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Interconnectedness of Nationalism and Authoritarianism: The Role of Nationalism in Regime Legitimation and Power Personalisation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan

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I hereby declare that I have researched and written this thesis independently. Ideas or data used from other sources have been fully referenced.

Abstract

The role of (non-)representational symbolism and nationalism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan's and Tajikistan's regime-building process remains the least studied despite the extremely high magnitude of accommodated national symbols, monumental space, and metanarrative in both former Soviet republics. Increasingly personalistic authoritarian regimes where personality cults of both — Nursultan Nazarbayev and Emomali Rahmon — have gone beyond is more remarkable considering two countries of the former Soviet Union with various distinct characteristics. This thesis claims that post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan is a strong case-study for understanding the interconnectedness of nationalism and authoritarianism, and its vital role to acquire “legitimacy” for consolidating and personalising power. The research explores the change in Kazakhstan's and Tajikistan's form and substance of nationalism as a multi-faceted process, with delicately institutionalised and instrumentilised type becoming a significant variable source of power legitimation (domestically and internationally) and personification. The primary tools for achieving these aims were the unearthing the history, myth, and the utilisation of nationalism which act as driving engine for the progress of regime signification from the early days of independence up until now. The study's central arguments are (1) that nationalism in both republics became the first and foremost variable source of “legitimacy framework” in the early wakes of independence when other sources were yet to revive; (2) monopolistic exhibition of nationalism enables regimes to frame the substance of nationalism that denigrates any opponents from political landscape thus helps regimes to become inalterable; and (3) that the successful management of monumental space is the engine for the advancement of regime signification and generating compliance within masses (alongside the real repressive policing and surveillance) sustains the stability and durability of authoritarian regimes in “state of emergency” periods, and nurtures personality cults of leaders. To support these claims, the study provides extensive qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Key Words: Authoritarianism; Legitimacy; Nationalism; Kazakhstan; Tajikistan; Central Asia; Nation-building; Regime-building; Power Personalisation

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Introduction

In official Kazakhstani and Tajik political discourses, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Tajikistan's Emomali Rahmon are often portrayed as omnipresent and omnipotent figures. In public media they are portrayed as the "father of nation," "first leader," and "guarantor of peace and stability" in their respective states. In every government meeting they demonstrate total familiarity with all issues and emphasise their unique, authoritative capacity to resolve them. The ubiquitous portraits, commemorative placards, and megalomaniacal projects led and completed by President Emomali Rahmon, and the ultra-modern city-scapes, ancient nomadic symbolism, and personal monuments to President Nursultan Nazarbayev, all attest to the inalterable features of these leaders in the everyday political life of their respective republics.

Politics is not only about the material world, it is also about competition within the symbolic world, for the control and appropriation of identity. Similar to controlling the material world or building institutions for law enforcement, most regimes try to control the symbolic landscape of their domains. While the appropriation of material, coercive, and symbolic spheres seem to have a reinforcing function, each of these, in fact, have their own particular role. However, a combination of these aspects of power comprise the public's experience of daily political activity (Wedeen 1999: 30).

The cult of Nursultan Nazarbayev and Emomali Rahmon continue to be both effective and powerful. The post-Soviet political historiography of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan cannot be understood without due attention to the role of the highly personalistic regimes of Nursultan Nazarbayev and Emomali Rahmon. Both leaders are known in the former Soviet space, and to the global arena, for their political achievements such as establishing peace and security amid civil war (Emomali Rahmon), and playing a significant role in facilitating important international agreements such as making a nuclear-free state by removing thousands of nuclear warhead left from the Soviet period (Nursultan Nazarbayev). Nevertheless, many note the undemocratic nature of the regimes that emerged under these figures and even contest their role as "fathers of the nation." Failure of the governments to ensure basic needs such as freedom of the press, political participation, basic legal protections are just some of many reasons for a lack of popular

support from the people. In fact, the main products of the regimes' appropriation of nationalism and national symbols became: (1) acquiring and consolidating the regime's legitimacy in a highly turbulent period—after the collapse of the USSR—when there was no other viable source of legitimacy, (2) eliminating dissidents, (3) creating a general atmosphere of ambiguity, which would catalyse the process of power personification and ensure the stability of the newly emergent authoritarian regimes.

This study seeks to show how two Central Asian states with a common Soviet history, as well as shared socio-economic, and political characteristics have coopted nationalism to legitimise their regimes. This thesis argues that while other variable sources from the respective “legitimizing frameworks” are yet to be revived, nationalism has played a central role in the regime-building process.

This thesis argues that the differing methodologies these regimes utilised in the nation- and regime-building process were not accidental, rather intentional, and based on specific historical and material foundations. A type of nationalism that was crafted by Nazarbayev was mainly due to Kazakhstan's (pre)existing distinct socio-economic, political issues and its dependency discourse Russia. Proposing ambitious projects such as constructing a completely new capital after independence allow Nazarbayev to leave behind his rivals in Almaty (Schantz 2009), but also provided an opportunity to exercise his “authoritative voice” for the new cabinet members and the public. In particular, the opportunity to exercise his authority by using nationalism, national symbols and projects was highly efficient thanks to a simultaneous growth in the country's economic output.

Tajikistan, which disintegrated into civil war following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, used different methods. Although peace was eventually settled with various internal and external actors, the Tajik regime under Emomali Rahmon was still fragile throughout the immediate aftermath of the war. A highly fragmented society, incoherent elite, and economic deprivation forced Emomali Rahmon to ‘build’ a nation and regime by chiefly unearthing national myths and symbols. This thesis argues that Tajikistan's regime uses its rhetoric not only to ‘build a nation,’ but also to oust political rivals within the elite. This study argues that in the aftermath of the conflict settlement, the regime preferred not to use oppressive measures, chiefly to avoid upsetting the international community, whose support was important after the civil war. Instead, by using myths,

symbols, and islamist threat, Rahmon's regime has been able to turn public opinion against the opposition.

This thesis argues that in both cases the form and content of nationalism has been evolving. Nationalism has helped these regimes become more legitimate, and after becoming more consolidated, the regimes began using their prestige to construct strong personality cults. Moreover, the accompanying monumental space, cityscapes, and symbols systematically ensure the health of authoritarian regimes, when other variables become less convincing.

To examine the aforementioned arguments, the thesis is organised as follows. Part 1 explores existing literature on the interconnection of authoritarianism and nationalism, which forms the theoretical basis for this thesis. Chapter 1 examines the nature of nationalism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. A combination of inherited and newly-created socio-political, and economic issues led to diverging methodologies for regime-building in both states. Chapter 2 explores how Nazarbayev's regime utilises its cityscapes thanks to its petrodollars, and importantly creates an atmosphere of sceptical ambivalence, which makes it easier for the regime to manage such diverse and potentially contentious Central Asian society. In Kazakhstan then, the interaction between the regime and nationalism becomes symbiotic with both spheres shaping one another's. Chapter 3, the final chapter, discusses Tajikistan's distinct features. This part of the thesis examines that in the first decade of independence, the Tajik government relied on international support, however, later, having acquired a certain degree of legitimacy, the regime begins to utilise nationalism in full. Exhibiting nationalism becomes phenomenal with unknown history, untold myth, and awkwardly constructed mega national projects. Having considered this interaction, this section examines the implications of the increasing cult of Emomali Rahmon and how it produces compliance, once it gets highly monopolistic.

Methodology

Conducting research in states with increasingly authoritarian forms of government is too risky. The process becomes even more complicated when one decides to touch upon sensitive topics such as the interconnection of nationalism and authoritarianism. Particularly in Kazakhstan, where the regime does not tolerate any alternative historiographies (Human Rights Watch, November 13, 2015)

It is even more challenging to conduct any type of independent research in Tajikistan (Rickleton, 2014). The increasingly personalistic nature of the Tajik regime, almost total control of the media, and the regime's active monitoring of any other political activity would virtually make independent academic work impossible.

Therefore, the project relies primarily on existing literature concerning the nexus between nationalism and authoritarianism within the Central Asian context. In parallel with exploring existing literature, the project would utilise primary sources as a method of data collection. These include both Kazakhstani and Tajik government press releases, a selective list of delivered speeches, and socio-cultural events with leaders' participation within the context of ethno-symbolism and nationalism. Furthermore, the project explores the form and meaning of monuments, posters and national symbols that are associated with leadership and the increasing role of personality cults in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, chiefly through the prism of 'a theory on metanarratives'.

To investigate these, the project uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as its main methodological instrument. The CDA method, developed by the linguist Nourman Fairclough, would fit best because it allows observation on the interaction between participants (recipients of policies, national symbols) and the regime itself.

The CDA's consolidated three dimensional frameworks: (1) analysing spoken or written language texts; (2) analysing discourse practice (the process of text production, dissemination and perception; and (3) analysing discursive events as moments of sociocultural activities (Fairclough 1995: 2-3) would provide a platform to examine relevant policies, statements, or more generally, texts generated by the Kazakhstani and Tajik regime in a more appropriate manner. As textual analysis does not only mean commenting on text's content, but more precisely, analysing the form and organisation of

texts (Fairclough 1995: 5). This method would surely allow an approach to Kazakhstani and Tajik regime-produced texts that is open to pragmatism, consequently producing a great nexus for a comparative approach. Since these regimes' texts contain extensive discursive strategies, the selected approach would allow for research of government rhetoric.

Furthermore, taking into account what Fairclough signifies as 'the major forces in any discursive event – the language and the order of discourse (Fairclough 1995: 8), it is vital to exhibit this method in Nazarbayev - and Rahmon-led - strategic discursive programmes. Importantly, having an exclusive monopoly over media infrastructure, active manipulation of texts allows the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes (Freedom House, 2015; Anceschi 2016) to process a meaning-making that is composed of: (a) the production of the text; (b) the text itself; and the reception of the text (Fairclough 2003), and thus enhancement of the power personalization of legitimacy.

Undoubtedly, as Fairclough (2003) underlines, there are possible challenges to analysing a text. The nature of some texts is very transparent and easy to understand, while others are more complicated to assess. Furthermore, there is the possibility of misinterpreting translations of these texts from local to English language. It is risky to strongly rely (without cross checking) on the secondary sources that may potentially be biased or misinterpreted. To overcome this constraint, the author aims to examine both primary and secondary sources in English as well as local languages. To mention one example, the author plans to use a BBC Monitoring Services and Lexis Nexis Academic to retrieve speeches in English to cross-check the context with speeches from the local primary sources.

As a result of comparison, the author aims to generate the nexus between Kazakhstani and Tajik regime's use of national symbols and their reinforcing role to boost the legitimacy of power personalization. To do this, the project will examine the following sections in a thematic way, and will organize the information in the following way:

- Qualitative analysis of both Kazakhstani and Tajik governments' primary and secondary sources. This will help to understand: (1) the differences and/or commonalities in the nature of nationalism as a source of acquiring the legitimacy

of power personalization; and (2) the magnitude of symbol usage and obsession with personifying and preserving power.

- Application of comparative approach to evaluate the level of interconnection of nationalism and authoritarianism in two seemingly similar post-Soviet Central Asian states with multiple distinct characteristics.

Literature Review

The Use of Nationalism to Reinforce the Legitimacy of Power Personalisation in Post-Soviet Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

“Nationalism has a way of oppressing others.”— Noam Chomsky

Introduction

The literature on the interconnection of nationalism and authoritarianism in Central Asia is increasing day by day, but the role of symbolic space in this regard is worth investigating further. The aim of this part is to enlist existing works on nation- and regime-building processes in post-Soviet Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. More specifically, the paper intends to explore the literature on how regimes in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan exhibit national symbols, myth, history, to reinforce a legitimacy of power personalization. Based on this, this section seeks to understand the primary methods of preserving such a consolidated form of personalised power in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

There are various reasons behind selecting a comparative approach using these two particular cases. First, regardless of apparent ethnopolitical, social, and economic differences, both states share a common, recent Soviet past. Although they have a Communist background, the two regimes' use and accumulation of power differ considerably, which necessitates further exploration as well. Second, the leaders — Emomali Rahmon and Nursultan Nazarbayev — appear to have growing personality cults, which are supported by various sources of acquired legitimacy over the past two decades of independence. Sources of legitimacy, therefore, increasingly serve as reinforcement mechanisms for power personalization, as well as regime stability.

Mainstream theories suggest the stability of governments can be challenged by the failures regimes encounter, but the ability of systems such as Kazakhstan's to balance conflictual situation and maintain power have been discussed by various scholars

(Brubaker 2011; Hale 2009; Olcott 1997; Sarsembayev 1999; Schatz 2000). Most of the observers interrelate these strategies to the increasingly authoritarian leadership in these states. In addition to this, both Tajik and Kazakhstani leaders, are formally recognised as ‘Father of the Nation’, ‘Founder of the Nation’ with extensive powers and immunity that grants them privileges even after their resignation from office.

Furthermore, in both countries, one can observe a skyrocketing number of monuments, symbols, historicised policies, large portraits and posters in every corner of the country, proposed banknotes with inserted leader’s photographs, praising words in schools and public events. Undoubtedly, these examples clearly indicate and strongly support an increasing role of personality cults in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, underline the decisive role of nationalism in nurturing personalistic authoritarian regimes.

The nexus between the process of power personalisation and nationalism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan primarily aimed to produce a form, a nature of power personification that is considered to be different from, for instance, those of the Stalin-type cult of personality, as well as among other Central Asian leaders. Unlike the Soviet-wide personality cults, the sources of legitimacy, notably nationalism, makes cases retrospectively distinct. Moreover, nationalism, as one of many variable sources of regimes’ legitimacy, plays a crucial role in reinforcing the cult of personality, and thus making leadership in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan unique, Central Asia-specific, personality cult governance. What else makes these systems so particular? Do regimes’ power personalisation process differ from their Soviet period ‘masters’ and contemporary post-Soviet colleagues in the region? And, can nationalism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan be a signifying factor of regimes’ distinct features? What are the commonalities and divergent points in acquiring legitimacy through nationalism and power personalization in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan?

In exploring these questions, this part of the thesis intends to examine works within the nation-building and regime legitimacy context in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The first part of the paper aims to explore the form of nationalism and factors for systemic change in its political structure. Subsequent sections will discuss the emergence of power personalisation and legitimation processes in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and will attempt to generate similarities and differences in this particular process of acquiring legitimacy and the growing cult of personality. The final part will

attempt to form a nexus between Kazakhstani and Tajik leaders' contemporary strategies for preserving already consolidated, personified regimes and possible power transfer scenarios.

Crafting Nationalism in Post-Soviet Tajikistan and Kazakhstan

The previous study argues that in the absence of independent nationalist movements in the early period of the independence process, post-Soviet elites had to struggle with establishing, newly-emerging myths and symbols, to acquire their legitimacy (Cummings 2006). Some believe that there was a passive type of movement that was not necessarily directed against the Soviet rule, but the local elite (Akbarzadeh 1996).

Moreover, nationalism in Central Asia, including in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, was an unusual take that contained various historical elements. Linking the current state with the 'imagined past' and underlining the importance of the current regimes' role in the successful continuation of their ancestors' achievements has been an important part in acquiring legitimacy (Mellon 2010; Cummings 2006a). The aim of this section is therefore to discuss existing works on how Tajik and Kazakhstani governments (mis)managed to sustain a particular type of stability and thus unify their nations, chiefly using national symbols, and in a broader sense, nationalism. Undoubtedly, the strategies applied by both governments are different, which accordingly, produces different outcomes.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan's nation-building process does not only rely solely on its heterogeneously inhabited population but by the ability of the Kazakhstani regime to manage a particular type of political stability. The territory of the country, its diverse ethnic composition of almost 130 nationalities, the level of Russification, and high degree of urbanisation were among the most salient issues Kazakhstan encountered, making it harder to manage transition than in other Central Asian states (CIA – The World Factbook 2010; Oliver 2000: 127).

A particular type of fear based on those difficulties led Nazarbayev to advocate projects such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and later, the Eurasian

Economic Union (EEU) hoping to boost integration with Russia (Oliver 2000: 130). This sort of dependency discourse has also urged Kazakhstani authorities to exercise ‘unionist nationalism’, that was theoretically inclusive, but in practice has had an increasing role and influence by ethnic Kazakhs. Although the form of nationalism in Kazakhstan mostly focuses on increasing the role of ethnic Kazakhs, it does not tolerate any secessionist movement from either side (Hale 2009). Maintaining such a friendly atmosphere with both Russia and its various minority groups has had a significant impact on domestic as well as foreign policies (Beacháin and Kevlihan, 2011a; Burkhanov and Sharipova, 2014a). Surely, the above-mentioned characteristic is another key element that differentiates Kazakhstani nationalism from that of its neighbours.

Constructing a common sense of belonging, or groupness, was the primary focus of Kazakhstani elites, which, at the same time, was central to ensuring power and political stability (Isaacs and Polese, 2015a). The Kazakhstani regime has also been careful in combining Islam and national identity, using neutral terms like 'religion' and 'faith' as an alternative to Islam, as well as stressing the importance of these concepts for national unity (Omelicheva 2014).

Another factor that led to the rise of Kazakhstani nationalism over the course of independence is believed to be high birth-rates among ethnic Kazakhs and a substantial decline in some non-Kazakh groups (Khazanov 1995). This trend can easily illustrate how Kazakhstan inherited an internationalist frame with an ethnic face from the Soviet Union. The fundamental difference in the strategy applied by Kazakhstan was that this time it was ethnic Kazakhs who had more privileges than, for instance, Russians (Schatz 2000). Schatz (2000a) underlines that the consolidation of nationalism in Kazakhstan has been taking place with state-supported coercion of minorities in parallel with the institutional support of ethnic diversity.

Even though many widely criticise Kazakhstani nationalism and its discursive nature, minorities, notably ethnic Russians, consider this approach better than no commitment at all (Schatz 2000b). Interestingly, the same political framework gives rise to different minority groups such as Tatars and Koreans. In a study that focused on the bottom-up nation-building process in Kazakhstan, experts discovered that the socio-economic interests of minority group representatives could produce a useful parallel discourse to the nationalising process of the state and quick assimilation process (Davenel

and Yim, 2016). Nonetheless, some scholars still observe internal tension between competing social components – State, Kazakhs, and non-titular groups. This tension mainly derives from the lack of institutional guarantees of pluralism, and the nature of such pressure largely depends on a political transition, the form of economy, and Kazakhstan's identification project more generally (Cummings 2006).

By and large, the literature above on Kazakhstan offers an insight into the interaction between the Kazakhstani regime and its diverse population over the past twenty-five years. Especially, the regime's ability to manage such a potentially diverse and contentious society makes the case more interesting.

Notably, it is more likely that the regime's discursive strategies frame this interaction and play a crucial role in sustaining socio-political stability. Schatz (2000) believes that these discursive structures can provide 'minimal, and necessary, reconciliation at critical moments, however, these policies are unlikely to be a stable guarantor of social stability in a long term'. Indeed, discursive systems might serve some degree of social security during critical moments. But do discursive strategies provide minimal support in a dangerous situation to maintain social stability? And is it precarious to retain implementing discursive frames in the long run? It seems that Schatz's understanding of the long-term framework is questionable. Specifically, it is still unclear what he means by long-term. Does he refer to ten years, twenty years, or twenty-five years, as long-term? Over the past twenty-five years of independence, there were a number of social protests in Kazakhstan, and the government has been managing to sustain social stability, be it discursively or coercively. And it is evident that government has not been overthrown, like it had happened in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. So does this have anything to do with leadership? Can the form of leadership have an essential place in this process? Then, what informs a type of leadership, the personality of Central Asian rulers?

Tajikistan

In 1993 Snyder envisaged the emergence of nationalism by *saying 'nationalism would be likely to emerge if states, after the collapse of the USSR, fail to meet their obligations to the people – including requirements to ensure democratic governance'* (Snyder 1993).

The Civil War that took place in Tajikistan right after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, created such a platform to establish a certain type of nationalism.

The unexpected collapse of the USSR in early 1990s had its negative impacts on Tajikistan as well. Socio-economic deprivation, weak national coherence, increasing hatred between and among the regions were all leading reasons for the eruption of fratricidal war in Tajikistan that lasted for five consecutive years (Akiner 2001: 37). A combination of increasing hatred, largely deriving from ideological, regional, and inter-communal rivalry, drove the country to bloodshed. The collapse of the Soviet Union created a power vacuum, which resulted in a number of conflicting groups headed by influential warlords, with an established loyalty to their clan or respective region, who sought to establish a country within the framework of their own ideology (Epkenhans 2016: 14-19). It is important to note that the Civil War was a tipping point in Tajikistan that has had a huge impact on the nation-building process, as well as to the increasingly authoritarian, personalistic regime of Emomali Rahmon.

Chiefly, in this conflict, there were two conflicting bodies composed of regions and the ones in favour of the status quo – communist loyalists. The so-called Tajik opposition, which consisted of an ‘unlikely coalition of democratic, Islamic, and local ethnic groups who formed the United Tajik Opposition (UTO)’ (Pannier 2017). They came up to the streets of Dushanbe, and in 1992 seized power from the Tajik Supreme Soviet. In winter of the same year, they were defeated, and the present Tajik government took control (Global Security). After this, the Supreme Soviet urgently called a session in the northern city of *Khujand*, which was hundreds of kilometres away from the conflictual part of the country. In this session, then president Iskandar Akbarsho resigned, and a politically insignificant, unknown farmer from *Kulyab* (Southern city), Emomali Rahmon became head of government (Akiner 2001: 38-39). Many believe that at the time Rahmon was a puppet president, as he was promoted to this position by a powerful warlord from *Kulyab*, Sangak Safarov, who thought that Rahmon would mostly represent the interests of warlords from the south where they are all originally from. After a few months of Rahmon’s symbolic presidency, his boss, Safarov, was killed in battle (Cooley and Heathershaw, 2017: 84-85), the reasons of which are opaque. The Safarov murder created room for Rahmon to ultimately begin manoeuvring on his own, which also changed the nature of his power from being symbolic to more active. Instead of getting

directions from warlords, this time Rahmon began taking the active role of facilitator, mediator, and negotiator.

The talks to settle the peace for this war continued until 1997, which eventually, with the support of external actors - primarily Russia - put an end to it by formally signing the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord (Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh, 2010: 95). This agreement was signed between President Rahmon, the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), and the UN's special representative to Tajikistan. As per the agreement, the following were the terms to be implemented: (1) releasing all prisoners of war and opposition figures under the amnesty; (2) providing 30 % representation to UTO in all executive bodies; (3) drafting constitutional amendment is subject to a popular vote; (4) drafting laws that include democratic principles on political parties, civil societies, mass media, and the parliamentary elections; (5) forming a general election commission with 25 % UTO representation to undertake parliamentary elections and national referenda (Abdullaev and Akbarzadeh, 2010: 119). Transformation toward embracing peace was finally sealed by the parliamentary elections held in 2000 and Tajikistan was soon seen as part of the democratic world

There are various push and pull factors that result in the rise of nationalism in Central Asia. It ranges from religious beliefs to ethnic minorities, sub-ethnic tribalism, and regionalism (Nourzhanov 2015: 85). Accordingly, every country in Central Asia experiences a development of nationalism based on the multifaceted characteristics they inherited and possessed at the time of declaring independence.

Since Islam was one of the main components of the Civil War in Tajikistan, a future form of Tajik nationalism, would likely include this element. However, the Civil War per se is considered as an indicator of identity crises in Tajikistan (Oliver 2000: 126). It is apparent that many leaders in Central Asia view Islam as the primary challenge to 'official' nationalism, and nation-builders are gravely concerned by its influence.

Therefore, carefully crafting a type of nationalism that would not in any way conflict with Islam, and thus, negatively impact their legitimacy has been a primary focus of the Tajik regime for years (Nourzhanov 2015: 71). Correspondingly, when the Civil War came to an end, the Islamic movement in Tajikistan was considered to be 'defeated', which subsequently created several outcomes within the state- and nation-building process. First, the public in Tajikistan no longer considers Islamism as an alternative

ideology to Sovietism, nationalism, and localism; second, Islamism's nature in Tajikistan became normalised with its unification with democrats and nationalists. Finally, after accumulating some legitimacy, Islamists began to limit most of their Islamic values and gradually got fused with nationalism, becoming Islamo-nationalism, which is to a greater extent identical to those of Middle Eastern states (Oliver 2000: 129).

Over time, Tajik Islamo-nationalism has made nationalism prevalent over Islam, wherein nation-builders, such as Rahmon, were systematically reminding people that it is, in fact, Tajikness that has substantially contributed to the development of Islam and not the other way around (Nourzhanov 2015: 85). Undoubtedly, statements of this nature clearly indicate a consolidation of both Tajik nationalism as well as regimes' legitimacy that was highly inconsistent and fragile during the early periods of independence. More critically, Emomali Rahmon, whose government was vulnerable in the initial days of independence, could not have afforded to express his position in this tone against Islamists. Moreover, it is a clear illustration of how Rahmon's regime has become firm enough. How does the administration become powerful enough to oppose the Islamists it was once 'accountable' to? Has this rhetoric been based on a strongly personalised power?

The next significant change in Tajik nationalism is that other than becoming increasingly prevalent and dominant in the state discourse during last decade, it became an important securitising and nationalised instrument (Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016). In contrast to the state of nationalism after the breakup of the Soviet Union, nowadays, Tajik nationalism stays highly stable in its content and remains distinctly ethnolinguistic compared to other developing state-authored nationalisms across the region. Moreover, during the course of its independence, Tajik nationalism's importance chiefly derives from becoming a tool that eliminates political opponents - mainly representatives of political Islam - and is indeed considered as a new and potentially destabilising phenomenon (Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016a).

The authors mentioned above rightly underline the change in the content and instrumentalisation of nationalism to denigrate political opponents. The fundamental problem with this explanation, however, is that it does not clearly express how this situation might be destabilising? What aspects of the Tajik regime seem to be fragile for this 'destabilising' factor? If nationalism has served as an ingredient for the growing

personality cult, and the system's consolidation, can it have a reverse effect as well? From a certain point and general view, the Tajik regime's monopolistic and instrumentalist interaction with nationalism might seem to be a destabilising factor. However, the tendency demonstrated by the increasingly personalistic and authoritarian regime's ability to eliminate opponents and thus become inalterable rather sustains the authoritarian stability in Tajikistan. It is, therefore, important to explore how the power personalisation process has taken place and thus aided the emergence of a significantly stable authoritarian regime.

Reinforcing Legitimacy of Power Personalisation

State – and nation-building - processes in Central Asia have progressed following their leaders' potential to craft both the type of system and nationalism in their respective states. Sources of acquiring legitimacy for regimes vary from state to state. However, over the past two decades of independence, both Tajik and Kazakhstani leaders seem to have increasingly personalistic authoritarian regime. It is projected both domestically as well as in foreign policy making, where the utilisation of nationalism is widely observed (Omelicheva 2016; Isaacs 2010; Anceschi 2014; Mateveeva 1999; March 2003; Schatz 2006; Cummings 2010; Marat 2007; Beetham 1991).

Although Tajikistan is perceived to be a mono-ethnic country, its five-year fratricidal war after the collapse of the USSR made it too fragmented (Gavrillis 2013; Akbarzadeh 1996). Undoubtedly, it is necessary to take into account war-torn Tajikistan's legacies that are prevalent in all aspects of post-conflict Tajikistan. Among these divisive forces of society, one can easily observe a high level of regional rivalries in today's Tajikistan, too (Nourzhanov and Bleuer, 2013). The most crucial thing within this context is that even though theoretically Tajikistan is mono-ethnic, in practice it is as divided and fragmented as any other 'heterogeneously' populated contentious country, with least harmonisation among different groups of people. So, why the use of nationalism and interlinkage of history in present Tajikistan is much higher than neighbouring Kazakhstan? What makes cases distinct, that are from a practical point of view, composed of similar 'diverse', 'heterogeneous' characteristic within their societies?

How do these different states shape the nature of power personalisation? What factors lead them to take this path? Does the process of authority personalisation affect the regimes' legitimacy, and thus influence its durability? Are there any standard approaches used in increasing the personification of power in these cases? As a result of comparison, the following paragraphs intend to enlist existing literature on the issues mentioned above and aims to discover the nexus in reinforcing the legitimacy of power personification in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan.

Emergence of Power Personification

The USSR's demise urged pro-communist leaders, who were once known to be ambiguous toward nationalism, to embrace the nation-building process by promoting policies and symbols that distinctly indicate the main features of their nation. More importantly, invented symbols were all carefully crafted, and mainly defined by the leader of the nation context (Isaacs 2010; Adrien 2014; Marat 2009).

In addition to this, the logic the newly-emerged Central Asian states followed was to invent a clear nationalistic ideology that would not have any relations with the prior Soviet values. Accordingly, the challenge governments have been encountering so far is that they systematically remind the international community that they do not have inherited communist legacies (Marat 2007) — be it in the form of governance or the nature of the regime. What are the implications? Why does the implementation of national symbols, myth, and historicised policies seem to be carefully selective? Does it have any relation with leadership/or reflect the rulers' personality? Has the use of nationalism developed the process of personalising power in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan?

Researchers believe that, formally, the process of power personalisation in Central Asia started with the adoption of presidential systems (Isaacs 2010). But has the shift to a presidential system equipped Central Asian leaders with necessary tools for progressing further?

In Tajikistan, although the system of government from the earliest days of independence was presidential, its leader, Emomali Rahmon, had no significant power for almost a decade or so (Danieli 2014). This, clearly illustrates that Tajikistan's nationalising project and its power personalisation process began only after the current

Tajik government accumulated a certain amount of power and the regime became relatively consolidated (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev, 2014).

The Kazakhstani case, on the other hand, with its differing features in socio-political and economic sectors, and primarily, the leadership under Nazarbayev, has also seen an increase in power personalisation for the past two decades. Are exercising and accumulating power with the use of nationalism similar both in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan? This section seeks to compare the process of power personification under Tajik and Kazakhstani leadership, and hence, discover what the commonalities and differences and potential factors behind their distinct features are.

El-Basi – Leader for Life?

Long-serving Kazakhstani leader, Nursultan A. Nazarbayev, is characterised as the oldest communist-era leader who still holds power in a former Soviet republic (www.rferl.org). Being very skilful and pragmatic makes him substantially different from his colleagues in the region. Many supporters of Nazarbayev point his success at multiple activities he has undertaken during his administration such as nuclear disarmament, significant economic growth, constructing a new capital, to mention few. Personal characteristics such as personal pragmatism and having relatively sensible leadership when compared with those of neighbouring states are the most salient features he possesses. Another difference from those in the region lie with his push for modernisation and his level of acceptance both at home and internationally (Isaacs 2010a).

Why is the Kazakhstani leader so acclaimed? Is this status sustainable? To what degree can one measure his legitimacy or acceptance? Do policies directed to acquire legitimacy impact the stability of the Kazakhstani regime both negatively and/or positively? And does Kazakhstan's 'success story' chiefly rely on the leadership's above-listed characteristics?

One reason for his success was his balancing of interests in the early years of post-Soviet transition to maintain stability. To achieve this, Nazarbayev was more willing than other regional actors to embrace ties with the Western world.

In connection with this, previous research has established that to get more acceptance and legitimacy on both fronts — at home and abroad — the Kazakhstani elite

has embraced the central principles of liberalism to balance interests. By and large, this was aimed at structuring general patriotic feelings for the whole population, and not the ‘titular’, Kazakh people exclusively. Therefore, this type of balanced situation clearly demonstrates how the Kazakhstani regime acquires its legitimacy not necessarily by past projects with homogenising its nation (Diener 2002: 636), that might, instead, have potentially destabilising dynamic.

A vast and growing body of literature has investigated this favourable balance as the ‘*three Discursive Paradigms of state identity in Kazakhstan that are Kazakhness, Kazakhstaness, and Transnationalism*’ where the Kazakhstani regime shows its pragmatism and a strong feature of state-led ideologies by switching between them systematically (Laurelle 2014; Omelicheva 2014). The study examines how the regime makes the transnational repertoire of identity through various branding strategies, which is regarded as an accumulation of political and economic benefits internationally and consolidating political legitimacy at home. Also, it is worth noting that Kazakhstan’s concern with image making domestically is significantly similar to how its transnational image is made (Schatz 2008).

To sum up, many pragmatic strategies and personal leadership characteristics make Nazarbayev’s administration distinct in the region. Among them: personal leadership characteristics, strategic implementation and management of a diverse society, stressing present achievements more than historiography, his ability to harmonise an ethnically diverse population and build a stable regime are his most readily apparent achievements.

Above all, it is important to note that the Kazakhstani regime does not only reveal its success in words, there has also been clear evidence of successful implementation of policies stated before. However, in light of declining oil prices and declining socio-economic situation in Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev’s success story becomes more questionable. It becomes difficult to combine and use ‘old strategies’ in such a turbulent new situation. The primary concern for the Kazakhstani regime then, is retaining the status quo — strongly personalised power (Anceschi 2015).

But the regime is also worried about transition. Recent work on Nazarbayev’s top cabinet reshuffling and significant constitutional amendments (KazInform, September 14, 2016) offer some valuable insights into Kazakhstan’s so-called ‘*new transitional*

government'. An in-depth analysis of cabinet reshuffles and constitutional amendments that have been approved by himself in March 2017 include appointing his elder daughter, Darigha, to the Senate, who will become head of state in the event of the president's sudden death or voluntary resignation (RFE/RL, March 10, 2017)

Many experts believe that manoeuvres of this nature regarding sudden cabinet reshuffle (especially in the aftermath of Karimov's death) are not usual practices. By doing so, Nazarbayev aims to maintain his galvanised reputation even after he voluntarily leaves office. He is already equipped with broad immunity and the power to control and shape decision making processes even after his resignation (Anceschi and Pannier, 2016).

I am the State: (In)significant Leader of Nation, Guarantor of (In)stability

Rahmon's leadership is very distinct from that of his Kazakhstani counterpart. Distinction can be observed both in his domestic and international activities, and the form of nationalism the Tajik government has been focusing on for the last decade. Moreover, the two countries' specific characteristics, ranging from ethnopolitical to post-independence (particularly post-conflict) experiences have had a significant impact on the political cultures and their future activities.

During the early phase of independence, the authorities in Tajikistan seemed to be less enthusiastic about nation-building. Subsequently, this development led to the fragmentation of society with various cultural cleavages (Heathershaw and Herzig, 2014: 67) However, gradually, when the five-year conflict came to an end, embracing nationalism began to play a crucial role in the regime-building of the Tajik government. With this intention, Rahmon's leadership has been focusing on nationalism as a signifying variable source of his regime during the last decade. Therefore, the nature of nationalism has become increasingly authoritarian (Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016a).

A great deal of prior research into the sources of nationhood in Tajikistan has focused on how the Tajik regime has crafted a political form of nationalism. Some scholars underline that Rahmon's administration wanted a Tajik nationhood that would exclude Islam, and thus deliberately concentrated on the pre-Islamic period of Tajik history.

Even the currently banned IRPT's (then the only officially registered Islamic party in the former Soviet space (Pannier, 2015) discourse contained nationalistic sentiments more than Islamic values (Heathershaw 2014: 67). Along with incorporating Islam with nationalism, the state is obsessed with introducing newer symbols and myths to justify and acquire its legitimacy by denigrating other pre-existing ideologies.

Present day historiography mostly projects strong links to Ariyanism, which officials and a wide range of people consider to be an official doctrine (Battis 2016). Moreover, Ariyanism understood as an alternative ideology to Islam and aims at weakening the social role of Islam in society (Laurelle 2007: 55). Laurelle (2007: 56) emphasises that by using Ariyanism, the Tajik officials want to create a secularised form of nationalism that would allow them to marginalise Islamists.

Factually, the lines between religion and nationalism are intertwined in IRPT's rhetoric, where IRPT had more nationalist elements in its discourse than Islamic ones (Heathershaw 2014: 75). Therefore, this dynamic is a clear illustration of how the role of Ariyanism as a denigrating tool of opponents under Rahmon government went beyond, which may target not only Islamists but any actor which would not fit under the "Ariyan category."

Competing Personality Cults

Rahmon's various titles such as 'Leader of the Nation', 'Founder of Peace and National Unity', 'Guarantor of Peace and Stability', and having lifelong immunity for himself and his family (The Guardian, December 11, 2015; Samuels, 2016; Eurasianet, November 23, 2015) seem to be similar to those privileges Nazarbayev possesses. Similarly, both leaders have national holidays named after them, and their faces on the local currency (Asia-Plus, December 16, 2016; Taylor, 2016).

In addition to this, in Astana, the Kazakhstani capital, there is a museum in Nazarbayev's honour and the university is named after him (Peterson and Mukankyzy, 2012). In Almaty, the second largest city in Kazakhstan, there is an open 'Wishbook' with the President's palm imprinted in it (Saidullin, 2007).

Seemingly, following Nazarbayev model, Rahmon is quickly catching up with developments in the region. He is subject to personality cult, similar to Soviet leaders,

Rahmon's pictures greet every school child in their textbooks. Moreover, officials address him as 'Your Excellency', which equalises him to a particular type of King (Asia-Plus, October 31, 2013). Unsurprisingly, last November the Tajik interior minister even wrote a song praising the president, where the head of security services confirms the song as 'great' (Akhbor, June 21, 2017)

Although the law in Tajikistan does not allow monument to a leader in his lifetime (Asia-Plus, November 16, 2016), it does permit him to spread huge posters of the President in various clothing and backgrounds. Also, Tajik officials publish 2,5 - kilo weighted book with Rahmon's photos on 300 pages (Ashurov, 2016). In fact, the list of symbols resembling a personality cult is exhaustive, and increasing day by day. However, this does not seem to be making the ageing authoritarian leaders happier and urges them to concentrate on more serious issues, such as the transition of power.

The 63-year-old Rahmon is not of the same age as Nazarbayev, but many scholars hear rumours suggesting that the Tajik leader has serious health issues related to the heart, which might also not allow him to serve as long as he wishes. Based on his personal condition, and mainly regional developments such as the Uzbek president's sudden death last September, concerns over power transition seem to be escalating in Tajikistan, too.

Like in Kazakhstan, the Tajik president has undertaken an immediate reshuffle in the top cabinet positions right after coming back from Karimov's funeral. Thanks to his large family, one of his daughters was appointed as the chief of administrative staff, another is head of International Relations department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Putz, 2017), his third daughter became a vice-chairman of a major bank (Orienbank). But the most interesting appointment so far is making his 29-year-old son, Rustam Emomali, as mayor the capital of Tajikistan (RFE/RL, January 12, 2017) He replaced one of the most influential politicians in Tajik politics, Mahmadsaid Ubaidulloev, many view as a potential rival for Rahmon (Putz, 2017).

All this evidence clearly illustrates yet another move to preserve the already consolidated power personalization in Tajikistan. And overall, what both the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes show is that it is no longer a concern for them to increase their power monopolisation. It is apparent that in both cases the leaders' cult of personality went far

beyond. Instead, what seems clear is that the main issue, is to retain the status quo by avoiding analogous succession models in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Based on this survey, the following arguments are key:

- The nature of nationalism in Kazakhstan appears to be more transnational and unionist, similar to the Soviet Union's. Tajik state-authored nationalism, by contrast, has been an ethnonationalist.
- Successfully utilised discursive strategies are alternatives for coercive and repressive policies. Importantly, some discursive strategies' content (i.e. nationalism) has had a dual effect both to nurturing the regime and shaping the form of nationalism.
- Exclusive titles such as 'Father of the Nation', 'Founder of the Nation', 'First President', and so on. (i.e. nationalistic elements, sentiments, and nationalism in more general) appear to be significant both for the Tajik and Kazakhstani regimes' vitality. Significance chiefly relies on the privileges and vast power these titles grant the leaders both during and after they serve their post.
- As a result, in both cases, leaders' cults of personality goes far beyond, so is their age and health condition. This circumstance, and 'succession of power' developments in the region, lead Nazarbayev and Rahmon to be anxious about carefully designing possible monopolised power transitions. Having monopoly over all kinds of resources in the country, so far, leaders demonstrate successful implementation of policies and consolidation of power.

Theoretical framework

Politics of Signification and Regime Legitimation

“In the arts of representation are found the real origins and organs of social control ... What then is a king? He is a king’s portrait, and that alone makes him king...” — Louis Marin

This part of the thesis argues that both the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes increasingly employ the politics of (non-) representation, and more particularly, newly-invented national symbols to enhance the process of signification of their regimes. The eventual outcome of this is that the rocketing number of symbols, posters, and monuments have had a powerful impact on building the regime in a vacuum that became prevalent after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Particularly, the section underlines the linkage between authoritarianism and symbolism, which provides grounds to compare selected cases that demonstrate how national symbols aid the nation- and regime-building processes in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Importantly, the section employs the theoretical approach of symbols as (non-) representational signifiers and one of the main sources and catalysts for the process of power personification in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. To achieve this, the study adopts both representational – that embodies the reflective, intentional and constructivist approaches, and non-representational – that is framed with a relationship of material and discursive strategies (Cummings 2010: 2-3).

The first part focuses on the theory of neopatrimonialism and symbolism. The second part outlines the interconnection of neopatrimonial regime and symbolism, and thus generate the process of signification in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. And the final part outlines symbolic aspects of legitimacy acquiring to increase the personality cult of both leaders.

Neopatrimonial Leadership in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan

It is interesting to explore whether symbolism is incorporated into the political lives of Central Asian states. Mainly, the reason why this region attracts attention in terms of symbolism's role in political life is that the states of Central Asia had no radical nationalist movements, and the form of independence they have mostly achieved was achieved practically by accident (Cummings 2006). In addition to this, although with varying degrees, these states have experienced increasingly authoritarian governments (Matveeva 2009; Schatz 2008; March 2003; Lewis 2008).

Neopatrimonialism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan?

Both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are on the lists of international human rights organizations for routinely violating fundamental rights and freedoms of their citizens. Denigrating opponents of any nature both at home and abroad is yet another observable practice of Kazakhstani and Tajik leadership nowadays. In parallel to this, one of the increasing trends within the form of governance is how these leaders seek to arrange the type of transition of their consolidated power.

In order to assess the interconnection of authoritarianism and nationalism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, this section will consider existing elements of neopatrimonialism in Nazarbayev's and Rahmon's regime.

The core elements of neopatrimonialism lie with how the chief executive ensures his authority by exploiting personal patronage networks. This process is facilitated by rewards for personal favours, which then mobilizes support for the leader (Ishimaya 2002: 44). Both Nazarbayev and Rahmon have got all of the above-mentioned characteristics, if not more. For instance, appointing close family members to the key positions in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan is now standard practice (Rosbalt, January 12, 2017; Eurasianet, September 11, 2015).

Second, one of the types of neopatrimonial regimes —personal dictatorial — where the regime seeks to exclude any opponent from the political arena, often physically (Ishimaya 2002: 44), is commonplace in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. For example, recent Tajik government activities that involve denigrating political exiles both at home and

internationally actually involving physical elimination makes the issue serious and shows how far the hands of the regime may reach (Lemon 2016; Cooley and Heathershaw, 2017: 86). The Kazakhstani government has also sought the political opponent Mukhtar Ablyazov several times, demanding he be extradited from France, however the claim was rejected by the French court (Agence France-Presse, December 10, 2016). This does not necessarily mean that there is not any opposition party in Central Asia. Indeed, there are few, but with extraordinarily symbolic nature that even grants presidents praise from challengers (Pannier, 2016)

Third, and one of the most important characteristics and the factor for the rise of neopatrimonial governance specifically for oil rich Kazakhstan is its energy sector and its huge dependence on it. Similar to other postcolonial states in the Gulf region or in Africa, the Central Asian states' political institutions were undermined by first Russian and then Soviet rule, which consequently urged the newly-emerged states to create a form of government strongly reliant on personal rule (Ishiyama 2002: 49). Accordingly, being a rentier state that has strong dependencies on Russia to further export its oil and gas has created internal consequences for strong control over resources in Kazakhstan, which is the most prominent sector of the Kazakhstani economy. The end result is that the government has complete control over resources, and less interest in distributing profits acquired from natural resources. Accordingly, this circumstance necessitates strong individuals to create client-patron relations that would further nurture highly personalistic regimes (Ishiyama 2002: 44a), which is observable in contemporary Kazakhstan.

Do highly personalistic, or as above-mentioned neopatrimonial Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes necessarily need to exploit symbolism? Why do these governments need to use symbols if they already have total monopoly over almost all types of resources in their respective countries? The following section intends to examine why regimes still need an exploitation of symbols regardless of having consolidated power, by emphasizing the significance of symbols in nurturing authoritarianism.

Defining Symbolism and its Role

Although there is not much consensus on the relationship of politics and symbolism (Cummings 2010: 2), the Kazakhstani and Tajik governments exhibit elements of

symbolism from both sides of the scholarship to enhance the legitimacy of power. As noted earlier, myths, national symbols, colourful posters of leaders, and galvanizing monuments are all indicators of (non-) representation theory prevalent in both cases. To examine the significance of symbols, this part attempts to outline the essential components of each and how they are related to nurturing the regimes' nature in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Ideology, Metanarrative and Myth

By and large, academic literature defines symbolism as a process of generating, conveying and interpreting meaning (Cummings 2009: 1083). Cummings (2009: 1083a) states that '*the meaning ranges from objects, activities, relationships, events, to gestures and spatial units*'. It is therefore important to explore the framework for the interconnection of visual, aural and linguistic symbols with politics in contemporary Central Asia with post-colonial experience. Scholars of symbolism and legitimacy in Soviet politics argue that any fundamental change in the political system involves reawakening the cultural sphere. Mainly, they refer to the reworking of the whole public sphere that involves new norms that replace previously prevalent ideas (Gill 2011: 4). Moreover, because it defines boundaries, symbolism is a significant element of the nation-building process. It informs and creates pre-modern, modern and post-colonial discourses (Elgenius 2011). The disintegration of the USSR and the creation of newly-independent states of Central Asia with gradually increasing use of newly-invented symbols suits well this claim.

Next, researchers argue that ideologies, metanarratives and myths are the driving forces of this change. The author elaborates that an ideology partially contains a philosophical foundation for the regime that may develop a process of acquiring legitimacy of authoritarian structure. However, they define a metanarrative as a simplified version of ideology that serves as a means of communication between ruler and the ruled. In addition, a metanarrative is an instrument that plays a crucial role in balancing some norms, while excluding others. Its meaning contains a discourse that substantiates the regime's rituals, and it is chiefly composed of a myth which provides a society the simple rationale, sense of belonging (Gill 2011: 12). Compared to the post-Communist states of

Central and Eastern Europe, most of the rural and to some extent urban parts of Central Asian states can be considered as having a ‘primitive society’ (Epkenhans 2016: 255) where the probability of making symbols viable is much higher (Gills 2011: 20). The nexus of this nature is best able to explain an effective linkage between symbols and regime in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Another compatibility tool of this theory is the way metanarrative functions, and its various visible elements in signifying both Kazakhstani and Tajik leadership.

Functioning of Metanarrative

It seems that without proper function of and the delivering methods for symbols there would not be a successful interaction between regime and ruled. Therefore, theorists argue that symbols are an integral part for a proper function of discourses such as ideology, metanarrative and myth. By and large, symbols’ significance derives from what they represent, and importantly, this type of representation is composed of simplified versions of complex ideas, realities, and issues (Gill 2011: 16). Others believe that symbols are important means of understanding, and it is chiefly through its evocation metanarrative and myth is expressed (Edelman 1985).

One can argue that it is true that regimes in Central Asia, including Kazakhstani and Tajik governments, that were built almost from scratch introduced numerous newly-invented symbols. However, there is a crucial point to Gill’s argument when we examine the same within the Central Asian context. For instance, as a part of nation-building process, the Tajik government has been systematically concentrated on generating both physical and visual symbols. The list is exhaustive and ranges from narratives of ancient Ariyan Civilization, Zoroastrian celebrations, that completely contradicts Tajikistan’s (pre-)Soviet history (Laurelle 2007) and mythicizing incomplete hydro-electric stations as a pride of the Tajik people (Menga 2016). Also, declaring a *hanafi* year of Islam in 2007 (Heathershaw 2014) is only contradictory with both Tajikistan’s past history and recent developments towards practicing the religion. So from this point of view, we can see that there is a clear discrepancy and almost no interrelation between symbols. However, Elgenius (2011) lists three crucial processes that make ‘insignificant symbols more powerful: (1) self-reference — telling people who they are; (2) differentiation — making

‘us’ and ‘them’; and (3) recognition — systematic affirmation against negating others. It is most probably that these three primary processes of signifying ‘insignificant’ symbols in Central Asia, and particularly in Tajikistan where symbols are hugely disconnected from one another.

Delivering Symbols and Regime Legitimation

Language, visual arts, physical environment, ritual are all vital delivery mechanisms of symbolism (Edelman 1985; Pisch 2016: 25) and the number, practice, and implementation of these symbols in contemporary Tajikistan and Kazakhstan is sky rocketing. All of these symbols embody powerful elements that impact the essence of community substantially. Symbols target emotional experience. Moreover, the statements metanarratives contain are most of the time authoritative, which makes the interaction of symbols and politics more effective (Edelman 1985: 9).

Sources of acquiring legitimacy are numerous and dependent on the form of the regime, society, circumstance and the period all these components exist. The variables of regime legitimation include: (1) ideocratic legitimation — when the populace shares the values of the regime; (2) teleological — legitimacy derived from a certain goals; (3) charismatic — based on a perception of human, a leader with superhuman powers and qualities; (4) nationalist legitimation — direct association of the regime with national sentiments and symbols based on traditional grounds; (5) performance — legitimacy stems from peoples satisfaction of needs; (6) democratic — mandate granted by populace; and (7) legal — exercising authority based on the flow of legality (Edelman 1964: 15).

Among these seven sources of regime legitimation, the Central Asian governments, particularly the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes, seem to have largely adopted nationalist legitimation. Ranging from celebrating extraordinary Independence, national holydays (Eurasianet, August 19, 2016), shifting from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet (RFE/RL, April 12, 2017) Especially, the Tajik government’s obsessive defence of language, which they believe as an important reconnecting tool to its ‘glorious’ past is widespread in today’s public discourse (Oliver 2000: 23). Producing numerous national symbols, monuments of ‘national heroes’ (Kalder, 2009), urging to wear national clothes

in a public space (Eurasianet, August 11, 2017) and endless list of other activities of similar nature are the most salient practices in present Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Consideration of neopatrimonial form of Kazakhstani and Tajik regime in their nationalist approach to acquire legitimacy leads us to explore how this components of interaction inform personality cult of leaders in these states.

Symbols and the Rise of Personality Cult

It is commonplace for a government to use arts as a component of their regime. But do symbols, along with dominating the public discourse, play a role in increasing the cult of personality? Why do already consolidated authoritarian regimes still use symbols?

Retrospectively speaking, even totalitarian regimes of the Soviet Union largely implemented symbols to gain certain amount of legitimacy. Especially, posters were the means of communicating and educating the population during the Soviet Union (Pistch 2016: 6). What posters were reflecting during that period were differing from time to time, and representing, thus increasing cult of personality was one of the main roles of symbols. The methods cults of personalities were presented were varying, but one of the most important things in every era of personality cult manifestation was the active role of arts. The leaders from the 20th century such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, Benito Mussolini, were all active users of arts to reinforce their cult of personality (Pistch 2016: 12). What is the form of personality cult in present Kazakhstan and Tajikistan? Does it really fit with what leaders of 20th or even ancient cult of personalities possessed?

There are many statements that define what cult of personality means. But the most suitable definitions for Tajik and Kazakhstani leader would be what was coined by Pao-min Chang saying *'the articular elevation of the status and authority of one man [...] through the deliberate creation, projection and propagation of a godlike image'*. Arpad von Klimo says that *'Here we define "cult of personality" as a sum of symbolic actions and texts which express and ritualise the particular meanings ascribed to a particular person in order to incorporate an imagined community'*. And similar to Chang, Plamper De Nes defines the personality cult as *'god-like glorification of a modern political leader with mass media techniques, and excessive glorification of this leader'*. (cited in Pistch 2016: 57).

Having total monopoly over media infrastructure and manipulating public discourse by promoting regime is a clear evidence under increasingly authoritarian regimes of Central Asia (Anceschi 2016). Increasing number of praising words such as “One Fatherland, one Fate, one Leader of the Nation,” “There will be no second Nazarbayev,” dedicated holidays of “First President’s Day” (Lillis, 2012), Nazarbayev’s portrait appearing on new banknote, monuments featuring him and prestigious academic institutions being named after him (Balmforth, 2016) are all characteristics that suit well with the above-mentioned definition of personality cult.

The Tajik leader, Rahmon, does not fall behind from his colleagues in the region in terms of developing cult of personality either. He has been entitled as a “Leader of Nation” and “Founder of Peace and Accord” numbers of books published and become a part of school curriculum (Michel, 2016), giant posters of him posing with various backgrounds in every corner of the country does certainly indicate a high magnitude of personality cult of Rahmon.

Evidently, the interaction of symbolism and politics in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan is booming. The personality cult is deepening day by day. What is important here is the interaction and the role symbols play in developing the consolidation of the power personalization process of these states, where there has not been a certain organised nationalist independence movement. Also, these cases are interesting because symbols were introduced in the course of that particular void (Cummings 2009: 1083a), and are successfully interacting with politics, and thus serving as an ingredient for the healthy personalised regimes of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

Conclusion

Based on the theories of (non-)representational politics examined above, this section of the project has argued that regimes in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have been exhibiting nationalism, historiography that prompted the signification of both regimes. Increasing number of national symbols, extravagantly developing monumental space have had a vital role in this dynamic since the early days of independence. The interconnection of nationalism and authoritarianism provides a great opportunity to examine the role of symbolism not only in the nation-building process but also how it has helped to reframe

the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes over the past two decades. Additionally, the section has examined that (non-)representational politics have been one of the signifying sources for the progression of personalising power under Kazakhstani and Tajik leaders. To demonstrate this, the study adopts metanarrative approach as well as significant influence of monumental space, where both “worlds” are successfully manipulated under monopolistic management of the governments.

The initial section thus emphasised on the interaction of theories of symbolism and neoprimitivism. As a result of this interaction, the following section has demonstrated the origination of regime signification in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The final section has outlined “legitimizing frameworks” politics of symbolism generates, and how it enhances personality cults of leaders.

The thesis now will focus on interpreting a form of state-authored nationalism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. It then intends to explore how the use and interaction of symbols became successful in these states, which were not energised by certain nationalist movements at the wake of their independence process.

Chapter One

Interpreting State-authored (official) Nationalism in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan

“Unity is our sacred banner” — Nursultan Nazarbayev

“Let holiness of national statehood, native language & unity be our helpmate to the civilized society & bright future!” — Emomali Rahmon

Introduction

State- and nation-building process became the most severe issues ruling elite in Central Asia encountered during the inevitable collapse of the USSR. As a part of this process, the content and the form of nationalism have to be understood concerning various characteristics. In the case of post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, the kind of nationalism became framed following pre-independence features and the challenges that followed in the post-independence nation-building process.

For Kazakhstan, at the very beginning of independence process, with its diversely inhabited population, the primary task was to avoid the eruption of any conflictual situation, and its unique demographic feature in combination with socio-economic and political turbulence created various challenges to expect.

Tajikistan, however, did not share an analogous situation concerning having a heterogeneously populated nation, could not avoid the eruption of the Civil War, which lasted for five years. This became a more complicated case to proceed with building a new ‘nation’. Above-mentioned were originating factors for rising nationalism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. However, gradually, as a result of the systematic interaction, nationalism begins to play an instrumental and institutional role.

This chapter advances the claim that both Nazarbayev and Rahmon regime relied on a strategic utilisation of nationalism to achieve smooth nation- and regime-building process and transformation. Particularly, the most intriguing thing in both cases is that the

usage of nationalism became a great mechanism to transmit policies, strategies, that would ultimately lead to the authorisation of Leaders. Also, nationalism in Nazarbayev and Rahmon era becomes a significant tool for eliminating any opponents both violently (Tajikistan) and non-violently (Kazakhstan) thus reinforcing a legitimate order and sustainability for their regimes.

Therefore, in parallel with being an important variable source of legitimacy, nationalism after getting precise shape and content begins to play a signifying role in boosting the process of power personification. With all 'achieved' national projects, nationalism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan becomes a vital ingredient for increasing cult of personality as well as regime stability.

The first section of the chapter explores the transformation and the change of nationalism's content and the form in post-conflict Tajikistan. Next, the chapter focuses on the process and increasing role of nationalism in Kazakhstan and how it became institutionalised and instrumentalised in a peaceful manner. The final section looks to the nationalism as a legitimising factor of both the regime, and enhancing the process of power personification.

The Change in Nationalism's Content and Political Form in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan

Tajikistan had been created as part of the Soviets' territorial delimitation policy in 1929 and received "indigenisation" policies from Moscow that institutionalised Tajik ethnicity along with the Moscow-led inclusive supra-ethnic community. In particular, the institutionalisation of Tajik ethnicity received discourses, praises on the 'uniqueness' of Tajik people and underlining the relevance of their 'glorious' ancient past even during the Soviet period (Martin 2001; Suny 1993:31). The two opposite Soviet approaches — institutionalised Tajik ethnicity and the Moscow-led inclusive supra-ethnic community towards the newly-emerged 'nation' — to some extent has aided the ultimate form of Tajik nationalism, and has a significant impact on institutionalising its current design.

Tajik nationalism's content and its evolution have been considered traumatic. According to state-led scholarship on nationalism, regardless of Tajiks' 'glorious' past,

where they had a leading role in the region's civilisation for centuries (Babakulov 2010: 86), Tajiks became victims of various 'attacks'. These include Turco-Mongol invaders, Arabs, Bolsheviks who were perceived to be the main reasons of disrupting Tajik nation and inconsistency of society (Masov 2008; Sharipov 2013). Grievances of this nature became prevalent at the early days of independence, especially after the Civil War came to an end. Importantly, this narrative gets exploited by the regime till today, and becomes an active mechanism of the government to promote nationalism.

The sudden disintegration of the Union brought to the scene incompetent elite, and consequent clan rivalry within the state. Accordingly, one of the most important instruments opposition parties had to use against the ruling elite, was the Tajik language (Akbarzadeh 1996), which was not widely spoken among the intelligentsia in Tajikistan at the time. And as noted, obsession with the Tajik language's importance was nurtured during and under the Soviet Union. Although the region as a whole described not to have had any national liberation movements against the Soviet rule (Cummings 2007), some observers claim that those internal tensions and the use of national sentiments such as 'to each people its own leader' were indeed an indication, although a passive one, against the ruling elite (Akbarzadeh 1996; Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev, 2014).

Thus, in the wake of independence, the use of Tajik language against the ruling elite can be considered as the beginning of official nationalism's revival in Tajikistan. In other words, the instrumentalisation of the Tajik language, which accordingly led to the instrumentalisation of nationalism in general that is aimed at eliminating opposing ideas, views, parties in the following years. Nonetheless the process of official nationalism had begun, the tendency in Tajikistan was not as high as, for example, in Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan. Akbarzadeh (1996) believes that this type of passive focus on promoting nationalism domestically, was mainly deriving from the 'historic trauma' — location of Tajik national symbols Samarkand and Bukhara — beyond its borders (in contemporary Uzbekistan), and Tajikistan's abstention from potential conflicts with Uzbekistan. On the other hand, others state that it is an ambiguous institutionalisation of Tajik ethnicity that was imposed by the Soviets and made the ethnic consolidation incomplete and fragile (Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016). It is more likely that the combination of those policies and discourses, subsequently became a leading factor in the rise of regionalism, rival and highly inconsistent Tajik society.

The characteristic of nationalism, primarily with its original role of newly-invented national symbols and metanarrative, became prevalent in the post-conflict Tajikistan. Enhancing the role of the Tajik language, by saying *'the Tajik nation remained intact mainly thanks to its beautiful, expressive, sweet and poetic language'* (Rahmon, 2012, cited in Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016c) were yet more building blocks for awakening national feelings among Tajiks. Moreover, renaming streets (Asia-Plus, April 27, 2011), abolishing monuments that left from the Soviet period (Tutubalina, 2011), propagating national norms and values, publishing a list of 3000 Tajik names and "offering" parents to name their newly-born child within the scope of this list (Asia-Plus, April 18, 2017) are only few among dozens of strategies for reviving national feelings in Tajikistan.

Based on this, the main reason for embracing this approach in Tajikistan seems to be its complex background of fragmented society. Crucially, nationalism considerably aids to Tajikistan's regime survival, by becoming highly instrumentalised. Moreover, the revived Tajik nationalism has inevitably become a useful instrument that unites the 'nation' as well as secure the government's legitimacy.

A consolidation of highly ethnic nationalism has taken place in a combination of various 'contradictory' values. As noted, in the post-conflict period, the Tajik regime turned its focus to reconstruct the national identity from scratch. Since Islamists were the great cosignatories of the peace agreement, various Islamic values and norms were introduced along with Ariyan and Soviet celebrations (Nourzhanov 2015). Even though these values clearly contradict one another in its typology, during the first decade of independence, the Tajik nationalism naturally became a fusion of varying symbols. Likewise, as already noted, over the past 20 years of independence, the form of nationalism in Tajikistan appears to become nationalised, monopolised, and highly securitized instrument of the authoritarian government.

Before transforming into securitised instrument, nationalisation process became visible with extensive mining of the Central Asian history and incorporating those values with the Tajik nation. Celebrations of Nawruz (Ancient Persian-Zoroastrian New Year), promotion of banal nationalism via state-owned media institutions, were all putting emphasis on these values as being Tajik only (Heathershaw 2009).

Another significant aspect of nationalising strategy related to interlinking the past with current is, as the Tajik leader states: *'Nawruz got revived and obtained a new splendour and transferred into one of the ground and holy national holidays in Tajikistan thanks to our independence'* or *'We are proud that Tajikistan is the motherland of Nawruz [...]*' (Rahmon, 2017). It is a clear indication of an incorporation of national symbols and holidays, as well as underlining their importance and crediting the 'independence', thus alluding the 'architect' of that 'achievement' for providing a ground to celebrate this joy.

The examples and successes of nationalising nationalism in Tajikistan are considerable with great personalising aspects and acts, strategies and discourses built in the following years of independence. As noted, nationalism, over the past 25 years became highly authoritarian and personalistic, securitising mechanism under President Rahmon. The process of securitisation has been realised once the form of nationalism more or less became consolidated. Inevitably, a consolidation of nationalism has occurred in line with regime's transformation. Thus, the nationalism, which contained a mixture of changing norms and values created a particular approach, which subsequently created an ethnic nationalist approach. In other words, all these mean an automatic screening of those actors who do not fall under this category. The role of screening takes place as a securitising instrument chiefly by denigrating opponents (Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016d). A possible factor of these results are due to Tajikistan's post-conflict feature, which produced this type of nationalism, says Heathershaw (2009: 74). The form of nationalism was a response to the conflict that created complex syntheses. One of the vital parts of this complex issue is that, Rahmon's regime, once it had regained legitimacy, began to demonise any potential alternatives by primarily exhibiting nationalism against its opponents.

For example, a form of state-authored nationalism began to target and eliminate (often physically) dissent (Ishimaya 2002:44b). For example, co-signatories of the peace settlement agreement, the members of the IRPT, were labelled a terrorist organisation in 2015 and banned from activity and a number of its members were imprisoned (Roche 2016; Lemon 2016). Other self-exiled opposition leaders are systematically threatened, kidnapped, or killed abroad by the security services (Cooley and Heathershaw 2017). By and large, opponents are labelled as 'foreign traitors' who wish to disintegrate the unity of

the Tajik nation (Article 19, July, 2007; Human Rights Watch, December 20, 2016), which is, as many in Tajikistan repeatedly state, '*realised thanks to the Leader of Nation — Founder of Peace and Stability, His Excellency — the President, Emomali Rahmon*' (www.feit.tj).

These results suggest that the authoritarian nature of the Tajik regime has been reflected in the type of nationalism the government has been nurturing so far. Monopolised, complete capture of elite-led nationalism leads to make nationalism in Tajikistan more authoritarian, and thus use it however it wishes (Heathershaw and Nourzhanov, 2016e).

What is interesting in the Tajik nationalism's transformation is that it may play a significant role in many aspects of a post-conflict, relatively new state such as Tajikistan. In parallel with successfully consolidating the regime's legitimacy, eliminating political opponents and 'unifying society', the current nature of nationalism still continues to play a significant role in the process of signifying the regime. President Rahmon making his name obligatory for state media to use the title 'Founder of Peace and National Unity — The Leader of Nation' anytime he is mentioned in a news ([Pafitt, 2017](#)), celebrations of national holidays with automatic association of every event to the president, giant posters and flagpoles, national sentiments praising the leader for the 'bright', 'peaceful' homeland he provides for the people, are all increasing sentiments in contemporary Tajikistan.

Kazakh, Kazakhstani or Nazarbayev-favoured Kazakh Nationalism

At the early wake of independence process, the so-called *Zheltoksan* event took place in Kazakhstan. This event followed an immediate protest against appointing an ethnic Russian to one of the high-ranking positions. Some observe this event as a tipping point of official nationalism and the reflection of Kazakhstan's political culture for the following decades. This event demonstrated the very nature of the Kazakhstani leader's strategies aiming at unifying opposition and nationalism to maintain order during highly chaotic situation (Omelicheva 2014: 5).

Since then, the content and the form of Kazakhstani nationalism has been criticised by various scholars for its ambiguity and inconsistency with its practical nature

(Isaacs 2010; Burkhanov and Sharipova, 2015; Schatz 2000). Similarly, it became apparent that Kazakhstan, regardless of its diversely inhabited population, critical living conditions have successfully constructed its policies based on a combination of its Soviet legacies (Kevlihan and Beacháin, 2014) natural resources and management.

By and large, the success story was based on the regime's intentions at unifying its heterogeneous citizens, maintaining peace and stability, developing a political system that actively excluded any political mobilisation of alternative ethnic or religious groups. Moreover, these elements were vital domestic factors in establishing and driving Kazakhstan's national identity in the following years, too (Kevlihan and Beacháin, 2014a). Admittedly, a political culture shaped in the Nazarbayev era avoided critical scenarios that became inevitable in the neighbouring states, for example, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Many believe that avoiding an analogous situation was chiefly based on Nazarbayev's strategic, multivector policies that principally embedded nationalism (Sharipova and Burkhanov, 2014). Yet, there are various factors behind Nazarbayev's strategies of a nation- and regime-building process.

As noted, its natural resources and the economy took a leading role in shaping the form of nationalism. Kazakhstan's economic dependency discourse, notably on Russia's monopoly over the infrastructure for natural gas and oil in the wake of independence and even today, made the regime embrace a unionist nationalism (Hale 2009), which 'welcomes' representatives of all 130 nationalities (www.kazakhembus.com). As noted, the Kazakhstani government does systematically remind its official discourse of not 'nationalism by blood' but 'nationalism by soil', however, the empirical study shows that the Kazakhstani government's unionist approach fails when it comes to implementation, simply stressing on ethnic Kazakhs mostly (Khazanov 1995: 253). In general, supporting a 'titular' ethnic group in nationalising discourse is commonplace in all Central Asian states (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev, 2014). What makes them different from Kazakhstan is that they have comparatively less composition of minority groups, and they do not usually emphasise having an ethnic corporatism as a source of 'unifying' a 'nation'.

Nonetheless of a unionist rhetoric the Kazakhstani government claims to have, Kazakhstan highly considered to be as a land of ethnic Kazakhs. In other words, remaining nationalities on this land are the recipients of Kazakh hospitality (Beacháin and Kevlihan, 2011). In return for this hospitality, ethnic minority groups of Kazakhstan shall

extend gratitude for this fortune regularly every year. And ironically, the ‘Thankfulness Day’ which was introduced in February 2017 (Lee, 2017) might serve as non-coincidentally-built platform to deliver gratitude.

Furthermore, in spite of the Russian language’s official title, Kazakh is becoming more prevalent both in the public and private sphere. Some argue that the Kazakh language was considered by the state as the only ‘homogenising factor’ of the state-authored nationalism, which sometimes becomes a principal obstacle in an ethnically diverse country (Dadabaeva and Adilbayeva, 2010). However, an increasing number of language clubs under the title of ‘Kazakh language for all’ (The Conway Bulletin, April 23, 2017), the government’s recent plans to shift from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet (The Straits Times, April 12, 2017), phenomenally more number of Kazakh speakers in the cities in contrast to its pre- and early independence period (Bardsley, 2008; Lillis, 2010) are the few among numerous indicators of increasing nationalising discourse in Kazakhstan.

This does not necessarily mean that the regime under Nazarbayev does not focus on the other segments of its diverse society. From time to time the Kazakhstani government skilfully shifts from one discourse to another, which may interchangeably target ideologies such as *Kazakhness*, *Kazakhstaness*, and *Transnationalism* (Laurelle 2014). Thus, these nationalising strategies attempt to make everyone satisfied. How can pragmatic shift from one nationalising strategy to another not cause any tension? Beachein and Kevlihan (2011a) write that a combination of strategic ambiguity, clashing nationalising and civil trajectories and symbolic implementation of policy serves the stability and state-building, which has indeed been apparent in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

In summary, it has been shown from this review that both in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan nationalism has played an incredibly important role in enhancing the process of nationalising and signifying both nation- and regime-building. In Tajikistan, with its post-conflict context, the form of nationalism has revived, became ethnonationalist gradually. In addition to this, nationalism with a ‘support’ of its embedded, numerous newly-invented symbols has been transformed into the instrument that boldly underlines ‘otherness’. Notably, the Tajik nationalism became a useful tool for the elimination of opponents that may potentially upset the existing status quo. In parallel with this, in recent years, a combination of revived nationalism and regime’s hysteria for

power transition (Pannier, 2015) has immensely nurtured the increasing role of Rahmon's personality cult, which is becoming phenomenally omnipresent in modern Tajikistan.

Resource-rich, heterogeneously populated Kazakhstan offers a form of nationalism that appears to be targeting every segment of society interchangeably and discursively, regardless of favouring ethnicisation policies in practice. Mushrooming symbols, massive dissemination of national discourse, a form of nationalism and transnationalism are all appear to be representing postmodern authoritarian leadership under Nazarbayev.

Although different in the way of reviving nationalism, ethnographic feature, socio-cultural composition, resources, and the leadership of these two states, the study suggests that nationalism in both cases plays an incremental role in regimes' durability. Apart from 'unifying' the 'nation', maintaining peace and security, nationalism, at least in the recent years, have become a signifying factor for regime legitimation and driving force for the personification of power.

Neopatrimonial Nationalism: Personification and Legitimation of Power

The previous section has shown that the revival of nationalism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan has been mainly based on the pre-existing socio-political component, specific national characteristics, leadership, and has been transformed and became a tool of the regimes respectively. This section of the thesis establishes that neopatrimonial nationalism has become the vital source of acquiring government legitimacy under the Rahmon and Nazarbayev administration during the 'state of emergency' periods. Notably, the use nationalism has immensely aided to the progress of state-authored discourses by mostly 'othering', 'demonising opponents of all nature', emphasising the importance of a 'peace and stability' mainly architected by themselves. Accordingly, after intensive interaction between the regime and nationalism, the political form of nationalism becomes personalised. Eventually, a galvanised form of nationalism becomes a vital source of governments' legitimacy, as well as serves to ensure the sustainability of regimes' legitimate order.

The strategies of acquiring legitimacy are various, mostly depending on a form of government that may range from authoritarian, to semi-authoritarian, partial democratic, democratic and hybrid regimes. Although it is not the aim of this thesis to measure the level of authoritarianism in Central Asian states, the section deems the legitimacy acquiring strategies of the governments of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan within authoritarian, semi-authoritarian or non-democratic context, as they have been assessed previously (Matveeva 2009; Kubicek 1998; Starr 2006).

Considering the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes as non-democratic does not indicate that their practices exclusive lay on repression—which is too costly, and therefore necessitates systems to gain widespread support as well (Weber 1980: 133-136). What are the other variables of acquiring legitimacy? Have the Kazakhstani and Tajik governments exhibited all six dimensions of legitimacy stated by Brusis (2015) that are: (1) foundational myth, (2) ideology, (3) personalism, (4) international engagement, (5) procedures, (6) performance? Or did Nazarbayev and Rahmon combine nationalism with a particular developmental model, base socio-economic indicators, and peace and stability on their personality? The following section attempts to explore the tactics of acquiring legitimate order in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, which are in line with above-listed strategies of gaining legitimacy.

Post-Trauma Rehabilitation: Suitable Narrative?

The relevant variables of acquiring legitimacy for both Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have been changing from period to period. A possible explanation for this trend might be state-authored nationalism, which arises when a state fails to meet its obligations to its citizens, such as ensuring democratic governance (Snyder 1993). Indeed, there might have been a certain degree of national feelings and the pretext of national reawakening in the early days of Central Asia's independence process. But the movements were not as sharp as, say, in other post-colonial parts of the world, mostly because of incredibly sick independent nationalist feelings (Mellon 2005; Olcott 1998).

On the other hand, the previous empirical study on nationalism in Central Asia suggests the role of banal nationalism as a powerful mechanism to boost barely existing national feelings. Mostly, it has become useful because it derives from social practices,

and becomes an intrinsic part of socio-political landscapes and gets accepted by the population (Beachain and Kevlihan, 2015). Therefore, a type of nationalism that has been reviving in post-Soviet Central Asia, notably in Tajikistan, is immensely based on what was left on the scene after the collapse of the USSR.

Unlike other neighbouring states, Tajikistan, which is the only Persian-speaking (other four are Turkic speaking) country, has been experiencing a unique form of its nationalism's transformation after the demise of the Soviet Union. The Tajik nationalism is widely considered as a predecessor of Sogdians, masters of Central Asia, subsequently conquered by Arabs, Persians, Turks, and lately Russians. A type of incomplete transformation from either period, makes Tajiks feel disintegrated, with a lack of dominant elite, and a particular sense of nationalism leads to the rise of regionalism and highly fragmented society (Oliver 2000).

Having this in mind, with an additional hit by the five-year fratricidal war, the Rahmon administration found useful to dig into the history deeper to revive 'victimized nation'. As noted in the previous sections, the Tajik government does not only unearth pre-Soviet history but goes even beyond, up until medieval ages. Although some states in Central Asia neither consider their nation-building process to be associated with pre-Soviet past nor a type of neo-Sovietism (Oliver 2000a), Tajikistan appears to be the most active among all neighbours to mine its pre-Soviet history which successfully nurtures and catalyses its nation- and regime-building process.

A combination of Tajikistan's Pre-Soviet and Soviet periods of national 'trauma' creates a great platform to acquire and maintain legitimate order. Accordingly, this very notion leads the Tajik regime to connect the present with the past, emphasise the greatness and importance of the nation in the past, and how the current government is reliable and continues ancestors' success (Mellon 2010). Moreover, similar to the King of Jordan, Husayn who is believed to be a descended from the Prophet and whose rule is officially represented as being engaged with sacredness and honour (Wedeed 1999: 158), Rahmon is depicted as guardian of not Islam but the Samanid epoch. This belief is widely spread in state-generated propaganda, including published articles, school textbooks, and state media. For example, a Tajik historian, N. Nabiev, states in his article titled *Emomali Rahmon—Founder of Peace and the Unity of Tajiks*, that: *'The Independence, which Tajikistan gained as a result of the Soviet collapse [...] establishing peace on this earth*

[...] primarily thanks to the mighty and wise ruler — Emomali Rahmon's — insistence and ambition, which reminds the Samanid epoch' (Nabiev 2016: 5).

Correspondingly, the Tajik government appears to be actively implementing national symbols, myth, which is building block of not only nation-building process (Connor 1992; Hutchinson and Smith, 1994; A.D. Smith 1998, 2001), but also a useful ingredient for the regime's legitimation and its consolidation. The examples of successful interconnection of the past and present, mainly, with omnipresent leader, are numerous. A very classical example can be an increasing popularity of Rahmon among the young generation, who have not witnessed the past war. But thanks to state-produced propaganda and relative isolation, they praise the Leader of the Nation without whom, they say, there would not have been a 'peace' and 'flourishing' in Tajikistan (Akhbor, July 14, 2017).

This understanding broadly suggests that the roots of power personalization had begun to cherish when the regime started to interconnect the present with the past. Crucially, the combination of Tajikistan's pre-existing, implanted national policies and its post-conflict context serves well to adopt nationalisation projects. As Edelman (1995) writes: *'Art, the mind, and the situation all together construct and transform beliefs about the social world, defining problems and solutions, hopes and fears, the past and the present, and the future'* are all prevalent in independent Tajikistan and successfully exhibited by the regime.

The above-discussed characteristic that has been evolving in Tajikistan, serves the system well to justify and exercise its rules with 'evidence' of consent (Beetham 1991: 16). Moreover, the administration has managed to create such discourse that involves tremendous numbers of myth and symbols that make the regime more legitimate, by underlining its 'achievements' and 'suitability' during the crisis. Importantly, legitimacy is not 'self-declared', but as Beetham (1991:17) states it involves people who firmly believe in it to be so. At the end of the day, it is individuals who credit all the 'success', 'flourishing', 'peace and stability' to one person — President Rahmon.

Initial Steps Towards Personalising Nationalism

As any other Central Asian leader, the Kazakhstani leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, is also considered as a state- and nation-builder by reinventing the past to legitimise his regime. Mainly, the establishment of such legitimacy lays on whom it depends. By and large, it is Nazarbayev's close circle and individual segments of the society, which are the channels transmitting legitimacy (Cummings 2002: 61). But can nationalism in Kazakhstan be considered as a source of Nazarbayev's regime legitimacy? When and how did the Kazakhstani leader begin acquiring his legitimacy through nationalism? What role does Kazakhstani nationalism play in this particular interaction? The following sections attempt to shed light on this particular topic.

Many scholars hold the view that in the wake of the independence process, Nazarbayev was less able to use nationalist and religious discourses to build his power (Cummings 2002: 65). One explanation for this strategy might be ethnic Kazakhs constituting minority compared to Slavs (and other minority groups as combined) who were the majority up until the last days of 1989 (Dave 2004). Similarly, Nazarbayev was reluctant to evoke such nationalistic feelings when Kazakhs began to overwhelm other nationalities after 1989 (Dave 2004a).

However, although not among the population, the use of nationalism came to take an active role within institutions, thus becoming institutionalised, and lately instrumentalised. Even in 1989, the period, which is considered to be absent of nationalistic sentiments, Nazarbayev begins to speak about the Kazakh nation. For example, in his speech delivered in the session of the Communist Party meeting in Moscow, Nazarbayev in response to criticisms from Checheno-Ingush national deputies states:

I would not hide that it was hurting to hear national deputies from Checheno-Ingush national deputies speaking from the session Tribune, who required from us to apologise for the events in *Novy Uzen*. On behalf of the Republic, I do apologise, though, it is less likely to console souls and feelings of the people who left Kazakhstan against their willing.

By doing so, I would like to ask the following: and who is going to apologise before the Kazakh nation for violently making their motherland a branch of *Gulag*? [...] The Kazakh nation, which follows its hospitality tradition for centuries did everything piously to host the victims of

‘Stalinization’, including Chechen and Ingush people, to make Kazakhstan their second motherland¹. (Nazarbayev 1989: 132-133).

The above statements clearly, project the future form of nationalism in Kazakhstan or the type of nationalism Nazarbayev sticks with up until now. Similarly, this speech by the Kazakhstani leader in mid-1989 illustrates how he has started emphasising on the Kazakh nation and its hospitality from the earliest periods of the nation-building process, which serves to gain legitimacy in the following decades from his circle, who would be composed of ethnic Kazakhs by and large.

Another significant indicator of how Nazarbayev began utilising nationalism is instilling this rhetoric within the state-building process. Institutionalising nationalism at the early stages of the independence process that immensely contributes to boosting the legitimacy and personalising political power of Nazarbayev.

In his official inauguration in 1991 as a President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev, while stating future objectives to overcome numerous, newly-created, socio-political-economic issues, recommends concentrating on *‘supporting political pluralism in line with the unconditional banning of parties and movements that preach extremism and national disunity, and separatism directed against territorial disintegration’* (Nazarbayev 1991: 24). Moreover, the Kazakhstani president says that *‘preserving inter-ethnic harmony based on equality of the law for every Kazakhstani, and priority of stability as fundamental principle of governmental policy’* is another paramount issue that needs considerable attention (Nazarbayev 1991: 25)

What is important in his speech is that Nazarbayev interlinks his statements mentioned above with economic transformation, liberalisation of prices, healthy financial system, and privatisation. The Kazakhstani leader claims that in the absence of political foundations it is impossible to achieve these goals (Nazarbayev 1991: 25a). Indeed, political stability in a country is integral for various developments. And, potentially, for the Kazakhstani case, it might have contributed to the ‘flourishing’ future of Kazakhstan as well. Nonetheless, it seems that Nazarbayev began to acquire legitimacy from the early days of independence, notably, by combining nationalism with a particular developmental model and basing socio-economic indicators on peace and stability (Brusis 2015). In

¹ Author’s translation

parallel with this, the Nazarbayev regime regularly emphasises ethnic nationalism, increasing the role of the once ‘deprived’, and ‘victimized’ Kazakhstani identity. In the very same speech delivered by Nazarbayev, we can grasp a signal of the future role of Kazakhstani identity that increases the role of ethnic Kazakhs mostly:

We must realise that we are facing a historical chance, which we must not dismiss. By this, I mean that the Kazakh nation, embodied with traditions and wisdom [...] accumulated tremendous experience of internationalism, national and civil compliance, can and has to take a great mission – be a guarantor of peace and stability [...]’ (Nazarbayev 1991: 27).

Nazarbayev’s emphasis on ‘Kazakh nation’ does not seem to be accidental. Prevalent reference to ethnic Kazakhs aims at finding ‘consensus’ to coping with non-Kazakh groups, primarily, for that period, with state officials (Cummings 2006) who remained from the Soviet era and might have been posing a real threat to Nazarbayev’s regime-building process. Correspondingly, in the concluding remarks of the first presidential inauguration ceremony, President Nazarbayev signifies the role of Kazakhs yet again by saying:

I believe that we can create a highly developed ethnic politics civilisation in the territory of Kazakhstan, where the Kazakh nation will be revived, and where all [other] belonging [living] nations and nationalities would feel freely (Nazarbayev 1991: 27a)

The next indicator for personalising power by using nationalism is the relocation of the Kazakhstani capital from Almaty to Astana (previously Akmola). During and after the relocation of the capital, the Kazakhstani leader sometimes refers to this relocation as a primary interest of Kazakh nation. For instance, it is mentioned that the previous relocations of the Kazakh ASSR's capital that were ‘dictated’ (by the Soviets) to be so, mainly intentional, revolutionary and class based in nature, but have excluded any national interests of the Kazakhstani people (Nazarbayev 1997: 447). This can be considered as another interlinkage between ‘past’ and ‘present’ and might play a factor building national identity (Gillis 1994) that was regularly referred by Nazarbayev while relocating the capital.

Along with the nationalising project, the relocation of the capital offered Nazarbayev's administration to marginalise his rivals at this critical moment (Schatz

2004: 127). This is demonstrated in a dramatic change of socio-demographic, national composition of people who were left back in Almaty, and the ones who were newly-arrived in Astana, as a result of this relocation (Sadovskaya 2001). To put it differently, these were initial steps to create loyal entourage, ensuring sustainable regime-building process largely through use of nationalism. This and other subsequent projects of this nature do systematically remind us who the author is, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of power personalisation for Nazarbayev only.

In his speech from the new capital of Kazakhstan, Akmola (now Astana), the president, as usual, sets strategies, including ones for forming types of national identities. Notably, Nazarbayev states that *'the Kazakh ethnicity, which, in the second half of the century, again became dominant in a majority position within all population must have the core role for political consolidation. Where the methods of reaching this would be evolutionary and nonviolent'* (Nazarbayev 1997: 456). Equally, the Kazakhstani president states: *'[...] it is high time for people finally to decide on their national belonging. Because from now on, this question [question of nationality/citizenship] will be under the President's personal control [...]'* (Nazarbayev 1997: 457).

By the same token, enhancing the role of the Kazakh language takes place in Nazarbayev's early discussions of identity politics strategy. He urges to increase the role of the national language along with Russian. At the same time criticises some authorities who consider it a radical change that may complicate the situation, should the Kazakh language be obligatory for everyone (Nazarbayev 1997: 457a).

As in any other national policy, Nazarbayev aims to primarily target opponents, and possibly eliminate them, as he puts it: non-violently. This is exemplified in the legislature on Kazakh language test, which became a requirement for any opposition candidates to pass before nominating themselves for the presidential election (Olcott 2010: 120). Though, the President regularly reminds that *'You can't expect an adult to learn a language overnight'* (Furst, 2013) it is evident that few officials could speak the Kazakh language in the wake of independence (Lillis, 2010), and this policy was intended to filter staff members and establish a specific 'threshold' for presidential candidates.

It is important to note that apart from ensuring peace and stability among such a heterogeneous population, introducing identity politics, enhancing the role of the Kazakh language, nationalism enabled Nazarbayev to dictate, legitimise, authorise his strategies

and policies. Thus, gradually making him sound more legitimate than before. Likewise, this approach sheds light for the people of Kazakhstan to know who is the author of this project, and who must be credited for all ‘achievements’.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that nationalism in both post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan has been changed in its content and political form over the past two decades of independence. The transformation of nationalism became a useful ingredient not only to the delicate nation-building process but also to the sustainability of authoritarian regimes. Additionally, the instrumentalised and institutionalised form of nationalism became a robust mechanism to ensure not only national unity but boost the governments' legitimacy. Subsequently, accumulated legitimacy, largely with a use of nationalism, enables regimes to personalise projects and power further, as well as leads them to become monopolised in the contemporary political landscape.

This chapter has also argued that unlike other variables of legitimacy, the Kazakhstani and Tajik nationalisms were and still are the most appropriate, dominant, source of legitimacy for a ‘proper’ regime. The most compelling evidence is that it is nationalism which is instilled in all other aspects of social, political, and economic life and becomes a central mechanism in legitimising regimes within these variables, both during and in the aftermath of any crisis situation.

Chapter Two

Kazakhstan: Nazarbayev's Politics of Ambiguity

“Our veterans showed us the greatest examples of accord, unity, brotherhood in arms. Our veterans are the generation of victors. Their heroic deed would last for centuries.”

— Nursultan Nazarbayev

Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated the evolution of nationalism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. What is crucial in this change of form and content of nationalism is not only unifying factor of the ‘nation’ or avoiding conflicts. Instead, it is chiefly the significant role of nationalisms that play an instrumental role, mostly nurturing, reflecting a type of government in these respective cases.

Along with that, the role of nationalism in Kazakhstan, after taking certain shape, goes a step further. Systematic interaction of nationalism and the regime leads to the enhancement of the regime, and thus the Nazarbayev cult of personality. Kazakhstani nationalism transforms from signifying the regime in abstract terms to physical. Throughout independence, its repetitive use makes the regime obsessive about monumental space that both manipulates the dominant discourse and signifies the regime.

Having said that, this chapter seeks to understand the role of monumental space in reinforcing the legitimacy of power personification in Kazakhstan. The chapter aims to examine signifying role of arts that are an integral part boosting both nationalism and the personalised regime in Kazakhstan. The first section discusses how the regime under Nazarbayev exploited the monumental space that portrays him as ‘magical authoritarian’. To illustrate that, the section uses ‘Bayterek Tree’ building, which is a perfect demonstration of this dynamic. The second part examines Nazarbayev’s image as an architect of modern Kazakhstan, not only at home but also abroad. The nation branding strategies that go beyond borders are accompanied with a personified context within it.

The Nazarbayev “Magical Authoritarian”?

The reasons why rulers prefer to produce such projects seem varied. They might range from being a signifying element of time and space to being an integral part of the interaction between regimes and those being ruled.

Throughout civilisation the function of art has been significant. The relevance of arts chiefly lays on its main function, where it offers conceptions and perceptions that can be perceived or amended in accordance with needs, fears, interests, or aspirations. Based on this, art plays principle role in the shaping of political ideas and action. Additionally, it provides emotional resonance within political actions. Interestingly, the art does not necessarily represent “reality”, the “real world”, or even “everyday life” (Edelman 1995: 28).

Similarly, the excitement of minds and feelings arts provide is an obstacle for democracy. Mainly, it is because of providing excitement, which embodies a provocation to mental and emotional alertness of people. In addition to this, by creating new realities, arts invade passive acceptance of typical ideas and basic responses. By doing so, arts help to establish a reflective public, which would be inclined to think less independently and live in accordance with dictates of the elite (Edelman 1995: 32).

Similar to arts, myth has also its important place within people’s minds. For example, Sorel considers myth as mobilising factor of ideas that pushes workers into action. As mentioned in the theoretical framework of this thesis, myth does not have to be objectively true. Crucially, although myth is not cynically generated, it is present within the mass in more silent form, and the aim of reinforced myth is to simplify the world and identify enemies (Pisch 2016)

Having said that, it is important to underline the dynamic between non-democratic regime of Kazakhstan and its exhibition of art. In parallel with what Pisch (2016) says in terms of the art’s role in identifying enemies, the art in post-Soviet Central Asia emphasises the architect who is behind that ‘success’, thus helps the regime to personalise power. To illustrate this interaction which signifies the personification of power in Kazakhstan, it is important to examine few arts and myths that Kazakhstani regime has been working on.

To begin with Kazakhstan's most famous project — Astana. Located in the north-central part of Kazakhstan, once largely inhabited with Slavic speaking population, it has been a capital of Kazakhstan since 1997. Built from the scratches in the middle of steppe was rather odd when the proposal of transferring the capital from Almaty was delivered. As noted in the earlier sections, some scholars argue that the proposal of transferring the capital from Almaty to Astana was chiefly driven by Nazarbayev who sought to “eliminate the rivals and bolster the supporters” and reinforce his legitimacy with geographical means (Schatz 2004). What Schatz says might be strongly related to the very early periods of transition, where Nazarbayev had no considerable power as he has it today. This, necessitates us to discover the Astana project further, which would enable to portray the role of Astana in the following years of independent Kazakhstan.

The selection of Astana is aimed to discover more signifying factors for the regime. Because it is mainly Astana city which became a great platform for the regime to exercise numerous symbols, arts, and visible monumental space that reinforce the legitimacy of power personification since the early days of independence.

Bayterek – Tree of Life

Illustrated in Figure 1, *Bayterek* is a ninety-seven-meters-high project, one of the most remarkable design achievements in Astana. The word Bayterek means “poplar” in Kazakh language. Almost every aspect of the building symbolises something. For example, similar to Saint Stephen's Basilica and The Parliament Building domes in Budapest that measure a 96 meters height or 96 steps stair within the building, which some claim as symbolising the nation's millennium in 1896, and the victory of the Hungarian Kingdom in 896 (Fitzgerald 2015), the Bayterek's ninety-seven symbolises the date of the capital's relocation from Almaty in the year of 1997. The title of the monument and its shape refer to the Tree of Life from Turkic mythology, where the magic bird, Samruk, laid its egg. The mythological building made of metal, glass, and concrete which is accompanied with a high-tech style pointing the future (Shelekpayev 2013).

Inside the glass orb there is a stone with President Nazarbayev's hand imprinted (probably double the size of his own hand), where many people, especially newlyweds, come and make wishes by putting their hands into it. Interestingly, if someone puts his or her hand into Nazarbayev's imprinted hand, from the top of the ninety-seven meter building, he or she would be directly facing the Ak-Orda, the presidential house where the Kazakhstani leader runs his administration from. Surely, these all reflect Nazarbayev's cult of personality indirectly (Laruelle 2016: 64), and shows how flattered are the monuments.

In recently published work about Nazarbayev's reflections on Astana's design, Laszczkowski (2016) interconnects the two—regime and cityscape—and coins the term “magical authoritarianism”. According to him, “*magical authoritarianism*” involves the rendering of material reality, and the social and political relations that produce it, as “*fantastic*”; that is, exceeding common notions of the real” (Laszczkowski 2016: 72). By this, it is stated that the new cityscape of Astana largely fosters a mode of domination, where the regime's vision of development and Nazarbayev's rule as a “miracle,” “dream,” and “beauty” which is beyond ordinary peoples' minds, and thus should not be a subject for any type of challenge. Based on this, the image of Nazarbayev in Astana is “aestheticised” and “depoliticised” in context, being represented as “*miracle worker, the only creator of this miracle city, the source and object of love*” (Laruelle 2016: 66).

Even the Day of the Capital Astana, which has been celebrated since 2008, falls on Nazarbayev's birthday as a national holiday in the country (Nurshayeva and Solovyov, 2015). More interesting than that, in autumn 2016 a member of the Kazakhstani Parliament proposed to rename the capital from Astana to “Nursultan” or “Nazarbayev”. Immediately afterwards, the idea of renaming the capital was praised by other MPs who said that it is the “right” and “vital” point to consider (Azattyq, November 23, 2016).



Figure 1 Bayterek, Source: <http://www.embkazjp.org/astananewcity.htm>

Following that discussion, finally, in summer 2017, the International Astana Airport has been renamed after Nazarbayev, which yet again confirms Nazarbayev's increasing cult of personality by being branded during his lifetime. Because JFK airport in New York, Charles De Gaulle in Paris (Sorbello 2017) Ataturk Airport in Istanbul, or Heydar Aliyev in Baku were all named after these leaders passed away, not during their lifetime. However, it is important to note that branding projects during or after leaders' lifetime is a denominator of a cult of personality, and what level it reached based on political developments in a certain country. Because, indeed, titling projects after leaders' name during their lifetime is not as widespread as the ones named after the demise of leader. For example, the same Washington DC was named when George Washington was still alive (PBS 2014), or Ataturk's portrait being depicted in banknotes was also introduced when he was still on the track of his full modernisation process (Dwyer 1990). Therefore, it is not only important whether the 'branding' takes place during or after the death of the leader, but the political circumstance, content, purpose all combined together.

Indeed, the role of Nazarbayev in the Astana cityscape is elevated in an incredibly novel manner. Terming his regime as "magical authoritarianism" perfectly fits with the design and interlinkage of mythical elements of contemporary Astana and the current state of the regime. Although Nazarbayev might presently seem like the "magical creator" of Astana and Kazakhstan, it might be correct to say that this was not so at the wake of turbulent situation during the first decade of independence, rather has been transformed in recent years. Especially, the Figure 2 Kazakhstan's GDP clearly illustrates that, at the time of relocation, the Kazakhstani economy was almost suffocating, and it was not a right moment for any kind of movement involving such massive funds.

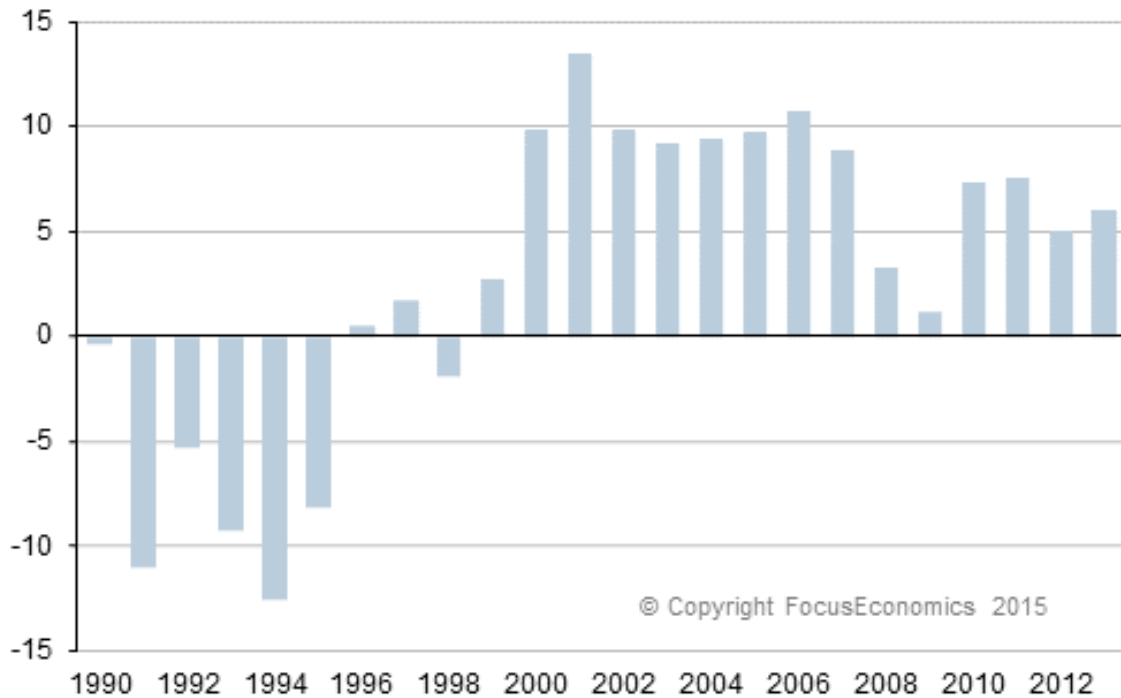


Figure 2 Kazakhstan GDP Chart <https://www.focus-economics.com/country-indicator/kazakhstan/gdp>

Since later economic growth became manifest in symbolism as a way of projecting economic success and modernisation, the relocation of the capital in 1997s with just reviving economy was not a logical option. But why did Nazarbayev insist so much on this symbolic relocation regardless of deteriorated Kazakhstani economic?

A possible explanation for embracing symbolism can be the regime’s intention to maintain a proper control over population and the elite through operationalising the symbols or the cityscapes in general. As it is proved earlier, it is much more difficult to manage people rather than subjects (Buckler and Johnson, 2013: 315).

Undoubtedly, the relocation was a risky move. And Nazarbayev, in the early stages of moving the capital, was not aiming to become a “miracle creator.” Rather, taking into account the signifying roles of symbols with authoritative features, President aimed to instil his authority through delivering speeches, ‘proposing’ projects within the elite, and consequently through monumental space to the public. Undoubtedly, as regime became more consolidated, symbols such as Bayterek, began to reflect, what Laszczkowski calls as Nazarbayev’s “magical authoritarianisms.” Moreover, public monuments or cityscapes, that are similar to those of modern Astana, offer a way to impose idea of shared values for uniting a nation. Thus, monuments transform people into

subjects and converts repression into an elevation of happiness. Similarly, myth and object transferred into monumental space transforms into “holy,” “ceremonial,” and “authoritative” sign (Buckler and Johnson, 2013: 315a). And finally, the ‘proposal’ of relocating the capital, gave a great opportunity for Nazarbayev to dictate, exercise his authority in a non-institutional level, thus helped to legitimise his voice, when there was no effective variable source of legitimacy other than nationalism and its symbols at the time.

Nazarbayev’s Transnationalism and Nation Branding Discourse

The economic growth in the aftermath of capital relocation led high-rocketing number of ‘magical’ symbols and myth, awkwardly constructed buildings, combined with modern cityscape to be seeming components of modern Kazakhstan’s capital. How does this combination of juxtaposing values coexist in contemporary Kazakhstan? Why has the regime under Nazarbayev embraced this combination, and to what extent does this approach reinforce the legitimacy of power personification as well as regime stability in Kazakhstan?

Nazarbayev successfully uses his projects such as Astana as a masterpiece that indicates reforms and transformations of the whole system in Kazakhstan. Importantly, the Astana design contains a mix of styles that transfers the multicultural brand for Kazakhstan (Diener 2016). This helps Nazarbayev to be recognised both at home and abroad. For instance, if we take a look at the same Bayterek building discussed earlier, which is built with a combination of ancient mythology and high technological, its design and what it reflects become diverse and ambiguous. Or hosting Syria Peace Talks in Astana and Expo 2017 are also some examples of Nazarbayev’s nation branding strategies.

In fact, ensuring the stability of the two—heterogeneous population and the delivered mixed values in the Astana cityscapes—is important. Because the understanding and perception of symbols by different audiences is central to their obedience to the regime, and therefore, it is crucial for regime legitimation that the

embedded symbols represented in the metanarrative coincide with the audience's values (Edelman 1985: 14).

Based on this, it seems that the diverse population with different values have coincided with the mix values produced by the state, thus reinforced the legitimacy of Nazarbayev's regime further. However, this does not necessarily mean that for establishing a coexistence between these two components there must be an explicit compatibility of both the society and the metanarrative, which are diverse in the Kazakhstani case. Instead, the 'diversity', 'mix of values' element of the metanarrative may also go beyond, like it is in Astana, where the society would be unable to characterise itself under one category. Mainly, the vagueness derives because of a too much variety of values, or, as a result of extremely high level of ambiguity in the content of delivered symbols.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how the Kazakhstani leader has been embracing the use of symbolism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Taking into account the devastating socio-political and economic situation in the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, the chapter has examined why embracing the metanarrative and monumental space has been a significant step for a regime revival in Kazakhstan. A successful management of the metanarrative that makes Nazarbayev, to borrow Laszczkowski's term, "magical authoritarian" and Astana a "fairy tale city", which turns its focus on Nazarbayev's image both nationally and transnationally.

In a highly turbulent transitional period, the relocation of Astana has become a great platform for president Nazarbayev's exercise of power. The monumental space first provided room for a relatively insignificant Nazarbayev to deliver his voice within the elite, to reflect the regime's nature. In parallel with becoming a platform for a non-institutional, authoritative message, the successful completion of those projects helped to legitimise the president's authoritarian tone. Along with this, the monumental space hugely aided the diverse population of the Kazakhstan in manipulating the ideas, and thus maintaining peace and stability. The messages monumental space has been delivering were so diverse, that they even made a heterogeneous population to be left in ambiguities.

By making the society ambiguous, the cityscapes contributed to the pacification and depoliticisation of people, alongside real repressive policing and surveillance.

Importantly, a comfortable exercise of authoritarian policies within the elite, and according legitimisation of Nazarbayev's power, and manipulation of the mainstream ideas with the use of symbolism has boosted the Nazarbayev's cult of personality in recent years.

It should not be ignored that the economic boom the Kazakhstani economy had enjoyed was a vital part in operationalising Nazarbayev-led projects that helped to galvanise his image to his current state. Because it is 'thanks to petro-dollars that Nazarbayev regime has been benefiting from allowed to invest in such prestige-enhancing projects through material investment' (Dave 2007: 159). However, the question would remain: how long this galvanisation would last? What factors may lead to Nazarbayev regime's corrosion, should the current trajectory change? With his extensive powers even after his term finishes, present elite with no real threat to the regime, systematic reassurance of the cabinet with reshufflings, and the strategic manipulation of public discourse offers that the possibility of Nazarbayev's regime erosion is less likely.

Chapter Three

Tajikistan's Rahmon the Great

“Politics will eventually be replaced by imagery. The politician will be only too happy to abdicate in favour of his image, because the image will be much more powerful than he could ever be.” — Marshall McLuhan

Introduction

The previous chapter has demonstrated how the Nazarbayev regime exploited a monumental space to become a leader with ‘magical’ ‘superhuman’ features, to ensure the stability of his regime. This chapter turns to Tajikistan, and examines how the regime has been boosted through signifying projects in the post-independence period, especially in the aftermath of the Civil War.

After years of bloodshed, the Tajik government in collaboration with the international community reached its long-awaited Peace Settlement agreement. Along with putting an end to this tragic conflict, the Peace Settlement and its legacies continue to contribute to Rahmon’s increasingly personalistic and authoritarian regime.

Having accumulated considerable powers and immunities, the Rahmon regime, all of a sudden, began reinventing the history of Tajiks, which becomes a welcoming step for the fragmented Tajik society. However, the number of unearthing projects goes far more that could have been imagined. The state-led projects, from various historical pasts of Tajikistan, become contradictory, with massive ambiguities. Nonetheless, in every possible speech, the state-led myths and narratives, orchestrated spectacles and symbols, get instrumentalised to denigrate opponents of any nature. Moreover, the increase in a number of signifying elements within the monumental space begins to serve as a regime promoter not only as an architect of peace and stability, but also, generate a potential threat within society (Wedeed 1999: 155).

To illustrate this picture, the first section examines factors that necessitated Emomali Rahmon to dig into the myth and introduce Samanid, Ariyan, and Zoroastrian narratives. Taking into account the post-conflict context of Tajikistan, the following section underlines how Rahmon's regime eliminated its remaining opponents, chiefly by using the same narratives. The third part of the chapter suggests reason of why the Tajik regime becomes obsessive and embraces the monumental space, regardless of its massive costs on the Tajik economy, thus explains its benefits for sustainable authoritarian regime.

Rahmon's Authoritarian Form of Nationalism

Emomali Rahmon, was born in 1952 in Danghara, a district located in the southern part of Tajikistan within a farmer family. In the year 1969, having completed a technical college, Rahmon, began working as an electrical technical in the nearby county. Several years later, after completing his university degree, becomes a director of a farm (President of the Republic of Tajikistan). As mentioned in the earlier sections, it is mainly his professional, personal background and the lack of political knowledge that led warlords and other parties to select him to be, as many call, a 'puppet president' (Cooley and Heathershaw, 2017: 84-85) during the highly turbulent early years of independent Tajikistan.

As per the Peace Agreement signed in 1997 to put an end to the Civil War, Rahmon intensively embraced pluralism. After gaining a certain amount of legitimacy both at home and abroad, Rahmon regime began suffocating democratic values. This process takes place under intensive "cleansing" of previous warlords, suppressing the media, cracking down the opposition, and making judiciary and legislative bodies not more than symbolic under increasingly powerful presidential system (Nourzhanov 2005: 111-17; Akiner 2001: 37).

Since then, Rahmon popularity has been elevating meteorically. Similar to Nazarbayev who favours monumental space, ritual, that emphasise on the interconnection of past and future, Rahmon-led projects are also associated with linking the past and present, mainly with inherent megalomaniacal features.

It is beyond of this thesis' scope to examine all the national narratives generated under the Rahmon regime. Yet, it is worth touching upon few of the national identity narratives that are, according to this research, the most important and signifying factors, which nurtured the importance of Rahmon's regime.

The study argues that the initiative to obsessively produce the following narratives, and national symbols was motivated to target the "elite" and paralyse the opposition. Alongside interlinking the past with the present, which is a useful component of a nation-building process. Almost every narrative and symbol contains a bullet that "headshots" dissent or potential rival for the regime. Importantly, the aftermath of exhibiting symbols and eliminating opponents, results in a legitimacy boost for an increasingly personalistic and authoritarian government.

The Rahmon Era as a Mirror of the Samanid, Ariyan, or Zoroastrian Epoch?

To begin with, the Samanid period (897-907), which is narrated as a glorious period for the Tajiks is systematically being interlinked with the current regime's "achievements." Moreover, the Samanid epoch symbolises strong statehood, Tajikistan's golden age and national unity (Suyarkulova 2013: 167; Hanks 2014: 121). It appears that the Samanid era is the most favourable narrative for Rahmon because the national currency was renamed the Somoni in 2000 (National Bank of Tajikistan), the country's national flagship carrier is also named Somon Air; there are Somon gardens in certain cities, plenty of companies named Somon, Somon Residence centres and many more (EurasiaNet, 3 April 2017; President of Tajikistan Website). More interesting, Rahmon even went to name his youngest son as Samani Emomali (Somoni Emomali in Tajik) (Asia-Plus, 24 May 2012), which seems to be associated with the Samanid era, if not with Amir Ismail Somoni himself who was the governor of the Samanids.

Dissemination of the term "Samanid" throughout the country that even reaches his family members might be useful to increase people's patriotic feelings towards the "glorious" past and "successful" present. However, what is crucial is the instrumental role of this narrative in the Tajik political landscape. The instrumental role of the Samanid narrative can be observed with the convergence of delivering this narrative with political developments taking place.

As noted earlier, the “glorious,” “holy” past of the Samanid era is not in a consensus with other values, primarily with Islamic ones, which consider no other option as “holy” or glorious other than the religion and its values (Nourzhanov 2014: 86). This clash and outcome demonstrate how narratives become a tool for “attacking” opponents. For example, in his 17th anniversary of State independence speech in 2008, Rahmon addresses to the people the following:

“[...] At the threshold of independence, because of internal disputes and political intrigues, that thousand years ago destroyed the Samani’s Empire, our country was brought into a civil war [...]

It was him [Abu Hanifa] who made efforts for the Tajik language to become a language of worship service & among believers the Tajik language was recognized as a language of Paradise.

Let’s pray the Most Merciful Allah in this day of Holy month of Ramazan to guide us to prosperity & future achievements!

Let holiness of national statehood, native language & unity be our helpmate to the civilized society & bright future!

Let supreme values of independence, constructive objectives & everyday deeds aspire us to the better future, happy life & prosperity of our peoples!

Long live the constructive, creative Tajik nation, the creator of cultures & civilizations! [...]”
(Rahmon 2008)

From the above statement one can understand that two — National narrative and Islamic values — are clearly juxtaposing. Even more crucial, the speech signals that statehood, the Samanid narrative, and independence are holier and more supreme values, which directly or indirectly deprives the role of Islamic values, which seem to be intentionally emphasised during addressing the speech.

This dynamic is demonstrated in the following of the pre- and post- 2008 independence speech, where we can observe how the narrative is realised in practise within the state-space activities. International Religious Freedom Report 2008 released by the U.S. Department of State suggests that in 2007 the Ministry of Education de facto

banned school girls from wearing the hijab. In April 2008 Tajik authorities suspended operations of Christian relief organisation for their “illegal activities”. Moreover, in the same year, the government refused to unload shipped books of Baptist organisation, as well as limits activities of Jehovah’s Witnesses by detaining, interrogating, and in some cases torturing its sympathisers. Importantly, the report states that these activities involved the deprivation of IRPT members too, who were the co-signatories of the Peace Agreement with Islamo-nationalist views, and the only potent opposition party in Tajikistan until 2015. Some of them were imprisoned for inciting “extremist ideologies”, others allegedly died in prisons “committing suicide” (International Religious Freedom Report, 19 September 2008). This is a clear illustration of how discourse has been transformed into an instrument that begins to target members of religious groups that included the IRPT — the major opposition party at the time.

Ariyanism — Tajik president repeatedly equates the Tajik and Ariyan terms associating the roots of world civilisation, which, according to him, rests on Tajiks (Marat 2008: 21). Similarly, Zoroastrianism, President Rahmon, prefers yet another time to establish linkages with the Zoroastrian period (628-551 B.C.) with religious perspective, claiming that Zoroaster was the first Prophet who guided the Tajik nation spiritually (Laruelle 2007: 54). Having examined the Rahmon speeches from gaining independence up until today, it becomes apparent that Rahmon mentions these narratives countless times. And indeed, if compared, almost all of those narratives are contradictory to one another.

Indeed, unearthing the Ariyan civilisation, linking Zoroastrian and Samanid epoch with modern Tajikistan have been an important factor in the nation-building process in Tajikistan. Furthermore, these symbols were vital in unifying people, thus increasing their patriotic feeling in the absence of any alternative. Although those narratives, myths, are ambiguous in nature, they are a vital part of securitised nationalism, that mainly rests on using these narratives against the “elite”, as examined in the earlier sections.

By and large, from one circumstance to another, these narratives produce a discourse that explicitly indicates “otherness”. Accordingly, after underlining the “otherness”, discourse under Rahmon does not remain steady, rather, shifts to categorise that “other” an enemy, which ultimately leads to elimination of “enemies of the nation”

from the social and political landscape. Therefore, often defaming or physically removing political opponents with the use of nationalism has become a commonplace in modern Tajikistan.

The development examined above seems to have taken active role in the second decade of independence. Later, after becoming relatively stable and recognisable both domestically and internationally, the regime begins to embrace prestige-enhancing megalomaniac projects. Similar to the Kazakhstani case, the monumental space, symbols and myth, begin to resemble the regime, and indicate the architect of these projects both representationally and non-representationally. Moreover, orchestrated spectacles considerably aid at increasing the Rahmon cult of personality in all aspects of contemporary life in Tajikistan.

From Miserable Pluralist to Omnipotent Authoritarian

As noted, President Rahmon, when first appointed was not the president of people, but the president of warlords who was appointed with the influence of prominent warlords as a ‘puppet president’ (Heathershaw and Cooley, 2017: 84). How could a once insignificant farm director, and symbolic president become omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent? What factors led to the increasing cult of personality of President Rahmon?

The reasons behind the rise of Rahmon’s grip on power are multifaceted. Strategic elimination of warlords by appointing them into position, where they face conflict of interest, and, as a result, collude. International support, mainly from Russia, Iran and the UN, and many foreign donors that helped the legitimate government to consolidate its defense and law enforcement agencies, are the most salient factors to enforcing the legitimacy of the Tajik government under president Rahmon. These developments enabled Rahmon’s regime to exercise power against potential ‘law breakers’, warlords, for instance by legally sacking, and imprisoning ‘in accordance with law.’ Compared to warlords who were still around busy with lucrative criminal activities during the first decade of independence, Rahmon became a legitimate leader with accumulated authority recognised both at home and abroad, which then can afford cracking down potential threats with a legal means (Heathershaw and Cooley, 2017: 85).

The above briefly mentioned dynamic explains the challenges and accomplishments of Rahmon that have tightened up its screws which were once too shaky. Although this interaction helped Rahmon's rise to power considerably, it is difficult to say that those systematically repressive strategies would boost his personality cult, which is escalating in contemporary Tajikistan. The chapter argues that, after achieving certain amount of socio-political and economic power, in parallel with inventing myths and symbols examined above, it is the monumental space with numerous placards and posters, which has been increasingly exploited in the last decades. It is these orchestrated spectacles via posters, placards, and vanity projects that ensures the sustainability of already acquired legitimacy. Moreover, the monumental space ensures the health of accumulated legitimacy during "emergency" "crises" moments. Undoubtedly, the cityscapes and projects led by Rahmon nurture his cult of personality, thus making him incomparable, supernatural leader.

Itching Economy, Scratching Monuments

Unlike resource-rich Kazakhstan, Tajikistan remains one of the poorest countries among the former Soviet republics. With 32% share of population living below the national poverty line (Asia Development Bank, 2015), Tajikistan's government is obsessed with investing billions of dollars on awkward, megalomaniacal projects that are mushrooming around the country every single day. For example, in 2015 the government proposed a plan to spend 100 million dollars to build the largest theatre in Central Asia, with no actual theatregoers (Eurasianet, April 15, 2015). Also, the government completed the tallest 165 meters' tall flagpole in the world in 2011 (Eurasianet, June 10, 2014), which was later beaten by the Saudi Jeddah flagpole with 171 meters tall (Guinness World Records). Interestingly, the top five countries with the tallest flagpoles in the world, after Saudi Arabia and Tajikistan being top two, are: flagpole in Azerbaijan (162-metre), Panmunjeom flagpole in North Korea (160-metre), and the 133-metre Ashgabat flagpole in Turkmenistan (The National, August 7, 2008; Trend Az, February 20, 2012; RFE/RL, February 3, 2011; Alamy, March 28, 2013). The intriguing thing is that these are all among the world's most repressive regimes, and how they learn and complete with one another.

Taking into account a type of obsession for giant monumental space, the list of vanity projects in Tajikistan is exhaustive. In addition to the aforementioned projects, Rahmon's regime built the biggest *Choyhona* (teahouse) in the world (Eurasianet, July 5, 2013), the largest national library in Central Asia, which needs 7.5 million additional books to its current collection of just 2.5 million, where officials ask local people to feel the empty, dusty shelves (BBC Persian, April 26, 2012). Additionally, it is inevitable not to see the huge billboards of the smiling president with thick eyebrows with various backgrounds almost in every corner of the country (Akhbor, June 28, 2017). From these few examples — massive teahouses, biggest libraries and giant theatres with no visitors — it becomes clear that the government is not interested in the real aim of those projects, but its symbolic existence and prevalence in the public discourse.

Yet, one might still ask, how does this economically deprived Central Asian state support its extravagant, expensive projects that are far beyond of its economic capacity. The quotation by the U.S. diplomat once serving in Tajikistan sheds a light to this question:

[the Tajikistan Aluminium Company (Talco)] factory is an impressive sight, but like many of the country's assets, President Rahmon sees it as a means of generating income for himself, his family members, and his inner circle. Although it is a state asset, decisions about the company are not made in the best interests of the country... As with other industries, Talco's revenue does not contribute to development of the country; rather much of it disappears for off-budget activities and projects, such as palaces and lavish state entertainments. The people of Tajikistan effectively subsidize Talco, by living without adequate health services, education, or electricity. Hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars have disappeared from the company since 1992, and the huge subsidies Talco receives in the form of cheap electricity are draining enormous resources from the Tajik economy... End Comment.

(Tracey Ann Jacobson, US ambassador to Tajikistan, leaked cable, 14 April 2008; cited in Heathershaw and Cooley 2017: 80)

Above statement is pretty much the explanation where does the primary funding for such constructions derive from. Apart from that, some “generous” funds are allocated by ‘friendly’ Arab nations in building mosques or Parliament houses as well (Al Bilad Daily, May 2, 2017).

Nonetheless of where the funding for this lavish projects come from, the obsession and the interest in erecting new symbols clearly illustrates the significance of metanarrative in regime promotion. The number of these projects is yet another illustration of government's awareness on the benefits of symbols in a daily socio-political life as well as enhancing the regime's prestige.

All of the construction developments in the cityscapes involve a mix of customary, traditional, mythological, ancient Zoroastrian, Samanid, Ariyan symbolic representation. The process is being undertaken in parallel with demolishing properly functioning buildings, mainly, those left from the Soviet time that include: Central Post Office, *Mayakovskiy Theater* (Asia-Plus, March 16, 2017), former presidential house and currently the office of president's son — Rustami Emomali — Dushanbe Mayor, has also been reported to be demolished soon (EurasiaNet, October 19, 2015). The logic behind these acts seem to be that anything containing the tiniest indication of Communism must be dismantled. Unlike the famous Statute Park (Memento Park in Hungarian) which displays a number of art pieces, statutes of famous personalities from the Communist era (MementoPark.hu), the fate of communist monuments in most of the Central Asian states is different. The best scenario is illustrated with a monument of Lenin being relocated and abandoned in the outskirts of capital in the middle of nowhere (Walker, 2016) the head of the statute being separate from the remaining. Some can even see the Stalin's statute in barns in some villages. Or, as a salvage metal, probably awaiting to be recycled.

Acts of this nature remind a clear replication of what was done, for example, by Lenin himself during the Soviet Union, who forcibly dismantled all monuments that were made in remembrance of Czarist Russia. Mainly, it was the replacement of ideology that led to such actions. Because, the myth — as an essential component, provided a collective identity and common destinations for all (Pisch 2016a), which has been exhibited through a newly-erected space.

A high magnitude of (re)constructing monumental space in Tajikistan indicates its vitality. By and large, this significance lays on the stability of the regime it ensures through the monumental space. Because orchestrated spectacles have a function that disciplines and organises masses to physically embrace rituals, preached by the regime. Thus, by reframing the people into an order, spectacles prepare them for a certain political obedience. By doing so, spectacles deliver audibly and visually politically

significant ideas that are otherwise unspoken (Wedeed 1999: 19-21). Therefore, vanish projects have demonstrated a signifying factor for enhancing the regime's popularity. The monumental space, as noted, is the messaging app of the regime that delivers its position, thus framing a certain public discourse and gaining obedience.

Having this in mind, it is clear that there is a convergence between the regime's delivered metanarrative values and the people's expectations or perceptions, which makes it more legitimate in the eyes of people (Edelman 1985a), hence gaining certain degree of obedience ensures the stability of Rahmon's authoritarian regime, along with dramatizing his 'achievements' and blossoming cult of personality.

Representational Symbols and Rahmon's rising Cult of Personality

Arts, spectacles have played vital role and been a means of effective communication and education of masses. Moreover, representational symbols significantly aid in enhancing the cult of personality. Previous studies have examined that personality cult of earlier centuries have used arts to generate and sustain personality cults (Pisch 2016: 89). The examples from the Byzantine Court, Ancient Greek, and Roman literature suggest that images of helmsmen or driving engine is also associated with a capable and strong leader (Pisch 2016: 87).

The proliferation of Rahmon's posters during the recent years shows that a rise of personality cult goes beyond. Unlike the president of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, who likes drifting racing cars (RFR/RL, January 29, 2015), President Rahmon appears driving a bulldozer (see Figure 3), pushing a pile of gravel into the river, officially relaunching, if completed, the world's tallest dam with 335 metres (Putz, 2016).

Similarly, in 2011, the Tajik president appeared to be digging the foundation of the largest mosque in Central Asia with an excavator (see Figure 4). Although the mosque's capacity to accommodate worshipers is considerable — 115 000 worshipers — there are not enough worshipers to come over to the prayers, due to government's strict control of religious practices, and high pressure on the freedom of religion in general (Najibullah, 2011).



Figure3 Source: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/81256>



Figure 4 Source: https://www.rferl.org/a/central_asia_largest_mosque_in_dushanbe/24354702.html

Repressing religious freedom is not a new phenomenon in Tajikistan. What is relevant is that Rahmon's image in these representational symbols. It becomes evident that he

mainly participates — as a ‘strong’, ‘capable’ ‘leader’— in the projects involving megalomaniacal features, which yet emphasises who the ‘architect’ of these extraordinary projects is. Additionally, almost no opening ceremony of both private and public projects are being held without the presence of Rahmon and his scissor to cut ribbons. This suggests that the rise of Rahmon’s cult of personality mainly stems from the regime itself, not the people. The below provided citation explains this dynamic well:

[...] The virtual absence of political participation and competition, the lack of transparency and accountability in the political system, and an increasing concentration of political and economic power in a limited group of individuals closely associated with or related to the President [Rahmon] [...] (Johannes 2008)

The statement indicates that, similar to the previous Turkmen president, Saparmurat Niyazov, whose cult of personality mostly stemmed from mid-level authorities (Denison 2009: 1167-1187) Rahmon’s regime also enjoys praises firstly from his entourage as well. Although Niyazov once said *‘I am personally against seeing my pictures and statues in the streets — but it’s what the people want’* (Niyazov 2002, cited in Mckay 2003), it is apparent that praise was not necessarily initiated by the people, and no view against the regime would have been tolerated, should it be against such totalitarian regime like Turkmenistan under president Niyazov.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the Tajik leader over the past two decades of independence has personalised political power. The sources for consolidating his power have been varying. At the first decade of independence, Rahmon largely relied on outside factors that considerably enhanced the legitimacy of his government both at home and abroad. One of the most salient interests of the international community to support the Rahmon government, was Tajikistan’s Civil War component.

Having accumulated certain amount of recognition, consolidation of government institutions and presidential powers by amending constitution for a number of times, Rahmon seeks to get rid of various potential rivals, including: previous

warlords, opposition party and many more. These actors were the main components of the Peace Settlement agreement, which guaranteed them certain power within government.

By unearthing mythical narratives, symbols, and orchestrating spectacles, Rahmon's regime targets dissidents of all nature. Alongside eliminating opponents, Rahmon's government generates compliance of the masses, largely by producing symbolic space where people praise the 'architect'. Because the representational space, mainly in authoritarian states, has a coercive nature. The coercive measure and threat that ensures authoritarian stability is not only relying on say by deploying police, but also via signifying projects (Wedeen 1999: 157). A small city of Vahdat close to Dushanbe, with around 45, 000 inhabitants (Room and Ratlif, 1995), which is surrounded by more than 1000 giant portraits of Emomali Rahmon, increasing number of giant projects with mythical and symbolical context and many more (Akhbor, June 28, 2017) are clear demonstration of sustaining threat, ensuring obedience and authoritarian stability, and thus enhancing Rahmon's cult mainly through these signifying projects, or nationalism in general.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the interconnection of nationalism and authoritarianism in post-Soviet Kazakhstan and Tajikistan plays significant role in framing the new regimes, ensuring their stability, and boosting the process of power personification of the leaders. The thesis has argued that the highly turbulent situation — the unexpected disintegration of the Soviet Union — had created a niche, where the future form of both nationalism and the governments was based.

Inherent features of governments from the past have played crucial roles in framing the form of nationalism and the regimes in these states. To begin with Kazakhstan, having multi-ethnic society with significant chunk of ethnic Russians, huge hydrocarbon reserves, its remaining dependency discourse on Russia, and the leadership characteristics of Nursultan Nazarbayev have had a significant impact on the future form of nationalism, and consequent policies that avoided conflicts in a potentially contentious society. Having this in mind, the form of nationalism in Kazakhstan becomes unionist with various ambiguities, which make the people more compliant, the regime durable, and Mr Nazarbayev unique and inalterable.

The thesis explored that, unlike in Kazakhstan, in monoethnic Tajikistan, the legacy of Civil War became a ground for the future socio-economic and political developments. Moreover, its post-conflict context created such a platform where the regime found unearthing myth and symbols as an important instrument to target the ‘elite’ and promote itself at home and abroad. Hence, nationalism in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan became a significant variable source of regimes’ legitimacy, in a period when other sources were yet to be revived.

The exhibition of nationalism hugely contributed to the nation-building process of these states. Importantly, after a certain period of nationalism’s exhibition in an exclusively monopolistic manner, the role of nationalism goes step further. Nationalism in both states becomes regime’s stick that ‘identifies’, ‘indicates’, and often physically eliminates any type opponents from the political landscape. The study has examined in detail how the process of eliminating opponents has taken place in these states. Moreover, in parallel with its securitised role, nationalism, presently enhances and sustains the leaders’ prestige, thus making them inalterable cult of personalities.

The process of personifying power through the use of nationalism became inevitable when the regimes began proposing various prestige-enhancing projects. Indeed, in the wake of independence, when the economies were not doing well, and the regimes were reviving, it was symbolism which provided the opportunity for leaders to exercise their voice and become more powerful. As Wedeen (1999: 26) puts '*rhetoric and symbols reduce the need to rely on sheer repression as a mechanism control,*' (Wedeen 1999: 26). So during the early periods of transition, it was not a right time for regimes to chiefly rely on repression, especially when introducing reforms related to market economy and democratic governance.

For example, in Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev's proposition of relocating the capital city from Almaty to Astana, led him to exercise his power institutionally and thus enabled him to marginalise all possible opponents, especially when there were no other '(un)democratic' tools with similar nature of targeting rivals. Alongside eliminating rivals, the use of nationalism, constructing cityscapes, the monumental space, and the metanarrative, enabled Nazarbayev to make its diverse society ambiguous and undecided how to categorise itself, with no repressive measures. Because, initially the Kazakhstani regime considered its nation's diversity component as a threat to the national unity. By strategically implementing his projects, Nazarbayev creates a compliance and ensure his authoritarian regime by becoming an architect of this achievements. It is important to note that the nationalism in Kazakhstan became a first and foremost source of Nazarbayev's legitimacy, especially when there was no economic growth which they have experienced in the last decade. Most people would argue that it is chiefly Kazakhstan's petrodollars that boosted Nazarbayev's image both at home and abroad. Admittedly, to a great extent this claim is correct. However, this study has found that it would not have been possible for Nazarbayev to generate a capital from Kazakhstan's natural resources, had it not embraced a certain form of nationalism that facilitated situation both domestically and internationally. The role of nationalism in Kazakhstan is therefore multifaceted; it has reframed Kazakhstan's relations with its neighbours (primarily Russia), helped Nazarbayev to deliver his voice both within the elite and the nation, thus enhanced his authoritarian muscles. Gradually, after accumulating certain degree of legitimacy, achieving booming economy, and successful delivery of projects,

nationalism began to play a signifying factor in boosting Nazarbayev's cult of personality, thus establish highly stable personalistic and authoritarian regime.

Tajik president has benefited from the extensive use of nationalism a lot more. Unlike Nazarbayev, who was already a member of Communist party, Rahmon was famous with being insignificant farmer from the Southern Tajikistan. However, having an agricultural background did not become an obstacle for him to successfully use nationalism to nurture his regime that became omnipresent and omnipotent, in the recent years. The post-Conflict context of Tajikistan have played crucial role for consolidating Rahmon's, present personalistic regime. The Conflict rhetoric that is systematically spread in the public discourse not only makes Rahmon a famous hero within the society, but also has helped his regime to get rid of still barely existing political dissent. In the course of eliminating rivals, Rahmon's government managed to make him god-like leader with extensive powers and immunities. All has been realised thanks to the extensive ethno historiographic researches and the use of symbolism.

Since the praises mostly derive from the closest entourage of the regimes' it is important to observe how long this praise that make Nazarbayev and Rahmon cults would last. Because, it is argued that in the post-Stalin Soviet Union, it was mainly a decline in repression that led to the erosion of commitment and the increasing incoherence within the metanarrative which was created after his death (Edelman 1985: 279-282). Therefore, it is a matter of time and possible regime transition scenarios that would depict a picture of post-Nazarbayev and –Rahmon regimes.

Furthermore, the study, as a result of comparison, has provided an opportunity to establish a nexus between the Kazakhstani and Tajik regimes in terms of their use of symbols and power personalisation, as well as significant differences between two Central Asian states.

To begin with similarities, although both Tajikistan and Kazakhstan were under the Soviet rule for almost seven decades, we cannot exclusively categorise Nazarbayev's and Rahmon's cult of personalities to those of Stalin. First, many consider Stalin as a 'second generation cult' who mostly adopted values from Lenin (Wedeed 1999: 28), but before Nazarbayev and Rahmon there was no one who would be praised the way as they are. Second, both regimes have promoted exaggerated rhetoric on 'achievement', 'peace and stability', 'economic development' that has undoubtedly developed personality cults

of these leaders. Third, both governments have used nationalism in a ‘state of emergency’ periods mostly to eliminate possible dissent, exercise the authoritarianism, and thus consolidate their regime. Fourth, both leaders are entitled as ‘Father of Nation’ that extends exclusive immunities for them and their family members. Also, this titles and the current form of nationalism enhances the cult of personalities of these leaders in phenomenal way that is prevalent in social, political and institutional levels. Economic performance, leadership characteristics, general social fabric, and the dates of adopted policies, suggest that Nazarbayev leads the competition of cult of personalities, while Rahmon does not remain passive, rather adopts policies, tactics from his counterpart’s authoritarian textbook.

Undoubtedly, there are significant differences as well. Firstly, similar to Syria’s Hafiz Al Asad (Wedeen 1999: 28a), Emomali Rahmon shares the symbolic landscape, and is associated with other heroes, especially from ancient periods. He is usually iconic with his family and repeatedly displayed as the only successful son of Samanid epoch who continues ancestors ‘achievements’ decently, which is less observable in Nazarbayev-led public discourse. Second, Kazakhstan, thanks to its natural resource reserves has had not much struggle to spend massive funds to the development of its monumental space. Tajikistan, on the other hand, the poorest country in the former Soviet space with its post-conflict recovery, has not had much money to spend on prestige-enhancing projects as Kazakhstan. Of course, its once tallest flagpole, the biggest teahouse with not visitors, or placards are in no way comparable with, say, ultra-technological “Bayterek Tree”, which may have more influence in generating a prestige, politics of compliance than in Tajikistan. However, the Kazakhstani cult is less intense than Rahmon’s; Nazarbayev’s placards may appear during national holidays, he also publicly ‘rejects’ proposals of cult-enhancing projects, which is much less observable in Tajikistan. The ill-performed economic, thus less influential monumental space might be a partial reason for the Tajik regime to be more oppressive. And the presence of relative liberal market, state’s ability to provide goods and services, strong control, maybe the reasons why Nazarbayev’s cult of personality is less desirable than Emomali Rahmon’s. Third difference lays on a social fabric of Kazakhstanis and Tajiks. It is important because *‘societal differences are reflected in the way in which two cults are designed and the overall reception they generate’* (Wedeen 1999: 29). Emomali Rahmon is often

depicted in agricultural background in a wheat field, dried fruits, nature and etc. While Nazarbayev looks more intelligent in a private jet completing his subsequent book. Without considering the pre-independence period, which is a foundation for various differences anyway, the breakup of the disastrous Civil War created numerous backlashes in education that shapes the social fabric, too. Although the War had not taken place in everywhere in Tajikistan, people are more afraid of terror and possible instability, which is less frightening in Kazakhstan. Last not least, Rahmon's cult, similar to his person, is less audacious. His speeches are not coherent, usually making simple grammatical mistakes. Compared to other leaders from Central Asia, he even does not have a proper Russian language skill, which is still might be considered as an indication of 'intelligence' in the Former Soviet space. Regardless of his age, Nazarbayev is more energetic, and in a good physical shape. He is cautious, and famous for his cleverness. Therefore, his cult is enhanced less by mythologisation than Emomali Rahmon's. Nazarbayev's lesser degree of control than Emomali Rahmon's suggests that strategies of pursuing monumental space are similar to Syria's Hafiz Al Assad, where his aim is not to increase charisma, but to evoke obedience (Wedeed 1999: 29a).

Indeed, the interconnection of authoritarianism and symbolism in post-Soviet, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan shows us how discourse and symbols generate unparalleled depictions of leader and nation-state, at the same time creating spaces with ambiguities (Wedeed 1999: 30), which considerably have aided to the accumulation, consolidation of legitimacy and continues to sustain a stability of authoritarian regimes under Nursultan Nazarbayev and Emomali Rahmon.

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