Doctoral School of

International Relations

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THESIS SUMMARY

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

doctoral dissertation

Supervisors:

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Introduction

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.[1]

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[2] as authentic nation-building projects (see Hvoslef 2001, Adams 2007, 2010, Straube 2008, Adams and Rustemova 2009, Murzakulova and

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[1] 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.

[2] 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.

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.

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.

Chapter 2: Setting the locale of Kyrgyzstan: *the ashar-stan*

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[3] 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 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

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

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)[4] and the latest Kyrgyz project titled "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

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[4] 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.

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.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework and literature review: cultural performance legitimation and unintended (indirect) nation-building

3.1 Political legitimacy and cultural performance legitimation

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.

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**.

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.

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.

3.2 Nationalism, nation-building and unintended nation-building

The question of when and how do nations come to existence has long been a central inquiry of the study of nationalism. According to Connor (1994) nation-building is a sort

of 'national awakening'. Karl Deutsch emphasized "the process of social mobilization" as a key factor in nation-building (1966: 188). According to him 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). For Connor (1972) 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). 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.

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.

Nation-building is dependent on context and does not have a universal formula of making a nation (Connor 2004, Isaacs and Polese 2016). 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) argued for non-state perspectives. 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[5] 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.

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

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

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 *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. Overall, 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.

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.[6]

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.

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. 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.

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[6] 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.

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 through the discourse analysis method. 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. In addition, I consulted 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. Finally, I did on-line ethnography by studying live-stream videos of the opening events of three World Nomad Games.

Chapter 5: Official discourses of mega-events in Kyrgyzstan during Akaev and power legitimation: Manas epic's 3000-years anniversary, Osh city's 3000-years anniversary and the Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary

Manas epic's 3000-years anniversary in 1995

Manas is Kyrgyz oral folk epic about a mythical hero who united conflicting Kyrgyz tribes. During the Soviet era Manas was neither officially banned nor promoted, although there are views that it was judged as 'reactionary' (Megoran 2017: 82). After the country gained its independence, the epic Manas became a central ideology to shape the Kyrgyz nation after communism (see Marat 2008, Megoran 2017). Manas epic was re-introduced in the national consciousness of Kyrgyz largely due to Akaev's efforts. Akaev also wrote Manas' Seven lessons – rules to be observed by the Kyrgyz citizens. In 1995 Kyrgyzstan celebrated Manas epic's 1000-years anniversary. "1995 year" was also announced by the United Nations (UNESCO) as "The international year of Manas epic". Thousands of citizens took part in mass events dedicated to the celebration and about 80 foreign delegations arrived. The program included series of cultural events, theatrical performances, national sports games, exhibitions and other scholarly events. Around eight million Euros was spent for the anniversary (Thompson et. al 2006: 181). The government built a museum in Talas, a historical and cultural complex "Manas Ordo" (settlement of Manas), 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 (a 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 Ayily* was organized. The state also ordered to produce films about Manas and promoted publication of books on the epic. Key celebration activities took place in Talas region. 1500 pieces of *boz ui* (known also as *urta* in Russian) were installed in Talas which welcomed international guests during the celebration. Around one hundred works about Manas were published in Kyrgyz and foreign languages, the epic was translated into 50 world languages[7]. Although the idea about Manas epic's 1000-years anniversary was suggested to Akaev by the scholars of the National Science Academy, it was presented as Akaev-led.

Osh city's 3000-years anniversary in 2000

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[7] UNESCO supported a translation of the epic into English.

In 2000, Osh city was declared as the oldest city in the entire Central Asia and celebrated its 3000-years long history. In 2000 on October 4th Akaev issued a decree which declared Osh city the second capital, and issued a medal "Danaker" (Peacemaker). Osh city's anniversary was similarly supported by UNESCO and was internationally celebrated. Nine million KGS were spent for the celebration day itself.[8] Gala celebration of the 3000-years anniversary lasted for two days. On October 5th major festive events took place with official delegations from more than 30 countries and representatives of 25 international organizations. 500 decorated *boz ui* with special reception programs[9] were installed to welcome international guests. Thousands of local students and schoolchildren took part in the mass performance at the city stadium and the central square which hosted parades and concerts.

The Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary in 2003

In 2003, the Kyrgyz Republic's independence day on 31st of August was a special occasion because it was accompanied by 2200-years anniversary of the Kyrgyz statehood. The presidential Decree stated that the anniversary was crucial 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 national history.[10] Similar to other celebrations this event was supported by a special resolution of the UN (UNESCO). On the celebration day, the main square in Bishkek hosted a generous performance. 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: "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 (Assembly)[11] delegates which were assembled for the occasion of the celebration. With these three spectacular mega-events in mind now we move on to examine socio-economic and political contexts behind each mega-celebration.

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[8] Vecherniy Bishkek newspaper: Ош-3000 [Osh-3000], Khamidov M…
[9] Traditional dances and songs
[10] 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
[11] To mark Kyrgyz statehood's 2200-years anniversary the Second World Kurultai of Kyrgyz was called in Yssyk-kol (Cholpon-Ata city) on 29-30th of August 2003.

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 (see Table 2). 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 (See Table 3). Therefore, in the speech Akaev skips his failures, such as inability to properly respond to Batken events in 1999-2000. Likewise, in 2003 Akaev was optimistic about the state's 2200 anniversary and believed in positive changes (See Table 4). In his speech[12] dedicated to the event Akaev stated that Kyrgyzstan cannot be proud of its natural resources (he meant oil and gas resources which neighbouring Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan enjoy), but instead he underlined that Kyrgyzstan was proud of its generous and willful population, ancient history, strong national spirit and the population's education level. Akaev cited a wise folk saying "One should love a country not when it is prosperous, one should love it when it faces difficulties".[13] By citing it he wanted to call Kyrgyzstanis for patriotism and love for their country despite economic hardships and poverty. Akaev argued that his reforms were fruitful despite they were painful too. 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, and would inspire communities to take initiatives on their own to improve own lives without grievances, criticism and protests against the government. However, Akaev was wrong and he was soon swept away by the Tulip revolution.

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

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[12] 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

[13] Ibid.: p.1

	- 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

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 - 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

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

Chapter 6: Official discourses of mega-events in Kyrgyzstan during Atambaev and power legitimation

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[14] 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.[15] 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.[16] 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.[17] 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[18]. 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, the government took the initiative very responsibly because the WNG were the

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

[15] 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).

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

[17] Ibid.

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

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*[19]. 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.

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

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[19] *Zhailoo* means a summer pasture in Kyrgyz language

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

Unlike the previous speech in 2014 at the first WNG, Atambaev during the second WNG made his public address mainly to 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. 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

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.[20]

Chapter 7: The World Nomad Games and Unintended/Indirect Nation-building in Kyrgyzstan

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.

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

Kok-Boru is ancient game played by men horse-back in most of Turkic states. 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.[21] *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*'.[22] 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*[23], number of players, introduction of *taikazan*[24] 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.

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

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

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

[22] Ibid.

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

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

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.[25] 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.[26] For instance, in 2016 Kyrgyzstan approved for Kok-Boru using a fake beheaded goat in order to respond to international norms.[27] In 2017, UNESCO included Kok-Boru into the UNESCO's intangible heritage list.[28] After the WNG Kok-Boru became widely known in the west and Asian countries. The membership of the International Federation of Kok-Boru[29] was enlarged after the WNGs by inclusion of Russia, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Turkey. Kok-Boru uniforms, various designs of uniforms and special protection accessories also developed after the WNGs.[30] 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.[31] In addition mobile plastic taikazan were developed in Kyrgyzstan after the WNGs.[32] 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.

The Federation of Kok-Boru in Kyrgyzstan – a key body in arranging kok-boru nation-wide – is not funded and run by the government. It is a public body funded by magnates, small and medium businessmen and other amateurs of the game. 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 organizes four national Kok-Boru games each year: a game dedicated to Nooruz holiday on the 21st of

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[25] 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).

[26] Ibid.

[27] 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).

[28] 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).

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

[30] 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.

[31] Interview with Kok-Boru player from 'Kelechek' team, Taalaibek uulu Baktiyar, February 25 2021

[32] Ibid.

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.[33] 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.[34] 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. 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). 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

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[33] Interviews with Kok-Boru players, Talas, January 2021

[34] Interview with Kok-Boru player from 'Kelechek' team …

this nomadic memory. Another reason why strongmen support Kok-Boru is because nowadays politicians prefer to breed horses as their hobbies.[35] 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.[36]

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*[37]. Usually every week from autumn to summer local people hold Kok-Boru tournament as part of *tois*.

Nowadays, Kok-Boru became a famous and popular than any time before. 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.

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

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

[36] 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).

[37] 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.

United States became interested in it." [38] 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)"[39] Several pop-songs were also released following the Nomad Games by famous young Kyrgyz singers such as Kairat Primberdiev[40], Kylych Edik[41], Kural Chokoev[42] and others. These songs appeared between 2016 and 2019.

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

In a similar way, the World Nomad Games contributed to a popularization of national clothing among Kyrgyzstanis. According to Bualima eje, a designer from Chon Alai, Kyrgyz youth, especially girls became very interested in national clothing.[43] She noticed that Kyrgyz national clothing, such as *kep takyia*[44], *beldemchi*[45], *kemsel*[46] became popular among modern Kyrgyz girls. As Sarieva recalled, her chapans became popular among youth after 2014.[47] 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.[48] 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

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[38] Interview with the former Minister of culture, information and tourism of Kyrgyzstan, Zhamankulov Azamat, February 25 2021
[39] In English: "Kok-Boru (A time of strong)"
[40] To access the song on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eC02k7Yqog8
[41] To access the song on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Dq0RkLlXzQ
[42] To access the song on Youtube visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpwlCX--dWI
[43] Interview with Bualima eje, a carpet designer from Chon Alai, March 2 2021.
[44] A traditional headwear of young unmarried women
[45] A traditional skirt of married women
[46] A traditional jacket without sleeves for men and women
[47] Interview with the founder of the clothing brand "Chapansar", Sarieva Jumagul, March 3 2021.
[48] To access the interview visit: https://www.facebook.com/KTRKkg/videos/2222698934704151

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.[49] 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.[50] In Osh, for example, she mentioned that shopper bags which apply ethno-elements such as *kurak*[51] and national ornaments are popular. In addition to clothes, accessories (bags, earrings, necklaces, etc.) 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."[52]

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'.[53] She concluded that it was indisputable to say that the World Nomad Games

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[49] Interview with Zhibek eje, a coordinator of a group of designers from Chon Alai, March 2 2021.

[50] Interview with Tolgonai, a university teacher in Osh, February 26 2021.

[51] Kurak is a Kyrgyz traditional patchwork

[52] 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.

[53] Ibid.

gave the hugest step for the culture. She believes that everything was shaken up and down, including a national identity.[54]

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. [55]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.[56] These brands themselves represent the country at international contests and increase prestige of the country despite they do not receive state support to attend these contests.

In this Chapter I illustrated how 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 the boost of Kok-Boru game culture and ethno-fashion industry. The chapter illustrated how following the WNGs national sport Kok-Boru and ethno-fashion had rapidly developed in the country, and how Kyrgyzstanis began associating themselves with these identity markers.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

This work is a valuable correction to the existing studies in nation-building and nationalism studies in the post-Soviet states. In particular, the study is notable in the following ways:

- 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 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

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Interviews with three clothing brands in Kyrgyzstan, March 2021
[56] Interviews with three clothing brands in Kyrgyzstan, March 2021

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.

- The study suggested a framework of *unintended nation-building* to explain nation-building patterns from below. A model of unintended nation-building 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.

- 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.

- 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 Central Asia. 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.

- 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, 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.

- 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.

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