



History and Memory: Implications for Pluralism in Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley*

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INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF HISTORY AND MEMORY

This paper assesses the role of history and memory in the making of identity in Kyrgyzstan and the impact of these historical legacies on perceptions of diversity today. Although closely entwined and sometimes competing, the Global Centre for Pluralism views the concepts of history and memory as distinct: *History* represents what available evidence tells us about the past and *memory* is the set of meanings that people attribute to past collective experiences. Both history and memory are foundational components of group relations and must be accounted for in efforts to encourage pluralism. These efforts include the promotion of an ethic of respect that values human diversity as a foundation for successful societies, and the implementation of a set of practices and outcomes leading to inclusive citizenship.¹

To understand both the roots of ethnic conflict and potential pathways to pluralism, it is important to understand how ethnicity has been consciously shaped in Kyrgyzstan's recent history, primarily in the Soviet era, as a basis for statehood. The links between "ethnicity" and "nation" have been reinforced by

post-independence political elites, as they navigate the challenging political terrain in which both minority and majority populations seek security and recognition along ethnic lines.

The challenges are particularly acute in the Ferghana Valley region, which encompasses areas of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As these independent states have hardened borders, the Ferghana region maintains a history and identity separate from state capitals, which are perceived as removed from regional, economic and political realities.

Cooperation and commonality have characterized relations between ethnic and social groups in Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley, more than tension and violence. However, legacies of imperial control and Soviet rule transformed interactions across the region, including those in intimate social and cultural relations and those in high politics.

Over time, historical narrative has shaped and re-shaped national identity in Kyrgyzstan and continues to influence perceptions of diversity and citizenship today. Memory also matters. How Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and other ethnic groups choose to remember their own and their neighbours' pasts, drives stereotypes and attitudes that underpin relationships in everyday life and the upper reaches of the state.

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1 Beverly Boutillier, "Defining Pluralism", *Pluralism Papers*, No. 1, Global Centre for Pluralism (2012), 11.

History and memory have become virtual industries in Central Asia. Each serves as an anchor for the general population in uncertain times. Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and others are proud of their historic attachment to their land and use family, tribal and other relationships to counter economic uncertainty and political turmoil. Changes in how history and memory are portrayed can portend as well as reflect social, cultural and political transformations. At present, uses of history and memory challenge movement towards a pluralist society in Kyrgyzstan. This is particularly true in the Ferghana Valley, which remains divided as it seeks to reconcile majority and minority claims in the wake of violence, most recently in 2010, and continued tension.²

Pluralist narratives are achievable but challenging in the current context, which encompasses nationalism in politics, economic inequality and deprivation, and well-established stereotypes. Strengthening the foundations for pluralism in Kyrgyzstan is an ongoing collaborative process that requires attention and action on many fronts.

This paper examines the role of history and memory in contemporary politics, society and ethnic relations, and their potential for promoting pluralism in Kyrgyzstan. It seeks to increase understanding of the power, complexity and dynamic nature of history and memory, as they relate to the creation, understanding and management of identity in contemporary Central Asia. It was also developed to serve as a foundation for the consideration of alternative historical narratives, as well as memories and counter-memories, with a view to fostering pluralism in Kyrgyzstan.

Section II outlines the need to understand the important place of history and memory in Central Asia, as well as the relationship between history and memory as they are understood in intellectual, political and everyday circles. Section III offers specific examples of how “ethnic entrepreneurs” have used history and memory to promote particular visions and understandings of the post-Soviet Kyrgyz nation and state. Section IV delves into regional history, highlighting its complexity and how it is characterized by both common understandings and cooperation and separation and conflict. Section V examines how history and memory interact with key pluralism drivers, as articulated by the Global Centre for Pluralism. Finally, Section VI offers recommendations for using history and memory to advance pluralism in Kyrgyzstan as a basis for national dialogue and comparative learning on nation building.

II. HOW HISTORY AND MEMORY WORK

History invests the past with meaning. Leaders, historians and the general population create history based on experiences, memories and stories of processes and events.

History is never neutral; it is always written for someone, for some purpose.³ Memory is also a complicated process, especially in times of great transition. As Eley writes, memory is “a way of deciding who we are and of positioning ourselves in time, given the hugeness of the structural changes so palpably and destructively remaking the world.”⁴ Modern states have long recognized the power of both history and memory. Monuments, commemorations, textbooks, anthems and flags intertwine memory and history to bind collectivities — “imagined communities” in Anderson’s words — into nations and political units.⁵ These tools shape a collective memory that both solidifies cohesive groups and creates outsiders.⁶

Memories gain power as they are “subsumed within common practices and representations.”⁷ Through this process, memory and identity become mutually constitutive, as identities are sustained through

2 I thank Beverly Boutilier of the Global Centre for Pluralism for this phrasing.

3 Keith Jenkins, *Re-thinking History* (London: Routledge, 1991).

4 Geoff Eley, “The Past under Erasure? History, Memory and the Contemporary”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 46, no. 3: 556.

5 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

6 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

7 Alan Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method” *American Historical Review* 102, no. 5 (1997), 1389.

recollections of sameness.⁸ Control over history and memory is always tenuous. As the past is “narratively promiscuous”, it allows for alternate histories to be created.⁹ The interaction between past and present is complex and potent, with retellings of the past able to control, direct and challenge current popular and state behaviour.

Violence and trauma heighten the importance of memory. Trauma launches a complicated process of remembering as individuals fit memories of loss into broader social and political narratives. In Kyrgyzstan, this occurred following the 1990 and 2010 ethnic riots.

This type of analysis of history and memory remains largely confined to western scholarly circles. Contemporary understandings in Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley follow Soviet-era positivism, where history is understood as either “objective”—generally if it agrees with state-based narratives or popular understandings—or “biased.”¹⁰ Scholarly debates revolve around which historical works are correct, and like their Soviet predecessors, post-Soviet states carefully control historical output. This control is manifest in

actions ranging from the commissioning of particular works to bolster nationalist narratives to the inspection of material taught in schools.¹¹ The challenge this poses to civil society engagement to pluralism is increasingly recognized among peace-building and reconstruction fields, most recently in the Caucasus.¹²

III. POLITICS AND OUTCOMES OF MEMORY IN KYRGYZSTAN AND FERGHANA

The shaping of history and memory to fit a modern Kyrgyzstan and Ferghana Valley began immediately after the Soviet Union’s collapse. States, maintaining Soviet-era power, remained privileged but no longer exclusive actors in this process. “Ethnic entrepreneurs”¹³ sought to reshape history and memory to enhance their own status, and local leaders and community members intervened in memory and history politics.

A Re-imagined Kyrgyz Nation and State

In 1991, Askar Akaev emerged as the first president of the independent Kyrgyz Republic, elected through democratic elections, and held office through 2005. An outsider to establishment politics, and ascending to power in the wake of the 1990 Osh riots, Akaev faced significant challenges. Over the next fifteen years, he fostered the construction of national and collective histories and memories to cement a new state. Continued ethnic tension and political challenges to his own rule and state legitimacy highlighted the limitations of his regime’s constructions.

Tensions resulting from the 1990 Osh riots (see section IV below) led Akaev to stress that all peoples were equal citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic. He sought to replicate Soviet models of a civic state through the formulation of the “Kyrgyzstan: Our Common Home” campaign.¹⁴ Akaev did not alter the ethnic Kyrgyz hold on political power, a legacy of Soviet nationality policy. However, he avoided nationalist rhetoric, which was common in other post-Soviet republics. Uzbeks, Russians and other minorities were able to maintain their own schools and cultural

8 Lorraine Ryan, “Memory, Power and Resistance: The Anatomy of a Tripartite Relationship”, *Memory Studies* 4, no. 2 (2010), 156.

9 George Steinmetz, “Reflections on the Role of Social Narratives in Working-Class Formation: Narrative Theory in the Social Sciences”, *Social Science History*, 16, no. 3 (1992): 491.

10 Sarah Amsler, *The Politics of Knowledge in Central Asia: Science between Marx and the Market* (London: Routledge: 2011).

11 For a fuller discussion, see Jeff Sahadeo, “Regional Histories, Critical Thought and the University of Central Asia: Between Global and Local, North and South” in *Globalization on the Margins: Education and Postsocialist Reform in Central Asia* ed. Iveta Silova (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2011), 95-116.

12 See Oksana Karpenko and Jana Javakishvili, eds. *Myths and Conflict in the South Caucasus*. Volume 1: Instrumentalisation of Historical Narratives (International Alert, 2013).

13 Community or political figures who foster ethnic division in order to pursue particular personal or group agendas. See for example Rogers Brubaker et. al, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

14 Marlene Laruelle, “The ‘Ethnogenesis’ of the Uzbeks as an Element of Soviet Scholarship”, *Ab Imperio* no. 4 (2005): 40. 15 Morgan Liu, *Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

Terminology

The terms “Kirgiz”, “Kyrgyz” and “Kyrgyzstan” have evolved over time as historical narratives of the birth and boundaries of the nation have shifted. Modern Kyrgyz historians have tried to establish a centuries-old link that connects the Kyrgyz people to the region. However, the modern state is a Soviet creation and has always been a multi-ethnic one. The formal Kyrgyz political unit and ethnic differentiation between Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and others were consolidated in the Soviet era. The territory that became the Kirgiz Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936 and formed the basis of present-day Kyrgyzstan joined northern mountainous lands that held nomads to southern irrigated

territories with settled and urbanized populations in the Ferghana Valley. “Kyrgyz” and “Uzbeks” were used by the Soviet state to designate national identities, primarily based on economic activity. Prior to that, there was no completely clear division between nomads and settled peoples and Kyrgyz and Uzbeks did not necessarily think of themselves primarily as such, favouring family, village and other affiliations instead. It was over time, supported by Soviet National Delimitation and more recent post-Soviet policies that these identities had particular characteristics assigned to them and the terms were solidified.

associations. Uzbek business elites that emerged during *perestroika* could operate without interference in the south, including the Ferghana Valley where a large Uzbek minority existed. In response, Uzbek community leaders shelved demands for greater language rights and political representation.¹⁵

Official efforts to promote Kyrgyz-Uzbek understanding had their corollary in historical writings. Beginning in the 1950s, in an effort to anchor Kyrgyz national consciousness, the 19th century Kokand khanate, a growing political power in the Ferghana Valley with a largely Uzbek population, was portrayed as oppressing Kyrgyz tribes to the north. In the 1990s, this representation shifted to portray a khanate where both peoples coexisted peacefully.¹⁶ Kyrgyz and Uzbek leaders in the south emphasized the multiethnic city of Osh as a site of exchange and mediation, dating back to the Silk Road.¹⁷

Efforts to use history to manage ethnic and regional issues continued after the Soviet Union. In 2000, Akaev launched a major initiative to celebrate the supposed 3,000th anniversary of Osh. With this action, he sought to demonstrate a focus on the south, which has traditionally seen itself as separate from, but controlled by Kyrgyz northern “clans”. Political observers noted that the celebration came in an election year. In the 1995 elections, Akaev had been soundly beaten in the region by his southern Kyrgyz rival, former Communist Party First Secretary Absamat Masaliev. As Akaev portrayed Osh as a centre of historic exchange, he also emphasized Kyrgyz contributions to that history. This framed an understanding of the city as “too Uzbek”, as Akaev made a play for the ethnic Kyrgyz vote in the south.¹⁸

The end of the Soviet Union allowed Kyrgyz politicians and scholars to re-imagine a nation beyond the narrative of the Soviet socialist framework. That narrative has proved remarkably durable, however. Current efforts to portray the Kyrgyz as a great nation with strong historical roots reflect the Soviet-era idea of ethnogenesis; that each people, linked to a specific territory, had innate characteristics reflected in history, culture and mentalities.¹⁹ Kyrgyz historians sought new sources to specify the moments when the nation came into being, in order to enforce claims to territory against neighbouring Central Asian states.²⁰

15 Morgan Liu, *Under Solomon's Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

16 Tyntchtykbek Tchoreov, “Historiography of Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, no. 2 (2002): 359

17 Liu, 197.

18 Liu, 67.

19 For a full discussion of ethnogenesis, see section IV.

20 David Gullette, “A State of Passion: The Use of Ethnogenesis in Kyrgyzstan”, *Inner Asia* 10, no. 2 (2008): 264.

Most Soviet-era historical narratives traced the arrival of the Kyrgyz tribe from Siberia to the Tien Shan mountains of present-day Kyrgyzstan to the 13th century. Post-Soviet Kyrgyz historians pored intently over Chinese sources and highlighted a political unit in the 2nd century BCE called “Gegun”, a term they claim is linked to Kyrgyz. This tribe appeared to be part of the Hsiung-nu empire that stretched to the Tien Shan.²¹ This new historical consensus spread into the political realm by 2003, when President Akaev declared “2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood”. This ethnogenesis is now standard in teaching the nation’s history.²²

The Manas Epic

An early mass celebration of Kyrgyz nationhood following independence was held in 1995, which was designated the 1,000th anniversary of the oral epic Manas. The hero Manas is credited with leading a tribe, seemingly considered Kyrgyz at the time, against Chinese and Kalmyk opposition and reestablishing a rightful homeland in the 16th and 17th centuries. In the late Soviet period, particularly during *glasnost*, the epic poem gained privileged status as an “encyclopedia of the Kyrgyz people.”²³ The 1995 celebrations were held in the northern town of Talas, now recognized as the burial site of Manas. Akaev and others saw the epic not only as a means to establish a great past, but also as a guide to the culture and moral framework of the Kyrgyz people. Akaev proposed Manas as a “companion for our life today”.²⁴ He compared Manas to a Bible, praising its spiritual influence and promotion of heroism and nobleness

as characteristics that formed the ethnic Kyrgyz character. Early post-Soviet efforts to celebrate the hero had not focused exclusively on ethnicity. One version of the epic considered Manas the son of a Tajik princess married to a Uighur, and as such a powerful symbol for a multiethnic Kyrgyzstan.²⁵ Akaev, however, now professed hope that all citizens of Kyrgyzstan would govern themselves based on the purported values of an ancestor claimed as an ethnic Kyrgyz.²⁶ Additionally, Manas allowed for a narrative that excluded Islam, a force that made political leaders groomed in the Soviet era uncomfortable. The emphasis on Manas placed the ethnic Kyrgyz as a privileged nationality, overcoming early efforts to situate him as a leader for all ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan.

Tribes and Clans

Rather than being seen as relics of the past, tribal (*uruu*) and clan (*uruk*) identities have blossomed in modern Kyrgyzstan. Each complements a national narrative, but can challenge as well as enforce official conceptions of identity and power. Ideas of tribe and clan evolve as memories and political imperatives shift over time. Soviet national identities in Central Asia operated through a folklorization of the past. The Kyrgyz were seen as a pastoralist people with tribal origins, even as these connections were expected to evaporate in a modern, Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The idea of kinship as a natural organizing principle for pre-modern pastoralist societies dominated western anthropology for most of the 20th century.²⁷ From this principle stemmed varied scholarly and popular efforts, beginning in the glasnost years, to recall and classify kinship, with “tribe” and “clan” often used interchangeably, as a hallmark of “Kyrgyzness”.

Efforts to reclaim clan identities in the late 1980s and 1990s focused on *sanjyra* (tribal or clan-based oral histories), as opposed to *tarikh*, (histories based on documentary evidence) generated by the scholarly establishment. In 1990, the local administration of Issyk-Kul region hosted a competition for genealogy

21 Roland Hardenburg, “Collective, Communicative and Cultural Memories: Examples of Local Historiography from Northern Kyrgyzstan” *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 3 (2012): 268; Tchoreov, 357.

22 Gullette, 269.

23 Gullette, 267

24 Gullette, 269

25 Elly Harrowell, personal communication, November 2014.

26 Gullette, 271

27 David Gullette, *The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic: Kinship, State and Tribalism* (Kent: Global Oriental, 2010), 48.

amateurs, publishing three volumes of material detailing tribal and clan trees and supposed exploits.²⁸ Printed booklets on various tribes, often handmade, gained popularity. Based on these efforts and the Manas epic, Kyrgyz scholars and amateurs identified forty tribes. Each is represented as a ray of the sun on the Kyrgyz flag, which was adopted in 1992.²⁹

Tribal and clan identities play important roles in the context of continued social and economic uncertainty. They provide a sense of belonging to community and networks, including political coalitions. Tribes and clans are considered “pure” national organizations, compared to state institutions based on Soviet models. Many Kyrgyz believe that the current political process has adopted western practices and, supported by foreign money, corrupted local politicians. As land pressures intensify across Kyrgyzstan, making claims to territory based on tribal background has become common.³⁰ Gatherings of tribal and clan leaders known as ‘kin councils’ have become common in rural regions, with calls to give them official status. Such initiatives highlight popular longings to reclaim history.

28 Svetlana Jacquesson, “From Clan Narratives to Clan Politics”, *Central Asian Survey* 31, no. 3 (2012): 280.

29 Saltanat Berdikieva, “National Identity in Kyrgyzstan: The Case of Clan Politics” (2006), 6. <http://equalbeforethelaw.org/sites/default/files/library/2006%20National%20Identity%20of%20Kyrgyzstan%20the%20Case%20of%20Clan%20Politics.pdf> retrieved 18 July 2013.

30 Alan DeYoung, “Creating and Contesting Meanings of Place and Community in the Ylay Talaa Valley of Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asian Survey* 32, no. 2 (2013): 163.

31 Ibid.

32 A discussion of Islam in Central Asia is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for example, Emmanuel Karagiannis, *Political Islam in Central Asia: The Challenge of Hizb ut-Tahrir* (London: Routledge, 2011).

33 Christian Bleuer, “To Syria, not Afghanistan: Central Asian Jihadis ‘Neglect’ their Neighbour”, *Afghan Analysts Network* 8 October 2014. <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/to-syria-not-afghanistan-centralasian-jihadis-neglect-their-neighbour/> retrieved 2 April 2015.

Islam and Spirituality

Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and other regional minority groups overwhelmingly consider themselves Muslims and now practice religion openly. Islam resurfaced as a communal identity following the Soviet Union’s collapse, but faced challenges based on historical precedent. Hanafi Islam, which dominates in the region, eschews involvement with politics. The Soviet period isolated Central Asia from the Islamic world and formal religious knowledge and practice is lacking. Islamic identity remains primarily cultural. Being a “good Muslim” means different things to different people in Kyrgyzstan, and is often compatible with practices such as drinking alcohol, eating pork and conducting burials in Kyrgyz national fashion. Islamic worship also remains diffuse, tied to local sacred sites, which weakens its ability to serve as a broad unifying identity.

Kyrgyz and Uzbeks alike see Islam as part of a national identity, distinguishing them from their former Russian overlords, and also from each other. The Kyrgyz consider their Islamic belief and practice as being open, flexible and accepting, in contrast to Uzbek practices, which they view as more conservative. This perception stems from historical narratives that tie Kyrgyz to the *adat*, a custom-based practice, rather than the religious codes in *sharia*, which are relied on more by Uzbeks. Kyrgyz Islam was delivered more frequently through learned Sufi teachers rather than by *mullahs* in mosques as in settled areas. Regardless of these differences, many young Kyrgyz and Uzbeks have now adopted a greater degree of piety and sought religious knowledge from outside the region.³¹

The governments in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan both fear Islam’s potential for antigovernment radicalism. Police carefully monitor youth for links to organizations such as *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, which oppose secular post-Soviet governments and seek to build a state based on *sharia law*.³² Central Asian governments have raised alarm bells over the involvement of their citizens in the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.³³ Reflecting Soviet policy, the Kyrgyz state has institutionalized religion

under an officially sanctioned spiritual authority or *muftiyat*. The number of mosques in Kyrgyzstan has risen from about 40 when the country gained independence, to over 2,000; many built with foreign funding. Islam remains a potential alternate, unifying identity but one that has been “nationalized” through history and memory.

Efforts to locate an indigenous Kyrgyz spirituality focus on *Tengirchilik*, based on the old Turkic term *Tnagri/Tengri* (sky/god). Kyrgyz scholars rely on sections of the Manas epic that refer to Turkic peoples who looked towards the sky, sun and moon for inspiration. *Tengirchilik* is said to predate Islam and has been associated with Kyrgyz ethnogenesis.

Constructions and Memories of Identity and Ethnic Relations in the Ferghana Valley

The national identities that now constitute the basis for independent Central Asian states were formalized in the early Soviet era. In the 1920s, considering “nation” a more modern form of identity than those then common in the region (family, village, tribe or oasis), Moscow planners and local intellectuals travelled extensively across Central Asia to create bases for nationalities. In the Ferghana Valley, Soviet delimitation commissions established “Uzbeks,” “Kyrgyz” and “Tajiks” as national groups. They differentiated Uzbeks from Kyrgyz primarily by economic activity: Uzbeks were farmers and town dwellers; Kyrgyz were pastoralists and nomads. In contrast, Tajiks were differentiated by language, recognized as Persian rather than Turkic language speakers.

The Soviet state proceeded to promote Kyrgyz and Uzbek separateness in different ways. National identification was included in passports and goods and services were differentiated on each side of the border. Collective farms were generally controlled by one national group or the other. The promoted Kyrgyz-Uzbek divide overlooked the reality that

many families and villages practiced both farming and herding in a semi-settled state. However, these divisions corresponded to popular notions of identity, as pastoralists and settled societies had long looked down on each other, and nationalist identities solidified.

For the Kyrgyz, this was expressed in different ways. Inter-marriage proved rare, with Kyrgyz parents expressing significant fear over children and grandchildren forsaking their culture.³⁴ Stereotypes feed a sense of Kyrgyz superiority. Uzbeks are often characterized as a different race with particular, virtually genetic markers. Many Kyrgyz claimed to be able to identify Uzbeks, who possessed supposedly “Middle Eastern” features, in contrast to their own “Asiatic, Mongol” ones.³⁵

Despite the reality that virtually all Kyrgyz were settled between the 1920s and the 1940s, these and other stereotypes endured, linked to economic activity and related to cultural practices and living arrangements. For example, Kyrgyz highlight their “pastoralist” need for significant amounts of meat with each meal — Kyrgyz will still slaughter a sheep at the arrival of a visitor for a special occasion — and the relative freedom of Kyrgyz women, entrusted with important, physical tasks. These are often described in opposition to Uzbek dietary and gender norms. Despite the fact that for most Kyrgyz practical village connections actually hold more importance than biological ones, Kyrgyz pride themselves on in-depth knowledge of ancestry and allegiance to family, and condemn Uzbeks for lack of ancestral knowledge and loyalty to village. Kyrgyz characterize themselves as open-minded and hospitable, due to their desire for company in broad pasturelands, compared to the ostensibly conservative, Uzbeks, who prefer walled-off dwellings. They credit their pastoralist background with fostering their naïve and trusting nature, and characterize Uzbeks as sly and cunning, based on trade-based livelihoods.

These stereotypes persist and feed contemporary Kyrgyz resentment at Uzbek business success in the south. Kyrgyz sometimes refer to Uzbeks as “Sarts.”

34 Elmira Köchümkulova, “Kyrgyz Nomadic Customs and the Impact of Re-Islamization After Independence” (Ph. D. diss., University of Washington, 2007), 90.

35 Köchümkulova, 121.

The pejorative meaning of this term, shouted by rioters in Osh in 1990, identifies Uzbeks as those who see themselves as masters of urban spaces;³⁶ a particularly potent claim, given real and perceived battles over the identity of Osh.

Uzbeks also have memories and mythologies of separateness. They express cultural differentiation spatially, defined by their *mahalla* or neighbourhood. Uzbeks dominated the urban population in the south until the 1950s and 1960s. When Kyrgyz migrants settled, they did so in new Soviet-style apartments. The older, Uzbek *mahalla* became a “cultural reservoir” for Uzbeks who were separated from their “home” state.³⁷ Turning stereotypes on their heads, Uzbeks assert that Kyrgyz lack business acumen, do not understand the value of hard work and that their presence in economic affairs can only drag down the country. They assert that the nomadic background of the Kyrgyz makes them poor managers.³⁸ They further argue that understanding agriculture and trade, as they do, helps produce a civilized, cultured society,³⁹ while Kyrgyz tribal identities lead to a dysfunctional political system with no loyalty towards the citizenry.

Even so, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks retain strong memories of the Soviet-era slogan and practices of the “friendship of peoples”. Even after the 1990 riots, many generally considered their relationships as symbiotic, with

Uzbeks managing business and farming and Kyrgyz in control of administration. Many in Osh believed that the riots were unleashed by political leaders in the capital or shadowy “outside forces” seeking to sow discontent.⁴⁰ Across the south, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks understand each other’s languages and interact easily on an everyday basis, even if their socioeconomic and housing spheres remain somewhat different. Kyrgyz and Uzbeks share a quest for a strong and virtuous leader capable of overcoming north-south divisions and steering the country towards global progress.⁴¹ This quest highlights the legacy of a region with frequent political turmoil and disunity, but still able, under the right conditions, to allow its different peoples to live together harmoniously.

The borders in today’s Ferghana Valley signify division, but also allow for common identity against three states with faraway capitals. In the Soviet period, driven by economic rationality, roads and canals crisscrossed the Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik Soviet socialist republics (SSRs). Following independence, borders emerged as frontlines for new states to display their sovereignty, producing violent clashes. Soviet border-making, in an effort to give national minorities territorial control, produced small pockets that belonged to one republic, yet were entirely surrounded by another. Even as populations have shifted, these pockets remain in the post-Soviet era., Sokh, now part of Kyrgyzstan, has an ethnic Tajik majority and is surrounded by Uzbekistan. Bribes, in place of or in addition to visas, are often required to cross borders. Barriers reduce everyday interactions but also offer opportunity. Differential prices and availability of goods give incentives for shuttle trade and have led to unofficial networks that cross ethnic and republican lines.⁴²

Colonial Legacies

Kyrgyz and Uzbeks share memories and experiences of the Soviet system, which leads to common visions of success. As in Soviet days, education is commonly perceived as a critical tool for social mobility, a “symbolic resource of hope.”⁴³ The loss of Soviet-era investment has shaped Central Asia’s economic

36 Russell Zanca, *Life in a Muslim Uzbek Village: Cotton Farming after Communism* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2011), 39.

37 Liu, 102.

38 Liu, 65.

39 Zhou, 7.

40 Megoran, 270.

41 On the idea of a virtuous leader, see Liu, and also Nick Megoran, “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism” Russia and Eurasia Programme Paper, 2012/03, Chatham House (London, 2012).

42 Madeleine Reeves, “Travels in the Margins of the State: Everyday Geography in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands” In *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present* ed. Jeff Sahadeo and Russell Zanca (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007): 281-300.

43 Sarah Amsler, “Promising Futures? Education as a Symbolic Resource of Hope in Kyrgyzstan”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1192.

struggles, leading hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and others to Russia as labour migrants. Labour migrants face significant intolerance from Russian officials and citizens, but wages can be twenty to fifty times higher than in Kyrgyz villages.⁴⁴ Despite pressure from migrants and their families, the Kyrgyz government has been unable to protect its citizens from racist attacks. Labour migration is the most potent legacy of the colonial economic system.

Kyrgyz memories of the Russian presence and the Soviet Union remain mixed. The most violent rebellion against tsarist rule, in 1916 — known as *urkun* (exodus) — has become part of the pantheon of Kyrgyz national history. The rebellion was not discussed openly in the Soviet era, but in 2006, its 90th anniversary was celebrated in Bishkek. However, the rebellion is considered one against the tsarist regime more than the Russian people. In 2003, Akaev dedicated a statue to an 18th century leader considered the first Kyrgyz to make contact with Russia. Unlike in Uzbekistan, where the regime has established a strong anti-colonial rhetoric, the Kyrgyz credit the Soviet period with positive results in education, urbanization and modernization. Lenin and the Bolsheviks are seen as giving the Kyrgyz nation privileges and a homeland after Kokandian and tsarist repression. The large statue of V.I. Lenin in Bishkek's central square remained in its original place until 2003, when it was quietly relocated to a less central but nearby location. In Osh and other Kyrgyz towns, Lenin still stands. In Bishkek, the museum to Frunze, the Bolshevik leader who reconquered the region from 1919 to 1921, still operates. Such manifestations demonstrate Russia's continued importance as a patron of Kyrgyzstan. They are also evidence of a general indifference to a Soviet history that does not conflict with an ethnicized, post-independence Kyrgyz one.

Common Memories, Common Future?

Ethnogenesis and the stereotypes described above, reinforced by recent ethnic violence, complicate efforts to locate a common, civic Kyrgyzstani national identity. At the same time, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks alike use memories to imagine a golden past, and laud similar traits of leadership, honor, hospitality, and kindness. Both trace these to glorious ancestors who created peace and waged war. Even if these traits are used to set the two peoples apart, they represent a common ground on which to establish the past and memories as part of a shared future. The search for histories and memories to allow a pluralist view of Kyrgyzstani society can begin by combing through the past, and looking for events and processes on which to base alternate, inclusive narratives.

IV. THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF HISTORY: THE PAST IN THE FERGHANA VALLEY AND KYRGYZSTAN

Neither history nor memory operates untethered from the past. While historical narratives and collective memories gain power through their impact on intended audiences, professional and amateur historians seek evidence. Buildings, monuments, documents, letters and interviews; the list of sources for a historian is always evolving.

The following represents a consensus among professional historians of events in the past on the territory that is now Kyrgyzstan and in the surrounding Ferghana Valley. This account relies on archival sources, fieldwork and oral histories. It is also based on extensive interaction with Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Russian and other scholars of the region, though each historian writes the past for different audiences. The discussion focuses on events that have become critical and contentious factors in forming contemporary ethnic identities and group relations.

44 Madeleine Reeves, "Black Work, Green Money: Remittances, Ritual and Domestic Economies in Southern Kyrgyzstan" *Slavic Review* 71, no. 1 (2012): 108-34.

Early Leaders and Peoples

The lands of modern Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley have changed hands numerous times. Persian, Scythian, Chinese and others ruled over Indo-Iranians who mixed with aboriginal peoples around 2000 BCE.⁴⁵ Southern Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley emerged as part of a network of trade routes known as the Silk Road from the 3rd century CE. Persian Sasanian rulers brought urban culture as well as Zoroastrianism, whose legacy remains, most notably in the *Navruz* or new year festival celebrated in spring. Turks from the north penetrated Central Asia in the 6th century. Shortly afterwards, Arab raiders bringing Islam gained control over lands of contemporary western Kyrgyzstan.

Chinggis Khan and his invaders, including Kyrgyz tribes of the Siberian-Mongol regions, broke upon Central Asia from 1219 to 20. Legends of glory in battle continue to make Chinggis Khan a source of authority and *Chinggisid* family lineages provide a source of legitimacy and prestige for both pastoralist and sedentary leaders of Central Asia. Tribes known as Kyrgyz established themselves in the Tian Shan mountains in the 15th and 16th centuries.⁴⁶ The Kyrgyz tribe from the Yenisey region of Siberia was described in Chinese records as fair-skinned and red-haired. Their relationship to the Turkic group that began to emerge, increasingly professing Islam

through contact with Sufi priests, is unclear.⁴⁷ As they settled in the mountains, Kyrgyz tribes developed a pastoral system and organization suited to highlands.

Chinggisid successor, Uzbek Khan (1313-1341) emerged as a force on the steppes of what is today southern Russia and northern Kazakhstan. The term “Uzbek” evolved from his name to designate the Turkic tribes of the southern steppe.⁴⁸ Uzbek Khan’s successors seized and settled on the Ferghana Valley’s agricultural land.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, some who abandoned the Uzbeks became known as Kazakhs (“tribeless” or “freemen”). They formed three confederations or hordes: Great, Middle and Small. Lands around Lake Issyk-Kul, the home of the Kyrgyz tribe, came under the Great Horde.

Mutual trade supplied pastoralists and urban inhabitants with vital goods. The relationship was critical and complex, as identities as mountain nomads or city-dwellers coalesced. Cities in the Ferghana Valley remained hubs of economic activity even as the Silk Road declined due to regional instability and the growth of seaborne exchange. A strata of wealthy Ferghana merchants emerged and the Osh bazaar gained repute across Asia.⁵⁰

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Central Asia faced expansionist neighbours, including Qing China, tsarist Russia and British India. Many Kyrgyz tribes allied with the Qing, profiting from trade to the east. Cotton grown in Ferghana was a key trade commodity between Central Asia, Russia and India. During this period, the fracturing of political units prevented the region from developing effective administration. Over the 18th century, the emirate of Bukhara claimed control of Ferghana. By 1810, Kokand, like Bukhara led by the Uzbek Ming tribe, emerged as a challenger, controlling rich trading routes with Russia. Pastoralist tribes periodically swept in from the steppe or the mountains, sparking conflict. Kokand expanded to territories of what is today northern Kyrgyzstan and built fortifications on its borders, including Pishpek (today Bishkek) in 1825. Kyrgyz tribes who fell within Kokand’s territory existed within an uncomfortable context of accommodation and resistance.

45 Abdulkakhor Saidov et. al., “The Ferghana Valley: The Precolonial Legacy” in *The Ferghana Valley: The Heart of Central Asia* ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk: ME Sharpe, 2011), 4.

46 Scott Levi, “Turks and Tajiks in Central Asian History” in *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, 24.

47 Karl H. Menges, “Peoples, Languages and Migrations” in *Central Asia: A Century of Russian Rule* ed. Edward Allworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 89.

48 Levi and Sela, 199.

49 Yuri Bregel, “Turko-Mongol Influences in Central Asia” in *Turko-Persia in Historical Perspective* ed. Robert L. Canfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 62-3

50 Morgan Liu, “A Central Asian Tale of Two Cities: Locating Lives and Aspirations in a Shifting Post-Soviet Landscape,” In *Everyday Life in Central Asia*, 66-84.

Tsarist Rule

By the 1800s, Russia had manifold political and economic interests in Central Asia.⁵¹ Even as some Kazakh and Kyrgyz tribes fought Russian invaders, others supported the tsar in an effort to gain military support against Kokand. In the 1860s, tsarist forces captured Kokandian forts at Tokmok and Pishpek. In 1868, Konstantin Petrovich Kaufman became the governor-general of the new province of Turkestan, which held much of modern Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley. Tsarist officials categorized their new subjects as either “Kirgiz” (pastoralists) or “Sarts” (urban-dwellers). The labels reflected the primacy of economic interests, classifying peoples based on their potential uses to the imperial treasury. The numbers of tsarist administrators remained small. Local elites, placed on the imperial payroll, were relied on to assure peace and collect tax revenue. Tsarist administrators, disdainful of the consensual system that produced regional leaders, demanded elections. This change produced significant confusion and corruption.

Tsarist officials considered the area north of the Tian Shan mountains as ideal for settling Russian peasants. Sparsely populated by Kyrgyz tribes, the area had agricultural conditions similar to those of European Russia and Ukraine. In 1906, Prime Minister P.A. Stolypin forged a plan to open Siberia, the Kazakh steppe and Turkestan to the Russian peasantry. By 1914, the Semirechie province, in present-day northern Kyrgyzstan, held about 300,000 Russian settlers.⁵² Many pastoralist tribes became sedentary, deprived of their pastures. Violent confrontations erupted with settlers.

In the Ferghana Valley, tsarist interests focused on cotton. Russian demand grew substantially in the late 19th century and textile factories drove

industrialization. Easy credit with high interest rates was supplied to cotton growers by Russian-owned trading offices, placing thousands of farmers in debt.⁵³ Central Asian businessmen, meanwhile, owned the majority of rough-processing plants. Between 1888 and 1916, cotton production in the Ferghana Valley increased tenfold.

In return for accepting tsarist restrictions on enforcing *sharia*, Islamic leaders retained significant autonomy. New-method or *Jadid* Muslim thinkers challenged this accommodation across Central Asia. *Jadids* focused on the power of education and literacy and the teaching of science and geography. Early Kyrgyz intellectual ferment centred on bards and *akyns* (story-tellers) who wove tales of resistance and wrestled with the challenges of modernity, primarily education and science, in their narratives.⁵⁴ *Akyn* Toktogul Satylganov gained renown as a Kyrgyz national hero, likely due to his compatibility with Bolshevik philosophy after 1917.⁵⁵

Russia’s entry into World War I subjected Central Asians to high war taxes. In July 1916, the tsarist general staff ordered the mobilization of the local population for rearguard duty. News of the decree sparked riots, including in Ferghana, that were brutally suppressed. Resistance shifted to pastoralist regions, where it was exacerbated by outrage over the settlement of Russians. By late summer, unrest raged around Pishpek and Issyk-Kul. More than 2,000 Russians died.⁵⁶ Casualties for the local population numbered in the tens of thousands. Hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz crossed the border into China, hence the contemporary appellation of the rebellion as “exodus.”

As the tsarist regime collapsed in 1917, food grew scarce due to drought and wartime privations. Local soviets in Pishpek and across the region grabbed power as exclusively Russian organs. Battles over food and land turned to mass violence. Russians killed hundreds, if not thousands, of Kyrgyz. Violence radicalized nationalists, who at an “all-Kirgiz” congress in July 1917, called for an independent and autonomous state.⁵⁷

51 Levi, “The Ferghana Valley”, 226.

52 Brower, 134.

53 Khalid, 64.

54 Igmen, 19.

55 Ibid.

56 Brower, 162.

57 Olcott, 135.

Early Soviet Rule (1917-45)

News of the Bolshevik Revolution arrived in Central Asia by telegraph, sparking struggles for regional power. The Tashkent soviet crushed a Central Asian government in Kokand in February 1918. Anti-Bolshevik Russian White forces controlled Pishpek. Anger over Russian rule sparked uprisings in Ferghana. Rebels became known as the “*Basmachi*,” or bandits. By late 1919, when Red Army commander Frunze broke White forces on the steppe and linked Turkestan to Soviet Russia, the Ferghana Valley was held by various groups.

Lenin was committed to drawing the local population to power, dispatching a delegation from Moscow for this purpose. Turar Rysqulov, a Kazakh educated in Pishpek, recruited Kyrgyz to party posts. Lenin supported the return of all land seized by Russian settlers in 1916. Even at the high point of native recruitment, however, only a few hundred Central Asians served in party and state structures. From 1920 to 1922, many accused of “bourgeois nationalism” were purged. Across Turkestan, famine and violence reduced the local population by 30 percent, as the Bolsheviks prioritized cotton production over food.⁵⁸

Turmoil across Central Asia prompted the Communist Party to develop a long-term governing strategy in 1923.⁵⁹ The region was divided into units that would administratively link the population to the young regime. A policy of National Delimitation created the republics that formed the basis for post-Soviet

national identities and states. In a region characterized as feudal and backward, Lenin and other Bolsheviks saw nationhood as an objectively progressive phenomenon in Marxist terms.⁶⁰ Even *Jadids* believed that education in “national” languages would speed literacy and modernize the region. Through the policy of *korenizatsiia* (literally “rooting” but often anachronistically translated as “affirmative action”), new strata of local administrators became critical links between their “own” peoples and Soviet power.

Efforts to delineate nations confronted identities tied to families, lineages, villages, neighbourhoods or regions. Soviet ethnographers based national categories on economic activity, language, dress, appearance, customs and craniology, among others. Kazakh intellectuals as well as *Jadids* became involved in the process, seeing nations as vehicles for popular mobilization and a basis for autonomy. Turkestan *Jadids* coalesced around the term “Uzbek” to designate settled, largely Turkic-speaking peoples, then known mostly as “Sarts.” In the steppe, nationalist leaders in modern-day Kazakhstan endowed the tsarist term “Kirgiz” with national characteristics, but began increasingly to use the term “Kazakh”. Lenin’s 1920 vision saw Kirgiz/Kazakh, Uzbek and Turkmen as national units within Communist Central Asia.⁶¹

How a separate Kyrgyz nation emerged from the Kazakh one remains unclear. The “Kara-Kirgiz,” mountain herders of Semirechie and northern Ferghana who became the basis for Kyrgyz nation, were at first classified as one tribe of the Kirgiz/Kazakhs. National claims may have evolved from bards whose stories focused on mountain herding to independent tribal chieftains who resisted Russian settlement.⁶² Political manoeuvres also played a significant role. Abydykerim Sydykov, descended from a long line of tribal leaders or *manaps*, was considered the father of the modern Kyrgyz nation. He argued that highland herders should have their own oblast or mountain district that he would lead.⁶³ Rakhmankul Khudaikulov, the son of a *mullah* who ascended quickly to leadership in the Kyrgyz Communist party, asserted that “Kazakh” could apply to both steppe and mountain peoples. The issue evoked significant passion and led to fistfights in Soviet meetings.⁶⁴

58 Khalid, 54.

59 Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Soviet Central Asia* (London: Palgrave, 2004).

60 Yuri Slezkine, “The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism”, *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): 414-52.

61 The term “Tajik” only came later, to designate non-Turkic highland tribes in the Pamir mountains and then Persian-speaking peoples of the region.

62 Igmen, 18-21.

63 Benjamin H. Loring, “Building Socialism in Kyrgyzstan: Nation-Making, Rural Development and Social Change” (PhD Dissertation, Brandeis University, 2008), 48-50.

64 Loring, 81.

A pressing issue in National Delimitation involved the fertile Ferghana Valley. Turkic intellectuals lobbied Moscow for a dominant Uzbek SSR controlling all of Ferghana. Stalin considered this “Uzbek chauvinism” and believed that local pastoralist populations needed their own national space. These included the Kara-Kirgiz (Kyrgyz) and the Persian-speaking Tajiks who lived in the Pamir mountains. Negotiations were dynamic. Administrators sought to ensure that each national unit possessed effective economic resources. The main Territorial Commission awarded Osh and Jalalabad, cities ringed by pastureland, to a Kara-Kirgiz national territory. Other disputed cities were awarded to an Uzbek territory. Both sides were outraged. Settled Uzbek residents from Osh demanded unification with Uzbek lands, claiming irrigation networks would be disrupted and fearing having to learn a Kyrgyz language. Protests proved fruitless. In 1923, the Kirgiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) came into being, under the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic, to keep it, according to Sydykov’s arguments, from falling prey to Kazakh domination. In 1936, the separate Kirgiz SSR was created.

Creating these units was the first step towards national mobilization. Over time, administrators, intellectuals, teachers and others inculcated national identities into Central Asian peoples. Ostensible attributes of each national group, based on language, culture, dress, food, literature and history, all remained to be negotiated and solidified. Leading intellectuals formulated standardized, written national languages. Once more, ethnographers combed the regions to determine “national” attitudes and behaviours.

New, national political Central Asian classes rose even as Russians controlled economic, policing, policy-making and military spheres. In the Kirgiz ASSR, Communist Party membership climbed to 60

percent Kyrgyz by 1925, approaching their figure in the total population. Over half of these members were illiterate and few had any training.

In the late 1920s, Bolshevik policies plunged Central Asia into turmoil. In 1926, Communist activists attacked Islamic institutions⁶⁵ and thousands of clerics were arrested. Gender also emerged as a battleground. From the early 1920s, women’s emancipation was seen as key to modernizing local societies.⁶⁶ With some local support, activists insisted that settled women unveil and join the public realm. Uzbek women, the main targets of this campaign, faced difficult choices. Hostile crowds attacked unveiled women, and thousands were killed, many by relatives. At the same time, the state punished women who did veil. The veil’s disappearance only came about with societal changes after World War II. Attacks on gender inequality in pastoralist regions focused on bride-wealth, which was considered to reduce women to commodities. In the Kirgiz ASSR, female emancipation became part of the sedentarization drive, as Soviet officials argued that pastoralist lifestyles forced women to do hard and demeaning work.

Collectivization of agriculture violently refashioned Central Asia. Communist leaders forced Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and others into collective farms, with outputs dictated to propel Soviet industrialization. Southern regions provided cotton and northern ones meat and grain. In 1932, 10,000 semi-pastoralist villages in the Kirgiz ASSR were moved into 200 settlements, often without any shelter or construction materials.⁶⁷ In 1933, only 22 percent of the stock of animals that existed in 1929 remained and likely hundreds of thousands of people died due to violence and hunger.⁶⁸

Collectivization turned the oases of Central Asia into reservoirs for cotton. Cotton became the hallmark of Central Asian identity for the Uzbek and, along with its nomadic background, the Kirgiz SSR. Hundreds of thousands of Russians arrived to oversee the region’s role in Soviet modernization. The city of Frunze (as Pishpek was renamed) came to resemble Soviet-constructed towns in Russia. Central Asian society

65 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 70.

66 There is a significant literature on this assault. See, for example, Douglas Northrop, *Veiled Empire: Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

67 Loring 337.

68 Olcott, 184-5.

now developed in two tiers. The first was dominated by ethnic Russians, with select locals who attended Russian-language schools and aspired to party-state careers. The second was relegated to rural areas, limited to national-language schools and with limited upward mobility.

A clear, though tacit, positing of Russian superiority was accompanied by official calls for interethnic harmony through the slogan “*druzhba narodov*” (the friendship of peoples). This philosophy, espoused by Stalin from 1935, emphasized national distinctiveness while promoting civic harmony.⁶⁹ The Communist goal of a merger of peoples (*sliianie*) was put off to the future. Nationality replaced class as an organizing principle of the Soviet Union. Russians became the “elder brother,” with Central Asian peoples relegated to the status of “backward” (*otstal’ye*) nationalities, needing assistance to advance towards socialism. Each people was endowed with immutable characteristics. “Backward” nations were symbolized by “traditional,” folkloric elements, such as the yurt for the Kyrgyz and skullcaps and bright clothing for the Uzbeks.

Druzhba narodov also sought to reduce communal tension. Each officially recognized ethnic group enjoyed a home territory, within which they had particular privileges. These titular nationalities were then expected to promote interethnic harmony. In the Kirgiz SSR, Uzbeks, Russians and others had their own schools and cultural organizations. Official ethnic labels came to dominate popular discourse. By

the end of the 1920s, the regional label of Ferghana-ites (*farghontsy*) disappeared. Yet these national groupings could inflame as well as temper communal tensions. Soviet officials inspecting collective farms noted disputes along clan and national lines.

The Great Purges of 1937 and 1938 decimated the intellectual and political ranks of the Kirgiz and Uzbek SSRs. The first generation of Soviet leaders was ousted, sent to the gulag or executed. In the Kirgiz SSR, ethnic Russians replaced all nationals on the Central Committee of the Communist Party.⁷⁰

Although far from the frontlines, Central Asia felt a profound impact from World War II. Central Asian soldiers served as conscripts and distinguished themselves on the battlefield.⁷¹ The experience endowed survivors with a sense of Soviet citizenship. Stalin suspended religious persecution, and in 1943, the regime created the Spiritual Administration of Muslims in Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM), staffed by *mullahs* who pledged loyalty.⁷² Frunze, Tashkent and other Central Asian cities hosted two million Soviet evacuees.⁷³ Wartime relocation placed 300 industrial enterprises in Central Asia.

Postwar Central Asia (1945-91)

The postwar system returned to the *korenzatsiia* regime. Ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbeks and others emerged as First Secretaries and in other visible positions in the Communist Party. However, ethnic Russians continued to control economics, the police and the military behind the scenes.⁷⁴ New national elites adhered to conservative styles of decision-making.

Central Asian leaders enjoyed exceptional stability. Turdakun Usabaliev led the Kirgiz Communist Party from 1961 to 1985. Moscow showed little appetite for intervening in regional affairs, as union republics competed for investment and infrastructure projects. Local and regional networks and interest groups, based on family, village, friendship, common education or economic status, competed for republican resources and patronage. The Uzbek SSR emerged as the strongest of the Central Asian

69 Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 438.

70 John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Democracy* (Sydney: Harwood Publishers, 1999), 12.

71 Köchümkulova, 100.

72 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 78.

73 Anti-Semitism grew across the USSR, with Jews suspected of disloyalty. Rebecca Manley, *To the Tashkent Station: Evacuation and Survival in the Soviet Union at War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 232.

74 Khalid, 90.

states, with its leader Sharaf Rashidov having strong connections to Communist First Secretary Brezhnev.⁷⁵

Cotton remained a top priority, with new pumping stations, canals and reservoirs developed.⁷⁶ By 1971, the USSR became the highest global producer. Soviet officials used fertilizer and chemicals to improve yields and brought marginal areas under cultivation. Pesticide-laden water seeped into the general supply. Water diverted to cotton fields led to the desiccation of rivers and lakes in Ferghana and elsewhere.⁷⁷ Mechanization levels remained far below those in the western world and thousands of children and students were drafted annually to pick cotton; a practice that continues in Uzbekistan.

Local factories were built to produce tractors and related equipment, alongside energy plants. However, the Uzbek SSR, which produced seventy percent of the state's cotton, only housed three percent of its manufacturing plants.⁷⁸ Central Asia was home to eleven percent of the Soviet Union's population in the 1980s, but attracted less than seven percent of capital investment and produced only four percent of national income.⁷⁹ In-kind exchanges and grey and black markets flourished outside of state control. Connections and "pull" (*blat*) became vital in fulfilling everyday needs.

75 Ibid.

76 Julia Obertreis, *Imperial Desert Dreams: Cotton Growing in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, 1860-1991* (Habilitationsschrift: Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 2011), 366.

77 On the Aral Sea, see Philip Micklin, "The Aral Sea Disaster", *Annual Review of Earth and Planetary Sciences* 35 (2007): 47-72.

78 Rumer, 83.

79 Rumer, 64.

80 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 97.

81 Nancy Lubin, "Implications of Ethnic and Demographic Trends" In *The Great Transformation*, 37

82 Jeff Sahadeo, "The Accidental Traders: Marginalization and Opportunity from the Southern Republics to Late Soviet Moscow", *Central Asian Survey* 30, nos. 3-4 (2011): 521-54.

83 Khalid, *Islam after Communism*, 84; Köchümkulova, 160.

84 On sacred sites, see David Abramson and Elyor Karimov, "Sacred Sites, Profane Ideologies: Religious Pilgrimages and the Uzbek State" In *Everyday Life in Central Asia*.

Colonial-style development reinforced Central Asia's two-tiered society. Central Asians recognized that Russians had the best jobs and housing in main cities. Moscow encouraged a level of social progress, offering select Central Asians admission to elite Russian universities. Most functioned better in Russian than in their "own" languages. Collective farm managers and local administrators linked top and bottom tiers. Education and other drivers, including party membership, allowed a degree of mobility. Substantial investments improved housing, schools, clinics and hospitals.⁸⁰ Renowned Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov described successful mass education as vital to modernizing the nation.

Central Asian populations nonetheless lagged in urban indices. From 1959 to 1989, ethnic Kyrgyz in cities increased from 11 to 22 percent, and ethnic Uzbeks from 22 to 30 percent, compared to all-Soviet growth, which rose from 38 to 66 percent in the same period. Overall meanwhile, Central Asian birth rates were three to four times the Soviet Union's average.⁸¹ Collective farms supported these increasing rural populations even as underemployment grew. The regime sought to train Central Asians for work in labour-poor areas elsewhere in the Union but these efforts failed. Some Kyrgyz and Uzbeks sold produce in Russian cities where prices were far higher.⁸² Additionally, while still expected to remain guardians of the home and tradition, Central Asian women increased their participation in public life as teachers, doctors, and professionals.

While a small number of *mullahs* operated underground and preached opposition to the Soviet system, for the vast majority of Central Asians, being Muslim did not affect their sense of being Soviet. Isolated in the Soviet Union, most Central Asians did not feel solidarity with Muslims elsewhere. Islam persisted, with people celebrating Eid and Ramadan and practicing circumcision. Officially, the religion remained under SADUM's control. The Communist Party expelled administrators who facilitated religious practices⁸³ and SADUM condemned the practice of visiting sacred sites, which was linked to pre-Islamic tradition.⁸⁴

Central Asian ethnic identities continued to be consolidated, with Russian superiority emphasized. The Kyrgyz were now said to have voluntarily entered the tsarist empire.⁸⁵ National expressions corresponded to a socialist vision, with working classes privileged. Rich enemies were denationalized in historical narratives. The Kokand khanate was depicted as a “foreign” state and an oppressor of the Kyrgyz, to present “titular” peoples as descending from those sympathetic to Soviet ideals.⁸⁶ An entire academic industry researched discrete histories of Soviet nations. Archaeological digs purported to show evidence of an Uzbek “race”; a blend of Indo-European and Mongoloid peoples who created a distinct Transoxanian culture centuries before the appearance of the Uzbek tribe.⁸⁷ National identities came to be seen as primordial, an unchanging part of one’s personhood as ethnogenesis penetrated from intellectual circles into national histories and daily life.

Kirgiz historians faced a difficult choice. As with the term “Uzbeks”, the earliest recorded history of a tribe using the name “Kyrgyz” was in the Middle Ages, too recent for a territorially-sound ethnogenesis. Historians claimed that with their pastoralist roaming, the Siberian-based Kirgiz tribe established a homeland

near the Tien Shan mountains in the 7th century, though this remained in dispute.⁸⁸ Historical novels that glorified distant pasts and epics were officially sanctioned. The Manas epic became a hallmark after the Sino-Soviet split, when its demonizing of the Chinese became less problematic. Students participated actively in recovering pasts through groups like the Young Archaeologists.⁸⁹ Considered part of national pasts, clan and tribal identities occupied a grey area under ethnogenesis, and their use was discouraged in modern life.⁹⁰ Yet among the Kyrgyz, tribe and clan continued to hold sway. Collective farm directors and village administrators often came from tribes and clans, which were recognized as powerful. Kirgiz children were inculcated with a strong understanding of tribal and family positions, and cliques emerged in Soviet schools.⁹¹

Under the “friendship of peoples” banner, national identities existed comfortably within a pan-Soviet one. In the Ferghana Valley, the lack of hard borders softened national identities. It was not unusual for Kyrgyz, Uzbeks or Tajiks to live in one republic, attend university in another and work in a third. Disputes were seen as family, not national, struggles. Moscow resolved occasional border issues, seeking to appear as a neutral arbiter, basing decisions on economic rationality.⁹² As Aitmatov argued, national cultures and scholarship interpenetrated. Citizens were taught to be Soviet first; only after this realization would ethnic identities matter.⁹³

Mikhail Gorbachev’s rise to Communist leader in 1985 marked a generational shift. Gorbachev sought dynamic policies for a country perceived as slipping behind the west. He planned to involve the Soviet people in a restructuring or *perestroika* through openness, or *glasnost*. At the same time, Gorbachev sought to harness increasingly autonomous republican Communist parties in Central Asia. He replaced all republican leaders. In the Kirgiz SSR about 75 percent of republican positions were vacated. Party members and the general population rallied against what they saw as an act of colonial control. *Glasnost* gave voice to a new generation of Central Asian intellectuals who challenged the

85 Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Soviet Nationalities* (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1969).

86 Tchorev, 359.

87 Marlene Laruelle, “The Concept of Ethnogenesis in Central Asia: Political Context and Institutional Mediators (1940-50)” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 9, no. 1 (2008): 180.

88 Tchorev, 355.

89 Keller, 273.

90 Jacquesson, 279.

91 Alan deYoung et al., “Creating and Contesting Meaning of Place and Community in the Ylay Talaa Valley, Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asian Survey* 32, no. 2 (2013): 167-8.

92 Nick Megoran, “Rethinking the Study of International Boundaries: A Biography of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Boundary”, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 102, no. 2 (2010): 471.

93 Azel Murzakulova and John Schoeberlein, “The Invention of Legitimacy: Struggles in Kyrgyzstan to Craft an Effective Nation-State Ideology”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (2009): 1234.

two-tier societal model. Inspired by nationalist movements in the Baltics, these intellectuals placed ethnic backgrounds above Soviet citizenship. In a way, their acts vindicated Soviet nation building, as none questioned identities established by the 1920s delimitation. Newspapers condemned the cotton monoculture.⁹⁴ In the Kirgiz SSR, criticism focused on the dominance of the Russian language.⁹⁵ Kyrgyz anxiety was fuelled by the precarious majority of their ethnicity in the republic, which was at 53 percent.

Protests over economic conditions mounted, with May 1989 demonstrations in Frunze, demanding land for new settlements on the city's outskirts. The uncertainties of *perestroika* corroded the system's already-weak ability to produce and deliver goods. In the cotton sector, 90 percent of irrigation networks were in disrepair⁹⁶ and the Soviet Union lost its position as top global producer to China.⁹⁷

Ferghana Riots and Independence

In May 1989, against this backdrop, ethnic violence broke out between Uzbeks and Meshketian Turks in Kuvasai in the Uzbek SSR. Uzbeks believed Meshketians, relocated by Stalin from the Caucasus, held privileged positions in trade. A dispute over prices in the central bazaar sparked a riot that led to 56 deaths. An investigative commission noted fierce Uzbek nationalism but passed off the violence as chance confrontations among reckless youth.⁹⁸ In July

of the same year, Kyrgyz from Batken and Tajiks from Isfara clashed over land and water rights, resulting in several deaths.

Nationalism in the Kyrgyz south heightened tensions. A 1989 law designating Kyrgyz as the official republican tongue made no allowances for Uzbeks, who comprised 46 percent of Osh's population.⁹⁹ Significant numbers of Kyrgyz had moved to Osh in the 1960s, adding to other communities, including Tatars, Ukrainians, Germans, Tajiks and Uighurs.¹⁰⁰ Uzbeks were frustrated that new First Secretary Masaliev filled party positions from his Kyrgyz networks. On their part, Osh Kyrgyz believed that Uzbeks controlled regional trade. Uzbeks and Kyrgyz lived side-by-side but apart, with Uzbeks in *mahallas*, and Kyrgyz in Soviet apartment blocks.¹⁰¹

Uzbeks and Kyrgyz mobilized in associational groups permitted under *glasnost*. Uzbeks rallied behind *Adolat* (justice) and Kyrgyz behind *Osh-aimagy* (Osh residents). Osh underwent massive growth, with the population increasing from 33,315 in 1939 to 211,045 by 1989.¹⁰² To house new residents, the city absorbed neighbouring farmland. *Osh-aimagy* supported Kyrgyz migrants squatting on municipal land used by Uzbek cotton farmers. Ethnic tensions rose in early 1990, with sporadic violence. In Jalalabad, an Uzbek association appealed to Moscow for autonomy in Osh province. Amid this tension, local authorities authorized land grants for Kyrgyz migrants, adjacent to an Uzbek collective farm. In turn, the Uzbek population demanded recognition of Uzbek as a state language. Demonstrations from June 4-10 of that year spiraled into violence and over 200 people were killed before the Soviet army and Interior Ministry troops intervened.

The causes of the conflict remain in dispute. Against demographic growth, socioeconomic and spatial distance grew between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks. Gorbachev's shift in party leadership may have destabilized tacit accords between elites. Deaths occurred in different battles, raising the question of whether they were deliberate efforts at mass ethnic violence or deadly but localized conflicts that gained

94 Micklin.

95 Fierman, "Central Asian Youth and Migration" in *The Failed Transformation*, 232.

96 Thurman, 236.

97 Lubin in *The Failed Transformation*, 55.

98 Nazarov and Shozimov in *Ferghana Valley*, 190.

99 Valery Tishkov, "'Don't Kill Me, I'm a Kyrgyz!': An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict", *Journal of Peace Research* 32, no. 2 (1995): 134.

100 Liu, 8.

101 Ibid.

102 Liu, 79.

ethnic overtones.¹⁰³ After the violence in the south, demonstrators in Frunze demanded Masaliev's resignation; the leader had no support base in the north and was an easy scapegoat.

In October 1990, Askar Akaev, Chair of the Kirgiz Academy of Sciences became the leader of the Kirgiz SSR. Akaev was a compromise candidate without political networks, having spent much of his career in Russia. He pledged to restore ethnic harmony. Calls for Kirgiz autonomy from Moscow remained. However, during a March 1991 referendum on whether the Soviet Union should continue, voters in both the Kirgiz and Uzbek SSRs voted overwhelmingly "yes" (95 and 94 percent respectively). Akaev supported Yeltsin following the August 1991 Moscow coup, and at the end of the month the Kyrgyz parliament voted for independence. Akaev resigned from the Communist Party and ran in a presidential election stressing his dedication towards a Kyrgyz national identity within a broader civic state.

103 Tishkov, 133-49.

104 Boutilier (2012).

V. HISTORY AND MEMORY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PLURALISM

The previous sections outline how history and memory intertwine to guide contemporary identities, behaviours and policies and can serve as barriers or drivers of pluralism. How do history and memory relate to other drivers of pluralism in Kyrgyzstan? This section will examine historical effects and narratives as they impact key drivers identified by the Global Centre for Pluralism.¹⁰⁴

Livelihoods

Economic prosperity creates opportunities for citizens to recognize the contributions of other ethnic and national groups and limits perceived competition for benefits. In Kyrgyzstan, since tsarist times, economic development has been designed to benefit a Russian core. Challenges of economic diversification that plague current Kyrgyz politicians have their roots here, especially as the republic lacks substantial natural resources.

The Drivers of Pluralism

Sources of inclusion and exclusion in diverse societies

Livelihoods and Well-being

How and whether citizens (male and female) access and benefit from state resources equitably and are able to participate in the market to achieve economic security and well-being

Law and Politics

The governance of diversity in terms of both content (values, laws, policies, programs) and process (institutional mechanisms)

Citizens and Civil Society

Foundations of collective civic identity and the role of civil society in the governance of diversity (i.e., citizens, organizations, institutions, faith institutions, business, media, academia)

Education and Culture

The social/cultural meanings attached to difference (identity) and diversity (the other) and their transmission between and among generations through formal and informal education and other means

History and Memory

The practice of history in a society and the role of inclusive modes of collective remembering and reconciliation as routes to shared citizenship

Regional Influences

Neighbourhood influences and transnational identities as well as the impact of place (urban, rural) on the governance of diversity and the impact of multicultural cities within diverse societies

A major legacy of the Soviet era is labour migration. Kyrgyzstan gains 31 percent of its gross domestic product from remittances, the second highest in the world.¹⁰⁵ Kyrgyz and Uzbek youth now focus on Russia; this continued postcolonial linkage impedes a sense of a common Kyrgyzstani destiny. Seeing their livelihood as dependent on leaving home deprives Kyrgyzstanis of all ethnicities of a promise for a future at home, with the related benefits of building a stable society marked by mutual respect.

Given poor economic performance, both sides feel victimized and mutual stereotyping persists. Residents of Osh and surrounding regions see prosperity as a zero-sum game, where competition, not cooperation, rules. At the same time, popular hope in Kyrgyzstan is directed towards concrete issues of investment and work.¹⁰⁶ Overcoming colonial economic legacies could play a critical role in fostering tolerance.

Law and Politics

Political and legal systems in Kyrgyzstan were imposed by the tsarist and Soviet regimes, and have little organic connection to the population. Moscow regulated relationships between and within republics. Incentives for Central Asian elites to negotiate declined. Graft became an accepted practice, and in the late 1980s, was almost considered a type of colonial resistance. As in the Soviet era, modern politicians use their positions to accrue benefits to their networks, even as Moscow no longer foots the bill.

Parallel to legal and public safety systems, informal networks and village circles provided everyday

policing, even where the population respected Soviet judicial organs. Today, poor pay for judges and legal officials has resulted in widespread corruption. Kyrgyz often turn to alternate forms of authority, including tribes and clans, fueled by historical imagination. Real or fictive kinship provides a far stronger bond among most groups than citizenship.

Political instability, ranging from the chaos of the Soviet collapse to popular uprisings in Kyrgyzstan and Ferghana, haunts the population. Popular historical memory values strong leadership, evident in clan and tribal efforts to link themselves to figures such as Chinggis Khan and Manas Kyrgyz idealize a powerful leader capable of uniting a disparate population, then of tribes, now riven by a north/south divide and political networks. In the Kyrgyz saying, “prosperity follows concordance.”¹⁰⁷ Uzbeks in Osh region similarly idealize a strong and virtuous leader, one who works for the people at large and selflessly judges disputes. Broader Islamic notions of justice and piety help to harmonize these notions.

The Kyrgyz government issued a Concept Paper on National Unity in 2012 calling for mutual respect and pledging to address minority underrepresentation in the state sector. At the same time, the paper describes the Kyrgyz ethnos as the “consolidating core” of a multinational state, following the tenets of the Soviet “friendship of peoples.”¹⁰⁸ While the paper discusses the need to learn Russian and other “world languages”, along with the official state language of Kyrgyz, minority languages, including Uzbek, are not mentioned. The paper includes solid pledges of building interethnic concord and recognizes the importance of economic development and civic patriotism. It remains to be seen how these will be implemented.

Following the 2010 violence in Osh, then mayor Melis Myrzakmatov erected new monuments to Manas and two recent additions to the Kyrgyz pantheon of heroes, Barsbek and Alymbek Datka. All are represented as fierce warriors, standing guard over main roads into Osh. Kyrgyz music now plays in the city centre, as well as at the entrance to previously Uzbek *mahallas*.¹⁰⁹ The yurt is glorified as a symbol,

105 <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2013/10/02/developing-countries-remittances-2013-world-bank> retrieved 18 July 2014.

106 Pelkmans, “Ruins of Hope in a Kyrgyz Post-Industrial Wasteland”, 20.

107 Megoran, “Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan,” 12.

108 Concept of the Development of National Unity and Inter-Ethnic Relations in the Kyrgyz Republic (Bishkek; Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2013), 6.

109 Emily Canning, “Scarcity of Signs: Language and Power in a Scarred City”, Presentation to Central Eurasian Studies Society Annual Convention, Madison, WI, 2013.

even though most Kyrgyz live in Soviet-style apartment buildings.¹¹⁰ Kyrgyz monitor each other to “purify” their language of Uzbek influences that represent their shared history. At the same time, far smaller monuments designed to promote peace after 2010 are already in disrepair.¹¹¹

Citizens and Civil Society

Ethnic identities have deeply penetrated everyday life in Kyrgyzstan, building on concepts of nomadic or settled pasts. Ethnogenesis remains central in understandings of identity. People are born Kyrgyz or Uzbek and this identity is seen as unchangeable. As tribal and clan genealogies proliferate among Kyrgyz, Uzbeks have grown estranged from the nation-state, a process that began in the 2000s as the economy declined and Kyrgyz political dominance increased, a process sealed by the 2010 riots.

Civil society organizations have weak roots in Kyrgyzstan. Historically, under fractured imperial or authoritarian leadership, alternate nodes of authority had no space to develop. Informal networks and consensus leadership served pre-colonial societies well, but could not thrive when imperial rule established European-style institutions. In the post-Soviet era, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have proliferated, but almost all depend on western funding. Nurturing links to potential and actual donors draws energy away from important horizontal cooperation and implementation. At the same time, the NGO sector draws dynamic local actors who are shut out of state structures.

110 Grace Zhou, “Building House and City: Perspectives on Conflict, Construction and Citizenship in Southern Kyrgyzstan”, Presentation to Central Eurasian Studies Society Annual Convention, Madison, WI, 2013.

111 Elly Harowell, “From Monuments to Mahallas: Contrasting Memories in the Urban Landscape of Osh, Kyrgyzstan”, *Social and Cultural Geography* 16, no. 2 (2015): 203-225.

112 Canning, 7.

113 Jeanne Feaux de la Croix, “How to Build a Better Future? Kyrgyzstani Development Workers and the ‘Knowledge Transfer’ Strategy”, *Central Asian Survey* 32, no. 4 (2013): 448-61.

Education and Culture

Education is still perceived as an important driver of social mobility in Kyrgyzstan. The sector suffers from chronic underfunding. International donors and NGOs have actively supported efforts to improve the quality of education in the country. The state retains significant control over curricula and schools have become a primary site in which to inculcate Kyrgyz national identity. In post-2010 Osh, students are pressed to write and speak in Kyrgyz and lessons glorify a nomadic past without recognizing Uzbek contributions.¹¹² Jeanne Feaux de la Croix notes that while many NGO’s talk of encouraging “civic patriotism”, local agents believe Uzbeks should subsume their culture within that of the Kyrgyz “felt [i.e. core] people.”¹¹³ In 2014, President Atambaev proposed a new historical commission to examine the content of primary and secondary education curricula. However, it remains unclear whether this will create an opportunity to promote versions of Central Asian history that privilege shared, interethnic histories.

Regional Influences

Borders in Central Asia have always been fluid and geopolitics plays a key role in the negotiation of identity. Shared identities and economies continue to link Ferghana Valley residents to each other as much as they link them to national capitals and nationalist projects across the three modern states. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan all have significant interests in areas bordering Kyrgyzstan, as well as co-ethnic minorities who received recognition and status in the Soviet era and maintain cross-border relationships. The Soviet legacy of inter-republican competition continues, and Russia works to maintain its regional role as postcolonial hegemon (challenged by China). In this way, states and peoples use history and memory to connect themselves to Kyrgyzstan and claim a stake in its actions, a process which both assists and complicates the search for a broader, civic identity.

VI. CONCLUSIONS: FINDING COMMON GROUND FOR A SHARED FUTURE

Kyrgyzstan's history is complex, dynamic and bears evidence of a rich intercultural exchange. However, a full narrative of Kyrgyzstan's history privileging a shared, pluralist experience remains to be written. Some opportunities to apply history and memory to foster an alternative and inclusive approach to nation building are explored here.

Using History and Memory to Build Civic Identity

Ethnicity has been consciously shaped in Kyrgyzstan's recent history. Given the extent to which ethnic identities have been internalized and accepted, the challenge of building an inclusive civic identity within the context of shared citizenship, is considerable. How can both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz proudly call themselves "Kyrgyzstanis?"

Common symbols and shared spaces may be helpful in this regard. Pluralist symbols that balance between statues of Manas and other heroes considered ethnically Kyrgyz on one hand and Lenin (perhaps the only remaining major figure whose monument speaks to a multiethnic, though Soviet, past) on the other, are needed. Parks and squares in places like Osh and Jalalabad could be re-imagined as meeting places.¹¹⁴ Historical records and events considered shared by all Kyrgyzstanis in popular memory can guide this process

towards reviving spaces for public engagement and interaction. Islam is the deepest-held value framework that unites Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and may serve as a potential common ground. Although Islam is diffuse in nature, core values such as virtue, communitarianism and piety could be the starting point to emphasize shared beliefs between ethnic groups.

While it does not resonate with Kyrgyzstani youth, the Soviet era still holds much pull among middle-aged populations and governing elites. President Atambaev still cites a common saying, "Anyone who wants to return to the Soviet Union is crazy, and anyone who doesn't has no heart."¹¹⁵ A refashioned "friendship of peoples" campaign could be capitalized on, continued nostalgia for the ostensible stability, equality and social welfare of the Soviet system. In everyday life, the "friendship of peoples" slogan still resonates as a concept to promote ethnic peace and tolerance. Popular conceptions of "friendship" could be extended to address interethnic marriages, language and education rights, and everyday relationships, all sources of considerable strain in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

The 2012 Concept Paper identifies the need for museums to highlight cultural diversity. Many, including the National Museum of History in Bishkek, remain frozen in the Soviet era and do not represent the rich and varied histories of all of Kyrgyzstan's peoples. Reimagining Kyrgyzstan's museums to showcase both majority and minority communities could facilitate the emergence of a variety of perspectives and narratives, and inspire a greater sense of belonging for all citizens of Kyrgyzstan. Such retellings would confront historical narratives privileging ethnogenesis and emphasizing divisions. Accepting a polyphonic approach will not be easy, as it will challenge well-ingrained knowledge systems taught in schools and accepted as "objective" among the general population and leaders.¹¹⁶ However, a stated openness from the Kyrgyzstan government towards research, and encouraging interaction between local and international scholars indicates an opportunity for history and memory to become a driver for pluralism.

114 See Harrowell for some thoughts on the relationship between space and memory.

115 Damira Umetbaeva, "National Memory in Kyrgyzstan: Attitudes to the Soviet Past" <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/damira-umetbaeva/national-memory-in-kyrgyzstan-attitudes-tosoviet-past> retrieved 12 July 2014.

116 Jeff Sahadeo, "Regional Histories, Critical Thought, and the University of Central Asia: Between Global and Local, North and South" *Globalization on the Margins: Postsocialist Reform in Central Asia* ed. Iveta Silova (Charlotte NC: Information Age Publishing, 2011), 95-116.

Some historical events remain ripe for revision. For example, the 1916 rebellion spread from settled to nomadic areas, and could be understood as a unifying event. Given that the Kyrgyzstani state has placed 1916 in the pantheon of Kyrgyzstani history, and its 100th anniversary is approaching, it might be an opportunity for civic remembrance that binds the population.

Dialogue on Shared Histories and Memories

Revisions to historical narratives that implicate civic identities require dialogue to uncover shared histories and memories between Kyrgyzstan's peoples. This paper represents an initial effort in this direction, employing a solid but diffuse historical scholarship. It can serve as the foundation for a conversation among scholars and historical "amateurs" to encourage a variety of narratives that challenge official or popular versions of history and broaden a sense of inclusion among majority and minority communities alike. Understanding and discussing how Kyrgyzstanis have internalized ethnic stereotypes and ethnogenesis narratives could also be a starting point for a more inclusive dialogue between and within groups in the country.

Once alternate historical narratives are manifest, they must reach a mass audience. Dialogue with officials who develop and issue school curricula and textbooks, perhaps in conjunction with President Atambaev's promised historical commission, would be one avenue to follow. Other stakeholders in developing regional and national histories, from clan and tribal leaders or record-keepers to museum curators, could be involved in this process as well.

Fostering Leadership

Strong leadership in the region has tended to be identified with illiberalism and relies on calls to exclusivist nationalism. Drawing on inclusive historical narratives to emphasize examples of virtuous, selfless leadership could provide an alternative to the prevailing model. The citizens of Kyrgyzstan are raised learning about the advantages of the principal of *yntyamak*, which encompasses cooperation, harmony and concordance. This could be channeled to foster leadership and models of interaction that emphasize civic values, rather than zero-sum identities and interactions.

Reckoning for the Past

One of the greatest obstacles to pluralism in Kyrgyzstan has been the lack of a reckoning for past violence, specifically, during the riots of 1990 and 2010. An independent international Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission stressed the role of ethnic Kyrgyz in instigating the 2010 violence that resulted in approximately 470 deaths and hundreds of thousands displaced. These conclusions were rejected by the Kyrgyz parliament, which also declared the head of the commission *persona non grata*.¹¹⁷ Uzbek Kyrgyzstanis see perpetrators going unpunished and Osh reimagined as a Kyrgyz city.

An open dialogue on history and memory that considers the motivations behind and the causes of the riots, and their results, can help to foster common understandings in the south and across the country. This process will not be easy. Kyrgyzstan lacks the administrative and judicial capacity and traditions to undertake a public investigation along the lines of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. History and memory can be used as a starting point, however, to bring together scholars with different perspectives and bases of evidence on the deadly violence and the discord that sparked Kyrgyzstanis to such acts. Historical investigations can set a framework for a dialogue that, when legal and governmental preconditions exist, will engage the broader public and political actors.

117 Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission <http://reliefweb.int/report/kyrgyzstan/report-independent-internationalcommission-inquiry-events-southern-kyrgyzstan> retrieved 16 April 2015.

Re-engaging the Region

History and memory can also serve as tools to re-engage the broader Central Asian region. Relations between Kyrgyzstan and its Ferghana neighbours are at a nadir, with border and water disputes leading to sporadic violence. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could deploy a status as patron of “their” minorities in Kyrgyzstan and further complicate regional politics and identities, even as they fear these co-ethnics might act as “fifth columns.” Efforts to build dialogue on a shared past of cooperation and coexistence will be most effective if the intellectual communities and historians in neighbouring states are engaged. This will maximize access to different sources and means to disseminate information that highlights a shared history across modern borders as Central Asians. This could dampen both regional prejudices and the narrowly defined national identities that reinforce them.

post-Communist nations offer examples of societies that have managed to handle diversity without major violence, or have implemented mechanisms to forestall future outbreaks. Joint, international research projects and dialogue on the role that history and memory have played in cooperation as well as conflict can offer valuable insights for the Kyrgyzstan and the Ferghana Valley.

Learning from Other Historical Experiences

Kyrgyzstan’s delicate balance between ethnic and civic patriotism echoes challenges across the globe. Efforts to build modern states based on colonial lines drawn on maps have given rise to tensions based on differing religious, communal, tribal or regional identities. In many postcolonial societies, from South Asia to Africa, ethnic violence has occurred with startling speed and deadly effect. The post-Communist world has seen outbreaks of ethnic violence as well, most notably in Yugoslavia and the North Caucasus. At the same time, post-colonial and

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