Post-Liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia

Imaginaries, Discourses and Practices of Social Ordering

PHILIPP LOTTHOLZ

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POST-LIBERAL STATEBUILDING IN CENTRAL ASIA

Imaginaries, Discourses and Practices
of Social Ordering

Philipp Lottholz

To Polina, with all my love

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Notes on Transliteration
and Language

Most of the research in this project was conducted in the Russian language. In rare instances, I have employed Kyrgyz interpreters or retrospectively discussed conversations or events held in the Kyrgyz language. All translations from Russian are my own unless otherwise indicated. Interviews were transcribed into Russian and, after analysing them, translated for quotation in the manuscript. The Russian or Kyrgyz original words added in brackets are marked as Russian/Ru. or Kyrgyz/Kg.

For transliteration, I use the Library of Congress ALA–LC Romanization table (www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/russian.pdf, accessed 13 November 2017), which means that all Cyrillic letters are transliterated with their Latin equivalents and i is used for й; j and zh for ж; kh for х; ts for ц; ch for ч; and sh for ш. For convenience, I transliterate щ with sh as the difference to ш is negligible in spoken Russian. I transliterate я and ю with ia and iu, but use ya and yu if the letters are used at the beginning of words. I further chose to omit apostrophes, other additional signs and some specificities in the Kyrgyz alphabet for reading and writing comfort, as long as they do not impede understanding. Most importantly, the word for rural executive committee or administration is written айыл окмоту, in most official communication and transliterated as *aiyl okmotu*, while the Kyrgyz version is айыл өкмөтү and would transliterate as *aiyl ökmötü*. Both in written and spoken Russian, this is usually simplified to the former version, although people tend to use the mutation ü at the end. I also use the Russian names for cities, such as *Uzgen* instead of *Özgön*. To build the plural of transliterated words, I add an s rather than Russian y (ы) or i (и), for instance in *aksakals*.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Lately, ex-president Akaev returned to the country, and he apologized for opening up the Kumtor gold mine. He said, please forgive me, the government is to blame but I am also responsible for this decision. Basically, he is to blame and he should apologize to these children suffering the consequences, for the decay and for the fact that our enterprises stopped working. We had such enterprises which, for instance, worked on the cosmos, it was called the Institute of Cosmic Research, or we had a firm that produced semiconductors on the basis of domestically sourced semi-crystalline flints from Tash Komyr, and based on other domestic resources like rare earth metals. All that disappeared. … In fact, what Akaev started back then was a neoliberal policy that included elements of stabilization, privatization and liberalization, in consequence of which all enterprises collapsed.

Kyrgyz historian and political economist

Co-Security – ('joint provision of public security') – [is a] new term suggested by [the] Civic Union 'For Reforms and Results' to denote a philosophy, set of norms and practices directed at the promotion of interaction among citizens, law enforcement bodies and other structures for better provision of security with focus on citizens' interests.

Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' (2015, p 3)

However, it became clear that the experience of addressing less serious issues together with local authorities and law enforcement agencies gave the community security working groups the skills and confidence to tackle more complex issues later on. Because of the consultative and participatory nature of the community security process, [working group] members learnt valuable skills

> about the benefits of inclusive decision-making and collaborative action. Local authorities and law enforcement agencies also developed their understanding of the benefits of democratic and responsive services by working together with working groups.
>
> Saferworld Kyrgyzstan (Saferworld, 2015b, p 11)

Entry: on (im)possible futures

For observers of Kyrgyzstani politics and most of the country's population, the events of October 2020 and the following months presented a heart-breaking development. After thousands of people had protested for days on end against the widespread rigging and fraud in the parliamentary elections on 4 October, the annulment of the results was celebrated as a victory. Yet, the events unfolding over the following days and weeks surpassed what most had hoped and feared as they eventually brought another extra-legal seizure of power to the country after a decade of relatively stable democratic governance. When President Jeenbekov finally declared his resignation on 8 October and protestors stormed the White House (the seat of the government), it seemed that the old regime had finally crumbled. But the ensuing power vacuum saw another notorious actor, ex-convict and ultra-nationalist Sadyr Japarov, emerge victorious as he managed to unite the majority of parliamentarians in a vote of confidence, took the position of prime minister and interim president as of 15 October and, notwithstanding criticism and widespread protest, won the presidential election on 10 January.[1] Japarov further secured, despite a record low turnout, a majority in a referendum to change the constitution from a semi-presidential into a full presidential system, giving him comprehensive legislative, executive and government appointment powers while reducing checks and balances.[2]

Although the populist and authoritarian regime of Japarov certainly presents the low point of Kyrgyzstan's recent development, the arbitrary and sometimes bizarre turns in its politics arguably mirror trends in past policy making. Ironically in the eyes of many, Sadyr Japarov has managed to construct himself as a 'man of the people' as he had served a prison sentence based on an unjust verdict, which resonated with widespread anger about the country's corrupt political and administrative system. His political campaigns

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[1]   BBC.com, 'Kyrgyzstan election: Sadyr Japarov wins presidency with landslide', 11 January 2021, www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-55613552. All links accessed 30 April 2021 unless indicated otherwise.

[2]   Sputnik Kyrgyzstan, 'Все о новом проекте Конституции Кыргызстана — коротко о главных моментах [Everything about the new constitution draft – briefly on the main aspects]', 9 February 2021, https://ru.sputnik.kg/politics/20210209/1051397731/kyrgyzstan-proekt-konstituciya-prezident-zhogorku-kenesh-pravitelstvo.html

further benefited from his self-fashioning as a 'native son' (Kyrgyz: *öz bala*) by invoking his genealogical belonging, wearing of traditional fur clothing and staging of ceremonies in which authoritative elders gave him their blessing to govern the country (Ismailbekova, 2021). Both this mise-en-scène and the reported usage of social media trolls and incitement of hate commentary, threats and even physical attacks against opposition leaders and journalists (Kutmanaliev and Baialieva, 2019), and his long-standing ethno-nationalist agenda that propagates the dominance of the Kyrgyz titular nation at the expense of minority representation (Mamedov, 2021) are elements which have already been used in one way or another by political figures in earlier years. Seen in this light, Japarov appears as the embodiment of the political repertoires and technologies that the country has recently accumulated, which makes many people in Kyrgyzstan conclude that 'Japarov is our Donald Trump' (Mamedov, 2021).

These recent developments clearly underline the importance of this monograph, which is interested in ways to capture the socio-political developments, logics and mechanisms by which Kyrgyzstan's recent 'backsliding' was possible. While the populist and authoritarian policies and tactics of Japarov are undeniable, they raise a bigger question about the type of political order, and the political and wider societal experiences that could allow for the recent turn of events, or maybe even provoked it. In particular, if Kyrgyzstan's current political order can certainly be called authoritarian, then what is the most appropriate term to describe the political regime in power before? And conversely, if the October events had not happened and Japarov had never come to power, would a more progressive, liberal-democratic political trajectory really have been possible? Since its independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan, officially the Kyrgyz Republic, a mountainous, landlocked country located between China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, has been the one out of the five Central Asian republics most open to liberal-democratic and market reforms. Yet, the failures of successive liberalization and reform programmes have led to increasingly corrupt and violent rule, two revolutions in 2005 and 2010, and to large-scale conflict in the south of the country. While successive reform and democratization agendas and, especially after 2010, peacebuilding and security efforts have thus promoted free elections, economic liberalization, 'good governance', and a 'liberal peace', the country's political system and wider societal set-up has arguably adopted and implemented these frameworks in incomplete, divergent and sometimes completely unintended ways. My proposal in this work is a post-liberal approach for capturing these forms of order, which, as I elaborate below, present a combination and fusion of liberal concepts and practices of ordering with hierarchical, exclusionary and coercive mechanisms, which, taken together, require a different terminology than the ones currently available in political and social science.

Kyrgyzstan's long-term political trajectory and recent deterioration is part of a global resurgence of authoritarian and anti-democratic forces which, coupled with the austerity crisis of the past decade, has put significant strain on liberal-democratic regimes, but has also pointed to the need to reconsider widespread assumptions about liberal democracy and the capitalist economic system. As many critical voices within political and social sciences, as well as public intellectuals beyond, have pointed out, this crisis appears to be the result of deeper structural contradictions in the late capitalist order which are coming to the fore as the economic, political and intellectual dominance of the industrialized and self-stylized 'liberal' Western world is increasingly unravelling. In this sense, the present moment in global politics presents a critical juncture, in which politicians, 'experts' and societies at large need to reflect upon the nature of liberal democracy and the capitalist system, its limits in terms of serving people's interests both at home and abroad via its expansion and replication, and possible variations and alternatives to this system.

With this book, I seek to advance the debate on non- or post-democratic forms of governance, statebuilding and order-making. These have largely been framed around the problem with such processes and their adverse effects in terms of the 'authoritarian' and 'illiberal' nature of politics in Eastern Europe and Eurasia more widely. As an alternative to these approaches, I argue that post-liberalism provides a lens to better understand recent and presently observable forms of peace, order, state structures and institutions which adapt and transcend liberal-democratic principles into particular contexts, but in so doing also exert exclusion, marginalization and violence. In this sense, I argue, practices and discourses of ordering may in one and the same instant be perceived and experienced to be conforming to liberal, as well as other non-liberal conceptions of social and political order. The coexistence of these understandings and interpretations is then more appropriately captured by the term post-liberalism, which aims to take the claims of democratic and still somewhat liberal ordering seriously, even if it seeks to scrutinize them. This work thus builds upon and extends calls for a critical reconsideration of prevalent 'authoritarian' and 'illiberal' framings in favour of analyses of whether and how such categories are relevant for the lived realities of Central Asian people (see Ismailbekova, 2017; N. Koch, 2019). It substantiates the argument for a post-liberal approach to statebuilding and social ordering through a comprehensive contextual and empirical analysis of peacebuilding and community security projects conducted in southern Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of the violent clashes in the year 2010.

The analysis presented in this work examines the different conceptions of peace, security, order and the corresponding practices, norms and institutional arrangements that people believe can help to bring about and maintain them. The study is thus situated in the fields of political and social

theory, cultural and area studies of Central Asia, and, in particular, peace, conflict and intervention studies. Adapted from Bliesemann de Guevara and Kostic (2017), the term 'peace, conflict and intervention studies' reflects the increasing fusion between peace, security and development studies and research focusing on different forms of international interventions in countries having experienced large-scale conflict. Here, 'interventions' are conceived of in the broadest possible way as including non-military intervention such as assistance and aid in various policy fields, with the conditionality and standardizing frameworks attached. This way, and with its focus on Central Asia, the study aims to extend the scope of peace, conflict and intervention studies beyond the usual focus on 'canonical cases' of post-civil war countries that have so far largely predominated intervention and statebuilding studies. Analyses of less militarized and more incentive-based interventions, which are mainly based on aid transfers and technical assistance, in conflict prevention (Lewis et al, 2018), security sector reform (Lewis, 2011), or governance reform (Kluczewska, 2019) have shown the important contribution that such 'soft intervention' studies can make. Authors such as Owen et al (2018) and Lewis (2017) have already indicated that such scholarship offers important insights for peace- and statebuilding intervention literature, both in terms of the empirical depth and detail offered by area studies perspectives and regarding the ambiguous and indeed limited role that 'liberal peace' agendas might play. With these critical reflections on existing research and attempts to rethink conceptual and methodological aspects of inquiry, this work adds to a decolonial turn that is increasingly manifesting in peace, conflict and intervention studies and in studies of Central Asia and the wider post-Socialist space. While acknowledging and trying to grapple with the questioning and reconsideration of existing regimes of knowledge demanded in these debates, the contribution of this work lies primarily in its attempt to produce a more dialogical and engaged perspective through a cooperative approach to knowledge production as elaborated below.

The conceptual mechanism by which the study realizes this decolonial ambition and unpacks the production of post-liberal order involves the conception of the social imaginary, which is developed out of regionally specific and more general research on the workings of social imaginaries (see Taylor, 2004; Yurchak, 2006; Valaskivi and Sumiala, 2014; Adams and Smith, 2019). I define three imaginaries capturing the most widely held ideas of social order in Kyrgyzstani society – the 'Western liberal peace', 'politics of sovereignty' and 'tradition and culture' – and analyse the interaction and contestation of these beneath the surface of peacebuilding and security practices. For instance, artistic and cultural expressions and events or the creation of new infrastructure can be interpreted as expressions of support for democracy and human rights within the 'Western liberal peace' imaginary by some, and as paying tribute to the 'tradition and culture' imaginary by

others. However, other societal groups may perceive the same events and practices to strengthen understandings of the sovereignty of the state within a 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. Thus, by analysing both the immediate effects of peacebuilding and security practices and their wider implications, this work embeds these forms of social ordering in the wider contestation between Western and more context-specific societal values and models of state sovereignty and capitalist development. Furthermore, I engage with decolonial critiques in peace, security and development studies by examining the construction of, and frictions inherent in, the 'tradition and culture' imaginary which exhibit the conflictive and not necessarily taken-for-granted nature of modern statehood and economic development itself. The analysis presented in this study thus helps to develop a better understanding of the emergence and shaping of peace- and statebuilding and social ordering practices by looking at the invocation and interplay of different ideas of social order captured in the three imaginaries. This conceptual innovation also points to the strong spatial component through which imaginaries of social order are working: the invocation and enactment of imaginaries through different measures, events and material reconfigurations have generative effects for the spaces in which they occur, as they seek to change perceptions of, or actual experiences in, particular communities, districts, regions or the nation state at large so as to render them more secure, peaceful and liberal. This Introduction continues by demonstrating the need for a conception of post-liberalism in a world where liberalism has been lost and has perhaps never been feasible all along, before discussing the contribution of this work to peace, conflict and intervention studies and related fields.

Post-liberalism: understanding (dis)order in a post-Western-dominated world

Ostensibly, research on countries emerging from conflict, crises and autocratic rule, including in post-Socialist Central Asia, has at least partially moved beyond the simple binaries of 'democracy' and 'authoritarianism', as well as the paradigm of 'transition'. Still, an imaginary ideal of building liberal-democratic states and societies in fact still lurks behind many critical analyses in all of these fields, including research on 'authoritarian' or 'illiberal' forms of peace and conflict management. For instance, Catherine Owen and colleagues understand 'illiberal peace' as resulting from local and regional actors contesting and transforming 'globally promoted norms' and the promotion of alternatives that challenge 'the western-led consensus known as the "liberal peace"' (2018, p 3). David Lewis, John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran (2018) propose the term authoritarian conflict management to analyse authoritarian regimes' reliance 'on instruments of state coercion and hierarchical structures of power' and rejection of 'genuine

negotiations', 'international mediation and constraints on the use of force', among other things (2018, pp 11–12). Meanwhile, Alexander Cooley and John Heathershaw's *Dictators Without Borders* (2017) examines the policies, practices and repressive apparatuses that Central Asian regimes and elites use to quell opposition and competition of political power. A parallel trend appears to emerge in international intervention literature, where von Billerbeck and Tansey (2019) are utilizing the concept of 'authoritarianism' to classify unintended consequences and political trajectories of intervention countries (see also Soares de Oliveira, 2011). As Lewis et al's overview (2018, p 490) indicates, the global resurgence of illiberal and undemocratic rule has in fact spurred a massive growth of scholarship studying these dynamics in various geographical contexts and academic disciplines (see Democratic Decay & Renewal (2019) for a comprehensive list).

Such critical inquiry into the discontents of state- and peacebuilding projects and of political ordering more generally is vital for an open debate on the nature of political regimes and the living conditions of the people of a given country. As the above-cited and other authors show, 'authoritarianism' has its merits as a concept to scrutinize the political and societal trajectories of countries subject to external intervention and support. Nevertheless, the concern of this work is that the framing around 'democratic' or 'authoritarian' forms of post-conflict or post-regime change transitions reflects an imaginary of ideal-type liberalism and democracy which requires more scrutiny and reflection. The continued predominance of the liberal imaginary in fact presents a paradox, insofar as the liberalism that is so often prescribed as a model for social, political and economic development has, in many ways, never existed in Western countries or anywhere else across the globe.

Scholars adopting the 'authoritarian' and 'illiberal' framings to analyse politics in the global periphery, however, brush over this fact (not infrequently without mentioning or reflecting on it) and thus, in the words of Natalie Koch, 'create moral geographies of the liberal and illiberal, the democratic and autocratic, the good and bad, which are inextricable from the actual conduct of geopolitics' (2019, p 912). Furthermore, '[b]y positioning authoritarianism as "Other" and [the West] as inherently morally superior, these narratives advance an Orientalist worldview, whereby authoritarian political configurations are portrayed as essentially foreign and "backward"' (2019, p 914). This critique creates an opening for research that views regressive, exclusionary and potentially violent social processes in the non-West in an equally critical manner, but with framings that avoid the orientalist and othering effects incurred by many analyses so far.

To offer an alternative to the simplistic and potentially orientalizing tendencies of scholarship on 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' forms of political order, this book departs from a critical reflection on Western liberalism and its illiberal undercurrents and a consideration of how non-liberal

or non-democratic forms of governance are co-produced by Western developed countries. It thus offers a new angle on the analytical and political challenge of authoritarian and illiberal forms of rule. While developed in detail through a perspective on the Kyrgyz Republic, the study is of significant value for understanding parallel developments in Central Asia, the post-Socialist space spanning from there to Eastern Europe and for 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' political regimes in global (semi-)peripheries more generally. In light of these debates, post-liberalism is presented as an alternative approach that helps avoid the orientalizing and othering effects that the moral geographies of 'liberal' versus 'illiberal', 'democratic' versus 'authoritarian' and other binary conceptions of global political space produce (N. Koch 2019, p 911).

The core argument of the book is that present 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' forms of governance – as well as other deviations from liberal democracy – can be better understood when seen as a part of a worldwide trajectory of post-liberal governance. The key point of this post-liberal approach is that national paths of development, policy making and social ordering more generally are not – and have rarely ever been – determined by free and collective decision making as envisaged in liberal political and economic theories. Three aspects form the basis for this argument and point to the decolonial stance that it is grounded in. First, from a political-economic point of view, the post-liberal approach captures the fact that national paths of development, reform and policy making, as well as political participation and collective decision making, are predetermined by international policy standards, economic wisdoms and conditionality regimes that enshrine principles of free, deregulated commodity and financial markets. This global regime, which David Chandler (2010) has called 'post-liberal governance', renders the adoption of neoliberal policies and liberal-democratic rhetoric less a political choice than a logical consequence of integration into the international community. This is especially the case for Central Asian and other 'young' states emerging from violent conflict or political rule, which undergo fundamental changes in 'democratic' transition processes that superimpose new, and often disembedded forms of collective decision making and economic management. Thus, globally reproduced forms of statehood, legal standards and frameworks of international integration and policy standardization effectively cultivate technocratic and top-down approaches to such an extent that democratic and participatory decision making become insufficient or completely ineffective. There are also meaningful practices and understandings of decision making and participation that emerge on the post-liberal plane beneath the democratic ideals of liberal advocates, as for instance Beyer's (2016) and Ismailbekova's (2017) work has indicated. Still, the fact that people engage in clan and patronage politics, including transgressions of

democratic rules, also illustrates the profound mismatch between political institutions in Central Asia and the kind of functions one would like to imagine for them (Ismailbekova, 2017).

The second iteration of the argument for a post-liberal approach is that what have been imagined as ideal-type liberal polities, institutions, practices and values in the Western, industrialized world, are to a significant extent built upon and still maintained by coercive, exclusionary and violent processes. This historical-institutional perspective emphasizes that the international economic cooperation and aid architecture that especially 'Western' states built up and continue to run is, in itself, only able to promote 'post-liberal' forms of politics and policy, which are liberal only in their stated intentions. This is most clearly demonstrated in what Bigo and Tsoukala have called 'illiberal practices of liberal regimes' (2008) in their analysis of Western counter-terrorism, interventionism and border regimes. The degree and scale of brutality that EU member states are ready to accept when it comes to policing borders has been documented on multiple occasions from 'push backs' on the Croatian border (Davies et al, 2018) to the drowning of people trying to cross the Mediterranean (Abdul Karim, 2020), to the 'state of emergency' measures curbing EU citizens' freedom of movement and working abroad (Manolova, 2020). The populist and xenophobic narratives dominating public discourses in Western states and the corresponding tendencies toward control, exclusion and violence in their policies bear testimony to the inherent authoritarian and nationalist potential of Western capitalist societies (see Nachtwey, 2018; Koch, 2018). An alternative political lens is needed to account for this inbuilt regressive and illiberal potential, and the post-liberal approach helps to grasp and unpack this trajectory of contemporary late-modern 'liberalism' – and the Central Eurasian region's place in it.

The third aspect of the post-liberal approach concerns the appropriation of ideas of emancipation and empowerment based on cultural values and welfare needs in building 'alternative' modes of governance and social ordering; a discursive and practical process that scholars in the West have largely ignored and started analytically grappling with only recently (Lottholz, 2018a, p 103). Especially the fact that the decades-long 'transition' toward a liberal-democratic capitalist order has not yielded tangible improvements in the lives of the majority of people in countries across formerly Socialist Eurasia has helped to back claims that these countries are in need of a special, context-sensitive model of development (Trevisani, 2014; Omelicheva, 2015, p 83). Therefore, the main implication of a post-liberal politics based on culture, and particularly on Central Asian culture's pronounced difference from 'the West', and welfare, whose provision through a liberal-capitalist model has proven elusive for the majority of Central Asian populations, is a rejection of Western norms, assistance and intervention (Omelicheva, 2015). The sentiment

foregrounding such reorientation after three decades of failed neoliberal reform is pertinently captured in the first introductory quote above, which points out how Kyrgyzstan's first president, Askar Akaev, under pressure from Western advisers, governmental and international institutions, led the country's well-developed economy to ruin.[3] Based on such experiences of organized economic collapse advanced by Western interests, and given the perceived need for different development models, the Central Asian variant of a peaceful and sustainable post-liberal development path thus seems geared toward transcending or replacing the different components of public debate and scientific discourse for more paternalistic and charismatic forms of politics. Correspondingly, practices of social ordering, mobilization and peacebuilding are not supposed to challenge these context-specific, and potentially exclusionary and subjugating forms of politics which therefore continue to be accepted as the idiosyncratic version of democracy and people's choice.

This points to the fact that debates on the usefulness and appropriateness of concepts such as democracy, authoritarianism and (il)liberalism are not confined to a clearly defined theoretical or analytical field. On the contrary, they are subject to potentially complex debates on the epistemology of political and social ordering, that is, how to understand and study it, as well as on its ontology, namely what constitutes politics in the first place. Similarly, anthropological and ethnographic studies on political change, social ordering, conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Central Asia (Beyer, 2016; Reeves, 2014) but also other contexts (Das and Poole, 2004; Spencer, 2007) have provided ample empirical insights into what 'real-life' and 'on-the-ground' politics look like and into the fact that they often evade categorizations as 'illiberal' or 'non-democratic' (Ismailbekova, 2017). It is a key concern of this study to bring these approaches into dialogue and extend their critical perspective in the empirical analysis of peacebuilding and community security practices. While focusing primarily on the Kyrgyz Republic, the discussion draws on cognate perspectives on neighbouring countries (see Carlson, 2013; Trevisani, 2014; Liu, 2014; Ibañez-Tirado, 2015), comparisons across Central Asia (Amsler, 2007; Omelicheva, 2015; Lewis, 2016; Kudaibergenova, 2016) and the wider post-Soviet and post-Socialist space (see Rabikowska, 2009; Peshkopia, 2010; Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015; Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017; Lottholz, 2019a) to demonstrate the relevance of the post-liberal approach beyond the primary case study. The next part of this Introduction outlines the key contributions

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[3]   Statement by Bakhtiiar Igamberdiev as part of a discussion on the occasion of Kyrgyzstan's 30th anniversary of national independence, 31 August 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=K62XMR_Vmbw

of the book and the new strands in peace, conflict and intervention studies that they help to advance.

Contributions to critical perspectives on peace, security and development

While situated in a specific context, this study offers important insights for other cases of 'liberal peace' interventions and assistance in post-Socialist and other regions globally. Most importantly, the book contributes to three research agendas that inquire international intervention and assistance processes from a decolonial angle, from a sociological perspective and from a practice-based standpoint, respectively. The book brings together these strands with scholarship on social ordering and transformation in Central Asia, Eurasia and peripheral regions globally in developing the post-liberal alternative to currently predominant perspectives on 'authoritarian' and 'illiberal' ordering.

The first, theoretical contribution lies in advancing the concept of post-liberalism and situating it within the emerging decolonial perspective on peace, conflict and security. The book provides a critique of existing debates on 'post-liberal' and 'hybrid forms of peace' as well as 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' forms of 'conflict management' by demonstrating how they are operating on the epistemological assumption that post-conflict countries are, or should be, evolving toward forms of modern statehood, liberal democracy and capitalist development. Drawing on foundational works in decolonial thought (see Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011) and its iterations in the field of peace- and statebuilding interventions (Turner and Kühn, 2016; Sabaratnam, 2017; Exo, 2017), the theoretical part (and specifically Chapter 2) develops a decolonial angle toward the idea of post-liberalism. It is thus argued that, contrary to the idea of post-liberal peace as a space of potential emancipation of the subjects of interventions from adverse and subjugating effects (see Richmond, 2011), a post-liberal approach needs to unpack the hegemonic nature of social order whereby identitarian and exclusionary practices, economic inequality and precarity, and historical forms of injustice, domination and colonization are brushed aside or silenced. The tracing of violence and subjugation in the creation of Kyrgyz modern statehood and ethnic identity (see Chapter 4), as well as its bearings on peacebuilding and security practices (Chapters 5–7) serves to problematize the predominant assumptions on statehood and development. It further orients the analysis of peacebuilding and community security practices toward the question as to whether and how these practices manage to take into account, and possibly reconcile, the different lifeworlds and livelihood situations of communities and, in particular, their division and stratification along socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, gender and other

markers. The analysis thus demonstrates how peacebuilding and security practices, while invoking the three imaginaries of social order, including 'Western liberal peace' ideas, also end up reproducing forms of hierarchy, order and subjugation that are embedded in recent neoliberal frameworks but also go back to Soviet and older, 'traditional' logics.

With this rethinking and re-embedding of social ordering in present-day global power formations and past legacies of domination, this study builds on and contributes to existing decolonial approaches in peace, conflict and intervention studies. Put briefly (see Chapter 2 and Kušić et al, 2019 for more detail), decolonial theory offers a more holistic perspective on the ramifications of the presence and history of violence, dispossession and exploitation in the modern capitalist system. This is captured in the term of 'modernity-coloniality' (Quijano, 2000; Mignolo, 2011), which expresses that while formally decolonized and having entered an era of electoral democracy and freedom, the modern capitalist system is built on and continues to sustain a high level of violence and lethal conflicts. Furthermore, the term 'coloniality of knowledge' (Mignolo and Escobar, 2013) helps to question and rethink accounts of world order and politics that sustain the idea that the world has made decisive progress toward peace and prosperity. Drawing on this framework, Turner and Kühn have demonstrated how intervention is often an act of 'policing of (colonial) differences globally' (2016, p 8) while Turner and Shweiki (2014) argue that Palestinians are 'experiencing a colonial matrix of dispossession, disenfranchisement and destruction in a world–historical period regarded to be post-colonial' (2014, p 3). In a similar vein, this research departs from the premise that the main goal from a decolonial standpoint is the repositioning of societies and people in a way that heals their 'colonial wound' (Sabaratnam, 2017, p 143), understood as a result of their classification 'as underdeveloped economically and mentally' (Mignolo, 2009, p 161; see also Anzaldúa, 1999, p 25) and corresponding subjection to policies of subjugation, dependency and exploitation.

The practice of enunciating the colonial nature of contemporary intervention processes and their interwovenness with global capital accumulation points to the second key point of decolonial thinking: the activity of recovering, making visible and potentially giving voice to the people, histories and standpoints which have been silenced in the modern–colonial global system (Mignolo and Escobar, 2013, p 46). Corresponding ideas of 'decolonising methodology' (Smith, 2008) and engaging with the lifeworlds and predicaments of people subject to intervention have been developed in Meera Sabaratnam's research that seeks to engage with Mozambicans' political consciousness and to investigate the country's historical presence and present-day material realities that they foreground (2017, pp 41–54). As Sabaratnam has indicated, decolonizing methodology also implies a critical reflection on how established practices of data

gathering, analysis, writing and knowledge production and dissemination fail to challenge dominant forms of intervention and therefore need to be overcome in favour of more dialogical and relational ways of producing knowledge. Mechthild Exo's research with women-led Afghani grassroots organizations demonstrated that this is possible, as her way of generating knowledge 'is based on the building up of respectful, reciprocal, caring, social and emotional relations' in which the scholar gives up the 'authority of scientific writing' and the 'privilege to have the last word' (2017, p 12).

This dialogical approach to knowledge production is a key take-away which has inspired and been further pursued in the present study. Building on and extending the above debates, I have developed and applied a cooperative and dialogical relation with interlocutors and participants in order to reveal their own understandings and practices of peace and ordering, rather than trying to fit them into pre-conceived frameworks. As I elaborate later, this approach, and especially the wider decolonial stance in which it is embedded, faced several contradictions, as regressive forms of peace, security and order – or patriarchal and otherwise hierarchical principles underpinning them – were often accepted or taken for granted as part of the different initiatives' attempts to go with the grain and try to achieve change in a longer run. The methodological move toward a dialogical approach thus serves to challenge and rethink existing accounts of state- and peacebuilding by highlighting – both from a decolonial, but also more pragmatically oriented perspective – the limitations and contradictions inherent in social ordering processes, as well as international efforts to support them. In this sense, it seeks to add to existing research on decolonial approaches in peace and conflict studies but is primarily interested in developing approaches that can help to better capture the global and hegemonic workings of colonial forms of violence and coercion, to which ideas about 'decolonizing peace' (see Fontan, 2012; Weerawardhana, 2019) are related more indirectly, if at all.

In contrast to these and the above works in peace and conflict studies (see also Rutazibwa, 2018), in this work I am not claiming the ambition to 'decolonize' peace and security in Kyrgyzstan, let alone the knowledge or necessary insights to realize such an agenda. Rather, by embracing an 'analytic of the coloniality of power' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p 10), I want to focus on a more modest contribution of trying to identify possibilities and potentialities of decolonial thought and action. Rather than presenting a fully developed reading of decolonial thought in the Central Asian context, this implies building upon such readings (for instance, Tlostanova, 2010, 2018; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012) in order to ask the right questions and develop a suitable way of doing research that helps to uncover the legacies and present-day effects of modern-colonial ordering, as well as any critical reflections and positions on it, in the analytical context of the study. This may inevitably lead some critics to regard this work as superficial, incomplete or

even extractive. However, in my view, it would be even more problematic to not engage with this way of thought that has shaped this project and my work at large. Following Mignolo and Walsh, I understand decoloniality not as a 'paradigm' (2018, p 5) with strict rules as to who can contribute to it and how, but 'as an option articulated in decolonial analytics of modernity/ coloniality' (2018, p 224) and as a way to think and work towards liberation from the colonial matrix of power.

The conceptual contribution of the book lies in introducing and applying the concept of 'social imaginary', which is understood as a mental construct structuring people's thoughts and actions. In the words of Charles Taylor, the social imaginary can be understood as 'intellectual scheme[s] people entertain when they think about social reality' and, beyond that, as capturing 'the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative images that underlie these expectations' (2004, p 23). Drawing on this and other key works in psychoanalytical and cultural theory (see Castoriadis, 1987), various publications have utilized this concept to capture complex social processes and their mediation through evolving media, communication and technological mechanisms (see Sneath et al, 2009; Valaskivi and Sumiala, 2014). Numerous publications, a new journal and book series attest to the concept's relevance for inquiring 'complexes of cultural meaning and cultural projects of power' as well as their (re)shaping in encounters with other cultures and civilizations (Social Imaginaries Editorial Collective, 2015, p 7; Adams and Smith, 2019).

I introduce the concept of 'social imaginary' and attendant methodological and epistemological innovations by, first, elaborating how various imaginaries can be conceived as existing beneath empirically observable practices and discourses which are, in turn, structured by imaginaries (Chapter 3). I then define three key imaginaries of social order in Kyrgyzstan on the basis of literature, public discourse and fieldwork data analysis: the 'Western liberal peace' (following Yurchak, 2006), 'politics of sovereignty' (based on Gullette and Heathershaw, 2015) and 'tradition and culture' (on the basis of anthropological research) (Chapter 4). These imaginaries and their interaction with peacebuilding and security practices, as well as contestation beneath the surface of these processes, build the basis for the analysis in the remainder of the empirical part (Chapters 5–7). With this focus on the discursive-semiotic dimension of peace- and statebuilding processes, the research offers a way beyond the impasse faced in peace, conflict and intervention studies, as well as security studies, where critical perspectives have confronted the failure of international actors and programmes to deliver intended results (see Mac Ginty, 2011; Millar, 2014) or the inherently regressive character of security policies and their outcomes (Neal, 2009; Soares de Oliveira, 2011).

This study goes beyond capturing such dynamics to show how they are also justified and normalized through the invocation of the three imaginaries of social order and underlying ideas of economic development, state sovereignty or preservation of culture and tradition. This adds to analyses of peace and security in Central Asia that have shown how people support and reaffirm hegemonic and potentially exclusionary – along lines of gender, ethnicity and religion/secularism – discourses of counter-terrorism (Lemon and Thibault, 2018), harmony and patriarchal society (Mostowlansky, 2013; Beyer, 2016) and illicit, criminal and potentially violent patterns of wealth accumulation (Ismailbekova, 2017).

The proposal to research 'imaginaries of social order' presents a new addition to innovative agendas in peace, conflict and intervention research along sociological lines. Such inquiry goes beyond a mere critique of liberal peacebuilding and gives more comprehensive insight into why and how situations of protracted conflict and negative forms of peace become entrenched. Volumes such as Berit Bliesemann de Guevara's *Statebuilding and State-Formation* (2012) or Bonacker et al's *Intervention Culture* (2010; see also Daho et al, 2019) represent nodal points in the synthesis between sociological and ethnographic approaches and the wider field of state- and peacebuilding intervention research. These contributions offer important insights into interveners' rationales, legitimizing discourses and the wider ideological and geopolitical visions foregrounding international intervention and assistance. On the other hand, many of them do not sufficiently account for the 'local' perspective on peace- and statebuilding, which is usually reflected in a number of press articles and selective interviews and thus implicitly understood as part of 'intervention society' (Distler, 2016). The dynamics of internalization or challenges and controversies around intervention and post-conflict ordering have thus largely remained underexplored and it could be argued that the prevalent focus on interveners in this literature is reflecting the very 'self-referentiality' of Western interventions initially critiqued by proponents of the sociology of international intervention themselves (Bliesemann de Guevara, 2012, pp 15–16). This bias needs to be balanced by inquiring into the legitimization and fortification of hegemonic forms of peace through discourses and practices in the domestic realms of the societies intervened upon (see Heathershaw, 2009; Sabaratnam, 2017). The present study aims to fill this gap by inquiring into the way in which concepts of peacebuilding and community security are received in Kyrgyzstani society, how they are made sense of and applied, and how this influences patterns of social ordering and statebuilding. While this approach does not completely dispense with the study of the roles and actions of international actors, it presents a standpoint, and perhaps epistemological shift, towards a – transnational, if not domestic – sociology of statebuilding, rather than a sociology of 'international intervention'. The study thus extends the scope

of sociological analyses of interventions and further adds to recent insights on intervention and assistance in peace and security matters, as explored in Kreikemeyer's special issue on 'Studying peace … from local and trans-local perspectives' (2020), and to research on security as experienced by people in Kyrgyzstan (see von Boemcken et al, 2020).

As the third introductory quote from a 2015 report by the UK-based NGO Saferworld illustrates, questions of peacebuilding, community security and crime prevention in Kyrgyzstan have proved to be strongly entwined with negotiations of participation of civil society and local populations in solving such questions. Furthermore, projects in this area have initiated learning on the part of authorities and administrations that fosters their 'understanding of the benefits of democratic and responsive services by working together with community security working groups', a process which is more successful if 'less serious issues' are addressed in the early stages of cooperation, allowing local working groups to develop 'the skills and confidence to tackle more complex issues later on' (Saferworld, 2015b, p 11). As I show in Chapter 5, while such confidence and capacity-building may indeed be valuable and a step in the right direction, the inability or unwillingness of local security working groups or Local Crime Prevention Centres to address conflict-related grievances or sources of insecurity can also be problematic in situations when there are no other mechanisms to address such issues. Thus, community security activities may serve to nurture the idea of social ordering through the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary, emphasizing local government cooperation with civil society and responsiveness to people's needs. At the same time, however, as was the case in one town examined, such activities can leave unchallenged local authorities' decisions and actions that mirror the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary and ethno-nationalist conceptions of order implied therein. Through this and other examples, the book unpacks the processes of community-level peace and security provision and scrutinizes them as to their post-liberal character, that is, as to how much official framings and statements about liberal-democratic and human rights standards are actually put into practice or are renegotiated, adapted and overridden by competing interests and visions of social, political and cultural order.

The third, methodological contribution of the book lies in the development and application of a cooperative and practice-based approach to fieldwork on peacebuilding and security practices in Kyrgyzstan. As indicated above, this approach builds upon previous attempts to rethink and reconfigure peace and conflict research and on discussions of methodology, positionality and knowledge production in decolonial scholarship. In trying to overcome the limitations of Western-centric and extractive research practice, I tried to recruit not just research participants but partners, and to engage these in a conversation over a longer period, instead of subjecting them to a one-off and short-term data-gathering exercise (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 104).

This approach helps to mitigate issues of safety both for the researcher and people participating in the research and, further, foregrounds closer and more in-depth access to the practices and lifeworlds of participants and partners and the processes in which they are involved (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 104; Lottholz and Kluczewska, 2017). While this attempt to rethink the methodological and wider epistemic nature of peace, conflict and intervention research has so far received limited resonance, the burgeoning debate on fieldwork in 'authoritarian' or otherwise adverse settings (see Rivas and Browne, 2019; Bliesemann de Guevara and Bøås, 2020) and Sabaratnam's and Exo's above-mentioned works attest to the significance of this approach.

With its grounding in practice theory and debates on collaborative and activist research (see Lottholz, 2018c), my approach was particularly careful not to impose questions, frameworks and terms of reference on research partners, but to engage with them on their own terms. This also implied conducting the research in Russian, which was the working language of most practitioners I talked to, and working with an interpreter from Kyrgyz to Russian in some cases. To ensure a two-way dialogue with research partner organizations, I was primarily interested in their views and understandings of work and the wider context and in accompanying (Ru.: *soprovozhdat*) their activities. In exchange for these insights, I offered to share my perspective in reports and analyses for internal use, but also articles and other publications that would describe my partners' work in an accessible language and thus help to raise their visibility. In this sense, I used a practice-based methodology which is focused on following practitioners in their respective field rather than relying on the accounts and representations they give in interviews (Graef, 2015, p 70). The second introductory quote exemplifies the vision of security of a civil society platform working toward alternative approaches to law enforcement reform, for whom 'Co-Security' means a form of security reflecting the needs and interests of people living in a given community and brought about and maintained in collaboration between them and law enforcement and public administration organs (Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' 2015, p 3). The detailed insights I gathered on the network members' different roles, practices and underlying rationales (see Chapter 7) demonstrate the advantage of the cooperative and dialogical approach to research that I developed throughout the project.

This approach thus foregrounds a decisive analytical and practical innovation in peace, conflict and intervention studies. As practice theorists in social sciences (see Reckwitz, 2002) and International Relations (IR) (Williams, 2007; Adler and Pouliot, 2011) have been arguing, it may not be so much actors and their 'agency' who are decisive for our understanding of international intervention and assistance processes (and their failures and shortcomings), but much more the practices, routines and forms of knowledge through which order is made and unmade. Büger and Gadinger

(2014) discuss how practice theory takes up the idea of studying the situation of specific people and communities in order to show how their lifeworlds, daily routines and professional practices lead them to act in the way they do. This presents a systematized inquiry and theoretical consolidation of the sociological study of intervention reviewed above. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, capital and *doxa* (that is, taken-for-granted, normalized forms of expert and lay knowledge) provide the basic tools for practice-theoretical research (Adler-Nissen, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977). The aim of the latter, as Büger and Gadinger (2014, p 4) point out, 'is not to reduce and present abstract explanations of social phenomena' but to 'come to deeper understanding of how the world works in and through practices'. Practices are thus understood as a vehicle through which knowledge is constituted and reproduced, making practice-based inquiry a *via media* between theories emphasizing technologies and structures of government and hierarchy (as conceptualized by Marx and Foucault) and, on the other hand, conceptions of social order and ways of life as something inborn, situated within people's brains and therefore hardly changeable (as understood by Weber, Schütz or Leví-Strauss) (Büger and Gadinger, 2015, p 451; Reckwitz, 2002). While building on these arguments and their applications in peace- and statebuilding literature (Graef, 2015; *JISB*, 2015; Visoka, 2016), this book adds to practice-theoretical research by situating this approach in long-term fieldwork and post-fieldwork correspondence with research partners, which practice theorists have often minded in favour of more selective, elite- and technology-focused empirical engagement.

Although practice-theoretical research may still be remote from decolonial thought, similar concerns have been stressed in Walsh's proposal to conceive of 'decoloniality in/as praxis', understood as 'continuous work to plant and grow an otherwise despite and in the borders, margins, and cracks of the modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal order' (Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p 101; see also Mignolo, 2011, p 292; Yehia, 2007). Correspondingly, the aim of this work is to trace and reveal how modern-colonial forms of ordering can be seen to play out in present-day peacebuilding and security practices, and whether and how the people involved in or affected by such practices demonstrate reflections and potentials to reimagine and reconfigure them in ways that overcome the coloniality of power.

Together with these three core contributions, the book provides a detailed empirical analysis of community security and peacebuilding discourses and practices in southern Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of violent inter-communal clashes in 2010. Drawing on ethnographic observations and both primary and secondary material such as programme documentation, public discourse and media coverage, the study demonstrates the significance but also ambivalent implications of community-level initiatives for peacebuilding and public security. The examination of three case studies foregrounds the core

argument that peace and security practices are associated with a multiplicity of meanings and wider implications as to what a social order should look like. Thus, artistic competitions, cultural festivals or the creation of new infrastructure can be interpreted as expressions of support for democracy and human rights by some, and as paying tribute to traditions and culture by others, while yet others may perceive them to strengthen understandings of the sovereignty of the state from both internal and external challenges and interference. This multiplicity of meaning attributed to peacebuilding and security practices implies that all three imaginaries of social ordering – the 'Western liberal peace', 'politics of sovereignty' and 'tradition and culture' – become invoked, affirmed and reproduced as legitimate and representative understanding of the social order that is being built in Kyrgyzstan. Given that this social order coexists with unmitigated forms of subjugation and violence – whether vis-à-vis ethnic minority-victims of the 2010 conflict, girls and women suffering from domestic or gender-based violence, or youth and other vulnerable groups deprived of basic care and support – notwithstanding its claims to bring about a democratic, human rights–abiding and emancipatory form of peace, I argue that it has to be called a post-liberal form of social ordering. This analysis also points to a significant spatial component through which imaginaries of social order are operating: the invocation of imaginaries and their enactment through different measures, events, material reconfigurations or simply statements try to recast certain spaces, such as city districts, entire communities or the nation state at large, by making perceptions of them or actual experiences within them more secure, peaceful or 'liberal'. As this study shows, rather than taking these various attempts of space-making at face value, the most analytically productive way to conceptualize the spaces emerging from peacebuilding and security practices in Kyrgyzstan is to conceive of them as 'post-liberal' and to unpack the multiplicity of meanings and effects they produce.

This argument extends critical perspectives on post-liberal forms of peace- and statebuilding (Chandler, 2010; Chandler in Chandler and Richmond, 2015; Graef, 2015) as it shows how forms of governmentality that permit or even reaffirm stratification, coercion and violence constantly coexist with the positive effects and implications of peacebuilding and security practices. Rather than resting the case with this critical perspective, however, the study also indicates how various individuals and actors are aware of these inbuilt regressive potentials and the registers of modern nation-building, statehood and capitalist market development that foreground them. The analysis does not provide concrete practical solutions, but indicates how this awareness and readiness to work further on the limitations of peacebuilding and security practices presents a first step toward inclusionary and representative forms of peace. The societal dialogue, solidarity and mobilization for socio-political engagement uncovered in the three case studies present ways past

the limitations of peace and security practice and are thus offered as key themes that further research in this area should pursue.

Outline of the book

The book is divided into a first part, which sets out the theoretical argument and methodological approach in more detail, while the second part presents four analytical chapters. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical contribution of the monograph in four steps: first, I provide a reading of post-liberal thought in historical perspectives on the imperial nature of liberal thought, in political theory and philosophy and in critical (and historical) security studies perspectives, all of which exhibit the violent and coercive nature of liberal political thought and practice and, in some instances, advocate for a post-liberal approach to study contemporary governance and ordering. Second, I discuss how the failures and transmutations of liberalism since the end of the Cold War have not only been exhibited in the non-West but also in the West itself, where the violent, coercive and identitarian tendencies of both political systems and wider social forces point to the need to rethink the application and scope of 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' framings in social inquiry. In a third step, I set out the post-liberal approach of the book by developing the governmentality-focused conception proposed by David Chandler into a lens that seeks to inquire, make visible and possibly transform violent forms of peace and order through a decolonial angle. The fourth section then traces the paradox of liberal ordering and corresponding need for a post-liberal approach in the field of community security to foreground prevalent analytical dilemmas identified by cognate literature.

Chapter 3 develops the analytical approach through which the study realizes its decolonial, dialogical and practice-based endeavour. It does so by developing the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* in the context of social ordering, where it can help to capture and analyse the multiplicity of meanings that coexist and inevitably shape the social world. The chapter further develops the concept of the social imaginary based on the works of Cornelius Castoriadis, Charles Taylor and others. I show how social imaginaries can help to analyse meaning and understandings that are not explicitly observable but nevertheless can help better understand social ordering processes and their outcomes. Finally, I present the dialogical and practice-based approach in further detail to demonstrate how it helped me to navigate issues with access and safety during fieldwork, and helped to uncover the role of social imaginaries in peacebuilding and community security practices. This part also includes critical reflections on the limitations and barriers I nevertheless faced and the implications of these for this and future research.

The second, analytical part of the monograph is opened by Chapter 4, which maps out the imaginaries of social order identified in this study. A brief initial reflection on the country's history since independence in 1991 and the social, political and economic challenges it has faced since then is carried forward and deepened in the discussion of the three dominant imaginaries of social order, which serves to show how these imaginaries have been historically formed, consolidated, normalized, but also contested. I discuss the three imaginaries – the 'Western liberal peace', 'Politics of sovereignty' and 'Tradition and culture' – and the four key discourses which can be seen to constitute each of them. The sections also draw attention to the contestations and complementarities between different composite discourses to orientate the reader as to how they can play out in social reality. In the final section, I provide further detail on how the interplay between different imaginaries, discourses and associated practices of peace- and statebuilding produce post-liberal, rather than 'liberal' or 'illiberal' forms of order and give an overview on how the case studies in the following chapters are situated within and vis-à-vis the three imaginaries of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter 5 introduces the reader into the field of community security in Kyrgyzstan and the first case study on Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPCs). To elucidate the conditions and constraints under which these bodies operate, the first section presents a sketch of life in rural and semi-urban areas in Kyrgyzstan and surveys the challenges to peace and security which the market transition and associated forms of migration-based livelihoods and informality are foregrounding. The second section presents a mapping of the local government structure and community-level social institutions as well as their role in helping to maintain a minimum level of stability, order and service provision. Against this background, I discuss the establishment of LCPCs as a node between executive and law enforcement authorities, local populations and social institutions, as well as NGOs and international donors. In the third section, I analyse peacebuilding and community security practices of LCPCs in various municipalities in southern Kyrgyzstan and scrutinize the selective, future-oriented and often performative approach whereby the imaginary of 'politics of sovereignty' remains unchallenged and liberal ideals of peace and order are recast into a post-liberal governmentality. Examining the peacebuilding measures that an LCPC in Bazar-Korgon carried out with reference to the Soviet-era discourse of 'peoples' friendship' (*druzhba narodov*), I show how the events and infrastructural changes carried out under this theme capture the popular desire for peace and unity in Kyrgyzstan, but at the same time leave experiences of injustice and suffering during the 2010 conflict as well as ongoing related grievances unaddressed.

Chapter 6 turns to an entity whose creation and capacitation, similar to LCPCs, has been initiated by local NGOs and supported by the Organisation for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE) Centre in Kyrgyzstan, but

which, apart from being aligned with executive and government agendas, also points more explicitly to the necessity of raising and addressing the needs of people by more systematic, national-level policy and institutional changes. The chapter starts by describing how this structure, the Territorial Youth Councils (TYCs) were created as bodies for conflict prevention, peace- and tolerance-building in the aftermath of the 2010 clashes in and around Osh and other cities in the region. The following analysis demonstrates how TYCs aim to address conflict-related and more general socioeconomic issues through different strategies ranging from solidarity and charity to self-help and entrepreneurial approaches that propagate resilience and adaptation while normalizing the neoliberal market economy. I further show how this alignment with the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary coexists with positioning in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary, as TYCs engage in events and practices that affirm Kyrgyzstan's national ideology and national elites' ambiguous, if not cultural-assimilationist, positioning vis-à-vis ethnic minorities in the country. Moving beyond the TYCs into the realm of national-level youth policy making and participation, I indicate the lack of systematic approaches on the part of state authorities amid a reliance on NGOs and international funding, which I argue is another example of the post-liberal constellation of policy and order-making that works from the national down to the community level.

The analytical thread on the alignment and divergence of state and non- or sub-state actors' interests is carried forward in Chapter 7, which analyses the evolution and impact of the NGO network Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result'. After situating the aspect of law enforcement reform in questions of peace and security, the first section surveys the creation of the 'Civic Union' and its challenge to the authorities' approach of reducing reform to capacity-building measures and mere renaming and restructuring exercises. Next, I map out how the network's activists faced a relative impasse in trying to affect policy change and were thus required to gather and demonstrate their 'expert' status to inform public debate and opinions more effectively. The analysis draws on fieldwork experiences to analyse the Civic Union's implementation of its 'cooperative security' or 'Co-Security' approach in piloting communities, which points to a general success of the network in bringing about more inclusionary and representative forms of security, even if some hierarchies and exclusions persist. Finally, I analyse the network's knowledge-production practices, including publication of research and commentary to demonstrate the importance and effectivity of cooperative security provision, and trace how the gradual changes in authorities' approaches that they achieved were slowly reversed by the recent re-monopolization of the police reform process and public policy more generally in a deepening authoritarian trajectory. This morphing of a post-liberal into a more clearly anti-liberal trajectory is then linked back to the book's

overall argument about the regressive nature of the results and long-term trajectories of 'liberal peace'-style peace- and statebuilding interventions.

The concluding chapter draws together the insights from the three empirical chapters and consolidates the monograph's argument on post-liberal statebuilding in Central Asia, as well as its relevance beyond this context. It first recapitulates and links the insights on practices and discourses of peacebuilding and community security in the three preceding empirical chapters to the overall framework and the imaginaries of social order identified in Chapter 4. This discussion also addresses the different forms and degrees of alignment, cooperation and contestation of actors and initiatives with executive and government authorities, and further extrapolates the positions and strategic choices of these actors; the possibilities and constraints that actors face in attempting to reconfigure and redefine the authority, obligations and competencies of state actors and institutions; the selective absence and withdrawal of the state, combined with claims to power of interpretation of particular events by state authorities (as captured in the invocations of the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary) and the corresponding argument that the country, and in different ways its neighbours as well, is on a post-liberal trajectory of order-making and statebuilding. I further reiterate the implications of this argument for the literature on 'illiberal', 'authoritarian' and other non-democratic forms of political order in Central Asia and beyond, as well as debates on peace- and statebuilding interventions. By surveying existing, and identifying new, potentials of dialogue with this literature and other debates beyond it, I consolidate the case made for a differentiated discussion on the post-liberal character of the contemporary politics and future pathways of statebuilding.

Theorizing Post-Liberal Forms of Statebuilding and Order-Making Globally

Introduction

The global resurgence of illiberal and undemocratic rule has spurred a significant growth of scholarship studying these dynamics in various geographical contexts and academic disciplines. This body of thought has made important contributions to critical thinking and action against regressive political forces that have become established in Eastern Europe, Eurasia and globally. Yet, regressive and illiberal tendencies have become increasingly visible in the political mainstream, institutions and everyday experiences in societies that have been regarded as exemplary liberal democracies, as well. This casts significant doubt on the idea that illiberal practices and forms of ordering are merely temporary side effects of democratic transitions in the non-West. On the contrary, scholars from Max Weber to, perhaps most famously, the Frankfurt School of critical theory, remind us that dictatorial tendencies and charismatic logics of legitimacy and leadership are, after all, an inherent feature of modern politics. More importantly, decolonial scholars such as Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2011) and their intellectual forebears (for example Williams, 1944; Fanon, 1961) have unpacked the violent and coercive character of modern capitalism and the liberal-democratic form of politics that merely serves to mask its true colonial essence. This line of thought foregrounds an approach of critical thinking about illiberal forms of politics – as well as corresponding terms of authoritarianism, patrimonialism and other deficiencies of political regimes. Such critical thinking, I argue, should prompt scholars to reconsider the conceptual apparatus, terminology and methodological and wider ramifications of their research in order to better grasp the complex processes of political change occurring in today's world.

   This chapter presents a post–liberal approach to studying political and social processes which is offered as an alternative to currently prevailing framings on the 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' nature of political orders in the non–West. This idea is developed from arguments and analyses in literatures in political science, philosophy and security studies, research on political change after conflict and violent rule, as well as conversations on post–liberal peace and decolonial approaches in peace, conflict and security studies. While the chapter presents a necessarily selective reading of this wide range of disciplines and intellectual traditions, I chose to maintain this breadth in order to highlight the resonances and commonalities of these diverse bodies of thought and research that require more dialogue and synthesis with one another.

   As already stated in the Introduction, the proposal of a post–liberal approach is by no means intended to downplay the forms of violence, exclusion and marginalization observable in the contexts analysed in this work or elsewhere. On the contrary, it seeks to exhibit these with equally accurate analysis and methods. The main difference between a post–liberal approach and analyses with an 'illiberal' or 'authoritarian' framing is that a post–liberal approach seeks to exhibit the conceptual slippage and reinterpretation, or reappropriation, whereby forms of ordering and maintaining peace and security that do not conform to liberal and democratic standards can, nevertheless, still be claimed to do so. In this sense, I offer post–liberal order as a term to describe situations where people, organizations and governments may claim that certain practices, repertoires and concepts are liberal–democratic according to a culturally or otherwise specific interpretation that is based on particular perspectives and experiences, while for some other actors or entities in the same context they may produce negative experiences and outcomes that make them disagree with such a labelling. A post–liberal lens seeks to grasp and unpack these multiple opinions and experiences and their contestation within statebuilding and social ordering processes. Both in the non–West, but increasingly so in the West as well, the main implication of post–liberal politics has been the limited acceptance or even rejection of liberal norms, practice and policy based on culture, and particularly non–Western cultures' pronounced difference from 'the West', and welfare – the provision of which has proved elusive for the majority of populations in the non–industrialized world. The empirical analysis foregrounded by this post–liberal lens is developed in Chapter 3 through the concepts of *heteroglossia* and social imaginary, while the empirical part will show how forms of social ordering and statebuilding in Central Asia are post–liberal rather than illiberal. Meanwhile, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the post–liberal approach is relevant for capturing dynamics beyond the Central Asian and post–Socialist space, that is, for understanding and theorizing post–liberal ordering globally. The discussion also points to

political–economic and historical–institutional renderings of the argument for a post–liberal approach, which imply that free market economics and liberal–democratic politics, as well as the sets of policy prescriptions they entail, are not suitable for dealing with present-day challenges (see Lottholz, 2019a).

The chapter continues by first tracing post-liberal thought in the history of empire and liberal thought, political theory and philosophy and critical (and historical) security studies. In the second section, I review how the failures and transmutations of liberalism have become apparent in liberal interventionism broadly defined, ranging from post-war UN-led peacebuilding interventions to democratization, development and security assistance provided globally and across Eurasia more specifically. I also show how critical peacebuilding literature – including perspectives on post-Socialist Eurasia – has not substantially overcome the 'paradox of liberalism' and indicate how a critical examination of the inherent contradictions and regressive tendencies of liberalism and the capitalist system more broadly in the West offers a more fruitful way forward therefrom. In the third section, I develop a decolonial perspective in relation to recent conversations on post-liberalism and the potentialities of emancipation and governmentality in peace, conflict and intervention studies. Finally, I situate the field of 'community security' within the paradox of liberal ordering and vis-à-vis peace- and statebuilding interventions. I outline how discourses and policies in this domain have exhibited the same regressive and exclusionary tendencies as liberal interventions and political ordering throughout history.

Post–liberal thought from imperial history to the present

Following the end of the Cold War and with renewed force in the post-9/11 'war on terror' and post-2008 financial crisis, a surge in literature can be found that critiques liberal political thought from both within and without. While not all of these debates explicitly use a 'post-liberal' framing, I will show how the arguments they offer are formative for the post-liberal agenda which has a long tradition within political studies and have received much attention in peace and conflict studies, as shown in the next section.

Historical studies and history of thought provide a rich repository of critical thinking about liberalism and its critiques. Especially informative are works on the history of empire which largely deal with the British and Anglo-American context (see Mehta, 1999; Muthu, 2012) but also have counterparts in continental European history (see Stoler, 2016) and in global historical perspectives in sociology (Bhambra, 2014; Go and Lawson, 2017) and IR (Hobson, 2012; Vitalis, 2015). These works strongly resonate with decolonial writings on the devastating fallout of colonial invasions in the name of liberalism (see Smith, 2008, pp 58, 66ff;

Mignolo 2011, pp xvff; Mignolo and Escobar, 2013, pp 391ff), but focus more on the inner contradiction of liberalism against this background. A key work at this intersection is Duncan Bell's *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (2016). As Bell illustrates, there were numerous strands and approaches to liberalism in 19th-century imperial Britain, ranging from early liberals such as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer to 'new' and more critical thinkers like John A. Hobson and Leonard T. Hobhouse. While these differed in their philosophical foundations and policy prescriptions, Bell bases his categorization on the fact that 'all shared a commitment to individual liberty, constitutional government, the rule of law, the ethical significance of nationality, a capitalist political economy, and belief in the possibility of moral and political progress' (2016, p 5). The imperial critique of these liberalisms, then, is foregrounded by their endorsing attitudes to empire as 'few rejected all its forms, and most … endorsed the formation of settler colonies' (Bell, 2016, p 6) even in the case of later-day liberals (pp 355ff). The most significant insight offered by Bell is the transmutation and shapeshifting of liberalism between the mid-19th and mid-20th century:

> For most of the nineteenth century, liberalism was commonly viewed as a product of late eighteenth-century revolutionary turmoil, but it was reimagined during the opening decades of the twentieth century, its origins pushed further back in time and its scope expanded massively, such that it came to be seen as the overarching ideology of Western modernity. This transmutation was profoundly influenced by the wars fought against 'totalitarianism,' both hot and cold. (Bell, 2016, p 9)

The profound reimagination of liberalism is further elucidated in James Traub's analysis which argues that after the Second World War, liberalism became the American 'chief export' as the 'dream of a liberal world order' had been carried forward from Woodrow Wilson's initial proposal in the First World War to Franklin D. Roosevelt's securing of American influence through the building of a new transatlantic order (Traub, 2014, pp 225–30).

In a similar vein to Bell's work, Domenico Losurdo's *Liberalism: A Counter History* traces the 'paradox of liberalism' (2011, p 27) that is apparent in liberal thinkers' and politicians' complicity with, or support and practice of, slavery and colonial expansion. Losurdo also surveys the lineage that historians have traced from 19th- to 20th-century totalitarianism, captured in their analyses of the 'American Holocaust' (targeting the Amerindians), the 'Australian Holocaust' (on the Aboriginals) or the 'late Victorian Holocaust' in colonial India (2011, p 338). While not dismissing the liberal intellectual tradition in full, Losurdo stresses the need to keep unpacking the dialectic of liberal thought, that is the coexistence of personal freedom

as the highest good with enslavement as a legitimate means to maintain it (2011, p 343), and concludes that the 'tragedy of peoples subjected to slavery or semi-slavery, or deported, decimated and destroyed' was one which, 'far from being impeded or prevented by the liberal world, developed in close connection with it' (2011, p 344). This is a crucial point when considering present-day illiberal entanglements of liberal regimes. While international interventionism spearheaded by the US has thus been couched in a language about bringing 'democracy' and 'freedom' from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush, it is abundantly clear that 'political, economic and geostrategic interests of western states' (Chandler, 2010, p 22) have usually been at the heart of the actions, ranging from military interference to development cooperation. The entwinement of ambitions of liberation with imperial dominance and exploitation, which might seem paradoxical to some and strategic to others, thus appears to span the entire history of liberal thought and policy.

While the Cold War itself would seem, from today's retrospective, to have been a time of political and conceptual closure, that era saw its own critical considerations of liberalism and its political practice, such as Macpherson's proposal of a 'post-liberal-democracy' (1964; see also Moody, 1983). This idea has been articulated into a line of post-liberal thought by John Gray, who is arguably the foremost thinker in political philosophy and political science. Gray's essays and monographs have controversially engaged with both philosophical, policy and practical aspects of liberalism, and further tackled the 'end of history' determinism rapidly acquiring hegemonic status in the wake of the fall of Socialist regimes in 1989. In his key work *Post-Liberalism: Studies in Political Thought* (1993), Gray defines the post-liberal position as one which 'rejects the foundationalist claims of fundamentalist liberalism' (p 284), which would wrongly confer 'liberal orders [a] universal or apodictic authority' (p 284) while ignoring the fact that 'liberal society … in the end [is] only one of many orders in which humans may flourish' (p 243). Gray decidedly rejects a teleological notion of liberalism in favour of one that appreciates the historicity, contingency and particularity of liberalism and sees it as 'feature[s] of late modern societies and polities' (pp 284, 259), while appreciating 'the narrower, but more substantial standpoints of real human beings in all their quiddities and miscellaneity' (p 259). This particularist approach is very clear that, if we accept that there is no 'apodictic supremacy' of liberal over other forms of political and social organization, then we cannot 'suppose that there is, or could be, any single measuring rod, on which the merits of different cultures or epochs' – and the respective forms of social organization they have developed – 'could be ranked' (1993, p 325). Gray anchors this approach in the political philosophy of Isaiah Berlin, which espouses a non-teleological understanding of history (1993, p 292) and value pluralism footed on the incommensurability of

values and virtues as in Heideggerian plural realism or perspectivism, which permits 'many true answers to the question, "What is real?"' (Dreyfus 1991, pp 261–2, quoted in Gray, 1993, p 296). This approach, according to which 'no single perspective is the right one' and 'no form of good life can be final or uniquely rational or natural' stands in stark contrast to the naturalist epistemology of ethics (Gray, 1993, pp 312–13) of John Stuart Mill and later-day liberal theorists such as Dworkin and Rawls, whose 'prescriptive doctrine' Gray declares 'dead' (p 314) in both intellectual terms and as a political project (pp 260ff). Gray's value pluralist approach provides conceptual grounding for attempts across the social sciences and humanities to capture the diversity and substantive differences in people's worldviews and understandings of human existence, in other words people's ontologies, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

In a parallel and more leftist project compared to Gray's, Susan Golding has situated post-liberal thought along the lines of Laclau and Mouffe's radical democratic theory and through a reading of Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*. Golding identifies the key problem in the fact that

> liberal–democratic theory could not successfully come to terms with what had been identified as one of the most fundamental prerequisites of a liberal–democratic state, namely, the creating and maintaining of a progressive society-state, that would be constituted by, and represent in all its diversity, the will of 'the people' and their fundamental equal right to creative self-development. (Golding, 1992, p 3)

She traces this problem back to early liberal thinkers such as Locke and Hobbes, who not only foresaw the creation of all people as equal in their universalist conception of human nature, but also predicted that as part of the competition in 'a society rooted in the scarcity of goods . . . inevitably some of the people might take, given their insatiable "appetites", more than their due and possibly, in so taking, prevent others from getting anything at all' (Golding, 1992, p 5). Early liberals then, as argued by Golding, understood the resulting 'cruelty of sociality' emanating from such a mode of production, characterized by 'disparities', 'meanness, exploitation, [and] alienation', as 'merely a reflection of the general nature of the [transhistorical] human condition' (1992, p 5), which could be all but mitigated by a social contract that enshrined the 'withdrawal from the [yet more anarchic] state of nature' and 'obligation to the sovereign state and a concomitant acceptance of inequality as the price for […] security and freedom' (1992, p 6). As a way past the forms of exclusion, inequality and coercion in the late liberal–capitalist system already foreseen in early liberal thought, Golding offers Gramsci's pragmatist philosophy as a way to 'articulate a post-liberal-democratic theory, one that can "retrieve"

the best parts of the liberal–democratic tradition and focus them on the context of a socialist discourse' (1992, p 4).

These critical counter perspectives to the hegemony of liberal universalism and the 'end of history' proclaimed by Fukuyama (see Lottholz 2017a, pp 19ff for further discussion), which were developed further in other works (see Gray, 1989, 2000) was picked up and carried forward by other political scientists (see Talisse, 2005) to foreground critical thinking on political ordering processes in international intervention dynamics and IR more generally. A widely known reprise to Gray's thought was Philipp Schmitter's guess that next to '*more liberal*' variants – with liberal principles extended further – and 'pre-liberal' ones – that is, a more traditional civic republican variant – a new development path of democracies could be a 'postliberal' one, which would see 'invention of novel, even unprecedented, forms of representation and accountability' to accommodate challenges of collective decision making in increasingly complex circumstances in economic and other policy fields (Schmitter, 1995, p 18). Discussion of post-liberal thought has received renewed attention in recent years, with some authors building on earlier work by Gray and Golding (see Milbank and Pabst, 2016) and others proposing the framing without grounding in previous work (Scholte, 2020). Meanwhile, this debate subsided between the mid-1990s and late 2000s and was only revisited in the wake of renewed global crises.

Important to mention in this regard are conversations about the aspect of economic liberalism under the label of 'postneoliberalism'. Thus, Ulrich Brand and Nicola Sekler (2009b, p 6) proposed that postneoliberalism be considered 'as a perspective on social, political and/or economic transformations' brought about by actors who in one way or other 'break with some specific aspect of "neoliberalism" and embrace different aspects of a possible postneoliberalism'. Mostly inspired by the experience of more labour-friendly and inclusive economic and social policies in Latin America (see contributions by Sader and Gago and by Sztulwark in Brand and Sekler, 2009a), this discussion pointed to possible forms of alternative social organization, participation and resilience on the community level (see especially Sekler's and Wichterich's contributions). On the other hand, Sekler's and Ceceña's contributions also cautioned that the particularity, fragmentation and 'plurality of approaches' of lower-scale social actors foregrounds a 'weakness in their capacity to change dominant power relations' (Brand and Sekler, 2009b, p 8; see Buckel et al, 2010 for a similar concern). The rejection of neoliberal austerity and related policies by Latin American social movements and political leaders has inspired a by now comprehensive body of post-(neo-)liberal thought which has also fed into debates in peace and conflict studies (see Wolff, 2015, pp 280–1).

Another strand of literature which contributed significantly to the critique of liberalism has emerged in critical studies of security in the wake

of the global 'war on terror' since 9/11. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq posed a puzzle to democratic peace theory or appeared to reveal a 'dark side' to this idea, which Geis et al's collection (2006) unpacked to show how, in Rengger's words, and in resonance with critical perspectives from the history of liberal thought mentioned above, 'the liberal democratic peace thesis … represents … an error common in the history of European political thought' (Rengger, 2006, p 138). Andrew Neal's examination of US counter-terrorism policies further revealed the paradox that, on the one hand, 'the need to defend the liberal subject as a historical achievement is taken as a central principle of Western politics' (Neal, 2009, p 2), while, on the other, this very idea of liberty and freedom is 'immediately at stake in contemporary practices of violence, illiberality and exceptionalism' (p 28) ranging from military intervention to detention and interrogation centres like the one in Guantanamo Bay. Dillon and Reid's *The Liberal Way of War* (2009) sharpened the line of thought on the emerging 'politics of security' and its 'state of emergency' logic. Theorized through the works of Giorgio Agamben and Carl Schmitt (see also Huysmans, 2006; Williams, 2007; Neal, 2009) they argued that 'the liberal way of rule … is as much shaped by its commitment to war' as by a 'continuous state of emergency and security as well as constant preparedness for war' (Dillon and Reid, 2009, p 8).

This securitarian critique of liberalism can be traced back to the Cold War through accounts of historians of security. In a much-acclaimed essay, Johannes Voelz has pointed out how in the late 1940s 'liberal intellectuals tended to be conflicted about "security"' because of the 'excess of rationality and control' – best captured with Weber's iron cage metaphor – that ensuring security entailed (2014, p 255). Tracing the gradual co-optation and overcoming of this scepticism, Voelz argues that liberals' 'rituals of consent to a set of "American" values … simultaneously created the space for the U.S. state to systematically act out imperial violence that grossly contradicted what America purportedly stood for' (2014, p 255). Adding to this debate, Timothy Melley argued that the 'state of exception', that is the strategy of defending liberty 'through the suspension of liberty … finds haunting every democracy' and has become a key feature of the 'liberal imaginary' (2015, p 150). Focusing on the abounding consumption of apocalyptic movies and other cultural genres, he observes:

> [The] strange fact—that contemporary democracy increasingly imagines, plans, and even rehearses its own destruction—is but one reflection of the growing contradiction at the heart of contemporary life. On the one hand, modern liberal societies laud the ideals of participatory democracy, free speech, individual liberty, and governmental transparency. On the other, they grow ever more committed to the biopolitical regulation of life, the mitigation of

threats to public health and safety, and the restriction of liberties as a way of securing liberty itself. (Melley, 2015, p 150)

The critique of liberalism put forward by critical (and historical) security studies with a particular Foucauldian grounding (see Foucault, 2008; Dillon and Reid, 2009; Neal, 2009) is thus centred on the paradox that 'security constitutes both liberalism's ultimate legitimation of power and a distinctly liberal technology of rule' (Voelz, 2015, p 23). While other debates such as those on liberal multiculturalism (see for example, Gilroy, 2004; Wade, 2016; Stoler, 2016) and migration (see below) or late settler colonial rule (see Povinelli, 2016) cannot be given justice within this discussion, the liberal dialectic between freedom and control, inclusion versus exclusion and life versus death is apparent in them too, so that they add to the picture of the contradictory condition and elusiveness of contemporary Western liberalism.

The debates reviewed above, and probably more so the decline of liberal–democratic politics in Western societies, have sparked critical reflections and reconsiderations of liberalism in more mainstream circles too, as exemplified in James Traub's *What Was Liberalism? The Past, Present, and Promise of a Noble Idea* (2019) and, perhaps most widely received, Francis Fukuyama's reconsideration of the liberal hubris of his 'end of history' thesis in *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (2018). Yet, while this post-liberal discourse has taken shape, the next section shows that it has only been slowly received in scholarly debates on political change after conflict and violent rule.

The failures and transmutations of 'liberalism' in the non–West … and the West

Notwithstanding its apparent discontents and contradictions, the breakdown of the Soviet Union and other Socialist regimes in Eurasia elevated liberal ideology and policy programming to the ostensible guiding principle of Western–led world order in the 1990s onwards. Liberalism has thus come to inform attempts to reshape political regimes, entire social systems, and, more importantly for this argument, approaches to international peace-and statebuilding interventions in the aftermath of large-scale conflict. The new dominance of the liberal model also, inevitably, gave new significance to critique vis-à-vis liberal universalist thinking and corresponding policy and institutional prescriptions. More or less in parallel with the genealogy of post-liberal thought outlined above, this critique of the failures and transmutations of 'liberalism' in the non–West played out in the literature analysing international intervention, cooperation and assistance, such as peace and conflict studies, comparative politics and IR.

Within intervention studies, a key concept shaping the discourses of the 1990s and 2000s was that of 'state fragility', which foreign policy scholars Helman and Ratner (1992) identified as crucial factors when it comes to avoiding large-scale conflict and genocide. As the logical counterpart, Francis Fukuyama and other scholars-turned-policy-advisers proposed 'state capacity' as the key factor for rebuilding, stabilizing and consolidating post-conflict countries (2004; see also Rotberg, 2004), even if it meant that certain standards, such as the rule of law and democratic elections, had to be established and defended with military force before a further degree of political liberalization was allowed (Paris, 2004). This institutionalist approach to political ordering via top-down 'statebuilding' (Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert, 2016, p 1473; see Lemay-Hébert, 2009) was criticized both for its analytical misconception – particularly of state capacity as something that 'can be gauged against a measuring stick whose endpoint is a variant of Weber's ideal-type of the modern rational state', and of state institutions as something that can be transposed across geographic locales and historical epochs (Migdal and Schlichte, 2005, pp 3, 11) – and for the often violent and exclusionary effects that Western-led interventions have produced (see Richmond, 2011).

The hegemonic consensus that such processes had to be informed by the main pillars of democratization, marketization, economic liberalization and the benchmarks of human rights, rule of law and good governance came to be termed, in reference to democratic peace theory, as 'liberal peace', which Duffield defined thus:

> The idea of liberal peace … combines and conflates 'liberal' (as in contemporary liberal economic and political tenets) with 'peace' (the present policy predilection towards conflict resolution and societal reconstruction). It reflects the existing consensus that conflict in the South is best approached through a number of connected, ameliorative, harmonising and, especially, transformational measures. (2007, p 11)

While various scholars and policy makers have continued to defend and advocate for this approach (most notably Paris, 2010), scholars with an interest in 'critical peacebuilding studies' have endeavoured to exhibit the conceptual contradictions of this approach and of the associated programming and policies (see Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009, esp. Introduction; Richmond, 2011; Campbell et al, 2011). The main point of this critique was the hypocritical and imperialist character of this consensus, as it declared to aim for the liberation and self-determination of the societies in question, but was in reality, according to critics: (1) 'cold and unfeeling, lacking understanding or empathy' vis-à-vis its target populations (Richmond, 2011, p 63); (2) only rhetorically encouraging

'local ownership' but not helping to realize it (Richmond, 2011, pp 3, 10, 83); and (3) not engaging with local needs and welfare (Richmond, 2011, ch. 4).

The circle of critical peacebuilding scholars around Oliver Richmond, Roger Mac Ginty and colleagues has offered important critiques of the failures and contradictions of the 'liberal peace', and, yet more importantly for this work and discussed in detail below, it has indicated the possibility of a 'post-liberal peace' that transcends the wrongdoings of internationally imposed ordering (Richmond, 2011; Richmond and Mitchell, 2011). In light of critiques of and engagement with these proposals (see Campbell et al, 2011; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2009; Chandler and Richmond, 2015), optimistic undertones about the emancipatory potential of post-liberal forms of peace have made way for a more pronounced focus on the regressive potential of the hybrid political orders assumed as carrying post-liberal peace (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2016) and for more in-depth research into how 'everyday' forms of peace can reshape and renegotiate the 'liberal peace' (Mac Ginty, 2017). Somewhat analogous to Bell's reading of the transmutation of liberalism into the ideology undergirding US interventionism throughout the 20th century, critical voices in this debate also stressed the fact that the 'liberal peace' approach, contrary to its self-labelling or, more precisely, to academics' denotation, has in fact been very top-down and imposing both in terms of its operating principles and the outcomes produced in interventions (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2015, p 176; Joshi et al, 2014, p 365). Echoing this, a number of contributions to the international peace- and statebuilding intervention literature, where von Billerbeck and Tansey (2019) have utilized the concept of 'authoritarianism' to classify unintended consequences and political trajectories of countries subject to intervention (see also Soares de Oliveira, 2011).

While peace, conflict and intervention studies have thus offered a number of important insights and conceptual advances, these perspectives have also been limited, most importantly, to globally renowned cases of post-conflict intervention, often after civil wars or large-scale conflict and led by the UN or the 'international community' at large. Therefore, this literature inevitably missed out on some aspects that research of 'authoritarian' or 'illiberal' forms of peace and conflict management in the former Soviet Union and Eurasia more generally has been able to capture. As Lewis (2017, pp 33ff) pointed out, the critical peacebuilding literature was still largely fixated on the possibility of emancipation or other forms of betterment in relation to the subjugation imposed by the 'liberal peace', while other actors who instantiate often worse forms of authoritarian post-conflict order – such as Russia or China – and their hijacking of discourses of emancipation and freedom remained disregarded. To this end, the collection *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia* by Catherine Owen and colleagues argued that

how 'illiberal peace' results from 'local and regional actors contest[ing] or transform[ing] globally promoted norms of conflict management and promot[ing] alternative ones' to thus challenge 'the western-led consensus known as the "liberal peace"' (2018, p 3). David Lewis, John Heathershaw and Nick Megoran (2018) further elucidate this shift from liberal to illiberal peace by analysing authoritarian conflict management as a process which serves to 'eschew genuine negotiations among parties to the conflict, reject international mediation and constraints on the use of force, [and] disregard calls to address underlying structural causes of conflict' (2018, p 11). Instead, they argue that authoritarian regimes 'rely on instruments of state coercion and hierarchical structures of power' in their attempts to quell unrest and maintain peace and stability (p 12). Further attention has been directed toward the policies, practices and tactics of Central Asian regimes, as in Alexander Cooley and John Heathershaw's *Dictators Without Borders* (2017), which provides insight into the repressive apparatuses and practices employed by governments and elites.

The critical inquiry into the discontents of projects of political ordering reviewed above is vital for an open debate and analysis of the failures and transmutations of 'liberalism' across the globe. As the above-cited and other authors show, 'authoritarianism' can serve as a concept to scrutinize the political and societal trajectories of countries subject to external intervention and support. Nevertheless, the concern of this work is that the framing around 'democratic' or 'authoritarian' forms of post-conflict or post-regime change transitions reflects an imaginary of ideal-type liberalism and democracy that still informs most critical analyses. This continued predominance of the liberal imaginary raises some uncomfortable questions: What about the fact that the liberal-democratic principles upheld in so many international intervention and assistance cases have in the past years been compromised on multiple occasions within the European Union or in transatlantic relations, as well? How to account for the fact that the 'liberal peace' – itself a term coined by academics – is not as liberal in its prescriptions and intervention approach as it supposedly claims? What if liberalism that is so often prescribed as a model for social, political, and economic development has in many ways never existed even in Western countries or anywhere else across the globe?

Scholarship adopting the 'authoritarian' and 'illiberal' framework for analysing politics in the global periphery, however, brushes over such questions and the contradictory facts they point to. In doing so, it can be argued that they, in the words of Nathalie Koch, 'create moral geographies of the liberal and illiberal, the democratic and autocratic, the good and bad, which are inextricable from the actual conduct of geopolitics' (2019, p 912). Such a critique may be limited as it attributes too much responsibility for unintended implications. At the same time, however, the productive effects of this scholarship beyond academic circles need to be taken into account

and inspire attempts to undertake research and theorizing in a different way, which can help prevent and overcome the secondary effects of scholarship. As Koch argues, '[b]y positioning authoritarianism as "Other" and [the West] as inherently morally superior, these narratives advance an Orientalist worldview, whereby authoritarian political configurations are portrayed as essentially foreign and "backward"' (N. Koch, 2019, p 914). This view of Western scholarship on 'authoritarian' and 'illiberal' governance in post-Socialist Eurasia, effectively suggests that this scholarship is, similar to the critique of the 'liberal peace' (see Chandler, 2015), caught in a 'paradox of liberalism', as it cannot offer an effective way beyond present-day political impasse, or worse, ends up deepening forms of Western hegemony through othering and orientalizing tendencies. Apart from these inner, conceptual contradictions, Koch's unearthing of the orientalist and othering effects of critiques of 'authoritarianism' and 'illiberalism' presents an effective extension of Meera Sabaratnam's argument that the critique of 'liberal peace' is 'haunted by avatars of Eurocentrism' that preclude meaningful engagement with societies subject to intervention (2017, p 23). This approach then serves to identify 'Western liberalism … as a source of oppression but also implicitly rehabilitate[s] [it] as the only true source of emancipation', thereby remaining unable to imagine that 'the targets [or subjects] of intervention can generate their own meaningful terms of engagement with interveners, nor critically evaluate the problems of modernity and development, rooted in their own experiences and knowledges' (Sabaratnam, 2017, p 23).

In turn, this critique creates an opening for research that views regressive, exclusionary and potentially violent social processes in the non-West in an equally critical manner, but with framings that avoid the orientalist and othering effects incurred by many analyses so far. To offer an alternative to the simplistic and potentially orientalizing tendencies of scholarship on 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' forms of political order, as well as those framed around the 'liberal peace', in this book I offer a critical reflection on Western liberalism and its illiberal undercurrents. This can serve to open a new angle on the analytic and political challenge of authoritarian and illiberal forms of rule, which will help to better appreciate how these forms of governance are co-constituted and co-produced by and with Western developed countries. This argument, which I further iterate at the end of this section, has a significant bearing on the understanding of parallel developments in Central Asia, the post-Socialist space, which spans from there to Eastern Europe, and for 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' political regimes in global (semi-) peripheries more generally.

As a sizeable body of scholarship has shown, the problematic developments occurring in the non-West are in fact not confined to projects of liberal intervention and assistance. On the contrary, the critical stance on which the post-liberal approach is centred holds that tendencies of marginalization, exclusion and coercion to the point of violent conduct are inherent in

the capitalist system which is inextricably entwined with what have been imagined as Western liberal democracies. In this sense, the ideal-type liberal polities, institutions, practices and values that are seen to prevail in the Western, industrialized world are, to a significant extent, built upon and still maintained by coercive, exclusionary and violent processes. This is best illustrated through a perspective on the increasingly regressive and coercive ordering practices and mechanisms evolving within Western societies, alongside their external policies and relations with the non-Western world.

In the case of the former, the argument is best demonstrated in Insa Lee Koch's analysis of the 'legacy of coercion' and intrusion of the state into people's lives in her recent book *Personalizing the State: An Anthropology of Law, Politics, and Welfare in Austerity Britain* (2018). Focusing her anthropological inquiry on London council estates, Koch traces how life in these state-created but later on privatized and marketized spaces became 'a marker of social exclusion and abject failure', with people living in such estates being 'among the country's most vulnerable socio-economic groups' (I.L. Koch, 2019, np). The gearing up of 'coercive policies' in the realm of welfare, such as profiling 'at risk' groups and targeting them with various measures such as means-testing for welfare or eviction in the case of 'anti-social behaviour', alongside politicians' continuous failure to hear people's expectations and accountability claims vis-à-vis the state, has thus, as Koch argues, 'turned political citizenship into an experience of punishment' (2019, np). This alienation of vulnerable and precarious population groups from politics at large and the nihilistic outcomes of the Brexit referendum and general elections since cannot, as Koch rightly argues, be explained by populist authoritarianism alone. Instead, they have to be seen as emerging together with, and as a reaction toward, the 'daily authoritarian actions of a liberal state that has intervened in the most intimate realms of people's lives' (2019, np).

Putting this argument in a more long-term perspective from the post-Second World War corporatist compact to its disappearance from the 1980s onwards, Oliver Nachtwey has shown how the downward mobility of wide-ranging milieus of German society, both in economic and symbolic terms, has made them susceptible to populist political mobilization and gives rise to a 'post-democratic politics' and 'authoritarian current that removes the liberal foundations of our society' (Nachtwey, 2018, p 211). Using insights from Adorno and colleagues' 1950 study *The Authoritarian Personality*, Nachtwey dissects how the present 'neo-authoritarian tendency' (2018, p 185) stems from the 'evil twin of democratic revolt and is fuelled by a mixture of anti-democratic and religious-identitarian resentment' (p 211). He further points to the gradual manifestation of an 'authoritarian liberalism' in the state welfare system, which activates and responsibilizes individuals to 'not make demands on the welfare state', so as to 'supposedly benefit the community as a whole' which, however, effectively reduces welfare rights

that had been presumed as a given in the bygone days of 'social modernity' (p 85). As recent election results and policy trends have shown, this trajectory has foregrounded a political consensus that has evolved from a marginal opinion of opposition factions and conspiracy theories toward informing mainstream political rhetoric, with right-wing parties de facto becoming the 'new workers' parties' (p 85). Abrahamsen et al (2020) further show how the transnationally networked 'New Right' has been especially effective in shaping conservative political mainstream discourse and actual policies – most notoriously in the fields of migration and asylum – across a large number of countries worldwide. Considering this new right-wing tendency in the political mainstream in Western countries, the argument for a post-liberal approach is substantiated and its relevance for reflecting on the current and past substance of Western liberalism is highlighted.

The regressive and illiberal potential of European and Western societies generally is not limited to their internal dynamics. As explored above, the separating and distancing of other populations seen either as a threat to the existing order or as otherwise problematic plays out in the entire range of policies in domestic and external arenas. This is best exhibited in what Bigo and Tsoukala have called 'illiberal practices of liberal regimes' (2008) undertaken in Western counter-terrorism, interventionism and border regimes especially since 9/11. They attribute the increasing limits and violations of human rights by security services to 'a solidly constituted security field of professionals of management of unease, both public and private, working together transnationally along professional lines mainly in European and Transatlantic "working groups"' that have driven the 'production and diffusion of (in)security at the transnational' (Bigo and Tsoukala, 2008, p 4). The authors do not share the viewpoint that the new 'governmentality by unease', that is by the systemic production of evidence for threats and its elevation into political debates, is revealing the 'true face of modernity … or … global capitalism' (p 3) or 'liberal society' (p 8). Yet, both their own and analogous contributions from critical security studies provide fertile ground for such a reading.

The legacy of counter-terrorism since 9/11, and even more so EU border policies in the context of the recent 'refugee crisis' have indicated the degree and scale of brutality which Western states are ready to accept when it comes to policing borders. Nick Vaughan-Williams' work, for instance, has drawn on Bigo's and Louise Amoore's work to point out how, in the wake of 9/11 and technological advances, borders have become more mobile and flexible than in classic, geopolitical understandings and that this requires a new biopolitical approach to understanding their workings beyond state territorial boundaries (Vaughan-Williams, 2009, pp 59–60; see Foucault, 2008). Further, in the wake of the 'refugee and migration crisis', Vaughan-Williams unpacked the 'thanatopolitical dimension of contemporary

humanitarian bordering practices' (2015, p 47), showing how they operate through a politics of death – figurative or literal – which turns out to stand in relation to the lives of European citizens (see Esposito, 2012). Whether through violent abuse and 'push backs' on the Croatian border (Davies et al, 2018) or the drowning of people trying to cross the Mediterranean (Abdul Karim, 2020), the abundant evidence of the price that Europe and the Western world in general is ready to pay for political and economic stability cannot go unnoticed. The ambiguous, if not supportive, position of the West vis-à-vis illiberal practice in non-Western regimes casts additional doubt on the liberalism it preaches. It is especially obvious in cases where Western states have either failed to effectively challenge autocracies or even actually supported and enhanced them, both of which was the case in Arab and Gulf countries before, and in the course of, the Arab Spring for example (Börzel, 2015, pp 520ff). The reluctant reactions to human rights abuses in countries such as Saudi Arabia or Turkey, alongside reliable weapon deliveries to them by the US, UK, France and Germany (Stavrianakis, 2019) are a further case in point. Taken together, these perspectives thus reveal the 'dark side' of European and Euro-American modernity as they have long been discussed in decolonial research (see Mignolo, 2011) and exhibit the violent grounding and embeddedness – both in the historical and present-day perspective – of Western 'liberal' regimes.

The populist and xenophobic currents and related tendencies toward control and violence that have dominated public discourse and policy trends in Western societies bear testimony to the inherent authoritarian and nationalist potential of the Western capitalist order. An alternative post-liberal perspective helps to better grasp and reflect on this trajectory of contemporary late-modern liberalism and its global manifestations. On the other hand, using the category of 'illiberal' or 'authoritarian' in discussing Central Asian or other political regimes in Eurasia and elsewhere would understate or distract from the illiberal nature of the contemporary capitalist system as a whole, and specifically that of Western states, which are routinely – and, as argued above, paradoxically – categorized as less illiberal and better able to sustain liberal-democratic principles and values. The post-liberal approach helps to avoid such a Eurocentric and one-sided approach and to reconsider the suitability of the term 'illiberalism' for such inquiry. The next section explores and situates this concept in more detail.

Theorizing post-liberal peace: emancipation, governmentality and decoloniality

Having reviewed the inner contradictions and transmutations of liberalism both from a theoretical and empirical perspective, this section sets out in more detail the post-liberal approach proposed in this book.

Emancipation vs governmentality?

The two thinkers at the forefront of debates on post–liberalism within peace, conflict and intervention studies, Oliver Richmond and David Chandler, can both be associated with the strands of critical literature reviewed above. Based on largely discourse–focused analyses (see Chandler, 2006, 2010; Richmond, 2009, 2011), they have put forward their conceptions of 'post–liberal peace' (Richmond, 2011) and 'post–liberal governance' (Chandler, 2010) which are informative for this work. Richmond's conception essentially foresees a way to mitigate the shortcomings of the liberal peace. He invokes de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) as a lens to focus on issues that really preoccupy people in post–conflict societies, for instance 'issues of rights, needs and welfare' (Richmond, 2009, p 331; 2011, ch 5), which would lie beyond the scope of liberal peacebuilding. The recognition of and engagement with such local, 'subaltern' points of view would then enable interventions focused on recipients' needs and a renegotiation of post–conflict peace– and statebuilding (p 331).

Chandler's approach to post–liberalism emphasizes how the emergence of statebuilding as a paradigm has given rise to post–liberal governance with largely problematic and negative implications for political struggle and resistance (Chandler, 2010). Here, 'post–liberal' emphasizes that the autonomy of individual states in the international order is limited in the post–Cold War world. Developed in reaction to contemporary civil wars and conflicts, international norms and principles such as the *Responsibility to Protect*, 'good governance' and commitment to transparency, anti–corruption and human rights are constituting a default design for new states that are being built after conflict, which predisposes the way they will be integrated into the international system. Analysing the policies of specific liberal peace actors, for instance the European Union and its involvement in South–Eastern Europe (Chandler, 2006; 2010, ch 5), Chandler shows how this path–dependency is discursively constructed and consolidated by immense amounts of aid and other assistance in the legal, governance, security and military sectors. The way in which such contingencies are downplayed and naturalized leads him to argue that the European Union is a case of *Empire in Denial* (2006), under whose aegis peripheral and post–conflict countries have no real choice but to conform to all the standards and expectations thrust upon them by Western states. In this sense, Chandler's work points out how in the contemporary international order, a truly liberal governance, where states and sub–state actors can freely choose the development paths and policy templates they want to pursue, is not possible and probably never has been.

In these two authors' collective discussion on post–liberalism (Chandler and Richmond, 2015), Chandler contests the emancipatory potential that Richmond sees in this concept. He concedes that 'everyday' voices of

ordinary people in post-conflict societies may play a role and have some emancipatory potential, as Richmond argues, given the fact that this everyday and 'local' perspective has already been incorporated into peacebuilding interventions since the 1990s (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, p 19). However, he denies the agential potential of the societal sphere and social interaction – where, according to Richmond, a solution to the current deadlock may be found. This post-liberal framework, he argues, 'despite its claims to "deeper" and more "bottom-up" or "social" understandings of post-conflict peace, remains entirely within the world of superficial appearances' (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, pp 19–20). Drawing on Louis Althusser's (2008 [1970]) work about the ideological embeddedness of the subject, Chandler argues that the subject is already embedded in ideology through 'Ideological State Apparatuses' and various cultural and religious institutions, and even through social practices in the private sphere, all of which are shaping the subject's cognitive and ideational understandings (Chandler and Richmond, 2015, p 18). Therefore, the barrier to shaping more emancipatory, just and peaceful societies cannot be overcome by disclosing the everyday perspectives and needs of populations. It is exactly there, Chandler contends, 'in the "materiality" of the mind-set of the subject, understood to be false, imaginary or ideological, due to the problematic societal practices in which they are embedded' where the problem lies in the first place (2015, p 20).

Against this impasse situated in the subjectivities produced by technologies of government in the post-liberal social order, Richmond holds that the 'liberal peace' has already been subject to 'a reconstitution of responsibility in which hybrid political dynamics might lead to a hybrid form of peace … [which] involves agonistic mediations of difference … in which inequalities are teased out and responded to by policy' (2015, p 11). Richmond's optimism that '[i]f the international [*sic*] peace and statebuilding … collapses when its subjects refuse that direction' (2015, p 9) is not shared by Chandler, who remains sceptical of such a potential for a critical, reflective agency. Chandler has thus argued that critical peacebuilding literature is caught in a 'paradox of liberal peace' as it continues to believe that 'local culture holds the key' for building more suitable and emancipatory forms of peace (Chandler, 2015, p 27). In light of this disagreement, the binary 'emancipatory versus governmentality' appears to be a useful way to discuss the implications of post-liberal forms of peace- and statebuilding and has also been used, for example, in Graef's work on Liberia (2015, pp 31ff). However, as I show in the following section, it is the appropriation of the idea of emancipation that helps to justify and legitimize forms of authoritarian governmentality and biopolitical subjectification. My argument for inquiring post-liberal forms of social ordering is thus grounded in a common concern with Chandler's sceptical stance on the possibility of emancipatory action and

agency. It is important to again flag Sabaratnam's dissection of how both of these approaches and the wider critique of the 'liberal peace' discussed above perpetuate a Eurocentric perspective as they 'emphasise the distinctiveness and importance of Western behaviour and primacy whilst occluding the space outside it' (Sabaratnam, 2017, p 27) and are unable to capture the 'historically blurred, intertwined and mutually constituted character of global historical space and 'culture' (p 30; see Lottholz, 2018c, p 702). To overcome this limitation and elucidate the ideological embeddedness of the subject and of the global institutional and governance architectures at large, I propose a decolonial angle to the study of peace, conflict and intervention.

Toward a decolonial perspective on post-liberal order

Given the shortcomings of peace, conflict and intervention research at large, and especially in light of the contradictions faced by critical peacebuilding scholarship itself, it appears that a more critical reflection on global peace- and statebuilding intervention along the lines of decolonial theory is possible, desirable and necessary. As already stated in the Introduction, what I have in mind, in line with Mignolo and Walsh's (2018, p 11) formulation of the decolonial angle as an 'alternative' or 'option' among a number of approaches, is a way of approaching peace and conflict research which is more firmly embedded in the awareness of global history and its current reinscriptions, and, accordingly, a way of doing research differently in terms of engaging with communities and actors in a given context. As the links to the history of empire and critical theory in the discussion above indicate, the post-liberal lens that I am proposing can be squarely situated within, or at least toward, such a decolonial approach, which strongly resonates with these traditions while also reconceptualizing them. While my discussion is focused on recent and earlier historical perspectives on the violent foundations and corresponding contradictions of liberalism, the effects of colonial invasion and conquest in its name, and its positioning alongside Christian, Marxist and other civilizing missions are well documented in the decolonial scholarship of Mignolo, Escobar, Smith, Quijano and early pioneering works of C.L.R. James, W.E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon and many others. Building on the wider decolonial critique, or rather dissection, of liberalism and recent contributions on decolonial perspectives in peace, conflict and intervention studies, the following key aspects of this approach inform the present study.

A decolonial perspective shows how peace- and statebuilding programmes reproduce and stabilize political and economic dynamics going back to the Cold War and colonial times (Turner and Kühn, 2016; Sabaratnam, 2017). A decolonial approach to peace research goes one step further than critical peacebuilding scholars in that it does away with the implicit assumption that

peace- and statebuilding interventions can somehow 'fix' societies in such a way that they can evolve sustainably and stably and attain levels of wealth and well-being comparable to industrial countries. As political economists have long established, the limits to planetary growth and exploitation have already made it impossible for all non-developed and non-industrialized countries to reach the level of economic growth (and hence welfare) of the developed world (see Held, 2007). Indeed, although some have argued that so-called 'emerging powers' might be able to challenge and ameliorate inequalities between developed and under-developed nations, it has become obvious that the roles and agendas of these powers are fairly similar to those of 'older' industrial countries, as they mostly dominate and reproduce the peripheral status of smaller, non-industrialized countries.

A decolonial perspective inquires the ways in which the creation, establishment and reproduction of modernity in the form of the nation state, its institutions and corresponding forms of knowledge, in other words the Enlightenment or modern 'episteme' – produces adverse effects on people's well-being – material, physical, mental, spiritual and otherwise (Mignolo, 2011). It inquires how, on the contrary, the adoption and consolidation of modern forms of social organization lead to the expansion, entrenchment and reproduction of a capitalist system of production, which places people into hierarchical relations of an exploitative and coercive character, thus entrenching precarious livelihoods. Decolonial thought seeks to unpack both the current state of the relations of production and social reproduction (namely sustenance of livelihoods) and the historical processes leading up to the establishment, consolidation and normalization of these relations, which Anibal Quijano has termed 'coloniality of power' (2000) while Walter Mignolo offers the term 'colonial matrix of power' (2011, p 2). In Mignolo's words, decolonial thinking is

> a relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity, the structure of management and control that emerged out of the transformation of the economy in the Atlantic, and the jump in knowledge that took place both in the internal history of Europe and in between Europe and its colonies. (2011, p 10)

This very basic understanding of decolonial thought (see Sabaratnam, 2017, ch 2; Lottholz, 2019b; Kušić et al, 2019 for further discussion) foregrounds two key aspects for rethinking social order and more practical steps toward it. First, rather than merely stabilizing and pacifying societies and integrating them into global frameworks of governance and capitalist production, the ultimate end of action from a decolonial standpoint is the positioning of societies and people in a way that heals their 'colonial wound'

(Sabaratnam, 2017, p 143), defined as 'the fact that regions and people around the world have been classified as underdeveloped economically and mentally' (Mignolo, 2009, p 161; see Anzaldúa, 1999) and, it may be added, have been subjected to policies of subjugation, dependency and exploitation. How could such healing be imagined? Meera Sabaratnam argues that decolonizing intervention along such lines means to abandon 'central intellectual assumptions' and thus 'remake a terrain for solidaristic engagement and … a redistributive postcolonial ethical order, which recognises forms of collective historic responsibility', including through 'historically engaged reparations'(Sabaratnam, 2017, pp 142–3). She further suggests that this goal can be reached, at least partly, by more consequentially avoiding duplication, repetition and tokenistic technical assistance, by better complying to the existing agreements on aid harmonization and ownership and fighting against Western countries' hypocritical stance on agricultural subsidies and offshore finance (2017, p 144). Rutazibwa, in her proposal for 'decolonizing international development studies', suggests reconceptualizing aid and development as reparations as a way of 'moving from the idea of generosity and superiority to one of restitution and justice' and 'decentring and displac[ing] … power epistemologically, while at the same time foregrounding the material, those tangible issues that allow or prevent (quality of) life' (2018, p 172). These arguments point to a horizon of decoloniality within the existing international order and based on progressive initiatives therein, even though sustainable changes in this direction still seem hard to achieve and leave unaddressed the necessity to reconfigure or dismantle the capitalist system in part or in its entirety (see Lottholz, 2019b).

The second and more immediate concern of decolonial thought is on the level of knowledge production, where it foresees more inclusive approaches that uncover and tell the stories of people and societies marginalized, silenced and dehumanized in Western and Eurocentric accounts of history and social science in general (Mignolo, 2011, p xxx; Mignolo and Walsh, 2018, p 208), and in peace- and statebuilding intervention in particular (Sabaratnam, 2017, pp 23-34). This has most significantly been accomplished in the work of the scholar and activist Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2008) and in cognate scholarly cooperation with indigenous resistance movements (see Rutazibwa and Shilliam, 2018, pp 8–9). Drawing on these perspectives, Sabaratnam develops strategies to overcome the usual limitations of social research and to reconstruct the 'political subjecthood' of the targets of intervention in Mozambique (Sabaratnam, 2017, pp 41-54). She does so most effectively in her engagement with the peasantry, demonstrating how they suffered from agricultural development assistance programmes promoting 'production for the market' (2017, pp 96–7), and how their initiatives for price stabilization and input subsidization were suppressed by international donors (p 107). In a similar vein, Mechthild Exo's study of Afghani grassroots organizations

seeks to 'giv[e] presence to [her partners'] perspectives which have been treated as insignificant and non-rational, and therefore as non-existent' as they contradict the orthodoxy of the liberal peace and capitalist modernity (Exo, 2017, p 18). Adopting Smith's relational epistemology, in which 'knowledge is based on the building up of respectful, reciprocal, caring, social and emotional relations', Exo gives up the 'authority of scientific writing' and the 'privilege to have the last word' (2017, p 12) and instead chooses to 'document' and '(re-) narrate … the histories, positions and future visions of peace of her partners' (Exo, 2017, p 76). This dialogical approach to knowledge production based on activist involvement with partner organizations is, as I argue elsewhere (Lottholz, 2018c, p 705), a key take-away of decolonial thought for peace, conflict and intervention research. It certainly needs to be acknowledged that Exo's and Sabaratnam's research does not present indigenous struggles for self-determination and liberation as the accounts of Smith (2008) or other researchers from indigenous communities. Nevertheless, their readings of Smith alongside other indigenous and decolonial thinkers offer important entry points for rethinking both social and political theory and methodological approaches employed therein.

As I discuss further in Chapter 3, this decolonial perspective on questions of peace and conflict and on how to engage with communities subject to intervention has also strongly influenced the present study. Thus, following the works discussed above, I have taken a cooperative and dialogical relationship with interlocutors and participants as a guiding principle and important feature to avoid an extractive and one-sided knowledge-production process. As I show in further detail in the next chapter, the research findings and conclusions about the 'illiberal' 'authoritarian' or 'post-liberal' nature of political systems and their ordering practices also depend on how and how much researchers engage with people in a given society. Debates on this aspect suggest that reliance on survey methodologies and quantitative indicators can be problematic in this regard, as people's understandings of and associations with concepts and framings used can differ and thus bias results (Lottholz et al, 2020, especially McGlinchey's contribution). Political anthropological research on Kyrgyzstan (see Ismailbekova, 2017) further affirms this argument as it shows how people develop a flexible relationship toward transgressions of democratic principles which they justify with hopes for a better economic future to be reached by the electoral outcomes and decisions taken in the negotiated mechanisms that are not entirely, or not at all, liberal-democratic.

While the primary engagement with and contribution to decolonial debates is thus along methodological lines, the decolonial grounding of the theoretical contribution and the critical perspective on forms of ordering is no less important and builds upon a long tradition of decolonial thought

in post-Socialist Eurasia. Thus, while decolonial thought and its practical iterations in Latin America or Africa are based on readings of European colonial conquest, the long 16th century and more recent US imperial ordering, the Eurasian landmass presents an even more pronounced multiplicity of subsequent imperial ordering projects and the ordering logics and legacies they have inscribed (see Nurulla-Khodjaeva, 2016). Yet more significant than this multiplicity of Persian, Turkic or Arabic influences are the distortions and erasures that more recent civilizing missions by the Russian and Soviet empires have wrought in their effort to divide and rule the people from the Caucasian, Central Asian and other peripheries (Tlostanova, 2010, ch. 3; Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012, pp 83ff). This hegemonic nature of post-imperial order is best illustrated in the fact that the legacy of the Soviet Union is itself highly ambiguous in most peripheral contexts, as it certainly exhibited the traits of a violent colonial endeavour (Tlostanova, 2010) but also brought so many achievements and benefits that a unanimous condemnation of the Soviet past, let alone its equalization with the fate of colonial domination has not happened in any of the post-Soviet and post-Socialist societies (including their intellectual circles) (Abashin, 2014).

Given this contested status of the colonial legacy of Socialism, it could be argued that decolonial thought in the post-Socialist space still has to be articulated. In trying to contribute to this articulation, the argument I am trying to substantiate here is that the Socialist period, as suggested in Madina Tlostanova's work (2010, 2018), cannot be viewed solely in terms of its repressive and violent character that reduced it to a 'second rate' modernity-coloniality in analogy to decolonial scholars' work. Rather, and especially in light of the effects of the neoliberal transition, social justice, public provision, equality and peace across categories of difference and international solidarity appear to be of continued importance in shaping the contours of decolonial ways of being, acting and knowing (see Kušić et al, 2019, p 21). My discussion in Chapters 4, 5 and the Conclusion will revisit this critical perspective of the Soviet and earlier imperial legacies and the critique of modern social ordering, including 'liberal peace' interventions, that they foreground.

'Community security' as discourse and practice of peace- and statebuilding

Having set out the theoretical contribution of the monograph – that is a post-liberal approach that critically unpacks the contradictions and unintended consequences of liberal ordering, in this section I now introduce the practical domain of community security as a setting for the study. While it would appear at first glance that community security is of central importance for peace, conflict and security studies, the

relative absence of this concept at least from the literature on peace- and statebuilding interventions indicates a gap that this research aims to fill.[1] Sketching out the situatedness of the field between immediate post-conflict peacebuilding intervention on the one hand and development and democracy assistance on the other, I point out its role and implications for building, extending, consolidating and maintaining functions of state power. Being dominated by concepts of crime prevention and community policing as well as corresponding practices of surveillance and order maintenance through patrolling and other measures, it can be argued that this is a domain that helps to maintain state power and structures. As critical literature throughout the 1990s and early 2000s has established, these concepts, mechanisms and practices thus reproduce governmentality, whether in Western or non-Western contexts. The counter-model to such governmentality is the idea that community security practice can also include ways of (re-)ordering and steering society in more positive ways, such as by identifying and treating causes and factors of crime and conflict or by encouraging and strengthening solidarity to mitigate and help people deal with them. The latter might include methods more directly related to crime and security, for example crime prevention, education about different criminal practices and how to avoid them. To illustrate this tendency toward governmentality, I review the emergence and development of 'crime prevention' from the 1980s until the early 2000s to then indicate the corresponding circulation of the concept of 'community policing' in global development and cooperation contexts.

Community safety as crime prevention and neoliberal governmentality

As far as English-language literature is concerned, the field of community security seems to have been dominated by concepts and corresponding priorities of crime prevention and 'community policing' which prioritize ordering and disciplining over substantive aspects of people's safety and human security. A survey of academic debates around 'community safety' illustrates the trade-off between, on the one hand, ambitions to empower and give voice to communities and, on the other, to employ communities' knowledge and forms of social ordering and regulation to deliver results in the reduction of crime and disorder. This 'top-down' logic is apparent in two ways: first, while 'community safety' and 'crime prevention' have been used as mutually supportive goals of local government and public management programming, a skewing of the agenda in favour of 'crime

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[1] Search results for 'community security' and analogous terms in standard peace and conflict journals or book series are few and far between.

prevention' is obvious. One of the few publications dealing with community safety explicitly acknowledges its de facto synonymy with crime prevention as it 'emerged out of burgeoning interest in locally driven and preventatively focused approaches to the governance of crime, low-level disorder and security' (Henry, 2012, p 413). The aspect of safety as something semantically different from the absence of crime – such as not being subject to threats of crime or other infringements on the personal sphere that do not fit criminal justice frameworks – is conspicuously absent from works that proclaim they devote attention to *both* community safety and crime prevention. In the *Handbook of Crime Prevention and Community Safety*, the editor admits that 'the [book's] coverage certainly [also] includes associated crime harms as well as crime *per se*. Yet it does not extend to issues unrelated to crime' (Tilley, 2005, p 7). Furthermore, one of the most comprehensive genealogies of community safety (Hughes, 2013) does not mention any significant efforts to develop the concept of community safety in an equally meaningful way as the aspect of crime prevention. For this, Hughes offers the explanation that, in contrast to crime prevention, community safety was widely perceived to be too vague and neither 'susceptible to [*sic*] technicist–cum–administrative measurement of success or failure, nor focused on clearly targeted crime and victimisation events' (Hughes, 2013, p 27).

However, this focus on measurable results at the expense of unpacking the intricacies of policy implementation in communities means that secondary effects of social exclusion and 'othering' of certain groups within respective communities have been under-appreciated. Most instructive in this regard is the observation that in the UK, 'much of the impetus for community-based "solutions" were crucially likened to and inscribed in a broader racialised discourse about managing the "race and crime" debate in which black communities throughout the 1980s were often pathologised and "othered"' (Hughes, 2013, p 25). Various contributions have declared this problematique of 'otherness' to be the main pitfall of the new interest in community-based forms of public management: it is in fact impossible to appropriately represent *a* community, as communities are always hierarchized and already structured by power relations, which are reproduced in communal practices (Crawford, 1998, p 244; Hughes and McLaughlin, 2003, p 7). This leads to irremediable tendencies to civilize or assimilate people who do not comply to a certain standard of behaviour – something that might be regarded as an unavoidable side effect but is nevertheless unpleasant for affected parties and brushes aside the structural reasons and sources of people's inadequacy (Young, 1990; Young, 1999).

This perspective is reflective of a broader synthesis between critical sociology, criminology and public policy perspectives and critical studies on governmentality which evolved in the course of the 1990s (see Young, 1990; Rose, 1999, 2001). These scholars drew attention to the new moral discourse

on the significance of *community* as the central unit of social life; a locus of political legitimacy, for facilitating grass roots democracy and local problem solving. This new discourse of 'communitarianism', most clearly expressed in the writings of Amitai Etzioni (see 1993), was taken up most prominently by Tony Blair's New Labour movement which promoted problem solving and crime prevention on the community level in its 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, among other legislative initiatives (Crawford, 1998, p 237). This approach was deconstructed by scholars working with Foucauldian and specifically governmentality frameworks, such as Nikolas Rose:

> Community, rather than the 'social' is the new territorialisation of political thought, the new way in which conduct is collectivised … in a double movement of autonomisation and responsibilisation. Once responsibilised and entrepreneurialised, they would govern themselves within a state-secured framework of law and order. (1999, pp 475–6)

This critique of communitarianism as 'the new social contract' (Rose, 1999, p 475) admonishes the responsibilization and autonomization of communities, in other words equipping them with budgets and decision powers to manage their affairs, which is done in ways that naturalize both the constraints within which this empowerment of communities takes place and the limits to social and economic development. This indicates not merely a decentralization, dispersion and pluralization of social control (Hughes and McLaughlin, 2003, p 5), but also a transfer of responsibility and accountability for the overall economic and societal conditions in which local politics are conducted.

This shifting of responsibility to communal and non-state actors is reflective of the rise of what Chandler calls a post-liberal form of governmentality (2010; Chandler and Reid, 2016): budgetary responsibility and decision-making powers are devolved to the communal level and the responsibility for ensuring employment and social reproduction are discursively appointed to individual households (Chandler and Reid, 2016, ch 2) while demands for redistribution and social welfare are fended off with invocations of policy conditionalities dictated by the global economy. In other words, the decentralized and community-based approach to social ordering and crime prevention emphasizes each community's own responsibility to facilitate not only the solution of problems, but also the design and implementation of measures that prevent social problems in the first place.

Many of the concepts used in peace- and statebuilding, democratization and other forms of assistance and intervention – for instance 'ownership', civil society involvement and community-based activism and service provision (see Lottholz, 2021) – have already been applied in some way in the community safety and crime prevention policies and practices in the UK, US and

other Western countries, or even in their historical experience of imperial domination. A critical analysis of community security thus foregrounds a perspective on the reasons, origins and widely used justifications for the decentralization, responsibilization and entrepreneurialization of communities by central authorities, and the implications such moves have for wider patterns of social ordering. Conversely, the rolling back of the welfare state and deresponsibilization of central state structures has been part of a neoliberal shift toward discourses about global competitiveness and budget discipline (see Crawford, 1998) that are a well-known part of the 'liberal peace' template to intervention and assistance (Joshi et al, 2014). While these dynamics have become all too obvious across the Anglo-American world but also in Europe, the global circulation of discourses and practices of community security has led to similar dynamics of ordering and crime prevention that operate on identitarian principles and thus reproduces existing forms of neoliberal governmentality.

The global spread of community policing and its discontents

Discursive patterns and governmentality tendencies of the community safety and crime prevention debate were not constrained to the Anglo-American world. The key concept that helped propel the new public policy approach with the community to the centre of attention and action was the concept of 'community policing', which, dating back to the colonial epoch (Hönke and Müller, 2012), was particularly popular in public policy from the 1970s onwards. Especially since the end of the Cold War, organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the UK-based international NGO Saferworld – whose work in Kyrgyzstan is analysed in Chapter 5 – have been among the most significant advocates of community policing (see UNDP, 2009; Saferworld, 2007, 2014). From Latin America to Southeast Asia, a burgeoning field of transnational transfer and circulation of ideas, concepts, practices and technologies in the realm of security has unfolded and become a major part of global assistance and cooperation (Müller and Hochmüller, 2017).

While a range of definitions exists, Denney and Jenkins capture the consensus that 'community policing' or 'community-oriented policing' is 'a more bottom-up approach to policing' premised on 'the importance of connecting the provision of safety and security to local needs', rather than simply implementing standard procedures and protocols (Denney and Jenkins, 2013, p 7). Based on cases of relative (though not uncontested) success in Western settings such as Northern Ireland, community policing became a major Western export, especially from the 1990s onwards. In their analysis of this Western export practice, Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar (2005, pp 4ff) note that the demand for it – and thus the basis for creating a

whole 'cottage industry' of consultants, experts and educators – was not so much created by the needs in the targeted localities, but much more by the constellation of the good governance and 'security and development' agendas promoted by Western states and donor organizations that created an immense global market for ideas and practical approaches to community policing.

Alongside other scholars (see Ryan, 2011; Albrecht and Kyed, 2014), Brogden and Nijhar draw attention toward the problems and trade-offs of community policing, echoing the critiques of governmentality scholarship and critical perspectives on security sector reform. Their 'ten myths of Anglo-American community policing' (Brogden and Nijhar, 2005, ch 3) raise the problem discussed above of doing justice to all members of a community (2005, pp 49ff); the reverse problem that community security initiatives might backfire when authorities cannot or do not want to provide the accountability demanded from the population (pp 52ff); and the fact that more fundamental institutional change on the national level is unlikely to occur thanks to community policing initiatives (pp 76ff). They also criticize the universalist and Eurocentric thinking that underpins the philosophies of many community policing advocates, who take an imagined Western model of Weberian legal–rational state institutions and their adaptation via community policing for granted, while ignoring other philosophies and practical approaches at social ordering and securing economic exchange, livelihoods and well-being (pp 79ff). These criticisms both resonate with more recent analyses. Thus, the key challenge, if not the impossibility, to holistically grasp the opinion of *a* community as the basis for collective action, creates the risk that community policing projects may reproduce, first, inequalities between communities, as some communities are better endowed with time, money and skills to participate in projects and fulfil their criteria such as report writing, internal mobilization and so on (Denney and Jenkins, 2013, p 33; see Luckham and Kirk, 2012). Second, community policing may reproduce power structures and inequalities within communities: if people in a locality have already established certain patterns and modes of doing things, then these naturalized hierarchies are unlikely to be challenged, so that women, young people and minority groups run the risk of not having their points of view adequately included in community policing programming (Denney and Jenkins, 2013; see Jackson, 2011).

Furthermore, echoing the critique of the responsibilization and thus autonomization of communities and the corresponding shifting of responsibility from governmental and state agencies to the decentralized level (see Rose, 1999), Denney and Jenkins (2013, p 33) have identified the risk that the ostensible empowerment of communities to deal with their problems on their own may distract attention away from reforms at the national level that would improve the accountability of police and security forces in the first place. This is reflective of a broader trend of making communities adaptable

and *resilient* to the shocks and externalities stemming from economic and political conduct which, especially in developing countries, often takes forms that are disconnected from people's livelihoods and interests (see Chandler and Reid, 2016).

In sum then, the main problem this section raises is that, rather than reconfiguring security and social ordering mechanisms toward the specificities of the respective context, community security or policing arrangements may also reproduce existing power relations, hierarchies and forms of exclusion in a given community. As community policing or community security practitioners need to operate on the basis of a clear analysis of problems and ways to tackle them, the question is how capable such initiatives are to address, or at least be aware of, more fundamental, yet not immediately obvious, reasons for security risks and crime, such as social injustice, corruption, or organized crime. While practitioners – whether they are working for the authorities or volunteering on behalf of residents – may not be able to tackle or even identify such underlying, more fundamental problems, their responsibility for the maintenance of social order and security can foreground a dilemma between performing this role according to protocol and addressing the underlying problems. This dilemma of representation and of appropriate action resonates with the post-liberal framework proposed in this study, which is wary of the possibility of building well-functioning institutions and practical routines on the basis of Western templates when the worldviews and practical knowledge of people in a given context are not taken into account or even ignored, and hard to grasp in the first place.

Conclusion: Theorizing post-liberalism globally

This chapter has covered a large range of disciplines and literature to demonstrate the significance and wide presence of post-liberal thinking. Rather than focusing on Central Asia or the post-Socialist space, it has shown how the post-liberal approach is relevant for capturing dynamics in the West as well, and how post-liberal governance and order-making have to be understood in their global dimensions and entanglements.

The line of argument in favour of a global approach to post-liberal ordering runs throughout the literature discussed here, as all of these works indicated a level of self-contradiction in Western liberal political (and philosophical) thought and the various foreign policy and cooperation approaches of Western countries. This is best captured in references to the 'dark side' of Western modernity, which various authors across fields refer to explicitly – such as Mignolo (2011), Geis et al (2006) but also Wade's critique of liberal multiculturalism (2016) – or implicitly, as scholars in critical security studies and critics of the 'liberal peace' approach to international

intervention. Another thread linking the latter critique with other literature is the argument grounded in Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics and governmentality (2008), through which various authors have unpacked the apparatuses and technologies of ordering which have subjugated and hierarchically categorized social groups and individual bodies in post-civil war or large-scale conflict situations, in peripheral regimes more generally, and, most notoriously, at the borders of the European Union. Although Foucauldian security studies have been critiqued for under-appreciating aspects of race, a common ethico-philosophical lineage between them and decolonial thought cannot be dismissed full course and deserves more attention in future scholarship.

In this light, as stated at the outset, the post-liberal approach to statebuilding and order-making proposed here can be squarely situated as part of the attempt within peace, conflict and intervention studies to forge a synergy with decolonial thinking and to thus rethink the idea of international interventions and assistance from the point of view of their subjects. This can implicate, as discussed, more solidaristic engagement and improvement of existing intervention practices (Sabaratnam, 2017), the consideration of reparations in light of colonial injustice (Rutazibwa, 2018) or the support of grassroots organizations which reject Western military intervention as completely inadequate (Exo, 2017), which is not necessarily unproblematic, either. The analysis in the empirical part of the book is not geared at formulating such more 'practical' perspectives and suggestions. Yet, it takes them and the decolonial approach underlying them as impetus to question whether and how assumed end points of statebuilding and security assistance, such as liberal democracy and capitalist free market development, need to be rethought and possibly discarded. Furthermore, decolonial thinking informs an attempt to capture the legacies of violence and ordering, and the current forms of conflict and exploitation, which foreground present-day dynamics of ordering and security to thus view these in a more complex register.

Through this decolonial approach toward capturing and analysing post-liberal ordering, I seek to move beyond the present status quo, which is largely characterized by a 'paradox of liberalism' that has been carried forward from historical liberal thought into today's scholarship on 'liberal peace' and 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' forms of ordering. As I have argued in line with critiques of this scholarship, the paradox lies in the fact that current critiques of liberal interventionism (broadly defined) and its failures cannot offer an effective way beyond political impasse, or worse, end up deepening forms of Western hegemony through othering and orientalizing tendencies. Although recent perspectives on illiberal peace in post-Socialist Eurasia have managed to move beyond the optimistic attribution of influence and 'agency' to 'the local' and the realm of the 'everyday' to somehow reshape and redirect international interventions toward more suitable outcomes,

this scholarship faces its own limitations as it focuses on macro-level dynamics while under-appreciating the role of bottom-up forces and global entanglements in co-producing illiberal order (see Lottholz et al, 2020). The next chapter provides further conceptual and methodological grounding for this argument as it unpacks the complexity of social ordering through the concepts of *heteroglossia* – that is, the coexistence and interaction of multiple meanings – and the 'social imaginary', alongside the cooperative and dialogical approach to research taken in this project.

From Imaginary to Practice: Capturing the Multiple Meanings of Peace, Security and Order

This chapter continues the line of thought from Chapter 2 as it elaborates the epistemological and conceptual grounding for the post-liberal approach and decolonial angle of this monograph. To that end, the first point to be elaborated is that the literature that views the 'liberal peace' (and even its critics) in a critical light, and similarly, authors demanding alternatives to prevalent 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' critiques of non-Western forms of political ordering, emphasizes the multiplicity of worldviews and knowledge that remain unappreciated in a largely Euro- and Western-centric scholarship. At the same time, these critiques rarely explore the marginal worldviews and knowledge to a great extent, either, but focus mainly on demonstrating how the respective actors contest (Sabaratnam, 2017) or completely reject (Exo, 2017) liberal peace interventions in specific political, economic or wider societal questions. Other studies, such as those by Shilliam (2015) and Povinelli (2016), present a more in-depth engagement with indigenous lifeworlds and struggles, but have not been received or discussed in peace, conflict and intervention studies. My aim in this chapter is to further apprehend the 'problem' posed by disparate and unacknowledged worldviews, knowledge or, one may say, ontologies, with the help of the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia*. Situated in the study of meaning and translation within and across cultures, *heteroglossia* posits the association of several meanings to one and the same signifier and thus, as I argue, offers an entry point into the deconstruction and tracing of the roles that meanings and interpretations take on in internationalized social ordering processes.

The second conceptual step of the chapter is to develop a way to capture the *heteroglossia* characterizing the state- and peacebuilding processes observed. Drawing on psychoanalytical and cultural studies works of

Cornelius Castoriadis, Charles Taylor and others, I introduce the concept of 'social imaginary' as a means to analyse meanings and understandings that are not explicitly observable in empirical reality. This is an important advancement from existing research, which focuses on discourses and practices while the wider implications of actors' positioning in ideological frameworks and understandings of being have remained underexplored. Thus, contestations about the kind of political system to be built in a given place, the role of historical legacies of colonialism and dependency or the relations between humans and nature deemed desirable by a given actor only feature in analyses to the degree that they are identifiable in actors' rhetorical, symbolical or otherwise positioning. By conceptualizing the social imaginary, this research seeks to widen the horizon of peace and security analysis into a perspective on how particular projects and practices are situated in wider understandings of society and human existence, which may stand in contradiction to the neoliberal episteme on which both social science and contemporary statebuilding interventions are based. In doing so, the chapter draws on the burgeoning literature on social imaginaries and their use in social research (see Adams et al, 2015; Adams and Smith, 2019) and hints at the alternative worldviews that emerge from this analysis and are further discussed in Chapter 4.

In a final step, I present the dialogical land practice-based approach through which I undertook this research. This discussion highlights the emphasis that I put on following and tracing the practices of various peacebuilding and community security actors, to then analyse how particular discourses and imaginaries of social order were invoked and reproduced in and through these. Beyond these conceptual concerns, I also reflect on the situated nature of my fieldwork and overall knowledge-production process, with a particular emphasis on the safety concerns involved in researching topics such as security and peace and aspects of interethnic relations and violent extremism that have become entangled with them. I demonstrate how the long-term cooperation and dialogue with my partners was the best way to understand and appropriately deal with these issues, while further research is needed to unpack the emerging post-liberal regime of order in Kyrgyzstan and the silences, invisibilities and violence that it inevitably produces.

Heteroglossia: the multiplicity of meanings in social processes

As Alexey Yurchak indicated in his study of the multiple understandings and philosophies of life in the late Soviet Union (Yurchak, 2006, p 133), Mikhail Bakhtin's *heteroglossia* presents a possible entry point for trying to capture worldviews and knowledges that remain unseen and unacknowledged by mainstream and Western-centric social science, but which may still be

important in capturing processes of social ordering. As Bakhtin sets out in his essays published as *The Dialogical Imagination* (1981), in complex social environments, one and the same semantic unit may have multiple meanings depending on the speaker, the audience and their respective intentions and agendas. In such a world, any utterance made serves to 'appropriate the words of others and populate them with one's own intention' (Bakhtin, 1981, p 21). The logical consequence is that, in Tate's words, '[t]he subject is surrounded by a myriad of responses, each of which must be framed in a specific discourse chosen from this available multiplicity' (Tate, 2007, p 9).

Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia* is, in this sense, highly relevant to processes occurring in intercultural and international contexts, as it is centred on the presence of multiple registers of meaning and values on which actors may draw in constructing their own discourse (Bakhtin, 1981, pp 7, 67). This leads to an extension of the somewhat two-dimensional conceptual apparatus used in much of IR and peace and conflict studies literature which, akin to the work of Homi Bhabha (1994), focuses on processes of reception, cooperation and resulting forms of 'mimicry' on the one hand, and of resistance and contestation, on the other. Complicating such binary scenarios, Bakhtin offers the important consideration that discourse is a hybrid and layered phenomenon in which the social, cultural, historical and otherwise context is sedimenting. In Bakhtin's words:

> Directed toward its object, a word enters a dialogically agitated and tense environment of alien words, evaluations and accents, is woven into their complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others ... and all this may in an essential manner shape the word, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. The living utterance ... cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. (Bakhtin, 1981, pp 267–8)

Bakhtin, similar to key works in discourse theory (see Fairclough, 1992), insists that utterances and discourses are a product of their context and will therefore reflect shifts in the configurations of this context. This approach offers a fruitful way to deconstruct the multiplicity of meanings and associations of discourses and practices of peacebuilding and community security and their implications for large-scale statebuilding processes.

Yet, beyond merely appreciating the multiplicity of frames of meaning, Bakhtin's idea of *heteroglossia* implies a pluralist ontology of the social world (Lottholz, 2017a). Thus, if we focus not only on the various discourses and ideas in the sphere of statebuilding and social ordering, but also unpack the different regimes of knowledge and lifeworlds that underpin them, we confront a more fundamental analytical challenge. This challenge lies in

grasping the very understandings, or rather standpoints of knowledge and facticity that underpin certain political or societal positions (Lottholz, 2017a). Different authors in the Central Asian, wider Eurasian and global context have observed that the assertion of cultural variation in understandings of knowledge, facticity and 'truth' has become applied in political discourse itself, even to the extent that acknowledging the (non-)reality of certain events and facts becomes a matter of political loyalty and national or cultural belonging (Rosaldo, 1989; Ortmann and Heathershaw, 2012; Szostek, 2017). This leads to a conflation of subjectivity and facticity, via political viewpoints and belonging, which has wide-reaching implications for politics in what Pomerantsev calls a 'post-truth world' (2016). This concept implies that even if people may be aware of the complexity and contestations around the social order they live in, conforming to the official discursive portrayals and disregarding, or even denying, uncomfortable truths becomes a matter of good citizenship or even personal security.

By taking into account the different lifeworlds, regimes of knowledge and indeed ontologies, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive account of the construction and maintenance of forms of peace and order in Kyrgyzstan. It thus proposes an approach to inquiry which embraces the complexity and contradictoriness of the socio-discursive sphere instead of taking side – whether implicitly or in a more reflexive manner – with the most reasonable version of competing truths and knowledges. In this sense, it is necessary to discard the neoliberal episteme (Richmond, 2009, p 332) – a conception of knowledge as something being clearly definable and handy for translation across contexts and into practical application, in favour of a 'post-liberal episteme', which, according to Pugh, 'works with rather than challenges complex life' (2014, p 316). This is the basis for an analysis of the processes by which certain forms of knowledge, whether narratives about past events and history or conceptions about democracy, development, or peace, become salient and inform socially grounded, dominant and potentially hegemonic forms of discourse and corresponding practices of peace- and statebuilding. The post-liberal knowledge regime foregrounded by this perspective is flagged up throughout the empirical analysis and exhibited most clearly in Chapter 7, where I show how civil society actors develop sound conceptions and generate objective evidence in favour of people-centred law enforcement reform in line with the above-mentioned Co-Security, which are in various ways ignored and overruled by the authorities in their effort to maintain state security and control.

In this sense, and referring back to the main theme, I understand a post-liberal approach to researching statebuilding processes in Central Asia not only as focused on the way in which liberal politics and policy making are transcended, but also as an epistemological commitment to expose the multiplicity and dialogicality of knowledge in Kyrgyzstan, which does

not lend itself to an inquiry from a liberal Enlightenment episteme with its unified conception of knowledge. More than conceptualizing the shift from liberal to post-liberal forms of social ordering, political debates and depoliticization, this approach rejects the neoliberal scientific episteme and seeks to grasp the contestations of various forms of knowledge in the analysis of internationalized processes of state- and peacebuilding. As Chapter 4 shows in more detail, the key divergences from neoliberal and analogous modernistic understandings of society and state–society relations lie in people's understanding of the role of the spiritual domain and human–nature relations. Tracing these in the discussion of the 'tradition and culture' as well as 'politics of sovereignty' imaginaries, I show how these ways of being in the world foreground a critical stance toward or even rejection of some aspects of economic and state institutional development, which can also imply complications in peace and security practices. In this sense, my research adds to decolonial perspectives in peace, conflict and intervention studies, as it demonstrates how alternative understandings of society and human existence play a role and need to be appreciated in terms of their influence on social ordering processes, even if they complicate the more pragmatic and solution-oriented perspectives in community security and peacebuilding.

Conceptualizing the role of social imaginaries in social ordering

Having discussed the necessity to engage more directly with the subjectivities and lifeworlds involved in the social ordering process through *heteroglossia* as a way to appreciate the coexistence of multiple perspectives and worldviews, this section turns to the question how this can be conceptually realized through the concept of 'social imaginary'. Publications using or only invoking the latter abound and make it somewhat a buzzword in social science research. Numerous articles, a new journal and book series attest to the concept's relevance for inquiring 'complexes of cultural meaning and cultural projects of power' as well as their (re-)shaping in encounters with other cultures and civilizations (Social Imaginaries Editorial Collective, 2015, p 7; Adams and Smith, 2019). The concept stems, at first sight, from the psychoanalytic theory of Freud and Lacan, who coined the triad of the symbolic, the imaginary and the real (Lacan, 1977). Yet, the key aspect of the 'imaginary' is that it links the realm of cognition and ideas with processes taking place in the 'real' world – a link that has been explored in scholarship ranging from Durkheim and Marx to Benedict Anderson (Adams et al, 2015, p 19). In this sense, it helps to bridge and mediate between the structural and materialist determinisms of realist and Marxist social theory and the primacy of ideas postulated by constructivists.

The scholar associated with the first introduction of the imaginary is Cornelius Castoriadis. His *Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987), originally published in French in 1975, has become a reference point for most applications and advancements of the concept. Following James' discussion (2019, p 34), Castoriadis' conception can be divided into the two aspects of, first, how humans come to know themselves in relation to others, and second, the imaginary as a 'constitutive basis of everything social', in other words a kind of matrix by which an understanding of society and humanity is created to begin with. The second, more fundamental aspect is foregrounded in Castoriadis' conception of the imaginary as a mirror image:

> Those who speak of the 'imaginary,' understanding by this the 'specular,' the reflection of the 'fictive,' do no more than repeat, usually without realizing it, the affirmation which has for all time chained them to the underground of the famous cave: it is necessary that this world be an image of something. (Castoriadis, 1987, p 3)

This all-encompassing and, in fact, totalizing understanding of the social imaginary as constituting 'each historical period, its singular manner of living, of seeing and of conducting its own existence, its world' (Castoriadis, 1987, p 145) offers an entry point to fundamentally rethink – and potentially reshape – social existence. However, it also runs the danger, as argued by James, of becoming 'everything and nothing' and not yielding analytical added value (2019, p 40).

More productive is the conceptualization of social imaginaries in the plural, as competing understandings of social order, which refers back to the first aspect of the imaginary as a vehicle for humans to come to know themselves in relation to others and within the social whole. As emphasized by various authors (James, 2019; Adams et al, 2015), the imaginary processes considered in this respect concern primarily dimensions and outcomes on a collective, macro-social level while being less interested in imagination as an individual capacity. Considering social imaginaries as shaped and reproduced by processes of socialization and negotiation in public and private spheres helps to explain stability and normality in the sense that people come to imagine certain behaviours, ways of life and political or historical processes as occurring in accordance with a set of inherent and universal rules. In this sense, the idea of the imaginary extends both Bourdieu's practice theory – in which he argues that practices as well as everyday life follow a natural order that '*goes without saying*' (Bourdieu, 1977, p 175, original emphasis) – and, in a more implicit manner, Foucault's observations on how the conduct of life may be regulated and governed (Foucault, 2008). Castoriadis draws this link between the imaginary and practical, material world himself as he

argues that the imaginary is not a mere projection or mirage, but emanates from 'proper', physical things and actions in the 'real world', which can be as diverse as 'a machine gun, a call to arms, a pay check and high-priced essential goods, a court decision and a prison' (Castoriadis, 1987, p 109).

The cultural studies scholar Charles Taylor has offered ample insights into this relation between social reality and the status quo on the one hand and between several contradicting and competing social imaginaries, on the other. In his opinion, the social imaginary provides 'the ways we are able to think or imagine the whole of society' (Taylor, 2007b, p 156) and it thus 'incorporates a sense of the normal expectations that we have of one another, the kind of common understanding which enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life' (Taylor, 2007a, p 30). Taylor's works also further consolidated the understanding of imaginaries being associated with material practices that serve to (re-)produce imaginaries. In his words: 'Because human practices are the kind of thing that makes sense, certain ideas are internal to them; one cannot distinguish the two in order to ask the question Which causes which?' (Taylor, 2004, p 33). He further indicates an entry point for the analysis of the imaginary as the 'way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms; it is carried in images, stories, and legends' (2004, p 23). This consolidates the idea of a nexus through which imaginaries materialize in visual artefacts, stories and, importantly in the case of Kyrgyzstan, history, or rather historiography as a technique of shaping the way in which society is imagined through representations of the past.

The idea of a nexus between imaginaries on the one hand, and associated discourses and practice on the other, also foregrounds an analysis of the use and manipulation of discourses by technologies of government that is less deterministic than the many discourse-focused studies with a Foucauldian grounding in peace, conflict and security studies alike (see Lewis, 2017). Analysing social imaginaries can put a balanced emphasis on the narratives and discourses appearing in a given context, while embedding them in wider cognitive and semantic predispositions and patterns, which can in turn enable the tracing of processes of reception and reaction that could reproduce but also reshape existing imaginaries. In contrast to discourse and narrative analyses which have become prevalent in the literature of international peace, conflict and security studies, or at least figure as a standard 'context analysis' tool therein, Castoriadis' and Taylor's works and their exegesis allow an engagement with more implicit – and therefore largely ignored – understandings of social order, culture and wider systemic and ontological positionings vis-à-vis questions of political and economic systems.

Such processes are conceptualized in the discussion of 'circulating social imaginaries' by the cultural studies scholars Valaskivi and Sumiala (2014). They affirm the conceptual step from conceiving of one imaginary as

a cognitive plane on which people's understanding of societies is based (Castoriadis) to thinking about several, coexisting and possibly competing or contradicting imaginaries of what society is and should be, and theorize the manifestation and movement of imaginaries in space, time and materiality: 'social imaginaries do not hang in the air, but are attached to material objects and representations, and that, as they travel and take different paths from one location to another' (Valaskivi and Sumiala, 2014, p 240). An imaginary, they continue, 'gains its power from the circulation in different materials, mediated places and spaces (including both virtual and physical places), and in the shared encounters between individuals created by circulation' (p 240).

Under certain circumstances, the (re–)production of an imaginary might thus be a rather straightforward process, such as in the case of a 'highly media-saturated' society with an 'affective economy of virtual encounters, remediation and circulation' that have produced disparate effects such as a decades-long global hype around the music and entertainment industry or success mythologies surrounding entrepreneurs as diverse as Steve Jobs, Tony Robbins or today's Instagram celebrities (2014, p 240). Still, scholarship also emphasizes that such circulation patterns are not necessarily linear but take multiple and hardly conceivable routes. Sneath, Holbraad and Pedersen affirm this non-deterministic stance, arguing that: 'While it is amply clear … that the effects we call imaginary may indeed serve a variety of purposes (divination, politics, ethics, and so on), it is also fundamental to bear in mind that the emergence of these effects *qua* underdetermined 'technologies' is, precisely, not purposeful' (2009, p 26).

This statement distinguishes the idea of the imaginary from a conceptualization as a technology of government, that is utilization of discursive, material and practical items for ordering, structuring and regulating society. While Sneath and colleagues may be right that such change may not be, in itself, purposeful, it is nevertheless important to analytically consider the ways in which technological advancements are used by governments to improve their leverage, as well as by social actors to resist or evade the reach of the latter.

It can thus be concluded that imaginaries can be understood as mental constructs materializing in different ways, such as in images, stories and legends (Taylor, 2004, p 33) or different kinds of discourses and narratives circulated through certain types of media (Sneath et al, 2009; Valaskivi and Sumiala, 2014). Furthermore, an imaginary need not always be explicitly formulated, but can be implicit in, and made up by, a number of such elements. In this sense, I understand the imaginary as a prism or filter that influences people's processing of, and relation to, images, discourses and implicit understandings of how things should be done and work their way in the world, for example in specific 'real-world' practices such as peace- and

statebuilding or community security. The experiences and perceptions people gather in such a specific field will, in turn, feed back into their understanding of how things work and should be done, in the process challenging, reshaping, but also confirming and reproducing the imaginaries that inform their thinking.

Thus, a cyclical understanding of the production of meaning and understanding in social and political life emerges, which I apply in my analysis of imaginaries of peace- and statebuilding in Chapters 5–7. In this sense, I see the imaginary as a higher order of discourse or, to use Laclau and Mouffe's description of discourse, 'nodal points' that 'fix meaning' in a more significant way than the discourses relating to them (1985, p 100; Lewis, 2017, p 34). Further, discourses can in turn be seen as vehicles that drive and shape practices as proposed in van Leeuwen's idea that – akin to Fairclough's (1992, p 4) understanding of discourses having both a textual, practical and social dimension – discourses structure the way that practices are devised and performed (van Leeuwen, 2008, pp 6, 124). These considerations inform a three-fold model whereby particular practices and the associated technical discourses relate to, or may be part of, a wider societal imaginary, which is itself constituted by a larger number of discourses in various spheres of life (see Figure 3.1).

As indicated in the above discussion of the need to capture the *heteroglossia* of social ordering, that is the multiplicity of meaning underlying signifiers (Bakhtin, 1981), the analysis of social imaginaries is especially promising for capturing how particular practices and discourses of peacebuilding present hybridizations and combinations and overlaps of potential imaginaries of peacebuilding, as Chapter 4 will demonstrate. More than an analysis of competing ideas or 'frames' (James, 2019, p 21) of social order, this foregrounds attention to the underlying ontologies or understandings of being in the world that various imaginaries are embedded in. As indicated in my discussion of the imaginary of 'tradition and culture' in Chapter 4, such alternative ontologies can be embedded in, first, an ecosophic worldview (Botokanova, 2015) that is centred on the unity and mutual relation of humans and nature and, second, in an understanding of human existence that regards the spiritual domain to have an active role in life (see Borbieva, 2013). Despite their significance and potential bearings on processes of peacebuilding and ordering, such worldviews have often been dismissed in Western and Western-centric scholarship, which is mostly interested in forms of knowledge and experience that can be grasped through the neoliberal, modern episteme. That said, the alternative worldviews and ontologies identified in the 'tradition and culture' imaginary were not present in most of the peacebuilding and security practices analysed in the later chapters. But this should not lead to the conclusion that they are irrelevant in this practico-discursive domain. Rather, as I argue, ecosophic and spiritualist ways

Figure 3.1: Cyclical production of meaning between imaginaries and specific practical fields
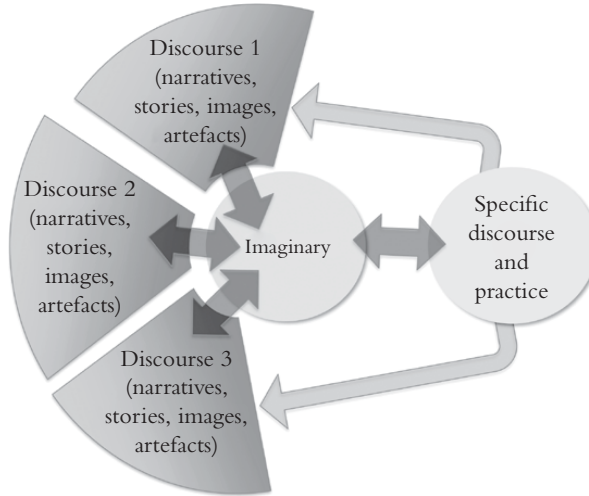
Source: Author

of being in the world can be seen as a normative plain that helps to critically reflect on how present-day forms of peace and order are embedded in wider historical legacies of displacement, disconnection and amnesia wrought by colonial domination and transformation of modern nation-statehood. In his later work, Castoriadis (1997) himself developed a more nuanced stance in this regard as he rethought his position toward human rationality and Enlightenment, admitting a 'degree of continuity between humanity and other species' and humanity's 'constant worldly engagement with nature' (Adams et al, 2015, p 37). While further details and implications of such diverging ontological approaches are discussed in the next chapter, the following section demonstrates how my approach to research was geared at following, understanding and interpreting the relation between imaginaries, discourses and practices in a mutually engaged and dialogical way.

A cooperative and practice–based approach to research

As a final step in setting the conceptual grounding of this monograph, I present the cooperative and dialogical approach to fieldwork taken in this research. It may be argued that imaginaries and discourses can also be analysed through more standard methodologies, as shown in Yurchak's (2006) and other analyses of the imaginary West (see Pilkington et al, 2002), as well as Gullette and Heathershaw's work on 'affective politics of sovereignty' (2015). Yet, to unpack the invocation and use of these registers in practices

of peacebuilding and community security, the cooperative and dialogical approach I offer here has proven indispensable. As is the case in most long-term projects, this approach has evolved and been adjusted throughout time, as reflected in other more detailed discussions of the general importance of dialogical research (Lottholz and Kluczewska, 2017; Lottholz, 2018c), of its advantage in helping to avoid issues of access and personal safety of researchers and research participants (Lottholz, 2017b; Bekmurzaev et al, 2018) and of the grounding of this approach in decolonial and feminist standpoint theory (Lottholz, 2019b). Building upon these discussions and offering more detail in the chronological table of data gathered in Appendix 2, I focus my discussion here on my attempts to implement a cooperative approach in the partnership with three peacebuilding and security actors and offer reflections for further refinement of this approach in light of experiences during my research.

Contrary to initial plans, I had not started approaching relevant organizations and projects in Kyrgyzstan prior to my arrival in the country in June 2015. This increased the pressure to connect and get access in less time, but also had the advantage of building up contacts and relations through personal meetings. In talking to people from international and domestic NGOs and other platforms involved in peacebuilding, security and wider societal activities, I communicated the main objective of my research as understanding the reception and application of and resistance to globally dominant notions of democratic governance and statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan (see Bekmurzaev et al, 2018). In initiating cooperation, I presented my research project information sheet and possible questions I would ask if the respective entity agreed to participate in the research. Instead of the usual semi-structured interviews, I asked people if they were interested in cooperating for a longer period of time, during which I would accompany (Ru.: *soprovozhdat*) their work and analyse the projects they gave me access to. This was supposed to create a 'win-win' situation, in which partners would gain from my analysis and external point of view, while I could get more in-depth and long-term insights rather than relying on the retrospective accounts of interviewees (Graef, 2015, p 70; Lottholz, 2018c, p 713).

This practice-based, cooperative approach has two main advantages: first, it helps to establish a common language with practitioners in order to trace, contextualize and interpret their practices, making them more likely to accept cooperation and give the researcher firsthand access. Rather than settling for one specific issue a priori, my more open focus on peacebuilding and community security practices shifted the spotlight to the attempts made by these organizations and their local partners to maintain a secure and peaceful environment in southern Kyrgyzstan (Lottholz, 2017b; 2018c, pp 703ff). Such closer and more in-depth access foregrounds a more profound understanding of the practices and lifeworlds of participants and partners

(see Lottholz and Kluczewska, 2017), which in turn enables the examination of the role of various imaginaries of social order in shaping these practices.

Second, by focusing on practices themselves, instead of introducing specific and potentially unsuitable framings into the interaction, for instance about 'conflict' or 'interethnic relations', I could mitigate concerns that cooperation with me might bring these organizations into trouble with law enforcement and security services. Analyses of the preconditions for doing research in Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of the '2010 events' in and around Osh have shown how security actors such as the State Committee for National Security (*GKNB*) and local police have in fact instated a state monopoly on commentary and research relating to sensitive topics like interethnic relations or violent extremism (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 105). The most visible case in point was an investigation into the international NGO Freedom House and its Kyrgyzstani partner Advocacy Centre for Human Rights for conducting a pilot survey project on interethnic relations in southern Kyrgyzstan which, according to the *GKNB*, could potentially have led to 'interethnic discord' (Beishenbek kyzy, 2014). Other cases, such as the detention of US-Pakistani journalist Umar Farooq in March 2015 in Osh on allegations of carrying 'extremist material', of Frederik Faust from Danish Church Aid (March 2014) and ICG analyst Conor Prasad (November 2012) (Mets, 2015; see Lottholz, 2017b) further confirmed the impression that authorities would not accept attempts by foreign researchers and organizations to do research on issues pertaining to national security. My awareness of these events and the constrained environment in Kyrgyzstan and adherence to principles of 'do no harm' informed my constant attempt to avoid situations that could place people who participated in my research at risk, as for instance by protecting their anonymity throughout the research process and also in the present monograph. As the following reflections from my fieldwork experience show, there were further access barriers and constraints that my cooperative and practice-based approach could not help to avoid or overcome.

A more fundamental caveat of this practice-based and open-ended approach concerns its relative silence about the way it is situated in the framework of institutionalized academic knowledge production and the limitations stemming therefrom. On a more pragmatic level, this means that my primary orientation as a researcher was on how the practices observed fit into my project and its conceptual and theoretical interests. While I did try to offer reflections and feedback on my partners' work, these usually were not timely or substantive enough to help them decisively improve their work or generate better support. Furthermore, I chose to reduce the information about the project to the relatively standard phrasing about the role of globally dominant peacebuilding approaches, while not explicating the wider decolonial stance underpinning the study. This was done in an

attempt to keep things simple and not overburden interlocutors in their already generous efforts of participating in the research project. The idea was to put the inquiry into their work, struggles and imaginaries before and above my own theoretical interests and intellectual pursuit, and to work out the resonances between these two realms in the later stages of the research. It could be rightly argued that this precluded a more wholesome engagement and connection between my research partners' peace and security work and the critical and decolonial perspective I am offering in this work. And further, it is true that in this way my endeavour remained embedded in a Eurocentric framework of knowledge production which gives research participants only a small stake in co-determining what is written about them, how it feeds into theory and what research outputs are delivered to which audiences. These limitations notwithstanding, I argue that the cooperative and dialogical approach that I developed throughout the project is the right way forward in trying to overcome the limitations of the Eurocentric episteme.

Reflections from fieldwork and beyond

Initially, my still vague idea of what cooperative research could look like in practice quickly took shape during my first cooperation with the UK-based NGO Saferworld, whose work is analysed in Chapter 5. Having met the head of the organization's Central Asia office during an expert workshop in Bishkek and continued the conversation thereafter, I was invited to work in Saferworld's main office in Osh to get to know their work, exchange perspectives and knowledge with staff, and to possibly collaborate with them in analysing the implementation of community security projects. The most insightful activity was supporting a contracted consultant in conducting profiling interviews with Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPCs) across the south of Kyrgyzstan, which are discussed in Chapter 5. However, when it came to other interactions, I was told that my attendance was not conducive or not desired at all, as representatives of the national partner NGO and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) would be present. Being unable to attend training and community events held by LCPCs as part of Saferworld's programme, I arranged follow-up visits with two of the LCPCs from the profiling interviews on my own initiative and soon focused on other collaborations. Furthermore, I was told that even though the MIA had been informed about the profiling visits, some of the LCPCs were subsequently visited by *GKNB* investigators who asked about the content of that interaction. This indicated that people are exposed to such 'control visits', even if interactions with external actors are legitimized as part of official cooperation between the MIA and well-established international NGOs.

The next cooperation involved the NGO network Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' (see Chapter 7) which at the time was closely working

with Saferworld and received capacity-building support from it. The organization's staff welcomed my offer to present a 'view from the side' (Ru.: *vzgliad so storony*) and were available for regular conversations as part of the organizational ethnography that I conducted in the head office in Bishkek, some of whose members became good friends. Yet, when it came to visiting and engaging with local communities who supported the work of the Civic Union, several encounters made me feel as if there was a glass wall preventing meaningful interaction with local community representatives. One example is a territorial council (a sub-unit of a city administration), where the chairman, a respected activist in the NGO network given the contributions he had made to police reform since 2010, was sympathetic to my project and the idea of doing focus groups, interviews and participatory observation, and so invited me to one of the weekly planning meetings (*planerka*) which included policemen, *aksakal* [elder] courts and community representatives. However, when I approached different participants after the meeting to introduce my research and invite them to participate, I was met with reluctance and failed to recruit a single participant. I had designed leaflets explaining and illustrating the purpose and content of my research, but these attempts to explain my research in intelligible terms were ignored. The chairman tried to explain: "For them, I am something like a superintendent [*nachalnik*], they tell me all of this in their own way. … Maybe they do not really like to talk to you because of the language, maybe they're a bit embarrassed [to speak Russian]." Although not convinced, I had to acknowledge the impasse and the people's obvious reluctance to participate in research conducted by foreigners. Given that this territorial council had been significantly affected by the 2010 conflict and its aftermath (see Chapter 4), the reservation was perhaps understandable, and I refrained from further efforts. Other similar episodes where my requests were viewed with suspicion (Lottholz, 2017b, p 16) confirmed the impression that some communities are too much affected by sensitive issues and thus require an especially sensitive approach with long-term preparation which I did not have the time for. As I demonstrate in further reflection on my role in community visits together with the Civic Union activists in Chapter 7, my presence as researcher and the cooperation with the network was perceived in positive terms when its purpose and benefits were properly explained by the network's own activists.

The third cooperation was arranged with an initiative to strengthen Territorial Youth Councils in Osh (see Chapter 6), which, established to promote peace, tolerance and exchange among youth after the 2010 conflict, had been institutionalized as part of the Committee for Youth Affairs (CYA) of the Mayor's Office. Having been allowed to participate in a youth forum to get to know the project and its participants from across the country, the implementing NGO told me that access to the project activities could only

be granted by the CYA. After some networking and contacting efforts, I managed to arrange a meeting with the committee's head and presented an official letter with letterhead and phrased in the best bureaucratic manner, asking 'for permission to conduct interviews and focus groups, during which I can ask those representatives who wish to take part in the research, questions on their work for the [youth councils]' '[i]n order to obtain a more holistic [*obshirnuiu*] picture of the [project]'. While the spontaneous approval given by the committee head was a bureaucratic success, it turned out that it was certainly not a guarantee that the members of the TYC would participate in the research. Given that the committee head explained the purpose and content of my research to other people in the initiative only briefly, it was usually necessary to do so again when I asked people for interviews or permission to participate in events and meetings. I tried to maintain full transparency by sharing documentation on terms of consent and the project as a whole and generally did not perceive reservations about my research topic. Yet, the initially slow progress in finding interview partners and events to attend, and different behaviours and reactions on part of Territorial Youth Council members pointed to a degree of reluctance on their part.

The foot-dragging and piecemeal way of sharing information on their part was most obvious in the behaviour of my initial 'contact person' from the CYA, who seemed to be struggling to arrange contacts and kept excusing himself for this. When I told the committee head that things were not going well, I was appointed another contact person who arranged several interviews with youth council leaders and participation in a team meeting within just a day. This indicated that the youth activists' interest and willingness to participate in the research depended, similar to the above example in the Civic Union, on who introduced me to them and how my position and activity was explained. Having become more aware of this, I took the opportunity during the official closing conference of the capacity-building project to introduce my research project and the possible benefits for the TYCs in front of everyone. I had underestimated the importance of doing so and kept a low profile during the youth forum in September when I had first been introduced to the initiative. When assessing the long-term interaction with TYCs, it was more selective and more difficult than in the case of the other two organizations, as I maintained contact and conducted follow-up conversations with key individuals who had been involved in implementation, while the relatively large number of interviewees and the changing life courses and interests reduced the long-term contacts to just a handful.

This experience during the fieldwork suggests three key takeaways, the first of which relates to the negotiation of access to relevant organizations and entities. While this aspect was overall successful, it demonstrated the importance of prior networks (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 105), as all

representatives of my later cooperation partners had been introduced by existing contacts of mine, while the organizations I approached without prior networking agreed either to only give interviews or to no interaction at all. A more bureaucratic way of securing access without prior contact only worked once with the CYA in Osh, where access to TYC members was still subject to negotiation. The cooperative and practice-based approach turned out to be useful as it gave central importance to the conversation with the partnering entities' members who appreciated the occasions to reflect on their work but also demonstrate their knowledge to a relatively inexperienced outsider.

Second, the difficulties I still faced once cooperative research had been agreed illustrate the important difference between getting general physical access to an entity – based on gatekeepers' permission – and, on the other hand, actual 'social access' to the perspectives of the entity's members (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 105). Third and relatedly, the open framing of my research project around reception, application and resistance toward global notions of democratic governance and statebuilding was effective in helping avoid concerns associated with framings around sensitive issues such as interethnic relations or violent extremism. Taking such a cautious approach proved to be important, but not enough, as the experiences of not being able to engage people in communities affected by such security issues, as well as the 'control visits' to LCPCs where we had made the profiling interviews, demonstrates. Being a junior researcher with limited resources and institutional backing, I decided that it was better not to engage with communities and organizations who could have been put at risk by my presence and thus I did not follow up on research in one of the TYCs which had invited me to more visits and conversations. When considering this important opportunity, I concluded that leading conversations on the difficulties and discrimination faced by Uzbeks in this district would have posed too much of a danger both to the young activists and to myself, if the police had taken an interest in my activities. This exemplifies the close entanglement between attempts to ensure people's safety and self-censorship, which I could merely balance by referencing work that documents the forms of exclusion, marginalization and violence that people in these communities are still subjected to (see Bennett, 2016; Ismailbekova and Karimova, 2018).

Fourth, these limitations incurred by the local security situation point to a broader concern about the limitations incurred by a foreign researcher's positionality. In terms of language, it can be argued that my fluent command of Russian and collaboration with a translator in Kyrgyz-language events puts this project on a par with most area studies scholarship and ahead of many studies on peace, conflict and intervention which tend to rely on interpreters for communication other than in English. On the other hand, the limited time frame of my fieldwork did not allow the degree of immersion

and building of trustful relations as is the case in most anthropological work. I was thus much more dependent on people's ability to trust or share information out of generosity, which limited my ability to cover the various aspects and topics pertaining to peace and security. For instance, apart from the few exceptions of outspoken people, I did not seem to be able to receive meaningful accounts about the current reality of interethnic relations, and particularly Uzbek lifeworlds in Osh, whereas 'off the record' information that I gathered from second- and third-hand accounts ("someone told me that …") revealed dramatic fates that some of them suffered. For the reasons discussed above, I did not try to push further to get access to such accounts but prioritized my idea of people's (at least momentary) safety over ambitions to produce a more revelatory account of peace and security in Kyrgyzstan. The analyses in the following chapters have to be seen in light of these limitations that my position as a foreigner, and additionally as a white, West European male, inevitably incurred and which are nevertheless balanced by a reliance on participatory observations and content analyses which are less affected by such concerns.

A final reflection concerns the more long-term experience with the cooperative and practice-based approach to research and especially regarding the idea of the dialogical knowledge production it entails (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018). The follow-up interaction with representatives from the three partner organizations has been of varying intensity, but overall indicated a sizeable gap between their and my respective priorities. For instance, the articles, policy papers and blog posts in which I described the Civic Union's work in an accessible language, including in Russian (see Lottholz, 2016a, 2016b, 2020), helped to raise their visibility, but to what extent they may really have influenced donors' or national partners' perception of the network is hard to grasp and is most likely negligible. Further, the peer-reviewed articles on the network (Lottholz, 2018c, 2021) as well as on Saferworld's work (Lottholz, 2018b), and not least this monograph, were published too late to offer significant help in positioning these actors. In terms of content, my analyses of community-level project implementation did not yield decisive insights for the practitioners and mostly served to provide further reflection on the dilemmas of community security when considered in the wider societal and political-economic context. Thus, interlocutors mostly told me that they and their partners in the communities were more or less aware of the aspects I had raised and were trying to address them.[1]

This limited usefulness of the reflections that I fed back to the partners is perhaps inevitable given the primary interest of my research in tracing,

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[1]   Skype interview with representative of Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result', 26 March 2016; correspondence with Saferworld representative, March 2016.

mapping and understanding the practices and discourses that they were already familiar with. Further, my embedding of their work in wider imaginaries of statebuilding and trajectories of post-liberal statebuilding have, somewhat unsurprisingly, not yielded decisive critiques and reconsiderations, either. Nevertheless, the fact that someone dedicated extensive time and effort to mapping and contextualizing this work has arguably served to highlight its importance, complexity and long-term impact and thus also generated a degree of appreciation on a personal and emotional level. These less tangible aspects of research collaboration need to be borne in mind and foreground what Lara Montesinos Coleman has called an 'ethos of critique' (2015), by which the remoteness of activist struggles and academic inquiry can be embraced and traversed in a relation of dialogue and mutual support. That is, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of our actions and ability to influence the status quo, an 'ethos of critique' unites researchers and practitioners in their interest in what can be done to gradually and incrementally expose, undermine, and dismantle the forces maintaining present injustice.

Conclusion

This chapter has further apprehended the empirical analysis of the book in three conceptual steps. First, it has presented Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of *heteroglossia* as an entry point to appreciate and analytically grasp the multiplicity of worldviews and knowledge that remain unappreciated in largely Euro- and Western-centric scholarship on processes of political ordering in the non-West. Second, it has introduced and developed a concept to capture such *heteroglossia*, namely the 'social imaginary' based on the works of Castoriadis, Taylor and more recent cultural studies scholarship. Although still somewhat abstract, this discussion already indicates the clear advancement that this approach offers compared with existing research on peace- and statebuilding. Thus, contestations about the kind of political system to be built in a given place, the role of historical legacies of colonialism and dependency or of relations between humans and nature and the spiritual domain, can be made visible and explicated through the analysis of imaginaries of social order. Not least Castoriadis' own later work on ecological imaginaries indicated this necessary broadening of the horizon beyond Western rationalist and metaphysical ontologies.

In the final section, I have discussed the cooperative and practice-based approach taken in this research and situated it both in the wider context and in reflections from my experiences during and after fieldwork. This reflection on the limitations of my own abilities to access and reveal at least some of the realities of life in contemporary Kyrgyzstan are a crucial part of critical social inquiry. Yet, as I have demonstrated here and as will become

clear throughput the empirical chapters, the cooperative approach taken in this research proved to be of decisive value in navigating the security issues faced and in examining how discourses and imaginaries of social order are invoked in, and thus substantively shape, people's understandings and practice of peacebuilding and community security.

Imaginaries and Discourses
of Social Order in Kyrgyzstan

Introduction: Imaginaries of social order
and transformations

This chapter introduces the reader to processes of peace- and statebuilding, transition and social ordering in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian context and further develops a framework for the analysis in the three following empirical chapters. In this way, the analysis of the hierarchical, regressive and exclusionary implications of forms of post-liberal ordering in Kyrgyzstan is provided with ideational and semantic content beyond immediately obvious concepts of 'liberal democracy' and authoritarianism or the interactions of international actors, 'civil society' and state authorities. Applying the conception of social imaginaries as mental constructs that are constituted through discourses (see Chapter 3), I present the different discourses and imaginaries of statebuilding that are most discernible and instructive for understanding social ordering in Kyrgyzstan. In terms of sources and data, the chapter is a hybrid between literature review and empirical chapter. It draws on a wide range of academic literature (including that of Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan), journalistic and other public discourse material to demonstrate how the discourses and imaginaries I define are not new but well established in academic and public knowledge. Beyond these formal sources, my perception of discourse and imaginaries of social order has been profoundly shaped by my experience of staying in Kyrgyzstan for half a year and having sustained contact with partners and friends there ever since. These experiential perspectives are not cited here but discussed elsewhere (see Lottholz and Manolova, forthcoming).

Analogous to the reflection on the approach to fieldwork in Chapter 3, it needs to be acknowledged that simply drawing on local-language literature and material presents merely another step toward a more informed study of social ordering in Kyrgyzstan. It is by no means an insurance for more reliable

or representative perspectives, as scientific and other forms of knowledge in Central Asia have been subject to various forms of ideological control and economic imperatives (Tlostanova and Mignolo, 2012, pp 83ff) and are thus considered with the corresponding scrutiny and reflection here. Yet, more important than the deconstruction of the ideological, political and epistemic influences behind the different sources is the fact that they point to alternative conceptions of human existence and of social ordering, which in turn underline the need to reconsider ideas of statehood and development from a decolonial point of view.

The imaginaries of statebuilding and their constituent discourses as I have mapped them are analytical ideal-types that I have identified as most relevant for the analysis of statebuilding, social order and transition based on my own experience and reading of relevant literature. Other scholars may well define different imaginaries based on other experiences and other material, which may also lead to different results and arguments about the nature (and relevance) of peace- and statebuilding for social ordering. Liu (2014), for instance, finds that the main 'political imaginaries' of Uzbeks in Osh comprised an Islamic one, and that of the *khan*: a paternalistic and authoritarian leader who guarantees security and well-being development, embodied in the figure of the first president of independent Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov. Meanwhile, Megoran invokes a 'post-nomadic political imaginary' (2017, p 91) which anchors present-day politics in the nomadic heritage of the Kyrgyz and foregrounds particular repertoires of claiming authority, maintaining order and asking people for support. While these concrete ideas are captured in the 'tradition and culture' imaginary I propose in the fourth section, the main goal of this chapter is not to provide a final framework for understanding imaginaries of social order, but to advance the conceptualization and use of social imaginaries for analysing the relation between ideas, discourses and concrete practices and outcomes of social ordering.

The crucial point about this analysis of social imaginaries and discourses is that they, as suggested in their original conceptualization by Castoriadis and Taylor, present a mental construct through which people make sense of their past, present and future and link these temporalities with one another. Conversely, this means that capturing present-day social imaginaries is only possible by drawing on historical, cultural and broad societal perspectives of a given locality. This also implies, importantly, an engagement with academic literature and cultural production in local languages, which I accomplished to a limited degree, but to a larger extent than many other works which rely solely on English-language academic literature.

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the most important historical processes and legacies can be captured in the three imaginaries of social order. The first imaginary is named Western 'liberal peace' as it captures the neoliberal

orthodoxy through which Kyrgyzstan's integration into, and its position in, the global (and regional) political economy and its different institutions have been understood and shaped. Within Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan was the country that was most open to international prescriptions of political and institutional reforms (Engvall and Laruelle, 2015, p ix; Omelicheva, 2015). Having been a net receiver of transfers during the Soviet Union but lacking the capital to maintain its costly mining industries, the newly independent country had no leeway to resist the lending conditionalities imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs), as opposed to its neighbours Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan (Broome, 2010; Pelkmans, 2017). The deepening dependence on external support reconstituted the country to what Pétric called a 'global protectorate' (2005), and once Akaev's attempts to blame the country's dire economic situation on global crises did not work, it finally led to his ousting in the 'Tulip revolution' of March 2005. Bakiev's similar authoritarian tendencies, despite earlier pledges of reform, led to his resignation after another popular uprising in April 2010, which entailed instability and conflicts between political groupings and along ethnic lines (mainly between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz political community). These dynamics culminated in the so-called 'Osh' or 'June events' from 10 to 14 June 2010; communal clashes in and around the southern Kyrgyzstani cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad, during which hundreds of people were killed, numerous properties and businesses destroyed and hundreds of thousands of people fled their homes.[1]

In much of the academic and analytical literature (see Omelicheva, 2015; Engvall and Laruelle, 2015; Megoran, 2017), the Osh events are presented as resulting from Kyrgyzstan's faulty development since its independence, while the fault-lines of this 'ethno-political conflict' and the role of state capture, institutional collapse and rivalries between clans (Kyrgyz: *uruu*) have been controversially discussed (Megoran et al, 2014; Ismailbekova, 2017). Many international actors argued that Kyrgyzstan was in need of comprehensive assistance for post-conflict reconstruction but also for political and legal reform to ensure basic human rights and governance standards. While post-conflict peacebuilding has been completed, international actors and domestic civil society continue to take over significant functions and capacities in the areas of security, conflict prevention and more general service provision (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021). The legacy of international intervention, from the Washington Consensus policy dictates to large-scale peacebuilding

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[1]   In this conflict that spread out from the city of Osh on 10 June 2010, 470 people were killed, about 110,000 left the country for Uzbekistan and 400,000 were internally displaced; although none of these numbers could be confirmed in detail (see Matveeva et al (2012) for a comprehensive analysis of the events themselves).

and conflict prevention after 2010, has clearly led to the emergence of a Western 'liberal peace' imaginary which strongly informs people's thinking about the country's economic and political development path.

Amid the dependence of the Kyrgyzstani state on outside help that strongly mirrored experiences of neighbouring Tajikistan and other global post-conflict countries, debates on the 'Osh events' and their implications became a major site for the reassertion of the country's sovereignty, at least in symbolic terms. Different discourses that can be grouped under a 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary came to pose, as suggested in Gullette and Heathershaw's (2015) analysis, resistance toward the Western 'liberal peace' and its various iterations. Discourses situated in this imaginary reject the interference and conditionalities of Western and international actors while invoking Kyrgyzstan's self-sufficiency, dignity and historical achievements and greatness. A third imaginary of 'culture and tradition' plays an equally important role in societal and political debates and processes, where it becomes entwined with both the 'politics of sovereignty' and the Western 'liberal peace' imaginaries. Thus, the nomadic tradition and heritage of the Kyrgyz is invoked to argue that external intervention, advice or assistance are not needed, but it also contains discourses of harmony, acquiescence and peaceful coexistence that are combinable with 'liberal peace' notions of social and political order. As already stated in the Introduction, discourses and ideas in this imaginary resonate with perspectives in decolonial thought as they emphasize the existence and importance of worldviews and forms of life where humans are in harmony with nature and wider spiritual and cosmic domains.

The following three sections provide a more detailed discussion of imaginaries and their respective discourses, which are illustrated below. Given the wide terrain mapped in this analysis, discussion is necessarily brief and embedded partly in long-standing academic and wider societal debates. Thereafter, I indicate how the interaction of these imaginaries and the practices and processes they co-produce shape forms of post-liberal statebuilding as suggested in Figure 4.1.

The Western 'liberal peace' imaginary

This imaginary embodies the idea that Kyrgyzstan should be reformed after the model of Western, liberal-democratic countries and according to ideas of democratic governance, free markets and free trade, privatization, rule of law and human rights as literature on the 'liberal peace' has shown for countries in the aftermath of civil war and large-scale conflict (Joshi et al, 2014). However, rather than merely capturing the status of the 'liberal peace' and the 'West' as globally dominant in terms of its ideological content and policy prescriptions, it is possible to trace the roots of the hegemony of the

Figure 4.1: Imaginaries of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan
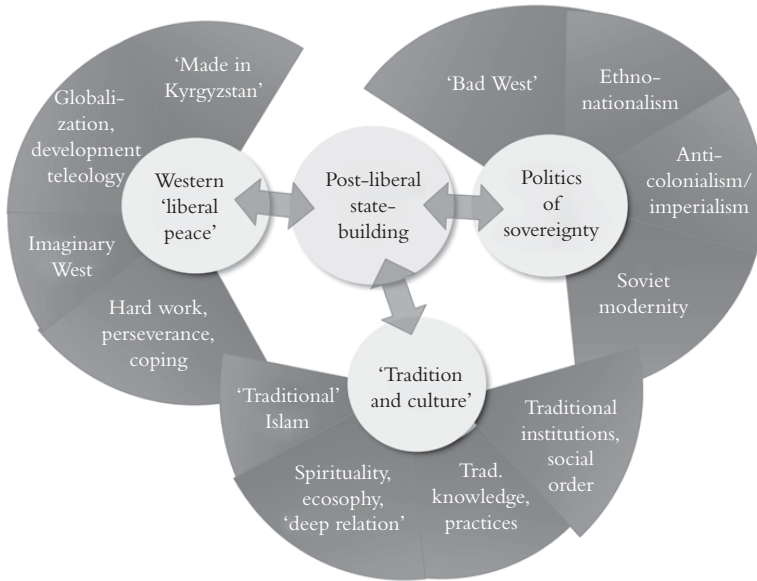
'West' back to its historical roots and collectively shared discourses. Besides the key historical discourse underlying this imaginary, that of the 'imaginary West' (Yurchak, 2006), I identify three further composite discourses, which are most significant for understanding the reception and reproduction of the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary.

The imaginary West

The imagination of 'the West' as a geographical and political space has been quite vivid in the Soviet Union and has continued to inform people's perception about the world and their country's position in it. In his seminal work, *Everything Was Forever Until it Was No More* (2006), the Russian–born sociologist Alexey Yurchak develops the concept of the 'imaginary West' as the 'elsewhere of late Socialism'. He argues that Soviet authorities, knowing that it would be hard to ensure a complete prohibition of the consumption and circulation of Western cultural and consumer goods from music and movies to clothing, asserted control over the interpretation of such materials and over people's views on the West. The Communist Party thus gave citizens explicit guidance on which elements of Western culture were desirable and legitimate to consume and which were too bourgeois and counter–revolutionary and, therefore, to be despised. Thus, according to Yurchak: 'The emergence of the Imaginary West was not in

contradiction with the ethics and aesthetics of state socialism; on the contrary, and somewhat paradoxically, cultural products and forms of knowledge on which the Imaginary West was based were explicitly enabled by the socialist project itself' (2006, p 160).

The result of this filtering and definition process (mostly conducted through Party-controlled media and corresponding societal discourse) is a relatively clear-cut distinction between a 'good' West, whose aspects were deemed commensurable with Socialism, and a 'bad' West that was considered 'extreme' and harmful (2006, pp 166–70). Needless to say, this portrayal might not have been shared by all citizens, whose craving for Western goods gave rise to large black markets in the Soviet and other Socialist economies (2006, pp 171ff). Nevertheless, the salience of this imaginary was proved through Yurchak's research and has been apparent in post-Soviet states until today.

As many scholars have shown, this 'imaginary West' informs people's way of rationalizing their societies, and their own, positioning in the global political economy and the possible vectors for individual and social development (Pilkington et al, 2002; Burrell, 2011; on Kyrgyzstan, see Féaux de la Croix and Ismailbekova, 2014, p 3). Crucially, the West is seen as the place where society and economy function in an efficient way, which makes emulation of Western concepts and models or migration toward the West highly desirable (Manolova, 2018). In turn, Kyrgyzstan's incomplete or only superficial adoption of the 'liberal peace' template of democracy, a free market system, the rule of law, human rights and good governance has been repeatedly emphasized by both politicians and commentators, who mostly blame the failed transition either on specific actors and groupings or the entire country and its 'system' (see Baktygulov, 2012). The main problem is seen in the concentration of power and organization of politics along family, clan and kinship structures which, it has been argued, has fuelled the continuous erosion of political institutions' accountability, the privatization of public offices and state assets and emergence of parallel shadow markets while public goods provision and institutional efficacy drop to a minimum (Gullette, 2010; Engvall, 2016).

In addition to this salient but not unproblematic 'corruption' argument, different authors have shown how discourses of danger and state 'weakness', 'fragility' and 'failure' have dominated the Western gaze upon Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia more generally, and especially so in the context of the global 'war on terror' (Reeves, 2005; Heathershaw and Megoran, 2011; Wilkinson, 2011). Wilkinson (2011) has shown how such concerns had been emerging during Kurmanbek Bakiev's tenure since 2005 when international organizations and individual countries refrained from major political interference, thus allowing Bakiev to consolidate his power and silence or curb opposition with increasingly authoritarian means. The combination

of lacking legitimacy and repressive means to assert authority thus led to the constitution of a 'Potemkin state', which, after the ousting of Bakiev in April 2010, was unable to quell the inter-communal clashes erupting in the south of the country (Wilkinson 2011, p 120; Matveeva et al, 2012).

The conflict made the country a prime target for 'liberal peace'-style peacebuilding and conflict-prevention activities supported by international agencies and donors (Megoran et al, 2014; Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021; Reeves, 2005, 2014, 2015b). In the course of writing this work, comments on this specific argument have highlighted that the 'liberal peace' promoted in Kyrgyzstan will certainly be different from that implemented in 'classic' cases of UN Peacekeeping Intervention such as Cambodia or Timor Leste. However, as the following chapters show, the regional and local projects implemented by organizations like the OSCE or UN Office for Drugs and Crime (UNODC) feature a rhetoric about democratic governance, human rights and other 'liberal peace' components and thus present important cases of 'liberal peace' being reconfigured into post-liberal forms of order. Overall, Kyrgyzstan's distance from the Western ideal of a 'liberal peace' has been a constant feature of public and private conversation and has received renewed attention since the events of October 2020 and the rise of Sadyr Japarov.

Globalization and capitalist development teleology

The teleological understanding of capitalist development and the corresponding endorsement or at least acceptance of market integration imperatives were not newly introduced with free market ideology in the 1990s. Rather, it is well known that they were founded on Marxist-Leninist teachings of national economics during Soviet times (Lottholz, 2017a), giving Socialist subjects a solid understanding of capitalism, the fight against which was declared lost in 1991. Thus, recent literature on capitalist development in post-Socialism (Amsler, 2007; Rabikowska, 2009, p 177; Peshkopia, 2010) has argued that Marxist-Leninist notions of equality and progress were replaced with a new ideal model of a liberal-democratic society, which was embraced with the same metaphysical idealism, if not Hegelian historical determinism and teleological thinking, with which people once worked toward a Communist society. Central Asian politicians and intellectual milieus of society thus embraced the belief that – in line with Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis (1992) – liberal democracy and integration into the world economy could bring economic development and prosperity to any country (Carlson, 2013, pp 128–9). The former *telos* of a Communist society, which was to be reached via different stages of Socialism, had now been replaced with the *telos* of liberal democracy and a free trade capitalist economy.

This fatalism, which Peshkopia denotes as 'fetishisation of capitalism' and a 'deeply ingrained teleological way of perceiving the future' (2010, p 24) elucidates the logic by which people started to adjust themselves to new 'market realities' and economic imperatives, while participation in politics as a way to improve economic policy making had not been perceived as a significant alternative. In his analysis of how the Central Asian 'generation 1991' perceived, internalized and coped with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Christopher Schwartz finds that many people of this generation embraced democracy as a new ideal end state, toward which their country should develop (2013, p 191). He demonstrates how even one of his respondents' fathers, who had grown up during the 'golden years' of Soviet Socialism, adopted free market values and was at some point accepted within his community:

> Namazaliev's impression is that his father was a trailblazer, albeit a tragic one: most of the other Kyrgyz in the village were still under the sway of communist ideology and condemned him as a capitalist, 'but now, it's not that way; everybody understands that this is fine, this is how it should work [*sic*], people are now more market-oriented.' (Schwarz 2013, p 197)

This passage signifies how even part of the generation who had lived under the Socialist regime for most of their life found a chance in the breakdown of this system and the newly pursued path toward democracy and economic liberalization. While there are of course counter examples to such uncritical adoption of the new market ideology (see next section), Kyrgyzstan's development path has become routinely framed within a market economy and trade-relations paradigm, which justifies the republic's dependence on international markets with its landlocked mountainous location and de-industrialized structure. One example for this thinking is ex-president Atambaev's statement on the lack of alternatives to the recent accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU): "Then what do you suggest? We have six million people. Should we maybe close ourselves in and live like in the jungle [*v djungliakh*]? We have to develop, we need a market."[2] This exemplifies how the political establishment is ready to accept the unequal terms under which the EEU and possibly other economic treaties are negotiated. Both in this official discourse and in the sense-making narratives of people more generally, ideas of development within the new global market form a standard template

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[2] Euronews, 'Президент Кыргызстана: свои проблемы мы решаем сами [Kyrgyzstan's president: We will solve our problems on our own]', 20 February 2017, https://ru.euronews.com/2017/02/17/kyrgyz-president-almazbek-atambyev-talks-to-euronews

for discussion (see Kudaibergenova, 2016), while ideas about regulation, state investment, subsidization and steering of the economy are largely dismissed for their association with the Socialist legacy (Amsler, 2007).

'Made in Kyrgyzstan'

To understand contemporary processes of social change in Kyrgyzstan, it is necessary to take account of a perspective somewhat oblivious to such 'politicized' views. In biographical terms, 'Made in Kyrgyzstan' refers to the generation who were born after the fall of the Soviet Union and who thus do not see the development of the country and their personal life walks in the same field of tension as suggested in the other discourses of this imaginary. Ibañez-Tirado expressed this ostensible unaffectedness by citing one of her respondent's questions: "How can I be post-Soviet if I was never Soviet?" (2015, p 192). This generational focus also foregrounds an awareness that the political contestations on Kyrgyzstan's Socialist legacy and its integration into world markets and regimes of democratic governance is less a question than a presumed necessity to younger people, for whom the Soviet Union appears a distant past, with the corresponding sentimentality and nostalgia being hardly understandable (see Ibañez-Tirado, 2015), much to the chagrin of middle-aged and older people (Féaux de la Croix, 2013a; Satybaldieva, 2017).

As Stefan Kirmse's research has shown (Kirmse, 2009, 2010), what matters most for young people is the fact that Kyrgyzstan is a unique country and that their everyday lives as well as memories of growing up are valuable in and of themselves, regardless of the country's economic or political situation or its significance in a global perspective. This also foregrounds an ambitious attitude among young entrepreneurs and professionals who seek to put their country on the world map, whether as Kyrgyz 'wolves of Wall Street'[3] or in the entertainment industry.[4] Kasymov and Nikonova (2006, p 123) argue that by promoting the 'Made in Kyrgyzstan' brand, new firms in niche markets such as handicrafts or food and natural products 'can become key exporters of local goods outside Central Asia, but only under certain conditions: adequate management, adequate marketing, and adequate technologies'. Although

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[3]   Limon.kg, 'Волки с Уолл-Стрит: Айтмырза и Бексултан совершают сделки на сотни тысяч долларов, работая трейдерами в Нью-Йорке [Wolves of Wall Street: Aitmyrza and Beksultan close deals worth thousands of dollars as they work as traders in New York]', 9 April 2021, https://limon.kg/news:74139?fbclid=IwAR0l_M_OFGttxBdaxUEGx_ydX2trqTgly-z22vqe_FYxq93vImU19ko68uo

[4]   For the latest example from Kazakhstan, see Katie Baine, 'Imanbek on How His Improbable Grammy Win Has Made Him "The Son of Kazakhstan"', Billboard.com, 19 March 2021, www.billboard.com/articles/news/dance/9543528/imanbek-interview-grammy-kazakhstan

these sectors have indeed developed and made the country internationally visible, the majority of people lack the 'adequate' skills, education and especially opportunities to run such businesses successfully.

Still, especially young people's perception of political and social issues, as well as their participation in civil society and politics, are thus dominated by the idea that a young person can achieve everything in life if they only work hard enough and start to embrace their personal dreams early enough. 'Made in Kyrgyzstan' thus also denotes the idea that lifestyles, identities and personhood depend on one's personal effort in self-actualization. This ethos resonates a great deal with perceptions about Western conceptions of individualism (Schröder, 2013, p 243) and entrepreneurial personhood (Makovicky, 2014). Relatedly, Kirmse finds that cultural globalization has made multiple media and lifestyle consumption portfolios available and created a 'market place for identities' in Kyrgyzstan (Kirmse, 2010, pp 389ff). The often contradictory combinations of interests and pastimes, which can range from Russian gangster rap, Bollywood and Sunni Islam to social relations with overseas Christian missionaries, are carefully crafted and navigated. Depending on the social context, such as vis-à-vis one's family or neighbours, they can also be dismissed in favour of conformity with gender roles and frames of 'Kyrgyz-ness' and Islam that still predominate in Kyrgyzstani society (Kirmse, 2010, p 399).

Kirmse and other authors also shed light on the dreams and imaginations of young people in terms of their future life goals, ranging from material riches in the form of cars and houses to professional self-realization and success at home or abroad (Kirmse, 2009). While these dreams of the future resonate with the visions of young people all over the world, the opportunity structure for realizing them is certainly more limited in Kyrgyzstan, and leads to selection and social stratification (Satybaldieva, 2015b). Stipends, academic exchange services and bilateral donors are the main sources of hope to attain education and embark on international careers, which do not infrequently lead into international extractive corporations working in Kyrgyzstan (Schröder, 2013). Overall, aspects of such social mobility are rather bleak, however. Without the right degrees, experience or networks, people are confined to the local labour market with long average working hours and low salaries, making it hard to sustain a family (Satybaldieva, 2018).

In sum, ambitions for self-realization under the slogan 'Made in Kyrgyzstan' are out of reach for most of the young generation who are struggling to make ends meet and of whom a large part has joined the transnational migrant economy that emerged over the 1990s (Sanghera and Satybaldieva, 2009; Satybaldieva, 2018; see the next sub-section). In many badly-off families, labour migration is regarded as a matter of course or even a 'rite of passage' akin to the introduction of young people into nomadic herding cycles (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, 2016). With wealth and luxurious

lifestyles on display in urban spaces and social media, it is understandable how inequalities can make some young people turn to networks of businessmen-politicians and their sports clubs to fashion a masculine identity and gain access to career paths in the world of shady business or organized crime (Kirmse, 2010; Radnitz, 2010).

Hard work, perseverance and coping strategies

Finally, ideas about hard work, perseverance, and coping while not getting involved in politics have been popular among people, not least in light of the political instability affecting the country. This perceived virtue of adapting to the transition thus facilitates the ongoing salience of a Western 'liberal peace' imaginary in national politics and statebuilding, but it appears to equally effect entrenched destitution, individual responsibilization and biopolitical subjectification. Perseverance, modesty and coping are crucial values embedded in historical legacies and self-perceptions of the Kyrgyz and thus play an important role in the post-liberal politics examined in this study. They have coexisted with the notion of 'paternalistic care' going back to Soviet days (Lewis, 2016, p 391), according to which authority over economic policy making and provision of welfare is 'put into the hands of rational political leaders … for the sake of a better economic life' (Peshkopia, 2010, p 27). Political leaders are thus entrusted with the necessary techno–scientific competencies (Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015, p 46; Heathershaw, 2009, p 66).

Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EEU in 2015 has further deepened its position as a marginal economy providing cheap migrant labour and raw materials and has further stripped the domestic economy of significant livelihood opportunities apart from labour migration. With a sixth, or around one million, of the country's overall population working for Russia or other post–Soviet countries (as of 2019, ADB and UNDP, 2020) in order to secure a living for their families, the burden on many Kyrgyzstanis is obvious. Labour migration has rendered most Kyrgyzstanis, similar to other Central Asians, as inferior among citizens of former Soviet states:

> Though most migration is voluntary, the conditions for migrants are often difficult, if not outright inhumane. Central Asians have found themselves tricked and trafficked into conditions of near-slavery, abused and deceived by employers, robbed, and victimized by a Russian public that has been increasingly xenophobic and violent against migrants from the former Soviet 'South'. (Fryer et al, 2014, p 172)

This biopolitical positioning of Kyrgyz society leads to strong counter discourses examined in the next section and, with the social dispersion, the

high burden on families and psychological effects it produces have profound implications for security and public order in the community, which are further discussed in Chapter 5.

Such hardship notwithstanding, migration to the countries of the former Soviet Union or beyond (for instance to China, Europe or the US) has become an established practice for securing livelihoods (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, 2016; Thieme, 2008). At the same time, maintaining and engaging with social structures and networks during migration helps people to cope with the conditions of a life dispersed by market forces (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, 2016; Fryer et al, 2014; Thieme, 2008). Both ancient traditions and cultures as well as the Islamic faith are invoked in the promotion of hard work, perseverance and coping strategies for the maintenance of harmony and unity under such harsh conditions, as is further discussed in the 'tradition and culture' imaginary. Most illustratively, Satybaldieva (2015b, p 116) shows how people engage in a 'politics of patience' as they 'tend to accept their circumstances, choosing to improve their own conditions and finding virtues in self-restraint, self-responsibility, endurance and determination … taking pride in not complaining, in overcoming difficult obstacles, and working hard'. Whether through such refuge into fatalism or in reference to tradition, spirituality and religion, it appears that many people have become accustomed to dealing with the hardship wreaked on them by the transition without complaining, simply hoping that things will get better at some point. On the other hand, these discourses and positionings have given rise to resentment and rejection of Western and other international influence in the attempt to assert the sovereignty of the country.

The 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary

This imaginary unites the discourses which can be attributed to Kyrgyztsanis' striving for independence and freedom from external and domestic criticism and interference in politics. David Gullette and John Heathershaw's (2015) analysis of the 'affective politics of sovereignty' in debates around the 'Osh events' of June 2010 provides the basis for the broader conception of 'politics of sovereignty' that I propose here. They argue that sovereignty should not only be researched in terms of its legal, political and international implications, as has predominantly been the case in the disciplines of political science, IR and legal studies, but that it should be 'considered in terms of its affects as well as its effects' on people's thinking and behaviour (2015, p 123). Much as I understand the imaginary as an interface between the material and ideational realms, they contend that '[t]o study the affective politics of sovereignty is to study the emotive, psychological, and embodied discourses of state politics in its full social context, symbolic, and material'

(2015, p 131). Yet, I understand 'politics of sovereignty' in a broader sense, which includes a wider variety of enactments and discourses of sovereignty, that can be more formal and legalistic as in the case of sovereignty discourses studied in political science and IR. People's use and support of such sovereignty discourses is an equally important factor in shaping social order and political decisions, for instance through ideas of 'titular ethnicity' or territorial integrity and claims to greatness going back to Soviet times. The key tension in this imaginary lies in the ambiguity between discursive positionings, those invocations of pride and belonging that do not stand in contradiction with individuals or groups who identify themselves otherwise, and, on the other hand, positionings that exhibit a readiness to use coercion, violence and exclusion to maintain or assert 'sovereignty' of the perceived political community. I examine the discourses 'ethno-nationalism' and the 'bad West' as examples of the latter position, alongside discourses on 'Soviet modernity' and 'anti-colonialism' that propagate sovereignty together with peaceful coexistence and 'peoples' friendship'.

The 'bad West'

This first discourse is the flipside of the 'imaginary West' element in the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary discussed above. As Yurchak has argued, Soviet ideologues tried to delineate people's perception of the West into good, acceptable elements (such as knowledge of certain authors, music and a sense of cosmopolitanism and tolerance) on the one hand, and the 'extreme' and harmful features of life in the West, on the other (2006, pp 166–70). Although not all of the population believed in the pictures conveyed in Soviet media, the portrayal of life in the West and Western societies as inferior in light of their moral weaknesses, greed and lack of solidarity appeared convincing to many people and continues to inform their understanding of world politics and ideas of capitalist development.

Especially in light of the disappointment with the market reforms, free trade and democratization, many people have started to think that the level of development and societal efficiency of the West is impossible to reach and is also not desirable or compatible with Central Asian 'culture' (Omelicheva, 2015, p 91). The West has thus also been imagined as the source of the neoliberal development agenda and as primary reference point for the elite project this model embodies in Kyrgyzstan (Pétric, 2005) and Central Asia at large (Trevisani, 2014). Ideas hailing from Soviet times, that market exchange and consumption are morally inferior and undesirable (Mandel and Humphrey, 2002) informs the West's construction as an anti–ideal associated with moral decay, capitalist greed and social inequality (Makarychev and Medvedev, 2015, pp 45, 50; Omelicheva, 2015, p 81). Féaux de la Croix's analysis of older–age Kyrgyzstani development workers' views exemplifies

these feelings with interviewees' opinions that young people 'just care about money' and have lost respect for elder people, and are generally lacking morality and spirituality (*dukhovnost*) (2013a, pp 225–8). This situation and the general lack of education and nurturing (*vospitanie*) is more or less explicitly attributed to the transition toward a capitalist market economy based on a Western template, while critical and anti-capitalist traditions in the West are overlooked in this discourse.

Furthermore, the negative side of the imaginary West informs arguments in domestic political debates on human rights and other issues, in relation to which international actors pressure the country to comply with global frameworks and standards. In order to reject such perceived external interference, it is commonplace to point to the financial support that human rights activists and NGOs receive from the US or other geopolitical actors, to then argue that no neutrality or positive contributions are to be expected from such 'grant-eaters [*grantoiedy*]' and 'foreign agents' (Féaux de la Croix, 2013b, p 452; Marat, 2013, p 16). A particularly politicized issue is the rights of LGBTQI+ people (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender, queer and intersexual), who are often perceived as 'a perversion of Western origin at odds with local values and identities, with many arguing that there is no such thing as a gay, lesbian or transgender Kyrgyz' (Wilkinson, 2014b). The fact that 'LGBT' activism came to be seen as an 'imposition of foreign norms by an aggressive group of morally corrupt deviants demanding "special rights" to violate local values' (Wilkinson, 2014b) exemplifies the construction of an imaginary West as a source of amoral, sexually permissive and deviant ways of life, whose influence the people of Kyrgyzstan have to resist. This reflects the logic with which 'the West', or external forces in general, are presented as the culprits responsible for the country's dire economic situation and instability.

Soviet modernity

This discourse stands in more implicit tension with the imperialist agenda of 'the West'. It denotes the acknowledgement, pride and nostalgia that is felt toward the Soviet Union and its achievements. While the literature on post-Soviet transition and democratization has arguably undervalued such sentiments, a large part of the population still confers meaning on the Soviet past. It is thus crucial to acknowledge the cognitive dissonance that such people have endured in the past decades which largely obliterated all the achievements established under great strain during Socialism (Cornis-Pope, 2012; Féaux de la Croix, 2013a).

The Soviet history of the Kyrgyz Republic and Central Asian republics more generally is often understood as the origin of their modern statehood. Scholars on Central Asia broadly agree that the Bolshevik conquest of

Turkestan and the social transformation campaign during Stalin's reign led to the establishment of Central Asian nations (see Hirsch, 2005; Khalid, 2007; Roy, 2007; Brubaker, 2011). While there had been forms of social organization under the Russian Empire and before (see Borubashov, 2013 and next section), it is argued that the Bolsheviks brought about the supposed liberation of the lower classes and reconfigured cultural and social relations in the new republics. These transformations came with a significant toll in the form of deaths, loss of property and livelihoods during restructuring and collectivization campaigns, and most importantly the purges of the 1930s (Haugen, 2003; Khalid, 2007). Given the still nascent status of historical reflection on the downside of the Soviet regime's reign in Central Asia,[5] its image is dominated by the idea that sacrifices under Stalin's rule and during the Second World War enabled the relative welfare and rising living standards during the post-Stalin era (Féaux de la Croix, 2013a, p 228; Sievers, 2013, p 5).

The process foregrounding the founding both of the Kyrgyz and other Central Asian republics and the territorial quarrels in the contemporary period is the national territorial delimitation (NTD, *natsoinalnoe razmezhivanie*), which took place roughly from 1924 until 1936. In its course, ethnicity, which had hitherto been largely insignificant and secondary to tribal or religious association principles, was elevated to be the major principle by which people, or rather nations (Ru.: *etnos*), would be distinguished and governed (Roy, 2007, p 61). The underlying idea was that of ethnogenesis, a combination of primordialist and constructivist conceptions of nationalism, according to which nations were formed based on common history, heritage and ancestral lines, while the adjustment of economic conditions, education and political engineering would serve to direct this process (Laruelle, 2008). The division of Central Asia into republics along ethno-national lines was thus supposed to 'accelerate history' (Haugen, 2003, p 169) and consolidate the nations of the Soviet Union. This ethno-national, primordialist discourse was constantly balanced with an internationalist rhetoric of the 'peoples' friendship' (Ru.: *druzhba narodov*) emphasizing solidarity and brotherhood between nations and propagating the idea that with the reaching of Communism and equality of people, ethnic belonging would gradually lose its meaning and, thanks to intermarriage of people from different ethnicities, finally fade away (Edgar, 2007, p 585).

The idea of 'peoples' friendship' in a multi-ethnic and multicultural Soviet society served as a mobilizing vehicle against the adverse effects of many Soviet policies (Edgar, 2007; Marat, 2008; Tlostanova, 2010). Most

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[5]   While Kassymbekova's collection (2017), Khalid (2007) and Roy (2007) cover related questions, a comprehensive history of the Gulag in Central Asia is still largely lacking.

importantly, it was used to mitigate people's grievances over being cut off from their 'home' national republics,[6] which was inevitable in central authorities' attempts to reflect both ethnic composition and economic and industrial production concerns in the delimitation (Haugen, 2003, p 181). While the running of political affairs and administration was dominated by the respective 'titular ethnicities', minority ethnic groups were granted cultural and linguistic rights, specific welfare provision and other forms of 'positive discrimination' (Martin, 2001, p 17; Reeves, 2014, p 123). This toeing of a thin line between the reification of ethnic identity and a civic-nationalist emphasis on Soviet citizenship was fairly successful in forging peaceful coexistence, at least until the Soviet economy came under increasing strain in the 1980s.

Ethno-nationalism

As a counter perspective to the civic nationalism of Soviet-era 'peoples' friendship', various analyses point to the significant role of ethnicity in life during the Soviet Union and the institutional racism and chauvinism experienced especially by Central Asians in relation to their 'European' counterparts, but also among each other (Sahadeo, 2007; Igmen, 2012). In Kyrgyzstan, competition between ethnic groups gave rise to an ethno-political legacy standing in tension with the 'peoples' friendship' discourse throughout the Soviet and much of the post-Soviet periods, and especially so in the southern part of the country.

With the increased urbanization and industrial restructuring of the southern city of Osh from the 1960s onward, more Kyrgyz started moving to the city whose central areas had been inhabited by a sizeable Uzbek population (Liu, 2014; Megoran, 2017, ch 4). The city administration began restructuring Osh into a modern industrial town, in which the traditional Uzbek *mahalla* neighbourhoods were supposed to give way to multi-storey residential buildings and urban infrastructures such as parks, boulevards and squares (Harrowell, 2015). The assertion of Kyrgyz interests further led to the increased staffing of administrative and education institutions with Kyrgyz instead of Uzbeks, who had been strongly represented in this area due to their high educational attainments (Megoran, 2013). Despite these changes forcing them to retreat into other professions, Uzbeks managed to maintain their relative well-being as perceived by large swathes of poor Kyrgyz moving to Osh from the countryside (Megoran, 2013). With the Soviet economic

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[6] Thus, Tajiks in Bukhara (Uzbek SSR), Uzbeks in Osh (Kyrgyz SSR) and Kyrgyz living in the environs of Andijan (Uzbek SSR) became minority groups in the respective republics (Haugen, 2003, ch 8).

model increasingly stagnating in the 1980s, tensions in the competition for jobs, public housing and land erupted into deadly clashes in and around Osh and Uzgen in the year 1990 (Tishkov, 1995). Since independence, the marginalization of Uzbeks and other national minorities intensified due the increasingly precarious economic situation and the perception that Uzbeks, traditionally more successful in trade and business, were generally better off than Kyrgyz.

The first president of the newly independent Kyrgyz Republic, Askar Akaev, attempted to mitigate these tensions and conflicts by promoting an agenda of 'interethnic unity' (Ru.: *mezhdunarodnoe soglasie*, lit. international, meaning between different nationalities or ethnicities) that emphasized the multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of a tolerant Kyrgyzstani society under the slogan 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' (*Kyrgyzstan – nash obshii dom*) (Marat, 2008, p 14). Akaev created a 'Peoples' Assembly' (*Assambleia narodov Kyrgyzstana*, Assembly of the peoples of Kyrgyzstan) as a forum for the representatives of minorities and for the celebration of Kyrgyzstan's traditions and historical legacies (Omelicheva, 2015, p 81). The epic of Manas, an ancient hero in oral history, was made a bedrock of Kyrgyz national identity and a mandatory part of the school curriculum and cultural life of the country (van der Heide, 2015). While Akaev maintained that Manas was a hero for Kyrgyzstanis of all ethnicities, this civic, modern conception of nationalism did not appeal to the conservative and ethno-nationalistically inclined, especially those from rural and southern districts of Kyrgyzstan (Laruelle, 2008, 2012).

Neither Akaev nor his successor, Kurmanbek Bakiev, used the ethno-nationalist register to mobilize support among the electorate and elites, which led to its emergence as an increasingly accepted discourse among opposition politicians in the course of the 2000s (Laruelle, 2012). Some politicians even went so far as to say that the Kyrgyz, being the majority or 'titular' ethnic group of the country, 'are the masters of the house, the other nations and peoples [are] tenants [*Kyrgyzy v strane khoziaeva doma, a ostalnye narody i natsii kvartiranty*]' (cited in Gullette and Heathershaw, 2015, pp 132–3). Different authors have argued that the 2010 clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan, which led to the disproportionate destruction of Uzbek properties, businesses and loss of Uzbek lives, have to be seen as an expression of such sentiment and the feeling of Kyrgyz that their sovereignty as the 'titular' ethnic group and majority was being 'imperilled' (Laruelle, 2012; Wilkinson, 2014a). Adding nuance to the accounts of Kyrgyz as perpetrators, some authors have pointed out that the fears and frustrations underlying this discourse deserve to be understood in their own right instead of being dismissed as irrational and uncivilized (Gullette and Heathershaw, 2015; Megoran, 2013, 2017, ch 4). A key challenge has been the virtual banning of research on the topic of interethnic relations and the ethno-nationalist sentiments from public

discourse in Kyrgyzstan, with researchers and journalists trying to investigate such topics having been targeted by authorities such as the State Committee for National Security (*GKNB*), which arguably sought to prevent criticism and debate (Bekmurzaev et al, 2018) and thus reinforced the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary.

The most violent phenomenon relating to ethno-national thinking and the defence of Kyrgyz heritage and culture is the emergence of vigilante groups, which police people's behaviour at home and abroad. *Kyrk chyro*, literally translated as 'Forty riders' and constituted in historical reference to the warriors in the following of the ancient hero Manas, raid night clubs and businesses that serve international visitors to expose their lack of morality and decadence and rid the Kyrgyz working in these businesses from their engagement with foreigners (Eshalieva, 2019). An even more bizarre form of ethno-traditionalism were attacks carried out by the so-called 'Patriots' [*patrioty*]; groups of young men who, both in Kyrgyzstan and in diaspora communities, track down, interrogate and intimidate Kyrgyz women who do not conform to expected behaviour (see Bigg, 2016). Such intrusive and violent policing of moral purity and the national gene pool – the justification purported by the vigilantes – are extreme ways of re-asserting perceived interests of sovereignty, which also present significant challenges for initiatives to maintain social order and community security.

Anti-colonialism

In opposition to the other three discourses within the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary, the one on anti-colonialism rejects interference not only from Western powers, but is also critical vis-à-vis the colonial and exploitative implications of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation, its prime successor state, alongside other players such as China (see Eshalieva, 2019). Regarding the Soviet period, different scholars have examined the colonial framings of the criticisms that the Kyrgyz SSR's position was in many respects one of colonial subjugation (see Loring, 2014). Thus, it was made to serve as a raw material producer for Moscow and thus was reliant on foodstuff and fuel deliveries from it (Pelkmans, 2017). Furthermore, the racial and civilizational discourse informing the politics between the republics' leaderships and people often had a strong undertone of white European supremacy over their counterparts in the 'Eastern Republics' (Sahadeo, 2007). These sentiments had already led to fierce battles for political power and control between Central Asian political leaderships and Moscow during *perestroika* period in the late 1980s (Lewis, 2012), and the campaigns of post-Soviet Central Asian leaders and their 'nationalizing regimes' (Brubaker, 2011) fortified this reassertion of sovereignty vis-à-vis external interests.

Most anti-colonial modes of thought seem to be inextricably linked to discourses of Kyrgyz nationalism, and specifically to the ethno-nationalist variant discussed above. The state-sanctioned historiography of the past three decades has spawned different protagonists of Kyrgyz history who were seen as martyrs and fighters for the interests of the Kyrgyz, even in the absence of a consolidated Kyrgyz statehood in the days before the Soviet Union. Similar to the rediscovery and utilization of the Manas epic by Akaev in the 1990s, these heroic stories were thus explored and moulded into a wider narrative about Kyrgyz statehood. The sourcing, rehashing and circulation of stories of heroic figures from periods of past greatness can be understood as another, historiographic form of 'politics of sovereignty'.

Three stories of anti-colonial heroes and heroines serve as key examples that have been promoted in the form of film productions in recent times. The first figure is Kurmanjan Datka, who in recent historiography and popular imaginaries has become regarded as a 'mother of the nation' and has been honoured with multiple memorials and streets named after her (Canning, 2014). Born in the tribe of the Mungush in the Alai mountains south of the city of Osh, Kurmanjan ran away from her arranged marriage, defying the patriarchal tradition of the time. She acquired the title *datka* or 'righteous ruler' after the assassination of her husband Alymbek datka by the far superior Russian army, which was encroaching on their lands. The climax of this story is when Kurmanjan Datka accepts the execution of her son as a sacrifice to reach a ceasefire, which became the foundation for a decades-long peace brought by the 'queen's' ability to persuade the Kyrgyz not to raise their arms (Pannier, 2015). Thus, Kurmanjan Datka's heroism, selflessness and strategic thinking, and striving for peace and unity make her a historical hero but also demonstrate the dilemmas of life under imperial rule.

Another historic hero celebrated for his standing up for the Kyrgyz national interest is Iskhak Razzakov, the first chairman of the council of ministers of the CPSU (Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union) in the Kyrgyz Autonomous SSR, the predecessor of the fully self-governed Kyrgyz SSR. Having defended research into and teaching of the Manas epic in the early 1930s, Razzakov was removed from office by the Stalinist regime, a course of events earning him retrospective hero status which was brought back into popular memory by a much-acclaimed movie in 2015. The final example of resistance toward the Soviet regime and its policy of de facto colonization of the Kyrgyz SSR is Yusup Abdrakhmanov, who in 1929 demanded more policy autonomy for the republic's leadership in order to facilitate economic development and mitigate dependency on food imports (Loring 2014, pp 80ff). Abdrakhmanov's labelling of European CPSU members as 'colonisers with party cards' (2014, p 79) is a rare instance of the explicit assertion of Kyrgyz interests through a colonial framing. These figures stand out

in a legacy characterized by both cooperativeness and resistance of many generations of Kyrgyzstani political actors.

With political actors seemingly unable or unwilling to challenge problematic developments such as the current integration into the EEU, a lot of resistance, which can be associated with anti-colonial/imperial forces, is located in decentral realms of popular protests. In 2006, for instance, a broad coalition of civil society actors rallied against the country's classification as a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) and corresponding imposition of further loan conditionalities (Marat, 2006). Another example is the demonstrations against the deployment of an unarmed OSCE monitoring mission to southern Kyrgyzstan after the 2010 events under the slogan 'Say No to a Kyrgyz Kosovo!' (Gullette and Heathershaw, 2015). Given the strong interweaving with other discourses in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary, anti-colonialism is an important discourse and line of thinking in this imaginary.

The 'tradition and culture' imaginary

The third imaginary of social order is most appropriately glossed as 'tradition and culture' and refers to the perception of the rich cultural and historical heritage of the Kyrgyz and its crucial role in shaping understandings of social reality and ways of life. As Beyer and Finke note, the undeniable centrality of 'tradition' in Central Asia stems from its omnipresence as an emic category but also from its use as a governing tool. As they argue, 'retraditionalization can be interpreted as paths by which powerful local and national actors try to redefine social order in their own interests and impose a corresponding set of rules of the game on everyone around' (Beyer and Finke, 2019, p 315). Thus, '[p]owerful actors may use traditional concepts, or sometimes invent them, to serve their own purposes', for instance to 'cover up or legitimize existing inequalities' (2019, p 315). Beyer's in-depth study *The Force of Custom* further elucidates the role of *salt* or custom – understood as a routine set of repertoires which are strongly embedded in legal and cultural understandings of tradition (2016, pp xvi, 20). As she shows, doing things 'according to *salt*' (Kg.: *salt boiuncha*, 2016, pp 6–7) is a principle that runs throughout private life and community-level justice and social relations, and is even used by regional and national political actors to legitimize – through public endorsement from *aksakals* (elders) – their economic activities or parliamentary campaigns (2016, pp 115–16).

At the same time, the status and very essence of tradition has been subject to debate and contestation in the wake of their revival and intensification through consumer cultures, and given their confrontation and mixing with multiple influences from across the world. This foregrounds a strong conceptual overlap between this imaginary and the 'politics of sovereignty'

one, as certain traditions and cultural practices are seen in need of protection from outside influence. While some of the 'tradition and culture' discussed under this imaginary concerns knowledges, thinking and practices as they actually exist in people's lived realities, the 'tradition' and 'culture' invoked in the 'politics of sovereignty' usually appear as stylized and hybridized with other modes of thought and action for precisely the purpose of presenting the dignity and sovereignty of the Kyrgyz(stani) people. This degree of instrumentalization or 'invention' of tradition and culture (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; see Beyer and Finke, 2019) does not mean that the traditions and cultural practices reviewed here are necessarily more 'authentic' or 'genuine'. As Kyrgyz tradition was subject to profound politicization, classification and regulation, the lines between officially sanctioned tradition under Russian imperial and Soviet rule and other merely tolerated, undesired or illegal customs and practices were often blurred (Hirsch, 2005; Beyer, 2006, p 160). While contestation on such delineation is most apparent in the religious sphere, where the discourse of 'traditional' versus 'foreign' Islam plays a significant role, the less politicized role of 'tradition and culture' in society is analysed through discourses on 'traditional institutions and concepts of social order' and on 'traditional knowledge as source of well-being'. Finally, the discourse of 'Connection between humans, nature and spiritual domain' foregrounds critical thinking about modern statehood and mass scale social organization that resonate with decolonial standpoints.

'Traditional' versus 'foreign' Islam

Since independence in 1991, Islam has been strongly embraced both in Kyrgyzstan and more broadly in Central Asia and thus experiences a resurgence that has mostly been attributed to the ideological vacuum left after the fall of the Soviet Union (see Pelkmans, 2017). Islam became a core feature of Kyrgyzstan's post-Soviet nation-building project, with the president and high officials identifying as Muslims, the main Muslim holidays declared as national holidays and extensive building programmes for mosques, of which there were already 1,700 in 2012, compared with only a handful in 1991 (Tromble, 2014, p 531). Still, authorities also tried to keep a distance from religion because of the potentially radical and politically transformative ambitions of religious movements. According to André Biard, they 'hoped to annihilate any pan-Islamist dimension by promoting a "good" national and traditionalist Islam' (2010, p 326). This was done through different state and semi-state bodies, most importantly the State Agency for Religious Affairs and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan or *Muftiat*. Opinions about these bodies diverge greatly, with many claiming them to be non-independent, corrupted and instrumentalized by the government (Khamidov, 2013).

Especially in the late 2000s, a dominant discourse started distinguishing a 'good' and 'traditional' Islam that does not challenge the social order and authorities with newer, more orthodox ideas gaining traction among believers. In fact, Islam itself had been brought to Kyrgyzstan, or rather the country's nomadic forebears, by Arab armies invading the areas making up the present-day republic and converting the nomadic population from the 8th century AD onward (Kargiannis, 2005, p 137). The predominant denomination in Kyrgyzstan, *Hanafi Maskhab*, can itself be seen as a hybrid of Islamic teachings and the customs of different nomadic tribes (Toktogulova, 2007). Besides a pious and diligent conduct of faith, it also espouses a number of festivities (called *toi* or *ash*), exchange and community relations and sacrifice rituals that are regarded as wasteful in more orthodox interpretations of Islam (Toktogulova, 2007). Especially the more permissive stance vis–à–vis alcohol consumption and socializing between men and women makes 'traditional' Kyrgyz Islam appear half-hearted and even sinful, so that many of the *Hanafi* practices are considered as *shirk* (idolatry) and *bidaiat* or 'innovations' diluting orthodox interpretations of Islam (Tulebaeva, 2017, p 82).

Tulebaeva's (2017) analysis dissects the value conflict between traditional Kyrgyz Islam and the newer, more orthodox trend, which prescribes rituals and ways of life directly derived from the Quran and teachings hailing from the Middle East, Turkey, India and Bangladesh. Such contestations are also framed as a matter of maintaining 'old' interpretations of Islam and the notion of *salt* or custom (see above), which refers to heritage handed down through generations and is considered as inalienable by Kyrgyz people. Correspondingly, Kyrgyz are seen to be Muslims by virtue of their ethnic identity and are also referred to as 'cultural Muslims' (Tulebaeva, 2017, p 78), who practise 'the Islam that has been coming from our ancestors' and is worth preserving, while adherents of orthodox approaches see it as a 'tool of enemies who want to destroy the religion' (Tulebaeva, 2017, p 95).

The salience of the topic was exemplified in a campaign on billboards in the country's major cities, which pictured groups of women in traditional Kyrgyz head–dresses (*elecheck*) next to women in *hijabs* and ones completely veiled with black *niqabs* with the caption: 'My poor people, where are we going?' [*Kairan elim, kaida baratabyz?*]. Despite their offensive message vis–à–vis the pious Muslim community, the billboards were welcomed by large parts of the population and public actors, with then President Atambaev even subsidizing and defending the campaign (Nasritdinov and Esenamanova, 2017). This shows how foreign religion and orthodox Islam have become framed as invasive and potentially dangerous, leading to a securitization of dressing styles and faith (Tromble, 2014). Beyond this adversarial discourse on religion in the public sphere, practices and teachings of Islam are also a source of social harmony, peacefulness, patience and obedience, which have served as an entry point for

peacebuilding measures (Alisheva, 2015) and resonate both with the discourse on coping and perseverance discussed above (see Satybaldieva, 2015b) and with the discourse on traditional knowledge discussed later on.

Traditional institutions and concepts of social order

The second crucial discourse emphasizes the importance of traditional institutions and concepts of social order stemming from the nomadic heritage and history of the Kyrgyz. In contrast to the next discourse on traditional knowledge, this discourse is situated in a particular historic or rather historiographic angle, which is primarily interested in the usefulness and application of historical forms of social organizations in the present. This discourse, apparent in recent works such as Bekbosun Borubashov's *History and Law of the Kyrgyz Republic* (2015), can be traced through the ongoing significance of two traditional institutions, the *kurultai* and *aksakal* courts and key concepts of order and peace which I briefly discuss here.

The *kurultai* – an assembly of community representatives – goes back several centuries in the history of the Kyrgyz nomadic tribes. Throughout history, it has been a significant vehicle for the establishment, consolidation and extension of administration, rule of law and military command in the epochs during which the Kyrgyz had lived under Turkic, Mongol, Kokand and Russian rule (Borubashov, 2015). As part of President Akaev's promotion of a multicultural nationalist ideology, they were reintroduced and institutionalized as village assemblies to plan and monitor municipal social and economic development (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, p 533). Having lost this role later on, *kurultais* are nowadays still held on various occasions, for instance as a substitute for party gatherings or as protests against authorities, as they symbolize proximity to the people and traditions (see Gezitter.org, 2015; Bedelbek kyzy, 2015).[7] Such popular democracy creates accountability, but is also vulnerable to capture, populism, manipulation and deadlock, because 'people [participate] because they are relatives or because they are promised money or offices'.[8] The best example of these ambiguous implications was Sadyr Japarov's calls for creating a national *kurultai* as an upper chamber of parliament that would represent people based on traditional principles.

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[7] Zanoza.kg, 'Народный курултай: референдум и изменение Конституции нелегитимны [People's *kurultai*: The referendum and changes to the Constitution are not legitimate]', 20 October 2016, http://zanoza.kg/doc/345642_narodnyy_kyryltay:_referendym_i_izmenenie_konstitycii_nelegitimny.html [17 April 2017].

[8] Ganyeva, N. (2016) 'Курултай новый – проблемы старые [New *kurultai*, old problems]', 12 March 2016, http://24.kg/perekrestok/28996_kurultay_novyiy_-_problemyi_staryie/ [17 April 2017].

Aksakal Courts, or Courts of Elders (literally white beards) are an institution in the legal realm that has enjoyed yet more popularity. *Aksakals* are seen as authoritative not only based on their age, experience and connectedness within the community, but also as elders of a respective lineage or *uruu* (clan or tribe) (Beyer, 2006, p 160). Already in Soviet days, when the courts had not formally existed, *aksakals* or lineage elders would meet regularly and discuss issues pertaining to the community. This social structure was an ideal basis for institutionalization into lay or alternative dispute settlement mechanisms and was institutionalized in 1995 to unburden the increasingly unfit ex-Soviet legal system. According to the 2002 Law 'On the *aksakal* courts', they are constituted by individuals who enjoy respect within the community and judge disputes 'according to moral norms that reflect the customs and traditions of the Kyrgyz'.[9] *Aksakal* courts were thus created in most communities and have become the first point of contact for smaller conflicts. Because all 'minor' cases are first reviewed by *askakals* before being handed on to the police and judiciary, it could be said that people are 'forced to interact with this institution if they want to have their cases considered by officials' (Beyer, 2006, p 147). On the other hand, Kyrgyz traditions tend to favour certain solutions to conflicts, for instance maintaining marriages rather than encouraging divorces, or not splitting inherited property for the sake of harmony, but at the expense of parties claiming their share (Beyer, 2006, p 152). Further, *aksakals*' knowledge of statutory law is faint or non-existent, which means that decisions are mostly taken according to *salt*, while state law and law enforcement mechanisms are invoked by *aksakals* to reinforce their decisions and act as de facto state representatives (Beyer, 2014, p 106). In light of these limitations, Beyer and Girke (2015) have argued that *aksakals* often reproduce a rather conservative and potentially repressive social order while not effectively addressing normative conflicts.

As Botokanova argues, the 'archaic conceptions of law' and moralistic understandings underlying *aksakals*' work were shaped by 'socio-economic factors, the nomadic way of life, the domination of the communal psychology over the individual, and the de facto absence of gender equality' (Botokanova, 2015, p 171). While foregrounding a level of injustice and bias in favour of well-endowed elites (2015, p 171), Botokanova maintains that this normative predisposition also ensured the functioning of society in rural areas and secured a sense of belonging under the harsh conditions of social transformation undergone throughout the 20th century (2015, pp 113ff; see also Féaux de la Croix and Ismailbekova, 2014).

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[9]   Art. 1, I, 2, 'Law on the *aksakal* Courts', http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/
    1070

Traditional law and norms stemming from the Kyrgyz nomad culture are an important basis of social order especially in rural communities. Ideas of 'unity' (*birimdik*) and 'harmony' (*yntymak*) are at the forefront of these projects, which are carried out by *aksakals*, imams and local civil society (Beyer, 2013, 2016). As Bichsel (2005) and Reeves (2015b) have shown, they are mobilized for conflict prevention in interethnic and cross border communities in the Ferghana Valley in southern Kyrgyzstan. As Reeves' critique of practices under the umbrella of promoting *tolerantnost* (tolerance) indicates, however, there is ample scope for investigating such practices of 'harmony ideology' (Lewis, 2016, p 389) as to how much they present an instantiation of a repressive system where, in Nader's words, 'harmony coerced is freedom denied' (Nader, 2001; Beyer and Girke, 2015). Traditional institutions and concepts of order thus link the Kyrgyz with their ancient traditions and the experience of their ancestors – making them stand above and beyond politics, which become cast in an amoral light – but also figure as an instrument consolidating social order and hegemonic domination.

Traditional knowledge as a source of well-being

Beyond pragmatic arrangements of governance, organization and administration, the application of 'traditional knowledge' from the nomadic forebears inspires more sustainable ways of life and social organization. On a more mundane level, nomadic traditions foreground a strong political agenda in regard to agriculture, resource management and environmental protection, which resonate with discourses of 'sustainable development', environmental protection, climate change and 'agrobiocultural diversity' (Botokanova, 2015, p 18). In presenting results of a 2010 research initiative on 'traditional knowledge' (*traditsionnye znania*, plural), Botokanova argues that '[t]echnogenic society', in contrast to its 'traditional' counterpart, is understood to see nature as a 'deposit' on which it draws for the realization of production, industrialization and economic growth (2015, p 110). The technogenic approach has wrought significant damage and the destruction of livelihoods in the form of flooded valleys in Kyrgyzstan's Tian Shan mountains or the salinization and drying out of the Aral Sea (Féaux de la Croix, 2016; Sievers, 2013).

The counter-model to the technogenic world view is an 'ecosophic' one which, according to Urmanbetova and Abdrasulov, is based on the nomadic way of life and 'keep[s] in step with the development of nature' and posits as the core principle the 'harmony of nature and humans' (Urmanbetova and Abdrasulov, 2009, p 92). According to this worldview, writes Botokanova, 'social welfare, [and] the spiritual foundations of society's and humans' existence are not only depending on the observation of ethico-moral norms … but also on [people's] relationship with nature, the source of life in all

its diversity and phenomenality' (2015, p 74). This worldview foregrounds traditional and ecologically sustainable livelihoods based on animal husbandry and cash cropping in agricultural, horticultural and silvicultural sectors (see Schmidt, 2013). While these were of prime importance during the Soviet period, post–Soviet privatization has diminished such livelihoods (Steimann, 2011; Féaux de la Croix, 2016, ch 2), as generating sufficient income requires a high scale of production and integration into distribution networks, which reduces smallholders to a very basic way of life, which is increasingly marginalized in a society flattered by the comforts of modern-day consumption.

Furthermore, with its emphasis on the collective – the family, kinship and community – traditional knowledge renders individual life meaningful in relation to its belonging to this collective. This social and genealogical relationality is expressed in the principle of *zhety ata* – literally 'seven fathers', denoting the rule that people should know their family tree into the seventh male ancestral generation – or greetings like *Kaisy uruktan, uurudan bolosun?* – 'Which clan or tribe do you belong to?' (Botokanova, 2015, pp 115ff). This points to a material aspect of mutual obligations in case of need (2015, p 120), and to the importance of belonging in an emotional and psychological sense, more generally. A good example of the stability and resilience such belonging can foreground is Beyer's (2013) analysis of a cooperative run by *aksakals* which promoted a moral way of life (such as advocating against the consumption and sale of alcohol) and cultivated land to support the needy in their village. Similarly, Mostowlansky shows how Kyrgyz community leaders in Murghab in Tajikistan's Eastern Pamirs, 'located the real potential for well-being in their own families', because '[w]henever there is unity in the family, the state becomes united' (2013, pp 463, 472). Traditional understandings of belonging and morality thus foreground important affective potentials of peace and resilience, but also imply forms of social control and corresponding pressures to maintain tradition and culture.

On a related critical note, the emphasis on the absolute value of traditional knowledge, ways of life and identity also exhibits tendencies of ethno–nationalist thinking, both in academic discourse and in its political usage. Botokanova, for instance, notes that '[i]n today's multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-confessional space, the problem of renewal, preservation and dissemination of traditional knowledge with the aim of preserving ethnic identity and securing continuity of cultural development acquires special importance' (2015, p 4). Traditional knowledge is thus positioned in the familiar opposition with the challenges and threats of globalization to evoke a threat scenario of the vanishing and extinction of ethnic identity and culture, especially in the context of labour migration and multi-local livelihoods in Central Asia. There are numerous examples of such social Darwinist thinking, which effectively justifies the ethno–nationalist

discourse and associated moral policing discussed in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. The most visible one was ex-president Atambaev's opening address at the Second World Nomad Games (a world event for nomadic traditional sports with a wide audience) where he remarked that "In today's world, humankind is forgetting its roots. There is a threat of the disappearance of unique cultures and peoples; state borders are changing."[10] The next and final discourse on 'tradition and culture' points to a more peaceful and 'decolonial' modality of being, which poses an important counter-weight to the biopolitical tendencies of these neo-traditionalist positions.

Connections between humans, the natural and spiritual domain

This discourse is of great importance both for its decolonial resonance and because it gives additional grounding to the three discourses examined above. It presents the ideational grounding for the traditional 'ecosophic' worldview and its emphasis on humans' 'relationship with nature, the source of life in all its diversity and phenomenality' (Botokanova, 2015, p 74). Such a harmonious relation or unity between humans and nature is present in pre-Islamic religions such as Tengrism and in principles like *ubal* – the responsibility for damage or suffering brought about by affecting nature, and *pir* – the idea that all objects and creatures of the natural world have a patron, a 'supernatural' being, who protects them and to whom one can pray for protection and blessings (Botokanova, 2015, p 63). Further, a good standing in the spiritual domain is understood as a precondition for well-being and good 'worldly conduct' more generally (Botokanova, 2015), which in turn foregrounds the importance of spirituality for domestic life and also social relations.

Offering insights from the religious and more general spiritual sphere, Borbieva (2013), for instance, has shown how the handling of bread and other foodstuffs was acrimoniously regulated in her hosts' household. Performing various rituals is thus understood to pay tribute to the holy status of bread in Muslim tradition; it secures a person's standing according to conceptions of doing good (*soop*) and having enough to live (*rizq/ɣrɣsky*); and to express valorization of the social bonds (with neighbours, guests or family members) that bread symbolizes (2013, p 504). Conversely, failure to stick to the rules may cause a disequilibrium in the spiritual sphere and incur threats, curses and

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[10] Gezitter.org, 'А. Атамбаев: Всемирные игры кочевников – это праздник возвращения к своим истокам [A. Atambaev: The World Nomad Games are a holiday of return to our origins]', 5 September 2016, http://www.gezitter.org/culture/53170_a_atambaev_vsemirnyie_%20 igryi_kochevnikov_-_eto_prazdnik_vozvrascheniya_k_svoim_istokam_/

unhappiness. Borbieva illustrates the compulsive and even coercive capacities of such spiritual beliefs with the behaviour of Uzbek friends who, similar to Kyrgyz or other Central Asian people, valued her presence as a guest and were more generous than they might have been able to afford. On the other hand, she indicates how they also expected her to return these favours by staying as long as she was asked to and by repeating her visits to further build up the new friendship, regardless of her own personal plans, preferences or habits (2013, pp 507ff). Pious and diligent interpretation and enactment of spiritual beliefs (see also Féaux de la Croix, 2016; Beyer, 2016; Tulebaeva, 2017) thus explains a good deal of resilience and positivity in people's lives.

On the other hand, research has also indicated how new forms of spirituality and faith have given rise to exigencies such as the omnipresence of traditionalist and patriotic images, slogans and self-portrayals in politics (Beyer, 2016, ch 4; Murzakulova and Schoeberlein, 2009), the persistence of syncretic traditions such as bride kidnapping, whose status as Kyrgyz tradition has been contested and even denied (Langford, 2015), and whole economies of conspicuous consumption in Kyrgyzstan (Kapalova, 2015). This is not to portray spirituality in Kyrgyzstan as problematic or a source of conflict, however. I would rather suggest that the significance of spirituality should be seen as a reaction of people to the continued introduction and dominance of relatively foreign concepts of social organization, which make many people want to reaffirm their identity and possibly seek protection from such influences. Historical-cultural analyses like that by Tlostanova (2010), and most famously the writings of Chyngyz Aitmatov (1988 [1980]; see Igmen, 2012) with their grounding in Kyrgyz oral history, have demonstrated how people in Kyrgyzstan and the wider region have drawn on 'trickster' identities and transgressive practices to navigate between normative frameworks of external domination and social tradition at the same time. This perspective relativizes the perception of non-conformist behaviour as foreign and points to the hybrid, indeed heteroglossic nature of spiritualities (see Chapter 3).

The important implication of the discourse on human–nature–spirituality connections is the effect of its implicit principles of respect, harmony and conflict avoidance on people's expectations of and positioning in social and political life. The general orientation it appears to give is more that of a 'politics of patience' which Satybaldieva found among her respondents (2015b, p 116; see also Pelkmans, 2017, ch 2). Thus, spirituality may have the effect of making people more acquiescent to social ills and may entice, if not coerce, them to focus on small deeds and actions in their immediate environment, instead of considering community-level or political action to effect more large-scale change. The micro-level and self-responsibility of the former stance plays into trajectories of biopolitical subjectification governmentality that this research seeks to uncover.

On the other hand, the ecosophic worldview with its emphasis on harmony with nature, and the historical relationship of the Kyrgyz nomadic tribes with it, resonates with Shilliam's (2015) idea of 'deep relation', which he defines as the healing of colonial wounds inflicted by the displacement, restructuring, and relocation of life that also implies a disequilibrium in the spiritual domain. The ecosophic worldview exhibits the potential to 'bind[ing] back together peoples, lands, pasts, ancestors and spirits' and 'to bring back the manifest and spiritual domains' (Shilliam, 2015, p 13), as Shilliam describes the establishment of 'deep relation'. In this sense, the ecosophic way of life could be seen as a form of decoloniality, as it seeks to re-establish relations and connections with spirits, forefathers and pasts that were displaced by the imperial history of Kyrgyzstan. Most relevant in this regard is Nargis Nurulla-Khodjaeva's proposal of the metaphor of *dakhlez* – understood, drawing on Sufi thinkers like Al-Gazali, as the receiving part of a house linking the 'inner' and the 'outer worlds' – as a link into the history of Samarkand's communities where 'it was natural to sustain the feeling of goodwill and hospitality to those who speak differently, eat different food [and] pray to different gods' (Nurulla-Khodjaeva, 2016, p 21). Embracing such connectivity can be a form of 'epistemic disobedience', through which modernity 'appears not as a law-like course of history but as merely one alternative among many' (2016, p 21; Mignolo, 2009). *Dakhlez*, ecosophic and other 'deep relation' principles are of course quite distant from the urban, modern lives that most people lead in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia at large. In this sense, these decolonial horizons are looming – captured in the 'tradition and culture' imaginary – behind discourses and practices of social ordering and community security, as a critical normative stance that seeks to exhibit and possibly reverse the displacement, disconnection and amnesia brought to Kyrgyzstan by the introduction and continuous transformation of modern nation-statehood.

Post-liberal statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan: a framework

The synthetic potential between the purposively defined imaginaries of social order and their composite discourses foregrounds an analysis of how they become combined and hybridized into concrete practices of statebuilding. The proposed framework allows to unpack the way specific actors, actions and speech acts are situated within and vis-à-vis particular discourses and imaginaries of social order. A simultaneous positioning in several imaginaries thus helps to reflect situations where certain practices or speech acts cannot be attributed exclusively to categories such as 'liberal peace' or 'authoritarian' ordering, or to 'local', 'traditional' or 'culturally authentic' positions, for instance. Rather, as my analysis shows, actors and modalities in statebuilding generally have to be seen in terms of how they situate themselves vis-à-vis

and within imaginaries of social ordering by drawing on particular discourses and engaging in certain practices and relations.

The use of the interpretive framework for the analysis of the multiple positions and *heteroglossia* underlying peace- and statebuilding discourse and practice is particularly well captured in the designation of the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. This denotation emphasizes that resistance by national or sub-national actors can rarely, if ever, be understood as being expressed against 'the West' or the 'liberal peace' in their very essence, and exclusively directed at them. A degree of relationality and interwovenness always remains, as external interference and conditionality are often rejected and resisted by invoking concepts of international law (most notably 'sovereignty' or 'territorial integrity') which are equally associated with ideas of modern statehood and the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary implied therein. While much of the literature on politics in the post-Soviet space uses a continuum of liberal–illiberal or authoritarian terms to label Central Asian states' forms of governance and politics, this framework enables an analysis of how governments, organizations and people use and reappropriate concepts like sovereignty or democracy to situate their politics and relations with international actors. Thus, rather than being opposed to one another, notions and concepts situated within the 'liberal peace' may be combined with discourses from both of the other two imaginaries in the crafting of post-liberal forms of statebuilding.

Taking up the critical view from Chapter 2 on security, peace- and statebuilding projects as form of governmentality, the example of a 'liberal peace'-style peacebuilding project using traditional concepts and institutions of social order best illustrates the effects of combining discourses and practices from varying imaginaries. Such projects might appear emancipatory given the valorization of people, their lifeworlds and cultural backgrounds. However, in the absence of a holistic consideration and critique of the embeddedness of the context in precarious economic and political conditions, such a project is liable to produce a form of governmentality and mere conflict management, instead of transforming conflict and tackling its root causes (see Reeves, 2015b; Lottholz, 2018b). While positive forms of peace, order and security are also thinkable, the analysis with this framework seeks to identify these while reflecting on the hierarchical, regressive and exclusionary implications of the forms of post-liberal ordering produced at the intersection of the three imaginaries discussed above. Table 4.1 provides an overview on how the actors in the following three empirical chapters have positioned themselves within or vis-à-vis the three imaginaries of social order.

Table 4.1: Positioning of actors within or against imaginaries of social order

	Western 'liberal peace'	Politics of sovereignty	Tradition and culture
1. Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPCs)	• General endorsement of democracy and human rights in project documentation • LCPCs presented as prime bodies of local democratic decision making and agency by implementing NGOs • Ambiguous position of LCPCs as the ordering practices they employ are often closer to 'illiberal' forms of peace • how free & egalitarian can local–level peace be in an otherwise subjugating and authoritarian setting?	• Compliance to government agenda, priorities and rhetoric is precondition for LCPC work • Government agenda, priorities and rhetoric are challenged in some municipalities by diverging views of LCPC representatives • Both here and especially for local groups in Chapter 7, the idea of Soviet civilizational achievements presented key source of meaning and social order	• Often framed as source of problems and challenges, e.g. of early marriages according to Islamic tradition • More implicit repertoires and mechanisms such as *aksakal* courts or women's councils support LCPC efforts
2. Territorial Youth Councils (TYC)	• General endorsement of democracy and human rights in project documentation • Representation of concerns, needs and rights of youth as an important de facto component of TYC work, tends to be under–explicated and overridden by local authorities • Indications of divergence with 'Western' stance on gender and sexuality	• Interpellation into state ideology via practices and festivals like national and local holidays • Desire to contribute to country's development and bring youth on 'right path' • Possible ideas and practices that deterritorialize and replace PoS with ideas of local development and conviviality	• Strong embeddedness via school curriculum and family practices • Performative dimension of tradition, e.g. in attire, while political position on it appears still open and subject to articulation

Table 4.1: Positioning of actors within or against imaginaries of social order (continued)

	Western 'liberal peace'	Politics of sovereignty	Tradition and culture
3. Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result'	• Frames on democracy and human rights are a basic ingredient • Representatives of 'liberal peace', i.e. IO staff in policy debates, advocated more top-down approaches supporting government positions • 'Co-Security' as key approach advocating horizontal collaboration between people and authorities: relatively open about normative and cultural aspects	• Explicit rhetorical challenge to complacent policy makers, but not seen as the same nuisance as human rights organizations (*pravozashitniki*) • Few challenges or criticisms of on-the-ground project implementation, where compliance and cooperativeness with local administrations and law enforcement was important basis • Invocations of wider statebuilding intentions as building a 'normal country' to mobilize initiatives	• Little explicit mentioning, mostly on anecdotal basis and without methodological implications • Role of religious leaders (*imams*) and elders (*aksakals*) important in some localities, but not presented as a major component of Civic Union's 'Co-Security' approach

Local Crime Prevention Centres and the (After) Lives of the State in Rural Kyrgyzstan

This chapter introduces the empirical field of community security in Kyrgyzstan and the first case study on Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPCs). In this sense, besides offering a specific analysis of community security practices and their co–production in the triangle between local–level actors, state authorities and international NGOs and donors, the chapter offers a more general view on how the imaginaries of social order discussed in the previous chapter play out in rural and periurban parts of Kyrgyzstan. As I will show, the presence and effects of the state in these parts of the country can be best captured with the metaphor of (after) lives. In her ethnography of borders in the Ferghana Valley, Madeleine Reeves (2014, ch 3) has used the term afterlives to capture the memory and imaginary historical presence of forms of internationalism in formerly industrial towns, where only decaying architecture and ruins bear testimony to the connectedness and privileged status of these places during the Soviet period. My proposal in this chapter is to refer this idea of afterlives not only to such signs of international connection and coexistence of various peoples, but to the state in its entirety. At the same time, to acknowledge that state authorities take an active stance and even intrusive presence in some areas of life in remoter parts of Kyrgyzstan too, the chapter shows how the afterlives of the Soviet forms of social organization and state provision coexist with the new ways in which the Kyrgyzstani state is regulating and ordering life.

Another key interest is to develop an understanding on when, why and how community security 'is done'. The premise here is that such an understanding needs to be based on a perspective of the livelihoods and struggles for survival that people in Kyrgyzstan became caught up in after the country's independence and subsequent privatization and liberalization programmes. Building on the discussion of these programmes and their

normalization within the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary, I outline the 'post-Soviet condition of uncertainty' (Pelkmans, 2017, p 5) and how it manifests in poverty, precarity and dependence on newly emergent institutions, mechanisms and access regimes including the securing of livelihoods through labour migration to former Soviet states and beyond. These developments are then juxtaposed with the emergence of institutional frameworks and practices in community security, including the detailed analysis of the role of LCPCs in preventing or overcoming conflict, crime and insecurity.

The chapter continues with the discussion of how life in rural Kyrgyzstan has unfolded between the Soviet legacy and 'new market' realities, to consider the implications of these dynamics for community security and conflict prevention. The second section presents a mapping of the historical and more recent role of local administrations and social institutions, including courts of elders (*aksakals*), women's committees, youth committees, neighbourhood committees and others. I subsequently discuss the role of LCPCs as a coordinating body for the latter and examine their role as a node between, first, executive and law enforcement authorities; second, local populations and actively operating actors/institutions; and third, international NGOs and donors. On this basis, I present an in-depth analysis of peacebuilding and community security practices of LCPCs and analogous bodies in southern Kyrgyzstan. Based on interviews and participatory observation, I scrutinize LCPCs' often exclusive orientation to the future at the expense of addressing grievances and justice issues, and, furthermore, their performative and selective engagement with communities. In conclusion, I further reflect on the analysis to show how community security and peacebuilding practices invoke the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary while not challenging discourses of executive power and cultural hegemony that are part of the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary, thus leaving the uncomfortable contradictions and contestations underlying Kyrgyzstan's post-liberal social order intact.

Life in rural Kyrgyzstan between Soviet legacy and 'new market realities'

As I argued in discussing the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary in the previous chapter, research has shown how large parts of Kyrgyzstani and other post-Soviet populations have accepted the necessity and inevitability of a transition from planned to market economy in a way that suggests teleological thinking ingrained through Marxist-Leninist ideology whose *telos* – the idea of a fully industrially developed Communist society – was replaced with that of capitalist development in a free market. In this light, I use the term 'new market realities' in inverted commas to suggest that, even though markets may not have become real or at least did not operate properly, people perceived

their constitution and necessity as real, and therefore were soon confronted with the challenge to find ways to make a living and navigate these realities.

From economic and institutional collapse to a moral economy of survival

For the larger part of the population, life in post-independence Kyrgyzstan has been determined by the rapid collapse of the industrial sector and economy as a whole. The 'shock therapy' reforms embraced by the first post-independence president, Askar Akaev, had the effect of diminishing the GDP in 1995 to half of the 1990 level within four years and thus back to the republic's 1970s' level (Igemberdiev, 2016, p 150). Mass bankruptcies in the industrial sector led to a plunge in GDP to 35 per cent of the 1990 level in 1995. More than privatization, this collapse was effected by the cessation of financial flows from Moscow and the implosion of distribution channels for Kyrgyz-produced goods throughout the former Soviet Union (Gullette, 2010, p 28). Setting up channels and infrastructures for trading and distribution took a considerable time, during which barter trading and the informal and black-market economy, as well as organized crime, were the main channels of economic exchange and accumulation. In consequence, the real wage dropped to a level of around a fifth of the 1989 level and, given hyper-inflation in the early 1990s and a five-fold rise in food prices, made it impossible to live let alone sustain a family if one had employment at all (Igamberdiev, 2016, p 152). Reeves' perspective from the Ferghana Valley borderlands (2014, ch 3), Mathijs Pelkmans' research in Jalal-Abad province (2017) and Elmira Satybaldieva's (2015b) accounts from Osh document the social effects of de-industrialization, de-development and the 'shutting down' of entire industrial sectors in the name of the free market. Towns and cities that once enjoyed Moscow provisioning and were seen as bastions of Soviet modernity, welfare and progress, have thus decayed into ruins and 'ghost towns'.[1]

This de facto economic collapse forced many people to find ways to secure their families' well-being, and often survival, in the informal economy and through subsistence agriculture (Pelkmans, 2017, ch 1). Most people, especially in rural areas, came to rely on a combination of wage labour and

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[1] For illustrations see Razul-zade, Tilav, 'Журавли улетели, забыв о родных гнездах и городе Шураб, превратившемся в бесхозные руины [The cranes flew away, forgetting about their nests back home and about the city of Shurab, which turned into ownerless ruins]', 23 June 2010, https://subscribe.ru/archive/news.world.turkestan/201006/29001625.html; Sputnik news, 'Кыргызский город-призрак — кадры из горного Иныльчека [The Kyrgyz ghost town – people from the mountainous Inylchek]', 25 August 2016, https://ru.sputnik.kg/photo/20160825/1028764675.html

subsistence agriculture, which they pursued on land plots allocated in the process of splitting up state or collective farms – through which agricultural production had been organized on an industrial scale (Steimann, 2011, ch 4; Botoeva, 2015, p 534). Similar to the privatization of industrial enterprises, agricultural de-collectivization was an uneven process in which former bosses and managers often acquired the machinery and equipment necessary to cultivate larger plots of land (Steimann, 2011, p 58). As Botoeva notes:

> Only a tiny minority of well-off families … were able to produce a surplus and generate cash. Although also a minority in the community, the poorer members could not cultivate most of their land and so rented it out (or lost ownership completely), or did not own much livestock (no livestock or one cow and a few sheep) and had to find other ways to generate income. (Botoeva, 2015, p 535)

These dynamics produced a sizeable population of rural poor who have increasingly moved into the urban centres in the different provinces – mostly to the capital Bishkek and Osh in the south – in the hope of finding jobs in the service and construction sectors (Satybaldieva, 2015a, p 373; 2015b, p 103). This increased the pressures on urban infrastructures and a worsening social climate. The suspension of housing programmes and other state provision gave rise to fierce distribution battles within the labour market and sectors of social housing and land registry, which at times evolved into manifest conflicts.

Besides the de facto collapse of the economy and especially the industrial sector, the more significant failure of the neoliberal 'transition' orchestrated by Western donors, international organizations and local collaborators was the redistribution of corporate assets – including key industries, public utility companies and infrastructures – into the hands of politicians or criminal elites with little public scrutiny or accountability. This has arguably created an oligarchical hyper-neoliberalism, in which the elites' power to dispose of assets and set agendas is in no way equalled by organized labour or the populace at large (Lottholz, 2019b). International financial institutions and regulatory frameworks permitted the largely unchecked accumulation of wealth by elites while the ensuing criminalization and violent practices emerging with the oligarchic elites went largely unchallenged or was even normalized. Large swathes of both Kyrgyzstan and its neighbouring states have become entangled in a post-transitional state where under-development and the exclusion of certain localities and social groups are a fact of life, while key extractive industries and utilities make up a large part of the GDP but are accrued mostly to the wealth of elites. This mechanism was analysed in Heathershaw and Cooley's collection (2015) which detailed how tax havens and offshore financial centres – spaces and arrangements that came into

being and keep operating thanks to the support and interests of Western countries – help Central Asian elites to siphon off revenues from private side-businesses and illicitly acquired corporate assets.

In effect, it can be argued that the privatization and hyper–neoliberal agenda in the 1990s has created proto or 'cannibal states' (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017) which, whether due to the incapacity or unwillingness of policy makers, have withdrawn the provision of public goods and in some areas and spaces simply ceased to operate and exist. In this way, rural, minority and other marginal populations have been shut out of the purview of public policy, so that their provisioning and wider development became outsourced to international organizations and NGOs, thus reconstituting the country a 'global protectorate' (Pétric, 2005; see Chapter 4). An important role in compensating for the disappearance of state programmes and institutions was played by domestic civil society and community initiatives which have (re-)established a minimal provision of educational and other services such as kindergartens, schooling and professional development (Féaux de la Croix, 2013b; Satybaldieva, 2015a).

This large-scale effort to step in for the receding state is part of a wider shift from once formal and institutionalized mechanisms of provision and distribution to an informal economy and logic of life that encompasses many areas of life in Kyrgyzstan and the post–Socialist world at large. As Morris and Polese argue, informal structures and economic mechanisms can be seen 'as response to botched political/economic reform' and a 'working solution' in everyday life, which it would make sense to formalize at least in some cases, so as to improve largely dysfunctional social and institutional systems (Morris and Polese, 2015, pp 11, 19). In Kyrgyzstan, there are many negative aspects to this compensatory logic, which manifest in informal payments that figure in many other areas of life from politics and administration to education and health care. For instance, with a university teacher's average salary of 40 USD not covering average living costs of 100 USD for a family (60 USD in rural areas), it is not surprising that, apart from working in several jobs, a culture of bribery is rife in Kyrgyzstani academia, where students can buy themselves good grades or get away with not attending lectures (Sanghera and Satybaldieva, 2009, p 31). Thus, according to Reeves, the complete disconnect between de facto and reported levels of educational attainment leads to corruption being 'interpreted not as the deviant action of particular immoral individuals, but the symptom of a much broader, systemic *dis-integration*' (Reeves, 2015a, p 22, her emphasis). Even more concerning is Sanghera and Satybaldieva's finding that medical staff could go as far as withholding medical treatment and care from people who are not able to make extra payments, or that police officers release criminals upon payment of bribes (2009, pp 929, 932). They cite the widespread view that '[people] have their own families that they need to feed. That's why they

take bribes. Maybe, if their salary were bigger, they would be taking fewer bribes' and they conclude that, 'public sector workers and professionals justify corruption as necessary for household survival. Their sense of living and being, their *modus vivendi*, rests upon family commitments, rather than upon a fragile professional ethos' (Sanghera and Satybaldieva, 2009, p 930). This perspective, which can be glossed as a moral economy approach to corruption (Olivier de Sardan, 1999), resonates with Veena Das's (2015) argument that rather than morally repulsive, corruption should be seen as bringing about the 'possibility of life' for many people in the precarious economy of post-Socialist collapse that is gripping Kyrgyzstan as it is many other post-Soviet countries.

A final aspect of informal compensation for state failure and coping mechanisms is traditional systems for mutual help and collecting money among relatives. These have existed throughout centuries and had, up to the late Soviet period, the primary function of mutual support and solidarity with those experiencing particular hardship, as well as financing children's life cycle events (Féaux de la Croix and Ismailbekova, 2014, p 7; Botokanova, 2015, p 123). For instance, *yrazha* (Kg.: literally law, mutual agreement) or *yntymak* (order, harmony) payments are collected among kin for occasions of weddings or deaths and serve to cover expenses related to the organization of feasts and gatherings (Kapalova, 2015, pp 252–3). With the increasing affluence enjoyed in the late Soviet period, and among wealthier groups for an even longer time, these schemes were of high symbolic significance, reflected in high average-level financial contributions. In the post-Soviet period, the increasing social stratification and earning differentials were mirrored in these schemes (Kapalova, 2015, p 255). Thus, to avoid embarrassment or even exclusion from such schemes, many people have started taking high-interest loans or engaged in petty crimes such as growing and selling hashish to finance their participation (Kapalova, 2015, pp 258–9; Botoeva, 2015: 542). Thus, it has been argued that informal support networks often merely create the 'illusion of support' (Kapalova, 2015, p 260) while increasing social pressure on people who lack financial means and social capital. In summary, the collapse of Kyrgyzstan's industries and economy as a whole, the withdrawal of the state and informal reorganization of many areas of life have effected widespread and entrenched forms of poverty and precarity, which present a potential of insecurity and conflict themselves, but also foreground migration as a prevalent livelihood strategy that is discussed next.

Translocal livelihoods and their implications for community security

Alongside its neighbour, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan is the country whose inhabitants are most dependent on labour migration for their survival and livelihood. The early 2000s saw a deepening trend of labour migration to

Russia, Kazakhstan, other CIS countries and beyond, with a sixth – or around one million of the country's overall population – residing abroad in 2019 (ADB and UNDP, 2020; see Chapter 4). Given this significance, Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich have argued that mobility as the constant state of labour migrants has acquired institutional status and become a vehicle through which people navigate their own life courses, career choices and relations with relatives (2016, p 421). They further argue that conceiving of these livelihoods as *translocal* rather than inter- or transnational helps to better take into account the often blurred and unclear effects of being in another place: the social pressure and economic hardship in the sending community may be evaded but also reproduced through networks and moral regimes that reach beyond borders (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, 2016, p 537; see Thieme, 2008).

Largely irrespective of whether migration has positive effects at home or abroad, it is clear that it creates additional pressure on societal setups, institutions and infrastructures in places of destination. As far as domestic migration is concerned, its effects on urban life and security questions in communities targeted by migration flows are perhaps the most profound. As indicated in the discussion of ethno-nationalist discourse in Chapter 4, migration from rural areas to urban centres was already putting pressure on social systems and institutions in the 1980s, and continued to do so throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The population of the capital, Bishkek, for instance, increased by up to 35 per cent to circa 1.1 million in the year 2001, while its administrative institutions and infrastructure were not enlarged accordingly (Fryer et al 2014, p 177). As well as putting additional strain on urban centres like Bishkek and Osh, an additional issue with in-migration of the rural poor was that many of them did not have a residence permit (*propiska*) that entitled them to education, health care and social benefits (Hatcher, 2011). Correspondingly, large numbers of people started living in so-called *novostroiki* or 'new settlements' in the outskirts of cities, where they acquired or squatted on land plots and utilities such as water, electricity, sewerage and administrative entitlements were only acquired over the course of years if not decades of political struggle, lobbying and mobilization (Hatcher, 2011; Fryer et al, 2014, pp 185ff; Nasritdinov et al, 2015). Being excluded from legal entitlements and basic services puts pressure on people to resort to livelihood strategies beyond legal boundaries. Especially in more rural settings such as Osh and Jalal-Abad, such poor groups have been shown to be liable to mobilization for political purposes if not conflict and violence (Sanghera, 2010; Radnitz, 2012; Megoran et al, 2014). Although this trajectory is not straightforward, the potential risks emanating from large populations without legal status, care entitlements and opportunities to take part in society are undeniable and pose a problem in and of itself.

This has also been acknowledged and tackled in recent donor interventions (see UNFPA, 2017).

Less visible at first sight, but even more significant are the social and psychological effects of labour migration beyond the national borders. Many labour migrants find themselves in a trajectory of systematic reproduction of their semi- or illegal status, as the Russian authorities have no interest in legalizing large numbers of immigrants (Reeves, 2014, p 130). Given this precarious status and exposure to rights violations by authorities (FIDH, 2016, II.2), most migrants embark on journeys abroad for several years. The xenophobia and racism prevalent in Russia, alongside arbitrariness, abuse and exploitation by employers (Fryer et al, 2014; see Chapter 4), have effectively reconstituted Kyrgyzstanis and people from other Central Asian states as subaltern migrant communities. Apart from the dire psychological effects of this subjugation, migration has put a high burden on families. Researchers agree that it particularly affects children and adolescents who are left with grandparents, or other relatives and even neighbours. Empirical studies (for example, Nasritdinov and Schenkkan, 2012) have shown that these relatives are often not able or ready to impart the attention, devotion and care that could substitute adequate parenting, which has a negative bearing on the emotional well-being and psychological health of migrants' children. This is most obvious in cases of physical and psychological ill-treatment by surrogate parents (FIDH, 2016, pp 49ff), and in the appalling conditions in which foster children sometimes live.[2] Sanghera et al demonstrate the long-term effects of distress caused by separation from parents and its 'adverse consequences on children's personal development … and later adult relationships' (2012, p 393) which can range from insecurity complexes and emotional dependence to depression, anxiety and aggression. Instead of receiving the appropriate emotional protection and economic support, many children and adolescents in Kyrgyzstan lack such basic conditions and are instead exposed to the hardships of supporting or entirely running a household early on in their lives.

As I indicated in discussing the imaginary of Western life, economic precarity and the struggles for a good life make dreams about becoming a successful entrepreneur and making money especially attractive, but also foreground feelings of exclusion, injustice and anger among people who lack the basic conditions to realize such ambitions. Seen from the moral economy perspective outlined above, it becomes obvious how inequality and social stratification in Kyrgyzstan and the additional burden of livelihoods fractured across locations can lure young people toward the

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[2]   See the documentary by Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result', 'Lost in their childhood' (*Poteriannye v detstve*), Youtube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfSWcPXxX2M [25 May 2017].

spectrum of informal, illicit, illegal and outright criminal practices and actions (Sanghera and Satybaldieva, 2009; Kirmse, 2010, p 394). Given the downsizing, withdrawal and often virtual absence of the state in sectors of health, education and welfare especially in rural and semi–urban areas of Kyrgyzstan, no significant level of compliance toward state laws and decrees or support for government strategies and appeals can be expected. As the analysis in the final section will show, such precarious living conditions and blurred boundaries between legality, licitness and morally acceptable practices appear to give rise to various crimes and conflict behaviour that abound in communities in southern Kyrgyzstan. In the next section, I introduce the structures of local self–governance and civil society that are employed by the Kyrgyzstani state in the effort to maintain order, security and peace against this background.

Local–level governance, social institutions and crime prevention

Local self–governance and social institutions during and after the Soviet Union

In this section, before introducing the legal set–up of LCPCs I first provide an overview of the local self–governance and social institutions which have continued to exist from the Soviet era into the post–independence period. Until 1991, the republic's Supreme Soviet, at the top of a vertically integrated institutional structure, had formally directed and regulated matters of local life, with local councils on various levels merely implementing policies programmed from the top down (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, p 526). In their overview of changes since independence, Alymkulov and Kulatov argue that 'there [was] no such understanding of the essence or limits of delegated state powers, leading to the permanent intrusion of the state into local self–government affairs' (2001, p 564). The legislative patchwork of the 1990s provided ample room for local elites, such as former *kolkhoz* heads, to secure the best assets before legal regulations and accountability provisions were put in place (Steimann, 2011, p 72; see above, but also Beyer, 2016, p 55).

Throughout the 2000s, local governance structures and competencies have become better differentiated in the 2008 Law 'On local self–governance and local administration', with particular attention to democratically elected bodies as a counterpart to governmental sub–divisions. The current set–up of 'local self–governance' (Ru.: *mestnoe samoupravlenie*) features a balance between executive bodies like mayoral administrations (*meriia*) in cities, and rural administrations (*aiyl okmotu*) in rural municipalities, on the one hand, and representative bodies such as city and rural councils (*gorodskii* and *aiylnyi kenesh*) on the other hand. Over the years, local administrations were

partly made responsible for maintaining infrastructure and basic operations while administering resources and dispensation of, for example, welfare and pensions. The gradual diminishing of state support and funding levels has put local administrations and councils in a more and more dilemmic situation, especially because local actors have little influence on the budgets they are allotted by the central government (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, p 520). Given the gaping underfunding of city and rural executive committees (*aiyl okmotu*) they often carry out only the bare minimum of their tasks, thus further driving out-migration and the associated problems discussed above of despair and destitution (Grävingholt et al, 2006; Steimann, 2011, p 62). The situation is further entrenched because province governors and district heads (*akims*) are appointed rather than elected, which means that 'state representatives often feel more accountable to their superiors than to the inhabitants of their rayon or oblast' and which, in turn, feeds into clientelistic and informal dealings replacing democratic and accountable patterns (Steimann, 2011, p 63).

In a similar way to questions of administration, welfare and service provision, a networked and decentralized approach is apparent in the way in which the maintenance of community security and public order are organized. There were already numerous public and semi-public organizations integrated with processes of local self-governance and social ordering at the end of the 1990s (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, pp 534–5) and their number increased further thereafter. The institutions and structures relevant for security provision and other issues of community governance, are listed in Table 5.1.

All the organizations listed in the table were part of communal life in the Soviet Union, with the exception of *aksakal* courts which 'escaped' Soviet attempts to eradicate them and were constituted as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism in 1996 (Beyer, 2016, p 28; see Chapter 4). Most of these bodies experienced a relative decline in importance and activity and have operated in places where they were most demanded by people. For instance, in large cities like Bishkek or Osh, district or *mahalla* committees or housing associations were sometimes relatively active in representing their inhabitants' needs, while in some rural areas women's councils (*zhensovets*) would try to foster solidarity and mutual help between women.

Overall, this institutional architecture and the ideational regimes it foregrounds were geared toward sustaining social order, harmony and peacefulness, even in the face of increasing strain and tension. This is most obvious in regard to Soviet times, when voluntary squads or neighbourhood committees were tasked with keeping the population under control and, in some cases, to collect intelligence and information that would help authorities to prevent open resistance and subversion (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, p 548). These mechanisms of social ordering and conflict

Table 5.1: Community-level social institutions and structures

Organization	Description
Voluntary squads, usually 'voluntary people's squads' (Ru.: *Dobrovolnaia Narodnaia Druzhina*)	Groups of citizens who complement police and other law enforcement organs in maintaining public order; protecting state-owned corporate property or territorial borders during Soviet times
Aksakal (elders', literally 'white beard') courts	Voluntary courts which mediate and arbitrate in minor disputes, usually in the domestic or neighbourhood context; activity inscribed into law in 2002
Women's councils (*zhenskii sovet* or *zhensovet*)	A structure to gather women and represent their interests both in public life and in the production process, as well as oversee compliance with Soviet legislation on women's entitlements
Neighbourhood committee (Ru.: *kvartalnyi komitet*), also *mahalla* committee in Uzbek-style neighbourhood	Voluntary group of inhabitants of one block or estate who deal with their affairs and coordinate action between *domkom*s and higher levels
House committees (Ru.: *domovoi komitet* or *domkom*)	Group of inhabitants of multi-storey houses regulating social affairs and solving problems
Residential associations	Evolved as response to the privatization of multi-storey blocks and the corresponding transfer of responsibility from local administration to proprietors/proprietor associations

Source: Author

management were equally useful for the new governing and economic elites of post-independence Kyrgyzstan. For example, the country's first president, Askar Akaev, first legalized *aksakal* courts and then promoted their transformation into a country-wide institution because the purpose they fulfilled – the maintenance of peace, harmony, solidarity and mutual help among the dispossessed and precarious population across the country – both served his own purposes and were in perfect sync with the international donors' agendas on decentralization and devolution of responsibility to the local level and grass roots governance (Beyer, 2016, p 33). On the other hand, the potential biases and omissions of *aksakals*' dispute resolution in line with traditional law (*adat utuk*) alongside faint knowledge of statutory law also became apparent (Beyer, 2016; see Chapter 4). Thus, while they may be effective for maintaining social order, harmony and for building peace and facilitating inter-communal conciliation *aksakals* and other social institutions in Kyrgyzstan are prone to being only partially effective in their activities by virtue of their semi-public and informal nature. Some of these

shortcomings were supposed to be mitigated by newly created LCPCs, which I will discuss in turn.

LCPCs between executive authority and societal concerns

After the web of Soviet and newly initiated institutions was more or less active in an overall piecemeal approach to social order and community security, the 2005 Law 'On crime prevention' (*zakon 'O profilaktike pravonarushenii'*)[3] regulated community security and crime prevention in an overarching framework and on all administrative levels from central government down to the village unit. Article 12–1 of the law defines the status and competencies of LCPCs as a 'non-commercial organization founded on the territory of local self-administration for the purpose of the mutual participation of the organs of local self-administration and citizens in the prevention of crime'. Furthermore, LCPCs, would have the right to, among other things:

- constitute themselves as juridical persons;
- design various projects and programmes on questions of crime prevention in order to receive grants and other transfers, including from international organizations and actors;
- [and] be funded out of … the local budget in agreement with the local government; voluntary contributions of juridical or physical persons; [and] grants and other gratuitous and non-refundable support. (See note 3.)

LCPCs are thus not only a platform where citizens and the local self-administration prevent crime in a joint effort, but also serve as vehicles to attract and use international funding. The competencies of LCPCs seem fairly limited, as the decision to inaugurate an LCPC and transfer competencies and budgetary decisions to them rests with local administrations alone (article 12–1). Article 14 details the ample competencies of local administrations apart from this right of initiation, which range from 'facilitat[ing] the development of LCPCs and coordinat[ing] their activities; consider[ing] the development of crime prevention measures in the socioeconomic development plans; confirm[ing] … other programmes on crime prevention' and further budget allocation and review activities. Regarding local governments' tasks to establish LCPCs and facilitate their work, the law has no binding character and, in this sense, establishes a unilateral mechanism: local administrations have rights to the initiation and coordination of LCPCs' work (alongside some obligations within

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[3] The law was signed by the then newly inaugurated President Kurmanbek Bakiev on 25 June 2005, available in Russian and Kyrgyz language at: http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1679

the measure of their capacities) while LCPCs or their constituent bodies are largely bound to carry out their tasks but lack scrutiny or feedback competencies vis-à-vis local administrations. Thus, LCPCs' work is largely dependent on local government as far as the law is concerned. In addition, law enforcement organs are another determining party as, 'crime prevention activities … are organized and coordinated through consultations of the law enforcement organs … on the provincial, city, district and local government' (article 7).

Overall, the 2005 Law on Crime Prevention constitutes a clear prioritization of governmental and executive authority in the conceptualization of crime prevention as the prime mechanism for community security. This seems problematic, as public initiative and the role of various representative bodies are subordinate and limited. The latter are merely foreseen in the secondary aspects of design and implementation of crime prevention measures or in the gathering of data and intelligence through which health, education and social welfare institutions are to assist law enforcement and executive organs' operations (article 11). The idea to combat and prevent crime through data and information gathering, analysis and subsequent devising of measures and policies is convincing with its rational logic of evidence-based policy making. It also has limitations, however, as essentialism and exclusionary methodologies used in the analysis can lead to alienation and other adverse effects in the population, as I discussed in the section on community security in Chapter 4. An essentializing epistemology is especially apparent in the definition of crime prevention in article 1 as:

> actions (*deitelnost*) … directed towards the identification, study, remedy and neutralization of the reasons for any unlawful actions being carried out (*soversheniu protivopravnykh deistvii*) and any conditions enabling this; as well as toward ensuring favourable living conditions and the individual upbringing of *certain categories of persons, whose behaviour reveals anti-social tendencies (kategorii lic, v deistviakh kotorykh imeetsa antiobshestvennaia napravlennost*); the activation of factors that stimulate the law-abiding behaviour of citizens; and the design and implementation of systems of legal, socioeconomic, organizational, educational (*vospitatelnykh*), special and other measures for the prevention of unlawful actions. (emphasis added)

Although this definition demonstrates some degree of complexity, the emphasized passage indicates an assumption that 'certain', in other words identifiable, 'categories of persons' will likely require measures for upbringing, education and other matters in order to make them refrain from anti-social or criminal behaviour. This formulation suggests a link between social belonging and anti-social behavioural tendencies and thus seems misconceived, as the statistical likelihood of a person from a

group engaging in deviant behaviour is not the same as ascribing certain behaviours as part of the general characteristics of that group. Basing analysis and measures on group categories might thus create a self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to scapegoating and pathologization of groups on the basis of stereotypes, which is anything but conducive to solving issues of crime and conflict. Therefore, the pathologization and 'othering' already identified as an issue in community safety debates in the UK in the 1990s (see Chapter 3) is apparent in the Law on Crime Prevention in the Kyrgyz Republic. The analyses in the next section and also in Chapter 7 will show how analytical thinking and conceptualization of measures by LCPCs and analogous bodies is not infrequently based on categories of people, who are thus unduly homogenized. This, in turn, foregrounds the post-liberal character of community security and social ordering where othering and corresponding forms of undue treatment and exclusion are combined with claims to compliance with human rights and democratic participation.

International security and peacebuilding programming

To provide background for the significance of LCPCs for debates on post-liberal statebuilding, a brief note on the role of international actors in Kyrgyzstan is warranted. Especially after the inter-communal clashes in June 2010, international organizations have set up large-scale peacebuilding community security programmes, making Kyrgyzstan another internationally renowned 'Peaceland' (Autesserre, 2014). One of rather few existing overview articles lists more than ten international organizations and bilateral development organizations such as the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) or the US Agency for International Development (USAID) which funded both short-term conflict prevention, mediation and reconciliation projects and long-term ones for community security and community policing, among other things, which have amounted to around 64.7 million euro since 2010 (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021, appendix 1).

Rather than creating new structures, several of these actors have pursued the idea of working with existing structures or at least tapping into the existing social networks and institutions discussed above. Most notable in this respect is the 'Community Security Initiative' (CSI) of the OSCE, which supported and helped to restructure policing work in conflict-affected localities with the help of civilian police advisers' monthly 'community-police discussion forums … where police, local authorities and civil society representatives talk about their concerns'.[4] As part of its Criminal Justice

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[4]   OSCE, 'The Community Security Initiative', 12 April 2012, www.osce.org/bishkek/106312

Programme, the UNODC has facilitated the creation of community-level crime prevention plans and financed cooperative community security and police reform projects of civil society organizations, which are analysed in Chapter 7.[5] Similar to the OSCE, it has provided infrastructural support by co-funding the refurbishment of local police stations in two districts in the country.

The UK–based international NGO Saferworld, with which I conducted the field research analysed below, has taken a similar approach of working with local partners across communities in southern Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In their 'community security approach' the organization aims at 'supporting communities and security actors jointly to identify and implement locally appropriate ways of responding to causes of insecurity' (Saferworld, 2015b, p 3). The organization's aim is thus to foster cooperation between the local population and, on the other hand, local government, law enforcement and security organs (Saferworld, 2015b, p 4). This is a crucial undertaking given the fact that in many communities, people have lost trust in these organs because of their perceived corruption, inability to protect people, and, even worse, individual police and other law enforcement officers' complicity with and active perpetration of violence, abuse and extortion (Saferworld, 2015b, p 3). In trying to foster cooperative relations between these parties, Saferworld also tries to promote an evidence- and analysis-based approach to local actions, in which a 'process of identifying → analysing → prioritising conflict and security concerns' is followed by the 'planning → implementing → [and] evaluating [of] responses' (Saferworld, 2015b, pp 5–6). Much emphasis is put on the idea of 'hear[ing] different perspectives and concerns' and activating and providing a 'safe place' for potentially excluded and vulnerable groups within community populations throughout the process, which also means that law enforcement and local administration members are involved 'wherever possible' but not necessarily in every step of the process (Saferworld, 2015b, pp 5, 8, 10). In this sense, Saferworld and its Kyrgyzstani partner, the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), are trying to nurture potential and build capacity among local civil society and activist elements within communities who are supposed to defend the interests of the population in the cooperative arrangements for community security provision.

Saferworld put a high emphasis on working with already existing structures to enhance their capacity (Saferworld, 2015a), not least because LCPCs specifically often turned out to be 'dysfunctional, non-funded

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[5]   UNODC, Criminal justice, crime prevention and integrity, www.unodc.org/centralasia/en/criminal-justice-crime-prevention-and-integrity.html

and composed of community representatives without the will or ability to undertake the centres' work' (Saferworld, 2015b, p 12). The organization usually approached the members of LCPCs and increased their motivation and skill set by providing training in conflict prevention and community security planning, and by initiating dialogue with other local stakeholders. In cases where LCPCs were non-existent or had ceased to work, the organization gathered interested people and helped them found so-called Community Security Working Groups (CSWGs), which would make plans and implement measures on crime and conflict prevention and aim at creating an LCPC later on (Saferworld, 2015a). At the time of writing, Saferworld and its partner FTI have supported such initiatives in 32 communities nationwide and have founded four new LCPCs (correspondence March 2020). It is important to stress again that LCPCs are effectively, as discussed above, under the oversight of the MIA (via the primacy of law enforcement agencies as well as local executive organs), which retains the right to veto or align to its own principles and agendas the activities carried out by the Saferworld community security programme.

The activities reviewed above only present a small share of the peacebuilding and security programming that has occurred in Kyrgyzstan since 2010. Yet, compared to others, these organizations have been distinguished by their grounded and long-term engagement that promised a more sustainable impact. As several analyses of peacebuilding and conflict-prevention programmes in southern Kyrgyzstan have pointed out, these activities have often been focused on more short-term and measurable/presentable approaches and practices, which were likely to be limited in terms of their structural and substantive effects (for example, Megoran et al, 2014). Thus, many actors have tried to promote harmony (Kg.: *yntymak*) and tolerance (Ru./Kg.: *tolerantnost*) between communities and ethnicities by organizing sports or cultural events among young people or mutual visits between different communities (Bichsel, 2005; Beyer and Girke, 2015). As Reeves (2015b) has shown, these rituals are often well known to their participants and take on a performative character that distracts from the persistence of underlying tensions and conflicts in the respective community. The idea of changing the behaviour of local authorities through long-term cooperation, or by building skills and capacities among local administrations and civil society to stand up for people's interests, bears testimony to an attempt to create more fundamental and long-term change – an argument I will revisit in Chapter 7. The following analysis presents insights from my collaborative research with Saferworld and various partner communities to indicate that this cooperative approach to community security and peacebuilding proved to be advantageous yet still had its challenges and contradictions.

Practices and discourses of community security in southern Kyrgyzstan

In line with the cooperative approach of this research (see Chapter 3), the present analysis is based on research I conducted together with and supported by Saferworld Kyrgyzstan. Having established contact and been invited to use a desk in the organization's main office in Osh, I accompanied a contracted consultant in visiting a number of LCPCs in southern Kyrgyzstan to undertake interviews and write them up into profiles which, combined with other material, were compiled in a brochure to be presented to national partners, including the MIA. The profiling visits, carried out between 11 and 15 June 2015, were scheduled to last up to two hours and revolve around a standard questionnaire. The schedule was tight, with three LCPC visits per day and considerable geographical distances between the locations. In exchange for helping to conduct the conversations and writing up the LCPC profiles, it was agreed that I could use the material gathered for my PhD research, while mentioning my position as a PhD researcher and Visiting Fellow with the American University in Central Asia (AUCA) was left as optional, depending on the situation. The final purpose of producing a brochure on 'Success Stories' of LCPCs (Saferworld, 2016) was somewhat peculiar, especially from a perspective concerned with scholarly positionality and critical analysis. Yet, given the clear separation between my role to support the production of the brochure and my own research project, the 'success stories' framing proved to be a rather useful way to understand what was working in the respective communities and what challenges they encountered.

An important impression from the LCPC visits was that, besides the 'success stories' we would eventually write, LCPC representatives devoted much time to recounting the multiple expectations and pressures, and often indifference, that they were facing from different local administration bodies and the population. Hence, some were struggling to present or even remember positive results of their work, so it took my colleague and myself repetitive questioning and tedious inquiry into details to gather enough data to construct a success narrative on a given LCPC. This was further complicated by the fact that some LCPC activists did not speak fluent Russian, as Kyrgyz is the language of communication across the country and especially in many rural areas. Although these barriers could be overcome thanks to translating support in some cases, the terms, concepts and overall workflow used in the community security programme were in themselves complex to navigate for some local representatives. The 'constructed' nature of the success narratives in the final brochure may thus raise concerns that these exaggerate and euphemize the effects of LCPCs' work, similar to what Heathershaw (2011) argued on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) local

development projects in Tajikistan. However, this was less of an issue here because the brochure was less of an M&E document than an additional communication tool in Saferworld's efforts to strengthen stakeholder awareness of community security in south Kyrgyzstan. To this end, it raised awareness about the obstacles faced by the respective LCPCs and their future plans and development.

In the following part, I discuss the main areas of concern for community security and crime prevention in the surveyed communities, as well as key aspects of their work. In a more in–depth analysis based on follow–up visits, I show how the LCPC in Bazar-Korgon aimed to build peace and mitigate tensions among its multi-ethnic population through the idea of 'people's friendship' to further unpack the implications of LCPCs' work for post–liberal forms of ordering and its embeddedness in the imaginaries of statebuilding identified in Chapter 4.

LCPC 'success stories': overall results and implications

To give a brief overview of the overall results of the LCPC profiling, Table 5.2 presents the different issues LCPCs were reportedly working on, with the respective number of times mentioned across the nine LCPCs in the 'General' column and the times mentioned as success stories in the 'Success' column (interviewees were told to identify one main 'Success story' per LCPC). The results from this profiling study present only a small number of communities throughout the vast territory of southern Kyrgyzstan, but comparing them with the results from a report discussed in Chapter 7 (CURR, 2016) and other community security initiatives (OSCE and El-Pikir, 2013) shows that the thrust of the issues presented is of relevance for community security in localities throughout the country. I have structured the issues named into the three clusters of 'Resources and infrastructure'; 'Social, communal and institutional'; and 'Family and individual' issues.

This compilation demonstrates that LCPCs deal with a wide range of issues, which have varying implications for politics on the national level. Issues in the first cluster of 'Resources and infrastructure' appear somewhat more straightforward as they are conceivable through the (neo)liberal modern episteme of science and technology. Thus, a problem can be relatively clearly defined through certain parameters and subsequently be solved through coordination and negotiation, which can require the mobilization of social and political pressure – especially in cases where regional and national authorities are needed to solve issues, such as in border regions – or of social support and contribution to municipal-level projects such as the building of canals, roads and other infrastructure. Issues in this area thus help to showcase communities' own capacities to address problems and conflicts at least if they are confined to the municipal level. This is reflective of the decentralization

Table 5.2: Issues that LCPCs are working on

	Issue	General	'Success'
Resources and infrastructure	Land disputes	6	
	New arrivals and squatted territories (Ru.: *novostroiki*)	1	
	Border issues (crossings, etc.)	2	
	Water conflicts (inter-communal; drinking and industrial; usage rota violation)	6	2
	Street traffic danger	2	1
Social, communal, institutional	Interethnic tension/conflict	6	1
	Inter-communal youth conflict	1	
	Racketeering (youth, school)	3	
	Religious radicalism (including religious pluralism; one 'extremism' only)	7	2
	Lack of trust toward law enforcement organs (including corruption in law enforcement, electricity usage, detentions)	4	2
	Lack of trust toward local government bodies	1	
	Juvenile delinquency (including hooliganism)	4	
	Cattle theft	1	
Family, individual	Migration (including consequence of infantile precarity)	2	
	Family conflicts (including divorce; domestic conflict/*bytovoi konflikt*)	6	
	Early marriage and divorce (including unregistered marriage)	4	
	Young female precarity (single mothers, impoverished)	1	1
	Excessive spending on lifecycle celebrations	1	
	Alcohol/drug abuse	2	
	Uncategorized	3	

Notes: Specific (sub-)issues are listed in brackets if they have been mentioned but can be reasonably included in a given issue count (for example 'including religious pluralism'); additions in brackets without 'including' provide detail on the respective issue, for instance 'Family conflicts (domestic conflict)'.

Source: Saferworld (2016); Author

and responsibilization of local self-governance and administrative structures discussed in the first and second sections of this chapter.

Disputes over land and water usage often occur on an inter-communal level and not infrequently across state borders, for instance those of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As Reeves observes, the creation of newly independent nations has affected the penetration of former areas of free movement across Soviet republican borders with new borders of sovereign states, which are guarded by military posts and barbed wire (Reeves, 2014). During Soviet times, infrastructures had been built with little regard to republican borders but according to economic and technical rationales, so that many water canals and pipes provide Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz villages in their course and there are points where streets from different territories meet or traverse administrative borders. LCPCs thus have to resolve quarrels over water usage rotas and infrastructural adjustment, which quite commonly requires the mobilization of regional and national political actors, as in the case of LCPCs in Batken and Jalal-Abad provinces (Saferworld, 2016, pp 22–4, 28–30). The legal uncertainty and arbitrary behaviour of border guards has given rise to tensions and disputes, with car accidents at crossings resulting in 'fights and violent incidents' and disputes over water and border crossings leading to confrontations of large crowds (Reeves, 2014, pp 218ff; Saferworld, 2015b, pp 9–10). In such situations, LCPCs and local government bodies are often confined to a rather helpless role of intermediaries who must quickly react and convey the urgency of concerns to superiors in the national hierarchy; a dependency sadly illustrated in the May 2021 large-scale conflict around the Tajik enclave Vorukh.

In the village of Tash-Bulak, a rural community located on the outskirts of Jalal-Abad at the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, a major road leading through the area proved to be a major security issue.[6] A constant increase in traffic volume and the number of road accidents and casualties required urgent action, especially to protect schoolchildren who crossed the street at dangerous and unmarked spots. While the local administration did not seem to pay much attention, the newly established CSWG tackled the problem by installing speed limit signs, building a pavement in the affected street section, and by organizing school lessons given by traffic police (GAI) staff on traffic rules and safety. These measures yielded immediate results, as no accidents involving pedestrians were reported in the following months. According to the working group members, this initiative can be called a success because people in the community started caring about and supporting this cause when they saw the LCPC members start to tackle the problem on their own, through voluntary initiative (Ru.: *na obshestvennykh nachalakh*), without

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[6] Profiling visit on 13 July 2015, see Saferworld (2016, pp 6–10).

any reward given. The support and mobilization in their own community also helped to lobby the local administration and traffic police departments to help solve the issue.

Among 12 profiling visits in the south of Kyrgyzstan, the Tash–Bulak working group stood out as a positive example, as it demonstrated determination and confidence in light of the successful resolution of this infrastructural issue. On a follow-up visit, I tried to find out more about the motivation and mobilization principles of the group.[7] After repeated questions on the reasons for members investing considerable free time to work for the LCPC and its constituent institutions, the head of the group, who was also deputy head of the rural executive committee, described his own motivation as follows:

'So what, patriotism might play a role [in motivating us] … but whether there is work or no work, a wage or no wage … this town is ours, these people are ours, all these children are my future, I am not indifferent … I am working here for the state, whether it's real work or not [*mne zdes vot na gosudarstvennuiu rabotu, rabotau ne rabotau*]. I am a human. You shall do good things, because something you have to do [*dolzhen delat chelovek*]. And from us something good shall remain, a good future. And in the future, there should also be good people. Their security matters to me [*ix ne bezopasnost bezrazlichno mne ne byvaet*] … If I only work for my own interests [*radi svoego interesa*], what would this be, then I'm an animal, or what? … But we are people and we have a conscience that tells us to do good. That's my human duty, that's how I understand it.'

Thus, the head of the working group, and the members who tacitly agreed with him, declared their voluntary work as a matter of fulfilling the duty implied by one's human nature and conscience. Working to maintain security and basic services for the community was attributed to an underlying, universal essence of human life, by which people who are able to contribute to the collective good are morally obliged to do so and risk being identified as merely self-interested and even 'animalistic' if they refuse to contribute. On the other hand, ideas of patriotism or Soviet heritage as a unifying framework were not denied by the group, but seemed to be less significant. The reasons for the group's motivation could not betray the fact, however, that not all people would be able to engage in and support LCPC activities to the same extent as the group members, some of whom were local administration employees (as in the case of the social worker and the group head) or

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were able to devote time to this cause because their family and economic situation allowed them to. The group agreed that there might be limits to the participation of the poor rural population and that more would have to be done to include wider social groups in community-building and rights education to address issues such as lack of registration or early marriages, which were another priority problem.

This leads on to the cluster of family and individual level issues which were of equal relevance as the 'Resource and infrastructure' category (with the former mentioned 16 times and the latter 17 times). But other than in the latter category with its straightforwardly identifiable issues and relatively clear division of institutional competencies, LCPCs appeared to be, on average, less equipped to deal with security problems in this area. This is because, on the one hand, upbringing, moral and practical education and family relations are habitually seen as an area curated by social and educational institutions or, given their downsizing and incapacitation, of family and kin networks. On the other hand, LCPCs and their constituents such as *aksakal* courts, women's committees or social workers would usually only step in when tensions and conflicts within families erupted into open confrontation or when people affected by domestic violence or other issues would actively approach them. LCPCs were, in fact, struggling to address the social effects of the transformation and increasing strain put on families in light of the translocal livelihoods discussed above. These included, apart from child labour and exploitation by surrogate parents, an increasing number of early marriages, subsequent divorces and the consequential social stigmatization and material destitution of young divorced women and single mothers. With the country-wide rate of underage married girls at 13 per cent in 2015, this was a problem of national dimensions.[8]

The LCPC in the Mirmakhmudov district of the city of Nookat in western Osh province recognized an increasing number of young women in need of material support.[9] Abandoned by their husbands, young mothers lacked both support and the right to claim alimony or child benefits as their marriages had not been registered but conducted through the traditional Islamic *nike* ceremony. According to an LCPC representative, their social stigma and exclusion made many women 'suffer from anxiety, depression and, in some cases, made them commit suicide as the last way out of such a situation'. The LCPC tried to address the situation by organizing a seminar with LCPC members, the neighbourhood committee, and

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[8]   Radio Azattyk, 'В Кыргызстане количество ранних браков не уменьшается [The number of early marriages in Kyrgyzstan is not decreasing]', 9 December 2015, http://rus.azattyk.org/a/27424930.html

[9]   LCPC profiling visits on 11 and 12 July 2015 and Saferworld (2016, pp 2–5).

imams on the topic of early marriage and marriage registration, with imams soon afterwards promising to only perform *nike* ceremonies for couples who have obtained official marriage registrations. They further organized information events for the population on the topics of early marriage, divorce and the role of the LCPC and disseminated brochures on the topic under the title 'What is an official marriage? [*Chto takoe ofitsialnyi brak?*]'. Additional targeted support and consultation with young couples in cases of quarrels and the allocation of expert staff to the local marriage registration office seemed to have made the overall approach effective: the level of early marriages dropped from 30 in 2015 to only two in 2016 (Mamatjalil uluu, 2017, p 33); imams complied with the code of conduct mentioned above and raised more awareness among the religious population; and the population at large, especially parents, became more aware about the negative effects of early marriages. Yet, while the effect of this initiative seems straightforward, it should not be forgotten that the basic living conditions of people in the town will not have changed. Thus, even if girls are not forced to get married as early as 17, it is, nevertheless, likely that practices like arranged marriages still persist, especially in light of the strong role of religious beliefs throughout Kyrgyzstan, according to which girls should be married or at least have a future husband determined for them at the age of 13 (Mamatjalil uluu, 2017, p 29). Overall, then, it seems that LCPCs can address and change some of the factors that affect community security negatively, specifically in regard to gender-based violence, which has become a more acceptable discussion topic and is frequently tackled through awareness campaigns and specific measures (correspondence, October 2021). On the other hand, given their limited scope, mission statement and resources, a more fundamental transformation of the living conditions and livelihoods that produce precarious living conditions in rural and semi-urban Kyrgyzstan lies beyond the realm of these institutions.

As in the area of 'Family and individual' issues, security challenges in the 'Social, communal and institutional' category appear complex, contentious and hard to transform. Within this domain, the items of 'Interethnic conflict/tension' and 'Religious radicalism' are of predominant concern and mentioned more often than all other issues together (13 vs. 11 times, respectively). These issues of public security (*obshestvennaia bezopasnost*) are at the heart of community security work throughout the country, especially in multi-ethnic and border communities in the South. Consequently, most LCPCs carried out measures to prevent and reduce tensions and confront stereotypes between separate communities, as well as of people joining and supporting radical religious groups. The following part will focus on one LCPC's efforts to prevent group- and community-based conflict through the idea of 'peoples' friendship'.

Building 'peoples' friendship' after identity-based conflict

As I have argued in discussing the 'politics of sovereignty' and its discourses of 'ethno-nationalism' and multicultural civic nationalism in Chapter 4, contradictions between official policies and institutional arrangements on the one hand and the discourse of 'people's friendship' and 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' on the other appear to be an inherent feature of Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.[10] Unsurprisingly, 'people's friendship' (*druzhba narodov*) has become the core idea behind numerous peacebuilding events and programmes, which try to call people and communities to unity, harmony and peaceful relations in the face of the violence in June 2010 and the continued impunity of perpetrators, persisting tensions and everyday forms of violence and marginalization (Lottholz, 2018a, 2018b). This dilemma of unifying people while their differences have been the basis for violence and (partly still ongoing) discrimination is faced by peacebuilders and administrators in communities across southern Kyrgyzstan.

This situation is well exemplified by the town of Bazar-Korgon west of Jalal-Abad and about 20 kilometres north of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, which was gravely affected by the violent clashes in June 2010 (McBrien, 2013). As the two representatives of the local LCPC reported during the profiling interview,[11] relations between the population and the police had already been strained in the months and years leading up to the 2010 'events'. Unjustified detentions and interrogations, one of which had ended fatally, especially after the June 2010 violence, produced a feeling of grave insecurity and people tried to avoid the police at all costs. During the 'June events', the destruction of numerous properties and the killing of 15 people revealed the 'deep interethnic hostility and the inaction of the law enforcement organs', but also involved civilian armed violence, killing one Kyrgyz police officer on 13 June. The post-violence period was characterized by continued tensions and irregularities in law enforcement and judicial procedures, as detentions to extort payments abounded. This insecurity meant many people sent their children to relatives or to work in Russia and in some cases entire families left their homes behind.

These issues presented an urgent matter when Saferworld and its partner FTI initiated conversations and the foundation of a CSWG in 2011. The first event organized by the group was a roundtable to start a conversation between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Bazar-Korgon, and it was primarily women who participated and voiced some of the grievances and worries held by people. This helped to further identify issues in a series of meetings with

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[10]   This analysis is partly adapted from Lottholz (2018b).
[11]   Profiling visit on 13 July 2015; the following analysis is based on the LCPC profile in Saferworld (2016, pp 18–21).

representatives of law enforcement organs, the prosecutor's office, the local administration and international partners, where a joint approach toward discussing problems and solutions was found and different measures were agreed to improve police performance and inspire trust from the population. These measures included the setting up of a help line (*telefon doveriia*), compulsory police badges and material improvements of police equipment, the opening of new police posts across town to enable quick reaction to violations, but also accountability mechanisms such as an annual report of the Regional Administration for Internal Affairs [*ROVD*] at 'town gatherings' [*selskii skhod*]. These measures, together with a change in police officers' behaviour, as they would wear uniforms and name badges whenever in service, helped to improve the population's perception and trust in the institution.

The LCPCs' attempts to mitigate ethnic tension and encourage a spirit of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence reflect the Soviet idea of 'people's friendship'. The events reported by the LCPCs reveal a consistent attempt to promote friendship and peaceful gathering, for instance at a 'Festival of friendship' (*Festival druzhby*) with music and dance performances, a sport events series entitled 'Sport – a messenger of peace' (*Sport – Poslannik mira*), dialogue events entitled 'Park of friendship' (*Park druzhby*) and 'Avenue of friendship' (*Aleia druzhby*) (Saferworld, 2016, p 18), and the setting up of a new seating area (*besedka*) in the school courtyard (see Figure 5.1). As the two LCPC representatives explained during the profiling interview, the idea was to create open spaces where people would be able to get to know and spend time with each other. Furthermore, an arts competition served to select the best way to illustrate the community's wishes for peace, which included a map of Kyrgyzstan with spaces for messages from the pupils of the local school to thus gather and make visible young people's perspectives.[12]

The different 'friendship'-themed events and the new *besedka* (seating area) in the local school-yard present viable ways of creating space for interaction and coexistence, which clearly resonate with the ideas of 'people's friendship' and 'unity in diversity' discussed above. Having grown up with these maxims, for most adults in Kyrgyzstan it is the most appropriate idea of interethnic relations, which resonates with the multicultural model of Soviet modernity which I grouped under the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary in Chapter 4. Thus, for former Soviet, and now Kyrgyzstani citizens, a multi-ethnic and peaceful Kyrgyzstan should not be disrupted by conflicts and divisions. The painting near the local school further shows how discourses of peace, harmony and unity are reproduced by young people, as the message written by one young person clearly resonates with these discourses: 'We wish

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[12] Interview with LCPC representative during follow-up visit, 30 October 2015.

Figure 5.1: Peacebuilding based on the 'peoples' friendship' discourse, Bazar-Korgon
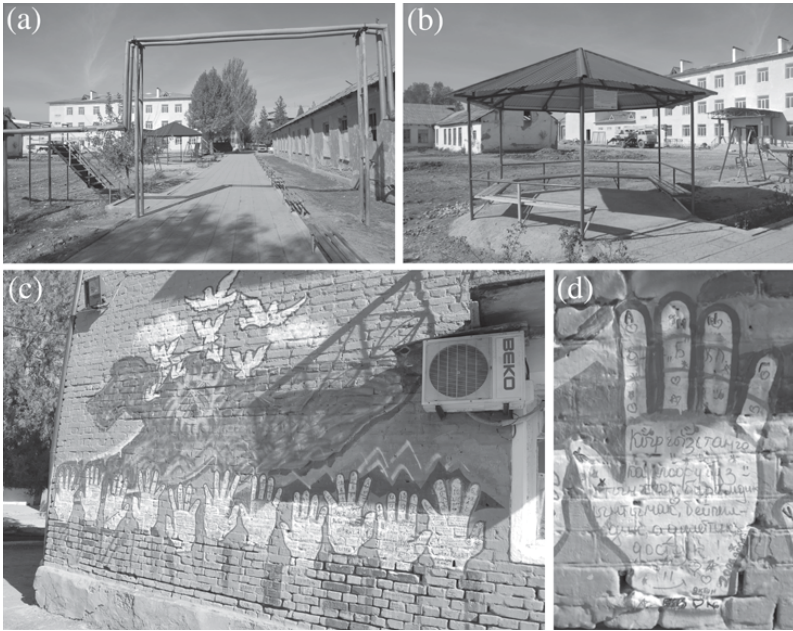
Notes: (a) 'Avenue of friendship'; (b) 'Friendship square' with seating area (*besedka*); a sign is indicating the funding by Saferworld, FTI and the US embassy; (c) a map of Kyrgyzstan held by hands in which local pupils wrote messages; (d) the hand on the right reads 'We wish Kyrgyzstan peace, unity, harmony, welfare, justice and friendship!' [Kyrgyz: *Kyrgyzstanga kaaloorubuz tynchtyk, birimdik, yntymak, beypildik, adilettik, dostuk!*]

Source: Author

Kyrgyzstan peace, unity, harmony, welfare, justice and friendship!' At the same time, the choice of the map of Kyrgyzstan as a basis to accommodate the different wishes and hopes of the local pupils also symbolizes the important role of territory, nation and state for a peaceful future.

When thinking about the effects of these peacebuilding initiatives, the most obvious question concerns the audience of these events and new infrastructures: who attends and makes use of these spaces? It appears likely that they are utilized by those who already have a basic readiness to interact with people beyond their own immediate social circle (and possibly from other ethnicities). However, whether people from economically and culturally marginalized parts of the communities would also seize these opportunities to reach out and build new bridges appears more than doubtful. This was confirmed by one LCPC representative, who pointed to the history of interethnic tensions during Soviet times, with clashes having taken place

in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1990s (see Tishkov, 1995) and explained how the policies on urban structuring and education system after the fall of the Soviet Union gave rise to new separations along ethnic lines:

'The problem is this: In the past, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz were going together to school. Class "a", that was Kyrgyz, the "b" classes were Uzbeks, and the "v" classes [the third letter of the Cyrillic alphabet] were Russians. Here in our school they learnt three languages, more than 40 years ago and they would always live and work together in a friendly way. Just when the Union broke up, they divided up schools, divided up the territorial administrative units [*uchastki*], told the Uzbeks to go there and the Kyrgyz to go here, even though they had lived together. So they created Kyrgyz and Uzbek mono-ethnic communities [*naselennye punkty*].'

This reordering of urban space after Kyrgyzstan's independence presents a significant 're-materialization' of ethno-territorial thinking, which was closely associated with the materialization and, in 1999, closing of the Uzbek–Kyrgyz border after incursions of Islamist fighters into Uzbekistan (Megoran, 2017, pp 19ff). While such compartmentalization is to the benefit of few, if any, the adverse effects have been most painfully felt during the '2010 events' and their aftermath. The LCPC representative concluded:

'people wouldn't be the way they are now if they worked together, went to school together, played together at sports events and if they knew each other. But now they do not want to be involved in such events, they are scared [*oni boiatsa*]. And the authorities are also afraid and do not let us go to them, we're not invited into the other school, 'it's not necessary', they say, 'don't do it'. But let them mix with each other whether it's a sports event, a festival or something else! Whether it's at work or in a holiday camp [*v lagere*], that's it, you have to mix them and they will live, they will develop a positive view [*u nikh poiavliautsa khoroshie positivy*].'

This makes the challenges of peacebuilding and interethnic reconciliation and trust building abundantly clear: with ethnicized territorial, labour market and welfare policies and provisioning already nurturing tensions during the Soviet period, authorities knew no better than to create mono-lingual schools and mono-ethnic communities (*naselennye punkty*) to strengthen national languages, cultures and traditions (Brubaker, 2011, pp 1802ff). As new generations grew up in isolation from one another, hardening stereotypes and deepening distrust were compounded by economic competition. The relative wealth of Uzbeks, some of whom sported an affluent lifestyle thanks

to their bazar businesses and networks with nearby Uzbekistan, stood in contrast to the dwindling livelihood opportunities of the poorer part of the Kyrgyz community, who increasingly depended on connections with the local administration or labour migration to the CIS and had accumulated frustration and envy by 2010 (McBrien, 2013, p 261). The idea of building 'people's friendship' between ethnic communities thus confronted historically and institutionally embedded ethnic divisions which were reinforced by ethno-nationalist rhetoric in national-level politics.

Apart from these semantic contradictions, the means of the LCPC were very limited to reach a substantial part of the vast population of 36,000 scattered across various communities around Bazar-Korgon. The average events usually attract between 20 and maximum 200 people, which, in the representative's words can be regarded a 'drop in the ocean [*kapli v more*]'. He also stated that, given that the people who come to community security and peacebuilding events will usually be the ones with a rather wide horizon anyway, events need to also include 'housewives, those who do not work, idlers (*bezdelniki*) and, how do you say, all layers of society … you basically should invite them to all events … then it will get better in our community, that's what I think, that's how it seems to me'. This suggests that reaching out to the entire community still requires more work and capacity on the part of the LCPC.

A further challenge lies in the persisting grievances and feelings of injustice in light of the still unaddressed misconduct in relation to detentions, trials and money extortion which were tolerated or actively carried out by law enforcement agencies. Addressing and bringing to justice would have seemed a precondition to involve the entire population of the town in a more sustainable building of peace, trust and coexistence. Yet, making progress in this area seems to lie beyond the LCPC's scope, as it focused on forging a dialogue with law enforcement and security organs in order to secure their cooperation and improve police performance as a first, basic step. In the words of a Saferworld report quoted at the outset of the book: 'addressing less serious issues together with local authorities and law enforcement agencies gave the community security working groups the skills and confidence to tackle more complex issues later on' (Saferworld, 2015b, p 11). Meanwhile, investigation of the (post-)June 2010 crimes would have to be initiated at the provincial or national level. Given that authorities have little interest in opening these cases, this precondition for acceptance on part of the wider community is unlikely to be met, which limits the peace and harmony that have been built in this and other communities, and will make them appear superficial and wrong in the eyes of the victims of the 2010 events. Seen from the prism of imaginaries of statebuilding proposed in Chapter 4, the human rights and democratic discourse (see Saferworld, 2016) that situate the LCPC's work in the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary seem hard to reconcile with the ethno-national thinking and law enforcement and security organs'

prioritization of stability that still took precedence and effectively remained unchallenged in community security affairs.

Conclusion

The analysis of peacebuilding and community security initiatives after the 'people's friendship' discourse, and in the case of early marriages and traffic infrastructure issues has served to illustrate the complexity and situatedness of community-level security and peace in Kyrgyzstan: on the one hand, LCPCs managed to bring together stakeholders and make them take steps toward remedying problems and restoring infrastructures, services and the trust of the population toward state institutions or across ethnic communities. On the other hand, the analysis has shown how the small steps achieved by this work, captured in the 'success stories' narrative, need to be seen against the background of wider historical, political and socioeconomic challenges. While only briefly flagged up in the discussion of the LCPCs' work, these challenges and contradictions have been developed in the other sections of the chapter and are foregrounded in the examination of imaginaries and discourses of social ordering in Chapter 4.

In trying to provide a well-founded contextual picture of community security in Kyrgyzstan, I have started by showing how the economic collapse and the withdrawal and downsizing of state institutions and provisioning have created precarious and deeply uncertain living conditions for most of the country's population. More particularly, the changes of the 1990s have given rise to a moral economy in which people's survival has come to be dependent on largely informalized practices and relations and on labour migration and the translocal organization of livelihoods. The significant implications of these trends for community security are the increasing number of 'social orphans' and entrenching trends in early marriages and domestic violence mirroring increasing psychological strain experienced by large parts of the population. In a second step, I outlined the context of local administration and its slow restructuring from a sole vertical integration on the executive side toward a balancing with representative bodies such as city and rural councils (*gorodskii* and *aiylnyi kenesh*). The discussion further surveyed local-level social institutions which have lived on from the Soviet into the post-Soviet period and have been institutionalized and incorporated into local ordering, law enforcement and crime prevention work. Most notably, the newly founded LCPCs present an attempt of Kyrgyz governments in the 2000s to create bodies that coordinate other local structures, including *aksakal* or women's courts and neighbourhood committees, to maintain order and prevent crime and conflict, and ideally do so with the help of international project funding while conforming to the priorities and orders of local or higher-level authorities.

Two deep-reaching reflections on the reconfiguration of social ordering, law enforcement and statebuilding emerge from the contextual picture and the more in-depth analysis of LCPCs' work. The first concerns a shift from a paternalist and almost omnipresent Soviet (as well as early post-Soviet) state to a neoliberal or, as argued by Kurtović and Hromadžić in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context (2019), 'cannibal' state which has withdrawn in most areas of life, leaving people behind to secure livelihoods and organize social order on their own, while retaining capacities to regulate and interfere in some other key areas. This has been most apparent in the decentralization of administrative and law enforcement functions and the corresponding responsibilization at the community level. Thus, what Akaev initiated with his Law 'On *aksakal* courts' in 2002 was continued by his successor Bakiev with the Law 'On crime prevention' in 2005 and constituted a process of outsourcing of ordering competencies that would otherwise have remained with the police and judiciary or local administrations, all of which were increasingly incapable of carrying out related tasks.

With the founding of LCPCs as the coordinating body for local institutions and public order bodies, community-level crime prevention and security provision were still retained as a competency of the MIA, but local-level bodies and civil society were recruited to help analyse and tackle security challenges. The result of this decentralization trajectory, which resonates with Western public management and 'good governance' ideas and adapts them to the local reality was, similar to an analogous process in the West discussed in Chapter 2, a responsibilization of the communal level for preventing and tackling crime. Meanwhile, the counter-aspect of strengthening accountability of provincial- and national-level authorities and reviewing and possibly changing policies has largely been ignored. Community security programming has, in this sense, been strong on the security side while challenges in the economic, employment, family, health and other sectors that are an important factor in conflict and insecurity have largely remained unaddressed. Such a 'security-first' approach points to the instantiation of a neoliberal form of governmentality which renders most attempts of ordering through 'liberal peace' ideas to be ineffective and contradictory at best, and as subjugating and violent at worst. This has been most apparent in the approach of 'addressing less serious issues' first to develop 'the skills and confidence to tackle more complex issues later on' (Saferworld, 2015b, p 11), as it was practised in Bazar-Korgon and effectively accepted that issues with injustice and impunity during and after the 2010 events could not be addressed and brought to justice in the present political order. Here, the post-liberal trajectory on which community-level security and peace evolved was most obvious.

Another observation that further substantiates this argument is the temporary and disembedded nature of LCPCs and analogous local-level

structures. As in-depth analysis has shown, many LCPCs across Kyrgyzstan are largely inactive and incapacitated and thus mostly depend on international support to work effectively (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021). Authorities have mostly focused on controlling and limiting the power of LCPCs, instead of actively facilitating their work or helping to create the legal–normative and institutional frameworks that would help to make community-level security and conflict prevention more sustainable (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021). Therefore, it is not unlikely that LCPCs whose support from Saferworld and FTI is discontinued will lose their capacities in a few years, unless new cohorts of voluntary activists are mobilized. The small, but significant 'success stories' of LCPCs in Tash-Bulak, Bazar-Korgon and other towns in southern Kyrgyzstan need to be seen in this light, as the motivation and 'fanaticism'[13] are also susceptible to fatigue and exhaustion when issues prove too complex and 'wicked' to be solved, or the ignorance and resistance from local and higher-level administration is too stubborn.

The analysed practices and discourses of community security and peace-building can be clearly situated within the three imaginaries of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan. The Law 'On crime prevention' and institutionalization of LCPCs can be seen as a combination of local governance situated in Western 'liberal peace' discourses with traditional discourses on social order and institutions, which has resulted in a set of institutions and practices conforming to the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. While the content of internationally supported projects and practices has thus largely drawn on Western notions of participatory techniques and local democracy and emphasized their compatibility with Kyrgyzstani local institutions such as LCPCs, *asksakal* courts or neighbourhood and *mahalla* committees, the overarching priorities and specific measures are always agreed with and thus subsumed under the priorities of the MIA. Thereby, domestic authorities' sovereignty is maintained vis-à-vis international actors' criticism or interference and also vis-à-vis local and municipal actors' challenges and attempts to influence the provincial and national policy making or legislation. Community security and peacebuilding are in this sense allowed to address the symptoms of economic, social and political problems by helping in coping with or adjusting to them. But a feedback loop that would create additional responsibility and accountability from the top levels vis-à-vis communities appears to be generally lacking. The state is thus reconfigured and rebuilt to a post-liberal one, where the classic relationship between state and society, which is supposed to feature collective decision making and vertical

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[13] About the new members of the team, the Bazar-Korgon LCPC representative commented: 'They are as much fanatics as we are, we are cast in the same mould [*oni tozhe takie fanaty kak my, s odnogo testa*]', Bazar-Korgon, 30 October 2015.

accountability, is transcended into one where the state is only active in certain aspects and situations while domestic non-state and international actors take over functions and responsibilities that state agencies cannot cover. In Chapter 7, I examine attempts to challenge this post-liberal reconfiguration by creating more accountability of state institutions, specifically the police, vis-à-vis society. The key message take-away from this chapter is a first insight on the co-production of peace, security and order by local-level societal and international actors with state authorities largely controlling the content, shape and symbolic positioning of these efforts, which can thus only evolve on a post-liberal trajectory rather than realizing the ambitions of the 'liberal peace'.

6

Shaping Peace, Social Order and Resilience: Territorial Youth Councils and the Field of Youth Policy

The previous chapter gave a first insight into community security and peacebuilding practices against the background of the post-Socialist transition and its effects on livelihoods in rural and semi–urban Kyrgyzstan. As I have shown, after the rolling back, downsizing and sometimes de facto collapse of state institutions and services, the web of social institutions and civil society under the umbrella of LCPCs addresses conflict and security issues, but is also highly dependent on local activists' readiness and ability and resources. Based on this first example of post-liberal forms of community security provision, in this chapter I present an analysis of the peacebuilding, social ordering and mobilization practices of Territorial Youth Councils (*Territorialnye Molodezhnye Sovety*, TYCs) and their implications for post–liberal statebuilding. Officially created in the year 2011 on young people's initiative to promote peace, tolerance and non–violence in the aftermath of the 2010 'Osh' or 'June events' (see Chapter 4), the TYCs were established with the help of continuous support from the Organisation for Co–operation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and the local NGO Iret[1] and were soon integrated into the local government architecture. TYCs in Osh and analogous structures elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan had an important stake not only in promoting tolerance, interethnic and inter–regional exchange but also self–help and solidarity among young people, which makes them a pertinent case for analysing post–liberal peace and statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan. Like the

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[1]   The Russian acronym for *Initsiativa razvitiia edinstva i tolerantnosti*, or 'Initiative for the development of equality and tolerance'.

LCPCs analysed earlier, they mobilize comprehensive efforts among young people and national NGOs to realize goals that are also in the interest of local government actors such as the Mayor's Office (*meriia*) of the city of Osh. Correspondingly, many practices and discourses of peacebuilding and social ordering undertaken by TYCs can be situated within the 'politics of sovereignty' and 'Western liberal peace' imaginary at the same time, while their content invoked 'tradition and culture' as a source of peacefulness and harmony in diversity.

The data used in this analysis were gathered in participatory observation during national meetings, community events and in interviews conducted with TYC representatives between September and December 2015.[2] I interviewed current or recent heads or active members from five of the 12 TYCs in the city of Osh, some of whom were currently working as staff in the Committee for Youth Affairs or in the NGO Iret. A first draft of the chapter was shared with the latter via an interlocutor and follow-up conversations as part of a visit of Kyrgyzstani youth within a Saferworld project were conducted in June 2019. These dialogical elements and sustained contact with one of the former project staff served to confirm the correct representation of the TYCs' story and put it into a broader perspective.

As I learned in the follow-up conversations in recent years, the role of TYCs had been significantly reduced as they had been centralized into six TYCs serving two districts each while staff and budgetary resources continued to be scarce, thus making it harder for TYCs to reach the same number of people. To put these and further developments across the country into perspective, I further examine Kyrgyzstan's national-level approach to youth participation and youth policy. This analysis leads me to the overall finding that, similar to the case of LCPCs, TYCs and other structures, such as youth centres or committees, are welcome to work on their own initiative and raise resources on their own while the responsible bodies and ministries are not doing sufficient work to create the preconditions, legal and institutional frameworks that would enable a more sustainable and holistic youth participation and youth policy. In this sense, both on the local and national levels a post-liberal constellation can be observed in which non-state actors ensure a minimal level of activity and service provision to mitigate challenges faced by youth, whereas state authorities are reluctant to improve the structural conditions and legal frameworks that could make such work easier and more effective.

The chapter proceeds in three substantive steps. First, I describe how TYCs were created, consolidated and established as an institution for conflict

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2   See list of attended events and interviews in Appendix 2. The Committee for Youth Affairs helped to arrange some of the interviews, but all interviews and conversations were conducted on separate occasions.

prevention and management, which was essentially discontinued once the priority issues had been addressed. Second, I analyse how they aimed to address conflict-related and related socioeconomic issues through different strategies and narrative framings situated in the imaginaries of social ordering from Chapter 3, as they affirmed national ideology and ideas of a 'right path' on the one hand, but also embraced diverse ideas such as solidarity, charity, self-help and entrepreneurial thinking, on the other. Third, I move beyond the example of TYCs into the realm of national-level youth participation and policy to analyse the state authorities' overall lack of commitment to systematic, structural and budgetary changes and their reliance on NGOs and international funding as another example of the post-liberal constellation of policy and order-making in Kyrgyzstan.

TYCs between conflict prevention and long-term peacebuilding

The establishing of TYCs in the city of Osh in the south of Kyrgyzstan goes back to the year 2010. One among a number of short-term responses to the June 2010 events, which brought massive damage to large parts of the city and other towns in southern Kyrgyzstan, was to create 11 working groups across the city (Booklet, p 7).[3] The young volunteers in these groups attempted to call their peers to peacefulness, to dispel the multiple conflict-related rumours circulating in the aftermath of the conflict and to build trust, reconciliation and new friendships. This initial conflict prevention, often in the form of seminars or training, was conducted under the project slogan 'I am a Kyrgyzstani' (*Ya – Kyrgyzstanets!*)[4] which captures the goal of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence among the population regardless of people's identities and in the multicultural, civic-nationalist sense discussed in Chapter 4.

In 2011, the youth groups were institutionalized as TYCs as part of a project implemented by the NGO Iret and in cooperation with the CYA under the Mayor's Office (*meriia*). The mayor's decree (*polozhenie*) also established a Coordination Council (*koordinatsionnyi sovet*) consisting of representatives of the CYA, Iret and the OSCE, and one representative from each of the 12 TYCs. In this body, all operative and strategic questions pertaining to TYCs' work were discussed, including the allocation of

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[3] Most of the information presented in this section can be found in the NGO Iret's *Information booklet on the Territorial Youth Council of the city of Osh [Informatsionnyi sbornik o Territorialnykh Molodezhnykh Sovetakh goroda Osh]*, Osh, 2015; cited as 'Booklet' hereafter.

[4] Conversation with youth council head, who had been part of the efforts in the aftermath of the Osh events; Osh, 13 November.

'mini-grants' to young people's projects on a competitive basis. A major factor of motivation and source of knowledge was the funded trips of select activists to Northern Ireland and Vienna, where experiences and perspectives on post-conflict trust building among young people were gathered (Booklet, p 8). Further capacity-building and skills training implemented by Iret with the support and advice from the OSCE helped to recruit new people who would gradually partake in the activities of the TYCs, take on responsibility and become second- and third-generation youth council representatives themselves. The training, exchange visits and – once similar initiatives had been started across the country – national conferences for problem analysis, brainstorming and project planning were regarded as prestigious and attracted many participants.

The institutionalization of TYCs served to confer authority to continue their operations and partly solved the question about the 'ownership' of the TYC structure. While Iret and the OSCE did virtually all of the capacity-building and recruitment of volunteers, neither of these organizations was a realistic candidate to become a patron of the TYC in the long term. An important step toward institutionalization of the TYCs was the integration of the 12 TYC heads (*predsedateli*) into the staff of the CYA in 2013 (Booklet, p 9). This step, together with the issuing of ID cards to all active TYC members (from ten up to 30 per TYC), increased the visibility and legitimacy of the volunteers' work. As one representative from Iret argued, this gave the TYCs a better position, because 'even if the authorities rotate people, our people will already be there and will not be touched by them [*ikh ne trogaiut*]'.[5] This degree of institutionalization of TYCs can be seen as a concrete activity of statebuilding, through which state structures, in this case local administrative structures, are supported and in fact extended in order to better reach young people. While administratively integrated in the CYA, the TYCs worked with their respective territorial councils, the sub-division of the Mayor's Office in each city district (see Table 5.2 in Chapter 5), and thus also with LCPCs located in each district.

The TYCs in Osh were regarded as a success both by the authorities and within the OSCE, and thus served as a model case for building up youth sector structures all over Kyrgyzstan. Analogous youth structures were created in the southern provincial capitals of Batken and Jalal-Abad, in the town of Uzgen north of Osh and in the city of Tokmok in Chui province, east of Bishkek. Here the establishment of a youth working group in an OSCE project in 2012 led to the founding of a Youth Coordination Council (*Koordinatsionnyi Sovet Molodezhy*, *KSM*) in 2013. However, establishing TYCs analogous to those in Osh proved impossible as the Mayor's Office

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[5]   Youth forum in Batken, 11 September 2015.

lacked the administrative competencies of the one in Osh, which is the only 'republican' city alongside the capital Bishkek.[6] This case and similar difficulties of legally constituting youth structures in Jalal–Abad and Batken[7] indicate the limits to the official incorporation of youth councils into local administrative structures.

Most TYCs' activities after 2013 were focused on fostering tolerance and peaceful interaction and were organized in cooperation with local schools, technical and professional colleges, universities and other educational or administrative institutions. TYC volunteers utilized existing channels and infrastructures for communicating events, recruiting participants and new volunteers for their work. On the other hand, TYCs also organize street–level activities such as sports events, small courtyard festivals or concerts with the title *Rebiata s nashego dvora* ('Kids from our courtyard'). While both kinds of events reached a sizeable number of the youth, I was particularly interested in understanding what social outreach TYCs could generate in relation to the large population of the 12 districts of the city of Osh they are operating in. With up to 50,000 inhabitants in one district, ensuring appropriate and effective measures and events to build trust and peace and prevent tensions and conflict seemed a potentially challenging endeavour. Cooperating with existing social and administrative structures such as LCPCs and territorial councils, it appeared that TYCs had on overall significant social outreach especially when compared with other cities or rural areas with little or no opportunities for the youth. However, it also seemed possible that pockets of young people who did not know about TYCs could still exist, and hence imply grievances of conflicts that were both unknown and not attended to.

This variety in the positioning of TYCs in their respective districts and corresponding differential 'coverage' of events and activities offered to the youth is best understood in light of the institutional loci of TYC activities. Several representatives stated that their activities were located in the schools and colleges of their city district, where pupils actively engaged in their TYC.[8] The presence of TYCs at schools could vary greatly, however. There may be no information about TYCs in some schools, and in one school, as one interviewee stated, "our school director […] did not admit such youth organizations. She did not want people to

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[6]   Interview with youth representative, Tokmok, 10 December 2015; correspondence, August 2017.

[7]   Although with similar difficulties, Committees for Youth Affairs were eventually instated under the Mayor's Offices of these provincial capitals. Participants on youth forum, Batken, 11 September 2015.

[8]   For instance, interviews with youth council head, Osh, 13 November; with youth council head, Osh, 4 December 2015; with two youth council activists, Osh, 4 December.

undertake such activity but wanted them to only study."[9] Youth activists from another TYC reported that their activities were focused on working with higher education institutions as no agreements for holding events with pupils from the district's schools had been reached.[10] While TYCs' presence in education institutions thus depended on individual initiatives and permissions, getting to know about TYCs outside of education or other social infrastructure was yet more dependent on coincidence and on whether the TYCs ran any events in a given neighbourhood. One ex-youth council activist reported:

> 'In our courtyard, it is possible that people knew [about TYCs]; only I didn't because I didn't go out on the street [to play]. My district is [covered by] the TYC Kerme-Too and it turns out that there, people knew well about it and that monthly events with graffiti and other things were held on the street. I knew that such events were being organized in our district … but I just didn't know that it was TYC people doing them.'[11]

This shows how TYCs have been present in children's lives through their 'Kids from our courtyard' and other street-level events, even if children may not have been aware of the structure behind these activities. At the same time, this social outreach depends on individuals' interaction with their own district and can vary across different districts. Furthermore, although events are advertised through posters and leaflets, sufficient recruitment of participants usually needed to be secured through word of mouth among youth and in the form of school teachers or pedagogues strongly encouraging or even 'pushing' young people to join.[12] Given her limited interaction with children in her courtyard, the ex-youth council activist quoted above was, like many others, recruited into her TYC during the first year of her studies at the Faculty of Business and Management of Osh State University. Overall, then, this demonstrates how TYCs had multiple age groups to work with in different settings and that covering all of these in each district was likely to be impossible. This challenge was elucidated by a TYC head, who pointed out that offering just one annual activity to young people at the three universities and eight schools in his district implied organizing one event per month, while there was still the 'city youth' (*gorodskaia molodezh*) to be catered for as well.[13] To deal with the amount of work, TYCs appointed responsible

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9   Interview with former 'golden ten' member, Osh, 3 December 2015.
10   Interview with two youth council activists, Osh, 4 December.
11   Interview with former 'golden ten' member, Osh, 3 December 2015.
12   Interview with activists and TYC head, Osh, 4 December. Interview with youth representative, Tokmok, 10 December.
13   Conversation, youth council head, Osh, 13 November.

persons or *sviaznye* ('communicators') to organize their work, especially in higher education institutions, more effectively, while this created a significant coordination workload for TYC heads.[14]

Mobilization, fluctuation and division of labour

A key difficulty in fulfilling the roles and goals of TYCs was posed by the turnover and fluctuation of membership which is, to some extent, inevitable in youth volunteering projects. Cultural festivals, events and activities in schools, colleges and universities also served to recruit new volunteers, especially at the beginning of academic years when TYCs would advertise themselves alongside other student organizations in higher education institutions,[15] while personal friendships played an important role in recruiting new members.[16] The TYCs' different events and training were advertised as places where 'active youth are gathering', can 'present themselves',[17] voice their ambition and get the opportunity to join the core team called 'golden ten' (*zolotaia desiatka*).[18] The idea was that each 'golden ten' member should recruit two more active members, making a TYC count 30 active members plus the head and deputy head. With the heads working as regular staff in the CYA and acting as a bridge between the latter and their TYC, the golden ten took on the principal responsibility for the operative work in the district. As one TYC head from a more rural district in western Osh explained, before working at the CYA in the afternoon, "in the morning, I go to my [home district] office, I have a territorial council head there, leaders of neighbourhood committees [with whom they cooperate] and youth representatives and leaders who are doing the whole [TYC] work there".[19]

In this sense, TYC heads depended on their 'golden ten' to keep the activities of the TYCs running, which could be challenging given the above-mentioned fluctuation. As the same TYC head explained, "[one year], we had about 14 leaders, but four had already left for their relatives in Moscow in order to work and only ten were left. The following year, of these ten, another four or five became students or also left to work." This fluctuation meant that within one year the positions within her golden ten team could change one or more times, as people would join the core team

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[14] Interview with activists, Osh, 4 December; youth representative, Tokmok, 10 December.

[15] Interview, ex-golden ten member, Osh, 3 December 2015.

[16] Interview with activists, Osh, 4 December 2015; similar stories were told in interviews by two TYC heads, Osh, 13 November and 4 December.

[17] '*Ty sebia pokazyvaesh.*' Ex-golden ten member, interview, Osh, 3 December.

[18] Interview, TYC head of a suburban district, Osh, 13 November.

[19] Interview, TYC head, Osh, 13 November.

for an average of only seven to eight months. Similarly, the TYC head with eight schools in his district remarked succinctly that, "as regards the regularity [of people's contribution], that varies [*eto po raznomu*]" and, worse, within a short period of time, "the golden ten completely fell apart. They finished the 11th grade and entered university in Bishkek or left for other reasons." This demonstrates that, while working in TYCs may be interesting and attractive for young people for various reasons, their life courses, personal plans and obligations vis-à-vis family and relatives may not allow them to be active in TYCs for a long time. This dilemma was particularly acute in the recruitment of pupils from higher school grades, who would mostly leave Osh to study or work elsewhere soon after. The situation frustrated TYC representatives and was seen as a major issue preventing a more sustainable impact of TYCs and raising questions about the aspects of livelihod and career development in relation to work within the TYCs.[20]

Ensuring the implementation of event plans amid this high degree of fluctuation required effective internal communication, delegation and division of labour, but inevitably foregrounded frictions among the activists. While TYC members were free to propose events and activities suitable for their communities and different target groups, the annual event calendar of the city of Osh with its traditional holidays already set some expectations on TYCs and especially their leaders to mobilize volunteers. The salary of 2,100 soms[21] that TYC heads received from the CYA until 2016 implied a degree of authority and prestige, but also further underlined the expectations and moral obligations to deliver the expected activities. The corresponding challenge for TYC heads was to convince their peers to join and actively contribute to the TYCs' work while maintaining the voluntary and open character of this work. This could also lead to failure, as exemplified in one TYC where members were discontented with their deputy head and, as the TYC head explained "they set up a meeting [*miting stroili*; laughs] and said, 'the guy doesn't do work', 'he is such and such' and they even called for new elections and elected a new deputy. … So that's the kind of internal politics going on." In another local youth group the leader shared the distress she experienced when her deputy head decided to resign because he did not agree with the way the local group worked:

'And when I asked him, why did you leave, why do you not want to work, he said [clearing throat], 'These are my principles, I want it like this, that's it.' And I just wanted to kill myself [*ubivalas*] and said, gosh, what's this, what am I supposed to do now, I have to explain

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[20] Presentation at national closing conference, 27 October, Janaat Resort, near Bishkek.
[21] Which equalled about 25 euros and about a sixth of the national average wage at the time.

this to the boss, what to say in front of [the implementing NGO] and the OSCE. How am I supposed to step up and say that … [this is] the person for whom I did everything to be included into the project. It was my full responsibility that he would work.'[22]

This illustrates the stakes involved in the work of TYCs and the trust implicated in decisions on recruiting people and investing in them by sending them to national conferences and training. These investments and the corresponding responsibility make the people in leading positions vulnerable to the disagreement, resistance or inability of ordinary members to carry out their work. The group leader further reflected:

'Anyway, one has to conform to some rules, to some pillars and to move in such a way that it's not only comfortable for yourself but also for others. There were days when I missed classes for three or four days in order to work in some project, to go on a trip. Because this is a responsibility, after all. Because you chose this life [*podkluchilsa v etu zhizn*], after all. You're not supposed to reject this responsibility because they invest money and work in you. And you're supposed to give some feedback [if you don't like something].'

As this statement shows, precarious situations and competitive relations were part and parcel of the TYCs' work. While such can be mitigated and transformed into constructive cooperation and even year-long friendships,[23] the entirely voluntary status of TYCs' work further stresses the question about TYC activists' livelihoods and career prospects after graduation. Given the lack of monetary compensation in these positions except the monthly wage allowance of Osh TYC heads, youth leaders have to sustain their existence through wage labour in various professions ranging from journalism to the hospitality sector. A few TYC activists were able to work in the NGO sector to write grant proposals and help implement projects, including the TYC capacity-building project, thus benefiting from international donors' post-2010 focus on youth as a vulnerable group.[24] Although a good proportion – about a quarter – of the TYC activists successfully progressed from ordinary member to leader and further to professional employment in youth work and policy, there was a need for more short-term motivational sources to mobilize people. These

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[22] Interview, youth council representative, Tokmok, 10 December 2015.
[23] For instance, the same youth leader told how she would regularly have disagreements or even fights with her colleague but would always find a common denominator in the end.
[24] Interview, youth work expert, Tokmok, 10 December 2015; conversation, TYC project consultant, 6 July 2017.

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are discussed in the next section with regard to young activists' personal (self-)development and contribution to what they saw as the nation's or their city's development. These positive aspects notwithstanding, the favourable business cycle created by international donor money could not hide the fact that existing structures and resources in Kyrgyzstan's youth work and policy sector were barely sufficient to sustainably tackle the challenges pertaining to youth and entire social milieus; a situation that was equally obvious in the TYCs' long-term establishment.

Delegated, but flexibilized authority

The above discussion has shown how TYCs worked to prevent conflict and build tolerance in the aftermath of the 2010 Osh events as they built up elaborate structures and capacities allowing them to run several events across their respective city districts with minimal budgetary support. TYCs can, in this sense, be seen as the ideal solution from the point of view of the local administration and the state at large. They served to channel international donor money and large-scale efforts of young people into conducting projects and activities, while the Mayor's Office could steer and control these efforts according to its preferences through the CYA and analogous bodies elsewhere. As the CYA head pointed out, the TYCs had managed to establish cooperation between 'local administrative organs' (*mestnye organy vlasti*)[25] and, specifically in Osh, 'interact closely' with law enforcement organs, territorial councils (the district-level sub-division of the Mayor's Office) and their composite institutions such as *aksakal* courts and women's councils (*zhensovets*).[26] "As regards the role of TYCs for these institutions", he further explained, "[they] are in need of human resources … they need people […] who will realize this, discuss, promote and advertise the events".[27] The best demonstration of this close cooperation between TYCs and other administrative and civil society bodies are big festivals held on the occasions of Nooruz,[28] 1 May, or the Anniversary of the city of Osh analysed further below, where TYC activists presented dance and theatrical performances and helped organize a culinary and arts fair. Further smaller-scale projects funded by 'mini-grants' allow youth to realize their ideas and get to know their peers from across the city and even Osh province. The important effect of these activities on building trust, tolerance and peace as well as preventing crime, conflict and delinquent behaviour among the

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[25] OSCE representative, national youth forum, Janaat Resort, 28 October 2015.

[26] Interview, Head of the Committee for Youth Affairs, Osh, 19 November 2015.

[27] Interview, Head of the Committee for Youth Affairs, Osh, 19 November 2015.

[28] A holiday celebrating the commencement of spring or, in Persian and Zoroastrian tradition, the new year.

youth, foregrounded a clear case for sustaining or even extending the TYCs' institutional status and mandate.

However, the following actions by the Mayor's Office sustained the flexibilization of the TYCs and even further centralized them. The TYCs' support from Iret and the OSCE officially ended in autumn 2016, meaning the TYCs were 'solely' – also in terms of funding and capacity-building support – 'in the hand of the Mayor's Office'.[29] The first measure taken thereafter was to halve the number of TYC heads working as ordinary staff members in the CYA: instead of one member of staff per TYC, the CYA employed six staff for the by now 13 TYCs, each of whom managed the work of two TYCs. Accordingly, the salary for each TYC manager was doubled and could more realistically support their livelihoods than the 2,100 soms previously received by each TYC head. Yet, the new arrangement also significantly centralized the procedures and communication channels and thus further increased the pressure on the TYC heads and their deputies to recruit, train and coordinate members for the organization of events and activities. Overall, it appears that the establishment and institutionalization of TYCs in Osh was already the biggest possible achievement, and that further structural and practical changes in youth work and youth policy could only be reached by higher-level initiatives. The pragmatic rationale of mayors' offices and rural administrations (*aiyl okmotu*) in smaller towns was to allow youth initiatives to organize events, educate and entertain young people without creating the structures making such work more sustainable, because doing so would incur additional administrative and budgetary burdens. Given that youth affairs are taken care of by voluntary youth activists and NGOs with the help of donor money,[30] there was basically no incentive to create structures such as TYCs or make the latter more sustainable in Osh itself.[31] The operating logic of TYCs and analogous structures is, in this sense, a post-liberal one as in the case of LCPCs in Chapter 5: They mobilize scarce resources such as donor money and the time and dedication of young activists with otherwise precarious livelihoods, with an appeal to a collective effort to build a peaceful and tolerant social order, while carrying out these activities in accordance with local governments' and wider state actors' political agendas. This political alignment of the peace and tolerance

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[29] Conversation, project consultant, 6 July 2017.

[30] The substituting effect of international donors' and local NGOs' activities in the youth sphere was noted by a senior specialist from the Tokmok Mayor's Office Social Department, Tokmok, 10 December 2015.

[31] Conversation, TYC project consultant, Osh, 3 December 2015. The expert in Tokmok (see note 30 above) noted how the creation of an official youth work structure was apparently more a matter of political will than of available resources or approval from higher-level structures.

produced by TYCs and its situating in imaginaries of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan is further analysed in turn.

Discourses and practices of TYC initiatives

Peace, tolerance and exchange between groups and locales

The original function and mission of TYCs was to build peace and trust between different ethnic groups within and across the districts of Osh city and beyond. Although this initial goal had largely been realized and receded into the background by 2015, many were still very much aware of it, especially youths in the districts affected by the '2010 events'. The inter-communal conflict of 2010 was still vividly present in the memories of young people and thus conditioned an acute awareness about perceived differences between ethnic groups and cultures and the necessity to work on this topic and challenge stereotypes and prejudice. Accordingly, the continued significance of exchanges, 'friendship camps' (*lagery druzhby*) and mutual visits of people from different districts of the city and beyond was emphasized by several interviewees. One acting TYC head from a district, which had been gravely affected by the '2010 events', told me how, as a reaction to the conflict and the reported involvement of people from remote districts of Osh province, they started organizing mutual visits with villages in Chong Alai region.[32] Such exchange between mono-ethnic communities from different ends of the city, for instance Japalak and Amir-Temur or Turan and Kerme-Too, and with remote areas beyond, was, as argued by a leading project consultant, one of the key achievements of the TYCs.[33]

This component of building peace, tolerance and trust and fighting stereotypes between ethnic communities was increasingly combined with activities of general interest for young people. Different so-called mini-projects for peace- and tolerance-building have focused on performances, sports competition or arts and handicrafts with the interaction of different youths from diverse backgrounds. Examples include projects such as 'Let's debate with one another' (*'Davaite obsudim vmeste'*), where debating and public speech skills training was combined with debating current issues; 'The world through art' (*'Mir cherez iskusstvo'*), where participants from both Osh city and province, who had special artisan and handicraft talents, created works on specific themes which were exhibited in all represented

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[32] Interview, Osh, 13 November 2015. Chong Alai is one of the regions whose almost exclusively Kyrgyz population is well known for harbouring stereotypes about Osh and its Uzbek population. This was confirmed in an interview with a project consultant on 3 December.

[33] Conversation, Osh, 6 July 2017.

Figure 6.1: Performances during *Rebiata s nashego dvora* event

Notes: (a) Photograph from the 'Kids from our courtyard' event; (b) music performance;
(c) breakdance performance.

Source: Author

locales;[34] and a workshop on origami paper folding, which included visitors from Aravan, a town south of Osh, and the Alai region.[35] Another important and more regular event theme is the above-mentioned *Rebiata s nashego dvora* ('Kids from our courtyard'), which offers a stage for young people to present any performances they would like to contribute. Attending such an event on the occasion of International Youth Day, I witnessed a wide range of acts including contemporary pop culture (breakdance, singer–songwriter and rock acts performing Russian- and English-language songs) and sketches and love songs performed in the Kyrgyz language (see Figure 6.1).

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[34] Presentations on national forum in Batken, 11 September 2015; Booklet, p 29.
[35] Interview, Osh, 4 December 2017.

These events, which make up a large share of TYC activities, place a central emphasis on the idea of practising and living tolerance and openness toward a variety of interests, orientations and identities among young people. While promoting peace and tolerance is still a key goal of these activities, it is not as explicitly propagated as in the events organized in the immediate post-conflict period. This shift toward more *implicit* peace- and tolerance-building is reflecting the need to 'move forward' from the initial focus of the TYC project,[36] which had already been successful in creating peace and was seen to be in need of 'new directions'.[37] A youth activist from Tokmok pointed out how rules for promoting tolerance and diversity were still adhered to in all projects, for instance by trying to always mix groups by gender and ethnicity in group work slots, or by making participants rethink and overcome reservations and stereotypes once they surfaced in interactions.[38] This peacebuilding in 'imperceptible ways'[39] and through an 'indirect model' emphasizing cooperation (*sotrudnichestvo*)[40] and simply practising diversity and tolerance in action, rather than explicitly propagating and educating young people about it as an end in itself, has emerged in reaction to the above-mentioned need to 'move forward' and to acknowledge that most young people with whom projects are conducted may not have memories from the 2010 conflict or may not feel that they are in particular need of being trained in peace. This approach thus takes up Megoran et al's (2014, pp 14ff) criticism that internationally funded peacebuilding projects among urban residents of Osh and Jalal-Abad were superimposing, often in a patronizing way, ideas of peace and harmony on people who did not feel they needed any peacebuilding measures at all. The peace- and tolerance-building of the TYCs has moved on from this problematic and limited approach not only in its more implicit emphasis on this goal, but also by persistently incorporating youth from the regions of Osh province. Stories of friendship and cooperation, such as the setting up of a joint coal trading business between people in the Alai region and the Turan district of Osh,[41] and the exceptional diversity of people working in TYCs themselves,[42] helped to overcome stereotypes on the part of young people and foreground stories of

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[36] As expressed by the head of the Committee for Youth Affairs, interview, Osh, 19 November 2015.

[37] Conversation, TYC head, Osh, 13 November.

[38] Interview, Tokmok, 10 December 2015.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Conversation, project consultant, Osh, 6 July 2017.

[41] As told by project consultants, conversation, Osh, 6 July 2017; 4 December 2015.

[42] The booklet lists all TYCs' golden ten members whose backgrounds range from sports (boxer, sportsman, fighter, karate champion) and artistic ones (artist, poet, musician, singer, dancer, *komus* [Kyrgyz string instrument] player) to political and student activist ones (school president, school parliament member, political party youth wing member).

personal transformation in other peacebuilding projects.[43] That the original mission of the TYCs is still of significance will become particularly clear in relation to its ideological positioning, which I discuss in turn.

National ideology and the 'right path'

On various occasions, the TYC project was positioned vis-à-vis questions of national ideology and the idea of a 'right path', *ak jol* in Kyrgyz, which referred both to individual life courses and the development of Kyrgyzstan as a country. As responsible individuals with good outreach in their respective communities, TYC leaders and youth activists from across the country demonstrated awareness of the issues Kyrgyzstan was facing in economic development and the corresponding challenges that society needed to face up to. Pronouncements by event organizers and funders that the young leaders could 'lay a good foundation for the future of Kyrgyzstan' and could themselves be 'the future of this country' illustrates how youth activists were encouraged to think in terms of national development and politics.[44] Young activists' affirmative statements in a theme movie on the TYC project, according to which they could imagine becoming politicians or president of the country, further strengthened the idea of taking responsibility for the country. In taking to the task, youth activists on a youth forum in Batken drew direct links between Kyrgyzstan's social and political problems and the insufficiently developed ideology and moral orientation of society. One participant stated:

> 'We need to make changes; now women drink and smoke, earlier there weren't such things [*ranshe togo ne bylo*]. Why are men not protecting their women and their country? We have to create jobs in Kyrgyzstan, so that women don't go in the wrong direction; we are doing dirty work on the streets; suicides are growing in number, there is a problem with upbringing [*vospitanie*]. … We need to preserve our national ideology [*sokhranit svoiu natsionalnuiu ideologiu*] and not forget our history. We have to help the people who are not on the right path.'[45]

This statement, which initiated a wider discussion on problems faced by youth in Kyrgyzstan, touched upon a number of problems, such as

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[43] For the story of a young man from Chong Alai, see Saferworld, 'From bias to cooperation – A personal transformation in Kyrgyzstan', n.d., www.saferworld.org.uk/en-stories-of-change/from-bias-to-cooperation-a-a-personal-transformation-in-kyrgyzstan

[44] On the forum in Batken, 11 and 13 September 2015.

[45] Plenary session during youth forum in Batken, 11 September 2013.

deteriorating social relations and role models and behaviours – such as men not living up to their perceived role of protecting women, drug consumption, and suicides – and indicates the possibility of solving these problems by helping those who are not on the 'right path' (*ak jol*, Ru.: *pravilnyi put*) and preserving national ideology and historical memory. Further participants agreed that there was a problem with people 'embarking on the wrong path' (*nastaiut na nepravilnyi put*) and that it was increasingly 'difficult to mobilize people' (*slozhno sobirat ludei*) as spiritual values were apparently changing (*'nashi dukhovnye tsennosti izmenilis'*).[46]

In discussing the perceived loss of ideology, people especially emphasized the rise of new Islamic practices: "People forget their [culture], they wear a *hijab*, but this is Arabic clothing, why don't they wear some Kyrgyz clothing like the *kalpak*?" Besides this recasting of the search for national ideology as an issue of 'traditional versus non-traditional Islam' (see below), one participant from Jalal-Abad also argued that: "The Kyrgyz language is part of our ideology … we should be proud of it; in Bishkek when someone speaks with a Southern dialect, they relate to him like to a *sart* [someone part of a sedentary population, usually referring to Uzbeks]." This invocation of ethno-nationalist othering of Uzbeks and the argument about maintaining national ideology by preserving the Kyrgyz language evoked reluctant reactions, but was only eventually countered by the moderator who pointed out: "Our national ideology is neither our language nor our clothing – it is justice [*spravedlivost*]! No matter what language we speak or what ethnicity we are from, justice is our national ideology, don't forget this!" This outlines the general tension between the opinion that a stronger national ideology was needed to improve the situation of people in Kyrgyzstan and that, on the other hand, emphasizing Kyrgyz culture and language too much and at the expense of other cultures, ethnicities and ways of life could jeopardize the TYCs' overarching goal of peace and tolerance. Both the forum in Batken and other TYC events I attended demonstrated that harmonic interethnic conviviality is possible under the banner of Kyrgyzstan's national symbols. The participants of the Batken forum, for instance, collected money to drive to the local *Manas Ata* (Father Manas) monument and take photos for their memories. They also set up an entertainment event the same evening, where participants recited the Epic of Manas and other traditional Kyrgyz poetry, alongside other music and sketch performances. While these activities occurred in harmony and even with enthusiasm, it is worth noting that this may have required a higher degree of adaptation and compromise on the part of youth activists who were not of ethnically Kyrgyz background.

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[46] Plenary session during youth forum in Batken, 11 September 2013.

Figure 6.2: Peacebuilding and national symbols

Notes: (a) Traditional dance performance, Lenin square, Day of the city of Osh celebration; (b) TYC activists takinfig selfies at Manas Ata monument, Batken; (c) picture from the *borsok* festival in front of the Kyrgyz drama theatre, Osh.

Source: Author

The main mechanism for producing such understandings of national ideology and interpellating people, including the youth, into it was the programme of official celebrations, as in the city of Osh. This calendar included important anniversaries pertaining to the Kyrgyz nation and the city itself. For instance, on the ceremony for the Anniversary of the city of Osh in late October 2015 (see Figure 6.2), dozens of young people were mobilized to present different dances and historical performances, with a key one being the story of Kurmanjan Datka and the murder of her son, the historical sacrifice made to ensure decades of peace and making the protagonist a national hero (see Chapter 4). Performances of such historical significance were combined, somewhat eclectically, with action–laden shows of hip hop and breakdance groups over the beats of Western RnB

and Drum-n-Bass music. While this event brought together Kyrgyz legends and dreams of modern life and self-expression on the Lenin Square in front of the Mayor's Office, the adjacent Lenin Street and the square in front of the theatre (*dramteatr*) hosted a farmer's market, an arts exhibition and *borsok*[47] festival. With the market hosting stalls representing most towns of Osh province and the *borsok* competition featuring stalls from local schools, the 'Day of the City' offered an impressive display of the diversity of people, traditions and cultures living in and around Osh, but also of the things uniting them, such as specific products in which the towns in the periphery have specialized or the *borsok*, which has been baked by all groups inhabiting Osh and its environs for centuries. The TYCs' participation in the anniversary celebration and other 'festivals of friendship' and similar events[48] thus attest to the fact that Kyrgyzstani national symbolism and the implicit reinvigoration of Kyrgyz traditions are commensurable with both displays of modern hip hop and youth culture and the diversity of ethnicities and cultures of Osh and its environs.

As further confirmation of the national ideological positioning, various interviewees from TYCs confirmed that their and fellow activists' motivation was based on patriotic feelings and desires to develop their community, city and the country at large. Asked about people's motivation to organize numerous events in their free time, one TYC head explained: "Well, there are some patriots among them [smiles]. After school, they all come on their own initiative, we do stuff, they are already like patriots."[49] Another TYC member explained that he was joining the TYC activities because he personally wanted to "change my country" and "make a contribution [*dat polzu*]".[50] The ex-golden ten member from a western district explained that "[o]ur goal was to unite the city and to develop it … and I knew that TYCs develop the city by strengthening it and creating interethnic accord".[51]

In this sense, participation in TYC work and its building of peace and tolerance was seen as an act of patriotism and a contribution to building the

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[47]   Central Asian fried dough specialty.

[48]   A city-wide 'festival of friendship' has been held practically every year since 2010, as the following headlines indicate: Aimak, 'В городе Ош прошел Фестиваль Дружбы [Festival of Friendship held in Osh]', 20 March 2015, http://aimak.kg/ru/fotoreportazh/3134-v-gorode-osh-proshel-festival-druzhby.html; Turmush, 'В Оше в микрорайоне «Амир-Тимур» пройдет фестиваль дружбы [A festival of friendship is held in the Osh microdistrict 'Amir Temur']', 25 March 2014, http://ik.turmush.kg/ru/news:52259; Turmush, 'Фестиваль дружбы молодежи различных национальностей прошел в Оше [Festival of friendship among youth of different nationalities held in Osh]', 17 June 2013, http://jalal-abad.turmush.kg/ru/news:43123 [5 September 2017].

[49]   Interview, Osh, 4 December 2015.

[50]   Interview, Osh, 4 December 2015.

[51]   Interview, Osh, 3 December 2015.

Kyrgyzstani nation by at least some of the youth activists. In these practices and activities, discourses emphasizing Kyrgyz tradition and defence against external influence, which can be situated in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary, can coexist with ideas of multicultural, civic nationalism and displays of pop culture and youth sub-culture akin to the creativity and self-expression in the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary. Incompatibilities between such discourses and positions were rarely confronted, as the platforms created by TYCs would allow a degree of diversity and *heteroglossia*.[52] Thus, the remark of one TYC head that "our people [*narod*] does not like these LGBT and similar people. Here, no one is forcing their opinion upon you" was not brought up during other interviews with TYCs or any events. Overall, the TYCs work thus made a key contribution to socializing tolerant and diversity-oriented people under the banner of national ideology, both in more open multicultural terms and under more exclusively Kyrgyz symbolism of national heroes like Manas and Kurmanjan Datka. These latter symbolic referent objects, on the other hand, also emphasized cultural and ideological positionings with more exclusionary character, foregrounding a post-liberal character of the peace and unity produced.

Tackling concrete problems: racketeering and poverty

Events and activities revolving around official discourses on nation-building, interethnic friendship and tolerance were the easiest and most straightforward way for TYCs to promote their goals. However, given their close focus on communities and the task of 'identifying problems [*vyiavlenia problem*] and contributing to their solutions'[53], TYCs also work to tackle the issues faced by youth in their respective districts and in the country at large. These included, among others, racketeering and poverty, which affected young people in often grave ways and were seen as source of further problems such as crime and delinquency. The efforts invested in tackling these issues were an important addition to the authorities' work, as in the case of peace- and tolerance-building discussed above.

In analysing and devising measures against racketeering in schools and wider youth milieus, TYCs made some important progress. Already in 2014, TYCs in Osh had organized events to tackle such issues together with the local administration, schools and Inspectors for Youth Affairs (*Inspektor po delam nesovershennoletnykh* or *IDN*) in the police. In a project on the problem of '[i]nter-group clashes among youth and racketeering in schools', a 'Dialogue Centre' for a discussion of the reasons for these phenomena was

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[52] Osh, 13 November 2015.
[53] Interview, head of CYA, Osh, 19 November 2015.

established, meetings with law enforcement agencies organized, and even an excursion was arranged for 'pupils under the influence of informal leaders [*imeiushikh vliiania neformalnykh liderov*]' (Booklet, pp 22–3). The TYC head from a central district in Osh reported that racketeering was the number one problem (*pervaia problema*) in his district's schools and how, thanks to his group's efforts to promote moderation, "some pupils who are racket leaders [...] already listen and it's already interesting for them".[54] He explained that sports events were especially useful in his team's attempts to make racketeers refrain from their practices. Many of the racketeers had become members of the TYC, because knowing what kind of events were being organized by this entity they started 'considering different things in life' (*soobrazhenie drugogo*). A project consultant confirmed that former racketeers and 'gangsters' [*bandity*] had indeed written quite interesting project proposals.[55] A more detailed story of a conversion of racketeers and youth gang leaders was told by the TYC head from the rural district of Osh:

> 'In my TYC we have 13 villages [*sel*] and all the time there are fights between youths of different villages. So, together with neighbourhood inspectors and *IDN*s, we set up seminars for the informal leaders … and we went to [a town] in Jalal–Abad province, where they had a good time [*otdykhali*], became friends and learnt new things. So, when they came back home they had already become friends.'[56]

Asked what exactly they told the racket group leaders to convince them to come to such a summer camp, the youth council head further explained that they approached them as 'very active young people' whom they sought to recruit for a camp for active people and for the development of new ideas for the youth. As the different leaders and the people 'managing different schools' (*smotriashie shkoly*, lit. 'looking after schools') became friends, the number of physical fights significantly decreased or, if they happened at all, fights were not that grave (*ne tak slozhno*), as the activist explained. While these cases of success benefited from good cooperation on the part of law enforcement agencies and the financial and organizational support of donors and NGOs, this situation can vary considerably with time and geographical location, even from district to district and violence among youths remains a significant issue across the country.

A yet more fundamental issue facing youth in Kyrgyzstan appears to be underlying the other problems that TYCs are tackling. While I have glossed the issue as 'poverty', this must be understood in its different nuances and

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54   Interview, Osh, 4 December 2015. A project consultant confirmed.
55   Conversation, Osh, 6 July 2017.
56   Interview, TYC head, Osh, 13 November 2015.

aspects which can loosely be grouped into, first, the general effects and social ills emanating from poverty and socioeconomic hardship; second, the social and psychological effects of migration and other attempts at coping with the situation; and third, the deprivation of rights and basic services affecting young people living in poverty. The first two aspects were especially present in TYCs' work. The TYC head from the rural district of Osh, for instance, said that her TYC team demanded a 'crisis centre' be set up, which would offer psychological help to women in difficult domestic situations which had led to a rising number of suicides.[57] Similarly, a police major from Batken reported that suicides, especially among children from badly-off families (*maloimushikhsia semei*), were a big problem, alongside children being left by parents who go to work abroad.[58] The social work expert from Tokmok shared similar experiences about the trend in the deterioration of the family as an institution:

> 'The institution of the family as such does not exist anymore … Now, where you look, you see lone mothers bringing up children, or lone fathers, or the parents went somewhere the child stays behind alone and becomes a social orphan, right? Or the parents leave the child altogether. What's this? To tell the truth, this kind of thing is very developed here now. … in the [municipal] Commission for Children's Affairs we had nine cases, and all these nine cases were from disadvantaged families [*neblagopoluchnye semi*], all of them! The children don't go to school because the family is badly off [*nuzhdaetsa*], because there is no birth certificate or because the father and mother do not have passports. … And then mothers and fathers, they have no upbringing [*vospitania*], no education [*obrazovania*], parents give their child to someone random, it doesn't matter at all what happens to their son, he's being brought up by some strangers or a grandmother who is eighty years old, we had all of these cases.'[59]

This shows how the deterioration of families is associated, on the one hand, with parents' attempts to cope with economic hardship through labour migration and delegation of the upbringing and provision for their children, but it is increasingly conditioned by social destitution and individuals and entire families vanishing from the registers of welfare institutions and the state altogether. Under the theme 'The violation of rights of young brides and the break-up of young families', TYCs set up a theatre play to raise awareness about the way in which negative family relations and factors

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[57] TYC head, Osh, 13 November 2015.
[58] Youth forum, Batken, 12 September 2015.
[59] Interview, Tokmok, 10 December 2015.

such as alcoholism or unemployment can lead to broken homes, while also discussing, in a roundtable, the possibilities of mitigating this trend (Booklet, p 29). The aspect of rights deprivation was highlighted by participants in the forum in Batken. This point was emphasized in regard to 'social orphans' left behind by their parents and relatives and living in state boarding homes (*internaty*) with only 500 soms per month allocated for their needs – a sum barely sufficient to cover a week's costs. The participants thus suggested rights education (*pravovedenie*) in the form of a school subject as a way to counter the entrenchment of the precarity of socially vulnerable children through the withholding of their basic rights. Poverty and destitution as fundamental challenges faced by youth and the Kyrgyzstani population at large both directly affect the TYCs and indirectly conditioned the problems they dealt with, such as family and upbringing problems, domestic violence and conflicts among the youth. The instruments and capacities of TYCs to address these issues were, as this survey shows, often limited to reacting to neediness or conflicts and criminal practices such as racketeering, which are deeply intertwined with these socioeconomic dynamics. The TYCs' approach to dealing with such socioeconomic issues in their challenging environment is discussed in the following.

Self-help and solidarity

There are two discernible strands of thinking among TYC activists as to how poverty and socioeconomic hardship in Kyrgyzstan can be dealt with. The first revolved around the idea that such challenges can be overcome and dealt with if people work on improving themselves to be better equipped for the challenges of life. This emphasis on the importance of basic education, knowledge, skills and the ideas of self-help and self-improvement had remarkable significance and resonance among young people working in the TYCs and in Kyrgyzstani society at large. As one participant at the youth forum in Batken proposed when reasoning on how to overcome problems in the work of TYCs: "One needs to start with oneself and to change oneself [*Nado nachninat s sebia, nado sebia meniat*]."[60] This stance also involved a critical angle on the lack of the right education and training to fill the employment positions that are actually available[61] which would lead to a human resources or 'cadre problem' (*kadrovaia problema*). The entrepreneurial ethos foregrounded in such ideas of self-improvement and self-help was best captured in the phrase, "We should not only ask what the state does, but rather, what can we do for the state?", which, going back to J.F. Kennedy, was

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[60] Batken, 11 September 2015.
[61] Youth forum, Batken, 11 September 2015.

echoed by various forum participants. At the closing conference, two of the more successful TYC heads put forward this self-initiative, entrepreneurial ethos as a key to escape the problems faced by youth. Making references to 'people who built today's America' such as Steve Jobs, they argued that becoming a successful leader and entrepreneur was mainly a question of will, as the opportunities available for young people nowadays were unprecedented ('*ranshe ne byli takie vozmozhnosti*').[62]

This and other presentations of TYC members thus promoted what could be called, according to Makovicky (2014), an entrepreneurial model of personhood, which with its defiance of the adverse conditions and lack of state provision and opportunities has gained popularity among youth in Kyrgyzstan. Numerous donor projects, programmes and events facilitate young people's self-development, such as the *Jashtar Kemp* ('Youth camp') organized annually by the youth-led NGO Youth of Osh that showcases successful business people and their personal development paths, are testimony to this new trend,[63] as are various 'business club' projects organized by the same NGO to support young businesses and tackle unemployment.[64] Such activities are very attractive for their focus on empowerment and the possibility to realize one's own ideas and projects and become successful. On the other hand, this 'liberal' and entrepreneurial approach runs the risk of homogenizing people's experiences while ignoring their unequal socioeconomic backgrounds, recent family histories and other factors that can render their attempts to self-improve and realize their potential impossible. People disproportionately affected by life's hardships may not be aware of this or may be in denial, causing disappointment or worse if they do not succeed. The same TYC activists who at the November youth conference had presented the idea of taking Steve Jobs and other entrepreneurs as role models admitted in later group work that people in their neighbourhood were still forced to go to work in Russia, even if they were very talented.[65] So, while self-improvement and entrepreneurialism were seen as ways to make the best out of the situation, the overwhelming feeling about the socioeconomic issues faced by the youth in Kyrgyzstan and the massive fluctuation they created in youth work, was one of frustration and desperation.

Here the second, complementary narrative comes into play: solidarity and empathy among young people and the initiative to help people in need were

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[62] National closing conference, Jannat Resort, Chui province, 28 October.

[63] See Youth of Osh, announcement of speakers at the 2020 Online Jashtar Camp, 8 May 2020, www.facebook.com/youthofosh/photos/a.288918511123598/3470836269598457

[64] See Youth of Osh, Business Club [*Biznes klub*], 23 November 2017, https://youthofosh.kg/2017/11/23/biznes-klub/; and Business Club Batken, 23 November 2017, https://youthofosh.kg/2017/11/23/biznes-klub-batken/

[65] National closing conference, Jannat Resort, Chui province, 28 October.

another important agenda of TYCs and other youth structures. TYCs undertook efforts to solve a number of problems, such as ensuring water supply and regular cleaning of different parts of Osh or the setting up of 'social taxis' [*socialnye taksi*] in an eastern district of the town.[66] The expert from the social department from Tokmok affirmed that youth nowadays are 'aware that it is necessary to help each other, and the poor, and the old' and enumerated countless examples of organizations and initiatives helping elderly, homeless, poor families, and school children. Similarly, the Tokmok youth delegation on the forum in Batken demonstrated how for them, 'everything starts from solidarity and tolerance' as they and their partners in the regions of Chui province worked to support children's houses and had even opened a canteen (*stolovuiu*), whose profits were spent on charity purposes.[67] The head and deputy head of a central district TYC in Osh gave their interview in the headquarters of the organization they worked for as professionals, which specialized in supporting disabled people for whom state support was insufficient or unavailable.[68]

This solidarity and charity aspect of the work of TYCs and their members is a critical complement to the self-help and entrepreneurial narrative examined above. Some interviewees put forward explicit criticism vis-à-vis the latter, remarking that "there are some people who join [TYCs] only to develop themselves, right? … Just to develop themselves and one's thinking somehow, and when you're done you try to get a job, right",[69] or indicating that some people were working "only for their own pocket [*na svoiu karmanu*]" to develop their own business and enhance their own life.[70] Another critical voice on the forum in Batken remarked: "[T]here are many egoistic people who think about themselves, but maybe even one day we will be corrupted [*mozhet byt my i budem korrupcionerami*], we need to pay attention to people around us, in our community [*nado obratit vnimanie cheloveku vokrug, v svoem soobshestve*]."

This is not to discredit the idea of self-help and self-development altogether, however. Rather, given the specific junction that the different people were at in their lives – the end of their school years and entering studies or professional lives – the idea of developing their own skill sets, abilities to lead teams and projects and to gather experience and knowledge is an indispensable part of the TYCs' work. The combination of this idea of personal growth and experience with empathy about the challenges and hardships faced by peers and society at large motivated many TYC and other youth activists to put all their time and effort into the improvement of

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[66]   Interview with TYC head, Osh, 13 November 2015.
[67]   Group presentation, Batken, 11 September 2015.
[68]   Interview with TYC head, Osh, 13 November 2015.
[69]   Interview, ex-golden ten member, Osh, 4 December 2015.
[70]   Presentation during the national closing conference, Jannat Resort, 28 October 2015.

youth policy and politics in their respective communities and Kyrgyzstan at large. While the project closing conference in 2015 and TYCs' discussions in the year 2016 were dedicated to questions of institutional development and sustainability,[71] the downsizing of TYCs from 12 to six salaried leading positions already indicated reluctance on the part of the authorities to create more sustainable and well-endowed structures. In the next section, I thus discuss further initiatives to bring substantive change in the area of youth policy and youth participation in Kyrgyzstan.

A voice of or vis-à-vis youth? Opportunities and limitations of youth participation and youth policy in Kyrgyzstan

Both the slow and selective progress in the institutionalization of TYCs and other youth structures, and the systemic nature of problems of poverty and crime indicated that youth activists needed to establish themselves on various levels in the political system, rather than just in their local communities. To capture these attempts and the agenda of creating more sustainable youth policy structures, I first focus on initiatives for better youth participation at the municipal and national levels before then discussing developments in Kyrgyzstan's youth policy sector, which, as I argue, appears to be captured in a post-liberal logic, as it selectively draws on international support and ideational frameworks to support the underlying goal of strengthening societal stability and national sovereignty.

The first aspect of youth participation started to come up during my research in Osh, where more and more reference was made to the upcoming inauguration of a Youth Parliament for the city of Osh which, according to one TYC head, would perhaps be more effective in solving problems at the city level as it would enter into direct dialogue with the city's parliament (*gorodskii kenesh*).[72] The CYA head affirmed that it would be helpful to have youth representatives raise issues and make recommendations for legislation and normative acts to the city parliament and Mayor's Office.[73] However, besides the opening of the Youth Parliament,[74] little is known about the results it has achieved and the recommendations it has made. Given its lack of official status, it seemed fairly straightforward for local authorities to devote

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[71] Conversation, consultant, Osh, 6 July 2017.
[72] Conversation, TYC head, Osh, 13 November 2015.
[73] Interview, Osh, 19 November 2015; the same mission was stated during the inauguration of the youth parliament in late December 2015.
[74] Vechernyi Bishkek, 'В Оше состоялось открытие молодежного парламента [The opening of the youth parliament was held in Osh]', 21 December 2015, www.vb.kg/doc/331338

more focus and also draw public attention toward a number of projects aimed at improving the performance of municipal services and quality of life in the city. The best example is the OshCity App project supported by USAID and DFID, which featured a mobile phone app allowing people to file any concerns and complaints[75] and was, in the words of the then mayor, Kadyrbaev, "very practical in helping us to keep track of the issues that concern our citizens and to efficiently react to them".[76] With the NGO 'Youth of Osh' as implementing partner, this initiative presented a significant success and impact of the local youth. Yet, it also drew public attention away from attempts to create an institutional mechanism to raise more youth-specific problems and challenges.

Analogous initiatives at the national level have taken more or less decisive steps toward strengthening democratic culture among youth and establishing structures for youth representation. A USAID-funded project entitled 'Generation of Democracy' (Ru.: *Pokolenie demokratii*; Kg.: *Demokratiia munu*) organized televised debates between the youth wings of established political parties with the goal of 'improving the culture of constructive dialogue and open societal discussion of different issues and draft laws' as well as further strengthening and comparing positionings of the political parties.[77] Perhaps the strongest initiative has been the Youth Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic (*Molodezhnii parlament* or *Jashtar parlamenti*) which after its founding in 2011 and subsequent inactivity was organized again in 2016 to advance the 'formation of an active civic position' among the youth and their 'active participation',[78] as well as dialogue 'with the *Jogorku Kenesh* [Parliament] and other state organs'.[79] The parliament has continued its work

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[75] See www.map.oshcity.kg/

[76] Youth of Osh, 'В Оше запустили мобильное приложение для приема онлайн обращений [In Osh, a mobile app has been released for filing online requests]', 28 May 2017, http://youthofosh.kg/2017/05/28/v-oshe-zapustili-mobilnoe-prilozhenie-dlya-priema-onlajn-obrashhenij/

[77] Kloop.kg, 'Публичная дискуссия и конструктивный спор. Зачем нужны молодежные политические дебаты? [Public discussion and constructive arguing. Why do we need young politicians' debates?]', 6 July 2017, https://kloop.kg/blog/2017/07/06/publichnaya-diskussiya-konstruktivnyj-spor-i-podderzhka-molodyh-politikov-zachem-nuzhny-molodezhnye-politicheskie-debaty/. The project is organized by the Central Asia section of the International Debate Education Association (IDEA), the International Republican Institute (IRI) and the media platform Kloop with the support of USAID.

[78] AKI Press, 'Фонд Поддержки Демократии» сообщает о начале проекта «Молодежный Парламент [Foundation for the Support of Democracy informs on the opening of the "Youth Parliament"]', 21 June 2016, http://pressrelease.akipress.org/unews/un_post:7794

[79] Kaktus, 'В Бишкеке стартует проект "Молодежный парламент-2016" [The project "Youth Parliament 2016" starts in Bishkek]', 26 September 2016, http://old.kabar.kg/rus/society/full/111772

in the following years and, while meeting with representatives of the *Jogorku Kenesh* and participating in some of its committee sessions,[80] it has made its most significant interventions in the form of survey research and public calls to tackle corruption in higher education and other problems faced by the youth.[81] Overall, the Youth Parliament has remained in the framework of a capacity-building project run by NGOs and funded by international but also domestic donors. Therefore, despite its important input, questions still remain as to whether more institutionalized structures and democratically elected representatives are not necessary to adequately represent Kyrgyzstani youth in national politics.

The second aspect of youth policy in Kyrgyzstan presents a similar picture as a systematic state policy approach has long been said to be lacking and necessitated UN Agencies such as UNICEF and an array of international donors and domestic NGOs to step in and fulfil the most urgent needs. Already in early 2015, a network of NGOs under the banner 'Youth policy in action' (*'Molodezhnaia politika v deistvii'*) filed a declaration (*obrashenie*) to the president, government and *Jogorku Kenesh*, asking them to initiate the drafting of a national 'Conception for Youth Development' and the formation of a working group called Council for Youth Affairs under the government.[82] The declaration pointed out that youth policy had remained 'at a very low level of effectiveness [*effektivnost ee realizatsii ostaetsia na ochen nizkom urovne*]' and that a 'tendency of extreme disinterest on the part of the authorities' had led to the relegation of urgent concerns to the margins of domestic affairs. Given this neglect, the organizations demanded a 'targeted and consistent process of structuring youth policy' including the drafting of the above Conception and the development of a 'systematic approach in realizing youth policy'. Various experts from youth organizations I spoke to explained how the once well-resourced youth structure of the country had gradually been dismantled in the course of the two revolutions in 2005 and 2010 and made youth work completely dependent on support from international organizations. The sentiment that international organizations seemed to know better and care more about Kyrgyzstani youth than the state itself was voiced on several occasions, for instance on the youth forum in Batken where one project consultant concluded their final remarks with a "Thank you" to the OSCE "for supporting our youth more than our

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80 See Youth Parliament KR, 21 March 2017, www.facebook.com/youthparliamentkr/posts/2188362311429008

81 See for instance, Akipress, 'The Youth Parliament named the KGMA, KNU and KGGU as the most corrupted HE institutions', 28 March 2017, https://bilim.akipress.org/ru/news:1372733

82 Youth of Osh, 26 March 2015, www.youthofosh.kg/2015/03/26/obrashhenie-k-prezidentu-kr-ot-seti-molodezhnyh-organizatsij-molodezhnaya-politika-v-dejstvii/

state; this is from my heart [*eto ot dushy*]" while an inspector for youth affairs remarked that many youth problems "are not solved at the state level".[83]

The insufficiency of the national-level youth policy was further explained by a representative of the Institute for Youth Development. In his opinion, the State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sport (State Agency or GAMFKS hereafter)[84] did not provide a clear line for youth policy coordination across relevant fields such as education, social affairs or law enforcement; moreover, it did not ensure vertical integration between the national and municipal levels, where an appropriate framework and conditions for conducting youth work were largely lacking, as well.[85] The state approach was further lacking, according to the expert, "clear indicators according to which we are supposed to achieve [goals], … so that we can move, within the next few years, towards a goal we are supposed to reach and can allocate all our resources for". Instead of taking over this coordinating and dialogical role, the State Agency focused more on concrete projects and thus duplicated the efforts of civil society organizations, making the interviewee wonder about this uncoordinated approach.

In the years since these observations, the authorities' approach to youth policy can be said to have slightly improved, at least as far as the structural side is concerned. A governmental decree from December 2016[86] further increased the State Agency's competency and enabled a more coordinated and holistic youth policy, thanks also to the inclusion of the Institute for Youth Development (IYD) and other youth NGOs in an expert working group to co-determine the conceptualization and measures in the design of national youth policy.[87] The IYD and its partners had continuously mobilized support and dialogue among youth organizations in a National Forum of Youth Centres and Youth Houses which served as a 'new communication platform for the uniting of all stakeholders in the spheres of youth policy and youth work'[88] and, furthermore, by organizing public discussions of

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[83] Batken, 11 September 2015.

[84] *Gosudarstvennoe agenstvo po delam mkolodezhi, fisicheskoi kultury i sporta pri pravitelstve Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki (GMFKS).*

[85] Interview, Bishkek, 9 December 2015.

[86] 'On the optimization of the structure of the State Agency on Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sport under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic', http://cbd.minjust. gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/98710

[87] For.kg, 'Для совершенствования нормативно-правовой базы образована экспертная рабочая группа по делам молодежи [Expert group on youth affairs formed for the improvement of a legal-normative basis]', 15 February 2017, www.for. kg/news-410136-ru.html

[88] For.kg, 'В Бишкеке проходит Республиканский форум молодежных центров и домов молодежи [In Bishkek an all-republican forum of youth centres and youth houses is under way]', 23 September 2016, https://for.kg/news-380573-ru.html

the draft law 'On the foundations of state youth policy' across the entire country.[89] The Institute has consolidated its leading position in the youth policy sphere, as it has provided courses to train specialists for youth affairs (*spetsialisty po delam molodezhy*) with the support of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) since 2013 and has been offering a broad portfolio of projects to advance the professionalization of the youth sector.[90]

The efforts of the Institute and network 'Youth policy in action' seem to have borne fruit, as in August 2017 Prime Minister Jeenbekov signed the 'Programme for the development of youth policy for the years 2017–2020', which prescribed a 'systematic approach of state administration organs and their partners' and gave the GAMFKS a central role in coordinating its implementation.[91] The 'Conception for Youth Policy for 2020–2030', which was developed with input from the youth NGOs and representatives and was released in October 2019, presented a further commitment from the government, but largely postponed the concrete means for reaching strategic goals in education, employment and political participation of youth to a plan of measures still to be worked out.[92] All in all, the efforts of youth policy actors have brought about a more proactive approach on the part of the authorities which has created a better basis for the development of a more holistic approach in the youth sphere. On the other hand, it remains to be seen how effectively the commitment of power holders is implemented and how the dialogue and cooperation between the State Agency and the wide array of civil society actors will evolve. The fact that the small successes discussed above were reached with significant societal mobilization and with significant and continuing donor support foregrounds a post-liberal

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[89] Youth of Osh, 'Голос молодежи о законопроекте "Об основах государственной молодежной политики» будет услышан" [The voice of youth on the draft law 'On the foundations of the state youth policy']', 28 May 2017, https://youthofosh.kg/2017/05/28/golos-molodezhi-o-zakonoproekte-ob-osnovah-gosudarstvennoj-molodezhnoj-politiki-budet-uslyshan/

[90] Institute for Youth Development, 'Профессионализация сектора молодежи и расширение экономических возможностей молодежи [Professionalization of the youth sector and broadening of economic opportunities for youth]', no date, https://jashtar.org/kto-my_/gallery/1.html

[91] State Agency for Youth Affairs, Physical Culture and Sport under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, 'Подписана программа Развития молодежной политики на 2017–2020 годы [Programme for development of youth policy for the years 2017–2020 signed]', 27 August 2017, http://sport.gov.kg/news/view/idnews/2530 [04 September 2017].

[92] Kabar, 'Абылгазиев провёл совещание по вопросу реализации Концепции молодежной политики на 2020–2030 годы [Abylgaziev conducted a consultation on the realization of the Conception for Youth Policy 2020–2030]', 31 October 2019, http://kabar.kg/news/abylgaziev-provel-soveshchanie-po-voprosu-realizatcii-kontceptcii-molodezhnoi-politiki-na-2020-2030-gody/

constellation in the youth policy and politics sphere. While non–state actors continue to mobilize large-scale funding and voluntary work, state authorities approve such initiatives as they serve to improve or at least stabilize the young people's situation. In the meantime, questions of sustainability and structural change still remain unsolved today.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed TYCs and other structures in Kyrgyzstan's youth sphere to show how they are part of peacebuilding, security and ordering processes that are situated in the country's trajectory of post-liberal statebuilding. As I have shown, the different practices of building peace, tolerance and trust and preventing conflict and violence are embedded in wider societal dynamics as they invoke understanding not only of national belonging and ideology but also of diversity which resonate with the imaginaries of statebuilding examined in Chapter 4. Further, the analysis has yielded the finding that a selective and somewhat opportunistic reliance of state actors on non-state initiatives has occurred both on the local and the national level. Thus, TYCs and local NGOs in the former and a broad coalition of NGOs doing donor-supported youth work in the latter case have ensured a minimal level of provision of services and projects to mitigate challenges faced by youth, whereas the structural conditions and legal frameworks determining their work have not been changed at all or only in a reluctant manner.

As in many other sectors, the shocking 'June events' in 2010 marked a turning point in the way youth and the necessity of youth work were regarded in Kyrgyzstan. Youth gangs and large crowds of youths had a clear role in the emergence and continuation of the conflict over several days (Matveeva et al, 2012). As the TYC activists and project consultants and supporters stated, the youth were especially receptive to the false information circulating during the few days in June and in their aftermath, which made concrete efforts to dispel rumours and prevent further conflict the initial main priority of conflict-prevention initiatives. The TYCs have since promoted trust, tolerance and peaceful interaction among the youth from different communities, ethnic groups and personal backgrounds. Through their mobilization for city–wide festivals, smaller events in courtyards, schools and universities and exchange events with communities in the regions of Osh province, the TYCs have established a culture of openness and cooperation. They have thus managed to significantly decrease the conflict and violence potential, both in regard to ethnic and cultural difference and in relation to specific problems such as racketeering and youth gang rivalries. In this sense, TYCs are a key actor of peacebuilding and conflict prevention, which was acknowledged in the decision of the Osh Mayor's Office to institutionalize

this structure under the Committee of Youth Affairs. However, despite the crucial work done by TYCs, the Mayor's Office did not further strengthen their status and capacity. On the contrary, by reducing the number of salaried TYC head positions from 12 to six individuals, who were still supposed to organize work in the entire city, the authorities have significantly limited their capacity since 2016. As follow-up conversations indicated, TYCs thus operate on a much lower level today than they used to in the framework of the OSCE project implemented by the NGO Iret. This points to the post-liberal character of social ordering in Kyrgyzstan, where the concerns of ensuring activities and participation frameworks for youth in the long run seem to come second to the priority of maintaining order in the immediate aftermath of the 2010 events.

When they did still work at full capacity, TYCs and analogous youth structures presented a convenient mediating and supporting function in areas and aspects that local authorities could not or did not want to cover, and were almost exclusively sustained by the voluntary labour of young people and donor money. With TYC heads working directly under the CYA, the work of TYCs could be shaped and controlled by the mayor's administration and the TYCs practically became an arm of the latter or, as suggested by one interviewee, a mediator between the administration and local youth. TYCs offered young people the entertainment, attention and care which the heavily strained, downsized and incapacitated state institutions in the educational and social sectors could not impart. In this sense, TYCs represented the local administration and thus the state by promoting behaviours and attitudes conducive to peaceful and resilient social order. On the other hand, even if the impact of TYCs and other youth structures served to prevent conflict and build tolerance and peaceful relations, this cannot be equated to a situation where the root cause for conflict and inter-communal or interethnic tension have been substantially mitigated or overcome. Rather than systematically dealing with material or sociocultural root causes of conflict, TYCs appear mainly as an institution of conflict management, which successfully promotes non-violence but does not have the mandate or capacity to tackle more fundamental problems.

The most significant impact of TYCs was to unite young people in a collective effort to build peace and tolerance through formats and practices that emphasized unity, harmony and a degree of acceptance of the social order which has emerged since 2010. The coexistence of multiple nuances of this social order can be understood through Bakhtin's notion of *heteroglossia*, which I have proposed as a way to interpret the discursive hybridity of processes of social ordering and statebuilding (see Chapter 3). As I have shown, young people understood their engagement in TYCs and other youth activities in ways as diverse as developing their community, city or country, developing and improving themselves to

prepare for their careers, or as an act of solidarity and help to people in need. In fact, both the first and second of these narratives can be related to the Western 'liberal peace' and 'politics of sovereignty' imaginaries, as they both implied ideas of realizing an entrepreneurial mode of personhood in a free market environment (Makovicky, 2014) and also emphasized a need to contribute to societal development, possibly with patriotic motivation. The most obvious manifestation of the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary lies in discussions of 'national ideology' and the need for its strengthening and leading people back onto a 'right path' (*ak jol* or *pravilnyi put*). Threatened Kyrgyz traditions and language and historical heritage were invoked along more or less clearly ethno-nationalist lines and thus stood in tension with a civic-nationalist, multicultural idea of society. Both on the youth forum and in public events and celebrations, however, the youth went along with such discourses and symbolism, as they coexisted in momentary harmony with celebrations of the diversity and commonalities of different ethnicities and cultural legacies in the country. This was best exemplified in the combination of ancient Kyrgyz legends and self-expression through hip hop and breakdance performances on the 'Day of the city of Osh' and 'Kids from our courtyard' events, which clearly illustrated the *heteroglossia* of social ordering in southern Kyrgyzstan.

These activities demonstrated how TYCs build peace through practised and lived tolerance and coexistence of diverse interests, values and identities. At the same time, my analysis of the high fluctuation and the fact that interaction with or in TYCs is in many cases a mere stopover in young people's life trajectories, as well as a selective social rather than merely territorial outreach, shows that this positive impact of TYCs can be limited and highly contingent, which in turn points to the importance of addressing conflict factors in a more systematic manner. Further caution is warranted regarding the fact that apart from motivating young people to be disciplined, polite and make the best of their situation through self-development, the TYCs' work can also serve to silence and normalize some people's disadvantages and the general absence of good opportunities and viable livelihoods in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, in the logical extreme of the entrepreneurial personhood promoted in the TYCs and wider youth work, state–society relations are recast into a post–liberal modality, where political subjecthood – the basis for shaping and negotiating the organization and reproduction of social life – is replaced by an entrepreneurial subjecthood, whose purpose is to optimally use the available resources without critically reflecting on wider societal conditions. While young people's solidarity and charity initiatives mitigate this autonomization and responsibilization, they have a similar effect of transferring collective responsibility from the state to non–state actors and international donors. In this light, besides mobilizing young people to help themselves and help each other, I have argued that

there is also a need for youth actors to try to bring about more systematic forms of political participation and youth policy in Kyrgyzstan.

I have outlined existing initiatives in this direction and the institutional and normative changes they have brought about, such as establishing a 'Youth Parliament' and effecting a more systematic approach toward youth policy on the part of the authorities. Yet, I also pointed out how the concrete manifestations of this seemingly new approach remain to be assessed and that the structural dependence of youth policy and youth work in Kyrgyzstan on international donors and domestic civil society has so far largely persisted. In turn, this foregrounds, in a similar way to the dynamics analysed around LCPCs in Chapter 5, the combination of substantive non-state actor social ordering and service provision, and a focus of state actors on sovereignty-related concerns into post-liberal forms of ordering. These findings will be further corroborated in the next chapter, where I examine the efforts of another civil society initiative to lobby popular interests from the bottom up, only to realize that changing policies and legislation is neither a straightforward process, nor sufficient to change concrete practices on the ground.

Reform Deadlock for Stability? The Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result'

Introduction: Community security and police reform as post-liberal statebuilding

This chapter analyses the emergence, achievements and dilemmas of the NGO network Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' as a case of an organization that advocates more representative security provision and law enforcement. Having analysed two types of entities which operated exclusively on the communal or municipal level in the last two chapters (namely LCPCs and TYCs), the analysis presented here offers a useful contrast that helps demonstrate the importance of engaging in debates on national-level policy making and institutional design (as hinted at in Chapter 6), but also points to the obstacles and difficulties encountered by organizations trying to do this. As I will show, the contestations and deadlock occurring in the negotiation of scope and content of police reform can also be mapped onto the controversy between competing imaginaries of social order proposed in Chapter 4. Thus, the Civic Union clearly situated its agenda in the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary and in discourses of transparent, accountable and democratically governed institutions. Not surprisingly, its proposals for institutional and policy reforms have evoked concerns among governmental and policy-making elites about the control and stability they would be able to retain in the case of such reforms. To overcome such reservations and resistance to reform measures on various levels, the Civic Union members needed to draw on the other two imaginaries, particularly that of 'politics of sovereignty', to frame police reform as a matter of building and shaping sustainable state–society relations and as being in the interest of patriotism and national dignity. On the other hand, the dilemma of the Civic Union's position is that in order to have their demands and ideas for

police reform heard, they also needed to approach this topic constructively and with at least some degree of cooperation with law enforcement officials. As I have shown, especially in Chapter 5, many people might barely, or even not at all, be able to embrace such cooperativeness in light of the violence and injustice done during and after the 2010 events. Thus, attempts to take constructive steps toward (re)building accountable institutions can appear extremely challenging in this wider socio-historical perspective.

While the insights into the Civic Union's community-level work are an important addition to the last two chapters' analyses of community security and peacebuilding processes and their implications for wider statebuilding trajectories, the network's agenda on reforming the police, law enforcement organs and internal affairs structures points to the important part that these have in the creation and consolidation of state structures that can enable sustainable peace. Police and security sector reform more generally are seen to be a vital part of 'liberal peace'-style transition after Socialism or colonial governance (Lewis, 2011; Jackson, 2011). More generally, the 'rule of law' has been identified as a problematic area with a prevalence of state-centric top-down logic driven by regressive post-conflict governmentality and peacebuilding (see Richmond, 2011, pp 48, 220ff). Mirroring this picture and the generally diverging levels of alignment with democratization and transition agendas, police reform is a field in which different Central Asian states have asserted their sovereignty and control over domestic matters by limiting cooperation and the degree or speed of harmonization with internationally promoted institutions (see Lewis, 2011). In a similar way, Kyrgyzstan's police forces are a domain in which successive governments have shown limited readiness to cooperate or let actions follow their announcements. This reluctance has been justified as a consequence of two recent revolutions in the country, which make effective policing and order-maintenance capacities a priority for governmental actors, while open debate is seen more sceptically (Marat, 2018). Principles such as the strict hierarchy of command, internal accountability and confidentiality of internal data and procedures have thus appeared too dear to power holders to reconsider them upon international or domestic actors' demands.

Civil society actors, especially organizations defending human rights (*pravozashitniki*), have undertaken comprehensive efforts to effect more bold steps toward the reform of the police, law enforcement and judiciary. The main desire among activists but also ordinary people is for the police to become more trustworthy and accountable in fulfilling its mandate and complying to laws and regulations. The everyday experience of Kyrgyzstani citizens stands in contrast to this ideal picture. Petty corruption, for example in the form of bribe extortion by traffic police, and negligence of duty of officers in recording and investigating crimes, have become a normality for some people rather than an exception (see Marat, 2018, pp 90ff). The cases

of Aizada Kanatbekova and Burulai Turdaly kyzy, young women killed by men kidnapping them as would-be brides, sparked a particular outcry and demands for a change in the police approach toward gender-based and domestic violence (see Eshalieva, 2021). The harsh criticism of the police, as in the latter cases or in the aftermath of the Osh events where impunity and a disproportionate persecution of Uzbeks have been admonished (see Bennett, 2016), is generally dismissed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) or government officials. While civil society has mostly focused on identifying procedural irregularities and human rights abuses and called for corrections through moral pressure and public campaigns (Tiulegenov, 2017), relatively few non-state actors have tried to propose concrete institutional changes in order to improve the performance of the Kyrgyz police, as shown in Marat's (2018) analysis of police reform efforts since 2010.

In this context, the work of the Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' (*Grazhdanskii Soiuz 'Za reformy i rezultat'*, hereafter CU) is remarkable, as the organization has managed to become actively involved in the discussion, design and implementation of police reform. De jure a network of 22 NGOs with a central office in Bishkek and member organizations spread across the country, the organization was admitted to consultations with top-level policy makers in early 2013 and has subsequently both continued to lobby change on the national level and applied its participatory community security approach in selected localities throughout Kyrgyzstan. The founding and strategic positioning of the organization in the years 2011 and 2012 was supported by the UK-based international NGO Saferworld, which continued to play a role in advising and supporting the CU, both on the basis of concrete project cooperation and funding but also aside from concrete programmes. Thanks to this support, the CU has evolved as a self-sufficient entity with a significant number of projects that generate enough paid work for a small office in the centre of Bishkek.

The core of active members consists of around ten Bishkek residents, mostly in their late 20s and 30s but also including more experienced activists and ex-internal affairs staff. Having witnessed and actively joined the meetings around the 2010 revolution, especially the younger cohort of the activists is driven by a vision of building a democratic Kyrgyzstan with accountable institutions; an agenda they had initially pursued in an NGO called Liberal Youth Alliance (Ru.: *Alians liberalnoi molodezhi*) which played a key role in the establishment of the CU. As discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, the cooperation with this network was the most in-depth and exhaustive one and has continued into the present. My offer to accompany (Ru.: *soprovozhdat*) the CU in the form of regular interviews, conversations and attendance at their events and to thus provide them with a 'view from the side' (*vzglyad so storony*) was warmly welcomed by my primary contact and other activists. This, together with the common contacts with my other

cooperation partner, Saferworld, provided the necessary trust and familiarity to admit me to participatory observations of meetings with CSWGs in different localities, which are part of this analysis. While the analytical insights, advice and support I gave as part of my research were welcome, they were not overly surprising to the CU members and, as discussed further in Chapter 3, the concrete benefits that academic collaborators can yield for NGOs still remain to be further clarified.

Amid the challenges posed to state actors in the aftermath of the 'Osh events' (see Chapters 5 and 6), the contribution of the CU's efforts to build a cooperative relationship between citizens and state institutions cannot be underestimated. As expression of this vision, and echoing a broader trend toward community-based security approaches that emphasize local–level cooperation over central, national-level reform and policy implementation, the CU coined its own approach, named *SoBezopasnost* or Co–Security, which emphasizes cooperation between the population, municipal authorities, civil society and law enforcement organs (see introductory quote in the Introduction, CURR, 2015, p 3). While this approach appears clearly preferable to other understandings of security that prioritize state, institutional and corporate interests, this chapter shows how introducing and implementing such a vision into law enforcement legislation and practice has so far proved all the more difficult. I interpret this trajectory of the CU primarily as an illustration of the epistemic dimension of the post–liberal mode of governance, through which we can understand why and how certain forms of knowledge (and related policies and practices) may remain marginal even if, from the objectivist standpoint of a (neo–)liberal episteme, they seem absolutely preferable and were also acknowledged as such as illustrated in the case of then Prime Minister (PM) Isakov on a discussion forum in 2018 (see page 196).

As I have argued in the Introduction, the competition of various forms of knowledge and the imaginaries of social order associated with them render the trajectory from collective thinking and debates on social ordering toward practical and policy solutions messy and sticky. Rather than leading from a problem to a discussion and, finally, to implementation of solutions, this nexus can assume a circular and never-ending path, as the chapter's fourth section on policy makers' ignorance of evidence in favour of reform measures shows. This post-liberal epistemic pluralism and the 'post-truth' (Pomerantsev, 2016) logic by which it often operates, is most effectively conceived with the help of critical security studies perspectives on knowledge production. Thus, Trine Villumsen Berling has argued that 'the products of science – for example, facts, scientific models, data – can be mobilized strategically by agents … to secure for themselves the power to impose the legitimate version of the social world and its divisions' (2011, p 393). On the other hand, she exhibits how in political practice, the lack

of knowledge often does 'not hinder governments from taking action' and that '[s]overeign decisions (and not democratic deliberations) are therefore taken at the *limit of knowledge*' (Berling, 2011, p 388, original emphasis; see Lottholz, 2021). In this sense, knowledge and even 'objective' evidence, as well as the lack thereof, can be overruled by the executive decisions of sovereign governments, as has been sadly illustrated by US presidential decisions on the 2003 Iraq invasion or by various governments' inaction and denial during the COVID-19 epidemic. The ignoring of objective facts (whether they are framed in scientific or more lay terms) in the name of state security and sovereignty is a key feature of the interaction between the CU and Kyrgyzstani authorities, which reaffirms the argument for a post-liberal perspective on statebuilding, as I discuss at the end of the chapter.

The chapter continues by sketching the emergence of the CU and the shift it underwent from engaging exclusively in political activism to its members proving themselves as 'experts' in the realm of law enforcement and security.[1] The third section provides a critical analysis of the CU's approach of 'cooperative security' or Co-Security, indicating how a community-level pilot project did not always produce the inclusionary and representative forms of security envisaged by the activists but nevertheless served to substantiate the network's claim to practical competence, expertise and a legitimate reform agenda. Subsequently, I analyse the network's 'knowledge-production' activities that further strengthened their case for an alternative approach to police reform and show how these have been dismissed and ignored by authorities as part of a re-monopolization of the police reform process and a wider tendency from post- to anti-liberal politics in Kyrgyzstan. This deadlock and the successes nevertheless achieved by the CU are linked back to the book's overall argument about the regressive results of statebuilding interventions and assistance with a 'liberal peace' approach.

From political activism to forging security expertise

This section traces the tension between the CU's grounding in civil society organizations and municipal-level institutions across Kyrgyzstan on the one hand, and the continuous rejection or deferral of deep-reaching reform measures in law enforcement and internal affairs organs on the other, from the early beginning of the CU's activities to the time of writing. It does so by considering the two key roles and corresponding practices the network's activists have engaged in over the years (see Lottholz, 2021 for a more in-depth analysis), which can be glossed as activism – understood as

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[1]   This and section four are adapted from Lottholz (2021).

mobilization of various forms of support and participation in debates for new approaches to police reform, and expertise − a form of knowledge and professional capital that the network needed to demonstrate and base its claims on.

The formation of the CU began with an initiative for an 'Alternative conception of the reform for the law enforcement agencies'. In 2011–12, activists of the various constitutive NGOs organized 32 public hearings in localities all over Kyrgyzstan and collected 10,950 signatures in support of the above-mentioned 'Alternative conception', which was handed over to parliament and the government. The network's grounded approach and adaptation to the needs and habits of the semi-urban and rural population is best illustrated in its use of a quarterly newspaper, in which the most recent achievements and future agenda are presented in both Russian and the Kyrgyz language (see Appendix 3 for the title page of an issue from 2012).

In presenting parliament and the authorities with the petition, the network took a strong and determined stance, announcing: 'We, the citizens of Kyrgyzstan, demand that the leadership [*ot rukovodstva*] of Kyrgyzstan set in motion major [*kardinalnykh*] reforms of the police without any delay!'[2] They did not spare their addressees vocal criticism of the lack of progress so far: 'Things have not developed beyond words. Enough with the cheating! [*Khvatit falshi!*] *We ask the authorities to keep their promise and immediately start to transform the old police into a modern police* [*nachat preobrazovanie staroi militsii v sovremennuiu politsiiu*]'[3] (emphasis in original). The desired reform was laid out in detail in the 'Alternative conception for the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs',[4] and included (1) the creation of a normative-legal basis regulating the activities of Internal Affairs organs in line with the constitution and international human rights standards; (2) optimization of the administrative system of the MIA, including redefinition of tasks carried out on various levels; (3) improvement of cadre recruitment policy, including increased hiring of staff from non-military and non-partisan backgrounds; (4) more transparency and accountability of law enforcement agencies

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[2]   Petition accessed at https://ru.petitions.net/za_reformu_mvd. All translations from Russian documents are the author's.

[3]   The terms *militsiia* and *politsiia* are used synonymously for 'police' in Russian, although *militsiia* is clearly associated with Soviet structures and policing practices.

[4]   Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' (CURR) 'Альтернативная концепция реформы МВД (проект Программы реформирования государственной системы обеспечения общественной безопасности) [Alternative conception for the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (draft Programme for the reform of the state system for public security provision)]', October 2012, https://reforma.kg/media/post/postpdf/2018-08-11-0050236422.pdf

vis-à-vis society; and (5) monitoring and assessment of the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies.

Overall, the network's efforts to collect, formulate and voice such demands had some effect in influencing the government's and the MIA's approach to reform in the subsequent months and years. A major step was the consultation in February 2012 with the then PM Satybaldiev, who promised to take on most of the activists' suggestions.[5] Further steps by the government followed suit, especially in the form of a series of decrees (*postanovleniia*), which satisfied to some extent the CU's demand for a normative-legal basis for the regulation and reform of law enforcement organs. The efforts of other international and intergovernmental organizations and fellow civil society actors (see Marat, 2018, pp 91ff), also played an important part in pushing the government to take these steps, and some of the changes had already been set out on the government's agenda to begin with.[6] Still, the CU has arguably contributed to this outcome by lobbying these changes from a point of view that expressed the will of Kyrgyzstani citizens, as well as in the concrete ideas and concepts it proposed to introduce into the reform process. Table 7.1 provides a list of key decrees and changes, together with a brief content summary and comments assessing their often declaratory character.

While not all changes proposed by the CU were taken on by the government, PM Satybaldiev signed decree No 220 on 30 April 2012[7] tasking the MIA to work on an 'Action plan' for the realization of the reform and introducing the so-called Council for the Reform and Development of the System of Law and Order in the Kyrgyz Republic[8] as the main mechanism for the implementation of the reform. Much of the subsequent interaction of the CU and other selected civil society representatives with the authorities took place in this council, which was officially formed in September 2013 and included representatives from the government and its administration both at national and local levels, as well as advisers from intergovernmental organizations such as the OSCE.

It soon became clear, however, that this council did not affect the design and implementation of concrete reform measures and, even worse, seemed to help the government and MIA delay such processes, making it a 'dialogue platform without actual administrative tasks' and without mandate to make

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[5] See protocol from the meeting (in Russian): http://reforma.kg/sites/default/files/

[6] They are set out, for instance, in section 2.9, 'Reform of law-enforcement organs, ensuring legal compliance of their operations', in the 'National sustainable development strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for the years 2013–2017 [Национальная стратегия устойчивого развития Кыргызской Республики на период 2013–2017 годы]', http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/61542

[7] Available at: http://mvd.kg/index.php/rus/program-gov/reform

[8] Russian: *Sovet po reformirovaniiu i razvitiu sistemy pravoporiadka v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike.*

Table 7.1: Legislative changes in police reform since 2012

Date, type, no.	Content	Comments and assessment
Decree No 220, 30 April 2012	'On measures for the reform of internal affairs organs': • Tasked the MIA with 'working out an Action Plan for the realization of [reform] measures' • Creation of Council for the Reform and Development of the System of Law and Order in the Kyrgyz Republic (KR) as main body for overseeing implementation of the reform	• Good first step, although rather vague provisions; more details needed • No effective oversight or sanctioning
Decree No 81, 24 February 2015	Introduces guidelines on the foundations of the 'complex assessment' of the activity of law enforcement organs, including external assessment through participatory methods	Development of methodology for external assessment
Decree No 547, 30 July 2015	• 'On the mechanisms of interaction of internal affairs organs of the KR with civil society institutions' • Defining functions of 'Public Council of the MIA' as key platform for communication with civil society actors and the public • Further details on role of neighbourhood inspectors and so-called LCPCs as main actors and platforms in the interaction between society and law enforcement organs (on municipal level)	Good description of necessary steps, but no concrete provisions on enforcement; implementation ultimately up to individual law enforcement units
Presidential Decree No 161, 18 July 2016	'On measures to reform the law enforcement system of the KR' • Definition of a strategy, principles and main tasks of law enforcement and national security organs, Prosecutor-General, and government agencies • Definition of measures to ensure sufficient resources, material-technical capacities and criteria for assessment of law enforcement organs • Mechanisms for implementation of measures, including review of legislation, structural changes made by government and the development of a legal–normative basis by a working group under the Security Council of the KR	• Generally valuable complex of measures and demonstration of president's readiness to support reform • No buy-in of MIA and law enforcement organs, as law prepared by Defense Council Secretariat • So far only structural changes implemented

Source: Author

binding decisions.[9] Alongside this inhibition of effective steps, it took another one and a half years for the CU to effect the next instructive legislative act, again based on a consultation with the PM.[10] The introduction of 'Guidelines on the foundations of the complex assessment of the activity of law enforcement organs of the Kyrgyz Republic' in Governmental decree No 81 February 2015 included a component of external assessment with a participatory approach. However, the planned external assessment component excluded the CU's participation.[11] Thus, rather than being able to influence and participate in the MIA's assessment of reform progress, the CU was relegated to the role of a bystander. The frustration this created among the network is well captured in the criticism of one activist, who called out the MIA's narrow focus on material capacity building, such as buying cars and radios, and the frequent justification of insufficient reform progress with lack of budgetary resources:

> 'If you want a reform then act, make sure there is money for it! When we talk to officials and ask them, is the reform happening?, they say, "Yes, it's happening". But where is it happening? It's not clear. They buy new computers, cars and so on, and say it's a reform, it's their understanding of a reform, but I don't think it can be called a reform.'[12]

The time required to achieve the different steps and their insufficient addressing of demands or implementation of solutions indicate clear limits to the CU's effectiveness in bringing about an alternative approach to police reform. It is also reflective of frictions in the interaction between the activists and ministerial and governmental officials. Given the acrimonious rhetoric and explicit criticism put forward by the CU, it is perhaps not surprising that top policy makers and law enforcement staff were surprised and overwhelmed by the demands of the activists. This astonishment is best understood in the context of the 2010 revolution and violent clashes

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9   CURR, 'Мониторинг реформы ОВД Кыргызской Республики. Навигатор реформы [Monitoring of the reform of law enforcement organs of the Kyrgyz Republic – Navigating the reforms]', October 2014, https://reforma.kg/media/post/postpdf/2018-05-25-0429691989.pdf, p 7; conversation with members of CU, Bishkek, 14 August 2015.

10 As stated in the protocol of the meeting on 20 September 2014; CURR, '*Реформа милиции в Кыргызстане. Обзор хода реформы. No 3* [Review No 3 on the progress of the law enforcement organ reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic]', October 2014, https://reforma.kg/media/post/postpdf/2018-05-25-0446885671.pdf, p 4 [28 July 2017].

11 CURR, 'Реформа милиции в Кыргызстанне, на пути к большей открытости? [Police reform in Kyrgyzstan: On the path to more openness?]', 22 March 2015, http://reforma.kg/sites/default/files/rev_5.pdf, p 13 [28 July 2017].

12 Civic Union activist, conversation, Bishkek, 14 August 2015.

in the south of the country, after which law enforcement and internal affairs organs tried to create the perception that they were a guarantor of security and stability despite apparent irregularities. The CU was among a few actors daring to tackle the topic of police reform in such an outspoken manner since the Osh 2010 events (Marat, 2018, p 93). As one CU activist captured it: "Reform brings instability, that's why they didn't implement it after 2010. After Osh [the Osh events] people were affairs (afraid?) to touch the police [and reform it]."[13]

Another important reason for the lack of understanding and engagement with the CU can be seen in the generational and professional remoteness of the young activists from the policy makers and internal affairs staff. The latter are usually civil servants who started their career and received education during Soviet and early post-Soviet years and have thus internalized principles such as hierarchy of command, military discipline, and loyalty to the nodes of power within the state system. Their counterparts from the CU were mostly part of a younger generation, who were not only inspired by their experience of political change in 2010 but also by their studies in political and social science and had embraced ideas about liberal-democratic reforms and accountable state institutions. This is not to essentialize these markers and their respective association with the 'politics of sovereignty' and Western 'liberal peace' imaginary, nor to say that they are completely incompatible. However, it does help to explain the determined, if not always explicit, resistance that the CU met in realizing its agenda. Ravshan Abdukarimov, ex-MIA officer and adviser to the CU, stylized the reactions the organization usually received as: "Don't rush, don't mess things up! Who are you in the first place? Do you want an office or what [*Vam dolzhnost nuzhna?*]?"[14] A good example of these animosities is a meeting of activists with law enforcement officials, including the then deputy minister of internal affairs, who took advantage of one activist's limited command of the Kyrgyz language in addressing him. "It turned out later", the activist explained vividly, "that he had told me to burn [in hell] [Ru.: *sgoret*], while I was nodding and acting as if I understood and appreciated what he was saying."[15] Abdukarimov further stated his recollection of a warning from the deputy minister for internal affairs during a meeting with MIA officials, that they should not try to enforce reforms "the hard way [*'ne po plokhomu!'*]."[16] Such interactions, which Marat's analysis documents in further detail (2018, p 105), bear testimony to the social distance between the activists and 'security professionals' and the nuisance with which the latter

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[13] Conversation, Bishkek, 26 June 2015.
[14] Interview, Bishkek, 20 August 2015.
[15] Conversation, Bishkek, 19 August 2015.
[16] Conversation, Bishkek, 20 August 2015.

regarded the former. This is visible in the body language of the activists and officials in their few meetings, as for instance in a consultation with then PM Otorbaev and p.p. Minister of Internal Affairs Turganbaev.[17]

The division between the CU and authorities is further traceable in a discourse on different professional and vocational spheres, which was reproduced by different former security sector employees. Ravshan Abdukarimov's remarks on how the 'young folks'[18] from the CU were leaving many authority representatives baffled was echoed in many conversations with supporters and activists of the network. One of them, a former law enforcement employee, explained: "People were laughing: Why did these young folks want to reform the police? … the higher echelons [leadership; *rukovodstvo*] only began to understand step by step [what they wanted]."[19] He further described the difference between the vocational spheres of the protagonists: "Civil society, this is a rather soft [*bolee miakhkaia*] part of society … the police, they just work through orders, they have completely different blood [*u nikh sovsem drugie krovi*]." This bifurcation between a security/law enforcement sphere and the 'civic sphere' foregrounds a broader claim about expertise and understanding of what is possible and desirable in reforming the police. Rather than engaging with the content of the CU's proposals, some actors thus stressed the fact that the network's expertise was insufficient and the nature and scale of their demands lay beyond what was realistically possible. This is best captured in the quote of an OSCE officer working on police reform: "I ask the question, what do you want from the Police? Civil society watches and argues without agreeing with each other … We are former police officers, we understand the best practices" (cited in Mangham, 2015, p 33).

These statements make clear how embedded the divide between the CU activists and their policy maker counterparts – both national and international – was both in their agendas and interests, and in their lifeworlds and personal backgrounds. Rather than publicly rebuking the content of the CU proposals, it was implied that the activists were lacking 'expertise' and experience in questions of law enforcement and policing. Thus, even if the CU might have had the better arguments based on scientific analysis or factual knowledge, their lack of 'expert knowledge' and experience made it easy for (former) police and military staff to overrule them by claiming to be better equipped to take decisions and design programmes by virtue of their belonging rather than their knowledge.

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[17] See photograph on facebook account of Timur Shaikhutdinov, 23 September 2014, www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153337214711029&set=t.677446028&type=3, [13 October 2021], as well as Lottholz (2021, figure 1).

[18] The Russian term is *rebiata* or *molodye* [young] *rebiata*; it was often used by interview partners when referring to activists from the CU central office in Bishkek.

[19] Conversation with territorial council head, Osh, 14 October 2015.

In light of such attempts by MIA and law enforcement officials to monopolize debates about police reform (see Marat, 2018, pp 96–7), the CU tried to acquire and strengthen their expertise and thus still make their demands heard in the national police reform process. One important way of doing so was to bridge the social, or sociological, gap between the 'young folks' and 'military people' (Ru.: *liudi voennye*) indicated above, by incorporating ex-police, law enforcement and MIA staff into the CU's network and initiatives. Although this helped to qualify the demands and evidence base vis-à-vis policy makers to some degree, the CU's impact on the reforms was still limited given inherent structural constraints and political manoeuvring. Rather than straightforwardly enforcing their agenda at the national level, the organization was forced to refocus efforts on working with communities to recruit new supporters and to practically apply and thus 'prove' the importance of their Co-Security approach with regard to power holders. One key way to realize this agenda and 'mobilize facts' in favour of their arguments (Berling, 2011) was to run various community security projects, one of which I analyse in the next section.

Practising and interpreting community security

In applying their Co-Security approach which emphasizes cooperation between society, local government and law enforcement organs, the CU had already gathered experience during the public hearings that fed into the drafting of the 'Alternative conception' for the police reform in 2011. Among a number of projects in 2015, the network won a tender to implement a project titled 'Developing mechanisms of social partnership on questions of the provision of public security and crime prevention' financed by the UNODC. The following steps were to be implemented in 12 pilot communities (CURR, 2016, p 8):

1. assessment of main community security issues and factors;
2. creation of working groups, including representatives from law enforcement, local administration, civil society and population;
3. discussion of possible measures to be taken to prevent security threats and tackle the identified issues, drawing up of a local community security action plan;
4. integration of the community security action plan into the local council's (*mestnyi/aiylnyi kenesh*) budget and execution of the action plan by local self-governance bodies.

The implementation of these steps involved conducting initial research, consultations with community representatives and especially persuading local government representatives to welcome the initiative and the

recommendations and actions it would propose at the end of the project. It is thus understandable that the degree of project implementation and success varied between communities, and that localities with a support base of the CU network and its new Co–Security approach were more effective in realizing the project.

While the overall impression from the project's analysis on the basis of participatory fieldwork is positive, the following analysis presents the CU's work in two localities with varying performance, with one community having implemented the project most successfully and effectively (community 2)[20] whereas participation in the other community appeared to be less valued (community 1).[21] While doing the research in these two places, I was officially acting as a volunteer to support and facilitate the running of the respective training events and group meetings. This legitimated my presence and the inclusion of the observations into my research. A more explicit communication of this arrangement in community 2 seemed to enable a more constructive role and seems to have provided additional motivation for the working group. On the other hand, my less clearly announced role in community 1 precluded such positive side effects, but also foreclosed negative ones, such as discomfort or suspicion on the part of the working group members.

Three key dimensions of the CSWGs' impact on the local security situation guide this analysis. First, I discuss and compare the status of the working groups in their respective local context, which concerns both the relevance and importance conferred on each group by its members and stakeholders and its complementarity with other administrative and security bodies. The second dimension, which I discuss separately for the respective community, concerns the way security problems and solution measures were being understood and constructed in rather simplistic ways and with a lack of consultation with the population groups affected by the issues in question. In a third step, I show how analytical practices and epistemic positionings expressed by the working groups can be situated within the imaginaries and discourses of statebuilding discussed in Chapter 3 and how they point to different constellations of post–liberal social ordering.

Status of working groups

In community 1, located north of Bishkek and bordering Kazakhstan, I attended working group meetings between August and November 2015,

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during which I accompanied a CU activist, Galina – a Bishkek woman in her fifties – and assisted in arranging presentations, taking photos and documenting group conversations. Our shared impression was that the significance and potential of the CU's project was either not sufficiently appreciated or duplicated the work of other bodies such as the LCPC and local council (*mestnyi kenesh*), which in turn limited the prospect of successful project implementation, and other issues such as infrastructure or the socioeconomic situation seemed more urgent. This impression was confirmed by a patchy attendance of group members, with only a handful of people being present at two of the meetings which had to be rescheduled, and an overall reluctance among attendees to contribute to discussions. This was best illustrated by two older women who during a working group meeting in August devoted most of their attention to reading their newspapers.

The difficulty of assembling more people and producing concrete results seemed to stem from both insufficient leadership and from the lack of a clear mandate of the group and/or awareness among participants and other stakeholders. One reason for this was the absence of the head of the *aiyl okmotu* (local administration), who, when Galina and I once met her accidentally, insisted that she simply could not find the time to participate, yet was reappointed head of the district administration a little later. Meanwhile, the deputy head of the local administration, a younger woman, did not appear to have the authority and resources to effectively mobilize and lead the group.

The lack of leadership and awareness of the purpose and possible value of the community's participation in the project became especially obvious in a training session in November. The programme manager of the funding organization, UNODC, was also present and did not hesitate to state her concern about the group's low turnout and lack of participation and engagement in discussing ways to tackle local security issues. Toward the end of the meeting, she addressed those who had not left yet and explained the purpose of the project and the general context of UNODC's work in the community: "What's the whole point with this [local security] plan?", she rhetorically asked. "It will be your tool … but how can you make a plan with only three people?" She further encouraged the attendees to more actively approach the police and ask police staff to participate in light of UNODC's investment into building a new local police station (*Poselkovyi otdel militsii* or *POM*): "Look, we invest 30,000 dollars to improve things here … get in touch with the police so that they attend all of the meetings!"

This wake-up call led the deputy head of the *aiyl okmotu* to endeavour more firmly to invite all group members, including the police neighbourhood inspector and local council members. These attended the next meeting three weeks later and contributed to a more constructive discussion on the prioritized security issues and possible actions. We were also informed that,

as indicated in an initial report,[22] the LCPC, women's council and *aksakal* court were actively working on preventing crimes and social tensions, which highlighted the above-mentioned concerns about duplicating ongoing work and about the project's low attractiveness compared to infrastructural and other development projects run by development agencies from nearby Bishkek. Priority issues and an action plan to tackle them were nevertheless agreed after long-winded discussions.

In contrast to the above, community 2 was something like a poster child of the CU's community security project. This was unsurprising, as their LCPC had received a lot of capacity-building support from Saferworld and the Foundation for Tolerance International.[23] This prior experience of the working group members and the local authorities' openness to community security work gave the project a good starting position. An important reason for the heightened interest and involvement of all stakeholders was the town's location along the border with Uzbekistan, which had put it into the focus of national authorities[24] and implied intense movements of goods and people in the region, as part of the wider transfer routes of the Ferghana Valley. This circulation appeared to have driven the rise of so-called 'non-traditional' religion, that is practices and denominations which became increasingly popular among the population and were believed to have led to a sizeable number of people reportedly leaving to join the Islamic State in Syria. This 'frontier' status of the community in the context of international violent extremism had necessitated local authorities' and activists' cooperation with national-level bodies such as the Tenth Main Administration under the MIA for Countering Radicalism and Extremism,[25] in short 'tenth department' (*desiatyi otdel*), and the State Committee for National Security (*GKNB*). The latter had participated in dialogue events held by the LCPC and had overseen measures to reduce and prevent the recruitment activities of 'non-traditional' religious groups.[26] This embeddedness of the local working group in national efforts of countering radicalization made the group members aware of the importance of their work, but also increased the pressure to identify and counteract radicalization and its root causes.

22 CURR, 'Общественная безопасность. Анализ ситуации и приоритетные проблемы – Сводный отчет по исследованиям в пилотных территориях [Public security. Analysis of the situation and priority problems. Preliminary report on research from pilot communities]', October 2015, unpublished document.

23 The biggest national NGO in the area of peacebuilding and community security; see Chapter 5.

24 LCPC representatives had indicated issues such as illegal border crossings by Kyrgyz citizens and conflicts with Kyrgyz border troops over electric energy usage. Interview on 11 July 2015; see Saferworld (2016, p 25).

25 In Russian, *Desiatoe Glavnoe Upravlenie pri MVD po protivodeistviu radikalizma i ekstremizma.*

26 Interview with LCPC representatives, 11 July 2015 (see Saferworld, 2016).

The prior collaboration and experience had also led to the development of a group spirit and friendships between some members of the local working group, as became obvious in the small talk when we set up the room for one training session in the local administration building.[27] The female leader of the group, who was also the deputy head of the *aiyl okmotu*, had been running the work in this community for years and talked to people in a positive and encouraging way but did not hesitate to oppose misguided and exaggerated opinions, either. The attendance and active participation of two neighbourhood inspectors and one youth affairs inspector from the police marked another contrast to community 1. The working group further included a range of local council (*mestnyi kenesh*) members, representatives from different bodies under the LCPC (the youth committee, the elders or *aksakal* court), the deputy head of local imams and head teachers from the local schools, among others.

Besides the composition of the group, its links to the other institutions seemed well developed, also thanks to the CU's proactive networking in the form of visiting the *aiyl okmotu* head after the event to discuss the result of the training, planned action steps and the necessity to include the group's action plan into the annual budget plan. Close ties were also maintained with the head of the local police station (*POM*), which was being renovated with the financial support of UNODC as in community 1, but whose staff demonstrated a cooperative attitude and commitment vis-à-vis the local administration and CSWG members. For instance, the *POM* head gave the CU team (including myself) a tour of the police station and drove us to the restaurant where the working group was having lunch after the training event.

Besides these intrinsic and structural sources of motivation, the two CU activists, Urmat and Timur, appeared to be running the training that I attended and the general communication with the group quite effectively. At the beginning of the event, they restated both the CU's founding idea and the role that the group in this community played in this mission: "The main idea of our work is to maintain law and order on the local level … people here can decide for themselves who is supposed to decide, whether it is the local leaders, the Regional Internal Affairs Administration, or others." The activists also took a proactive and explicit stance in introducing me and my background: "Philipp here is producing a large academic work. He is writing about how we are building a normal country [*kak stroim normalnuiu stranu*]." Judging by later conversations I had with group members, this sufficed for me to become accepted as part of the project's collective endeavour and to foreclose concerns about

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27 The following analysis is based on participatory observations during a working group training and planning session on 11 November 2015.

suspicion or discomfort on the part of the group (see Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 111). Further appreciation of the group members' work was expressed in the awarding of the *Co-Security* prize for '*IDN* of the year' to the town's juvenile affairs inspector at a national-level forum held by the CU later the same month, which reaffirmed the 'poster child' status of this community.

Understanding of security problems and solutions: community 1

Preliminary research and focus group discussions identified the priority security issues of (1) road security; (2) drug consumption and dealing; (3) vulnerability of children; (4) tensions between different groups and individual dwellers. However, during the meetings I attended the group appeared split in their opinion on some issues and ways to tackle them. Disagreement was most consistent – although rarely explicated – on the issue of drug trade and consumption in the community. Various group members voiced their doubts that this was an issue significantly pertaining to the community's security, or that it was even a problem in the first place. "We don't have such a problem right now", said an elderly Kyrgyz wearing a *kalpak* during the meeting in August, although he admitted, "Yes, that's possible", when Galina said it had been raised during initial focus groups. "If it is possible to uncover incidents, then there is a problem", said the local school's head teacher, suggesting that the problem was only of priority if concrete evidence could be presented. Thus, the group eventually removed the item from the agenda, and a loose agreement was made that preventive work should be done in schools. This demonstrates the working group's power to set the agenda and decide on the urgency of a security issue, and even its very inclusion into the action plan. Although there was little disagreement within the group as to the minor importance of drug consumption and trading, a more holistic understanding of this would only have been possible by juxtaposing this point of view with the perspectives put forward during the initial focus groups.

In a similar way, the relevance of 'tensions between different groups, especially between inhabitants and migrants from other regions of the country and [ethnic Kyrgyz] from Tajikistan' for the community security action plan was contested. A way of life where everyone was for themselves seemed to have been established in the community long ago, and actual tensions and conflicts seemed to be a rare occurrence. Thus, the problem seemed to lie more in the disinterest and single-mindedness of the different groups toward each other, which, as some group members suggested on the second meeting for planning concrete action steps, might be overcome by reinvigorating the spirit of national unity and patriotism. The post-Soviet multicultural slogan 'We are all Kyrgyzstanis!' (Ru.: *My vse Kyrgyzstantsy!*)

was invoked by several group members alongside the idea that 'people should be taught to love their nation'.[28] The group agreed that educational and prophylactic work, including gatherings between groups, had to be done to further strengthen the sources of unity within the village and resolve the paradox that, in the words of a local council member, "On Friday [at the Islamic *namaz* prayer] everyone greets each other but then go their way and don't care about each other anymore".

Much more consensus could be found on the problem of (5) 'grazing of cattle and damage to communal areas and harvest', which was added to the list later on. The working group members attributed the overgrazing of communal areas and destruction of arable land and harvest particularly to so-called 'new arrivals' or *priezzhye*, many of whom had their livestock grazing all over the central village green, which was legally prohibited and led to the deterioration of this area into a plain of bare soil and decrepit trees. In the early November meeting, group members had remarked how this was rooted in the new arrivals' attitude toward the state and social order more generally. "For the natives, it is a shame to see that for the new arrivals the law doesn't count", as one dweller summed up a common sentiment.[29] While this picture went unchallenged in that meeting, the working group meeting later that month was also attended by an elderly man who listened to the discussions and wanted to add his view on the problem, but seemed to go unnoticed by the rest of the group. While the group was hotly discussing, he got up from his seat at the back of the room, distant from the rest of the group, inhaled hastily to raise his voice, extended his hand to be called to speak and quietly – although audibly for those who paid attention –remarked, "I am a new arrival, for instance". Neither Galina nor any group member noticed him, thus missing out on hearing the point of view from the people concerned in this debate.

This clearly indicated the limits to the participation of representatives of all different groups and categories of village dwellers in the working group, as well as the potential of missing certain points of view during discussions, especially when they are heated and emotional. What somewhat inevitably resulted from this limited inclusiveness of the group and its bold way of trusting their own opinion and knowledge about the problems in their

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[28]   The neighbourhood inspector further made clear that, contrary to the dominant 'mentality' among the Kyrgyz, it would be inappropriate to invoke the 'ethnic' category when talking about the different groups. Yet, while 'native' village dwellers were quite diverse, the 'new arrivals' were predominantly Kyrgyz 're-settlers' from Kyrgyz territories in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (so-called '*Kyrgyzy-Kairylmany*').

[29]   '*Dla korennykh obidno, chto dlia novykh zakon ne deistvuet*'. The person put forward the example of people cutting trees in the village area. Participatory observation, 6 November 2015.

community is a certain degree of objectification and patronization with regard to other groups. Rather than a critique, this is to be understood in the context of the generally benevolent intentions of the group's members and the logics of provision and care according to which they apparently saw it as their responsibility to provide 'the others' with security or create a secure and peaceful environment.

Another example of the limited inclusivity of the group is the role of the youth committee, which seemed to be non-existent beyond a list of members presented on a blackboard next to the other local institutions and their staff. One young man had attended all of the meetings but had not made any contribution to the discussions, although they revolved around juvenile delinquency, car races organized by the local youth and the problem of drug trade and consumption. When I dared to make one of my very few interventions and asked why the group was not consulting their youngest member when discussing possibilities of keeping young people busy and distracting them from delinquent activities and 'hooliganism', the answer was unbelievable for me but perhaps descriptive of the situation: "He sits quite far away [*daleko sidit*]", remarked one attendee and another just dismissed my initiative: "The elderly will sort it out for him [*Dlia nego pozhilye reshaiut*]" – and on went the discussion. This reluctance to engage with specific groups that play a crucial part in or are affected by the community's security issues limits the scope of both the analysis of the situation in this community and the potential to effectively tackle security issues.

Understanding of security problems and solutions: community 2

Consistent with earlier experiences discussed above, the increased radicalization and alignment with 'non-traditional' sects among the population was one of two core issues identified as a particular challenge by the working group. A major factor of the occurring shift in beliefs and practices of Islam was the activity of missionaries who visited the town from outside, either from elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan or from neighbouring Uzbekistan. Correspondingly, one major concern for some group members was how to block the access of such missionaries or prohibit their seemingly illegal practices. "They should be completely prohibited from entering [the town]", posited one NGO activist during the group meeting and visibly captured the group's general fatigue with the issue. The head of the group and deputy *aiyl okmotu* head agreed but urged the members for more modesty: "Our main goal is to maintain public control. I agree [the foreign missionaries need to be controlled] but it has to be according to some rules [*na baze kakikh-to pravil*]." Furthermore, the deputy head of the local imams argued against the earlier proposition

on the ground that recruitment of supporters for radical Islamic sects and their incitement to join the fighting in Syria was mostly done via the internet. Therefore, he argued, tackling the foreign missionaries might not even be the most effective way of reducing radicalization and extremism in the town. After a long discussion, the group agreed that prohibiting missionaries' access appeared unfeasible and that they needed to focus on getting more information and a clearer view on the visitors' movements and activities.

Another core problem was the desperate situation among local youths and the widespread hooliganism, school racketeering and violence taking place among them. The discussion on ways of overcoming this situation was in some ways very similar to the one that took place in community 1, as all group members seemed to see the problem more or less in comparison with their own upbringing and the pride and dignity that had been part of their everyday life during the late days of the Soviet Union. The strongest proponent of a re-establishment of long-vanished virtues was the neighbourhood inspector of the police, who emphasized his view that a more serious consideration of conscribing a higher number of youths for military service could enhance their '*discipline*'. This was met with exclamations across the meeting room and followed by a controversial discussion. The head teacher of a local school adamantly raised her concern of such a reinvigoration of youths' attitude through a militarized national culture, especially given the connotations this had in terms of excluding different national minorities who would not subscribe to such ideas or simply were not eligible for conscription due to lack of Kyrgyzstani citizenship. "Excuse me," she concluded, "but if Kyrgyzstan is only for the Kyrgyz, then all others will already feel afraid [*to drugie uzhe boiatsa*] … if it's only about 'us', 'ours', 'this is for us' … [*esli eto tolko 'my', 'nash', 'eto nam' …*]".

While there was general agreement that patriotic education and military-style disciplining of young people might be too divisive, the group leader expressed her own observation of the gendered nature of the lack of discipline and esteem among people: "You know what the problem is all about?", she addressed the CU activists and me. "We don't have any men, there are only women in the schools … The racketeering is spreading without any male authorities counteracting it … in any case, a man is a man [*vse ravno, muzhchina – eto muzhchina*.]." While this suggestion that women lack the authority and competence to effectively deal with issues of racketeering and authority might sound patriarchal and misogynistic, it is suggestive of the wider gender implications of the marketization and political economy of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, as well as the incapacitation of the education system it has conditioned (DeYoung, 2007). The fact that average wages do not enable people to secure a family's livelihood forces most male breadwinners or even parent couples to work abroad and to leave their children to be

raised by partners, grandparents, or more remote kin and even neighbours, with significant implications for their emotional and psychological well-being (see Chapter 5).

Although having little idea as to which measures might be helpful in tackling the problem without marginalizing anyone's interests or needs, the group agreed that organizing sports tournaments and 'cultural mass events' – in the style of *KVN*[30] for instance – might be useful to further facilitate young people's creative and organizational talents, and they planned to devise more specific measures at a later point. Rather than tackling the root causes of violence and addressing them with responsible state institutions and higher-level bodies, the working group thus focused on doing all it could to manage the situation on the ground. Further planned measures of 'meetings with parents' and 'joint raids conducted by police and activists from villages in the evening time to prevent criminal behaviour' confirm this pre-emptive logic and the focus on behavioural change.

Potentials, implications and interpretation of community-level projects

The observations from the implementation of the largest community security project of the CU in 12 pilot communities so far allow some conclusions about the post-liberal condition of community security and its ramifications for wider social ordering and institutional reform processes. The project generally presented a great success given that the action plans were approved by local authorities in all 12 communities and received budgetary allocations for the realization of the planned measures. Still, as the participatory observation from two project communities shows, the change brought about by the CU's Co-Security approach was, in many ways, performative and limited to a few measures, rather than tackling underlying structural issues. Relatedly, the impact of the project is inherently contingent, negotiated and in need of being illustrated, for instance with clearly improving relations among different actors or through references to better crime statistics. Thus, as Graef (2015, ch 8) has observed in relation to legal empowerment interventions in Liberia, the relevance, impact and success of the project need to be constantly negotiated and maintained, while critical reflection on side effects and encountered problems and limitations are of secondary importance.

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[30] Literally *Klub veselykh i nakhodchivykh* or 'Club of the merry and ingenuous', a format combining quiz show and comedy elements, which is firmly established in post-Soviet states' entertainment culture and is practised by numerous student or youth *KVN* associations.

That said, as the research on the above communities and reporting from others has shown, the project had the irrevocable impact of initiating a dialogue between local administrations, law enforcement and populations. This dialogue had the potential to effect a more meaningful consideration of the needs of different population groups and to then reflect these needs in appropriate measures. On the other hand, the above analyses also demonstrate how the security working groups tended to occupy a moral and epistemic high ground in analysing issues and making decisions, while possibly failing to engage and consult with groups or people affected by, or associated with, security or crime issues. This was most obvious in the case of the working group of community 1 failing to listen to representatives of the local youth and 'new arrivals'. Similarly, community 2 appeared to be more preoccupied with curbing the activity of missionaries than with understanding the reasons for missionary activity and whether and how it was actually associated with the reported recruitment of violent extremists. These ways in which the working groups related to their communities are reflective of paternalistic understandings of governance and social ordering which, as I have argued, are rooted in the mode of social organization practised during Soviet times.

Another basic impact relating to the latter aspect was thus to help working group members in community 1 become aware of their common heritage and the inspiration they once used to draw from the discourse on Soviet modernity and 'peoples' friendship' (*druzhba narodov*), which was carried forth in the slogan 'We are all Kyrgyzstanis' in the Akaev period and invoked by working group members. This positioning in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary was also the case in community 2 given its frontier status at the Uzbek border and in the fight against violent extremism. This group also demonstrated adherence to elements from the 'tradition and culture' imaginary, particularly in its differentiation of 'non-traditional' religion from the dominant denomination of Hanafi Islam. This positioning of the working groups' approaches to and understandings of community security in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary was also effectively used by the CU activists holding the training in community 2. They invoked the patriotic dimension of the project as a way to curry support for both their agenda and my presence as a researcher–cum–volunteer, who would document how the project served to 'build a normal country' in this and other pilot municipalities. In this sense, the CU managed to position itself in the available imaginaries of social ordering while its transformative agenda, located more in the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary, remained intact.

The critical considerations about working groups' representativeness and competence to decide for the rest of the community leads to a broader argument about the epistemic dimension of the shift toward post–liberal community security and statebuilding. As I have shown, the working group

and LCPC members had a near monopoly on deciding which issues in their community were of priority and should thus be worked on, and which were of minor importance or not problematic at all. In community 1, this meant that drug consumption and trading was eventually taken off the priority list. In another, third community I visited during my fieldwork, community members even refrained completely from mentioning any problems in the community vis-à-vis the police and myself (see vignette in Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 115), even though the large-scale violence that had struck that community back in 2010 made it virtually impossible for all issues to have been solved five years later (Bennett 2016; Ismailbekova and Karimova, 2018; see also Chapter 5). It thus seems that denying the importance or very existence of certain issues, and especially the wrongdoing of the city administration and law enforcement, is perceived as a matter of sticking to unwritten rules of what can be said and what cannot. By insisting that everything is going well, working group or LCPC members appear to hope to shield the community from scandalizing reports and to build a constructive relationship with authorities and law enforcement.

Following a similar logic, no explicit criticism was voiced in community 2, which was perceived as a largely successful case, but would require more scrutiny as to whether there are disagreements between the different actors involved in community security. Community-level cooperative security provision and social ordering seem to depend on a suspension of epistemic ambiguities – for example, as to where and how recruitment of foreign fighters really takes place, or what would really be the best way to keep the youth from getting into conflict with one another and the law. The observed processes thus present a post-liberal modality characterized by uncertainty instead of a fully explicit exchange of opinions and criticisms.

In this sense, it can be argued that the working groups' activities were geared toward a post-liberal politics of conflict management and peace performance, similar to the LCPCs in Chapter 5 and TYCs in Chapter 6. On the one hand, this is understandable given the limited resources, time, skills and knowledge available. On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge how a focus on empirically observable results, such as the reduction of fighting or racketeering among the youth or of the amount of recruitment of foreign fighters, might make community security practitioners susceptible to disregarding the possibilities of addressing root causes of such issues and improving authorities' approaches in dealing with them.

These observations suggest that, even if newly established cooperation between police and local community workers should be acknowledged as a success of the CU's work, it is not always clear to what baseline such a 'success' is compared, how acute community security issues may be in a given community, and how well-suited they are for illustrating the

appropriateness and effectiveness of the CU's approach. This relativity of success and impact of reform practices necessitates an effective approach on the part of the CU to interpret or – in Berling's (2011) words – 'mobilize' the overall results of this project, so as to back up claims and demands for more cooperative and people-centred approaches in community-level law enforcement. The CU have done that effectively in statements such as: 'After all, this worked in the countryside, where we have worked. There, the number of cattle thefts, car accidents, domestic violence and school racketeering cases in fact decreased.'[31] This emphasis on the overall positive impact of the project has helped the network to establish and consolidate its image as an organization basing its claims in police reform debates on concrete actions on the ground. To this end, the achievements of the UNODC-financed project and follow-up work were widely shared in press coverage, which I analyse in the next section as part of the CU's wider approach to knowledge production.

Producing (and ignoring) knowledge

As a final key strategy employed by the CU, this section turns to the different forms of knowledge production that the network engaged in and their implications for achieving more substantive and sustainable reform. The network's role in this regard is to draw on conceptual knowledge from outside the Kyrgyz Republic and adapt and 'translate' it into the national context; a position that is best captured in the Co-Security approach that is based on internationally acclaimed community security principles. The network's knowledge production efforts consist mainly of writing and publishing empirical evidence and analyses in media commentary and research to support arguments for the alternative and more comprehensive reform agenda outlined above. Akin to Berling's idea of 'mobilizing facts' (2011), the CU is putting forward empirical evidence from its own projects, law enforcement statistics and research from abroad to support its cause. However, as Berling also argues, the 'lack of scientific knowledge' does not inhibit the government from certain (in)action and from taking '[s]overeign decisions … at the *limit of knowledge*' (2011, p 388), or even beyond what makes sense according to established knowledge.

Soon after its constitution in 2013, the CU started publishing regular media commentary and research on police reform. Having published

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[31] 'How your neighbour can ensure your safety', 15 August 2017, Azattyk. Hereafter, research, commentary and other press coverage publications are cited with English titles, dates and source hyperlinks for sake of brevity; see supplement in note 34 for full list of sources.

altogether 37 publications in the past seven years, including project reports and commentaries on the progress of the police reform, the CU has created a knowledge base that is hard to ignore in debates about community security in Kyrgyzstan.[32] Among other things, this is reflected by the fact that the network was twice invited to report to the national parliament *Jogorku Kenesh* to report on the progress of police reforms.[33] The network's efforts addressed a number of topics and pitched arguments to various audiences, including policy makers and the international community on the one hand and the wider population on the other. In an earlier analysis (Lottholz, 2021), I have tracked publications by and about the CU from the year 2016 until spring 2020 and grouped them by the following subject areas: (1) general coverage on reform progress and role of the CU; (2) results and follow-up activities of the UNODC-funded community security project; (3) 'Patrol service reform': commentary and discussions around the Road Patrol Service reform; (4) a research project conducted with the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) methodology; and (5) a donor-supported research project on racketeering conducted in schools.[34]

As this publication analysis shows, the CU and particular individual members of it have managed to establish themselves as a voice in debates on police reform in general, including sub-aspects such as the Road Patrol Service reform, as evidenced in TV debates with key policy makers and other news coverage including the activists' comments.[35] Further sector-specific research projects and thematic threads, such as on crime victim statistics (ICVS) or school racketeering have served to put a spotlight on the challenges and insufficiencies of police work; in particular the low number of crime victims who say they would report to the police,[36] and the lack of cooperation with educational and social institutions in the prevention of racketeering and youth violence.[37]

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[32] See https://reforma.kg/analytics/ for the list of publications in Russian.

[33] See for instance, CURR, 'Второй независимый доклад для Жогорку Кенеша о положении дел в Министерстве внутренних дел и реформе ОВД Кыргызской Республики [Second independent report on the state of affairs in the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic]', 11 June 2018, https://reforma.kg/media/post/postpdf/2018-06-12-1522267460.pdf

[34] This content analysis is available in a supplement at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/suppl/10.1080/13533312.2020.1792296

[35] 'Five on Channel 5: What's happening with Kyrgyzstan's police?', 6 February 2019, Channel Five.

[36] 'More than 60 per cent of crime victims do not report to the police', 24 February 2016, Azattyk.

[37] For instance: 'In Kyrgyzstan, the problem with violence in schools remains extremely worrying', 24.kg; 'Crime, racketeering, drug addiction. What's surrounding Bishkek youth?', 25 May 2018Osh, reforma.kg

Notwithstanding the CU's holistic approach and the overbearing evidence it produced in favour of more comprehensive reforms, the years following its intervention have not brought much progress in national-level reforms. On the contrary, as also diagnosed in Marat's analysis (2018, p 104), a gradual re-monopolization of the reform process by the government and MIA has taken hold. After presenting the *Jogorku Kenesh* with a new petition for a reform with concrete results,[38] the scope for civil society input into the reform process became further limited by the decision to dissolve the Council for Reform and Development of the System of Law and Order. Although the Council was also criticized for the insufficient competence it was given (see above), the CU warned that its liquidation amounted to 'stripping civil society from its right to have a stake in the reform process', a problem further sustained by transferring the competencies of this organ to the 'Council for Security and Public Order', which did not include any civil society representatives.[39] Further efforts of the CU included its reports on reform progress presented in parliament and the organization of two national forums in 2016 and 2018 in cooperation with MPs under the title 'Co-Security and crime prevention policy in the Kyrgyz Republic'.[40] In particular, the forums served as a platform for dialogue with decision makers and officials from the government and the MIA, who after the first forum passed a set of laws to restructure law enforcement, which the then secretary of the Defence Council qualified as 'fundamental reform'.[41] At the second forum in 2018, the CU not only received support from participating MPs[42] but also from the then PM, Zhapar Isakov, who explicitly endorsed the idea of creating a 'modern' police force and 'cooperation with citizens and civil society' to replace the current *militsiia* with its controlling and punitive functions as well as military and authoritarian ethos.[43] The congruence between Isakov's plans and the demands of the CU to reform the *militsiia* into a *politsiia* (see 2011 petition) and a cooperative approach to law enforcement, suggests that the CU's efforts bore some fruit, after all.

However, this progress was followed by an anti-liberal backlash against further concrete steps of reform, which is best illustrated by the fact that

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[38] 'Activists in Jogorku Kenesh handed over petition with appeal for police reform', 29 January 2016, Azattyk.

[39] 'Society could be deprived of the right to take part in the police reform', 5 April 2016, reforma.kg

[40] 'Civic activists handed over dozens of proposals for police reform in Kyrgyzstan', 24 June 2016, KNews.

[41] 'Law enforcement agencies in Kyrgyzstan will be cardinally reformed', 4 June 2016, 24.kg

[42] 'Djanybek Bakchiev MP: Security should be a key element of modern society', 11 June 2016, KNews.

[43] 'The reform of the *militsiia* into a *politsiia* is a tedious process, but a necessary one', 3 March 2018, Kabar.

Isakov, who was in favour of substantive reform, was arrested by the State Committee of National Security (*GKNB*) and put on trial briefly after his resignation in June 2018, just three months after his statements on the CU's Co-Security forum. While charges raised against him, relating to corruption and embezzlement in relation to repair measures at the Bishkek power station (Ru.: *TETs*) carried out by Chinese companies proved to be justified, the fact that they led to the end of his career and incarceration can be seen as the expression of disapproval of his reformist ambitions on part of a conservative political establishment around the then President Jeenbekov.[44] The long reach and influence of the internal affairs apparatus already seemed apparent in the fact that changes undertaken in implementing the above-mentioned legislation were again of a superficial nature and largely limited to the renaming and restructuring of internal affairs structures into six separate services.[45] The CU warned that such a 'renaming is not yet a reform' and did not diversify the MIA leadership's de facto control over these services, which also still consisted of mostly personnel with a military background.[46] The renaming and restructuring measures were the last actions of the MIA before the presidential elections in October 2018, in the aftermath of which no more substantial measures were undertaken at the national level where President Jeenbekov and his followers tightened their grip on power.

In the meantime, however, the CU had managed to consolidate its role as practice-oriented and knowledge-generating experts in law enforcement and crime prevention, as the achievements of the UNODC-financed project, the continued work with some communities in a small grants programme and another project implementing the Co-Security approach in the Sverdlov district of Bishkek[47] were widely shared in press coverage and project reports (see 'Pilot project' column supplement linked in note 34).[48] Another significant step forward was the creation, recruitment and piloting of a new patrol police unit in Bishkek, in which CU members were involved and cooperated with the Bishkek Main Administration of Internal Affairs (*GUVD*).[49] In the national policy-making arena, cooperation with a group of MPs taking interest in further advancing police reforms led to

[44] Kaktus, 'Sapar Isakov held under arrest until end of investigation', 5 June 2018, https://kaktus.media/doc/375394_sapar_isakov_vziat_pod_strajy_do_konca_sledstviia.html

[45] 'Six new services have been created in the MIA', Azattyk.

[46] 'Renaming does not mean reform', 10 August 2017, reforma.kg

[47] 'Joint plan: Bishkekians define the priorities for crime prevention', 2 August 2017, Kaktus.

[48] 'A joint plan allows for the mobilization of civic efforts and state authorities for crime prevention (final report)', 24 August 2016, reforma.kg

[49] 'Societal monitoring of the patrol police's work is starting in Bishkek', 5 November 2019, KNews.

the institutionalization of a parliamentary oversight mechanism to review existing reform legislation and propose additional measures if necessary.[50] Another hopeful development was the process toward a new Law 'On the foundations of crime prevention', in which CU members participated and which activists hoped would solve some of the contradictions and inertia inhibiting effective and needs-based law enforcement. The fact that this law was accepted on the third reading gave the activists new hope in an otherwise hopeless time marked by the ascent to power of Sadyr Japarov.[51] The constitutional changes which, notwithstanding widespread protest, were approved in a referendum in April 2021 and have turned the country from a semi-presidential into a presidential governing system, cast doubt on the possibilities of the CU to further effect concrete reform steps, but need not preclude further reform progress that is already enshrined in recent legal and institutional changes.

Especially in light of recent events, it can thus be concluded that the overbearing evidence that the CU has produced in favour of more effective and wide-reaching reform measures has not led to a shift of the consensus among authorities. The scenario from Berling's research (2011, p 393), where concerns over political stability and the ability to exert sovereign governmental control over law enforcement and internal affairs made decision makers refrain from yielding more oversight functions and decision-making participation to societal actors and public scrutiny, presents an apt description of events in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, as the recent successes and increasing cooperation with the CU among municipal administrations and Internal Affairs Offices (*GUVD*) as well as with parliamentarians show, the experience and relations the network has forged over the years present a strong basis for advancing their agenda in further pilot projects and national-level institutional changes. Thus, while the power holders might choose to ignore the evidence and arguments produced by the CU, such ignorance and mere imitation of reform are likely to be called out by people, as has happened in the case of the highly visible femicides of Burulai and Aizada discussed above. This suggests that more deep-reaching law enforcement reform is of wider popular interest. Given the persistence of assertive and illiberal actions on the part of the government and its repressive security apparatus, it becomes obvious how the, in many ways, 'liberal peace' police reform agenda of the CU and its supporters becomes hybridized into a post-liberal mode of governance.

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[50] See: 'Police reform will be successful under parliamentary control', reforma.kg

[51] 24.kg, 'Deputies passed the law on crime prevention on the third reading', 24 March 2021, https://24.kg/vlast/187420_deputatyi_vtretem_chtenii_prinyali_zakonoproekt_oprofilaktike_pravonarusheniy/

Conclusion

This chapter has taken the analysis of community security processes, their situatedness in imaginaries of social ordering and implications for a post–liberal mode of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan further from the municipal level to the national level. This perspective presents a valuable contrast to, and extension of, the research presented in the previous chapters, where the entities examined were mostly subject to and dependent on the municipal administration, law enforcement and ministerial bodies deciding on their agenda and competencies. This chapter has demonstrated the transformative agenda of an exemplary civil society platform which sought to change not only the way that law enforcement organs work with local administrations, civil society and populations (as well as the terms of such cooperation). The CU's far more bold endeavour consisted in also changing the overarching legal framework, the internal management, recruitment policies and the structure of the internal affairs apparatus itself.

The controversy and resistance to these plans have revolved around issues of belonging to the cohort of Soviet-trained and practically experienced law enforcement and security professionals claiming to have a better understanding of what is possible and desirable in police reform. In navigating and trying to overcome this disagreement, the mostly 'young folks' from the CU have built up and demonstrated a status of 'experts' and undertaken practices of knowledge production in order to back up their reform demands both in conceptual terms and with empirical results. The burden of evidence and strong case these efforts have produced in favour of a substantive reform in line with the Co-Security approach was hardly deniable and correspondingly embraced by the then PM Sapar Isakov's announcement to create a new, modern *politsiia* to replace the country's authoritarian and military-style *militsiia*. While Isakov subsequently faced a trial and prison sentence and the reform measures he envisaged were watered down, further successes of the CU as, for example, in setting up a parliamentary oversight mechanism and creating a new Patrol Police Service, which is currently being built up in all of Bishkek and expanded to the southern city of Osh, indicate that the network is successfully extending its alliances to withstand the anti-liberal backlash and politics of non–reform that has consistently taken hold in Kyrgyzstan in the past years. Nevertheless, my analysis has demonstrated that reform progress needs to constantly be negotiated and defended within the post-liberal knowledge regime where sound conceptions and objective evidence in favour of reform get ignored and overruled by the authorities' main focus on maintaining state security and control.

Finally, a fruitful way of reading the interactions between not only the CU and their counterparts in the government and internal affairs apparatus

but also international organizations are the three imaginaries of social order defined in Chapter 4 and the post–liberal forms of statebuilding they foreground. The CU and its constituent organizations, foremost the Liberal Youth Alliance which contributed the most active members into the network, are very clearly associated with the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary and corresponding discourses of transparent, accountable and democratically governed institutions as well as anti-corruption. On the other hand, the activists were able to invoke other meanings and implications of police reform and cooperative community security practices, which resonated with discourses situated in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. These include the discourse of Soviet modernity and nationalist patriotism, whether it is in the form of defending communities from foreign missionaries and religious influences by 'building a normal country' or by reinvigorating the multicultural awareness that 'We are all Kyrgyzstanis'. These diverging ways of situating the network's pilot project and wider endeavour helped the activists to claim a significant stake in the way the country's law enforcement institutions and practices are reshaped. This interplay and mixing of the different imaginaries of social ordering foregrounds an order which is not predominately shaped by 'liberal peace' ideas, but realizes them in combination with or translation into Kyrgyzstani understandings of order, security and justice. Post-liberalism thus seems the best approach to capture the nature and implications of this order.

8

Conclusion

I opened this book with a reflection on the events of October 2020 and the following months, which appeared to have put Kyrgyzstan back into a state of authoritarian ordering and populist politics. The momentary and spectacular nature of this political development was taken as a departure point to inquire how the recent deepening of authoritarian ordering can be seen as an intensification and culmination of tendencies and developments in governing, policy making and social ordering that have occurred over recent years. In this light, I have questioned how we can productively describe and capture the kind of political system and wider forms of ordering that have emerged in Kyrgyzstan after the 'Osh events' in 2010 in line with comprehensive efforts to promote democracy, the rule of law, human rights standards and participatory decision making both before and especially after this tragic conflict. I have argued that the most appropriate way to understand the forms of governance and order-making that have emerged at this intersection of international assistance and domestic ordering dynamics is a post-liberal form of social order and of statebuilding in particular.

After further demonstrating the need to think about the post-liberal nature of contemporary political and social ordering in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia and globally, I developed a conceptual mechanism through which to better capture the processes of contestation, interpretation and (re-)appropriation that are at play in the production of post-liberal orders, which other scholarship has continuously tried to situate within or between 'democratic' and 'liberal' frames of analysis on the one hand, and 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' ones, on the other. As a way forward from these approaches and the analytical and political impasse they imply, I emphasized the need to capture the *heteroglossia* of social life, namely, the coexistence and interaction of multiple understandings of order and of human existence – indeed multiple ontologies – that figure in and thus inevitably affect the social ordering process. To better capture this *heteroglossia*, I adopted the concept of 'social imaginary', understood as a mental construct through which people make sense of the world and their existence and conduct within it, as an analytical

vehicle that links imaginary and discursive formations with materialities and practices in 'real life'. This framework offered a productive way to capture the various understandings and normative positionings of social order in Kyrgyzstan and, in particular, the ways in which they are not only enacted, but also reproduced in practices of community and peacebuilding and the more macro-level forms of post-liberal order they foreground. Analysing imaginaries of social order and their constitutive discourses has also helped me to capture the contested condition of capitalist development and the legacies of transformation, exploitation and coercion it is built on, which in turn foregrounds decolonial perspectives on contemporary order.

In concluding this work, I proceed in three steps that develop the contributions of the monograph from the conceptual advances and empirical observations offered in the previous chapters. First, I recapitulate the key findings on how practices, discourses and imaginaries of social order in Kyrgyzstan co-produce post-liberal forms of statebuilding as they leave unchallenged the hyper-neoliberal redirecting of responsibility toward community-level and non-state actors while state-centric notions of authority and ideas of national and cultural order remain in place. In a second step, I relate these findings back to the contribution of this work to decolonial approaches to studying social order, and to the conceptual and methodological advances it offers in the Central Asian and global contexts.

Practices, discourses and imaginaries of social order in Kyrgyzstan

While covering a wide and indeed complex range of actors, practices and processes, the empirical analysis offered decisive insights into how local government, civil society, community-level institutions such as neighbourhood committees or courts of elders, and the population at large help produce, challenge and reshape post-liberal forms of statebuilding. Given the micro-level and practice-based focus of the analysis of community-level activities, this trajectory is not always obvious and its contours only take shape once the various practices, discourses and ideas the actors draw on are situated within the imaginaries of statebuilding and the post-liberal formations of order that their combination foregrounds. The empirical analyses and wider reflection can be captured in five key tendencies that manifest the post-liberal trajectory of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan.

These include first, the increasing responsibilization of community-level and non-state actors to provide security, order and services, which has encouraged and often necessitated a selective withdrawal or even absence of state institutions. On the other hand, various actors and agencies from the state have maintained claims to the power of interpretation of particular events by state authorities (as captured in the invocations of the 'politics of

sovereignty' imaginary), which also imply or explicitly feature the rejection of external interference and commentary. This maintenance of a minimal and selective level of state authority foregrounds a second distinctive feature of the emerging post–liberal form of statebuilding, which could be termed as selective delegation, by which state authorities have limited the scope of the communal and other non–state actors to whom they delegated key ordering and service functions both in territorial and temporal terms. Third and relatedly, the analyses pointed to a strategy favouring ad hoc solutions over institutionalization, as state authorities appeared to reduce the institutional status of newly created entities to the absolute minimum necessary to ensure operations, while further reducing or de facto ending the institutional mandate of bodies deemed less or not necessary, as in the case of the downsizing of Territorial Youth Councils (TYCs) in Osh. These forms of ad–hocism and the lack of systematic approaches to policy on the macro level and other disagreeable features in the authorities' conduct foreground a fourth feature of post–liberal ordering, namely the articulation of different forms and degrees of alignment and cooperation of community and non–state actors with executive and government authorities, and, in contrast to these, contestations and challenges that some actors, especially the Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' have put forward. These four key tendencies of responsibilization, selective delegation, ad–hocism and cooperation versus contestation run throughout the empirical findings from Chapters 5 to 7.

To enable an in–depth and historicized understanding of the ways in which community security and peacebuilding are done in semi–urban and rural Kyrgyzstan, I began Chapter 5 by analysing socioeconomic and political changes that have taken place since Kyrgyzstan's independence in 1991, and paid particular attention to the emerging moral economy of survival and translocal livelihoods and the insecurity and conflict potential they created. Against this background, I situated LCPCs as the prime body created to coordinate the work of other community- and neighbourhood-level institutions in preventing and solving conflict, legal violations and higher-level disagreements. This preliminary insight already pointed to the legal and institutional alignment of LCPCs with local government and Internal Affairs bodies who have ultimate authority over the operative and strategic orientation of LCPCs, which already suggests path dependencies and certain selective priorities of some entities over those of some groups in the community or the population at large. The analysis of LCPC work based on the 'success stories' (Saferworld, 2016) has illustrated how these bodies can successfully mobilize local residents and state institutions to solve problems pertaining to infrastructural issues or societal issues such as early marriages. I advocated caution about the narrow numeric indicators and short-term time horizons of these 'successes', whose underlying causes seemed too entrenched and complex to be addressed by LCPCs. This

performative, constructed and temporary nature of successful LCPC work was also apparent in their attempts to rebuild interethnic peace and trust according to the Soviet-era idea of 'peoples' friendship' (*druzhba narodov*) in the aftermath of the 2010 conflict. As the local LCPC representatives admitted, their attempts to instil peaceful coexistence could only reach a selective part of the population and perhaps, as an artwork at the local school indicated, had most potential when promoted to affect younger people's way of relating to one another. However, it also became clear that a lot of work remained to be done if the historically entrenched divisions between different mono-ethnic communities of the city were to be overcome.

Furthermore, I argued that the promotion of friendship and tolerance alongside human rights and other Western 'liberal peace' discourses was overshadowed by the fact that many residents in the analysed town had suffered violence and abuse not only from civilians who were still at large but also from law enforcement and other state actors. With this injustice and ongoing grievances not addressed, the kind of order emerging in the town can certainly not be seen as a liberal, inclusive one. Rather, as invocations of 'liberal peace' and 'peoples' friendship' ideas of multicultural coexistence figured in an uncomfortable co-presence with opinions and discourses and the authorities' judicial conduct in the 'politics of sovereignty', which remained effectively unchallenged, the order observed in this case and many analogous ones needs to be called post-liberal at best, when considering the coercive and violent elements which must have made some consider it outright authoritarian.

In Chapter 6, I analysed processes of conflict prevention, peace- and tolerance-building among young people by looking at the establishment and present activities of TYCs and embedding them in a more macro-level perspective on youth policy and participation. The themes of responsibilization and selective delegation which already emerged in the previous chapter came to the fore here too, even more clearly in some respects. Thus, the overall insights from the long-term perspectives on the TYCs' establishment, institutionalization and downsizing is that the Mayor's Office of the city of Osh, into whose Committee for Youth Affairs the TYCs were integrated, generated the maximum impact on peace- and tolerance-building and ordering among the youth, while investing minimal resources. This was possible thanks to the OSCE's and NGO Iret's immense efforts to build up and activate TYCs in successive capacity-building projects between 2011 and 2016, and, perhaps more importantly, through the TYCs' functioning as a conduit that mobilized young people to take on leadership positions and implement events and measures directed toward the goals mentioned above. This responsibilization and delegation of functions had many positive aspects, not only as it enabled young people to participate and actively shape peace and order in their communities, but it also created

pressure, especially on TYC leaders, to deliver the planned activities while trying to secure their livelihoods and future career paths.

The under-resourced but highly important status of TYCs and analogous youth structures in other cities foregrounded a dynamic interaction with various ideas and motivation situated in the different discourses and imaginaries of statebuilding. The TYC activists' key goal was not only to build peace and tolerance, but also to contribute to the development of the city and the country at large; a connection that was made both in neutral terms and in invocations of national ideology and dignity that clearly resonated with the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. Both on city- and national-level holiday celebrations and at more small-scale events, affirmation of the Kyrgyzstani nation and its legends and cultural heritage coexisted with expressions and performance genres such as breakdancing and singer-songwriter music, which can be situated in liberal multicultural ideas and the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary more broadly. More than in these expressions and performances, the post-liberal combination of state-centric and individualistic ways of being was apparent in the TYCs' efforts to build solidarity and support networks for the urban poor and especially children in need on the one hand, while promoting ideas of self-help, self-development and entrepreneurial ways of life as a way toward success and well-being on the other. The deeply entrenched nature of poverty and precarity as well as other problems such as racketeering and gender-based violence pointed to the need for more systematic and institutionalized ways of fostering young people's development. However, as my analysis of national-level youth policy and participation has indicated, this area has still been characterized by a post-liberal logic in which selective delegation to non-state and international actors and ad hoc solutions have so far prevailed.

I further substantiated this multi-level picture of post-liberal statebuilding in the analysis of the NGO network Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' and its attempts to bring about substantive and people-centred law enforcement reform through both national-level advocacy and community-level project implementation (Chapter 7). Contrary to LCPCs' and TYCs' dependent and hence strongly aligned position vis-à-vis authorities, this case demonstrates the important, even if difficult, role of actors who confront the state and cooperate only when actual change and progress are in sight. Having mobilized activists and popular support for its 'Alternative conception for police reform', the network seemed to successfully wield influence on national-level decisions, only to realize that many of their demands remained ignored or rejected and they were side-lined for a purported lack of expertise and experience in questions of public security. The network's efforts to gather and prove their expertise through community-level projects and various research and commentary activities, which I have analysed as part of their role of knowledge production, eventually served to consolidate and strengthen their position

as a key civil society actor in the police reform process. On the other hand, I have indicated how the increasing authoritarian and closed approach of state authorities served to again limit the CU's influence on the reform process, which was only retained in concrete collaborations on the new Road Patrol Service and parliamentary oversight. While especially the latter have shown that it is possible to overcome the ad-hocism discussed above and bring about institutional changes, the overall logic of selective delegation and responsibilization of the CU and other civil society actors have prevailed, as the latter have made tremendous efforts to inform reform policies and legislation and pilot projects while having had a limited stake in decision making and being completely dependent on international funding. It is here that the logic of post-liberal statebuilding is most obvious, as international money often, quite literally, builds up or refurbishes local police stations, car pools and technical equipment, while the conceptual and practical changes put forward by donors and their civil society counterparts are adopted in selective and temporary ways which, as recent developments have shown, can quickly morph into top-down and repressive ordering.

These higher-level dynamics should not distract from the fact that hierarchical, identity-based and potentially exclusionary forms of ordering are a feature of many areas of life in Kyrgyzstan. As my analysis based on participation in community-level project implementation events indicated, the CU's 'Co-Security' approach, indeed, seemed effective in fostering cooperation and debate between law enforcement, local administration, neighbourhood leaders and the wider population and thus enabled the design of more appropriate measures for crime prevention and security provision. However, further critical reflection also pointed to the limited abilities or willingness of local security working groups to capture the complexity of security issues and include all residents' points of view. Thus, in the constructing of newly arrived residents (*priezzhye*) or religious missionaries as a source of problems, or in the more or less wilful ignoring of these groups' or young people's viewpoints, the local groups seemed to embrace at times paternalistic and at other times objectifying, exclusionary and potentially overzealous approaches toward tackling issues of public disorder, violent extremism and juvenile delinquency. While the CU were aware and trying to address these shortcomings in their work with the local groups, the insights on the differing levels of buy-in and activity of the community groups also indicate the network's dependence on the latter to help demonstrate the suitability of the 'Co-Security' approach. The activists tried to secure this support by giving group members the space to problematize the loss of virtues and ideals that had once been upheld by Soviet modernity and civilization – a stance that must have seemed anachronistic to young people – and, more explicitly, by pointing out the significance of the project work as an attempt at 'building a normal country'. In this way, the CU situated its own reform

agenda, which revolved primarily around ideas of transparency, accountability and anti-corruption from the Western 'liberal peace' imaginary, in a productive tension with local working group members' concerns about the dignity of the country and its population that were situated in the 'politics of sovereignty' imaginary. In sum, the three case studies examined in this work illustrate the varying and sometimes contradictory positioning of peace and security actors within the imaginaries of statebuilding and the shaping of post-liberal forms of order via the mechanisms of responsibilization, selective delegation, ad-hocism and cooperation.

Governmentality and decolonial horizons in post-liberal statebuilding

The empirical insight and conceptual as well as methodological advances of this study foreground the three contributions that I have already discussed in the Introduction. In revisiting these, I focus on the insights that add to the decolonial perspective to then point out how the conceptual and methodological contributions are woven into it. In Chapter 2, I developed the decolonial approach to studying statebuilding and social ordering out of debates on post-liberal peace and the way in which it, as argued by Chandler, constitutes and serves to legitimize forms of governmentality as apparent potentials and realities of emancipation are overridden by processes of domination, subjugation and exclusion. I further traced this governmentality – understood broadly as a condition of contemporary post-liberal societies and not limited only to governmental technologies – through the various critiques of liberal political thought and of the illiberal nature of contemporary liberalism. Effectively, the book's engagement with the various literature strands and empirical realities in Kyrgyzstan has thus demonstrated how forms of governmentality are paramount throughout global space and time – as community security practices exhibited problematic exclusionary and essentializing tendencies in their application in Anglo-America, which have played out in strikingly similar ways in Kyrgyzstan, and as historical modes and logics of social ordering and corresponding habitualization and normalization of violence and injustice still appear to be at play in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and beyond.

In furthering decolonial perspectives on the former Soviet space (see Tlostanova, 2010), my analysis demonstrated how in Kyrgyzstan the reproduction of internally established forms of hierarchy, exclusion and inequality is especially apparent in relation to the legacy of Soviet modernity. As Chapters 5 and 7 have shown, the Soviet ethos of voluntary engagement as a civic duty still informs present-day community volunteers' activities and contributions to the solution of problems and is seen as a high value but also a moral obligation and expectation toward elderly and well-off people. One

local representative's explanation that "If I only work for myself, what would this be, then I'm an animal or what?" especially stressed the normalization of this ethos with its humanist and Enlightenment ideas. Meanwhile, voluntary communal workers also find themselves in a position of arbiter between the population and local or higher-level authorities, law enforcement and security organs. Especially in cases when potentially problematic residents or groups of residents are hard to access, or when decisions are hard to take and contested, voluntary local groups and societal bodies in fact become representatives and defenders of the authorities' decisions and policies, unless they challenge the latter themselves. The community-level actors examined in Chapters 5 to 7 thus become decisive players in the new governmentalization of the community, which is astutely captured in Rose's description: "Community, rather than the 'social' is the new territorialisation of political thought, the new way in which conduct is collectivised … in a double movement of autonomisation and responsibilisation. Once responsibilised and entrepreneurialised, they would govern themselves within a state-secured framework of law and order" (1999, p 475).

The decisive aspect facilitating this autonomization, responsibilization and thus governmentalization is the work of imaginaries of statebuilding, through which the promotion and implementation of local and national governmental agendas is secured in non-obvious ways and not rarely presented as something which is, by all measures of appropriateness, the right thing to do. This way, promoting tolerance through the 'peoples' friendship' idea, despite deep chasms between mono-ethnic communities, tackling racketeering and devising restrictive measures against religious radicalism, and the re-establishment of platforms and practices which introduce local youth to past achievements and civilizational virtues all seemed to be perfectly reasonable solutions to community security problems. At the same time, however, they also served, even if unwittingly, to reproduce the current order, stabilize existing hierarchies and distract from ways to deal with the more fundamental causes of insecurity, crime and violence.

This situating of post-liberal ordering in Kyrgyzstan as part of a wider trajectory of global governmentality resonates more or less obviously with decolonial perspectives in peace, conflict and intervention studies and beyond. Even if many approaches with a decolonial angle would reject this association because of justified concerns with the Euro- and Western-centric perspective that Foucault himself embodied (see Mignolo, 2011, p 133), this work is interested in exploring the common ground between decolonial analyses of the 'colonial matrix of power' or 'coloniality of power' and what (post-)Foucauldians call forms of governmentality and biopolitics (see Mignolo, 2011, p 14). In pursuing this line of thinking in the present study, I have used decolonial thought as a plane of critical reflection on the contemporary manifestations and historical legacies of the colonial nature

of modern capitalism in Kyrgyzstan. Concrete forms of being, acting and knowing which seek to overcome such coloniality have been most apparent in the 'tradition and culture' imaginary, where the ecosophic worldview and corresponding discourses on traditional knowledge as a source of well-being and human connections with nature and the spiritual domain suggest parallels with other modes of existence that aim to heal the 'colonial wound' as they, in Shilliam's words, 'bind back together peoples, lands, pasts, ancestors and spirits' (Shilliam, 2015, p 13). As already indicated in discussing other discourses in the tradition and culture imaginary, such forms of 'deep relation' (Shilliam, 2015) do not appear significant in Kyrgyzstan's society as a whole, especially given the prevalent role of modernistic understandings of culture and tradition which, as suggested in Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) argument on the 'invention of tradition', are strongly connected to understandings of the Kyrgyz as a nation.

Correspondingly, when it comes to the empirical analysis, I did not come across anything resembling a decolonial 'political project' or forms of decolonial political 'subjecthood', but mostly encountered decoloniality as diffuse and amorphous forms of being, acting and knowing with a faint presence in the narratives and practices observable in people's lifeworlds. Conceived of in a broad sense and in association with momentary empowerment and emancipation, it could be argued that decolonial thinking was reflected in attempts to bring back together people from different ethnic communities analysed in Chapter 5, or in the TYCs' efforts to bring together the youth from across town and from the countryside, and perhaps more so in their attempts to mobilize help and solidarity for those in need (Chapter 6). These attempts at forging peaceful coexistence and conviviality between people of diverse origins and backgrounds can perhaps best be understood with the concept of *dakhlez*, which Nurulla-Khodjaeva (2016) proposes as a decolonial way of being that defies Eurocentric forms of rationality, modernity and civilizational hierarchy (see Chapter 4). Furthermore, and in further emphasizing the aspect of mutual help and solidarity that is less reflected in *dakhlez*, the CU's efforts to help people from rural localities across Kyrgyzstan to organize more people-centred ways to provide security can be seen as inspired by a decolonial sentiment. Ultimately, however, it has to be acknowledged that all these initiatives are situated within the institutions, practices and knowledges associated with the Kyrgyzstani nation state and the capitalist order in which it is embedded, and are thus liable to reproduce colonial tendencies of ordering, hierarchizing, stratification and subjugation, even if indirectly and unintentionally.

Why is decoloniality strictly defined absent from the different community security and peacebuilding practices examined? Why not use a broader definition of decoloniality as an extension of the 'emancipatory' or 'empowering' trajectories that other scholars in peace, conflict and

intervention studies have tried to uncover in recent years? The point of this analytical strategy, of defining decoloniality as an extreme, radical vantage point to analyse social ordering and statebuilding is to acknowledge and enunciate the 'coloniality of being' as it pervades life in the current late capitalist period, alongside the historical processes of the production of this coloniality. In the context of Central Asia, this means to acknowledge the historical forms of oppression and governing of people by way of creating hierarchies and divisions between them while providing frameworks that communicate an equality among supposed equals and common future goals, as well as the contemporary materializations of the epistemic frameworks underlying these governing approaches (Tlostanova, 2010).

Much in the same way as critical criminology and governmentality scholars have examined community safety and crime prevention debates in Western Europe and North America (see Chapter 2), the point of my analysis was to show how community-level security and peacebuilding initiatives need not be more inclusive or emancipatory than their supposedly more top-down, state-sanctioned equivalent. Rather, I have tried to demonstrate that even people who take the responsibility and invest efforts to define and deal with security concerns in their community are liable to develop constrained and exclusionary perspectives and corresponding security and peacebuilding measures. Once again, the point is not to suggest that people are unaware of these shortcomings. It is to show how, given the limited possibilities available to build peaceful and secure communities, people choose to engage in these potentially exclusionary and not quite perfect ways of doing something, rather than doing nothing. While this is understandable within the parameters of the cases examined, it is equally important to point out how the aggregation of the examined initiatives, and of the numerous other processes they represent, can lead to such levels of exclusion and marginalization that the overall trajectory this feeds into is one of conflict management and governmentality, rather than peacebuilding and security provision. While decolonial ways of being, acting and knowing might exist in the interstices of the capitalist-colonial nation state system in which the examined initiatives operate, it seems that more large-scale, visible forms of decoloniality are only possible in localities that are to an extent 'de-linked' from this system and thus sufficiently independent of its imperatives and modes of operation (Mignolo, 2011, pp 118ff). While such fundamental challenges to the current system appear remote, the above-mentioned discourses in the 'tradition and culture' imaginary, as well as the anti-colonial discourse in that of 'politics of sovereignty', present potentials that deserve further examination. Furthermore, the immense efforts of civil society bodies and wider societal actors in challenging authorities and working to ensure minimal levels of security, order and public services in their communities deserve more systematic attention as to whether and how

they already present forms of autonomy, solidarity and resilience that can be meaningful from a perhaps more pragmatic decolonial angle.

As indicated at the outset of this section, the other contributions that this monograph makes are more or less directly linked to the key concern of advancing debates on decolonial approaches to studying peace, conflict and intervention. Thus, both the conceptual and methodological move proposed in this work have their grounding in decolonial thought and the related concern to develop a more critical and grounded inquiry. My conceptual proposal was that research needs to start to appreciate and try to capture the *heteroglossia* of social ordering processes, which I have done by conceptualizing social imaginaries as a way of understanding the relation between concrete practices and materialities of peace- and statebuilding on the one hand, and the ideas, discourses and underlying worldviews and ontologies on the other, and the nexus of combination and hybridization unfolding between them. Even if some of the outcomes of this analysis have been reached in other approaches as well, the decisive added value of this framework is that factors of social ordering that are not apparent in textual representations, speech acts and practices of internationalized ordering projects are given more analytical attention and can thus be better appreciated in terms of the roles they play in the adaptation, reinterpretation and inversion of internationally promoted concepts and practices.

In direct relation to the latter concern, my methodological move was to introduce a cooperative and practice-based approach to doing research. Based on previous debates in practice theory and collaborative approaches to knowledge production, the idea is thus already known, but was situated in a wider concern of overcoming the division between researchers and research participants as well as communities in order to avoid the usually prevalent one-sided and extractive logics of knowledge production in favour of a more dialogical process. As I have elaborated in Chapter 3 and demonstrated throughout the empirical analysis, this approach has helped me get more in-depth and comprehensive insights than most more standard ways of doing fieldwork would have done. In particular, it helped me navigate issues of personal safety concerning both myself and research participants and partners which have been under-appreciated in earlier research. Although this has also implied a level of self-censorship in selecting the communities and actors whom I analysed in more detail, and despite the further limitations incurred by the diverging priorities of community and civil society actors which turned out to be hard to satisfy, this cooperative approach was continued and led into long-term collaborations and friendships with my partners in Kyrgyzstan. My evolving positionality as a researcher in continuous conversation and in a relation of mutual support with local partners thus presents an important contribution to the idea of 'decolonizing methodology' and transcending the neoliberal scientific episteme. Even if decolonial

thought does not directly feature in these conversations and appears remote, the common concern to expose, undermine and dismantle the institutions and wider social forces maintaining present injustice foregrounds a decolonial sensibility in a wide, but tangible sense.

On a final note, it needs to be acknowledged that this monograph has left a number of aspects still to be addressed in future work, especially concerning the specificities of post–liberal ordering in Central Asia and beyond. As the discussion of the imaginaries of social orders in Chapter 4 and various parts of the following analysis have indicated, amid all variation with the more authoritarian regimes of Kyrgyzstan's neighbouring countries, the post–liberal approach appears valuable to capture the forms of liberalism and democratic ordering in other Central Asian states as well. Further, and more importantly, as the critical review of various approaches to liberalism and accounts of its failures and transmutations has demonstrated, the latter exhibit striking similarities across global regions, including Western Europe and wider industrialized parts of the world. In this light, a critical approach to studying peace, security and development, and especially decolonial versions of it, need to further unpack the forms of peace, order and security created in the name of liberal democracy to capture the extent, effects and implications of global post–liberal order.

APPENDIX 1

Maps of Kyrgyzstan

Figure A1.1: Geographic map of Kyrgyzstan and overview of research sites

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure A1.2: Satellite map of Kyrgyzstan

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Abridged Inventory of Gathered Data

Date	Conversation, notes taken	Interviews, recorded	Participatory observation	Cooperative research, conferences, travelogues
Overall	34	22	21	11
26/06/15	Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result' (CU), Bishkek			
27/06/15	University Professor, Bishkek			
02/07/15	CU members, Bishkek			
03/07/15	Head of Kyrgyzstani NGO (Kg NGO), Bishkek			
06/07/15				Presentation at Saferworld
07/07/15	Kg NGO lawyer; Kg NGO head, Osh			
08/07/15	Kg NGO project coordinator, Osh			
11/07/15			LCPC profiling visits:	1×, Osh province
13/07/15				2×, Osh and Batken province
14/07/15				2×, Batken and Osh province
15/07/15				3×, Jalal–Abad province
17/07/15	CU member, Skype			
20/07/15	CU activist, Osh	Kg NGO head, Osh		
21/07/15	OSCE programme manager, Osh			
22/07/15		International NGO programme manager, Osh		
14/08/15	CU office, Bishkek			
17/08/15			CU Working group meeting, Chui province	
21/08/15	CU member and consultant, Bishkek			Saferworld roundtable on gender violence, Bishkek
24/08/15	CU office, Bishkek			
01–05/09/15				Moscow – Bishkek train journey
11–13/09/15			TYC youth forum, Batken	
16/09/15	Ex-intern, CU, Skype			
21/09/15			Research institute admin, visa authorities, Bishkek	
22/09/15		AUCA alumnus, Bishkek		
25–28/09/15			Dispute with drunken youth, Minibus	3-day travel around lake Issyk Kul

Date	Conversation, notes taken	Interviews, recorded	Participatory observation	Cooperative research, conferences, travelogues
09/10/15				Conference on 'Traditional knowledge', Bishkek
10/10/15			CU results presentation, Bishkek	
12/10/15	CU office, Bishkek			
14/10/15	Kg NGO lawyer, Osh; territorial council head, Osh			
15/10/15	TYC project consultant, Osh			
16/10/15		International NGO programme manager, Osh		
20/10/15	CU representatives; Territorial Council Head, Osh			
21/10/15	Kg NGO head, Osh		Planning meeting, territorial council, Osh	
26/10/15	CU office, Bishkek			
28/10/15			Osh bridge opening + Youth committee Osh	
29/10/15			Osh 3015 anniversary	
30/10/15			Focus group Tash-Bulak LCPC, Jalal-Abad province	
		Interview with LCPC representative, Bazar-Korgon, Jalal-Abad province		
04/11/15	2 academics, Bishkek			
05/11/15		NGO head, Bishkek		
06/11/15			CU working group training, Chui province	
09/11/15		CU member; NGO head, Bishkek		
10/11/15			International youth day celebration, Osh	
11/11/15			CU working group training, Batken province	
12/11/15	TYC head and deputy		Committee for Youth Affairs, Osh	
13/11/15	2 × TYC head; 1 × TYC head and deputy, Osh	TYC head	TYC meeting, Osh	
18/11/15				School visit and presentation, Osh
19/11/15	2 Youth NGO staff			Car trip Osh Bishkek
		Youth NGO head; CYA head, Osh		
20/11/15	Business woman, Bishkek		CU forum, Bishkek	

Date	Conversation, notes taken	Interviews, recorded	Participatory observation	Cooperative research, conferences, travelogues
25–6/11/15				Saferworld CVE conference, Bishkek
27/11/15			CU working group meeting, Chui province	
28/11/15				TYC national closing conference, Janaat
30/11/15				Academic Conference on International Law, Bishkek
01/12/15	Academic, Bishkek			
03//12/15			5 × students; ex TYC deputy head; TYC project consultant, Osh	
04/12/15		2 TYC members, 1 TYC head	Tea with TYC head	
05/12/15			Host, Osh; TYC head at forum; Consultant, Bishkek	
			CU forum, Chui province	
07/12/15			2 project coordinators, UNODC; 1 UNDP consultant, Bishkek	
09/12/15			Head, Institute for Youth Development	
10/12/15			Youth council representative, Tokmok	
			Social department senior specialist, Tokmok	
11/12/15	CU office, Bishkek			
21/03/16	CU member, Skype			
06/07/17	2 TYC project consultants, Osh			
07/07/17	OSCE programme manager, Bishkek			

Source and full version at: https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/8358/

Civic Union Newspaper (Russian Version)

Figure A3.1: Front page of the Civic Union Newspaper

Source: Civic Union 'For Reforms and Result', permission obtained

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