Generous in order to please his soul, we believe that they [descents] have honour and might to preserve forever a banner and a motto of the ancestors." (2003: 33)

Eventually, Akaev closes his speech in a positive spirit with inspirational slogans: "Let a sacred spirit of the Father Manas to support our effort to build for the second time a sovereign state and our aspiration for a welfare future, let a peace always stay in our land and let a kindness accompany our lives.

Let our Alatoo, our motherland, the Kyrgyz *Ak Kalpak* nation preserving traditions of our fathers, and our gifted and noble spirit which survived from the time immemorial to stay forever in this world. I wish you all to stay safe!" (2003: 33)

Based on underlined words and phrases above I have identified five main themes in the speech of Akaev (based on the order within the text):

1. historical age of the nation

2. ancestors

3. the epic

4. functions of the epic

5. the present time

In the *Table 2.* below in analysis I mention key words and phrases in accordance with the identified themes.

Table 2. Central themes in Akaev's speech during Manas-1000 mega-event

Central themes:	Key words and phrases:
historical age of the nation	Kyrgyz have 2000-years-old history Ancient nation Kyrgyz are stepping in the third millennium Kyrgyz got independence twice
Ancestors	Fought for freedom and future Share their knowledge and historical experience Need to preserve ancestors' traditions, spiritual heritage Please the spirit of ancestors Commemorate ancestors Get strength from ancestors Herigate from ancestors
the epic	The greatest Non-comparable Important Unique Meaningful Encyclopaedia National sacred book National ideology
functions of the epic	Unites the nation Gives a spiritual strength Motivates for tomorrow and future Guides to the future Helps to determine a direction of development, a national path Teaches about lessons from the past Teaches about inter-ethnic harmony, tolerance Teaches about gender and respect to elders
the present time	It is a time to celebrate Manas because we are independent country It is a time to apply Manas in our life It is a time to observe Seven Lessons Today we keep in our hearts Manas' Seven Lessons Today is a rebirth of Manas Today is a reincarnation of once-great Kyrgyz state Today we protect and develop our state Today we have a sacred duty Today we continue a dream of the Farther Manas Today we need to please Manas' soul Today we respect Manas and try to be like him

As the *Table 2.* illustrates Akaev communicated to the nation the need for celebrating Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary in 1995 through presenting Manas as a central symbol of independence, essence of Kyrgyzness and the Kyrgyz statehood and a foundation of development and national prosperity. The epic and Manas himself are represented as extremely intertwined with the Kyrgyz nation's past, presence and future. The epic is presented like an invisible thread which keeps the Kyrgyz statehood intact. Akaev's speech was aimed to create among the citizens an illusion of a great past and of ancient[83] culture

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[83] All through the text Akaev reminds that the Kyrgyz nation's history is more than 2000 years or that the nation is entering to the third millennium. These statements are also another detail to argue that all three mega-events were connected to each other and were part of Akaev's bigger legitimation strategy project,

which should make Kyrgyz proud and strong despite economic hardships they face at the present time. Another aim was to re-invent a national hero Manas and to adapt him in a post-Westphalian setting by inventing Seven Lessons in order to give a spiritual strength and belief in future. Seven Lessons of Manas were in a way a formula of success and development of the country, and they gave an inner confidence for tomorrow because it seemed that there was a recipe for prosperity based on wisdom of the ancestors. Overall, a bigger aim was to persuade citizens that the path, the reforms, the leader whom they have chosen after the collapse of the Soviet Union were not wrong and Manas Epic through its political interpretation gave another confidence in rightness of Akaev's policies which we discuss below in the third section of the chapter.

5.2.2 Akaev's speech during 3000-years anniversary of Osh City

Akaev delivered his keynote speech on October 5th 2000 during the celebratory event in Osh City. In the introductory part of the speech Akaev declares that "Today – is the great day in the history of the Kyrgyz state, a special event." (2003: 144) Akaev described Osh City as one of the ancient cities in the world which is located on the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, the sacred land and the second capital of Kyrgyzstan. Then Akaev states that Osh City's 3000-years-old history is also a history of Central Asia and a history of the Silk Road. Putting the celebration into the context of modern day Kyrgyzstan Akaev says that "History of ancient Osh – is a history of Kyrgyz nation, history of our nation-state, history of our culture …" (2003: 145). Here he stresses that Osh City's history of renewal, history of rebirth were possible only after the independence. He mentions that since the independence efforts were made to rehabilitate the national history and national ideology. To cite: "That national idea – was to build an independent Kyrgyz state, rehabilitation of Kyrgyz spiritual culture, implementation of Manas the Brave's immortal testaments [here he meant his Seven Lessons he generated from Manas Epic in 1995]." (ibid.)

Next Akaev briefly switches to the government's activities since 1991, namely connected to Osh City's anniversary. He says:

"We worked for nine years to willfully build this great idea, build our politics based on our wisdom. One of distinct evidences of [wise] politics, a concrete continuation of that politics – is the President's special announcement or Decree of 1996 on

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they were planned and designed in advance, they were announced when Akaev was in need of them. This argument is more elaborated in the conclusion part of this chapter.

celebration of Osh City's 3000-years anniversary, dear compatriots, dear Kyrgyzstanis." (2003: 145)

Then Akaev underlined that the most important and the most fortunate thing for Kyrgyzstan was <u>UNESCO's support</u> of Osh-3000 initiative and demonstrated to the public UNESCO's calendar of activities which included Osh-3000 in their list and UNESCO's protocol on Osh-3000. Later Akaev briefly gave an account about historical and archaeological findings in Osh, listed scholars who contributed to the research. Akaev in detail made a historical journey to Osh City's past and its historical role, mentioned great people who admired the Suleiman Mountain. Here he noted that the Suleiman Mountain became – <u>the second Mecca</u>, center of the Islam world. Akaev exclaimed that Osh was the place where the Russian Tsarist General Skobelev signed a historical agreement with a great ruler of southern Kyrgyz Kurmanjan Datka.

Following the historical journey to the past Akaev returns to the present time and underlines <u>his role as a national leader</u> in rehabilitating history, uniting the nation and in initiating Osh-3000 event. He states the following:

"I considered it as <u>my responsibility</u> <u>as a leader</u> to bring to the population this sacred debt, sacred mission, and four years earlier, in other words, in 1996 25th of March I signed announcement, <u>the Decree</u> on "Osh-3000" event. The important reason for this announcement was – and I want to emphasize it, dear brothers-relatives, - not just celebrating or holding the event. I want to openly state that the main reason, the main rationale, of course, are several priority strategic objectives directed to a <u>future </u>of independent Kyrgyzstan, optimistic plans.

What were these objectives and plans? The first priority plan is – to transform Osh City of independent Kyrgyzstan into the second political-economic, cultural and academic center, <u>the southern strategic garrison</u>. Because in my personal opinion, if <u>the southern region</u> will develop, then the entire Kyrgyzstan will develop. If a solid Osh City will prosper, then Kyrgyzstan will turn into a strong state, <u>the north and the south </u>[of Kyrgyzstan] amicably will develop, and will have a decisive meaning for the <u>prosperity</u> of the whole nation.

In other words, similar to Russia's Saint-Petersburg, Turkey's Istanbul, Uzbekistan's Samarkand, Kazakhstan's Almaty it is very important to have solid Osh in this role and we should put all efforts we possess to reach this objective, dear Kyrgyzstanis.

The second strategic objective – is to increase Osh City's <u>international importance</u>, today in a world where <u>the Great Silk Road</u> is being recovered, we should rehabilitate its [the city's] <u>ancient</u> unique role. To do so again we need to <u>develop</u> Osh City." (2003: 149-150)

Below Akaev listed all <u>the infrastructural projects</u> which needed to be completed to convert Osh City into a modern transit city. Then Akaev proudly declares for the public a sort of report on <u>implemented activities</u> within the Osh-3000 event: "Today with all my dignity I can report to all Kyrgyzstanis – that we could implement most of mentioned activities [infrastructural projects]. … oblast philharmonic was built … Stadium was fully reconstructed. Roads around Suleiman Mountain were fully rehabilitated… the Great Silk Road museum's buildings are nearly completed." (ibid.: 150) Among other refurbished infrastructures Akaev mentioned a city airport, two schools, a water pipe system, a city hippodrome, a trolleybus line and constructed eight monuments. He informed that around 800 million KGS were spent for all these preparations, and nearly 100 smaller objects were completed for the raised public funds.

President stressed again that back in 1996 a very far-sighted decision was made by issuing a <u>Decree</u> on Osh-3000 celebration and upgrading the city's status. Akaev strongly emphasized that the development of <u>the southern Kyrgyzstan</u> was and would be one of <u>priority activities</u> during his Presidency terms. He stated again that development of Osh City was one of <u>priority objectives</u> of the government. To be more specific Akaev mentioned his <u>Decree</u> on declaring Osh City the second capital of Kyrgyzstan, and repeated once again that the <u>Decree</u> was issued by him in order to achieve these <u>grand objectives</u>. Finally, he declared a ten-year period between 2000-2010 as a period for the <u>development</u> of Osh City, which also included steps on moving some ministries to the south and opening the southern residency for the president.

Akaev mentioned about Islam Karimov's visit to Kyrgyzstan which resolved most of issues concerning <u>the southerners,</u> such as reducing price for Uzbek gas, revival of transport communication between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, improved procedures for border crossing and others. He encouraged that better economic opportunities were waiting neigboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Akaev also wanted to underline importance of <u>friendship</u> with Uzbekistan by citing a folk proverb and wanted to stress his role as a president in maintaining good relations with Uzbekistan by referring to Karimov as his dear <u>friend</u>.

In a concluding part of the speech he recalled <u>Manas-1995</u> and said that it was an event which comes once in a century. He stated that it was a celebration of Kyrgyz <u>independence</u>. Akaev reminded the main objective of <u>Manas Epic</u>'s 1000-years celebration: "In 1995 the image of Manas <u>united</u> us, it brought to our land <u>peace</u> and <u>agreement</u>, <u>friendship</u> and kinship." (ibid.: 156) In a similar way Akaev asserted that Osh City was <u>uniting the people</u> of Kyrgyzstan through Osh-3000 event. Once again Akaev reminded importance of Osh and importance of completing infrastructural projects in the future. In a positive mood and exclaiming strong slogans Akaev closed his speech:

"Osh is … <u>immortal</u> city, <u>eternal</u> city.

Stay <u>forever</u>, sacred Taht-i-Suleiman! Stay <u>forever</u>, the second capital, my dear <u>ancient</u> Osh City! Stay <u>forever</u>, my sacred Kyrgyzstan!" (ibid.: 157)

In 2002 Akaev wrote[84] that he decided to hold Osh-3000 celebrations in order to demonstrate that one can transform natural relationship between the ancient history and modernity into a celebration and a force of national unity. However, in his speech delivered at the Osh-3000 event I could find a reference to national unity only in the end of the speech, and, on the contrary, based on underlined words and phrases above I have identified two main themes in the speech of Akaev (based on the order within the text):

- Theme on Osh City
- Theme on Akaev

In the *Table 3.* below in analysis I mention key words and phrases in accordance with the identified themes which I revealed in his speech.

Table 3. Central themes in Akaev's speech during Osh-3000 mega-event

Central themes:	Key words and phrases:
Osh City	ancient on the crossroads of the Great Silk Road the sacred land the second capital the second Mecca the Suleiman mountain the southern strategic garrison the southern region history of Central Asia history of the Silk Road history of Kyrgyz state history of renewal history of rebirth

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[84] Osh Zhanyrygy newspaper: Кыргызстандын түштүгү тарых күрөөлүндө. Байыркы Ош. Захереддин Мухаммед Бабур. Түштүк көңүл берүүну талап кылат. [The southern part of Kyrgyzstan on the pages of history. Zakhereddin Muhammed Babur. The south needs attention.], Akaev A., № 64, 2002, 7 September, p.4-5.

	- internationally important - symbol of unity - immortal city - eternal city - forever
Akaev	- independence - rehabilitation of history - rehabilitation of culture - seven lessons of Manas - great idea - wisdom - far-sighted decision of the president - Akaev's decrees - UNESCO's support - national leader - president - responsibility - future - prosperity - priority objectives related to Osh - friendship with Uzbekistan - grand objectives - infrastructural projects - Manas-1995

As the *Table 3.* illustrates Akaev communicated to the nation the need for celebrating Osh City's 3000-years anniversary in 2000 through displaying Osh City and the southern region of Kyrgyzstan, in general, as economically important strategic area under modern circumstances for the country's development because of Osh City's geostrategic location on the crossing of the Eastern and the Western civilizations (the Great Silk Road). The task of Akaev as a leader is to revive Osh's once-important connecting and transit role because the city has international importance for the entire region, including its tourist potential because of the Great Silk Road. Overall, Akaev wanted to persuade his compatriots that Osh City and the southern region are symbols of national prosperity, economic development and national unity and they need a timely infrastructural investment and support from the government, because he repeated many times address to the nation (such as, dear compatriots, dear Kyrgyzstanis, dear brothers-relatives, etc.) when speaking about the importance of Osh and the south in modern time. Akaev understands that as a president by putting too much attention to the south's development he might hear discontent from the northern Kyrgyzstan, therefore he tries to underline several times throughout his speech that Osh's development is the development of the entire state ("the north and the south amicably will develop") and tries to remind that Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary was already celebrated in Talas (the northern Kyrgyzstan).

Along with the southern region's economic potential, Akaev, apparently, wants to underline its political and security importance for the country's stability and names Osh the 'second capital' because of its geographic proximity to neighbouring instable regions, although Akaev does not mention explicitly about it in his speech but only lists state bodies (ministries and security-related bodies) which in the future should be moved to or should have branches in Osh. When Akaev in his speech reports about the latest developments in the bi-lateral relations with Uzbekistan and highlights importance of friendship with Uzbekistan, it becomes even more clear that Osh should become a 'southern garrison' in its security meaning too. Here Akaev implicitly makes a reference to the tragic events of summer 1999 when terrorists from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) penetrated the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan – Batken and Alay, in order to enter Uzbekistan. Again, Akaev does not mention terrorist penetration of IMU to Kyrgyzstan in this speech probably because it would demonstrate Akaev as a weak leader (see more discussion about this in the third section of the chapter). On the contrary Akaev wants to emphasize his qualities as a far-sighting leader therefore he repeatedly throughout the speech points out his Decrees issued back in 1996 and in 2000. Finally, and most importantly, because of scheduled presidential election in December 2000, Akaev's speech under the discussion and, in general, the Osh-3000 event cannot be not considered as part of his electoral campaign. Akaev affirms his southern electorate that the development of the southern region would remain the main priority of his policy in order to secure votes from the most populated south. Thus, for Akaev Osh-3000 celebration was primarily a platform where he could report to the electorate about his achievements as a president for the last five years, he emphasized infrastructural developments and plans which again contributed to imaginaries of development. Akaev in his speech completely ignored his failures, such as inability to properly respond to Batken and Alay crisis during the IMU invasion. In a similar way, Akaev did not mention a single word about on-going Batken conflict which started in August 1999. Instead, he announced his presidential programme for the next term and sought for support in the upcoming election.

5.2.3 Akaev's speeches during the celebration of Kyrgyzstan's 2200-years anniversary

Unlike other paragraphs above in this section, two related speeches of Akaev are discussed here. The first is a very short presidential address in relation to Kurultai. The second is his

speech delivered in Osh for the occasion of 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood.

In his brief address to Kyrgyz residing worldwide Akaev notes that the Kyrgyz nation went through a meaningful path and history despite all the difficulties. Then he states that Kyrgyz residing worldwide can be proud of the country's 2200-years anniversary and the UN resolution. Akaev calls Kyrgyz residing in other countries and all Kyrgyzstanis to support the Kyrgyz statehood, peace and development in their motherland. He assures that the future is bright and asks the spirit of Manas the Generous to support.

Another a more detailed speech Akaev gave during his trip to Osh at the event commemorated to the 2200-years anniversary.[85] In the beginning of his speech Akaev congratulates with 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood and the independence day holiday. Then he moves to explain that today there is an increasing interest in national history both from scholars and ordinary citizens. He asserts that an opportunity to systematically study a national history became possible only after the independence of Kyrgyzstan. Based on historical sources he claims that the Kyrgyz already had their state apparatus XXII centuries ago. Here Akaev wants to make an emphasis that today Kyrgyzstan is a state ruled by law. Akaev underlines that the Kyrgyz state's 2200-years anniversary is not an only event supported by the UN resolution and reminds other celebrations. He stresses that World Kurultai to be held in August will boost national identity of Kyrgyzstanis living abroad and will bring unity to the nation. Then he states that Kyrgyzstan cannot be proud of its natural resources (here he meant oils and gas resources which neighbouring Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan enjoy), but he underlines that Kyrgyzstan is proud of its generous and wilful population, ancient history, strong national spirit and the population's education level. Akaev cites a wise folk saying "One should love a country not when it is prosperous, one should love it when it faces difficulties".[86] By citing it he wants to call Kyrgyzstanis for patriotism and love of their country despite continuous economic hardships and poverty. Next he says few words about the independence and the country's worldwide acknowledgment. He states that the country is the UN member-state and it had achieved to build good relations with international organizations and other countries. Among important economic and cultural partner-states Akaev lists Russia, the US, Germany, Japan, China and Turkey. Then he moves on

[85] Akaev's speech in *Erkin Too* newspaper: Элибиздин эркиндиги эң башкы, баа жеткис кенчибиз [Freedom of the nation is the most important and valuable wealth], №67 (1273), 2003, 2 September, 2-3.
[86] Ibid.: p.1

domestic achievements such as <u>economic reforms</u> and results these reforms brought; other <u>achievements,</u> such as <u>privatization,</u> <u>membership in the World Trade Organization</u> and timely introducing of <u>the national currency</u>. Akaev also mentions reforms within the governance – <u>decentralization</u> of local governance. With a sort of relief, he exclaims that <u>the destiny of Osh City is in the hands of Osh citizens</u>. To highlight a historical role of the south in shaping the Kyrgyz statehood Akaev refers to Kurmanjan Datka and Alymbek Datka, and other Soviet Kyrgyz statesmen born in the south. After it Akaev again tries to persuade that his <u>reforms were fruitful</u> despite they were painful too. He mentions about <u>a program on improving social life</u> and <u>elimination of poverty</u> which supports families in need by issuing so-called 'social passports'. Akaev resumes his speech by noting that <u>many issues remain unaddressed</u> such as development of industries, creating employment opportunities and improving lives in communities. Then he calls all Kyrgyzstanis <u>to value</u> and <u>to protect independence</u> and wishes <u>peace</u> and <u>friendship</u> for the country.

Akaev issued a Decree on the celebration of the Kyrgyz statehood anniversary on August 1st 2002. The Decree stated that the anniversary was needed in order to please increasing interest of the community to learn about its past, to raise the youth and to promote among them pride for its great history. In his speech delivered in Osh Akaev noted about it too. Based on underlined words and phrases above I have identified two main themes in the speech of Akaev (based on the order within the text):

- Achievements of Akaev's reforms (a persuasion)
- Support/patience/trust from the population during hardships

In the *Table 4.* below in my analysis I mention key words and phrases in accordance with the identified themes.

Table 4. Central themes in Akaev's speeches during Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary

Central themes:	Key words and phrases:
Achievements of Akaev's reforms	- despite difficulties - pride for the country - 2200-years anniversary - the UN resolution - other UN resolutions - World Kurultai - Kurultai will boost national identity of Kyrgyzstanis living abroad - Kurultai will bring unity to the nation - Independence - the country's world-wide acknowledgment - opportunity to systematically study a national history - a state ruled by law - the UN member-state

	good relations with international organizations and other countries established relations with partner-states economic reforms and results of these reforms privatization membership in the World Trade Organization timely introducing of the national currency decentralization of local governance a program on improving social life and elimination of poverty
Support/patience/trust from population during hardships	to support the Kyrgyz statehood, peace and development of their motherland the future is bright generous and wilful population strong national spirit high education level among population one should love his motherland when it faces difficulties patriotism and love to the country despite continuous economic hardships and poverty the destiny of communities is in their own hands many issues remain unaddressed to value and to protect independence

In comparison with previous speeches dedicated to other mega-events, Akaev during the 2200-years anniversary admitted that the country was not in a good condition. As the Table 4. demonstrates Akaev is concerned with failures of his reforms, increasing poverty and increasing distrust towards him. Therefore, in his speeches he tried to list the country's achievements since independence and tried to persuade in success of his reforms. Akaev explained that 2200-years-old celebration was important because of increasing public interest in the national history. Also the celebration would teach and raise young people in a strong national spirit. We can see parallels between a strong national spirit and underdevelopment and poverty in the country. Akaev believed that the great national history, Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary would build a strong national spirit in order to overcome economic difficulties the country was facing back then, would inspire communities to take initiatives on their own to improve own lives without grievances, criticism and protests against the government. Especially his decentralization reforms were aimed at decreasing the central government's responsibility, i.e. his own responsibility. Thus, the implicit message of the speech of Akaev in Osh City was that "your welfare is in your hands, not in the hands of the government". Akaev strived to get support and trust from population despite economic hardships by stating that people should be patriotic and supportive of the state and reassured a bright future. However, it is important to note that Akaev in his speeches does not mention a single word about Aksy events, which will be further discussed in the final section of the chapter.

5.3 Critical socio-economic and political contexts of mega-events

5.3.1 Socio-economic and political context of Manas celebration: Akaev's re-election in 1995

President Akaev was a young scholar when he entered politics. His candidature as a president was only accepted in the second turn of voting by barely 51% of support from the Kyrgyz parliament (McGlinchey 2011: 78). Therefore, Akaev in comparison to other Central Asian leaders enjoyed a lesser political legitimacy from the very beginning of his political career. Unlike other CA presidents, he lacked a perestroika-inherited party and his stay in power in McGlinchey's words can be described as "precarious" and "repeatedly shaken" by other elites (2011: 83). In 1994 so called the Legendary Parliament[87] of the Kyrgyz Republic (former the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic) faced its early dissolution because of tensions between the branches of power and president Akaev over disputes on electoral bi-cameral system and Kumtor[88], a Canadian-based gold-mining company (see Ibraimov 2015, Luong 2002, Huskey 1997). The role of the Legendary Parliament was crucial during the first years of independence because it adopted many important decisions.[89] The population was expecting much from the first president Akaev. In the early independence he was admired both domestically and internationally due to his liberalization promises (Ibraimov 2015, Huskey 1997, Gleason 2003, Spector 2004). The international community favored Akaev for his progressive pro-democratic and liberal policies (Spector 2004, Ibraimov 2015) and fueled enormous donor aid (McGlinchey 2011). Akaev's central political programmes can be briefly put as economic and democratic reforms, transition to market economy, liberal policies towards civil society and mass media (Spector 2004, Radnitz 2010, McGlinchey 2011). Between 1991-1994 Akaev carried the first stage of land reform. A period between 1991-1993 was characterized by wild "tornado" of privatization (Ibraimov 2015: 120). According to Radnitz 85% of the total state enterprises was privatized by 1994 (Radnitz 2010: 62). Major social objects, even buildings of the culture were 'distributed' for private individuals (Ibraimov 2015). Another important direction of Akaev's policy was improving inter-ethnic relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south after the conflict in 1990 (Huskey 1997, Spector 2004, Ibraimov 2015). International community was important because Akaev depended on international financial

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[87] In 1990 October 27th, 350 members of the legendary parliament elected Akaev as the first president of the Kyrgyz SSR. In 1991 on October 12th after the country declared its independence Akaev's presidency was put on popular vote and received a majority support (95,3%).
[88] The company belongs to a Canadian corporation "Cameco".
[89] Declaration of Sovereignty (December 15th 1990), Declaration of Independence (August 31st 1991), Constitution (May 5th 1993), Flag (March 3rd 1992), Coat of Arms (January 14th 1994), Anthem (December 18th 1992), adopted the national currency – the som (May 3rd 1993).

assistance. By 1995 Akaev could attract international loans and grants to support his economic liberation policies and democratic reforms. As Huskey described: "Akaev's ability to attract generous foreign economic assistance created around the president an aura of indispensability…" (1997: 256). By 1993 Kyrgyzstan introduced its own currency, became a member of the World Bank, launched its privatization programme and attracted half a billion USD (see Huskey 1997). In addition to these reforms, in 1992 Akaev held the First World Kurultai (Assembly) of Kyrgyz which assembled ethnic Kyrgyz and guests from 200 countries.

Nonetheless, by 1994 Akaev's legitimacy and reputation as a leader of the state began to suffer. Akaev's grand economic reforms did not give a substantial result on public level. A November issue of *Pravda* newspaper in 1993 stated that Akaev's promises about economic recovery were not achieved (see McGlinchey 2011: 83). Gleason observed that: "Kyrgyzstan's economic reform did not lead to the expected growth in economic output, did not result in the expected improvements in social welfare, did little to improve the government's capacity to protect civil rights, and had negligible effects on the process of political liberalization." (2003: 65) The most miserable years were the first years of independence. As Grigory Gleason puts: "Between 1991 and 1994 farm and industrial output fell, trade dropped, inflation soared, and the government ran a large fiscal deficit. The Kyrgyzstan economy reached a nadir in 1994…" (2003: 66). In 1993-1994 the domestic income decreased by 20% (Huskey 1997). Labour migration has been dramatically raising since 1993 (for details and illustrations see the Chapter 1). According to official statistics, number of unemployed population increased from 136 people in 1991 to 50,409 unemployed in 1995, and peaked in 1996 reaching 77,198 unemployed country-wide.[90] According to the World Bank study poverty percentage in Kyrgyzstan in 1993-1994 averaged 84%, while in 1987-88 it made only 12% (1998: 18). Labour migration and shuttle trading became the only means of economic survival. State workers, such as teachers, doctors and others left their jobs because of harsh economic conditions. On the contrary Akaev's privatisation policies largely enriched and benefited elites. As a result, most of vital social infrastructure, such as kindergartens became in deficit and even unavailable for public use in cities not speaking about rural areas. For instance, in 1991 during the fall of

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[90] See for more details Chart 2. Number of unemployed people (1991-2018) in the Chapter 1. Source: *http://stat.kg/*

communism there were 1,696 state kindergartens nation-wide.[91] After Akaev's privatisation programme, number of state kindergartens significantly dropped to 456 in 1995. By 2001 number of state kindergartens fell to 402.[92] Other social infrastructure needs such as potable water, sewage systems, roads, schools and hospitals remained largely unaddressed.

Apart from worsening socio-economic conditions, developments within a domestic politics were neither encouraging. Akaev's disposition to appoint his friends and countryman to various state positions led to opposition's anger. Involvement of his inner family into politics was another concern[93] (Spector 2004, Radnitz 2010). In addition, the name of Akaev, his family and members of his inner circle began to appear in corruption scandals. According to sources Akaev and his family fully and partially run 42 businesses, including Kumtor gold mining company (Radnitz 2010). The Kyrgyz government's concluded a contract with Canadian-based company on gold-mining in the northern Kyrgyzstan in 1993 at Kumtor gold ore. Public was concerned that Kumtor deal was not a fair one for the country and benefited merely to Akaev's family: 'the scandal related to gold was the first and sufficient hit on A. Akaev. There was a certain distrust towards the President, although he tried to defense as much as possible.' (Ibraimov 2015: 86-87) McGlinchey wrote that in comparison with Kazakh and Uzbek counterparts, the Kyrgyz president faced an immediate institutional challenge – a lack of "large executive-oriented single parties" inherited from perestroika (2011: 25) which limited his capacity to ensure elite loyalty, to supply public goods and to empower coercive institutions. Members of the Parliament too blamed Akaev for personal enrichment from Kumtor.[94] Akaev did not want to give up to the Parliament, during his interview to the Russian show *Utro* he stated that they wanted to turn him into a 'British Queen' (ibid.: 83). In 1993 the Legendary Parliament (former the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic) formed a special Commission to investigate alleged illegal traffic of Kumtor-related gold to Switzerland connected with the name of Kyrgyz president (see McGlinchey 2011: 84), however Akaev could somehow interrupt the hearing of the Commission although he admitted that two tons

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[91] See for more details Chart 3. Number of state and private kindergartens (1990-2019) in the Chapter 1. Source: *http://stat.kg/*
[92] The private sector slightly had improved the situation by opening private kindergartens. Whereas international organizations like UNICEF and others have been working to address deficiency of kindergartens in rural areas since 2006.
[93] One of key reasons of the Tulip protest was election of his two children into the national parliament in 2005.
[94] Akaev did not share wealth from Kumtor (see McGlinchey 2011: 85)

of gold were shipped to Switzerland for safekeeping.[95] Because of the parliament's pressure Akaev had to dismiss his prime-minister Tursunbek Chyngyshev the same year. Chyngyshev along with other Akaev's close appointees were accused of corruption (McGlinchey 2011). Eventually, in 1994 the Legendary Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic was dissolved because of tensions with the president Akaev over disputes on electoral bi-cameral system and Kumtor Canadian-based gold-mining company (McGlinchey 2011, Ibraimov 2015, Luong 2002, Huskey 1997).[96] Huskey observed that after 1994 referendum Akaev started 'an authoritative offensive' (1997: 257). Akaev locked two opposition newspapers and several journalists were sentenced (ibid.). After 1994 Kyrgyzstan's liberalism came to end wrote also McGlinchey (2011). Scandal around Kumtor on popular level had a negative association with the name of Akaev and along with clan-based rule became one of central opposition discourses which eventually shattered legitimacy of Akaev (Megoran 2017). As McGlinchey put "his image and his popularity were severely damaged." (2011: 85). This happened especially because of freedom of print and unrestricted readership of opposition press (ibid.). In addition, Akaev put efforts to ensure loyalty in the newly elected Kyrgyz Parliament in February 1995 by appointing deputies of the representative chamber of the parliament to the state administration and thus taking legislative power (ibid.)

With these developments within domestic politics and upcoming presidential elections, for president Akaev national anniversary of Manas Epic became an excellent opportunity to increase his popular support. Akaev needed to stage a mega-project to secure his tenure during December 1995 presidential elections. First, in January 1994 Akaev staged the First Kurultai of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan which was officially introduced as a platform for inter-ethnic dialogue, where Akaev told his famous slogan "Kyrgyzstan is our common house" and following which Akaev established the Assembly of Peoples of Kyrgyzstan. Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary was expertly planned in advance for this occasion, as initial preparations for the anniversary started back in 1992 and in 1994 the application was filed to UNESCO for approval. Both projects were designed to increase Akaev's legitimacy because through the First Kurultai of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan Akaev

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[95] Kaktus Media: Референдумы по Конституции: от Акаева до Атамбаева [Constitutional referendums: from Akaev to Atambaev], 21 October 2016,
https://kaktus.media/doc/346173_referendymy_po_konstitycii:_ot_akaeva_do_atambaeva.html (accessed 27 December 2020).
[96] Similar tensions between the legislative and executive branches were on issues related to the Kyrgyz Constitution, land reform, language law, etc. (see McGlinchey 2011:86)

intended to get support from ethnic minorities, while Manas anniversary project was targeted more towards ethnic Kyrgyz and international community. In addition, an increasing power consolidation of Akaev after the referendum on January 30th in 1994 could be noticed. Right after adoption of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic in May 1993, Akaev issued a decree in November 1993 on scheduling the referendum for 1994 through which he aimed to confirm his legitimacy as acting president. The question put on the referendum was whether the population confirmed that Akaev was through a popular vote elected on October 12th, 1991, for a term of 5 years.

According to Akaev's referendum initiative the official term of his presidency was expiring only in October 1996, however despite this Akaev succeeded to hold early presidential election in December 1995 because earlier election was giving to Akaev several political advantages. Firstly, it weakened the opposition because it needed more time for running to the presidency and collecting a required 50,000 signatures from the population. Secondly, by going into early election Akaev believed that his popularity gained in early 90s would not fade away because of worsened state economy and nearly a failure of his economic reforms. Thirdly, Manas Epic's celebration in 1995 was already Akaev's major electoral campaign: the event was held on the international level under the support of UNESCO and brought to Akaev immense domestic and international attention and admiration. As Osmonakun Ibraimov (2015) wrote, Akaev was "shining" during the anniversary, especially because his popularity was declining. International attention and support for Akaev's Manas Epic mega-event was an immense indicator of rightness of Akaev's policies as a president in the eyes of majority Kyrgyzstanis. In other words, external or international legitimation of Askar Akaev as a progressive reformist also played a crucial role in increasing Akaev's domestic legitimation and contributed to Akaev's re-election in 1995. Akaev because of earlier listed reasons (worsening socio-economic situation, corruption, Kumtor and expansion of opposition) was worried that he could be not re-elected. Not counting Akaev other seven strong candidates were running for the presidency: Masaliev, Amanbaev, Sherimkulov, Tekebaev, Aibalaev, Toichubekov and Bakir uulu. Close to the presidential election day the Supreme Court of the Kyrgyz Republic excluded three candidates under a reasoning that some of signatures were fake: Aibalaev, Amanbaev and Tekebaev. The excluded candidates applied to the Constitutional Court which did not consider the case. They did not have other options than to declare a hunger strike in the White House in order to draw attention from the president, the public and international community. However, the hunger strike was not successful. In the end only

three candidates were running for the presidency: Akaev, Sherimkulov (former speaker of the Legendary Parliament) and Masaliev (former the first secretary of the Communist Party). In the end Akaev won with 71.5% vote.[97]

In this way, Manas Epic's celebration could not be celebrated earlier than 1995 – the presidential election year, because Akaev needed a sort of show and performance to present himself both for domestic and international auditoriums as a leader of the nation who united people in Kyrgyzstan under one *boz ui* and launched radical pro-democratic and liberal policies. The Manas Epic was 'invented' in 1995 when Akaev's reputation on domestic level was shattered, he and his close surrounding was suspected to Kumtor deal and other corruption, and his economic reforms did not give expected results. All of these developments contributed to Akaev's lean towards authoritarianism, unfair electoral competition, electoral fraud and closure of opposition newspapers (Huskey 1997). As Akaev recalled later in his book, the epic Manas' 1000-years anniversary presented to the Kyrgyz nation a "genuinely spiritual rise" (2002: 410). Ibraimov also observed how Manas-1000 event positively impacted Akaev's reputation and legitimacy: "A successful world-wide celebration of Manas Epic's 1000-years anniversary significantly impressed moral and spiritual well-being of the population and notably strengthened trust towards President A. Akaev." (2015: 152)

In fact, already in 1945 the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party planned to celebrate Manas' 1100-years anniversary (Akaev 2002: 62). The version of Manas Epic suggested by *manaschi* Orozbakov Sagymbai was nominated for Stalin's Prize along with the opera "Manas" (ibid.). However, later the Soviets became cautious of further promoting Manas because they found it was nationalist, pan-Turkic and pan-Islamic. By that time the Soviets started a soviet-wide campaign against the nationalists and cosmopolitans (see Akaev 2002: 406). As Akaev (2002) wrote, most of scholars who took part in the process of Manas Epic's anniversary were repressed and punished. Earlier in 1939 the 1000-year anniversary of the Armenian national epic called "David Sasunskiy" was celebrated Soviet state-wide (Akaev: 2002) because it was celebrated earlier than the campaign against the nationalists and cosmopolitans. Akaev (2002) believed that Kyrgyz intellectuals were not lucky with time back then. Thus, the anniversary of Manas Epic was

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[97] Akipress: Президенты Кыргызстана. Как их выбирали? [Presidents of Kyrgyzstan. How were they elected?], 3 July 2017, https://kg.akipress.org/news:630478 (accessed 9 December 2020).

postponed until the independence. Akaev acknowledged that Manas has an ideological power which could be used and similarly misused by the power: "If there is a desire, from any epic one can make an instrument of ideological influence with a direction to this or that way." (2002: 65) Based on it we can assume that Akaev was very well aware about political power of epics and could intentionally brought Manas Epic to national agenda for his political gains.

There was also a big criticism to the celebration of Manas Epic and accuse of large state expenses for organizing the mega-event (Ibraimov 2015). They claimed that Manas Epic was mainly used to advertise the country and the president, but not for the sake of the epic itself (ibid.). To remind, Manas Epic celebration was held not only on national but also on international scale because the event was a key first step to introduce the country to the rest of the world, in particular to attract foreign investments and get international support for Akaev's reforms. Akaev strived to get international support and international acknowledgment in order to demonstrate himself domestically as a compelling and legitimate leader.

5.3.2 Socio-economic and political context of Osh 3000-years celebrations: Akaev's re-election in 2000

The second term of Akaev's presidency (1995-2000) was neither characterized by economic boost. Despite international loans and international aid programmes the Kyrgyz economy was limping (see International Crisis Group 2001). Socio-economic situation was harsh: "poverty remains widespread and the public is increasingly dissatisfied with declining living standards" (ibid.:1). Number of officially unemployed had slightly decreased in comparison with the first five years due to labour migration abroad.[98] However the poverty rate in the country in 1996 was 68.7% (Falkingham 1999: 19). Likewise, quality of state services (schooling and pre-school facilities, healthcare) and access to them remained very poor (Falkingham 1999). Land reform launched in 1991 did not give a sufficient improvement in the agrarian sector, therefore, in 1996 Akaev issued a Decree on the sale of land use rights (Bloch and Rasmussen 1998: 94). However, in the end privatisation of land in most cases benefited the directors of collective farms not peasants who did not have good connections (Radnitz 2010: 63). And even if privatization reached local farmers there were no clear mechanisms of its implementation and most things

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[98] See the Chapter 1 for more details.

remained on paper as Morgan Liu noted (2012: 156). A good news was that private sector started to develop and according to some sources by 1995 it made 40% of the GDP (see Radnitz 2010). Economic growth was relatively stable in 1996-1997 and salaries were issued on time (Ibraimov 2015: 123). In 1998 Kyrgyzstan became World Trade Organization's member. Nevertheless, Akaev's ambitious economic reforms did not largely improve the living standards in Kyrgyzstan and did not result in a sufficient economic relief (International Crisis Group 2001).

Along with economic misfortunes Kyrgyzstan moved towards more authoritarian rule under Akaev. Right after three weeks of his re-election in December 1995 Akaev initiated amendments to the Constitution which were aimed at increasing his presidential privileges. The referendum was scheduled for February 10th 1996 and received support from the population. According to a new version of the Constitution, the president was guaranteed a personal immunity and the power was considerably concentrated in the hands of the president. The presidential apparatus justified an increased power of Akaev by stating that "strong executive powers are needed to deal with pressing security and economic problems" (International Crisis Group 2001: 2). Likewise, Ibraimov (2015) noted that it was a transition period and the power had to be concentrated in one place in order to succeed in announced reforms.

Very shortly after 1996 referendum, Akaev issued a decree for another referendum to be held on October 17th 1998. This time referendum was putting on the agenda three important changes: private property for land, 25% of Legislative chamber of the parliament would be elected from political parties, and freedom of speech no longer was persecuted (except for libel). According to Ibraimov (2015: 158), the last point on freedom of speech was a very important and sensitive issue for Akaev personally because Akaev and his family members were in very hostile relations with the yellow press[99] and even sued some of them for libel. International Crisis Group Report in detail lists court cases, court sentences up to 2000s and titles of opposition newspapers which were forced to shut down (see International Crisis Group Report 2001: 13-14). Akaev did not want to lose his image of a "single democrat" in Central Asia therefore he decided to include a statement in the new version of the Constitution (1998) about the guarantee of a freedom of the speech (Ibraimov 2015: 158). On the other hand, Akaev wanted to stay in his post for another term. In July 1998 Akaev's request to run for the presidency in 2000 was satisfied by the Constitutional

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[99] These were mainly opposition newspapers

Court. He had to apply to the Court because according to the Constitution of 1993 Akaev could not run for the presidency because of his previous two-terms of presidency. However, Akaev disputed that presidential election of 1991 did not count because it was held when the Constitution of 1993 did not exist.

Meanwhile opposition and a vibrant civil society were worried about increase of power around Akaev and Akaev's pressure on critical press. They believed that Akaev usurped a power with the help of referendums and he was racing for presidential elections in 2000 by breaching the law. Ibraimov (2015) wrote that close to 2000s the opposition leaders blamed Akaev for family-based rule. Akaev's son Aidar and son-in-law Toigonbaev were involved in Manas airbase affiliated companies which provided the US airbase with various services, such as fuel, etc. (McGlinchey 2011). FBI report in 2005 stated that Akaev enriched himself and his family through three private companies providing services to the US airbase and between 2002 and 2005 Akaevs secured 120 million dollars for fuel contracts only (see McGlinchey 2011: 98). Akaev's family according to opposition was involved in heavy corruption schemes, such as the Kumtor company, a mobile company, a fuel company and others. One of oppositionist activists Topchubai Turgunaliev noted that corruption in Kyrgyzstan is led by Akaev himself, his son Aidar Akaev and a son-in-law Adil Toigonbaev.[100] Akaev tried to build a shield and to distance himself and his family from the corruption discourse by establishing a National Council on Transparent Governance and launched an 'artificial' campaign against corruption.[101] However, Akaev did not succeed to do so, because public distrust was increasing towards him. According to former minister of agriculture of Kyrgyzstan Zhumakadyr Akeneev, Akaev's son-in-law Toigonbaev was also involved in the corruption scheme at the Kyrgyz Customs office, while Akaev intentionally tried to demonstrate the poorest and most underdeveloped regions of Kyrgyzstan to representatives of international community in order to get more grants.[102] A recent investigation by the Kyrgyz Republic stated that Akaev was linked to another major corruption scheme related to international loans totaling around one billion USD between 1993-2002. According to the investigation around 40 international credits

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[100] Deutsche Welle: Коррупция в Киргизии [Corruption in Kyrgyzstan], 1 April 2003, https://p.dw.com/p/3Rw6 (accessed 29 December 2020).

[101] Deutsche Welle: Киргизия: по коррупции – нетрадиционными методами [Kyrgyzstan: on corruption – with non-traditional methods], 14 April 2003, https://p.dw.com/p/3Ubk (accessed 29 December 2020).

[102] Akipress: Жумакадыр Акенеев: Начиная с 1995 года никто в Кыргызстане не думал об экономике [Zhumakadyr Akineev: Since 1995 nobody in Kyrgyzstan thought about the economy], 29 August 2011, https://24.kg/archive/ru/economics/107705-zhumakadyr-akeneev-nachinaya-s-1995-goda-nikto-v.html/ (accessed 29 December 2020).

were concluded with Kyrgyz national companies during the presidency of Akaev. To support these international credits national gold reserves abroad were indicated as deposits, however very shortly after transfer of credits to the international bank accounts the national companies were found bankrupted and international credits remained in the hands of the Kyrgyz elite.[103] Economic interests of Akaev's family members created a basis to name Akaev's rule as family-based rule, it will become even more evident when his son and daughter would run for parliamentary elections in 2005. As Ibraimov (2015) recalled family of Akaev, especially his wife Mairam Akaeva interfered into the state affairs and informally decided cadre appointments. Thus, the image of the single "island of democracy" in Central Asia was "gradually fading away" and the western world in various ways was letting know that Akaev as major democrat in the region "not always kept his promises" (Ibraimov 2015: 185).

Another massive challenge for Akaev's reputation was his inability to properly respond to the crisis in 1999 in Batken and Alay regions, which are known in the history of Kyrgyzstan as "Batken events." The terrorist group belonging to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan took advantage of weak borders of Kyrgyzstan in order to penetrate to Uzbekistan to takeover Islam Karimov's regime and to build Islamic caliphate in the Fergana valley.[104] The terrorists took for hostage several villages in Batken. As Ibraimov wrote Batken events were "a serious trial for the country," the vast majority of borders since the independence remained unpatrolled and "holey" because of lack of needed infrastructure and financial means to maintain border patrolling (2015: 177). Megoran (2017) notes that 1999 border crisis and overall state's incapacity to provide security challenged Akaev's regime. To cite him: "The Batken crisis was an extreme embarrassment to the government from start to finish, exposing the absolute failure of intelligence services, the wretched state of the armed forces, and the lax border control regime." (Megoran 2017: 110) Border incident was "discursive" in hands of excluded political opposition in particular because of November 2000 presidential elections (ibid.: 95). Batken events shattered a public trust to the government and to president Akaev,[105] namely in their ability to provide security for their citizens. Every citizen also understood that the state cannot

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[103] Azattyk: «Дело на миллиард». Как из Кыргызстана десять лет выводили кредитные средства ["A case of one billion." How were credit money smuggled from Kyrgyzstan for ten years], 9 November 2020, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/30937827.html (accessed 29 December 2020).

[104] In 1999-2000 around 1,000 terrorists penetrated southern borders of Kyrgyzstan. Number of internally displaced people ranged between 4,000 and 8,000 people.

[105] Who is also the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces

protect itself from a foreign threat and that the Kyrgyz state was "weak" (Ibraimov 2015). In his recent interview for Azattyk in 2019 Akaev also admitted that the border with Tajikistan through which the terrorists penetrated the country were not equipped and maintained by the government because of difficult economic conditions which the country faced during the first decade of independence.[106] The only border which was well-equipped and maintained was the Kyrgyz border with China which was inherited from the Soviet Union.[107]

To respond to the invasion all military forces were concentrated to the south: three special groups were formed and sent to the site. However, the mission failed – several officers and the head of the rayon were captured by the terrorists for ransoms. The Kyrgyz government gave money for their release. Shortly after that, the terrorists managed to capture Japanese nationals. The story was no longer domestic or regional but became international. Using all possible efforts, the Kyrgyz government could also release Japanese nationals. The battle lasted more than a year with a winter break in 1999 and the second offensive of the terrorists in August 2000. On October 7th 2000 the operation was successfully ended. In total 54 Kyrgyz soldiers were killed, 82 – were wounded and 64 terrorists were liquidated. On October 26th 2000 Akaev held a parade in Bishkek dedicated to the Batken operation. Because of Batken events Kyrgyzstan had tense relations with Uzbekistan which later Akaev could skilfully regulate and, therefore, in his speech dedicated to Osh-3000 event Akaev underlined importance of friendship with Uzbekistan.

The Batken events re-shaped Akaev's domestic policy already in 2000.[108] Security and military structures were reorganized, and a separate border-patrolling department was formed. The state started to pay attention to the Kyrgyz army and other military structures. Batken district of Osh *oblast* was reorganized as a separate administrative unit – Batken *oblast* because of its geostrategic location and national importance. Osh City was given a status of the southern capital and Akaev became committed to development of the southern region in general, as he emphasized several times in his Osh-3000 speech. Osh-3000 celebration and Akaev's speech during the event persuaded many southern voters in favour of Akaev. Consequently, with a major support from the southern Kyrgyzstan Akaev was

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[106] Azattyk: Баткен коогалаңынын актай барактары (5-бөлүм, соңку бөлүм) [Personal pages of Batken conflict history (5th part, the final part)], n.d. 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKXwdBj-xfs (accessed 25 December 2020).

[107] Ibid.

[108] In 2001, following the 9/11 terror attack in New-York, the US transit center in Manas airport was opened, the Kyrgyz government rented out its airport between 2001-2010 to support the US operation in Afghanistan.

re-elected for the third term. Akaev and his family made a first visit after the re-election to Osh City, they visited the Suleiman Mountain and met with citizens to thank them for their support and trust to Akaev. In 2002 Askar Akaev in his article to the newspaper "Osh Zhanyrygy" wrote that he would like to express his gratitude to the electorate[109] from the southern Kyrgyzstan for their trust and support during the presidential elections in 2000: "I have expressed my deepest gratitude to the southerners who generously supported me during the presidential elections in 2000 and today too I have the same warm feeling."[110] Akaev wrote that the southerners were very optimistic with a new status of Osh City – as the second capital of Kyrgyzstan – because it gave an opportunity for development of not only Osh but the entire southern Kyrgyzstan.[111] Akaev also warmly recalled Osh-3000 celebrations in his article, he wrote that Osh-3000 event is the brightest one in his memory because it reminded him beautiful streets and squares, colourful festive stadium of Osh City.[112] Citizens of Osh too were positive about the celebration of Osh's anniversary and sincerely received the government's attention to municipal outdated infrastructure (Ibraimov 2015).

Akaev's Osh-3000 celebration was also a means to demonstrate to the domestic auditory about his achievements on the international arena – UNESCO's attention and UNESCO's resolution on Osh-3000 celebration. To please the international community Akaev declared 2000 – a Year of tourism. Thus, Osh-3000 celebration did not accidentally coincide with a Year of tourism declared in Kyrgyzstan. As the Concept of Osh-3000 anniversary above noted one of important aims of the event was attraction of foreign tourists and foreign investment which were vital for the country's development. Ibraimov also put that Osh-3000 anniversary and a Year of Tourism in 2000 were targeted to increase tourism and make Kyrgyzstan a "noticeable" country (2015: 186). In 2000 Akaev made a very famous statement: "We should meet tourists like presidents." (ibid.) Similar to Manas' anniversary celebration, in 2000 UNESCO supported seminars on tourism and trainings on how to receive tourists for airport personnel and border control officers (ibid.).

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[109] According to the statistics of 2002, the southerners made 55% of the entire population, accordingly shaped the largest electorate.

[110] Osh Zhanyrygy newspaper: Кыргызстандын түштүгү тарых күрөөлүндө. Байыркы Ош. Захереддин Мухаммед Бабур. Түштүк көңүл бурууну талап кылат. [The southern part of Kyrgyzstan on the pages of history. Zakhereddin Muhammed Babur. The south needs attention.], Akaev A., № 64, 2002, 7 September, p.4-5.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

To end with, Osh-3000 celebrations were crucial in Akaev's legitimation and re-election in 2000 despite increasing distrust towards him because of corruption, family-based rule, poor economic condition and Batken crisis in 1999-2000. Similar to Manas-1995 celebration, UNESCO's support of Osh-3000 increased a domestic legitimacy of Akaev.

5.3.3 Socio-economic and political context of Kyrgyzstan's 2200-years anniversary celebrations and collapse of Akaev's regime

The third term of Akaev's presidency (2000-2005) was likewise not characterized with by economic performance. Akaev's economic reforms were not giving a substantial result within communities. Neither rent of Transit Center at Manas Airport launched to support US operation in Afghanistan after 9/11 was sufficient to improve lives of ordinary people. As McGlinchey put, Manas "secured the sons and sons-in-law of Presidents Akaev and Bakiev payments in the hundreds of millions of dollars." (2011: 12) thus benefiting only a narrow presidential circle. According to him it became one of reasons why these regimes were ousted (ibid.). Poverty did not decline and Akaev had to adopt a special program on improvement of social life and elimination of poverty according to which 'social passports' were issued to families in need. In 2003 the government adopted another document – the "National Strategy on elimination of poverty". Due to this strategy the government could decrease poverty from 52% in 2000 to 45.9% in 2004,[113] however overall a socio-economic situation remained tense country-wide.

Another response to poverty and harsh economic condition of the population was ideological one. In 2001, Akaev's inner circle, namely his state-secretary Osmonakun Ibraimov wrote the ideological programme called "Charter of the Future". The Charter was adopted on 26th of May in 2001 at the National Round Table participated by the government representatives, political movements of Kyrgyzstan, including the opposition and civil society representatives (Ibraimov 2015). In its introductory part called "Abandoning illusions" Ibraimov wrote that citizens expected a lot from the president and the government, therefore it was important to remind people that the development of Kyrgyzstan depends merely on each citizen, in particular his/her entrepreneurial

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[113] Novye litsa: Год 2003-й: признаки революционных призраков [Year 2003: Signs of revolutionary ghosts], 3 June 2016, http://www.nlkg.kg/ru/projects/soviet-kyrgyzstan/god-2003-j-priznaki-revolyucionnyx-prizrakov (accessed 14 December 2020).

capabilities to survive in economic competition and to find own place in the industrial world. To cite the author: "We have to become better, innovative and flexible than others. … we should not have any illusions regarding the future of our lives and the country's fate – all this is dependent on each of us, on each individual." (Ibraimov 2015: 131) On the one hand, a new ideological statement of the government (the Charter) could be justified based on lack of historical entrepreneurial experience of nomadic nations in comparison to historically settled nations with more developed entrepreneurial skills. In other words, we can observe the government's efforts to promote and to encourage small and medium business and entrepreneurship within economically deprived Kyrgyz population. On the other hand, the Charter was an attempt of the Kyrgyz government led by Akaev to escape a responsibility for worsening of socio-economic living conditions of ordinary citizens. Akaev tried to make individuals, but not the state led by him, look responsible for socio-economic misfortunes taking place in Kyrgyzstan.

Already in 2000 and 2001 the first signs of the Tulip Revolution of 2005[114] were present which ended with an overthrow of Akaev's rule in 2005 (International Crisis Group 2001). These were minor localized protests country-wide where people were indignant towards poverty, high market prices and unemployment. The opposition took the advantage of the ongoing protests and fuelled the situation with rumours about Akaev's involvement in the sale of Kyrgyz land to China as an outcome of the disputed border demarcation with China. Azimbek Beknazarov, a member of parliament was among the active actors who generated a discourse on a 'secret deal' with China signed back in 1996 and 1999. The relationship of the government with the opposition in the parliament worsened because of the border issue, the latter intimidated to impeach Akaev. In April 2001 ten opposition parties united into one movement called People's Patriotic Movement which was concerned with Akaev's increasing power usurpation and his pressure on civil society and opposition media, namely court cases against critical media.

Opposition discourse on a 'secret deal' did not fade away and Beknazarov became an increasingly popular figure. In response the government opened a criminal case against Beknazarov which was related to his last position as a prosecutor and detained him. Beknazarov's kin-region Aksy protested in March of 2002 against the government's decision and demanded release of Beknazarov. The government declined the demand. In response the protesters became violent: damaged the building of the local government

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[114] See the Chapter 1 for more details

office and set fire on the *rayon* police department. In the end six civilian people died in the protest and several got wounds. As Ibraimov recalls, the protest in Aksy was "a beginning of the end of A. Akaev's power" and ruined a positive international image of the country (2015: 215). Aksy protest also heavily damaged Akaev's reputation of a "single democrat in Central Asia" and international community was "disappointed" with him. Akaev was blamed for use of military power to oppress the protest. According to Ibraimov (ibid.), Akaev was a soft person, he listened to advice of his surrounding advisors and the decision to use a force did not belong to him. Nevertheless, Akaev was the one who was blamed for the violence of 2002 in Aksy. The bloodshed could be prevented by Bishkek, but was not (ibid.). A movement called "Against Akaev and for reforms" was launched by the opposition after the events in Aksy and held campaigns against the president.

Akaev instead blamed the opposition and stated that Aksy events in 2002 were an attempt to divide the country into two: the south and the north.[115] He wrote that when the conflict got tense, he was abroad, and upon his arrival he studied the situation and understood that behind it there were destructive forces which needed to be prevented. Akaev did not acknowledge blames against him and believed that the event was no more than a staged drama for which responsible was only the opposition. To quote:

"There are forces within and outside the republic which claim that there are tensions between the north and the south … They seek for any reasons to inflate a conflict. … a recent dramatic event occurred on 17th of March in Aksy region of Jalal-Abad oblast can be estimated in this way."[116]

On the notorious background of Aksy events Akaev again initiated referendum in January 2003. A new version of Constitution was put for agenda. This time the initiative on constitutional amendments were negatively accepted not only by domestic opposition, but also by international community. In particular, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights urged Akaev to postpone the referendum because the Kyrgyz government could not ensure necessary public discussions of the new Constitution. While the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan stated that the absence of

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[115] Osh Zhanyrygy newspaper: Кыргызстандын түштүгү тарых күрөөлүндө. Байыркы Ош. Захереддин Мухаммед Бабур. Түштүк көңүл бурууну талап кылат. [The southern part of Kyrgyzstan on the pages of history. Zakhereddin Muhammed Babur. The south needs attention.], Akaev A., № 64, 2002, 7 September, p.4-5.
[116] Ibid.

the ODIHR should not put under a doubt the referendum results.[117] The opposition launched a campaign against the referendum and accused Akaev of power usurpation. However, a new Constitution was supported by majority of the population on February 2nd 2003.

As a response to his decreasing domestic reputation and legitimacy, as well as international reputation because of Aksy violence, Akaev needed another mega-event: 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood. Despite the celebration was calling for a national consolidation and inviting the Second World Kurultai to demonstrate unity, the event was more designed as entertaining and legitimacy-building project under the shades of Aksy events and mass poverty. For instance, the opposition was critical of massive expenses spent for these events. They believed that the 2200-years anniversary was staged by Akaev to distract people's attention from social, economic and political issues within the country.[118] The celebration was not suitable for Kyrgyzstan in a critical time when nearly half of the population (52%) were in poverty.[119] As Marat (2008) also put the 2,200th Anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood was developed by Akaev during his third term of presidency when his family-members started involved in the politics and his public support was declining because the country was experiencing serious socio-economic problems. According to Deutsche Welle, most of surveyed people were not inspired with the celebration, instead they were worried about other socio-economic issues.[120] Osmonakun Ibraimov (2015), one of key organizers of 2200-years anniversary also admitted that the celebration itself did not change everyday lives of many Kyrgyzstanis. He wrote: "But all these efforts did not solve the issue of poverty, social vulnerability of the population. Poverty remained, problem of lack of potable water, roads, social infrastructure remained, the consequences of 1998 crisis were not fully addressed. The country made less income." (2015: 200)

Akaev (2002) wrote that the idea about the Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-year anniversary emerged during the International academic conference on history in 2002. As he clearly stated in his book, by introducing another celebration – Kyrgyzstan's 2200-year

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[117] Novye litsa: Год 2003-й: признаки революционных призраков [Year 2003: Signs of revolutionary ghosts], 3 June 2016, http://www.nlkg.kg/ru/projects/soviet-kyrgyzstan/god-2003-j-priznaki-revolyucionnyx-prizrakov (accessed 14 December 2020).

[118] Deutsche Welle: 2200-летие киргизской государственности [2200-years anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood], 1 September 2003, https://p.dw.com/p/41lB (accessed 29 December 2020).

[119] Novye litsa: Год 2003-й: признаки революционных призраков [Year 2003: Signs of revolutionary ghosts], 3 June 2016, http://www.nlkg.kg/ru/projects/soviet-kyrgyzstan/god-2003-j-priznaki-revolyucionnyx-prizrakov (accessed 14 December 2020).

[120] Deutsche Welle: 2200-летие киргизской государственности [2200-years anniversary of Kyrgyz statehood], 1 September 2003, https://p.dw.com/p/41lB (accessed 29 December 2020).

anniversary, Akaev hoped for positive changes within the Kyrgyz society, he wrote: "I am confident, that the decision to hold a year of the Kyrgyz statehood will have a positive impact on the socio-political situation within the republic." (2002: 55) Positive changes brought by the celebration of the Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary in 2003 did not last for long and faded away with the collapse of Akaev's rule in 2005. The Tulip revolution ended successfully because of Aksy lessons (Ibraimov 2015). After Aksy the government became "weak" and did not prefer to use power because the state was afraid to be again blamed (ibid.). In a similar way, police were passive and not decisive because they did not want to become again the ones who actually took the responsibility for the consequences.[121]

5.4 Conclusion

The Chapter 5 argued that national celebrations and anniversaries held under Akaev's rule (1991-2003) were rather political steps than were designed as nation-building programs. Important factors for 'inventing' mega-projects were socio-economic hardships and Akaev's interest in power legitimacy, namely re-election and support for referendums.

The study found that Akaev's speech during Manas-1000 event was aimed to create among the citizens an illusion of a great national past in order to keep the nation strong despite economic hardships. Another aim of Akaev was the re-invention of a national hero – Manas and his adaptation into a post-state reality through Seven Lessons in order to give a spiritual strength and belief in future. Seven Lessons of Manas were in a way a formula of success and development of the country, and these lessons were a recipe of prosperity based on wisdom of the ancestors. Thus, a bigger aim of Manas-1000 was Akaev's legitimation: his re-election and support of his referendums. Likewise, Akaev's Osh-3000 celebration was primarily a platform where he could report to the electorate about his achievements as a president for the last five years and to share his program for the next term (which was mainly development of the southern region). Therefore, in the speech Akaev skips his failures, such as inability to properly respond to Batken events in 1999-2000. In a similar way Akaev used 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood in order to recover own reputation and legitimacy following the violence in Aksy in 2002.

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[121] Following Aksy violence only the police who shoot civilians were sentenced and jailed. The government representatives were just dismissed.

Thus, mega-events were multi-functional, they were not merely designed as nation-building projects. They built a positive international image of Kyrgyzstan to increase inflow of investments and tourism. They fostered Akaev's re-election legitimation to the international community by demonstrating to the international guests how Akaev was fancied in Kyrgyzstan. They built a domestic legitimation of Akaev also through the international support and international legitimacy he received, such as UNESCO's support and the UN resolutions. Thus Akaev did both. On the one hand, he strived to get international support and international acknowledgment in order to demonstrate himself domestically as a compelling and legitimate leader. On the other hand, he strived to demonstrate to the international community how legitimate and loved Akaev was in his country; by doing so he tried to justify his re-elections, his amendments to the Constitution and increasing power consolidation around him. Akaev had to react to increasing doubts of the international community, which questioned his status of 'a single democrat' of Central Asia and the status of the country as 'island of democracy' in Central Asia because Akaev needed international money to support his reforms and remain in power. Therefore, Akaev's national anniversaries also were more aimed at building a positive country image to attract more international investments.

There were several similarities between three Akaev's mega-events. First, all these mega-events received an international blessing – they were acknowledged by UNESCO and were featured by UNESCO's attention and support in organizing and promoting them on international level, the UN adopted resolutions on international celebration of these mega-events. Second, these celebrations were aimed at building a positive international image of the country and attraction of tourism and international investments. Third, the celebrations had a logical and thematic cross-references and interaction with each other, picturing in unison a complete discourse that the Kyrgyz are ancient and culturally rich nation, who respect and remember their ancestors and learn from the past in order to build a confident future and they are strong despite all the hardships. According to Ibraimov (2015) Osh City's 3000-years anniversary was a 'continuation' of Manas-1000 project held in 1995. He recalled: "we had to continue the process of reviving a national history for the nation" because during the Soviet times historians deeply misinterpreted it (ibid.). Fourth, the mega-events were mass events because they involved mass participation, mass performance and mass mobilization (as mentioned above community and entrepreneurs contributed in cash or in kind for the celebrations, including Akaev himself). Fifth, the lavish celebrations were expensive for the Kyrgyz budget, which was suffering from a

chronic deficit, the Kyrgyz government tried to attract as much as possible foreign grants to cover them. Sixth, programmatically all celebrations included similar in nature activities, such as scholarly conferences, mass performances, contests, concerts, exhibitions, national sports games, installation of *boz ui*, demonstration of ethno-villages, etc. Finally, these anniversaries were largely 'invented' because they were brought up for the public attention when the power thought it was a time to do so. All three mega-events were connected to each other and were part of Akaev's bigger legitimation strategy project, they were planned and designed in advance, they were announced when Akaev needed them.

CHAPTER 6: OFFICIAL DISCOURSES OF MEGA-EVENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN DURING ATAMBAEV AND POWER LEGITIMATION

In this Chapter, I focus on two World Nomad Games (the WNG) held under the rule of Atambaev (2011-2017), and in addition analyse the third World Nomad Games of 2018 held under Zheenbekov (2017-2020). The third WNG provides also important data for study and analysis because Zheenbekov was a political successor of Atambaev, therefore the third WNG can be considered merely as a continuation of Atambaev's presidential apparatus' project (which is also evident in Zheenbekov's keynote opening speech of the third WNG analysed further in the chapter).

In this Chapter I argue that the World Nomad Games, as previous mega-events held under Akaev, were designed for both domestic and international auditoria for the purposes of building a positive country image which would bring more investment and eventually improve domestic relations between the state and the society and will boost power legitimacy of ruling incumbents. The Kyrgyz government is very enthusiastic about the project of the World Nomad Games and sees it as tourist and investment attracting instrument, as well as image-building or nation-branding project. Once famous as an "island of democracy" of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan became associated with continuous political turmoil and unstable risky economy – the country was pulled into a series of political and inter-ethnic violence for the last two decades. These negative developments led to decrease of international prestige of the country, reduced the investment flow which the Kyrgyz government intended to regain through the World Nomad Games. Especially after lootings during the Tulip revolution in 2005, the April revolution and June events in 2010 most of foreign investors lost their properties. A new project was immediately needed to re-advertise Kyrgyzstan as once-again stable and secure country for investments, as Kyrgyzstan's economy desperately needs foreign investment to support its domestic economy. However, despite above-mentioned sound economic incentives behind these Games, there is also a political incentive behind the Nomad Games, namely legitimation of Atambaev's rule by creating imaginaries of development. When Atambaev came to power the society was highly politicized and fragmented, and very soon Atambaev became criticized for his politics (as further discussed in the last section of the Chapter).

In the first section of the Chapter I describe Atambaev's festive World Nomad Games held in 2014, 2016 and 2018. In the second section of the Chapter I analyse president Atambaev's speeches delivered during these mega-events (and Zheenbekov's speech in

2018). Finally, to support my argument, in the third section of the Chapter I offer a comprehensive analysis of political and socio-economic factors which contributed to 'invention' of the World Nomad Games project by Almazbek Atambaev.

6.1 The World Nomad Games and Atambaev

Almazbek Atambaev's presidency (2011-2017) was famous with the World Nomad Games, which according to many was the best nation-branding and tourism project the country ever implemented (Arora and Sharma 2022: Chapter 16). In 2012 nomadic sports, namely the World Nomad Games[122] was elevated by Kyrgyzstan on the international level. President Atambaev suggested this idea during the Summit of the Turkic Council in 2012. Originally, the term "World Nomad Games" was coined during the scholarly-practical conference titled "National physical culture and national sports games: current situation and prospects of future development" held in Bishkek on December 7th 2007 under the support of the Kyrgyz State Academy of physical culture and sport by Askhat Akibaev, the head of Ethno-games confederation.[123] Akibaev suggested the concept of "World Nomad Games" as a means of promoting national sport on international level. Akibaev proposed the idea of the WNG to president Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005-2010), however it was not then supported.[124] After the collapse of Bakiev's rule, the idea of the World Nomad Games somehow reached to Atambaev and his Apparatus, and already in February of 2011 the Kyrgyz government during its meeting with the government of Turkey announced about hosting the first WNG in Kyrgyzstan.[125] A more comprehensive programmatic and cultural form of the World Nomad Games was accomplished during the II Summit of Turkic-speaking countries of the Turkic Council in August of 2012 in Kyrgyzstan and was documented in the Bishkek Declaration[126]. During the summit the Turkic Council member-states unanimously decided to support the initiative of the Kyrgyz government on the World Nomad Games. Already on 19th May 2014 the Kyrgyz government issued its instruction on preparations for the WNG. The document ordered to outline the Organization Committee, assigned tasks to the Organization Committee and other ministries for the preparation of the first WNG. Overall,

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[122] The official name of the mega-event in Kyrgyz is *Duinoluk Kochmondor Oiunu*, in Russian *Vsemirnye Igry Kochevnikov* (in brief *VIK*).

[123] World Ethnogames Confederation: О проекте Всемирные Игры Кочевников [About the project World Nomad Games], n.d., https://weconfederation.com/wec/vik (accessed 14 January 2021).

[124] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021

[125] Ibid.

[126] Turkic Council member-states are Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Turkmenistan and Hungary have observer status.

the government took the initiative very responsibly because the WNG were the first large-scale image-building and nation-branding mega-event since the country's independence.

The nomad games mega-project presents nomadic history, nomadic culture and traditions. The World Nomad Games consists of three main thematic components: sports games, a cultural part and a scientific part. The mission of the WNG is rebirth, preservation and development of world ethno cultures, and is aimed at promotion of international tolerance and diversity. The Games received a large support from local sponsors and international actors, such as international United Nations agencies. For instance, the third WNG received an international support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

All three WNG were accompanied by ethno-cultural activities in *Kyrchyn zhailoo*[127]. A variety of cultural programs were displayed in the ethno-village *Kyrchyn*. A picturesque mountainous *zhailoo* with dozens of installed *boz uis* welcomed international guests, tourists and official delegations. Ethno-cultural activities in *Kyrchyn* demonstrated Kyrgyz national customs and traditions starting from the birth of a child up to a marriage. In addition, traditional handcrafts, traditional clothes, traditional cuisines, traditional songs and dances of other participating countries were displayed. Thus, the WNG also reminded a celebration of a diverse nomadic culture.

These games are claimed to be nomadic alternative of the World Olympic Games, with 37 kinds of nomadic sports, starting from hunting and horse riding, and finishing with arm-wrestling and intellectual games. Initially the information leaked on internet that the WNG will be moving from one country to another. However, as the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan confessed, neither the Secretariat, nor President's Apparatus and president himself did not want to pass the WNG to other countries.[128] Turkey, Kazakhstan, the United Arab Emirates and Mongolia were among countries which expressed their interest in hosting the second WNG is their country. As Adenov explains, the President's Apparatus wanted to make the WNG Kyrgyzstan's 'business card' (in Russian *vizitnaia kartochka*).[129] In addition, there were also other public opinions who shared the view that the WNG should remain in Kyrgyzstan and should not be passed to other countries. For example, the former minister of culture of Kyrgyzstan, Sultan Raev suggested to host the WNG only in Kyrgyzstan in order to make the WNG a new national

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[127] *Zhailoo* means a summer pasture in Kyrgyz language
[128] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021
[129] Ibid.

brand of Kyrgyzstan. This idea was shared by then deputy-head of Ministry of Culture, tourism and information of the Kyrgyz Republic, Azamat Zhamankulov. For instance, in 2016, during the meeting of the Council on Tourism in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)[130] Zhamankulov said:

> "We have to have a kind of annual brand-event [in Kyrgyzstan] about which tourist are aware and plan their trips accordingly. There are many this kind of events in the world which are associated with one country. For instance, we watch carnivals from Brazil but not the USA. Bullfighting is held only in Spain, and many tourists go there to watch them. The World Nomad Games should become a similar brand-event."[131]

Similarly, during the press-conference after the first World Nomad Games in 2016 Sapar Isakov, the deputy-head of the President's Apparatus, stated the following:

"The entire world has learned about such a small and democratic country as Kyrgyzstan. The games pushed a genuine interest in all countries in the world. Each country has its ethnic games. A decision was made to hold them [the World Nomad Games] once in two years and *only in Kyrgyz land*."[132] (emphasis are mine)

Askhat Akibaev, the author of World Nomad Games, a former governor of Yssyk-Kol *oblast*, currently the head of Ethno-games confederation, also emphasized that the WNG is ethno-sport tourist festival and is a touristic brand of Kyrgyzstan, the central part of the event is not a competition part but its performance or extravaganza and mass participation.[133] He noted the following:

"World Nomad Games – *is our product*. For instance, Kazakhstan arranged Great Games of the Steppes. While *nomad games – are ours*. One does not need to prepare for these games for eight years. They are more democratic games. Olympics – is for rich [countries]. There are more than 200 countries in the world – and only very few can afford Olympics. But in the format of world ethno-games *each country can be represented*. It is *a new format*

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[130] CIS established in 1991 by the initiative of former Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

[131] Sputnik Kyrgyzstan: Глава департамента туризма: Игры кочевников должны остаться в Кыргызстане [Head of the tourism department: Nomad games should remain in Kyrgyzstan], 8 July 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/culture/20160708/1027457694.html (accessed 15 January 2021).

[132] Sputnik Kyrgyzstan: Исаков: Игры кочевников будут проводиться только в Кыргызстане [Isakov: Nomad Games will be held only in Kyrgyzstan], 8 September 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20160908/1029088777.html (accessed 15 January 2021).

[133] RIA Novosti: На Всемирные игры кочевников в Киргизии пригласили представителей 40 стран [Representatives of 40 states were invited for World nomad games in Kyrgyzstan], 21 June 2016, https://ria.ru/20160621/1449422477.html (accessed 12 January 2021).

[of games], each country can display own settlement [culture] – wigwams, urts, tents. We have to demonstrate diversity and beauty of each nation."[134] (emphasis are mine)

Hence, since 2014 with interval of two years the World Nomad Games were held three times in Kyrgyzstan in Cholpon-Ata city of Yssyk-Kol *oblast*.[135] But in 2018 during the closing ceremony of the third WNG it was announced by president Sooronbai Zheenbekov that the fourth World Nomad Games would be held in 2020 in Turkey. Because of Covid-19 pandemic the event was postponed to 2021.

The Kyrgyz government managed to successfully present idea of nomad games not only on national, but also on international level because nomadic sport and culture became increasingly popular outside Kyrgyzstan following series of WNG. For instance, the Saudi Arabia expressed its interest in promoting nomadic culture. In 2019 the Saudi Arabia launched its International Ethno-festival "Nomad Universe" where more than 2,200 people from 95 states took part[136]. Similar to WNG, Ethno-festival "Nomad Universe" combined both nomadic sport activities and nomadic cultural activities. The Kyrgyz delegation along with other delegations represented own culture, customs and traditions by displaying Kyrgyz ethno-village in the Saudi Arabia. Another important international development in promotion of nomadic culture which occurred after Kyrgyzstan's WNG project was the initiative of UNESCO to hold the first World Ethno-sport Games in 2021. Among the countries which applied for hosting UNESCO's World Ethno-sport Games are Kazakhstan, Turkey, Canada and South Korea.[137]

Below I describe in brief three World Nomad Games held in Kyrgyzstan between 2014-2018. Despite the thesis examines the time-frame between 1991-2017 beginning with the presidency of Akaev and ending with the presidency of Atambaev, for the purpose of all-embracing analysis of the WNG mega-project, a closer study of the third WNG of 2018 is also important. It is important to analyze the WNG of 2018 also because it is a legacy of Atambaev, namely a continuation of his initiative presented in 2012.

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[134] Ibid.

[135] The first WNG in 2014, the second WNG in 2016 and the third WNG in 2018.

[136] World Ethnogames Confederation: Международный этнофестиваль «Вселенная Кочевников» [International ethno-festival "Nomad Universe"], n.d., https://weconfederation.com/wec/nu (accessed 13 January 2021).

[137] Azattyk: Казахстан подал заявку на проведение первой этноолимпиады [Kazakhstan applied for hosting the first ethno-Olympics], 4 June 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29269689.html (accessed 16 January 2021).

6.1.1 The first World Nomad Games in 2014

The first WNG held between September 9-14[138] in 2014 attracted 583 sportsmen from 19 countries.[138] 1,200 people were involved into the mass performances under World Nomad Games. Ten kinds of ethno-sport games were played.[139] International TV broadcasting channels[140] from 40 countries with auditory of 230 million people reported about the WNG from Cholpon-Ata city. The opening ceremony of the first WNG lasted for two hours and included 14 theatrical performances. The ceremony was staged at the city hippodrome. Performances reflected the history of nomadic Kyrgyz, the epic Manas, and national songs and dances. After the WNG's official opening sports tournaments lasted for six days. Tournaments were split into two locations: the city hippodrome for horseback games and the historical cultural centre "Ruh-Ordo" for intellectual games. Simultaneously in Kyrchyn ethno-village a special nomadic programme was organized. 150 decorated *boz ui* representing all regions of Kyrgyzstan were installed in Kyrchyn and displayed national traditions and customs. Various festivals, such as "Nomad folk"[141] and "Dastarkon"[142] were held in Kyrchyn valley. In addition, "Ruh-Ordo" centre hosted an exhibition of nomadic craftsmen, "Ethno Fashion" fashion show and "Ordo-Sakhna" folk theatre. Kyrgyzstan spent 200 million KGS for the organization of the first WNG. In addition, around 11 million KGS were spent for the reconstruction of old city hippodrome. Entrance to the tournaments and to other festivals and events under the first WNG were free of charge, except for opening and closing ceremonies. The closing ceremony was accompanied with a laser-show and a concert featuring local and international singers and dancers. Kyrgyzstan took a leading position in the first WNG. In total Kyrgyzstan earned 55 medals (16 gold, 20 silver and 19 bronze). Kazakhstan took the second place with total 28 medals (10 gold, 9 silver and 9 bronze). Turkmenistan earned in total 6 medals (3 gold and 3 bronze) and received the third place. The total prize fund consisted of 16 million KGS.

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[138] Afghanistan, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Mongolia, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, USA, Uzbekistan. For more details about the first WNG visit: http://worldnomadgames.com/ru/page/VIK-2014/

[139] *Alysh* (wrestling with belts), *alaman baige* (horse racing for a long distance), *jorgo salysh* (horse-racing on footsteps-horses), Kazakh *kurosh* (Kazakh wrestling), Kyrgyz *kurosh* (Kyrgyz wrestling), *Kok Boru* (a horseback team game with a headless goat), *kunan chabysh* (horse racing of three-year old horses), *ordo* (Kyrgyz national game in the knucklebones), *toguz korgool* (Kyrgyz national intellectual table game), *er enish* (horseback wrestling).

[140] 250 international journalists from foreign TV broadcasting channels such as BBC, CNN, The Guardian, Washington Post, Al Jazeera and others broadcasted WNG from Cholpon-Ata.

[141] A nomadic music festival

[142] A nomadic food festival

6.1.2 The second World Nomad Games in 2016

The second WNG was held between September 3-8th in 2016. 1,200 athletes from 62 countries participated at the event. Number of ethno-sports played increased to 26. World TV channels with auditory of 500 million people broadcasted the event from Kyrgyzstan. The second WNG was accompanied with different mass festivals and activities, such as "Kochmondor Aalamy" (in Russian "Vselennaya nomada") folk festival in Kyrchyn valley, festival of sand figures "A magic sand of Yssyk-Kol 2016" and others. Similar to the first WNG the valley Kyrchyn with 288 *boz ui* welcomed international guests to the Kyrgyz ethno-village consisting of nine sites representing cities Bishkek and Osh and seven *oblasts* of Kyrgyzstan. The ethno-village narrated to foreign visitors about Kyrgyz culture and traditions. Similar to the first games in 2014, in 2016 various contests, exhibitions and festivals were held in Kyrchyn. Already on the first day of its performing more than 40 thousand people visited the ethno-village in Kyrchyn.[143]

Some of sport tournaments such as hunting with eagles and archery were played in the valley Kyrchyn, while a major part of horse-back sport tournaments were held in hippodrome. In a newly built hippodrome near Cholpon-Ata 1,000 *boz ui* were installed for the festival "Nomad Fest", where each participating states presented own traditional crafts. The festival represented a platform which narrated about nomadic cultures and traditions of participating countries. Among them the most exciting was a contest on the fastest assemble of *boz ui* which was completed in a record time by the team from Yssyk-Ata: 616 seconds. The assemble time at the first WNG was 14 minutes and 10 seconds.[144]

For the second WNG the Kyrgyz government fully reconstructed a hippodrome near Cholpon-Ata city with 10 thousand seats. In total the government spent 1,5 billion KGS for construction and reconstruction of city infrastructure for the second WNG. According to then deputy-head of the President's Apparatus, Sapar Isakov, the government did not use funds from the state budget for reconstruction of the hippodrome, because president Atambaev was able to attract foreign grants for its full renovation[145]. Two thousand pieces of special silver coins were issued to mark the second WNG (1,000 pieces) and the 25th

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[143] World Nomad Games: Вторые Всемирные игры кочевников [The second World nomad games], n.d., http://worldnomadgames.com/ru/page/VIK-2016/ (accessed 15 January 2021).

[144] Sputnik Kyrgyzstan: Собрать юрту за 600 секунд. Кадры с турнира на джайлоо Кырчын [To assemble a urt in 600 seconds. Coverage from tournaments in Kyrchyn zhailoo], 7 September 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/video/20160907/1029044685.html (accessed 15 January 2021).

[145] Sputnik Kyrgyzstan: Исаков: ипподром близ Чолпон-Аты строится не на бюджетные средства [Isakov: hippodrome near Cholpon-Ata is built not for budget funds], 11 July 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20160711/1027553638.html (accessed 14 January 2021).

anniversary of Kyrgyzstan's Independence (1,000 pieces). The second WNG is remembered by the appearance of the Hollywood star Steven Seagal and a spectacular opening ceremony where 1,000 *komuz*[146] players played a melody *Mash Botoi*[147]. Kyrgyzstan again took the first place at the second WNG: in total Kyrgyz sportsmen won in total 79 medals (25 gold, 25 silver and 29 bronze). The second place was taken by sportsmen from Turkmenistan by earning in total 24 medals (15 gold, 3 silver and 6 bronze). Kazakhstan took the third place with its 38 medals (12 gold, 12 silver and 13 bronze).

6.1.3 The third World Nomad Games in 2018

The third World Nomad Games were held between 3-8th of September in 2018 in Cholpon-Ata. Number of participating countries according to the official statistics reached to 77, meanwhile number of sportsmen increased up to 3,000 people and number of ethno-sports games played reached to 37. The slogan of the third games was: "United by strength! United by spirit!" By contrast, the third World Nomad Games were held under support of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO acknowledged the efforts of the Kyrgyz government undertaken since 2014 in preservation and promotion of ethno-cultural diversity. Following the WNG, in 2017, UNESCO included Kyrgyz traditional horse-back game called *Kok-Boru* into the UNESCO's intangible heritage list.[148] UNICEF also supported the third WNG by organizing a special programme for children called "Caravan of children's games" featuring 25 games.[149] More than 5,000 children from Kyrgyzstan took part in UNICEF-led games in the Kyrchyn valley.[150] Nomad games of 2018 in contrast with other games also included a scientific part, namely a scientific forum called "Historical Heritage and the Future" which consisted of various thematic events and conferences. Another feature of the games was the 61st International Altaic Conference titled "Folk games, traditions and customs" which drew attention of 70 scholars from more than 45 countries.

Similar to the previous WNG, the third games also included a rich ethno-cultural program in the ethno-village in Kyrchyn valley. However, this time in addition to Kyrgyz

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[146] Kyrgyz national musical instrument
[147] Sputnik Kyrgyzstan: Маш ботой [Mash Botoi], n.d., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TasuJHUGeSk (accessed 14 January 2021).
[148] UNESCO: Kok Boru, traditional horse game, n.d., https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/Kok-Boru-traditional-horse-game-01294#identification (accessed 13 January 2021).
[149] UNICEF: Children's Games of Nomads, n.d., https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/childrens-games-nomads (accessed 16 January 2021).
[150] Ibid.

ethno-village the organizers also held a separate ethno-festival aimed at presentation and promotion of other nomadic cultures. Around 400 artists from 30 participating countries took part in the ethno-festival. The ethno-festival's program consisted of "Ethno-hit," "Ethno-dance," "Ethno-fashion," "Ethno-bazar," and "Ethno-house" sections. The third WNG were scheduled close to the date of the IV Summit of Turkic-speaking countries of the Turkic Council held on September 3rd 2018 in Cholpon-Ata. President of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev, president of Turkey Erdogan and prime minister of Hungary Orban were present at the opening ceremony of the World Nomad Games. In addition, prince of the Saudi Arabia was another guest of the third WNG. The opening ceremony of the third WNG was also memorized by performance of 1,000 *manaschy* who simultaneously recited an excerpt from the epic Manas.

In the *Table 5.* below I illustrate how Kyrgyzstan's World Nomad Games have been evolving so far since 2014. It is observable that by each game the WNG became more spectacular, diverse and bigger. It can be noticed that the WNG by 2018 became rather a popular and significant event.

Table 5. The World Nomad Games in numbers[151]

	WNG-2014	WNG-2016	WNG-2018
Participating states	19	62	80
Participating sportsmen	583	1,200	3,000
Ethno-games played	10	26	37
Total prize fund	16 million KGS	28.400 million KGS	35 million KGS
Medals issued	109	387	594
State budget spent	102 million KGS	258.6 million KGS	303.1 million KGS
Other sponsorship	-	3 million USD	more than 200 million KGS
Revenue	-	9,9 million KGS	-

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[151] The Table 6. is compiled based on available open data and interviews with the WNG Secretariat.

Buildings built or renovated	1 existing hippodrome's full renovation	1 new hippodrome built a road and an airport are fully renovated	-
Visitors, including foreign tourists	45 thousand (10% foreign tourists)	-	70 thousand
Accredited foreign media	40	35	56
People involved in mass performances	1,200 300 volunteers	6,000 700 volunteers	- 4,000 volunteers
World celebrities featured	1	9	13
Foreign delegations	-	-	5
Official sponsors	3	6	-
Partners	14	35	-

The project of Nomad Games was criticized a lot by domestic opposition and some experts. For example, opposition within the Kyrgyz parliament raised a concern about the WNG's expenses, they noted that it was not the right time for celebrations during the times of domestic economic decline[152]. Some noted that it would be better instead to direct money spent for the games for construction of schools or roads in the regions. In response the organizers responded that the government spent from the budget a minor amount and emphasized that most of infrastructural rehabilitations and constructions were implemented by foreign grants raised by president Atambaev. The Kyrgyz government actively sought for support and sponsorship of the state's World Nomad Games project among local and

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[152] Azattyk: Всемирные игры кочевников: финансы не спели романс? [World Nomad Games: finances did not sing a romance?], 19 September 2016, http://azattyk.asia/a/27999945.html (accessed 13 January 2021).

international business companies.[153] However a member of the parliament Zhanar Akaev noted that World Nomad Games reminded a 'wedding for a credit', in other words, a feast in times when there is no money in the budget for it.[154] He was also concerned that the Games were held every two years which even more impacted the state budget. While most businesses were eager to financially help the Kyrgyz government to hold the third WNG they were concerned about aid because the state did not announce publicly any financial report on profits and expenses of the previous games.[155]

Another criticism towards the games were related to tenders and construction companies involved in the reconstruction works. For instance, a construction company that rehabilitated old city hippodrome in 2014 was accused for tax avoidance.[156] In 2016 for the construction of a new hippodrome near Cholpon-Ata the government initially stated that it had allocated 480 million KGS, which was later increased to 1,5 billion KGS[157] and later it was denied by the President's Apparatus (by Sapar Isakov) with claims that the government did not use any state budget funds for its reconstruction but used instead foreign grants (see above).

Finally, another criticism was connected to lack of state support of artists from regions of Kyrgyzstan participating in the World Nomad Games and use of administrative resources, namely administrative pressure and tasks towards local municipal governments (*ayil okmotu*). For example, in 2014, each *oblast* in Kyrgyzstan was tasked to bring to Yssyk-Kol 25 *boz ui*. As some news outlets report some *ayil okmotu* representatives complained that the finances to cover expenses for travel, accommodation and transportation from the regions to Cholpon-Ata were not considered by the government. They informed that the local cultural workers were forced to travel for own expenses while their salaries were miserable. However, later, the government assured that the local governments were warned in the begging of the year to allocate some part of their local

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[153] Azattyk: Власти в поисках спонсоров Игр кочевников [The government is seeking for sponsors for Games of nomads], 12 April 2016, http://azattyk.asia/a/27668665.html (accessed 14 January 2021).

[154] Azattyk: «Свадьба в кредит». Надежда на бизнес в проведении Игр кочевников ["Wedding for a credit". Hope for business in holding nomad Games.] https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-world-nomad-games/29291841.html (accessed 14 January 2021).

[155] Ibid.

[156] Kloop: ГКНБ: Цену строительства ипподрома для Всемирных игр кочевников завысили [GKNB: The price for construction of hippodrome for World Nomad Games was increased], 28 May 2018, https://kloop.kg/blog/2018/05/28/gknb-tsenu-stroitelstva-ippodroma-dlya-vsemirnyh-igr-kochevnikov-zavysili/
(accessed 13 January 2021).

[157] Ibid.

budgets for the WNG expenses. [158] Thus, in the end local administrations but not the national government were blamed for these incidents. According to Zhanar Akaev, *ayil okmotu* workers, other municipal workers even doctors from the regions were involved into the Games as administrative resource, this practice disturbed lives of local communities because all local administrations were at the World Nomad Games instead of doing their primary task – serving to local communities. [159]

Despite the criticism, the Kyrgyz government decided to hold the World Nomad Games every two years because it was believed to be benefiting for the country image and state budget (increase of foreign investments and tourism). [160] Sapar Isakov, the representative of the Presidential Apparatus during the interview for a media outlet stated that the World Nomad Games became Kyrgyzstan's brand:

"the World nomad games should be held twice a year *only* in Kyrgyzstan … I think that the initiative about holding *World nomad games will be written in golden letters* in the history of our state. In addition, I can say for sure that *this initiative will be written in the history of world development and peace*. To document this event and to mention about it in the history of the UN, Kyrgyzstan suggested about this idea during the 71-st General assembly of the UN Kyrgyzstan." [161] (emphasis are mine)

In 2019 president Zheenbekov even announced that domestic nomad games (also called as National nomad games) will be held every year within Kyrgyzstan moving from one *oblast* to another. The first National nomad games were held in 2019 in Talas. Zheenbekov argued that nomad games became increasingly popular in Kyrgyzstan and international community was very interested too. [162] However, since then no domestic games were held because of coronavirus epidemic situation.

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[158] Azattyk: Всемирные игры кочевников: местные власти выкручиваются, как могут [World nomad games: local administrations get away how they can], 16 August 2016, http://azattyk.asia/a/27925280.html (accessed 13 January 2021).

[159] Azattyk: «Свадьба в кредит». Надежда на бизнес в проведении Игр кочевников ["Wedding for a credit". Hope for business in holding nomad Games], 25 June 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-world-nomad-games/29291841.html (accessed 14 January 2021).

[160] Azattyk: Всемирные игры кочевников: престиж и политические очки [World nomad games: prestige and political gains], 31 August 2018,
https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_nomads_games_2018/29463622.html (accessed 22 January 2021).

[161] Cabar: Сапар Исаков о Вторых Всемирных играх кочевников [Sapar Isakov about the Second World nomad games], 11 October 2016, https://www.for.kg/news-383021-ru.html (accessed 22 January 2021).

[162] President.kg: Президент Сооронбай Жээнбеков: Республиканские Игры кочевников будут ежегодно проводиться в каждой из областей [President Sooronbai Jeenbekov: Republic nomad Games will be annually hold in each oblast], 20 February 2019,
http://president.kg/ru/sobytiya/13487_prezident_sooronbay_gheenbekov_respublikanskie_igri_kochevnikov_budut_eghegodno_provoditsya_v_kaghdoy_iz_oblastey (accessed 22 January 2021).

In the section below I analyse president Almazbek Atambaev's speeches delivered at the opening ceremonies of the first and the second World Nomad Games. Also, my analysis here covers the speech of president Sooronbai Zheenbekov, the successor of Atambaev during the opening ceremony of the third World Nomad Games event in 2018. As I stated earlier, the third WNG is also considered in the study in order to produce a more comprehensive and accurate analysis on political purpose of the WNG for political elites in power.

6.2 Analysis of Atambaev's/Zheenbekov's speeches during the mega-events

In this part of the chapter, I analyse Atambaev's/Zheenbekov's speeches addressed to the nation and international guests during the opening ceremonies of the World Nomad Games in 2014, 2016 and 2018 in Cholpon-Ata. In my analysis of the published texts of the speeches below I will focus more on implicit in the text based on the detailed contextual picture (domestic political and socio-economic developments) under which the mega-events were conducted and endorsing speeches of the mega-events were delivered. My primary aim in analyzing presidential speeches delivered at the opening ceremonies of the mega-events is to understand the official reasoning of importance of these mega-events and to understand what central themes the speeches raise and why Atambaev/Zheenbekov emphasize these themes. So the questions I will be asking here are the following: *How did Atambaev/Zheenbekov communicate to the nation why the World Nomad Games are important for Kyrgyzstan in particular timing and context?* Below I underline words and phrases which are rhetorically or frequently used by Atambaev/Zheenbekov and which I highlight from the speech as central themes. To support my claims in the end of the chapter I provide analysis of domestic political environment and socio-economic situation within the country as a contextual background of the WNG.

6.2.1 Atambaev's speech during the first World Nomad Games in 2014

President Almazbek Atambaev delivered his speech on September 9th 2014 during the opening ceremony.[163] Atambaev welcomed the nation and the guests of the first WNG. He

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[163] To access a full text of Atambaev's keynote speech at the first WNG please visit the following link: President.kg: Выступление Президента Кыргызской Республики Алмазбека Атамбаева на открытии I Всемирных игр кочевников [Speech of President of the Kyrgyz Republic Almazbek Atambaev during the opening of the I World nomad games], 9 September 2014, http://president.kg/ru/sobytiya/novosti/2276_vistuplenie_prezidenta_kirgizskoy_respubliki_almazbeka_atambaeva_na_otkritii_i_vsemirnih_igr_kochevnikov (accessed 27 January 2021).

thanked the presidents of Kazakhstan, Turkey and Azerbaijan for supporting the Kyrgyz initiative on the WNG which Atambaev proposed in 2012 during the Bishkek summit. Atambaev noted that the WNG was a great event in the life of Kyrgyzstan and the country was very proud of it. Then Atambaev paused on who were nomads:

> "The nomads stayed at the beginning of the human civilization history and are nations which had a distinctive contribution to a humankind's development. We are responsible for learning and studying ways of lives of our ancestors and nomadic philosophy. The ones who know own roots and their past can find a way to the future."

> Directly after, Atambaev turned to Kyrgyz nomads and stated the following: "It is not just a concurrence that the beginning of nomad games is taking place in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz nation – are the one of those who founded the nomadic civilization, it is one of nations which headed it [the nomadic civilization], it is rich in history and traditions and customs."

Concluding the first part of the speech Atambaev highlighted that importance of a welfare future was only in unity and cooperation between the countries:

> "Let us together build a future by remembering heritage of our ancestors and their sacred words! Let the God to bright our way! Only in unity with kin nations and partner states we can pass this path! We have a common background. Similar to the Father Manas who "made a nation from split tribes," let us make our lives together with other nations and kin nations!"

In the next part of his speech Atambaev called the WNG – a unique game because of its new format. He described in brief that the games had unique spectacular events. The president noted that most of modern sports emerged from ancient war tournaments. Atambaev believed that sports would unite nations, strengthen friendship and harmony between the nations. Then Atambaev again paused to speak about nomadic civilization and its importance:

> "Many states had disappeared from the world map for the last centuries. Many nations had vanished. However, the spirit of nomadic civilization is going on. Its strength – is its ability be in a harmony with the nature and ever-changing world. This is in particular is important in our century – the century of transformations and globalization. Nomadic nations had always respected their past, had remembered own ancestors, they had generated legends about own heroes and passed them from one generation to another. Thus, for Kyrgyz nation a spiritual power comes from the millennial epic Manas, other nations also have own great heroes and works. Even if

our history is not reflected in ancient stone cities, it lives in <u>our hearts</u>, <u>in memory</u> of peoples. It is important for us to <u>remember our past</u>, <u>remember our roots</u>. We have many things in common. We have <u>common roots</u>. I am sure that our <u>future</u> is also one!"

Another important part of his speech was the following:

"<u>Today</u> we – <u>the descendants of nomadic nations</u>, are <u>responsible</u> for <u>reviving</u> in our hearts <u>spirits of our fathers and mothers</u>, souls and are responsible for <u>reviving</u> civic feelings. Let us learn <u>to live in peace</u>, let us <u>stop conflicts</u>, let us <u>remember our history and roots</u>, and *only* then we can have <u>a bright and great future</u>. It seems that the ancient and the present eras are facing each other in the shores of a sacred Yssyk-Kol! These games will disseminate to the world <u>the history</u>, <u>talents</u>, <u>culture</u> and <u>nature of nomadic nations</u>, and will improve our <u>unity</u> and exercises our <u>peace</u>."

Then Atambaev turned to international guests and hoped that the guests liked Kyrgyzstan, its nature, its celestial mountains and rivers, the Yssyk-Kol lake, and hoped for bright memories from the World Nomad Games. Atambaev stated that the government planned to make the games annual and invited the guests for the next year's games. He wished all to enjoy the event, wished a good luck to participating sportsmen and a fair judging.

Finally, in the conclusion Atambaev highlighted about importance of WNG for the country: "World Nomad games which we are launching today will certainly develop <u>tourism</u> to our country, especially will contribute to Yssyk-Kol oblast's <u>development</u>. It is the best <u>advertisement</u> of Kyrgyzstan to the world! Therefore, for the sake of our country, we ask you not do breach public order, respect our guests and let us hold [the games] on a high level." While addressing the participating sportsmen he reminded them that they were <u>descents</u> of <u>great nomads</u> such as – Attila, Oguz Khan, Manas, Chenghiz Khan and Babur. He wished to have a successful event, asked for prosperity, unity and peace for all, and declared the games open.

In the Table 6. below I identified five key themes in the keynote speech of president Atambaev, they are: nomadic civilization, nomadic heritage, Kyrgyz and nomadism, future (international) and future (domestic). Atambaev explained importance of WNG to the Kyrgyz nation both by economic benefits for the country and by nomadic spiritual judgements as descents of a great nomadic civilization. Atambaev stressed the spiritual rationale behind WNG by noting that Kyrgyzstan was not just a first random place to host WNG, but it was a sacred nomadic land with great history, unique culture and past and the Kyrgyz nation was one of founders of nomadic civilization and nomadic culture. Economic

rationale behind WNG was noted by president as important because the event attracted tourists and improved Kyrgyzstan's international prestige making attractive country for investing. Atambaev saw these games as a means of international cooperation and partnership, and a prosperous future, he hoped that WNG would boost economic partnership with other states and increase international investment to Kyrgyzstan. To do so Atambaev attempted several times to highlight other states about their common nomadic background and common future. For that very reason Atambaev was also eager to hold the games annually and even declared the games annual in front of international guests, international mass media during the opening ceremony (although later it was decided to hold WNG once in two years but not annually). Thus, the official reasoning of importance of WNG communicated to the nation was economic and spiritual ones (as a spiritual duty of nomadic descents). The state administration understood that the WNGs would be perceived as positive development steps on the local levels too. The central themes raised in the speech support these claims: first, Atambaev reminded who were nomads, then he noted about nomadic heritage and mentioned about responsibility/duty of nomadic descents [also Kyrgyz nomads] and, finally, Atambaev discussed a future of nomadic states and the country's bright future, in particular how WNG would contribute to a better future and development.

Table 6. Central themes in Atambaev's speech during the WNG-2014 mega-event

Central themes:	Key words and phrases (rephrased and summarized):
Nomadic civilization	- founders of human civilization - had a contribution to mankind's development - the spirit of nomadic civilization goes on - nomads can stay in harmony with the nature - great nations
Nomadic heritage	- nomadic philosophy - we are responsible as descents to revive and remember - to be aware of nomadic past and roots - to pass legends from one generation to another - to respect and remember the ancestors and the past
Kyrgyz and nomadism	- Kyrgyz are among the nations which founded, headed nomadic civilization - Kyrgyz have a rich nomadic culture and traditions
Future (international)	- we have a future if we know our past, if we remember our past - we have a better future if we [nomads] unite and cooperate - we can pass the path only in unity - we have a common background/roots and future - unity of nations, friendship and harmony - learn to live in peace - stop conflicts
Future (domestic)	- development of tourism - development of regions - the country's advertisement on the global level (WNG is great, unique event)

	· Kyrgyz are proud of WNG · improvement of the country image

6.2.2 Atambaev's speech during the second World Nomad Games in 2016

President Atambaev opened the second WNG in Cholpon-Ata on September 3rd 2016.[164] The speech started with welcoming the nation and the guests. President said that his country was <u>proud</u> to meet guests from 62 countries: "For Kyrgyz meeting a guest is a particularly good sign. There is a folk saying "A prosperity comes to a house along with guests." Therefore, Kyrgyz had always met <u>guests</u> with a joy, a good wish and a good intention."

Then Atambaev mentioned about the first WNG: "The heritage, traditions and customs of nomadic nations had been revived and increased <u>a huge interest worldwide</u>. If at the First World nomad games representatives of <u>19 countries</u> took part, today representatives of <u>62 countries</u> came for the second games, and the number of games had also <u>increased</u>." President again reminded how WNG were introduced back in 2012 and thanked the presidents of Turkic Council member-states.

Right after it he tried to link nomadic heritage with <u>current regional and global issues</u> by referring to <u>ecological problems</u> and a <u>threat of dying of unique cultures</u>:

"Under these conditions a gentle treatment of <u>the nature</u> by nomads, their maintenance of <u>ancestor's heritage</u> became a subject of attention and a thorough study. A <u>high number of guests</u> attending this holiday are an evidence to it.

Nomadic civilization – a <u>unique</u> pre-model of <u>sustainable development</u>, a model which today the whole mankind is in search of. The <u>UN sustainable goals</u> after 2015 are also aimed at solution of these issues."

Next Atambaev noted about on-going issues within sport such as its politization and commercialization and urged for a need of humanization of sport. He noted, that WNG are a good alternative because the games were aimed to <u>unite various cultures and nations</u>. He equated WNG to <u>a holiday of returning back to origins</u> and <u>a demonstration of nomadic</u>

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[164] To access a full text of Atambaev's keynote speech at the second WNG please visit the following link: President.kg: Президент Алмазбек Атамбаев: Всемирные игры кочевников – это праздник возвращения к своим истокам, возможность показать нашим детям и всему миру все богатство кочевой культуры [President Almazbek Atambaev: World nomad games – is a holiday of returning to its roots, opportunity to demonstrate to our children and to the whole world all the wealth of nomadic culture], 3 September 2016,
<u>http://president.kg/ru/sobytiya/novosti/4216_prezident_almazbek_atambaev_vsemirnie_igri_kochevnikov_
_eto_prazdnik_vozvrasheniya_k_svoim_istokam_vozmoghnost_pokazat_nashim_detyam_i_vsemu_miru_
vse_bogatstvo_kochevoy_kulturi</u> (accessed 22 January 2021).

culture. He noted that WNG also had a separate cultural component where spectators could learn about nomadic way of life, their traditions, arts and philosophy. The slogan of the second WNG is "Unity of strength! Unity of spirit!" which balances physical power and spirituality noted Atambaev. He paused on why the nomad games were important, he said that "Under globalization, scientific and technologic development there is also a threat of dying of unique cultures, customs, traditions. It is a very correct step to timely undertake the efforts to preserve a heritage of our ancestors and to propagate them under such conditions." For him WNG were regular sports and cultural festival, and a new sports and cultural direction for the entire mankind. In the conclusion, president wished a fair judging, a good luck to sportsmen and a joyful time for international guests and expressed his hope that the guests would also come for the next games.

Based on underlined words and phrases above I have identified one dominating theme: a theme on international importance of the games. Unlike the previous speech in 2014 at the first WNG, Atambaev here addressed mainly the international auditory not the domestic one. We can assume that by focusing on international importance of the World Nomad Games he tried to communicate to the nation about rightness of his decision on initiating and holding the WNG. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there was a major criticism towards the WNG within the domestic opposition and the public after the first nomad games. Many criticized the games for expenses spent from the budget. A keynote speech during the second WNG was an opportunity for president to shine and to say proudly that those who criticized were wrong because these games leveraged the country's image and the country's economy by increasing tourism. For that reason, Atambaev highlighted key numbers, such as number of countries involved in the games, etc. He also wanted to note that the country was successful due to WNG project, in particular, the country's ideological and cultural contribution to the mankind was growing (such as promotion of unity, diversity, sustainability, harmony with the nature and preservation of unique cultures). Thus, president explained why the games were important not only for Kyrgyzstan but for the whole world. The Table 7 below illustrates details of the dominating theme in his speech.

Table 7. Central themes in Atambaev's speech during the WNG-2016 mega-event

Central themes:	Key words and phrases (rephrased and summarized):
International importance of the games	· high number of international guests · number of countries had increased · number of games had increased · increased a huge international interest

	· provides a sustainable development model to the world (namely in the way how nomads historically threated the nature) · corresponds to the UN sustainable development goals · a good alternative to politicised and commercialised sport · promotes international peace, unity and harmony · contributes to maintenance and preservation of unique world cultures and traditions under conditions of globalization · a new direction for the mankind

6.2.3 Zheenbekov's speech during the third World Nomad Games in 2018

President Sooronbai Zheenbekov made his keynote speech in Cholpon-Ata on September 2nd 2018 during the official opening ceremony of the third WNG.[165] Zheenbekov's speech started with greetings of the nation, the participants, the guests and foreign high-level delegations.[166] In the introduction part of his speech he portrayed Kyrgyzstan as the land of white snow mountains and the motherland of Manas. He described the Kyrgyz nation as a freedom-loving and hospitable nation. Then he made a brief historical note about the history of the birth of the WNG. Zheenbekov emphasized that participation of heads of Turkic Council member-states was a sign of a high respect of the Kyrgyz nation and the World Nomad Games. President Zheenbekov next highlighted international importance of the games. Namely Zheenbekov noted about the role of international organizations and international mass-media. Then he moved to a justification of these games. He stated that in the era of progressive technology and globalization, new challenges also appeared which could be addressed if the mankind would turn to the past: "Under such conditions it is very important to turn to values, traditions and heritage of nomadic nations." He noted that values of nomadic culture would reinforce unity of world nations and would promote humanism and would change the way how the humanity had treated the nature and had treated each other. He said the civilization of nomads was geographically huge and their philosophy was unique:

"It is a great heritage, scattering a territory from the Pacific Ocean to Europe, the Central and Eastern Asia, Asia Minor and Middle East. Such boundless spaces could

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[165] To access a full text of Jeenbekov's keynote speech at the third WNG please visit the following link: President.kg: Президент Сооронбай Жээнбеков: Игры кочевников призваны способствовать развитию неповторимой культуры и традиций нынешних поколений кочевников! [President Sooronbai Jeenbekov: Nomad games are meant to contribute to development of irreplaceable culture and traditions of modern generations of nomads!], 2 September 2018, http://www.president.kg/ru/sobytiya/fotoreportazhi/12392_prezident_sooronbay_gheenbekov_igri_kochevnikov_prizvani_sposobstvovat_razvitiyu_nepovtorimoy_kulturi_itradiciy_nineshnih_pokoleniy_kochevnikov (accessed 22 January 2021).

[166] To remind the opening event of the third WNG was attended by presidents of Kazakhstan and Turkey, prime-minister of Hungary and president of Tatar Federative Republic of Russia.

master <u>only nomads</u>. <u>The nomadic world includes hundreds of nations</u>. Their culture, worldview have <u>unique</u> properties."

He continued that <u>nomadic philosophy</u> was about <u>balancing between material and spiritual</u>, and <u>a life in harmony with the nature</u>. Nomads were the ones who <u>bridged the West and the East</u>, and nomads were <u>important</u> in global development, he said. Current global challenges made us to return to our <u>nomadic roots</u>, <u>pure culture and traditions</u>, and <u>get energy</u> from there he added. According to him, nomads always were supporters of <u>folk democracy</u> and were <u>multicultural</u>, and today democracy and multiculturalism were key world ideas. Then Zheenbekov wished a good luck to Turkey – the next recipient-country of the WNG. In the end of his speech Zheenbekov reminded the core components of the WNG: sport, culture and knowledge, and spirit and strengths. He encouraged Kyrgyz sportsmen participating at the WNG reminding about their recent success at the Asian Games. Finally, Zheenbekov stressed that the WNG did not only demonstrate strengths and speed, but also developed <u>a unique culture and traditions of nomadic nations</u>. Zheenbekov said that nomadic sports and cultures <u>united people from different parts of the world</u> and contributed to <u>a peaceful coexistence of nations</u>. President wished impartial judging during the games and wished the guests to enjoy the beauty of Kyrgyzstan and hospitality of its people.

Based on underlined words and phrases above I have identified two main themes in the speech of Zheenbekov:

-Theme on the World Nomad Games as a successful project

-Theme on nomadic heritage and its modern importance

In the *Table 8.* below in analysis I mention key words and phrases in accordance with the identified themes.

Table 8. Central themes in Zheenbekov's speech during the WNG-2018 mega-event

Central themes:	Key words and phrases (rephrased and summarized):
The World Nomad Games as a successful project	- international importance of the games - involvement of international organizations - coverage through international mass-media - international guests and delegations
Nomadic heritage and its modern importance	- nomadic past/experience as a response to new global challenges - nomadic values, traditions and its heritage are sources of energy - unique nomadic philosophy: harmony with nature, humanism, multiculturalism, folk democracy, balance of material and spiritual, peaceful co-existence of various nations, unity - important bridge between the West and the East - the WNGs contribute to modern multiculturalism, democracy

As the *Table 8.* illustrates Zheenbekov communicated to the nation and to the world the importance of the World Nomad Games. While through the first theme (the WNG as a successful project) Zheenbekov more turned to the domestic auditory by stressing the importance of the games initiated by the Kyrgyz Republic. The second theme (nomadic heritage and its modern importance) is more related to the international and global nation. Here president Zheenbekov wanted to stress a historical contribution of the nomadic civilization to the global development and its modern day relevance. Overall, the speech was more directed towards an international auditory rather than to a domestic one. It is also important to note that Zheenbekov merely repeated what Atambaev earlier said during the previous opening ceremonies. Similar to Atambaev, Zheenbekov noted in his speech about a contribution of nomads to the global development, their philosophy, diversity and unity, etc. Thus, it can be assumed that Zheenbekov tried to support earlier statements of Atambaev about the WNG although he did not mention in his speech about Atambaev at all.

6.3 Critical political and socio-economic contexts of the World Nomad Games

In this part of the chapter, I examine why were the World Nomad Games important for Almazbek Atambaev. As put earlier the idea of WNG was introduced also to president Kurmanbek Bakiev, however it was not supported most probably because of financial costs of the games.[167] Instead Bakiev supported ideology of tribalism. As Ibraimov wrote: "Bakiev's administration decided totally to revive a tribal system of the Kyrgyz society, encouraged tribe-based kurultai, openly supported regionalism and localism, without realizing that this is the end of the Kyrgyz unity…" (Ibraimov 2015: 133). Marat (2008) put that nomadism was depicted by the Soviet academics as a "regressive phenomenon" (2008: 40). It was believed that "nomadic culture has little to contribute to the idea of a unified modern nation-state" (ibid.).

Nevertheless, for president Atambaev, nomadism became an opportunity to create a new national brand and a new country image, which the country lost in the course of series of coups in 2005 and 2010, and the bloody inter-ethnic conflict in Osh. As the head of the WNG Secretariat told during the interview, prior to the WNG Kyrgyzstan was associated with negative things, such as bride-kidnapping, revolutions, murders and drug

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[167] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021; Interview with the specialist of the WNG Secretariat, Nadyrbekov Souzbek, February 5 2021.

trafficking.[168] Since turmoil in 2005 Kyrgyzstan became internationally known as the country of protests. Domestically protests became a common practice in resolving any kind of local or regional issues. Protests were widely used to support or replace directors and heads of local, regional or national-level public structures. Protests became increasingly deeply rooted in the minds of people that it was perceived as a normal practice in the country. Even teachers gathered to support and to replace university rectors or faculty deans. Therefore, one of primary tasks of Atambaev was to change this way of thinking and behaviour among Kyrgyzstanis. It was important to diminish popular street protesting also for Atambaev's personal power stability because this was the way how previous Kyrgyz president lost the power. In addition, it was a time when regionalism was popular, people were divided into the south and the north, they were highly polarised, disappointed and politicized.[169] To quote the head of the WNG Secretariat:

> "The nation was split into the north and the south. There was a division even between oblasts. The cultural sphere among the population weakened. The population became very politicized, and everyone was talking about politics. There was a need to make people busy with some other things. There was a need to unite the population and direct them towards the national culture. This [the WNG] was a political decision – to unite the nation, to make the nation busy with preparations to the project [the WNG]. In other words, the government told to the people "be quiet, stop all your conflicts because there are guests coming". Also there was a 'boom' of Islamization among the nation. The power used the project as much as it could. The WNG was a low-cost but very effective project. The government resolved all these issues together at once with the help of the games."[170]

He continued that "At least there were three main issues which Atambaev aimed to address through the WNG. They are unity of the nation, diminishing of Islamization and improvement of the country image. The WNG addressed all these issues at once, which or course was cheaper than addressing each of issues separately."[171]

Apart from these major country image-related issues, Atambaev's rule also lacked a popular support. First Atambaev's policies, namely his decision about the entrance to the

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[168] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021.
[169] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.

Eurasian Economic Union[172] (the EaEU) in 2015 was largely criticized by local entrepreneurs and farmers. Kyrgyz agricultural products were blocked on the borders with Kazakhstan preventing their further export to Russia. As noted by the head of the business association "JIA" local entrepreneurs faced a big loss within the EaEU because of new bureaucratic regulations, such as certification of products.[173] According to him other member-states did not acknowledge a certification issued by the Kyrgyz laboratories. Members of the parliament also acknowledged that the EaEU was not a 'fair' union for the Kyrgyz economy.[174] They believed that Kyrgyzstan cannot become a competitive member of the union because since its entrance the country's export to the member-states had decreased, alternatively imports from the member-states to Kyrgyzstan had increased.[175] In addition, there were fears that the Russian influence would increase into a 'new' Soviet Union. Nevertheless, the official statistics and the official statements supported the membership and stressed advantages the country received after its entrance, such as eased employment procedures for Kyrgyz labour migrants in Russia, increase of remittances and growth of the country GDP.[176]

Second, during the presidency of Atambaev international relations of Kyrgyzstan with several countries had worsened because of Atambaev's 'emotional' speeches addressed to presidents of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkey and Tajikistan.[177] For instance, relations with Kazakhstan had worsened twice during Atambaev's rule: in 2016 when Atambaev commented on Kazakhstan's border closure decision in 2010, and in 2017 when Atambaev commented on the meeting of then-president of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev with Omurbek Babanov[178], a Kyrgyz politician running for presidency. The worsened relations between the countries negatively impacted everyday lives of thousands of Kyrgyz citizens and entrepreneurs who could not cross the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border for

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[172] The Russian-led union was established in 2015, other member-states are Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Armenia.

[173] Azattyk: Кыргызстан и ЕАЭС: плюсы и минусы четырехлетнего пребывания в организации [Kyrgyzstan and the EaEU: pros and cons of four-years membership in the organization], 30 August 2019, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-economy-eurazes/30137604.html (accessed 7 February 2021).

[174] Azattyk: Кыргызстан в ЕАЭС: где страна выиграла и где проиграла? [Kyrgyzstan within EaEU: where the country gained and lost?], 3 December 2019, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_v_eaes_chetyre_goda/30304722.html (accessed 7 February 2021).

[175] Ibid.

[176] Azattyk: Кыргызстан и ЕАЭС: плюсы и минусы четырехлетнего пребывания в организации [Kyrgyzstan and the EaEU: pros and cons of four-years membership in the organization] …

[177] See the video here to watch Atambaev's impolite speeches addressed to the presidents of neighbouring states. Source: AzattyqTV, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kyrgyzstan-atambaev-rezkie-vyskazyvania/28873846.html

[178] Sooronbai Jeenbekov's main competitor at 2017 presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan.

several days because Kazakhstan increased its inspection procedures following Atambaev's speech.[179] The Kazakh side explained new complicated procedures with its fight against smuggling while the Kyrgyz side named these procedures artificial and called Moscow for its intervention within EaEU regulations. The Kyrgyz-Kazakh tensions were resolved only after a newly elected Kyrgyz president Sooronbai Zheenbekov's visit to Kazakhstan. During Atambaev's term relations with the west had worsened and the country undertook pro-Russian direction. In 2014 Atambaev did not prolong activity of the American military base in Bishkek, and in 2015 the country became EaEU member-state. By 2017, Russia and Kyrgyzstan signed documents about annulation of external credit debts to Russia.

Third, Atambaev put pressure against critical mass media – he sued for 28 million KGS several media outlets, such as the Radio Azattyk and media-portal Zanoza.kg in 2017, and news website Maalymat in 2015.[180] The general prosecution office accused these media for damaging honour and dignity of Atambaev. These critical media wrote about Atambaev's allegedly involvement into corruption and presence of his offshore businesses. In 2017 Omurbek Tekebaev, Ata-Meken opposition party leader was prisoned after his accusations of Atambaev in connection with offshore businesses and smuggling.

In comparison with the previous presidents Atambaev did not involve into politics his family and relatives. Nevertheless, his rule was disapproved because of involvement into politics of his other inner circle. For example, his personal driver became the deputy-head of the President's Apparatus, one bodyguard became the head of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, and another bodyguard became the head of one of departments of the State Committee on National Security. Atambaev was also critiqued by the opposition for his constitutional amendment in 2016. He made changes to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic despite the moratorium adopted by the Interim Government in 2010. The moratorium prohibited modification of the constitution until 2020. Despite the modification of the constitution was aimed at increase of authority of the prime-minister and strengthening of the parliament, Atambaev intended to secure his further political career after the end of his presidency term because his political party SDPK gained the majority

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[179] AzattyqTV: Очереди на границе Кыргызстана и Казахстана [Queues on the border between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan], 12 October 2017, https://rus.azattyq.org/a/kazakhstan-kyrgyzstan-granica/28787867.html (accessed 8 February 2021).

[180] Sputnik: Самые громкие иски и суды против СМИ – примеры из Кыргызстана и мировой практики [The most resonance lawsuits and courts against media – examples from Kyrgyzstan and from the world], 8 May 2019, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20190508/1044262173/smi-zhurnalisty-isk-razbiratelstva.html (accessed 8 February 2021).

in the parliament. Thus, Atambaev's long-term aim was consolidation of his power within the parliament after his presidency ends.

Finally, under the rule of Atambaev volume of international debts had significantly increased because the country received Chinese loans and credits to improve domestic infrastructure (road connections, energy, etc.). To maintain political stability it was important for the leadership to generate imaginaries of development. Among projects completed for Chinese loans were the electro-energy line "Datka-Kemin" connecting the north and the south of the country. Another Chinese loan was used for construction of the alternative road connection "Tunduk-Tushtuk" between the north and the south. There were unpleasant moments however which questioned transparency of Chinese loans. For example, the accident of Bishkek's central heating plant reconstructed for Chinese loan amounted 386 million USD[181] was one of infamous Atambaev's infrastructural projects. Despite Atambaev's rule was characterized by positive economic developments,[182] socio-economic factors on societal level did not improve. As illustrated in the Chapter 1 in the Chart 2. number of unemployed ranged between 61,074 – 57,578 people.

The Secretariat presented the WNG as Atambaev's project in order to receive funds from the state budget for its implementation and to be able to invite other state leaders, in other words to make it international. Atambaev initially did not support this idea because of tight state budget. It was merely Sapar Isakov, the deputy-head of the President's Apparatus, who played a key role in persuading Atambaev to support the WNG:

> "We should say a big kudos to Sapar Isakov too. He believed into this project from the very beginning. He was the one who persuaded Atambaev. He visited the president's office nearly every day to get his support and approval. Atambaev did not see perspective out of the WNG when there was no money in the state budget. At last Atambaev agreed to hold the games, under the condition that Isakov would be responsible for the entire project. Thus, the first games were organized by the President's Apparatus."[183]

But very soon Atambaev realized importance of the WNG for his power stability:

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[181] Azattyk: ТЭЦ: на что потратили $386 млн и много ли это [TETs: for what $386 million was spent and is it too much], March 20 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-thermal-power-plant-modernization/29111073.html (accessed 8 February 2021).

[182] For instance, the country GDP increased from 6.198 billion USD in 2011 to 7.703 billion USD in 2017, except its fall in 2015. Source: The Word bank, Kyrgyz Republic, n.d., https://data.worldbank.org/country/KG (accessed 8 February 2021).

[183] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021

"Later Atambaev trusted that the WNG is a holiday that will unite the nation. This was a political decision to unite the nation. A celebratory mood was needed to make people less political. They needed to keep people busy with preparations for the games, but not busy with politics as they were at that time. The project was a window through which the state could communicate any information."[184]

Thus, bearing in mind above-mentioned factors within domestic political context, we could argue that the World Nomad Games were important in order to keep the society apolitical and busy, to maintain political situation stable, and keep people out of street protesting. In other words, the WNG was a legitimacy-building project for the elite in rule – for Atambaev because it helped him to stay legitimate and secure his term. Eventually Atambaev very soon understood importance of these games because they could address simultaneously several key issues Atambaev then faced, such as improvement of international country image for attraction of foreign investment, ensuring domestic political stability, increase his domestic popular support and improving inter-society, inter-confessional and inter-ethnic relations. At the end of the day the WNG became a grand international project the country had ever implemented for which Atambaev will be distinguished.

6.4 Conclusion

In this Chapter I argued that the World Nomad Games were designed for both domestic and international auditoria for the purposes of building a positive country image which would bring more investment and improve domestic legitimacy of president. Although Atambaev initially was against the WNG later he became very enthusiastic about it once he realized that the games could bring positive changes within society, namely could keep people out of street protests and keep them busy with constructive activities. This was important for Atambaev because the society became highly politicized and could threaten his power. The WNG were important for Kyrgyzstan because they improved international prestige of the country and re-advertised the country as a stable and secure country for investments. The efforts of the government to attract foreign spectators and visitors to the World Nomad Games was enormous, they accredited as much as possible foreign media to cover the events, developed special promotional videos about the games via social media to promote the games, invited world celebrities and launched non-visa entrance for most countries.[185]

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[184] Ibid.
[185] Visit the World Nomad Games YouTube channel for more information and promotion videos:
https://www.youtube.com/user/worldnomadgames/videos

They developed attractive and user-friendly web-site in English, Russian and Kyrgyz languages that contains all relevant information about the WNG, such as history, programs, contact information, ticket information, visa information, information about volunteering, information about traditions and customs, etc. For the occasion of WNG a special soft phone application was developed which contained all relevant information for the international guests. The Secretariat used the social media tools to spread the word about the games (Twitter and Facebook). Thus, the government put much effort into promoting these games.

The organizers of the World Nomad Games believed that the project made a huge positive advertisement of the country. Askhat Akibaev, one of organizers stated that "Most of tourists recognized the country not by its name, but by Nomad games. If in 2011-2012 number of international tourists who visited Kyrgyzstan were 2.2 million people, in 2016 it made 4.2 million. Huge revenues in tourism mostly were achieved due to nomad Games."[186] In a similar way, the interviewed members of the Secretariat noted that the WNG made Kyrgyzstan associated with the games, but not other negative things.[187] A research featured in one of media outlets in 2018 also confirmed that Kyrgyzstan's country image had significantly improved since the first WNG in 2014. As the piece noted between 2011-2013 among analyzed 368 foreign articles about Kyrgyzstan 75% were negative in their content, while only 8% were in positive mood. However after the WNG, between 2014-2016 the number of positive articles about Kyrgyzstan increased for 29% and the number of negative articles decreased to 51%.[188]

Apart from securing Atambaev's power stability and improvement of the country image as argued in this chapter, the WNG had also a nation-building component as they shaped idea about what is to be a real Kyrgyz nomad through the traditional sport and games, about which I elaborate more in the next chapter.

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[186] Azattyk: Стали ли Игры кочевников брендом Кыргызстана? [Whether nomad Games became Kyrgyzstan's brand?], 5 July 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-nomad-games-brand/29339911.html (accessed 21 January 2021).

[187] Interview with the head of the WNG Secretariat, Adenov Nursultan, January 17 2021; Interview with the specialist of the WNG Secretariat, Nadyrbekov Souzbek, February 5 2021.

[188] Azattyk: Как кыргызстанские и мировые СМИ освещали Игры кочевников [How did Kyrgyz and international media cover Nomad Games], 4 October 2018, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-nomad-games/29524673.html (accessed 21 January 2021).

CHAPTER 7: THE WORLD NOMAD GAMES AND UNINTENDED/INDIRECT NATION-BUILDING IN KYRGYZSTAN

> "I just cannot forget how we rushed to Kyrchyn to witness the cultural programmes. You had to see it. Yurts, amazing nature … and the scale…"[189]

In this chapter I argue that mega-project of the World Nomad Games indirectly contributed to the formation of the national identity or led to a process of unintended nation-building which is the study's central argument. The unintended nation-building aspect of these mega-projects is illustrated in the thesis based on a field data collected between December-2020 and July-2022 about the impact of the World Nomad Games on fostering national identity at societal and individual levels. As the chapter demonstrates following the WNGs national identity was developed through the development of national sport and national fashion.

The main question this chapter addresses is: *What were societal effects of these mega-projects (namely of the World Nomad Games)?* To address this question, I examine how the World Nomad Games had contributed to the development of ethno-sports and ethno-fashion among local communities in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, I underline the role of non-state actors – strongmen – magnates, small and medium businessmen and other amateur politicians – in the process of cultivating national identity by promotion of Kok-Boru sports and ethnic fashion domestically and on international level.

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[189] A quote by a professor from Osh State University, coordinator of Osh oblast ethno-design group during the first, the second and the third World Nomad Games (2014, 2016, 2018) and at the 1st National Nomad Games in 2019, interview in March 6 2021.

7.1 Ethno-game Kok-Boru: Kyrgyz Gladiator Games.

7.1.1 Kok-Boru

Kok-Boru is ancient game played by men horse-back in most of Turkic states (see the Photo 2. below). The game's name and rules are different in each country despite they are quite similar. In the ancient times these games were used to train future warriors and to shape their character.[190] *Ulak* is another vernacular name for Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan. In Kok-Boru a team is made up of twelve men above 18 years old. In Kyrgyzstan, there are several local Kok-Boru variations: for instance, in Chui oblast – '*zher ulak*' is popular, where a team consists of only 3-4 men. In Batken oblast locals play '*teke ulak*' and in Jalalabad and Osh oblasts – '*torpok ulak*'.[191] Teke ulak and torpok ulak are also called *alaman ulak* which is an individual rather than a team game.

A modern-day Kok-Boru was standardized by setting common rules and game conditions (such as a weight of a horse, a weight of *ulak[192]*, number of players, introduction of *taikazan[193]* etc.) by famous workers of culture such as Bolot Shamshiev, Temir Duishekeev and Bolot Sherniyazov. They are known as founding fathers of modern Kok-Boru which was presented also at three WNG held in Kyrgyzstan.

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[190] Interview with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas, Muzuratbekov Jyldyzbek, February 25 2021

[191] Ibid.

[192] A beheaded goat with a weight ranging between 25-35.5 kg

[193] A plate where a beheaded goat is thrown for which a team gets a score

Photo 2. A man playing Kok-Boru organized by the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan, December 2020.

Kok-Boru has been also modernized in recent years because of the World Nomad Games. As interviewees noted Kok-Boru was 'reborn' after the launch of the WNGs in Kyrgyzstan (as further discussed in the chapter). The head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas told that Kok-Boru developed because of the competition between teams and between oblasts.[194] As he noted earlier the annual contract paid for best Kok-Boru players was 10-20 thousand KGS. Whereas today the contract paid for the players is worth the of price of one- or two-bedroom flats in Kyrgyzstan. The WNG stimulated modernization and international promotion of Kok-Boru.[195] For instance, in 2016 Kyrgyzstan approved for Kok-Boru using a fake beheaded goat in order to respond to international norms.[196] In 2017, UNESCO included Kok-Boru into the UNESCO's intangible heritage list.[197] After the WNG Kok-Boru became widely known in the west and Asian countries. The membership of the International Federation of Kok-Boru[198] was enlarged after the WNGs by inclusion

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[194] Interviews with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas, the general secretary of the Federation of Kyrgyzstan, two players of 'Kelechek' team (February 2021).

[195] Ibid.

[196] KTRK: Кок-Бору по-современному [Kok-Boru in a modern way], 15 June 2016, http://www.ktrk.kg/ru/music/video/3076 (accessed 26 February 2021).

[197] UNESCO: Kok-Boru, traditional horse game, n.d., https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/kok-boru-traditional-horse-game-01294#identification (accessed 13 January 2021).

[198] Established in 2001 by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

of Russia, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Turkey. Kok-Boru uniforms, various designs of uniforms and special protection accessories also developed after the WNGs.[199] As they informed special locally produced Kok-Boru uniform shops opened in Bishkek. Uniforms also include a special protection hat and special protection items for legs and hands. According to Kok-Boru player from 'Kelechek' team, Baktiyar Taalaibek uulu, average price for the whole Kok-Boru uniform is around 15-20 thousand KGS.[200] In addition mobile plastic taikazan were developed in Kyrgyzstan after the WNGs.[201] As the player noted plastic taikazan are widely used during local Kok-Boru tournaments because they can be easily transported from one field to another.

7.1.2 Public management of Kok-Boru

In 1998 the National Federation of Kok-Boru (further the Federation) was established which set the regulations on when and how national championships of Kok-Boru should be carried out. The Federation is a complex body with own budget and a decision-making board. The Federation is not state body; it is a public foundation registered in the state registry of sports. According to the general secretary of the Federation, Kuvatbek Askarbekov, the Federation is a single public foundation registered in the state registry of sports which makes them almost 'official' body on national Kok-Boru.[202] The decision-making board of the Federation is made of 21 people: The President of the Federation, the chief judge of the Federation, heads of regional federations (seven oblasts, Osh City and Bishkek city), heads of the higher league teams (six teams), three vice-presidents of the Federation, chief trainer of the national Kok-Boru team of the Federation and the representative of the Directorate on National kinds of sports of Kyrgyzstan.

The Federation develops annual calendar plan with game dates, dates of teams' selection and other important dates. The plan is adopted by the State Directorate on national sports of the Kyrgyz Republic. For example, the calendar plan for 2021 consists of two seminars in February and July 2021 to prepare judges for international judging by learning English and Turkish terms (as part of preparation for the fourth WNG in Turkey in 2021); holding of international tournament dedicated to the memory of Bolot Shamshiev, Temir

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[199] Interviews with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas, the general secretary of the Federation of Kyrgyzstan, two players of 'Kelechek' team.
[200] Interview with Kok-Boru player from 'Kelechek' team, Taalaibek uulu Baktiyar, February 25 2021
[201] Ibid.
[202] Interview with the general secretary of the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan, Askarbekov Kuvatbek, February 26 2021

Duishekeev, Bolot Sherniyazov – the founding fathers of modern Kok-Boru – on Nooruz holiday in Cholpon-Ata (to be held on 21 March 2021); match game in Uzbekistan in April 2021; match game in Tajikistan in April 2021; a trip in June 2021 to the USA to open official Kok-Boru federations and to train the US team on Kok-Boru (as part of preparation for the fourth WNG in Turkey in 2021); tournament dedicated to the Victory Day (9 May 2021); international tournament in Moscow in July 2021 for the Cup of Chingiz Aitmatov within the framework of the "Russian World" international festival; three-stage selection process of horses and players for the national team in July and August for the fourth WNG; international tournament on the Independence Day for the Cup of the president of the Kyrgyz Republic in Cholpon-Ata on 31 August 2021; participation at the fourth WNG in Turkey (tentative dates September-October 2021); and Youth Kok-Boru Championship in Batken in October 2021.[203] The plan is annually updated and all tournaments are planned in advance with the participation of the Federation. In 2021 the Federation started shooting of a documentary film about Kok-Boru. According to the press service of the Federation the aim of the project is to promote, to preserve and to restore a tradition of Kok-Boru and also to foster patriotism among the youth.[204]

The Federation works closely with the State Directorate on national sports of the Kyrgyz Republic. The latter institution is a regulatory body and is official organizer on behalf of the state. As noted earlier, the Federation is not funded and run by the government. It is funded by only by magnates, small and medium businessmen and other amateurs of the game.[205] The state sponsors only few official tournaments by organizing food and accommodation for players and by providing a prize fund.[206] The general secretary noted Kok-Boru is expensive sports and the state cannot afford its maintenance and development. "We seek for sponsors among businessmen and Kok-Boru devotees to support Kok-Boru teams in Kyrgyzstan. In a team consisting of 12 men there are 12 horses which need to be properly feed. We buy expensive vitamins for horses to keep up them in shape. Prior a tournament we collect and train teams." he said [207] In a similar way, the head of Kok-Boru

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[203] Interview with the general secretary of the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan …

[204] 24 KG: Shooting of a film about national Kok-Boru game starts in Kyrgyzstan, July 15 2021, https://24.kg/english/201301_Shooting_of_film_about_national_kok-boru_game_starts_in_Kyrgyzstan/ (accessed 21 September 2021).

[205] Ibid.

[206] Ibid.

[207] Ibid.

federation in Talas, Muzuratbekov Jyldyzbek told that there is no support from the state to develop Kok-Boru:

"Today Kok-Boru is on its rise. The state does not allocate sufficient means to develop Kok-Boru. We do not feel enough support from the state. The ones who carry on Kok-Boru are young businessmen, Kok-Boru amateurs and devotees. Let me give you a simple example. Last year Talas oblast Kok-Boru team spent 750 thousand KGS for the participation at the Championship and won only 500 thousand KGS as a prize fund. As you might have noticed we usually spend financially more than gain. Therefore, we would wish a prize fund to be more than the expenses spent so the boys in the team would also profit."[208]

Finally, both of the interviewees mentioned that there are no good hippodromes to play Kok-Boru. The head of Kok-Boru federation in Talas wished that it would be wonderful if a modern Coliseum-style hippodrome was built in Bishkek:

"There is a tremendous energy and spirit to play and to develop Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan. We have a lot of teams in Kyrgyzstan and we have the best horses. Kyrgyzstani Kok-Boru players are the best in Central Asia and the world. Unfortunately, there are no good fields (hippodromes) to practice and play KokBoru. Ak-Kula hippodrome in Bishkek is in accidental condition and, therefore, is no longer allowed for use. The newly built hippodrome in Cholpon-Ata for the World Nomad Games are not best suited for Kok-Boru. There are outdated Soviet hippodromes in Talas, Jalalabad and Osh. In Batken recently a new hippodrome was built. But all of them are not best suited for spectators to watch Kok-Boru. We need a big central hippodrome in Bishkek in a Coliseum-style, so that spectators could observe games from above and have a better view. Kok-Boru is a picturesque and spectacular game. Spectators should enjoy it. Kok-Boru can be compared to the Gladiator Games in the ancient Rome."[209]

7.1.3 Strongmen and community-based Kok-Boru

Kok-Boru is supported by community members, mainly by strongmen. The Kyrgyz state does not substantially assist to maintain and develop this ethno-sport because of lack of finances. Kok-Boru is played on national level only several times. The government

[208] Interview with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas …
[209] Interview with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas …

organizes four national Kok-Boru games each year: a game dedicated to Nooruz holiday on the 21st of March, a game dedicated to the Victory Day on the 9th of May, The Kyrgyz Republic President's Cup, and the national Championship. The government prepares prize fund for each of these games. Teams from each oblast arrive to Cholpon-Ata and Bishkek to participate in these tournaments. The state, according to Kok-Boru players is present only symbolically through its Kok-Boru tournaments by issuing certificates and prizes.[210] The state-led tournaments are dedicated to national holidays in Kyrgyzstan, and the President's Cup is mainly a modern invented ritual to strengthen the institute of the president.

It is usually a group of strongmen who support Kok-Boru (referred by Kok-Boru players also as sponsors). Strongmen or sponsors are local businessmen, members of the national parliament, and other 'big'(wealthy) men. As noted by the interviewed Kok-Boru player, these 'big' men launch Kok-Boru teams, finance teams, buy horses, hold competitions and issue prizes for winners.[211] In case if a team does not succeed to find own strongmen they are usually forced to close. For instance, a team called "Kelechek" fall apart in 2020. "Kelechek" fell apart because of lack of sponsors. The local government, the federation and the players of the team themselves could not find sponsors to sustain as a team. In the end the team was forced to close. Currently the Kok-Boru players from Kelechek team are looking for other opportunities in other teams. During the tournaments too sponsors provide support with transportation, accommodation and meals of the participants and their horses. The Federation on the other side supports the state's games and provides financial assistance to Kok-Boru teams taking part in competitions.

As the interviewed respondents stated strongmen also participate in maintenance and development of Kok-Boru on local, national and international levels. Kok-Boru is supported by strongmen, such as business or political elites who usually rise from either private or state resources. Kyrgyz strongmen are in between the state and the society; in other words, the boundaries between politicians and businessmen are blurry. Johan Engvall defined the logics of the Kyrgyz politics as "investment market" (2016: 23). He wrote:

> "Investing in public office in Kyrgyzstan should be understood as being grounded in rational calculations of expectations of making a return on the initial investment. It is essentially similar to an investment on financial markets or the real estate market. …

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[210] Interviews with Kok-Boru players, Talas, January 2021
[211] Interview with Kok-Boru player from 'Kelechek' team …

In this state, office-holding is not primarily a public vocation, nor is it a right granted solely due to clear patrimonial reasons, but an investment made for the purpose of making immediate profit. In the process, public goods become privatized at the expense of the state budget." (ibid.: 24)

For instance, the Kyrgyz MPs are the common example of 'investments'. Elected deputies are rich businessmen or elites who had enriched themselves from the state resources (see Engvall 2016, 2022). Like nomadic *bais* (the wealthy) in the past, these elites turn their assets into various property while horse-breeding is one of the most luxurious. In the past *bais* had hundreds or thousands of domestic livestock including horses. Obsession of the Kyrgyz politicians with horse-breeding could be explained with this nomadic memory. Another reason why strongmen support Kok-Boru is because nowadays politicians prefer to breed horses as their hobbies.[212] A prominent example of a strongmen who kept horses back in 2012 was Omurbek Babanov, ex-prime-minister. According to media sources, horse-breeding is his hobby and he breeds expensive stallions in his stable.[213]

Apart from strongmen, ordinary citizens within communities also maintain Kok-Boru traditions. This usually takes a form of *alaman ulak* hosted on the occasion of private ceremonies, such as birth of a child, jubelees and other occasions. As noted earlier there are local Kok-Boru variations such as *alaman ulak*, *zher ulak*, *torpok ulak* and *teke ulak*. These games are held regularly by local residents on the occasions of various feasts or *toi*[214]. Usually every week from autumn to summer local people hold Kok-Boru tournament as part of *tois*. They put as a main prize the following items: cars, horses, cows, gold or cash. Local Kok-Borus attract many volunteers from neighbouring communities who fight for main prizes in small teams or individually. In one village-level *ulak* an average number of horseback men involved is 500 people (from each village around 30-40 players arrive).[215] In rayon-level or oblast-level *ulaks* number of horseback players clearly exceeds 1,000 people. For example, in a village called Kyzyl-Too in Ozgon rayon on average five or six zher ulak, torpok ulak or teke ulak are held annually.[216] As Islam clarified, nowadays number of local Kok-Borus in their village had declined. However, in Kyrgyzstan Kok-

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[212] Interview with Kok-Boru player, anonymous, July 2022, Osh.

[213] Azattyk: "Лошадиный скандал" вызвал политический кризис [A horse conflict resulted in a political crisis], 20 August 2012, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan_babano_horse/24682483.html (accessed 4 June 2022).

[214] Toi is a Kyrgyz word for feast. Tois are given on the occasion of building a house (ui toi), marriage (uilonuu toi), birth of a child (beshik toi), birth of a baby-boy (uul toi), etc.

[215] Interview with Islam, Kok-Boru player from Ozgon, February 26 2021

[216] Ibid.

Boru is organized by locals for every occasions. In general Islam was concerned with the rise of local Kok-Borus in the country, as he said "they become frequent but their quality is poor".[217] Kok-Boru players prefer to participate in Kok-Borus held by strongmen because their prizes are bigger. Among strongmen who hold Kok-Boru are members of the national parliament, governors, and other high-ranking state officials.[218] According to Kok-Boru player from Ozgon, high-ranking state officials usually hold Kok-Boru to commemorate their parents (usually fathers).[219]

According to the Kok-Boru players in Nookat *ulaks* are held in their region very often.[220] Azamat and his friends had recently played alaman ulak in mountains (see Photo 3). They told that, the game was organized by their neighbor on the occasion of feast celebrate his new house.[221]

Photo 3. Men playing alaman ulak in mountains of Nookat region for the occasion of a private ceremony, Kyrgyzstan, July 2022. Source: the author.

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[217] Ibid.

[218] Interviews with three Kok-Boru players, February 2021

[219] Interview with Islam, Kok-Boru player from Ozgon, February 26 2021

[220] Interview with three Kok-Boru player from Nookat, July 2022

[221] Interview with Azamat, Kok-Boru player from Nookat, July 2022

7.1.4 The World Nomad Games and Kok-Boru

There is a prominent Kyrgyz folk saying about Kok-Boru: "Babadan kalgan Kok-Boru baatyrlardyn mekeni" which literally means that heroes and strong warriors are there where Kok-Boru is. If in the past Kok-Boru was a national game which trained men to guard its nation, today Kok-Boru fosters national identity and instils patriotism among many. Nowadays, Kok-Boru became a famous and popular than any time before, although it was very popular earlier too.[222]

The interviewed respondents (Kok-Boru players, Kok-Boru federation representatives and high-level officials) noted that this ethno-sport game became very popular after the WNGs. Before Kok-Boru was mainly played in rural areas predominantly by rural youth, today however Kok-Boru's fans are urban youth too. Nowadays Kok-Boru is played on weekends and on occasions of holidays. Today there are about twenty KokBoru teams in Kyrgyzstan. The World Nomad Games served as a domestic and international advertiser of Kok-Boru because of very spectacular and exciting games demonstrated during the WNGs. During the WNGs this reindeer game matches were at the epicentre of public attention. In particular, the matches between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were compared to football's *El Clasico* meets between Real Madrid and Barcelona football clubs.

Kyrgyz Kok-Boru teams and some of players became famous after the WNGs. They opened own social media channels, such as Instagram pages, Telegram channels and official WhatsApp numbers. For example, the team called 'Yntymak' – one of three strongest teams in Kyrgyzstan, a three times winner of the WNGs and a six times winner of the President's Cup – on its official Instagram page has more than 76 thousand followers.[223] It has also a fan account with more than 80 thousand followers.[224] Chui based Kok-Boru team called 'Sary Ozon', has more than 87 thousand followers on its Instagram page.[225] Another famous team called 'Dostuk' has almost 32 thousand followers on its official Instagram page[226], while its fan account page has more than 78 thousand followers.[227] These teams share with their followers the latest developments within their teams, update about scheduled game dates, share nice photos and videos of their matches,

[222] Interviews with three Kok-Boru players, February 2021
[223] See https://www.instagram.com/kokboru_yntymak/?hl=ru
[224] See https://www.instagram.com/talas_yntymak_bakubat/?hl=ru
[225] See https://www.instagram.com/kokboru_sary_ozon/?hl=ru
[226] See https://www.instagram.com/kokboru_dostuk.official/?hl=ru
[227] See https://www.instagram.com/fanclub_dostuk/?hl=ru

inform about Kok-Boru related news and post commercial advertisements. In a similar way, the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan runs own social media pages. The Federation has Instagram page with more than 28 thousand followers, YouTube channel with almost 16 thousand followers and Twitter account. As the general secretary of the Federation acknowledged they launched their social media pages in 2014 on the eve of the first World Nomad Games in 2014 in order to get more visibility and popularize Kok-Boru not only in Kyrgyzstan but also internationally.[228]

The WNGs were a key turning point in the promotion and popularization of Kok-Boru locally and internationally. As was noted by the head of the Confederation of KokBoru in Talas during the interview, these days Kok-Boru is flourishing in the country: "Young people are very fond of this game not only in the rural areas as it was before. Following the WNG Kok-Boru became popular nation-wide and on international level. In urban areas young people come to watch Kok-Boru and they also play it."[229] According to Kok-Boru player, the game has been developing for the last five-six years.[230] As he continued, earlier Kok-Boru was played primarily in rural areas, such as Chui and Yssyk-kol oblasts: "Today Kok-Boru is played nation-wide. It became an admired game. Urban youth also is fond of this game very much. The population in general watches Kok-Boru with great interest. Young people became interested in Kok-Boru after the WNGs."[231]

The head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas also noticed that during the last year number of young people who are taking part at the regional competitions is increasing.[232] As he explained each year the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas selects best horses and best players. To do so they annually hold several levels competitions in Talas. The first level competition is held on the level of ayil okmotus. The second one is held on the level of rayon, and finally, the third one is oblast-level competition, where the best Kok-Boru players from the entire oblast demonstrate their skills. He noted the improvement of national timing record in throwing ulak into taikazan. Earlier the record was – 24 seconds, while today – the record time is 11 seconds. The record time has improved because of a better performance of Kok-Boru players and also because of breeding of the best breed horses. As he acknowledged there were pure lineages of famous horses such as

[228] Interview with the general secretary of the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan …
[229] Interview with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas …
[230] Interview with Kok-Boru player from 'Kelechek' team, Taalaibek uulu Baktiyar, February 25 2021
[231] Ibid.
[232] Interview with the head of the federation of Kok-Boru in Talas …

Mr Prospector, one of Mr Prospector's Kyrgyz lineage horses playing Kok-Boru is called Kakhraman.

According to the former Minister of culture, information and tourism of Kyrgyzstan, Zhamankulov Azamat, after the WNG interest to Kok-Boru had dramatically increased: "Kok-Boru had drawn attention of many after the games. Kok-Boru started to be played in leagues-format like in football. In villages even little school children play Kok-Boru because they were very much impressed by the games performed at the WNGs. Kok-Boru also became more known internationally. Other countries like Turkmenistan, Iran and the United States became interested in it." [233] After the first WNGs American sportsmen decided to learn how to play Kok-Boru. "Everything in my life was totally rinsed away and all I could think about was Kok-Boru" said one of American Kok-Boru players.[234] In 2016 and 2018 the American team of cowboys from Wyoming played Kok-Boru at the nomadic games.[235] In 2017 the American Kok-Boru team established the first in the history US Kok-Boru Federation in order to promote it in the USA.[236] Similar federations run and operate in other states too, namely Russia and Hungary. Ideas about the establishment of Kok-Boru federations in other countries was suggested by the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan, a leading body in Kok-Boru promotion during international meetings.[237]

Similarly, the general secretary of the Federation, stressed that Kok-Boru got a new impulse from the WNGs: "Number of Kok-Boru followers had increased, especially among the youth. Urban citizens also became interested and watch Kok-Boru. On the international level it also became famous due to the World Nomad Games."[238] A musician from Osh who played a komuz melody *mashbotoi* during the opening ceremony of the second WNG also noted during the interview that after the WNG citizens started valuing more Kyrgyz traditions, sports and culture.[239] As an example he mentioned Kok-Boru ethno-game. He admitted that this game became increasingly popular not only locally but also

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[233] Interview with the former Minister of culture, information and tourism of Kyrgyzstan, Zhamankulov Azamat, February 25 2021

[234] USEmbassyBishkek: The U.S. Kok-Boru Team thanks the Kyrgyz Republic for its warm welcome!, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVKnYB8bf4I (accessed 21 September 2021).

[235] The Diplomat: American Cowboys in Kyrgyzstan, 7 September 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/american-cowboys-in-kyrgyzstan/ (accessed 21 September 2021).

[236] After the third WNGs the American team invited a prominent Kyrgyz Kok-Boru player Manas Niyazov to train them in the USA.

[237] Interview with the general secretary of the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan …

[238] Interview with the general secretary of the Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan …

[239] Interview with the head of the Osh-based folklore troupe "Saltanat", Zhumabaev Bakai, February 15 2021.

internationally. He mentioned as an achievement that one of Kok-Boru players Manas Nyiazov who was invited to the USA to train the US team on Kok-Boru. Finally, the representative from the WNG Secretariat said that: "Afterward the WNG Kok-Boru became very popular. Annually a national championship on Kok-Boru is held. Special infrastructures for games had appeared in each oblast. Kok-Boru became a pure local game because it had dissolved among the nation."[240]

Kyrgyz pop-singers and filmmakers were in a similar way impacted by rise of the Kok-Boru game. For example, in 2019 a young filmmaker Ruslan Akun and a producer Aibashov Nurbek shoot a movie in Russian called "Kok-Boru (Vremya stoikikh)"[241] which became a favorite film not only of Kyrgyzstanis but other Central Asian states, in particular Kazakhstan. The movie was filmed by the private company without any support from the state. After its official premiere at Youtube the film was watched more than 5 million times and got more than 13 thousand positive comments.[242] The film narrates about modern young men who plays Kok-Boru and deals with a notorious group of sportsmen. The film in general promotes this traditional game, and it was shoot in sports facilities (hippodromes) built or refurbished for the World Nomad Games in Yssyk-Kol. According to Ruslan Akun the WNGs was very popular and they wanted to make a movie related to this game.[243] When he visited the hippodrome in Cholpon-Ata he saw a lot of Kok-Boru fans and realized that there is a need to film a movie about this game. During the interview Akun also recalled that he had a meeting with very influential people (i.e. strongmen) who asked him why had not he filmed yet a movie about Kok-Boru. The main idea of the movie was to document the authentic Kyrgyz way of playing Kok-Boru. He said that due to international pressures countries like Kazakhstan had to play with a fake goat:

> "We realized that Kyrgyzstan too in the near future might be forced to play according to new international rules, such as using fake goats and playing without taikazans. Therefore, we wanted to document Kok-Boru game as it is played today and it was played in the past – with a real goat and taikazans. In the future, if the rules will change, the movie will be valuable as a piece of history of the authentic Kok-Boru."[244]

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[240] Interview with the specialist of the WNG Secretariat, Nadyrbekov Souzbek, February 5 2021.

[241] In English: "Kok-Boru (A time of strong)"

[242] To access the film on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pERDMQVp9Ns

[243] Interview with Ruslan Akun, May 2021

[244] Ibid.

Several pop-songs were also released following the Nomad Games by famous young Kyrgyz singers such as Kairat Primberdiev[245], Kylych Edik[246], Kural Chokoev[247] and others. These songs appeared between 2016 and 2019.

7.2 Contemporary ethno-fashion and Kyrgyz national dressing trends
7.2.1 Development of domestic ethno-fashion after the World Nomad Games. State and community-based efforts in promotion of national dressing.

During the Soviet era, Kyrgyz national clothing was nearly forgotten in everyday life and was not worn by the Soviet Kyrgyz. The traditional clothing was widely perceived as an artistic costume.[248] Instead, they preferred Soviet clothes. As a professor of the Osh State University, adviser to the Minister of culture of Kyrgyzstan and a coordinator of Osh oblast ethno-design group at three WNGs and the National Nomad Games recalled during the interview:

> "In the 70s during the Soviet era when I studied at the university, we decided to work on Kyrgyz national costumes, because we noticed that Kyrgyz people did not wear own national costumes like other Soviet nations. Kyrgyz traditional clothing was perceived as an artistic costume. But Uzbeks wore own *topus[249]*, Ukrainians wore own dresses, Turkmens wore own, only Kyrgyz preferred to wear Soviet wardrobe like hats. Even Kyrgyz living in *zhailoo*– pastures in mountains – wore felt hat instead of kalpak, and wore *fufaika*[250] (in Russian) instead of *chapan*[251]. In the end, we were not allowed to work on Kyrgyz national costumes because they were perceived as a sign of nationalism. Only after the independence traditional clothing could develop."[252]

The modern Kyrgyz ethno-fashion had rapidly developed in the last decades. Especially in 2000s Kyrgyzstan became a leading country among other Central Asian states in fashion industry.[253] "Kyrgyz designers are very talented" and "university courses are also decent" said the founder of "Chapansar" brand.[254] The World Nomad Games opened another page

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[245] To access the song on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eC02k7Yqog8
[246] To access the song on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Dq0RkLlXzQ
[247] To access the song on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpwlCX--dWI
[248] Interview with a fashion-designer, March 2021.
[249] Uzbek traditional headwear, in Russian tubeteika
[250] In English: sweat shirt
[251] A traditional Central Asian coat filled of cotton, among Kyrgyz it is worn by men, women and children
[252] Interview with a professor from Osh State University, coordinator of Osh oblast ethno-design group during three WNGs (held in 2014, 2016 and 2018) and at the 1st National Nomad Games in 2019, March 6 2021.
[253] Interview with the founder of the clothing brand "Chapansar", Sarieva Jumagul, March 3 2021.
[254] Ibid.

of ethno-fashion history in the country through encouragement of Kyrgyz ethno-fashion design and advertisement of ethno-tailoring to the world she believes. The professor from Osh State University also agreed that due to the Nomad Games national culture had revived and developed, she noted that:

"After the WNGs ethno-fashion had developed, people started wearing a traditional outfit like chapan, chepken[255] and others. Women even started to sew themselves traditional clothing, I was surprised to see it in Leilek during my business trip there. Therefore, I think that the Nomad Games is the most important page and unique epoch in the history of culture of the Kyrgyz Republic, not only in the history of development of ethno-design. It is not comparable to other events held after the independence in its mass performance, scale and richness. It was held in a spirit of competition where each team were motivated to get the first place. I was a participant of three World Nomad Games and a national nomad games held in 2019. For example, in 2014, I presented own collection from Sary-Mogol and Chon Alai which included old traditional clothing for men, women and children and also modern clothing with ethno-elements. I was assigned by the Osh City Mayor's Office as the coordinator of a group of ethno-designers from the south for the World Nomad Games. We had displayed more than 100 pieces of ancient traditional clothing, among them there was even a coat of snow leo. We received the first place for our collections at all three Nomad Games, and got the first place at the national nomad games."[256]

The WNG was a unique project implemented by the government because using less expenses the country could attract enormous international attention.[257] The university professor also noted that today as a result of the WNGs nomadism and nomads are immediately associated with Kyrgyz.[258] She cited the article written by Kazakhs who wrote that Kazakhs were real nomads but not Kyrgyz because the latter only moved from one mountain to another. The article claimed that Kazakhs were real nomads because they galloped in the vast steppes. "Nevertheless, after the World Nomad Games the world immediately associates Kyrgyz with nomads and Kyrgyzstan with a nomadland," she said with pride.[259] The WNGs could attract many tourists from Europe and Asia who were

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[255] A traditional Central Asian coat filled of cotton, among Kyrgyz it is worn predominantly by men
[256] Interview with a professor from Osh State University …
[257] Interview with the former Minister of culture, information and tourism of Kyrgyzstan, Zhamankulov Azamat, February 25 2021
[258] Interview with a professor from Osh State University …
[259] Ibid.

impressed with the beauty of the Kyrgyz nature and the national ethno-tailoring and ethno-sports believes the former Minister of Culture.[260] Following one-two years after each of WNGs number of tourists was increasing for 10-15%.[261] As the ex-minister noted earlier Kyrgyzstan was perceived as a non-stable and non-secure place to travel, therefore tourists were afraid to travel to Kyrgyzstan. However, the WNGs could exclude these negative associations and gave to the country a new positive, festive and colourful image. This colourful and festive image of Kyrgyzstan was also due to colourful and festive ethno-fashion designs from local designers presented to the international guests. Apart from attracting tourists from abroad, the WNG contributed to the cultural enrichment of the nation: "The WNG made a 'spiritual' or cultural revolution within the nation."[262] Nomad Games essentially contributed to the development of the national culture and served as an event uniting the whole country.[263] As the ex-minister highlighted activity and art of local handicraftsmen, ethno-style designers and carpet-makers had improved very much due to the Nomad Games:

> "Handicraftsmen, carpet-makers and designers working on ethnic motives were reborn as a consequence of the Nomad Games. Several new ethno designs and motives were developed by them in order to take part in the contests organized within the framework of three Nomad Games. For instance, new kinds of boz ui decorations had appeared which were designed based on old nearly forgotten motives which somehow survived in some parts of Kyrgyzstan. In a similar way, other forgotten elements and motives were revived in national costumes, carpets and other national wardrobe and displayed for domestic and international visitors at the Nomad Games."[264]

Special regulations were issued by the WNG Secretariat and the Ministry of culture, information and tourism of the Kyrgyz Republic (further the Ministry of culture) for the participation at the festival-contests within the World Nomad Games between 2014 and 2018. For example, the Regulation of 2016 festival-contest "Nomad Fashion Fest"[265] states that the contest is open for participation for young designers of fashion and accessories (university students), practicing designers and amateurs. The aim of the contest is to support

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[260] Interview with the former Minister of culture …
[261] Ibid.
[262] Interview with the former Minister of culture, information and tourism of Kyrgyzstan …
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.
[265] For more details see the Regulation of the festival-contest "Nomad Fashion Fest 2016" at http://www.worldnomadgames.com/media/images/2016/07/19/nomad-fest2016.pdf

local designers, to identify talented designers, to increase creativity among the youth, and to maintain ethno-style in modern fashion. The prize fund for the best collections in nominations 'Ethno-style', 'Avant-garde' and 'Accessories' were also considered, while the best collections received opportunity to present their collections at the 2016 World Nomad Games fashion festival. I spoke with several "Nomad Fashion Fest" participants in Osh who are students at the Osh State University. They said that these kind of festivals had appeared after the WNGs, before they did not hear anything similar apart from local small exhibitions. As students, they received a valuable experience and met with other international designers. They realized that there was increased interest in ethno-styled garments in domestic and international consumption, which they believed was mainly due to the WNG project.[266]

The Ministry of culture continued its work on promotion of brand of nomadism in Kyrgyzstan after the third WNG. In 2019, the ministry in partnership with local initiative groups organized four-days international festival "Fashion of the nomads" which united various talented designers from 12 countries in Central Asia, Asia and Europe.[267] The participating designers presented their collections in ethno-styles. The festival was planned to be held annually in different regions of Kyrgyzstan starting from 2019. The festival is aimed at promotion of domestic ethno-designers on the international level, development of Kyrgyz brands and international cooperation.

Another international festival called "Oimo" has been co-organized by The Ministry of culture since 2016.[268] The latest one was held in 2019 in three cities: Bishkek, Cholpon-Ata and Osh. The festival was accompanied by exhibitions, master-classes, concerts and fashion-shows. Around 150 artisans from countries such as Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Georgia, Russia and India took part in the festival. The event is aimed at preservation of cultural heritage, development of tourism and formation of a positive international image of Kyrgyzstan.

Local young designers became more confident to take part in international contests and festivals. For instance, in June 2019 several Kyrgyz designers took part in festival of fashion "Ethno-Fashion" held in Russia, St. Petersburg. Two designers received decent

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[266] Group interviews with Osh State University students, young designers, July 2022

[267] KTRK: В Бишкеке прошло официальное открытие фестиваля "Мода кочевников" [Official opening of the festival "Fashion of the nomads" was held in Bishkek], 19 August 2019, http://www.ktrk.kg/ru/news/s/31476 (accessed 1 March 2021).

[268] Sputnik: "Оймо-2016": показ этнической моды, танцы и праздничный парад ["Oimo-2016": ethno-fashion show, dances and festive parade], 30 July 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/photo/20160730/1028281771.html (accessed 1 March 2021).

nominations for their collections: Zholdosheva Sumaya got the second place for her collection titled "Kyrk Kurak" in the nomination "Ethno-motives in the modern fashion", and Smanov Maksat got the first place for his collection "Devil" in the nomination "Avant-garde".[269] Two designers from Kyrgyzstan participated at the international contest "Silk Road Fashion London AW 21/22" held in online format in February 2021 with their collections and received awards. Akmatova Gulmira, owner of the brand "Mountain Cedar Woolens" was nominated in the category "Ethnic in modern life", and Sarieva Jumagul, owner of the brand "Chapansar" received the award for the category "Stylish everyday".[270] In total 14 designers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Europe took part in the contest.

In addition, in the recent year other non-state community-based initiatives and events were held to promote and support national clothing. In 2017 in Bishkek activists held the event dedicated to *elechek*[271] where 1,000 females from different parts of Kyrgyzstan took part.[272] The event was aimed at maintenance of national traditions and promotion of national unity and patriotism. The same year in autumn an initiative group "Oimok Art" with the support of "Ayimdar KG" foundation held a flash-mob in Moscow called "Elechek is walking around the globe" to popularize Kyrgyz culture.[273] In 2019, a photo-exhibition of Kyrgyz national headwear was organized by Sputnik information agency and the public foundation "Kiyiz Duino" which displayed various female, male and children headwear.[274] To end with, the same year another initiative group of activists

[269] Sarafan: Фестиваль этномода IBEFF: как это было [IBEFF ethno-fashion festival: how it was], 15 July 2019, https://sarafanitd.ru/festival-etnomoda-ibeff-kak-eto-bylo/ (accessed 1 March 2021).

[270] For more details about the contest, the participants and their collections visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8127pMV1-w&feature=emb_imp_woyt

[271] A traditional headwear of married women

[272] Sputnik: Праздник элечека с участием 1 000 женщин пройдет в Бишкеке [A fest of elechek with participation of 1000 women will be held in Bishkek], 20 February 2017, https://ru.sputnik.kg/culture/20170220/1031858036/prazdnik-ehlecheka-s-uchastiem-1000-zhenshchin-projdet-v-bishkeke.html (accessed 1 March 2021).

[273] Sputnik: Потрясающие! Впечатления москвичей от кыргызок в национальных костюмах [Astonishing! Impressions of Muscovites about Kyrgyz females in national costumes], 27 October 2017, https://ru.sputnik.kg/video/20171027/1036032540/vpechatleniya-moskvichej-ot-kyrgyzok-v-nacionalnyh-kostyumah.html (accessed 1 March 2021).

[274] Sputnik: Удивительные фотографии украсили площадь Ала-Тоо. Приходите на выставку! [Amazing photographs decorated the Ala-Too square. Come to the exhibition!], 20 March 2019, https://ru.sputnik.kg/society/20190320/1043705126/kyrgyzstan-bishkek-vystavka-fotografii.html?fbclid=IwAR1ZdHWAhTyrtFO-5G9XacEpuDiOx1slKhV50ukXV29D7GaHbUWSxM7PkBM (accessed 1 March 2021).

organized a nation-wide contest in Bishkek titled "40 girls" aimed at preservation of Kyrgyz traditions and clothing.[275]

The project of Nomad Games, in particular, international advertisement of Kyrgyz ethno-tailoring and design through ethno-fashion exhibitions at the WNGs encouraged and motivated activity of various local small and medium businesses and rural groups (networks) of females making ethno-wardrobe. There was no any financial state support to develop and promote ethno-design in the country. The Ministry of culture in partnership with local companies held various festivals after the WNGs. According to the informants the companies usually involve the Ministry in their projects in order to get a wider visibility and acknowledgement. [276]Most of famous clothing brands interviewed told that Kyrgyz ethno-design is developing and surviving in the country due to the efforts of small and medium businesses and amateurs.[277] These brands themselves represent the country at international contests and increase prestige of the country. They do not receive state support to attend these contests. Below, I pause on community-based and private examples of works on traditional sewing in Kyrgyzstan. I start with a rural project funded by international organizations and end with popular ethno-brands.

7.2.1.1 By Alay brand (a community-based rural project)

The project "By Alay" was launched in 2018 in Alai and Chon Alai region under the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Earlier, between 2012 and 2018, a similar project called "Small and Medium Enterprises Development in Alai and Chon Alai" was also realized in these communities. The project was implemented in these regions because most of handicrafts and ethno-designing traditions are preserved there. The project "By Alay" has been supporting development of rural female designers from three ayil okmotus of Chon Alai region and six ayil okmotus of Alai region, namely assisted with the development of brand "By Alay". In total, 300 women were trained under the project. Special training programmes were conducted by the representatives of famous clothing brands in Bishkek and other parts of Kyrgyzstan in order to improve quality and technology of clothing and household items produced by women from Alai and Chon Alai. This network had improved their designs according to contemporary trends and needs. The

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[275] Sputnik: Они красивы и без косметики [They are beautiful also without a makeup], 12 March 2019, https://ru.sputnik.kg/photo/20190312/1043636886/kyrgyzstan-devushki-konkurs-krasota.html (accessed 1 March 2021).

[276] Interviews with three clothing brands in Kyrgyzstan, March 2021

[277] Interviews with three clothing brands in Kyrgyzstan, March 2021

project co-financed participation of rural women in various exhibitions within Kyrgyzstan. These women consult with older generation representatives in designing items in order to preserve traditions. They use old items as examples and also consult internet in order to keep their items modern. Women successfully developed own brand "By Alay" and sell their products in a special store in Osh City, they also ship them to Europe and other destinations (see the Photo 4).

Photo 4. A shop run by "By Alay" network in Osh. Source: the author.

Bualima eje[278] from Chon Alai, is one of beneficiaries of this project. She works in Chon Alai to preserve unique handmade Kyrgyz national carpets. She is one of female designers working together in a community-based network of designers from Chon Alai and Alai regions of Osh oblast. Bualima eje participated in all three World Nomad Games and she was also present at the first national nomad games held in 2019 in Talas. She won several prizes for her works. According to her the WNG served as an opportunity to present works of rural designers like her for domestic and international guests. Most of designers

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[278] In Kyrgyz addressing format to elder women

performing at the Nomad Games were able to sell their products, to establish contacts and meet designers from other parts of Kyrgyzstan.[279] However, she thinks that in general the state does not support enough designers working on preservation of national culture. She also noted that ethno-fashion and ethno-industry in Kyrgyzstan was developing primarily due to hard work and efforts of local designers – private entrepreneurs, small and big businesses, etc. or due to support from international projects. To cite her:

> "Private entrepreneurs and rural women groups of designers work hard to preserve national motives and elements in clothing and household items. Unfortunately, the government does not have money to support us. We work together as a community-based group of 150 rural females from Chon Alai and Alai regions. There are young girls, women and elder women. We became a large network due to efforts of the international project we are all part of. We were lucky that were supported by this project, because we were trained how to develop our own brand. There are very rare elements of ethno-design which survived in Chon Alay, for instance clothing patterns which do not exist in other parts of Kyrgyzstan. So, we try to preserve this culture. We make clothing and household items from pure natural and ecologically sustainable materials, such as camel's felt, cotton, silk and others. We sew headwear, shoes, carpets, dresses and other clothes."[280]

Zhibek eje, a coordinator of a group of designers in Chon Alai shared similar views during the interview.[281] The state does not support rural designers and handicraftsmen confessed she. The local government would not help her if she would go there she said. They seek for help from other non-state sources. For example, they turn to local hostels or hotels and ask them to sell their products for visitors. They look for international aid programs. As Zhibek eje confessed the project "By Alay" opened her eyes and helped to organize and launch own brand. She said that earlier women who sew traditional wardrobe and household items could just give their works as presents to guests coming from other regions of Kyrgyzstan or other countries, whereas now they value own work, they value own time spent on sewing and sell them. She confessed that local ethno-designers need a support from the state in order to preserve and to revive national culture. They feel very much thankful to the international project and wish there would be more similar projects.

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[279] Interview with Bualima eje, a carpet designer from Chon Alai, March 2 2021.
[280] Ibid.
[281] Interview with Zhibek eje, a coordinator of a group of designers from Chon Alai, March 2 2021.

In addition to "By Alay" project, there are other similar international projects implemented in Kyrgyzstan which work with rural communities. For instance, the United Nations Organization's programme in Kyrgyzstan has been supporting since 2014 local communities from five oblasts.[282] Under the framework of the project, twenty residents of Sary-Kamysh village of Karakulja region were trained how to sell own products via Internet. The project also taught to sew traditional outfits and household items for amateurs.

7.2.1.2 Chapansar brand

Chapansar brand[283] is a famous Kyrgyz brand of modern *chapan* which is designed for women, men and children. The brand was established in 2011 by Sarieva Jumagul. The brand was officially presented to the public in 2012 with its first collection of 70 chapans. Since then the brand is participating in different regional and international exhibitions. In 2013 they won a grand prize in Moscow. In 2021 they were also nominated at the prestigious international contest. As the founder of the brand told during the interview, her main idea behind popularization of chapan was a preservation of old traditions and techniques of making chapan:

> "My childhood shaped my special love to chapans. It was a very practical item in the life of a nomad. It was multifunctional. A huge philosophy lays behind Kyrgyz traditional clothing which nowadays are forgotten. I grew up with chapan, while contemporary youth even did not see chapan in their childhood. Therefore, I wanted to preserve and revive this traditional clothing by modernizing it and adapting it into modern way of living. For example, we do not ride on a horses that often, instead we drive cars, therefore the length of chapan became shorter. Modern chapans are convenient for use."[284]

The designer within a very short time could make Kyrgyzstanis to wear back their traditional clothing – chapan. Today chapan became a must-have outfit in a wardrobe of a modern urban women and men.[285]

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[282] Azattyk: В Оше народные умельцы учатся продавать свои изделия через Интернет [In Osh folk designers learn how to sell own products through internet], 24 December 2019, https://rus.azattyk.org/a/v-oshe-narodnye-umelcy-uchatsa-prodavat-svoi-izdelia-cherez-internet/30339758.html (accessed 4 March 2021).

[283] To see examples of modern chapans visit the official Instagram page at https://www.instagram.com/chapansar/?hl=ru

[284] Interview with the founder of the clothing brand "Chapansar", Sarieva Jumagul, March 3 2021.

[285] 24 Kg: Как простая женщина превратила чапан в модную одежду [How an ordinary woman could transfer chapan into a modern outfit], 23 December 2018,

Sarieva told that she designs her chapans based on lessons she took from her mother and believes that bigger efforts are needed also from the government in order to maintain and revive traditional clothing of the past. Currently they receive no support from the state. Important domestic fashion shows, such as Fashion Week are conducted with the support of private sector only. The state organization called "Legprom" (a Russian abbreviation for Light Industry) in the past was initiator of fashion show, but again their support to brands like Chapansar is missing. "The state is not interested to support us"[286] she said. She recalled a story. She told that the Russian representative of "Legprom" wrote a letter to the Ministry of economy of Kyrgyzstan to note a special contribution of Ms. Sarieva in development of the Kyrgyz ethno-design and ethno-fashion. However, upon her arrival to Kyrgyzstan she did not get attention from the state she expected to receive. Sarieva later suggested to the government to jointly work on development and revival of chapans however her suggestion was ignored by the state. Despite it, Sarieva continues to support the state and represents the country in international festivals and contests. In 2016 her company developed a special collection of chapans for the second World Nomad Games. Chapansar made around 1,000 pieces of chapans for the participants of the Nomad Games – the Kyrgyz national teams of sportsmen, dancers and other performers performing at the opening and the closing ceremonies of the WNG. Chapansar's chapans were also worn by the President's security team during the WNG. These collections were designed by Sarieva and the representatives of the National Sports Committee. The President's Apparatus chose the colours of fabrics to be used for costumes. According to her, most of these chapans were re-worn by sportsmen, dancers and other performers during the third WNG in 2018.

7.2.1.3 DILBAR brand

DILBAR is the first and only "couture" brand which was established in 2004 by Ashimbaeva Dilbar. DILBAR produces high-quality products exclusively from natural materials. The brand produces clothing and accessories which combine both ancient traditions of Central Asia and modern fashion trends. The company has been representing the country in different prestigious contests, exhibitions and fashion shows. The brand DILBAR took part in design and tailoring of national costumes for parade walk of Kyrgyz

https://24.kg/obschestvo/104677_kak_prostaya_jenschina_prevratila_chapan_vmodnuyu_odejdu/ (accessed 3 March 2021).
[286] Ibid.

sportsmen abroad at international Olympics, traditional costumes for domestic cinematography, traditional costumes for Kyrgyz theatres, bally and opera. Currently around 300 women are employed at DILBAR. The brand also funds and implements social projects which support motherhood, children, ecology, medicine and art. In a similar way, the brand does not receive state support, however it participates in state tenders to provide national teams with costumes.

7.2.1.4 Sherden brand

Sherden brand was established in 2013 when Mirrakhim Oposh presented his first collection of men clothing. The founder of the brand, Mr. Oposh had presented his works at several international exhibitions in Central Asia, Hungary, India and other destinations. Sherden is a brand designed for both domestic and international consumers. His garments are practical at the same time they express Kyrgyz identity and culture. According to him, the World Nomad Games had contributed to the rapid development of the fashion industry by increasing interest into nomadic culture and garments.[287] His items are currently popular both among foreign tourists and locals. Although he noted that among his local consumers are those who had been abroad or live abroad. Similar to other designers, he noted that fashion industry is not supported by the state; it is run my individuals and brand founders. For instance, Mr. Oposh with his colleagues had established a special organization called "Fashion Industry" in order to organize fashion shows in Kyrgyzstan. Today "Fashion Industry" international events like Burana International Fashion Week (which is held twice a year) and the World Nomad Fashion in Kyrgyzstan (which was initiated after the WNGs). According to him at the local fashion weeks there are increasing number of students-designers who present their works in ethno-motives. He believes that garments in ethno-style are popular nowadays in contrast with the past when the traditional clothing or clothes in ethno-motives were worn only during national holidays such as Nooruz or during other private ceremonies, such as weddings or funerals.

7.2.2 Contemporary dressing ethno-trends

The World Nomad Games contributed to a popularization of national clothing among Kyrgyzstanis. According to Bualima eje, a designer from Chon Alai, Kyrgyz youth,

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[287] Interview with Mirrakhim Oposh, March 2021.

especially girls became very interested in national clothing.[288] She noticed that Kyrgyz national clothing, such as *kep takyia*[289], *beldemchi*[290], *kemsel*[291] became popular among modern Kyrgyz girls. As Sarieva recalled, her chapans became popular among youth after 2014.[292] She although does not think that chapans popularity has to do something with the WNG. Sarieva believes that chapan was always popular in rural areas, and following the Games most of Kyrgyzstanis liked chapans because they were demonstrated during this international event. If earlier only foreigners or domestic singers were interested in chapans, today many urban young women and men visit her office in order to order own unique chapans.

A young designer and a founder of the brand "Sherden" Mirrakhim Oposh also told during his interview to the state Kyrgyz channel in March 2020 that currently ethno-design combined in modern style is very popular in Kyrgyzstan among young people.[293] As he noted young people prefer ethno-design because they are aesthetically beautiful, comfortable and made of pure organic materials and create a unique individual image. He said that his clients wear his clothes with a pride, while foreign tourists find them very exotic.

Zhibek eje, a coordinator of a group of designers in Chon Alai in "By Alay" project told that ethno-designing has been reviving rapidly since the last three years.[294] Earlier these traditions were fading away she told. Nowadays traditional sewing became demanded in the Kyrgyz society. Most people understood that traditional wardrobe and household items made of wool, felt, silk or cotton are not harmful for health and sustainable. They understood that it is better to use natural traditional carpets, for instance, than Chinese ones which are not good for health and for the environment.

A university teacher of ethno-design in Osh, Tolgonai noted that after the Nomad Games clothes in ethno-style became in demand among citizens.[295] In Osh, for example, she mentioned that shopper bags which apply ethno-elements such as *kurak*[296] and national ornaments are popular. In addition to clothes, accessories (bags, earrings, necklaces, etc.)

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[288] Interview with Bualima eje, a carpet designer from Chon Alai, March 2 2021.
[289] A traditional headwear of young unmarried women
[290] A traditional skirt of married women
[291] A traditional jacket without sleeves for men and women
[292] Interview with the founder of the clothing brand "Chapansar", Sarieva Jumagul, March 3 2021.
[293] To access the interview visit: https://www.facebook.com/KTRKkg/videos/2222698934704151
[294] Interview with Zhibek eje, a coordinator of a group of designers from Chon Alai, March 2 2021.
[295] Interview with Tolgonai, a university teacher in Osh, February 26 2021.
[296] Kurak is a Kyrgyz traditional patchwork

in ethno-style became popular among youth. She believes that due to the WNGs outfits in ethno-style became popular not only in Kyrgyzstan but also in international level. According to her ethno-design, design and reconstruction of traditional old clothing as university disciplines became widespread among contemporary students in Osh. Year by year number of students enrolling to these disciplines is increasing because young people became interested in modern and traditional tailoring. The professor from the same university thinks that these occupations became in demand:

"Today at the university we teach how to make a restoration and reconstruction of old traditional clothing. For example, I have shown to my students during my classes the ancient ornament from Batken and showed how this old element is used in modern design. Designer as occupation became fashionable in Kyrgyzstan. We have many students enrolling to our department of design and model-making. Today our department is in fashion too."[297]

As she clarified even in rural areas old women say that their grand-daughters want to become designers, while these *babushkas* themselves do not fully understand the term 'designer'.[298] She concluded that it was indisputable to say that the World Nomad Games gave the hugest step for the culture. She believes that everything was shaken up and down, including a national identity.[299]

During my group interview with university students in Osh, they acknowledged that their interest in ethno-design in tailoring arose during the WNGs.[300] They realized that Kyrgyz have a rich and unique culture which needs to be preserved. The popularity of Kyrgyzstan as a tourist destination also was important for them because they believed that most of garments in ethno-style is purchased by foreign guests.

7.3 Conclusion

In this Chapter I argued that the World Nomad Games indirectly contributed to the formation of the national identity or resulted in unintended nation-building. In other words, I argued that the Nomad Games fostered national identity at societal and individual levels through Kok-Boru game and ethno-fashion industry. The chapter illustrated how following

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[297] Interview with a professor from Osh State University, coordinator of Osh oblast ethno-design group during three WNGs (held in 2014, 2016 and 2018) and at the 1st National Nomad Games in 2019, March 6 2021.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Ibid.
[300] Group interview with Osh State University students, July 2022.

the WNGs national sport Kok-Boru and ethno-fashion had rapidly developed in the country. In particular, Kok-Boru became popular among urban youth and dressing in ethno-fashion style became a wide-spread phenomenon in comparison to the pre-WNG period. Kok-Boru and traditional clothing were accepted on societal and individual levels as national identity markers. In other words, national identity was fostered by performing and popularizing Kok-Boru games and traditional clothing, such as chapan, beldemchi, kep takyia, kemsel and others. Thus, societal effects of mega-projects in Kyrgyzstan, namely of the World Nomad Games were acceptance and practice of the traditional game Kok-Boru and consumption of the ethno-clothing within communities.

The World Nomad Games had contributed to the popularization of ethno-sports and ethno-fashion among local communities in Kyrgyzstan and by doing so it unintentionally fostered national identity of individuals. As the chapter illustrated non-state actors, such as strongmen in case of Kok-Boru and local businesses (brands) and international projects in case of ethno-design played a key role in developing ethno-games and ethno-design, and eventually, in shaping Kyrgyz national identity. The chapter illustrated the important role of non-state actors – politicians, businessmen, fashion designers and other individuals – in the process of cultivating national identity by promotion of Kyrgyz sport and fashion domestically and on international level.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 The contribution to the existing scholarship

Existing nationalism theories do not fit well to explain nation-building patterns in the *ashar-stans* or states maintained by the communities, the term I propose to conceptualize the state in the context of Central Asia (*ashar* meaning a traditional collective action in CA, and *stan* – is a renowned ending of five CA states). In the *ashar-stan*, the state's weak performance and inefficiencies in delivery of state services are improved due to communal efforts. The state remains robust and functional despite its actual poor performance. The communities themselves support the state's critical public services, such as public healthcare, public schooling and other social infrastructures. In the *ashar-stan* the state does not deliver in its full capacity the most important state functions. Most of these states are former colonies or former union states, which, as a consequence of disintegration, had fuelled into identity conflicts and violence, and had experienced on-going difficulties in building cohesive nations. The main nationalism schools (the modernists, the ethnosymbolist, the primordialist) primarily explain the origins of nationalism based on European or Western experiences, in other words, they fit well to explain nationalism patterns in political settings where the state and state institutions are robust. By contrast, the thesis proposed a critical study of nation-building in the political settings where the state under-functions in the socio-economic sphere and is maintained by the communities. The thesis examined state-sponsored cultural and sports events in the former Soviet Central Asia beyond a 'fixed' nation-building framework prevalent in the existing scholarship on nation-building. The state-sponsored celebrations were studied as legitimation frameworks for the ruling regimes, while nation-building was defined rather as 'unintended' outcome of these invented mega-events.

This work is a valuable correction to the existing approaches in nation-building and nationalism studies applied to explain nation-building in the post-Soviet *ashar* states. In particular, the study is notable in the following ways:

First the study proposed *the cultural performance legitimation mode* – as alternative to economic performance legitimation mode (or output-based legitimacy) prevalent in the existing literature on political legitimacy. Poor economic performance of ashar-stans and lack of survival strategies were detrimental for political legitimacy of the incumbent regimes. I argued that this conceptualization of self-legitimation is helpful to analyze a broad range of cultural events prevailing in the region. I illustrated how during the

economic hardships the state leaders consider the cultural space as alternative sources for political support and legitimation. For the Kyrgyz political leadership economic performance as such has been a challenging task. Cultural performance with its mass mobilization and spectacular shows had a capacity to create an image of a 'functioning state' or create *imaginaries of development*. Imaginaries of development secured re-election of the incumbent regimes while cultural projects did indirectly affect economic sector by attracting foreign investment and tourism.

Second, the study suggested a framework of *unintended nation-building* to explain nation-building patterns from below. A model of unintended nation-building in ashar states suggests that the attempts of the regimes to remain legitimate by staging mega-events indirectly led to a process of national identity formation. Unintended nation-building or indirect nation-building occurs as an unintended outcome of state-led activities designed with another purpose. In the model of unintended nation-building I suggest that the political elites do prioritize own regime survival, whereas maintenance and fostering of national identity is rather a collective activity – in particular, fostering of national identity is implemented by local strongmen, private entrepreneurs, businessmen and individuals. Using the examples of Kok-Boru games and ethno-fashion industry in Kyrgyzstan, I demonstrated how non-state actors themselves actively produced and promoted identity markers or ideas presented during these invented mega-projects. The study established that mega-project of the World Nomad Games indirectly contributed to the formation of the national identity. National sport game *Kok-Boru* and ethno-fashion had rapidly developed in the country. In particular, Kok-Boru became popular among urban youth and dressing in ethno-fashion style became a wide-spread phenomenon. The study demonstrated how non-state actors, namely strongmen in case of Kok-Boru, and local ethno-clothing businesses (brands) and international projects in case of ethno-design played a significant role in nation-building. In contrast, the state was passive in developing Kok-Boru and ethno-clothing and thus it was not participating directly in shaping national identity.

Finally, a broader contribution to the study of nationalism in Central Asia is that in contexts like Central Asia where the state underachieves its core duties, nation-building and legitimation are indivisible and inter-related processes and should not be studied separately.

8.2 After all ashar nation-building?

The Kyrgyz nation-building per se was carried out on institutional administrative or central levels because it was limited by formalities such as establishing state symbols, adopting

coat of arms, national hymn, defining the national language, etc., rather nation-building was carried out on a deeper level reaching out the public consciousness or the peripheries. Put another way, Kyrgyzstan's nation-building was more oriented towards outside as it was a requirement for inclusion to the international membership needed for the establishment of new diplomatic ties, getting the UN membership and others. In fact, Kyrgyzstan still faces challenges to define its state ideology, while the people are divided along traditional regional or kinship identities; various ethnic, regional and other forms of identities co-exist and often compete. Most writings on informality, democratization, elections and state-society relationships, in general on CA, mention the issues of tribalism, clientelism and kinship as key. Therefore, other CA states also face similar challenges in nation-building.

Official nation-building programs in Kyrgyzstan run by the state, such as language programs, state education curriculum, law on national symbols, etc. as noted above primarily had institutionalized Kyrgyzstan as an independent nation-state and an international player on the global map. In contrast 'domestic' nation-building in Kyrgyzstan remained incomplete and was chaotic despite Askar Akaev's efforts to shape civic identity built on Manas' Seven rules in early independence years. The second president Kurmanbek Bakiyev neither introduced a new ideology, nor prohibited Manas' Seven rules. Only after June clashes in Osh in 2010, the new government developed the Concept on inter-ethnic relations which also did not sufficiently reach out communities (Sheranova 2020e). Overall it was chaotic because the official nation-building was implemented predominantly on the central level (oriented towards outside and international donors), and did not reach out the peripheries or did not echo local realities. The realization of the Concept had continued during the presidency of Almazbek Atambaev during which nomadic sentiments began to appeal for the masses following the WNGs. In its turn, 'unintended' popular nation-building, which we examined in this study, was predominantly carried out on the peripheral or community level, and did not substantially reach out the center, in other words, the popular nomadic nationalism did not end with official accounts on behalf of the state as a national ideology.

Nonetheless, nation-building in Kyrgyzstan remains chaotic because it is carried out by non-state actors who have administrative, financial resources or reputation to promote certain values and ways of life. Similar to the tradition of *ashar* and to the logic of *ashar-stan* which underlines the role of communities in maintaining the state's important functions, such as healthcare, education and public infrastructure, one could observe similar

patterns of *ashar nation-building* in Kyrgyzstan carried out by non-state actors to support or fill in gaps within the state's task of nation-building.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix 1: **Chronology of key events in Kyrgyzstan between 1991-2017**

Chronology of key events in Kyrgyzstan:

1991 Independence, election of Akaev

1992 Flag, UN, CIS, the 1st World Assembly of Kyrgyz people

1993 Constitution, national currency

1994 Coat of Arms, 1st amendment to the Constitution

1995 1000-year anniversary of Manas, 2nd re-election of Akaev

1996 Manas medal

1998 WTO

1999 The 1st national census (once every 10 years), intervention of IMU

2000 3000-year anniversary of Osh City, 3rd re-election of Akaev

2001 opening of US military base in Manas

2002 Aksy protest, CSTO

2003 opening of Russian military base in Kant, the 2nd World Assembly of Kyrgyz people, 2200-year anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood

2005 1st coup-etat/Tulip revolution, flee of Akaev to Russia, election of Bakiev

2006 2nd amendment to the Constitution

2009 2nd re-election of Bakiev

2010 2nd coup-etat/revolution, flee of Bakiev to Belarus, Interim government, June inter-ethnic clashes, referendum for adoption of new Constitution (parliamentary form of governance)

2011 Election of Atambaev

2012 Law on non-visa entrance, <u>World Nomad Games presentation</u>

2012 Protests for nationalization of Kumtor Gold Mining Company

2013 Kyrgyzstan-China pipeline (BRI)

2014 Alternative road the North-South (BRI), I World Nomad Games

2015 EaEU, Datka-Kemin power electric line (BRI), Parliamentary elections

2016 II World Nomad Games

2017 Election of Zheenbekov

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