

# THE BORDERS OF ETERNAL FRIENDSHIP?

The politics and pain of nationalism and identity along the  
Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley boundary, 1999-2000.

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## Summary

In 1999 and 2000 the boundary between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan became a concrete and sometimes violent reality in the lives of those living in the border area, as Uzbekistan stepped up surveillance and control and began unilateral demarcation. 'The border' became a politically sensitive issue between these two states that had, in 1997, signed a 'treaty of eternal friendship.' This dissertation asks why this happened, and what the effects on populations in the Ferghana Valley were. It uses this case study to engage with a number of theoretical, methodological and empirical debates in the burgeoning literature on political change and nationality in these republics, and a number of theoretical and disciplinary debates within geography.

Although recognising their importance as a background, it considers those deterministic explanations of the boundary question that revolve around Soviet-era borders and nationalities policies, the needs or interests of states, ethnic animosity, or the logic of independent statehood, as insufficient. Rather, drawing on critical social theory in geography, it emphasises the importance of the interaction of domestic power struggles in both states. 'The border' acted as both a material and discursive site where elites struggled to gain or retain control of power and to imprint their own geopolitical visions of post-Soviet space on the Ferghana Valley.

This study of elite discourse is balanced by an ethnographic account of the traumatic effects of the unfolding crisis on borderland populations. It uses ethnography, interviews and focus groups to highlight the gulf between elite and popular conceptions of ethnicity and political geography. Against accounts that depend upon theoretically and empirically deficient notions of 'ethnic conflict', 'nationalism' or 'democratisation,' it suggests that this dynamic space is vital to the understanding of the politics of nationalism in post-socialist Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and may also be key to envisaging alternative future political formations.

*This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It is not substantially the same as any that has been, or is being, submitted for any qualification at any other university. It does not exceed "80,000" words including footnotes but excluding appendices and bibliography.*

*Nicholas W. Megoran, 25th September 2002.*



Map A: Central Asia

(CIA World Factbook, 2000)



Map B: The Ferghana Valley: location of places mentioned in text





# Acknowledgements

and dedication

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<sup>1</sup> See the entry 'Toponyms' in Appendix 1, for an explanation of the use of dual spellings throughout this dissertation.

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<sup>2</sup> [Note inserted following examination: Hotamjon died in September 2002, although I did not hear the tragic news until after I had submitted this dissertation.

and empowering to working people about the Soviet Union, all that is invigorating about Ferghana Valley culture, and all that is hopeful about Kyrgyzstan. It is to him, and to Turdahon Buva, that this dissertation is dedicated.

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# Chapter 1 : Introduction- National Territorial States And International Boundaries In The Ferghana Valley

Between 1999 and 2000 the hitherto largely invisible border between the republics of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan became a concrete reality for those living in Ferghana, the valley through which much of it winds. Barbed-wire fences were erected, bridges destroyed, cross-border bus routes terminated, customs inspections stepped up, non-citizens attempting to cross were denied access or seriously impeded, and unmarked minefields laid. Tensions flared into violence at checkpoints, people and livestock were killed as they strayed onto minefields, and suspicion and fear at times reached fever pitch. Close-knit communities that happened to straddle the boundary were spliced in two and a squeeze on trade added to the poverty and hardship of the Valley's folk. These experiences of 'the border' led to a collective trauma throughout the frontier region. Such affronts to any sane notion of human well-being simply demand an explanation. That is the purpose of this dissertation: to investigate *why* these events occurred and *how* the Valley changed as a result.

This dissertation offers answers to both these questions, but is also an entrance point to explore the question that has occupied scholars of Central Asia across a wide range of disciplines over the past decade: what comes after the Soviet Union which collapsed so spectacularly in 1991? This is the classic post-colonial problem: how are independent nation-states to be built where they did not exist before and what happens when that is tried? This dissertation should also thus be read as an investigation of the attempt to map the geopolitical vision of the modern nation state onto the Ferghana Valley (Figure 1-1). The study investigates the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border question by employing theoretical perspectives from the discipline of political geography, augmented by advances in critical international relations theory and political anthropology, to provide a critique and development of general approaches to thinking through post-Soviet state-building in those two republics. It is *not* a technical-legal discussion of where the boundary does or should lie; rather, it is an investigation of the political and social significance of this question.

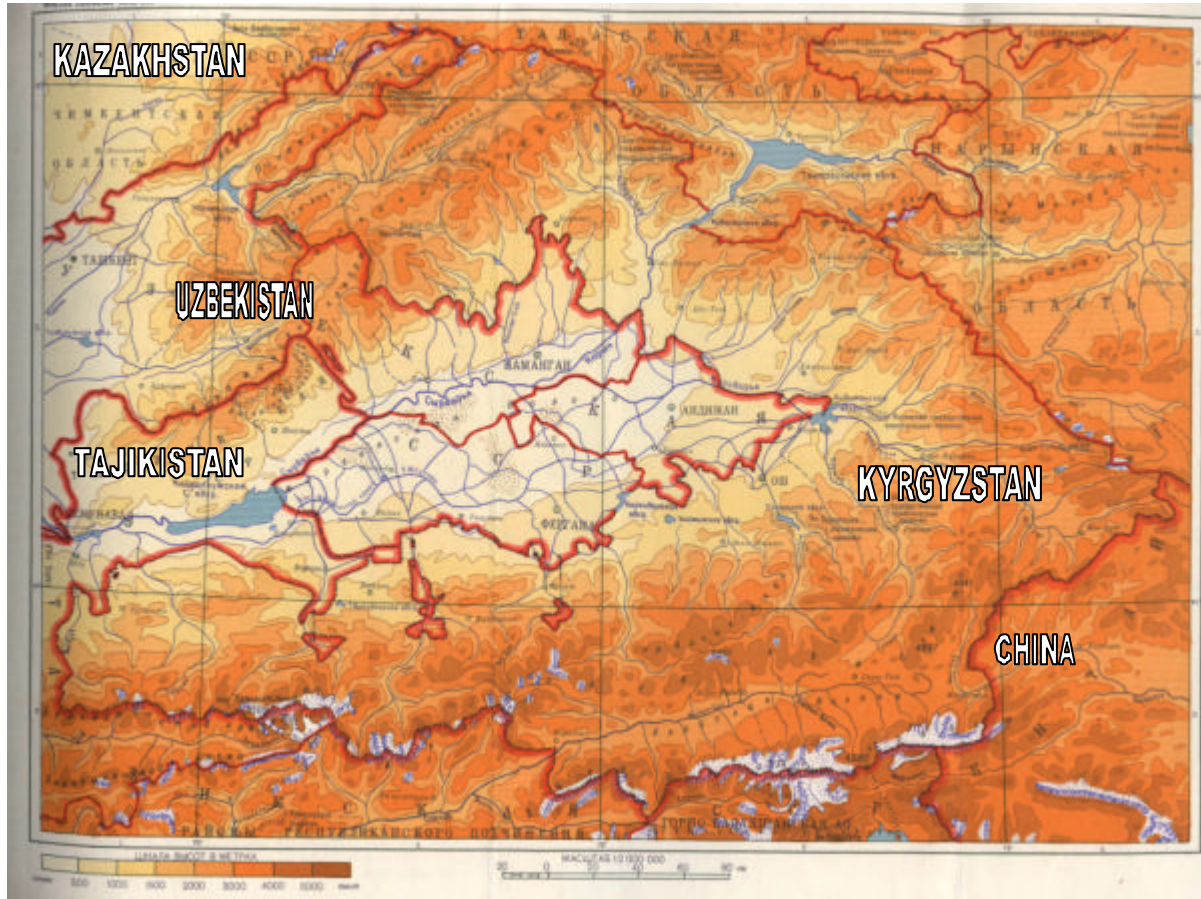


This dissertation argues that the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border crisis was not a dispute between long-suppressed ethnic antagonisms that were waiting to explode once the 'lid' of the Soviet Union was lifted off. Neither was it simply a conflict between two states over territory and natural resources, although the importance of these questions is not denied. Whilst Uzbekistan's attempt to control the circulation of capital, labour and goods within its territory led it to tighten its border controls, the pursuit of diverging macro-economic policies by the two states cannot account for the particular course of the 'border question.' Nor was it the product of a 'ticking bomb' of poorly- or maliciously-drawn republican borders dating from the Soviet period, although these clearly form a background to the events of 1999-2000 and beyond. Nor was it the inevitable result of the pursuit of national interests and security in the anarchic world of independent states. In contrast to these general explanations, this study emphasises *politics*, that 'the border question' is best understood as a product of the interaction of (very different) domestic power struggles in the two states. A key site of these struggles was the discursive terrain of post-Soviet Central Asian geopolitical space. 'Border disputes' formed vehicles for rival political factions to frame their geopolitical visions of Central Asia, and assert hegemonic control over national space through a variety of textual, cartographic, security and governmental strategies. The implications and consequences of these struggles were felt most acutely by borderland dwellers, as the crisis forced fundamental shifts in notions of geopolitical identity. These experiences were in turn appropriated and interpreted by different factions in political conflict.

## **PART I: ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM IN CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES**

The Soviet Union organised Central Asian political space according to the European ideology of *nationalism*, the principle that territory and a group of people with shared language and cultural memory (the *nation* or *ethnic group*) should be coterminous: that is, the world should consist of *nation-states*.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary post-Soviet Central Asia is the heir to that map. Because of this, nationalism and ethnicity remain important categories and processes for understanding Central Asian societies today.

However, at the same time, a glance at the copious literature on state-building in Central Asia suggests that these processes are very difficult to study well.



**Figure 1-1 : Topographic map of the Ferghana Valley and surrounding area (Oruzbaeva 1987: 16. Scale: 1:2,000,000).**

These two simple points are the reason that this study focuses upon the explicitly non-ethnic issue of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border<sup>4</sup> dispute. It was selected as a means to engage a number of debates within the inter-disciplinary literature on state building, nationalism and ethnicity in post-Soviet Central Asia. Although there is unprecedented output in this field, much of the literature is skewed or polarised between different positions and epistemologies. Through detailed empirical

<sup>3</sup> It is undoubtedly paradoxical that the Marxist ideology of the USSR should have reorganised political space along nationalistic lines, and the relationship between the two ideologies is complicated. See Smith (1996) for a discussion of these themes.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 1 for a discussion of the terminology of borders used in this study.

investigation of a single issue in a narrow timeframe, this study seeks critically to appraise these debates and move towards a synthesis of approaches. This dissertation addresses itself to six theoretical and methodological tensions and weaknesses with the study of nationalism in Central Asia.

Firstly, attempts to define 'the nation' or ethnicity have polarised between essentialists and constructionists: ironically enough, generally along ethnic lines. A certain school of Western scholarship has tended to conceive of ethnicity in Central Asia as a historically determining and tangible force from which the contours of efficacious action can be plotted. For example, Dash predicted that "Central Asia is sure to pass through a chaotic phase of self-assertion of its peoples' identities" (Dash 1992: 119-120), while Carlisle discussed "the centuries old antagonisms between Uzbeks and Tajiks" (Carlisle 1995: 75) and Haghayeghi the supposed "ethnic discord which has always been a major feature of the Central Asian landscape" (Haghayeghi 1995: 186).<sup>5</sup> Powerful critiques of this standpoint by scholars drawing upon post-structuralist theory have undermined these formulations (Bichel 1997; Schoeberlein-Engel 1994), stressing instead the fluidity and historical contingency of 'ethnic' boundaries and the role of Soviet (Allworth 1990) and post-Soviet (Adams 1999a) authorities in designating and manipulating national categories.

However, these positions have increasingly clashed with the work of intellectuals claiming to be rediscovering ancient national identities suppressed during the Soviet period (To'lanov 1998; Ziyov 2000). This has too often become an unseemly stand-off between Europeans and Americans on the one hand, and Central Asians on the other, each frustrated at the seeming failure of the other to understand their positions (for example, Adams 1999b: 357). This study side-steps these over-politicised and polemical debates by asking not whether contemporary Central Asian nations are ancient entities or modern creations, but what an investigation into the role of notions about them and their use in particular situations can reveal about the political landscape of contemporary Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (following Brubaker 1996: 16; Mitchell 2000: 74-75).

Secondly, this study addresses a predicament that has arisen in the study of ethnic conflict in the Ferghana Valley. Any such study of nationalism and ethnicity is

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<sup>5</sup> The spuriousness of much of this literature is demonstrated by Carlisle identifying the Tajiks and Uzbeks as ancient enemies but Haghayeghi lumping them together as comrades in a struggle against the Kazakhs and Turkmen.

necessarily haunted by memories of the terrible inter-communal violence in the Valley during the late Soviet period, particularly Uzbek-Kyrgyz fighting around Osh in 1990 (for a brief overview of these incidents see Abazov 1999: 70-74). The conflict prevention genre is motivated by the important task of understanding such conflict to prevent its reoccurrence. Yet 'conflict prevention' has been dominated by a genre of policy-oriented semi-scholarly writing funded by and heavily invested in 'Atlanticist' and neo-liberal ideologies of governmentality (examples are Rubin and Lubin 1999; Tabyshalieva 1999). Extreme care is needed in addressing what has become a highly sensitive issue lest it be exacerbated, as Goodhand and Vaux (2001) and Megoran (2000b) have cautioned with reference to the Ferghana Valley. As Eriksen and others have observed, directly investigating 'ethnicity' tends to pre-determine answers by the very framework in which the question is posed (Eriksen 1993). However, the demolition of simplistic primordialist formulations of ethnicity by researchers such as Schoeberlein-Engel and Bichel, along with concerns of post-structuralist sensitivity to the complexities of identity, have discouraged the study of ethnic processes in a form that might address these questions in a relevant and policy-orientated fashion. This study seeks to move beyond this impasse by exploring the meaning of ethnicity and conflict in the context of a concrete issue that is explicitly non-ethnic (state border disputes) but allows ethnicity to emerge alongside other forms of identification and explanation.

Thirdly, a polarisation in the scale of studying the construction of nation-states has impeded the development of richer understandings of the meaning of nationalism and ethnicity in Central Asia. Most studies concentrate either on what the state says about its people or how people make sense of their state. The former tend to produce accounts of the manipulation of identity in official discourse, exploring activities such as the organisation of cultural commemorations (Adams 1999), the 'nationalisation of the political elites' (Anderson 1997: 141), and the redefinition of historical figures acceptable as state emblems (Allworth 1998). The latter have gone to the opposite end of the spatial scale in investigating local understandings of the post-Soviet state (for Ferghana Valley examples see Abramson 1998; Liu 2002; Rasanayagam 2002). All of these studies make important contributions to understanding the meaning of the post-Soviet Central Asian state. However, whilst the former tend to be weaker at assessing the resonance and effectiveness of elite discourse with the general populace, the latter lose sight of the importance of the state as producer of discourse, initiator of

policy and dispatcher of security forces. I fully support Kandiyoti's forcible advocacy of ethnography as a necessary balance to the macro-scale analysis of legal frameworks and official discourse that has predominated, yet that alone is inadequate to capture an apprehension of the evolving realities of post-socialist Central Asia (Kandiyoti 2002: 248). However, I also believe it is vital not to lose *that* aspect either. This study is an attempt to integrate the macro and micro scales of analysis, and produce a more nuanced assessment of the contemporary meaning of nationalism and ethnicity in Uzbekistani and Kyrgyzstani society.

Fourthly, a tendency to depend heavily upon single methods of research has reinforced this polarisation of scale. For example, Bichel's post-structural theory-informed research based primarily upon discourse and textual analysis tends to stress the historically and spatially contingent nature of ethnicity and the nation (Bichel 1997), whilst Liu's phenomenological-humanistic ethnography takes ethnicity as a given point from which individuals locate themselves in the matrix of political space (Liu 2002). Neither of these perspectives is incorrect, but neither one of them exhausts the meaning of ethnicity and nationality. In employing a number of diverse research methods informed by different theoretical positions, this study attempts to bridge these divides and recapture a more complete and nuanced understanding of the processes of state formation and ethnicity mediated through the single event of the border dispute. (The reasons for this approach are at root philosophical and will be revisited at the end of this chapter.)

Fifthly, an irony of Central Asian studies is that the field has tended to reinforce the very distinctions it critiques. Many scholars are highly critical of the manipulation and creation of national identities within national spaces by the states of Central Asia; yet by confining their research and expertise largely to one state they reproduce and reinscribe the relevance of those boundaries and divisions, thereby rendering them less artificial. This 'methodological nationalism' (Agnew quoted in Paasi 1999: 70; see also entries for 'nationality' and 'toponyms' in appendix 1) is particularly marked in Central Asian studies, where the brevity of time available for language acquisition and detailed field research since the dissolution of the Soviet Union has limited the ability of most non-Soviet individuals to gain expertise in the affairs of more than one Central Asian republic. The study of a frontier zone, as presented here, was conceived as an attempt to avoid the trap of methodological nationalism by moving constantly between different states, ethnic groups, and modes and forms of politics.



Finally, although the questions this dissertation tackles have arisen from within the multi-disciplinary field of Central Asian studies, the paths taken reflect my own background as a (British) geographer. Although, as Watson argues, "The Royal Geographical Society established its credentials as an Orientalist authority to no small degree through the exploits of its surveys of Central Asia" (Watson 1998: 118), between Ellsworth Huntington's expedition of 1903-4 (Huntington 1919) and Sarah O'Hara's excellent work on water management in the 1990s (O'Hara 2000), anglophone geographers have largely ignored Central Asia. This matters for two reasons. Firstly, territory and the boundaries that enclose it are key components of modern statehood, and a core concern of human geography. As Graham argues, "powerful narratives of place, fixed within hegemonic representations of the past, remain fundamental to the modernistic ideas of legitimacy and authority underpinning the territorial state" (Graham 2000: 75). However, these have been under-emphasised in studies of post-Soviet Central Asia. Secondly, Schoeberlein (1999) has observed that the only major theory articulated using Central Asian source material has been the geopolitics of the British geographer Halford Mackinder (Mackinder 1904). Yet whilst this century-old theory has been subjected to searching criticism by geographers (Kearns 1993; Ó Tuathail 1996a: chapter 3), and other theories of space and politics developed in its place, it is still used (sometimes uncritically) by many analysts of Central Asian affairs (for example, Jones 2000: 1; Sharapova 2002: 86-7) or proponents of more interventionist foreign policy positions (Zotov 2000). Modern geographers have both an imperial past to redeem, and constructive contributions to make in understanding contemporary processes of state building and boundary construction in Central Asia.

This study uses the precise events surrounding the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border in 1999-2000 to attempt to address these six deficiencies in the literature and engage with the debates surrounding them. Having established *what* the dissertation is studying and *why*, the next section considers just *how* a border dispute is to be studied. Although little of substance has been written about borders in Central Asia, the study of international boundaries has a century-long history and is becoming increasingly sophisticated and inter-disciplinary. It is from this literature that part II of this chapter formulates the approach used in this dissertation to the study of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border.

## PART II: UNDERSTANDING BORDERS AND BORDER DISPUTES

### Disciplinary overview

The past decade has witnessed something of an explosion in the study of international boundaries, in response to the changing geopolitical realities of the post ‘Cold War’ era. The creation of new states from the wreckage of the Soviet and Yugoslav federations has led to many more international boundaries, whilst at the same time the increasing importance of inter-state organisations such as the EU has paradoxically brought a softening of other borders. In this section, I will briefly discuss the usefulness of approaches in the disciplines of sociology, law and political science/international relations in assisting an analysis of the 1999-2000 Ferghana Valley border disputes, before going on to explore in more detail the geographical material.

Sociology has traditionally placed more emphasis on the study of the state as a centralised institution than on the study of its borders.<sup>6</sup> Weber’s germinal account of the state defined it as “that human community which (successfully) lays claim to the *monopoly of legitimate physical violence* within a certain territory” (Weber 1994 (1919): 310). State borders would appear to be simply the outer line of the extent of that power which the state accrues to itself by force. Giddens updated Weber’s notion by describing the nation-state as a “bordered power-container” and underlined the importance of the delimitation of boundaries (Giddens 1985: 120), but these still remain as the logically final outcome of the argument he proposes. Mann’s influential analysis of interstate violence was an important attempt to break out of the mould of single-state analysis that dominated sociology, but retains the earlier relegation of territory and boundaries as given categories over which and up to which politics occurs, and which are in need of no further explanation (Mann 1988).

Lawyers undertake important work in allocating territory and delimiting boundaries in a dynamic field that has developed with the increase in independent states; the exploitation of offshore hydrocarbon reserves; and the increasing importance of institutions of international law in the modern world. Their remit is necessarily precise: proving title to territory (McHugo 1998) and exploring matters such as the relationship between the permanence of boundaries and the treaties that establish

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<sup>6</sup> I have not undertaken a comprehensive overview of the current sociology of borders; these classic texts also indicate something of the concerns of traditional social science.

them (Marston 1994). Nonetheless, legal practitioners readily admit that political factors are the key to resolving boundary disputes: issues that are beyond the remit of juridical experts.

If border disputes are inescapably political, then it might be expected that the fields of political science and international relations would have developed extensive and sophisticated literatures on boundary issues. However, this is not the case. As in sociology, a heavily state-centric analysis in both disciplines has tended to reduce borders to the outcomes of power processes enacted between governments and capital cities, and seen territory as the undifferentiated space over which these processes occur. International relations professor, Chris Brown, accepts not only that “neither political theory or international relations theory has an impressive record when it comes to problems posed by borders, frontiers and identity” (Brown 2001: 117), but goes so far as to suggest that “Borders are an embarrassment to liberal political thought” (ibid.: p135). Anderson’s 1996 useful introduction to the study of frontiers adds and extends empirical material to the similar introduction by the geographer Prescott some thirty years earlier (Prescott 1965: see below), but makes no significant theoretical advance. The work of Dan Elazar, a political scientist unusually sensitive to issues of space (see, for example, Elazar 1999), has been heavily critiqued by his geographer colleague, David Newman, as being akin to the empirical, descriptive and quantitative attempts to assess the importance of space in which geographers were involved some decades earlier. Newman argued that by drawing on the work of thinkers as diverse as Lefebvre, Foucault, Bhabha and Said, political geographers have shown the importance of space as a social and political phenomenon (Newman 1999).

### **Political geography**

The study of international boundaries played a prominent role in the founding of the discipline of geography. That is true of no place more so than Britain, where the importance of securing its Central Asian borders was formative in the experience of leading luminaries of border issues including Sir Thomas Holdich and Lord Curzon of Kedleston (Curzon 1907; Holdich 1916). These ‘Great Game players’ both welcomed the increasing prominence in the academy that geography was gaining by the turn of the twentieth century. Holdich commented approvingly that “this period in

our history has been well defined as the boundary-making era" (Holdich 1899: 466-7), and that studies of the geography of borders were of prime practical importance for the cultural, economic and military interests of Britain. Indeed, at the Versailles conference the role of geographers such as the American, Bowman, and the Frenchman, de Martonne, was crucial in mapping the geography of post-World War I Europe (Freeman 1961: 220).

These geographers were concerned with developing the technical processes of delimiting and demarcating borders and creating a vocabulary to facilitate this. Hartshorne further refined the terminology of these early workers (Hartshorne 1936). Holdich was hostile to the work of geographers whom he considered detached from the practical experience of boundary making, singling out for criticism the output of American geographer Ellen Semple (Holdich 1916: ix). Semple suggested that states and races were organisms whose borders grew naturally at the expense of weaker races (Semple 1907a,b). This work, which itself drew on Turner's romantic-patriotic myth of the expanding frontier as the site where US identity was forged (Turner 1996), served to justify the genocide of Native Americans as a natural process. The implication in the project of Nazism of the work of German geographers such as Ratzel and Haushoffer (for example Haushofer 1998 (1942)) led to the widespread discrediting of 'geopolitics' within academic geography after World War II (Freeman 1961).

In the postwar period the study of boundaries was advanced most notably by Prescott. His 1965 work, *The Geography of Frontiers and Boundaries*, was a definitive statement of the state of the field, providing an authoritative synopsis of the typologies and terminology of boundaries, borders and frontiers. He advocated more empirical studies of actual boundary questions and border landscapes, and also signalled a need to pay heed to the political dimension of border disputes (Prescott 1965). Yet, since that time, progress in the study of boundaries has been disappointing. As Muir argued, "At least until the 1970s, the literature of political geography was dominated by studies of frontiers and boundaries. Now, such accounts are much rarer" (Muir 1997: 163). This decline is highlighted by contrasting the editorial essays of the subdiscipline's flagship journal *Political Geography*. In the opening editorial of 1982 (when it was called *Political Geography Quarterly*), Taylor stated that international boundaries received less prominence in the discipline than they used to, but still identified them as a fruitful topic of research (Taylor 1982: 6).

However, when Slater took over from Taylor in 2000 he altogether ignored boundaries in his overview of the field (Slater 2000). What explains this apparent volte-face in the fortunes of border studies within geography, from foundational plank to forgotten backwater?

Prescott's 1965 overview of the field is a good text with which to begin an answer to this. It should be observed initially that his call to move beyond debating taxonomies to more empirical studies of particular boundaries and border landscapes has not gone unheeded. The work of Minghi and Rumley is an example of the latter (Rumley and Minghi 1991). The International Boundaries Research Unit (IBRU) connected to Durham University's Geography Department has facilitated extensive comparative research into international boundaries (for example, see Blake 1994), and produces a respected bulletin and monograph series. Yet the marginalisation of these empirical studies within geography is rooted in the very assumptions that led Prescott to promote them. He believed that German and French geopolitical studies of boundaries were unduly influenced by erroneous and subjective theories that only served pernicious and narrow national interests. His response was a dogmatic assertion, after Jones, that theorisation was futile as each boundary case is unique (Prescott 1965: 12).<sup>7</sup> This retreat from theorisation for understandable ethical reasons has inhibited the development of the study of boundaries.

### **Theoretical advances**

Whilst the study of boundaries within geography has developed only slowly since the 1960s, a number of theoretical tools have been imported and developed by geographers that have enabled them to overcome these shortcomings. Whilst political geography in general has embraced these, mainstream boundary studies have tended to stick to Prescott's technical empiricism. However, since Prescott's book there have been six theoretical advances that have affected political geography, the wider adoption of which by boundary scholars could re-invigorate the subject.

Firstly, as geographers have increasingly subjected the roots of their discipline to critical re-examination they have realised that it was not merely German geographers who served unsavoury expansionist powers by their work. The wider discipline was deeply implicated in the imperial project, both in the actual conquest and governance



of colonial lands and in the production of imperial knowledge about colonised peoples which served to underwrite the imperial project (Edney 1997; Hauner 1990: 41; Dodds and Atkinson 2000b: 6-9). Critiques by Marxist (Harvey 1973) and feminist (Rose 1993) geographers have further served to bury the myth that geographers were producing apolitical, objective knowledge. This has two implications for boundary studies. Firstly, it discounts the reservations of Freeman and Prescott against engaging in theory by demonstrating the impossibility of apolitical work. Secondly, it suggests that geographers should critically investigate the role of boundary studies in maintaining and supporting the geopolitical status quo and the rule of certain regimes. The delimitation and demarcation of boundaries was not only an integral part of the imperial age (Blake 1997): tight border regimes are used to buttress oppression by preventing dissatisfied and oppressed people from leaving (North Korea) or entering (Great Britain and the USA). The British Government sends Kyrgyzstani border guards to IBRU to train. International boundaries and their studies are never apolitical, and therefore it is important for critical scholarship to engage with them.

Secondly, great advances have been made in the study of the phenomenon of nationalism (the argument that the political and national unit ought to be coterminous); whilst all of these differ, they generally agree on locating its historical genesis in the modern period. Gellner (1983) stresses the importance of industrial capitalism for the rise of nationalism; Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) unmask the passing off of newly devised state commemorations and symbols as supposedly ancient traditions, and Anderson underlined the importance of the development of the printing press, territorial administrative divisions, and museums and censuses in the constitution of 'imagined communities' of people who had never met each other (Anderson 1983). Breuilly and Brass have argued that nationalism is essentially a political strategy of power (Özkirimli 2000: 104-116). These theories have been used by geographers to explore the discursive portrayal of territory in nationalism. However, a notable omission in the literature is a comprehensive investigation into the role of borders in nationalism.

Thirdly, there have been considerable advances in the study of political economy since Prescott's 1965 book. His reluctance to apply theory to borders was partially a product of his avoidance of questions of political economy. It has become

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<sup>7</sup> For Prescott, taxonomies were the only permissible generalisation.

fashionable in recent years to suggest that 'globalisation' has initiated a process that will lead to the eventual disappearance of the modern territorial state and its borders, a process for which the EU is seen as paradigmatic (Khan 1996; Ohmae 1995). Juxtaposed against this, the strengthening of borders and nation-states in some parts of the world appears to many as paradoxical, even anachronistic. Does this apparent paradox validate Prescott's claims that there can be no overall theory of borders? It has certainly caused considerable difficulty to some students of borders; for example, the political scientist Andreas rejects the 'borderless world' thesis, yet struggles to do anything other than list empirical 'varieties of rebordering' (Andreas 2000). Certainly, many researchers are confused by a similar paradox in Central Asia, describing as somehow contradictory the simultaneous efforts to enter the international economy, and yet also construct exclusive nation-states.

However, since Prescott's time geographers sensitive to historical political economy have been able to explain these apparent antinomies as compelled by the same process of globalisation. Agnew and Corbridge (1995) have demonstrated that the sense of paradox emerges only with a false conception of the primacy of the territorial state as a transhistorical given, ignoring the fact that space has different meanings and significance in different places over time. The globalisation thesis on the decline of the state confuses state adaptations to new circumstances with the erosion of the state (Taylor and Flint 2000: 191). However, there is neither contradiction nor paradox. Central Asian elites are integrating into the global economy by breaking up non-differentiated Soviet economic space into national territorial economies. They are doing this by constructing semi-authoritarian nationalist states predicated on a core ethnic constituency. Once this is established, it is possible to explore border issues in the Ferghana Valley without inhibition.

Fourthly, Prescott's formulation of the study of borders had little to say on the human experience of living in frontier zones. Subjective human experience was something with which geographers were uncomfortable, until the humanistic geography of the 1970s took up Wright's challenge of a generation earlier to explore the subjective experience of the world (Wright 1947).<sup>8</sup> This explicitly rejected the sole validity of scientific epistemologies (Lowenthal 1961) positing the human experience of immersion in the world as a more authentic starting-point for

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<sup>8</sup> Arguably, many still continue to be so!

geographical analysis (Pocock 1981; Seamon and Mugerauer 1985a; Tuan 1974). Trenchant critiques of the politics of the project of the humanistic geographers notwithstanding (Gregory 1981; Peet 1998: 64; Rose 1993),<sup>9</sup> it established and validated the qualitative study of experience of the world. This was continued by radical geographers; for instance the oral histories of the poor in Latin America collected by Janet Townsend *et al* (1995). However, this approach has not been applied by geographers to the study of border areas and border landscapes. This is by no means unique to geography. As Cleary and Butalia have complained, accounts of the partitions of Ireland and India have generally been from the viewpoint of ‘high politics,’ ignoring the human perspectives of those ‘below’ (Butalia 2000: 5-6; Cleary 2002: 10).

Fifthly, post-structural formulations have revolutionised theorisation of the nation-state across the social sciences. In particular, Foucault’s unique combination of a pseudo-history of the subject in modernity with a neo-mystical aesthetics of the self has had a profound impact on the understanding of the self/other dichotomy. Both the writings of Foucault himself and their mediation through writers such as Said (1979), Clifford (1986b) and Campbell (1998) have revolutionised and revitalised 1990s political geography through the vibrant sub-discipline dubbed ‘critical geopolitics.’ This has considered foreign policy not as the positive response of a state to given needs and interests, but as a series of practices that discursively define places over and against each other, creating and policing boundaries of identity that are ideological visions of who belongs in a given space and who does not. Production of this geographical knowledge is thus a spatial practice exercising power over others (Dodds 1994; Ó Tuathail 1996a). In spite of the vibrancy of this sub-field (testified to by the diverse collection of essays in Dodds and Atkinson 2000a), critical geopolitics has virtually ignored international boundaries. For example, in an article providing a summary of the field in 1993, Dodds mentions political boundaries only once as the almost incidental output of the work of the foreign policy professionals which is his more important concern (Dodds 1993: 73). Somewhat ironically, it would appear that critical geopolitics still sees political boundaries as extraneous products of state policy.

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<sup>9</sup> The humanistic geographers themselves accepted these criticisms to some degree (Relph 2000; Tuan 1999: 65-66).

Finally, whilst critical geographers have struggled with these, the twin metaphorical and literal meanings of international boundaries have been embraced effectively by a branch of cultural/literary studies associated with the US/Mexican border known as 'Borders Theory.' Gloria Anzaldua compares her own liminality as a chicana lesbian feminist poet living in borderlands conquered by the US in 1848, to the liminal space of the USA/Mexican border (Anzaldua 1999 (1987)). Nelly Richard uses this position to assert the transnational fragmentation of identity and critique modernist notions of the hierarchical state (Richard 1996). Borders theory is an excellent example of post-structural theorisation placing international boundaries at the heart of an analysis of state discourse. However, despite Soja's endorsement (1996: 122ff), borders theory has had little impact upon geography.

### **Recent developments in the political geography of borders**

There have recently been some indications of a return to the study of boundaries within mainstream political geography. John Agnew stressed the centrality of frontier and boundary regions as crucial settings for the making of national-state distinctions (Agnew 2001b: 13), drawing on Sahlins' interest in "the critical, if too-frequently ignored role of borderlands as both sites and metaphors in the political and cultural constructions of a modern world of nation states" (Sahlins 1998: 31). Sahlins argues that the arbitrary division of the Cerdanya valley between France and Spain by the 1659-60 Peace of the Pyrenees did not lead to a replacement of local identities with national ones. On the contrary, local disputes were escalated to a national level as factions increasingly called upon an unwilling Madrid or Paris for support, so that a consciousness of the nation appeared on the periphery before it did at the centre.

Prescott wrote that "the sensitivity of citizens to the state's boundaries make them a vital subject to politicians, since they can be used to generate national loyalty", but did not develop this important insight (Prescott 1965: 26). Sarah Radcliffe is one of the few political geographers who have attempted to understand the centrality of borders in the formation of national identity. She used the 1995 Peru-Ecuador border war and the long-running frontier disputes of which it was the latest violent manifestation to explore geopolitical visions in Ecuador (Radcliffe 1998). Using a Gramscian analysis of hegemony and state discourse, she examined the meaning of the border for popular senses of nationhood and the interplay between international,

regional and local identities. She argued that articulating, circulating and policing ideas about the border was pivotal to the government's construction of senses of nationhood, disseminated through institutions such as the military and schools. Her paper shows clearly that international borders are not simply the results of inter-state relations, but can also be at the heart of a domestic politics of state nationalism. However, although Radcliffe briefly summarises some counter-hegemonic discourses, the lack of a deeper ethnographic aspect to this paper leaves it silent as to what 'ordinary' Ecuadorians made of state propaganda. Furthermore, her analysis does not convincingly explain why the dispute occurred when it did. Thirdly, the hegemonic power of the Ecuadorian state is taken as a given, but the reader is left wondering whether certain political factions stood to gain or lose from the conflict or how they sought to use it to further their own goals.

The work of Finnish geographer, Anssi Paasi, is the most advanced attempt to date to construct a contemporary political geography of borders which is sensitive to the recent theoretical advances outlined in this chapter (Paasi 1999). He argues that geographers have not paid much attention to the meanings of boundaries in the construction, organisation and reproduction of social life. Such a study, he believes, whilst valuable in explicating many co-existing and overlapping identities, is particularly suited to illuminating national identity. His outstanding book *Territories, Boundaries and Consciousness* (1996) is an eclectic combination of regional and national economic, social and geopolitical history, with an attempt to explore these processes in relation to intimate consciousness of place at the local level. He concludes that the interactions of these different scales produce what Massey described as a 'global sense of place' at the local level (Paasi 1996). He embeds Massey's conception of place in Castells' monumental study of the spatiality of late twentieth century capitalism as a 'space of flows': identities of bounded places being reconstructed with material and symbolic resources that may well be from outside the region (Castells 1997; Paasi 1996:5). Although his stated aim is to combine two geographical perspectives which have typically been pursued separately in geographical research, "a structurally based analysis of the construction of boundaries as part of the nation-building process, and an interpretative analysis of local, personal experience of this process" (Paasi 1996: xv11), his work is embedded in a political economy of the changing fortunes of one section of the Russo-Finnish Karelian



border area, and acts as a narrow window on the history of industrialisation in the region.

Paasi's work combines a rare sensitivity to social theory without retreating into an apolitical obscurantism that overlooks material and economic realities of border struggles. He demonstrates how the study of an international boundary can simultaneously be the study of nationalism and state-building itself. His success is partially due to his willingness to use multiple methods of study at multiple scales. As he explains, "The aim is to combine two geographical perspectives which have typically been pursued separately in geographical research - a structurally based analysis of the construction of boundaries as part of the nation-building process, and an interpretative analysis of local, personal experience of this process." (Paasi 1996: xvii).

It is this endeavour to illuminate local experience of the border that sets his work apart as a boundary study, at least within any discipline that takes political factors seriously. He does this by drawing on the work of humanistic geographers. However, as was typical for the humanistic geographers, he is comfortable analysing written autobiographies, yet his work falls down when it comes to interacting with the living. He approvingly cites Smith's declaration that it is necessary for geographers to learn 'participant-observation.' Yet Paasi himself uses flawed and dubious 'interviews', rigidly structured in such a way as to produce answers along the spatial scales by which he structured his analysis (Ó Tuathail 1998: 254ff). To this he adds the evidence of a single day trip with pensioners returning to their childhood homes across the border into Russian Karelia. This is far from the ethnographic method developed by anthropologists, and Ó Tuathail's endorsement of (ibid.) illustrates only how poor political geographers generally are at scrutinising human meaning and experience from non-textual sources.<sup>10</sup> To complete this final piece of the borders jigsaw, I turn to that discipline that has prized the study of group senses of meaning more highly than any other: anthropology.

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<sup>10</sup> Herbert (2000) accuses geographers in general of all but ignoring ethnography, although his criticisms make more sense with reference to certain traditions of political geographers rather than to development geographers in general. See page 176 for a fuller discussion of this.

## **Political anthropology of borders**

Hastings Donnan and Andrew Wilson have pioneered the anthropological study of international borders. Like other students of nationalism, they are eager to explore the imprecise fit between nation and state (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 11). They consider the existing literature insufficient, due partially to the polarisations I have indicated above. They argue that, on the one hand, many social scientists following Weber take the state as a given entity with borders as a concomitant logical extension. This ignores internal inconsistencies and contradictions (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 154). On the other hand, definitions of the political which privilege notions of gender, sexuality, ethnicity or class within discussions of discourse and representation risk underestimating or ignoring the role that the state continues to play in the everyday lives of its own and other citizens (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 1). They believe that a study of the state must involve both an examination of the human experience, as well as discursive representational practice, as "nations and states, and their institutions, are composed of people who cannot and should not be reduced to the images which are constructed by the state, the media or of any other groups who wish to represent them" (Wilson and Donnan 1998: 4). They suggest that ethnography as practised by anthropologists can overcome this dichotomy, arguing that social action and concepts of power are best studied at frontiers as "power is demonstrated, projected and contested in the social, economic and political practices of quotidian life at international borders" (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 155).

Whilst the study of borders as a method for comprehending processes of nation and state formation developed by Donnan and Wilson has many merits, in their eagerness to balance the study of power as representational practice with everyday understandings and experiences of the projection of that state power at borders, they arguably go to the other extreme and fail to substantially handle elite discourse or relate it closely towards local understandings. Furthermore, their analysis of the relationship between centre and locality is hazy, and could be enhanced by more explicit analysis of the spatial scale that geographers such as Paasi use.

This dissertation attempts to draw on all these theoretical perspectives by studying the 1999-2000 Ferghana Valley Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border question through an integrated analysis of representational practices and phenomenological-humanistic ethnography.

### PART III: THE UZBEKISTAN-KYRGYZSTAN BORDER CRISIS

Having established the theoretical parameters of this research, this section will outline the historical background to the existence of present-day Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and the everyday human experience of their borders. It begins with the Qo'qon Khanate as the immediate predecessor to Russian and then Soviet rule in the Ferghana Valley, although for a helpful introduction to the political geography of the Valley in the millenium up until then, see Bregel's historical maps (Bregel 2000).

#### The Ferghana Valley up until Soviet rule

Following the collapse of the last remnant of Timurid rule in Central Asia and Sultan Babur's move to India in the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the Ferghana Valley fell under the rule of the Bukharan emirate. This continued until 1709 when Shahrukh, a chieftain of the Uzbek Ming tribe, established himself as *bey* over a state centred on Qo'qon that he began carving out of the Emirate of Bukhara (Soucek 2000). It was this state (known to history as the Khanate of Qo'qon) that was to expand to encompass the Ferghana Valley and much of present Kyrgyzstan and beyond until the Tsarist conquest (see Figure 1-2).



Figure 1-2: The territorial division of Central Asia ca.1825 (Soucek 2000: 176)

Kenensariiev divides the history of the Qo'qon state into three periods (Kenensariiev 1999: 15). 1709-1800 saw the establishment and consolidation of the state. In the period 1810-1840 the state blossomed, and Alim (r.1800-1810) assumed the title 'khan.' Finally, 1840-1876 was a time of recurring economic and political crises, marked by frequent uprisings and bitter power struggles that fatally weakened the state. In 1876 the Khanate of Qo'qon was abolished and incorporated into the advancing Russian empire and most of its territory annexed to the province of Turkestan, the Ferghana Valley being incorporated into the oblast<sup>11</sup> of Ferghana (see Figure 1-3). Although Bukhara and Khiva maintained some nominal independence as vassal Protectorates of the Russian empire, the whole region was brought within the Russian orbit of power.



Figure 1-3: The administrative -territorial division of Central Asia under Tsarist Russia (Soucek 2000: 194)

The social constitution of the Qo'qon Khanate has become a highly politicised matter for contemporary Central Asian historians. Whilst acknowledging the poly-ethnic nature of the Qo'qon Khanate, Uzbek historians such as Sodiqov *et al* (2000) tend to describe the three kingdoms occupying the territory of present-day Uzbekistan as 'the Uzbek Khanates.' The Kyrgyz historian Kenensariiev disputes this tendency

<sup>11</sup> See language notes, Appendix 1.

(1997: 3-5), emphasising both the political significance of the Kyrgyz and Kipchak tribes along with the Sarts, and the absence of the ethnonym ‘Uzbek’ in important contemporary accounts of the period such as Mulla Niyaz’s *Tarix-i Shaxri* (Kenensariiev 1999: 32-33).<sup>12</sup> He also refers to the enormously complicated and at times contradictory web of ethnic, place-based and socio-economic categorisations of people found in Niyaz’s work. This type of debate highlights Jabborov’s unease at the tendency of some historians in the era of national independence to politicise the ethnic history of Central Asia by exaggerating the role of their own group at the expense of others (Jabborov 1994: 52-53).

What is clear from the historical record is that the Khanate of Qo’qon was not a modern nation-state, nor did its borders even closely coincide with the present international boundaries. The incessant warfare with its neighbours resulted in a constantly-shifting border. The nearest that Qo’qon reached to an established and defended frontier was the network of fortresses established in the north of the country, the ‘????? ??????’ shown in Figure 1-4.

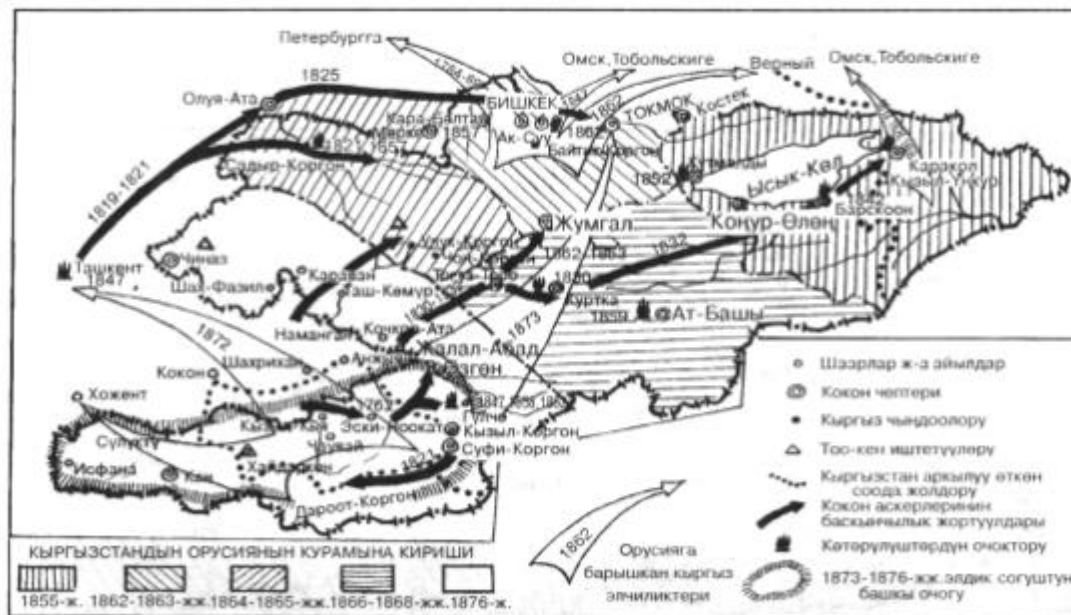


Figure 1-4: The last years of the Qo’qon Khanate as it was overwhelmed by Russian forces (Ömürbekov T.H and Chorotegin 1998: 194).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Kenensariiev’s respected work highlights the complicated social structure of the Ferghana Valley under the Qo’qon Khanate, although his division of the terminology applied to people groups into ethnic, place-based and socio-economic categories perhaps oversimplifies the issue.

<sup>13</sup> Ömürbekov’s map is a classic piece of retroactive nationalism, claiming a pre-national polity as the political and ethnic heritage of one modern nation. Mapping the Qo’qon Khanate (here called ‘Kyrgyzstan’) on to the present map of Kyrgyzstan conflates the two entities, a move supported by

The incorporation of Central Asia into the Russian crown trumped British attempts to gain influence in the region. Events such as the Russo-British clash at the Afghan town of Penjdeh in 1885 pushed Russia to delimit its international borders with Britain and China in order to prevent such a border incident escalating into a full-scale war (Morris 1975). The Kashgar Protocol of 1882 and the Jangī-Margelan Protocol of 1884 with China began the process of a formal border division,<sup>14</sup> and a number of treaties including the Durand Agreement of 1893 and the Pamir Treaty of 1895 delimited the extent of Afghanistan as a buffer zone between Britain and Russia.

The imperial boundary-maker, Sir Thomas Holdich, believed that these policies little affected the Kirghiz of the High Pamir, who “just wanders, adjusting himself to conditions of weather, and his life appears to be the ideal of simple contented ease... caring nothing for the boundaries which have been drawn about his hills” (Holdich 1916: 5-6). The extent to which Holdich’s somewhat romanticised paternalism was an accurate appreciation of Kyrgyz responses to border demarcation is unclear, but Shahrani has shown how this division was to have momentous consequences on Afghanistan’s Kyrgyz in the following century when China and the USSR closed that border to nomadic transhumance (Shahrani 1979). Whilst Tsarist rule was largely to pattern the map of international boundaries that would persist as the external borders of the USSR and then the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) in Central Asia, the Soviet period was radically to redraw the internal boundaries of Central Asia that would form international ones in 1991.

### **The Ferghana Valley in the Soviet period**

The period between the collapse of effective Tsarist power in 1916 and the establishment of Bolshevik control by the mid 1920s was turbulent, with many rival factions competing for power: some of them backed by foreign agents and ideologues.<sup>15</sup> Ferghana was a key site of this drama, its densely populated valley bordered by mountainous terrain becoming a redoubt of the ‘basmachi’ anti-Soviet

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labelling fighting with Russia as ‘The Nineteenth Century Kyrgyz National-Independence Movement.’ The map appears in an attractive textbook for 8th year schoolchildren, replete with the state flag, symbol, and national anthem printed inside front and back covers.

<sup>14</sup> S. Almanov, ‘Chek arası taktin chır-chatagı jok’, *Kirgiz Tuusu* 75, 18/05/1999.

<sup>15</sup> See Pipes (1997 (1954)) for an account of the politics of this complicated period.

guerrillas throughout the period. During the winter of 1917-1918 a predominantly Muslim government was established in Qo'qon to rival the largely Russian entity in Tashkent. This authority was ineffectual and short-lived, being crushed by a force from Tashkent.

In 1918 the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (TASSR) was proclaimed to replace the Governate-General of Turkestan, and in 1920 the Kyrgyz (i.e. Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet Socialist was founded, largely comprising present-day Kazakhstan. These new entities were augmented by the transformation of the protectorates of Khorezm (Khiva) and Bukhara into nominally independent 'people's republics.' This complicated political geography is shown in Figure 1-5.



Figure 1-5: The territorial-administrative division of Central Asia in 1922 (Pipes 1997 (1954): 157)

With the consolidation of Bolshevik power by 1924, Moscow instituted a wholesale redrawing of the political map of Central Asia, known as the 'national delimitation.' This attempted to reorganise the region along the lines of 'nations', defined by Stalin

as “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Stalin 1994: 20). The autonomous people’s republics were abolished as the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) were formed, along with the Tajik Autonomous Region of the Uzbek SSR that itself achieved full union status in 1929. Present-day Kyrgyzstan was incorporated into the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic as the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, attaining full union status in 1936 as the Kyrgyz SSR. The Kyrgyz Autonomous SSR was also incorporated as the Kazakh SSR in 1936. Although Uzbekistan granted ‘special administrative divisions’ to minorities such as Kipchaks and Kurama in its part of the Ferghana Valley, these were abolished as the groups were de-registered from the 1959 census, on the claim that they had been fully assimilated (Koichiev 2001a: 14-15). The resultant political geography of Central Asia until the dissolution of the USSR is shown in map C, p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**

Of course, new inter-republican borders were a crucial element in the fashioning of these states: Stalin argued that “the delimitation of frontiers in Turkestan is primarily the reunion of the scattered parts of these countries into independent states” (quoted in Mandel 1944: 113). Between 1924 and 1927 all-party commissions were established to settle numerous ethno-territorial claims for revision of the proposed boundaries, with submissions taken from academics, local leaders, economic planners, peasants and others. In the densely populated and farmed Ferghana Valley the new borders led to particularly intense disputes over the inclusion into one polity or another, ranging from individual villages to cities such as Osh.

The majority of academics in European and North American circles view this process as the artificial creation of nations and states in a purposive top-down ‘divide and rule’ policy. For example, Allworth believes that “the authorities arbitrarily selected dead or dying medieval designations and conferred them on the people of the region by political decree” (Allworth 1990: 206). Wilson’s view (2001) that “the Soviet Union drew Central Asia’s borders specifically to minimize the chances of regional unification and rebellion against the Soviet state” is a typical statement of this position. This stance easily becomes contradictory; for example, Olcott wrote that the division of the Valley was “*arbitrary*” yet that “boundaries were *deliberately* drawn to spread ethnic population concentrations among two or more administrative units” (Olcott 1994b: 224, 212, emphasis added). Roy even attributed a measure of



sadism to ‘the Soviets’, who he supposes “amused themselves by making things more complicated” (Roy 2000: 68). Nonetheless, that the products of territorial delimitation were arbitrary did not mean that they lacked efficacy: far from it, as Roy showed using Anderson’s thesis on ‘imagined communities’, nationalism in Central Asia solidified as the imposed colonial structures were re-appropriated by local elites (Roy 2000).

Whilst the ‘divide and rule’ thesis is clearly not entirely invalid, one suspects that in many cases it is more the outcome of political and theoretical disposition than empirical historical research. What little primary work there has been on the delimitation reveals an intensity of resistance to decisions and proposals made by the commission from both political leaders and ordinary citizens that indicates people were far from indifferent to the decision as to which republic their land was allocated to. This would suggest that the account of the formation of national states in Turkistan cannot merely be explained as a fabrication that only later took on resonance. Two different dissenting positions can be identified. Firstly, Akiner regards as exaggeration the view that the ethnic divisions upon which administrative units were built did not exist prior to 1924, arguing only that these ‘proto-nations’ lacked political significance before then (Akiner 1996: 335; but especially Akiner 1997b). More explicitly, she suggests that far from physically destroying tribal/regional groupings, the new Soviet political geography preserved them almost intact whilst modernising them (Akiner 1998: 9-10). This position mirrors Smith’s arguments for the ‘ethnic origin of nations’ (Smith 1991: especially chapter 2). Likewise, Koichiev (forthcoming) sees national delimitation not as a fabrication, but as the attempt to build modern states on pre-existing categories. However, he argues that this process was flawed by poor census data; political sensitivities within the border demarcation committee; a need to balance ethnic factors with considerations of the economic and political viability of the new states; and the premature suspension of the commission’s activities with many disputes left outstanding.<sup>16</sup>

Koichiev also highlights apparently irrational decisions about which groups should form the basis of territorial divisions. In 1920 Lenin recommended the drawing of an ethnographic map of Turkestan separated into Uzbekiya, Kyrgyziya (meaning present-day Kazakhs) and Turkmeniya. Koichiev considers to be unknown the reason

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<sup>16</sup> This would appear to be more a primordialist rendering of the continuity of nations, leaving less space for political manipulation and mobilisation of identities than Akiner and Smith do.

that Lenin and his advisers failed to mention other groups such as Kara-Kyrgyz (present-day Kyrgyz), Turks and Tajiks (Koichiev forthcoming). This bewilderment highlights the fact that national delimitation is still poorly understood. For example, in an interview provocatively headlined “was sex the reason why Turkestan ended up as ‘Uzbekistan’?” a niece of the Kara-Kyrgyz republic’s first leader, Abdikadir Orozbekov, claimed that Stalin’s mother had been raped by an Azerbaijani Turk, and in revenge Stalin vetoed plans for Uzbekistan to maintain the Tsarist designation ‘Turkistan.’<sup>17</sup> It may never be possible to confirm or deny such rumours, but the politics behind national delimitation will remain dimly understood until further archival research (like that of Karasar 2002) is undertaken.<sup>18</sup>

The second challenge to the ‘creation and imposition’ consensus outlined above is presented by Hirsch, arising from her archival study of the actual process of delimitation between 1924-7. Hirsch investigated examples of delimitation disputes that the commission handled, based on submissions and deliberations regarding individual cases along the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border. She rejected both the primordial idea that nationalities were innate, but also the suggestion that artificial borders and nationalities were simply imposed from above. Rather, nationalities evolved over time as a combination of expert policies and local initiatives, and here the border disputes handled through the commission were vital. The process of making submissions to the commission taught people to participate in a new political sphere, and also demonstrated that, by effecting access to land, the delimitation of the union had practical implications for their lives. Local leaders learnt to articulate linguistic, economic and ethnic differences as ‘national’: thus, “border disputes were a continuation of inter-clan and inter-ethnic hostilities resumed against a new political backdrop” (Hirsch 1998: 135). Far from ‘the Soviet empire’ ‘creating’ nations and imposing borders, officials along with experts, social scientists, local elites, workers, peasants and others helped make the Soviet nations *and* the Soviet empire, and, by so doing, became integrated into the union’s colonial-type framework through their national identities (Hirsch 1998: 327).

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<sup>17</sup> ‘Kırgızdın 1-prezidenti Abdikadir Orozbekovdun Karındashı Nurinsa eje menen maek’ *Osh Tayms* 3 (35), undated, p.2-6. The sex reference was a linking headline on the front page. This edition was undated, but was on sale in Bishkek in January 2000.

<sup>18</sup> A conclusion reached in a discussion of this very issue on the Cenasia discussion list during the academic year 1995-96.

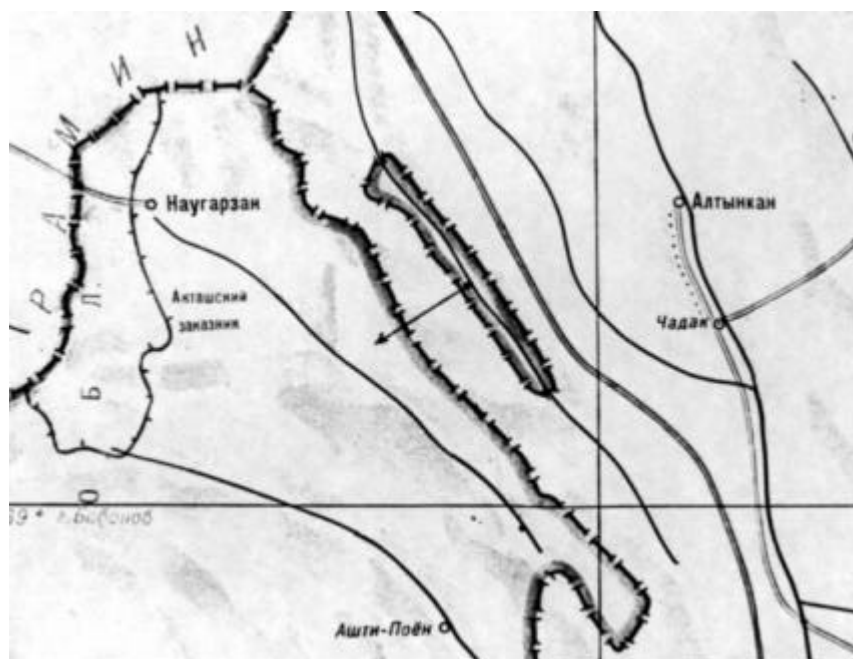
The borders established by 1939 were largely to persist until the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. However, the administrations were not indifferent to territorial questions, minor alterations being initiated at various points; for example, when a joint Uzbek-Kyrgyz SSR border demarcation commission was established in 1955 to resolve outstanding inter-republican disputes (although this commission never completed its work).<sup>19</sup> According to Brendan Whyte's study of enclaves in the Ferghana Valley based on Soviet atlases, Vorukh, Sarvaksoi (Figure 1-6), Qalacha, and Sokh (Figure 4-2, p.184) were enclaved at this time by the transfer of territory between from the Tadjik and Uzbek to the Kyrgyz SSR. However, the accuracy of Whyte's chronology is yet to be confirmed, as he himself acknowledged that the USSR allowed falsified maps to circulate in the West, and stated that "a proper history of the formation of the enclaves will require specialist research in Russian archives" (Whyte undated).<sup>20</sup> A Kyrgyz SSR decree of 1989 created a border delimitation and demarcation committee which established that Tajikistan's Leninabad oblast was using 636 hectares of land in Leylek (in the far west of what is now Batken province), and the people of Leylek in return were utilising 164 hectares of Tajikistani land (Anonymous 2000).

Apart from these legal-territorial changes, the importance of the boundaries was limited and transgressed by dynamic borderland land-use processes and inter-republican economic co-operation and planning. This was unhindered by obtrusive border controls, and Ferghana Valley cities lacked the passport-propiska system for restricting demographic mobility that existed in other Soviet cities (Smith 1989). Thus the Uzbek SSR's Ferghana Valley cotton crop was irrigated by reservoirs constructed largely in upland Kyrgyz SSR territory, and raw cotton was taken for processing to factories in Osh as well as in the Uzbek SSR. Road and rail links, often inherited in inchoate form from Tsarist Russia, were planned with wanton disregard for republican boundaries. As Figure 1-7 shows, Kyrgyzstan's main rail artery between Osh (via Jalaľ-Abad and thence Andijan) and Bishkek wound through the Uzbek, then Tajik, then Uzbek again and finally Kazakh SSRs. Likewise, the rail link from Tajikistan's second city of Hujand (Khudzhand) to the capital Dushanbe passed through the Uzbek, Turkmen and back again through the Uzbek SSRs, whilst

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Azim Karashev, member of bilateral Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border demarcation committee, Osh, 12/06/2000.

Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent's link with its important Ferghana Valley cities passed through the Tajik SSR. Road links in the Valley likewise criss-crossed republican boundaries.



**Figure 1-6: the Sarvaksoi & Sarvaki-Bolo enclave. According to Whyte (undated), this 14km long by 600m wide stretch of Tajikistani territory in Uzbekistan, consisting of two small hamlets in a bare valley, was enclaved by the 5km westward retreat of the Tajikistani boundary in 1954-55.**

Daily works buses ferried workers from the Kyrgyz SSR to factories in the Uzbek SSR, and the Uzbek SSR in turn rented significant tracts of land in the Kyrgyz SSR for industrial and agricultural use. These were intended to be fixed-term contracts, but rents were frequently left uncollected and land unreturned, so that settlement occurred and persisted on these plots over more than one generation. Ethnic minorities crossed the republican borders relatively freely for higher education in their own mother-tongues, meaning that the Ferghana Valley SSRs had no need to develop further education institutions for their minorities. These factors combined to make the republican boundaries practically invisible in everyday life; and explain why border closures and separate economic and social planning on independence would so rupture life in the Valley.

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<sup>20</sup> Whyte's piece was a discarded chapter from his dissertation published as a research paper (Whyte 2002), that sought to list all the enclaves on earth.



Figure 1-7: Rail links to capital cities out of the Ferghana Valley (Clem 1997: 166)

(Capital cities are indicated by stars, and railways by tracked lines)

The disregard for these borders revealed in economic, transport and education policy and in the carelessness with which cross-border land exchanges were policed, is mirrored by a similar lack of concern with the geography and history of Soviet internal borders by scholars; for example, Chandler ignores them entirely in her study of the USSR's external borders, a rare topic itself (Chandler 1998: 109). Although the durability of Soviet control in Central Asia was an issue of concern to non-Soviet scholars in the 1980s (for example, Bennigsen and Broxup 1983), the future of Soviet Central Asia's internal borders roused little excitement, with the notable exception of Guy Imart. As Imart believed that the demarcation of Central Asian boundaries was unilaterally imposed from above by state apparatuses with no link whatsoever to the communities involved (Imart 1987: 9), he predicted that the "Soviet and Chinese condominium over Inner Asia" would collapse with the reassertion of latent Inner Asian nationalism. He rejected Pipes' view that the new Inner Asia would follow Africa in preserving its artificial colonial boundaries; rather, he believed that authentic new states based on the three nations of Inner Asia (Turkestan, Mongolia and Tibet) would "settle down' in their proper place and limits" (Imart 1987: 64-67, see Figure 1-8 below).



**Figure 1-8: Guy Imart's tentative prediction of the borders of the authentic Inner Asian nations that would arise in the 21st century with the collapse of the Chinese and Russian empires (Imart 1987: 99)**

### **Central Asian boundaries at independence**

The collapse of the USSR was triggered neither by the “Muslim nationalism” that Bennigsen predicted (1986: 132), nor by the “Inner Asian nationalism” that Imart prophesied would lead to a fundamental redrawing of boundaries (1987: 53). Nevertheless, independence presented a complicated and uncertain boundary geography: heir of Soviet-era patterns of land-use that wantonly transgressed the administrative boundaries of the Ferghana Valley republics. Those boundaries themselves had never been fully demarcated, and different maps showed different borders. Kyrgyzstan shared borders of 1300km with Uzbekistan and 990km with Tajikistan, and hosted the world's two largest enclaves of Uzbekistan's Sokh at 238km<sup>2</sup> and Tajikistan's Vorukh at 97km<sup>2</sup> (Whyte undated).<sup>21</sup> Oblasts centred on the

<sup>21</sup> See Whyte (2002: 5) for a list of not only all the Central Asian enclaves, but all the enclaves on earth.

Ferghana Valley contained one quarter of Uzbekistan's population, one third of Tajikistan's, and half of Kyrgyzstan's (Rubin and Lubin 1999: 35).

At independence in 1991 significant areas of the borderlands were being utilised by citizens of neighbouring states. This occurred both through informal illegal squatting and formal fixed-term inter-state territorial leases. For example, in 1991 Tajikistan's 'Ittifoq' sovkhos was illegally using 1040 hectares of land in Batken region; the Batkenites in turn were exploiting 308 hectares of Tajikistani land. Even though 30,000 hectares of Kyrgyzstani land in the Alay region was due to have been returned by Tajikistan's Kurab region in 1992, the land is still being utilised.<sup>22</sup> Uzbekistan's Marhamat region was utilising 6885 hectares of land from Osh's Aravon region. Uzbekistan has paid nothing for its oil and gas plants in Kyrgyzstan's Kadamjoy region, and in 1994 took the decision to build a carbide production plant in Kyrgyzstan's territory, allegedly without seeking Kyrgyzstani permission. In January 1982 the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan concluded an agreement to construct a reservoir at Sox flooding Kyrgyzstani land, for the use of Uzbekistan. The agreement stipulated that residents of Batken's flooded Kara-Tokoy village would be properly compensated and relocated; this project and agreement have not been fully implemented (Anonymous 2000).

The effects of Soviet era border-planning were not felt in the years immediately following independence, apart from a brief crisis in 1993 when President Karimov closed Uzbekistan's border with Kyrgyzstan to prevent Russian roubles flooding the Valley, in response to Kyrgyzstan's exit from the rouble zone as it introduced its own currency (Olcott 1994a: 39-41). Border and customs posts were established, but control checks were minimal or non-existent and daily cross-border life in the Valley continued almost uninterrupted. Social and familial cross-border links were very strong. Weddings continued to bridge the republican border, great convoys of cars and buses transporting dowries and guests. Border-area shrines (such as that located only metres from the boundary in Uzbekistan's border town of Rishton, Solomon's Mount in the heart O'sh<sup>23</sup> city, and the Sahoba shrine outside the Kyrgyzstani town of Eski-Nookat) continued to precipitate significant flows of pilgrims at set seasons. Soviet-era bus routes persisted, and the economic crisis pushed many professionally

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<sup>22</sup> As of spring 2000.

<sup>23</sup> See entry 'Toponyms' in Appendix 1 for an explanation of why dual spellings of the same place are used in this dissertation.

skilled people to utilise them in cross-border trade. In the O'sh city region Uzbek schools often celebrated the 'last bell' at the end of the school year by bussing their children out to the popular and smart Uzbekistani pleasure park at Xonabad.<sup>24</sup> The Uzbekistani border village of Do'stlik/Dostuk<sup>25</sup> continued to be a popular venue for parties and celebrations for Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks.

However, the two republics slowly 'drifted apart' as they became increasingly differentiated in tangible ways; for example, the relative simplicity of travelling across borders for mother-tongue higher education evaporated. Ferghana State University, a favourite destination for Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks in the Soviet period, preserved a limited number of spaces for Kyrgyzstanis only until the mid-1990s. Politically, the administration of Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov was marked by an authoritarianism that differentiated it from the relatively freer regime in Kyrgyzstan. Economically, Uzbekistan maintained Soviet-style production and procurement of cotton and wheat, whilst the application of more neo-liberal economics in Kyrgyzstan led to the breaking-up of collectives and a greater diversification into cash crops such as tobacco. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan also introduced separate currencies.

As well as these macro-scale political and economic changes, more symbolic factors highlighted the divergence of the two states. Uzbekistan moved to a one-hour difference daylight-saving time scheme. A switch from the Soviet telephone network to independent technologies meant that calls across the border became international using international codes; whilst a call from O'sh to Ferghana cost the same as a call to Bishkek in 1997, by 1999 it cost almost ten times the price. The switch to a Latin alphabet in Uzbekistan in 1995 meant that highway signs and roadside slogans were printed in different scripts. Uzbekistan maintained its stretch of the Osh-Andijan border in a better state of repair than Kyrgyzstan did, a difference that could be felt when driving over the border. Whilst Uzbekistan diligently exterminated traces of Marxism-Leninism by attempting to expunge its territory of statues and slogans celebrating the Bolshevik revolution, in Kyrgyzstan statues of Lenin and Marx and slogans declaring 'glory to labour!' continued to adorn the built environment alongside new mantras of independence.

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<sup>24</sup> A yearly ritual for the Osh school that I accompanied for this event in 1997, but which was abandoned in 1999 due to the border closures.

<sup>25</sup> See appendix 1 for notes on the spelling of toponyms in this dissertation.



Contrasting this mismatch between symbolic and substantial change, one wry Osh Uzbek put it to me that “In Kyrgyzstan they have kept the statues of Lenin, but departed from Lenin’s way; in Uzbekistan they have got rid of the statues of Lenin, but all the same they have continued to follow down his way!”

After independence in 1991 the people of the Ferghana Valley experienced a gradual but unmistakable sense of divergence between states that had previously been part of one country. The gradual differentiation of border landscapes at the local scale reflected diverging political and economic processes at the state scale. Whilst independent nation-states officially arrived with declarations of independence, the adoptions of new constitutions, and the formal abolition of the USSR, the conscious experience of living in them crept upon the inhabitants of the Valley more slowly. In fact, a fuller consciousness of nationality and independence did not dawn on many inhabitants of Southern Kyrgyzstan until the events of 1999-2000.

### **The Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border issue 1999-2000<sup>26</sup>**

On February 13th 1999 Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov, confirmed that the major Osh-Andijon cross-border bus service, along with many other routes in the Ferghana Valley, had been suspended. He explained the moves by that ‘Kyrgyzstan is a poor country, and it is not my job to look after the people. Every day five thousand people come from O’sh to Andijon - if each of them buys a loaf of bread, there will not be enough left for my people.’<sup>27</sup> The suspension, that actually began in January, concluded a process that commenced with a reduction in services the previous summer.<sup>28</sup> It was ostensibly designed to protect the more state-run economy of Uzbekistan where it abutted regimes such as the one ruling Kyrgyzstan that had adopted more neo-liberal economic policies. At the same time, Uzbekistan had embarked upon other policies designed to secure greater control of its border.

Closure of the border was accelerated three days later when a carefully-orchestrated series of bomb blasts rocked the Uzbekistani capital Tashkent, killing 16 and plunging the state into crisis. The authorities blamed ‘religious extremists’ and ‘terrorists’

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<sup>26</sup> For a fuller account of the events of 1999 see my series of articles "The Borders of Eternal Friendship: Kyrgyz-Uzbek Relations in 1999" *Eurasianet Insight* December 1999 (New York: OSI). See page 271 for the URLs of all electronic media cited in this dissertation.

<sup>27</sup> News broadcast, Tashkent TV1, 13/02/1999. I watched it at the time and wrote the quotation down the following week, so cannot confirm that these were the exact words used.

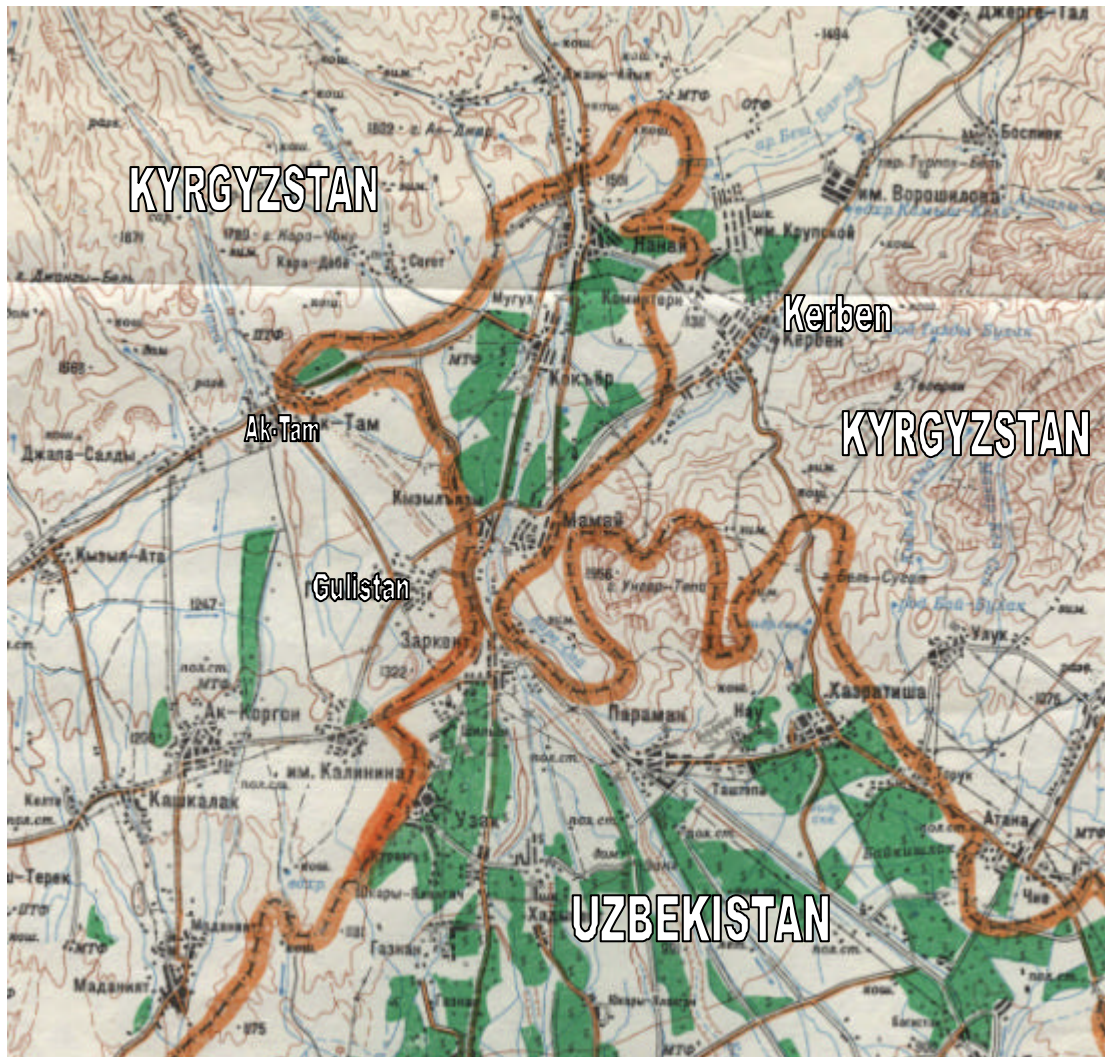
<sup>28</sup> ‘O’sh-Andijon chegarasi passajir transporti uchun yopiq nega?’, *Mezon* 13-20/02/1999: 1.

backed by outside powers, a reference to Islamists whose intellectual inspiration or practical support was drawn from movements and governments in neighbouring states and the wider Islamic world. Their supposed heartland was the socially and religiously conservative Ferghana Valley. Uzbekistan immediately sealed its border, and after a partial reopening later in the week, security was dramatically tightened up. Many more soldiers, border guards and customs officers were drafted to the state borders, and special units were deployed to sensitive border areas. New control posts were built and existing facilities upgraded, and in many places crossings were closed, roads dug up, and bridges demolished. In some areas (for example, around Vodil) inspection posts were built on very short stretches of undeveloped Uzbekistani territory that dissected roads running between Kyrgyzstani towns. A concomitant 'securitization' (to borrow -and misuse- a term from the financial industry) of internal oblast borders and a reorganised policing and control of movement and transport within the country matched these moves. This formed part of a wholesale attempt by the authoritarian regime of Islam Karimov to round up, root out and pre-empt anyone who could be defined as an active, latent or possible opponent.

The effects of these unilateral measures were keenly felt by Kyrgyzstanis. Daily life for many citizens was hampered by the interruption in bus services. Conditions were especially difficult for those living in remote areas of Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces, where border closures to Kyrgyzstani traffic forced often significant detours (Figure 1-9). Because many major roads criss-cross international boundaries, travel times from Osh to outlying mountainous regions such as Leylek and Batken increased up to threefold. Uzbekistan's tighter border regime impacted national as well as local transport systems in Kyrgyzstan. The country's major rail artery, the Bishkek to Jalal-Abad rail link, ground to a halt, rendered uneconomical by Uzbekistan's decision to forbid Kyrgyzstani trains halting en route. Traffic using sections of the major O'sh-Uzbekistan highway that passed through Uzbekistan was frequently subject to severe restrictions and delays. The economic effects were felt in the form of higher food prices, as longer journey times and corruption on the part of the increased number of officials ate into the profits of the small traders who depended on access to local markets.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 'Bazarlarga-Tashkenttin taasiri', *Zaman Kirgizstan* 2/03/1999: 1,5.



Scale: 1:200,000

**Figure 1-9 : Map showing the contorted border where the northernmost part of Uzbekistan's Namangan oblast intersects with Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad oblast (Goskartografiya 1999). With Uzbekistan's closure of the border in 1999, the previously simple journey from Gulistan to Kerben via Uzbekistan necessitated a detour up via Ak-Tam and travel by a treacherous dirt track recently cut through the foothills of the mountains.**

In spite of the employment of this range of technologies and techniques of control, the 'border regime' was far from uniform or predictable. Ever-changing regulations seemed to apply to pedestrians, buses, trucks and private cars over time and between crossing points. Different crossings earned reputations as being easier or harder to pass. The lack of a clear policy statement from Tashkent compounded the uncertainty, ensuring the proliferation of rumours about the introduction of visa regimes, tariffs on traffic, and even complete closures of the border. Many people in southern Kyrgyzstan, particularly the Uzbek and Tajik minorities, had family in

Uzbekistan, and the border closures led to major disruptions of social networks. The independent newspaper, *Vecherniy Bishkek*, carried a report of a young Kyrgyzstani Uzbek schoolteacher strip-searched three times as he crossed an Uzbekistani border post in transit between two sections of Osh oblast’s Aravan region that were spliced by Uzbekistani territory around the town of Marhamat, borders that were previously open for through traffic (Figure 1-10). The teacher, 23-year old Ozodbek Maidinov, told Kyrgyzstani authorities that Uzbekistani guards were boking for tattoos that would identify him as a religious extremist.



**Figure 1-10: The two parts of Kyrgyzstan’s Aravan region (1) were entirely dissected by Uzbekistan’s Ferghana oblast around the town of Marhamat (2). This presented no impediments to movement between the two halves until 1999 (Oruzbaeva 1987: 190).**

The accompanying headline montage depicted barbed web superimposed over a map of southern Kyrgyzstan under the headline, “Iron Curtain?” Uzbek and Kyrgyz traders crossing the border wearing nothing but underwear and national headgear suggested not only humiliation at the hands of Uzbekistani officials, but an impious and un-Central Asian indifference to Islamic scruples about male attire in public space (Figure 1-11).



**Figure 1-11: ‘Iron Curtain?’ Front-page leader in Kyrgyzstani (Russian language) press making charges of degrading Uzbekistani inspections policy at border posts (‘Jelezniy zanaves?’), *Vecherniy Bishkek* 205 (7361) 22/10/1999: 1).**

Initially, the government of Kyrgyzstan's president, Askar Akaev, barely reacted to these events. There was neither money nor political will to either copy or respond to the kind of measures that Uzbekistan was implementing. The political opposition within Kyrgyzstan reacted furiously both to Islam Karimov's actions and Askar Akaev's perceived inaction. Parliamentary deputy, Dooronbek Sadirbaev, depicted the events as a military invasion of Kyrgyzstan, alleging that Uzbekistani forces were advancing on border posts and seizing huge swathes of Kyrgyzstani territory.<sup>30</sup> Sadirbaev interpreted the border issue as indicative of Uzbekistan's arrogant attitude to Kyrgyzstan and Akaev's failure to stand up to Karimov. He advocated strong action to reclaim lost territory, and suggested that Kyrgyzstan start charging

<sup>30</sup> ‘Tübüng büyünbü, tübölük dostuk?’, *Asaba* 12 (9687) 19-25/03/1999: 6-7. In actual fact, I believe he was referring to land rented, farmed and settled by the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic during the Soviet period and never returned. These lands had been de facto under the control of Uzbekistan for many years.

Uzbekistan for the water in retaliation for Uzbekistan's intermittent halting of gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan due to unpaid bills.

In August 1999 an already tense situation was plunged into a crisis as the so-called Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a group of dissident Islamist guerrillas headed by Ferghana Valley exiles linked to militant Islamist groups in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, invaded Kyrgyzstan's southern regions of Batken and Chong-Alay from Tajikistan (see map B., p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**). Their intent was apparently the establishment of an Islamic state in the Ferghana Valley. The attackers poured through a virtually undefended border, took hostages, and battled with the ill-prepared Kyrgyzstani military before melting back into the mountains of Tajikistan by November. Uzbek jets mistakenly bombed the Kyrgyz village of Kara-Teyt as claims and counter-claims flew. Uzbekistan sealed its borders, while numerous internal checkpoints sprang up within Kyrgyzstan.

In the aftermath of the Batken crisis, Uzbekistan took ever greater measures to insulate the state and its borders. The authorities began erecting a two-metre high barbed wire fence around large sections of the Ferghana Valley border (see Figure 1-12). Factories were instructed to shed non-essential Kyrgyzstani labourers. Poorly marked minefields were laid along vulnerable stretches of the border, including the Sox enclave. By a decree of 1st March 2000, President Karimov introduced a mandatory visa regime for all non-citizens spending more than three days in the country.

Kyrgyzstan, too, struggled to respond to the new difficulties thrown up by the Batken crisis and the border problems with Uzbekistan. Energies were channelled into road upgrading and construction schemes to bypass Uzbekistan and connect the Kyrgyz regions in the South directly to each other.<sup>31</sup> President Akaev detached four of the regions most directly threatened by the Batken crisis from Osh oblast and merged them into a new oblast, Batken.<sup>32</sup> This was intended to ensure better local supervision of border security,<sup>33</sup> and reduce the inconvenience of crossing multiple Uzbekistani borders in order to reach the regional capital. To facilitate this, Akaev

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<sup>31</sup> 'Turkistan-Newsletter: Kirgiz News.' 17 May 2000 (Amsterdam: SOTA).

<sup>32</sup> 'Batken oblastı negizdelüüdö', *Zaman Kirgızstan* 8/10/1999: 1, 9.

<sup>33</sup> 'Altın öröön Batkenim', *Kirgız Tuusu* 177-78 (22,372-73), 16-18/11/2000; for critical responses to this move see 'Batken oblastı: kim emne deyt?', *Asaba* 8/10/2000.



also unveiled plans to create no fewer than seventy border posts on the hitherto unguarded 470km Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 1-12a&b: Uzbekistan's perimeter fence built along its border with Kyrgyzstan's Aravan region, autumn 2000 (Photographs: Nick Me goran).**

Although both governments repeatedly insisted that there were no border disputes and that relations between them were warm, local tensions along the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border belied these claims. The border regime continued to cause great

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<sup>34</sup> *Jamestown Monitor*, Vol. V, No. 188, 12 October 1999 (Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation).

inconvenience and added to the economic hardship of border dwellers.<sup>35</sup> Breaches of the border in cat-and-mouse games played by Uzbekistani border guards and petty smugglers were frequent (Megoran 2000a), sometimes leading to fatal incidents. An undetermined number of people and livestock died after wandering onto Uzbekistan's minefields. Occasionally, even agents of state security forces clashed, as on 6th June 2000 when Uzbekistani and Kyrgyzstani soldiers exchanged fire after an Uzbek soldier allegedly stopped a car on Kyrgyz territory.<sup>36</sup>

These dramatic events accelerated the bifurcation of the political trajectories of the Ferghana Valley's principal states, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Their joint border became, as Fumagalli said in applying Martinez's phrase, an 'alienated border' whose two populations were characterised by reduced interaction and high tension (Fumagalli 2002). The net result of these events and incidents was neatly summed up by Tabyshalieva, who described this "new fragmentation of Central Asia" as "a painful and unpleasant lesson for the local population. The imaginary borders of Soviet times have become real."<sup>37</sup>

### **Explanations of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border issue**

There have been an assortment of disparate predictions for and explanations of disputes arising over Central Asian borders since 1991. Some commentators have stressed the technical/managerial nature of the 'border question.' Thus Almanov defined the issue as essentially technical, hinging upon the difficulties of demarcating borders, but believed that a bilateral committee of experts from Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan should resolve all outstanding questions.<sup>38</sup> Similar reasoning can be detected behind British and US governments' provision of training and equipment to Central Asian border guard services to improve their performance.

Other geographically deterministic accounts have stressed the fact of independence as triggering conflicts grounded in inherited poorly- or maliciously-drawn boundaries. Thus, before the 1999 crisis, Clem asserted that "the political-geographic legacy of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibrakhimova, Muazzam 'Uzbek visa controversy.' *IWPR's Reporting Central Asia* 8, 23/06/2000 (London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting).

<sup>36</sup> Sadji, 'Two opposing forces capable of changing the political situation in Kyrgyzstan.' *Prism*, Volume VI, number 10, Part 4, October 2000. (Washington: Jamestown Foundation)

<sup>37</sup> Anara Tabyshalieva, 'Central Asia: Imaginary and Real Borders', *Central Asia and Caucasus Analyst Biweekly Briefing*, 19/12/2001.

<sup>38</sup> 'Mamlekettik chek ara - janduu organizm, anı taktoo kıldattıktı talap kılát', *Erkin Too* 38, 19/05/1999: 5, 13.



the Soviet era virtually guarantees future problems with ethnic minorities and disputed borders” (Clem 1997: 170). Babakulov’s version of this thesis is typical:

When Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan declared independence, an international border suddenly sprang up between the two former Soviet republics. With an international border, came border posts. And with border posts came guards, whose conduct has bred such resentment among Kyrgyz and Uzbek travellers that some analysts are warning that frontier disputes could sow the seeds of inter-ethnic violence.<sup>39</sup>

This theory is able to explain neither why the border only became a serious issue in the domestic politics and bilateral relations of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1999, nor why Kyrgyzstan’s borders with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have not generated the same tensions.

A simplistic ‘ethnic’ rendering of the border issue was provided by Alimov, who wrote of Central Asia’s borders that, "Drawn up long ago and of practically no importance for a long time, these borders have now turned into battle lines for people of different ethnic origins" (Alimov 1994: 222). Olcott combines this with the techno-managerial thesis to suggest that the past would take revenge for the artificial division of 1924, writing that "Because of the arbitrary way the Ferghana Valley was divided up among Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, and because of ancient competing claims for this very fertile and desirable land, the possibility of military conflict in the region seems high." (Olcott 1994b: 224). Like the technical-managerial explanation, it is apolitical in that it reduces comprehension of Central Asian politics to the simple factor of ‘ethnicity’ to which is ascribed maximum efficacy. Bichel has excoriated this approach, commenting in 1997 that “the lack of violent ethnic conflict in Central Asia since independence is especially noteworthy, given the sharp decline which each of these states has suffered in its economy, severe dislocations in the workforces, reductions in patterns of national wealth and in standards of living” (Bichel 1997: 148).

Perhaps the most common explanation of the role of the border in Uzbekistani-Kyrgyzstani relations is modelled on a realist conception of international relations, that sees foreign policy as the positive response of a state to threats and challenges to its given interests. O’Hara emphasises the mal-distribution of water resources as a

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<sup>39</sup> Babakulov, Ulugbek. 2002. ‘Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border Tensions’, *Reporting Central Asia* 96, 03/02/2002, (London: IWPR).

source of conflict (O'Hara 2000).<sup>40</sup> Gleason's accounts of Central Asian borders follow the realist-economistic model closely, emphasising the managerial role of international organisations in facilitating incorporation of the region into networks of global capitalism. Thus Central Asian borders with China are the result of great-power politics, but Gleason sees organisations such as the Shanghai Forum as engineering their opening up to the benefits of globalisation (Gleason 2001b). Gleason views the degree to which Central Asian borders are controlled and their importance as a direct response to economic measures taken by different states acting out of kilter with each other, and considers that these states' foreign policy is a response to threats to security from Islamic extremism, drugs, and arms trafficking. Essentially analysing formal texts and practices of foreign policy, emphasising treaties signed, conferences held, and organisations formed, he places great faith in organisations and government activities to resolve disputes and mitigate the economic impact of borders (Gleason 2001a). Typical of realist conceptions of international relations, his analysis assumes that national interests are represented by incumbent governments, and overlooks the role of domestic power struggles in formulating foreign policy.

Many writers, such as Gleason, emphasise divergent macro-economic policies as a cause of border disputes. It is certainly true that, with Kyrgyzstan's rapid moves to a market economy and Uzbekistan's determination to maintain a level of price and currency controls, the state border became a site of differential wages and prices that smugglers could exploit. Without doubt, Uzbekistan's actions to tighten border controls were partially motivated by an attempt to restrict the circulation of capital, labour and goods. However, the political significance that this played in both Uzbekistani and Kyrgyzstani domestic politics, as well as the precise course that the dispute took, suggests that economics alone is inadequate for fully explaining the significance of the border.

The report 'Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential' of the Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG) reflects a similar realist position, although its element of field research lends a more informed account of border politics than Gleason provides. Typically, the report traces border disputes to the supposed fact that independence "reopened a Pandora's box of border disputes." In discussing

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<sup>40</sup> See Horsman (2001) for a more balanced assessment of the potential of conflict over water allocation.

Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border disputes a range of issues including water, territory and industrial facilities are cited that are effectively boiled down to inter-state relations and economics (International Crisis Group 2002a: 13-17). Domestic internal politics are entirely ignored. Although domestic political considerations were mentioned in the discussion of the Kyrgyzstan-Chinese border,<sup>41</sup> they disappear in the report's section on policy recommendations.

## **PART IV: THIS DISSERTATION**

### **Outline of the chapters**

This study considers all of the above explanations of border issues in the post-Soviet Ferghana Valley to be deficient in explaining what happened in 1999-2000. Each of the four substantive chapters in this dissertation approaches the events of this time from a different theoretical perspective to answer the questions posed at the start of this introduction: *why* they occurred and *how* the Valley changed as a result. At the same time, this study is an exploration of the process and implications of mapping the concept of modern, independent national states onto the Ferghana Valley. Each chapter can thus be read as a separate intervention into debates regarding the nature of the new polities, the role of nationalism as an organising principle, and the meaning of ethnicity in the Valley. The dissertation falls naturally into two halves, focusing on elite politics and popular understandings respectively.

Chapters 2 and 3 use a 'deconstructive' method of discourse analysis to unpack texts about the border produced by political elites. They emphasise the role of *domestic political factors*. They argue that not only the precise configuration of events, but also the very notion of a 'border dispute' or a 'border issue', arose as a result of the interaction of two different domestic power struggles within each polity, structured by contrasting regime types and historical political trajectories. Rather than assuming the inevitability of a border conflict, they ask how ideas about 'the border' were produced, figured and employed in concrete political struggles.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.: 17-18.

Here I follow the approach that Verdery took in Romania (Verdery 1996). Rather than asking 'Do we have nationalist tensions in Central Asia and the Ferghana Valley?', 'How strong is the Islamic threat to Uzbekistan?', or 'Is Kyrgyzstan developing civil society and democracy?', I have found it more profitable to ask 'What does a political economy of the symbolism associated with these notions reveal about each countries' post-socialist position?' The border issue highlighted the fact that for all the different elite factions in both states, the fate of their nation was seen as having ultimate value. A key element of the political struggle was the effort to monopolise symbolic definitions of the meaning of the border to position themselves as legitimate champion of the nation. As Verdery again acknowledged, "While recognizing that politics is far more than symbolism and discourse, I believe that for the former Soviet bloc these aspects have not yet received the attention they warrant" (ibid.: 105).

Chapter 2 draws upon post-structural theories of critical international relations (IR) and critical geopolitics to reject the view that Uzbekistan's foreign/border policy can be explained as the external orientation of a pre-established state with a secure political identity confronting some 'reality.' Rather, official discourse about the border actively created and maintained a particular Uzbekistani identity, relentlessly portraying a world of plenty and order separated and protected by the border from neighbouring realms of chaos and danger. Although the chapter rejects a purely instrumentalist interpretation, it argues that these border discourses justified tight control over the population; framed the project of national independence; and legitimised the dominant role of President Karimov within it. These findings question the analytical value of the formal division of 'domestic' and 'foreign' policy that has characterised studies of Uzbekistan.

Chapter 3 employs discourse analysis to examine the same events as they unfolded in the Kyrgyzstani press. Gramscian-inspired discourse theory is used to locate 'the border question' in the context of a fierce domestic power struggle in which notions of the nation and the homeland became pre-eminent fields of intense struggle and contestation. The government alternatively portrayed itself as a strong authority defending the republic's external borders, and an enlightened leadership dismantling them in the name of inter-ethnic and international tolerance. For the nationalistic opposition, however, the border was symbolic of a weak leadership presiding over a weak nation that was threatened by ethnic minorities within and enemies without. By

discursively weaving together a whole range of economic, social and international concerns into what they dubbed ‘the border issue’, they mounted a strong challenge to President Akaev and forced him to respond. This demonstrates the fact that concepts such as ‘the border’, ‘nation’, ‘territory’ and ‘geography’ are not given coordinates from which the contours of political conflict can simply be read off, but are social products open to multiple interpretations and manipulation and are inextricably linked to power.

Whereas chapters 2 and 3 concentrated on elite interpretations of the border issue, chapters 4 and 5 contrast these with popular responses in Kyrgyzstan’s part of the Ferghana Valley. They show up a sharp divergence in understandings of ‘the nation’ held by political elites and local populations. They posit a fundamental conflict between elite conceptions of the national entity as coterminous with territory demarcated by a tight border, and local conceptions of ethnicity as the space over which kinship ties and duties operate. The events of 1999-2000 are then conceived of as an attempt to forcefully inscribe onto the landscape of the Ferghana Valley and the consciousness of its inhabitants one geopolitical vision over the other. In referring to ‘geopolitical vision’, I use Dijkink’s definition as a set of “ideas concerning the relation between one’s own and other places” (Dijkink 1996: 11): or how the relationships between territory, population, nation and state ought to be ordered.

Chapter 4 balances the accounts of elite discourse in the previous chapters with the often harrowing story of the border-folk who experienced first-hand the events of 1999-2000 as they unfolded. It is constructed from a series of journeys made around the border region before, during and after the initial closures, and tries to capture the immediate mood along the boundary. Theoretically, it argues that the discourse analysis based social constructionism of chapters 2 and 3 struggles to take seriously everyday human experience and senses of meaning, and suggests the adoption of reformulated theories of embodiment as a corrective. Following Donnan and Wilson, it advocates the use of ethnographic participant observation as a research method ideally suited to exploring experience of the nation-state at the level of state borders. Epistemologically it valorises empathy and emotion, yet avoids portraying borderland dwellers as passive victims by describing multiple and extensive resistance to Uzbekistan’s border regime. It highlights a gulf between elite and popular meanings of nationality / ethnicity.

Chapter 5 widens this gulf through focus group material systematically investigating responses to the border closure. It probes the extent to which the border crisis was an 'ethnic' issue for the populace of southern Kyrgyzstan, exploring how 'Uzbekness' or 'Kyrgyzness' mediated responses to and were in turn reconstituted by the border dispute. Understanding ethnicity as a contingent and dynamic process constituted along with class, gender, age, and geographical factors, it demonstrates a significant yet contingent divergence between elite and popular understandings of the border crisis. It concludes the thesis by arguing that the contingent nature of ethnicity and the extent of these divergences means that 'ethnic conflict' is not inevitable, but that the border crisis opens up the possibility for new progressive and inclusive forms of political formation to emerge.

### **The research process**

Throughout this dissertation I have attempted to make my research activities and personal position as transparent as possible without becoming unnecessarily or indulgently lengthy. This is an ethical demand of research, and is also intended to enable the reader to engage critically with my work and understand whence flaws or emphases arise. The material for this study was collected between 1995 and 2000, with the major research stage being winter 1998/9 - autumn 2000. In providing a brief overview of that period, I heed Stanley and Wise's criticism of the presentation of research projects as orderly and coherent, with mistakes written out (Stanley and Wise 1993: 150-3). The smooth research process I had begun to plot in 1994 was disrupted or inverted at every stage. This project has thus been characterised throughout by voluntary and forced detours precipitated by political developments, the suggestions of friends, the criticisms of enemies, chance encounters, death, the visitation of past mistakes, troughs of overwhelming despair, and moments of inspiration and revelation.

Between 1995-6 I taught at Ferghana State University (Uzbekistan) and between March and September 1997 at Kyrgyzstan's Osh State University. During this period visa and border regimes were lax and I travelled widely throughout the Ferghana Valley. I moved to O'sh having studied Uzbek in Ferghana, intending to write about the effects of state nationalism on the Uzbek minority there. However, I realised that this was a one-sided approach that aroused certain suspicions. I therefore went to the

Northern Kyrgyzstani town of Narin in summer 1998 to learn Kyrgyz, intending to conduct a cross-border comparison of minority language schooling between Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan.

Just before returning to Osh in January 1999 I learnt that an article I had written had attracted the unfavourable attention of the authorities in Ferghana (see chapter 4, p. 185). This was followed shortly afterwards by the massive Uzbekistani crackdown on opposition and increased supervision of the activities of foreigners following the February bomb attacks. A comparative study in the frontier zone was thus out of the question, its fate sealed by tightened border controls and visa regulations of which I fell foul in spring 1999. I also came to realise that 'ethnic conflict' or 'ethnic relations' was a crass theme that many locals resented outsiders studying, perceiving it as a misplaced venture or a new form of colonialism. The switch of research focus to 'the border issue' seemed to make sense, although the IMU guerrilla incursions from Tajikistan across the border into Kyrgyzstan's Batken region in summer 1999 and again in 2000 made my research topic politically highly sensitive and affected access to certain areas and individuals. A desire to avoid drawing unfavourable attention to my work instilled a certain wariness of unnecessary contact with officialdom, until towards the end of my research period when I ventured to interview more state representatives.

I returned to Kyrgyzstan in the summer of 1998, and from January 1999 until my departure from Osh in October 2000 I split my research time between collecting material for chapters 2 and 3 (largely from newspapers bought by subscription or consulted in libraries), and conducting ethnographic and focus group research for chapters 4 and 5. Much of this followed the unfolding drama of the events described in these pages and the concomitant transformations of the Valley.

The wholesale reorientation of the empirical focus of my work necessitated, of course, explorations into new bodies of theory upon my return to Cambridge. This was also precipitated by the tragic death of my doctoral supervisor Graham Smith in 1999, and the resultant collapse of his 'Post-Soviet States in Transition' research programme at Sidney Sussex College. My new supervisor, Alan Ingram, pointed me towards a subtly different body of political geography and international relations theory, and an increasing familiarity with the anthropological literature was encouraged by Piers Vitebsky, as I sought the company of others engaged in trying to make sense of post-socialist change.

## Fundamental considerations

In this research I have employed a diverse range of research methods to assist me in tackling the same question. This is commonly called *triangulation* in the literature on social science research. Schutt thinks that “The ability to apply diverse techniques to address different aspects of a complex research question is one mark of a sophisticated social researcher.” (Schutt 1996: 369). He identifies two types of triangulation (ibid.: 355). The first is supplementary, where qualitative data are used to make quantitative research better. For example, the geographer Erica Schoenberger (1991) finds qualitative interviews useful in illuminating her more quantitative work on business location decisions, although in response to this Linda McDowell (McDowell 1992: 213) casts doubt on the approach, observing that qualitative and quantitative data may actually contradict each other. Schutt identified as the second category of triangulation multiple investigations in which different methods are used, in the way that Feldman does in advocating a plurality of methods as “fruitful” in work that she undertook (Feldman 1995).

However, my decision to use multiple methods was not merely informed by pragmatic reasons or some desire to display ‘sophistication.’ Certainly, as I have argued in this chapter, I believe that there are compelling practical reasons to commend the mixture of methods I have employed in this dissertation. However, at the most fundamental level, the structure of this dissertation reflects my own philosophical position. In outstanding texts such as John of Damascus’ *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* and Al-Ghazali’s *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*,<sup>42</sup> great thinkers of the Abrahamic faiths have expounded a philosophy of human knowledge as contingent and incomplete before the absolute incomprehensibility of the Ineffable Creator. These thinkers grappled with the problem of the meaning and significance of human knowledge when it could only ever be partial.

This question has relentlessly driven leading contemporary post-structural thinker, Jaques Derrida, who has himself turned increasingly to apophatic (1995a) and

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<sup>42</sup> For example, Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 ) began this text with these words: “Praise be to God, alone in His majesty and His might, and unique in His sublimity and His everlastingness, who clips the wings of intellects well short of the glow of His glory” (Al-Ghazali 1992: 1). For John of Damascus (c.675- c.749) see Damascus (1899).



existential (1995b) theological texts. However, in de-privileging presence through the absences that make meaning both possible yet impossible, the subject ultimately slips beyond reach into the depths of hermeneutic webs.

Like Derrida, the pioneer psychiatrist and philosopher, Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), took seriously the post-modern rejection of Enlightenment claims of objective knowledge. He was worried that the contest between empirical and interpretative psychiatry was losing sight of the value of the sick person in falsely claiming a monopoly of knowledge. However, his response was markedly different from Derrida's, secularising the theological tradition inherited from Kierkegaard and developing a conception of the totality of being as the 'Encompassing', that which is always already present, yet ever beyond our grasp. In thought we temporarily abstract from the encompassing but can never claim full, closed, objective knowledge (Jaspers 1986). In his remarkable work *General Psychopathology* (1997 (1913)) he fashioned from this claim a set of succinct, general guidelines on the principles and practices of academic research. Central to this was what he termed a *pluralistic methodology*, approaching the same question from a variety of different angles, never totalizing the findings of one method.

I consider that many of the weaknesses and impasses in Central Asian studies of ethnicity and nationalism outlined in part II (above) arise from the 'absolutization' of single theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. For example, approaches that take ethnicity as a historical given correctly appreciate that in concrete situations it is important, but forget that it is contingent and ever in a process of contestation and reconstruction. Likewise, post-structural conceptions of identity that deny the historical authenticity or contextualised efficacy of ethnic categories tend to be poor at addressing acute policy questions. My use of a pluralistic methodology, of abstracting different elements of Central Asian social and political processes using different methods and reaching tentative conclusions and ad-hoc hypotheses, is thoroughly Jasperian and has fundamentally structured this thesis.

Finally, it remains for me to explain my personal reasons for undertaking this research. It springs from a fascination with both Central Asia and the political geography of the nation-state that extends back to my childhood. Ethically, it is informed by a Christian tradition of concern for social justice that accepts neither the inevitability nor inherent desirability of contemporary modes of the political organisation of space, or the immutability of exclusive categories of nationality. The

motivation for this particular study is well illustrated with a story from spring 2000, when I visited the village of Turkabad at the boundary between Uzbekistan's Andijan and Kyrgyzstan's Jalal-Abad oblasts. As Uzbekistan's border policy increasingly disrupted kinship networks and threatened livelihoods, many local communities were fearful and angry at the perceived abdication of political responsibility towards them on the part of the governments of both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. An enraged man, when he was told that I had come from England to learn about the border, looked me in the eye, pointed his finger straight at me, and said, "That's very good - you go and tell the world what they are doing to us here!" This dissertation is my attempt to discharge that commission.

## Chapter 2 : Discourses Of Danger At The Border: Political Identity And Nationalism In Uzbekistan.

...it was a dangerous world and we knew exactly who 'they' were. It was us versus them and we knew exactly who 'them' was. Today we're not so sure who 'they' are, but we know they're there. George W. Bush, January 2000 (Quoted in Rogers 2000)

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. (Anzaldua 1999: 25)

### Part I: INTRODUCTION

#### Uzbekistan and the border question, 1999-2000

1999 was a grim year both for Uzbekistan and its strong-arm president Islam Karimov. The peace and stability that he had carefully fostered was shattered on February 16th with murderous bomb attacks on prominent targets in the capital Tashkent. The enraged President pinned blame on a supposed coalition of Islamist and more secular opponents. Further violent incidents followed including a bus hijack and attacks on police. In the summer Kyrgyzstan's neighbouring Batken region was invaded by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a Tajikistan-based militant group of Uzbekistani exiles and allied Islamists calling for the replacement of Islam Karimov's regime with an Islamic state. Combined with the ongoing activities of high-profile exiled opponents such as Mohammad Solih,<sup>43</sup> and the clandestine leafleting campaign of the underground pan-Islamist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir,<sup>44</sup> the

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<sup>43</sup> Solih wrote to OSCE president, Knut Vollebak, voicing his concerns: 'Uzbek opposition leader warns of Afghan-style civil war,' *RFE/RL Newswire*, Vol. 3, No. 125, Part I, 28 June 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Hizb ut-Tahrir is a movement originating from Arab scholars in the 1950s calling for the creation of a single Islamic state, modelled on their understanding of the Caliphate, to replace all secular regimes in lands where Muslims are, or once were, a majority. It advocates non-violence as a means of achieving power, although it believes that after this point the state could legitimately employ means of violence, including military force. Ideologically, it reflects certain elements of the Marxist critique of imperialism and nationalism. It is very critical of wide economic disparities and elite self-aggrandizement. Its leaflets denouncing President Karimov as an enemy of Islam and calling for the re-establishment of the Caliphate included 'Musulmonlar Yahudylarni Do'st Tutmaydilar,' Hizbut Tahrir, Tashkent, 27/01/2000, and 'The Ruling Clan in Uzbekistan is a Tyrant and Criminal Clan,' Hizb ut-Tahrir, Uzbekistan, 14/03/2000 (in English, obtained in London). Against Islam Karimov's oft-quoted slogan of the early 1990s that 'Uzbekistan is a country with a great future,' these leaflets argue that such a Caliphate would be the greatest country on earth.

secular authoritarian order of President Karimov faced a greater challenge than at any time since he had assumed power a decade earlier. With high poverty levels increasing the potential for dissatisfaction to be transformed into opposition (Ilkhamov 2001), the government needed to act to protect its position.

President Karimov's response to the Tashkent blasts was decisive and, in the opinion of certain human rights groups, harsh.<sup>45</sup> Mass arrests accompanied sweeping crackdowns on any possible source of dissent, and military forces were placed on high alert. The state border was a vital front in this reaction, being completely sealed off at various times, militarised, and in sections mined and barricaded. Border defence units were reorganised and upgraded. Customs rules were widely publicised (Vazirliqi 2000). Many new checkpoints were established and unmanned crossings were closed through the demolition of bridges and the digging up of roads.<sup>46</sup> Control of passport and visa regulations was tightened up. As these policies were accelerated and continued into 2000, they provoked hostile responses in neighbouring states with whom President Karimov pressed for delimitation and demarcation through treaties. Incidents of fatal and non-fatal violence between security forces and civilians at borders multiplied. This was a wholesale retreat from President Karimov's stated aim at independence of preserving open borders and free travel in Central Asia (Karimov 1992: 25).

In this chapter I provide an explanation of these events using an alternative theorisation of the state to that which has dominated studies of Uzbekistan. Since independence, social scientists have addressed two fundamental questions about the nature of the emerging Uzbek polity. The first has been an exploration of the type of state that Uzbekistan is domestically, a debate that has commonly hinged on the efficacy of supposed contenders to 'fill the ideological vacuum' left by the withering of Communism. The second major subject of investigation has been the separate topic of foreign policy orientation of the new republic. I argue that this epistemic divide has contributed to incomplete and inadequate explications of the behaviour of the government of Uzbekistan and mistaken suppositions about relations between states in Central Asia.

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<sup>45</sup> For example, see 'Uzbekistan: The Atmosphere Of Terror And Violence,' Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan: 1999, via *Turkistan Newsletter* V.3 (288): 15/12/1999 (Amsterdam: SOTA); ' "And it was hell all over again..."'; Torture in Uzbekistan, Human Rights Watch, New York: 2000.

<sup>46</sup> See pages 52-52 for a fuller account of these events.

Based upon a study of official discourse on the border issue in 1999 (and into 2000), I make three suggestions. Firstly, drawing on critical post-structural theory in international relations and political geography, I seek to collapse the domestic/foreign divide for analytical purposes. Secondly, I argue that so doing enables empirically enriched contributions to the study of nationalism in Uzbekistan and its inter-state relations. I propose that the concept of *danger* has increasingly come to structure Uzbekistani politics in a way that is not true of neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, as the next chapter will demonstrate. Finally, I emphasise the geographical or territorial nature of state nationalism in modern Uzbekistan.

This chapter and the next constitute the first part of the dissertation, a study of elite discourses about the border in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the context of domestic power struggles. The theoretical themes introduced in this chapter will be continued and concluded in the next, before moving on to the human element to the same story, the theme of chapters 3 and 4.

### **Uzbekistan in independence**

With the collapse of the USSR in 1991 Yalcin has argued, with many others, that in Uzbekistan “an ideological vacuum emerged, raising the need for a new doctrine” (Yalcin 2002: 86). This prompted a flurry of often highly speculative literature assessing such contenders as nationalism, democratic civil society, and Islam, along with pondering what state would offer the most attractive model for Uzbekistan and other Central Asian Republics to follow (Mesbahi 1994b; Zhang and Azizian 1998: 4). The government of Uzbekistan has pursued what President Karimov himself described an “ideology of national independence” (Karimov 1997).<sup>47</sup> For Karimov, the Uzbek nation was artificially divided for centuries under the weak feudal khanates that succeeded the fifteenth century putative Uzbek state of the Shaybanids. It was then repressed by Tsarist and Soviet overlords. Thus independence in 1991 was “the most significant event in the centuries long history of the nation” (Karimov 1992:3), a teleological fulfilment of the desire of the Uzbek people.

Independence has allowed modern Uzbeks patriotically to reclaim the cultural, scientific, literary and historical legacy of their ancestors and finally take their place

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<sup>47</sup> See March (2002) for a sophisticated discussion of the use -and abuse- of history in this ideology.

as an equal in the world family of nations. Many works have revisited the importance of past Central Asians to the modern culture, from single studies such as Bo'riev's introduction to *Al-Farg'oniy* (1998), to Hayrullaev's volume outlining the significance of almost 100 past luminaries (Hayrullaev 1999). Uzbek historians have critically revised accounts of the Russian conquest of Central Asia (Sodiqov *et al.* 2000). Whilst journals such as *Tafakkur* have celebrated the intellectual significance of thinkers and poets such as Alisher Navoiy (Konrad 1997), politicians have matched this by commemorating their legacy through building monuments to them (Figure 2-1). Philosophers have found new freedom to explore the wider significance of the intellectual legacy of Uzbekistan (Po'latov and Abdullaev 1998), arguing that it was repressed under Soviet ideology (Hayrullaev 1994: 3-7). The Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences published a 'popular-scientific' dictionary of independence, including references to the ideas, institutions, events and individuals significant to the ideology of national independence (Jalolov and Qo'chqor 2000). A comprehensive statement of the ideology of national independence was provided by one contributor to this volume, To'lanov, whose mammoth work *A Philosophy of Values* (1998) attempted to ground philosophically and historically the broad sweep of Karimov's ideology and politics of national independence. The contrast between this and his Soviet-era works such as his polemic against 'bourgeois individualism' in *The Collective is a Mighty Force* (1984), and *Philosophy* (1991) (a weighty Marxist tome with barely a dozen pages devoted to Central Asian thought) illustrates the dramatic change in thinking since 1991 linked to the ideology of national independence.

The working out of these policies in the life of the republic has been widely studied under the general rubric of nationalism. There has, however, been little explicit focus on the geographical and geopolitical dimensions of the discursive construction of national identity, and no serious explication of the role of the state border. However, as this chapter will show, these play a highly significant role in Uzbek nationalist discourse.

If the ideology of nationalism has been one prevailing theme for non-Central Asian scholars studying Uzbekistan, the foreign policy orientation of the new state has been another. A rush of speculative publications followed independence, considering the possible alliances that Uzbekistan and its neighbours would make (Clark 1994:195-198; some of the essays in Mesbahi 1994a). Studies of foreign policy generally take a similar form in the literature, and I will take three recent studies as examples:

Annette Bohr's *Uzbekistan* (1998b), Neil Melvin's *Uzbekistan* (2000), and Rasul Yalcin's *The Rebirth of Uzbekistan* (2002). All these studies expand analysis outwards along different geopolitical scales. They typically begin with Uzbekistan's relations with its Central Asian post-Soviet neighbours, move on to consider regional alliances and the CIS, and conclude with a discussion of relations with 'the world' (the EU, Japan, USA etc.).



**Figure 2-1: Unveiling of a statue of Alisher Navoiy outside Ferghana Hokimiyat, January 1996. The large audience in attendance consisted mainly of conscripted soldiers and students whose lessons were cancelled at short notice to enable them to participate (Photograph: Nick Megoran).**

Structurally, these studies formally compartmentalise 'domestic' and 'foreign' policy issues in different chapters and sections. Although all three refer to the importance of state nationalism in the domestic sphere, this is largely divorced analytically as well as structurally from discussion of foreign policy. The main exception made is for the presence of Uzbek minorities in neighbouring states, which are deemed to be of importance for Uzbekistan and/or potentially destabilising for neighbouring states in the light of Uzbekistan's policy of domestic nationalism (for example, Bohr 1998b: 50). As I will argue, this is a weakness arising from exactly the compartmentalisation of study topics and the tendency to overlook the importance

of territoriality that I have critiqued so far. Furthermore, these analyses tend to treat state nationalism as an ideological question internal to the constitution of the state, but foreign policy as the instrumental, the rational response of that state's given needs and interests: as Yalcin writes, "the determining factors of Uzbek foreign policy are geopolitical, political, and economic in nature"(Yalcin 2002: 235).

### **Critical theories of the state**

It is this 'realist' account of the state that 'critical international relations (IR) theory' and 'critical geopolitics' has sought to unpick in recent years, through a neo-Nietzschean deconstruction of the grand narratives of modernity mediated through the writings of Foucault, and through him in turn Said, Butler and Clifford. I will use the writings of two such theorists, David Campbell and Gearóid Ó Tuathail. Although they write almost exclusively about US foreign policy, I will argue that their insights can help towards a better understanding of the contemporary polity of Uzbekistan and its actions in the 1999-2000 border disputes with its neighbours.

Campbell is opposed to the 'realist' understanding of international relations with which Yalcin and most students of Uzbekistani foreign policy work with, that posits states as anthropomorphic entities motivated by 'needs', 'desires' and 'interests' assessed primarily in terms of the rational pursuit of power. For Campbell, foreign policy is not the external orientation of pre-established states with secure political identities, but rather boundary-producing practices central to the constitution, production and maintenance of American political identity (Campbell 1998: 8). In examining the texts of US foreign policy (speeches, historical accounts, academic books, laws etc.), Campbell found them replete with statements about the 'fundamental purpose of the nation', 'God-given rights', 'moral codes', 'the principles of European civilisation' and the 'responsibilities and duties thrust upon the gleaming example of America.' In this sense, he argued, "the texts that guided national security policy did more than simply offer strategic analyses of the "reality" they confronted: they actively concerned themselves with the scripting of a particular American identity" (ibid.: pp31-32).

That the practice of foreign policy is constitutive of the identity of the state (who its people think they are in the world) should be relatively uncontroversial. However, Campbell produces two further arguments that are more complicated. The first is the



post-structuralist argument that all meaning is constituted through difference and that where the logic of difference operates it has the potential to transform into a hostile 'otherness' (ibid.: 70). This means that the political identity of a state is created by continual practices of demarcating the self from the other, those inside the state from those outside, a domestic from a foreign. It is a truism that in defining ourselves as *x* we suggest we are not *y*: this argument proposes that foreign policy does just that at the state level.

Campbell completes his thesis by asserting that foreign policy secures the boundaries of a state's identity by representation of *danger* (ibid.: 3). Campbell argues that this is particularly true of the USA, and traces developing ideas of external and internal threats from the founding of the polity to the 1990s, focusing on the 'Cold War.' Campbell does not deny that events in Berlin, Korea, Prague and Vietnam occurred or were real, but insists that they had to be *interpreted* as threats to the USA. Crucially for Campbell, danger is not an objective condition but a subjective interpretation: thus the McKinley assassination did not lead to a 'red scare', whereas the Haymarket Bombing did, and the Iraqi invasion of Iran was not interpreted as a threat to the USA, whereas its invasion of Kuwait was. The study of foreign policy becomes an investigation into how boundaries of self/Other are discursively enacted and maintained through practices of foreign policy that depend upon identifying some 'danger' to the state. As Steve Bell suggested in his cartoon in Figure 2-2 the more important to a government policy that sense of danger is, the more it must be constantly reworked and updated lest it loses the power to legitimise certain actions: Bell's cartoon refers to massive increases in US military spending and a war on Iraq to combat the elusive Al-Qaeda and other supposed threats to the USA. Campbell believes that his analysis applies particularly to the USA, but might also be pertinent for other states.

Such critical perspectives on international relations theory have been employed by geographers in the field of 'critical geopolitics', who emphasise the importance of *territory* and *place* in foreign policy discourse. I outlined the conceptual framework of critical geopolitics in chapter 1 (see page 26); here, I will use one article by Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *The effacement of place? US foreign policy and the spatiality of*

*the Gulf Crisis* (1993), as it illustrates Campbell's arguments and illuminates the texts of Uzbekistani discourse about the border in 1999 and 2000.<sup>48</sup>



**Figure 2-2: Steve Bell's commentary on George W. Bush's visit to Europe in May 2002, anxious to counter European scepticism over the 'war against terror' that had come to define and legitimise the presidency he assumed following a dubious election victory in 2000 (*The Guardian*, 24/05/2002: 20).**

Like Campbell, Ó Tuathail begins his discussion of the 1991 US-led Gulf War on Iraq with a critique of the realist position that the war was necessary to defend US interests. The US did not depend on Kuwait for oil and Iraq, being pro-Western, would most likely have gladly continued to sell oil to the US. Leading conservatives such as Brezezinski were sceptical about the need for a war.

Having rejected the power of realist accounts to explain USA policy, O'Tuathail, like Campbell, suggested that for the US the Gulf War was more about maintaining a political identity. The 'Cold War' had provided a conception of who Americans were and what their role was in the world by defining themselves as champions of liberty

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<sup>48</sup> Ó Tuathail's paper was published one year after the first edition of Campbell's book (1992).

and freedom against what Reagan termed 'the Evil Empire' of the USSR. The end of the Cold War "threatened to loosen the cultural hegemony of Cold War understandings of 'America' and 'the West'... not to mention the lock of the Republican Party on the White House." For Ó Tuathail, the Gulf War was essentially about asserting and maintaining a political identity, the "traditional identity, authority and role of 'the United States of America'" (ibid.: 7).

Ó Tuathail highlighted the practices of foreign policy by concentrating on preparations for the US war. The ruling Kuwaiti regime hired US public relations group, Hill and Knowlton, to lobby for US action to evict Iraq from Kuwait, CNN passing off its carefully prepared propaganda material as objective news reporting (1993: 8). The company launched a massive campaign of misinformation, including the orchestration of a false Congressional testimony about Iraqi troops tossing babies out of their incubators. Unfounded reports of Iraqi troops massing on the Saudi border were also used to justify the rapid despatch of US forces (Pollock and Lutz 1994: 265).

However, Ó Tuathail argued that the war was prosecuted not merely by 'propaganda' in this traditional sense. Basing his study on speeches and policy statements by top officials recorded in the US State Department's weekly publication *Dispatch*, Ó Tuathail argued that official discourse on the invasion of Kuwait enacted certain place-bound identities that helped justify the US war effort. Kuwait was described as a rape victim, a highly gendered image suggesting a moral obligation on the part of the masculine US forces to intervene and protect 'her.' The war was described as a 'defence of Saudi Arabia', the protection of a helpless state in need. Saddam Hussein was scripted as another Hitler, suggesting that not to stand up to him would be to 'appease' him, thereby portraying Kuwait as another Czechoslovakia and reminding Americans of their duty to stand up to tyranny as they had done in the past.

Thus, Iraq was represented as a *danger* to the US and the form of liberty of which America saw itself as the guardian. Critical geopoliticians emphasise that foreign policy discourse and practice is inherently place-bound, creating and re-creating political identities by scripting places in certain ways. It is through "the relentless construction of imaginary geographical boundaries between the self and the other, the domain of freedom and the domain of danger, the inside realm of community and the outside realm of anarchy" that places become "rigidly inscribed with sets of identities,

descriptions, histories and intentions.” This geopolitical scripting designates the map of international politics ( Ó Tuathail 1993: 10).

Whilst their use of evidence tends to be highly selective, the theses of Campbell and Ó Tuathail are powerful. Although simplistic criticisms such as those by Lora (1994) can be dismissed as politically motivated, Herbert’s objection that Campbell ascribes to ‘identity’ the same essential power that realist accounts attribute to state interests is more pertinent (Herbert 1996: 644). So too is the concern that a preoccupation with the politics of identity and representation can produce historical accounts that ignore the material conditions of the production of discourse and obscure the application of power for the instrumental purposes of economics (Agnew and Corbridge 1995).<sup>49</sup> Clearly discourse alone cannot fully explain the course of foreign policy, without recourse to other factors such as shifting power bases (the topic of the next chapter) and economics. Nonetheless, these difficulties notwithstanding, Campbell’s account of USA foreign policy with the geographical modifications of Ó Tuathail provides a powerful tool for interpreting official Uzbekistani discourse about its border in 1999-2000, and is taken as the theoretical framework for this chapter. It is significantly less useful for tackling Kyrgyzstani responses, as the next chapter will show.

### **President Karimov and the centrality of danger**

The importance of the social construction of danger for understanding Uzbekistan is highlighted by comparing books written by Islam Karimov in the period immediately after independence with his more recent titles. His *Building the Future: Uzbekistan-Its Own Model for Transition to a Market Economy* (1993) is an exuberant and effervescent celebration of independence and a patriotic statement of hope and expectation for the future. Karimov argues that Uzbekistan’s rich history and spirituality, about which he has far more to say than questions of state security, guarantee that “a great future awaits us”. Claiming boldly that “much of what we have failed to achieve for centuries has been attained during the first year of our Republic’s independence”, (ibid.: 4), it is a patriotic celebration of national independence and its symbols such as the flag and anthem which “reflect the honour, dignity, historical memory and aspirations of the peoples of Uzbekistan” (ibid.: 69). The only obstacles to be overcome are the residual deprivations of past oppressors.

This intoxicating thrill of a new dawn gives way to grim reflections on the “short but sometimes bitter experience of our years of independence” in President Karimov’s 1997 book *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*. Danger is at the heart of the President’s analysis. Divided into two sections, part 1 is entitled ‘Threats to Security’ and is a dark litany of the “problems, difficulties and trials” that Uzbekistan will face in attaining its historical destiny. These include drug trafficking, religious extremism, ethnic intolerance, civil war, terrorism, the arms trade, human rights violations, nuclear weapons manufacture, ecological dangers, nationalism, tribalism, corruption, criminality, great power chauvinism. Although the ‘ideology of national independence’ is shaping citizens of high moral value and laying the foundations of a prosperous and happy state, this is threatened because “Uzbekistan is encircled by countries burdened with ethnic, demographic, economic and other problems” (Karimov 1997: 6). It is just this scripting of boundaries between “the domain of freedom and the domain of danger, the inside realm of community and the outside realm of anarchy” that Ó Tuathail emphasised (above, page 72).

President Karimov’s sense of the political identity of Uzbekistan underwent a radical change during the 1990s from a polity at peace with itself and its neighbours, brimming with confidence at self-discovery, to a besieged island of civilisation in a sea of anarchy that threatened to overwhelm it. Studies of the Uzbekistan of the early independence period rightly focused upon the cultural and political manifestations of the celebration of the ideology of national independence. Now we must recognise that this domestic identity has been subtly and increasingly rewritten by the articulation of foreign danger.

### **The press in Uzbekistan**

This study draws out this scripting of identity through foreign policy texts about Uzbekistan’s border and relations with other states in 1999-2000. Paasi draws much of his material from school geography textbooks, arguing that they “are probably the best 'official' media available for studying the construction of the languages of difference and integration.” (Paasi 1996: 69). However, these textbooks present coherent hegemonic views of socio-spatial knowledge. Although I have little knowledge of Finnish political history, I was left wondering how far those textbooks

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<sup>49</sup> The very criticism that Ó Tuathail (1996b) makes of Campbell can be turned back on his own work.

glossed over political debates and differences within Finnish society, and also overlooked the extent to which political elites within Finland sought to mobilise border and territorial debates in their own power struggles. In this study I use newspaper coverage, as in Central Asia newspapers closely reflect the positions of their owners and, in the case of Kyrgyzstan at least, are integral elements in power struggles. Although this latter factor is not the case in Uzbekistan where there is no independent political media to speak of, I have also used newspapers there too to enable a comparison with Kyrgyzstan in the next chapter.

For this study, Uzbekistan's normally four-page long, high profile daily newspaper *Halq So'zi* ('Word of the People') was used. Being the official publication of the parliament, it reports information on all major government activities and new laws passed, as well as carrying comprehensive texts of presidential speeches. This makes it one of the best means of understanding the messages the government wants the people to receive. Although television news is a more popular medium, this generally carries the same line as *Halq So'zi*, and logistically it was easier for me to access and analyse newspapers. Its title strip perfectly embodies its function (figure 2-3): images of Amir Timur (Tamburlaine, see below, p.91) and the parliament building flying the Uzbekistani flag, together with the words "Uzbekistan is a country with a great future" stress the historical destiny of the ideology of national independence under the authority of a strong leader. *Halq So'zi* has commonly been referred to in passing by researchers as the voice of official Uzbekistan (Allworth 1998: 79; Bohr 1998b: 57), although I am not aware of an extensive qualitative study of the organ.

I analysed every article in 1999 that referred to the border, relations with neighbouring states and the wider world, and nationality questions. Although my prime focus was relations with Kyrgyzstan and questions of the border, in order to place these and see how relatively important they are, all material pertaining to foreign policy was collected. I used a set of the papers a friend collected for me,<sup>50</sup> from which a handful of editions were missing or incomplete. As *Halq So'zi* does not print at weekends, this means that material is derived from around 250 papers.

I also skim read *Halq So'zi* for articles from January 2000 until June the same year, and a local newspaper, *Farg'ona Haqiqati* ('Ferghana Truth') for the same period. This I did in a library at Qo'qon on a visit just before I finished field-based research at

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<sup>50</sup> Rustam Mamashev, to whom I am much indebted.

the end of the summer of 2000. Logistical difficulties in obtaining a visa limited my access to Uzbekistani libraries, and a breakdown in post connections meant that although it was theoretically possible to subscribe to Uzbekistani newspapers in O'sh, as I did for Kyrgyzstani ones, they never arrived.



**Figure 2-4: Title from *Halq So'zi* (15/04/1999). The two illustrations are the statue of Amir Timur that replaced Karl Marx in central Tashkent, and the parliament building of Uzbekistan.**

Nonetheless, this exhaustive search yielded a substantial amount of information, which I codified thematically using the time-honoured method of marking transcripts with different coloured pens. These themes were ones that emerged in the course of my reading and re-reading of these papers, both in the Ferghana Valley but particularly after returning to Cambridge, informed also by my research methods, theoretical ideas and empirical interests. Although this had been neither rehearsed nor planned, as I returned to Cambridge and began to write this chapter I increasingly used the approach of ‘deconstruction’ to organise material. This emphasises sensitivity to the ideological content of texts (Feldman 1995). Bichel describes it as a theory of reading that aims to undermine the logic of binary opposition which underwrites the realism of the nation-state system, moving away from a state-centred analysis and problematizing taken-for-granted assumptions and hidden pretexts (Bichel 1997: Chapter 4). Whilst another researcher might have come up with alternative categories or grouped them in different fashions, it is necessary to abstract for the purpose of analysis (see my argument to this effect on page 61). I believe that the categories and themes I have identified have allowed me to develop a

comprehensive way of understanding the importance of the border in Uzbekistani political life over this period.

## **Part II: DANGER AT THE BORDER**

*Halq So'zi* repeatedly positioned the state border of Uzbekistan as the boundary between a whole series of binary dualisms; order and disorder, progress and backwardness, stability and chaos, wealth and poverty. The state boundary became not just a line on a map established by treaty, but a moral border between good and evil. Uzbekistan was scripted as a haven, yet one whose prosperity and tranquillity were threatened upon all sides. The border was the site of this discursive construction, where chaos threatened to burst in upon stability. In defending this geopolitical vision of Central Asia, it was necessary to ignore or distort those facts which would dislocate this view. This section examines a number of discursive strategies embedded within reporting of the border in the pages of *Halq So'zi*.

### **Descriptions of heaven and hell**

The most straightforward of these strategies was the simple positing of two opposite images of place. Uzbekistan was imagined as a site of prosperity, peace and happiness. This was a significant historical moment, as the long struggle and wish of the Uzbek people over a thousand years for their own state had been achieved. Examples of this type of discourse are plentiful. One is provided by history professor, Hamid Ziyoev, in an extract printed from a paper at a conference on recent Uzbek history.

The young people living in our country today are an exceedingly happy generation. That is because they have been delivered from the politics of colonialism and the clutches of national oppression, and are living contentedly. The value of this cannot be measured.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> 'O'zlikni anglash tarixni bilishdan boshlanadi', *Halq So'zi* 5 (2043), 08/01/1999: 1.



The following extract from the letter of the very Soviet concept of a 'Hero of Labour' in Qashqardarya region painted the same picture:

Our nation is living in peace and tranquillity. Recently our grain was safely harvested. Our storehouses are full of seed. We have just begun to gather in our cotton. We are busy with our own work. Our homeland is daily growing more prosperous.<sup>52</sup>

Similar assessments can be found in almost any edition of *Halq So'zi*, lauding the industry, culture, sport and music of Uzbekistan.

This image is in sharp contrast to the portrayal of neighbouring Tajikistan and Afghanistan as chaotic and desperate. An article run on 1<sup>st</sup> June entitled "Tajikistan's unhappy times" captured the essence of this, describing how that unfortunate land was host to "...murder, kidnapping, intimidation, plunder, banditry..." perpetrated by Pakistan-backed extremist elements of the United Tajik Opposition. Another article reported the murder by an opposition group of four farmers in the Gorno-Badakhshanskaya region of Tajikistan (see Map C., p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**) for refusing to give them cattle. The group then tried to retreat into Afghanistan but were involved in a firefight with Russian border troops.<sup>53</sup>

Such wanton violence has, over the years, made Tajikistan a convenient bogeyman for the government of Uzbekistan, which has argued that the civil war was caused by too hasty a transition to democracy. This has been a key justification of the failure to introduce promised democratic reforms: "you don't pull down the old house until you have built a new one", is one of President Karimov's favourite proverbs. The corollary of this position is that tight control has been maintained over the population, with those expressing dissent silenced in various ways (see footnote 45, p.64). The binary geopolitical envisioning of Uzbekistan as a land of plenty and its neighbours as places of deprivation has thus been central to the legitimisation of authoritarian rule. In order for this scheme to continue working, the conceptual divide must be constantly reworked and maintained. For *Halq So'zi*, the state border was a key site of the enactment of the Us/Them distinction.

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<sup>52</sup> 'Katta fitnaning bir xalqasi', *Halq So'zi* 179 (2217), 9/09/1999: 1.

<sup>53</sup> 'Dehqonda nima ayb?' *Halq So'zi* 8 (2046), 13/01/1999: 2.

## The threat of drugs, religious extremism and terrorism

*Halq So'zi* did not merely picture two separate realms; it suggested that the chaos and evil of its neighbours was threatening to sweep across Uzbekistan's borders. Throughout 1999, it presented drugs, terrorism and religious extremism as the three main dangers threatening the peace and prosperity of Uzbekistan. The site of this clash was the border.

Drugs were a major problem, connected with '74% of crimes', according to an article on 10<sup>th</sup> February.<sup>54</sup> A commentary on civil disorder in Tajikistan and Afghanistan run on 2<sup>nd</sup> June, emphasised the threat in reference to the 'Silk Road', a term coined by German geographer Alexander von Humboldt that has entered even the Central Asian geographical imagination:

At the moment narcotic substances move from Afghanistan to Tajikistan, and it is no secret that a similar 'caravan route' through the territory of our country to Russia and Europe is opening. The many tonnes of 'poisoned murder' passing through Tajikistan and being apprehended by our customs service provides more evidence for this argument.<sup>55</sup>

This sedate caravan route, which once carried luxuries such as spices and silks from East to West, is now transporting 'poisoned murder.'

Following the Batken invasion, coverage of the issue became terser. *Halq So'zi* blamed the Batken conflict on the inability of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to control the flow of drugs across their borders.<sup>56</sup> This weakness was contrasted with the struggle that Uzbekistan was putting up. The article continued by asking if the same thing could happen in Uzbekistan; "And what about Uzbekistan? No, in this country control is very strong", because it pinches the flow of drugs and has a force of well-trained officials. Firm control of the state was needed; otherwise there will be disorder. This is in effect firm control over the whole territory. In 1999 human rights groups alleged that groups whom the government wished to remove because it considered them threatening (devout Muslims, Uzbek Christian converts, and people connected with

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<sup>54</sup> Although it was not explained what this figure meant or how it was obtained.

<sup>55</sup> 'Qo'shning tinch - sen tinch', *Halq So'zi* 108 (2146) 2/06/1999: 1.

<sup>56</sup> 'Katta fitnaning bir xalqasi', *Halq So'zi* 179 (2217) 09/09/1999: 1; 'Narkobiznes - terrorning moliyaviy rahnamosi', *Halq So'zi* 190 (2228) 24/09/1999: 1.

the secular opposition) were frequently 'found' to have drugs in their possession and punished appropriately.

'Religious extremism' or 'fundamentalism'<sup>57</sup> was a threat that featured prominently in *Halq So'zi*, particularly after Islam Karimov blamed the bomb blasts in February on religious extremists. This ill-defined category principally included the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU - see page 50) and Hizb ut-Tahrir (see footnote 44, p.63). However, it could also be applied to anyone who practised piety or demonstrated this through sporting facial hair or by clothing style. There were many arrests and trials of individuals.

An article on the first anniversary of the Tashkent bombs, "A warning against evil", cautioned that, "Even though world Islamic revolution is an illogical concept... certain terrorists are distributing leaflets and rumours. Coming through the borders of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and northern Afghanistan, they are threatening the entire region."<sup>58</sup> The article, alleging a link between Hizb ut-Tahrir and the IMU, portrayed this threat as coming from outside, over the borders. As I argue below (p.88), this was an attempt to displace opposition from disaffected Uzbekistanis to some sort of shady conspiracy 'over the border.'

In this article *Halq So'zi* accused the Islamic groups of 'terrorism.' The government of Uzbekistan commonly collapsed what it perceived as the three chief threats to the state, religious extremism/fundamentalism, terrorism, and narcotics, as being the same thing. An example is provided by President Islam Karimov's address to the OSCE Istanbul summit in November 1999. "A twenty year long civil war," he says of Afghanistan, "has turned this country into one where all sorts of groups of international terrorists and fundamentalists take refuge and set up training camps, funded basically by the cultivation and sale of drugs."<sup>59</sup>

The mechanism of the conflation of the three threats of narcotics, religious extremism and terrorism and their re-working, around the concept of border, into a unified discourse incorporating the grand themes of national independence overseen by the current government, is skilfully demonstrated in an article run on 15<sup>th</sup> May.

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<sup>57</sup> *Halq So'zi* used the European loan-word *fundamentalizm* and the Uzbek word *aqidaparastlik* as apparent synonyms, both of which I have rendered as 'fundamentalism.'

<sup>58</sup> 'A warning against evil.' *Halq So'zi* 34 (2331) 17/02/2000 (for some references I only recorded the article in English translation in my own notes; this oversight means that I am not able to recover the original Uzbek translation. For similar reasons, some other references are recorded incompletely).

<sup>59</sup> 'O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti Islom Karimovning Istambul sammitida So'zlagan nutqi', *Halq So'zi* 229 (2267), 19/11/1999: 1.

Under the sectional headline, “What’s going on at the custom’s house?”, an article entitled, “Their intentions were wicked”, is ostensibly about the smuggling into the country of fundamentalist materials, and details a number of cases of people recently intercepted at the border. Five instances are mentioned, altogether totalling the attempted smuggling of 8790 "fundamentalist" and "rabble-rousing" books and 1000 such video and audio cassettes. It was also stated that in 1998 36,000 copies of “literature of a fundamentalist or extremist spirit was intercepted trying to be brought over our borders.”<sup>60</sup>

### **Unusual threats**

Although the idea of danger at the border was dominated by the trio of drugs, terrorism, and religious fanaticism, a small number of articles drew attention to other dangers trying to break in upon the state. Examples included the threat of pollution from an aluminium smelting plant poorly maintained by struggling Tajikistan,<sup>61</sup> and from radioactive materials hidden in a consignment of metals seized as they were being brought over the border from Kazakhstan, apparently en route to Pakistan.<sup>62</sup> Uzbekistan’s Kazakhstani border was the bulwark against fake dollars circulating in southern Kazakhstan along the Uzbek border and in danger of leaking into Uzbekistan.<sup>63</sup>

President Karimov was personally involved in the battle against locusts, attending a meeting to discuss the problem. *Halq So’zi* reported that a warm winter had allowed these harmful insects to flourish, posing a particular threat to the cotton harvest.

Recently the increase of locusts in our republic’s territory has been observed. This year locusts have damaged 331,000 hectares of crops. Locusts essentially cross over from neighbouring states. The situation is particularly difficult in areas bordering Kazakhstan. In the territory of Kazakhstan 20km from Tashkent’s Chinoz region there is a great swarm of locusts. However, because of the insufficiency of pest control in the neighbouring state, there is a danger of the locusts causing damage to the crops in

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<sup>60</sup> ‘Bojhonada nima gap? Ularning niyati buzuq edi’, *Halq So’zi* 96 (2134), 15/5/1999: 2.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Tojikiston alyumin zavodi salbiy ta’sir qiladigan zonadagi ijtimoiy-ekologik vaziyatni barqarorlashtirishga bag’ishlangan xalqaro uchrashuv ishtirokchilarining Tojikiston Respublikasi Majlisi Oliy hamda O’zbekiston Respublikasi Oliy Majlisiga Murojati’, *Halq So’zi* 84 (2122) 30/04/1999: 1.

<sup>62</sup> *Halq So’zi* 64 (2361), 04/04/2000.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Qalbaki dollarlar’, *Halq So’zi* 251 (2289) 22/12/1999: 1.

regions of ours such as Chinoz and Yangiyul. Because of this, Uzbekistan, at its own expense, has on a number of occasions provided pesticides against the swarm for a distance of 20km within Kazakhstan's territory.<sup>64</sup>

The danger was in border areas. A great swarm of locusts was poised to swoop over into Uzbekistan. The author considered it important to "be underlined that in regions which border on Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan the incidence of pest infestation is 2-3 times greater than in other regions." This is evidence that these states have abandoned the chemical and biological fight against pests, whereas Uzbekistan, under the personal supervision of Islam Karimov- is bravely resisting them, as it is resisting all other menaces at the border.

Travelling through Uzbekistan in 1930, Anna Louise Strong witnessed a similar war against an infestation of African locusts that threatened the cotton fields. Resistance was organised on a grand scale, replete with regimental divisions of combatants and even military bands. One rumour then circulating was that the British had sent them (Strong 1930). Such state-led, pseudo-military, patriotic campaigns were common strategies in the Soviet Union to mobilise populations and imbue ideology, and *Halq So'zi* utilises this familiar form of discourse. The article implies that whilst neighbouring states have grown weak and unruly, Islam Karimov is still resolutely holding back at the border the foe that would ravage Uzbekistan's national wealth.

### **Border as a site where wealth leaks out**

Although the emphasis throughout the year was on strengthening the border to hold out harm, the border was also portrayed to a lesser extent as the site where the prosperity of Uzbekistan *leaked out*. *Halq So'zi* reported many instances of customs officers apprehending people trying to secrete over the state borders items such as money,<sup>65</sup> an electric transformer,<sup>66</sup> honey,<sup>67</sup> and meat.<sup>68</sup>

However the main concern was the booming trade in illegal scrap metals, largely smuggled to Kyrgyzstan before being sold on legally to China.<sup>69</sup> The stripping of

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<sup>64</sup> 'Zararkunandalarga qarshi kurash - muhim vazifa', *Halq So'zi* 136 (2174) 19/07/1999:1.

<sup>65</sup> 'Bojhonada: 4200 dollar bilan ketayotgan yo'lovchi', *Halq So'zi* 14 (2052), 22/01/1999: 1.

<sup>66</sup> 'Xovosga chiroq kerak emasmi?', *Halq So'zi* 14 (2052), 22/01/1999: 4.

<sup>67</sup> 'Bojhona: Asalxo'r Inomiddin', *Halq So'zi* 111 (2149), 05/06/1999: 3.

<sup>68</sup> '<Go'shfurush>lar qo'lga tushdi,' *Halq So'zi* 5 (2043), 08/01/1999:1.

<sup>69</sup> Megoran, Nick, May 2000, 'Scrap metal on the Silk Road.' *Eurasia Insight* (New York: OSI).

power and communications cables was widely reported, and blamed by the heads of the electricity supply industry for “inflicting great damage on our country’s economy” and impeding the development of the republic.”<sup>70</sup> New measures were introduced in November 1999 and March 2000 reorganising the scrap metal processing industry and introducing harsher laws that promised, “No mercy for copper thieves.”<sup>71</sup> The papers informed their readers that although since 1997 alone 3000km of high quality telecommunications line had been installed to promote the “wealth and welfare of our country”,<sup>72</sup> thieving acts of “hooliganism” were threatening this.<sup>73</sup> On 13th March, *Halq So’zi* stressed that a group of criminals with 40 tonnes of metal were apprehended at a site on the border with Kyrgyzstan *where no border control station was located*. This point served to justify the stringent and disruptive new border regime.<sup>74</sup>

The absences are as integral to the meaning of any text as the presences. There was no discussion of such issues as why people were prepared to risk being caught in damaging their own infrastructure so. In the copious reporting of these thefts, ‘hooliganism’ or criminality/evil were identified as the motives. The government was not willing to admit that poverty drove many, as that would have ruptured its narratives of a rich and happy Uzbekistan, which only knows poverty by the glances it casts from safely behind its border. Likewise, there was no mention of people smuggling foodstuffs, livestock and other goods *into* Uzbekistan.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the contentious issue of bribery and corruption of customs officers and border guards and thus their complicity in smuggling rackets was completely ignored. The government was not willing to see its myth of plenitude and satisfaction challenged, or to destabilise its key discursive strategy of the geographical imagination of rich land/poor land, articulated at the state border.

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<sup>70</sup> *Halq So’zi* 45 (2342), 4/03/2000.

<sup>71</sup> ‘<<Mis>> o’g’rilariga shafqat yo’q’, *Halq So’zi* 228 (2266), 18/11/1999: 4.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> ‘Rangli metall <<Shaydolari>>’, *Farg’ona Haqiqati* 30 (20,632) 13/04/2000.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Qalloblarning misi chiqdi,’ *Halq So’zi* 50 (2088), 13/03/1999: 4.

<sup>75</sup> My evidence for this comes from my own observations of the constant stream of goods being taken into Uzbekistan bypassing official checkpoints, anecdotal reports, and interviews. For example, one Kyrgyz family living in Kyrgyzstan's border zone in JalaĀ-Ābad told me that their impoverished relatives from Uzbekistan's Honabad came and smuggled basic foodstuffs back home.

## Border as division between poverty and wealth

The notion of the border of the state being the division between different realms of wealth and poverty was dynamically enacted in incidents of distribution of humanitarian aid. Rescuers were sent to Turkey to assist following the devastating earthquake in August,<sup>76</sup> and a trainload of cement and other much-needed items was sent to Tajikistan's city of Hujand following heavy flooding in July.<sup>77</sup> However, the most elaborate account of humanitarian aid was printed in an article about aid to Kyrgyzstan in May.

The article detailed the construction of a road from the Kyrgyzstani 'Ergeshtem' border post with China to its Osh border with Andijon (see map B, **p.Error! Bookmark not defined.**). This was part of the 'Great Silk Road' reconstruction programme, linking Europe and China via Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, whilst Uzbekistan was fulfilling its responsibilities, Kyrgyzstan was struggling:

The construction of the Tashkent-Andijon section of the road is progressing well. It is only the section in Kyrgyzstan, but due to some economic problems that have emerged, where there is a delay in starting construction. At the initiative and invitation of our president Islam Karimov, he has taken responsibility for contracting and financing the above section of the road himself.<sup>78</sup>

Although "the Andijon-O'sh-Ergeshtem road project is a co-operative venture... it is Uzbekistan which has seen to the technical and mechanical aspects as well as the construction expertise needed to implement the project. It is basically the "Andijonavtoyol" state enterprise which will carry out the work." Thus whilst it is a 'co-operative venture' the nature of co-operation is not equal; Kyrgyzstan is clearly the poorer partner which can neither afford nor has the necessary skills to do the work itself; in contrast to Uzbekistan, which has already completed its section. Now, this may all be true, but it is necessary to situate this discussion in the wider field of *Halq So'zi* handling of joint ventures. These have been actively encouraged and underwritten by the Uzbek government, with the foreign partner providing the technology and skills training that Uzbekistan lacks. However, they are not couched in the language of Uzbekistan's deficiency, but of equal partnership: for example, the

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<sup>76</sup> 'Zilziladan jabr ko'rganlar uchun', *Halq So'zi* 166 (2204) 24/08/1999: 1.

<sup>77</sup> 'Tojikistonga insonparvarlik yordami etkazib berildi', *Halq So'zi* 138 (2176) 14/07/1999: 1.

<sup>78</sup> 'Nurli manzillar', *Halq So'zi* 90-91 (2128-29), 8/05/1999: 1.

establishment of South Korean joint ventures producing paint<sup>79</sup> and manufacturing cables.<sup>80</sup>

Having set the scene of a beneficent Uzbekistan and an impoverished and deficient Kyrgyzstan, the author presented two events that occurred either side of the border. The first was held at the Uzbekistan side of the border:

Yesterday at the Hojabad customs post a ceremony to mark their handing over to Kyrgyzstan was held. Those who had gathered expressed their gratitude for the generosity of our President towards this grand project, and wished the road constructors success in completing the tasks entrusted to them.

The final stage of the hand-over was just over the border in Kyrgyzstan:

After that, the modern graders, bulldozers, transporters and other necessary technical equipment set off towards O'sh oblast. There at the Kyrgyzstan border the oblast leaders and community representatives received them with great joy. At a celebration, those who spoke drew attention to the restoration of the Andijon-Osh-Erkeshtom road as a product of the eternal friendship and practical co-operation of the two peoples, and expressed gratitude to the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, but especially to Islam Karimov.<sup>81</sup>

The contrast between the two events should be noted carefully. In Uzbekistan, a solemn *ceremony*<sup>82</sup> was held, a dignified pseudo-religious gathering concluding with a blessing bestowed on the missionaries of technology and order as they embarked upon their civilising mission over the border. When they arrived with these gleaming symbols of progress, the *oqsoqols*<sup>83</sup> received them with gratitude and held a joyful *celebration*.<sup>84</sup> The image is redolent of the paternalism of the colonial encounter. Crucially, the border becomes the immediate site of this juxtaposition.

Later that summer, *Halq So'zi* published a flowery piece by a writer who visited the construction workers sent to work on the Osh-Ergeshtom road. He gladly relayed the words of one Kyrgyz man who

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<sup>79</sup> 'O'rta Osiyoda yagona', *Halq So'zi* 67 (2105), 06/04/1999: 2.

<sup>80</sup> 'O'zbekistonning eksport salohiyati yuksalmoqda', *Halq So'zi* 238 (2276), 02/12/1999: 1.

<sup>81</sup> see footnote 78

<sup>82</sup> *marosim*

<sup>83</sup> see appendix 1

<sup>84</sup> *tantana*



extolled the compassion of the Uzbek people and the wisdom, generosity and sagacity of our leader, our president Islam Karimov. 'We would not have had the capacity to build or even repair the Osh-Ergashtom Rd.. But Islam og'a was most generous: this year he has set aside \$30m. Is \$30m a small amount? On top of that, he has provided all the technology we don't have. He sent the best road construction experts.'<sup>85</sup>

The incapacity of the Kyrgyz allowed the Uzbek leader to shine.

### **Looking over the border**

It is always a danger that a political message will make little impact because it is too abstract. *Halq So'zi* published a number of articles in 1999 describing the experience of individual people 'looking over the border.' Parliamentary deputy Qurbon Amirqulov put it eloquently in an article published on 24<sup>th</sup> February, a week after the Tashkent bombs:

Because the Surhon Valley neighbours with Afghanistan, we have the opportunity to compare life on both banks of the river, and see that the difference is like that between earth and the sky. Afghanistan has been an Islamic state for ten years, but see, all the same the poverty of the people has not been filled with bread, peace and safety has not come to their homes, and the tears of the people have not stopped flowing... We are always one with Islam Karimov, and support his patriotic politics.<sup>86</sup>

The President was continually linked with the defence of the border, and in no more imaginative a way than that provided by a schoolteacher in Denov region who touchingly named his new son 'Islam Abdug'anivich Karimov', the full name of the president. For showing this respect, the mayor invited him to an official reception. The proud father explained that he had named his son so as a sign of respect for the President: "We are located close to Afghanistan and Tajikistan... so more than others we greatly appreciate the importance of a peaceful and contented life."<sup>87</sup>

The border with Tajikistan received the same attention; a letter from some people living alongside it spoke of their gratitude that President Karimov had protected them

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<sup>85</sup> 'Buyuk Ipak Yo'li - mustaqillikning eng muhim inshooti', *Halq So'zi* 152 (2190), 6/08/1999: 2.

<sup>86</sup> 'Alpomishni yengib bo'lmaydi', *Halq So'zi* 38 (2076), 24/02/1999: 1.

<sup>87</sup> 'Ham havas, ham niyat.' *Halq So'zi* (2104), 3/4/1999: 1.

from the things they see happening every day in the neighbouring state. Of course, it is most unlikely that they could actually see violence daily: 'seeing' is a way of conveying an embodied sense of the proximity of danger.

### **Responding to the threats**

*Halq So'zi* not only presented a grim list of threats and dangers; it tirelessly reiterated all the efforts the government was taking to defend Uzbekistan from them. Readers were assured that

groups of the State Customs Committee, the National Security Service, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and also the border forces are working closely together in a systematic way. To tightly control some parts of the border area criss-crossed by many roads, mobile customs houses and checkpoints are in operation. The committee and its regional administrations have formed special effective action groups which, night and day, are controlling our borders.<sup>88</sup>

Reflecting the graver military threat of the Batken crisis, stronger language was used:

In Uzbekistan measures are being implemented to strengthen the defence system of the state border. Sections and units of the country's armed forces and military structures are ready to counterstrike any attack from diversionary-terrorist groups that may occur.<sup>89</sup>

A presidential decree on 14th January reorganised the border defence forces, establishing them as their own entity separate from the National Security Service, to be supplied with the latest weaponry and technology. 14<sup>th</sup> January was henceforward to be celebrated as 'border forces day.'<sup>90</sup> As Paasi argued, "[a] boundary does not exist only in the border area, but it manifests itself in many institutions such as education, the media, novels, memorials, ceremonies and spectacles etc." (Paasi 1999: 76). In February the President rewarded many of his customs officials in

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<sup>88</sup> 'Bojhonada nima gap? Ularning niyati buzuq edi', *Halq So'zi* 96 (2134), 15/5/1999: 2.

<sup>89</sup> see footnote 56.

<sup>90</sup> "O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentning Farmoni: O'zbekiston Respublikasi Davlat Chegaralarini Himoya Qiluvchi Qo'mitani Tashkil Qilish To'g'risida", *Halq So'zi* 9 (2047), 14/01/1999: 1.

recognition of their work.<sup>91</sup> It is precisely through such moves that nationalism is territorialised and transformed into part of the civil religion. In the Soviet period 15th February was celebrated, the date in 1921 when the border guards were founded (Chandler 1998: 40). President Karimov's new celebration was thus new in content but not form, an assertion of state authority in a post-Soviet framework that would be readily comprehensible to politicians and public alike.

The opening of a new customs house was hailed as "Glad Tidings" for the country: "Now at last the movement... into our country of narcotic substances, weapons and ammunition, and other illegal products will be ended."<sup>92</sup> A new school to train customs officials was established in the Ferghana oblast on 1<sup>st</sup> April, a "fortress of the state" and bulwark upon which "the abundance of our homeland and the fullness of our dining tables are strongly dependent."<sup>93</sup> Later in the year, a "Letter of Gratitude" from the students to President Karimov was printed in the paper, thanking him for establishing such a well-equipped college. The students wrote:

We want to underline that, with true commitment, we will from this day onwards be vigilant in defending social stability and peace, the well-being of the citizens and ethnic groups, the inviolability of our borders and the integrity of our state's territory against aggressors and evil forces, and if necessary are prepared to give up our own lives in so doing!<sup>94</sup>

This short letter served to underline the binary dualism of good/evil that the state frontier demarcated. This side of it was a stable, peaceful, harmonious collection of ethnic groups living together (with the homeliness of full, family dining tables), whereas on the other side evil aggression threaten to destroy that. The perpetuation of this gentle commonwealth is conflated with the maintenance of the inviolability of the border, a task the young recruits are prepared to die for. Such heroic talk is usually associated more with warriors than customs officials. This suggests a country under siege, yet emphasises that the government, under the leadership of its president, is more than able to defend the country's borders.

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<sup>91</sup> 'O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentning Farmoni: O'zbekiston Respublikasi Davlat bojhona qo'mitasining alohida o'rnak ko'rsatgan xodimlaridan bir guruhini mukofotlash', *Halq So'zi* 27 (2065), 10/02/1999: 1.

<sup>92</sup> 'Hushhabarlar: Yangi bojhona', *Halq So'zi* 18 (2056), 28/01/1999: 4.

<sup>93</sup> 'Bojhona: Mahorat maktabi,' *Halq So'zi* 64 (2012), 01/04/1999: 1.

<sup>94</sup> 'O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidenti Islom Karimovga tashakkurnoma', *Halq So'zi* 141 (2179), 17/07/1999: 1.

The unwritten corollary of this safeguard is that the population ought to accept the sometimes disruptive and apparently repressive policies that ensure their safety. As the Batken fighting reached its final stages, *Halq So'zi* announced that “‘cleansing’ measures are being taken to identify those in local communities with extremist tendencies, fundamentalists, criminals under investigation and foreign citizens living illegally in the oblast.”<sup>95</sup> This information was part of an article about securing the Ferghana border (which abuts Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region, see map B, p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**) against outside attack. Thus, proper control of the border extended to surveillance and arrest of anyone labelled ‘outside forces’ wherever in the territory they might be living. Control of the Uzbekistani border also became a means for Uzbekistan to attempt to control and influence critical reporting by its neighbour. Reporting interrogation and extortion at the hands of Uzbekistani border guards in 2002, Kyrgyzstani journalist, Babakulov, alleged that they maintained lists of ‘wanted’ Kyrgyzstani journalists who wrote articles critical of Uzbekistan’s border policies.<sup>96</sup>

### **Geographical displacement of opponents**

The repeated circulation of stories of danger itself risked becoming problematic, as it implicitly acknowledged that some Uzbekistanis may not be loyal to the government of Islam Karimov. *Halq So'zi* tackled this head-on, asking, “How is it that day by day fundamentalism and armaments are entering our beautiful, lovely and peaceful state that to an increasing degree is astounding the world?”<sup>97</sup> The paper devoted numerous column inches to discrediting President Karimov’s enemies.

The grievances and proposals of opponents such as the IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and Mohamad Solih (see p.50) were never reasonably examined or explained. They performed the same role as the Kazakhstani terrorists in the Hollywood film *Air Force One*, who Bichel argued, were essentially scripted to show that we live in a dangerous world and therefore their aims and goals were irrelevant (Bichel 1997: 181). They were dismissed as evil others: ‘religious extremists’ or ‘international terrorists’ whose beliefs are parodied and grievances ignored. Slavoj Žižek has

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Vatan sarhadlari mustahkam’, *Halq So'zi* 202 (2240), 13/10/1999: 1.

<sup>96</sup> Babakulov, Ulugbek “Kyrgyzstan: Regional Press Muzzled”, in *Reporting Central Asia* 123. London: Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 07/06/2002.

<sup>97</sup> see footnote 88.

described this general process as the “fetishization of the radical Evil of our neighbour into the absolute Otherness... which is rendered untouchable, unpoliticizable, impossible to be accounted for in terms of a power struggle” (Zizek 2000: 112). But these simplistic arguments were also permeated by a subtle geography, predicated on the core discursive construction that this chapter has highlighted of Uzbekistan as the realm of order and prosperity, threatened, but for President Karimov’s leadership, by an external realm of chaos and anarchy. This strategy territorialised the patriotic ideology of national independence in a realm of virtue, and located opponents outside of it both geographically and morally.

Thus, rather than being indigenous proponents of alternative forms of government, the threats to Uzbekistan were portrayed as external:

outside our country there are aggressive and fundamentalist forces who, exploiting the sacred value of the Islamic faith of our people, using the religion of our forefathers as a mask want to stop and reverse the democratic and spiritual progress of Uzbekistan.<sup>98</sup>

Parliamentarian Rustam Jumaev spoke darkly of “outside forces”,<sup>99</sup> whilst those Uzbekistanis who joined them were traitors, selling their dignity for money like prostitutes.<sup>100</sup> Referring to a student uprising in 1992,<sup>101</sup> a ‘Hero of Uzbekistan’ Ibrohim Faizulaev, told the readers of *Halq So’zi* in an article printed on 5<sup>th</sup> March that those who opposed Karimov were “false democrats, opportunists and religious fundamentalists, with the help of outside forces.”<sup>102</sup> However, the demonstrators supported opposition leader and poet Muhammad Solih, and were thus thoroughly national and assertively indigenous. Yet indigenous opponents were de-legitimised through strategies of discursive geographical displacement.

The makes of car of unsavories apprehended at the border were only mentioned by *Halq So’zi* in two cases: a Volkswagen and a Volvo.<sup>103</sup> In certain Soviet and post-Soviet social understandings, driving a ‘foreign’ car carries a hint of suspect patriotism. The Volkswagen driver had religious material published by Hizb ut-

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<sup>98</sup> ‘Hushyorlikka da’vat: Prezident Islom Karimovning O’zbekiston milliy axborot agentligi muxbirining cavollariga javoblari’, *Halq So’zi* 125 (2163), 25/06/1999: 1.

<sup>99</sup> ‘Ekstremizm va terrorchilik - hurriyat kushandasi’, *Halq So’zi* 42 (2080), 02/03/1999: 2.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Prezidentga – halqqa – tinchlikka tajobuz’, *Halq So’zi* 34 (2072), 18/02/1999: 2.

<sup>101</sup> Sparked by bread price rises, the students called for social and political reform.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Kechagi odamlar emasmiz’, *Halq So’zi* 45 (2083), 05/03/1999: 1.

<sup>103</sup> See footnote 88.

Tahrir, and the article alleged that a genuine believer would have been reading Imom Bukhariy. Bukhariy was a compiler of the primary Hadith variant used by Central Asian scholars. Born in Bukhara, he is associated in current nationalist interpretations of history with the Uzbek nation. Apparently incidental details such as make of car and what a person was *not* reading locate them outside the realm of authentic Uzbekness as defined by the ‘ideology of national independence.’ Thus their opposition could be explained by essential deficiency, rather than considered political choice.

Alongside the assertion that Islam Karimov’s enemies were ‘outside forces’ or their collaborators came another geographical argument, that they were traitors who rose up “against the homeland that nurtured them.”<sup>104</sup> Thus, rather than pushing radical reform programmes to counter specific social and political ills, they simply desired to harm a homeland. They had forgotten what a homeland was,<sup>105</sup> and were, therefore, less than human as “those without a homeland are without a conscience, those without a conscience are without a homeland.”<sup>106</sup>

This form of discourse resonates deeply with Soviet-era propaganda about the threat of ‘outside forces.’ In her ground-breaking study of the USSR’s border policy, Chandler argued that border controls took on extraordinary significance because “Stalin considered the world outside to be plotting and scheming to conquer his government from without and overthrow it from within” (Chandler 1998: 6). This continued into the 1980s, when KGB chief, V.V. Fedorchuk, accused Western “centres of ideological diversion” of systematically violating Soviet borders by conducting illegal trade (ibid.: 88). More recently, Kosach *et al* encountered a similar attitude at the Russia-Kazakhstan border (Kosach, Kuzmin and Mukomel 2001: 285).

### **Historical continuity of border defence**

Narratives of post-independence threats were interwoven with ancient ones in a historical myth of the ongoing struggle between Uzbekistan and the Uzbek people and those traitors who join with the insidious outside forces to plot the downfall of the state. A staple theme of President Karimov has been that modern Uzbekistan is the

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<sup>104</sup> ‘Tarixning o’chmas saboqlari’, *Halq So’zi* 230 (2268), 20/11/1999: 3.

<sup>105</sup> *Halq So’zi* 149 (2187), 29/07/1999.

successor to the great states and leaders of the past that existed on its soil, and the heir to their spiritual, cultural and political legacy. It is only fitting that it should be the heir to their battles, too, which was the theme of the November article, “The undying lessons of history.” The warrior-leader of the thirteenth century Horazim state, Jaloloddin Manguberdi, and the legendary hero of the Alpomish epic (Yo'ldosh O'g'li 1998) are both characters that have been widely celebrated as part of Uzbekistan's nation-state building project.<sup>107</sup> The President underlined the fact that these men stood for values such as a strong state, patriotism, and loyalty:

No matter what people or country, far more than disasters from outside one must be extremely wary of those wicked individuals and faithless traitors emerging from within who, putting their own interests above everything else, rise up against the homeland that nurtured them.<sup>108</sup>

This reasoning strongly implies that President Karimov is their successor; indeed, he has cultivated the ‘strong leader’ image and drawn inspiration from the example of Timur in particular.

Amir Timur (1336-1405) built a huge empire based in Samarkand, and was described as a destructive conqueror by Soviet historians, an image impressed upon the anglophone world by Marlowe's portrayal of him as “the Scourge of God” in his play *Tamburlaine the Great*.<sup>109</sup> However, in independence he has been reinterpreted as a just ruler and strong state-builder as well as a brilliant military tactician, presiding over an Uzbek cultural and artistic Renaissance (Ali 1996; Jalolov and Qo'chqor 2000: 15). His excesses have been acknowledged, but explained as an inevitable product of being born into a ruling feudal class whose interests he served (Sh. Ahmedov 1996; Karimov and Shamsutdinov 1997).<sup>110</sup> Indeed, a cult has been fostered around him as “the centrepiece of an Uzbek national ideology”, assuming

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<sup>106</sup> *Halq So'zi* 113 (2151), 09/06/1999.

<sup>107</sup> In the 1952 Stalinist attack on Central Asian epics, Alpomish was condemned by Uzbek academics for distorting the characteristics of working people, but glorifying the representatives of the ruling classes and their exploitative and warlike behaviour (N. Karimov 1994).

<sup>108</sup> See footnote 104.

<sup>109</sup> Although colonial apologists such as the administrator Pahlen (1964) and geographer Markham (preface to De Clavijo 1859) described Timur as a great leader whose legacy was betrayed by his descendants yet restored by Tsarist Russia and the British Raj respectively.

<sup>110</sup> Here, the legacy of the Marxist paradigm of historical progression through differing modes of production is apparent. Ahmedov also argues that, in building an empire, Timur did no more than any other leader attempted to at the time, and that his wars lifted the ‘Mongol yoke’ from both Europe and Asia (1996: 3-4).

that Uzbeks have long been the dominant political and cultural force in Central Asia (Melvin 2000: 46). President Karimov unveiled an impressive equestrian statue of him that, tellingly, replaced Karl Marx in central Tashkent in 1993 (visible in Figure 2-4, p.75), and presided over grand celebrations of his 660th anniversary culminating in 1996.<sup>111</sup> Significant amounts of academic scholarship and more popular literature have accompanied the new freedom to re-evaluate the legacy of Timur, and many works about him have been translated into Uzbek from other languages (see for example, Ivanin 1994 (1875); Keren 1999 (1978); O'rinboev 1992).

In ceaselessly urging his people to understand the importance of their past (Karimov 1998), Islam Karimov has framed a conception of his own rule as legitimate. He has modelled himself in certain ways on Timur (Thaulow 2001: 16). Following the Tashkent bomb blasts, two further education teachers edited a book of touching poetry commemorating the events with contributions from builders, teachers, bookkeepers, students, policemen and schoolchildren as well as national poets. The themes of homeland and nation were central, alongside support for the President. The longest poem was a *doston* by Habib Sa'dulla called 'Jarohat', or 'wound.' Following the events from explosions to funerals, one section of terrific impact was entitled 'The Verdict of the Ancestors.' Sa'dulla marshalled a role-call of past luminaries of science, religion, statecraft and literature claimed as forefathers of modern Uzbekistan, including Bukhariy, Naqshband, Farg'oniy, Ulug'bek, Navoiy, Bobur and Cho'lpon, to condemn the attacks. This preceded the crescendo of the *doston*, a section called 'the meeting.' Here, Timur himself appears in a vision to the startled President Karimov and affirms the leadership of a humble Karimov whom Timur addresses as 'my child' (Hasanov 1999: 116-154).

This explicit linking of Islam Karimov with Timur was apparent in *Halq So'zi's* portrayal of the President as the defender of the border, reorganising border forces and making them directly answerable to himself. A letter to *Halq So'zi* from some folk living alongside the Tajik border thanked the President for keeping them safe from the terrible things they saw across the border. A Timur quotation adorned the letter: "a country without a head is like a body without a soul."<sup>112</sup> By defending the state border, President Karimov was emulating Timur, and was thus a legitimate leader.

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<sup>111</sup> For a very short description of the culmination of these celebrations by a participant, see Petersen (1996).

<sup>112</sup> 'Xalqini sevganni haq ham sevadi', *Halq So'zi* 39 (2077), 25/2/1999: 1.



## **Borders of Peace**

Although the pages of *Halq So'zi* were packed out with articles asserting how well-controlled the borders were and with implicit criticisms of neighbouring states, the paper was keen to gloss this over with assurances that relationships between neighbours were good. Following a border demarcation incident that threatened to escalate into localised military confrontation,<sup>113</sup> the presidents of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan explicitly denied the existence of border tensions at a summit in April. On the contrary, “The heads of state concluded that the border between the republics of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan will be a border of peace between the kinfolk peoples of the two countries.”<sup>114</sup> Speaking of the Ferghana-Kyrgyzstan border region, President Karimov insisted that:

The Uzbek and Kyrgyz have since time immemorial lived side by side. They drink from the same stream. One side of the cotton field is Uzbek, the other side Kyrgyz. The markets and cemeteries are one, and both happiness and sorrow are shared.<sup>115</sup>

An intrepid *Halq So'zi* journalist ventured into Kyrgyzstan's Batken region to discover if the population were dissatisfied with Uzbekistan, but could report only praise for Islam Karimov on their lips.<sup>116</sup> A fortnight later *Halq So'zi* addressed the complaints in the Kyrgyzstani press that Uzbekistan's border policies were causing suffering to the borderland populations. After interviewing a Batkenite, the paper reported that whilst “Uzbekistan's armed forces are guarding our country's frontiers with vigilance...there has been no hindrance to their comings and goings.”<sup>117</sup>

This is more than simply a diplomatic denial of difficulties, it gestures towards the ideas of inter-republican ‘unity of the peoples’ and ‘equality and friendship of nations’ that characterised Soviet discourse from the Brezhnev era onwards (Smith 1996: 13). Although Olcott claimed that this was merely a façade (1994a: 17), the fact that it is one which post-Soviet governments still find recourse to indicates that

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<sup>113</sup> Goble, Paul, 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbors', *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 4, No. 23, Part I, 2/02/2000.

<sup>114</sup> ‘Qo'shma bayonat,’ *Halq So'zi* 78 (2375), 22/04/2000.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Islom Karimov: Maqsadim, baxtim - xalqim, yurtimning tinchligi!’, *Halq So'zi* 195 (2233), 01/10/1999: 1.

<sup>116</sup> ‘Gazandalar niyatiga yetolmaidi,’ *Halq So'zi* 194 (2232), 30/09/1999: 1.

<sup>117</sup> see footnote 95.

the concept did gain a certain moral legitimacy. It also shows how border discourse was used to deny inter-governmental tensions and hostility towards Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstani border dwellers. It was also used to deny the hardship caused to Uzbekistan's border population, and to portray a sense of organic community and patriotic support for the state. Returning from his visit to Kyrgyzstan, the journalist reports that,

as we drew closer to Uzbekistan's frontier,<sup>118</sup> a wonderful sight at the military posts met our eyes. The people of the mahalla<sup>119</sup> were supporting and helping in every way the soldiers of the border defence force who were guarding the frontier of our homeland with such vigilance. Indeed, our nation is truly generous. Such a nation!- such a nation will never be defeated.<sup>120</sup>

I am not suggesting that those forces and events that *Halq So'zi* portrayed as threats were somehow illusory. Unsuspecting civilians died when bombers struck in Tashkent. The looting of wire as scrap metal caused havoc to communications and transport systems.<sup>121</sup> The heinous trade in pernicious narcotics that enriches some but ruins many certainly passed through Uzbekistan. What I do question is the interpretation of these dangers, and the neat discursive division drawn between two distinct realms of good versus evil. In order to maintain this myth, contradictory facts had to be suppressed. In contrast with the more open Kyrgyzstani press, *Halq So'zi* never reported the poverty and hardship under which many suffer. The grievances of those joining radical groups were not aired. The absence of alternative means of protest was not assayed as a factor radicalising and channelling dissent. The shadier side of the work of border guards and customs officials that made them hated and feared by many, corruption and robbery, was ignored, as was discussion of their meagre wages that made them reliant on such activities. It may be true that Islamist groups were involved in the drugs trade, but allegations of similar collusion between customs officials and other state agents with organised crime were not investigated.<sup>122</sup> The endorsement given by foreign states was highly publicised, but the sharp

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<sup>118</sup> *sarhadi*

<sup>119</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>120</sup> See footnote 116.

<sup>121</sup> For example, it has been claimed that Ferghana's excellent trolleybus system ground to a halt partially due to the theft of overhead power cables.

<sup>122</sup> For example, 'Kyrgyz police apprehend Uzbek security officer', *RFE/RL Newslines*, 2 (80) Part I, 27/04/1998.

criticism of Uzbekistan's human and civil rights record, restricted media, and lack of genuine democracy was ignored. The achievements of neighbouring states were not reported in any way that would engender unfavourable comparison with Uzbekistan. Whilst it is true that many Kyrgyzstanis respect Islam Karimov as a strong leader, his border policies have caused widespread dissatisfaction and resentment in Kyrgyzstan, but *Halq So'zi* only reported the former.

It is not enough simply to explain these lacunae by dismissing *Halq So'zi* as toothless. In good Soviet Uzbekistani tradition (Ilkhamov 2001: 38-39), *Halq So'zi* ran various articles over the year critical of this mayor or of that service for failing to meet expected standards,<sup>123</sup> and reported convictions of officials for malpractice.<sup>124</sup> The paper's staff would have been aware of the above issues; rather, the absences were as telling as the presences. Together they wove a powerful geopolitical vision of what Uzbekistan was: of who was inside that moral commonwealth, and who outside. As Renan argued in 1882, "the essence of a nation is that they have many things in common - and also that they have forgotten many things" (Renan 1990 (1882): 11).

### **Part III: UZBEKISTANI FOREIGN POLICY DISCOURSE**

Before concluding this chapter, I include a brief overview of the broader contexts of Uzbekistani foreign policy discourse in 1999. This is to provide a framework for locating border discourse and a point of comparison for the Kyrgyzstani government's view of the same events, which is the topic of chapter 3. It also further corroborates my suggestions about the analytical utility of collapsing the distinction between the domestic and foreign spheres, and the role of foreign policy in enacting and maintaining political identities of the state.

In 1999 *Halq So'zi* gave copious coverage of Uzbekistan's foreign policy and relations with the outside world. I argue that this was enframed by two contrasting discourses of Uzbekistani political identity. The first was the enduring Soviet

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<sup>123</sup> According to *Halq So'zi* the administration of Marg'ilon was censored for preventing the blossoming of this ancient Silk Road town that was now possible under national independence ('O'ylanmasdan chiqarilgan qaror', *Halq So'zi* 192 (2230), 28/09/1999: 3.

<sup>124</sup> For example, the article 'Hokim qonunni tan olmasa...', an investigation into the corruption of a disgraced official; *Halq So'zi* 15, (2053) 23/01/1999: 1.

‘friendship of the peoples’ doctrine of an equality and comradeship of states, augmented by claims that the Central Asian peoples in particular share common language, cultures, historical experience, religion and culture and are in fact ‘one people’. The second was the particularist ideology of ‘national independence’, stressing the uniqueness and greatness of an Uzbek state rediscovering its historic calling as the inheritor of past Central Asian civilisation.

I argue that the second discourse dominated, that foreign policy was primarily a sphere of action that portrayed Uzbekistan as displaying its re-found greatness under the leadership of Islam Karimov, a testimony to the ideology of national independence. This was validated through the endorsement of respected states. Foreign trade networks needed establishing so “that we gain unimpeded access both for the export to the world market of our daily increasing export of our fast-selling products,” which the world wants to buy.<sup>125</sup> Tourism would also be promoted, enabling more visitors to come and see Uzbekistan.<sup>126</sup> “Uzbekistan’s achievements leave us speechless”, was the message of a French delegation, relayed by President Karimov,<sup>127</sup> in the same month that an Uzbek trade fair was held in Hamburg.<sup>128</sup> Pride was expressed that an Uzbek film “won the hearts of art-lovers” in countries such as Germany and Holland as well as FSU states.<sup>129</sup> A conference about Uzbekistan in Japan was proof that “The Japanese want to know about Uzbekistan.”<sup>130</sup> All of these incidents were evidence that during the Soviet period Uzbekistan’s progress was held back by being unable to make direct contact with the outside world, but that independence had removed that obstacle.<sup>131</sup> Uzbekistan was taking its rightful place in the family of nations, embodied by a group photograph at NATO’s 50th anniversary celebrations (Figure 2-5).

### **Uzbekistan in Central Asia**

A comparison of discourse on ‘Central Asia’ in the mouthpiece *Uzbekistani* and *Kyrgyzstani* presses reveals a sharp contrast. For the Kyrgyz government, as the next chapter will show, ‘Central Asia’ was the political space of mutual interests of

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<sup>125</sup> ‘Dunyoga ochilgan yo’llar’ *Halq So’zi* 105 (2143), 28/05/1999: 2.

<sup>126</sup> ‘Moziyga ko’prik,’ *Halq So’zi* 23 (2061), 04/02/1999: 4.

<sup>127</sup> ‘O’zbekiston erishgan yutuqlar bizni lol qoldirdi,’ *Halq So’zi* 31 (2069), 13/02/1999: 1.

<sup>128</sup> ‘Gamburgda O’zbekiston iqtisodi kunlari’, *Halq So’zi* 35 (2073), 19/02/1999: 3.

<sup>129</sup> ‘Ekkranda- ayol timsoli,’ *Halq So’zi* 191 (2229) 25/09/1999: 3.

<sup>130</sup> ‘Yaponiyaliklar O’zbekiston bilish istagida,’ *Halq So’z* 134 (2172), 08/07/1999: 1.

‘eternal friends.’ For the Uzbekistani government, however, it was primarily a conceptual space for Uzbekistan to demonstrate its leadership and superior development, as it had done under Timur. Thus positive comparisons with neighbouring states had an important function. Uzbekistan’s grain production had increased since independence, whereas Kazakhstan’s had fallen.<sup>132</sup> *Halq So’zi* reported that the whole world was backing Islam Karimov in his initiative to make Central Asia a nuclear-free zone,<sup>133</sup> ignoring the most important step taken in this direction by Kazakhstan’s President Nazarbaev in yielding ex-Soviet nuclear warheads to Russia. A number of projects were lauded for being ‘the only one in Central Asia’, including an advanced paint-producing factory,<sup>134</sup> a golf course,<sup>135</sup> and an Islamic university.<sup>136</sup>



**Figure 2-5: President Islam Karimov standing proudly at US President Bill Clinton's right hand during group photo session, NATO's golden jubilee celebrations, Washington April 1999 (*Halq So'zi*, 27/4/1999).**

This attitude of Uzbekistan to the other Central Asian states is illustrated by a comparison of two pictures depicting Central Asian summits. Figure 2-6 is taken

<sup>131</sup> “Islohotlar yo’li- iqtisodiy erkinlik”, *Halq So’zi* 76 (2114), 20/04/1999: 1.

<sup>132</sup> ‘O’zbekning o’z noni bor’, *Halq So’zi* 140 (2178), 16/07/1999: 2.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Markaziy Osiyo tashabbusi: qadamba-qadam,’ *Halq So’z* 1 (2039), 01/01/1999: 1.

<sup>134</sup> See footnote 79.

<sup>135</sup> ‘O’rta Osiyoda yagona’, *Halq So’zi* 98 (2136), 19/05/1999: 4.

<sup>136</sup> ‘Buyuk ajdodlarimizga munosib voris bo’laylik’, *Halq So’zi* 175-176 (2213-2214), 04/09/1999: 1.

from the Kyrgyz press: there is no attempt to depict president Akaev as the pivotal element in the photograph. This contrasts sharply with a picture in *Halq So'zi* over a year earlier (Figure 2-7), that clearly centres on Islam Karimov as the leading head of state in Central Asia.<sup>137</sup> Both pictures are typical of reporting in their respective papers: *Halq So'zi* made assiduous efforts to portray President Karimov as the leader of any group photograph of Central Asian heads of state.



**Figure 2-6 : Leaders of Central Asian republics gather in Tashkent. *Kirgiz Tuusu*, 25-27/09/2000:**

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Although Central Asia was a sphere where Uzbekistan did express undying friendship with its neighbours,<sup>138</sup> these were somewhat perfunctory and lacked the gravity that Kyrgyzstan gave them. Ironically, they asserted that *because* of independence these countries could now be close allies, whereas in fact independence was throwing up numerous obstacles to co-operation that did not exist before.

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<sup>137</sup> The leaders were meeting in the Turkemenistani capital Ashgabad to discuss the Aral Sea problem.

<sup>138</sup> For example, with Kazakhstan ('Do'stlik rishtalari mustahkam', *Halq So'zi* 210 (2248), 26/10/1999: 3) and Tajikistan ('Birlashgan o'zar,' *Halq So'zi* 71 (2109), 13/04/1999: 3).

Moreover, Uzbekistan's policies regarding resources, borders and customs make the gesturing towards 'Central Asian friendship' sound hollow.



**Figure 2-7: Presidents Rakhmonov of Tajikistan, Niyazov of Turkmenistan, Karimov of Uzbekistan, Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, and Akaev of Kyrgyzstan at a meeting in Tashkent. *Halq So'zi*, 10/04/1999.**

### **The Great Silk Road**

The EU-sponsored TRACECA (Transport Corridor for Europe-Caucasus-Asia) programme aims to increase overland trade between Europe, Central Asia, the Caucasus and China (bypassing Russia) by serving as a contemporary counterpart to the ancient Silk Road. Whilst Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akaev envisaged the Silk Road as a form of egalitarian internationalism (see p. 139) and "mainly a spiritual idea linking the East with the West" (Akaev 2001: 185), in Uzbekistan the emphasis was placed on its magnifying the greatness of Uzbekistan's ideology of national independence and its leader. It was described as "the greatest construction of independence",<sup>139</sup> and President Karimov claimed as an initiator of it six years earlier.<sup>140</sup>

The historical significance of the Silk Road was much emphasised, tied always to the restoration of that significance under the inspiration of president Karimov now

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<sup>139</sup> See footnote 85.

that independence had come.<sup>141</sup> Islam Karimov's project mirrored that of Timur, who 'restored' the Silk Road and made Samarkand its powerful capital linking East Asia and Europe. Thus:

In view of this, the basic concept of the conference can be described: Uzbekistan, which can be regarded as the heart of Central Asia, should act as the fundamental bridge between Europe and Asia and needs to affirm its position as an initiator of international integration.<sup>142</sup>

However, the restoration of the Silk Road was threatened by the ever-present dangers of religious extremism and fundamentalism, big state chauvinism, and 'some neighbouring states' whose borders/customs policies hamper trade.<sup>143</sup> It was ironic that Uzbekistan should have been accusing others of strangling border trade at that time, but the 'Silk Road' concept showed how President Karimov was able to skilfully weave the themes of national independence, historical destiny, and decisive leadership modelled on Timur into this most geographical of notions.

### **Ambivalence of discourse: just who was Alpomish?**

A fascinating example of how *Halq So'zi* could switch between the discourses of 'Central Asian eternal friendship' and Uzbek superiority is provided by two articles that provide radically different cultural-political interpretations of the meaning of the Alpomish epic (see above, p.91). An article in May described a festival of reciters of the ode from Uzbekistan, Karakalpakstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.<sup>144</sup> The poem was a unifying factor for Central Asian peoples with a shared cultural legacy. However, an article published the following month was very different:

The 'Alpomish' doston lauds the courage, bravery, pride and honour of the people known as the Uzbeks, shows their national identity, and is a living, priceless work that has for over a thousand years been passed from heart to heart and mouth to mouth.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> 'Osiyo va Evropa o'rtasidagi "ko'prik"', *Halq So'zi* 93 (2131), 12/05/1999: 1.

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*,

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> See footnote 125.

<sup>144</sup> 'Alpomish madhi,' *Halq So'zi* 100 (2138), 21/05/1999: 4.

<sup>145</sup> '<<Hush kelding, hoi elim-ov, Alpomishning to'yiga...>>' *Halq So'zi* 110 (2148), 04/06/1999: 4.



Discussion of a common Central Asian legacy was entirely absent: here, Alpomish was the essential product of the historic Uzbek people. This was in marked contrast to the May article, which made no claim that Alpomish was Uzbek. The ambivalent handling of the Alpomish epic demonstrates the existence of a contradiction within the intellectual project of historical interpretation in the national ideology of independence: the attempt to root a modern nation-state in medieval feudalism. This is reflected in the formation of foreign policy that is ideologically inspired by that ambiguous history and also constrained by socialised practices of statehood and the material factors of international political economy.

### **Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan**

Before the Batken crisis, little column space in *Halq So'zi* was given to Kyrgyzstan. When Kyrgyzstan was mentioned it was generally as a background to threats facing Uzbekistan, such as references to incidents of smuggling at the border. A visit of Kyrgyzstan's Prime Minister Muraliev in July received only cursory coverage.<sup>146</sup> Articles that referred to Kyrgyzstan were not usually featured prominently. *Halq So'zi* openly admitted that there were 'obstacles' to developing bilateral relations.<sup>147</sup>

With the onset of the Batken crisis, Kyrgyzstan was thrust to the centre of Uzbekistani attention. The 'eternal friendship' rhetoric declared that Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were united in opposing the attackers. Reporting a meeting of the foreign and defence ministers of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan in Osh on 31st August, *Halq So'zi* insisted that "The Uzbek people always have and will continue to stand with the resolute Kyrgyz nation through testing as well as joyful times. The criminal groups should not forget this."<sup>148</sup> However, the bulk of the articles on Batken were highly critical of Kyrgyzstan, accusing it of failing to deal adequately with the attackers.<sup>149</sup> Because the borders of Osh oblast are not protected, they are "a convenient place for the spreading of religious extremism, terrorism and the drugs trade."<sup>150</sup> This occurred in spite of President Karimov's later confession

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<sup>146</sup> 'Oliy Majlisida uchrashuv', *Halq So'zi* 137 (2175), 13/07/1999: 1.

<sup>147</sup> 'Oqsaroyda qabul', *Halq So'zi* 136 (2174), 10/07/1999: 1.

<sup>148</sup> See footnote 56.

<sup>149</sup> See footnote 52.

<sup>150</sup> See footnote 56.

that he “asked Kyrgyzstan’s president a number of times why he doesn’t put border guards there.”<sup>151</sup>

It is informative to contrast column space and tone of articles devoted to Kyrgyzstan with that which featured other countries. Japan yields just one example. Business ties,<sup>152</sup> technical co-operation,<sup>153</sup> diplomatic relations,<sup>154</sup> academic and cultural exchange,<sup>155</sup> and sporting links<sup>156</sup> were lauded. Formal avowal of the kinship of the Uzbek and Kyrgyz peoples notwithstanding, links between Japan and Uzbekistan were given more prominence in the pages of *Halq So’zi* than corresponding links with Kyrgyzstan.

Criticism of Kyrgyzstan increased markedly as the Batken fighting continued, but this was perhaps not only a result of the conflict. An open letter written by the exiled chairman of the Erk opposition party was submitted to a US government “Democratization and Human Rights in Uzbekistan Hearing” held at Capitol Hill, Washington DC in November 1999. Solih wrote that:

Stability was major argument in arms of the Uzbek dictator. He skilfully used it in struggles with the opposition. He repeated it for seven years: ‘If I allow freedom to the people, there will be a war here as in Tajikistan.’ However, he never spoke about, ‘will be as in Kyrgyzstan.’ Because in Kyrgyzstan, no war, in spite of the fact that freedom was given to the people. There was stability... people openly using constitutional rights: freedom of speech, demonstrating, and meetings.<sup>157</sup>

Reversing Islam Karimov’s geopolitical envisaging of Central Asia, he alleged that the violence and conflict that now threatened Uzbekistan stood in stark contrast to the peaceful protests that characterised its more democratic neighbour; evidence that President Karimov’s arguments were flawed and his policies had failed. This letter was widely circulated and would certainly have been read by Uzbekistani officials; it

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<sup>151</sup> ‘“Biz o’z hududimizni halqaro me’yorlar doirasida bizda mavjud barcha usullar bilan himoya qilamiz”’, *Halq So’zi* 205 (2243), 19/10/1999: 1. Here again IMU grievances with the ruling Uzbekistani regime are not discussed; the crisis is explained by the inability of Kyrgyzstan to control its borders.

<sup>152</sup> ‘O’zbekiston-Yaponiya: Hamkorlik yangicha sifat kacb etmoqda,’ (*Halq So’zi* 68 (2106), 07/04/1999: 1.

<sup>153</sup> ‘O’zbekiston-Yaponiya o’rtasidagi rangi ko’prik,’ *Halq So’zi* 86 (2124), 04/05/1999: 3 - an article about Japanese involvement in modernising Uzbekistan’s air transport system.

<sup>154</sup> ‘“Jisa” vakillari tashrifi’ *Halq So’zi* 86 (2124), 04/05/1999: 3.

<sup>155</sup> ‘Boburnoma- Yapon tilida’, *Halq So’zi* 57 (2095), 22/03/1999: 3.

<sup>156</sup> ‘Yaponiyada kurash federasiyasi’, 74 (2112), 16/04/1999: 4.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Open letter by Muhammed Salih, ERK Party chairman of Uzbekistan,’ Oslo, dated 14/10/1999 (via Turkistan-N newslist).

may be that the intensity of Uzbekistani criticism of Kyrgyzstan in the second half of the year was partially an attempt to counter this discourse.

As we have seen, *Halq So'zi* was more than willing to list Kyrgyzstan's faults, whether subtly through detailing gifts of humanitarian aid, describing social problems such as drug abuse,<sup>158</sup> or by explicit criticism of its failure to defend its borders against attack. These examples also correlated with the continual representation of Uzbekistan as a haven surrounded by chaotic and weak states. However, at times the claim of Uzbekistan to the cultural and civilisational hegemony of Central Asia by virtue of historical destiny was threatened by Kyrgyzstan. The threats had to be re-interpreted as actually forwarding the ideology of national independence.

An example of this was the presidential decree "On the awarding of cosmonaut S. Sharipov with the "Great Service" medal." Solijon Sharipov is an ethnic Uzbek from O'sh's Uzgen region, a Russian citizen, a member of its space programme, and the first Uzbek into space- on a flight in the USA's shuttle Endeavor (Jusupbeokova 1998). He might thus be seen primarily as a symbol of post-Soviet internationalism. However, the text of President Karimov's award offers a somewhat different interpretation:

For achievements on the American 'Shuttle Endeavour' spacecraft of space research, services in raising the honour of the Uzbek nation, an important role in teaching the young about the secrets of the universe, and for promoting the spirit of patriotism and friendship, cosmonaut Solijon Sharipov is awarded with the "Great Service" medal.<sup>159</sup>

All inconvenient traces of his Kyrgyzstani origins and Russian life have been removed: he is someone who has worked 'in the spirit of patriotism' for the honour of the *Uzbek* nation, and the friendship, not of the post-Soviet peoples, but between America and Uzbekistan

Arguably the most well known Kyrgyz to symbolise Central Asian/Soviet 'friendship of the peoples' is the veteran writer and latterly statesman Chinggis Aytmatov, whose world-famous stories of Kyrgyz and steppe life took him to the highest echelons of the Soviet literary elite. He is close to Islam Karimov, and is

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<sup>158</sup> 'Qo'shni mamlakatlarda: Qirg'iziston', *Halq So'zi* 135 (2173), 9/07/1999: 3.

<sup>159</sup> 'O'zbekiston Respublikasi Prezidentining Farmoni: Kosmonavt S. Sharipovni <<Buyuk xizmatlari uchun>> ordeni bilan mukofotlash to'g'risida', *Halq So'z* 150 (2188), 30/07/1999: 1.

known for his sympathy towards of some form of Turkestani federation to unite Central Asia.<sup>160</sup> In 1999 he celebrated his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

At a conference held in honour of his birthday in January, President Karimov awarded him a medal of honour. A eulogy in *Halq So'zi* indexed stock tropes of Uzbek identity building, such as Timur, but entirely excluded any reference to Kyrgyzstan or the Kyrgyz.<sup>161</sup> Coverage of a speech delivered that March in Tashkent again avoided any mention of Kyrgyz or Kyrgyzstan, introducing Aytmatov as a Central Asian writer.<sup>162</sup> His main message appeared to be a condemnation of the February bombs in Tashkent and a call for the world community to unite against terrorism.<sup>163</sup>

This appropriation of the great Soviet/ Kyrgyz writer for Uzbekistani political ends is most pronounced in an article that appeared on 2<sup>nd</sup> June celebrating his birthday. The text drew special attention to his role in the so-called 'Uzbek affair' or 'cotton scandal' in the 1980s that led to the imprisonment of over 2500 officials and the disgrace of former First Secretary of the Communist Party in Uzbekistan, Rashidov (for a fuller account of this, see Critchlow 1991, especially chapter 3). The paper acknowledges his defence of the Uzbek people in the Soviet paper *Pravda* at the time, and quotes approvingly his belief that "The influence of ancient Uzbek culture on Central Asia can be compared to that of ancient Byzantine on Russia."<sup>164</sup> His admiration continues to this day, as evidenced in a speech of acceptance of his 1995 'Friendship' award from President Karimov.

The work of the Uzbek people in strengthening their independence and restoring their culture always leaves me speechless,' said Chinggis og'a every time he came to Tashkent... I am infinitely grateful to the Uzbek people and their president for their respect and kindness.

In many articles about Chinggis Aytmatov in 1999, Kyrgyzstan was referred to only once, in reference to a theatre festival held in the Kyrgyzstani capital of Bishkek in his honour.<sup>165</sup> It would not be possible to deduce from *Halq So'zi* that Saripov and

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<sup>160</sup> Megoran, Nick. "Chinggis Aytmatov and The Geopolitics Of Kyrgyzstan." *Eurasia Insight* (New York: OSI), 14/02/2000.

<sup>161</sup> 'An'anaviy Aytmatovhonlik,' *Halq So'zi* 10 (2048), 15/01/1999: 4.

<sup>162</sup> In fact, the only reference to Kyrgyzstan in this edition of the paper was about the theft of scrap metals (see page 91).

<sup>163</sup> 'Chingiz Aytmatov bilan uchrashuv,' *Halq So'zi* 50 (2088), 13/03/1999: 2.

<sup>164</sup> 'Yerdan usilmaidi oyoghi,' *Halq So'zi* 108 (2146), 02/06/1999: 4.

<sup>165</sup> '<<Eski Machit>> gran-pri covrindori' *Halq So'zi* 89 (2127), 07/05/1999: 3.

Aytmatov were Kyrgyzstanis. The meaning of their work was discussed only in so far as it promoted the ideology of Uzbekistan's national independence and esteemed the president.

Even more telling than the erasure of Kyrgyzstan and the appropriation of Kyrgyzstanis to the Uzbek discourse of national greatness was a savage polemic against the 'Osh 3000' celebrations in Kyrgyzstan. The late Alexander Zadneprovskiy, veteran Leningrad archaeologist with half a century's research experience in Central Asia, introduced carbon dating techniques to Central Asia and used their results to suggest that Osh had been inhabited for 3000 years.<sup>166</sup> President Akaev decreed that the celebrations should take place in October 2000. They were large-scale, involving massive preparation including an extensive urban renewal and road-resurfacing project. As Osh had apparently been founded 3000 years and a month before the presidential elections, the celebrations provided a convenient platform for Askar Akaev to appeal to southern voters.

*Halq So'zi* rehearsed the succession of civilisations in Uzbekistan over six millennia, concluding that together they had formed the civilisation of Uzbekistan.<sup>167</sup> The article claims that the oldest town in Central Asia is the Dalvarzin-Tepa ruins near Uzbekistan's city of Andijon, dating back 2500 years. Nearly half of the (long) polemic is dedicated to refuting Zadneprovskiy's claim and what it termed the "empty babbling" of Askar Akaev's decree. An array of arguments is marshalled, although Zadneprovskiy's main evidence from carbon dating is not discussed.<sup>168</sup> The article dismisses Zadneprovskiy's hypothesis as "old Russian politics in a new form", sniffing some political reasoning behind these monstrous claims.

The writer believed that Uzbekistan's claim to contemporary leadership of Central Asia was based upon its being the authentic inheritor of past civilisation, from which it follows that the existence of traces of an older Central Asian civilisation in Kyrgyzstan would be an immense challenge. Similarly, Uzbekistan lacks the cosmonaut and world-renowned author of whom Kyrgyzstan can boast, a deficiency that again challenges Uzbekistan's pretensions to greatness, but which was neutralised and transformed through discursive practice. These examples serve to illustrate the indivisibility of 'domestic' from 'foreign' when analysing the political identity of the

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<sup>166</sup> Personal conversation with Zadneprovskiy, Lenin Kolhoz, O'sh, 1997.

<sup>167</sup> A claim contested by Kyrgyz historians such as Kenensariyev who resist Uzbek historians' depiction of the Qo'qon Khanate as Uzbek, stressing rather its Kyrgyz character (see p.32).

state and how it is constituted through interaction at both national and international levels.

In spite of the perseverance of a Soviet and pan-Central Asian rhetoric about the ‘unity of the peoples’ crystallised in the signing of an ‘eternal friendship’ treaty with Kyrgyzstan in 1997, Uzbekistani foreign policy discourse in effect saved its unreserved warmth and enthusiasm for rich states such as Japan. This is in marked contrast to Kyrgyzstani discourse, where warm relations between the two states and the two presidents were emphasised as being at the core of foreign policy. I suggest that there are two reasons for this marked discrepancy, both material and discursive. The first is material: that Kyrgyzstan needs Uzbekistan more than Uzbekistan needs Kyrgyzstan, due to cross-border transport and energy links and Kyrgyzstan’s weaker economic position. In *realpolitik*, new business partnerships are more important than eternal friendship. The second reason is the different political identity of the two states, enacted in foreign policy discourse. In 1999 President Akaev’s conception of Kyrgyzstan was partially as a liberal, multi-ethnic state, whereas President Karimov’s ideology of national independence expressed itself in equality with the world’s greatest states and superiority over its neighbours.

#### **4: CONCLUSIONS**

In 1999-2000 Uzbekistan increased pro-active control and administration of its international boundaries, souring relations with neighbouring states. As opposition to the incumbent regime became increasingly violent, the spotlight was turned on to fortifying the borders as bastions of security. This chapter has explored the official policies, pronouncements and discourse of the Uzbekistani government on the state’s boundaries with neighbouring states in that traumatic time, as recorded in the official mouthpiece newspaper *Halq So’zi*. It has embedded these in a study of reporting of relations and ties with other states in general, and Kyrgyzstan in particular. The border question was not merely the site of a violent power struggle between an entrenched president and disaffected radicals, or the location of Uzbekistan’s defence of its patrimony, or an attempt to restrict capital and goods flows precipitated by increasingly divergent macroeconomic policies of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It was

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<sup>168</sup> ‘O’rta Osiyo shaharsoslik madaniyati ildizlari’, *Halq So’z* 144 (2182) 22/07/1999: 3.

also a cartography of knowledge that mapped a geopolitical vision of post-Soviet political space, and enabled the Uzbek elite to write its authority over the material and social landscapes of the Valley. I wish to make five suggestions with regard to the study and understanding of post-Soviet Uzbekistan in the light of this work.

Firstly, using post-structural critiques of the realist paradigm in political science, I have attempted to move away from the argument that Uzbekistan's borders policy can be explained simply as the pursuit of rational interest by a pre-existing state facing given, external threats. This view draws an epistemic divide between 'domestic' and 'foreign' politics, mirrored in a formal division of material within academic publications. Intrigued by what would fill the supposed ideological gap left by the evaporation of Marxism-Leninism, scholars have investigated the political identity of nationalist Uzbekistan with little reference to foreign policy, which has been dominated by speculation about those with whom Uzbekistan would ally itself and what 'model' it would follow.

Against this, this chapter has argued that matters connected with the state border and relations with neighbouring countries are at the heart of President Karimov's domestic 'ideology of national independence.' Dodds suggests that foreign policy discourse serves to create and police boundaries of identity that are ideological visions of who belongs within the state and who does not (Dodds 1994: 199-202). In the material practices and texts of 'foreign policy,' official discourse constitutes and maintains a vision of Uzbekistani political identity. *Halq So'zi* discourse about the state border was a constant rewriting of the character of Uzbekistan, and framed and defined a particular identity. This was performed by the relentless repetition of a series of contrasting images about Uzbekistan and its neighbours. Uzbekistan was a haven of order and prosperity and the heir to an illustrious past that independence allowed it to reclaim as a foundation for future greatness, under the patriotic oversight of President Karimov. In contrast, bordering states were desperate quagmires of poverty, extremism, narcotics and anarchy. The state boundary was a site where this division was re-enacted in the pages of *Halq So'zi*.

Secondly, I have highlighted the importance of 'danger' in structuring the Uzbek polity. Campbell (1998) argued that the representation of danger was integral to understanding US foreign policy, but was unsure how the model would work for other states. Although he did not use Campbell's theoretical approach, Newman has shown that for over fifty years Israel's political identity has evolved in connection with

notions of danger, security and collective safety (Newman 2000: 309-314). This study argues that Campbell's theory fits Uzbekistan well. The identification of 'danger' to the state was important in discursively enacting and maintaining boundaries of self / other that constituted the political identity of Uzbekistan.

However, I also wish to signal my reluctance to embrace all aspects of critical IR / geopolitics. The border served Uzbekistani propaganda well: but its closure did reflect as well economic and security concerns. Whilst finding the writings of these post-structural theorists useful and refreshing, I do not wish to follow them in overdetermining identity or in a naïve reliance on the text as a singular guide to understanding action. Words can mask as well as inform, and sometimes yield only clues to geopolitical reasoning. Criticising this in Ó Tuathail's writing, Agnew insists that the human world is a mix of ideological impositions and practical pressures (Agnew 2001a: 42). Thus, to argue that the discourses and practices of Uzbekistani foreign policy in relation to its borders enact and constitute a political identity, is not to deny that they are simultaneously an attempt to insulate the state from actual military or economic damage. Rather, it is to accept that human actions are a complicated and often unpredictable product of everyday understandings, ideological beliefs and practical necessities. All of these are inherently implicated in power. These practices and discourses were part of an ensemble of strategies that protected the hold on power of the ruling elite. The constant refrain of the territorialisation of virtue under the strong leadership in the tradition of Timur and the ubiquitous existence of danger justified sometimes draconian measures of control and surveillance that enabled it to entrench its power base against opposition. But it does not follow from this that the ideological content of border discourse or the whole project of the ideology of national independence was a cynical deception to mask raw power politics.

Thirdly, this chapter has demonstrated the importance of *territory* to the ideology of national independence. Following Sack (1983), geographers have approached human 'territoriality' less as an innate behavioural instinct, but more as a strategy of political control. As Graham has argued forcefully, "powerful narratives of place, fixed within hegemonic representations of the past, remain fundamental to the modernistic ideas of legitimacy and authority underpinning the territorial state" (Graham 2000: 75). This is demonstrated in the explicit construction of national place in the texts of foreign policy as outlined in this analysis. However, homeland is 'flagged' in daily



life (Billig 1995) by constant reference to it in pop songs, street-side slogans, office wall maps, outlines of the state map adorning the cover of schoolbooks,<sup>169</sup> and countless other ways. President Karimov has described the homeland as “Sacred as a Holy Place” (1995). The importance of territoriality to President Karimov’s ‘ideology of national identity’ has been neglected in even sophisticated discussions on Karimov’s ‘ideology of national independence’ (for example, March 2002), and I hope that this contribution will go some way towards balancing that.

A greater sensitivity to the importance of territory might enable a better understanding of Uzbekistan’s foreign as well as its domestic policy. One of the few ways in which an analysis of domestic ideologies of nationalism has been seen to impinge upon foreign relations is in the case of cross-border ethnic minorities ‘stranded’<sup>170</sup> by independence. It has been assumed that their presence would influence Uzbekistani foreign policy (Anderson 1999: 90; Olcott 1994b: 224-5). Indeed, President Karimov asserted in 1992 that Uzbekistan would be a “cultural and spiritual centre for all Uzbeks irrespective of their domicile” (Karimov 1992: 15), and backed Uzbek factions in the Tajik and Afghan civil wars. However, support for these factions was not simply due to their being Uzbek but as opposition to Islamist groupings. In Kyrgyzstan, far from being courted, the Uzbek minority has been viewed with suspicion, and many Uzbeks feel alienated from and rejected by the Uzbekistani state (Liu 2002; also this dissertation, chapters 4 and 5). Whilst it is true that President Karimov has spoken of the importance of maintaining close relations with “ethnic brothers living in other sovereign states”, this should not be taken as a contemporary policy priority: in the same work, he also indicated the importance of non-state owned TV and press freedom (Karimov 1997: 49, 109). Uzbekistan has not readily granted domicile to its foreign ethnic kin in the way that Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have; far from it, it has often met them with suspicion and even hostility.<sup>171</sup> The imperial ambitions of Timur have not been translated into aggressive policies of territorial aggrandizement by President Karimov; on the contrary, he has located his vision of authentic Uzbekness firmly within the boundaries of Uzbekistan.

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<sup>169</sup> For example, see Mo'minov *et al* (2000) and Jo'raev *et al* (1998).

<sup>170</sup> To use Cohen's phrase, 1997: 22.

<sup>171</sup> See for example ‘Report of forced deportation could heighten Tajik-Uzbek tension,’ *Eurasia Insight* 28/06/02 (New York: OSI), chapter 4 of this dissertation, and Morgan Liu’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (2002).

<sup>172</sup> In 1999 *Halq So'zi* scripted the international territorial boundary as a neat division between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz peoples, rendering the existence of minorities almost invisible. President Karimov's nationalism might be ethnic, but it is also firmly territorial.

Fourthly, these results demonstrate the importance of detailed, inter-disciplinary empirical research. This notion that the existence of an Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan was a major factor in driving Uzbekistani foreign policy was widespread in the 1990s. It was based upon a false conception of 'ethnicity' as the most powerful motor driving Central Asian politics, and also the taking at face value of official pronouncements, when ethnographic research or more detailed discourse analysis would quite easily have shown that that this was untrue. As a recent piece by Kangas illustrates, Central Asian Studies continues to produce tepid, descriptive introductions to the 'new states' that struggle to achieve innovative analytical rigour as they are impeded by a lack of original primary research (Kangas 2002).

Fifthly, this work leads me to question 1991 as the date to begin studies of Uzbekistani foreign policy, understood as a series of practices and ways of thinking. Campbell argued that if the Cold War were understood as a struggle related to the production and reproduction of identity, then it is a misunderstanding to think of it ending in 1991 (Campbell 1998: 169). New threats and dangers would be found to take the place of the old ones, but the entailments integral to the particular form that US political identity took would remain. I suggest that such analysis might also be applicable to Uzbekistan. Viewing Uzbekistan as a *tabula rasa* in terms of political ideology and foreign policy in 1991, as Pandit (1992) does, forgets that the features of national statehood were moulded by the Soviet Union as the political basis on which to organise and rule Central Asian space. It also ignores the continuity of state practice and discourse with the Soviet period under which post-independence leaders were schooled.<sup>173</sup> Discourse on the state border demonstrates that clearly. Whether holding back dark 'outside forces', rooting out unpatriotic traitors within the state, or resisting locust infestation, the border of contemporary Uzbekistan performs similar functions to those of the Soviet border, even if the named threats are different. If pre-

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<sup>172</sup> For example, subsequent Uzbekistani attempts to de-enclave Sox and Qalacha have been pursued through negotiation and suggested land-swaps with Kyrgyzstan, not unilateral military action.

<sup>173</sup> Imart suggested a continuity in Soviet discourse from the time of Ivan IV, when he claims that Russia's border first came to be seen as sacred, and a place where external menaces kept at bay (Imart 1987: 14-15).

1991 "border controls were one of the visual images that propagated the myth that the USSR was a strong state" (Chandler 1998: 3-4), post-Soviet Uzbekistani borders do likewise. Exit visas were a significant means of controlling populations in both periods. The importance of stating 'the friendship of the peoples' and the purport of designating a particular day to celebrate border defence forces are comprehensible only within the framework of Soviet practices of statehood and the exercise of power. The continuity of form, if not content, between Soviet mythology represented in flags, building-top slogans, public celebrations, statues and historiographies has been observed in the context of domestic policy (Anderson 1997: 141). Further research is needed to establish whether there is also continuity in the foreign policy sphere, as this work might indicate.

Finally, this chapter spotlights the towering importance of the person of President Islam Karimov to the project of national independence. Omnipresent in the border texts throughout 1999 and into 2000, he stood in the breach between the dual realms of prosperity and anarchy that the state boundary demarcated. By defending the borders of the state against all manner of threats from terrorists and fundamentalists to locusts and pilfering Kyrgyzstanis, the President was positioned as the champion of independence, the guarantor of prosperity, and the rightful successor to the legacy of Amir Timur. *Halq So'zi* aptly summarised his role by printing these telling lines from poet, Abdulla Oripov, asserting that President Karimov *himself* compensated for that geopolitical deficiency unique to Uzbekistan as the world's only double-landlocked state:

*Sometimes it makes me deeply sad,  
That in this world no ocean have we;  
But, uncle Islam, my heart is glad-  
For Uzbekistan, you are our sea!*<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> *Halq So'zi* 20 (2058), 30/01/1999: 1. Uzbekistan is not only landlocked, but is surrounded entirely by states that are themselves landlocked.

## Chapter 3 : Kyrgyzstan's Frontier- Enclosing the 'Common Home' or the Home of Manas?

### PART I: INTRODUCTION

#### **Kyrgyzstan and the border question, 1999-2000**

The unilateral decision of the government of Uzbekistan to tighten up its state border had profound implications for the people of southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000. A technically extant, but in practice almost invisible, boundary became a concrete reality of quotidian life; the increased concentration and exercise of state force symbolised by a transformed and militarised border landscape of imposing new edifices of surveillance and control, the demolition of cross-boundary infrastructure, and strict passport and customs regimes. How and why the Kyrgyz state ought to respond to what its press dubbed 'the border question' moved to the forefront of domestic politics, and is the subject of this chapter.

The 'border question' is incomprehensible outside an explication of a political power struggle in 1999, the year that was arguably the most turbulent of independent Kyrgyzstan's brief history. Whilst boosting his status internationally by becoming the first CIS leader to take his country into the World Trade Organisation (WTO),<sup>175</sup> at home President Askar Akaev survived both an alleged assassination attempt on his life and the invasion of the Batken region by guerrillas of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU, see p.50). Dissatisfaction continued to mount over ongoing economic malaise and deepening poverty levels accentuated by the knock-on effects of the Russian financial crisis of 1998. This was exacerbated by deteriorating relations with neighbouring states, depriving the Kyrgyzstani population of essential gas supplies and export markets for agricultural products. 1999-2000 was also a crucial period in Kyrgyzstani political life: local elections in the autumn were followed by a parliamentary contest in January 2000 and a presidential election that November. These elections were the arena for a bitter struggle between the government and its opponents, characterised by numerous instances of harassment of

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<sup>175</sup> In December 1998.

opposition candidates and their supporters.<sup>176</sup> In the spring of 1999 the opposition looked confident and capable of mounting a concerted campaign against President Akaev: one year later it was shattered, with many of its leading figures disqualified from political office, in exile, defected to the government, defrauded of election victories, or under arrest. It was not only the opposition that was shattered: President Akaev's re-election to an apparently unconstitutional third presidential term in a campaign shrouded with allegations of foul play buried his international reputation as a reformer, and Kyrgyzstan's as 'the island of democracy'.

It is against this background that debates over 'the border' need to be understood. The government of Kyrgyzstan lacked the means and resolve of the Kazakhstani government to oppose Uzbekistan's unilateral moves along the border;<sup>177</sup> apart from entering into bilateral delimitation negotiations that began belatedly in 2000, it preferred to avoid conflict with its more powerful neighbour. In this sense, there was no 'border dispute': Tashkent took certain steps to enforce control of its border, to which representatives of Kyrgyzstan offered little protest or resistance. However, at the discursive level of political contestation within Kyrgyzstan 'the border dispute' came to be defined as a major issue. For the opposition, 'the border' was a weapon to wield as a damning indictment of the government, made into a symbol of the weakness of President Akaev by linking to it a range of concerns about poverty, water, gas, immigration, language and national identity. In response, the government vacillated between two contradictory positions: denying that there was any dispute with its 'eternal friend' Uzbekistan, and using the border to demonstrate its patriotic defence of the country. All of these discursive strategies were attempts to monopolise definitions of 'the nation' and assert rival geopolitical visions of Kyrgyzstan. This is not merely a matter of intellectual curiosity: as Fierman has argued in the case of Uzbekistan, alongside the distribution of material goods, nationalism is one strategy of legitimising rule that "has probably paid significant political dividends" to the leadership (Fierman 1997: 398).

This chapter should be read, then, as an exploration of the parameters of nationalism as both political ideology and as a strategy of legitimisation in contemporary

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<sup>176</sup> For example see 'Kyrgyz Republic: Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2001', US State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 4/03/2002.

<sup>177</sup> As evidenced by the Kazakhstani government's rapid resistance to Uzbekistani forces' attempts to unilaterally fence off disputed territory in 2000- Goble, Paul, 'Good Fences Make Good Neighbors', *RFE/RL Newslines*, Vol. 4, No. 23, Part I, (Prague: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty) 2/02/2000.

Kyrgyzstan. An analysis of the role of the border question in Kyrgyzstani politics has two advantages. Firstly, it enables an empirical study of the nature of the Kyrgyz polity in its actually existing reality, one that is not analytically handicapped by being chained to the abstract meta-narratives of ‘democracy,’ ‘authoritarianism’ and ‘civil society’ in the way that Menon and Spruyt's account is (1998). It demonstrates the subtleties of competing visions of nationalism that dominated political discourse. Secondly, read alongside the material presented in chapter 2, it demonstrates that the ‘border dispute’ cannot simply be explained as the product of ethnic tensions, competition for resources, poorly drawn Soviet-era boundaries or any other deterministic explanation. Although not necessarily denying the role of these factors, this chapter argues that ‘it’ was the discursive outcome of the complex interaction of ideologically charged domestic power struggles in two divergent political entities, Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

### **Critical geopolitics and post-Marxist theories of discourse**

The first chapter used critical political geography to demonstrate that the political identity of the state is not a pre-existing given entity, but rather one that is constantly maintained or contested through the construction of place. It also followed Ó Tuathail's (1993) and Campbell's (1998) analysis of US foreign policy in arguing that Uzbekistani political identity was formed in association with militantly dualistic narratives of fear and threat. This chapter accepts the first proposition, but finds the monolithic analysis of these two essays less appropriate for getting to grips with the dynamism of Kyrgyzstani politics. Here, I prefer the approaches to discourse analysis developed by the ‘Essex school’ that draw on the critiques of orthodox Marxism by the Italian communist thinker and activist Antonio Gramsci.<sup>178</sup>

Marx and Engels believed that classes were the basis not only of economic and political interest, but also of ideology (Marx and Engels 1970 (1846)). However, the Russian Revolution of February 1917 led Gramsci to draw the conclusion that Marx's historical dialectic was over-deterministic. The Revolution occurred not because Russian society reached the stage of ‘advanced capitalism,’ but because revolutionary parties organised well and moulded social consciousness (Gramsci 1994: xv). The

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<sup>178</sup> Gramsci's son, incidentally, came to Kyrgyzstan as a Comintern orphan in World War 2 (Anderson 1999).

success of Thatcherism amongst the ‘working class’ in 1980s Britain further exposed the shortcomings of Marxist theories of class, and questioned a single, essential meaning of the term (Jones 1983). This approach is sometimes called ‘post-Marxism.’ Hall used Gramscian analysis to explain the Thatcherist discourse as the formation of a hegemonic ideology by the articulation and combination of a number of disparate ‘signifiers’ including Tory values of patriotism, the family, and law and order with neo-liberal economics (Hall 1988).

Laclau and Mouffe’s reconstruction of a left politics in the wake of such critiques drew heavily on Gramscian thought in fusing strands of Marxist, post-structuralist and psychoanalytical theory (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Their work founded the school of discourse analysis at Essex University in the UK, which has systematically taken their handling of class politics and applied it to the study of other fields of political conflict such as nationalism and environmentalism. It is the presentation of their work in the flagship publication of this school, *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis* (Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000b) on which I draw in this chapter.

The Essex discourse-theoretic approach is concerned with how identities emerge within and are constitutive of social conflict. Drawing heavily on Laclau and Mouffe, it has developed a complicated technical vocabulary, although I will outline only those terms relevant for this study. Identities emerge through the *articulation* (or linking) of contingent signifying elements that exist in a discursive field (Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis 2000a: 7). Articulation is a practice that establishes a relationship among those signifiers that modifies their identity: what results from this *articulatory practice* is a “structured totality” known as *discourse*. Within a particular discourse, some signifiers become key sites of conflict upon which each side attempts to imbue with radically different meanings, and these are termed *empty signifiers*. It may be that a privileged empty signifier emerges to act as a reference points with all groups attempting to hegemonise its meaning, and this signifier is termed a *nodal point* (ibid.: 8). According to Howarth *et al*, at the heart of politics is the construction of *antagonisms*, or us/them dichotomies that define the political terrain (ibid., pp.9-10). Unlike simple Marxist theorisations, these cannot be reduced to pre-constituted interests or identities; as these borders between agents are constructed they actually become constitutive of identities. They are constructed by logics of *equivalence*: linking together groups of actors or characteristics to define positions in a conflict.

Thus discourses and the identities produced along with them are inherently political entities that always involve the exercise of power.

This formulation is a very powerful way to carefully trace the unfolding of political conflicts and the functioning of ideology and identity within them. Some post-foundationalist philosophies that emphasise the inability to finally close off meaning struggle to handle everyday political conflicts, the Derridean ones being a case in point.<sup>179</sup> The great strength of the Essex discourse-theoretic approach is that, whilst stressing the ultimate contingency of social identities and refusing to ascribe external efficacy to notions and entities such as ‘class’ and ‘nation’, it acknowledges that partial and temporary fixations of meaning are possible and necessary in the social world. It is then free to study them with rigour and in detail; as practitioners have done with as diverse a range of topics as constructions of post-1989 Romanian social democracy (Adamson 2000); the importance of myths of the Revolution in twentieth-century Mexican political struggle (Burgos 2000); and the campaign against Manchester Airport’s second runway (Griggs and Howarth 2000). In this, it emphasises the primacy of *politics* rather than falling back on terms that can obfuscate it such as ‘nationalism’, ‘ethnicity’ or ‘geography.’ This is a pleasing balance that corresponds with the Jasperian approach that frames this dissertation (p.61) and facilitates a bridging of the polarisation in Central Asian studies identified earlier (p.17).

Using this theory I argue here that the *discourse* of Kyrgyzstani politics in 1999-2000 was structured by the *nodal point* of ‘the nation’ or ‘the people’ (*el / kalk*). Both government and opposition (the antagonism that was at the core of political struggle) assumed this as an unquestionable given. However, ‘the nation’ was not a simple category with uncontested meaning. Rather, through *articulatory practices* both groupings sought to imbue this *empty signifier* with a definition that encompassed their vision of the geopolitical identity of Kyrgyzstan. It followed from this that in political conflict each group constructed an identity for itself as the most authentic

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<sup>179</sup> Advocates of Derrida who seek to defend him from the charge of political quietism, such as Beardsworth (1996) demonstrate this by the complicated and intricate arguments they construct. Derrida’s own attempt to construct a post-foundationalist ethic of international law (Derrida 1995b) is philosophically impressive and one with which I feel a certain sympathy (see my discussion p.60), but its use in analysing real and current political conflicts is not immediately obvious. This is not a criticism of Derrida, as his project is a far loftier movement towards a post-foundationalist reconstruction of politics through a critical engagement with the European metaphysical traditional, but in the meantime more readily applicable formulations such as the Essex discourse-theoretic approach are needed.



guarantor of 'the nation' and therefore its rightful guardian. The opposition's primary discursive tactic was to treat signifiers such as language, the border, culture, and national pride as *equivalent* to each other as demonstrations of the weakness of the rule of Askar Akaev. 'The border issue' was the pre-eminent signifier in this *chain of equivalence*. Rather than being primarily a technical-cartographic problem, 'the border' was a key *empty signifier* in these competing discursive articulations that formed the ideological visions and political strategies of a fierce power struggle. It is the articulatory practices associated with this *signifier* of the border that this chapter will reveal.

### **Kyrgyzstan in Independence**

As the previous chapter demonstrated, Western writers have been intrigued by the ideological quality of state-building in post-Soviet Uzbekistan. In marked contrast, English-language introductory texts to Kyrgyzstan have virtually exhausted the question of ideology or political identity of the state by repetitive narratives lamenting a descent from the encouraging signs of a transition to 'democracy' and 'civil society' in the early 1990s into 'authoritarianism' from the middle of the decade (for example, Huskey 1997; Anderson 1999). This genre of writing generally includes a discussion of the role of ethnic minorities (particularly Russian and Uzbek) and matters of language policy and political representation, but lacks analytical and especially empirical depth. Transfixed by the totemic notions of 'democracy' and 'civil society' and haunted by their historic spectral Others of 'authoritarianism' and 'ethnic conflict', such thoroughly Eurocentric analysis seems unable to engage in more sophisticated considerations of ideology outside the realms of its own experience. This chapter argues that this is one reason why the border question in 1999-2000 was so thoroughly misunderstood by Western commentators (see p.52-55), and attempts to provide a corrective.

In sharp contrast, encouraged by the academic-turned-politician, President Akaev, Kyrgyz academics have regarded the question of developing a national ideology for independent Kyrgyzstan as of the utmost importance.<sup>180</sup> This is partially a result of the

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<sup>180</sup> See, for example, the extended debate on this question 'Intelligentsiya jana Ideologiya', *Kirgiz Tuusu* 6-9/07/1999: 6-7, and Professor Mambetov's political tract for the Party For Those Struggling To Build A Just Society In Kyrgyzstan (KAKP) 'What Type of Society and Ideology do we Need?' (Mambetov 1996).

precarious position that many Kyrgyz perceived themselves to be in at independence. Kyrgyz barely formed a majority in their new state, and numerically were a minority in both major cities (Osh and Bishkek). The highly Sovietised elites were linguistically and culturally alienated from anything that might be imagined as authentic Kyrgyzness, and inexperienced in international statecraft. Facing a socio-economic crisis without the subsidies and export markets for lamb and wool that the Soviet state guaranteed, and being a tiny population surrounded by larger states, many people felt a need for a sense of security and a unifying political identity. This has been sought in the pre-Soviet nomadic history of the Kyrgyz, in a flowering of scholarly output allowed by the collapse of the Soviet censor. Amongst the most remarkable achievements of this period were the two-volume edited work, *The Kyrgyz*, a wide-ranging collection of histories, genealogies, ethnographies, philosophies, poetry and folklore (Jusupov 1993), and the ongoing multiple volume, *People's Literature Series*, an impressive volume of oral epics and other poems (Akmataliev 1997).

Historians have investigated this past with new freedom. Some have emphasised the sophistication of the so-called 'Great Kyrgyz Empire' that replaced the collapsed Uighur Kaganat in AD 840 (Kaana, Begaliev, *et al* 1996: 14-15). The ferocious 1916 anti-Tsarist uprising has been described as a "national independence struggle" (Ömürbekov T.H and Chorotegin 1998: 143-150), and original documents from the period have been reprinted (Kazıbaev 1996). A two-volume collection of lectures by the great Chinese Kyrgyz historian, Anvar Baytur, was published in 1992 (Baytur 1992a, 1992b). However, unlike the Uzbek intellectuals, Kyrgyz have not generally projected a vision of a putative territorial national state onto a golden period. The reason for that will become clear soon.

Kyrgyz philology has few written texts before the twentieth century to study; the non-literate art of the *akins* (bards) transmitted and reformulated Kyrgyz conceptions of natural philosophy and moral virtue, as exemplified in the songs of mid-twentieth century *akin* Barpi Alikul (1995). The output of anti-colonial *akins* such as Moldo Kılıch was condemned as reactionary in the Soviet period (Attokurov 1997: 176). However, since independence the neglect or disparagement of the non-literate *akin* has in turn been condemned as 'Eurocentrism' by philosophers such as Janıbekov (1996: 5) who argue that the *akins* articulated a positive and intellectually coherent philosophy of contemporary relevance.

Ethnographers have sought to describe and trace the ancestry and genealogy of the Kyrgyz, an undertaking proscribed and restricted by the KGB and other state organs during Soviet times (Attokurov 1995: 4). Since the late 1980s research and publication in this field has mushroomed, taking as its starting point the classic Russian orientalist Bartold's assertion that the Kyrgyz are "one of the most ancient peoples of Central Asia" (Bartold 1993: 126). Tracing supposed references to the Kyrgyz in Chinese, Greek, Roman, Persian, Arabic and other sources, ethnographers have proposed a bewildering variety of possible histories of the Kyrgyz that involve varying theories of migration, simultaneous appearance, and assimilation (for a good overview see Murzakmatova 1997: 18-20).

Attokurov, however, has criticised what he describes as this confusion of ancient Kyrgyz ethnoses for the contemporary one (Attokurov 1996: 5). He argues that the Kyrgyz formed in three distinct areas (Inner Asia, Southern Siberia and Central Asia with Southern Kazakhstan), but that the process of the formation of the modern Kyrgyz was completed with the Soviet innovations of state, territory, laws and official language (ibid.: 164).<sup>181</sup> This conclusion is vital: in a later work, Attokurov developed its contemporary political significance for a weakened Kyrgyzstan supposedly riven by damaging tribal, factional and regional identities.<sup>182</sup> He doubted the reality of these 'identities' and called for their suppression in the name of national unity (Attokurov 1997: 193-195).

This conception of the unity of the nation and the threat of disunity derives from a conception of the tribal history of the Kyrgyz. As Bastug has described, group formation amongst the Mongol and Turkic tribes of Inner Asia was a dynamic pattern of fission, fusion, shifting alliances, genealogical manipulation, realignment, redefinition and renaming (Bastug 1999). Strong confederations would survive, weak ones would buckle, and a good leader was one skilled at uniting disparate entities. This was as true for the Uzbek Shaybanid Khan as for the tenth-century Kyrgyz, yet the memory of tribal nomadism is fresher for Kyrgyz than for the Uzbeks, who have been settled longer. The Tsarist conquest of what is now Uzbekistan was facilitated by disunity between the Khivan, Bukharan and Qo'qon *states*; modern Kyrgyzstan fell as

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<sup>181</sup> An argument not dissimilar to Anderson (1983), although as a committed nationalist Attokurov is less ambiguous than Anderson as to the necessary response to this conclusion.

<sup>182</sup> For a recent analysis of the importance of tribalism in contemporary Kyrgyzstani politics, see Khamidov, Alisher, 'Kyrgyzstan's unrest linked to clan rivalries', *Eurasia Insight* (New York: OSI)

different tribal factions sought to play the Russians off against their rivals. The disunity that precipitated this ‘betrayal of national honour’ is viewed by academics such as Mambetov as the greatest threat to modern Kyrgyzstan, making the formation of a state ideology of the utmost importance for the contemporary Kyrgyz<sup>183</sup>. This historical consciousness explains why President Akaev and Kyrgyz thinkers place a high premium on *intimак*: the co-operation between tribes that created unity and ensured prosperity and security on the steppe. The significance of this hypothesis for understanding the ‘border question’ will be demonstrated in this chapter.

The icon of the Kyrgyz rediscovery of history is the epic poem *Manas*. The world’s longest poem at over half a million lines, it recounts the story of the warrior leader who led the Kyrgyz to victory against their Kalmak enemies. It is unclear whether *Manas* was a single historical character or when the events described took place. It was traditionally told by *Manaschis*, men who received the poem in a vision and relayed it in a trance-like state. Multiple versions exist, and the process of writing them down was begun in the nineteenth century by ethnographers such as Valikhanov who lauded it as a “steppe Iliad” (1995:251).

Valikhanov regarded *Manas* as a “ferocious, barbarous nomad”, and the epos was condemned as ‘reactionary’ in the 1950s (Attokurov 1997: 171), although Kyrgyz intellectuals were better able to resist the Stalinist denunciations of their epic than those of any other Central Asian republic (Myer 1999: 111), ensuring that the major part of the poem was published by the late 1950s. In independence *Manas* has moved to the centre stage of the intellectual project, its 1000th anniversary being somewhat arbitrarily celebrated in 1995 with the support of UNESCO (Asankanov and Bekmuhamedova 1999: 119-123; see also Figure 3-1, that shows commemorative postage stamps). A version of Sayakbay Karalaev’s variant of *Manas* was published for the occasion (Koychuev 1995), along with a two-volume comprehensive encyclopaedia of the epos (Karipkulov 1995a, 1995b).<sup>184</sup> A plethora of shorter books accompanied these, hymning the epic for preserving the “core of the cultural development of the Kyrgyz people” (Brudnyi 1995), revealing their cosmology (Urustemov, Tölöbaev, and Kaltaev 1995), and being an encyclopaedia of authentic

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06/05/2002; for an argument that the term ‘tribalism’ obfuscates understanding of social and political processes, see Gullette (2002).

<sup>183</sup> Mambetov, A. 1999. ‘Satilgan uluttuk ar-namistin jana adashkan ideologiyaniin maseleleri’, *Res Publica*, 7-13/09/1999.

Kyrgyzzness, even to the extent of cataloguing national games (Aydarkulov 1994). Manas’s life was turned into a popular novel by Ashim Jakipbek (1995).<sup>185</sup> Many believe with Aidarova that the epos can also be “a source of inspiration from which the Kyrgyz people of today can draw the spiritual energy necessary to struggle to preserve their Motherland” (Aidarova 1995).



**Figure 3-1: Postage stamps produced to celebrate the 1000th anniversary of the Manas epos in 1995.**

<sup>184</sup> UNESCO’s sponsorship of the celebrations ensured they had an international flavour, highlighted by the publication of Walter May’s translation of the epos (Orozbakov 1995).

<sup>185</sup> However, the book’s title, which may be translated as *The God Manas*, sparked controversy in Kyrgyzstan.

On the basis of his pioneering research on the Manas epos, Radlov wrote that “the Kyrgyz are especially remarkable for their strong and lasting feeling of the people’s unity, which is so clearly manifested in their epic poetry” (Radlov 1995 (1885): 258). It is this role of Manas as a unifier of the disparate Kyrgyz tribes that has made him so compelling an icon for intellectuals and politicians of independence. President Akaev has derived seven principles from the epic.<sup>186</sup> He has attempted to raise these to the level of state ideology that communism occupied,<sup>187</sup> promoting their adornment of offices, schools and roadsides (Figure 3-2) even saying that “just as the Muslims hold their five duties sacred, so we too ought to observe [the 7 principles].”<sup>188</sup> Chief of the seven principles is preserving the unity of the nation; the second is *intimак* between nations.



**Figure 3-2: The seven principles of Manas, arranged around a portrait of President Akaev set against Kyrgyzstan’s flag, adorning a wall in Kyrgyzstan (Photograph: Nick Megoran).**

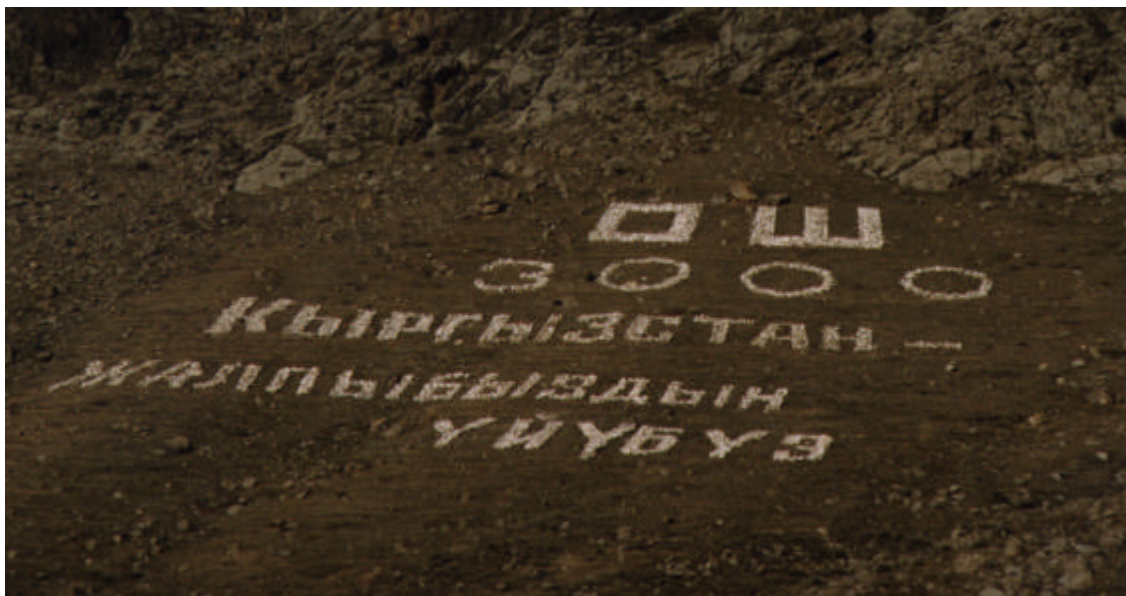
<sup>186</sup> See Isakov (1997) for a commentary on the seven principles argued with close reference to the Manas Epos.

<sup>187</sup> Toktobay Sulayman, ‘Manas Bababizdin Jети Osuyati Jönündө Sөz’, *Osh Jangirigi* 84, 18/09/1999: 3.

<sup>188</sup> Quoted by Sovetbek Baygaziev, ‘<Traybalizm> - kolomtogo kömүlgön mina’, *Kirgiz Tuusu* 57-58 (22251-52), 13-15/04/1999: 6



The application of these two principles entails an inherent tension.<sup>189</sup> As Bohr argued for Central Asia in general, the hidden practices and unwritten rules of nationalism work to contradict the official and constitutional arrangement for equality of all nationalities (Bohr 1998a: 163). On the one hand, Askar Akaev has sought to portray himself as the one who has at last united the Kyrgyz by overseeing independence and who promotes a Kyrgyz identity wedded to the territorial state, through the patronage of projects such as Manas 1000. Kyrgyzstan is presented as the historic homeland of the Kyrgyz, which all Kyrgyz must defend (Manas' seventh principle). On the other hand, he has striven to promote unity and understanding between the different ethnic groups of Kyrgyzstan by blocking extreme nationalistic laws in parliament (Anderson 1999: 42), supporting the role of Russian as an official language, and founding the 'Assembly of the Peoples' that brings together representatives of ethnic minorities (Osmonov and Asankanov 2001: 461). This is summed up by his favourite slogan 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home,' which adorns building tops and highways (Figure 3-3).



**Figure 3-3: 'Osh 3000- Kyrgyzstan is our common home', a huge mountainside slogan celebrating the 'Osh 3000' events, arranged from rocks besides the O'sh-Aravan road (Photograph: Nick Megoran).**

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<sup>189</sup> A tension that is revealed in contradictory policies emphasising both the ethnic and civic strands of official Kyrgyzstani nationalism (for another example, see Nick Megoran, 'Language And Ethnicity

Scholars commonly differentiate between *ethnic* and *civic* forms of nationalism, a distinction that parallels Geertz's split between *primordial* and *civic* sentiments (Geertz 1994: 31). Ethnic nationalism equates the nation with the dominant ethnic group, whereas civic nationalism stresses incorporation into the nation on the basis of citizenship. The Soviet Union combined these contradictory modes of political organisation in a unique manner, with a civic notion of belonging to the polity at the union-wide scale, yet this being a union composed of ethnic constituent republics (Brubaker 1996: Chapter 2). The position of an individual in this system, based on the ethnic ascription in their passports, had important implications for life chances and access to scarce resources. A fuller discussion of this analytical distinction is provided on page 213, under the heading 'The Soviet and post-Soviet institutionalisation of ethnic and civic nationalism.'

This analytical distinction is one that Bohr and Crisp find useful in conceptualising the terrain of Kyrgyzstani political struggle. They identify two forms of nationalism in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan that correspond to this ethnic/civic distinction.<sup>190</sup> In the first place, the inclusive civic nationalism of President Askar Akaev has sought to encourage forms of national belonging encompassing all ethnic groups (hence his key slogan, 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home'), and he has attempted to enshrine the equal treatment of all citizens in constitutional law. On the other hand, the identified a "virulent strain of *Asaba* type nationalism" (see below, p.126), for a discussion of the newspaper *Asaba*) associated with extreme opposition movements that equated the national with the Kyrgyz group (Bohr and Crisp 1996: 403).

I also find the ethnic / civic nationalism distinction to be of great utility in describing differing positions taken by competing actors in domestic Kyrgyz power struggles. However, I will argue in this chapter that positions are not as clear cut as Bohr and Crisp suggest. Returning to the discourse theory outlined above, I suggest that Askar Akaev has articulated around the nodal point of 'the nation' two inherently contradictory positions: the first using an *ethnic* form of nationalism and the second a *civic*. The opposition, on the other hand, defined 'the nation' as unambiguously ethnic, depicting Kyrgyzstan as primarily the home of Kyrgyz people and bearer of Kyrgyz virtue. The contradictions and conflicts between these two antagonistic

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In Kyrgyzstan', *RFE/RL Newline* Vol. 4, No. 108, Part I, 5/06/2000 (Prague: Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty).



positions were central to understanding ‘the border conflict,’ and the formation of political identities in Kyrgyzstan.

### **The press in Kyrgyzstan**

An analysis of the press in Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000 is an altogether different exercise from studying it during the Soviet period when the government press had a monopoly of printed truth in Kyrgyz (Mirza 1983: 110), or from studying the contemporary press of Uzbekistan. Whereas Uzbekistan’s government had gained near complete control of the media, Kyrgyzstan’s had either been unable or unwilling to do so, in spite of growing pressure on critical channels since 1994 (Anderson 1999: chapter 2).<sup>191</sup> One result of this pressure was that positions became highly polarised. Thus Soviet-style government mouthpieces existed alongside fiercely polemical opposition organs. It was common for these papers to engage in often-vitriolic exchanges with each other. As the opposition generally found access to television media restricted, these newspapers became the major forums for political debate and campaigning in the election fever of 1999 and 2000.

I analysed the six main Kyrgyz-language national political newspapers that were published throughout the period of my study. The two national government newspapers, *Erkin Too* and *Kirgiz Tuusu*, are circulated nationwide at subsidised

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<sup>190</sup> They also identified a third form, a reactive nationalism associated with Russian and other minorities, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

<sup>191</sup> The explanation of why Kyrgyzstan emerged as a more pluralistic and democratic polity than Uzbekistan post-1991 is commonly explained by Central Asians as a factor of pre-Soviet social formations and their impact into the Soviet period (Anderson, 1996, discusses the impact of clans on the political development of Kyrgyzstan since 1991). According to this argument, whereas the Kyrgyz tribal alliance system ensured that no faction could gain absolute hegemony, the influence of old sedentary urban centres in Uzbekistan facilitated a tradition of strong and centralised control.

In my experience, Uzbeks often explained their acceptance of the authoritarian rule of Islam Karimov by repeating the saying that ‘we are a people who have known khans’, meaning, have lived under powerful rulers who demanded -and exacted- obedience. Kyrgyz, on the other hand, are often critical of Western perspectives that see Askar Akaev as a democrat, insisting rather that the credit for the greater openness of their state is due to the fact that Kyrgyz simply refuse to respect leaders and submit to totalitarian rule, as they are a nomadic people of tribal confederation.

Although Liu (2002) seems to go some way towards accepting this argument, his work at this point sails dangerously close to an essentialist (and Orientalist) notion of inherent cultural subservience. It must certainly be true that the dramatically different natures of pre-Soviet political formation affected the later incorporation of Kyrgyz and Uzbeks into Soviet federalism. However, as Collins (2002) shows, clan networks have been crucial in structuring conflict for control of economic resources before, during, and after the Soviet Union, in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It seems clear that President Karimov has been more effective at eliminating rival clans than has Askar Akaev; the extent to which that can be attributed to the differential organisation of clan systems rather than, say, the personal agency of the presidents or embedded cultural proclivities has, in my opinion, yet to be established

prices. The former provides extensive coverage of government activities and contains the texts of new laws and presidential decrees, whereas the latter runs more intellectual analysis of Kyrgyz politics. Both fully support the President and government.

*Asaba* was the most prominent Kyrgyz language opposition paper in the period under consideration. It was owned by its editor, Melis Eshimkanov, a veteran political activist and publicist who aligned it to his opposition party, the vocal *El (Bai-Bechara) Partiyasi*.<sup>192</sup> As well as critically and satirically reporting government policy, it raised issues such as poverty, domestic violence, female masturbation and prostitution that were taboo in most other papers. *Aalam* and *Kirgiz Ruhu* were smaller papers with opposition leanings, concerned more with patriotic Kyrgyz issues such as language, culture, and national honour than supporting individual parties. The fierce polemics of *Res Publica* landed its editor, Damira Sydykova, in prison in 1997. Although primarily a Russian-language paper, it periodically included a selection of Kyrgyz articles.

I have drawn much of the material for this chapter from these newspapers, which I subscribed to through the post office. At the local level, I have also referred to *Osh Jangirigi* and *O'sh Sadosi*, sister papers printed in Kyrgyz and Uzbek respectively by the administration in Osh oblast. They closely followed official activities in Osh, as well as copying material about national politics from *Kyrgyz Tuusu*. *Mezon* was an Uzbek language paper supporting the position of its proprietor, colourful local businessman and parliamentary deputy, Davron Sabirov. There are also references to the state run regional Uzbek-language *Do'stlik* (serving O'sh's Aravan region), and to *Zaman Kirgizstan*, a paper funded by a Turkish foundation seeking to promote closer relations between Turkey and Kyrgyzstan.

In studying these papers I chose articles that discussed or even simply mentioned the 'border question' and relations with Uzbekistan, embedded in their wider discussion of the place of Kyrgyzstan in the world. 'Geopolitics' was a favourite topic of the opposition press. This chapter explores the crucial importance of geographical notions such as 'Great Silk Road', 'common home', 'island of democracy', a 'small country' that was 'between two fires', 'the border', and 'the

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<sup>192</sup> Megoran, Nick 'Presidential Candidate Melis Eshimkanov Discusses Kyrgyzstan's Political Climate and Central Asian Relations,' *Eurasianet Q&A* (New York: OSI) 8/11/2000.

Switzerland of Central Asia' in articulating political visions of Kyrgyzstan and its place in the world.

Secondly, the technically more sophisticated Kyrgyzstani press made better use of visual iconography of territory than did Uzbekistan's Halq So'zi, and this chapter attempts to incorporate that into its analysis. It suggests that the study of this iconography, in political cartoons and montages, yields valuable insights into foreign and domestic policy debates, as Berg and Oros (2000) show in their work on Estonia. As Dodds argues in his reading of Steve Bell's cartoons about the Bosnian conflict in the British newspaper, *The Guardian*, they are placed prominently in papers and thus may have great impact, yet have been neglected within studies of critical geopolitics (Dodds 1998: 175). The same might be said of Central Asian studies. Dodds argued that Bell's cartoons were important because they featured alongside the editorial sections; the Kyrgyz press placed its cartoons even more prominently, in central position on the front pages.

## **PART II: THE BORDER AND KYRGYZSTANI POLITICS BEFORE THE BATKEN CRISIS**

### **The Opposition press and the spring border crisis**

Relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan had been problematic for a number of years, and became more so in the second half of 1998 as Uzbekistan had been tightening up its border controls. Mutual relations deteriorated significantly in the space of one week in mid-February 1999. President Karimov, speaking in a television interview which thousands also saw over the border in Kyrgyzstan, confirmed that the major cross-border bus service in the Ferghana Valley had been suspended, concluding a process that began with a reduction in services the previous summer. He explained that "Kyrgyzstan is a poor country, and it is not my job to look after the people. Every day five thousand people come from O'sh to Andijon - if each of them buys one loaf of bread, there will not be enough left."<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Tashkent Television, 13/02/1999.

Tension between the two states rapidly escalated following the bomb explosions in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent three days later which killed 16 people. The borders in the Ferghana Valley were sealed for several days by Uzbekistani officials, while authorities searched for suspects. After reopening, the frontier became increasingly harder to cross, with tightened inspections and periodic closures facilitated by the construction and upgrading of many more military posts and checkpoints, and the destruction of bridges and digging up of roads at. The tighter border controls exposed Kyrgyzstan's vulnerability to the whim of Uzbekistan in its transport and trade network. Uncertainty dominated: different crossing posts were relatively easier or harder to pass through, and the regime at the same crossing could change from day to day. Border communities buzzed with alarming rumours about complete closures, vehicle bans, and visa regimes. The road journey time from Osh to some outlying areas increased threefold, and prices of certain products imported from Uzbekistan also increased. Uzbekistan's fortification of its border brought up the issue of land ownership, which became a focus for allegations that Uzbekistan was annexing significant chunks of Kyrgyz territory.

Against this background, *Aalam* published an emotional article under the title "Kyrgyzstan - here today, gone tomorrow?" with a dramatic cartoon map of Kyrgyzstan being torn apart by ferocious ogres (see Figure 3-4).

These ogres, from the general directions of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and China, are devouring the map of little Kyrgyzstan by tearing off sections at the border. The introduction to the article underlined this: "The border question is not a joke, it is extremely important, and may be the issue which decides the future of our country." The border had become the single most important issue facing Kyrgyzstan because, the article argued, from 1st January the country's border guards had assumed from responsibility from Russia for defending the border.

The author began with a gem of ancient statecraft:

In the old days a khan would give this counsel to his son: 'If, during your reign, you add one inch of land to your country you are a great khan. If you don't even add one inch, but nonetheless lose not an inch, you are an average khan. However if you lose even one inch of the country's land then the people will curse you, you are bad khan- therefore guard your land like your right hand.'

This historical allusion was clearly a challenge to President Akaev: if you do not defend the land of the Kyrgyz you are a poor leader, and will suffer the condemnation of your people. The article went on to accumulate evidence that the President had already failed this test. Water flowed to neighbouring states without their paying for it. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were swallowing up sections of Kyrgyz border area. Chinese herders were penetrating deep into Kyrgyz land for pasture. Uzbekistan was advancing its border posts into Kyrgyz territory. Tajiks were occupying whole areas inside Batken province. "Currently it is as if someone drove a donkey-cart through our map, careering all over the place" - not the way a khan should oversee his territory.



Figure 3-4: "Kyrgyzstan - here today, gone tomorrow?" ('Bügün Kïrgïzstan Bar: Erteng jok bolup ketishi mümkün?', *Aalam* 7 (259), 34/02/1999-02/03/1999).

The article seized upon president Akaev's much-used slogan of ethnic inclusivity, "Kyrgyzstan is our common home." It alleged that the impoverished Kyrgyz were

selling their homes in the south for a pittance and emigrating to Bishkek or Russia. Foreigners were coming over the border and taking their place. “The slogan ‘Kyrgyzstan is our common home’ has sunk deep into the hearts of everyone. You remember it every time you see someone of a different nationality”, it sneered sarcastically. The doors of the country stood wide open, so that “whoever wants to can freely enter our country, without any impediment.” In a diatribe against the “large numbers of people who have taken refuge in the ‘common home’”, *Aalam* warned that, “our hospitality could cost us dearly.” This scornful treatment of a key conceptual plank of the president's policy transforms a geographical notion of harmony and tolerance to an ironic indictment of a state policy that fails to protect the country against immigration.

As Hayter has shown in the case of debates on immigration and border controls in Britain, this racist demonisation of the ethnic ‘other’ in times of socio-economic crisis is a recurring strategy of nationalists (Hayter 2000). In Kyrgyzstan, the opposition press ran many articles that suggested implicitly or explicitly that ethnic minorities, especially Uzbeks, posed a threat to the Kyrgyz nation and state. *Kirgiz Ruhu* printed an article about ‘Wahabism’, the puritanical ideology of the Saudi Arabian ruling elite allegedly motivating the IMU, asserting that it was hostile to the syncretic belief forms of the Kyrgyz. The accompanying article showed apparently Uzbek men at prayer in the grounds of a mosque, implicitly identifying the minority with the threat to Kyrgyz culture.<sup>194</sup> *Aalam* resented the attention that foreign organisations were paying ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan, and accused the OSCE of stirring up trouble where it did not exist: the Kyrgyz were actually worse off than the minorities who threatened the very unity of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>195</sup>

The unprotected border is thus the site where dangers such as Uzbekistani land-grabbing, immigration and squatting, illegal pastoral herding, rural poverty, depopulation, and loss of water resources are located. The cartoon map powerfully depicts the loss of border areas as akin to the dismemberment of the very state itself. “Does Kyrgyzstan even have a border?”, a question posed by opposition outspoken opposition parliamentarian, Daniyar Üsönöv, and quoted in the paper which then echoed the question itself: “What sort of politics is this, then? Who will take responsibility, which map is Kyrgyzstan living with?” If a border and the map are

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<sup>194</sup> ‘Vahabizm: diniy jana sayasiy prinsipteri’, *Kyrgyz Ruhu* 36 (341): 11/1999.

<sup>195</sup> ‘Kirgizstandin birimdigi: Mayda uluttarga avtonomiya kerekpi?’, *Aalam* 13 (265), 14-20/04/1999.

missing, the Kyrgyz lack the essence of independent statehood. For a nationalist in the age of nation-states, there could be no greater indictment. The prognosis was thus dire:

Another 10-15 years of this 'politics of hospitality' and it is possible that we will not be able to find our border at all. Thanks be to God, we have a number of deputies who take up this matter...

These were opposition deputies, Daniyar Üsönöv and Ömürbek Tekebaev, both of whom would seek to challenge Akaev in the 2000 presidential election.<sup>196</sup> This was a bold challenge to Akaev: a good khan does not lose territory, you have, but these men would be more worthy khans. The 'border question' was thus made the yardstick of political success. The article ended by urging the (Kyrgyzstani) White House to take up the issue of disputed territories, which

would also yield a 'political dividend' to the President. We want the peaceful demarcation of our border... We have faith in the resources, capabilities and talents of the Kyrgyz diplomatic service. The Kyrgyz people need peace. This is our life's most precious thing. We will not let this matter rest. Therefore, we will appeal again shortly.

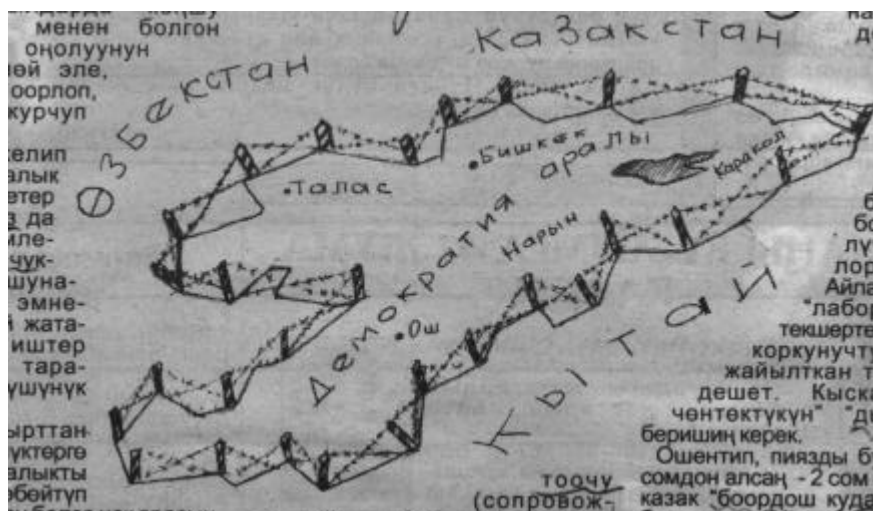
True to promise, March saw *Aalam* run two more polemics damning government border policies. Both used cartoon maps of Kyrgyzstan to reinforce the message of the text. The first was entitled: "Are the neighbouring states placing an economic blockade on Kyrgyzstan?" (Figure 3-5).

The article was a comprehensive critique of Kyrgyzstan's foreign relations, an arena in which President Akaev sought to make much political capital, being bullish about his reputation abroad as a democrat and achievements such as joining the WTO. Olcott *et al* wrote that the financial crisis of 1998 forced Kyrgyzstan to choose between the obligations of its customs union with Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus, and international trade: by joining the WTO it chose the latter (Olcott, Åslund and Garnett 1999: 126). *Aalam* argued that this was the wrong choice, since it had created intolerable conditions as neighbouring states slapped 200% tariff rises on

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<sup>196</sup> Although Üsönöv was excluded on a technicality.

Kyrgyzstan's exports in retaliation for breaking ranks. Added to the bribes taken at each new border post, Kyrgyz traders were being "suffocated."<sup>197</sup>



**Figure 3-5: "Are the neighbouring states putting an economic blockade on Kyrgyzstan?"**  
 ('Kırgızstanga kongshu mamleketter ekonomikalik blokada koyushuudabi?', *Aalam* 9 (261),  
 10/03/1999: 1, 3). The text in the map reads 'The island of democracy.'

*Aalam* further charged that it was now "easier to fly to Turkey and back than to get across the border to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan." Whilst literally untrue, this hyperbole brought into relief the radical geopolitical dislocation that Kyrgyzstan was experiencing. Considering these policies in the light of the personal insult that Islam Karimov gave President Akaev, it was clear that old relations had been severed. Regular summits between Central Asian leaders produced fine-sounding words and declarations about eternal friendship and 'open' borders, but are farcical as the reality on the border showed: "There is no difference between a meeting of the CIS presidents and a group of drunkards in a sauna," the paper stated derisively. The border issue showed that Kyrgyzstan needed these neighbours more than the WTO, as

<sup>197</sup> Later that spring I spoke to a truck driver who normally spent the spring and summer transporting fresh produce to Russia: he was glumly sitting at home, the expense of the new border arrangements having made his trade uneconomical. The border and customs issue compounded a fall in Kyrgyzstani trade with Russia as a consequence of the latter's financial crisis in 1998 (Olcott, Åslund and Garnett 1999: 126).



for a thousand years we have lived as kinsmen with our neighbours. If God wills, we will live another thousand. We do not live with America, England, or Germany. We live alongside Kazakh, Uzbek, Tajik, Russian and Chinese. Our foreign policy should begin not at the far side of the oceans, but with our neighbours.

As *Aalam* suggested in a third polemic on the same theme, Kyrgyzstan needed to ally itself with its neighbours, yet had been tucked in the West's back pocket with nothing to show for it but empty words such as 'democracy' (Figure 3-6).



**Figure 3-6: "Pocket politics" ('Chöntök sayasat', *Aalam* 11, 31/02/1999: 1, 3).**

Other opposition papers subjected the government to mounting criticism over the border issue during the spring of 1999. *Kyrgyz Ruhu* was alarmed that Uzbekistani security forces crossed the border apparently at will to snatch Kyrgyzstani citizens whom they suspected of having links with anti-Karimov groups.<sup>198</sup> *Asaba* ran an

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<sup>198</sup> 'Tüshtük Sindromu', *Kyrgyz Ruhu* 10 (315), 23/04/1999: 5.

interview with filmmaker and outspoken opposition deputy, Dooronbek Sadirbaev, who was questioned about Uzbekistan's border closures. He raised the question of disputed territory along the border

in the Maily-Sai region the Uzbeks have penetrated 24 chagym deep into Kyrgyzstan... In the Karl Marx collective farm Uzbekistanis have taken possession, completely unlawfully, of 10,000 hectares of Kyrgyz land.... the local authorities are guilty of selling, completely unlawfully, the Kyrgyz lands which have been handed down from father to son, for one plate of palov and 200 grams of cognac.<sup>199</sup>

Sadirbaev claimed to have possession of a copy of an agreement renting 45,000 hectares of land to Uzbekistan in the 1960s that should have been returned in 1980, but never was. The deputy was alarmed: "If we don't quickly demarcate the border with our neighbours, it will later be very difficult to prove that those lands are ours." The interviewer comments that the Kyrgyz would do "well to heed the wisdom and knowledge of Sadirbaev, who has studied the 800 year history of our border." Quite what this time scale refers to is not explained, but it had rhetorical value in bolstering Sadirbaev's image as champion of the border and true patriot.

*Res Publica* published a similar polemic at the same time, exploiting a sense of offence at Karimov's insult to the Kyrgyz with a pessimistic article suggesting in its title that "the price of eternal friendship is 5000 loaves of bread." Pouring scorn on the 'eternal friendship' treaty that Uzbekistan has negated by its actions, it cautioned that "if today the accusation runs that 'they have taken 5000 of my loaves of bread,' who can be sure that tomorrow they will not say 'I am taking five thousand hectares of your land.' Uzbekistan is less an 'eternal friend' than trying to establish itself as a 'regional hegemon.'<sup>200</sup>

This discussion on foreign policy and borders moved to a consideration of the ideal state, which *Res Publica* believed had an ethnically and linguistically homogenous population of 30 - 100 million people. However, only 61.2% of Kyrgyzstan's paltry 4.7m inhabitants were 'native' due to large numbers of Uzbeks and Russians, and although ten years had lapsed since the law making Kyrgyz the state language, it had clearly failed. The discussion shifted from the geopolitical frailty of the state to its national weakness caused by significant ethnic minorities and the failure to make

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<sup>199</sup> 'Sadirbaev bir Akaevdi on Karimovgo almashpayt', *Asaba* 10, 5-11/03/1999.

<sup>200</sup> 'Tübölük dostuktun baası 5000 bölkö nan', *Res Publica* 8 (340), 16-22/03/1999: 1.

Kyrgyz truly the national language. Indeed, 'foreigners' were exploiting the 'spiritual wealth' of the country.

According to some articles in the opposition press, the threat that these minorities posed was a particularly gendered one. As Walby (2000: 523) argues, "Nations and national projects are gendered projects." Nash (1995) demonstrates that the nation is often gendered through feminine images of nation and state. Building on the work of Yuval-Davis, Nagel contends that women often become the signifiers of difference in articulations of the nation-state (Nagel 1998), an argument Akiner makes for post-Soviet Central Asia (1997a: 284-287). Whereas the Soviet union sought to encourage ethnically mixed marriages (Bacon 1980(1966): 216), Tohidi notes how Azeri women played the role of primary carriers of identity and religion during this period, marked off from Russian women by refraining from drinking, smoking, and wearing trousers, and by a cult of virginity. She observes that gender-related issues were "part of the ideological terrain upon which issues of national identity, cultural authenticity, and independence are being debated" in the post-Soviet period (Tohidi 1997: 148). Tishkov has shown that during the 1990 outbreak of Kyrgyz-Uzbek violence, the rape and bodily humiliation of women became a demonstrative form of gaining revenge and humiliating the other group (Tishkov 1997: 148). However, the role of gender in constructions of post-Soviet nation-states in Central Asia has not always been recognised by scholars (Megoran 1999).

The importance of gendered conceptions of the nation was highlighted by Daniyar Üsönöv in an interview run by Asaba in March, that sharply criticised the government's decision to hold a parliamentary border debate behind closed doors. He expressed fears of the "fifth column" posed by immigration of Uighurs from China across the open border. For Üsönöv, the fear of Uighur women using their wiles to subvert Kyrgyz men threatened the national and territorial integrity of Kyrgyzstan, as they repeated an ancient trick of Chinese statecraft:

There was a tradition amongst the Chinese that if a Chinese girl married a foreigner, the emperor summoned her, and set two duties. 'Nurture your husband, make him a minister, or a king. Then he must join his country to China. If you can't do that, at least then make your son a king.'<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>201</sup> See footnote 30, p.49.

However it was not merely Uighur women that posed a threat to Kyrgyzstan; poverty had made Kyrgyz women immoral, a weak link in the nation:

Do you all know, that this happened a hundred years ago. We don't know what will happen tomorrow...I have no enmity against the Uighurs. But their relationship with the official powers in China makes me very uneasy. Today, they come from the villages, and give bread to penniless, shameless girls and marry them to bear them children. What will happen in 50 years time? Will we be turned into Uighurstan?

To a patriarchal culture that designates nationality through paternal descent alone, this racial contamination through miscegenation presents a profound danger. It was compounded by rural depopulation as impoverished Kyrgyz left the border regions of China that were decimated by the economic mismanagement under Akaev:

What is a border? If there are no Kyrgyz living in At-Bashy, then there will be no border. It will just be some mountains belonging to no-one. But what sort of conditions have we made for the At-Bashy and Chong-Alai Kyrgyz? Aren't whole populations deserting to [Bishkek]?

The very border of the state was under threat. Linking these points with other border concerns including land, security and Uzbekistan, he concluded pessimistically that "every country must have its own interests and its own path. A country which does not have the political will to pursue that path is not a country." Soon afterwards *Asaba* declared Üsönöv "man of the month," and he was also praised in *Res Publica*. He had started his election campaign, and through his outspoken comments on the border had made himself the government's prime enemy. He later declared his intention to stand against Askar Akaev in the presidential elections, but was prevented from doing so by being prosecuted in what was widely regarded to be a politically-motivated trial over a minor offence committed some years earlier. This meant he also lost his parliamentary seat in the February 2000 elections.

Thus, using the theoretical approach of Howarth *et al*, it can be seen that in the context of a significant deterioration in relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 1999, the major nationalist opposition Kyrgyz language newspapers formulated their attacks on the government by linking a whole series of issues together around the nodal point of a highly exclusionary ethnic concept of 'the

nation.’ By a *logic of equivalence*, the pre-existing signifiers of territorial integrity, the vitality of the Kyrgyz language, the protection of ‘spiritual wealth’, the necessity for strong leadership, the perpetuation of ancient traditions, the maintenance of racial purity and idealized gendered subjectivities, the development of good links with neighbours, the defence of national pride, and the promotion of economic prosperity were linked together as attributes and aspirations of ‘the people’ that the opposition represented yet the government negated. This logic sought to sharply divide social space by condensing meanings around two antagonistic poles (Howarth, Norval and Stavrakakis 2000a: 11). ‘The border’ was the key signifier in this movement, around which an expanding web of equivalences was constructed. This signifier lacked essential meaning outside of discursive structures, but was imbued with it through the articulatory practices of a series of mutually reinforcing evocative cartoon maps and highly charged rhetorical and polemical texts. The outcome was a comprehensive assault on President Akaev’s claims to be the authentic defender of the Kyrgyz nation and territory, articulated at a range of spatial levels from the local to the international. The overall message was that a failure to protect the border demonstrated a weak and indifferent leader presiding over a weak state and nation: a leader who ought to stand aside for more able men.

### **Government response to the spring border crisis**

Throughout the spring and summer the opposition press continued to print a barrage of critical articles on the ‘border issue’, and vocal opposition deputies continued to make valuable political capital out of the issue. A response was needed. The government did not attempt to contest the new border and concomitant control posts that Uzbekistan established. The practical impact of legislation regarding border guards<sup>202</sup> and customs<sup>203</sup> was minimal, and even the centrepiece, *Law on the Kyrgyz Republic's External Borders*,<sup>204</sup> only began to have limited effects a year later,

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<sup>202</sup> ‘Chegarachni boshini aylantirmang!’, *O’sh Sadosi* 30 (9083), 17/02/1999; ‘Kırgız Respublikasınin Mamlekettik chek arası jónündö: Kırgız Respublikasınin Prezidentinin Ukazı’, *Erkin Too*, 02/06/1999.

<sup>203</sup> ‘Kırgız Respublikasınin Ökmötünün 1997-jıldin 11-uyunundagı No.347 <<Jeke jaktardın Kırgız Respublikasınin bajı chek arası arkıluu tovarlardı jana bashka zattardı alıp ötüüsünün Erejelerin bekitüü jónündö>> toktomuna özgörtülördü kirgizüü tuuraluu Kırgız Respublikasınin Ökmötünün toktomu’, *Erkin Too* 37 (846), 14/05/1999: 7.

<sup>204</sup> ‘Kırgız Respublikasınin Mamlekettik chek arası jónündö’, *Erkin Too* 23 (832), 26/03/1999: 8-9. The paper states that the law was passed by parliament on February 18th, although it was debated in closed session on 12th March, as the opposition piled pressure on the government.

once a joint border commission had been formed with Uzbekistan. In 2000, as the presidential elections drew closer, the government was to apply increasing pressure upon opposition papers and activists through the courts, attempting to disqualify candidates from standing. These would also include an attempt by those close to government to close down and even allegedly buy off newspapers.<sup>205</sup> However, in the first half of 1999 the government attempted primarily to counter the opposition arguments through its own press channels.

Whereas the opposition press wove around the 'border question' a highly charged ethnic nationalism, up until the Batken crisis the government framed its response in terms of civic nationalism. This was associated with a formulation of nationalism diametrically opposed to that of the opposition, which involved denying that the territorial and spiritual integrity of Kyrgyzstan was threatened either by ethnic minorities within its state or by the animosity of neighbouring states. Rather, because the democratically rejuvenated state had achieved peace at home through the friendship of the peoples of the 'common home' and had transferred this experience to the international stage, border disputes or ethnic tensions were impossible.

This began at home. In 1999 the government celebrated the 5th anniversary of the establishment of 'The Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan', a consultative body representing the major ethnic minorities of Kyrgyzstan to the president. It has been a key plank of President Akaev's much-vaunted attempt to promote inter-ethnic harmony within Kyrgyzstan, although its work is more cultural-educational than effectively political. Its work was celebrated in many articles in the spring and summer of 1999. *Erkin Too* printed a full-page collage divided into smaller sections which gave summaries of the work of the different ethnic sections, under the headline 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home', the key slogan of president Akaev's nationalities policy.<sup>206</sup> The work of the Uzbek centre was praised more fully in a long article in *O'sh Sadosi* about its second general meeting.<sup>207</sup> Regional newspapers continued to report stories of warm relationships between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz at the individual and

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<sup>205</sup> Melis Eshimkanov, editor of *Asaba*, told me in an interview in August 2000 that a government official offered him \$500,000 to buy off *Asaba* until after the election (see footnote 192).

<sup>206</sup> 'Kırgızstan - jalpıbizdın üyübüz', *Erkin Too* 34 (843), 05/05/1999.

<sup>207</sup> 'Xalqimiz olmos bo'lsa, jilosin biri - O'zbek: O'bek milliy-madaniy markasining II qurultoyidan', *O'sh Sadosi* 25 (9078), 02/03/1999. A suggestion from the floor of the meeting (at which I was present) to send a formal note to Uzbekistan complaining at border closures was rejected by the podium, and the exchange not reported in the article.

inter-state level,<sup>208</sup> rejecting absolutely the existence of inter-ethnic tensions but stressing rather unbreakable harmony.<sup>209</sup>

According to Kyrgyz government discourse, the special relationship between Uzbek and Kyrgyz people within Kyrgyzstan was paralleled in inter-state relations. In 1997 Presidents Akaev and Karimov had signed a 'treaty of eternal friendship', and the existence of this treaty and the relationship it symbolised was frequently invoked by the Kyrgyz government in absolute denial of any inter-state tension. In March 1999, one month before his dramatic resignation as mayor of Bishkek and defection to the opposition, government papers carried an interview with Felix Kulov. He said that the warm relationship between the governments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was the basis for solving any border disputes, and the interventions of opposition deputies like Dooronbek Sadirbaev were just political profiteering.<sup>210</sup>

Rather, the government press reported that far from being hostile, relationships between neighbouring states were improving and growing warmer. In June the presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan met in Bishkek to discuss the progress of the creation of a unified economic space under the aegis of the Central Asian Economic Community. Although the other leaders complained that the organisation was ineffectual, President Akaev insisted that it was making progress in establishing a new "common home" of Central Asia.<sup>211</sup>

### **Friendship along the Great Silk Road**

In the autumn of 1998 the Kyrgyz government introduced a new (geo)political ideology to the political imagination of the Kyrgyzstani people: the 'Great Silk Road Doctrine.' This Silk Road Doctrine attempted to frame a vision of the future political, social, cultural and geopolitical development of the Kyrgyz Republic, and was an attempt to apply the 'common home' doctrine to foreign policy. Its development in the spring of 1999 was part of the government's response to criticism of its handling of the border question.

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<sup>208</sup> 'Siylaship, siyluu jürüşöt, kirkiz, özbek bir tuğan', *Osh Jangirigi*, 28/04/1999.

<sup>209</sup> 'Millatim -Qirg'iz, vatanim - O'zbekiston', *O'sh Sadosi*, 14/04/1999.

<sup>210</sup> 'Obodan emas', *Mezon* 9 (109), 27/03/1999.

<sup>211</sup> 'Prezidentterdin jolugushuusu jemishtuu boldy', *Erkin Too* 51 (80), 25/06/1999: 1.

In a lengthy article, *Kirgiz Tuusu* outlined "The doctrine of the president of the Kyrgyz republic, Askar Akaev" in late October 1998.<sup>212</sup> The benefits of restoring the Silk Road today were extolled: regional and inter-regional integration, 'globalisation', the spread of information technology systems, tourism, and trade. Stated thus, it would appear to be a reformulation of Askar Akaev's enthusiasm for the project of neo-liberal economic restructuring, now within the confines of the WTO. However, the document is clearly about more than simply economics.

The Silk Road of old, according to the declaration, connected Eastern and Western civilisations economically, culturally, and politically; carried travellers and scientists; and was a conduit for philosophical, intellectual and spiritual ideas and faiths of all kinds. Likewise, the spiritual core of this project would be friendship and harmonious relations between all the states, deepening their 'friendship' and "co-operation."

President Akaev's Silk Road Doctrine envisaged a unique and grand role for Kyrgyzstan in fostering "cosmic and planetary understanding." Kyrgyzstan had the spiritual and political resources to play this role by virtue of the democratic reforms and macro-economic stability that together demonstrated that "Kyrgyzstan has entered an age of renaissance." Inter-ethnic harmony was integral to this:

'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' is the basis for forming a consciousness that deepens international friendship and co-operation, and allows all citizens of the country to enjoy the good life. The representatives of many nationalities and religious confessions, which have together absorbed both the spiritual inheritance of East and West and their own rich traditions and customs, are living in friendship and peace.

The contrast here with the role President Karimov perceives for Uzbekistan in the Silk Road project is striking (see chapter 2, p.99ff.). For President Karimov, Uzbekistan was the pivot of the Silk Road under Timur, and it was his destiny as the inheritor of that legacy to restore Uzbekistan's former greatness. For Askar Akaev, Kyrgyzstan's historic Silk Road legacy was not as the seat of empire but as the site of peaceful and pluralistic exchange predicated on the domestic experience of inter-ethnic harmony that had already enabled Kyrgyzstan to act as peacemaker in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Thus, in the quotation above, the efficacy of the slogan 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' is skilfully connected across the two geopolitical

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<sup>212</sup> 'Jibek Jolunun Diplomatiyasi (Kirgiz Respublikasinin Prezidenti Askar Akaevdin Doktrinası)', *Kirgiz Tuusu* 137-38 (22,157-58), 27-29/10/1998: 11-12.



scales of the nation state and Eurasia, using the 'Great Silk Road' doctrine to provide an essential framework for Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy.

One result of this historical process of friendship and trust along the Silk Road, embodied both by Kyrgyzstan's internal and foreign policies, is that borders will play a decreasingly important role. In an argument resonant of globalisation theorists such as Ohmae (1995), President Akaev argued that globalisation along the Silk Road would create a flow of "information that 'washes over' national borders", leading to the increasing irrelevance of national boundaries. This notion is strikingly absent from Islam Karimov's geopolitical vision. Whereas the government of Kyrgyzstan has enthusiastically embraced institutions of global capitalism such as the IMF and the World Bank, Islam Karimov's Uzbekistan has preferred to protect the economic sovereignty of his state. Thus, whilst *Halq So'zi* did write about friendship with neighbouring states and the easing of travel restrictions, this was not envisaged as undermining national borders.

The differing meanings across post-socialist space of a single ideological position has been highlighted by Humphrey in her study of 'Eurasianism' (Humphrey 2002). She argued that, whilst a single ideology (the Communist Party) dominated during the Soviet period, in post-socialist Eurasia it is more helpful to talk about a complicated web of competing and contrasting ideas and people, a 'political imaginary', in which a single ideology may have different meanings in different places. The various interpretations of the meaning of the 'Silk Road' as an ideology in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan would illustrate the second part of Humphrey's argument.

President Akaev went on to argue that this 'Silk Road diplomacy' would reduce border forces, iron out any disagreements, and had already begun the gradual reduction of the importance of the border:

Kyrgyzstan is working regularly and fruitfully with the neighbouring states to ensure the full security of the border. In signing agreements with regional states Kyrgyzstan has taken an important step in the direction of strengthening military trust and co-operation and reducing forces on the borders, which has given the real possibility of resolving outstanding border disputes.

Throughout 1999 and 2000 the government press repeatedly returned to the theme of the Silk Road as a way to counter the criticism of the opposition. One example was

provided by the delivery of technical equipment from Uzbekistan to help Kyrgyzstan construct the Andijon-Osh-Ergeshtom section of the Great Silk Road. As the previous chapter showed, *Halq So'zi* used this event to demonstrate the more advanced development of Uzbekistan over Kyrgyzstan (see pages 99-100). *Osh Jangirigi* however interpreted the event as one symbolising equality, “cementing the friendship and unity of these two peoples which have lived closely together since ancient times.”<sup>213</sup>

Kyrgyzstan's transport minister, Jantörö Satıbaldiev, thanked the Uzbek people for their help and said

We are witnessing yet more evidence that the Uzbek and Kyrgyz are one people. Since ancient times we have shared the same marketplaces and graveyards. Now the building of the Great Silk Road is another demonstration of that unity.

In his speech, the governor of Osh oblast Termirbek Akmataliev spoke along similar lines:

8 years ago the friendly relations between the two neighbouring republics halted as they became independent and embarked upon their own paths of development. But now, the Uzbek Republic's \$30m building and reconstruction of this 272km road signifies the strengthening of co-operation and unity<sup>214</sup> between the two peoples.

The ceremony took place at the *Dostuk* border crossing, itself symbolic of the changed geopolitical realities of the region. Somewhat ironically, 'Dostuk' means 'friendship'. The road had been a vital link between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek republics, and was initially surfaced by the Tsarist authorities to enhance its role as a major conduit of European-Chinese trade (Pahlen 1964: 104). Up until at least as recently as 1997 it was an almost unmarked road crossing, manned by a couple of border guards in a small hut. In 1998-99, however, a full international-style border crossing was constructed, replete with imposing superstructure, a quarantine section, full customs offices and a large staff. It was temporarily closed following the Tashkent bombings and, along with the termination of cross-border bus routes and rigorous inspection of those crossing it, became symbolic of the separation of peoples along artificially

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<sup>213</sup> 'Dostuk jolu <Dostuktan> sapar aldi', *Osh Jangirigi* 08/05/1999.

drawn lines and a bold geopolitical statement about sovereignty and about insiders and outsiders. Governor Akmatallyev's logic is thus a *reverse* of the actual events. He interpreted independence in 1991 as rupturing ancient friendships but those of 1999 as restoring them.

This sentiment and logic was echoed by Uzbekistani deputy prime minister Rustam Yusunov who also spoke at the ceremony:

The wish of all of us is that goods which our people need will be able to pass along this road, and we will be able to cross for weddings and other such joyous occasions. Truly, the friendship between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz peoples is eternal and unbreakable.

Whether these speeches were intended as specious rhetoric, subtle irony, or genuine conviction, I do not know. But that does not alter the fact that the realities of ever-diverging states with solidifying territorial divisions and multiple tensions were not only entirely ignored, but interpreted as the exact opposite! All difficulties were subsumed under the 'eternal friendship' of these two Silk Road partners. Whilst the opposition press were talking of state borders to argue that the very Kyrgyz nation was under grave threat of dismemberment or extinction by enemies outside and within as state and society collapsed, the government was countering this by stating that the disappearance of borders was occurring as a result of the new renaissance of the multi-ethnic people of the 'common home' of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akaev.

### **Direct response to the opposition**

I will complete this analysis of the Kyrgyz government's response to opposition discourse focused on the border in the first half of 1999 with two articles that tackled the opposition attacks head-on.

Geography professor and head of the Kyrgyz Republic's governmental delegation on border issues, S. Almanov, wrote a scholarly rebuttal of the opposition's arguments for *Kirgiz Tuusu*. He dismissed charges of government inaction, explaining that no one should be surprised at either the existence of border disputes or the time it takes to resolve them. Referring to the International Boundaries Research

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<sup>214</sup> *intimак*

Unit attached to Durham University's Geography Department,<sup>215</sup> he wrote that "according to research at Great Britain's Durham university, 25% of land borders in the world today have not been fully agreed upon, 75% of conflicts are connected to unresolved border issues, and there are 95 border conflicts." Explaining the complications of border delimitation and demarcation, he cited the Kyrgyzstan-China border settlement as an example. It was a long process, stretching from the 1882 Kashgar Protocol between China and Tsarist Russia to the final agreement signed between Jiang Zemin and Askar Akaev in 1996. This was a great day, as

on this day the independent Kyrgyz state, for the first time in the long history of the Kyrgyz people, as an equal with a neighbouring state, and in accordance with international laws and standards, established the basis of its own border.<sup>216</sup>

The state border policy showed that, under the leadership of Askar Akaev, Kyrgyzstan was standing proudly as an independent country. He accepted that there were still outstanding issues arising from the piecemeal and incomplete settlements of border issues during the 1924-27 National Delimitation that left a legacy of "lots of incorrect, twisted and contorted borders in our region, especially in the Ferghana Valley." Even here some progress had been made and "the government of Kyrgyzstan is ceaselessly working to delimit our independent country's border. The experts working on this strongly believe that the border is an easily-wounded living organism that demands careful treatment...Because of this, border questions can take decades or even centuries to resolve."

Lastly, in June, *Kirgiz Tuusu* carried a polemic against opposition claims that a weakly-defended border was symptomatic of a weak state with a weak government. It acknowledged that many doubted the ability of Kyrgyzstan to survive as an independent state, worrying that "age-old border conflicts with our powerful neighbours will start up again."<sup>217</sup> However, this was an unpatriotic attack on the sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan, which the paper dismissed out of hand by declaring that its neighbours were 'confidantes not quarrellers', and that independence had actually

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<sup>215</sup> See page 23.

<sup>216</sup> See footnote 38. An extract of this was reproduced verbatim in *Kyrgyz Tuusu* on May 18th. This unusual move might suggest the gravity of the issue in the eyes of the government and the need to counter opposition claims. That the issue of the border with China would become such a sensitive one, leading to violence and mass protests in Kyrgyzstan in 2002, shows (see p.165) that Almanov was too hasty in claiming this settlement as a triumph for the government.

<sup>217</sup> 'Chek aradan chir izdegen Chuykov...' *Kyrgyz Tuusu*, 22-24/06/1999.

improved cultural and economic ties. The article concluded by framing around the border a confident assertion of state patriotism articulated through the 'common home' myth:

If you don't know, we will tell you something wonderful: we have one goal, the sacred wish - 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home.' More than one hundred nationalities are labouring to turn this home into a blossoming country. That they might dwell in peace, our border guards are watching over them. By day and night, in heat and cold, our vigilant young heroes are standing firm at the border.

Fine sentiments, but tragic: soon after this article was written guerrillas of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan would cross Kyrgyzstan's southern frontier unopposed, and dramatically redefine the 'border' debate.

### **PART III: THE BORDER AND KYRGYZSTANI POLITICS AFTER THE BATKEN CRISIS**

#### **The opposition press**

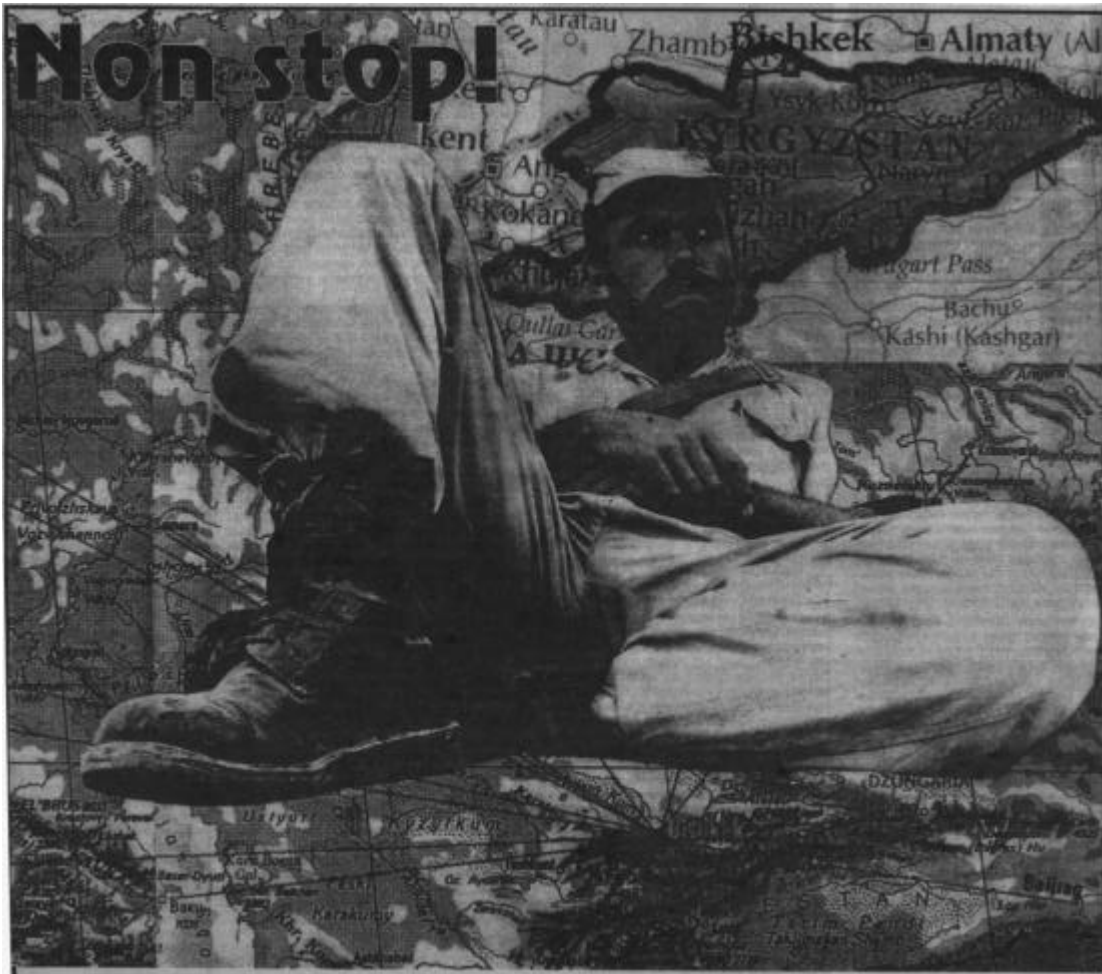
The shock news of the Batken incursions was greeted in typical cartographic eloquence by *Kyrgyz Ruhu* (Figure 3-7). Its frontispiece depicted a sinister, mujahidin character reclining nonchalantly against two maps of Kyrgyzstan. His bodily comportment against the map of Kyrgyzstan indicated that he had the freedom to dispense with its future as and when he chose, indicating the fragile geopolitical position of the republic. A montage in *Asaba* carried the same message in December (Figure 3-8). Although entitled, 'Namangani is preparing for a spring offensive', the picture actually depicted Osama bin Laden as a stand-in for the IMU leader.<sup>218</sup> Sitting at ease and pointing his stick at will over a map, the image suggested that the attackers could strike at leisure, unopposed by a weak government. The grave danger posed was embodied in strong ethnic 'others' mastering a Kyrgyzstan that was as vulnerable and passive as a map spread before them.

Government discourse effectively denationalised the attackers as 'religious extremists' and 'international terrorists.' For the opposition press, however, the

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<sup>218</sup> At this time many people would not recognise the face of bin Laden, and this substitution is revealing- it is not the individual characteristics or motivations of IMU leaders that is important, but that they represent a generic threat.

ethnic Uzbek nature of the attackers was frequently mentioned, and connections were drawn with the Uzbek minority within Kyrgyzstan that represented a fifth column. At the climax of the Batken crisis, *Kirgiz Ruhu* suggested it was revisiting the 1990 Uzbek-Kyrgyz rioting in O'sh which was essentially about redrawing borders to form an Uzbek FANO (Ferghana-Andijon-Namangan-Osh) state, adducing the alleged immigration of 83,000 people from Uzbekistan in 1997 alone as evidence of that Uzbek threat.<sup>219</sup>



**Figure 3-7: 'Non stop!'**, *Kirgiz Ruhu* 24 (329), 27/10/99:1.

*Aalam* was even more forthright: the minorities were not joining in the patriotic defence of the Fatherland as 99% of the defenders were Kyrgyz. As a result, president Akaev's 'common home' slogan was seriously flawed: "Aren't we to

<sup>219</sup> 'Chek araga chek barbi?' *Kirgiz Ruhu*, 1/10/1999.

understand that 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' really means 'Kyrgyz go to war while other nationalities party'?"<sup>220</sup> An *Asaba* article about a border village just outside Osh called Sürüt-Tash, where there was no border post and the Uzbek population had close connections with Uzbekistan, raised similar fears: "Is Kyrgyzstan also the neighbours' home?" it asked in a parody of Askar Akaev's beloved slogan.<sup>221</sup>



**Figure 3-8 : 'Namangani is preparing for a spring offensive.'** ('Namangani jazgi jortuulga dayardanip atat', *Asaba* 87 (9762), 14/12/1999.

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<sup>220</sup> "'Jalpi üy" kirgizdarga gana kerekpi?', *Aalam* 29, 29/9/1999.

<sup>221</sup> 'Chek ara it jatkan jerde', *Asaba* 81 (9756), 23/11/1999.

The Batken crisis heightened fears about the long-term security of the Kyrgyz state and nation and, as ever, geographical tropes were key to opposition discourse. In a 'we told you so' article *Aalam* reproduced its 'Kyrgyzstan here today - gone tomorrow?' illustration (see figure Figure 3-4, above p.129), under a new article, "Do you believe that Kyrgyzstan actually has a border?"<sup>222</sup> Following Batken and into 2000 the opposition press continued to carry numerous reports of Uzbekistan's border policies encroaching onto Kyrgyzstan, and also longer and more sophisticated pieces combining detailed case studies and general analysis, printed in parts over a number of issues.<sup>223</sup>

Finally, the opposition continued to ridicule the supposed 'eternal friendship' between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan that was meant to eliminate borders: an October summit inspired a montage of Askar Akaev driving the other delegate presidents on a tractor. In a reference to president Karimov's criticism of Kyrgyzstan's inability to defend its borders and independence, he is depicted as saying, "Where are you taking us, Askar Akaevich? If it's to Switzerland, then I'd rather get off..." (Figure 3-9).

Askar Akaev had famously promised to transform Kyrgyzstan into the 'Switzerland of Central Asia': for *Asaba* the Batken debacle and Karimov's criticisms were resounding proof that this grand project had failed. Less amusing but perhaps more intriguing was *Kyrgyz Ruhu's* complicated cartoon depiction of Uzbekistan as a fortress, Islam Karimov snatching large amounts of money from those who wish to pass along the Leylek-Batken-Bishkek road (Figure 3-10). Cartographic line-dot-line patterns demarcate borders with the four Central Asian states, but Russia takes the place of Uzbekistan's fifth neighbour Afghanistan. This is revealing of post-Soviet geographical imagination: Uzbekistan was politically more closely linked to Russia than Afghanistan in the twentieth century, even though they did not share borders: Uzbekistan's policies had ruined a unified post-Soviet space.

Whilst the three nationalistic opposition papers differed between each other, and even within their own pages, about the causes of the Batken crisis<sup>224</sup> and trod different paths between criticising the government yet not wanting to look unpatriotic, all three were agreed that Batken threw Kyrgyzstan into an impossible situation -

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<sup>222</sup> 'Kırgızstandın chek arası bar dep ekenine isheneşizbi?', *Aalam*, 29/09/1999.

<sup>223</sup> 'Alachykka orun jok, aylang keter, Ala-Toonu chetinen sata berseng...', *Kırgız Ruhu*, published in three parts on 7th, 14th and 26th June 2000; Asmanın achıkpı, Ata-Jurt?!' *Asaba*, published over 7th, 11th and 14th April 2000 (*Asaba* editions 27 (9794), 28 (9795) and 29 (9796)).





**Figure 3-9: "The tractor 'treaty.' Islam Karimov, Uzbek President: Where are you taking us, Askar Akaevich? If it's to Switzerland, then I'd rather get off..." ('Traktir "Traktati"', *Asaba* 74 (9749), 29/10/1999: 1.)**

'between two fires.' For *Aalam* these two fires were Uzbekistan and Japan,<sup>225</sup> for *Asaba* Uzbekistan and Tajikistan,<sup>226</sup> and for *Kyrgyz Ruhu* poor Kyrgyzstan was stuck

<sup>224</sup> See for example 'Geosayosat: Bir kadam onngo, bir kadam solgo', *Kirgiz Ruhu*, 25/10/1999: 3; 'Apaattin aldin aluu kerek', *Res Publica* 34 (366), 26/10 - 1/11/1999.

<sup>225</sup> 'Yaponiyaga jagam dep Karimovdun 'kozünö chöp salgisi' kelgen sayasati', *Aalam* 15-20/10/1999: 3. The IMU took four Japanese geological prospectors hostage when they surged into Batken region, ensuring close Japanese involvement as the saga unfolded. Their capture of some similarly unlucky American alpinists the following year is told by Greg Child in his book Child, Greg, *Over the Edge: The True Story of Four American Climbers' Kidnap and Escape in the Mountains of Central Asia*, published in London by Piatkus in 2002.

between President Karimov and his opposition.<sup>227</sup> The significance of this is that it highlights how the opposition depicted Kyrgyzstan as vulnerable to its neighbours, whereas the government insisted either that the country's neighbours were its allies, or that President Akaev had neutralised any threats.



Figure 3-10: Cartoon from front cover of *Kirgiz Ruhu* 19 (366), 12/5/2000.

### Batken and beyond- the government press

The Batken crisis was an extreme embarrassment to the government from start to finish, exposing the absolute failure of intelligence services, the wretched state of the armed forces, and the lax border control regime. Of course, the government tried to

<sup>226</sup> 'Boevik beker jatpasin, dayardap koyduk akchasin...!', *Asaba*, 22/10/1999: 2.

<sup>227</sup> 'Kimdin artında kim turat?', *Kirgiz Ruhu*, 1/10/1999: 4 (although whilst here the expression 'between two fires' was not used, the idea of an impossible position was the theme of the article.)

put as brave a face on the incident as possible. In making patriotic appeals to the nation to rally round the government, it increasingly switched emphasis from discourses of civic nationalism to an ethnic nationalism drawing on traditional notions of nomadic Kyrgyz identity and the cult of Manas.

The civic nationalism of the 'friendship of the peoples' in the 'common home' was still employed by the government, but it no longer occupied central place. *Osh Jangirigi* carried an appeal for unity by heroes of labour of Osh, Andijon, Ferghana and Namangan oblasts, urging that just as Uzbeks and Kyrgyz had fought together against Chinggis Khan, the Kalmuks and Fascist Germany, so today they needed to stand firm against this new threat.<sup>228</sup> Likewise, solidarity between the leaders of the Central Asian republics was stressed, the IMU's attack being portrayed as a 'holy war' against all of Central Asia<sup>229</sup> that was met by a unified response of kinsmen states.<sup>230</sup> The government press tried to paper-over the increasingly acrimonious criticism by Uzbekistan of Kyrgyzstan's failure to deliver a decisive blow to the attackers, and expunged any mention that Uzbekistan's planes had bombed the village of Kara-Teyt in error when reporting Akaev's visit to meet the injured and bereaved.<sup>231</sup>

However, the government increasingly turned to the ethnic patriotism embodied by the Manas epic in calling people to rally around and fight. In calling on the nation, it was calling on the *Kyrgyz* nation. In an address to the soldiers the President said to them, "You are the noble offspring of our illustrious father Manas!" and prayed that Manas' spirit would protect them. In the darkest days of the conflict an emphasis on the ethnic nationalism of the Kyrgyz nation, rather than the civic nationalism of the 'common home', suggests that the government considered the former to have greater efficacy and political value than the latter, when push came to shove.

Another article suggested to the people that they had the duty to preserve the integrity of the borders of contemporary Kyrgyzstan that were a legacy of Manas:

We have no treasure more precious than that wealth which is the peace of the homeland and the integrity of the borders bequeathed by the illustrious Manas and formed over many centuries by our people.

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<sup>228</sup> 'Fergana - tınchtıktın, berekenin, öröönü: Kırgız Respublikasınıń Osh, Özbekstandın Anjiyan, Fergana jana Namangan oblustarınıń emgek ardagerlerinin kalkka kayrılıusu', *Osh Jangirigi* 113-14 (15635), 31/12/1999: 2.

<sup>229</sup> Büt Borbor Azıyaga <<ıyık sogush>> jariyalashkan', *Erkin Too*, 8/09/1999.

<sup>230</sup> 'Kün buluttan chıktı...', *Kırgız Tuusu* 7-9/09/1999: 2.

<sup>231</sup> 'Chong-Alayda beypildik' *Erkin Too* 17/09/1999: 3.

This unsubstantiated statement allowed *Kirgiz Tuusu* to position Askar Akaev as the legitimate successor of Manas:

In looking at the border and state security, it cannot be denied that the policies and efforts of president Askar Akaev in the last ten years have steadily strengthened our independence and allowed us to establish ourselves [in the family of nations]<sup>232</sup>

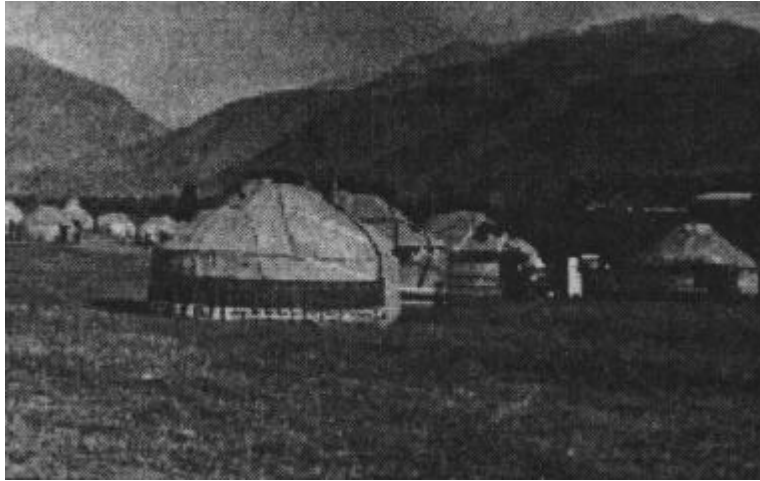
In similar vein, Professor Baigaziev appealed to “My people, the Kyrgyz” to give their all for the fatherland as Manas had been prepared to do.<sup>233</sup> His article was peppered with pastoral scenes of stereotypical nomadic Kyrgyz life, interspersed with military reliefs of legendary warriors and the modern Kyrgyz army (Figure 3-11).



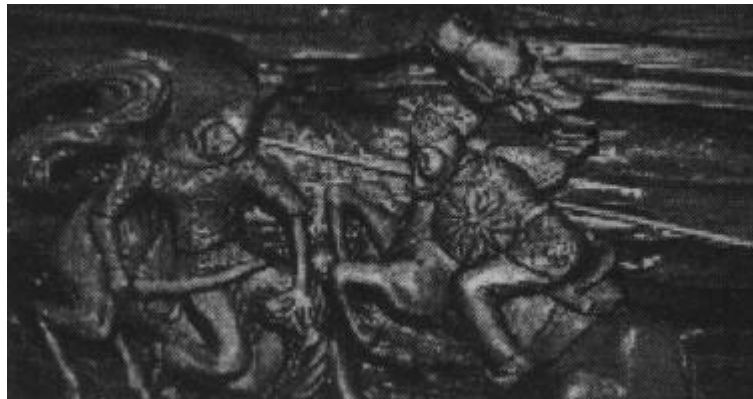
**Figure 3-11: 'On who does our independent fatherland rely?' Images accompanying the article depict national costumes and traditions...**

<sup>232</sup> 'Sabirduu Ak Sanatay Sayasat.' *Kirgiz Tuusu* 32 (22,429), 5-8/05/2000.

<sup>233</sup> 'Egemendüü Ata Jurtubuz kimge tayanat?' *Erkin Too* 104-05 (913-14), 31/12/1999: 12-13.



...the Kyrgyz *böz üy* (yurt)...



...epic warriors...

In addressing his “respected countryman” it is clear that he is envisaging a male, *Kyrgyz* ready to die for his beloved *Kyrgyz* women, the nomadic way of life, and the honour of *Manas* (in fact, another image that I have not reproduced here was of an elderly *Kyrgyz* woman in traditional headgear). It is not an appeal to ‘nation’ envisaged as the inhabitants of the progressive, multi-ethnic ‘common home.’ Whereas pre-Batken the government emphasised the civic notion of citizenship in the nation, at a time of national emergency it fell back increasingly upon ideas about the *Kyrgyz* ethnic identity.



...and the Kyrgyz army today.

### **Geopolitics and the February elections<sup>234</sup>**

As 1999 moved into 2000 and campaigning for elections to the *Jogorku Kengesh* moved into full swing, an acrimonious clash over the geopolitical future of Kyrgyzstan erupted between *Asaba* and *Kirgiz Tuusu*. It was sparked by an interview given by Kyrgyzstan's most eminent citizen, the veteran author, Chinggis Aytmatov, who was himself fronting a pro-Akaev bloc in the elections. The debate, provoked by the border question and troubled relations between Tashkent and Bishkek in 1999, spotlights how contested notions of nation and state operate in the actual dynamic process of Kyrgyzstani political contestation,

The article that sparked the dispute, “We need to unify Turkestani society in the 21st century”, was run by *Kirgiz Tuusu* on 3rd December. Aytmatov argued that violent incidents in 1999 from the Tashkent bombs to the Batken crisis showed that only unity between the states of Central Asia could ensure long-term security. Border

controls were symptomatic of a lack of common vision amongst Central Asian leaders, and Aytmatov suggested that pre-Soviet 'Turkestan' was a historical paradigm upon which to found a new union. He envisaged a timeframe of 50 -100 years.<sup>235</sup>

Aytmatov echoed the government's belief that borders along the ancient 'Silk Route' would become more open. His source of inspiration was the EU, which he had seen at work at first hand during his years as ambassador to it. He expounded further on his theme in a BBC Central Asian service interview on 30th December, in which he also said that the current geopolitical reality was that Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov played the leading role in the region. Nationalist opposition leaders condemned Aytmatov's comments, as people misunderstood him to be suggesting that Kyrgyzstan submit itself to a Central Asian union under the leadership of Islam Karimov. Aytmatov was furious with the BBC's editing of the interview, but the damage had been done.

The issue might have ended there, but for an interview given by popular ex-mayor of Bishkek, Felix Kulov, to *Asaba* on 12th January. Kulov was not only a candidate in the forthcoming parliamentary elections, but was also considered the most powerful challenger to President Askar Akaev in the presidential contest scheduled for later in 2000. Rather than join others in making political capital out of attacking his rival Aytmatov, Kulov told the paper that he supported the esteemed writer's position and added that he himself highly respected Islam Karimov.<sup>236</sup>

*Kirgiz Tuusu* seized on Kulov's remarks a week later, accusing him of wishing to surrender Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty "to some neighbouring country", and "raising a leader not from our own people, but from a different country."<sup>237</sup> Thus, although he had actually supported the government politician, Aytmatov, and merely answered a theoretical question posed to him about who would lead the 'confederation' if it were to appear in the very short term, his comments were twisted to depict him as unpatriotic.

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<sup>234</sup> Material for this section was first used in Megoran, Nick (2000), 'Chinggis Aitmatov and the geopolitics of Kyrgyzstan,' *Eurasia Insight*, 14/ 2/ 2000 (New York: OSI).

<sup>235</sup> 'Biz, Türkestan jamaatchılığı XXI kılımda birigishibiz kerek', *Kirgiz Tuusu* 187-8 (22,382-3), 3-6/12/1999.

<sup>236</sup> 'Feliks Kulov: Men Akaevdin özünö emes, aylanasingilarına karshıman', *Asaba* 2 (9769), 12-13/01/2000: 1,4.

<sup>237</sup> 'Özdön chıkkın jat jaman...' *Kirgiz Tuusu* 3 (22,400) 19-20/01/2000.

Of course, this move led to the embarrassing question as to whether Aytmatov was himself unpatriotic. *Kirgiz Tuusu* dodged this by opting for a racial slur that cast doubt on Kulov's own Kyrgyzness. The newspaper criticised Kulov's lack of proficiency in the Kyrgyz language, and questioned his ethnic background by suggesting he was a Kalmak.<sup>238</sup> As Kalmaks were the sworn enemy of Manas in the epic, this somewhat brilliant piece of propaganda not only located Kulov outside the ethnic nation of the Kyrgyz but positively as a foe. This was elaborated in a number of pro-government newspapers: for example, *Argument* tied the testimony of a schoolmate of Kulov's father that he was Kalmak<sup>239</sup> with a sorry piece exploring the historical enmity between the Kyrgyz and Kalmaks.<sup>240</sup>

Initially, *Asaba* responded cautiously. In a 21st January commentary, the newspaper stressed its scepticism over a Central Asian confederation. *Asaba* asserted that neither America nor Russia were options for long term security partners and rescuers of Kyrgyzstan from the difficulties it was in. It doubted that a Central Asian Union could in practice be achieved: after all, it concluded dismissively, "semi-feudal states have never in history unified voluntarily."<sup>241</sup>

*Kirgiz Tuusu* returned to its theme a week after this, however, anxious to clear Aytmatov's reputation of any lingering suspicion that he might have expressed treacherous opinions. It cast doubt on *Asaba's* basic ability at arithmetic, emphasising that Aytmatov envisioned the emergence of a Central Asian confederation only "in a hundred years or so", by which time, of course, Islam Karimov would no longer be around.<sup>242</sup>

Casting aside its earlier restraint, *Asaba* riposted on 1st February by publishing a satirical cartoon-montage of an Aytmatov in Uzbek national dress sowing 'Uzbek' seeds on 'Kyrgyz' land, and thus supporting the alleged annexation of Kyrgyz (border) territory by Uzbek farmers. In a pun, Aytmatov was dubbed, 'Herald of the Melon-Federation'<sup>243</sup> (Figure 3-12). The article castigated state-controlled media for

<sup>238</sup> 'Kulov Kalmaktarga barat deybi?', *Osh Jangirigi* 113-14 (15635), 31/12/1999: 1.

<sup>239</sup> 'Kulovdun atası Kalmaktan', *Osh Jangirigi* 113-14 (15635), 31/12/1999: 1.

<sup>240</sup> 'Kirgiz-Kalmak chabishi', *Argument* 3 (30), 04/02/2000: 3.

<sup>241</sup> 'Aziya, Amerika, Orusiya- ortodo Kirgizstan', *Asaba* 5 (9772), 21/01/2000.

<sup>242</sup> 'Chinggis Aytmatov: Kantkende adam uluu adam bolot?', *Kirgiz Tuusu* 6 (22,403), 28-31/01/2000: 3.

<sup>243</sup> 'Koon-federatsiya kabarchysy.' Kyrgyz take the Russian loan-word 'konfederatsiya' for 'confederation', and 'koon' is melon. Melons do not grow in many of the colder climes where Kyrgyz live, and are associated with Uzbekistan and Uzbek-inhabited areas of Kyrgyzstan.



distorting Kulov's comments and pursuing a vendetta against him.<sup>244</sup> On 8th February *Res Publica* joined in what was becoming a veritable mêlée, printing a letter from a group of 25 *aksakals* in Kulov's home village, that rejected as baseless reports in the government press that Kulov was a Kalmak, insisting he was of the Orto-Sultan Kogoy tribe. Turning President Akaev's slogan 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' against the government press, it added that discrimination on the grounds of nationality was contrary to the Kyrgyz constitution.<sup>245</sup>

The stakes were too high for either side to back-down. The government was using all means to ensure that the elections returned as few opposition candidates as possible, and had forced leading *El Partiyasi* candidates, Bakit Beshimov and Daniyar Üsönöv, to withdraw. *Erkin Too* joined the fray with a highly personal attack 3 days later (9 days before the elections to the *Jogorku Kengesh*) in which it accused Kulov of being prepared to sell his own country. Referring to recent trips overseas in which he had been garnering sympathy for his cause, it compared him to Kózaman who betrayed the Kyrgyz in the Manas epos;<sup>246</sup> again, using the epic as the touchstone of political integrity.

Eventually, this bitter and ugly squabble was overtaken by the election results. Although the bloc he had fronted performed well, Aytmatov declined to take a parliamentary seat, while Kulov was defeated in a somewhat dubious second round of the parliamentary elections. He went on to be disqualified from running against Akaev in the presidential elections in November and ended the year in arrest and imprisonment. The following March *Asaba* itself was closed down by the authorities. That same March court rulings went against imprisoned independent journalist Moldosali Ibragimov and jailed opposition politician, Topchubek Turgunaliyev; executive director of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, Toleskan Ismailova, was attacked by unknown assailants, and O'sh-TV was ordered to stop broadcasting in what Mambetaliev described as "a bad month for supporters of a civil society in Kyrgyzstan."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> 'Agasyn talamayga salyp berdi.' *Asaba*, 1/02/2000.

<sup>245</sup> 'Ortogo ot jakpagila', *Res Publica* 5 (377), 8-14/02/2000.

<sup>246</sup> 'Feliks Kulovgo on cobol', *Erkin Too* 15 (929), 11/02/2000: 1,5.

<sup>247</sup> Kuban Mambetaliev, 'Asaba closure outrage', *Reporting Central Asia* 46, 30/03/2001 (London: IWPR).



Figure 3-12: 'The herald of the melon-federation.'<sup>248</sup>

Cheering [Uzbek] spectators: "He is sowing Uzbek seed on Kyrgyz land, bravo!"

[Chinggīs Aytmatov]: "When I said that my harvest would take 50-100 years to grow, I was wrong, it seems."

### Worlds Apart

As I have traced the coverage of the 'border question' in the Kyrgyzstani press throughout this chapter, two entirely different worlds have been portrayed. Nothing illustrates this more clearly than illustrations taken from different newspapers on the

<sup>248</sup> 'Koon-Federatsiya kabarchisi', *Asaba* 8 (9775), 1/02/2000: 1.

same day, as elections for the *Jogorku Kengesh* moved into a second round. The first pair (Figure 3-13) is taken from the pages of an article in *Erkin Too* on president Akaev's visit to the southern border (on the same day a longer series of pictures was published in *Kirgiz Tuusu*).<sup>249</sup>

In a series of photographs, the president was shown inspecting military forces, portrayed with impressive weaponry, overseeing a strong state. The second (Figure 3-14) is taken from the pages of *Asaba*, backing Felix Kulov for the second round run-offs. It depicted Islam Karimov, mocking the Kyrgyz leadership and its much-vaunted joint commission on demarcation, cheerily singing away as he tore defenceless Kyrgyzstan apart at will as if it were some mere fabric off-cut. Published on the same date, they illustrate the absurdities of the debate on the border, and demonstrate forcibly how foreign policy and security concerns were inseparably embroiled in the bitter struggle for domestic power over the assertion of competing visions of state and nation.



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<sup>249</sup> 'Elibizdin beykuttugu er-azamattar kolunda', *Kirgiz Tuusu* 22 (22,419), 28-30/03/2000: 1-3.



Figure 3-13 (a, on previous page, & b): President Akaev inspects the southern border forces. 'Our border is secure. Our people can go about their work in peace' ('Chek arabiz bekem. Elibiz tinch emgektene berse bolot', *Erkin Too* 27 (941), 29/3/2000).

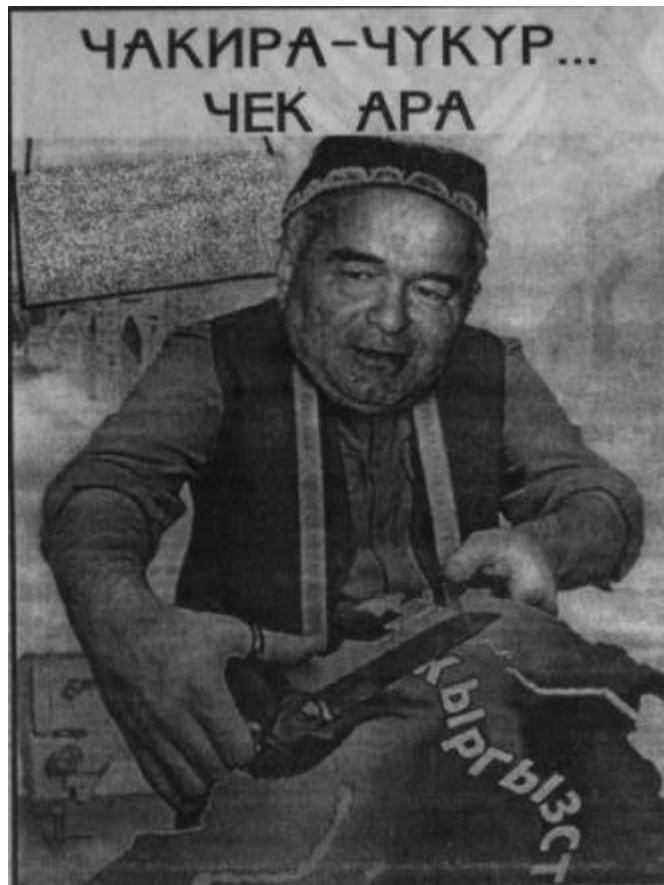


Figure 3-14: President Karimov snips away at the Kyrgyzstan border ('Chakira-chükür... chek ara', *Asaba* 15 (362), 29/03/2000: 1.)

## PART IV: CONCLUSION

“Geography dictates foreign policy”, wrote Ismagambetov on the role of boundaries in Central Asian inter-state relations (Ismagambetov 2002: 10). However, it would be counter-intuitive to describe the border question in 1999 as merely the product of topography, Soviet border policy, the result of ethnic tensions, or determined by necessary and pre-given ‘needs’ or ‘interests’ of the state, such as land or security. This study has shown that in 1999-2000 different political factions struggled to articulate a notion of ‘the border’ with (often self-contradictory) interpretations that legitimised their claims to rule, in a way that would simply not have arisen had public debate been silenced in the way that it was in Uzbekistan. This underlines the central insight of critical political geography, that “the geography of the world is not a product of nature but a product of histories of struggle between competing authorities over the power to organize, occupy, and administer space” (Ó Tuathail 1996a: 1).

Five conclusions can be drawn from the study in this chapter. The first is that ‘geography’ is not a simple given category in the analysis of national and inter-state politics, but is a social product inextricably linked to power. Since the late 1980s human geography has exhibited a sustained commitment to investigating this ‘social construction of space’, an examination into the ways in which different societies produce specific geographies and how these shape social thought (Smith and Godlewska 1994: 3). Kaiser has critiqued the tendency of studies of nationalism in the FSU to treat space and place as insignificant variables or empty containers (Kaiser 1994: 5).<sup>250</sup> The importance of territory to the politics of nationalism has been a neglected theme in studies of Central Asia, yet is a vital corrective to the tendency of some writers to engage in simplistic ‘geopolitical’ speculation and explanation. This chapter has argued that geographical notions such as ‘Great Silk Road’, ‘common home’, ‘island of democracy’, a ‘small country’ that was ‘between two fires’, ‘the border’, and ‘the Switzerland of Central Asia’ were crucial in articulating political visions of Kyrgyzstan and its place in the world.

Secondly, this study has highlighted the role of nationalist ideology as a strategy of power in this construction of space. It presents a more nuanced account than that of Collins, who explicitly denies the importance of ideology in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstani

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<sup>250</sup> Although Kaiser’s own analysis of territoriality in the role of borders in Central Asia falls into the trap critiqued in this chapter of regarding space as a given category (Kaiser 1994: 189, 370-1).

politics (Collins 2002: 146).<sup>251</sup> However, it does not argue that ideology was merely a cynical mask donned by unscrupulous megalomaniacs. The construction of independent Kyrgyzstan has taken place within impassioned and historically aware debates about the political identity of the Kyrgyz, debates that have not always been overtly political yet have been intrinsically highly politicised. Informed by these debates, both government and opposition took it for granted that the ‘empty signifier’ (to use the terminology of Howarth *et al*) of ‘the nation’ was the ‘nodal point’ that structured political discourse, and that legitimacy depended upon defining and occupying this ground. Whilst the opposition articulated a concept of the nation as exclusively ethnic, the government vacillated between an inclusive civic nationalism and an exclusive ethnic nationalism. ‘The border issue’ was a vehicle for articulating these competing ‘geopolitical visions’ (Dijkink 1996), which also created and policed moral boundaries of belonging to and exclusion from ‘the nation.’ The idea of ‘the nation’ was more important in Kyrgyzstani political life than questions of ‘democracy’ and ‘civil society’ that have so exercised US and European-based commentators: a greater sensitivity to understanding Kyrgyzstani politics will be facilitated by relaxing an emphasis on these analytical frameworks. As Radcliffe and Westwood do in their study of Ecuador, I have foregrounded ‘the nation’ as the terrain of struggle and contestation, and would contend that their conclusion for Ecuador holds true for Kyrgyzstan: that the arena of national identities will be crucial to envisioning future democratic (or other) politics (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996: 42, 50).

Thirdly, this lack of attention to the ideological nuances of Kyrgyzstani politics leads me to conclude that paying more sensitive attention to the importance of nationalism in Kyrgyzstani politics would yield a greater understanding of the actual state of ‘democratization.’ There has been a tendency for some observers to reduce their analysis of ‘the island of democracy’ to a simplistic division between an increasingly authoritarian president and a democratic opposition. However, the ‘opposition’ itself appeared at times to be more of an elite activity that depended on control of certain media outlets and contingent alliances, than consistent ideological positions expressed in stable party structures. Opposition papers and leaders often

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<sup>251</sup> This argument does not dispute Collins’ assertion of the importance of kinship networks in the struggle for economic power; but as chapter 4 shows, such economic accounts alone are inadequate for explicating the multiplicity of meanings of kinship in the Ferghana Valley.

resorted to highly racialised demonisations of ethnic minorities. This has led to the championing of groups or individuals whose xenophobia would shock liberal society in Europe or the US, at the expense of other opposition movements who do not espouse the current buzzwords of ‘civil society’, as Simon Churchyard has argued.<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, the swift and dramatic transformation of Felix Kulov from government apologist to founder of one of the largest political parties demonstrates that opposition politics were often based upon the ambitions and platforms of charismatic leaders, rather than on committed investments to building grass-roots movements. The useful report by the International Crisis Group (2002b) on the Becnazarov case and its implications for Kyrgyzstan is helpful in spotlighting some of the issues about the structure and dynamics of opposition movements in Kyrgyzstan (see below, p.165), although it did not sufficiently heed the importance of ideologically-charged debates over borders since 1999 as a backdrop to the Kerben tragedy. Fuller accounts of political change in Kyrgyzstan must include detailed scrutiny of the dynamics and ideology of opposition movements, especially when they are weighted towards informing policy.

Fourthly, the shortcomings that this study has exposed in many accounts of Kyrgyzstani politics suggest the need for more thorough explications of concrete situations. Outlines of independent Kyrgyzstan’s political trajectory commonly read like a religious parable, centring on the idea that President Akaev was once a convinced democrat who has now fallen and strayed from the true path of democracy, to which he is being called back by ‘the international community.’ Quite apart from their quaint absurdity and psychological self-gratification, these theories tend to overstate and fetishise the personal agency of Askar Akaev at the expense of more thorough investigations of the actual workings of Kyrgyzstani political life. Huskey’s recent chapter on Kyrgyzstan is a classic example (Huskey 2002). He draws on a limited range of sources, and entirely ignores the Kyrgyz language press that has been a major arena of political contestation. The first part is a hagiography of the early Akaev. Huskey quotes “Kyrgyz commentator” Abilabek Asankanov, as evidence that Akaev enjoyed full support of the population (ibid.: 78). Asankanov is indeed a fine scholar of Kyrgyz history, yet also works in the presidential administration, so is hardly a neutral voice. In describing the later Akaev administration, Huskey states

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<sup>252</sup> Simon Churchyard, ‘Opposition, Fundamentalism and Human Rights in Kyrgyzstan’, *Eurasia Insight*, 1/05/2000 (New York: OSI).

that he is popular with the northern Kyrgyz yet unpopular with the southern. No convincing evidence is adduced for this geographical distinction; in fact, the majority of Akaev's most serious and persistent opponents have been northern Kyrgyz. Bichel wrote in 1998 that in place of critical analysis the literature on Central Asian society and politics consists mainly of "unreflective essays... [and]... hundreds of pages of tepid analysis" (Bichel 1998: 19). Although much more critically-informed and empirically-grounded work on Central Asia has been published since Bichel penned those criticisms, they continue to have some validity.

Whilst believing that this chapter is an advance on these vague overviews of Central Asian states, I would hasten to acknowledge that it has various shortcomings. My own lack of Russian language knowledge has limited the access to sources,<sup>253</sup> and my emphasis on discourse analysis and my personal and professional association with many journalists has meant that my perception of politics in Kyrgyzstan has been less informed by interviews with deputies and state functionaries. Nevertheless, I believe that it demonstrates something of the potential of theoretically informed empirical research.

Fifthly, I join Bohr and Crisp (1996) in finding civic/ethnic notions of nationalism of use in analysing ideological positions of power elites in Kyrgyzstan, building on the attention to this subject drawn by Brubaker and G. Smith. I suggest, however, that they are over-simplifying the issue in mapping a simple civic/ethnic divide onto the Akaev/Opposition stand-off. Rather, Askar Akaev himself maintained and moved between two contradictory geopolitical visions of Kyrgyzstan, one ethnic and one civic. The movement between these poles was particularly dynamic at times of crisis, such as the Batken invasion when Akaev leaned on ethnic nationalist ideas to encourage the Kyrgyz to support him. Thus, whilst Brubaker posits a civic/ethnic tension in the USSR (Brubaker 1996: Chapter 2; see also p.213), I suggest that a similar tension exists in modern Kyrgyzstan, although institutionalised in different forms.

My final conclusion is theoretical, an endorsement of the Essex discourse-theoretic approach. Rather than engage in the highly politicised and polemical question of how old or authentic the Kyrgyz nation is, I have asked what the contemporary political and social meaning of the signifier 'the nation' is. Rather than attempting to assess

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<sup>253</sup> I attempted to learn Russian alongside Uzbek and Kyrgyz but failed, deterred by the complexity of the grammar and the shortness of life.



the extent of the ‘transition to democracy’, I have explored the process of domestic political formation over a certain issue. By focusing on the indirect phenomenon of ‘the border dispute’ as an ensemble of acts that constitutes a nation, I have attempted to provide a more nuanced description of state-building processes in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

Drawing on Howarth *et al*, I have rejected the idea that the meaning of ‘the border’ is extra-discursive (that is to say, exists for this particular conflict as something outside the social construction of it), or that different political actors in Kyrgyzstan have pre-established and solid political identities that pre-determine their response to the border crisis. Rather, by articulating contingent signifying elements in the discursive field of Kyrgyz politics such as language, national pride, gender notions, historical myths, the nation, and the border, both the identities of competing elites and the discursive meaning of ‘the border’ actually emerge: and in this, the primacy of the political is stressed.

However, research that studies *only* discourse can itself become handicapped if it assumes it has exhausted reality by that study. The major shortcoming of the Essex approach, indeed of much work on discourse theory, is that it highlights the ‘production’ rather than ‘consumption’ of discourse. Material presented in the two chapters thus far is devoid of *people*, and yields few clues as to how effective were the various strategies described above. Crucially, it does not enable us to know *how* the Ferghana Valley changed as a result, and whether ‘ethnic conflict’ became more or less likely. To answer those more difficult questions, very different research methods are needed that are sensitive to human experience. That is the task that the second half of this thesis attempts.

### **Coda: the border in 2002**

It is sometimes argued that studies of discourse and identity ignore the ‘real’ conditions of political struggle. This study does not set ‘discourse’ against ‘reality’, but argues that the study of political discourse is inseparable from the story of competing power factions headed by determined individuals. The fate of many of the central characters in this chapter - the glory of office or the ignominy of the dungeon - is a reminder that the articulation of discourse is no mere intellectual activity.

However, the importance of the ‘border question’ explored in this chapter was brought into sharp focus by the political trauma that engulfed Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 2002. On 17/18<sup>th</sup> March police shot dead five protesters around the Jalal-Abad town of Kerben in the region of Aksy in the north of the Valley (see map B, p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**) as they demonstrated against the imprisonment of opposition deputy, Azimbek Beknazarov. Beknazarov had been a vocal critic of President Akaev’s border delimitation agreement with China, alleging he was ceding Kyrgyz land that he ought rather to have been defending. Massive protests blocking the main Bishkek-Osh highway followed the police killings, which precipitated the release of Beknazarov (who then initiated impeachment procedures against President Akaev), the resignation of the government, and the appointment of a new prime minister. The impact of these events on future relations with neighbouring states is as yet indeterminate, but popular feeling can no longer be ignored by the state.

It would be wildly implausible to suggest that what was witnessed here was the product of some given geography or the need of the state to defend its interests or security. Such an explanation could not account for the events beginning in Beknazarov’s constituency and not elsewhere. His constituency was part of Jalal-Abad oblast, a region that does not border China, and it would be surprising if as many as one in fifty of the demonstrators had ever visited the remote and sparsely-populated areas that were being divided between the two countries. Beknazarov and his supporters were able to mobilise popular discontent with the Akaev regime around ‘the border issue’ and the subsequent arrest of the deputy. These developments cannot be explained without reference to the ‘border issue’ of 1999-2000, a series of events and debates that imbued the state border with the explosive significance that was to frame the Beknazarov saga.

The border issue of 1999-2000 and the subsequent Aksy tragedy and its political repercussions were the product of the geography of Kyrgyzstan mediated by and interpreted through an ongoing power struggle between ambitious individuals and factions. This struggle took place within contours defined by the unique trajectory of Kyrgyzstan’s political and social development since independence, in particular the actual working out of constitutional provisions for formal politics, forms of expression of social discontent, debates in wider society about the meaning of historical consciousness, and contested geopolitical ideologies of nationalism. The ‘border issue’ in 1999-2000 and beyond took place within these parameters, but these

parameters themselves were continually reformed and renegotiated through practical politics. It is by unpacking this complex dialectic in the empirical context of actual political practice, and eschewing an analysis beginning with the formulaic application of abstract ideological frameworks developed in the European and US contexts, that the meaning of nationalism and the nature of the contemporary Kyrgyzstani nation state can best be explicated.

## **Chapter 4 : Beyond Representation? Embodiment, Performativity, And An Ethnography Of The Border.**

In his highly influential 1969 presidential address to the Regional Science Association, *What happened to people in regional science?*, the geographer, Torsten Hägerstrand, voiced concern over "the fate of the individual human being" (Hägerstrand 1970: 7) submerged under the dead weight of 1960s logical positivism. Three decades later Kay Anderson and Susan Smith wrote an editorial for *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* that resonated with Hägerstrand's concerns, profoundly disturbed that the emotional element of human life was being overlooked in the discipline, stifled by the obsession with representation and discursive construction within cultural studies (Anderson and Smith 2001).

This chapter proposes the thesis that the study of nationality and identity in human geography (and other social sciences) has become overly cerebral, raising the danger of a human geography in which real humans are absent. This results in a concomitant shortcoming in our ability to comprehend the full import and multiplicity of the phenomena of national identity, nationalism, and inter-state political conflict. I argue that this is due, in part, to an over-emphasis on discursive representations of nationalism.

The theoretical focus of this chapter is on the current efforts to move beyond representational practices through theories of performativity and embodiment. I argue that rather than being a coherent project, this movement has a sharp dualistic divide. Whilst one strand of this theorising is merely the rehashing of considerations of discursive constructionism, another seeks to move beyond that by recapturing a more authentic articulation of human experience. I welcome this second development, and go on to propose that the anthropological technique of ethnographic participant observation, which has been little-used in geography, is the ideal tool to explore it further. My aim is not to argue that the one approach is superior to, or ought to be used at the expense of, the other, but to attempt to hold them alongside each other. It is exactly the intention of Paasi, who, in his remarkable study of the Russo-Finnish border, states that his aim is "to combine two geographical perspectives which have

typically been pursued separately in geographical research - a structurally based analysis of the construction of boundaries as part of the nation-building process, and an interpretative analysis of local, personal experience of this process." (Paasi 1996: xvii).

Chapters two and three employed a highly cerebral method of inductive study to understand the 1999-2000 border crisis between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan through representations of the nation in official discourse. Although a powerful way to study political conflict, taken alone this method would risk depicting a world that is the product of the mere imaginative whim of the powerful. As a counterbalance, the following two chapters explore the meaning of nationality and the impacts of the border crisis by investigating the emotional reactions and responses of people living along the border as the political crisis unfolded. This chapter uses participant observation to describe what the border crisis *felt* like. The contrast between this perspective and those of political elites opens a space in the following chapter to explore more systematically the different meanings of nationality in the Ferghana Valley, and the future role of nationality and ethnicity in political formations and inter-communal relations in southern Kyrgyzstan.

## **PART I: INTRODUCTION: REPRESENTATIONAL THEORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY**

### **National identity as a ‘social construction’**

There are as many theories of nationalism and attempts to categorise it as there are theorists. However, in geography and the social sciences, national identity is commonly understood not as an expression of primordial belonging, but as a social product. In his study of Kazakh nationalism, Surucu (Surucu 2002) identified two theoretical traditions that I think can be located in this camp. The first perspective he called *instrumentalist*, who conceptualizes ethnicity as an expression of group interests competing for power. The second he terms *constructivist*: stressing the social construction of identities and the relative autonomy of culture, and attaching more importance to ideas, discourse, and inter-subjectively communicated ideas than do instrumentalists.

I do not want to dismiss the intellectual pedigrees and substantive differences between these positions, but for the sake of this discussion wish to highlight what they have in common. Rather than being a primordial and immutable category, they both understand contemporary nationality as taking concrete form in the modern period, and that it is implicated in systems of power that legitimise and enable certain forms and strategies of political control. As such, its representational and socially produced elements are accessible to historical investigation. These include the glorification of the leader (Rowe and Schelling 1991), the creation of new literary languages (Lynn and Fryer 1998: 574), officially organised rituals and spectacles (Kong and Yeoh 1997), renaming of streets (Azaryahu 1997), popular culture (Radcliffe and Westwood 1996), state symbols flagged in the banality of everyday life (Billig 1995), and the role of the printing press and the organisation of bureaucracies (Anderson 1983). All these act to inculcate senses of national identity that would not otherwise have existed. Suny and Eley consider that the fundamental insight of what they approvingly term ‘constructionists’ since Kedourie (a definition that collapses Surucu’s distinction between constructivists and instrumentalists) is that “nations are not so much discovered or awakened, as they are created or invented by the labours of intellectuals” (Suny and Eley 1996: 23). This position emphasises not the emotive experience of being national, but the political manipulation of nationality. Breuilly explicitly rejects the relevance of any irrational or emotional element to explaining nationalism, interpreting it as a purely political strategy to gain power (Breuilly 1993: 385-8). Such conclusions are potentially revolutionary and politically controversial: as shown by the angry reaction to James’ charge that the idea of ‘the Celts’ in Britain is a fabricated, Romantic (and possibly dangerous) myth (James 1999).

However, this mainstream instrumentalist/representational perspective is questioned in some quarters. As Hennayake observes, “Most of the theories fail to explain why nationalism, rather than any other form of politics, is sought after as a remedy to social, cultural and economic problems in many areas of the world” (Hennayake 1992: 257). Breuilly admits that, “People do yearn for communal membership... which give their lives meaning”, but brackets this issue as being “beyond rational analysis.” Suny and Eley acknowledge that the nation is a refuge in a changing world, but do not explain why it should be (Suny and Eley 1996: 31).<sup>254</sup> The insight that

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<sup>254</sup> These criticisms have been echoed by a number of thinkers working in other fields. Lyotard (Lyotard 1991) has criticised the refusal of mainstream thinkers to discuss what it means to be human,

nationalism is a representational practice embedded in systems of domination is a powerful position from which to critique it as a spatial practice of social control, as I have done in the second and third chapters of this study. However, the story of any socio-political formation such as nationalism is not exhausted by the study of elite discourses: and it is to the growing awareness of this amongst geographers who stress notions of 'performativity' that I now turn. Before doing that, however, I will briefly consider the humanistic geography of the 1970s that also attempted to recapture a greater sensitivity to human experience in the face of the dominance of the discipline by highly-cerebral theoretical systems.

### **Humanistic geography and logical positivism**

Humanistic geography was a reaction to both the perceived aridity of the dominance that positivism had achieved over human geography by the late 1960s, and also a response to contemporary concerns about the environment, the civil rights movement, and the USA's war in Vietnam. According to proponents of this movement such as Ley, 'human being' had disappeared from geography, but through the philosophical traditions of existentialism, phenomenology, humanism and pragmatism, it should be possible to envisage "a richer model of man and of human creativity...unlike the pallid figure of logical positivism" (Ley 1983: 8). This echoed the earlier concerns of germinal papers by Wright (Wright 1947) and Lowenthal (Lowenthal 1961). The starting point for humanistic geographers was the affective bond of humans and place, a theme explored by scholars such as Tuan (1974), Relph (1976), Pocock (1981), and Seamon and Mugerauer (1985b).

Although humanistic geography provided an imaginative alternative to the overly-cerebral positivism that characterised the quantitative revolution in geography, it encountered forceful criticisms for its often-pretentious writing style (Billinge 1983), its masculinist presuppositions (Rose 1993), and its failure to acknowledge the structural operation of political economy (Gregory 1981). Humanistic geography's two chief concerns were definitions of agency and place. However, the influential post-structural work of Barnes and Duncan (1992) problematised stronger humanistic

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suggesting that they work with an assumption of the value of human life that their theories need, and it is safest not to submit that to deconstructive theory. Ingold rejects the notion that human worlds are socially constructed, arguing instead that perception "involves the *whole person*, in an active engagement with his or her environment" (Ingold 1996: 114). Latour (Latour 1999) considers that social constructionist perspectives fail to come to terms with everyday life and human nature.

notions of author-as-knower, whilst the school of 'New Regional Geography' associated with Doreen Massey established a more Marxist definition of place as the site whereby powerful global economic forces reorganise social lives (Massey 1984).

Although these criticisms were substantally rejected by Tuan (1993), Buttimer (1993), and Pocock (1995), who reiterated the importance of aesthetics and contemplation in the tradition of western humanism, they were accepted by Relph (2000), and the humanistic emphasis that 1970s humanistic geography brought to the discipline was largely overtaken by the theoretical positions mentioned above. Nonetheless, it did serve to legitimise the study of human experience in the discipline at a time when that was unfashionable, and its impact can be traced through to contemporary investigations into 'performativity' and 'embodiment': indeed, David Ley was Kay Anderson's doctoral supervisor. Having suggested that there is a parallel between the problematic identified by Hågerstrand in 1969 and Anderson in 2001, I now turn to that body of theory with which Anderson is identified.

### **Geography and the body**

The work of Nigel Thrift has signified an important attempt to summarise the shortcomings of representational theorisation in human geography and to outline some alternative course forwards. In his influential 1996 book, *Spatial Practices*, he voices disquiet over the obsession with representation and discursive construction in the discipline. He has called instead for 'non-representational' theory, characterised by a focus on everyday practices and concerned with sympathetically understanding a person and then telling their story (Thrift 1996: 7). For Thrift, this means "thinking with the entire body" (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000: 411-2).

Thrift's initial challenge has encouraged amongst geographers a surge of interest in ideas of 'performativity,' 'the body' and 'embodiment', including a double issue of *Society and Space* in 2000, introduced by Thrift himself, and a reading meeting of the Social and Cultural Geography Research Group on this theme in Durham at Easter 2001. This output can be broadly grouped into two categories, those that refine and reinforce the cerebral emphasis on representation and discursive construction, and those that signal a more radical break with it.



The first use of theories of embodiment and performativity explain how socially constructed discourses actually attain pervasiveness in society. Thrift's answer, using the work of Butler, is that this is neither mysterious nor subliminal, but simply a process of individual people copying other individuals whom they see in everyday life, in print or on television. Thrift uses the term "inscription" as a more or less pompous way of saying 'copying' (Thrift 2000). Because this inscription is always incomplete, new social forms slowly emerge, thus "power operates in a rather different, altogether less predictable, manner than that implied by the reading of Foucault's account of power which currently dominates the geographical literature" (Gregson and Rose 2000: 442). In spite of her disavowal of constructionism, Nash's account of the history of the tango is typically constructionist, detailing how ideas of culture, class, masculinity and nation were rehearsed through the dance (Nash 2000). An insistence that this work celebrates the fragmentary and unstable notwithstanding, it is highly rationalistic as the formation of ideology, down to the very processes by which it enters the minds of individual humans, is understandable in its entirety to the researcher (for examples of this see Pratt 2000; Reville 2000). Anything that might be termed mysterious, irrational, unquantifiable, pre-symbolic, hyper-linguistic and non-textual are tamed or banished.

A second strand of theorisation by geographers has radically questioned the cerebral bent to representational theory. Some of this draws on the work of anthropologist Alan Radley. Radley has questioned the value of theories of performativity and embodiment that reduce the body to a socially constructed "discursive body" as the site of the actions and interests of others, when in fact the body actually configures our realms of experience (Radley 1995). A number of geographers have used Radley's work, such as Dewsbury (Dewsbury 2000). Following Radley, Harrison believes that social constructionism has overlooked the configuring role of the body; he suggests that daily routines not only inscript discursive ideologies, but address existential questions by holding at bay the nagging angst of the meaninglessness of life (Harrison 2000).

The anthropologist Tim Ingold has maintained a sustained assault on the paradigm of social constructionism, arguing that world-views are best understood not as social and cultural constructs, but as ways of living emerging from the embodied practice of everyday life (Ingold 2000). Whatmore echoes Ingold's critique, attacking the social constructionist perspective that perceives nature as the "always already crafted

product of human interpretation." She calls instead for a new 'hybrid geography' that is able to "admit and register the creative presence of creatures and devices amongst us, and the animal sensibilities of our diverse human being" (Whatmore 1999: 24).

For the anthropologist, Stephen Muecke, the effect of an Australian dawn piper on Remembrance Day in recreating the nation is more than just conveying cerebral ideas by flagging ideological concepts: it is the power of a vital force on "bodies full of effect" (Muecke 1999: 2-3). Likewise, Hinchliffe questions the value of knowledge that is devoid of both emotion and bodily interference, preferring a form of knowledge that moves away from perceiving of actions as the consequences of thoughts to one that emphasises emotion (Hinchliffe 2000).

The critical examination of the textual practices that produce and reproduce notions of national identity is a powerful and valuable tool to explore the workings of nationalism, power and ideology in a modern state. Yet by bracketing off affective human experience it implicitly claims to exhaust the meaning of nationality as an inscribed representational practice. It marginalises human experience, in the way that positivism did in the 1960s.

Through theories of 'performativity' and 'embodiment', many geographers are trying to come to terms with this danger by exploring a diverse range of phenomena including emotions, existential angst, morality, sensation, the agency of non-humans, and the sublime. The focus of this study is everyday practice. Much of what geographers are getting at in these discussions is encapsulated in a definition of 'the body' as not merely a physically sensate subject, but *the total human being through which the world is encountered and negotiated as physical, moral, existential and aesthetic entity*.

However, investigating a phenomenon is altogether a different exercise from simply identifying it. In the next section, I propose that the ethnographic method, as used in contemporary anthropology but little utilised by geographers, is ideal for sympathetically studying the embodied sense of being-in-the-world that many geographers are calling for.

## **Ethnography**

From the 1890s onwards members of Haddon's 'Cambridge school' of anthropology moved the discipline on from armchair theorising, through detailed field studies, to

intensive studies of kinship networks (Sanjek 1990: 203). Bronislaw Malinowski advanced this by pioneering participant observation and establishing its dominance in British anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s. In his ground-breaking *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* Malinowski defined the goal of ethnographic study as being "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world" (Malinowski 1922: 25). To study this it was necessary for the researcher to 'plunge into the life of the natives' over an extended period of time.<sup>255</sup> Cambridge's Radcliffe-Brown influenced the young sociologist, William Foote Whyte, whilst lecturing in Chicago in the 1930s. Whyte's landmark pioneering ethnography of Boston's North End ('Cornerville') district stands as a key text of both the 'Chicago School' of sociology and of modern social science in general (Whyte 1981 (1943)). He thought that intimate knowledge of social life was obtained not through collection of statistics, but by living in a place and participating fully in the activities of its people through Malinowskian participant observation. In challenging the prevalent racially-prejudiced views about the Italian immigrant district, which were based largely on statistics about juvenile delinquency, lack of bathtubs, overcrowding and other social malaises, Whyte remarked that "there is one thing wrong with this picture: no human beings are in it" (Whyte 1981 (1943): xv). This ethnographic method has achieved a dominant position within anthropology, used by such diverse researchers as the founder of the 'Manchester School' of Marxian anthropology, Gluckman (1940), and the more spiritually-inclined Piers Vitebsky who, in his study of the Sora of India, was initiated as a lower-order shaman. For Vitebsky, the essence of ethnography was empathising with others in "an imaginative leap which involves seeing ourselves in another person's situation" (Vitebsky 1993: 9). His sensitive insights into Sora conceptions of selfhood and temporality would have been impossible to obtain through a method such as interviews or surveys.

The 1980s witnessed a radical 'postmodern' critique of ethnography as claiming a false transparency through immediate knowledge. Clifford and Marcus proclaimed a "crisis in anthropology", problematising representation as being indelibly influenced by the agency of the ethnographer (Clifford 1986a). Using this critique Cook slates the Marxist feminist ethnography of Iacovetta as oppressive in ignoring representational practice (Cook 1999: 85-86), whilst Obeyesekere criticises Vitebsky

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<sup>255</sup> The American Margaret Mead, apparently independently, devised a similar form of participant observation shortly afterwards (Mead 1933).

for not recognising that ethnography is a "western construct" and assuming he could speak with authority about a people for whom he was always only ever an outsider (Obeyesekere 1995: 458-459).

This 'postmodern' ethnography received a hostile reception amongst many anthropologists. Gellner dismisses it for supposed ideological and political impotency (Gellner 1995: 26), and likewise, Iacovetta considers that it smacks of liberal pluralism and doubts its commitment to emancipatory scholarship (Iacovetta 1999). Wolf takes issue with the sidelining of feminism by Clifford and Marcus (Wolf 1992: 6-7), whilst Morris objects to what he sees as their caricature of anthropology that ignores its historic awareness of the contingency of ethnographic knowledge (Morris 1997). An implicit criticism is that these writers do not really know what they are talking about, not having done extensive participant observation themselves (Wolf 1992: 134). Sanjek argues that Rabinow, Geertz and Clifford have used interviews rather than ethnographic study, locating their work in a pre-Malinowskian (Boasian) paradigm (Sanjek 1990: 247). The work of these 'postmodern' critics of anthropology has been more widely read in disciplines that lack a proper understanding of and make little use of Malinowskian ethnographic research. Indeed, it was the main source of notions about 'the problem of representation' in geography, popularised in the discipline by Barnes and Duncan (1992).

Humanistic anthropologists such as Stoller (1989) and Altork (1995) have re-articulated the case for ethnography in the wake of the postmodern criticism. Stoller has called for a "radically empiricist" ethnography that abandons pretensions to predicting scientific social laws, centring instead on more vividly embodied descriptions of place, sound, smells, drama, and plot; an ethnography emerging from "respect, born of deep immersion in other worlds, demands that nameless informants be portrayed as recognizable individuals who suffer defeats and win victories in their social worlds." Through ethnographic research, this chapter attempts to recover something of this in the lives of people along the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border as the political crisis unfurled.

The geographers, Cook and Crang, pithily summarise the basic purpose of ethnographic methods as "to understand parts of the world as they are experienced and understood in the everyday lives of the people who actually 'live them out'" (Cook and Crang 1995: 4). However, as Steve Herbert regrets, it has been neglected within geography. He draws the important distinction between ethnography (in the

anthropological sense) and the use of interviews, surveys and other methods.<sup>256</sup> Calculating that between 1993 and 1998 only 3.5% of articles in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* and 5% in *Society and Space* made use of ethnographic data, he makes a strong call for geographers to employ it more often (Herbert 2000: 505). Like Herbert, Katz acknowledges the challenge presented by Clifford and Marcus, but thinks it is met by the exploration of the researcher's own positionality. Moreover, concerns over discourse and representation should not obscure remembrance that "oppression is not simply discursive and not just a representation or invention" (Katz 1992: 504). I generally support Herbert's claims, although would prefer to make them on a *sub*-disciplinary rather than disciplinary level. Development geographers have been more sympathetic to the use of ethnographic methods (for example, Katz 1992, Townsend et al. 1995, Radcliffe and Westwood 1996): it is certain political geographers such as Paasi (see discussion on p.29) whose work could be much enriched by the use of ethnographic methods.

Having argued that Malinowskian participant-observation ethnography is a highly appropriate tool for contemporary political geographers, it is immediately necessary to recognise the unusual challenge presented by borders. An international boundary is an exquisitely unique entity; extremely long, very narrow and often infuriatingly contorted. I draw on two sources to solve this dilemma.

The first is the work of Hastings Donnan and Andrew Wilson, political anthropologists engaged in an innovative project to develop an anthropology of international borders. They are concerned that the sociological conception of power as emanating from the centre of a given state (see p.20), or critical social science's reduction of nations and states to images constructed by groups seeking to represent them in pursuit of particular goals (as used in chapters 2 & 3 of this dissertation), produce very abstract concepts of the state. Critical of anthropologists for shying away from scrutinizing the nation-state, Donnan and Wilson believe that anthropology's ethnographic method permits a searching examination of the operation of the state at a micro level. A study of the everyday lives of border communities is simultaneously the study of the daily life of the state, a marrying of local and national perspectives that concentrates on "how power is demonstrated, projected and

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<sup>256</sup> Schutt also distinguishes between participant observation, intensive interviews, and focus groups as three very different techniques of field research (Schutt 1996: 317).

contested in the social, economic and political practices of quotidian life at international borders" (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 155).

Donnan and Wilson highlight the role of cross-border trade and smuggling, prostitution, the symbolic and ritual enactment of state power at the frontier, the control of bodies crossing it, and violence and identity politics as important topics of study in any anthropology of borders. Their work represents an exciting attempt to explore the significance of international boundaries and the nation-state from an anthropological perspective. Although initially sceptical of 'borders theory' (see chapter 1, p.27) (Wilson and Donnan 1998), more recently they have cautiously welcomed it as part of an ensemble of approaches to envisage borders (Donnan and Wilson 1999).

Yet whilst Donnan and Wilson's formula lacks a certain dynamism, it is still anchored to the spatially restrictive anthropological fetish of the 'small community': in this case, a small community close to a border. For an attempt to grasp the international border in its unique spatial formation, the work of the great historian of the Chinese frontier, Owen Lattimore, is invaluable. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate to label him the 'frontier Malinowski.' Having learnt various local languages, he inconspicuously criss-crossed the old caravan routes of 1920s Inner Asia. In 1926 he spent a year with caravans, an experience he called his "frontier education" (Lattimore 1995 (1929)). This approach allowed him to develop a unique angle on the study of China, Mongolia and Inner Asia. Rather than studying the frontier as a peripheral feature of the Chinese state, he placed frontier dynamics at the heart of his theorisation (Lattimore 1962b).

### **Ethnography and this chapter**

In my research, I have combined both Malinowskian participant observation with Lattimore's "frontier education." I spent much of my time based in the Kyrgyzstani city of Osh, a city that has intrigued me since my first visit in 1995. By shifting residence and work patterns I tried to move continually between the city's two main ethnic groups, Uzbek and Kyrgyz.<sup>257</sup> I had a full social life across a broad spectrum

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<sup>257</sup> The ability to move between groups is not always open to ethnographers, especially in circumstances of intense conflict; the geographer Lorraine Dowler considered that paramilitary

of people and activities, and also tried to make as much time as possible for accepting the invitations of new acquaintances. I sometimes followed bus-routes, unaware of their destination, getting off the bus at a whim with someone I met in it, or at the last stop. In doing this, I attempted to take seriously Stoller's call for an 'ethnography of detours following the researcher's intuitions' (Stoller 1989: 22). When not teaching, interviewing, studying or researching my hours were spent in tearooms, concert halls, homes, mosques, churches, schools, theatres, fields- anywhere where people were making meaningful lives. In my final year in O'sh, when I had my own flat which I was sharing with a local friend, I was (with the invaluable help of his aunt, Hairahon) able to return this hospitality to some small degree and frequently hosted guests.

At the same time, I used Osh (and before that Ferghana, over the border in Uzbekistan's part of the Valley) as a base for regular forays into the border regions. In the spring and summer months I would find myself as often as possible taking regular trips to all sides of the Ferghana Valley. My favourite methods of transport were the old public buses, and the private cars that ply the routes between towns when they can find four passengers. Less frequently I cycled, hitched and hiked. Just as Lattimore learnt much from speaking to those on the caravans to which he attached himself, I learnt much from the conversations in buses and taxis, which almost invariably from February 1999 onwards, even without my input, turned towards the border and the shared experiences of crossings. A similar random approach was endorsed by Butalia as the method for her feminist oral history of the 1947 creation of the India-Pakistan border (Butalia 2000: 12-16).

I generally travelled lightly and inconspicuously, in simple cotton shirts and trousers and with a bazaar bag bought locally. Until I introduced myself otherwise, I was often mistaken for a local. I sometimes stayed in cheap hostels and hotels, but more frequently with friendly strangers I met along the way. I kept in touch with many of these people and revisited them over the years. I immensely enjoyed this travelling, and felt lured by the frontier. This was a form of research accessible to me as an outgoing young, single man with knowledge of local languages and a reasonable ability to comport myself appropriately in male-dominated public space. It would have been more likely that a young single female researcher doing the same would

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contacts with one side of the sectarian divide in Northern Ireland would both jeopardise and be jeopardised by contacts with the other (Dowler 2001).

have been regarded as morally suspect and made herself vulnerable to sexual harassment.<sup>258</sup>

Having arrived in the Valley in 1995, I made extensive tours throughout the spring and summer of 1996, and repeated most of these journeys in the spring and summer of 2000. During this time the experience of nation-state and border changed immensely, and I keenly felt these changes for myself. At the same time, I was studying the local press and world news and had a keen sense of the pace of political change. Whilst my own personal trajectories were, of course, different from those of the average border dweller, it was my own emotional involvement that helped me understand to some extent what those who lived along the border were experiencing, and my travelling 'close to the ground' that brought me into contact with them. As a result, this chapter does not claim to be 'objective': it is an attempt to recover something of that brief moment of time when the states of the Ferghana Valley started genuinely to *feel* like different countries for the first time in their history.

## **PART II: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF THE RESEARCHER**

This chapter has argued that a political conflict ought to be understood not simply as a power contest between rational actors, but also in the terms of those directly experiencing it. Such ethnography cannot leave the practitioner unmoved. On the contrary, the experiences and emotions of the researcher are themselves an integral part of the data and its collection. This chapter has also contended that ethnography, especially since the emergence of 'postmodern' critique, cannot pretend that the researcher is absent; researchers must write themselves into their research and describe how their personal agency influenced research results, as Adams 1999b does clearly in her paper *The Mascot Researcher*. This section will explore three areas of my own experience of the border: differences observed over my years of travel, unpleasant personal experience of the changing border regime, and dreaming about the border. I have placed this section at the start of my presentation of results because I take seriously the insights of Stoller (1989), Clifford (1986b) and others cited in this chapter, that the subjectivity of the researcher is not absent from the

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<sup>258</sup> I am grateful to Clare Pressnal for pointing out the implications of this to me in 1996 in our illuminating discussions of alternative forms of ethnographic interaction available to women and men. Claudia Stein raised the same theme with me some years later when visiting Osh, and we discussed it further at the November 2000 'Friendly Conference' in Geneva that was to launch the CARN network.

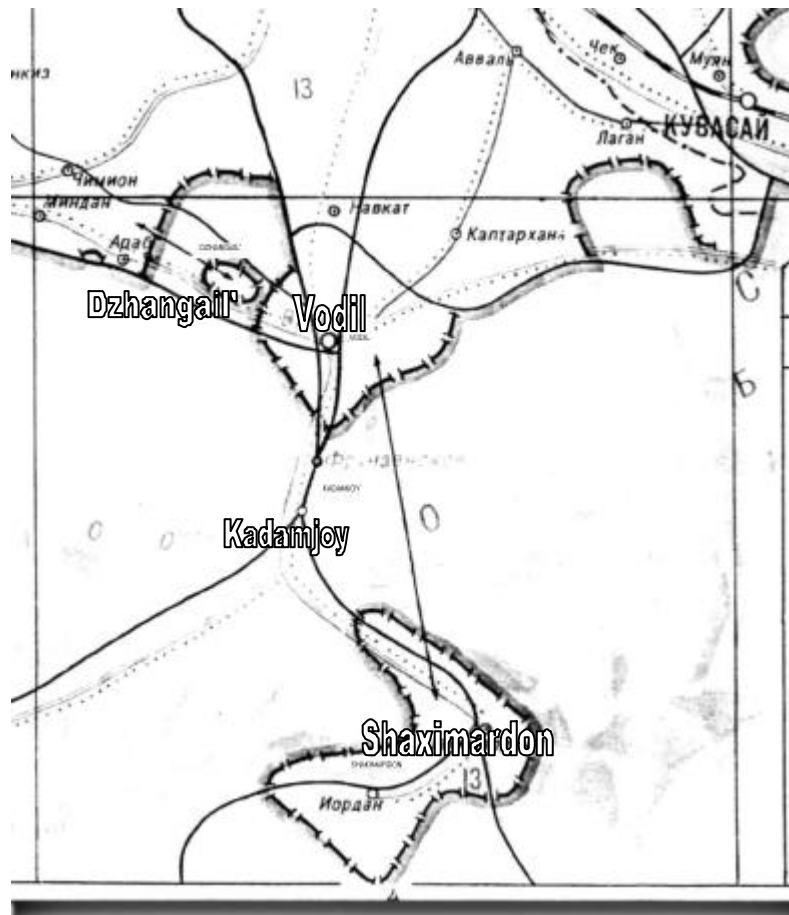


research and should therefore not be hidden. I thus make no apologies for relating emotional experiences that informed my understanding of the border, and will also enable the reader to situate, understand and critique my work. The three sections are not merely interpreted as personal recollections, but I argue that they share certain parallels with the experiences of other people in the valley.

### **Comparative explorations**

My most extensive travels around the border region were made in the spring and summer of 1996 and retraced in the spring and summer of 2001. The different experiences I had during this time helped me understand the effect of the changes in the border regime and diverging state politics. I will provide a few examples in this section. The point of this section is to demonstrate that the border closures (occurring as part of an increasingly authoritarian crackdown on dissent) were both dramatic and traumatic, and that my own experience of this enabled me begin to understand what those to whom I spoke and interviewed meant.

On December 25th 1995 I cycled from Ferghana to the Kyrgyzstani enclave that Whyte calls Dzhangail', in the mouth of a Kyrgyzstani salient into Uzbekistan's territory around its border town of Vodil (see Figure 4-1). It was difficult to ascertain what territory belonged to what state, as people along the way were unsure where the boundaries lay. Revisiting the area in 2000, there was no mistaking the territorial division of the area as an assertive Uzbekistan had inscribed its presence onto a new border landscape of barbed-wire fencing, blocked roads and militarised border control posts. Kyrgyzstanis complained of the economic impact. Fertilisers now had to be smuggled over the border and were a third more expensive, whilst prices of foodstuffs had been raised and profits from the sale of produce had been hit by bribes, delays and more expensive transport costs impeding access to the regional market in Kadamjoy (see Figure 4-1). Lamenting that the young could no longer go to study in Uzbekistan as his generation had done, one Kyrgyzstani Uzbek man pointed scornfully over the barricade and said, "My brother is living just a hundred metres away, but now we are cut off by this barbed wire fence."



**Figure 4-1: Border between Uzbekistan's southern Ferghana Valley oblast of Ferghana and Kyrgyzstan's Osh oblast, showing Uzbekistan's enclaves of Shaxkimardon and Dzhangail'**

In the spring of 1996 I visited the world's largest enclave, Sox. Most of Sox's 40,000+ population are ethnically Tajik in this Uzbekistani enclave within Kyrgyzstani territory, economically tied closely to Uzbekistan's town of Rishton. Figure 4-2 shows the borderland's intricate political geography. At various points one or other of the banks of the River Sox forms the border, at other points the river flows through national territory. The enclave of Qalacha contains a single village on the eastern bank of the river, but is not bridged to Sox (Whyte undated). A section of Batken region ('A2' on Figure 4-2) is itself isolated from Batken by the Sox enclave, and is contiguous only with territory of Kyrgyzstan's Kadamjoy region. Uzbekistan has recently dammed a reservoir on the River Sox and that complicates this political geography further as it displaces Kyrgyzstani villages, although this is not shown on the Soviet-era map. The Valley does not lie entirely within Uzbekistani territory; at

the eastern end, towards Haydarkan (see map B, p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**), there are a number of Kyrgyzstani villages.

A surpassingly beautiful valley, Sox is entered by mountain passes from east or west or barren upland plains rising from Uzbekistan's town of Rishton. On my first visit the impact of the valley was heightened by entering it from Rishton, the dilapidated bus spluttering up over a barren and rocky wasteland before suddenly descending sharply into the verdant and fertile valley of peach blossom and rice fields watered by the river Sox. There was little in the way of border control, and I had no dealings with police whilst in Sox. I stayed with a family I met as I walked around, and was to sojourn with them on subsequent visits. On one of these we climbed one of the mountains ringing the settlement up to the snow-line.

The openness both of the borders and the people had vanished entirely when I visited in the summer of 2000. The IMU guerrillas who had invaded Batken the previous summer (and were to invade again shortly afterwards) had penetrated as far as Sox, making it the front line of Uzbekistani defences. From Rishton to Sox the Uzbekistani bus in which I travelled was searched repeatedly at Uzbekistani checkpoints. The combined effect of this proactive enforcement of border controls, the laying of unmarked minefields, constant warnings of the threat of extremists in government media (see chapter 3), and the mobilisation of local groups to act as civilian defence units led to a sense of siege. This fear permeated the enclave. Taking a walk through the villages so as to skirt the minefields, I was mistaken for a terrorist by locals, who rapidly mobilised an army detachment to apprehend me. The arrival of the soldiers was welcome as the swelling mob of panicking villagers refused to believe that my (British) passport was genuine, and were angrily accusing me of being a terrorist, concealing weapons in the sand, and hypnotising the local people. Officers who took me their headquarters to write a statement asked me whether I wanted to press charges against the people who had manhandled me. I did not, as I fully understood their concerns and anyone exposed to the sustained fervour of daily newspaper and television reporting I outlined in chapter 2 could have reacted in that way. Still, the contrast between the reception given on my first visit and on that one could not have been more illustrative of a changed attitude to state security and the threat that outsiders posed.

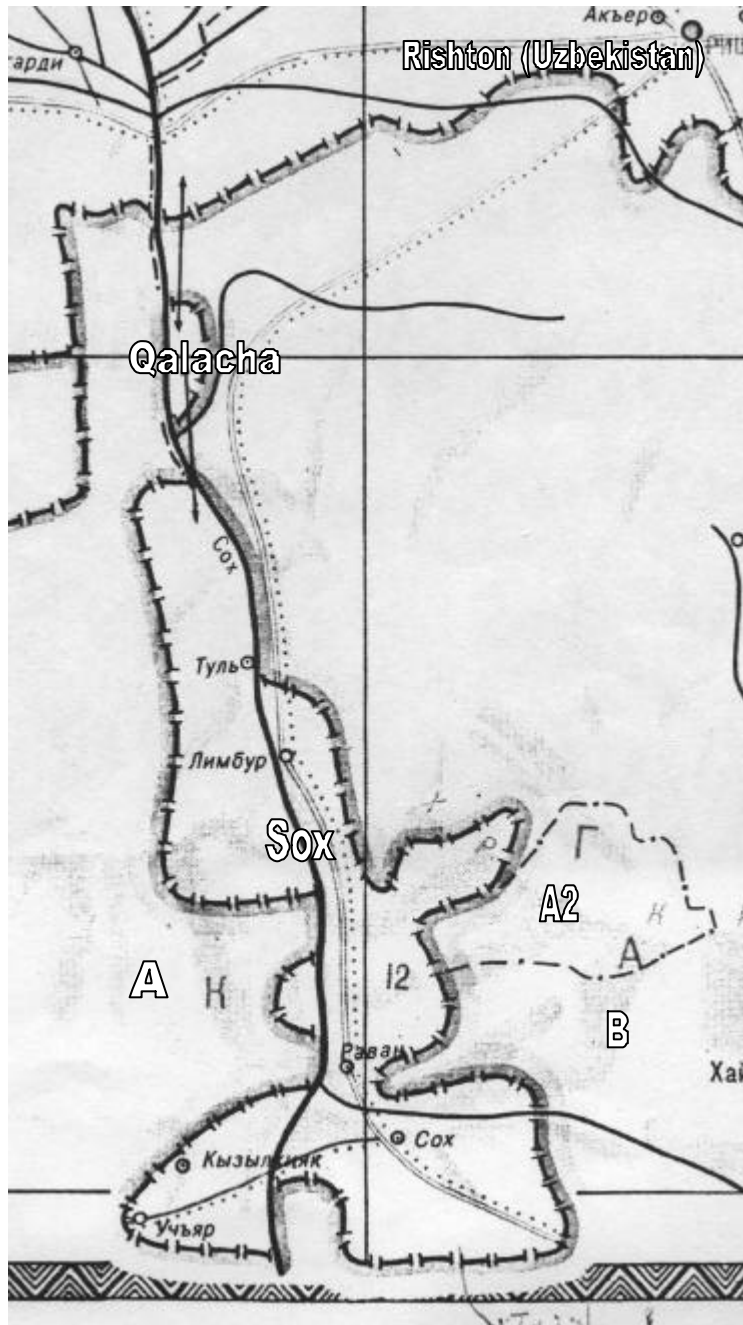


Figure 4-2 : Uzbekistan's Sox and Qalacha enclaves

**KEY: A= Kyrgyzstan's Batken region      B= Kyrgyzstan's Kadamjoy region**

A visit I made a week earlier to high summer pasture on Kyrgyzstani land in the nearby mountains brings this change into sharp relief. The remote pasture was accessible only by a long trek on foot or horseback, had been evacuated following the first Batken invasion, and was highly susceptible to guerrilla attack. Yet, when I

visited, I encountered no security forces and roused no suspicion on the part of those camped out tending flocks. People joked about the impending invasion. The contrast with the fear that had gripped Sox, even though the military threat was more real, demonstrates the effect of living under two different regimes with very different propaganda machines.<sup>259</sup>

### **Personal experience of the border regime**

Over my years living in the Ferghana Valley I keenly felt the transformation of the border regime. When first there I travelled across the border regularly, often without even taking my passport, let alone having the correct visa. The same bus would take me from Osh all the way to Tashkent, even without an Uzbekistani visa, and the two countries still looked much alike. By 2000 that had changed: bus routes had been terminated and borders proactively policed or closed. The two states were further differentiated by cosmetic considerations such as Uzbekistan's introduction of Latin script, and by more substantial structures of political economy and political identity.

Two key moments helped me grasp these changes. The first was when I learnt at the end of 1998 that a (dreadful) article I had (somewhat foolishly) published in Britain had found its way in (unauthorised) Russian translation to Ferghana, where the relevant authorities had investigated it and my activities.<sup>260</sup> Dismay at my own lack of foresight and consideration and the knowledge that I was no longer welcome across the border<sup>261</sup> was very upsetting and also made me appreciate the relative lack of freedom in Uzbekistan as compared to Kyrgyzstan. The second moment was in the spring of 1999. Unfortunate disagreements between Uzbekistani law-enforcement officers over the interpretation of regulations on visa-less transit through Uzbekistan led to my being fined, bound-over, escorted to the border with Kyrgyzstan and expelled. Quite apart from the anxiety felt during my detention, I was deeply saddened at being unable to visit Uzbekistan with the regularity and ease to which I

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<sup>259</sup> For further information about the different forms of state propaganda response to the Batken crisis in popular culture see Megoran, Nick. 'Remembering Batken: militarism and pop concerts', *Eurasianet Culture* (New York: OSI), 21/11/2000.

<sup>260</sup> The sorry article in question was Megoran, Nicholas (1997). 'Problems and possibilities for higher education in Uzbekistan: the English department of Ferghana state university' *Central Asian Survey* 16(3 ): 353-362

was used. It was only then that I truly felt that Osh and Ferghana were in different countries and under different types of regime. Looking aghast at the crackdown on supposed ‘religious extremists’ in Uzbekistan, many O’sh Uzbeks expressed similar sentiments to me at the time, and felt constricted or afraid in Uzbekistan. I would often climb Solomon’s Mountain that towers out of the heart of Osh, and look out across the plains towards Andijon, sadly aware that I was observing a very different political geography from that which I had seen before.

### **Border dreams**

Like others I spoke to in Osh who were similarly emotionally affected by the border crisis, I dreamt about it from time to time. Cook argues that recording dreams is an important part of maintaining field notes.<sup>262</sup> Mine began with disturbing dreams about trying to cross into Uzbekistan in 1999 and hopeful dreams about controls being relaxed, before moving more in to 2000 subversive dreams about smuggling and pro-statist dreams about patrolling the border and intercepting criminals (bizarrely enough, alongside UNITA forces). This dream-world transition to dealing with the border in different ways mirrored the emotional roller-coaster that others had in the Valley: sheer shock and fear followed later by a grudging acceptance and search for different ways to deal with it.<sup>263</sup> Other people in O’sh told me about similar dreams they had; for example, two men took comfort from dreaming that President Karimov promised to assist them to reopen the border. Such dreams were amongst the ways that people responded to the fear and uncertainty of the new geopolitical realities.

## **PART III: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE BORDER CRISIS**

### **Historic inter-connectedness of region and invisibility of borders**

My ethnographic work impressed upon me how interconnected the Ferghana Valley borderlands were in the Soviet period. Economic, linguistic and social

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<sup>261</sup> The visa-issuing Ovir office in Ferghana declined to authorise a subsequent letter of invitation to me, although I have since obtained Uzbekistani visas.

<sup>262</sup> (Cook 1997: 140-141)

geographies were not coterminous with the political geography of independence. Everywhere I met people who had family and friends across the border, or who had themselves gone to study or work on the other side at some point. For example, in Kizil-Kiya I met many young people who had never visited Tashkent, Bishkek, Dushanbe or even Osh, but for whom Ferghana was their 'big city.' The Uzbek accent spoken by Tajiks and Uzbeks there is closer to Ferghana's than to Osh's, and Ferghana's refreshing 'Oltin Vodiy' ('Golden Valley') beer is widely drunk in these Kyrgyzstani towns, but rarely found in Osh.

Further along into Batken oblast I spent a day in summer 2000 biking around the border region with Tajikistan. Cycling out of Kyrgyzstan's Kara-Bak village, I noted that the border in this area was indicated only by a single marking stone, and runs straight up the middle of a field. I stopped to ask some boys working the fields for a drink, and they told me they were Tajikistani Uzbeks cultivating land their family had acquired just over in Kyrgyzstan (Figure 4-3). The practical irrelevance of the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border at this point became apparent when I asked some people in Lyakkan village, just over into Tajikistan, with whom I had a meal, where the border was. No permanent indicator being present, a lady pointed to an animal standing nonchalantly in the midday heat, and told me that "Kyrgyzstan is on the other side of that donkey" (Figure 4-4).

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<sup>263</sup> 'The border' reappeared in strange places in my dreams; through the middle of property I bought in Osh, along the front wall of my West Yorkshire village home in England, and as a general presence in bad dreams.



**Figure 4-3: Location of boundary between Kyrgyzstan’s Batken and Tajikistan’s Leninabad oblasts outside Kara-Bak village; the boundary runs into the picture dissecting the fields (Photograph: Nick Megoran).**



**Figure 4-4: Lyakkan village, Tajikistan: ‘This is Tajikistan. Kyrgyzstan is on the other side of that donkey.’ (Photograph: Nick Megoran)**



However it is the small village that I will call Arosat<sup>264</sup> which yields no clearer example of the inapplicability to the Ferghana Valley of the idea of clearly defined nation-states. It straddles the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan boundary at the eastern end of the Valley, although what that means in practice is unclear. It was unclear to the inhabitants, who told me that two thirds of the sixty-odd households were Uzbek and one third Kyrgyz, and who debated the exact position of the border with me and each other as I stood there during a visit in summer 2000. At some points it seemed that the border ran down the middle of the road. If territory was difficult to delineate, nationality was even harder. The village was a mixture of ethnic Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Unlike areas of the Valley such as Osh and Uzgen where relations between the two groups have been strained and fighting occurred in 1990, people claimed that intermarriage exists and rituals and celebrations are held commonly.

The notion of a clear historical ethnic division of peoples that is so important to discourse of national independence in Central Asia, and the suture along which the 1990 disturbances in Osh and Uzgen occurred, was shown to be more fragile with a little genealogical digging. Some Kyrgyz to whom I spoke traced their lineage to Kypchaks, some Uzbeks to Muslims from Kashgar (in the Chinese region of Xinjiang/Chinese occupied Eastern Turkestan; labelled 'Kashi' on Map A., p.3) now generally known as Uighurs. People assured me that the 1990 Osh-Uzgen disturbances had not occurred in their area, that ethnic relations were very good, and that people lived intermingled in the same mahalla.

But even more than territory and nation, the border of the functional *state* was highly contorted. Many people had moved employment and residence backwards and forwards between states over their lifetimes. Water for all the homes was provided from Uzbekistan, electricity from Kyrgyzstan. Down the same side of one street, the inhabitants of four alternate houses to whom I spoke had alternate citizenships: the first and third Uzbekistani, the second and fourth Kyrgyzstani. Those whose inhabitants had Uzbekistani citizenship sent their children to a school in the next village in Uzbekistan, and received post and pension from, paid tax to, and did military service in the army of, Uzbekistan. Likewise, for those with Kyrgyzstani citizenship, Kyrgyzstan provided those services and demanded those loyalties. And

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<sup>264</sup> I told villagers that I would not disclose the actual name of the village. As a result, this village is not shown on Map B.

these were neighbours living side by side on the same side of the same road! Some people set their clocks to Uzbekistani time, others to Kyrgyzstani (there is a one hour difference in the summer), and the inhabitants of one house had two clocks, each showing one of the time regimes!

One retired farmer to whom I spoke was Kyrgyz, yet wore a *doppa*, the type of prayer hat is regarded as a signifier of Uzbekness in some areas of the Valley, such as Osh. He was an Uzbekistani Kyrgyz, his wife a Kyrgyzstani Kyrgyz. He was a citizen of Uzbekistan, but his house appeared to be in Kyrgyzstan's territory. Some of his ten children worked in Uzbekistan, others in Kyrgyzstan. His own citizenship was a matter of indifference to him, and he regarded the border as "pointless." My questions about what postal service and time zone he used did not impress him: he said they have no clock, and get no post, and he showed impatience that I thought such things were relevant. These answers made those gathered around laugh, amused at my bewildered attempts to establish some order and demarcate Uzbek and Kyrgyz, Uzbekistani and Kyrgyzstani. "Here no one talks about Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan," laughed one person, a sentiment many repeated to me in different forms. Fittingly, the village head was a Kyrgyzstani Uzbek - named 'Kyrgyzbai!'

This liminal space where nation, territory and state were not coterminous rendered nation-state building programmes absurd and artificial. However, the ominous construction of a new Uzbekistani customs post, a recent visit by boundary cartographers, and the beginnings of the exclusion of non-citizens from the Uzbekistani school which had forced the local Kyrgyzstani school to admit Uzbek children, are indications that the national states are attempting to assert national geopolitical order on such communities.

### **Violence of border closures**

This cross-border interchange was attacked and eroded on multiple fronts in 1999-2000, accelerating the slow uncoupling of Valley states that began in 1991. Fanned by the excited debate in the Kyrgyz press depicted in chapter 2, it was the topic of innumerable discussions and altercations that I overheard wherever I went during this period, whereas it had not been before. Rumours, stories, information, and anecdotes about border closures, terrorism and instability in Uzbekistan, future visa regimes, government policies, and incidences of corruption and extortion by officials circulated

throughout the Kyrgyzstani part of the Valley, but it was in those areas immediately on the boundary that the violence of the border closures was most keenly felt.

The small village of Jar, straddling the Uzbekistan/Kyrgyzstan border near Marhamat, highlights the cartographic violence of the new border regime upon the Ferghana Valley. Jar is a simple agricultural village consisting of one straight road with a few dozen houses, one school, one mosque and one cemetery. The inhabitants are ethnically Uzbek and families the length of the village are closely inter-related. In these ways, Jar is typical of villages throughout the region. What sets Jar apart, however, is the tragic fact that the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border cuts across the middle of the village. This abstract line had not been important until autumn 1999, when Uzbekistan suddenly put up concrete posts and strung a barbed wire fence across (see Figure 4-5). A checkpoint was positioned some 200 metres up into Uzbekistani territory.

The shock, disbelief and anger of people who gathered around the border and who were speaking to me just after this incident is hard to convey. It seemed difficult for people to accept that their leaders had done this. "Why our states and *padeshahs* [rulers, potentates] are not reconciling themselves over this I don't know. How will they sort this out? That such a thing should happen to towns so closely connected as this!" exclaimed one inhabitant. Such direct criticism of the leader commonly comes uncomfortably to Uzbeks in the Ferghana Valley, and so this reveals a sense of betrayal but also of genuine astonishment. It is in marked contrast to the Uzbeks in O'sh that Liu spoke to that summer (Liu 2002). The closure utterly violated the practice of their kinship networks that formed an integral part of meaning and orientation in the world: "This person has an elder brother, that a younger brother, this a father, that a daughter-in-law - its hard. Everyone lives mixed in with each other," said another. The point was stressed again and again by different people (Uzbekistanis and Kyrgyzstanis) as some joined in our discussion and others drifted away: that everyone here lived inseparably mixed together and the fence showed that the authorities did not understand that. If they could, perhaps it would somehow be different.



**Figure 4-5 : Uzbekistan's barbed-wire border fence, Jar village, Osh/Ferghana oblast border  
(Photograph: Nick Megoran).**

One man, living now on the Uzbekistani side but who had formerly lived on the Kyrgyzstani side of the border, told me that his parents still lived on the Kyrgyzstan side. One of his neighbours teased him, saying, "so what will you do, call out 'o-hoy' over the fence 'to your father!'" There was nervous laughter all round, expressive of the absurdity of this tiny village being spliced in two. Similarly, I often found throughout my border travels that the idea of Kyrgyzstanis or Uzbekistanis being foreigners (*chet ellik*) in the neighbouring states was greeted with an abstract affirmation, yet also immense hilarity. They *were* legally foreigners, and borders, visas and checkpoints were slowly making them realise it: but it was still too strange and ludicrous a concept to grasp conceptually.

As we stood there, people argued with each other about the reasons for and rightness of erecting the fence. Some accused Uzbekistan's President Karimov of being a dictator, others said he was defending the interests of his people. Comparative reforms and living conditions were assessed in both states, and someone said that this division was inevitable following democracy. The inhabitants of Jar

were in a state of shock and panic as they speculated about the future. A small break in the fence had been left to allow people to cross, but people told me that the Uzbekistani soldiers had said that they were planning to demolish a lone house at this break and complete the barricade. Other rumours abounded, for example, that the only corridor to allow them to pass would be through far-away Honabad or Dostuk, and even then a rumoured visa regime would oblige the acquisition of passes from Osh or even Bishkek. The rupture in geographical imagination was immense; a few seconds walk they had been making all their lives now conceivably taking days, involving vastly increased distances by car or even plane, and costing hard sums in dollars that most people did not have. People described the absurdity of this imaginary journey to visit family metres away in the same village.

I had visited this area some years earlier, when the border was all but invisible. Were it not for local friends who told me where it was, who pointed out anomalies of different states' buildings in each other's territories and the irrigation canal winding in and out of both countries, I would have been unaware of the existence of an international border. But in the autumn of 2000, walking around a few kilometres of border now closed off to cars, manned by guards extorting money at new or reinforced checkpoints and with children being turned away from schools, the fact of the existence of separate nation-states impinged strongly on people for the first time. It was the new border fence that caused this, evoking shock, fear and anger, and that acted as a focus for a range of other socio-economic concerns.

Anger, fear and also desperation were the emotional responses of Aygul Eje, a middle-aged Kyrgyz woman I met at the border of the Kyrgyz enclave of Barak, part of Osh oblast's Kara-Suu region.<sup>265</sup> A small cotton-producing village of some 620 Kyrgyz in 216 households, it became cut off from Kyrgyzstan proper in the Soviet period as Uzbekistan's *Birlik* collective farm encroached on the unused land around it. On 25th August 1999 Uzbekistan closed all road access to the enclave, claiming this was a temporary measure to combat suspected terrorist attacks on the republic at the Independence Day celebrations on 1st September. However three months later the restrictions were still in place, and the access road to Kyrgyzstan had a trench dug across to halt traffic. Accessible only by horse or on foot, Barak was to all intents and

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<sup>265</sup> See map B., p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.** Barak is not shown on recent Kyrgyzstani (or Soviet-era) maps as an enclave, although Whyte counted it as one following a personal communication

purposes left stranded. Kyrgyzstani buses went as far as the border with Uzbekistan, four kilometres from the *ayil ökmötü* (village administration) centre, but from then on there was another four-kilometre walk to Barak. When I visited, the villagers were distressed at being unable to transport their cotton to market. Uzbekistani officials were insisting that produce be taken via the Dostuk border post near Osh, which they said made the cost prohibitively expensive. Thus the very survival of the fragile community was at stake. A land swap and relocation was mooted as one possibility. As a local official put it somewhat dramatically, "the fate of Barak came to a halt on August 25th."<sup>266</sup>

Aygul eje had, however, even more immediate problems. She had just crossed the four kilometres to the border and was tired and distressed, heading towards Kara-Suu hospital to visit her husband. I took her in the car I had hired, and as we drove she told us her story. Her husband had been robbed and beaten up by some Uzbekistanis, yet the police had done nothing to help her. She complained that there were no police to protect them in Barak, neither Uzbekistani nor Kyrgyzstani. It had been a brutal attack, a fact I confirmed in speaking to the badly-beaten man in the hospital: "They kicked and kicked him like a football," wailed Aygul. She spoke about Barak as being at the mercy of Uzbekistan, with the road closed and electricity frequently turned off. Her state was powerless, an observation she made by bitterly pointing out that Kyrgyzstan had not put up posts to restrict Uzbeks in the same way that Uzbekistan was harassing the Kyrgyz. For her, the future seemed bleak:

This is our God's problem... it would be okay if just they opened one road. There is absolutely no future left for this place, because of all this.... as for me, I don't want to live and die here, I have got four children, and they will have children in the future. Uzbekistan has set itself so strongly against us, it comes and whacks us and just turns the electricity off when it feels like it. How can young men live like that? They'll all just escape to the towns.

The wretchedness of her own personal tragedy was conflated with the tragedy of her sad village. The blows rained down on her husband's body were like those rained down by Uzbekistan on her village, and her own powerlessness mirrored the

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to this effect from Stuart Horsman at the Central Asia Desk of London's Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

<sup>266</sup> Information in this paragraph obtained from interviews with Ak-Tash Ayil Ökmötü, 28/11/1999.

powerlessness of her state. Her circumstances were altogether wretched, and she despaired of the future. In the exhausting walk to the border, distressed and angry, the experience of the nation state and the border was inscribed onto her tired body in ways far less glorious than official discourse sought to portray.

### **Embodied geopolitical visions**

The 1999 border crisis foregrounded by the horrendous experience of the attack on her husband and its aftermath forced upon Aygul the realisation of her own wretched political geography. I did not know Aygul before those events, nor did I ever speak to her again, so cannot locate the incident in the biography of her evolving geopolitical imagination. However, a parallel is suggested to me by similarities with two incidents that occurred to young male O'sh Uzbeks who had tried to address a painful sense of alienation from Uzbekistan and uncertain acceptance by Kyrgyzstan by making lives in Uzbekistan.<sup>267</sup>

Whilst relaxing over a meal and watching Uzbek television with the first, he looked pained and suddenly asked me to turn it off. The programme showed music videos made by attractive and sophisticated young Uzbekistani pop-stars, part of an emerging new cultural elite in Tashkent. He said he could not bear seeing what was happening in Uzbekistan while being excluded from it. He had tried to move to Uzbekistan to study, but had been refused permission. However, the single incident that upset him more than any other was being intrusively body-searched by Uzbekistani border guards. This degrading activity, compounded by the condescending officiousness of the guards, distressed and humiliated him so much that it made him feel unwelcome in the land he had once looked to as some sort of source of support and help.

Secondly, I opened my door to a visitor late one night, shocked to find him covered in mud and blood. He had been apprehended by an Uzbekistani border foot patrol while smuggling simple goods over from Uzbekistan, goods that were necessary for his work but which he could not easily take across customs posts. A fight ensued, and the man escaped after overpowering his captors, when they started to beat him. He was certainly lucky to escape with such light injuries as he did. After getting cleaned up, he reflected angrily about Uzbekistan and contemporary politics. He said that he regretted all the efforts he had made over the years through education and work to

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<sup>267</sup> I obtained specific permission to use these examples; names have been changed.

find a place for himself in Uzbekistan, because Uzbekistan had finally rejected him. He also reflected negatively on the future of Osh Uzbeks like himself, his mind going back to the 1990 fighting and the ambiguous position of Uzbeks at the cusp of the two states:<sup>268</sup> "If there is another war," he said, "and we go to the Kyrgyz, they will shoot us. But if we go to the Uzbeks, they will shoot us too!" Through the blood, bruises and dirt inflicted on his body at the border by the new control regime he finally came to accept the process of separation which had caused him much existential angst over the years, and to realise that there was no concerned ethnic patron over the border.

In both these cases a bodily degrading or violent border incident was the catalyst that led to a sea change in their sense of geopolitical identity. As Donnan and Wilson argue, the border is an unusual liminal space of body politics where normal conventions on bodily and personal privacy are suspended and violated (Donnan and Wilson 1999: 131). For each man, the long struggle to define a sense of belonging and identity was brought to a head by an incident at the border that suggested to them that their future, if it lay anywhere, was not to be found in Uzbekistan. Time alone will tell how decisive this moment was.

For many older men I spoke to, border incidents focused their sense of the narrowing of opportunity and the shrinking of the political space that they inhabited since the collapse of the Soviet Union. An elderly Tajikistani living near the border with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan had been turned away from Uzbekistan at the border since the Batken crisis, left unable to visit his family. He contrasted that tellingly with his travel throughout the Soviet Union in his lifetime. Likewise, a retired Uzbek KGB officer who had been not only all around the Soviet Union, but as far as Cuba, Vietnam, Poland and Yugoslavia, expressed similarly negative views of the new border which, he said, had divided historical Turan.<sup>269</sup> Once, when standing at a border road bridge barricaded and closed off by Uzbekistan, an old man exploded with rage as a Kyrgyzstani car drove as far as the obstruction and had to stop:

Look at this car here, at its number plate! You can drive to China in this car, you can drive freely to France, or to all sorts of other places even - but Uzbekistan won't let this in! What's the point of that? You can go to foreign countries but you can't go into Uzbekistan!

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<sup>268</sup> This description of Osh Uzbeks is borrowed from Morgan Liu



Tracing imaginary journeys, the old man evoked an essential human bodily orientation in space to scorn the new political geographies of independence.

### **Disruption of kinship networks**

Thus far this section has argued that the Ferghana Valley borderlands have traditionally been closely interlinked, but that the border crisis of 1999 exerted a violent pressure to remake these links so that they were more in keeping with the national boundaries and thus accelerated a process of gradual differentiation begun in 1991. I have also suggested that the embodied experience of this violence forced people to reconsider and refashion their “geopolitical visions,” or “ideas concerning the relation between one’s own and other places, involving feelings of (in)security or (dis)advantage” (Dijkink 1996: 11). However, this term is an etic category applied from anglophone political geography. For borderland populations, *kinship* practices were the touchstone used to judge new political developments.

Wide segments of Ferghana Valley society highly value fulfilment of the filial duties of sons. This duty also extends to honouring the memory of the dead, by memorial feasts and prayers. For many Valley Kyrgyz, knowledge of seven male generations of fathers is regarded as prerequisite to genuine Kyrgyzhood, and the recitation of genealogies ties the living into a complicated network of meaning extending back in time and out through the spaces in which ancestors lived.<sup>270</sup> Land in which forefathers lived or were buried is sacred, a place where prayers are said at set intervals to remember the dead and pacify departed spirits. An understanding of this enables comprehension of the following text transcribed from the discussion at Jar, as a father and son split into different states by the border presented a thorny problem:

A.: “When there is a death, where will you do burials?”

First respondent (laughing at madness of it, in disbelief)- “All our forefathers are over there, everyone” [general agreement]

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<sup>269</sup> The Turkic Islamic lands, as opposed to the Iranian ones.

<sup>270</sup> These networks can be efficacious in securing position and access to economic resources, the problem dubbed ‘tribalism’ in Kyrgyzstan (see p.119, especially footnote 182).

Second respondent: “They have told us that that is it, we can't bury there any more”

First respondent: “We are shocked, will we even be able to get across?”

You know it is important for us at *hayits*<sup>271</sup> to go to the cemetery, to our fathers” [surprise and disbelief].

I provide an unedited transcript here, with my original comments, to attempt to convey the emotion expressed. A political decision so at odds with what was fundamental to daily life was more inexplicable than reprehensible. It simply could not be true.

The relationship between brothers, other male relatives or respected friends of differing ages (*aka-uka* in Uzbek and *ake-ükö* in southern Kyrgyz dialects: see appendix 1) is a very important one for Ferghana Valley males, being a kinship relation that is integral to social organisation. When describing the harm done by the border, men would intone in frustration and exasperation that "our *aka-uka* are on that side." Women would more commonly say "relatives" to express the same idea; for them, it was generally expected that the husband's family took precedence over the parental home after marriage, and there existed no similar feminised kinship term expressing the same importance.

Likewise, marriage relationships were almost invariably referred to in discussion about the border. I heard the phrase, "we give our daughters, we take their daughters" used innumerable times around the border area to describe the cross-border connections. Women and men, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Turk and Tajik, employed it to express how ridiculous and damaging the border regime was. It expressed a deep fear for the future, undermining the very fabric of everyday social meaning. In fact, it was the trope *par excellence* for indicating that the border region was undifferentiated in matters of ultimate importance, yet was under threat by a new politics.

Thus, the obligations and responsibilities of kinship networks were the primary locus for interpreting the unfolding border crisis of 1999-2000 in the rural border area. The border closures were a violent cartographic<sup>272</sup> imposition of the geopolitical vision of territorial nation-states over the more meaningful mental maps of the social

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<sup>271</sup> Periodic religious festivals, for example, to mark the end of Ramadan or Abraham's offering of his son to God.

<sup>272</sup> This is a paraphrase of Shapiro (1997).

geography of kinship. Yet, returning to the criticisms of the social constructionist theory of nationalism raised at the start of this chapter, *why* should this generate so passionate a response? I am convinced this is because kinship articulates a sense of personhood and plays an existential role in structuring meaningful existence. In this, I draw on the existential description of human attempts to make existence meaningful rendered by Kierkegaard in *The Sickness Unto Death* (1989 (1849)) and Heidegger in *Being and Time* (1962 (1926)). According to these accounts that prioritise (in the existentialist maxim) existence over essence, humans find themselves ‘thrown into the world’ and confront the angst of the threat of inauthenticity. It is through performing the roles of child, wife, husband, father, mother and sibling that an individual occupies a position in society, being accredited by the *mahalla* with increasing respect and value over the passage of time, the raising of children, and the greying of hair. This is buttressed with the passage of time by the renouncing of youthful vices, the learning of Islamic prayers, increasing mosque attendance and, for a privileged few, the *hajj* to Mecca: cultural capital that yields respect and the authority to officiate at rites of passage and family gatherings. In short, the sum of all these practices helps answer existentially the inescapable question, ‘what is the meaning of life?’ The perpetuation of this sense of living well, by performance of intricate rituals connected with rites of passage and kin responsibilities, was threatened in communities straddling the boundary by the new border regime. If my explanation that the border closure presented a radical threat to the very meaning of individual lives at the deepest embodied philosophical level, then the intensity of panic, anger and fear in response becomes comprehensible.

A complementary theoretical framework that can assist in understanding the reaction of Uzbeks (and Kyrgyz such as Aysel) to the border crisis is presented by Piers Vitebsky in his use of psychotherapeutic concepts to explore reactions of the Even reindeer herders of Siberia to the radical changes in relations between people and the land over the past 20 years (see Vitebsky and Wolfe 2001 for a description of these changes). Vitebsky found that many Even found it impossible to envisage any future for themselves, and inability to visualise a future due to the trauma of the cutting off of the past has been much documented by psychotherapy as a *violation* of identity (Vitebsky 2002). In the same way, many Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks were traumatised by being cut off from their past in Uzbekistan and forced to confront a sense of futurelessness in Kyrgyzstan. It is this existential sense of futurelessness,

rather than a rational assessment based on calculations of political economy, that the O'sh Uzbek men whom Liu studied sought to resolve by making Islam Karimov the focal point of notions of legitimate authority learnt at mahalla level (Liu 2002).

## **Gender**

It is apparent from the above discussion that these kinship relations were gendered: the duty of sons to their parents (rather than to the wife's parents), the importance of male sibling/cousin and avuncular ties summed up in the *aka-uka* relationship, and the exchange of females through marriage ceremonies. For borderland men, whether Uzbek or Kyrgyz, these gendered notions of kinship practice were, as I shall argue more fully in the following chapter, vital elements of notions of ethnicity. These gendered notions of kinship were the primary framework for criticising the border policies of Presidents Karimov and Akaev. The border closures threatened the ability of these men to fulfil their obligations as males, undermining their senses of masculinised ethnic identity.

Donnan and Wilson have highlighted the gendered nature of 'trader tourism,' or the plying of a trade route across an international boundary, trading each way with goods that can be carried by hand (Donnan and Wilson 1999:122-125). In the Ferghana Valley it was largely women who engaged in this trade, repeatedly traversing the border in buses. The longest journey of this kind I made was actually outside the Valley, from Naryn in Northern Kyrgyzstan to Kashgar in China (labelled 'Kashi' on map A, p.3). All but one of the score of traders was a woman, sharing camaraderie in the two-day journey over the frozen wastelands over the border zone. Many had left jobs in education and health to earn money to support their families, necessitated by the collapse in male industrial employment in the impoverished town and the slashes in the real value of their own wages. It was these women who were affected most directly by the termination of cross-border bus routes.

The border crisis of 1999 is likely to have further differential gender impacts. Wives are considered part of the husband's family, and can often lead lonely lives in the new compound until they have their own children and become accepted by their female in-laws. Frequent visits of girlfriends and female relatives ease this difficult period, and the tightened border regime can only serve to isolate brides in cross-

border marriages in a way that does not affect their menfolk. However, this is speculation on my part: as a man it was easy for me to talk with younger unmarried or older women on buses and in public space, yet inappropriate to talk to these young women when visiting homes.

### **Resistance and subversion along the border**

Although the human story of the 1999-2000 border crisis I have recounted in this chapter is one of violence and pain, it would be a mistake to suggest that borderland dwellers were simply passive victims of a totalising power. On the contrary, they actively sought imaginative ways to circumvent the new obstacles. For example, at one border village, a Kyrgyzstani who worked in Uzbekistan told me that he kept his car, with Uzbekistani number plates, at a friend's house on the Uzbekistani side of the border, and every morning crossed over and took his car to work, since as he could no longer drive it all the way home over the barricaded border. A man from the Jalal-Abad - Andijan border village told me that an Uzbekistani checkpoint a few hundred metres over the border harassed people taking animals up to the traditional pasture grounds in the Kyrgyz mountains, so the herder had secreted them through someone's garden. In June 2000 I crossed the unmarked border from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan's Batken oblast, and helped a woman I met with her bags. She explained that she and her husband were farmers, but to help make ends meet she carried bags of cheap household goods from Tajikistan, bypassing border controls, to mark up a few *som* and sell in the market in Kyrgyzstan. At every point throughout the borderlands I spoke to or observed people breaking the customs regime through petty smuggling or massive organised crime.

Whilst the spectacle of a herd of cows being quietly smuggled across an international border through someone's back yard may seem amusing, it is such attempts to outsmart new rules and thwart state control of borders that scholars, somewhat romantically, used to term 'resistance.' As such actions are motivated primarily by a desire to protect livelihoods and ways of living, they should not imply a revolutionary commitment to destabilise the established order. Yet Donnan and Wilson argue that the symbolic import of what they term the "subversive economy" cannot be reduced merely to cheating states of revenue. Rather, "such activities

threaten to subvert state institutions by compromising the ability of these institutions to control their self-defined domain. Such activities do not play by state rules. They ignore, contest and subvert state power" (Donnan and Wilson 1999:48).

There is no more appropriate place to examine resistance and subversion to the new border control regime in the Valley than the Do'stlik/Dostuk crossing on the Osh-Andijon arterial highway. It was at this crossing that President Karimov, with his '5000 loaves of bread' comment, drew the discursive and material battle lines against supposedly impoverished Kyrgyzstanis pouring over the border to plunder Uzbekistan's wealth (see chapter 1, p.45). Following independence it consisted of a handful of guards conducting cursory inspections from a small hut and operating a hand-operated rope-lifted barricade. That changed in 1999 with the opening of the new border control post that was hailed in the Uzbekistan press as an important step in the defence of the homeland.<sup>273</sup> An imposing complex replete with offices, medical inspection and quarantine sections, and a whole range of other technologies of people control, gave the crossing the sense of a genuine *international* border.

Dostuk certainly acted as a major impediment to the free-flow of cross border trade and movement, pushing up prices and disrupting social movement. However, in terms of controlling the flows it was supposed to, Dostuk was seriously compromised. The route is regarded as a major narcotics corridor and the role or involvement of authorities is ambiguous, as it is throughout Central Asia.<sup>274</sup> Occasional hauls of drugs, trumpeted on state and international news media, are necessary performances to suggest that action is being taken, but those caught by the police can frequently bribe their way out of custody and return to their trade shortly afterwards.

Cycling a few hundred metres to the other side of Dostuk, I made my way along the river and asked a group of men pushing bicycles where the border was. They told me that I was already in Uzbekistan, that at this point the border was unmarked and unpatrolled. I accompanied the men back into Kyrgyzstan, where they each dropped off the sack they had had on the back of their bikes, with a Kyrgyzstani watching over a growing pile of these sacks. They were working for someone trading salt and used to go via Dostuk, but since the tightened border controls they took this back door

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<sup>273</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>274</sup> For example, a diplomatic storm blew up after Kazakhstani authorities discovered that the Tajikistani embassy's chauffeur was using his employer's car to ferry drugs across the republic. Taukina, Rozlana, 'Five held in Tajik Embassy drugs scandal', *Reporting Central Asia* 4, 25/05/2000 (London: IWPR).

route instead! After they had deposited their loads I cycled around with them to a nearby border checkpoint into Uzbekistan, through which they passed without problems. In fact, they told me that the authorities never obstructed them, from which the reader can draw their own conclusions. Thus, this carefully organised undocumented trade network was performing a continual circuit around the back of the fortress of Dostuk!

Cycling through fields further along the border, I noticed that every few hundred metres the fence had either been completely cut through or, more commonly, the bottom few wires had been lifted up and put on the middle clasps to allow passage underneath. This was done largely by Uzbekistanis to allow them to continue their daily business. I asked one Uzbekistani girl watering cattle in Kyrgyzstan if the authorities minded their breaking of the border. She replied, "If they close it, they close it, if they don't, they don't. They know that we have to make a living." I eventually reached a border section where Uzbekistan had demolished a road bridge over the narrow irrigation channel that formed the border, and put its ubiquitous barbed wire fence up along the length of the border. However, the fence had been cut through, and tyre tracks suggested it was a well-used route. I encountered half a dozen men in animated discussion by the border negotiating the details, prices, and times of a smuggling operation.

A short walk around the other side of the impressive border fortress revealed a constant stream of people on foot smuggling goods in both directions and out at the back of Dostuk through the *mahallas* (neighbourhoods). Once when investigating this route I spoke to two Uzbek women, who asked me hopefully if I was dealing in aluminium. I replied that I wasn't, and asked where the border between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was. One replied that she didn't know exactly, that there were neither soldiers nor checkpoints: "Here there is no such thing as Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan, it is all mixed up." This inability to distinguish where one state ended and the next began did not seem to alarm them, although it profoundly disturbed the nationalist sentiments of *Asaba* in an article about the same place that called upon the government to control its border and prevent the holding of dual passports.<sup>275</sup> Just a few metres from the most potent symbol in the Valley of the separation of Uzbekistan from Kyrgyzstan, and the most assertive statement of the control of the state over

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<sup>275</sup> See footnote 221, p.147.

border flows, both the state division and overseeing power appeared fragile and tenuous.

Walking along the border between Dostuk and Aravan one winter morning in early 2000, I happened upon a section of the border fence that had been carefully cut away overnight, and there were fresh lorry tyre tracks across the section. This was done by Uzbekistanis who found their exits along roads blocked (Megoran 2000a). Close to Dostuk, in the summer of 2000 I saw that, where the barbed wire perimeter fence had cut through someone's private property, they had pinned the wires up to allow access to their vegetable patch. What is more, they had even hung their underwear out on the wire to dry in the sun!

An important element in circumventing and manipulating border rules was the exchange of information. In buses, tea-rooms, bazaars and homes the exchange of stories, anecdotes, rumours and experiences helped build up detailed local knowledges about which checkpoints were softer than others and the best tactics to use to negotiate them. Although these knowledges were fragmentary and contingent, reflecting the uncertain nature of the border regimes in 1999 and 2000, and although they could verge on the mythical, especially when questions of narcotics or armed insurgency were involved, they served to enable traders and travellers to maximise their profits, and also inculcated a 'them-us' idea of ongoing conflict between officialdom and populace.

The multifaceted, innumerable, and continuous acts of resistance to, or resilience in the face of, Uzbekistan's attempts to proactively enforce a border regime by both Uzbekistanis and Kyrgyzstanis raises an unavoidable question: to what extent is it actually possible to say that a border exists? It is important not to negate the massive physical, economic and psychological violence of the border, as controls such as Dostuk succeeded in alienating and frightening many, as well as disrupting the formal economic, social and cultural fabric of the border zone. Some people in some places were affected and harmed more than others. Yet for savvy traders with good connections this new order presented opportunities for enrichment and gain, if only the authorities could be outwitted or co-opted.

Nonetheless, the constant stream of undocumented trade smuggled around the very edges of Dostuk, whilst dirty washing is hung on the perimeter fence, is almost farcical. Certainly, the flimsy fences present almost no impediment whatsoever to any determined guerrilla force. The inadequacy of state wages for customs officials



and border guards ensures that they depend upon bribes to feed their families, making them dependent upon the very subversion they are employed to counter. Poverty in the Valley guarantees that as long as prices are differentiated spatially 'smuggling' will continue. Nonetheless, as Andreas suggests, regardless of how effective a tightened border regime is, 'there is a powerful political and bureaucratic imperative to at least project an impression of territorial control and to symbolically signal official commitment to maintaining such control' (Andreas 2000: 5). Avalos has made an innovative contribution to the emerging field of 'border theory' that I introduced in chapter 1 (see p.27). He suggested that the US-Mexico border controls were effectively *theatrical*. He argued that because countless crossings each day go unhindered, the short stretches of the frontier that are fenced and controlled are not so much like the Berlin Wall as a spectator show for domestic consumption. Economically, socially and culturally the border between Mexico and the US is a figment of the imagination, but, mythologised by the media, it "still exists as an *idea*, as some kind of pillow on which the American public can rest their terrorized heads.... The fence says, look, there are still defenders of the Alamo, maintaining a noble fight on behalf of America's sovereignty" (Avalos and Welchman 1996: 192).<sup>276</sup>

In using the word 'theatre' Avalos is not ignoring the massive projection of US power on its southern border, nor belittling the outrage of the deaths each year of scores of Mexicans attempting to outwit this power by entering into the USA 'illegally' to seek a better life for themselves. Rather, he is highlighting, as Andreas does, the fact that border controls can be as much about public consumption as material effect. Chapter two argued that Uzbekistani official discourse about the border created and policed boundaries of identity and acted as means of justifying powerful control of the state: and thus maintaining the power of the current regime. The multiple technologies of border control were trumpeted by the Uzbekistan government as protection from armed attack. Yet the security value of the border itself was almost nil. Furthermore, the economic functions of the border regime were fatally compromised by the political economy of the Valley and by structural poverty. Attempts to enforce it wreaked untold psychological damage on border populations, benefiting smugglers in league with impoverished state officials yet forcing many citizens further into poverty. In the light of this, I paraphrase Avalos: the border

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<sup>276</sup> However, it may be that Avalos' thesis requires some reconsideration in the light of more recent attempts by the USA to police and control its border.

between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan is a figment of the imagination, mythologised by the official media, a *yostiq* upon which the terrorised Uzbekistani public can rest its head. The fence says, "Look, there are still defenders of Samarkand, Manguberdi and Timur are still with us, maintaining a noble fight on behalf of Uzbekistan's sovereignty." Since some commentators hold that the authoritarian regime of Islam Karimov is partially responsible for anti-state violence as it radicalised the opposition by proscribing peaceful forms of protest, the multiple ironies involved in this position are not lost on the careful observer.

## **PART IV: CONCLUSION**

As I walked near the border in rural Jalal-Abad in the spring of 2000, a villager angry at Uzbekistan's construction of its obtrusive perimeter fence reminded me that "Hitler made barbed wire fences." Such reactions contradict the Uzbekistani government position (chapter 2) that portrayed the fortification of the border as a patriotic act supported by the loyal populace and causing no hardship to neighbouring Kyrgyzstan. This chapter has used ethnographic to argue that the psychological toll of the 1999-2000 border crisis was immense, causing fear, shock and anger that led to fundamental revisions of geopolitical vision. Up until 1999 the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Ferghana Valley border had little impact on the lives of borderland residents, and the gradual differentiation of the two republics had not been experienced as the division of two foreign states. The rude shock of the crisis forced Kyrgyzstanis to accept for the first time that the political geography of nation-states since 1991 was a real category.

This chapter has argued that the border crisis was a highly traumatic experience for borderland dwellers, and particularly for Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. The emotional responses to the dramatic changes in the everyday political geography of the borderlands can reasonably be interpreted with reference to the threat to rural livelihoods. However, political economy alone is insufficient to explain why the angry opposition to Uzbekistan's border controls and dissatisfaction with Kyrgyzstan's failure to protect the interests of its population was articulated most passionately in the vocabulary of *kinship*. The spatial and social practices of kinship networks mapped a social and moral geography of the border region that was

threatened by the assertive new political geography of the independent state. I have suggested that these kinship practices performed an important existential role in making sense of life. Thus the border closures represented a radical threat to the very meaning of individual lives at the deepest level and a profound violation of the individuals concerned. Such an explanation is necessary to account for the panic, anger and fear of responses of those along the border.

There are implications of this study for understanding both borders and ethnicity in the Ferghana Valley, and for theory and practice in geography and the social sciences.

### **Borders in the Ferghana Valley**

The findings of this study questions four common interpretations of ‘the border question.’ Firstly, as I outlined in chapter 1 (pp.52-55) many commentators have suggested that international borders were a product of independence, or a national divide. This chapter suggests that is a highly distorted perspective. It was not that borders sprang naturally from a sense of belonging to different states: as border villages such as Jar and Arosat show, the distinction between national the states of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was arbitrary and lacked considerable relevance until 1999. Quite the contrary, the sense of dwelling in one state alongside a different one was actually a product of the border closures. The national organisation of space in the Ferghana Valley was not a product of nations; it is creating them.

Secondly, this chapter suggests that forms of investigation that *do* deliberately seek to highlight the plight of border populaces may also themselves be subject to limitations. One such is the ‘development discourse’ of Western-funded organisations, that is sympathetic to the impact of border constraints on economic activity and the well-being of ethnic minorities (see for example Rubin and Lubin 1999). Nonetheless, it often reduces these impacts to statistics and generalisations, underplaying the ability of people to cope with, resist and profit from political crises.

Thirdly, journalism, although rarely guilty of ignoring the impact of political conflicts on individuals, can be susceptible to sensationalising momentary incidents by over-emphasising both the political and epistemic significance of emotionally charged direct quotations of ‘eye witnesses’ who are cast simply as the universal apolitical victim about whom little is significant except their victimhood. Articles about the border in the widely-circulated and much-read reports of the London-based

Institute for War and Peace Reporting have sometimes tended towards this.<sup>277</sup> This chapter has attempted to avoid these shortcomings by locating reactions within the biography of a particular community, and by indicating acts of resistance or resilience rather than simply resigned suffering.

Finally, as chapter three showed, journalism in the context of this border crisis served to provide ammunition for nationalistic politicians. Some articles attached nationalistic interpretations to the events, even to the extent of accusing ethnic minorities of disloyalty.<sup>278</sup> My ethnographic work along the state border showed, rather, that the ethnic tension that could be detected in Osh and some other urban areas was far less prevalent in most rural border zones, where there was a strong sense of common destiny; and common tragedy. For them, the border crisis was not an issue of concern because it risked exacerbating ethnic tensions, but because it disrupted patterns of daily life that were little differentiated by 'ethnicity.'

### **Social constructionism, ethnography and geography**

A critical geopolitics that draws exclusively on textual criticism is unable to recover the perspectives of those who do not leave texts behind. Without them the picture will be incomplete, privileging the voices of those with access to the media. Rather than deconstructing ideas about nationality, taking them seriously as lived categories can reveal how people make sense of life and show other frameworks in which alternative geopolitical visions are constructed. Political geographers have been poor at doing this not merely because they lacked competence in ethnography, but because particular forms of highly cerebral theorisation (instrumentalist and constructivist accounts of nationality) have achieved near-hegemonic status in the sub-discipline.

A focus on 'the body,' as the total human being through which the world is encountered and negotiated as physical, moral, existential and aesthetic entity, has provided an alternative perspective. This body is neither the "pallid figure of logical positivism" (Ley 1983: 8) nor the dull automaton of instrumentalism or social constructionism. It is a gendered and aged body that becomes faint with fear for the future and longs joyfully for reunions and homecomings. It can become exhausted

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<sup>277</sup> See for example Sultan Jumagulov, 'The new 'Iron Curtain'', *Reporting Central Asia*, 35, 09/01/2001, (London: IWPR), and Muazzamin Ibrakhimova, 'Uzbek Visa Controversy' *Reporting Central Asia* 8, 23/06/2000 (London: IWPR).

<sup>278</sup> A disturbing example is furnished by 'Osh Talash - 3', *Asaba* 79 (9754), 16/11/1999.

and hysterical as it trudges through fields to visit loved ones in hospital. It imagines alternative geopolitical realities, tracing out fabulous routes around monstrous borders that cause it to tremble in blind rage. The existential threat of alienation and loss is ever hanging over it, brought to the fore in moments that threaten its serenity. Finally, it is a *moving* body, mapping new worlds through its own spatiality, confronting new political states and new states of being as it moves across borders, and seeking ways to circumvent and subvert boundary practices.

This chapter has also argued that such embodied geographies can be explored by humanistically-inclined ethnography. Muir complained that political geography has rarely been approached from a humanistic perspective (Muir 1997: 3). The remarkable systematic humanistic geography that Tuan (for example, 1977, 1993 1998) developed over two decades (alongside the work of Buttimer, Relph, Pocock and others) was rightly criticised by Peet for ignoring power relations (Peet 1998: 64). This was partially due to political and philosophical orientation, but also because geographers lacked the tools that anthropologists had in Malinowskian ethnographic participant observation, and thus they preferred to study (often-literary) texts. Certainly ethnography needs to be grounded alongside alternative explanatory frameworks such as political economy or critical theory.<sup>279</sup> Nonetheless, as I have argued throughout this chapter, those alone are inadequate means of understanding the constitution of society, as they can easily overlook being human, as Hägerstrand and also Anderson and Smith both argue.

An inability of geographers to critically evaluate what have been dubbed the 'postmodern' critiques of ethnography (Barnes and Duncan 1992; Clifford and Marcus 1986) has made them suspicious of seeking to represent others. It has encouraged a cosy retreat into discourse analysis of texts produced within their own societies, an analysis employing frameworks provided by Foucault and others. Cloke has argued that the theoretical sophistication of human geography has rendered it increasingly unable to articulate a sense *for* the other that is emotional, connected and committed (Cloke 2002: 591). Sibley has criticised the retreat into safe debates about and dependence upon 'author figures', recommending instead that one should address one's own fears and inhibitions by going out and encountering and understanding the

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<sup>279</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti encouraged me to pursue this argument in a personal communication as I was writing this chapter.

life-worlds of others in a non-colonialist, non-imperialist way (Sibley 1995: 185-6). I have argued that ethnography is an excellent way to attempt this.

Although aware of the limitations of the 'postmodern' critique of ethnography, I do not dismiss all its findings, and thus have not attempted to write myself out of this analysis. However I address these concerns about representation by stressing what Ley and Mountz call the humanistic belief in the 'strong author', whose presence is stressed through emotions that are able to connect to the emotions of others (Ley and Mountz 2001). I would not claim that my experience of the border closure was the same as that of anyone else, as I was not faced with increased economic hardship as a result, and could choose, for example, to leave the Ferghana Valley for England whenever I wanted to.<sup>280</sup>

In a compelling essay, Clifford (1986b) suggested that ethnography was allegorical in that it told a story about *the ethnographer* rather than *others*. From 1995 until 1998 I not only kept field notes, but also fairly continuously wrote poetry. From January 1999, when the Ferghana article affair came to my attention and the border crisis erupted, new entries into my poetry scrapbook completely dried up. 'The border' absorbed both my waking and sleeping passions, the focus of my research shifted, and my ethnographic work was overtaken by the responses of those around me. I have tried to recount the story of people who were immediately affected, or rather, I felt compelled to tell a story that increasingly became my own in the telling.

Whilst endorsing it as a method, I am wary of the danger of exaggerating the claims that can be made on the basis of ethnographic data. I am not arguing that what is presented here embodies the abiding or persistent political and cultural proclivities or pre-dispositions of post-Soviet Ferghana Valley dwellers; quite the contrary, this chapter presents a 'snapshot' of a mood as the border crisis unfolded. Scores of examples from across the Valley convince me that the mood I have described was reasonably consistent, at least throughout the Kyrgyzstani part of the Valley, at this time. The shock, anger, fear and disbelief felt were unprecedented and could not be maintained over any length of time. For a brief moment post-Soviet time was hyper-accelerated by the belated cartographic violence of the logic of nation-states. The legal-constitutional division of the Valley in 1991 only 'caught up' with borderland folk in 1999, forcing them finally to grasp in an embodied and existential way that

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<sup>280</sup> Steve Legg was helpful in pointing this out to me. It may be one factor that has made me stress geopolitical and existential factors over economic ones in this chapter.

Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan were two separate countries; and they could not belong to both in the same way. The time between 1999 and 2000 was crucial in registering changes in the geopolitical visions of borderland residents, although I cannot speculate on future developments.

I have recorded this snapshot of a brief fragment of human history because I believe that the story of the pain and resilience of borderland dwellers is as important as the parallel narratives of the deployment of 'legitimate violence' or the abdication of political responsibility by governments seated somewhere over the mountains. For Edward Said, the task of the intellectual is to universalise a particular political crisis, "to give greater human scope to what a particular race or nation suffered", in order that "a lesson learned about oppression in one place will not be forgotten or violated in another place or time" (quoted in Cleary 2002: vii). In an ethnography exploring not cultural constructions, but embodied passions that resonate beyond individual subjectivities, this chapter has attempted to address Said's appeal by depicting "a sense of what it is like to live in other worlds, a taste of ethnographic things" (Stoller 1989: 156).

## Chapter 5 : Ethnicity And Popular Geopolitical Visions Of The Borderlands

### **PART I: INTRODUCTION: NATIONALISM and ETHNICITY**

This final substantive chapter completes my attempt to undertake the task began in chapter 4; namely, to understand the 1999-2000 border crisis from the perspective of people living along the boundary. Chapter 4 employed an ethnographic methodology with that assumed the primacy of embodied emotion in pre-existing settings, as a way of knowing accessible to a researcher partaking of a common humanity with his or her interlocutors. This chapter approaches the same question using a different methodology, employing focus group data to explore the perspective of Kyrgyzstanis living in the borderlands, but not necessarily immediately at the boundary.

This chapter addresses three questions. Firstly, it probes the extent to which the border crisis was an 'ethnic' issue for the populace of southern Kyrgyzstan. Put otherwise, it explores how 'Uzbekness' or 'Kyrgyzness' mediated responses to and were in turn reconstituted by the border dispute. Secondly, it explores how the nationalistic interpretations of the border crisis made by political elites (described in chapters 2 and 3) diverged from or converged with popular understandings. These two issues are not merely of theoretical concern. Ethnicity and nationality have figured highly as a nodal point upon which post-Soviet Central Asian political struggles have been articulated. The fear that the divisions which occurred along Uzbek-Kyrgyz lines in the horrendous 1990 Osh tragedy could again demarcate lines of inter-communal violence add extra weight to these concerns in my study area. McGlinchey wrote of Uzbek-Kyrgyz relations in 2000 that "ethnic tensions have grown since 1998. Border controls between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have become increasingly draconian, making Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan feel ever more isolated."<sup>281</sup> If this is true, then it is profoundly important and demands a policy response. Therefore, the third crucial question that this chapter addresses is whether the border crisis has made ethnic relations in the O'sh area of the Ferghana Valley

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<sup>281</sup> Eric McGlinchey 'Powerless in Kyrgyzstan', *RFE/RL Newslines*, 13/07/2000 (Prague: Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty).



more tense, and proposes a reformulation of strategies of political mobilisation in the light of these findings.

At the heart of this chapter is the subject of ‘ethnicity,’ a range of ideas and theories from which it seems impossible to escape in any consideration of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstani and Uzbekistani society. Chapters 2 and 3 showed that elites conceived of ‘ethnicity’ as an essential category, with given characteristics that determined correct political behaviour and dictated that the state was essentially the embodiment of the dominant ethnic group.<sup>282</sup> Many academics have also ascribed great causal power to ethnicity, persistently conceiving it as the most important social cleavage in the Ferghana Valley. Investigating ethnicity not as a given attribute adhering to an individual, but as a fluid and contested process that only has meaning in concrete contexts (in this case, the border crisis), this chapter finds sharp divergences between these conceptions of ethnicity and the popular significance attached to it in southern Kyrgyzstan. Although, if asked, people might readily assent to these elite views, in practice ‘ethnicity’ was understood primarily in terms of kinship practices and class relations that Uzbeks and Kyrgyz largely shared. These ‘ethnicities’ (that were further modified by geography, age and gender) framed responses to the border crisis. Together with positive memories of the Soviet Union and an insistence on remembering ethnic minorities on either side of the border, popular ethnicity envisaged geopolitical visions that differed radically from elite nationalism. This chapter seeks to open up a space between these visions that could form the ground for imagining new, inclusive forms of national ideology in Kyrgyzstan.

### **The Soviet and post-Soviet institutionalisation of ethnic and civic nationalism**

Scholars of Central Asian studies described numerous different and complex relationships between people in Central Asia as primarily ‘ethnic’ (see pp.14-18). Ethnicity is a term which is hard to define without slipping into tautology, but generally refers to belonging by birth to a cultural group with a historical consciousness and, commonly, a shared language and adherence to certain territory. It is also a *new* term, entering the Oxford English Dictionary only in 1972 and lacking

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<sup>282</sup> The government of Kyrgyzstan switched between an ethnic and civic form of nationalism, the former emphasising that the Kyrgyz were the basis of the new state and the latter envisaging it as the common home of all peoples. However, in times of crisis (such as the Batken invasion), the latter discourse was given greater prominence.

an appropriate translation in many languages. Nonetheless, it is one that has gained wide currency in not only the anglophone academy, but also the popular media, commonly touted as the cause of conflicts, or as a quality adhering to an individual. The explanatory power of 'ethnicity' has been thoroughly critiqued in the social sciences (see, for example, Pieterse 1997), and to a lesser extent by scholars of Central Asia (Bichel 1997; Schoeberlein-Engel 1994).

Before proceeding further with a discussion of how ethnicity filtered popular, as well as elite, understandings of the border crisis, it is necessary to establish the significance of the political economy of the geography of nationality in the Soviet Union and its successor states. The USSR institutionalised ethnicity in a unique and paradoxical way, a way that determined access to scarce resources and life chances, and allowed 'titular' groups to use ethnicity to assert themselves against minorities. Kandiyoti has succinctly observed that the central paradox of Soviet nationalities policy was that "while officially espousing the goal of merging nationalities and transcending ethnic particularisms, it institutionalised, codified and ossified them" (Kandiyoti 1996: 524). The clearest accounts of the institutionalisation of ethnicity in the Soviet Union are provided by Rogers Brubaker and Graham Smith, both of whom explore the question in terms of how the federal structure of the Union enshrined a paradoxical combination of ethnic and civic nationalism.

Brubaker has provided an *institutional* account of ethnicity in the Soviet Union. For Brubaker, the USSR was a multinational state not merely in ethnodemographic terms (consisting of a heterogeneous population) but in institutional terms. "The Soviet state not only passively tolerated but actively institutionalized the existence of multiple nations and nationalities as fundamental constituents of the state and its citizenry" (Brubaker 1996: 23) - and, in so doing, prepared the way for its own demise.

Traditional models of nationalism often distinguish between *ethnic* nationalism, which defines belonging to the state on the basis of membership of an exclusive ethnic group, and *civic* nationalism, whereby belonging is defined in terms of common citizenship (see discussion of Geertz, 1994, p124). For Brubaker, the Soviet Union combined both of these models in a unique way. On the state scale, Soviet leaders elaborated the *civic* idea of a *Soviet* nation that was supra-national, the fusion of peoples of all ethnic backgrounds. Yet, on the scale of union republics, the USSR codified and institutionalised nationality through the organisation of republics based on single, dominant *ethnic* groups, with distinct identities, where distinctive national

intelligentsias and cadres were cultivated and promoted.<sup>283</sup> Thus, whilst the Soviet Union was not organised as a nation-state, it defined its component parts in national terms (Brubaker 1996: 28).

This nationalism was the product of social engineering, a formal construct and an institutional form: however, unlike Sovietologists who saw it as an empty fiction (for example, D'Encausse 1979), Brubaker argues that it powerfully shaped Soviet society (Brubaker 1994: 47). The tension between the civic and ethnic models was a paradox that was never resolved, and the eventual break-up of the Soviet Union was shaped by the territorial-political crystallization of nationhood.

For Smith, the combination of a federal superstructure and institutionalised ethnicity in the union republics explodes the post-Soviet nationalist myth that for the borderland states the process of nation-building was interrupted by Soviet rule and could begin again only with statehood in 1991 (Smith 1998: 6). Furthermore, as a pragmatic response to the pressing needs of 1920s state-building, it failed to modernise. The end of the Cold War removed the argument that a federation was necessary for collective security, contributing to the demise of the itself in 1991 (Smith 1996: 19).

According to Smith, the federal structure of the Soviet Union was a pragmatic and short-term solution to problems of state building and the assertion of centralised authority following the Bolshevik Revolution. Classical Marxism had little to say about the nation question, considering ethnic divisions as contingent, and either reactionary or progressive according to their social location (Smith 1996: 3). Lenin's adopted of the federal model simply because he held it useful for the organisation of large territorial units, and adopted the policy of *korinezatsiya*<sup>284</sup> at the level of the union republic as a way to obtain the support of non-Russians in building the fragile socialist state. Smith's work is a sustained examination into the ways in which spatial policies were used to structure relationships between citizens and state in both the Soviet (Smith 1989) and post-Soviet (Smith 1997) periods. His work focuses on nationalism, particularly the way in which the Soviet Union attempted to manipulate and accommodate nationality through its unique federal structure- and the impact that

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<sup>283</sup> A form of 'positive discrimination.'

<sup>284</sup> 'nativisation', the policy of creating and promoting national cadres of the titular minority in non-Russian union republics.

this paradoxical formulation has had on post-Soviet states, particularly in relation to questions of citizenship and stranded Russian minorities (Smith 1999: 91).

For both Brubaker and Smith, Soviet nationalities policy has transmitted to the successor states a distinctive manner of institutionalising ethnicity. The contours and impacts of the removal of the USSR-scale of civic nationalism have yet to be fully explored and explained.<sup>285</sup> However, shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Brubaker warned darkly that, combined with the pressures of state-building and economic restructuring, these deeply-rooted and powerfully conflicting expectations of belonging might engulf new ethnic minorities in “potentially explosive, ethnonational conflict in coming years” (Brubaker 1992: 72). It is this line of analysis and prediction that those who stress the danger of ethnic conflict in the Ferghana Valley take to considerable lengths. This chapter is an empirical corrective to such analysis: it accepts the above analysis that ethnicity is a contested ground for struggle over resources and life chances in Kyrgyzstan, but challenges the somewhat deterministic accounts of ethnicity that assume ethnic conflict to be all but inevitable.

### **Theory and Method**

As stated above, ethnicity is not only inseparable from discussion of political economy and life chances in the post-Soviet context, but is a concept that is the subject of theoretical controversy. How can it be studied to answer the question of the extent to which the border tensions of 1999-2000 are likely to have an impact on ethnic relations in the Valley? How are we even to begin studying it?

In one of the most authoritative anthropological works on the subject, Thomas Eriksen highlights succinctly the dangers facing students of ‘ethnicity’: “In a sense, ethnicity is created by the analyst when he or she goes out into the world and poses questions about ethnicity. Had one instead been concerned with gender, one would doubtless have found aspects of gender instead of ethnicity” (Eriksen 1993: 16). If that were the case, perhaps the obvious solution would be simply to ignore ‘ethnicity.’ Eriksen rejects this, however, as “on the other hand, individuals or informants who live in the societies in question may themselves be concerned with issues relating to ethnicity, and as such the phenomenon clearly does exist outside the mind of the

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<sup>285</sup> As chapter 3 argues, both ethnic and civic models of belonging exist in an uneasy tension in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

observer." The 1990 Uzbek-Kyrgyz clashes evince tragic support for this argument. Eriksen's problematic would appear to pose a methodological dilemma.

I have addressed this quandary by researching a concrete political conflict that was not explicitly 'ethnic.' In the spring of 2000 I conducted a number of focus groups in the Kyrgyzstani part of the border region. In none of the focus groups did I ask, either directly or indirectly, any questions pertaining to ethnicity, except basic self ascription in the introductory phase. By structuring discussions around a number of aspects of the border dispute, I allowed ethnicity to emerge as a pertinent issue, should this be the case, alongside other constituents of social identity such as gender and class. I believe that this has enabled me to avoid both the dangers that Eriksen outlined, whilst constructing an account of the meaning and importance of ethnicity in understanding reactions to the border dispute.

## **PART II: METHODOLOGY: FOCUS GROUPS**

A focus group is "a one-off meeting of between four and eight individuals who are brought together to discuss a particular topic chosen by the researcher(s) who moderate or structure the discussion" (Bedford and Burgess 2001: 121). Invented during World War 2 to investigate propaganda impact and morale, it was then developed by market researchers (Schutt 1996: 328). The use of focus groups has found increasingly popularity amongst social scientists, including geographers (Limb and Dwyer 2001).

Post-structural social scientists distinguish their use of focus groups epistemologically from market researchers, who work within a positivist paradigm that regards opinions as enduring attributes of a subject which simply need uncovering; rather than treating opinions rhetorically as utterances specific to a particular situation (Myers and Macnaghten 1999: 182). As Doty argues (1996), "National identity is never a finished project: it is always in the process of being constructed and reconstructed." The flow of discussion allowed by the focus-group format corresponds to an epistemology that approximates such post-structural conceptions of knowledge as a never-completed discursive process subject to continual modification and contestation.

Jenny Kitzinger argues that focus groups are ideal for highlighting the way in which views are socially constructed and expressed, and it is her work that I have found most helpful. For her and Barbour, focus groups show how ideas, story-telling, self-presentation and linguistic exchanges operate within a given cultural context (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999: 5). I observed a number of clear instances where views changed during the course of discussion. In FG1 Clinton initially stated that the border question was not a problem, but during the course of the discussion accepted that it was. The eloquent Muzaffar in FG8 convinced his fellow members of the group that the obstacle to a union of Turkestan was not Islam Karimov but Kyrgyzstani politicians, although they in turn persuaded him to accept that it was not all Kyrgyzstani politicians but rather those in the *north*.

This dynamic of debate and discussion demonstrated how opinion about the border crisis was formed. The reaching of consensus through the exchange of experiences, rumours, and opinions provided an insight into the haphazard way in which local knowledge about the border was actually constructed. A lack of clear and reliable channels of information, combined with uncertainty about government policy and a complex, rapidly-changing border situation created a tense environment where rumours freely circulated. This was exacerbated by highly-politicised media channels conveying radically differing accounts of the crisis. This contributed to the fear and uncertainty that so affected the people to whom I spoke to in the course of the ethnographic work reported in chapter 4.

Focus groups also have the advantage over interviews in that, whilst speaking to peers, people are less likely to use language to impress the researcher and more likely to talk in locally-relevant ways, making them more sensitive to emic categories of knowledge (Goss and Leinbach 1996: 117). They can also be stimulating and exciting activities, especially when unexpected information is stumbled upon in the free-flow of discussion; as happened when I discovered the efficacy of *class* through my groups. I ran 17 focus groups in border regions of Osh, Jalaʼ-Abad and Batken oblasts between March and May 2000. I also covered the same questions in 16 interviews over the same period, and attended four *ziyofat/gap*, Uzbek periodic feasting events, in which I ran modified focus groups.<sup>286</sup> However, with the exception

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<sup>286</sup> Most studies of post-Soviet Uzbek society have underemphasised the significance of *gaps* (e.g. Abramson 1998). *Kandiyoti* explores their economic/welfare role in women's support networks (Kandiyoti 1998), but Liu is alone in emphasising the importance of *gaps* as part of the

of a small number of references, results from these two types of study have been excluded from this chapter for reasons of space.

Focus group research has been used in Central Asia by market researchers<sup>287</sup> and aid agencies,<sup>288</sup> but only rarely by academics. The sociologists, Kleinbach and Amsler, used them to fine-tune a questionnaire about bride kidnapping (*ala kachuu*) in Kyrgyzstan (Kleinbach and Amsler 1999). I acted as the translator for these groups, giving me some initial experience in moderation.

### **Formation of focus groups**

One of the most crucial elements in focus group research is the decision about whom to recruit and how, as this has a great influence on the results obtained. Logistically, it is hard to assemble a number of people for an hour or more in a particular place, and it may involve trial and error and some patience before results are achieved (Goss and Leinbach 1996; Holbrook and Jackson 1996). Although some researchers hire market research firms to recruit and run focus groups (for example Zeigler, Brunn, and Johnson 1996), this is expensive and detaches the researcher from the dynamics of group formation.

I recruited for focus groups by 'snowballing' through gatekeepers: key individuals helped me recruit others, who in turn asked their friends along. The participants of 14 of the 17 focus groups I ran consisted of students,<sup>289</sup> which allowed better comparison between groups consisting of similar ages and occupations. Three groups were conducted with non-student populations. After delivering a conference paper I was approached by a women's activist who invited me to go to a village to meet a group of women with whom she had been running consciousness-raising programmes. On two occasions I recruited unemployed men who were sitting at Osh's so-called 'slave

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processes of disciplining knowledge in the mahalla (Liu 2002: 123).

<sup>287</sup> The international market research analysts IDC, who specialise in "providing strategic marketing services that support information technology vendors in developing and implementing more effective business plans and operations," utilise focus groups as one method amongst many in their operations in Central Asia [http://www.idccentraleurope.com/products/index.php?actionPr=consult\\_main](http://www.idccentraleurope.com/products/index.php?actionPr=consult_main) (accessed spring 2002).

<sup>288</sup> see <http://www.mercycorps.org/programs/ferghana.shtml> (accessed spring 2002). For a preliminary needs assessment in the Ferghana Valleu, Mercy Corps not only found the focus groups invaluable for more closely defining needs, but also as a way of simultaneously establishing relationships with the participating communities.

<sup>289</sup> In their studies Burgess (1996) ran 13 focus groups, and Holbrook and Jackson (2001) 20.

market,' and waiting for people to come and employ them for a day or two of casual labour. My groups ranged from between 3 and 8 people, the average number being 6.5.

The goal is not to be able to claim to have held discussions with a statistical sample of people who accurately represent 'their community,' but rather to explore in detail the responses of some people, whose experiences may have much in common with those of other people. I employed "qualitative sampling," the selection of groups with people who reflected my research interests (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999: 7). Thus I recruited groups of Uzbek, Kyrgyz or Tajik students. I also tried to ensure the participation of both mixed and single-sex groups, to explore whether the border crisis affected these groups differently. Table 5-1 is an index of focus groups, whilst Table 5-2 shows the overall ethnic and sex composition of all participants.

I ran some single-sex and some mixed groups, to see what differences and contrasts emerged in those settings. Goss and Leinbach doubt that a truer picture will emerge if segregated groups are run, as mixed-gender groups help reveal the gender differentiated aspects of social knowledge (Goss and Leinbach 1996: 119). However, I generally ran separate Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups. This was partially because these students were generally studying in separate groups in the classes from which I drew them, but also because I was initially anxious to avoid bringing criticism upon myself or the university authorities in the event of 'ethnic' splits during discussion. Gender, unlike ethnicity, had not been the axis of mass mobilisation and violent clashes in recent years.

I ran groups in a variety of different venues: university classrooms, cafes, tea-rooms, and my own home. I recorded focus groups with a desk-top flat microphone connected to a small battery-powered Sony TCM-459V cassette-corder, and transcribed recordings using a Sanyo Memo-Scriber TRC 8800. Although I asked people always to give their names when they spoke, they often forgot during the free-flow of conversation, so some references in this chapter are simply indexed as 'participant.'



<b>GROUP</b>	<b>PARTICIPANTS (majority) and LOCATION OF FOCUS GROUP</b>	<b>No. IN GROUP (M/F)</b>	<b>HOMEPLACE OF PARTICIPANTS (majority)</b>
FG1	Kyrgyz students, Osh	3/5	Osh & Jalal-Abad
FG2	Kyrgyz Students, Osh	6/0	Osh
FG3	Kyrgyz students, Osh*	0/6	?
FG4	Kyrgyz students, Osh*	?/?	?
FG5	Kyrgyz Students, Osh	0/7	Osh City, Kadamjoy
FG6	Kyrgyz/ Uzbek Students, O'sh	0/3	Osh City
FG7	Uzbek Students, Osh	4/4	O'sh
FG8	Uzbek Students, Osh	6/1	O'sh
FG9	Kyrgyz Students, Andijon**	1/7	Osh
FG10	Kyrgyz Students, Jalal-Abad	0/8	Jalal-Abad & Osh
FG11	Kyrgyz housewives, Jalal-Abad	0/7	rural Jalal-Abad
FG12	Unemployed Kyrgyz men, Osh	7/0	Alay & Kara-Suu region
FG13	Unemployed Kyrgyz men, Osh	8/0	Alai
FG14	Uzbek students, O'sh	3/5	O'sh
FG15	Kyrgyz Students, Kizil-Kiya	1/7	Kadamjoy & Nookat
FG16	Tajik students, Kizil-Kiya	1/6	Uch-Korgon & Batken
FG17	Tajik Students, Kizil-Kiya	0/7	Uch-Korgon, Batken

\* data missing, excluded from all analysis \*\*Andijon oblast, Uzbekistan

NB: 'Osh' and 'Jalal-Abad' refer to both the cities and regions unless otherwise stated

**Table 5-1: Index of focus groups**

	<b>Kyrgyz</b>	<b>Uzbek</b>	<b>Tajik</b>	<b>Russian</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Female</b>	45	14	12	1	72
<b>Male</b>	25	12	1	0	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	70	26	13	1	<b>110</b>

**Table 5-2: Sex and self-ascribed ethnicity of participants in focus groups (total=17 groups).**

## Running of focus groups

The role of the moderator is highly significant in introducing the topic, steering the conversation, and drawing the group to a close. I began with a brief introduction to my work, and myself, although I passed over my exact theme very quickly, as I wanted to avoid limiting the discussion or suggesting answers. I explained how my work might be used, and gave an assurance of anonymity on my part that was augmented by allowing participants to choose pseudonyms for themselves: a light-hearted ice-breaking exercise with a generous sprinkling of US and European politicians, pop-idols and sports personalities as well as local names.

Following an initial opportunity for questions, I structured the conversation around a series of headlines relating to the border crisis taken from Kyrgyz newspapers. The first was the cartoon map, "Kyrgyzstan - here today, gone tomorrow", taken from *Aalam* (see p.129), the second the article and montage, "Iron curtain?", lifted from *Vecherniy Bishkek* (see p.49) the third a headline from *Res Publika* questioning whether "The price of eternal friendship is 5000 loaves of bread?"<sup>290</sup>; and the last the headline from *Kirgiz Tuusu*'s interview with Chingis Aytmatov suggesting that "We need to unify Turkestan society in the 21st century" (footnote 235, p.155).

The imaginative and startling cartoons and montages were highly conducive to initiating discussion. Methodologically, the benefit of basing discussion around articles that had formed the object of discourse analysis in chapter 3 allowed the study of 'consumption' as well as 'production' of discourse.

I distributed multiple copies of each in turn, asking, "what impression does this make on you?" I expounded with the questions, "what is this article about?", "is it an important question?" I was interested not only in responses *per se*, but the respondents' confidence, passion, and familiarity with the subject, all things that can be noted in focus groups but not questionnaires. I prompted when conversation petered out, and followed diversions. Thus, for example, when showing people the first prompt, "Kyrgyzstan - here today, tomorrow it may be gone" I excluded the accompanying text from the sheet. I asked people what it was about, and it was interesting that many people thought firstly not of foreign but domestic politics; of their own leaders consuming the wealth of Kyrgyzstan. I then read out the first line, "The border question is not a joke, it is an extremely important issue, perhaps that

which will determine the fate of our country," and was able to gauge people's familiarity with and interest in that topic.

### **Ethical issues of focus group research**

Generally speaking, the ethical issues encountered in focus group research are the same as those that need to be faced in every element of social science. However, focus groups do raise certain new angles on these questions. *Informed consent* may be compromised by the use of gatekeepers 'snowballing' participants. Thus, in student groups arranged through a teacher, I had to begin by underlining the voluntary nature of the group, and assuring people they were free to leave if they did not want to participate further. However, I cannot be completely sure that some did not stay because they felt an obligation to their teacher. Likewise, it is not possible for a researcher to guarantee absolute *anonymity* as may be the case in interviews: whilst I may not personally divulge information given to me, I cannot guarantee that other *participants* will do likewise.

Some practitioners, such as Baker and Hinton, believe that focus group research is ethical in leading to a more equal balance of power between researchers and researched in controlling of the research process, which they see as an ethical good (Baker and Hinton 1999). It is also a practical good, as participants can turn the discussion to themes they regard as important but which the researcher overlooked; for example, significant blocs of discussion in my groups were taken up with critiques of elites: this was an unexpected turn as far as I was concerned, but provided crucial material that I would otherwise have missed. At times, I became incidental to the ongoing discussion and was, on at least one occasion, used by protagonists. In FG8 Muzaffar (Uzbekistani Uzbek) and Olimjon (Kyrgyzstani Uzbek) were ferociously debating the relative merits of Uzbekistan's border control policy. Muzaffar asked me a series of yes/no questions about borders and visa requirements in Britain to prove the point he was making, namely that Uzbekistan was justified in introducing similar requirements along its border. However, it would be absurd to exaggerate the extent

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<sup>290</sup> 'Eternal friendship' refers to the treaty signed in 1997 by Presidents Akaev and Karimov; for the 5000 loaves reference, see p.45.

to which power relations are redistributed: I was able to change the subject and move on to a new topic.

### **Analysis of results**

Scholars use differing methods of processing and analysing focus group data including greater (Bedford and Burgess 2001: 130) or lesser (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 30) comprehensiveness of transcription, and analytic methods such as 'deviant case analysis' (Frankland and Bloor 1999: 145) and 'conversation analysis' (Myers and Macnaghten 1999: 182-3). The analytical approach that I have found most useful is based upon Burgess' use of 'discursive maps.' After each session I made debriefing notes. I did not transcribe each session in full, apart from initial ones. I re-read/re-listened to each session a number of times, drawing a 'discursive map' on A2 paper, identifying specific themes, issues, personal stories and recording a few illuminating quotes (Burgess 1996: 133). The map was constructed around the three articles given to the participants to comment on, each written up in a different coloured ink. This ensured that each discussion was fully represented, and allowed for strong visual comparisons. I structured these themes and issues into the subsections of the presentation of results (below), illustrating them with the stories and quotations recorded alongside. This was a laborious process. After that, I reread and transferred material to an extended categorical division of subject matter, from which I analysed and developed the theory presented in the second half of this chapter.

Three analytical concepts were important in my handling of the data: context, emphasis and consensus. The first was the *context* from which particular answers emerged. In this I follow Myers and Macnaghten's view that opinions should be treated as utterances specific to a particular situation rather than attributes of a subject (Myers and Macnaghten 1999: 182). For the first two focus groups I introduced a fourth newspaper headline, "Is Kyrgyzstan between two fires?", taken from *Kirgiz Ruhu*, and asked participants which two fires they thought that the newspaper was referring to. Answers were given such as China and Uzbekistan with their large populations. If, in the course of discussing the geopolitical future of Kyrgyzstan, someone had expressed the view that poor little Kyrgyzstan was sandwiched between powerful China and Uzbekistan, that would have been an important contribution

revealing geopolitical fear. However, when asked to name two different states that are threatening Kyrgyzstan, participants took it in turns to give different possible political pairings as a somewhat academic answer. This shows that in the context of simply responding to an abstract survey question, it is difficult to know what relevance to attach to the answers given. Paying close attention to the context in which references to ideas of Uzbekness or Kyrgyzness were raised in discussion was vital to the development of theory in this chapter.

*Emphasis* refers to the emotion expended on points that were raised. I noted when participants repeatedly and emphatically dwelt on a point and kept returning to it, contrasting this with issues that were merely raised in a cursory manner, no matter how important people claimed it was to them. A group *consensus* on a particular issue was the third key discursive moment to which I was particularly alert, as that showed a context of general agreement (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999: 16-17).

Mike Crang has commented that, "the practices of interpreting qualitative data remain under-reported in geography" (Crang 2001: 215). It is my intention in making my own method more transparent to overcome this, and to enable readers to better understand *how* I have achieved particular results and evaluate my conclusions.

### 3) RESULTS

Nick: "What effect has the border had on you?"

FG17 participant: "First of all, on *qarindosh-urukchilik* [kinship]. For example, it is now hard to go and visit family when we have to. Secondly, we used to go to Uzbekistan to sell the fruit we grew here. Now, we can't do that, and our fruit is left unsold."

This short quotation lifted from a dialogue in FG17 succinctly summarises the two main responses to the border crisis, as an obstacle to *kinship practice* and movement in the border area and a threat to *livelihoods*. Kinship practices are no mere anthropological exotica, but rather of paramount importance to contemporary senses of ethnicity in the context of responses to the border crisis. Likewise, livelihood concerns are subsumed in a framework of *class* analysis. The complex interaction of ethnicity and class, thus understood, is the basis of identity as a social process that not only mediated responses to the border crisis, but enframed geopolitical imaginations in the post-Soviet Ferghana Valley.

## Overview of reactions to elite views

Before proceeding to an investigation of the results in greater detail, I will present a brief summary of responses to the newspaper article headlines. This will enable a comprehension of the ways in which local opinion matched or differed from elite perspectives.

The policies of the government of Uzbekistan were central to discussions of the *'Iron Curtain'* collage and the *'5000 Loaves of Bread'* headline. There was general consensus across all ethnic groups that Uzbekistan was right to control its border in order to protect its interests against the threats of terrorism and narcotics. Indeed, many people expressed the view that Kyrgyzstan ought to do likewise, and that its poverty was partially a result of indifference to this important question. This was implicitly a scornful rejection of the Kyrgyzstan government's claim that it was defending the national borders. However, there was also a near consensus<sup>291</sup> that Uzbekistan was wrong to restrict links with Kyrgyzstan in the way that it was doing, cutting kinship ties, reducing trade and increasing poverty, and setting once-united peoples against each other. This contradiction was left unresolved.

The *'5000 loaves of bread'* comment drew near unanimous criticism, on two points. Firstly, everyone agreed that it did not reflect the true situation: it was *Uzbekistanis* who brought their wares to Kyrgyzstan to sell and make a living. It was insulting to suggest that this was in some way charity on the part of Uzbekistan, or that Kyrgyzstan was much poorer than Uzbekistan. In fact, many groups (of both ethnicities) repeated the common wisdom that has emerged in recent years, that 'in Kyrgyzstan the state is poor and the people rich, whilst in Uzbekistan the state is rich but the people poor.' Secondly, Karimov's remarks were objected to because they reflected a general approach that denied the necessity of economic relations between friendly states and overlooked their mutually complementary natural resource allocation (gas and water). On these issues there was a general consensus that cut completely across ethnic background. Whilst all held that Karimov's policies were harmful to Kyrgyzstan, there was more disagreement as to whether or not they

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<sup>291</sup> With one or two dissenters, the Uzbekistanis Muzaffar and Elip in FG8 and FG14 respectively, and Bolot (Kyrgyz, male) in FG15.

benefited Uzbekistan. Nobody made a strong personal attack on the person of Islam Karimov, in the way that the newspapers *Asaba* and *Aalam* did.

The behaviour of Kyrgyzstan's leaders was focused upon in discussions arising from the cartoon accompanying the headline '*Kyrgyzstan - Here Today, Gone Tomorrow?*' Without knowing the theme of the article, the majority of groups immediately surmised that it referred to their *chongdor* (Kyrgyz) or *kattalar* (in Uzbek). This word literally means 'big ones,' those (generally wealthy) elites including politicians, businessmen, and heads of public bodies whose access to power allows them to trap resources and advance themselves and their families and allies. The closest translation I have encountered is Erdin Beshimov's 'bigwigs,'<sup>292</sup> but that underplays the pejorative implication: the 'big ones' can jump the queue, bend the law, and exploit the system to their own ends. Thus, in this chapter, I will simply use the Kyrgyz word *chongdor*.

The general interpretation of the cartoon was that the *chongdor* were devouring Kyrgyzstan for their own ends. Untold foreign aid had poured into the country, but had been embezzled without any of it benefiting the common people. This interpretation transcended ethnic boundaries. A Kyrgyz participant said, "The *chongdor* love gobbling everything up, for their own benefit; why, they are ready to lick the whole of Kyrgyzstan clean, if it comes to it!", words echoed by an Uzbek in a different group: "At the moment people are stopping work, becoming unemployed, workshops and factories are closing...If people keep gobbling [Kyrgyzstan] the way they are at the moment, the mountains themselves may disappear!" The resultant social ills of poverty, a drift from professions to the bazaars, narcotic abuse, factory closures, hunger, and unemployment were freely rehearsed. The *chongdor* were prospering whilst the common people suffered.

Other explanations of the ogres were that they were foreigners. After domestic *chongdor*, the terrorist threat from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan was named as a major danger. Much reference was made to foreign capitalists, for example Turkish businessmen and Canadian capitalists; (a reference to the Canadian Kumtor gold mining corporation operating in northern Kyrgyzstan), as well as Chinese traders. These were sometimes described as being 'in cahoots' with the Kyrgyz *chongdor*, together draining the wealth of Kyrgyzstan.

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<sup>292</sup> Personal communication, Huddersfield, Easter 2002.

Some groups hit upon the actual topic of the article, the threat of neighbouring republics. I revealed the answer to all groups in time; every group agreed in theory that the border question was “the most serious issue”, but, nonetheless, spent much more time discussing the threat to Kyrgyzstan posed by the *chongdor*: and with more feeling. When the border was discussed, it was generally in the context of impeded border crossings, tortuous routes, broken kinship ties and more expensive goods in the bazaar, rather than the idea that Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China were grabbing land. Whilst some Kyrgyz participants did express a worry that Uzbekistan was intent on acquiring parts of Kyrgyz territory, this was not worked into the threat that the opposition papers portrayed it as being.

People connected the discussion with interstate relations and disputes over gas, water and electricity, as the article did; but no group made any connection at all with the supposed weakness of the Kyrgyz language and sense of identity that the opposition so bemoaned. What is more, the term *chongdor* seemed to include disrespect for the political elites in general, *including* the opposition. Perhaps surprisingly, President Akaev was never once directly singled out for criticism in any of the groups. Whilst this may indicate a reticence to attack a leader in the presence of a stranger with a tape recorder, it is also because the attack on *chongdor* is a general condemnation of the ruling elites who are seen as self-serving and opportunistic.

As with reactions to the above three articles, the general response to Chinggis Aitmatov’s suggestion of a ‘Turkestani confederation’ (see p.154) showed no significant split along ethnic lines. The general consensus was that it was a good idea, but would be unlikely to be implemented in practice. Different supporting arguments included the reuniting of historical kinsfolk split by Russian and Soviet rule or by independence in 1991, common cultural, religious and kinship heritages, and the means of mitigating the more harmful effects of independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Apart from a few exceptions, most participants could not envisage any form of union in the near future. The 1990 Uzbek-Kyrgyz fighting and diverging political paths of authoritarianism and democracy pointed to futures further apart, rather than closer together.

The most emphatic support came from FG13, the unemployed and destitute Kyrgyz men who had suffered most as a result of the demise of the Soviet Union. One man hoped that such a confederation would restore the prosperity of the people



which had been decimated by borders and embezzled by the *chongdor*: "If we unify as before, everything would be good, for the people: it would be good especially for the people. Everything would be back to normal, there'd be enough to eat, there'd be employment." Or, as a Tajik man put it (FG16): "It would be great if there was a union as at the moment everyone suffers hardships when they go and see their relatives. They could freely go and visit them, they could buy and sell."

It is with that quotation that I draw this section to a close, as it indicates the two themes that I argue are key to analysing responses to the border crisis: kinship and class. (I will explain the, perhaps, surprising use of the word 'class' rather than 'livelihood' below). I argue that the core elements of 'ethnicity' in responding to the border crisis are not concepts of exclusive identity, based upon language and a historical sense of group identity that can be correlated with an assertion that this group is incomplete without exercising power over territory. I do not deny that that is one aspect of ethnicity that can come to the fore, as it did in 1990. Rather, I argue that kinship and class are the core components of 'Uzbek' and 'Kyrgyz' ethnicities in the context of the border crisis. More than that, I argue that the similarities in response to the border crisis provide hope for an ethnic politics of commonality, rather than division, for future politicians with the will to grasp them.

### **Ethnicity, kinship and the border (i): Uzbeks**

I argued in chapter 4 that the key concept for those living right at the border in understanding and critically responding to the border crisis was *kinship* (pp.197-200). Analysis of the focus group material confirms those findings. The expression of 'giving daughters in marriage, taking daughters in marriage' recurred in explanation of the cross-border kinship networks, although I will not repeat that material here. Here I argue that 'kinship' is not a separate type of social network, a pre-modern form of organisation surviving as a remnant alongside modern ethnicity. Rather, I argue that kinship systems are at the very heart of modern Osh Uzbek senses of ethnicity in the context of the border crisis.

Participants described the very essence of 'Uzbekness' (*O'zbekchilik*) in terms of kinship networks and responsibilities, which were the basis for the strongest attacks on Uzbekistan's border policy. No finer example was given than this quotation from

Dilshot (FG7, Uzbek, male) who lived right on the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border in Kyrgyzstan's Aravan region:

We are Uzbek *millat* but Kyrgyz citizens, and 70% of our families live in Uzbekistan. We each have a relative in this place, a friend in that - and when people die, Uzbekness means we go for *patochilik*.<sup>293</sup> At the time of the Batken thing, one woman's relative died. She wanted to go, but the soldiers wouldn't let her cross. She sobbed and wept, and implored them, to let her go to the funeral of her relative, but they wouldn't let her .. [tape turns over] ... this is not right, because we are Uzbek, that's our *millat*. [turns to address me] As for you, you come from a foreign land, from the other side of the ocean. If they search you, you won't be too offended. But because we are from Kyrgyzstan - your own *millat*, your own *halq* - our only fault is to live in Kyrgyzstan.

In this impassioned plea, Dilshot explicitly defined kinship duties to attend the final rite of passage as at the heart of 'Uzbekness.' The behaviour of the border guards who turned the woman away was as despicable as it was incomprehensible, cutting as it did straight across the bonds of *millat* and *halq* (ethnic group, nation). The mere fact that the woman in question happened to live on this side of a border was incidental and subservient to the more relevant fact of common ethnicity. The border guards should have understood this as it was central to being Uzbek. Had they treated me in this way, a foreigner who spoke Uzbek with them freely, yet was not Uzbek, because I was entirely outside of any kin relationship, that would have been altogether different.

Nargeza (FG7, Uzbek, female) agreed, developing Dilshot's point about my citizenship being a different matter from theirs:

If I go to a foreign country, for example to England, if someone thoroughly searches me I won't be offended, because I am from a foreign country. They have the right to search me at military posts, there is nothing illegal about that. But I am against Uzbekistan doing that... By doing everything according to the rules it shows that Uzbekistan's border guards don't trust the population of Kyrgyzstan. This is proof that they don't trust them.

Nargeza tacitly acknowledges that, although Uzbekistan might have the *technical* right to treat with suspicion anyone without Uzbekistani citizenship, this playing by

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<sup>293</sup> Prayers held at the house of the deceased.

the rules of the *nation-state* directly contravenes *national/ethnic* Uzbek notions of trust and respect. That lack of trust may be fine for strangers, but is insulting to kinsfolk. Nargeza feels no need to expand; it is obvious enough to anyone that this is the case.

This conceptual clash between the legal imperative of the nation-state and the cultural imperative of kinship can be seen more fully in a sharp exchange between another Aravani Olimjon (FG8, Uzbek, male), and an Uzbekistani, Muzaffar (FG8, Uzbek, Uzbekistani, male). Olimjon gave an example of a woman being delayed two hours by Uzbekistani guards as she was on her way to her mother's funeral in Uzbekistan, and concludes that, "This border is nothing but harm to us." Muzaffar objected, saying to Olimjon, "You don't seem to understand that every developed capitalist state has its own borders." Olimjon indignantly retorted:

You're speaking from the *rasmiy* (official) perspective. But we have what we call *milliy* (national cultural/ethnic) traditions and customs. For example, my aunt lives in Uzbekistan: if I marry and have a wedding, doesn't my father have a right to go and invite his younger sister to the wedding?! If you have to take two hours of stick from a soldier on the way to make a wedding invitation - there are such things as 'human rights,' aren't there? Where we live, human rights are being broken everywhere.

In this fascinating exchange radically different geopolitical logics are played out against each other. Olimjon began by stating that borders were bad because they hindered important kinship obligations - the pre-modern logic of kinship. Muzaffar objected not by denying the validity of kinship as a form of action, but by stating that the logic of the modern nation-state overrules it. Olimjon responded by contrasting the authority of 'official' (nation-state) discourse with 'national-cultural' (ethnic), and making the former subservient to the latter. He finished with the sophisticated twist of salvaging the 'ethnic' discourse from supercession by the nation-statist by conflating the pre-modern national-cultural with the ultra-modern discourse of 'human rights.' In so doing, he flagged a debate that is central to international law: the 'sovereignty' of a nation-state versus alleged 'rights' of its inhabitants.

This intriguing and emotional debate is at root a struggle over nationalism as an ideology, addressing the question as to where the Uzbek nation is located spatially. Islam Karimov would map it as coterminous with the newly-independent nation-state, whose borders, which enclose authentic Uzbek cultural history, were jealously

guarded by the Seed of Timur. This would exclude stranded Uzbek minorities in adjacent states, rendering them marginal not only to Uzbekistan but to the revivalist project of Uzbekness itself. Osh Uzbeks reject this, prioritising non-territorialised kinship practices over the institution of international boundaries. Although temporarily marginalised by Uzbekistan's 'un-national' policies, they believed that they would surely prove more durable than the nation-state and in the end lead to its marginalisation: "There *will* be a confederation, definitely, because until this day we have been close kinsfolk, and even if there are a million obstacles it will still happen." For Olimjon, these ties were at the heart of being Uzbek: the basis not only of past society and present belonging, but the rock of geopolitical eschatology.

### **Ethnicity, kinship and the border (ii): Kyrgyz**

The circumstances in Kyrgyzstan of majority Kyrgyz is obviously very different from minority Uzbeks, as they had not been 'stranded' outside a titular homeland. What is more, whilst Uzbek participants of the focus groups overwhelmingly had relatives in Uzbekistan, only a minority of Kyrgyz did. Nevertheless, and perhaps surprisingly in view of this, Kyrgyz people used kinship figures very similarly to the Uzbeks. Significantly, the point was stressed most by FG15, the Kyrgyz group in Batken region the majority of whose participants had relatives in Uzbekistan. They spoke a great deal about the breaking of *tuuganchilik* (the social practice of kinship), and the exchanging of daughters as both a concrete social practice and a metaphor of kin between the two states. Zinat (FG11, Kyrgyz, female) gave an example of how the border disrupted these connections:

We gave a daughter in marriage to Uzbekistan, and went to the wedding. The car was full of gifts for the dowry. At every single post and customs point they opened and checked every last item and wouldn't let us through until we gave money... they took 40 soms here, another 80 soms there.

Although few Kyrgyz in my groups had relatives in Uzbekistan, the existence of a Kyrgyz minority there was generally regarded as important.<sup>294</sup> Thus one participant in FG12, a group where no one had relatives in Uzbekistan and some had never even

been, said that, "There is a lot of exchange between us. We have always lived together, taking daughters and giving daughters. For example, there are Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan, and here in Osh we have lots of Uzbeks." Whilst these points were made frequently, they did not rouse quite the passion that they did for Uzbeks.

Like Olimjon in FG8, one Kyrgyz female participant of FG11 believed that the enduring efficacy of kinship bonds underwritten by a common Muslim heritage, could form the basis for Chinggis Aytmatov's confederation: if the political will of the leaders existed:

If there is *intimak* (peace and solidarity) amongst the five countries - Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkestan, [group intervention: Turkmenistan], and Tajikistan, the five - all five are Muslim, if they put their heads together, these kin countries and kin peoples, if they want to come together, and don't do harm to each other - yes, it could happen.

These examples show that there are significant parallels between senses of Uzbekness and Kyrgyzness and how the border crisis in southern Kyrgyzstan impinged on these. In discussing the exchange of women, it is apparent that these ethnicities are gendered, and are also marked by local conceptions of class and kinship. In fact, rather than attempting to establish one identity as primary, it makes more sense to discuss subject positions constituted from a variety of class, gender, kinship and ethnic processes. Furthermore, these kinship-based analyses, for both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, show a preparedness to challenge state discourse that conflates nation with state and territory, and an insistence on remembering those minorities united by blood ties whose very existence is an embarrassing fact for a nationalising regime. Finally, such questioning of the geopolitical logic of nationalism also undermines the legitimacy of those regimes that justify their existence on behalf of the titular nation on attaining independence.

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<sup>294</sup> According to Bohr (Bohr 1998a: 153) there were 358,700 Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan in 1997 but only 200,000 Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan.

### **Class, ethnicity and border crossings**

I suggested above that *class* played a significant role in structuring general responses to the border crisis and the political geography of independence, and that this was a concept that cut across ethnic subject positions. However, the focus groups showed that class, like kinship, was also constitutive of ethnic subject positions. Focus groups relayed a view of independence, the concomitant border regimes, and the penetration of global capitalism yielding access to foreign revenues and goods, as developments that have benefited the *chongdor*, but brought unmitigated disaster to the ordinary people of Central Asia in the form of nationalism and poverty. However, class terms were also used explicitly to discuss differential experiences of actually crossing the border. Again, these cut across ethnic divides.

Whilst listing the difficulties that 'ordinary people' experienced at border crossings, participants of focus groups commonly identified two categories of people that side-stepped these obstacles: "the rich and the *kattalar*<sup>295</sup> get across the border, the poor don't" (Uzbek participant, FG14). There was much overlap between these two categories, although *chongdor* usually refers more explicitly to office or connections with office.

The 'rich' were those who had made money through illegal or shady means and used their wealth to circumvent the law. As Gulya (FG14, Kyrgyz, female) put it:

We suffer here, but if we look at it truthfully, at the customs posts, the rich get across if they give some money, whatever sorts of goods they have with them, whatever they are doing - they let them cross... if you are even just a little rich you can cross easily, but the wretched poor, even if they do get across after all of that hassle, suffer greatly. But the children of the rich get across easily, whatever sort of illegal activities they are engaged in.

The case was put more strongly still by an unemployed and destitute Kyrgyz man in Osh in FG14, commenting on the 'Iron Curtain' article:

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<sup>295</sup> *Kattalar* is the Uzbek equivalent of *chongdor*.

It's hard on the working men,<sup>296</sup> you can't bring things over that you need, things that you lack... those that transport scrap iron etc have money, they can pay; it hits the ordinary, everyday people. If you take apricots to sell, you have to pay at the borders for this and that, and it doesn't cover what you make from it. Those rich people with plenty of money can cross, while the poor people are left standing there.

This is basic, popular, class analysis about ordinary working people impoverished and oppressed as they try and eke out a daily living while the rich prosper and bend the law. It resonates with both the Soviet Marxist critique of the working man being exploited by capitalists, and the enduring pre-modern Kyrgyz ethic of equality that critiques the wealthy who do not use their power for the good of the people. It demonstrates not only that class is a subject position that people occupy alongside ethnicity, and which filters their geopolitical imaginations, but also that the two are inseparable: 'class' positions are constitutive of 'ethnic' ones, and vice-versa, a point I shall go on to expound below.

If the rich are the first category of *chongdor* who can circumvent the border restrictions by the power their cash buys, the second are *government officials*. A Kyrgyz participant in FG2 expressed the common sentiment that officials were unaffected by the crisis: "Uzbekistan customs officers take from the ordinary people, but from officials they do not take a bribe - they cover all their mistakes... they do not touch officials, they touch only poor people." Sontag (FG10, Kyrgyz, female) suggested that officials were so out of touch with people's concerns because the same restrictions did not apply to them: "Whenever they cross the border, they don't encounter such difficulties - they use official cars, that's why they don't know about these problems and don't want to solve them."

These accusations were borne out by the results of interviews I did with local officials. Consider the following extract from an interview with Ahmadjon Mahamadov, the ethnically-Uzbek *akim* (mayor) of Kyrgyzstan's Nookat region, and Kyrgyzstan's 'Mayor of the Year' 1999:

Nick: I hope it would not be rude for me to ask a personal question- when you go to Uzbekistan, do you feel like a foreigner?

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<sup>296</sup> *Jumushchular*. I have gendered the term as this captures the traditional class sense of a labouring male that I believe the respondent was evoking.

Ahmadjon: Of course, I have a different passport, and so I am forced to say, 'I am a foreigner.' Only yesterday I crossed the border and they asked, 'Where is your declaration?' [laughing] I told them that I was off to see the *hokim*<sup>297</sup> and they let me through.<sup>298</sup>

He claimed to understand the difficulties being caused for locals, and experienced a dissonance between knowing objectively that he was a foreigner, yet not grasping that subjectively. However, his own (class) position in local government meant he was not subject to the same stringent controls and restrictions, and exploitation. Likewise, I interviewed Azim Karashev, a Kyrgyz representative on the bilateral commission appointed to delimit and demarcate the Kyrgyzstani-Uzbekistani border. I asked him about the general confusion over which border crossings were open and under what conditions, and he replied, "I can't answer, as I don't have a great deal of information on this. However, the last time I went they let me across without difficulty, just looking at my passport and checking my bags."<sup>299</sup>

This gap between the experience of ordinary citizens and those of the *chongdor* was graphically demonstrated, whilst I was visiting the administrative offices of the Soqqoldi region in Jalal-Abad oblast, an *ayil ökmöt* (village administration) that borders on Uzbekistan and is itself 32% Uzbek. After interviewing the head of the *ayil ökmöt*, I was introduced to an older official (Kyrgyz) who eulogised the warm relations with their counterparts in Uzbekistan.

We also have good relations with their customs posts. If you say that you have come from Uzbekistan, or have come from Kyrgyzstan, they immediately welcome you. ... things are very good with our Uzbek relations, not at all bad. We invite them to our new year, the Muslim new year of Navrus. A delegation comes... Our mullahs [*moldolor*] have good relations with them, there is nothing awry at all... As you yourself know well, Saturday is our market day. 70% of the traders are Uzbek [i.e. from Uzbekistan]. We give summer pasture to them, we have good relations over pasture... We take daughters, we give daughters... We receive them well, see them home. As you know, hospitality is important. We cross the border, greet them, then return....

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<sup>297</sup> Mayor (Kyrgyz *akim*)

<sup>298</sup> Interview, Nookat, 02/05/2000

<sup>299</sup> Interview, Osh, 12/06/2000.



As this paean to Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan relations was in full flow, a woman who had come to complain about a different issue heard it and interrupted, angrily insisting that the situation was dire, the Uzbekistani officials treat you rudely and the Kyrgyzistani ones steal. This unusual interchange, before the woman was ejected from the office, clearly demonstrated how the different experiences at the border of *chongdor* and ordinary people affected their estimations of the gravity of the problem.

To conclude this section, what I have categorized as a class-based critique of the border regime cut across ethnic lines in responses to the border crisis. However, it was not merely that class was a different category of identification from ethnicity that temporarily took precedence. The words which Kyrgyz people used for 'the people' when explaining their sufferings were *kalk* and *el*<sup>300</sup>: words which nationalistic leaders used to refer to the whole nation. People were, in setting the *chongdor* over against the *el*, in fact suggesting that the *chongdor* were not part of the *el*, the people, at least in this situation. By so doing they were implicitly arguing that far from patriotically representing the people as they claimed, the *chongdor* had rejected the ethics of Kyrgyzness and set themselves *outside* the authentic nation.

I have described the importance of *kinship* and *class* as subject positions constitutive of particular forms of ethnicity to which people responded to the border crisis. In the next section I will deepen the analysis of ethnic subject positions to show how they are even further complicated by location, age and gender. Having done this, I will finish by broadening the discussion to the political sphere in order to examine whether inter-ethnic tensions have increased as a result of the border crisis.

### **Factors mediating responses to the border crisis: location**

That a particular response to the border crisis cannot be universally ascribed to members of a single ethnic group is clear when the importance of *geography*, or location, is taken into account as a mediating factor. This is true for both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Every person in the Uzbek/Tajik groups FG7, FG8, FG16 and FG17 had relatives in Uzbekistan, spoke Uzbek as a primary language, and followed overwhelmingly Uzbekistani radio and television. However, Uzbeks in the groups FG7 and FG8 spoke with great passion about the insidious effects of the border,

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<sup>300</sup> Frequently with qualifications such as *karapayim* and *jönökö*, meaning 'common' or 'ordinary.'

whereas Tajiks in FG16 and FG17, whilst disapproving of the border regime, were less impassioned in their criticism. (In the southern Ferghana Valley, Uzbeks and Tajiks are commonly bilingual and have very similar cultural practices: they are sometimes lumped together by some other groups with the pejorative term 'Sart.')

I suggest that this discrepancy can be partially explained by local factors. Many of the Uzbeks of FG7 and FG8 were from Aravan, a border region near Osh. Local stories about violent incidents at the border abounded, and the region had a highly-complicated border geography of dissected settlements (see photograph, Jar village, p.192). Aravan was closer to the showpiece *Dostuk* border checkpoint. What is more, a long section of barbed wire fencing running alongside the main Osh-Aravan highway was erected by Uzbekistan (see p.51). The students would see this powerful symbol of the nation-state every time they travelled to Osh for lessons.

In contrast, students in FG16 and FG17 lived in Uch-Korgan, a short road journey from their university in Kizil-Kiya. They experienced no border in the course of their daily lives. In that border zone, I saw none of the barbed wire fencing that had been established in the Osh-Aravan region, suggesting a more lax border regime. This difference is reflected in the perspectives of students from FG16 and FG17.

This short example also illustrates the importance of seeing ethnicity as only one constitutive element of social identity and concomitant political commitment. All the participants of the groups FG15 and FG16 studied in Kizil-Kiya. It would have been possible to explain the greater hostility towards Uzbekistan's border regime expressed by Kyrgyz group FG15 in comparison with Tajik groups FG16 as simply 'ethnic', for example, arguing that Kyrgyz had an enmity towards the Uzbek state that Tajiks, being closer ethnically to Uzbeks, lacked. It is possible that is true, although these discussions yielded no corroborating evidence. A better explanation is geography. FG16 students came from the village of Uch-Korgan, a short and unimpeded journey from Kizil-Kiya. They passed no borders in the course of their daily lives. Students in FG15, however, lived mostly in rural Kadamjoy and Nookat areas. They had to pass through Uzbekistan's heavily-guarded Sox enclave (see map B, p.**Error! Bookmark not defined.**), as one student put it, "we cross four borders to get from Kadamjoy to here. We are searched at every one - it's far too much, it's unnecessary." This argument is further corroborated by contrasting the views of Osh-based participants in FG1. Like FG15 they were Kyrgyz students and, whilst vocally objecting to the border regime, their attacks were more muted than those of FG15.

Most came from the Osh area and crossed no borders to get to college. Only 1 out of 8 had family in Uzbekistan, in contrast to FG15 where a majority had relatives over the border. There was little reason for the participants of FG1 to cross the border: therefore, it impinged less upon their daily lives.

In marked contrast, the unemployed Kyrgyz day-labourers of FG12 and FG13 had a grim perspective on 'the border.' Coming largely from the mountainous Alay area to the south-east of Osh, few had relatives in Uzbekistan and some had never been there. Although they flagged the Uzbekistan border as an important issue, it excited little rhetorical concern. For them, rather, 'the border' meant China. They had seen the flocks they tended decimated and skins exported to China, and had watched trucks of aluminium heading towards the border. They associated the opening of the Chinese border with unmitigated ruin, economic collapse, and the extreme poverty that had forced them to migrate to Osh city. In our discussions they referred incessantly to this, and the threat that China posed. Whilst China was almost universally mentioned as a threat in other groups, the emphasis there was more on the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan border.

These examples demonstrate that the geography of residence and work is important both in explaining attitudes that might otherwise be mistaken as 'ethnic,' and in constituting and differentiating attitudes and experiences within the same ethnic group.

### **Factors mediating responses to the border crisis: age**

The anthropologist, Morgan Liu, studied reactions to the border closure amongst a number of Uzbeks in an old mahalla in Osh city in the summer of 1999, and found that, even though the border closures hurt them, they were not prepared to criticise Islam Karimov. He interpreted this by arguing that Uzbeks in Osh resolved their contradictory position between the nationalising states of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan by articulating loyalty towards an ultimate figure of legitimate authority, Islam Karimov. Liu suggested that such deference to people regarded as legitimate figures of authority was a political strategy learnt in the mahalla (Liu 2002).

I will discuss Liu's intriguing and compelling thesis further below (p.250), but here will register simply that my focus groups yielded apparently contradictory results on

the question of criticism of Uzbekistan. Generally, I found that Uzbeks and Kyrgyz alike were critical of Karimov's border policies, but accepted that state security needed ensuring and that Karimov was doing a better job of that than Akaev. Neither Uzbeks nor Kyrgyz showed much reticence in criticising the wisdom of Islam Karimov's policies, although most refrained from the personal vilification that characterised the Kyrgyz opposition press. I suggest that age or generation is a key mediating factor here. The majority of the participants in my focus groups were younger people who could scarcely recall the Soviet period.

I encountered a staunch refusal to criticise Islam Karimov, along the lines that Liu discovered, only in some older Uzbeks whom I interviewed or from whom I elicited views in other research contexts. For example, after attempting to run a focus group at a traditional mahalla *gap*, the elderly head of the gathering ended with prayers and a lecture on punctuality, attendance, gossip, and a pointed warning not to engage in careless political banter:

God has appointed people to rule over us and they are his representatives. It is not our duty to mix in this, nor to criticize them- they are responsible to God and will answer to Him.<sup>301</sup>

This deference to authority may be spatially contextual, a discourse more appropriate to *mahalla* space than university space. It is also less natural for a younger generation of Uzbeks growing up in a more democratic Kyrgyzstan. These are students exposed to Uzbekistan's media but who also learn Kyrgyz and read *Asaba*: participants in 3 out of 4 Uzbek and 1 of the 2 Tajik groups read the paper. They are open to more critical perspectives than their parents were and, lacking significant adult experience of open borders, do not identify to the same extent with Uzbekistan or the Uzbekistani president. In short, if a core component of Uzbek ethnicity is marked by particular attitudes to authority, then the 'Uzbekness' of the younger generation of students who have grown up in a very different geopolitical milieu from that of their parents is concomitantly different. Ethnicity, geography, class and age together combine and

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<sup>301</sup> Osh, spring 2000.

recombine to constitute different and complex 'ethnic' responses to the border crisis.<sup>302</sup>

### **Factors mediating responses to the border crisis: gender**

Along with location, class and age, gender can be an important factor in moulding geopolitical imaginations, as I have discussed in chapter 4 of this dissertation. I have drawn attention both in this and the last chapter to the gendered nature of kinship patterns as systems of exchange of females in marriage, or close fraternal, paternal and avuncular relationships. However, in terms of responses to the border disputes, I detected little differentiation that could be attributed to gender. Amongst student focus groups, men and women shared views on the relative merits or defects of government policies and of their impacts on border populations. Nor was there any noticeable impact from patriarchal gender relations in discussion dynamics; men and women contributed freely to discussions in mixed groups. In FG14, to give one example, articulate and politically-aware women dominated the discussion, with one male student silent throughout.

I asked the all-female FG10 directly if men and women have different perspectives on this issue. This was the only occasion I asked that question. They quickly assented: "We are softer - men mostly think with their minds, we are more sensitive," replied one, whilst another agreed, "We don't like wars, we like to have solutions to the problems, not by wars or fighting, but peacefully." They immediately fell back on traditional patriarchal gendered notions of less rational and more emotional womanhood. The accuracy of these statements was belied not only by the similarities of the views they expressed to those of all-male groups, but by the fact that their group was the single most politically-active I encountered, with more collective experiences of conflict with the authorities than any other! When I pressed further for examples, they suggested that "women are respected in society, men less - women are mothers in every problem," and that women are therefore searched less than men.

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<sup>302</sup> However, this divide was not a simple one between young and old, as the travel experience of some older men counteracted what Liu depicted as the closed world of the mahalla. One retired security officer to whom I spoke had travelled widely throughout the Communist world (visiting Cuba, Vietnam and Eastern Europe), and was disparaging of the division into new states. Likewise, an elderly journalist, whose work had taken him from one end of the Soviet Union to the other, was dismissive of Uzbekistan's claim to have a right to defend its border.

However, the only example of a naked strip-search at the border that my 17 focus groups yielded was from one woman in this very group!<sup>303</sup>

This demonstrates that asking explicitly about an issue can be a self-fulfilling exercise, and that answers to direct questions that define the terms of the response (for example, about gender or ethnicity) should be handled cautiously and critically. Focus group research is an appropriate way to facilitate that. My results from chapter 4 showed that there were instances whereby different gender roles necessarily meant different experiences of the border. However, in the case of the students who formed the bulk of my focus groups, gender was not a major factor in differentiating experiences of and attitudes to the border crisis.

#### **PART IV: IMPLICATIONS**

Having explored the meaning of 'ethnicity' in the context of the border dispute, this section addresses the question that inevitably haunts all work on ethnicity in southern Kyrgyzstan: does this increase the likelihood of a repeat of the 1990 inter-communal violence?

##### **Ethnic tensions: the 1990 Osh events and the 1999 border crisis**

Various commentators have suggested that the ongoing border crisis is not only a source of interstate conflict, but one that also has the potential to raise tensions between different ethnic groups within Kyrgyzstan. The prediction of ethnic conflict in the area is not a new activity for scholars of Central Asia. Anti-Soviet scholars speculated, wrongly, that nationalism in Central Asia was "more dangerous for the final stability of the USSR than the better known Ukrainian, Georgian and Baltic nationalist movements"(Bennigsen 1986: 132). Some commentators have feared a repetition of the 1990 clashes (Rubin and Lubin 1999; Fane 1996; Tabyshalieva 1999), although I have elsewhere criticised these reports for formulaic approaches, notable more for their ideological biases than empirical content (Megoran 2000b). Moving on to the present border disputes, Babakulov feared that "frontier disputes

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<sup>303</sup> However, I do not rule out the possibility that others were searched in the same way, but were unwilling to admit or discuss it in a group context.

could sow the seeds of inter-ethnic violence.”<sup>304</sup> The International Crisis Group's April 2002 report on border disputes in Central Asia warned that "the increased division of peoples of the Ferghana Valley is reinforcing negative stereotypes and hardening national identities." It further cautioned that they might exacerbate "existing inter-ethnic strains in the region between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks" (International Crisis Group 2002a: 16). That such speculation has proved incorrect or hasty before is no guarantee that it is now. Recollection of the 1990 death toll<sup>305</sup> impresses that this is a very grave issue. So, has the dispute been mirrored in tensions between Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities along the border? How have notions of state and nation changed as a result? Is there a danger of a repetition of the 1990 inter-ethnic clashes? The focus groups I ran provided a wealth of information with which to begin answering these important questions, and with which I will round off the presentation of results.

I was concerned to see what importance the focus group participants would have attached to the 1990, but never asked about them unless others brought the subject up. They were referred to by a number of groups in the course of the discussions, although more as an event from which lessons needed to be learnt than as an example of ongoing hatreds. However, I cannot of course rule out the possibility that people regarded it as important, but did not wish to discuss it in the focus group context. Nonetheless, it would be incautious to claim that if different views were expressed in different contexts one, and only one, represented the 'true' position. A view expressed in a public sphere may form the basis for positive utilisation by leaders within that sphere to promote peaceful co-existence, whatever other perspectives might be expressed in different contexts.

Kyrgyz groups mentioned 1990 less than Uzbek groups, who indicated a certain amount of residual fear and mistrust. Some Kyrgyz groups, too, expressed doubt about the loyalty of the Uzbek population and the territorial intentions of Uzbekistan. However, in some Kyrgyz groups neither 1990 nor Uzbek-Kyrgyz tensions were raised at all. Many participants from different groups would have agreed with one participant in FG8 that a confederation such as that suggested by Chinggis Aytmatov would be welcome, but 1990 made it less probable in the shorter term. All discussions

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<sup>304</sup> Ulugbek Babakulov, 'Kyrgyz-Uzbek border tensions', *Reporting Central Asia* 96, 03/02/2002, (London: IWPR).

<sup>305</sup> Officially 171 (Tishkov 1997), although local sources suggest it may have been much higher.

were marked by minimal negative stereotyping of other groups and the near absence of simplistic uses of ethnicity as a causal factor in tensions. The association of radical Islamism with Uzbeks and Uzbekistan made by one student in FG9 was rejected by other Kyrgyz in the group. Both Uzbek and Kyrgyz groups made occasional reference to the supposed transfer of Osh and Aravan to Kyrgyzstan and Khanabad to Uzbekistan, but these statements did not generate emphatic support; they were viewed as historical wrongs, but not high on the political agenda today. In FG3 alone the border crisis was linked to supposed Uzbek separatism, with criticism voiced of the somewhat populist Uzbek parliamentarian Davron Sobirov. Although one student from FG10 said a confederation was unlikely because "we don't like people from Uzbekistan and they don't like us"; this was an exception.

Rather, people generally held their leaders responsible for 1990, blaming selfish and careless politicians for a dispute that split the unity of the common people. As Farida in FG14 (Uzbek) said, the 1990 incident was the result of a dash for sovereignty by republican leaders who did not give due heed to the consequences and "didn't think about the friendship of the peoples."<sup>306</sup> Her point was that this was a lesson that needed heeding in the contemporary border crisis. The context of comments is significant, as Farida made this during discussions about Islam Karimov's '5000 loaves of bread' comment. A number of Kyrgyz groups made exactly the same point about Karimov's remarks. A Kyrgyz participant of FG11 said:

Nick, do you see that with one word from our presidents so much nationalism can be produced amongst the people, setting them against each other, the Uzbek and Kyrgyz people live well together. In saying that the Uzbeks live well and us badly - nationalism and conflicts appear.

The overwhelming majority of participants agreed that the remarks of Islam Karimov and the actions of the two states had potentially negative effects on inter-ethnic relations. It is significant that the same class analysis was used for events in 1990 and the border crisis: the solidarity of the ordinary peoples of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan was broken by thoughtless and grasping politicians. This theme was reworked through arguments about the unity of the people through faith, Turkicness, and

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<sup>306</sup> A Soviet ideological concept explained on page 93.



history, and that the impact of the politicians' games result in not only nationalism but poverty:

In order to make a living people need to be connected to each other. Humans can't live alone. People need people. They have just put a barrier between two peoples, their friendship has been broken. There are no relations. That's wrong.

A comment by one participant showed the imprint of the Soviet-era discourse of the danger posed by capitalist countries. Muzaffar, an Uzbekistani Uzbek in FG8, argued that outsiders were also involved in causing trouble, pointing the finger of blame at the US and the UK. In particular, he accused the BBC's then Central Asia correspondent, Louise Hidalgo, of purposely exaggerating reports of the border issues, and implied my focus groups had a similar aim. This parallels one opinion widely held in Osh that the violence of 1990 was caused by reactionary agents from Moscow inciting instability to discredit Gorbachev's reforms. The role of British imperial agents with a skill in local languages is widely attested to both in Central Asian and Western literature (Hopkirk 1990; Sodiqov *et al* 2000: 53-60). FG8's contribution completes the picture of state nationalism (whether in 1990 or 2000) as a process initiated by political elites, possibly with the encouragement of shady outsiders, which serves to break the unity of historically-united common people.

These findings are ambiguous, but generally not encouraging. On the one hand, it is surely positive that little animosity was expressed about other groups and that negative stereotyping was almost absent. The 1990 dispute was not the all-determining issue that Rubin and Lubin saw it as (1999), and there was no expression of Uzbeks and Kyrgyz as 'ancient enemies.' On the contrary, nationalism and ethnic tension were almost universally explained as the product of malign leaders deliberately stirring up trouble between otherwise friendly kin peoples, or causing it by a thoughtless quest for sovereignty. However, the rejection of crasser forms of the 'ethnic animosity' thesis does not preclude the reoccurrence of Uzbek-Kyrgyz conflict. People feared that just as leaders caused the 1990 fighting by their mismanagement and desire for political power through state sovereignty, so the leaderships of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan might again precipitate conflict by their adamant defence of independence. And yet, as I suggest below, in the very border crisis that intensified

these concerns, there lie the seeds of a different sort of hope: the reconstitution of new forms of ethnicity more finely attuned to changing geopolitical realities.

### **Redefinition of Identities**

Even though both 1990 and aspects of the contemporary border crisis were generally viewed as political manoeuvres by elites, most participants of most groups agreed that the crisis had the potential to generate nationalism and damage relations between the common people. But what effects did the crisis have on Kyrgyzstanis' geographical imagination of the Ferghana Valley; that is, the everyday sense of its division into nation-states and their relationship with different ethnic groups? In other words, did the crisis tend to bolster or undermine the states' attempts to legitimise themselves? And, importantly, did it radically alter senses of ethnicity amongst Uzbeks and Kyrgyz living within Kyrgyzstan?

For Kyrgyz, 82.5% of whom did not have relatives in Kyrgyzstan,<sup>307</sup> the border crisis made the experience of crossing through Uzbekistan to get to other parts of their country an unpleasant one to be avoided if possible. A Kyrgyz participant in FG10 told her group that she had not returned to Uzbekistan since being thoroughly and repeatedly searched on her last visit. "We don't like to go through borders because they are disruptive, when the customs officers search us." Another female Kyrgyz in her group said that after being stopped and fined by an Uzbekistani border officer, "now we don't go through Uzbekistan - even if they invite us, even if they request us, we will never go. I would rather go through the mountains than Uzbekistan."

Whilst many Kyrgyz might be able to decide to avoid Uzbekistan wherever possible and take longer routes to get around the Valley, the border crisis raised far deeper existential questions about belonging for Osh Uzbeks. The experience of being turned away or treated with suspicion or humiliated at the border by people of the same *millat* (nation, ethnicity) was generally traumatic for Uzbeks. An Uzbek participant of FG14 told us that some of their relatives were thinking of moving to Uzbekistan, but were put off by the experience of others who had moved and were still disparagingly called 'Kyrgyzstanis.' This sense of exclusion was chilling, and

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<sup>307</sup> Figure excluding participants of FG12&13, who do not originate from the Valley but an adjacent area (Alay). If they are included, the figure rises to 88%.

was reinforced by the experience of crossing the border: "It makes you not want to go to Uzbekistan," said Anny (FG6, Uzbek), "Isn't that the plan?"

However, the border crisis meant more than just crossing a frontier; it was symptomatic of a broader process of disengagement and differentiation between the two countries. In each of two Uzbek focus groups I ran there was one vocal Uzbekistani Uzbek, who strongly supported Uzbekistan's actions (Muzaffar in FG8, and Elip in FG14). Kyrgyzstani Uzbek members of the group argued with them, and at times the debate became very fierce. Elip engaged in a furious argument with Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks in FG14 about the relative development strategies of their respective countries. This became quite personal; Farhod infuriated Muzaffar by insisting that Kyrgyzstan was more democratic and Uzbekistan totalitarian, resulting in the consciousness of the young being lower in Uzbekistan than Kyrgyzstan. This illustrates not only a sense of difference, but of positive identification with Kyrgyzstan and national pride, and is a clear expression of divergence from Uzbekistan. The phrase, 'in Kyrgyzstan the state is poor and the people rich, whilst in Uzbekistan the state is rich but the people are poor', was consistently repeated by both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. It suggests an acknowledgement that Uzbekistan was making better state-led economic progress than Kyrgyzstan in opening new factories and maintaining the infrastructure, yet at the same time there were economic advantages to being Kyrgyzstani, such as a greater availability of land and less government interference in its use.

Two conversations I had with young Kyrgyzstani Uzbek intellectuals aged in their late 20s furnish similar examples of this sentiment. One from Jalal-Abad told me that from the 1990 events to the middle of the decade he felt under pressure as an Uzbek. However, as relations had slowly mended and Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan had seen that they enjoyed more economic and personal freedoms than those over the border, he detected a growing confidence. On another occasion I discussed the relative merits of Islam Karimov's regime over lunch with an *O'shlik*.<sup>308</sup> After defending Karimov robustly (in the way that Liu describes), he leaned back and admitted candidly, "Having said all that, Nick, I know that if we lived in Uzbekistan me and all of our friends would be dead or in jail."

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<sup>308</sup> (Uzbek) - resident of Osh

This articulation of the advantages of life in Kyrgyzstan did not receive universal consent and was balanced with an awareness of disadvantages. Nevertheless, it was widespread and does indicate something of a desire to be part of the new state. It supports the findings of the survey done by Elebayeva, Omuraliev and Abazov (2000) that, whilst yielding somewhat ambiguous results, suggested that most people accepted the reality of living in Kyrgyzstan. Dilshot (FG7, Uzbek) reminded his compatriots that Kyrgyzstan is a new country, and even the USA took 200 years to develop. "We shouldn't criticise our homeland,<sup>309</sup> it is wrong to be so negative. We ought to try, rather, to work hard for it, no good will come simply by listing off its faults," he exhorted them. Contrasting these views with those of older people I have spoken to over the years, there would, unsurprisingly, seem to be a greater acceptance of the division between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan amongst younger Uzbeks than older ones, who remember the Soviet times and probably studied in Uzbekistan. The same was true for Kyrgyz.

This leads to two conclusions. Firstly, it reinforces the above argument of the importance of age and generation in constituting geopolitical visions, rather than their being uniform ascriptive qualities of some given 'ethnicity.' Secondly, the border crisis has forced Uzbeks to confront the reality of the division of two states for the first time. Rather than increasing ethnic tensions, this may actually have the opposite effect of forcing them to seek to establish a future for themselves in Kyrgyzstan, of seeking participatory 'voice' rather than 'exit', in the formulation of political scientists. As one Kyrgyz parliamentarian said to me informally, 'The border dispute is actually a very good thing - it has made our Uzbeks realise they belong with us, as Uzbekistan doesn't want them.'

It is even possible that the border crisis might open spaces for new forms of identification that could cut across ethnic divisions. For example, participants from all ethnic backgrounds shared the view that Kyrgyzstan was more democratic than Uzbekistan. Nigena (FG17, Tajik) noticed the difference: "In our country I can speak my mind freely, but after crossing over into Uzbekistan it's not wise to talk about the president etc." One Kyrgyz person in FG5 thought that the creation of a confederation, though desirable, would be unlikely because of different trajectories being followed: under Islam Karimov Uzbekistan is totalitarian, whilst people in

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<sup>309</sup> *vatan*

Kyrgyzstan are free to criticise the government. Farhod (FG8, Uzbek) agreed; because you cannot speak your mind in Uzbekistan, the consciousness level of the youth there is lower than in Kyrgyzstan. Although no one used the expression, it surely warrants allusions to Askar Akaev's definition of Kyrgyzstan as Central Asia's 'island of democracy.' This would perhaps allow the possibility of the emergence of a civic nationalism (instead of an ethnic nationalism) that could work to undermine ethnic tension. However, the undemocratic moves that accompanied the run-up to the elections (see page 157) and subsequent attacks on opposition parties and press have undermined that potential.

If time allowed towards the end of each focus group, I used my own example to ask a final question of the participants about their geopolitical visions. I told them that if I went to Uzbekistan, I was treated as a foreigner, and a visa was demanded of me; I then asked them if *they* considered themselves foreigners in Uzbekistan. The responses, across all ethnic groups, were remarkably similar- they *were* technically foreigners, but felt it to varying degrees, and still considered that they were in a different category from mine. A Kyrgyz female participant of FG15 said that her relatives in Uzbekistan tease her by joking, "Our relatives laugh and say, 'ah, we have guests from a foreign country!'" Dilshot (FG7, Uzbek) expressed identical sentiments to hers when she said that I indeed ought to be required to need a visa, but they shouldn't, "because England is far away, but Uzbekistan is here." Many students joked about the idea that they were foreigners as I was; it was both something too ridiculous to believe, yet at the same time a horrible reality already beginning to impinge upon their lives. For some, exclusion and discrimination experienced in Uzbekistan reinforced the sense of being foreign there. Nigena (FG17, Tajik) shared her experience that "If people ask where we are from and we tell them 'Kyrgyzstan,' they look at us with suspicion. Therefore when I go there I feel like a foreigner. I didn't use to, but do now." Various groups accepted their identities were in flux, agreeing that although they didn't feel like foreigners, they knew that in fact they were, and accepted that they may well come to feel as such in the future. For some, it was hard to put their fingers exactly on what made the states different, but they were now. A Tajik female in FG16 replied to my question about whether they considered themselves foreigners:

No, we don't regard ourselves as that, but they are different countries now - but the differences can be felt. [I ask what he meant] Well, before-, but now if you go, well, Uzbekistan does things *differently* to Kyrgyzstan.

### **Morgan Liu on the response of the Uzbek minority**

I have already referred above (p.239) to Morgan Liu's work on the response of Osh Uzbek men to the border closures, and here will examine it in more detail, as it is the most sophisticated analysis yet undertaken of ethnicity and the border question (Liu 2002). Liu spent 6 weeks in the summer of 1999 in Osh, revisiting the mahallas where he had conducted ethnographic research in 1997-98. He described the border closures as forcing Osh Uzbeks to recognise their own predicament in a nation-state system where they felt welcome in neither Uzbekistan nor Kyrgyzstan, a conclusion that I too reached in my research (chapter 4).

Liu suggests that Uzbeks resolve this contradiction by defining their sense of place in the political landscape primarily with regard to their relations of allegiance to legitimate authority embodied in particular figures, rather than thinking in terms of nation-states. At the local level, this happens in respect of elders in the dense *mahalla* neighbourhood networks. At the national level, Osh Uzbeks see in Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov a figure in the classical Uzbek khan ideal. Thus they refuse to criticise his closure of the border, even though it brings harm upon themselves. Liu argues that his informants justified the closure as a struggle against terrorism, reworking the sequence of events into a popular meta-narrative of a decisive Karimov taking necessary crisis measures.<sup>310</sup>

Liu's work enables him to engage with what he considers as the flaws in Brubaker's theory of foreign policy in post-Soviet (and other) states, driven around a dynamic triangle of minorities, newly nationalising states, and external homelands (Brubaker 1996). Liu argues that Osh Uzbeks lack a concept of minority rights as they accept that Kyrgyzstan is a state ruled by Kyrgyz clans and, as the border closure brutally demonstrated, Uzbekistan has shown no interest in being an 'ethnic patron.' For Liu, Brubaker's model is flawed because it posits nation-states as the primary actors and operates within a nation-state framework of understanding ethnic minorities. Liu is also able to dismiss as unfounded the claim sometimes made that Islam Karimov is

interested in supporting Uzbeks in Osh; he clearly has not been, whatever the rhetoric, and none are as painfully aware of this as the Osh Uzbeks with whom Liu lived (Liu 2002: 58). My own findings in this dissertation fully support that argument.

However, my results contradict Liu's generalisations that Osh Uzbeks declined to criticise the border policies of Islam Karimov and refused to believe that he made the infamous '5000 loaves of bread' comment (see p.45). Uzbeks, like Kyrgyz and Tajiks, universally acknowledged that Karimov made the remarks and, with the exception of two Uzbekistani students backing Karimov (Elip and Muzaffar) and a pro-Karimov Tajik student in FG17 (Nigena), universally believed they were wrong. Just as the Kyrgyz groups did, the Uzbeks said that it is Uzbekistanis who are coming to Osh to trade and sell, rather than the other way round. On the contrary, the strong sense of personal rejection and insult which some Uzbeks felt at Karimov's remarks only added to the vehemence of their denunciations. On top of this, I was in Osh when Karimov made the remarks, watched them on television with an Uzbek family, and remember them quickly becoming the talk of the town in Uzbek circles. What could explain this discrepancy?

I suspect that the answer is that Liu used, spatially and temporally, too restricted a sample to be able to make more general claims. Some peculiarity of the neighbourhood on which he based his findings may explain his results. For example, he referred to a man named Tolib who actively worked to scotch the story that Islam Karimov made those comments, and maybe this man's propaganda was successful, but only in that small mahalla, not Osh or Southern Kyrgyzstan in general. Perhaps no one saw Karimov's words on the television, because there was a localised power-cut or an important neighbourhood gathering at the time of the broadcast that caused everyone to miss it. Whatever the explanation, this example shows that 'ethnicity' is not a given and determining political position, but that the meaning of 'Uzbekness' is shifting and fragile, differing over space even within the same town.

These two examples highlight the classic dilemma of anthropology: that detailed ethnographic work in a small community is able to question the universal applicability of a general theory, but is ill-equipped, by itself, to propose one. Liu's theories about the mahalla as a field of power that structures responses to the nation-state are compelling and important, but it would be a mistake to confuse one moment in a

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<sup>310</sup> It will be recalled from chapter 1 (p.45) that the border closures began *before* the Tashkent bombs of February 1999. I also frequently found that this order was reversed in popular memory.

small neighbourhood of Osh for a more stable element of Uzbekness in southern Kyrgyzstan. Had he conducted research in other parts of the city or Valley at the same time, I believe he would have modified his views. Furthermore, he takes no account of Kyrgyz perspectives. As I have shown in this chapter, the views about the border closures held by Kyrgyz and Uzbeks often had much in common. For example, broadly speaking both were critical of Uzbekistan for closing the borders, but both accepted the need for the preservation of security, and indicated a measure of respect for Islam Karimov. Commonly, Kyrgyz as well as Uzbeks reversed the sequence of events of the border closures, forgetting that they began *before* the Tashkent bombs. Thus this cannot simply be explained as Uzbek senses of authority learnt in the mahalla. In overlooking this, Liu risks exoticising and essentialising the Uzbeks, portraying them as entirely different to Kyrgyz and loyal not to their own state but to Uzbekistan's president. Although not usually finally responsible for the way in which their research is used or abused, scholars need to take into careful consideration the possibility that their writings might be wilfully misconstrued by nationalistic political factions within Kyrgyzstan.

## **PART V: CONCLUSION**

This chapter concludes the process began in the previous one of understanding the border crisis from the perspective of those living in southern Kyrgyzstan. However, the purpose was not to catalogue different reactions outside of a political context, but address pressing policy questions. Many observers would agree with Fane that, since the 1990 Osh incidents, "tensions continue to smoulder" (Fane 1996: 275) and McGlinchey and Babakulov (above, pp.212 & 242 respectively) that the border crisis could so fan these smouldering embers that they burst into flames. This chapter has attempted to assess these claims.

Much literature on Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan suggests that 'ethnicity' is tangible and that ancient or enduring ethnic cleavages determine political conflict in contemporary Central Asia (for example, Büyükakinci 2000). This conception of ethnicity has been comprehensively discussed and dismissed by writers such as Bichel (1997) and Schoeberlein-Engel (1994). However, as the 1990 Uzbek-Kyrgyz conflict



demonstrated, ethnicity cannot simply be explained away. Schoeberlein's own biography exemplifies this incongruity; whilst questioning the very validity of separate terms such as 'Uzbek' and 'Tajik' in his academic work (*ibid.*), projects in which he has played a key consultative role, such as the UN Ferghana Valley Development Programme and the International Crisis Group's work on Central Asia, depend on the pragmatic use of these terms.

The question of how to study 'ethnic conflict' thus poses a dilemma. As Eriksen wrote, "The choice of an analytical perspective or 'research hypothesis' is not an innocent act. If one goes out to look for ethnicity, one will 'find' it and thereby contribute to constructing it" (Eriksen 1993: 161). This can become a self-fulfilling prophecy, especially when it informs policy: Alimov argues that the superficial reporting of the alleged problems of non-nationals in Uzbekistan only aggravates discontent (Alimov 1994: 232).

Two imaginative responses that advance the general field are provided by Liu and also Vaux and Goodhand. Liu's detailed ethnography of sense of place in an Uzbek mahalla in Osh (above, p.250) demonstrates the importance of ethnographic insights, yet also highlights their inadequacy in explaining macro-scale processes without reference to more general theories and comparative empirical work.

Goodhand and Vaux's study of the relationship between conflict and foreign aid in southern Kyrgyzstan is a positive break with the repetitive and deterministic speculation on 'ethnic conflict' that has formed the bulk of the literature on this theme. Although brief, it is informed by empirical research. Whilst they acknowledge that tensions between Bishkek and Tashkent over the border could lead to ethnic minorities being alienated and targeted in the Ferghana Valley (Vaux and Goodhand 2001: 8), they do not believe that this is an inevitable outcome (*ibid.*: 24). Rather, they focus on the role that foreign 'aid' programmes have played in unwittingly exacerbating tensions, and the potential that ideologically driven economic restructuring programmes have had for creating social unrest by further impoverishing the population.

This dissertation is my own response to this dilemma, using a variety of methods to examine the border crisis as an explicitly non-ethnic issue in order to understand the meaning and relative importance of ethnicity in a concrete situation. This chapter has argued that ethnicity is not a simple attribute of an individual that can be read off like sex or hair-colour; nor is it a 'thing' about which correct answers can be uncovered

with abstract questions. Rather, it is part of a complicated cultural, social and political process that must always be studied in a context. In this chapter, that context has been the 1999-2000 border crisis, and the way I studied it was through focus groups as they are more sensitive to emic categories of knowledge (Goss and Leinbach 1996: 117). The focus group method enabled me to study 'ethnicity' without ever explicitly asking about it and thereby defining the terms of answers. My results showed just how intricate and dynamic a process ethnicity is. Kinship, class, age and even location constituted ethnic responses to the crisis. Religion and gender played lesser, referential roles. Kyrgyz and Uzbek responses across a broad range of issues showed remarkable similarities. Both accepted that Uzbekistan had a right to defend its interests, but, contradictorily, both had suffered greatly from the border regime and opposed it. Both were more concerned about impediments to transport, travel, border crossings and earning livelihoods than the abstract geopolitical visions of elites.

Crucially, both framed geopolitical visions from notions of Uzbekness or Kyrgyzness that sprang from very similar conceptions of the duties and responsibilities of everyday kinship practices. Uzbeks prioritised these over the institution of international boundaries, rejecting Islam Karimov's attempt to claim a territorial monopoly of Uzbekness coterminous with the borders of the state of Uzbekistan. Likewise, Kyrgyz were not prepared to accept their elites' nationalistic conflation of state and territory with Kyrgyzness and the people. Not only did this alienate them from their kinsfolk in Uzbekistan, but through independence the *chongdor* had seized the wealth of the common people and abrogated their kinship duties to past forefathers and future descendants. What is more, borders were impoverishing present-day Kyrgyz and widening social divisions within the nation. The good of the people had been sacrificed by wayward *chongdor*, government and opposition, for their own ends.

Both Kyrgyz and Uzbek were convinced that corruption and mismanagement by *chongdor* had wrought untold misery on the people. Far from believing that ethnic conflict sprang from age-old hatreds, both Uzbeks and Kyrgyz held to a sense of primordial unity and interest of their peoples located in common Turkic or Islamic mythology. The *chongdor* or *kattalar*, the wealthy and ruling classes, had created nationalism by setting the ordinary working people against each other in their thirst for the power and wealth that they obtained through access to resources available as a

result of independent statehood. Borders were despised both for the actual suffering and inconvenience they caused and as symbols of state independence.

This does not mean that this is the only conceivable or most correct definition of Kyrgyzzness or Uzbekness. On the contrary, it is highly contextual. In other situations these categories can be imbued with radically different meanings, arousing intense hatreds and fears flagging stereotypes and collective memories of trauma, abuse and suspicion. Nationalist politicians and media can fan and intensify such feelings, creating and manipulating nationalist sentiments for their own ends. To understand ethnicity as a contested process with fragile and shifting meanings does not in any way negate its potential to form the basis of cataclysmic and destructive divisions.

However, 'ethnic conflict' will not be ameliorated or avoided in Kyrgyzstan purely through the implementation of poverty alleviation schemes, or by encouraging or cajoling the government to address questions of social exclusion, vital though this work is. Nor does its occurrence depend, *contra* Naumkin (1994: 204), on "the manner and direction of the world community and international relations", although the policies of other states could indeed exacerbate or ameliorate domestic tensions. 'Ethnic conflict' is not a species of natural disaster that occurs when certain environmental conditions have been met. It rather arises within conditions of power struggle located in particular social formations discursively constructed in relation to contested definitions of the nation, against material conditions of poverty and deprivation accentuated by existential fears for future security. As many examples in 2002 of far-right election successes in Europe and a massive outburst of aggression against Muslim and Middle Eastern-looking people across the USA following Al-Qaeda strikes against military and commercial targets in September 2001 demonstrate, no democracy is immune from racism and xenophobia. (Indeed, Western states are on shaky moral ground when it comes to lecturing Central Asians on these matters.) These examples highlight the fact that ethnic tensions arise within contexts of the xenophobic reporting of issues such as immigration in national media, their exploitation and mishandling by mainstream political parties, and negative stereotyping of ethnic and religious 'others' in popular and political culture.

My findings about the nature of ethnicity in the context of the border crisis open the possibility of another approach. By framing a political message that emphasises these common concerns, and addressing it to Uzbek and Tajik as well as Kyrgyz people, a powerful democratic force could be developed, built upon genuine concerns

and fostering unity between peoples of different ethnic backgrounds, rather than dividing them on abstract geopolitical visions. As Osh Uzbeks have been forced to confront the fact that they are excluded from Uzbekistan, and that if they want to belong anywhere, it must be in Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz opposition has been forced by defeat in the 2000 presidential election to take stock of its position. For both of these reasons, it may be that the time is right for the development of a new, popular political discourse that can unite people of all ethnic groups in Southern Kyrgyzstan on the grounds of genuine common interest.

I wrote in chapter 3 that post-Marxism reformulated the term 'class' from a single, enduring category that formed a given basis for political formation, to an 'empty signifier', whose meaning was under constant negotiation and contestation in the play of politics and open to redefinition by different groups (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). When the notion of 'people' in Kyrgyzstan is seen as an 'empty signifier,' open to multiple interpretations, an opportunity is opened to imbue *el/xalq* with a new meaning, that could form the basis of a progressive, inclusive, democratic politics.

That new definition, a fresh reworking of existing notions, would have the potential to unite different ethnic groups and alleviate ethnic tension. This cannot merely be a 'discursive strategy' of the intellectual. It would have to be an extra-discursive commitment to political activism, including a leadership beyond reproach, and would take women and men of integrity, courage and vision who can win the respect of the impoverished and sceptical of the Ferghana Valley. The time is right, as never before, for such a movement to emerge. Thus, rather than being a harbinger of conflict as the prophets of doom have warned, both hope and reconciliation could emerge from the emotional carnage of the 1999-2000 border dispute.

# CONCLUSION

## **The borders of eternal friendship?**

In May 2000, as the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan border became etched evermore clearly on the topography of the Ferghana Valley and the mental landscapes of its inhabitants, India's Lara Dutta was crowned 'Miss Universe' in Cyprus. This surreal juxtaposition of violent cartographies of impoverishment and immiseration, alongside the commercialisation of the pampered bodies of rich women, illustrates the absurdity of naïve forms of the 'borderless world' globalisation thesis. Nevertheless, Ms Dutta made a comment apt both for the venue and her homeland: "There may be lines and boundaries drawn on the ground separating one country from another, but we do not have to have them in our head."<sup>311</sup>

This dissertation has been about the actualisation of those legal lines in the Ferghana Valley from 1998 onwards, but especially in 1999 and 2000. The international boundaries that had hitherto existed largely on paper became inscribed onto the landscape in a network of fences, control posts, demolished bridges and security checkpoints. These material realities dramatically impinged on the lives of borderland folk, but also became discursive realities for the entire populations of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. It was not until this moment that most border dwellers practically grasped the nature of the formal political division of the Valley into truly separate states.

These traumatic events did not follow naturally from the geography of badly-or cunningly-drawn Soviet borders and unevenly distributed natural resources, although the importance of these in framing the issue is not denied. Nor can political economy alone account for the precise course and intensity of these debates, nor even their acquisition of the label 'dispute.' It is true that Uzbekistan's tighter control of its borders was precipitated by the increasingly divergent macro-economic policies followed by Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, with Uzbekistan shielding its more controlled economy from the freer-market policies of Kyrgyzstan. However, the

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<sup>311</sup> *Foreign Policy*, Nov/Dec 2000, p15.

reaction of competing factions of the Kyrgyz elite, and the symbolic importance that 'the border question' assumed in both lands, resists any attempt to reduce explanations of the events of 1999 and 2000 to economics alone. Neither was there a separate logic of 'independence' that inexorably propelled the two states into conflict, although the attainment of sovereign statehood was certainly a prerequisite for these border disputes. Still less did some extraneous force known as 'ethnicity' revive ancient hatreds or generate new ones. Rather, 'the border' crisis, in the form witnessed in 1999 and 2000, was the product of the interaction of power struggles within each state. For Uzbekistan, 'the border' became a key point in defining a political identity for the state that served to legitimise the nation-state building project under the direction of President Islam Karimov. As Uzbekistan increasingly fortified and controlled its border, the nationalistic opposition in Kyrgyzstan seized upon this as a vector to present its vision of Kyrgyzstan and attack the government, in an important election year. In turn, the government of President Askar Akaev responded by using the border to articulate and frame contradictory and alternative geopolitical visions. Thus the 'border question' was thoroughly political from start to finish, and cannot be understood apart from the intersection of domestic power struggles within two states marked by different post-socialist trajectories of nationalism.

The foreign policies of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan towards each other cannot merely be read off an already existing geography, a set of pre-given needs and interests, or responses to external threats. Rather, 'needs', 'interests' and 'threats' require interpretation as such and judgements made about their relative importance. These multiple and ongoing acts of interpretation drew metaphorical lines dividing 'us' from 'them', constituting a sense of the political identity of the new states that in turn affected foreign policy.

This dissertation does not set 'discourse' against 'reality.' Notions of political identity are inseparable from material conditions of power struggles (including the resources to construct edifices of state control), the two continually reconstituting each other. Askar Akaev's government initially seemed happy to all but ignore Uzbekistan's border policies. The notion of a 'border conflict' or 'border question' arose as certain elements of the nationalistic parliamentary opposition (a phenomenon entirely absent in Uzbekistan) assigned a particular interpretation to the meaning of the border, discursively constructing it as a key issue in their fierce campaign against

the government. Indeed, the very term 'border question' itself gained currency only through the discursive strategies of the opposition and its associated press.

At the heart of these struggles were ideological definitions of *the nation*, definitions that were articulated with regard to notions of 'the border.' All elite parties accepted that 'the nation' had ultimate value, and struggled both to define it and position themselves as its true defenders. I have not studied what the nation 'is', but rather the role that ideas about it play in the political economy of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

At the same time, the definitions of 'the nation' that elites employed in their political discourse were widely contested by borderland folk, both discursively and materially through transgression of the border regime. For many of them, the everyday sense of the space of 'the nation' was coterminous not with the territorial state, but with those places over which active kinship networks and ancestral obligations operated. It was this sense of 'Kyrgyzness' or 'Uzbekness' that was at odds with elite attempts to map them as coterminous with the modern territorial state. 'Ethnicity' was not a given category inexorably dividing peoples and determining action and geopolitical visions, or a substantial quality that adhered to individuals and was open to simple and explicit uncovering, but rather a malleable subject position partially constituted by class, age, gender and geography. The 'border crisis' was thus a form of geographical knowledge that was also a coercive strategy of control. This sought to map an ideological vision of the organisation of post-Soviet space as national over the complicated geopolitical visions of borderland dwellers that were structured by inherited Soviet imaginaries and kinship networks.

### **Disciplinary and methodological contributions**

As well as contributing towards an understanding of the meaning of nationalism, ethnicity and borders in the Ferghana Valley, I hope that this dissertation will be of particular interest to political geographers. It has argued that a number of theoretical developments over the past two decades have equipped human geography with a powerful range of tools to return to and re-examine one of the discipline's most neglected roots, the study of international borders. It has attempted to augment the pioneering work of Paasi with a more rigorous ethnographic element drawn from

anthropological and other social sciences. The sensitivity of human geography to the social construction of space and its use in political conflict (otherwise known as ‘territoriality’) provides a positive corrective to the under-theorised tendency to produce deterministic accounts of Central Asian societies and their interaction, and can be usefully appropriated by both geographers and non-geographers alike.

It is my hope that this work will inform the engagement of anthropologists and other ethnographers with questions of the meaning of the post-socialist state in the lives of everyday Ferghana Valley inhabitants. Between them, Liu (2002) and Rasanayagam (2002) have provided compelling and sophisticated accounts of this for small communities either side of the Osh/Andijon border, and this dissertation contributes to the task of assembling examples of the fragmentary and variable experience of the state in everyday life. Further detailed studies across different social groupings are required. However, both Liu and Rasanayagam claim to assess local understandings of official discourse, yet both pay only cursory attention to that discourse in taking it at face value, rather than exploring the subtleties of meaning and emphasis in concrete situations. By attempting the task of discourse analysis alongside an ethnography of its ‘consumption’, this dissertation argues that the two scales ought not be divorced and provides an effort to achieve that.

Furthermore, this work questions the usefulness of the ideological concepts of ‘democracy’, ‘civil society’ and ‘authoritarianism’ as frameworks for constructing sensitive accounts of actually existing Central Asian political cultures. Mandel has shown that attempts by US and European governments to build ‘civil society’ in Kazakhstan using conceptions imported from the donor states have failed due to false assumptions about post-socialist society (Mandel 2002). Likewise, when structured around the tropes of ‘transitology’, academic accounts of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan generally fail to provide sophisticated depictions. Rather, this study suggests that ideas of ‘the nation’ are crucial to political discourse and require explication in their own terms.

After Jaspers (1997 (1913)), and like Paasi (1999), this study advocates the use of a plurality of research methods and forms of theorisation to achieve an integrated analysis over a range of spatial scales. Whilst acknowledging their power, this dissertation has argued that explanatory frameworks such as political economy, power politics or Foucauldian critical IR/geopolitics are in themselves insufficient to account for the human responses to the border crisis. The dissatisfaction with the dominance



of this last approach in human geography has driven much of the interest in theories of ‘embodiment’ and ‘performativity’, but these tend to be poorly worked out and often revert to a form of the social constructionism that they explicitly disavow. A poststructuralism that assumes ‘identity’ is an efficacious force yet leaves it as an under-theorised ‘black box’ is strangely inconsistent. Rather, this study suggests that theoretical approaches informed by such diverse philosophies as humanistic phenomenology, existentialism and possibly psychotherapy are needed to augment our understandings of political change in Central Asia, particularly when it has traumatic implications on local populations.

Kandiyoti is rightly critical of the superficiality of the macro-scale studies of identity and nationalities policy that have preoccupied the literature on Central Asia, and advocates instead the use of “painstaking ethnography” (Kandiyoti 2002: 240), an argument that has closely informed this research. However, her suggestion that this should be replaced by ethnography of the functioning of economic institutions and their local manifestations is unnecessarily constrictive. Here I have followed Verdery in locating ethnographic studies of postsocialism alongside Foucauldian post-colonial theory, explicating *practices of domination* such as manipulations of time and space, the inscription of the state system on the bodies of its subjects, and discursive organisations of the world through constructions of images and knowledge about it (Verdery 2002: 17).

### **Directions for future research**

This dissertation, like any study, opens up many more lines of enquiry than it has been able to pursue. Perhaps its most significant shortcoming is in the analysis of the political processes of decision-making in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan; where, when, how and why decisions were taken to put up fences and introduce visa regimes. I accept that discourse can mask as well as reveal intentions. Although I conducted a number of interviews with administrators and officials at the local and regional level, I was hesitant about engaging too closely with governments for the reasons highlighted on page 59. However, against this objection, I would weigh the consideration that even a comprehensive series of interviews with different political

actors could easily miss important considerations, deals and struggles known only to a select few.

Secondly, it suggests that a systematic analysis of the economic impacts of the border crisis and its effects on trans-frontier economic activity would be of substantial help in comprehending socio-economic processes in each of the three Ferghana Valley states. Kandiyoti found that the Andijon farmers with whom she worked were substantially dependent upon sales of rice, and preferred to sell it in Kyrgyzstan where it fetched a higher price (Kandiyoti 1998: 568).<sup>312</sup> If the border closures are increasing hardship levels in Uzbekistan, certain segments of the population may become more politically radicalised (Ilkhamov 2001). At the same time, the opportunity for smugglers and officials to enrich themselves as a result of the tightened border controls may strengthen the government's support base amongst other sectors of society.

Thirdly, this work hints that more detailed investigation of the regional scale, that is, the role of oblast administrations in the Ferghana Valley and their relationship to each other and the centre, could further enhance future research. This is markedly different in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: Kyrgyzstani local and regional government officials told me of their frustration at the difficulty of dealing with their Uzbekistani counterparts in handling cross-border issues, as they need to seek approval and instruction from Tashkent on issues over which Kyrgyzstani officials are allowed greater degree of initiative. Similarly, this research has not explored the role of the supposed North-South divide in Kyrgyzstan, and of regional clan struggles in Uzbekistan, both of which possibly effect the equation.

Fouthly, work is still to be done on the politics of the Uzbek minority in Osh in the context of national and international debates and struggles. Although I collected some material, space did not allow for its inclusion, and I was also influenced by the caution with which Uzbek informants approached this subject. Nonetheless, disputes over who is the legitimate voice of the Osh Uzbeks were played out in the newspaper coverage of the border question and the connected issue of Osh Uzbeks' relation to

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<sup>312</sup> Similarly, I repeatedly encountered anecdotal evidence that fewer Uzbekistani flocks and herds are taken to the Kyrgyzstani mountains for summer pasture. I was, however, unable to obtain accurate information about exactly what happens to them instead, and the impact this has on profitability, productivity, and social organisation.

Uzbekistan.<sup>313</sup> Such a study would profitably add to an understanding of modern Kyrgyzstan and would have significant utility for policy-makers, yet at the same time ought not to be undertaken lightly, as it is unlikely that it would be seen as neutral by either Uzbeks or Kyrgyz, and could create or exacerbate tensions and rivalries.

Finally, this report has drawn attention to the paucity of material on not only the Soviet Union's international borders, but also about inter-republican borders throughout the Union and in this case their role in relations between states of the Ferghana Valley before 1991. Whilst Hirsch (1998) and Koichiev (2001b)<sup>314</sup> have begun the process of archival research for the 1920s demarcation, the period between 1927 and 1991 is extremely poorly understood. A clearer understanding of exchanges, relationships and co-operation and conflicts during this period would enable a better comprehension of post-Soviet relations between Ferghana Valley states, and their impact on local populations and political constellations. This would not merely entail factual accounts of border delimitation discussions, but a fuller appreciation of the discursive role of the republican borders, and practices of control and management by those bodies that inherited responsibility for them in the post-Soviet era.

### **Final remarks**

In spite of these limitations, I hope that this research will contribute not only to an understanding of the 1999-2000 border disputes, but to the general field of Central Asian studies. This study is in many ways a gloomy one. It has uncovered the trauma of those most effected by elite attempts to discipline the complicated social geography of the Ferghana Valley by mapping onto it the closed and exclusive boundaries of the modern national state. It has highlighted the power of the discursive construction of threat to animate and terrify populations. It has described the abdication of political responsibility in the relegation of the interests of states', literally marginal populations, and it has hinted at the general failure of intellectuals, scholars and

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<sup>313</sup> For example, the deputies Davron Sabirov and Mahamadjon Mamasaidov, who presided over different (and many would consider rival) Uzbek cultural organisations, held conflicting views on whether Osh Uzbek schools ought to switch to Uzbekistan's new Latin script. In 1999-2000 Sabirov argued, through his own newspaper *Mezon*, that the Osh Uzbeks ought to make the switch, whereas Mamasaidov (a former doctoral supervisee of Askar Akaev's and his staunch political supporter) promoted the production of new textbooks in Cyrillic script for Kyrgyzstani Uzbek schools, a position sometimes expressed in the state newspaper, *O'sh Sadosi*.

<sup>314</sup> I point the reader to this text on the recommendation of others; as I do not know Russian, I do not claim to have read it.

professionals, both internal and external to the region, adequately to question these tendencies. However, this work also detects two possibilities of hope.

Firstly, this work has highlighted a gulf between elite and popular geopolitical visions of the post-Soviet Ferghana Valley. It echoes the conclusions that Schoeberlein-Engel drew for Tajiks in Samarkand: he denied that that the region was an 'ethnic powder keg' waiting to explode, but warned that Uzbekistan's policy of nation-building risked enforcing a particular exclusionary and discriminatory notion of Uzbekness on minorities that, combined with economic stress, could allow demagogues to flourish (Schoeberlein-Engel 1996: 19-20). In southern Kyrgyzstan the gulf between popular and elite geopolitical visions is a space that elites attempted to collapse by writing their accounts as the true ones. In collapsing it they risk alienating ethnic minorities and damaging the livelihoods of large sectors of the rural poor, sowing the seeds of future conflict. However, 'ethnic conflict' is not an inevitable feature of the Ferghana Valley landscape. This very space also opens the possibility of new, inclusive forms of demos-politics that emphasise the common inter- and intra-state 'class' interests of Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik populations who have experienced hardship as a result of the border crisis and the project of independence in general. The outcome of this process is, to a large extent, in the hands of local populations, and particularly their political elites.

The second hope is found in *geography*. Unlike most accounts, this study has emphasised the central importance of geography to the politics of nationalism in post-socialist Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. With Shapiro, it has argued that rather than being an exogenous 'explanatory variable' from which conflicts can be predicted (and thus legitimised as rational), it is a primary part of the ontology of the new nation states, implicated in how they locate themselves in the world and how they rehearse and perform meanings of self and other (Shapiro 1997: xi). Shapiro's vision is dark: for him, "Geography is inextricably linked to the architecture of enmity." However, this dissertation has shown that whilst geography is key to articulations of threat, danger and aggression, it is also the case that spatial notions such as 'Kyrgyzstan', 'Central Asia' or 'the Silk Road' can be vehicles for expressing geopolitical visions of inter-dependence, harmony and co-operation between Central Asian states.<sup>315</sup> It is exactly this vision of geography as a discipline that motivated the great Russian

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<sup>315</sup> See Megoran 2000c for a tentative attempt at this, in relation to the Osh 3000 celebrations.

practitioner of the subject, Prince Kropotkin, with whose fitting words I draw this study to a close:

In our time of wars, of national self-conceit, of national jealousies and hatreds ably nourished by people who pursue their own egotistic, personal or class interests, geography must be - in so far as the school may do anything to counterbalance hostile influences - a means of dissipating these prejudices and of creating other feelings more worthy of humanity (Kropotkin 1885: 942).

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## APPENDIX 1: Transliteration Tables and Terminology

### Transliteration Tables

#### 1: Uzbek

Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin
<b>Aa</b>	Aa	<b>Kk</b>	Kk	<b>Xx</b>	Xx
<b>Bb</b>	Bb	<b>Ll</b>	Ll	<b>Cc</b>	S s
<b>Vv</b>	Vv	<b>Mm</b>	Mm	<b>Hh</b>	Ch ch
<b>Gg</b>	Gg	<b>Nn</b>	Nn	<b>Ww</b>	Sh sh
<b>Dd</b>	Dd	<b>Oo</b>	Oo	<b>?/</b>	Ee
<b>Ee</b>	Ye ye	<b>Pp</b>	Pp	<b>{ [</b>	Yu yu
<b>  \</b>	Yo yo	<b>Rr</b>	Rr	<b>Qq</b>	Ya ya
<b>" '</b>	Jj	<b>Ss</b>	Ss	<b>ë¬</b>	O'o'
<b>Zz</b>	Zz	<b>Tt</b>	Tt	<b>â¼</b>	Qq
<b>Ii</b>	Ii	<b>Uu</b>	Uu	<b>ëé</b>	G'g'
<b>Jj</b>	Yy	<b>Ff</b>	Ff	<b>ôÅ</b>	Hh

Following Tog'ayev *et al* (1996), “ + ” is rendered as “ ‘ ” whilst “ : ” is deleted.

#### 2: Kyrgyz

Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin	Cyrillic	Latin
<b>Aa</b>	Aa	<b>Kk</b>	Kk	<b>Uu</b>	Uu
<b>Bb</b>	Bb	<b>Ll</b>	Ll	<b>ç´</b>	Üü
<b>Vv</b>	Vv	<b>Mm</b>	Mm	<b>Ff</b>	Ff
<b>Gg</b>	Gg	<b>Nn</b>	Nn	<b>Xx</b>	Kh kh
<b>Dd</b>	Dd	<b>×Ã</b>	Ng ng	<b>Cc</b>	Ts ts
<b>Ee</b>	Ye ye	<b>Oo</b>	Oo	<b>Hh</b>	Ch ch
<b>  \</b>	Yo yo	<b>¬¿</b>	Öö	<b>Ww</b>	Sh sh
<b>" '</b>	Jj	<b>Pp</b>	Pp	<b>Yy</b>	İi
<b>Zz</b>	Zz	<b>Rr</b>	Rr	<b>?/</b>	Ee
<b>Ii</b>	Ii	<b>Ss</b>	Ss	<b>{ [</b>	Yu yu
<b>Jj</b>	Yy	<b>Tt</b>	Tt	<b>Qq</b>	Ya ya

Almost all the Uzbek language sources cited are written in the Cyrillic script, and have been transliterated in accordance with the 1995 Latin script introduced by

presidential decree in August 1995, and outlined in the helpful reference book by Tog'ayev *et al* (1999:366).

The Kyrgyz alphabet is officially written in the Cyrillic script, in spite of periodic discussions about switching to Latin. The transliteration table that I have used for the Kyrgyz alphabet is based on Krippes' table (1998: xix), with some modifications. For example, in order to maintain a balance with Uzbek Latin script, *H* and *W* have been rendered as *Ch* and *Sh* respectively, rather than Krippes' *C* and *Š*. I have used these transliterations in both English translation and Kyrgyz original, except where commonly-used English forms exist. Thus in English sentences I translate *Kyrgyz* as 'Kyrgyz', whereas when it appears in untranslated Kyrgyz texts, I have rendered it as 'Kīrgīz.'

## **Translations**

All translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Due to word limitations stipulated by my degree committee, I have been unable to include translations of the titles of articles in Kyrgyz and Uzbek language newspapers, except where that is important.

## **Some notes on vocabulary**

All use of language is inescapably political, and a study of the Ferghana Valley brings this into sharp relief. This is emphasised in the following brief overview:

*Aka-uka* (*Uzbek*), *ake-ükö* (*Southern Kyrgyz*): Literally 'older brother - younger brother', but this fails to capture the meaning of an important asymmetric relationship between two males (who may or may not be relatives) entailing mutual respect and obligation. Therefore, this phrase has been left untranslated.

*Aksakal* (*Kyrgyz*) *oqsoqol* (*Uzbek*): Literally 'white-beard', an old man. It suggests wisdom and demands respect and, as this is impossible to capture in a single English phrase, has been left untranslated.

**Borders:** A multiplicity of terms exists in English to describe borders and their environs including *border*, *frontier*, *borderline*, *boundary*, *borderland*, and *march*. Some of these have themselves been further subdivided and imbued with technical meanings, as Lattimore does with the term *frontier* (Lattimore 1962a: 469-70, 476-77) and Hartshorne with the term *boundary* (Hartshorne 1936). Different writers have used these same terms in different ways, and thus I regard the project of attempting to create a definitive taxonomy as redundant. Anderson has shown that finding equivalents, even between European languages is problematic (Anderson 1996: 9), and this becomes even more so when translating from Kyrgyz and Uzbek. For both of these reasons, I do not dogmatically insist on a particular taxonomy of terms.

I have generally avoided the term ‘frontier’ as it flags romantic and ideological connotations from US history (epitomised by Turner 1996) that are alien to the Ferghana Valley. I have used the term to translate the more literary word *sarhad* from Uzbek, a word that Krippes describes as ‘obsolete’ or ‘literary’ (Krippes 1996: 142). I have also occasionally used *frontier* for *chek ara / chegara* in Kyrgyz, when I detected that a more romantic/literary rendering was appropriate.

I believe that a technical distinction between *boundary* (as technical and juridical line between two states delimited by treaty and eventually demarcated on the ground) and *border* (as the boundary landscape that may contain control posts, crossings, customs checks as well as human settlement and social processes) is very useful, and one I have employed. However, it is difficult to draw a distinction between *boundary* and *border* in Uzbek/Kyrgyz. In Uzbek, I have rendered *chegara* as *border* and *ghov* as *boundary*, although I do not claim that these words correspond to my English definitions; it is more to enable those making future studies to be aware of the terms used. I have rendered *chek ara/chegara* as *border* when translating from Kyrgyz, except as indicated above.

**Central Asia:** ‘Central Asia’ has been rendered for *Markaziy Osiyo* and *O’rta Osiyo* in Uzbek and *Borborduk Aziya* and *Orto Aziya* in Kyrgyz. This has been for simplicity’s sake, and also because I lack the necessary competence to judge between debates about the English terms *Inner Asia*, *Middle Asia*, *Central Asia*, *Eurasia* and *Central Eurasia*.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> See Schoeberlein (2002: 4-5) for a recent perspective on this debate in relation to the founding of the *Central Eurasian Studies Society*.



**Chongdor** (Kyrgyz) **Kattalar** (Uzbek): Relatively wealthy members of the political elite: generally a pejorative term, see discussion p.227.

**Ziyofat** (Uzbek) / **gap** (Uzbek dial.): Periodic social gathering around food hosted alternately at regular intervals by members of a set formed on some common basis such as residential location, kinship networks, or having studied, worked, or undertaken the *haj* together (see footnote number 286, p.215).

**Gender:** I have used gender-inclusive language in translations where no particular gender is indicated in the original, even if this reduces the rhetorical effect. For example, I have translated a quote from the newspaper *Aalam* as "the main reason is because our Uzbek *relatives* have closed the border."<sup>317</sup> The original Kyrgyz word is 'tuugan', rendered as 'relative, kin' by Krippes. In this passage the word is, in my opinion, best translated as 'brothers,' as the more technical 'relatives' loses the deep sense of irony implied in the passage, and I do not doubt that the writer was thinking of men. However, even though 'brothers' resonates better to the ears of British people like myself, this is the result of generations of gendered language use that is part of western discourses of masculinity that have oppressed and marginalised the female. As I think it is important to resist this exclusivity, I have generally chosen to use non-gendered translations of explicitly non-gendered original words.

**Kilometre:** Following Krippes, I have translated the Kyrgyz word *chakirim* as kilometre.

**Mahalla:** A residential district, often coterminous with a low-level hierarchically-structured, semi-formal, functional unit of Uzbek society.

**Nation:** The translation of terms such as 'nation', 'people' or 'ethnic group' is generally problematic between any language. This dissertation argues that the words *halq/khalk*, *millat* and *el* lack a stable meaning and are open to contestation: any attempt to rigidly pin them down to specific English words is thus misguided. They

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<sup>317</sup> Short bullet-point in *Aalam*, 07-18/05/1999.

have variously been translated as ‘people’, ‘nation’ and ‘ethnic group’ according to context, and the original is often preserved for the sake of clarity.

**Nationality:** Against common practice, I have not used the adjectives ‘Uzbek’ or ‘Kyrgyz’ to refer to the states, governments, citizens or any other attribute of the republics of Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan. The use of these terms obscures the existence of non-titular ethnic groups in these states, and becomes implicated in state-led policies of nationalism. I have instead used the more cumbersome ‘Uzbekistani’ and ‘Kyrgyzstani’, preserving the ethnic appellations exclusively for circumstances referring to those groups.

**Oblast:** I have chosen to use this Russian word for the largest administrative subdivision below the nation-state in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, rather than the variety of formal and colloquial terms in currency such as viloyat, obulus, oblus, and duban. Even though a variation of the word ‘violyat’ was used by pre-Tsarist Kyrgyz, it has not been formally revived in independence, so the Russian word is used as a neutral term.

**Toponyms:** I have used both Uzbek and Kyrgyz spellings of the same place in accordance with the linguistic context: thus both *Andijon*, *Do’stilik* and *O’sh* (Uzbek) and *Andijan*, *Dostuk* and *Osh* (Kyrgyz) are used. This is to resist the homogenising tendencies of the nation-state building process and register the existence of difference and diversity in the border zone.

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