

(Re)defining National Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: the Cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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Introduction

Two decades after independence there is much to consider about where the Central Asian states have come from and where they are going. The complexities of the Central Asian social and political developments are tied to the region's unique historical legacies tracing to the past, whilst the urgent issue of building national cohesion and bridging cleavages is pressing today in the face of the danger of regional collapse. Existing cleavages and tensions among Central Asian groups have long been perceived as a threat to regional stability. National identity introduced by Bolsheviks to the region's diverse populations was to provide a solution. Over seven decades since then, new elites are still struggling with defining the content of their respective national identities. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the states of Central Asia acquired independent statehood that most of them had not sought and received half-heartedly, as independence and sovereignty implied great challenges. Being all creations of the Soviet Union, at the moment of its break up Central Asian states found themselves unprepared economically, institutionally and ideologically for an independent statehood. The region's newly independent states faced a challenge to form national cohesion, win loyalty among population and shore up their government's legitimacy.

The present work focuses on Central Asia's two smallest and poorest states, where the issue of national cohesion is particularly vital. National unity in the divided societies is poorly developed even among the titular nationality and substantial ethnic minorities are present. Violence on ethnic and religious lines plagued both republics: Kyrgyzstan experienced bloody clashes between the

Kyrgyz and Uzbek population in Osh (1990) which were virulently reenacted in June 2010. Tajikistan descended into a civil war lasting 5 years in 1992.

Through the analysis of identity production and nation-building projects in the independent Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the study aims to examine *how* the weak state contests national identity and defines nationality today and *why* it has chosen a particular discourse over others. It seeks to understand *why* nation-building appeared so problematic and *how* a deeply fragmented society evolved which challenges attempts to introduce state-national identity embracing its whole citizenry. The conception of the Soviet state, Bolshevik nation making and post-Soviet nationalism in the successor states had already been thoroughly studied especially since Party archives had become available¹ and these findings are drawn upon significantly in my research. Also some important works are written on the nationalizing politics of the Central Asian successor states² deemed as a legitimate consequence of the Soviet past. Nevertheless, in the existing research the nationalizing narrative in the successor Central Asian states is taken as a given whilst there always exist alternatives. In the two cases studied in this research that appears particularly paradoxical as elites and regimes mainly do acknowledge the presence of large minority groups and the subsequent need

¹ Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and Category "Nationality" In the 1926, 1937 and 1939 Censuses " *Slavic Review* 52, no. 2 (1997). ———, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," *Russian Review* no. 59 (2000), ———, *Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet State* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), ———, *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet State* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), Ronald Grigor Suny, "State, Civil Society, and Ethnic Cultural Consodliation in the Ussr - Roots of the Natioanl Question," in *From Union to Commonwealth: Nationalism and Separatism in the Soviet Republics*, ed. Gail W. Lapidus and Victor Zaslavsky (Cambridge: Cambridge Univserity Press, 1992), ———, *The Revenge of the Past* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993), Rogers Brubaker, "Citizenship Struggles in the Soviet Successor States," *International Migration Review* xxvi, no. 2 (1997), ———, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account " *Theory and society* 23 (1994), ———, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univetsity Press 1996). Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2003).

² Erica Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Paper* (2008), Marlene Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology " *Nationalities papers* 35, no. 1 (March 2007), ———, "Regional Revival, Nationalism and the 'Invention of Tradition' : Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan " *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 2 (2006).

for national identity to appeal to and embrace its whole citizenry. This understanding even had an institutional expression in rather accommodating nationalizing policies in regards to citizenship, language and education³ taken up during the first steps of the independent statehood. This fact notwithstanding, the regimes have appeared to fall into an essentialist ethnocentric narrative in the state ideology production as this work concludes. The contribution of this research lies in explaining what has foreshadowed this “status quo” and how this situation came about.

For understanding the social realities of Central Asia today it is necessary to inquire what has prefigured them decades earlier. Therefore, the work will embark on examining the legacy of Soviet rule and policies of the Soviet state pointing out to the striking continuity in evidence between the two epochs. Both ethnicity and nationality in the form they exist today were conceptualized with the advent of the soviet regime that was the first state that systematically based its political units on ethnicity.⁴ The organization of the state pivoted on nationality policy that was central to the regime’s principles and respective institutional arrangements. Understanding the legacy of the nationality policy effected in institutionalization of nationhood and ethnicity both territorially and ethnoculturally reveals the dynamics of the current discourse on national identity in the successor states carried out by national elites. The argument fits into the new institutionalist theoretical framework adopted for the purpose of this analysis. The basic point of analytical departure within the historical-institutionalist account is the assumption that choices that were made early in the history of any policy or system influence and persist in shaping choices over time. By looking at the Soviet institutions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality the analysis attempts to demonstrate how they pervaded into the post-Soviet space of social classification and still constitute basic categories of identity. These initial policy choices and related institutionalized commitments

³ As compared to the Baltic states. Check what they are exactly

⁴ Suny, "State, Civil Society, and Ethnic Cultural Consodliation in the Ussr - Roots of the Natioanl Question," 28.

are argued to persist in the post-Soviet social and political spaces long after the disintegration of the Soviet system.

The first part of the work provides insights into the logic of soviet policy-making, particularly the Soviet nationality policy. It points out the centrality of the nationality policy for the Soviet regime, which institutionalized territorial nationhood and personal nationality through its ethnofederal principle linking ethnicity, territory and political administration enshrined in the idea of national statehood.

The second part studies the effect that Soviet policies had particularly for Central Asia. It deals with what is known as the most prominent example of institutionalization of national identity, the period when national identity was introduced to the Central Asians and acquired institutional and personal significance. Reconfiguration of multilingual multicultural political space along ethnic lines entrenched territorially defined nationhood among people who did not identify themselves in national terms. It is a striking example of how categories proposed, articulated and institutionalized from 'above' internalize from 'below'. This section features how nationality becomes meaningful through acquiring institutional significance providing a footnote to the general debate within the discipline on 'what is a nation'. It suggests that ethnicity and nationality were neither primordial nor artificial but were categories that became meaningful through policies, institutional arrangements and administrative practices.

In the third part of the thesis, I look into the nation-building projects carried out by the elites in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. By linking the Soviet experiences to the present discourse, the work seeks to understand how the state-building became problematic in the Central Asian context. I examine the identity narrative in each republic by deconstructing national ideologies promoted by the elites. Looking at what identity engineers promote as the pillars and main building blocks of

national identity, I thus define national identity in a narrow sense as through the nationalizing narrative of the elites and not as an identity of populations. I intend to demonstrate that despite the conception of the states as multinational and an acknowledged need to formulate cohesive inclusive national identity, the discourse on identity is mostly articulated in an essentialist mode and the nation is portrayed in an ethnic meaning where ethnicity is articulated and experienced as nationhood. This way the analysis shows how the institutionalized categories pervaded into the post-Soviet space of social classification and still constitute basic categories of identity. These initial policy choices and related institutionalized commitments persisted and continue framing the definition of a nation chosen by present day elites. A system that first established nations and institutionalized them through policies and administrative practices, later in time after its collapse that ironically was brought down through the same arrangements that were once its establishing principles, allowed political space and even compelled for political action in a national sense yet paradoxically obstructs the constitution of the unifying national identity.

Looking into national ideologies intended to build national cohesion and define the nation, I point out that the rhetoric taken up by national elites is path dependent on institutional policy choices of the Soviet epoch. In the pursuit of national doctrine and in response to what is perceived as “weak national unity”, the state adopts an ethnicity narrative in a primordial sense that marginalized other groups. Monopolizing the identity production and becoming the sole ideologues of it, government elites continue to invoke ethnic groups as nations and to interpret ethnicity through the Soviet historiographical tradition which emphasizes the genetic nature of ethnic groups and never its constructive character as an alternative interpretation. Incumbent regimes sustain and support this vision through their appeals to the antiquity of national community and their ethnic core as the main argument for claiming ethnic supremacy and symbolic ownership over territory they occupy which

was back in time conceptualized through the Soviet policy of ‘indigenouslyness’. It demonstrates the unique feature of the Soviet system of institutionalized nationality and its “unintended political consequences” and explains why the reconciliation of civic identities based on inclusive citizenship and exclusive ethnic identities is challenging. Failure to succeed in constructing an effective narrative for the purpose of promoting civic unity is deemed to be found in the problematic understanding of ethnicity, nationality and citizenship as categories confused by institutionalized definitions of nationhood and nationality as sharply distinct from statehood and citizenship.

Theoretical framework

Looking into the nation-building of the Soviet successor states I engage in the scholarly approach that traces the origin of post-Soviet nationalism to the Bolshevik nation-making. I operate within the set of hypotheses set out by scholars such as Francine Hirsh, Terry Martin, Ronald Suny and Rogers Brubaker which serve as broad guidelines for my research. They comprehensively elaborated conception of Soviet policies which institutionalized nationhood in its ethnofederal form and aligned ethnic nationality with organization of public life. This body of literature provides an in-depth understanding of the formulation and implementation of nationality policy giving insights into the political and social consequences of institutionalization of nationhood as the ethnofederal territorial state, and personal nationality as a form of political and social classification. The approach thereby provides a general framework for the discourse over the national question through an institutionalist account.

Hirsh’s works uphold that “ethnographic knowledge” used by policy-makers in national delimitation was more than a tool to “rationalize political decisions” in state-building, it provided

information on “how to formulate its policies”⁵ and demonstrate how this “scientific” knowledge found practical use in polices. It was not a given that the Soviet state would take a shape of an “ethnoterritorial union”⁶. The national idea has been contested in an ongoing debate among state agencies, particularly Gosplan and Commissariat of Nationalities. The compromise solution started the comprehensive Soviet nation-building, where, as Hirsch points out, ethnographers fixed the ethnic categories in the census and determined the internal, administrative borders of the USSR which subsequently became the borders of the new independent states of the post-Soviet period. The study very elaborately demonstrates how nationalities were created on the presumption of ethnogenesis, i.e. on the “blood and belonging” principle and how nationhood underwent the institutionalization process from the period of formulating the nationality policy. NKVD’s decision of 1938, for instance, introduced internal passports specifying an individual’s nationality according to the parent’s nationality not a voluntary choice. Taken together, Soviet policies set the principle of ethnogenesis at the center of the Soviet national question. According to Hirsh, ethnographic knowledge facilitated the process of what she calls “double assimilation”, first assimilation in the created nationality categories which people were assigned and than assimilation within the Soviet state.

Martin’s Soviet policy focus is on the *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) process aimed at the promotion of national identity and self-consciousness of non-Russian population and their cultural and political institutions. His analysis points out to how consequences of the nationality policy generated conflicts and brought negative effects in the time of Soviet regime crises and later collapse. Through analyzing the three stages of the policy (period of implementation, crisis and “Great Retreat”), he brings in an important conclusion that the entire system pointed towards ethnic

⁵ Hirsch, *Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet State* 11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

segregation and reinforced the popular conception of a national territory as their own. It originated the tendency to view national minorities as foreign and often unwelcome guests⁷. Martin's observations point out that through indigenization, privileged positions for titular nationalities put them in conflict with disadvantaged groups of other ethnicities living in the same region and at the same time caused resentment by local Russians that at the end put the policy in crises. Suny's analysis's contribution also lies within the focus of historical construction of identities. He emphasizes that in their generations and evolutions both class and nationality are constituted historically and politically⁸.

The analysis of the nationality policy through this body of literature reveals important points for understanding how it generated the "unintended political consequences" for the successor states. To explore the enduring consequences of Soviet institutional definitions of nationhood on the national question in the new post-independence context, I adopted Roger Brubaker's analytical focus on the form in which nationhood and nationality were institutionalized: territorial and political on the one hand and ethnocultural and personal on the other hand, I applied it in the Central Asian context. He points out the distinctiveness of the Soviet nationality regime that institutionalized these categories not at the state-wide but at the sub-state level. He suggests that the unique feature of the Soviet system lies not in its ethnic extraordinary heterogeneity as such but in its effective institutionalization that codified nationhood and nationality as fundamental social categories sharply distinct from statehood and citizenship, which in turn continue to constitute basic categories of social classification and political understanding and fundamental forms of public and private identity in successor states⁹. I apply this hypothesis in analyzing the current discourse on national

⁷ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 74.

⁸ Suny, *The Revenge of the Past*.

⁹ Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account ", ———, "Citizenship Struggles in the Soviet Successor States."

identity in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan by incumbent elites in the attempt to understand why power elites are failing to construct a consensual unifying national identity exploring the meaning and roles of identity.

This argument of the emphasis on institutionalization and legacy shares a broader analytical orientation on the roles institutional arrangements play in shaping, mediating and constructing choices and behaviors. Andre Lecours highlights new institutionalism as a means to reframe and renew theoretical and analytical importance of institutions in studying various social, economic and political phenomena and their outcomes. New institutionalism does not constitute a unifying body of thought. Despite, sometimes fundamental, conceptual, methodological and epistemological differences, they all bring their insights to the study of politics. Thus depending on the focus and purpose of study, a certain approach could be made preferential. Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C.R. Taylor identify three schools of thoughts: historical institutionalism, rational choice intuitionism and sociological¹⁰. Whereas Peters defines seven main approaches within the new institutionalism, in addition to these three he sees another four: normative, empirical, interest representation, and international. In historical institutionalism the basic point of analytical departure is the assumption that choices that were made early in the history of any policy or system influence and persist in shaping choices over time. These initial policy choices and related institutionalized commitments that follow them are seen to determine later decisions. Interpretation of logic of the development of policy thus depends on understanding the initial decisions in policy-making. Policies are argued to be “path dependent”¹¹ (Krasner, 1984 in Peters, 2003). The rational choice institutionalism operates within the utility-maximizing framework and argues that behaviors are a function of rules and

¹⁰ Andre Lecours, *New Institutionalism. Theory and Analysis* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2005).

¹¹ Guy Peters, *Institutional Theory in Political Science. The “New Institutionalism”*. (London and New York: Pinter, 1999).

incentives. Institutions in this approach are regarded as means to maximize individual/group utilities, as offering opportunities and imposing constraints (Weingast, 1996 in Peters, 2003). Thus, institutions are seen to emerge to meet social and economic necessities. Sociological institutionalism focuses on the cognitive rather than historical or strategic dimension of institution. Institutions are seen to shape the perceptions of actors and their decisions. The normative approach Peters associates with James March and Johan Olsen. In this approach emphasis is put on the norms of institutions as means of understanding how they function and how they define or at least shape and influence individual behavior through the “logic of appropriateness”. The empirical institutionalism approach regards the structure of the government as central to impact policies and decisions and thus in this assumption stands close to the “old institutionalism” that focuses on material structure on a general level. The interest representation institutionalism takes political parties and interest groups as its institutional variables. One of the less obvious forms of institutional theory is international institutionalism. It aims to analyze how structured interactions at the state level explain behavior of states and individuals. As we see, though stressing the same fundamental analytical points, they vary in their approaches. The fundamental unifying point is that the scholars can achieve greater analytical leverage by starting the analysis with institutions not individuals. After going through all the approaches, Peters concludes that there is a sufficient core to justify these approaches being considered one broad approach namely new institutionalism.

Variations within the discipline allow narrowing the focus on a particular approach. When discussing the legacy of policies and its established patterns, historical institutionalism appears to be most appropriate to understand the influence earlier policy made on later patterns. Within this approach ideas are seen to play a crucial role in shaping policy. It argues that once government makes their initial policy and institutional choices in a policy area, these patterns will persist.

Despite the limits of explanation of how ideas become institutional and how they define the nature of institutions, difficulties of falsifying a generated explanation and problems with approaching institutional change (more consistent than punctuated equilibrium and adaptation explanations), the approach allows to analyze the impact of institutional choices across time and to draw conclusions in regards to the researched impact of the ethnoterritorial federal structure of the Soviet space and institutionalization of multinationality and its consequences.

Methodology and conceptual clarifications

Pivoting on the institutionalist account I intend to develop an analytical explanation of the contested national identity discourse through studying the two cases of post-Soviet construction of national identity. Tracing processes¹² of institutionalized multinationality and its aims, I build a link to the discourse on identity and examine it using the concept of path dependency as a broad causal explanation.

Looking at how nationhood and nationality were conceptualized then and now, I evaluate the hypothesis that once institutionalized, definitions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality became an organizing principle of social classification and continue to constitute fundamental forms of social categorization and public and private identity. Through institutional arrangements, policies and administrative routines, the definitions had set a standardized scheme through which national identity is construed in the contemporary discourse.

¹² Process tracing is a procedure designed to identify processes linking a set of initial conditions to a particular outcome. It aims at examining multiple features of each case to assess causal and constitutive relations between factors. See Pascal Vennesson, "Case Studies and Process Tracing: Theories and Practices," in *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences. A Pluralist Perspective*, ed. Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Empirical analysis (that is framed as qualitative, interpretative and constructionist) is based on the above-mentioned theoretical intention. The methodology used for the empirical part is a discourse analysis¹³ as I look into structures and practices used to construct meaning of national identity by elites and academic circles and locate the concept of identity historically and socially. I define national identity as constructed through national ideology employed by elites not of populations, thus narrow it to the nationalizing narrative of elites. I also do not imply that there is a one single elite narrative, rather I am dealing with narratives employed by regimes and politicians who were in power since independence. I conduct the analysis in the form of a case study using the two cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The cases are drawn from the same unit and are meant to be representative of the same phenomenon studied. The amalgamation of two intends to strengthen the hypothesis through within case observation not contrast on potential differences between the two. The focus on the two particular countries is sparked by the immediacy of the identity discourse in both states and the weak national unity with a history of violence along ethnic and religious lines.

¹³ Laffey and Weldes's definition of discourse is the structures and practices that are used to construct meaning in the world. It explores how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created and are held in place in Yoshiko M. Herrera and Bear F. Braumoeller, "Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis " *Qualitative Methods* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2004).

Chapter 1

The legacy of Soviet nationality policy

Both ethnicity and nationality in the Soviet space were conceptualized through the nationality policy that was central to the Soviet regime and became its unique feature¹⁴. Nationality policy was a pragmatic strategy to accommodate the extraordinary ethnonational heterogeneity of the Soviet population and to get nationality relations in a multi-ethnic state under control. This heterogeneity per se was not a distinct feature of the system but the way it was accommodated through institutional arrangements is the central characteristic of the system. The policy's primary intention was to get control over potentially destructive political expressions of nationality through creating administrative federal structures based on ethnicity and cultivating national elites and cultures based on national belonging. In the long run, this type of institutionalized nationhood was intended to transcend itself and evolve into internationalism. Nonetheless, as Brubaker noted "seldom have intention and consequences diverged as spectacular as they did in the Soviet case"¹⁵. The consequences of institutionalized multinationality, territorially and ethnoculturally, that linked ethnicity, territory and political administration not only provided a "ready-made template for claims of sovereignty"¹⁶ but also continue to have an enduring impact on basic categories of identity in the successor states. The first chapter focuses on intentions and diverging outcomes of Soviet nationality policies through illuminating its logic, premises and concepts, and then the work proceeds to the analysis of the enduring consequences of institutionalized nationhood that is assumed to have defined the national question in the successor states studied.

¹⁴ On the centrality of nationality policy : Hirsch, *Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet State*

¹⁵ Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account ": 49.

¹⁶ Ibid.: 48.

Basic ideological principles and their practical applications

Marxism

Soviet nationality policy as a system of established principles and institutional arrangements, which regulate the system of functioning of the multi-ethnic society, was born of the entire historical development of Soviet society¹⁷. Based on Marx's perspective, the idea of a national community was of no interest as such for Soviet leadership as class was to be the only organizing principle of social structures¹⁸. The basic attitude toward nationalism and nationhood was that as to a transitory phenomenon used for achieving immediate political goals. In fact, nationalism has been viewed by socialist ideologues as a dangerous mobilizing force with a potential to forge alliances stronger than class based. Instead of attacking nationalism and nationality itself, Stalin suggested to grant the "forms of statehood" to satisfy national demands which would be in the longer run doomed by class divisions and national alliances would thus be avoided.¹⁹ Nationalism as formulated by the Soviet leadership was to be drained of its content but legitimated as a form²⁰.

Modernization

The concept of modernization was also crucial in granting nationhood to accelerate the historical development process. National consciousness was seen as an unavoidable historic phase all communities should go through to achieve international socialist society of "denationalized" people. The national stage of development had rather positive connotations as it was regarded as a

¹⁷ Victor Zaslavsky, "Success and Collapse: Traditional Soviet Nationality Policy" in *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

¹⁸ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 11.

¹⁹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 5.

²⁰ Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account".

transitional stage in the process of modernization of the Soviet Union²¹. This concept was particularly applicable to the backward regions of Central Asia where, as Slizkine maintains, the promotion of nationality was part of a “catching-up” strategy. The backward periphery was to catch-up economically, socially and culturally with the population of Russia²².

In this respect, Soviet administrators held the opinion that nation-making is a necessary means for rapid modernization, a state-sponsored effort to turn backward peoples into nations by drawing new political boundaries and fostering national distinctions. Hirsch defined this process as a “state-sponsored evolutionism.”²³

Colonialism and egalitarianism

The Soviet leadership asserted that non-Russian nationalism was primarily a response to tsarist oppression and that new parties had inherited “the psychology of great power chauvinism of the Tsarist regime”²⁴. This approach led to the establishment of the crucial principle of the nationality policy. Lenin denounced the “Great Russian chauvinism” and distinguished between “nationalism of oppressor nations” on the one hand and “nationalism of oppressed nations” on the other hand, considering the latter a justifiable response to the former and therefore less of a threat²⁵. Consequently, the “nationalism of oppressed nations” was anticipated to be appealing to local populations.

²¹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, 4-8.

²² Yuri Slezkine, "The Ussr as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994).

²³ Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," 208.

²⁴ Ibid., 5

²⁵ Ibid., 4-10

Hirsch upholds that for Soviet policy-makers colonization and “making nations” went hand in hand and soviet nationality policy was a variation on Western colonial policy²⁶. Through her account, the nation-making project should be understood as a manifestation of the Soviet regime’s attempt to define a new “non-imperialistic colonization” and demonstrate that it could have a benevolent form, in which colonizers assist the local population. So, policy-makers intended to foster a new kind of society that would be fundamentally different from the capitalist empires that the Bolsheviks denounced.

The means of achieving an egalitarian society was another ideological branch that took practical form of nation-making: the soviet regime should give nationhood to peoples often without national consciousness like in the case of Central Asia in order to equalize power relations among groups at different levels of cultural development and national statehood. This approach was taken up, adopted and used on the part of local ‘colonized’ populations, when national groups were often ‘manipulated’ with their backward status to promote their interests.

All the expectations of the mature soviet state to evolve through the predetermined stages of nationhood were to be achieved by means of the nationality policy which in practical terms meant a complex administrative and societal reorganization. The diversity of the population and the emphasis on national communities and national rights was an important issue for the new regime that had begun to establish itself. This specific nationality policy and the role of nationality came to be a distinctive and peculiar feature of the Soviet system. Originally perceived as a problem, national identity gradually came to be seen as something ‘natural’ and unavoidable. Indeed, nationality policy eventually became central to the Soviet project and central to the formation of the Soviet Union²⁷. In the short term, it became a part of the Soviet strategy since it was perceived as a practical solution

²⁶ Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," 202.

²⁷ ———, *Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet State* 5.

that would enable the regime to consolidate its rule and influence through winning national loyalties and achieve a level of political stability. In this respect, Haugen notes that in some regions, notably in Caucuses and Central Asia, the promotion of national identities was to be directed for settling interethnic cleavages that were perceived as a threat to stability in the region²⁸. Hence, it was a pragmatic policy of state construction and consolidation of Bolshevik power. In the long-term perspective, the use of the national framework was aligned with the Marxist perspective of historical development to foster a state of denationalized socialism, was supposed to accomplish modernization - to improve the conditions in the culturally and economically backward regions as Central Asia and “colonize” its territories in a benevolent and egalitarian way. This paradoxical process of creating national identity was fittingly described by Hirsch by the concept of “double assimilation”²⁹: the assimilation of diverse peoples into nationalities and then the assimilation of nationalities into the Soviet state. Debates whether pragmatic concerns dominated over ideological ones are irrelevant for this purpose, as both pragmatic and ideological considerations went hand in hand in the state-promoted nation-building.

Institutionalization of nationhood: the ethnofederal principle

Based on these premises the Soviet regime put emphasis on ethnicity and nationality and made institutional and organizational changes in accordance with national divisions. Most importantly, the Soviet leadership proceeded with the gradual implementation of the Leninist nationality policy with its promise of self-determination. Although initially the right to self-determination served simply to “remove ethnic psychological resistance” to the formation of a unitary state and thus had a “purely

²⁸ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 106.

²⁹ Hirsch, *Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet State*

propagandist character”³⁰, it turned soviet style federalism into an indispensable instrument for managing its vast territories. Through this tactic, the Soviet Union became the first modern state to place the national principle at the base of its federal structure³¹. Indeed, the fundamental feature of Soviet style federal state formation was based on the linkage of ethnicity, territory and political administration enshrined in the idea of national statehood³². This way the Soviet Union was organized into national territories with different levels of autonomy (union republic, republic, *oblast*, *okrug and krai*)³³. The union-republics were set up in the form of nation-states named after the predominating population in the area, called *titular nationality*. The national territorial delimitation of Central Asia, which will be the focus of the next chapter, was an important element in this strategy. However, in many territories because of difficulty to draw ethnodemographic borders due to complexities of settlements, there was a large degree of incongruence between national territory and personal nationalities inhabiting them. Nevertheless the principle of ethnofederal structuring was applied uniformly everywhere. In these national territories, the Soviet regime promoted the idea of national cultures, language and local elites. This promotion of national culture and development of national languages was a key element in the institutionalization of nationality³⁴. The process of simultaneous dual institutionalization of territorial nationhood and personal nationality through national classification laid down fundamental tensions between two opposite forms of nationhood defined by Brubaker as “territorial and political and personal and ethnocultural”³⁵. The task for the incumbent Central Asian elites to reconcile the two is a great challenge and a logical carry-over of the ethnofederal principle applied for organizing federation units of the Soviet state.

³⁰ Zaslavsky, "Success and Collapse: Traditional Soviet Nationality Policy ", 31.

³¹ Ibid., 5.

³² Ibid., 31.

³³ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 13.

³⁴ See Terry Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*. for his analysis of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) policy

³⁵ Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account ": 54-57.

Institutionalization of nationality

Roger Brubaker defined this distinctive nationality regime as an unprecedented example of displacement of nationhood and nationality as organizing principles of the social and political order from the state-wide to the state sub-level. “No other state has gone so far in sponsoring, codifying, institutionalizing even ... inventing nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level, while at the same time doing nothing to institutionalize them on the level of the state as a whole”³⁶. While ideologically, Soviet rulers conceptualized the idea of Soviet people (*sovetskii narod*) with its Stalinist “merging of nations” (*sliyanie*) and the Brezhnevite “creation of a new historical society – the Soviet people”³⁷, they never fully elaborated the state-nation idea embracing the whole citizenry but instead promoted national identities linked to territories and national belonging. As Brubaker argues, the state-wide identity was explicitly conceived as supra-national and not national. The significance attached to the personal nationality, particularly in the distribution of land and resources, in education and careers in the course of the formation of Central Asian national territorial entities ensured the rapidly growing relevance of nationality among groups that lacked national consciousness. This way, national labels became meaningful through a combination of official policies, expert input and local initiatives³⁸.

The Soviet state made nationality a decisive criterion in the distribution of goods and resources such as jobs, education, positions in bureaucracy and so on³⁹. The cultivation of distinct national cadres, national languages and intelligentsias brought the nation-state into existence which

³⁶ Ibid.: 52.

³⁷ Ian Bremmer, *Nations Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, *Reassessing Soviet Nationalities Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 11.

³⁸ Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," 210.

³⁹ Martin, *Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*.

could live and function on “its own” territory⁴⁰. Conceptualized by Brubaker, it was a process of “dual institutionalization” of nationhood and nationality on the sub-state level: on *the territorial political level* through the establishment of ethnoterritorial organizations linking nationalities and their territories on the one hand and on *the individual level* through the introduction of an officially recognized ethnic affiliation of each Soviet citizen on the other⁴¹. Through its ethnofederal principle as a fundamental element of state formation, the Soviet state made nationality a main category in its classification of the population. The registration of one’s nationality (understood as ethnic origin) on the passports introduced by the Stalinist regime in 1932 basically represented genealogical information about the holder and could be registered strictly on the basis of entries in parent’s passports, irrespective of culture, mother tongue, religion, let alone personal preferences⁴².

This record had been instrumental in preferential treatment of territorially based nationalities, notably admission to higher education and employment. Nationality was codified as ethnicity, while ethnicity was understood and became institutionalized as a strictly biological category and was made an ascriptive characteristic defined by birth. Evidently, this approach contrasts with the constructive approach to ethnic identity that construes ethnic identification as a process of socialization and conscious self-identification. This primordial interpretation of ethnicity was as well a distinctive feature of Soviet tradition that was carried along to the post-Soviet space together with the tradition of analytical confusion of ethnicity, nationality and citizenship. Ethnicity, in this sense, is experienced and articulated as nationality. Thus, those of different ethnicity understand themselves and are understood by others as belonging to different nations⁴³.

⁴⁰ Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account ": 52.

⁴¹ Ibid. and Zaslavsky, "Success and Collapse: Traditional Soviet Nationality Policy ".

⁴² Zaslavsky, "Success and Collapse: Traditional Soviet Nationality Policy ", 34.

⁴³ Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account ": 50.

As a practical strategy, the Soviet nationality policy had an undoubtful success in controlling and constraining ethnic nationalism and was instrumental in maintaining ethnic stability in the multinational empire and consolidation of power and control over its territories. The implementation of the policy depended largely on institutional arrangements that produced consequences that were not foreseen or intended by its architects. The form of ethnofederations in which ethnic multinationality was institutionalized and the manner in which ethnicity was aligned with the organization of social life created 1) bounded national territories with nationality being its building block and 2) legally codified ethnic nationalities as an important social determinant. Societal organization along the lines of ethnicity and the divisive system of passports eventually extended their impact beyond the limits of its original intentions and continue to frame identities in the post-Soviet era. As Erica Marat noted, the conflation of ethnicity and nationality as well as confusion of ideology and nationalism persist in identity production and nation-building in Central Asia yet today⁴⁴. This persisted interpretation of nationhood and nationality in the post-Soviet political and societal organization appears to be a major cause for many Central Asian countries' difficulty to develop a state-national identity embracing its whole citizenry.

⁴⁴ Erica Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan" *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Paper* (2008).

Chapter 2

Central Asian territorial delimitation: the emergence of nations

Nationality policy in Central Asia

In 1924, in line with the above elaborated nationality policy, the Central Asian territorial framework was reorganized into new territorial administrative entities along national lines. This administrative program was officially titled “national-territorial delimitation” (*natsionalno-gosudarstvennoe razmezhevanie*) and created territorial entities with the boundaries that persisted in the national republics. The delimitation described in this chapter is approached as an important element in the institutionalization of ethnicity and nationality and as a key to understand present day developments in Central Asia hinged on the assumption that post-Soviet nationalism is the result of a nationality policy that institutionalized ethnicity, nationality and nationhood. This chapter deals with the big shift in understanding identity among Central Asian groups and repercussions of the nationality policy for the identity frames in the region. It seeks to depict how national identities evolved out of the new political space created by the delimitation project. The emerged identities associated with nationalities are argued to mediate, shape and channel the current identity discourse.

Carving national identities: the ethnographic challenge

The significance of this event in the history of the region is great not only because it drastically changed the Central Asian societal organization but particularly from the identity point of view, as it marked the era of nationality for the Central Asian groups and became the point when “nationalism

as a belief system developed among Central Asian groups”⁴⁵. The project in and of itself is the most prominent expression of the institutionalization of national identity as it entrenched territorially defined nationhood among people who did not identify themselves in the national sense. This kind of group conceptualization was hardly found in the pre-Soviet nineteenth-century Central Asia. Tribal communities and clans were the predominant frame of identity among Central Asians and the delimitation became a big shift in understanding identity after the Soviet advent to the region.

Creating borders based on the Soviet ethnofederal principle discussed in the first chapter was particularly problematic in the region because of difficulties with ethnic designations in the mixed heterogeneous society. The many languages and dialects spoken in the region with complex ethnic tapestry, overlapping traditions of affiliation, fluid identities and variety of lifestyles “ensured” that national delimitation was not accurate. Under these circumstances, it clearly was problematic to distinguish between ethnic groups and ascribe them to national categories, which the Bolsheviks had nonetheless undertaken. The assumption of arbitrariness in drawing the borders thus derives from the complexities associated with making clear distinctions between the groups who were shading one into another. The populations predominantly consisted of people of Turkic, Mongol and Persian origins whose lifestyles ranged from nomadic and semi-nomadic to sedentary and urban but individual identities did not strictly correspond to these classifications. Identities revolved around overlapping affiliations with religion, region, city, village for sedentary populations (Sarts, a sedentary bilingual hybrid); and tribal, clan family affiliations for nomads and semi-nomads (Kazakh-Kyrgyz-Karakalpak and nomadic Turkmen tribes)⁴⁶. For example, in the cities such as Samarkand and Bukhara, it was common for an Uzbek who spoke Tajik (Persian) to identify

⁴⁵ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

him/herself as a Bukharan⁴⁷. Much of the population was at least bilingual and lived in mixed settlements. Countless linguistic and affiliation anomalies were common for the region, many were at least bilingual out of necessity of interaction in various mixed settlements. Furthermore, cleavages rarely ran along ethnic lines but were rather preconditioned by differences in lifestyles and geography, a situation still existing today. Conflicts mostly occurred over competition for resources, not ethnic differences⁴⁸. Thus, the task for ethnographers set by the center was to make sense of this “mosaic of people” and to establish most appropriate borders⁴⁹ was not an easy one. The initial establishment of administrative boundaries based on an existing census in 1924 produced a situation of competition and disputes over land, resources and national designation and even after the collapse of the Soviet Union many borders in the region remained disputed, particularly in the Tajik-Uzbek case. So, as of the time of ethnic designation by the ethnographers, geographers and other specialists, a consensus was reached that nationality should be defined as a biological category, thus putting ethnogenesis in the center of forming Central Asian republics.

The logic of delimitation: central perspective and local initiatives

The delimitation can be looked at from two perspectives: from the central perspective and local groups’ involvement and existing identities. From the perspective of central authorities, the national delimitation of Central Asia was an integral part of the logic of nationality policy with its premises and aims of non-imperialist colonization, modernization of the backward societies with predominantly ‘feudal-patriarchal’ societal structures and stabilization of the region that was

⁴⁷ Amanda Farrant, "Mission Impossible: The Politico-Geographical Engineering of Soviet Central Asia's Republican Boundaries " *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 1-2 (March-June 2006): 67.

⁴⁸ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia*

⁴⁹ Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and Category "Nationality" In the 1926, 1937 and 1939 Censuses ".

perceived as highly fragmented and divided by numerous cleavages cutting across the region. Through the ethnoterritorial principle, the idea of national cultural nationhood was brought to the region where national consciousness was lacking. It was done not simply for the sake of promoting nationality to transform the society but also for consolidating the Soviet might as all national parts of the union were to become “interconnected parts of an economic, administrative, and political whole”⁵⁰.

The suggestions in regards to what was the main rationale for realignment vary to the extremes. Some scholars have attributed it to the combination of *realpolitik* and a typically imperialistic divide and rule policy that was intended to weaken pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic aspirations⁵¹. More recent studies, however, having emerged after sources in the former Central Party Archives were made available, reveal a more complex web of motives of a number of actors⁵². As Haugen argues, for the Central Asian case the Soviet leadership mainly shared the assumption that that the ethnoterritorial structure would ease the administration in the region. Specifically, it was deemed to be the best available way to ensure Soviet control and further implement nationality policy over Central Asian territories and peoples. From his perspective, in the eyes of the regime this fragmentation represented an obstacle, and unity was rather a goal than a threat. The Soviet regime saw national antagonism prevailing in Central Asia, and believed that it was a challenge to Soviet stability⁵³. From this point of view, the reorganization was primarily aimed at facilitating the administration of the region and only secondly it should have fit into the idea of a more comprehensive plan for societal transformation and modernization of the backward regions of the

⁵⁰ ———, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," 206.

⁵¹ John Glen, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (London McMillan, 1999).

⁵² Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and Category "Nationality" In the 1926, 1937 and 1939 Censuses ".

⁵³ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 96.

Soviet space⁵⁴. The case of Central Asian territorial delimitation demonstrates that the major task of uniform Soviet nationality policy could be defined as a means of mobilizing ethnic populations to accomplish Soviet-style modernization, while maintaining internal stability in a multinational region full of ethnic divisions and resentments based on the assumption of its deep fragmentation.

On the part of the local population the language of nationality was adopted quickly after the regime linked the official nationality category to land and resources and people coalesced around the nationality principle to benefit from the designated national category. "These categories were neither primordial nor totally artificial but were labels that became meaningful through a combination of official policies, expert input and local initiatives: people did not passively submit to the new identities but learnt to manipulate them for their own ends ... learnt the proper way to be national"⁵⁵. The emergence of Central Asian republics could fit into Rogers Brubaker's conception of the emergence of the nation being not necessarily a result of a long historical development but rather as a reaction to a particular political situation and circumstance and as a result of corresponding institutional arrangements⁵⁶.

Arbitrariness in border making has long been perceived as a main characteristic of the borders and was regarded as a main cause of existing antagonisms present day. Nevertheless, notwithstanding many predictions of disintegration of the states after the collapse of the Soviet regime, based particularly on the argument of its artificiality and arbitrariness, they persisted and continue elaborating a national message to legitimize its existence. The groups and territorial entities' existence in a national sense and the scale of assertion of national identities represent an enduring consequence of pervasive institutionalization of nationality. The growing meaning of

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵ Hirsch, "Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities," 202.

⁵⁶ See Rogers Brubaker, "Rethinking Nationhood: Nation as Institutionalized Form, Practical Caterogry, Contingent Event. ," *Contention* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1994).

nationality however should not be simply limited to mere pragmatism. It is the new political situation and the emergence of conscious national elites that reinforced national identities alike. It nevertheless does not mean that national identity became dominant over tribal and clan conglomerates and local affiliations, particularly among the common population, even though elites could be engaged, intellectually and politically, in promoting national rights. Indeed, it is important to note that the division along smaller identities within national groups is still a political and cultural reality today.

Thus, the delimitation marked the big shift in identity as a result of nationality policy brought to the Central Asian region. New political situations and the promotion of a national ideology craved a relevant political identity while the institutions of national republics defined states of and for particular nations. Nonetheless, the impossibility of constructing ethnodemographically “clean” frontiers of national territories made the full congruence between ethnic groups and territories unattainable. The principles of attaching specific ethnicity to a given territory under its name predisposed tensions between “titular nationality” and minority groups who occurred to be “on the wrong side”, where the distinction between the core nationality and the citizenry on the whole, as discussed in the first chapter, was sharp. This co-existence made majority and minority groups even more ethnically self-conscious and created a distinction that runs deep cleavages within social and political spaces.

Mindful of Brubaker⁵⁷, the administrative-territorial delimitation (as a major project of reconfiguration of multiethnic, multilingual, and multicultural political space along ostensibly ethnic lines) is treated in this analysis as an extraordinary example of institutionalization of

⁵⁷ ———, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004). The approach suggests looking at the “politics of categories” from above (imposition and institutionalization) and from below (“micropolitics”), how the categories are expropriated; treats *group-making* as a social, cultural and political project aimed at transforming categories into groups and increasing levels of groupness.

nationality and national identities that became entrenched in administrative routines and governance and that transformed ethnic categories into salient groups. In this chapter examining the creation of the national identity category “from above”, I intended to demonstrate how categories were proposed, articulated, institutionalized and entrenched in particular territories through nationality policy. “From below” the imposed national identities were quickly internalized by local populations once the regime linked the resources distribution to the nationality principle. Through the elements of the nationality policy as breeding national cultures and preferential treatment policies, nationality obtained meaning for Central Asian groups not only in an administrative sense but once institutionalized became an organizing principle of social classification and a category used to make sense of the social world that became embodied in the modern states of the post-Soviet epoch.

Chapter 3

Search for post-Soviet national identity

Challenges, responses and continuity

As has been discussed in the preceding chapter, through the delimitation project, nationality has been given political and institutional significance when administrative and territorial divisions were carried out based on ethnic belonging. Political resources were increasingly connected to national affiliation, and it was mainly this factor that transformed relatively insignificant divisions into important ones⁵⁸. The ethnic groups in names of which national republics were established, subsequently consolidated into full-blown nations as a result of the implementation of the nationality policy in the region.

The collapse of the Soviet Union had drastically changed the situation in the republics of Central Asia. Unlike in the cases of the Baltic or Georgian independence movements, independence in Central Asia was received reluctantly and no nationalist movement in the strong sense took place that would mark the new era of sovereignty and legitimize national leaders in power. Central Asia, unlike the Baltic republics, did not have a history of prior Soviet statehood and its republics were the creations of the Soviet Union. When sovereignty came to the Central Asian republics, the political leaders who wished to remain in power had to reformulate their political agendas and all of them engaged in promoting what Anderson has called “the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our times”⁵⁹ - the idea of nation. The former communist leaders of Central Asian republics turned to the discourse on nationalism to legitimize their rule in a new sovereign context.

⁵⁸ Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2003).

⁵⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London Verso 1991), 12.

For more than a decade, the Central Asian republics have elaborated a national discourse by attempting to define national identity in response to the challenges associated with the fall of the Soviet Union. The quest to build cohesion among diverse populations and readdress the national question had set a number of challenges for the ruling political elites. At the moment of Soviet collapse, the Central Asian republics were not ready for the independent existence economically, institutionally and ideologically but were in need to form national cohesion, win loyalty among the population and shore up their government's legitimacy.

The case study of nation-building in the two republics of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, intend to exemplify how the discourse on national identities carried out by political elites is influenced by their common Soviet legacy and their institutional experiences as an explanation to why elites' attempts to build a national identity that its citizens could relate to did not succeed.

Kyrgyzstan

Despite the seven decades of existence as a national state, at the moment of the Soviet Union's dissolution, Kyrgyz national identity was poorly developed. Traditional forms of sub-national identities continue to occupy a significant place in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan. Ethnic identities and various kinds of regional and other sub-national identities, loyalties, and patronage networks were not replaced by monolithic national identification. Some analyses claim that this situation is a legacy of the Soviet period as the Soviet experience created an environment in which those kinds of divisions proved useful and valuable in the context of limited economy and rigid bureaucratic structures⁶⁰. Existing tensions reflect the country's numerous divisions, notably regional origin, ethnic background and kinship groups (between Kyrgyz *uruu* or lineage). At present the most prominent division used to characterize Kyrgyz society is a cleavage between the north and the south

⁶⁰ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 212.

of the country. The north-south categories are perhaps mostly used in labeling politicians and coalitions. It can be asserted that the north-south cleavage is a reaction to the politics of the elites not a product of ethnic differences,⁶¹ nevertheless both ethnic and regional cleavages do exist and the independent statehood after collapse of the constraining power of the Soviet Union made it a political reality.

Political elites realize that if their states are to continue functioning, a unifying national identity needs to be cultivated. As Erica Marat notes, in this mission political elites became the sole producers of national ideologies as of the times of independence, with other public sectors, including academic circles, working merely in a support for elite narratives. Looking at the ideologies promoted by the elites aiming to formulate national identity as distinct from Soviet postulations and to legitimate the existence of the state after the collapse of the Soviet regime in the national spirit, the analysis assumes that despite the conception of the “new national start” the identity recomposition brought about by independence has been based on identity markers created by experiences of Soviet policies which framed the definitions of nation, ethnicity and culture as interchangeable primordial categories endowed in a particular territory. The consequences of the nationality policy that brought the nations of Central Asia into existence mapped the way for elaborating national discourse in the independent states and limit it in a variety of ways. In the meantime, the corrupted authoritarian practices of the power elites causing resentment and frustration of its constituencies aggravate the existing cleavages and make reconciliation of civic identities based on inclusive citizenship and exclusive ethnic identities barely possible.

⁶¹ Maxim Ryabkov, "The North-South Cleavage and Political Support in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 3/4 (2008): 301.

The land law of 1991 marked the first legal attempt to conceive the independence of the Kyrgyz state. The newly elected parliament adopted a new land law, which referred to the land and natural resources of Kyrgyzstan as the wealth (*dostoianie*) of the ethnic Kyrgyz⁶².

Given that 90 ethnic minorities constituted almost half of Kyrgyz population the declaration was vigorously protested against by non-titular nationalities. (See Table 1.a.)⁶³

The first president of independent Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev to prevent worsening of already tense ethnic relations vetoed the Article. The declaration was not intended to be discriminative as in the detailed provisions of the law it was made clear that all ethnic groups enjoy equal rights for use and possession of the land. What is curious about this episode is that the natural logic guiding the lawmakers followed that if the territory was given a name of a specific ethnic group it has a historical right, being defined as indigenous population, to assert an ownership over the land. This assumption of historical claims over territory is an everlasting subject of historical research and a recurrent theme of the national discourse. It should be noted here that apart from ethnic groups populating the lands of the republic before the advent of Soviet rule like Uzbeks of the southwestern part and Kazakhs of the northern and northernwestern regions, the industrialization during the Soviet period brought a large number of Russians and other Slavs into the republic. The other group of minorities such as Germans, Koreans, Crimeans, Chechens, Meskhetian Turks and some other were brought to Kyrgyzstan by forced resettlement as a punishment for alleged communal disloyalty during World War II. Thus those who are 'historically foreign' to community are not assumed to

⁶² Eugene Huskey, "Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of Demographic and Economic Frustration," in *Nation and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 398.

⁶³ Source: *Narodnoe Khozyaistvo Kirgizskoi SSR* (Frunze, 1982), p. 16; *Vestnik statistiki*, 1991, 4, p.76-78 in Eugene Huskey, "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan, 1980-90," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 5 (1995). Data for 2010: *Natsionalnii statisticheskii komitet KR* (National Statistical Committee (Bishkek, 2010)

share the same privileges as those who have legitimate (indigenous) claims over national territory⁶⁴.

In the Central Asian republics which all share the legacy of the Soviet nationality policy this assumption often underlines the categorization of minority groups.

Table 1.a. Ethnic composition in Kyrgyzstan (1979-2010)

Group	1979	1979	1989	1989	1999	1999	2010	2010
	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)	(no.)	(%)
Kyrgyz	1,687,382	47.9	2,229,663	52.4	3,128,147	64.9	3,860,549	71.3
Uzbeks	426,194	12.1	550,096	12.9	664,959	13.8	780,583	14.4
Russians	911,703	25.9	916,558	21.5	603,201	12.5	407,981	7.5
Dungans	26,661	0.8	36,928	0.9	51,766	1.1	58,914	1.1
Ukrainians	109,324	3.1	108,027	2.5	50,442	1.0	20,176	0.4
Uigurs	29,817	0.8	36,779	0.9	46,944	1.0	49,171	0.9
Tatars	71,744	2.0	70,068	1.6	45,438	0.9	30,725	0.6
Kazakhs	27,442	0.8	37,318	0.9	42,657	0.9	33,047	0.6
Tajiks	23,209	0.7	33,518	0.8	42,636	0.9	46,786	0.9
Turks	5,160	0.1	21,294	0.5	33,327	0.7	39,153	0.7
Germans	101,057	2.9	101,309	2.4	21,471	0.4	9,240	0.2
Koreans	14,481	0.4	18,355	0.4	19,789	0.4	17,182	0.3
Other*	88,658	2.5	97,842	2.3	72,175	1.5	64,792	1.2
TOTAL	3,522,832	100	4,257,755	100	4,822,952	100	5,418,299	100

*Other include : Armenians, Azerbaijani, Chechens, Belorussians, Georgians, Lithuanians, Moldavians, Turkmen, Estonians, Jews and other ethnic groups

⁶⁴ See M. Fumagalli (2007) on self-categorization of the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan who refer to themselves as a “historical nation” not “diaspora”, latter interpreted through the Soviet understanding of nationalities: diaspora as “small in number and not indigenous” and therefore lacking legitimacy to claim membership in the community associated with minority groups defined by Stalin ‘enemy people’. pp.580-582

This case exhibits another issue of the post-Soviet national discourse of self-assertion and preeminence of the titular nationality over other groups. This is an emotional political issue for people who try to assert themselves in their newly acquired sovereignty in the state that bears the name of their ethnos but where they constitute a bare majority or in some cases even a minority⁶⁵. The issue was relevant for Kazakhstan and Latvia as well. The ethnic Kyrgyz had a vulnerable position in their state on the dawn of independence. First, because they did not represent an overwhelming majority of the population, second they oftentimes felt underprivileged in the transition to a market economy. As a group, they did not have the education and skills in certain areas as the Slavs, neither the commercial traditions of the Uzbeks. In the higher education system the percentage of Kyrgyz applicants admitted to the Kyrgyz universities was 25 percent lower than of Russian applicants⁶⁶. Logically the situation aggravated nationalist demands on the part of titular nationals since the independence and Kyrgyzstan have implemented nationalizing programs that aim to promote members of their respective titular nationalities. Consequently Kyrgyzstan (and also Tajikistan) can be classified as a nationalizing state:

These are states that are conceived by their dominant elites as nation-states, of and for particular ethnocultural nations, yet as “incomplete” or “unrealized” nation-states, as insufficiently “national” in a variety of senses. To remedy this defect, and to compensate for perceived discrimination, nationalizing elites urge and undertake action to promote the language, culture, demographic preponderance, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the core ethnocultural nation.⁶⁷

Here it should however be noted that post-independence nationalizing policies in the cases of both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the field of citizenship, language and education have been far more accommodating than for instance those of the Baltic states. Both CA states adopted a zero-option citizenship policy that automatically included all permanent residents of the former Soviet Socialist Republics in the post-Soviet demos thus rendering the same rights and privileges to all

⁶⁵ J. Linnekin, "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity," *American Anthropologist* 93 (1991).

⁶⁶ Huskey, "The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan, 1980-90," 411.

⁶⁷ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, 9.

non-titular groups. The Russian language spoken as mother tongue by a large number of minority (and titular) groups has been granted an official status of the language of the inter-ethnic communication. Kyrgyzstan's constitution, for instance, guarantees the preservation, development and functioning of Russian, and it prohibits the infringement of rights and freedoms based on ignorance of the state language (Kyrgyz)⁶⁸. Citizens are also guaranteed a choice of language of instruction in all state institutions⁶⁹. These rather minority-friendly accommodating policies were the only reasonable way to go for the states that firstly are greatly dependent on Russia and secondly had a low index of state language proficiency. In Kyrgyz case for instance only 53% of population in 1989 spoke the state language according to the National Statistical Committee.⁷⁰ This reflects an understanding of ethnic and linguistic complexity of the independent state and makes the fall back of the elites into ethnocentrism that is treated in this analysis particularly puzzling.

This fact notwithstanding a large number of nationalist aspirations were common for the post-independence period. Another example is a proposal by a new political party to grant 65 percent of the republic's property to ethnic Kyrgyz during privatization along with other Kyrgyz titular defensive actions. Growing nationalist sentiments in turn caused fears among ethnic minorities and a round of disturbances, caused a flight of minority groups, Russians in particular⁷¹. In this context it was particularly critical to bring consensus and inter-ethnic stability. The complicated ethnic tapestry made the idea of cohesive national identity challenging. Since 1991 Askar Akaev, the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan, has started building a national identity from scratch. Akaev assumed the

⁶⁸ "Konstitusiiia Kirgizskoi Respubliki" (Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic) (Bishkek: Raritet Info, 1999), Article 5

⁶⁹ For a comparative analysis of the condition of Russian minorities in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan, please see Michele E. Commercio, "Exit in the near Abroad. The Russian Minorities in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan," *Problems of Post-Communism* 51, no. 6 (November/December 2004).

⁷⁰ *Natsionalnii statisticheskii komitet, "Itogi pervoi natsionalnoi perepiski naseleniya Kirigizskoi Respubliki 1999 goda"* (National Statistical Committee, "The results of the census of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1999), Bishkek, 1999

⁷¹ For economic reasons of Russian population exit, see M. Commercio's comparative analysis of the Russian minority exit in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan as related to the presence of absence of an ethnic division of labor.

politics of priority of inter-ethnic stability and under the banners like “Civil consensus and national unity - YES; chauvinism, nationalism, and extremism - NO”⁷² or “Kyrgyzstan is our common home” he attracted a large popular support, including unequivocally from minority groups. Among all Central Asian leaders, Akaev was the most elaborate in defining the civic vector of national identity when he assumed power. However, his growing authoritarianism and attempts to get a tight hold on power turned his ideological discourse into available means to entrench his regime and position. His celebration of Manas 1000 (1000th anniversary of the Kyrgyz epic hero) and Osh 3000 (the anniversary of 3000 years of the Osh city) were used for the purpose of generating support before the presidential elections in 1995 and 2000 respectively⁷³. As Erica Marat points out, it is the common trait of post-Soviet states is the use of national ideologies for quick mobilization of titular ethnicities and the ignorance of the civic minority rights⁷⁴. This has been the case with Akaev’s later ideological projects as well. “In the Soviet manner of ideology production the President became the soul national ideologue and enjoyed full unrestricted power interests.⁷⁵” In the tradition of the Soviet Communist Party that monopolized ideological production, the post-Soviet national leaders approach national ideology with the same attitude and regard it as their mission to indoctrinate and institutionalize the identities they define. In the Kyrgyz case, Akaev was the primary narrator of the Kyrgyz story, which has taken eventually an ethnocentric and manipulative tone. Despite his push for the Manas, as a symbol of nation’s antiquity, to be the nation’s hero of choice, Manas was largely a passing reference for the average person and the UNESCO-sponsored celebration of 2.5 million US dollars⁷⁶ was considered a waste of money. The growing cynicism in regard to

⁷² Elebaeva Ainura and Nurbek Omuraliev, "Problems of Managing Ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 1, no. 13 (2002): 151.

⁷³ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 8.

⁷⁴ Ibid.: 11.

⁷⁵ Lori M. Handrahan, "Gender and Ethnicity in the 'Transitional Democracy' of Kyrgyzstan " *Central Asian Survey* 20, no. 4 (2001): 470.

⁷⁶ Ibid

celebrations of this kind was predetermined by the general decline of living standards and poverty among the population. The ideological poverty somehow was deemed as a higher priority than economic and social crises. Through the attempts to divert attention from the socio-economic problems and growing authoritarianism, the population was offered a “spiritual” symbolism. Public discontent with the regime eventually caused the downfall of Akaev who was ousted during the so-called ‘tulip revolution’ of 2005.

For Central Asian republics’ national history can not be a fruitful source for national identity, therefore the leaders turned to a pre-Soviet period framing, the discourse in the national spirit. Having inherited borders created by the Soviet Union and culture promoted within the scope of Soviet ideology, the Central Asian states now try to give themselves a new meaning through inventing and re-interpreting historical events, making historical analogues and employing metaphors from the ‘ancient past’. Turkmenbashi⁷⁷, the incumbent president of Turkmenistan, for instance, in his endeavor to create homogenous Turkmen national identity uses the term “national revival” instead of “nation-building” that asserts the existence of the nation in the pre-Soviet times and the revival of the true spirit of the nation.⁷⁸ However, the distinct feature of the Turkmen nation-building is that his policies are carried out in the relatively homogenous environment and aim at unification of five Turkmen tribes. Generally, the nation’s pre-Soviet experience of statehood in all Central Asian states occupy a central place in revision of histories. Akaev tried to prove that Kyrgyz memory of statehood dates back 2,200 years⁷⁹ on which occasion a grand celebration of 2,200 years of the Kyrgyz statehood was held. The “antiquity race” among groups continues to be used to

⁷⁷ His actual name is Saparmurat Niyazov. He adopted the name Turkmenbashi (head of Turkmens) following independence and maintains a highly authoritarian regime until now

⁷⁸ *Turkmenistan: Stability, Reforms, Neutrality: The Fragments of Speeches, Interviews and Talks by Saparmurat Turkmenbashi* (Ashgabat: Ministry of foreign affairs of Turkmenistan, 1996). in Ahmet T. Kuru, "Between the State and Cultural Zones: Nation Building in Turkmenistan," *Central Asian Survey* 21, no. 1 (2002):

71.

⁷⁹ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 24.

substantiate legitimacy over occupied territories and ethnic supremacy over other groups living on these territories invoking the Soviet policy of indigenism and ethnogenesis as a central concept for building an ethnofederal state. The ideologies promoted are thus focused on the experiences of the titular ethnicity and identified historical experiences that took place on its territory. In the case of Tajikistan though, it also includes Bukhara and Samarqand, presently territory of Uzbekistan, but linked tightly to Tajik history and culture and elaborated in Tajik discourse as historically Tajik.⁸⁰

The ideological projects in Kyrgyzstan had a pre-text of large heterogeneity and President Akaev who took the civic tone in bringing up the notion of citizenship at the moment of his coming to power, though his later discourse articulated more of a primordial rather than a constructed definition of ethnicity and fell into ethno-centric position for the sake of mobilizing his apparatus and the need to by least means acquire quick electoral support of the titular group. Moreover, generally Kyrgyz political elites as well as the general public had difficulties in adopting the notion of citizenship, as citizenship, nationality and ethnicity were indoctrinated by the Soviet regime as practically identical notions. Ultra-nationalists called for a need to make emphasis on the Kyrgyz experience, culture and tradition in promoting national identity while ethnic minorities could not associate themselves with promoted ideologies. Manas ideology was some sort of a retreat in promoting the idea of citizenship as it was aiming at invoking Kyrgyz national consciousness. Akaev argued that “every nation has its genetic code that was formed thousands of years ago”⁸¹ and Manas was a representation of this Kyrgyz genetic code⁸². Using the image of Manas as embodiment of Kyrgyz patriotism, Akaev used the veneration of the Manas ideals in his definition of state

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Askar Akaev, "Trudnaya Doroga K Demokratii [Difficult Road to Democracy]," *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya* 2002, 177. in E. Marat (2008)

⁸² ———, "Otkrovenny Razgovor [Frank Conversation]," *Sovershenno sekretno* 1998, 24. in E. Marat (2008)

nationalism by treating anyone who would oppose his interpretation as unpatriotic⁸³. Moreover, he adopted these interpretations to suit his political purposes, for instance by arranging celebrations to co-inside with his electoral campaigns⁸⁴. The national identity was constructed on the basis of ethnic symbols and further was instrumentalized to ensure short-term political support taking a safer path of appealing to ethnic sentiments rather than civic values, which both reflected and reinforced the Soviet tradition of understanding nation in primordial and autochthonous terms.

In contrast to Akaev, the next regime, also ousted as a result of popular protests in April 2010, abandoned the state-sponsored ideological production as a foundation for national identity. Despite few inconsistent attempts of Akaev's successor Kurmanbek Bakiev to take lead in ideology production, this issue was obviously out of his priorities. This inspired the resolution by the Kyrgyz parliament with recommendation to the government to define Kyrgyz "national intangible cultural heritage" in February 2010. The goal of the project was "to prevent possible inscription of epic Manas into UNESCO World Heritage List by other nations". Specifically, the lawmakers suggested to patent Issyk-Kul lake, Arslanbob national park, Saimaluu-Tash petroglyph site, Burana tower, all items of national clothes, yurt, musical instrument komuz, national horse game At Chabysh. "We should preserve heritage of our people for our descendants ...there is a great risk here that the national heritage would go to other people. This is why we should submit it (to UNESCO) on behalf of the Kyrgyz⁸⁵", the law-maker suggested. This was an attempt to bring back the identity discourse through the subject of 'ownership' and the need to uncover, realize, promote and protect the culture of the nation and prevent "expropriation" by foreign elements. Bakiev also launched an initiative to proclaim 2010 as the Year of Heritage when his regime was already in crises but it remained low-

⁸³ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 38.

⁸⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵ "Kyrgyz Parliament Recommends That Government Makes List of National Intangible Cultural Heritage," *News Agency AKIpress* (2010).

profile and passed by unnoticed. When Bakiev came to power in 2005 he signed a decree establishing the creation of a working group with the mission of elaborating a ‘Conception of the state and national ideology of Kyrgyzstan’ though the commission never finished their project of defining ‘proper national ideology’ for the state of Kyrgyzstan. The chair of the commission was Dostan Sarygulov appointed as the State Secretary, the post that assumed the official responsibility to develop national ideology, was a propagandist of Tengrism, an ancient Turkic religion dating back to the fourth century BC. Though the idea was and remains marginal and it did not received a wide-spread support, it was nevertheless institutionalized with the founding of the “Tengir-Ordo Association for the preservation of the National Heritage”, which is yet another example of an ethicized form of the search for post-Soviet national identity in Kyrgyzstan. As Marlene Laurrelle in her research of political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan points out, it represents a trend to claim the originality of nation in its ethnic meaning, its existence on the same territory as of ancient times, its ethnic continuity from the historic past and its specific religious conceptions. “The quest for an ancient prestigious past is thus at the heart of the rehabilitation of the ethnic sentiment advocated by Tengrism”⁸⁶. As Sarygulov put it, “the individual can only go back to his roots by evaluating the ethnic past, and by liberating it from the colonialist presuppositions of Russian dominance”⁸⁷. The narrative suggested through the Tengrism revival is that the Kyrgyz state should assume the model of development that would be the continuation of the historical past and ethnic heritage. Unlike the Tatarstan case, that is not an independent state, where Tengrism permits the development of pan-Turkik solidarity, the Kyrgyz case treats Tengrism as means to emphasize the Kyrgyz character of the state.

⁸⁶ Laruelle, "Regional Revival, Nationalism and the 'Invention of Tradition' : Political Tengrism in Central Asia and Tatarstan ": 209.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Religion on the whole is an important factor of post-national independence identity recomposition⁸⁸. Though majority of the population of Kyrgyzstan are Muslim⁸⁹ (*Hanafi* Sunni Islam), the authorities have been careful not to declare Islam an official religion and are trying to keep it apolitical perceiving it as a potential ideological rival and factor of destabilization. On the other hand in a search for cultural authenticity and need for counter references to Russian-Soviet domination, political elites try to reinvest Islam as a form of traditional identity. The references to Islam by the political authorities in Kyrgyzstan represent their attempt to establish their symbolic legitimacy and to thwart the competition from Islamic movements⁹⁰. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Islam is postulated as one of the cornerstones of the national construction of Kyrgyz post-independence, it did not evolve into a supra-ethnic unifying Muslim identity among Muslim ethnic groups. Biard's research on re-Islamization through ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan concludes that "ethnic identities prevail over any Muslim solidarity" and "damage any attempt at promoting a transnational and supra-ethnic Muslim identity"⁹¹. Indeed, the national phenomenon prevails over religion and it is evident from the fact that imams have to come from "ethnic groups" within which they practice and mosques are designated as Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Dungan etc. Whilst religion as part of national identification presents a separate subject for research, the existing findings point out to the aspect important for the present work, i.e. the salience of ethnic affiliation and national references over collective religion identification. This, as I argue, is another indicator of the salience of ethnicity on the post-Soviet spaces as a result of its policies.

⁸⁸ On more detailed account of religion in relevance to national identity see: Aurelie Biard, "The Religious Factor in the Reification Of "Neo-Ethnic" Identities in Kyrgyzstan " *Nationalities Papers* 38, no. 3 (August 2010), Alexander Agadjanian, "Revising Pandora's Gift: Religious and National Identity in the Post-Soviet Societal Fabric " *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 3 (2001), Ferideh Heyat, "Re-Islamization in Kyrgyzstan: Gender, New Poverty and Moral Dimension " *Central Asian Survey* 23, no. 3-4 (December 2004).

⁸⁹ The religions which are "historically linked to the nation" such as the Orthodox Church and some other Churches has been granted status by being written down into national legislation. Non-national religious movements are deemed "foreign" and denounced as "sects" (Biard, 325).

⁹⁰ Biard, "The Religious Factor in the Reification Of "Neo-Ethnic" Identities in Kyrgyzstan ": 325.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*: 330.

Because of the Soviet past and distinctions drawn among people along ethnic lines, newly independent states are inclined to institute an ethnographic regime. The ideology that specifies ethnicity matches the Soviet presumption of nationality policy that assumes that the world is divided into cultures and civilizations which are conceptualized in an essentialist mode, hence the tilt towards the ideologies that would underline the unique originality, distinctiveness and antiquity of an ethnic group thus giving it more legitimacy.

The present situation in Kyrgyzstan after the fall of Bakiev's regime is still in flux. It's too early to make predictions which position the new government will adopt in relation to identity in the midst of economic and social crises. The new constitution for instance has abandoned the categories of "titular nation" and "titular language", though whether this development heralds a new approach to identity interpretation yet remains to be seen. Economic frustration and dissatisfaction with the low level of life is often expressed through ethnic resentments. Conflicts not ethnic in nature surface over ethnic alliances, because in extreme conditions of political uncertainty and social unrest people tend to fall back on existing networks of support. This occurred when the coup that ousted President Bakiev was followed by a number of clashes along ethnic lines⁹² and spilled into a major outbreak of violence in the South that the region hasn't seen in decades. These developments once more pointed out that inter-ethnic stability is a prerequisite for the country's viability and the way the government will address this challenge and national 'identity crisis' remains to be seen.

It is important to note that heterogeneity is not a problem per se. The experience of ethnic co-existence and tolerance in the spirit of internationalism is also a significant Soviet heritage. Ethnic

⁹² April 9, 2010: a shooting attack on Uzbek newspaper "Dyidor" office, Jalalabat
 April 12, 2010: attack against ethnic Russians and ethnic Meskhetian Turks in Maevka village
 May 12, 2010: clashes between Uzbek supporters of Kadyrjan Batyrov and ethnic Kyrgyz, Jalabat Province
 Source: www.ferghana.ru "Jug Kyrgyzstana: Kriminal'nye konflikty mogut privesti k etnicheskim potrjasenijam". (South of Kyrgyzstan: criminal conflicts may cause ethnic disturbances)
 05.05.2010

variety is not a source of conflict, rather the lack of national cohesion and consolidation in the civic sense is. Such cohesion is viable in the content of heterogeneity if a citizen identifies with the state and feels that the state represents its interest. The state must become a provider of basic needs, security and justice whilst state's involvements in defining the sole proper format for identity in ethnic terms should be abandonment.

Tajikistan

The case of Tajikistan shares many similarities with the Kyrgyz case covered above. Both bear the legacy of more than seven decades of Soviet rule, both are the creations of the Soviet Union, Central Asia's poorest states, both marked with the history of violent conflicts. Tajikistan, though, grapples with its own context-specific version of the problems of nationality politics. After decades during which the Soviet regime defined and regulated national identity, Tajiks now assumed control over the interpretation of their own statehood just like other states. National assertiveness in the Tajik context, however, had been impacted by the experience of a protracted violent civil war that lasted six years from 1992 to 1997. The marks of civil war and existing regional and clan cleavages and economic deprivation made the issues of nation cohesion highly relevant. Reunification of a divided nation became the state's ultimate aim though as well as a matter of political speculation on the part of elites. Tajikistan's pursuit of a national doctrine in the effort to combine modern ideas and a historical narrative became a strategic political issue for President's Emomali Rakhmon after the end of the war. Another historically distinct fact is that the Tajik, referred to by Tajik nationalist, as "the loosing party of delimitation"⁹³, experienced a national trauma caused by delimitation as a result of which the Tajiks ended up with only a "rump-Tajikistan" because the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara, which have a strong cultural, symbolic and historical meaning for the Persian population of

⁹³ Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* 211.

Tajikistan, were cut off in favor of Uzbekistan. The fact that Tajik national pride is located beyond national borders gave the nation a sense of ‘symbolic handicap’. This fact made the Tajik national ‘revival’ even more meaningful and marginalization and ‘othering’ of its Uzbek minority population more intense.

Just like in the Kyrgyz case legitimizing ideology of the elites acquired a nationalist flavor in the revival of national self-appreciation in Tajikistan. The examples of the ideological choices of national elites and President Emomali Rakhmon to be discussed in this section as the “pillars” intended to instill Tajik national identity are the cult of Ismail Samani, the myth of the Aryan civilization and Zoroastrianism. The underlying motives of these ideological projects demonstrate the assumption that the nation’s ancient presence on its contemporary territory and ethnic divisions continues to represent the basic matrix of the national discourse.

The Persian line of identity narrative alludes on the distinctiveness of the Tajik ethnic culture and its direct link with the Persian civilization and language that allows Tajikistan to stand out from Turkic Central Asian neighbors but also distinct itself from its large Uzbek minority that defines itself in purely Turkic terms. Relying heavily on the Soviet historiography and ethnography in ideological production, Tajikistan adheres to the primordial definition of ethnicity and defines ethnicity as a core of national identity. The Soviet means of ideological production are also prevalent in the Tajik case. Political elites treat ideologies as part of their function. The discourse on identity is being performed in an essential mode, retroactively projecting onto the past existence of a Tajik nation which in national terms was born out of Soviet modernity. The ethnic and regional identities (Kulyabs, Pamiris, Yangnobs) project themselves to some distant past in order to create an aura of legitimacy. Being a native Kulyab, Rakhmon emphasized the ancientness of his city and its ‘cultural pureness’. A number of pro-presidential politicians argued that Kulyab must become the national

capital due to its historical heritage and cultural pureness⁹⁴. These distinctions resurfaced after the fall of the Soviet Union and reinforced by the civil war, predominantly base themselves on the same arguments assumed through delimitation, i.e through the ethnic make up and ethnic characteristics and its attachment to a particular territory. The ideologies of post-Soviet Tajikistan continue depicting ethnic groups as existing, objective, and natural facts from which contemporary national identity derives.

The elaboration of a discourse on the national identity in today's Central Asia is always politicized, for which the Tajik case is no exception. The Tajik three main ideological projects of the cult of Ismail Samani, Zoroastrianism and the Aryan civilization aim at the legitimization of the Tajik nation and its statehood were primary sought to increase their main ideologue's President Rakhmon's power and alienate Islamic opposition which became a strategic political issue after the end of the civil war⁹⁵. Construction of a nation state and expanding presidential authority are mutually supporting processes in Central Asian context, as presidents of the new republics try to establish authoritarian power by asserting that new independent states lack a firmly established national identity and thus needs a strong state. Interestingly, academic circles and post-Soviet sciences, now free of Soviet ideological pressure, had to adopt themselves to this situation and engage in justifying and explaining the 1991 independence and the existing state borders⁹⁶. As Laruelle rightly notes "not only does the state put pressure on sciences, so that they assert its legitimacy and independence scientifically, but the authorities being increasingly authoritarian, claim for themselves the right to shape national discourse, following the Soviet tradition"⁹⁷.

⁹⁴ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 57.

⁹⁵ Ibid.: 9, ———, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan".

⁹⁶ Marlene Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology" *Nationalities papers* 35, no. 1 (March 2007): 53.

⁹⁷ Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology ": 53.

The state after independence decided to embody “the great medieval Iranian-speaking Muslim culture”⁹⁸ as a model. Now, after independence, through national revival, the nation was promised to experience a period of rebirth and international recognition. In historical discourse elaborated by the state the modern Tajik nation as Tajik ethnos represents a continuity of an ancient civilization autochthonous for the region as of ancient times. The “glorious past” of the Tajik self is identified first and foremost with the Samanid Dynasty (875-999). According to Soviet Tajik historiography, carried on by modern historiography, the Samanid Kingdom was a Tajik state and presided over the emergence of the Tajiks as a “distinct, consolidated people with a flourishing culture”. In reality, however, it ruled very little of what today is the Tajik republic⁹⁹. According to Shukarov, Sadridin Ayni’s works (one of the most prominent writer’s of the country’s history) are widely used in interpreting the content of Tajik identity today. His works emphasize the historical and philosophical grounds for the definition of Tajiks as a united and distinct ethnic group based on the narrative of the Tajik ethnos stressing the importance of Farsi literature and language as defining identity factor¹⁰⁰. The new ideology put a big emphasis on language as its soul and symbol of national unity. Tajikistan’s 1989 language law equated Tajik and Persian¹⁰¹ that again indicates the importance of the Persian connection of contemporary Tajikistan in a linguistic and cultural sense. Curiously, in the draft to a language law someone had added that the Tajik calendar was going to change to the national Iranian¹⁰² to bring Tajik national consciousness even closer to that of Iranian.

⁹⁸ Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Why Did Nationalism Fail in Tajikistan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no. 7 (1996): 1107.

⁹⁹ Muriel Atkin, "Tajikistan: Ancient Heritage, New Politics " in *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States* ed. Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 363.

¹⁰⁰ Rustam Shukurov, *Tadzhikistan: Muki Vospominaniya [Tajikistan: Pain of Memory]*, *Natsional'naya Instoriya V Sovetskom I Postsovetskom Gosudarstvah [National History in Soviet and Post-Soviet States]* (Moscow: ARIO-XX, 2005), 237. E. Marat 54

¹⁰¹ Atkin, "Tajikistan: Ancient Heritage, New Politics ", 369.

¹⁰² Franz Wenneberg, "The Globality of Tajik Nationalism - a Research Note," *Central Asian Survey* 21, no. 4 (2002): 405.

The idea of Samanid legacy is an example of how the pre-Islamic period continues to be mythologized by identity engineers in the national spirit to suit the agendas of the power elites. The promotion of the Samanid Dynasty was the major theme of the national day celebration in 1999 celebrating the 1100 years of the Samanid State (proclaimed as the first Tajik statehood) commemorated by a larger statute of Ismail Samani, one of the Samanid dynasty's kings. The role of the Samanid dynasty was instilled further when a new national currency Samani was introduced.¹⁰³ Ismail Somoni is presented as the man who unified the Tajik people, brought independence, universal recognition, culture and civilization free from religion and forged the ethnic identity of the nation. In the contemporary myth Emomali Rakhmon is equated with Ismail Somoni as in the role the ideology assigns to the president in settling the civil war¹⁰⁴. The idea of Samanid legacy of statehood and emphasized Persian character of the national consciousness leaves no room for its large Turkic Uzbek minority.

Indeed, the current regime models its nation-building project on the Samanid state¹⁰⁵. Yet it was still deemed insufficient by ideologues as it "suffered from a sloppy ignorance of the importance of other historical periods before and after the Samanid Dynasty".¹⁰⁶ Among all, the Aryan myth proved to be a significant but also ambiguous ideology in Rakhmon's politics. Aryanism emphasized an Arian core of Tajiks and the antiquity of the Tajiks as an ethnic group, thus underlining its cultural and ethnic superiority dating it back to the days of Ariana. The Aryan project also aimed at alienating the Islamic opposition and connect modern Tajikistan as posterity of Aryan civilization with European civilization¹⁰⁷. Although the Tajik's connection to the Aryan civilization does not

¹⁰³ Ibid.: 408.

¹⁰⁴ Helge Blakkisrud and Shahnoza Nozimova, "History Writing and Nation Building in Post-Independence Tajikistan" *Nationalities papers* 38, no. 2 (2010): 178.

¹⁰⁵ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 56.

¹⁰⁶ Marat 56

¹⁰⁷ Marlene Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology" *Nationalities papers* 35, no. 1 (March 2007): 59.

enjoy much recognition even locally, Rakhmon nevertheless institutionalized the idea by supporting numerous scholarly writings, promoting it through his own books and speeches, and by holding grand celebration in September 2006¹⁰⁸. The cultural and historical heritage used by contemporary identity engineers in their attempt to construct anew national identity continues to employ the ‘old soviet resource’ and relies on Soviet historiography. As France Wenneberg points out, the new government that emerged after the civil war was stuck between nationalisms formed by the Soviet discourse and the unwanted nationalism of a more transnational nature that was advocated by the Islamic-democratic opposition¹⁰⁹. And the Soviet heritage was deemed to be safer to adhere to as it emphasizes its secular heritage (instrumental to alienate Islamic opposition and curb Islamic transnationalism) and the antiquity of dominant ethnic group to strengthen its position in power.

The state continuously emphasizes the immense antiquity of their culture and language, claiming that their nation is among the most ancient in the world. In such a debate the ethnic group’s antiquity alludes to its cultural richness and superiority. As a result, cultural supremacy is understood as being proportional to how long a people has been present within its national territory revoking the principle of autochthony relied on by Soviet policymakers as a primary source of legitimacy of ethnic group and its territorial belonging.

In the scientific tradition of the Tajik Academy of Sciences there appears to be little tendency to “deconstruct the authenticity of traditional culture and reveal it to be an “intellectual red herring.”¹¹⁰ The concept of cultural exclusivity, antiquity and supremacy remains entrenched in popular thought and is an emotional political issue for people asserting themselves in the newly

¹⁰⁸ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan": 9.

¹⁰⁹ Franz Wenneberg, "The Globality of Tajik Nationalism - a Research Note," *Central Asian Survey* 21, no. 4 (2002): 407.

¹¹⁰ J. Linnekin, "Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authenticity," *American Anthropologist* 93 (1991): 903.

acquired sovereignty though employing a traditional Soviet understanding of human history. Many Tajik researchers are interested in the word “Ariana” and present it as the ancient country of the Aryans, whose historical existence has been proved and whose territory would have corresponded closely to contemporary Tajikistan. In research works published in Dushanbe, the Tajik capital, it is maintained that, in terms of politics and culture highly developed proto-Aryan peoples were already in existence several centuries before Christ. The Tajik world thus has been born out of high Aryan civilization in the second millennium before our era¹¹¹. This retroactive construction of identity between Aryans and Tajiks permits the local science “to monopolize the great empires of Asia Minor, the Achaemenids, the epic of Alexander the Great, and the Selvedis”¹¹².

As Laruelle points out in her research of the Tajik Aryan myth, the invention of the Aryan myth to substantiate Tajik national antiquity and superiority making its century-long heritage of culture and statehood directly linked to the modern Tajik nation and its Persian population serves particular purposes. This discourse competes with the Turkic world and more particularly with the Uzbek neighbor and its Turkic identity but also to a lesser extent with Iran, deemed to expropriate a rich ancient heritage, which should be shared with, if not fully attributed to, Tajikistan. Tajik territories were not late provinces of Iran but cradles of Zoroastrianism and of the Aryan peoples. Through invention of the antiquity myths Tajikistan presents itself as the sole possessor of the Indo-European heritage of Central Asia¹¹³. Tajik academic historiographical tradition mainly relies on Soviet historiography which emphasize the genetic nature of ethnic groups rather than its constructive character and still treats “ethnogenesis” as a central category in the formation of ethnic groups¹¹⁴. As during the Soviet period, ethnicity today is still largely understood as a biological

¹¹¹ Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology".

¹¹² Ibid.: 59.

¹¹³ Ibid: 57-60

¹¹⁴ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 9.

category, rather than a cultural construct. The idea of constructed nature of ethnic category is being incorporated to a very limited extent into the discourse of ethnic origin. True that inventions were always common components of the development of authentic culture where producers of invention are both insiders and outsiders,¹¹⁵ the Soviet ethnographers and native groups in the Central Asian case, but the ethnic obsession of the Tajik national discourse and particularly the Aryan myth contributes to its radical racialization and defeats the purpose of the national unity. The Aryanist obsession of certain Tajik academic groups and an attempt to conceptualize new a national identity in an Arian spirit goes hand in hand “with the willingness of an ethnic, even racial, separation between the Turkic and Indo-European peoples, obviously with the intention of asserting the superiority of the latter”¹¹⁶. The Soviet tradition of physical anthropology, developed particularly in the study of the peoples of the region has now been strengthened by its fusion with the ethnic discourse. The words “race” and “ethnicity” now are being used in Tajik works with the aim to dissociate Tajiks completely from the Uzbeks and to bring up the Aryan line of descent and with this bring up the whole racial question. Both academics and nationalists tend to depict a world made up of bounded, homogenous cultures and “natural kinds”¹¹⁷ and moreover to define them in racial terms. The ethnicization of the discourse on identity also marginalizes Islamism that historically is an important part of the cultural as well as spiritual traditions of a large part of the Tajik population¹¹⁸ and brings up numerous racial connotations creating internal tensions with its large Uzbek minority. About 1 million of Uzbek minorities (i.e. 15% of population, see Table 1.b) cannot

¹¹⁵ F.A. Hanson, "The Making of the Maori: Cultural Invention and Its Logic," *American Anthropologist* 91 (1989): 891.

¹¹⁶ Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized National Ideology ": 59.

¹¹⁷ On the practices of understanding ethnic groups as entities and casting them as actors in ethnopolitics as well as categories of academic analysis see Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups*.

¹¹⁸ Atkin, "Tajikistan: Ancient Heritage, New Politics ", 373.

identify themselves even partly with a single dimension of the identity promoted by the state and feel marginalized within such an identity construct.

Table 1.b Ethnic composition of Tajikistan (1979-2000)¹¹⁹

Group	1979 (%)	1979	1989 (%)	1989	2000 (%)	2000
Tajiks	58.8	2237048	62.3	3172420	79.9	4898382
Uzbeks	23.0	873199	23.5	1197841	15.3	936703
Russians	10.4	395089	7.6	388481	1.1	68171
Kyrgyz	1.3	48376	1.3	63832	1.1	65515
Lakay	-	-	-	-	0.8	51001
Congrats	-	-	-	-	0.3	15102
Catagans	-	-	-	-	0.1	4888
Yuz	-	-	-	-	0.0	1053
Barlos	-	-	-	-	0.1	3743
Semiz	-	-	-	-	0.0	1
Kesamir	-	-	-	-	0.0	13
Others	6.5	252,508	5.3	270,029	0.1	148436
Total	100.0	3806220	100.0	5092603	100.0	6127493

The importance of Zoroastrianism in Tajik history was as well employed by the President for the purpose to deter Islam in domestic politics.¹²⁰ The Zoroastrianism heritage is actively promoted by the state authorities though the religion is basically extinct. In 2001 the Tajik authorities encouraged on a “voluntary” basis the celebration on the 2700th anniversary of the holy scriptures of Zoroastrianism, the Avesta, and on President Rakhmon’s initiative UNESCO officially recognized

¹¹⁹ Source: Source: Naselenie Respubliki Tadjikistan 2000.

¹²⁰ Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," 58.

2003 as the “3000th Anniversary of the Zoroastrian Civilization.¹²¹” The modern school textbooks have it that eastern and western “Tajikland” were united in a single religion Zoroastrianism, to which all people adhered¹²². Zoroastrianism now is re-interpreted as a unifying force connecting modern Tajik territories and people with the greater and ancient Tajik heritage thus increasing its legitimacy and claims over “lost” territories and alluding at its ethnic superiority over the Uzbek minority and the more powerful Uzbek neighbor.

It is through these ideological projects that the president and intellectual circles of Tajikistan have been conceptualizing the Tajik nation that would justify its claims over the territory it occupies now as an independent state and the President’s dominant position in politics. It is also through this ideological projects we see the continuation of the lingering influence of the Soviet policies in today’s definition of nationality that emphasize ethnicity as the most legitimate form of identity that was prefigured by the organizing principles of Soviet policies in regards to nation-making. Though these ideologies are apparently dubious and mainly marginalized, they demonstrate that the ethicized forms of nationalist expressions play the central role in (re)defining post-Soviet national identity. What Tajik ideologues define as weak national unity causes the state to adopt an ethnicity narrative that marginalizes its significant minority group of Uzbeks and Islam and undermines the ultimate aim of the reunification of a divided nation in which the aftermath of civil war can still be felt. The invocation of ethnic and racial reference in the offered definition of identity is unlikely to contribute to the unity of the nation, whereas the ethnicization and racialization of the discourse on identity and nationalization of political space may only draw deeper division within a fragmented society.

¹²¹ Blakkisrud and Nozimova, "History Writing and Nation Building in Post-Independence Tajikistan ".

¹²² For the analysis of the school history textbooks as part of the nation-building project in Tajikistan see Ibid.

The common denominator for the two nation-building projects

The study of the two cases demonstrates that modern elites of the both countries continue to invoke the Soviet tradition of determining ethnic groups as nations. Nationhood and nationality in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan continue to be interpreted through a prism of Soviet policies and research, i.e. as social categories fundamentally distinct from statehood and citizenship. Ethnic nationality is affiliated with soviet categories such as “ethnic genesis” and “ethinc code” which are used interchangeably along with concepts of “national identity” and “cultural heritage”¹²³. Ethnicization of the discourse on identity, nationalization of political space and conceptualization of the nation in ethnic and territorial meaning are the common features for national ideologies promoted in the republics by power elites. Similarly, methods through which elites promote national identity remain Soviet in their means as well. Authoritarian leaders monopolize the right to shape national discourse in the Soviet tradition and institutionalize their ideologies through supporting scholarly rewritings, promoting books and speeches and organizing grand celebrations.¹²⁴

The common feature for constructing national identity for both states studied is reinterpretation of history in the spirit of nation-building that would emphasize antiquity of the national communities and their ethnic core. As a result, ethnic supremacy is seen as being proportional to how long people occupied certain territory. Claims are continued to be made on the bases of what Soviet policies defined as indigenoussness, historical belonging to the territory and symbolic ownership of the territory¹²⁵. Marginalization of other identities is assumed to be a

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Marlene Laruelle, "The Return of the Aryan Myth: Tajikistan in Search of a Secularized Natioanl Ideology " *Nationalities papers* 35, no. 1 (March 2007), Marat, "National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan."

¹²⁵ Matteo Fumagalli, "Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilization in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan " *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 4 (2007).

necessary foundation for strengthening national identity but this in turn alienates substantial minority groups.

Despite the fact that the delimitation of Central Asia was based on the ethnic factor and territories bear names of the ethnic groups identified as indigenous, due to a high degree of intermixing, the complexities of ethnic designation discussed in the preceding Chapter, the republics are ethnically heterogeneous. The Soviet experience also brought a variety of ethnic groups to the region Slavs in the course of region's industrialization and groups defined by Stalin as 'enemy people' or 'suspect nations' who were resettled to Central Asia. In this context of extreme diversity, heterogeneity, divisions and resulting tensions introducing the unifying national identity is both crucial and problematic for both republics. Even ethnically 'pure' nations are not homogenous communities and their members do not necessarily share all the elements of identity (symbols, culture, language, traditions, memories etc) and even if they do, they experience them differently and with different intensity¹²⁶. In these two cases the historical context did not play a favorable role for conceptualizing a national identity as a state-wide citizenry. Despite the acknowledged need to give national identity a more civic vector, the approach to identity articulation taken by elites of the two countries, by and large acquired through the Soviet experience, are growing increasingly ethnocentric promoting an ethnic concept as a an organizing principle of national identity. By examining the ideological project of elites aiming at defining national identity the hypothesis of persistence of the institutionalized categories of nationhood and nationality and inherent tension between the two in the Central Asian context had found a confirmation. The examination of the national discourse in the two states demonstrated how institutionalized definitions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality as sharply distinct from statehood and citizenship became an organizing principle of social classification and categories and a legitimate form of identity narratives that in turn hinders

¹²⁶ Montserrat Guibernau, *The Identity of Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 138.

the evolvement of new identity forms. Hence, the interpretation of identity is path dependent on its once institutionalized forms created under the Soviet regime.

The analysis also suggests that the reason for the existing ideologies precariousness aimed at fostering national cohesion and solidarity lies as well in their purely symbolic and manipulative nature devised for the sake of solidifying authoritarianism and the regime's hold on power. In this setting people do not really experience the promoted identities as relevant to their lives. For instance Manas, a Kyrgyz ancient warrior, who was institutionalized as the founding father of nation and republic, turned to be problematic because first the symbol emphasized the ethnic nature of the nation and second was monopolized by former President Akaev and his political group which would use the symbol for their political purposes and campaigns. The research also concludes that the deficit of disenchanted politics, persistent loss of credibility by the government and increased resentment to political-economic elites have undermined civic conception of a supra-ethnic identity. Hence, the deficit of politics induced the population to reinvest in the traditional form of sub-national identities and networks and thus reified the primacy of ethnic identification.

It is important that the power elites and politicians restrained from invoking ethnic discourse as a shortcut for winning political loyalty. For example, in Kyrgyzstan as ethnic tensions and ethnic awareness grew strong and memories of the ethnic violence sparked in the south between Kyrgyz and Uzbek groups were still fresh¹²⁷, many politicians played an ethnic card to enlist political support for the major parliamentary elections in the country. Through the results of elections proved that bringing ethnicity into politics is effective in winning electoral support, in order to avoid fomenting existing tensions that proved to be deadly, it is absolutely necessary to withhold from manipulating ethnicity. The invocation of the ethnic references and autochthonous principles as the

¹²⁷ For the chronology of events and their analysis see International Crisis Group's Asia Report N 193 "The Pogroms in Kyrgyzstan"

central part of the national discourse chosen by the weak states became the main references through which elites of the both countries, small and lacking resources that came into existence through the Soviet political project, try to claim the territory their independent states occupy now and their dominant position in power. The analysis suggests that in order for identity to be constructive it needs to incorporate civic-based norms rather than carry a purely ethnic message and should be defined not just symbolically but through social and political experiences. If people do not identify with the state and do not see that the state represents their interest and carries out its functions, the cohesive national identity would long remain an unattainable perspective.

Conclusion

Empires often have the bad habit of surviving their physical demise as they seldom leave a tabula rasa behind. They breed a peculiar way of thinking, loyalties, views and identities. This observation is especially relevant for the Soviet Union as its regime bore many unique controversial features which had enduring consequences that long survived the regime itself. Nationality policy was the most central of them. Not simply because its consequences presumably brought the collapse of the Soviet Union. Though many Sovietologists agree that it was not the power of suppressed nationalism that brought the collapse of the regime but rather the one-party system, the centrally-planned economy and the massive bureaucracy doomed the Soviet system. It is the spectacular divergence of policy's intentions and its unintended consequences what made it significant. As discussed in Chapter 1, the nationality policy was to constrain potentially disruptive political forces of nationalism by creating ethnoterritorial units and by cultivating national cultures and elites. In the long run, this type of institutionalized nationhood was intended to transcend itself and evolve into internationalism where nationality would be devoid of meaning. Along with the intention to "drain nationality of its content"¹²⁸, it legitimated its form through the ethnofederal principle and became the first modern state to place the national principle at the base of its federal structure. This marked the process of simultaneous institutionalization of territorial nationhood and personal nationality. It is this institutional dimension of the policy as the analytical focus of this work is argued to have defined the national narrative in the post-Soviet era through laying down fundamental contradictions between the two.

¹²⁸ Rogers Brubaker, "Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account" *Theory and society* 23 (1994): 49.

The study concludes that examined nation-building ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (1) assume a discourse promoting an ethnic and territorial understanding of the nation and promote the nation in an ethnic meaning because ethnicity and autochthony are seen as the most legitimate forms of identity and social classification and a standardized scheme for the world's "vision and division". The examined ideologies elaborated by the national elites revealed that ethnicized forms of nationalist expressions play the central role in (re)defining post-Soviet national identity. Researching the question as to why elites chose to promote this concept of national identity and tilt toward ethnographic regime despite the acknowledged need in an identity that would unify a divided society and embrace its citizenry regardless of ethnic affiliation, the study examined the policies which brought the nations into existence and institutionalized national identity in the two states. After examining in detail the nationality policy and its implementation in the Central Asian region the research concludes that (2) institutionalized through the nationality policy the definitions of territorial nationhood and personal nationality were conceptualized as sharply distinct categories from statehood and citizenship and prefigured the identity discourse in ethnic and territorial meanings. The salience of the two categories of identity, ethnocultural and territorial, were brought by their effective institutionalization. The institutionalized categories persisted and continue to constitute an organizing principle of social classification, basic forms of public and private identities and central parameter in the nation-building of the successor states. Because of the Soviet legacy and distinctions drawn among people along ethnic lines, newly independent states are inclined to institute an ethnographic regime. The Soviet state made ethnic nationality a decisive criterion in the distribution of goods and resources in the course of the delimitation project and together with the cultivation of distinct national cadres, national languages and intelligentsias brought into existence the nation-state which could live and function on "its own" territory. Though these institutional

arrangements nationality became codified as ethnicity, while ethnicity was understood and became institutionalized as a strictly biological category and was made an ascriptive characteristics defined by birth through passport systems. Political territorial institutionalization had defined the territorial understanding of nation reflected in the ideologies promoting its ethnic antiquity alluding at its cultural supremacy as being proportional to how long a people has been present within its national territory. It revokes the principle of autochthony relied on by Soviet policymakers as a primary source of legitimacy of ethnic group and of territorial belonging.

After decades during which the Soviet regime defined and regulated national identity, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan now assumed control over the interpretation of their own statehood. The challenges faced by the new states in addressing the national identity question lies within reconciliation of an all-inclusive territorial citizenship and a “remedial ethno-nationalism” of the ethnic group. The expectation was to create a new identity of poly-ethnic nature but at the same time bring out titular culture, history and language as the ingredients of the new territorial identity. However, the discourse on identity undertaken by new power elites could not abandon the concepts determined by the Soviet past. Stressing biological decent and kinship in the promoted ideologies and treating ethnicity as extended kinship restrains the discourse to ethnic ties and ‘primordial bonds’ related to collectivities rooted in the past as opposed to ‘civic ties’ related to a modern civil society. Within the Central Asian context of instability, problems in practically every sector of social and economic life, and identity fragmentation a serious attempt needs to be done to promote civic culture and abandon the Soviet style mechanism for producing national ideologies and monopoly over its production. The analysis suggests that in order for identity to be constructive it needs to incorporate civic-based norms rather than carry a purely ethnic message and should be defined not just symbolically but through social and political experiences. If people do not identify with the state

and do not see that the state represents their interest and carries out its functions as a provider of basic needs, security and justice, the cohesive national identity would long remain an unattainable perspective.

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