Living in the Margins of the State

Elina Troscenko

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
University of Bergen, Norway
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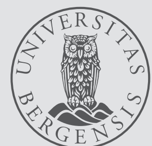

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the various forms of state manifestation in the lives of the Uzbek population living in the borderlands of Kyrgyzstan. With a particular focus on the stateless persons amongst this group, the thesis examines how the state materialises, manifests and transcends the lives of Uzbeks living in the physical, social and legal margins of the state. Based on fieldwork conducted along the militarized Kyrgyz-Uzbek border from 2013–2014, the ethnography presented in this work illuminates how people are experiencing, interacting and dealing with such manifestations of the state as borders, document practices and citizenship regime.

This work addresses the scarcity of literature on statelessness in Central Asia and on rural Uzbek communities in Kyrgyzstan expanding the knowledge and understanding of the lived realities of this community by exploring how their worlds have been both shattered and coalesced through various political projects that temporarily both inhibits and facilities the existence of their cross-border social worlds. This thesis explores how the state is shaping the lives of the people who have become entangled with the increased presence of the state in the form of physical border barriers, state documentation practices and the prevalent citizenship regime.

It particularly looks at the physical manifestation of the state boundaries, namely the borders and their morphology, illustrating how the physical presence of the borders have created new ways of socialising for a community whose lives transcend and spill over the state boundaries. By illuminating how the particular morphology of the border shapes and directs sociality, this work calls for more attention to the materiality of borders in the anthropological literature. Furthermore, this thesis advances the anthropological understanding of the state's manifestation process itself by illustrating it's fluctuating presence. The thesis shows how through scrutinising people's engagement with documents, the temporal dynamic of state's spatialising practices become visible. Finally, this thesis illustrates how the most prominent material artefact denoting the citizenship status, the passport, is central to the way people narrate their experiences of statelessness and to their understandings of citizenship status as such.

This work advances the study of statelessness by focusing on the statelessness experiences and understandings of this status, rather than its legal dimensions, and argues for the incorporation of a spatial dimension and documentation aspects in exploring how people situate their lives in spaces where the nation-state is not always the main point of reference. Attending to such material state manifestations as borders and documents, this thesis highlights how locating the state in its concrete expressions in everyday lives enables us to explore the ways the state becomes present and transcends the lives of people, and how people on their own behalf engage with these state manifestations.

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INTRODUCTION

It was a white, shabby-looking chicken. The chicken's feathers were worn out in some places and missing in other places. Its supposedly white colour had turned almost grey from the muddy surroundings it was walking in. With its scruffy looks, the chicken was making its way in the same direction as we were. The chicken was walking slowly, but it was quickly pulling up its thin legs, doing the typical chicken walk. It was not making any sound and did not seem to even notice that we were walking beside it. The chicken was sticking its small yellow beak into the ground in between the last season's grey grass and brown leaves. The small spots of exposed ground were revealing the black and fertile soil of the Ferghana Valley. The ground was still mostly grey, as the green sprouts had just started to appear in a few places here and there. Still, the appearance of the first grass gave the landscape a greenish tone and was signalling the arrival of spring. People had been complaining that spring was coming late this year. But at last, the first signs of the spring were here. The chicken was making its way in this landscape of the vast, open, empty plains that were soon to be sprouting the green vegetation as the new farming season would start. Looking at the chicken, the only white spot in this grey-green landscape, I became fascinated by it. Not so much by the chicken itself, but by the fact that it was walking on the other side of the fence – on the other side of the rusty, metal barbed wire fence that separated Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the middle of the fertile plains of the valley. The fence stretched along one side of the dirt road that Farida and I were walking along. The narrow dirt road was locked between a row of houses marking the end of the village on one state's territory and the fence marking the beginning of another state's territory. The row of houses on the Kyrgyz side of the border fence and the empty Uzbek plains on the other indicated that the chicken must have come from the Kyrgyz side as the only houses to be spotted on the Uzbek side were far away on the horizon. The chicken was walking on the small land strip

between the fence and deep trenches that separated the open plains and the barbed wire fence. While I was observing the chicken strolling, I was wondering where it had come from and how it had gotten there.

It must be from this side, I thought to myself. While looking closer at the small holes in the rusty wire fencing, I figured that it probably had squeezed through a small opening in some stretch of the barbed wire. But, how would the chicken get back? Would it be able to find another loophole in the fence? What if it did not find one? Maybe the Uzbek border guards would take it. I had heard stories about how they stole sheep from the Kyrgyz side, so a chicken which was already on the other side would be an easy catch. What if the owners looked for it and did not find it? Even if the owners found it, they could not just simply grab it either. It was on the other side of the border fence after all. It will simply have to find another hole in the fence and find its way through the metal wires or around them, I said to myself. It probably would, I figured.

As Farida and I continued on our way along the road, we were slowly approaching her new house. We had come to the village to pay a visit to her father and prepare lunch for him as he spent his days working on Farida´s new house. While Farida was telling me about the new property that her family had acquired, another thing suddenly caught my attention. Further down the road from the strolling chicken, a three-wheel bicycle was hanging at the top of the border fence, which stretched up several meters high. It was a small blue children's bicycle caught up in the barbed wire at the top of the fence and was hanging by its wheels. Intrigued by this unexpected view of a children's bicycle hooked up in the barbed wire on the top of the border fence, I pointed it out to Farida. She simply replied that somebody must have tried to throw it over without succeeding and proceeded with her story about her new house without paying much more attention to the bicycle. As we approached it, I again started to wonder. Where had this bicycle been heading to when it got caught up here? Had somebody been trying to get the bicycle from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan or from Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan? Had the

> *people who owned the bicycle managed to cross the border while the bicycle got stuck here and had to be left behind? If a child had had to abandon it here, imagine the heartbreak of the little one. A bicycle means the world to you when you are young. But what about the border guards? Had they already seen the bicycle hanging here? Would they take it down once they saw it? I hoped the people who had lost it would not get into trouble because of it. Or, maybe the bicycle had been intended as a gift and somebody had simply tried to throw it over? While was I contemplating the fate and the origins of the bicycle which was left hanging in the air between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Farida and I finally arrived at her new house. As we entered the courtyard, a big blue plastic curtain – a provisional courtyard door substitute – flapped in the wind behind us, concealing the view of the road we had walked on and the border fence we had walked along with all the things entangled with it.*

The children's bicycle hanging at the top of the fence and the white chicken's ignorant behaviour of trespassing across a closed border seemed to violate the intended clear-cut border divide between the two states. Reminding, once again, that border fences are never clear-cut, simple or straightforward. The landscape of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek borderlands are filled with the traces of cross-border spillovers, such as these, as well as with marks of ruptures along it. Despite the physical manifestations of the border preventing or limiting the movements across it, the life on the margins of the Kyrgyz state was crossing over its borders, while still bearing vivid signs of ruptures that the tangible inscription of the state boundaries had brought about. Such spillovers and ruptures are also the central topics of this thesis. This thesis explores how the state materialises, manifests, and transcends the lives of the Uzbek population living in the rural borderlands of Kyrgyzstan and how people are transcending and dealing with such manifestations of the state. It specifically focuses on how the state is texturing and shaping the lives of the people that have become entangled with the increased presence of the state in the form of physical border barriers and state documentation practices. This paper consists of an introduction chapter and three articles. The subsequent introduction chapter provides a backdrop for the articles that follow. First, it places the work geographically and gives a brief historic account on the region, the states, and

people that the thesis focuses on. Then, it draws on the existing anthropological literature and analyses theoretical approaches towards the study of state, materiality, borders, bureaucracy and citizenship. Lastly, it provides ethnographic background and discusses methodological concerns.

LOCATING THE ETHNOGRAPHY

A Region from Which to Explore the State

Central Asia, a region located in the heartland of the Eurasian continent, even today for many people represents an unknown terrain. Most commonly, the term Central Asia is used to refer to the territory consisting of five former Soviet states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. However, the terminology concerning the region is not that straightforward. Both in English and Russian, various terms have been applied to the region; amongst them are Inner Asia, Central Asia, Greater Central Asia and Middle Asia, each of them covering broader or smaller geographic parts of the area. Along with different geographical delimitations, political transformations of the region have also influenced the terminology used to describe the region. For example, after the establishment of the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) in the region, the Russian term Middle Asia (*Srednyaya Aziya*[1]) was applied when referring to these republics, while the broader term Central Asia (*Tsentralnaya Aziya*[2]) was used in the Russian language referring to lands beyond the Soviet Union, including some parts of Mongolia, Tibet and China[3]. However, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the term Central Asia is more commonly used both in Russian and English when talking about the post-Soviet countries of the region. Likewise, this thesis uses this latter definition, limiting the regional label to the former Soviet states with their common history, their shared Soviet past and their Soviet legacies. While regional labelling is a well problematised issue in the anthropological discipline (Gupta and Fergusson 1997; Lederman 1998), the anthropological comparison being a defining practice of the discipline highlights how, drawing on commonalities and differences between regions and places, one can make sense and gain a better understanding of the world at large.

Since the region of Central Asia was largely inaccessible to outsiders during the Soviet period, and as it is not a common stop on the itineraries of world travellers today and also seldomly makes the newspapers' headlines around the world, it has remained

[1,2] Transliteration from the Russian language.

[3] For more on the terminology of the region, see Cummings (2012) and Akiner (1998).

somewhat mysterious and unfamiliar to the general public. Similarly, the region was an uncharted place for Western scholars until quite recently. Along with an increased accessibility to the region during the last two decades, a growing body of academic literature on the region has been published, in addition to the already existing Soviet scholarship. Establishment of regionally dedicated journals and academic networks, such as Central Asian Survey and The European Society for Central Asian Studies, attests to the growing focus on the region amongst the scholars. However, as pointed out by Morgan Liu (2011, 116), in much of the scholarly work, 'the region tends to be treated in terms of something other than itself: as an Islamic periphery to be measured against the Middle Eastern heartland; as a subject of Soviet, Russian, or Chinese imperial projects; as a geopolitical chessboard for Great Powers, yesterday and today; as an underdeveloped source of hydrocarbons; as a needy recipient of assistance in loans, technocratic expertise, and neoliberal practices; and as a strategic battleground in the Bush Administration's worldwide "war on terror"'. While the region's role in global geopolitical processes is an important subject of inquiry, Liu's critique on how a region is seen only through its relevance for others is an argument that stretches beyond the scholarly literature on this region alone. Too often, the significance of places is framed through their relevance for others, rather than seeing them as worthy of having their own stories told and known. Nevertheless, the relevance and impact of large-scale political processes on the life of a region is undoubtedly a matter of interest not only for the scholars alone. For example, during my fieldwork, people in Kyrgyzstan were particularly concerned with the expansion of Eurasian Economic Union and Kyrgyzstan's accession to it, debating its possible impact on people's everyday lives. This underscores that people are situating themselves in networks stretching beyond their state and that they recognise the region's embeddedness in and connections with the wider world, such as through their belonging to the Muslim community across the world, their affinity to Turkic peoples, the region's economic connections with and migratory network routes to Russia and the presence of Chinese investments in the region. However, people's contemplation over these attachments and relations are done with respect to the lives of the inhabitants of the region. Rather than taking the region's relevance to wider global processes as an analytical lens

through which to explore the region, the local realities of people in the region can offer new understandings and perspectives. Responding to Liu's critique, this thesis complements the documentation of life in a region less explored. It contributes to the existing regional literature by providing new insights into the local worlds and practices, in particular as how they relate to statehood. Moreover, the thesis addresses statehood in an undertheorised region by advancing the understanding of how people living in the margins of the state experience, understand and interact with various forms of state manifestations.

The Central Asia region provides a fascinating context for studying the state and the reasons for this are manifold. Firstly, the establishment of the Central Asian states, as we know them today, was highly orchestrated and guided by the Soviet regime, resulting in significant amounts of archival documents on these processes. This allows us to explore the creation and institutionalisation of nations with their respective territories on various scales and with quite a sophisticated level of detail. Secondly, the post-Soviet period opens up for exploring the continuous production of 'stateness' in a postcolonial and post-Soviet context. Moreover, the diverse political projects of nation- and state-building in the various Central Asian countries highlights the contingency of state-building processes in the region. In addition, the region provides a window through which to study practices and functionality of state institutions and people's engagement with them in a highly volatile and changing environment. As the history of state- and nation-building processes in this region is relatively recent, it allows us to trace the various aspects of it, both with regard to its territories, people and statehood, and to see how the legacies of the various time periods are still present and relevant today.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Central Asia was inhabited by various rival tribe and clan agglomerations, some of which were settled in communities, but others were nomadic pastoralists. The political organisation of these clans and tribes varied across the region, and while some were united in hordes with fluid borders, others were organised in distinct political units, such as the Bukhara Emirate, the Khanate of Khiva and the Khanate of Kokand. Yet, the political and administrative organisation of the region was soon to be changed along with its subjection to an

imperial power. The region's northern neighbour, the Russian Empire, had a growing interest in the region that was linked to its political, military and economic ambitions. Moreover, the Russian Empire's position in relation to other European imperial powers and the empire's Central Asian neighbours were linked to expansion of its territories. The Russian Empire's expansion southward started in the 1830s, and with a series of military campaigns and conquests throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the territories of Central Asia were gradually incorporated into the Russian Empire (Abazov 2008; Abdullaev, Khotamov, and Kenensariev 2011; Morrison 2014)[4]. Alexander Morisson (2014), a historian of the Russian Empire and Central Asia, has noted the significance the region played in the statehood of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. For the Russian Empire, the vast territories of Central Asia appeared to be 'unassimilable to the Russian "core"', framing the empire as a colonial power with its peripheries as the subdued 'others'. For the Soviet authorities, on the other hand, the region of Central Asia provided the grounds for nation-building experiments. However, as Morrison pointed out, the real importance of the Russian Empire's conquest of Central Asia is 'to be found in Central Asia itself, where its legacy was 130 years of Russian and Soviet rule, and an unequal political and cultural relationship which continues to this day' (133). After colonising the vast land areas of Central Asia, the Russian colonial authorities carried out several reforms to consolidate their power over the region. In addition to political and economic reforms, a new administrative division of the territories was introduced.

[4] For more on the history of Central Asia, see Golden (2011), Sahadeo and Zanca (2007), Hiro (2009) and Khalid (2015).

An illustrative map of Turkestan by 1990. Illustration by Nina Bergheim Dahl.

After the imperial conquest of the region, some of the political entities, such as the Bukhara Emirate and the Khiva Khanate, remained as distinct political units within the Russian Empire, while the rest of the territories were incorporated into the Turkestan Governor-Generalship, which was established in 1867 with Tashkent as its capital. In the coming years, numerous other administrative reforms were implemented in the region, redividing the region into *gubernyas* (regions), which were sectioned into *oblast* (provinces), districts and subdistricts. Following the fall of imperial power in 1917, Central Asia was torn by a violent power struggle as various groups attempted to establish their own political centres and systems of governance within smaller territories. A civil war ensued which lasted for several years until the Bolsheviks gained control over the region in the 1920s. Thereafter, the Soviet authorities set in motion new policies aimed at recreating and modernising the region, transforming both the land and the peoples according to the Soviet promoted ideology. The region was completely reshaped by the establishment of new administrative territorial units, which today represent the independent nation-states of Central Asia.

The administrative and political changes implemented in Central Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were comprehensive and unfolded in a region of great variation and complexity. The physical geography of the region alone covers several climate zones and includes the extremes and contrasts of natural landscapes. It

stretches from the Caspian Sea in the west to the high mountain ranges of Tian Shan and Alatau in the east, and from the vast grasslands and prairies in the north, through the desert areas in between, to the Pamir mountains in the south. This kind of variation in the physical characteristics of the landscape also entails variation in the climate and temperature. The high mountain ranges with freezing temperatures of –40°C and the dry desert zones with burning temperatures of over 40°C make some areas of the region uninhabitable, while the valleys along the rivers of Amu Darya and Syr Darya provide more moderate climates and fertile lands in this landlocked region, marking areas where the region's population cluster (Abazov 2008). Historically, the population of Central Asia encompassed two different but interacting groups, each of them occupying their niche in the ecological system of the region. The valleys were inhabited by sedentary populations who were engaged in agriculture, while the vast steppes and mountain ranges were inhabited by pastoralist nomads who engaged in animal husbandry (Ruziev, Ghosh, and Dow 2007; Sahadeo and Zanca 2007; Golden 2011). The mode of livelihood was also one of the core elements in people's self- and other identification practices. As nations in terms of the modern political understanding did not exist in Central Asia before the twentieth century, the people's identification process was complex and dynamic, involving various elements and aspects of their lives. The multi-layered identities were built on such elements as the mode of livelihood, clan and tribe affiliations, religion, language, status and locale. However, these contextual and fluid identification processes were to change along with the institutionalisation of ethnic identities, territorialisation of ethnicities and nationalistic policies of the Soviet regime (Hirsch 2005; Pelkmans 2017).

Neighbours Drifting Apart

The Central Asian republics, as we know them today with their respective territories, were created by the Soviet authorities. The process of establishing these republics was neither easy nor straightforward. This process was closely related to and evolved from the basic concepts of the Soviet Union's ideology and formation. While Bolsheviks had promoted national self-determination of all peoples prior to the revolution, the question of self-determination posed a challenge to the new authorities and their wish to retain control over the vast land masses of the former Russian Empire. The solution to this problem was to integrate ideas of national self-determination and territorial control into the administrative structuring of the Soviet Union. Consequently, the federal and administrative system of the Soviet Union became based on national territories. However, the construction of such a system required the state to identify nationalities and their respective territorial units (Hirsch 2005).

The idea of national self-determination raised questions about the concepts of nation and national consciousness of the various people inhabiting the enormous territories that were now controlled by the Soviet authorities. Francine Hirsch (2005) in her study of the formation of the Soviet Union and its nations, has looked at how the Bolshevik's Marxist-Leninist world view affected the Soviet authority's approach to the nationality question. Based on the ideas of evolutionist historical development, in which nationality was one of the essential stages in transition towards communism, the Soviet authorities engaged in what Hirsch has called 'state-sponsored evolutionism'. According to Hirsch, the state-sponsored evolutionism aimed to advance the populations along the Marxist timeline of historical developments by transforming clans and tribes into nationalities and nationalities into socialist nations, which eventually would unify under communism. This entailed that 'the Soviet regime and its ethnographers attempted to take charge of the process of nation formation in regions where clan and tribal identities prevailed and where local populations seemed to lack national consciousness. (…) Ethnographers tried to help the regime predict which clans and tribes would eventually come together and form new nationalities (…) Ethnographers, along with local elites, then worked with the Soviet government to create national territories and official national languages and cultures for these groups'

(Hirsch 2005, 8). Central Asia was one of the regions where the Soviet policies of nation formation unfolded to the fullest, the legacies of which are still highly relevant today.

Central Asia posed a complex and difficult task for the Soviet Union's nation formation policies, due to both its fractioned tribal and clan geographies, and the people's multi-layered and fluid identification practices. Ethnographers, economists and other experts engaged in collecting data on the people of Central Asia that was categorised, formalised and institutionalised. Population census and maps were crucial tools in mapping both people and territories that were to match them. The diverse landscape of the Central Asian region posed a challenge to these processes as people, census categories and territories on the maps did not overlap. Nevertheless, the Soviet authorities identified titular groups that would be given nationality statuses along with nationally defined territories, and thereby created national republics in Central Asia. 'The end result of this political "imagination" was the identification of the Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Tajik, and Karakalpak ethnonational communities, followed by the territorial delimitation of their respective national jurisdictions, a process which laid the foundation for Soviet nation-making in Central Asia' (Ubiria 2015, 134). The national territories were created through a sequence of territorial reforms called the National Territorial Delimitation process during the period from the 1920s to 1940. In 1924, the first territorial reform aimed at creating national territorial units was passed, establishing the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast. In subsequent years, further territorial changes and adjustments occurred with redividing the territories, such as moving areas from one republic to another, swapping of territories and changing the status of territorial units. While the emphasis was put on the nationality question in the initial territorial division, the latter rearrangements were guided by the economic interests of the region's republics. By 1936, the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic were also created. Thus, within a period of two decades, the Central Asian states were established along with provisional borders between them (Hirsch 2005; Ubiria 2015).

An illustrative map of Soviet Socialist Republics in Central Asia by 1936.
Illustration by Nina Bergheim Dahl.

The National Territorial Delimitation process changed not only the administrative and territorial division of the region, but it had a far-reaching impact on the political and social worlds of the people of Central Asia by transforming people's identification practices. While designations such as 'Kyrgyz' and 'Uzbek' were not completely new creations, their usage and conception were fluid and contextual (Megoran 2017). The meanings of these designations were to change along with the Soviet policies of creating nations. The category of Uzbek provides a telling example of this. Grigol Ubiria (2015), in exploring the making of the Uzbek nation, has noted that the term 'Uzbek' became actively used by a special Turkestan commission (*Turkkomissiia*) that was established in 1919 by Lenin to work out proposals for ethnoterritorial divisions of the region. 'Under "Uzbeks", the members of *Turkkomissiia* supposedly referred collectively to an urban and sedentary Turkic (and possibly some "Farsi-Tajik")-speaking population of the TSR [Turkestan Socialist Republic], such as those who (or whose predecessors) were defined in the 1897 imperial census as Sarts, Uzbeks and *Tiiurks*. (…) Later the term "Uzbek" was also formally approved by the central Bolshevik government in Moscow as an ethnonym

for a to-be-forged titular nationality of the projected Soviet republic of Uzbekistan' (Ubiria 2015, 102). In a similar manner, Alisher Ilkhamov (2004), in his historical account, has analysed how such groups as Sarts, Dashti-Kipchak nomadic Uzbeks, Chaghatay and Oghuz Turkic tribes along with other local Turkic clans formed the bases for the modern Uzbek nation. Ilkhamov also suggests that the Soviet authority's choice of the ethnonym 'Uzbek' was not coincidental and points to the group's symbolic capital, namely their heritage of historical symbols testifying to the former glory of Uzbek tribes, and their rural/unprivileged status as important factors that Bolshevik's saw as fitting within their project of nation-building (Ilkhamov 2004). During the process of establishing the Central Asian republics, not all ethnic identities of the region were destined by the Soviet authorities to evolve into nations. Thus, hundreds of separate collective identities, indigenous groups and languages were lost while others were constructed, built upon and enforced.

However, the introduction of the national categories and territories initially did not significantly change the ways people identified. Mathijs Pelkmans (2017, 31) contends that 'the people who were categorised as Kyrgyz initially hardly identified with that label, referring to themselves primarily in terms of kinship, as member of a tribe or tribal segment, as pastoralists in contrast to the agriculturalists of the Ferghana Valley, and as Muslims in contrast to the Russian administration and settlers'. While the established national identities were becoming important, particularly in the political sphere where the local elites had appropriated them, tribal and clan identities nevertheless endured throughout the whole region. Still, the Soviet authorities along with the republic leaders introduced various policies to not only categorise populations along the formally established Soviet nationalities, but also to institutionalise these identities. The state practices of categorisation, standardisation and legibility of people and the significance of these practices in various state-building projects have been explored by numerous scholars, who have remarked how some of the most common categories in which we apprehend our social worlds today, such as surnames and, indeed, nationality, have been created by states as preconditions for modern statecraft (Scott 1998; Torpey 2000; Tishkov 2005). Census-taking, identification cards,

administrative records, ethnographic museums, national symbols, standardisation of language and promotion of national cadres were amongst the many tools implemented and used by the Soviet authorities to make the national identities meaningful in the everyday lives of the people of Central Asia. For example, censuses ensured that people were categorised only according to the officially recognised nationalities. Ilkamov (2004) illustrates how other groups, such as Sarts, were simply renamed as Uzbeks, as the designation Sart was eliminated from the list of national groups in the All-Union Census in 1926. Censuses were not only instrumental in categorising people, but also helped the titular nationalities to gain the dominant position in their respective territories. '(…) the 1926 census data, conforming the ethnic Uzbek majority in the Uzbek SSR, considerably facilitated the Soviet Uzbek government's nation-building efforts to nativise (or Uzbekise) its territory through state-sponsored history-writing and myth-making projects, producing narratives exclusively linking the territory of Uzbekistan to the dominant nationality it was named after' (Ubiria 2015, 140). As the Soviet policies in the region were framed in national terms, the local populations and elites appropriated the terminology and vocabulary used by the Soviet administration in their assertion of rights, positions, resources and territories. For example, the local elites, attempting to secure larger territories, more resources and power, would frame places in national terms arguing for their inclusion in their administrative units. Thus, the officially introduced nationality categories forged by the Soviet authorities were gradually appropriated, applied and used by the local populations making them 'real'. The institutionalisation of national identities illustrates how instrumental the Soviet authorities were in creating modern nations in Central Asia.

The historical process of the creation and delimitation of the Central Asian republics is a disputed topic amongst scholars as the reasons behind the establishment of the republics and their borders is divided. While Hirsch (2005) argues that the Soviet policies creating national territories were grounded in the regime's ideological beliefs in evolutionism, other scholars contends that creating national territories was based more on Moscow's divide-and-rule approach intended to prevent Soviet republics' development as independent nation-states (Sabol 1995; Roy 2007). Likewise, the question as to what extent local elites were involved in the delimitation process and

how much of this process was determined by Moscow has been debated. While some scholars underscore Moscow's decisive role in the National Territorial Delimitation process, other scholars point out that the role of local elites has been underreported in much scholarly work, arguing that local elites initiated fierce negotiations for control over disputed areas around the borders of the Soviet republics of Central Asia, particularly over populated and fertile areas (Hirsch 2005; Reeves 2014; Morrison 2017).

The border between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan lies in an area that runs through one of the most fertile valleys of the region, the Ferghana Valley. The Ferghana Valley is naturally framed by mountain ranges – the Alai and Turkestan mountain ranges in the south, the Ferghana range in the east and the Chatkal and Kuramin mountains in the north and west – and consists of some of the most fertile lowlands in the region (Saidov, Anarbaev, and Goriyacheva 2011). It is one of the most densely populated areas of the region, and it is a place where historically various ethnic groups have been living side by side. Until the establishment of the Soviet republics in Central Asia, the Ferghana Valley – in spite of being divided and shared amongst various ethnic groups, languages, religions and cultures – had been under the same ruler and belonged to the same political entity during long periods of its history. However, during the 1920s, the valley became divided amongst three republics – the Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik SSRs. While the national territories of the Uzbek SSR and Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast (later the Kyrgyz SSR) was established already in 1924, the border between them remained disputed and dynamic. The bordering areas were, from time to time, transferred between the Soviet republics, and land swaps and rental agreements between the republics contributed to creating dynamic and unsettled borderlines. While the territorial divisions were made in relation to putative ethnic or national composition in the 1920s, from the 1930s onwards, land usage and territories were more subjected to the economic interests of the Soviet modernisation programme and its agricultural imperatives: 'In Ferghana Valley, where the contours of the 1924-1927 delimitation had often not been demarcated (i.e., inscribed in physical form on the landscape), this meant that collective farms belonging to one Union republic often came unknowingly to incorporate and cultivate swathes of grazing land that technically

were part of the neighbouring republic' (Reeves 2014, 82). Consequently, the early maps of the delimitation process had little resemblance in the practical usage of the lands or de facto situation of the borders. During the years that followed, several commissions were established to review the border delimitation, and often adjustments were made according to the collective farm boundaries; however, these treatments were often ratified only at the oblast level, but not at the union level. In addition, during the 1950s and 1960s, population movements from the mountainous areas to the sedentary spaces meant that more pressure was put on populated places, such as the Ferghana Valley, and new settlements were established both along and on the borders. Moreover, the infrastructure of the region was also built to integrate the region rather than making the union republics self-sufficient. Road networks, train track networks, gas pipelines, water channels and other essential infrastructures were built across the borders, both marking out and contributing to a highly integrated cross-border life in which borders did not play a significant role (Gavrilis 2008; Bichsel 2011; Reeves 2014; Megoran 2017).

Nonetheless, these internal boundaries of the Soviet Union became international borders upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 when all the Central Asian states signed the Alma-Ata Protocol on the 21st of December 1991. The Alma-Ata Protocol not only set the founding principles for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)[5] whereby the Central Asian states joined together with several other Soviet Union's succession states, but it also stated that the member states recognised each other's territorial integrity along with their borders (Megoran 2017).

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly established sovereign states of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were struggling to cope with the collapse of a system that had been structuring the lives of millions of people for more than half a century. As the old system of an integrated economic and political unit was crumbling, the new states were looking for ways to manage this transition period. Kyrgyzstan, while being on the verge of economic collapse in the beginning of the 1990s, chose to follow the

[5] The Belavezha Accords signed on the 8th of December 1991 (two weeks before the Alma-Ata Protocol) are also considered to be one of the founding agreements of the CIS. They included the CIS Creation Agreement, which was signed by the Byelorussian SSR, the Russian SFSR, and the Ukrainian SSR. The Alma-Ata Protocol is considered both as an extension of the Belavezha Accords and the first enlargement of CIS as eight additional countries joined the Commonwealth.

neoliberal economic policies of the Western international finance organisations. In close cooperation with International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Kyrgyzstan implemented radical structural adjustment policies to facilitate transition to the market economy. This entailed liberalisation of the market, reductions in the state's welfare provisions and a large-scale privatisation process. However, the promises and hopes of economic growth did not materialise, and Kyrgyzstan became one of the prime examples of transition gone wrong. Much of the failure of this transition has been attributed to the ignorance of the local context upon the implementation of structural adjustment policies. Throughout the Soviet period, Kyrgyzstan received subsidies from the central Soviet authorities, and its economy was mainly based on agriculture, animal husbandry and mining. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan struggled to export goods to its regular markets due to the overall decline of economies across the post-Soviet space (Pelkmans 2017). The harsh economic situation of the country placed strains on the state apparatus, and during the first decade of independence, the state was almost unable to provide services or to sustain its own employees in the health care system, the education sector and other state sectors. People's understanding of the state was closely related to ideas of stability, authority and provision of state services, and to the networks of support and welfare that they had experienced during the Soviet period, all of which dissolved along with the economic collapse during the transition period. As Pelkmans (2017, 27) has pointed out, 'Two decades after gaining independence, Kyrgyzstan was at the bottom of former Soviet republics in terms of economic indicators, ranked amongst the most corrupt countries in the world, and had become politically volatile'. Much of the political turmoil that took place in Kyrgyzstan in the years of independence can be attributed to the disastrous transition that left people disillusioned by the promises of democracy, and 'hollowed out the state, becoming a shell to be captured and mobilised by rotating factions' (Pelkmans 2017, 40).

In the last two decades, Kyrgyzstan has experienced several violent and tumultuous political events and upheavals. Amongst them are two revolutions, first in 2005 and then in 2010, during which the sitting presidents were ousted. The first president of independent Kyrgyzstan was Askar Akaev who held the post from 1991

to 2005. In 2005, he was ousted during the 'Tulip Revolution', the third in a series of 'colour revolutions' unravelling in the post-Soviet countries. The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 have been commonly characterised as popular pro-democracy uprisings against corruption, poverty, and undemocratic authorities.[6] However, some scholars have called for a more nuanced understandings of the Tulip Revolution rather than just in terms of its simple pro-democracy appeal (Heathershaw 2007; Juraev 2008). For example, David Lewis (2010) suggests that the Tulip Revolution was more an outcome of dynamics of domestic politics. Pelkmans (2005), on the other hand, convincingly argues that, although the common explanations of revolution were not unfounded, the analyses grounded in liberal democratic discourse overlooked how disillusionment with the democratisation process had motivated the revolution. In the aftermath of Akaev's dismissal, Kurmanbek Bakiev, the former prime minister, came to power and held the presidency from 2005 to 2010. While the Tulip Revolution deposed Akaev, who subsequently fled the country, the revolution did not bring any real improvements for the people of Kyrgyzstan. Rather the opposite, as changes under the Bakiev's government within the political, social and economic sphere were perceived as largely negative with increased corruption, mismanagement and a more authoritarian system of governance (Marat 2008; Lewis 2010). In 2010, Bakiev faced a similar fate to that of Akaev as he was ousted in the 'afternoon revolution' and fled the country (Reeves 2014b). A provisional government was created in the aftermath of Bakiev's fall, which was led by interim President Roza Otunbaeva. In the 2011 elections, Almazbek Atambaev, the former prime minister, won and remained in the post until 2017. Another former prime minister, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, won the elections in 2017, marking the first peaceful transition of power between presidents in the history of sovereign Kyrgyzstan. Although Jeenbekov was endorsed by his predecessor during the election period, the relationship between the former allies deteriorated quite rapidly as criticism, allegations of smear campaigns and accusations of corruption were made on both parts. In 2019, the former president

[6] For more on the 'color revolutions', see Hale (2006), Manning (2007), Beacháin and Polese (2010) and Radnitz (2010).

Atambaev was stripped of his legal immunity, and attempts were made to bring him into custody due to corruption charges. This led to a violent confrontation between the state's security forces and the supporters of Atambaev, after which the former president was arrested. The ex-president is now awaiting trials as he has been charged with attempted murder, murder and assaulting representatives of authorities in relation the bloody confrontations that took place upon his arrest, as well as a separate trial for abuse of power during his presidency period.

In addition to a turbulent political life, the country has also experienced inter-communal violence in the years since independence. In the aftermath of the national political crisis following the political demise of president Bakiev, ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks took place in the southern part of Kyrgyzstan in 2010. The ethnic violence of 2010 was one of the bloodiest conflicts that the region had seen in years. The conflict raised questions about the structural inequalities between these two ethnic groups in Kyrgyz society, the fit of the nation-state structure for the Central Asian countries that have minority groups from the neighbouring countries, growing nationalism and political stability of the region (Ismailbekova 2013; Megoran 2017). While the ethnic conflict was unfolding in southern Kyrgyzstan, leaving hundreds dead, thousands injured and many more fleeing their homes, a concern about a potential regional conflict arouse along with the possibility of Uzbekistan's involvement in the conflict in order to protect the Uzbek minority in Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan, after the demise of the Soviet Union, took a rather different path in comparison with its neighbour Kyrgyzstan. The first leader of independent Uzbekistan was Islam Karimov, who also was the leader of the communist party in the Uzbek SSR. While Kyrgyzstan opted for embracing neoliberal economic policies in the wake of the Soviet regime's collapse, Uzbekistan's leadership with President Islam Karimov at the helm chose what has been referred to as 'gradualist' approach (Kandiyoti 2007). Although Uzbek authorities proclaimed their intent to introduce market-oriented reforms, they also formulated a transition model based on national peculiarities and socioeconomic conditions. Moreover, the state ascribed itself a guiding role in this transition period with stability as one of the primary goals of the whole transition process (Ruziev, Ghosh, and Dow 2007). Since social stability was a primary concern

for Uzbekistan's new leadership, the economic reforms were tailored to support this. Matteo Fumagalli (2007b, 2) has described how 'under President Karimov's rule, preserving stability of the economy and of social and political order had become an overarching rationale for rejecting a shock therapy approach to market reforms, for delaying the introduction of democratic institutions and for developing a strict border regime by de facto sealing the country's borders'. In a similar vein, Jennifer Murtazashvili (2012, 79) emphasises that 'stability has been the self-professed goal of the Karimov regime. The Uzbek term *barqarorliq* ("stability") appears on slogans on streets and in nearly every presidential speech and official statement'. Matteo Fumagalli has pointed out that Uzbekistan's emphasis on stability implied a construction of an unstable 'outside', which was projected towards its neighbours. Many of the policies implemented for the sake of preserving the stability 'implied protection from spill-over from neighbouring countries' (Fumagalli 2007a, 112). The ethnic conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010 was used by the Uzbek authorities to reinforce their message of a safe, stable and happy life in Uzbekistan, protected by the strict border regime that prevented the chaos that was spreading in the neighbouring country, caused by its failed experiments with democracy, from affecting Uzbekistan (Megoran 2017). Uzbekistan did not intervene militarily in the conflict, but after encouragement from international organisations, it opened its sealed borders and allowed over 80,000 Uzbeks fleeing from the conflict to seek shelter on its territory (Liu 2012). Although the opening of the border was welcomed and praised by the Uzbek community, some critical voices were also raised against the way Uzbekistan repatriated all the refugees back to Kyrgyzstan. During my fieldwork in 2013–2014, several Uzbeks recounted how women and children were allowed to cross the border during the days of the conflict, praising the Uzbek authorities for their help. They also noted that the fact that the Uzbek military was right on the border gave them assurances that the villages located close to the border would not be touched by the attackers. However, some people also shared critical stories about their physical eviction from Uzbekistan after the conflict had ceased. In the aftermath of the conflict, some people engaged in house swapping. Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan would swap houses with Kyrgyz living in Uzbekistan to facilitate a move to their putative ethno-national state.

However, this practice turned out to be very unfortunate for the Uzbeks who attempted to move to Uzbekistan. On one occasion I met an elderly Uzbek woman who had engaged in such house swapping, but after a couple of weeks in Uzbekistan, Uzbek authorities requested that she leave the country. Upon her return to Kyrgyzstan, she no longer had a place to stay as her house was now inhabited by the Kyrgyz family with whom she had swapped, and consequently, she was left with nothing. This illustrates the Uzbek authorities' reserved attitudes towards Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan who, to a certain degree, were even viewed as threatening to the existing regime. As Morgan Liu (2012, 56) describes 'Karimov found Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan too politically active and unpredictable, given that they lacked direct tutelage under Uzbekistan's educational and propaganda systems'. This underscores the regime's preoccupation with safeguarding the stability of the country and the regime, as well as its concern with the potential threats that Uzbeks abroad might represent. It furthermore highlights Uzbekistan's policy of disregard for the interests and needs of Uzbeks living in the neighbouring countries.

In Uzbekistan, not only the political but also the economic system developed in a different direction from that of Kyrgyzstan after the demise of the Soviet socialist system. Uzbekistan was one of the least industrialised countries of the Soviet Union, and its main economic activity was the agricultural production of cotton. Cotton production was so central in Uzbekistan that the country's economic and productions systems were built around it (Ruziev, Ghosh, and Dow 2007). The heart of Uzbekistan's cotton production industry lies in the Ferghana Valley, a valley it shares with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In addition, Uzbekistan was the largest producer of gold within the Soviet Union. While cotton export remains one of the major income generators for the country's economy, Uzbekistan has attempted to diversify its agricultural production. Moreover, it has been developing its capacity to export raw materials, such as gold, natural gas and oil. While some economic reforms were introduced during the 1990s, the country did not switch to a market economy, unlike neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, as the authorities continued to maintain strict control over the key elements of the economy and the state–society relationship remained and resembled the Soviet model that existed in the Uzbek SSR (Adams 2010). Some

scholars argue that the Uzbek government system was a direct continuation of the Soviet regime (Hojaqizi 2008). While Kyrgyzstan, during the first decade of its independence, was portrayed as an island of democracy in Central Asia, Uzbekistan's political system lead by President Islam Karimov, on the other hand, took on authoritarian characteristics. The political scene in Uzbekistan also remained unchanged for the first 25 years of country's independence with President Islam Karimov in power. He was succeeded by the former prime minister Shavkat Mirziyoyev who, after coming to power in 2016, has pursued policies liberalising some spheres of life and introduced economic, judicial and social reforms. The new regime has also been making an important effort to improve Uzbekistan's relations with neighbouring countries, including Kyrgyzstan.

As Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan pursued different policies in economic and political spheres after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they consequently set on diverging paths. Gradual introduction of diverging sets of legislations, currencies, national languages, scripts, political and economic reforms that differed considerably marked changes where there had previously been overlaps within the two neighbouring republics of the former paternalistic Soviet state. While the dissolution of the Soviet Union was accompanied by tremendous social, economic and political upheavals, the initial changes of the republics and their border status carried few implications for the borderland inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. However, in the following decades, the new sovereign states of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan took diverging trajectories in political, ideological and economic spheres, and thus, the lives of the borderland inhabitants started to change. Megoran (2006), in exploring the biography of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan boundary, describes how these changes initially seemed to carry signs of more general transformations in the life of the people of the region, and did not appear to represent boundaries that were important to the people living in the borderlands. However, in 1999–2000, inhabitants of the Ferghana Valley experienced a sharp change in cross-border life. At the beginning of 1999, Uzbekistan started to suspend many of the transportation routes between the largest cities of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in the Ferghana Valley. Suspension and reduction of transportation services that were connecting borderland inhabitants was justified by the

need to protect the Uzbek economy which, in contrast to that of Kyrgyzstan, was state-run. Moreover, in 1999, a bomb blast shook Tashkent, and the Uzbek authorities pointed to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, a militant group with bases in Tajikistan and Afghanistan, as the organisers responsible for the attack. As part of protective measures in the aftermath of the attack, the Uzbek authorities closed the country's borders, and while they were later reopened, the border regime had significantly changed: 'New control posts were built, and existing facilities upgraded, and in many places, crossings were closed, roads dug up, and bridges demolished' (Megoran 2002, 46). This first wave of border securitisation that was unilaterally introduced by Uzbekistan affected the lives of many Uzbeks living in Kyrgyzstan who had close ties with their kin and social networks in the border region stretching into Uzbekistan. While the securitisation of the border was an important element in Uzbekistan's policies of securing control over the flows of people, goods and ideas into its territory, as Megoran (2017, 67) points out, 'it was also a cartography of knowledge that mapped geopolitical vision of post-Soviet space, and enabled the Uzbek elite to write its authority over the material and social landscapes of the Ferghana Valley and the whole republic'. This shows how the closure and securitisation of borders was not simply a step towards a stricter border regime. Rather, it signalled a different way for the state to apprehend its territories and marked new relations with those living outside the state's territory, whether they were ethnic Uzbeks or not.

While discussing the changes in the border regime with my interlocutors in the Ferghana valley, the local inhabitants struggled to provide me with a timeline on when and how exactly the border had come into being, particularly as the border had come into being in different ways to different people in different places and at different times. Some borderland residents referred to the early 2000s as a time when the border appeared, and others noted the late 2000s, while some pointed to the 2010 as a year after which the life in the borderlands changed dramatically. During the time of my fieldwork in 2013–2014 most of the border in the populated places was strictly guarded and barbed wire border fences had been stretched through the settlements. The border was closed to regular crossings with some exemptions. The allowed crossings would, for example, include border crossings for important life events, such as weddings and

funerals, and for persons who were married to the citizens of the other neighbouring country. The crossings consisted of long journeys as only a few border posts were opened, demanded certain paperwork and would often involve bribery. The extensive cross-border kinship networks and the frequent cross-border communication via phones and along the border fences depicted the wide social worlds of borderland inhabitants, spanning across the landscape divided between the neighbouring states of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Likewise, the existence of cross-border bridges, road networks and markets located on the border, but no longer in use, indicated the former connectedness of these borderlands. Yet, the depilated state of the connecting infrastructure and its abandoned state were the visible marks of the current restrictive policies governing cross-border economic and social life.

A row of empty kiosks along the road to the main border crossing point in Southern Kyrgyzstan – Do'stlik. Photo: Elina Troscenko.

Caught in the Middle

Uzbeks are the largest minority group in Kyrgyzstan. In 2013, the Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan had reached 836,000, making up 14.5%[7] of the country's total population of 5.7 million. The majority reside in the southern regions of Kyrgyzstan that are located on the eastern part of the Ferghana Valley. The valley is one of the most densely populated areas of the region as the mountainous areas there give way to the fertile lowlands. Throughout their history, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz cohabited in the Ferghana Valley. There, the pastoralists from the mountainous areas, the sedentary populations of farmers from the irrigatable lands and traders from the urban settlements interacted. Their coexistence was largely based on these different ecological adaptations. Uzbeks were sedentary and engaged primarily in trade and agriculture, while the Kyrgyz were nomadic pastoralists (Liu 2012; Ismailbekova 2013). Prior to the Ferghana Valley's incorporation into the Russian Empire, and as in other parts of Central Asia, the distinctions between groups were contextual and people identified with several labels amongst which ethnicity was only one (Hierman 2015). As described earlier, these identification practices dramatically changed with the advent of the Soviet regime. However, the Soviet nationality policies not only inscribed and promoted the value of nationality, but also established a hierarchy of ethnic categories in Central Asia. The designated titular nationalities of each Soviet republic came to enjoy a privileged status, while the situation of ethnic minorities varied, from groups who were given autonomous territorial units within the Soviet republics to officially unrecognised ethnic designations. While the Uzbeks in the Kyrgyz SSR did not enjoy specific rights or privileges, they still held a specific position in southern Kyrgyzstan. Fumagalli (2007a) describes how, through informal agreements, a precarious balance of power was established between the two ethnic groups in southern Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet period. By the end of the 1980s, Uzbeks constituted one third of the population of southern Kyrgyzstan, while in the city of Osh, they made up almost half of the population. According to Fumagalli, ethnic stratification of labour was central to this

[7] "'Kyrgyzstan' Brief Statistical Handbook 2011–2013" by National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. (Accessed May 5, 2020). http://www.stat.kg/en/publications/kratkij-statisticheskij-spravochnik-kyrgyzstan/

balance of power. While the Kyrgyz as the titular nationality held the majority of the highest positions, Uzbeks retained central places in the trade, media and agricultural sectors. In addition, Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks could also draw on advantages that the proximity of the SSR designated as the titular Uzbek republic entailed. The immediate proximity of the Uzbek SSR allowed Kyrgyzstani Uzbeks to obtain education and employment in the Uzbek SSR with the privileges that the membership in the titular ethnic group entailed. However, this balance of power in southern Kyrgyzstan was put under constraints in the late 1980s.

Political instability combined with socio-economic crisis and increasing competition over limited resources disturbed the fragile balance of the region. In 1990, a dispute over land ignited a violent conflict that erupted along ethnic lines, preceding the ethnic clashes mentioned above. This became one of the most violent ethnic conflicts in the Soviet Union, killing hundreds of people and exposing several thousand people to crimes of rape, assault and pillaging (Tishkov 1995). The violence subsided after a couple of days when the Soviet army entered the region. The brutal riots left painful wounds in the social fabric of the region. While court cases were conducted and people were charged for violent acts, the basic grievances and suspicions were not dealt with, leaving them simmering under the surface of seemingly peaceful coexistence. The withdrawal of the Soviet army and the Soviet regime, during which the Russians had played a mediator's role, heightened an Uzbek sense of vulnerability and insecurity about the future. Morgan Liu (2012), in his monograph 'Under Solomon's Throne. Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh' writes about the post-Soviet predicament of Uzbeks living in the city of Osh, the largest city in southern Kyrgyzstan. He describes the first decade of post-Soviet independence for the urban Uzbek community in Osh as 'haunted by the anxiety, ever present beneath the veneer of public peace and political stability, that another incident could again trigger massive inter-ethnic conflict' (22).

In 2010, a national political crisis in Kyrgyzstan triggered another conflict that broke out in southern Kyrgyzstan with violent clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, as already noted earlier. This time, the violence lasted for nearly a week, leaving almost 500 people dead, thousands injured, and forcing around 300,000 to flee their homes

(KIC 2011; Ismailbekova 2013). The overthrow of Kurmanbek Bakiev, the sitting president of Kyrgyzstan, earlier that year (see above), had caused a power vacuum in the country which set off fierce power struggles and competition for influence amongst various groups. Some of the political fractions were also seeking support from the Uzbek community. Uzbek involvement in these political events was interpreted by some as arguments for autonomy and was thereby considered as a direct challenge to the integrity of the Kyrgyz state. While the exact course of events that led up to the outbreak of violence is contested, most of the accounts refer to a street brawl in the city of Osh between young Uzbek and Kyrgyz men. News about this standoff spread extremely quickly and was accompanied by unfounded rumours of committed atrocities. This led to mobilisation of youth from both ethnic groups that poured into the city of Osh from the surrounding countryside to defend and avenge their own group. Violence rapidly spread to the neighbouring cities and villages, while also taking on more systematic and coordinated characteristics. The situation in the region stabilised only when the mobilised crowds started to withdraw from the cities, as more military troops arrived in the region and as elders from both communities urged for unity and reconciliation. Although the rioting ceased, the situation in the south remained volatile. Amongst the many atrocities committed during the violent days of June 2010 were murder, torture, sexual assaults, arson and plunder (KIC 2011). In the aftermath of the June events, an international commission was established to investigate the circumstances of the conflict. The Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission issued a report in 2011 on the June 2010 events in which they pointed to the various structural causes and political circumstances leading to the conflict. Many of the structural causes were related to the systematic discrimination and marginalisation of the Uzbek community, while the role of the Kyrgyz authorities in failing to prevent the conflict from erupting and stopping the violence was emphasised. Moreover, the role of military forces in intentionally or unintentionally facilitating the violence against the Uzbek population was pointed out. In addition, the report clearly highlighted the disproportionate numbers of casualties amongst Uzbeks. Uzbeks were also overrepresented amongst the convicted and detained for the crimes committed during the conflict (KIC 2011). The Kyrgyz government responded to the report by issuing a resolution that placed all the

blame for the conflict on the local Uzbek leaders, making them the official culprits of the bloodshed. As a minority group that was blamed for the conflict, Uzbeks were subjected to vengeance and exposed to various types of harassments. Kidnappings for ransom, illegal seizures of their properties and businesses, threats, illegal arrests, illegal detention, public assaults, rapes, torture, money extortion and denial of access to justice were amongst the abuses that Uzbek community members experienced in the aftermath of the conflict (KIC 2011; Ismailbekova 2013; Megoran 2017). The general life situation for the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan worsened after the conflict of 2010. Uzbeks were removed from all the political positions that they held before the conflict, their economic activities were severely damaged if not destroyed, the media in Uzbek languages were shut down and the Uzbeks' position in the society was utterly marginalised. Aksana Ismailbekova (2013, 116) in exploring Uzbek coping strategies in the aftermath of the conflict, describes their situation in the following manner:

> Uzbeks are vulnerable: they have lost their economic security and also their political position and status, and they are thus excluded from valuable state networks in various political and economic fields that would bring them advantages. I heard that many Uzbeks had changed the names of their restaurants or hired more Kyrgyz people to avoid being visible in their own restaurants and cafes. Other Uzbek business owners either hired Kyrgyz to work for them or completely closed their businesses. I attended many festivities in the city during my research stay in Osh, such as the Day of Osh, Independence Day, and so on. I did not see many Uzbeks in the streets or actively attending these events as they used to. Uzbeks appear less and less in public as individuals, and they have lost their political representatives.

Ismailbekova identifies marriage, migration and public avoidance as important elements in Uzbek strategies for dealing with post-conflict uncertainties and insecurities. Indeed, during my fieldwork, Uzbeks were not visibly present in major cultural events taking place in Jalalabad and Osh, indicating their absence in urban public gatherings. This resonates with Ismailbekova's accounts of coping strategies

amongst the Uzbek population. Moreover, in discussions I had concerning the encounters with state authorities, Uzbeks would often note how challenging it was to deal with state authorities as they experienced a lack of interest in helping Uzbeks with their inquiries. They recounted episodes of mistreatment and even some instances of police harassment. Such stories were often accompanied by commentaries that it is best not to engage with the authorities in order to avoid the abuses such encounters might entail. In a majority of the cases I recorded, the Uzbeks saw their ill treatment by the Kyrgyz authorities through their ethnic belonging, highlighting the tensions that were present amongst the two ethnic groups.

Inter-ethnic relations in Kyrgyzstan worsened significantly after the demise of the multi-ethnic paternalistic Soviet state, as the Soviet-promoted ideas of nationalities gained new prominence in the state-building projects of the sovereign post-Soviet states. Nationalism and ethnicity were both considered to be important principles in the nation-building projects for both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. While the first Kyrgyz government led by President Askar Akaev during the initial years of independence promoted Kyrgyzstan as an inclusive place for all ethnicities, with slogans such as 'Kyrgyzstan – Our Common Home', Kyrgyzstan's political landscape turned more nationalistic with time (Marat 2008). Kurmanbek Bakiev, the second president, who was in office from 2005 to 2010, developed much more nationalistic policies, and more emphasis was put on the unity of the Kyrgyz, promoting Kyrgyzstan as the land of the Kyrgyz. The nationalistic rhetoric of Bakiev's government, along with the promotion of southern Kyrgyz in leading positions, highlighted the Uzbek exclusion from the Kyrgyz state and heightened their sense of insecurity (Cummings 2012). Liu has describes the precarious situation of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan as trapped between a rock and a harsh place. Liu (2012, 10) states that 'the nation-state concept is a poor fit for Osh Uzbeks, who look to Uzbekistan for their ethnic identification and to Kyrgyzstan for their citizenship. The predicament of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan is that they are caught between these two republics yet excluded from meaningfully belonging to either'. While in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks found themselves more and more marginalised from political and economic spheres, and their relations with the state of their putative ethno-national affiliation became strained.

Fumagalli (2007a), writing about Uzbekistan's relations with the Uzbeks in neighbouring fellow post-Soviet states, notes that, in opposition to other post-Soviet countries' supportive political approach towards their co-ethnics abroad, Uzbekistan 'seemed to "forget" about the very existence of Uzbek co-ethnics abroad' (108). Uzbekistan's lack of policy towards Uzbeks living outside of the Uzbek state has highlighted the state's disinterest and separation from their ethnic members. Both Liu and Fumagalli in their analyses underscore that Uzbeks living in neighbouring states have been excluded from meaningfully belonging to Uzbekistan. Moreover, Liu (2011, 123) points out that 'Uzbekistan has consistently pursued policies that harm the numerous Uzbek populations living in neighbouring republics, even while it trumpets itself as a proud standard-bearer of the Uzbek civilisation. Fumagalli explains this by Uzbekistan's focus on territoriality rather than ethnicity in its state-building project. Moreover, Uzbekistan's lack of interest in facilitating the maintenance of kin ties across the border indicates the state's position towards Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, considering them as belonging to Kyrgyzstan rather than Uzbekistan. Despite the strained relationship between the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan from a political point of view, the Uzbeks I encountered still had a strong attachment to Uzbekistan. The rural communities of Uzbeks, amongst whom I conducted my fieldwork, were much more informed about the current state of affairs in Uzbekistan than in Kyrgyzstan. During evenings and the cold winter days, families would spend time in front of their TV sets. As there were no Uzbek language media in Kyrgyzstan after the conflict of 2010, only Uzbek television channels were watched, underlining their seclusion from the wider Kyrgyz public. While watching the news reports on Uzbek channels, people would sometimes comment on the differences between the regimes, reflecting on the disparities between the authoritative regime in Uzbekistan and the revolution-ridden Kyrgyzstan. While, in their comments, people would point out that there are more civil and political rights in Kyrgyzstan, they also noted how unstable everything in Kyrgyzstan was. The Kyrgyz state system was often described as corrupt, where private and business interests of individuals, clans and other groups are being played out, while the strong leadership of Uzbekistan was seen as more united and genuine in their policies aimed at developing the state. At the same time, people

were also aware of the limitations of freedoms in Uzbekistan, particularly with regard to the Uzbek authorities' scepticism towards religious practices. Some informants mentioned how unhappy the Uzbek authorities were with mosques being built too close to the border of Uzbekistan. This was explained by the political situation in Uzbekistan where all religious activities are state controlled. Yet, the strict state control in Uzbekistan was often also evaluated in positive terms, particularly after the violent chaos that people experienced in 2010. This illustrates that, despite Uzbekistan's reserved attitudes towards Uzbeks living across the border, the daily lives of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan are still textured with diverse attachments connecting them to Uzbekistan. These attachments have been encouraged by their growing exclusion from the wider Kyrgyz society.

Excluded amongst the Excluded

The Uzbek community's precarious position in Kyrgyzstan has also been undermined by another aspect, namely, that Uzbeks were until recently overrepresented amongst the stateless population in Kyrgyzstan. Remarkably, however, in July 2019, UN agencies announced Kyrgyzstan to be the first country in the world to resolve statelessness issues and to become stateless-free. Indeed, five years earlier, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had launched the Global #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness, and since then it had been working in close cooperation with the Kyrgyz authorities on both identifying stateless persons in Kyrgyzstan and settling their legal status. Consequently, in 2019, the UNHCR announced that almost 14,000 stateless people had been identified in Kyrgyzstan and had received legal assistance in resolving their stateless status.[8] Prior to this campaign, however, there was little knowledge about statelessness issues in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia in general. The scarcity of literature on statelessness in Central Asia and the limited official data made statelessness poorly accounted for and little explored in this region.

The few reports that could be found estimated that the number of stateless people in Kyrgyzstan had reached over 11,000 (UNHCR 2009; Farquharson 2011). Two major groups of stateless people were highlighted in these reports. The first consisted of former citizens of the USSR who had not managed to exchange their old USSR passports or acquire new ones according to the requirements indicated in the new citizenship laws. This group included both holders of the Soviet passports issued in the Kyrgyz SSR and the Uzbek SSR. The Soviet-promoted regional integration had led to a vibrant cross-border life in the region. As the Soviet established inter-republican borders had little practical implications for the people residing in these regions, cross-border social life unfolded without hindrances. In some places, the border went through the villages without people even being aware of it or knowing if they resided in Kyrgyzstan or Uzbekistan (Megoran 2002; Reeves 2014; Troscenko 2016). The cross-

[8] "Kyrgyzstan to Become the First Stateless-Free Country in the World," UNHCR Central Asia. Accessed May 5, 2020. https://www.unhcr.org/centralasia/en/10768-kyrgyzstan-to-become-the-first-stateless-free-country-in-the-world.html.

border life implied that many people would on a daily basis cross the border. For example, people who lived on the Kyrgyz side were working, going to the school or using services on the Uzbek side and vice versa. Consequently, people had various cross-border links and connections, which were often reflected in their personal documents. Identity documents, such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, residence registrations and passports, were issued by both the Kyrgyz SSR and the Uzbek SSR. As people had legal connections to both republics, some people faced problems in meeting the legal requirements for citizenship in the newly established post-Soviet nation-states in the 1990s and, consequently, became stateless.

The second group consisted of people who were holders of expired passports issued in another country, namely expired passports of Uzbekistan. These were mainly women from Uzbekistan who had married across the border. According to Uzbekistan’s citizenship law of 1992, Uzbek citizens permanently residing abroad had to register at a consular institution. The failure to fulfil this requirement resulted in automatic withdrawal of person’s citizenship after five years of residence abroad. Most of the rural inhabitants in the Ferghana Valley region were unaware of this regulation, and in addition, an expensive and lengthy ten-hour trip to Uzbekistan’s embassy, located in Bishkek, was not a feasible option for most. Consequently, many Uzbek women residing in Kyrgyzstan were unable to renew their Uzbek passports. Similarly, acquiring Kyrgyz citizenship was not possible either, since one of the requirements to apply for Kyrgyz citizenship was a valid passport. As these women possessed only expired passports, they were unable to acquire Kyrgyz citizenship and thus became stateless.

Most of the stateless women possessed outdated documents (old Soviet passports or expired Uzbek passports) and were therefore unable to legalise their status. Facing problems of corruption, entangled bureaucracy, discrimination and lack of means and knowledge about the legislation, and being unable to provide the necessary documentation for naturalisation, these women were trapped in statelessness. Gaps in the citizenship legislation of both states, as well as a lack of knowledge about the

legislation, and lack of financial means consequently led to both *de jure* and *de facto*[9] statelessness for these women. Statelessness has been primarily conceived of as a juridical matter as, within the international legal system, it is defined as a status of a 'person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its *law*' (UN 1954). At the same time, the international human rights regime has promoted statelessness as a fundamental human rights issue as the right to citizenship is included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2014, just as I started my field research in the Ferghana Valley, the UNHCR in Kyrgyzstan was planning to start a campaign together with local NGOs and state authorities aimed at finding permanent solutions to statelessness issues in the country. The main idea behind the campaign was to bring the solution to the stateless persons, instead of asking them to come to the authorities. This was done by introducing mobile legal clinics consisting of lawyers and representatives of state authorities which would visit villages, collect information about the document problems and resolve the situation on the spot. The success of the campaign was highlighted in 2019 as the UN announced that statelessness in Kyrgyzstan had been eradicated.

[9] While *de jure* refers to the stateless people who are legally recognized as such by the country they reside in, the *de facto* stateless are people who have undetermined citizenship, who struggle to prove their citizenship or who are citizens under the operation of law, but for various reasons their citizenship is ineffective. *De facto* statelessness is a highly debated issue, whether there is such a thing, how to incorporate it into international law and how to define it (Massey 2010b).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before departing for fieldwork in the rural areas of southern Kyrgyzstan, I spent some time in Bishkek while arranging paperwork for my research stay. During this time, I met with several local scholars and shared with them my interest in exploring statelessness issues along the border, hoping to gain more insights into my upcoming fieldwork site. One such meeting was with a local political scientist, who commented on the topic of my research in the following way:

> *The state as such does not have a relationship with its citizens. So to look at people who have no citizenship makes no sense. Everything is being decided informally as the state structures do not operate the way they should. Everybody has to give bribes - either you have 'papers' or you don't. The bureaucrats themselves do not decide this, particularly not in the regions. There are other informal leaders, who decide – village elders, local mafia and others. In general, you do not need documents in the villages and in the regions because people know each other either way. It is not like you have to show a document in order to do something.*

While this comment, to a certain extent, describes realities in many rural areas, particularly with regard to the prevalence of corruption, practices of informal networks and power structures, it also reflects how this urban interlocutor expected the state to behave and the specific ways the state was supposed to be present in the lives of people. Moreover, it suggests certain expectations and assumptions about what the relationship between the state and its subjects should entail, such as governance through documenting practices and formalised encounters with an indifferent bureaucracy (Herzfeld 1993), elements that apparently were considered to be missing in the case of Kyrgyzstan. Further, during our conversation, my scholarly colleague also drew on notions of the rights and duties as a part of the state–subject relationship, which according to him had no real bearing in the context of the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan.

Being at the initial phase of my fieldwork, this conversation made me concerned about how I would approach statelessness in a context where the state was absent in

the lives of people or in a space where the state and the subjects were out of touch with each other, as indicated by my colleague. How would I approach statelessness in a stateless space? Did statelessness then have anything to do with the state at all? If there is no relationship between the state and people, does that mean that the state is not present in their lives?

Contrary to the views expressed by this urban interlocutor from Bishkek, the state appeared to transcend the lives of stateless people living in the rural areas along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border in many ways, even if their everyday lives seemed to be detached from the formal realms of the state. The most apparent, visible and tangible expressions of the state's presence in the lives of these people was its symbolic and material manifestations, namely, borders with all their physical attributes and identity documents. The stateless people were navigating their lives along and across the state border that had materialised in their lived landscape, and significantly, documents had become an important prerequisite in navigating this landscape. It was precisely through these practical experiences, such as encounters with borders and documents that stateless people talked about their statelessness and the state. Manifestations of the state thus became a guiding topic throughout my research and the generation of this thesis.

One of the most important contributions of the anthropological discipline to the study of the state, in addition to the more apparent input of adding culture to the analyses and highlighting its pivotal role in the state constitution processes, is the discipline's ability to disaggregate 'the state', illuminating its multi-faceted, multi-layered character and the plurality of its guises (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Such disaggregation reveals the assemblage of elements participating in the instantiation of the state enabling us to study each one of them and their individual role in state formation practices. My approach to the state through the analyses of its various manifestations builds upon the work of anthropologists who have critically argued against the presumption of the state as an empirically given object or a distinct entity (Radcliffe-Brown 1940; Mitchell 1991; Trouillot 2001). At the same time, other scholars have criticised a pluralistic and fragmented view of the state (Marcus 2008; Thelen, Vetters, and Benda-Beckmann 2014). While the deconstructionist approach disaggregates the state and exposes its multifarious nature, it can also be argued that

the exploration of the various state manifestations illuminates how different elements are taking part in the creation of what is ultimately a coherent and uniform image of the state, putting it back together in a sense. Either way, an anthropological study of the state calls for attentiveness to the multitude of ways the state is present and transcends the lives of people, and this thesis is a contribution to this scholarship.

Scrutinisation of the state also poses the question of what the state is and what it is not, and whether it can be clearly distinguished from the rest of society. Scholarship on the state has long been debating the possibilities and difficulties of such a distinction (Abrams 1988; Mitchell 1991; Gupta 1995; Aretxaga 2003; Stølen 2005; Sanchíz 2019). While attempting not to dichotomise the state and society, by acknowledging the fluidity and elusiveness of the boundary between these two categories, this thesis still draws on the two dimensions, particularly in seeing how throughout an historically contextualised approach one can trace both the changing presence of the state and wider societal changes taking place. More precisely, this thesis examines the entanglements between political formations, such as citizenship, borders, bureaucracy and the state, and different modes of social organisation based on family relations, kinship and ethnicity, illuminating how large-scale political formations interact and affect everyday lives of people living in the margins of the state.

Scholarly work that focuses on representations and images of the state has been subjected to criticism for its lack of contribution to the advancement of a coherent theory on the state, arguing that more focus should be given to the actual practices of the state (Thelen, Vetters, and Benda-Beckmann 2014). This thesis's emphasis on the manifestations of the state can be criticised in a similar vein. However, the aim of this thesis is to explore when and how the state is instantiated in the lives of the stateless population in the borderlands of Kyrgyzstan, rather than how the state is constructed per se. In other words, this thesis situates itself amongst the body of work that approaches the state through its concrete expressions in everyday life (Harvey 2005; Hull 2012b; Navaro 2012) and through people's encounters with the state (Gupta 1995; Poole 2004). It looks at 'the state as both an open notion and an entity, the presence and content of which is not taken for granted' (Aretxaga 2003, 395). The ethnography illustrates how stateless people encounter the state in their everyday lives as well as the

ways the state is present in their lives through its material and symbolic manifestations. The illuminative and productive qualities of an approach that exposes the state's effects on the mundane lives of people are well documented in the anthropological literature (Harvey 2005; Navaro 2012; Jansen 2013). Yet, this work not only explores how the state transcends the lives of people through its material manifestations, but how people also undermine, interact and engage in a dialectical process with these manifestations, while navigating their lives within and across the state boundaries. While the material manifestations of the state are given prominence in this work, they are undoubtedly intertwined with other dimensions of 'stateness', such as affect (Navaro-Yashin 2007; Laszczkowski and Reeves 2015), governmentality (Foucault 1991), state formation (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005) and power (Victoria 2016), amongst others. Richard Jenkins (2009, 140) approaches power as 'the ways and means that people employ in the pursuit of their ends, whatever those are'. As illustrated throughout this work, the power dimension is always present in the interactions between people and the various forms of state manifestations, may those be borders, the state's documenting practices or the citizenship regime, as the attempts to intrude, impose, shape, resist and obscure are part of the objectives of these interactions.

Materiality of the State

The subject of materiality, the ways that material objects and practices are interacting with, facilitating, enhancing, structuring, forming and mediating the lives of people is a well-established topic in anthropology (Appadurai 1988; Ingold 2010; Harvey and Knox 2012; Dalakoglou 2012). Within political anthropology, a significant body of literature has dealt with the material manifestations of the state as one type of modality through which the state is encountered and experienced. For a state to be present, it must be enacted in some way, and as Navaro-Yashin (2012, 124) puts it, "state-like structures make themselves evident to the people who inhabit their domains in the form of materialities', turning them into an accessible object of study and a vantage point from which to approach the state. Timothy Mitchell (1999) has highlighted the transcendental appearance of the state, and scholars studying its material manifestations have argued how locating the state in the various material objects that represent the state can unhinge this image of the state (Keshavarz 2016). Following this line of thought, numerous works within anthropology have explored various ways the state is constituted and has materialised in everyday life, exploring such topics as infrastructure, territoriality, bureaucracy, state symbols and state representations (Poole 2004; Harvey 2005; Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Reeves 2009; Hull 2012a; Navaro-Yashin 2012).

However, the scholarly engagement with the material world, the emphasis that should be placed on the materiality of objects and whether the object- or human-centred perspective should be the prevalent one have all been subjected to heated debates in the social sciences. Such works as those of Bruno Latour with his actor-network theory, Daniel Miller with material culture, Tim Ingold's ecology of materials and Michel Foucault's government of things, amongst others, have had a central role in these discussions. While much of the work by the so-called 'new materialists' take up an ontological discussion on the agency of the material, I align my work along the theoretical approaches of scholars who attempt to combine both humans and objects in their studies, underscoring the complementarity of a material dimension to the analyses of social worlds (Navaro-Yashin 2012). Building upon the work of Yael Navaro-Yashin, as well as Stef Jansen (2013) and Madeleine Reeves (2017) who specifically

have incorporated the material world in their respective studies of borders, this thesis takes the material manifestations of the state as its analytical focus, thus exploring how state manifestations shape, facilitate and compromise people's social worlds on the margins. Borders, in this regard, represent one of the dimensions of life in the margins of the state.

Border Studies

Borders, along with all their attributes represent and mark the limit of the state's territoriality and sovereignty and are some of the most evocative manifestations of the state. Borders – being both so central to the construction of the state, while at the same time being peripheral by representing the margins of the state – have been subject to a great number of studies within social and political sciences. Recently, borders as a topic of scholarly interest have seen a renaissance. This renewed interest can be attributed to various large-scale political, economic and military events that contributed to reconfigurations of borders and reorganisation of space. Amongst those are the Crimean case that involved violent and unexpected border shifts in Europe, changes in European border policies ('Fortress Europe') in the wake of large-scale migration and the highly debated border wall project along the Mexico–US border. The large number of edited volumes on borders, as well as the readers and companions to border studies published over the last decade, reflect the comprehensive scholarly work dedicated to understanding and exploring borders from various vantage points and relating them to various subjects, places, scales and approaches (Feyissa 2010; Wastl-Walter 2011; Billé, Delaplace, and Humphrey 2012; Wilson and Donnan 2012b; Bringa and Toje 2016; Agier 2016). However, as already mentioned, borders are in no way a newcomer to the scholarly literature.

Up until the 1980s, state borders were mainly considered as an outcome of a top-down political decision-making process, a view that was strongly anchored in the geopolitics of the Cold War, which meant that the scholarly preoccupation was with the description of the borders rather than the actual study of them (Newman 2006). The emphasis on the political and topographical conceptualisation of the borders had foregrounded them as a subject of study within the field of political geography. Yet, along with the fall of the Iron Curtain, dissolution of the Soviet Union and the upheaval of the Cold War world order, the study of borders gained a new prominence both within political geography and in social sciences more generally, including anthropology. During the 1990s, border studies emerged as a distinguished interdisciplinary subfield, as the tremendous geopolitical changes of the time induced a whole set of border related processes – new borders appeared, some vanished, some opened and others merged.

Moreover, during the following decades, political and economic processes shaped a new world order that significantly affected border practices, processes, appearances and meanings attached to them. Such processes as the enlargement of the European Union, globalisation, the war on terrorism, expansion of neoliberal governance, China's economic rise, Russia's policies in its near abroad with appropriation of new territories, creation of new supranational organisations such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the rise of the Islamic State and its expansion in the Middle East, establishment of new states, the surge of nationalism and protectionist policies, large-scale migration and displacement and refugee crises, as well as climate crises, are processes on both a global and regional scale that created and opened new ground for critical border studies (Newman 2011; Wilson and Donnan 2012a). Throughout almost three decades, border studies have explored and theorised 'the intersections of borders, place, power, identity and the state' (Wilson and Donnan 2012a, 5), predicted deterritorialisation and the downfall of the nation-state as well as the disappearance of borders in the wake of globalisation, but also observed the proliferation of borders and the current prevalence of distinctive border regimes with differentiated permeability embedded in the securitisation discourse. Advancements in the theoretical frameworks of the sub-disciplines include several important changes in approaches towards the study of borders. Importantly, there has been a significant change in how borders are perceived. From conceptualising borders as 'products' and demarcation lines with a primary focus on their physical dimensions, border scholars, influenced by post-structuralism, now have a more process-oriented approach exploring 'human practices that constitute and represent differences in space' (Van Houtum 2005, 672). Other important changes include comparative analyses covering new regions, incorporation of culture and everyday practices as pivotal elements in border studies, a nuanced view of borders both as marginal and central locations and seeing the incompleteness and fragmentation in the work of borders and states. By embedding a multidisciplinary approach that combines geography, history, political science, sociology and social anthropology in their approach, border studies have attempted to depart from the disciplinary limitations and develop a common cross-disciplinary approach to the study of borders (Newman 2011; Wilson and Donnan 2012a).

The anthropology of borders has played a key role in the development of border studies. While the social dimension of border configuration processes was absent from the early border studies that were embedded in political geography, anthropologists had long been theorising about the socially constructed boundaries between groups of people. A work of paramount significance in the theorisation of boundaries is the volume *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* edited by Fredrik Barth (1969) that challenged the orthodox view of cultures as enclosed static units, and highlighted how boundaries are produced and maintained through the interactions between ethnic groups. The social organisation of societies, their boundedness, boundaries and interactions with others have preoccupied anthropologists from the early days of the discipline. Later on, this interest was extended to studies of state borders as also these frontiers became a subject of anthropological inquiry. Within the literature that specifically attends to state borders, the extensive work done on the Mexico–US border established it as a template for future border studies, as this iconic case study encapsulated connections across and divisions between states (Heyman 1994; Alvarez 1995). However, the geopolitical changes in Europe after the Cold War and the scholarly literature that developed in its aftermath illustrated the wide variety of the border conditions that both diversified the anthropological literature on and the analyses of the borders, denouncing the status of the Mexico–US border as the standard template. Such important ethnographic contributions as Daphne Berdahl's (1999) work on the German borderlands after the re-unification of Germany, John Borneman's (1992) work on the division of Berlin, Sarah Green's (2005) work on ambiguity and marginality along the Greek–Albanian border and Pamela Ballinger's (2003) exploration of hybrid identities in the borderlands of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia highlighted the variety of border conditions in Europe alone. While the regional coverage of the anthropological literature on borders was expanding, as well as the issues that they were illustrating, the main focus was dominated by the overall exploration of the 'forms of engagement between people and border regimes" (Green 2013, 349) in which particular importance was given to how borders affected people's identity. This focus can be traced back to the already mentioned work of Barth and the anthropological preoccupation with social formation and cultural entities.

Still, this also meant that the border itself escaped anthropological scrutiny. Much of the anthropological literature on borders includes lengthy descriptions of geographical locations of the border, historical explorations of the changing border regimes and the life unfolding along and across it, without actually describing the morphology of the border in question. The disregard for the appearance of the border was also evident in the public discourse of the anthropology of borders in the beginning of the 2010s. For example, while attending anthropological conferences, workshops, seminars, and plenary sessions on borders, my attention was drawn to the fact that there was almost no consideration given to the actual appearance and physical attributes of the borders. This oversight of the border itself and neglect of its materiality can be attributed to the theoretical advancements that have conceptualised borders as a process, as border work, highlighting their dynamic nature and people's engagements with them, as well as the attempts to de-objectify them. Jansen (2013, 23) attributed this disengagement with the materiality to the fact that 'most studies in the anthropology of borders seek to denaturalise the notion of borders as things'. However, this disregard for the border obscured it, along with its materiality and the ways its morphology interacted with space and people, thus reconfiguring the border landscape, people's everyday lives and the sociality across it. This neglect of the border's materiality was challenged not only within the wider debates of the new materialists in social sciences that also resonated in anthropology, but also by the construction of new border barriers and the erection of border fences across Europe at the height of the so-called 'migration crises' and the US president's (in)famous political project of border wall building along the Mexico–US border.

While the impact of border regimes on the population that lives in borderlands is not a new topic in the anthropological literature, evidenced by, for example, Pelkmans's (2006) work on the emergence and changes of the Georgian–Turkish border, at the beginning of the 2010s, there was little concern about how the physicality of the border was interacting with people. The majority of works on the borders up until the 2010s, and during the fieldwork of this study, were silent on the actual appearance and particular morphology of the borders, although there were calls for increased attention to the border materialisation processes. For example, Madeleine

Reeves (2008) was drawing scholarly attention to the necessity for explorations on how the borders were materialising both through the manning of the border, objects and techniques that were framing the border space and on the ways in which the border itself was producing mobility, immobility, certain types of crossings and subjectivities. Also, Jansen (2013) was attempting more explicitly to incorporate materiality in his exploration of the division of Sarajevo. However, the politics of security in Europe, the images of the high border fences being set up around the 'Fortress Europe', and the rising wall along the Mexico–US border made the material border more real than ever. This generated an increased focus on the new border technologies and infrastructure, a subject that has been widely covered within critical security studies. Consequently, anthropologists have started to explore the brutal materiality of the border and its effects (Andersson 2016; Jusionyte 2017). This wider focus on the materiality of the border is also supported and accompanied by anthropologists' increased focus on infrastructure that has been a flourishing topic within the discipline (Harvey 2005; Dalakoglou 2010; Larkin 2013; Jensen and Morita 2017). The increased focus on the border itself, specifically its technologies of power, morphology, infrastructure and physical prominence, has opened a new dimension in the studies of borders, illuminating how it brings about new subjects and how it is transforming the space around the borders along with the social relations in which the physical elements of the border play a central role. The exploration of borders' infrastructure and materiality thereby has to embrace this duality as it not only illuminates the political and ideological factors that are manifested in the material (Humphrey 2005), but also how it forms and shapes new social configurations. Casper Bruun Jensen and Atsuro Morita (2017, 620) in describing the potentialities of infrastructure notes that 'infrastructures hold the potential capacity to do such diverse things as making new forms of sociality, remaking landscapes, defining novel forms of politics, reorienting agency, and reconfiguring subjects and objects, possibly all at once'.

Yet, Madeleine Reeves (2017) has pointed out that attending to materiality requires caution, since it cannot be assumed that the relation between the material and the political is direct and transparent. She underscores how, for example, infrastructure refracts, leaks and breaks, highlighting that the material has a life of its own. Moreover,

through examining the infrastructure along the Kyrgyz–Tajik border in the Isfara Valley, she directs our attention to how 'present infrastructural visions are interrupted by past modes of doing and inhabiting space' (730), emphasising the unboundedness of the material and its embeddedness in the local context. Specifically, this unboundedness opens the material world to be appropriated in various ways as well as the possibilities to imbue it with various meanings, both diverse and conflicting. Therefore, the material is always relational, as it is embedded in networks of relations, meanings, appropriations and ascriptions, as illustrated throughout this work. Further, this work contributes to the body of border literature that focuses on the intersections of the material and social worlds by exploring how the particularities of the border's material capacities bring into being new forms of sociality, reconfiguring social relations by facilitating, inhibiting or redirecting them, at the same time illustrating that people themselves are creatively engaging with these materialities as they become incorporated into the physical and social landscape of people.

Documents and Bureaucracy

Whereas the materiality of the borders represents some of the most visible manifestations of the state, the infrastructure of a state's bureaucracy, along with its material expressions such as documents, while seemingly less impressive in terms of its magnitude and scale, can be no less powerful with regard to its symbolic representations as well as its capacities to produce subjectivities and the configuring of people's lived worlds.

While bureaucracy and its functions have always been fundamental and indispensable parts of the state project, anthropologists have been wary about studying bureaucracies. The lack of engagement with bureaucracy on the part of the anthropological discipline can be traced to several factors. One of the most influential and popular writings on bureaucracy, that of Max Weber (1978), depicted bureaucracy as a rational and dehumanised system of rule within 'modern' states. This powerful image of bureaucracy as an objective, technocratic practice from which individual subjectivities are detached, excluded bureaucracy from the anthropologists' field of interest as the discipline saw itself preoccupied with the study of humans' social and cultural lives. Moreover, the formal organisations of political systems were long considered to be a subject of other disciplines, such as political science and sociology. Anthropologists' preoccupation with the societies outside the 'modern' world added to their disregard for the bureaucratic realm, and even when the societies under study were affected by colonial bureaucracies, their effects rather than the bureaucratic practices themselves were scrutinised. Therefore, the anthropological exploration of bureaucracy is quite recent and dates back to the mid-1990s when the anthropology of the state became increasingly engaged in exploring ways in which political structures frame and affect people's everyday lives. Today, the anthropology of bureaucracy consists of a rich literature covering various dimensions of bureaucratic practices in many parts of the world, their effects and experiences, not only for state institutions, but also other large-scale institutions, such as corporations, non-governmental agencies and global humanitarian organisations with complex administrative structures. Anthropologists have explored the power of bureaucracy (Heyman 2004; Feldman 2008), its nature and capacities (Ferguson 1990; Herzfeld 1993; Nuijten 2004; Jacob 2007), bureaucratic

knowledge (Weber 1978; Strathern 2000; Mathews 2008), encounters (Silver 2010; Gupta 2012; Kravel-Tovi 2012; Carswell, Chambers, and De Neve 2018), its affective dimensions (Stoler 2009; Navaro-Yashin 2012;) and bureaucrats themselves (Hoag 2010; Scherz 2011; Riles 2017). The anthropology of bureaucracy has underscored how bureaucratic practices make the state available for closer scrutiny, as precisely through exploring the everyday practices of bureaucracies one can illuminate the various ways the state is constituted in people's lives and vice versa (Gupta 1995). Sharma and Gupta (2006, 11) underline the importance of exploring the mundane bureaucratic procedures as they 'provide important clues to understanding the micro-politics of state work, how state authority and government operate in people's daily lives, and how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population'.

A central role in bureaucratic procedures is played by bureaucratic technologies, such as files, documents and digital forms of documenting practices. These technologies are constitutive elements of the bureaucratic domain through which it operationalises itself and through which it exercises 'governmentality' (Foucault 1991). Anthropological interest in bureaucratic documents, both as ethnographic artefacts and a source of data, has been shifting along with the development of the discipline itself. From being the primary sources of information for 'arm-chair' anthropologists with a shift in focus on fieldwork and participant observation as the key method for production of anthropological knowledge, documents were ignored. Still, documents were brought back into the discipline by the post-modern turn in anthropology that saw ethnographic knowledge as textual (Lowenkron and Ferreira 2014). Scholarly works analysing documents as semiotic constructs were mostly concerned with representations and how documents as textual representations were engaging in construction of subjects and objects. New scholarly appeal towards the material world also had its impact on the study of documents, as documents could be studied as valuable artefacts beyond their semiotic content. The particular focus on documents' materiality has produced a body of work that explores people's encounters with documents through their responses to the documents' patterns and aesthetic forms, and the emotive dimensions that such encounters evoke and the ways documents

signify linkages to and amongst places, people and things (Hull 2012a). Today, documents with their semiotic and material dimensions are actively incorporated into anthropological knowledge production, both as important sources of information and as ethnographical artefacts that are actively engaging in production and mediation of subjects, objects, relations and social structures.

Documents are one of the prime modalities through which the state engages with people and vice versa. People encounter and engage with the state through various types of documents, such as identity cards, permits, registries, agreements, statements, applications, complaints, voting ballots and court papers. Documents not only frame people's interactions with the state, but also illuminate how the state is documenting people's lives and even affirming crucial life events from registering births to issuing death certificates. In this regard, documents are often analysed as the paradigmatic artefacts of state control, coordination and subjection. John Torpey (1998), in his historical account of the invention of the passport, illustrates how passports and other documents were developed as central tools for the state apparatuses' mechanisms of legibility, control over the population and as a means of monopolising the mobility of people. While identification of its subjects is essential for the state, such identification processes through documentation are also essentially intertwined within construction of particular subjects – citizens, migrants, husbands, drivers, welfare receivers, pensioners, patients and illegal subjects, to mention just a few. Identification, categorisation and documentation of people makes them 'legible' (Scott 1998) to the state institutions upon whom particular management policies can be implemented. These generative capacities of documents in constructing various subjects and their implications are well explored in the anthropological literature (Riles 2006; Jacob 2007; Pelkmans 2013; Haas 2017). Nevertheless, while much of the literature has focused on the state's imperative to render subjects legible in order to be able to exercise their regulatory power, there is innovative scholarly work arguing for how some document regimes enhance opposite processes. For example, Heath Cabot (2012, 16) explores how particular documents intended to control can actually contribute to making people illegible to the state, as documents become imbued with other meanings 'that reshape or even undermine state regulatory activities'. Cabot describes how 'pink

cards', an identity document issued to asylum seekers in Greece, are reconfigured by the asylum seekers themselves as they ascribe the significance of a 'residence permit' to these documents in the attempt to give meaning to their legal limbo status. Such scholarly contributions as Cabot's provide an insight into how people themselves are actively participating in constructing documents, tapping into the bureaucratic mechanisms of control by imbuing them with contradictory meanings, thus challenging and reconfiguring their legal and official status. These works, in particular, contribute to expanding our knowledge of how people apply documents and creatively adapt them to meet their everyday needs, outside their institutionalised bureaucratic purposes.

While acknowledging the multi-layered modalities of power and control mechanisms inherent in documenting regimes, this thesis attempts to shed light on how people engage with documents, focusing on the practices and meanings associated with them. Such an approach shows how documents can stand for something other than their legal statuses, as their role and application in people's everyday lives reveals the significance that is given to their particular capacities besides the control mechanism, as for example, the symbolic meanings or performative aspects associated with them. Moreover, the documents themselves can be significant markers not only of the state's power over its subjects, but also of the state's presence or absence in people's lives.

Another well examined aspect in the anthropological literature of states' documentation practices is related to the governance of mobility, which explores how documents contribute in constructing mobile and immobile bodies and thereby controlling people's movement (Torpey 2000; Wang 2004; Salter 2006; Jansen 2009; Fassin 2011). Mahmoud Keshavarz (2018), in his sophisticated and innovative work on the passport, illustrates the central role of passports in defining bodies and orientating them in space. Keshavarz also emphasises how space itself is defined through the mobility of the 'passportised' bodies, determining which bodies have access to certain spaces and which do not. This resonates with other scholarly work that explores how passports and other documents are expressions of a state's sovereignty over its territory (Caplan and Torpey 2001). While documents can be powerful tools in providing people with mobility, it has also been pointed out that documents are highly unstable objects. Tobias Kelly (2006, 102) in his work on

Palestinians in the West Bank, demonstrates that, while documents could provide people with the possibilities of mobility, 'the meanings and implications of particular documents were never stable and consistent'. Throughout their lives as material objects, according to Appadurai (1986), documents may be ascribed various roles depending on the political, economic and social context of their application. The material durability of the documents allows them to be reinterpreted and reapplied in contexts different from those of their initial use. As pointed out by Annabel Pinker (2015, 110) in her study of document practices in the Peruvian Andes, the continuous weightiness of documents was precisely 'inhered in their material durability over time and their capacity to be reinterpreted'. Moreover, document validity itself can be contested and disputed by the state and is often highly dependent upon the performance of its holder (Kelly 2006; Reeves 2013; Keshavarz 2016). However, it is not only in the power of the bureaucrats to determine the validity of documents. By exploring people's engagements with documents, these studies show how the validity of documents and their application is embedded in the network of social relations that the documents are a part of. They also indicate how people, through their performances, can make invalid documents applicable, validating their mobility across the space that the same documents were intended to control and sustain.

The power dimensions of documents are inherent not only in the subject construction, representation and application of the documents, but also in the processes related to their production and acquisition. People's engagements with documents presuppose bureaucratic encounters, and a great deal of anthropological literature has explored how people's encounters with bureaucracy are marked by a variety of affective experiences, such as feelings of fear, hope, uncertainty and ambiguity, through which bureaucracies also exercise control over their subjects (Nuijten 2004; Kelly 2006; Cabot 2012; Hull 2012b). Deborah Pool (2004, 50) has argued that 'the law as a guarantor of rights always already contains within it the threat of an arbitrary power'. Accordingly, the unpredictability of bureaucracy is inherently linked to its functions of implementing the legislative regulations of the state. Contradictory to Weber's (1978) rational image of modern bureaucracy, arbitrariness and unpredictability are systematically produced within complex systems of modern

bureaucracy around the world, often having critical consequences for the people it affects. For example, Akhil Gupta (2012, 6) notes that poverty in India is linked to the fact that 'bureaucratic action repeatedly and systematically produces arbitrary outcomes in its provision of care', which has dramatic consequences for the population as in some cases it determines people's chances for survival. The unpredictability and the arbitrary nature of bureaucratic encounters imply that dealing with bureaucracy always contains a potentiality of consternation. Marginalised populations, in particular, are more vulnerable to this arbitrary character of the state as their position in society makes it difficult for them to challenge state authorities. The unpredictability of bureaucracy in many cases is also closely linked to time consumption as people's engagements with the bureaucracy are time demanding. The time-consuming practices that people engage in, such as countless and futile trips to the state offices, are also accompanied by a systematic production of waiting. While it has been argued that waiting for the state can be seen as future orientating practices which generate hope, temporal processes in people's encounters with the state are often analysed as a source of power to be used by the state as a particular mechanism of control and domination (Nuijten 2003; Hoag 2014; Carswell, Chambers et al. 2018). Likewise, scholars have explored how people are trying to take back control over their time and give meaning to prolonged process of waiting, which often occur in relation to asylum procedures (Cabot 2012; Bendixsen 2015). Ethnographic explorations of bureaucratic encounters have revealed how the state is experienced in everyday life – particularly in cases where such encounters are the most notable ways in which people engage with the state – how such encounters texture people's relationship with the state and how bureaucratic practices are configuring people's lives.

Anthropological explorations of local level bureaucratic practices can likewise indicate how the regulations and decisions of the centralised state are implemented on the ground, revealing the practices of the state on various scales. The unpredictability, indeterminacy and arbitrariness of bureaucratic practices can thereby also be seen as a systematic characteristics of the state system that is embedded in top-down legislative practices through which changing legislation – that has to be enforced locally – creates discrepancies and arbitrary outcomes for people on the ground. As exemplified by

Gupta, deeper inquiries into bureaucratic practices can help us understand how social realities are created through particular, sometimes arbitrary, bureaucratic actions.

The relationship between the social realities and the bureaucratic order is another topic attended to in some of the contemporary anthropological writings. Within these works, particular attention has been given to exploring the gaps between these two domains and the ways people are navigating between their own lived social realities and the bureaucratic, documented realities (Reeves 2013; Lowenkron and Ferreira 2014). Colin Hoag (2011) stressed the importance of writing about and, moreover, writing from these gaps as it forces one to look for elements that are complicating the legal realism of bureaucratic practices. Following Hoag's suggestion, this work engages with the material artefacts of bureaucratic practices, namely documents, exploring how what I refer to as 'document predicaments', amongst the rural Uzbek population along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, can be illustrative of gaps between the state's bureaucratic order and people's social realities. Moreover, by developing the concept of 'entangled documents', this work attempts not only to point out the gaps and gap filling practices, but also explores the genealogy of such gaps. As documents are the material traces of bureaucratic practices, their entanglement and contingency reveal the dynamics between the bureaucratic state order and changes in the political, social and economic spheres of life.

The Ferghana Valley represents not only a patchwork of borders and territoriality. Uzbeks residing along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border are also left with a 'patchwork of documentation' (Parsons and Lawreniuk 2017, 1) that connects people to several now independent nation-states. Documents, being material artefacts crafted and applied in a certain time and space, offer a unique possibility to trace and explore people's relationship with the state as the production and application of documents is precisely one of the practices that the state engages in to both materially and symbolically establish relationships with people (Petryna and Follis 2015). By drawing on the various practices associated with documenting regimes, such as subject construction, governance, document appropriation and application, as well as meanings associated with documents and bureaucratic encounters, this work engages with the materiality of this patchwork of documents to illustrate and analyse the dynamics in

state–subject relations amongst the rural Uzbeks living along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border.

Theorising Citizenship

The state manifests itself, not only in the materiality of tangible objects such as borders and documents, but also through the bodies of its subjects, namely in and through the production of its citizens. Indeed, subject production has been recognised as one of the most fundamental features of statecraft (Trouillot 2001). Michel-Rolph Trouillot, approaching the state as empirically borderless, has identified four distinct and recognisable state effects that make state processes and practices available for ethnographic study. Two of these state effects, the isolation and identification effects, explicitly refer to the production of individualised subjects and their identification with collectivities (Trouillot 2001). These state effects directly attend to the production of citizens and citizenry, which not only are some of the most profound features of the state, but are also central to state formation itself (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005). Generating citizens and the formation of specific subjectivities are thus inherent in the state-building process itself, marking citizenship as an important site of enquiry for exploring ways in which the state transcends people's lives.

Scholarly literature on citizenship operates with several different conceptualisations of the term. Firstly, it uses the term citizenship to denote formal membership in a state with all the rights and obligations it entails. This concept of citizenship, referring to a person's legal status in a political community, that is the state, is the common understanding of the term and represents, in a sense, the way the state operationalises it. Secondly, citizenship is also an analytical concept used by anthropologists and political scientists alike, addressing processes and practices relating to individuals' membership in a variety of political communities (Lazar and Nuijten 2013). This, for example, may entail the analyses of individual political agency, the processes of claim-making and self-making and individuals' participation in political communities of various scales, such as trade unions, and in political communities in various spaces, such as cities. Thirdly, the concept of citizenship from an ethnographic perspective entails people's understandings and experiences of citizenship, which might be overlapping, complementary to or contradicting the legal and analytical concepts of citizenship. For example, Trevor Stack (2012, 876), drawing on his fieldwork in Mexico, describes how his informants saw citizenship as a way of

living in a society that 'combined the inescapable condition of sociality with the ideal of trying to live in a civil way'. These various conceptualisations of citizenship show how the term has different applications and utilities within the scholarly literature, indicating the complexity of the analytical terrain it compromises and revealing the historical development of the scholarly engagement with citizenship.

Explorations of ideas concerning membership in a political community have a long history dating back to the early Greek city-states when philosophers such as Aristotle puzzled over how to define members of the polis and what constituted them. While anthropologists since the early days of the discipline have attempted to understand and explore the political organisation of people and the social order of communities, citizenship has not been an anthropological concern until quite recently. The widespread notion of citizenship as a legal concept obscured it from the anthropological gaze and placed it in the domain of political theorists. However, as citizenship became unhinged from its purely legal conceptualisation, and was gradually developed as an analytical tool, by such works as the writings of Thomas Humphrey Marshall (1950), the concept also took root in other disciplines, particularly in sociology where much theoretical work on the concept of citizenship was done (Tilly 1995). Anthropologists are, in other words, latecomers to the now interdisciplinary field of citizenship studies, but they have made a significant contribution to the theory and understanding of citizenship.

Anthropologists' input to the theoretical advancements of citizenship studies is diverse. Firstly, anthropologists have contributed to unravelling and nuancing the concept of citizenship. Despite its universalistic image, the citizenship concept has a strong normative character. The term itself became widely used after the Second World War as issues concerning the rights of people and the protection of rights and democracy were heavily debated while tackling the atrocities of the war. The term citizenship played a central role in these debates as it referred both to the autonomy of the individual and the individual's inclusion in a collectivity. Within this post-war context, the scholarly debates about citizenship, and more prominently questions regarding what citizenship should mean and include, were normatively framed and based in Western political history (Magnette 2005). The scholarly work on citizenship

from this post-war period is thus situated in a Western, liberal, political thought. Anthropologists, through their ethnographic insights, have disputed this normative and universalistic understanding of citizenship, accentuating how ideas about citizenship and the ways it is practiced depend on and are deeply embedded in the local contexts (Lazar and Nuijten 2013). For example, anthropologists working on the post-Soviet space have pointed out how former Soviet policies affected the citizenship regimes that were established in the new nation-states, how the economic struggles of the transition period affected people's notions of citizenship, how Soviet legacies of particular bureaucratic practices in relation to citizenship are still applied today and how the Soviet citizenship regime in general is still informing people's understandings and notions of citizenship (Verdery 1998; Hojaqizi 2008; Yalçin-Heckmann 2012; Bloch 2014; Mühlfried 2014; Werner, Emmelhainz, and Barcus 2017).

Anthropologists have likewise contributed to the disaggregation of the citizenship concept itself. The conventional understanding of the citizenship concept involves notions of membership and rights that are articulated through the particular legal bond between an individual and the state. However, anthropologists along with other social science scholars have shown how these various elements forming the core of the citizenship concept can be detached from each other, challenging the image of their interdependence. Some works have exemplified how people without formal membership of the state, such as migrants, can still enjoy rights in the state where they reside, particularly due to the legal frameworks embedded in the international human rights regime and other supranational treaties (Soysal 1994). In other situations, quite the contrary has proven to be the case. Some people, despite their citizen status, are not granted the rights and protections that citizenship entails, underlining how gender, class, race, ethnicity and religion can be important variables according to which some people are rendered as less citizens than others and thereby do not enjoy the privileges their legal status formally entitles them to (Yuval-Davis 1997; Koster 2014). The conventional idea of citizenship, which is embodied through a formal, legal link between an individual and the state, conveys the concept a static appearance. Many works have demonstrated how citizens and non-citizens alike are actively engaging with the concept of citizenship, as non-citizens are requesting their inclusion in the

collectivity, while citizens are asking for the expansion of their rights. Thus, these scholarly works are challenging the static appearance of citizenship status and documenting the processual, changing nature of citizenship, revealing the instability of the concept despite its static appearance (Holston 1999; Bendixsen 2013). Anthropologists' decoupling of the core elements of citizenship and their emphasis on the processual nature of citizenship have also challenged the nation-state as the framing scale of citizenship, particularly as many works have indicated how other spaces than the nation-state can be important sites for citizenship practices that have more prominence in people's the everyday lives, referring both to cities and transnational locations (Holston 1999; Schiller 2005).

These theoretical and analytical advancements have generated a whole range of analytical concepts aimed at capturing and analysing the various practices related to how people are constituting themselves as members of various political communities, such as cultural citizenship (Rosaldo 1994), multicultural citizenship (Kymlicka 1995), insurgent citizenship (Holston 1999), transborder citizenship (Schiller 2005), substantial citizenship, environmental citizenship, biological citizenship (Petryna 2004), flexible citizenship (Ong 1999) and migrant citizenship (Nyers 2015). The proliferation of such terminology has also been questioned for endangering the term through its over-usage, as it becomes imbued with such diversified meanings that it risks losing its value (Magnette 2005). However, this body of literature has investigated the vast number of diversified experiences related to citizenship practices, whether understood as analytical concepts attempting to grasp how people constitute themselves as members of various communities, or terms coined to describe particular practices, performances of citizenship or people's own experiences and understandings of what citizenship means and entails in their everyday lives.

As the state-centric conventional understanding of citizenship has been challenged and replaced with contextual, processual and performative approaches towards citizenship, highlighting the differentiated nature of citizenship, this has also revealed how the binary set of citizens and non-citizens omits the complexities of various types of belonging, membership, exclusion and discrimination that people encounter. Kate Hepworth has suggested that, in order to grasp the diversity of

subjectivities that individuals might have both within the political system and outside it, topology could be a useful analytical tool. Hepworth notes the diversity of terms that have been put forward to describe a particular relationship between a subject and a political community – 'alien citizens' (Ngai 2004), 'abject citizens' (Hepworth 2012; Sharkley, 2008), 'graduated citizenship' (Ong 2006), 'undocumented citizens' (McNevin 2012) and 'irregular citizenship' (Nyers, 2011) – pointing to a whole spectrum of statuses and different constellations of membership and belonging (Hepworth 2014). Much of this literature has explored the statuses of marginalised groups, such as irregular migrants, undocumented labour force, Roma people and other vulnerable groups who are marginalised within society. While there is an increased focus on diversity of political subjectivities besides the citizen, one particular group of people is seen as the ultimate 'other' of citizens, namely, stateless people.

Statelessness has been posed in a binary opposition to citizenship, and therefore, this status is often treated as an either-or position in the academic literature. Just as citizenship, statelessness too was on the international agenda after the Second World War when dealing with the consequences of the war. From that period onwards, statelessness has been primarily conceived of as a rights issue and as a juridical matter defined in the international legal system as a status of a 'person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its *law'* (UN 1954). One of the most influential works on statelessness was written by Hanna Arendt, who herself was rendered stateless by the German Nazi regime along with other members of the German Jewish community. In her famous work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt (1968) remarked on how the denationalisation of Jews meant losing 'the right to have rights' and, consequently, implied a loss of humanity. This rights-based conceptualisation meant that the majority of academic literature attending to statelessness was within the legal, political science and humanitarian fields. However, recently, social scientists have turned their attention to the undertheorised field of statelessness and explored statelessness from other vantage points than the rights-based imperative, looking at it through topics such as labour exploitation, displacement, affective dimensions and stages of liminality (Mountz et al. 2002; Azis 2014; Belton 2015; Bloom, Tonkiss and Cole 2017; Parsons and Lawreniuk 2018). Nevertheless, anthropological literature in

this topical field is still very limited and in dire need of ethnography that would shed more light on stateless people’s own perceptions, experiences and understandings of statelessness. This thesis is thus a contribution to the expansion of general knowledge on statelessness. Moreover, moving beyond the rights-based approach, this thesis aligns itself with other scholarly works that are encouraging scholars to situate experiences of statelessness within a space where the state is not always the people’s main reference point. Such an approach to statelessness not only illuminates a subject’s particular relationship with the state, but also sheds light on people’s understanding of citizenship and what a formal relationship with the state would potentially involve.

Temporality

All the above-mentioned cases of particular state manifestations in the lives of the rural Uzbek communities along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border are also layered with another dimension that textures and shapes these manifestations, namely, temporality. Anthropologists have always been tuned in to the temporal dimension of social and cultural phenomena we study, acknowledging the changing nature of social realities. Scholars in general have addressed temporality not only as a linear measurement of time, but also as a socially constructed concept concerning how people's experiences and understandings of time vary, particularly as it manifests itself very differently in people's lives. The various forms of state manifestations in everyday life of people, such as borders, documents and citizenship forms, are thus experienced, felt and understood differently by various subjects.

While the scholarship on borders has an overwhelmingly spatial and territorial focus, scholars have recently paid more attention to the temporal dimension of border work. Some scholars are applying a linear time approach towards the studies of border, as for example, Nick Megoran (2012) who has written about the biography of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, explors border changes through a sequential timeline of events. Megoran has been advocating the approach called 'boundary biographies', which he has defined as 'theoretically informed and empirically rich, comprehensive, multiscale, multimethod studies' (245). He has emphasised the importance of geography in understanding nationalism and its constitutive role in social processes: 'As a postclassical approach to studying nationalism, interrogating the materialisation of boundaries and other aspects of territoriality provides fresh purchase on the questions of nation-state formation, ethnicity and nationality' (245). He refers to the border as a technique of governance both for the Soviet authorities and the twenty-first century nation-states.

Others, however, have demonstrated the complexity in the way the temporal dimension plays out in border work, underscoring the multiple, messy and disorderly nature of border practices and their manifestations in people's life (Little 2015; Reeves 2016). Adrian Little (2015, 431), addressing the importance of the temporal dimension of borders, applies the concept of 'complex temporalities' to exhibit 'the disorderly

manner and the uneven tempo in which change takes place in the real world'. According to Little, experiences of bordering processes vary as temporal changes occur at a different pace for different actors and at different sites. While acknowledging the importance of exploring the biography of borders, which can be particularly useful in tracing the political project of a border regime, I concur with scholars who emphasised the contingency and complexity of the temporality in border work, particularly as an anthropological endeavour, attuned to the experiences of people, illuminates the diversity of the ways temporal changes unfold in their lives. For example, during my fieldwork, I would often engage in conversations with my interlocutors about the changes of the border regime and its effects on their lives. Their accounts would differ on the time frame regarding the closure of the border since the effects of particular closures or openings were experienced differently according to such factors as the location of their village, the dynamics of the border's materialisation, presence of border guards, possession of personal documents enabling or impeding cross-border mobility, individual ability to negotiate possible crossings with the border guards, resources to manage legal/illegal border crossings and people's general engagement with cross-border mobility. This underscores that the temporal dynamics of border work and border practices were experienced in a wide variety of ways by people living at the border. Besides the temporal dimension of human experiences, the material structures of the border landscape were also marked by different temporalities as the infrastructure of both present and past political projects were part of the border landscape.

The lives of borderland people on the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border are unfolding in a space that used to be apprehended and conceptualised in other terms, namely, through the ideological and territorial policies of the Soviet Union. The promotion of regional interstate integration, facilitated through infrastructure projects connecting the neighbouring SSRs, as well as population spill-overs across the republic borders – and even the development of settlements along and on the invisible interstate borders – were embedded in Soviet policies to promote the Union's integration, development, interconnectedness and the brotherhood of Soviet nations. Today, the remnants of the Soviet state live on in the material, social, institutional and ideological ruins left behind

by this political project. The border landscape is filled with the material traces of the former border regime infrastructure that was meant to connect and integrate; bridges, roads, road signs, channels, pipelines and even village settlements that were built on the border. While the Soviet state ceased to exist formally upon the Union's dissolution, its legacies are still having a profound effect on people's lives. Ann Laura Stoler (2008, 195) in her work on 'imperial debris' has pointed out how various types of 'ruins of empires' are 'exerting material and social force in the present'. While the bridges and roads connecting the two Central Asian states are now closed and 'deactivated', they are still present in the landscape. The material durability of such infrastructure is marked with a different temporality than the political project and construct that brought it about, and which have long ceased to exist. Stoler notes that the longevity of institutional, material and ideological practices and ideas have different time scopes, and that the pace in which people extricate themselves from the former order of things varies.

Material legacies were not only found in people's physical environment, but also in the material bureaucratic infrastructure – documents and documenting practices inherited from the Soviet regime. This resonates with Weber's (1978) description of how one of the tasks of bureaucracy is to offer stability precisely through the change of political regimes. Matthew Hull (2012b, 6), in his study of the materiality of bureaucracy in Pakistan, has described the inheritance of the British colonial administration in the bureaucratic practices of today's Pakistan, stating that 'the continuity of the colonial bureaucratic material infrastructure, much like that of roads and bridges, was more obvious, unquestioned, and profound'. This was also true for the documenting practices in Kyrgyzstan, as well as Uzbekistan, where for example, the propiska (residence registration) system was inherited from the Soviet bureaucracy and was still a central element in the documenting regime of both these post-Soviet states that the borderland Uzbeks were connected to. Moreover, the temporal dynamics of documenting regimes are marked not only by the legacies of former regimes still practiced today, but also by the fact that the documents themselves are layered with various modes of temporality. For example, the legal validity of some documents within a state's bureaucratic system, such as passports, is defined through the

expiration dates, marking the temporality of their validity. Nevertheless, the material durability of documents marks a temporal permanence and enables people to apply them in new settings, under different regimes and even in different states, so that even invalid documents could still be used by people in their attempts to make certain claims in their encounters with the state.

Likewise, subjects' encounters with the state have their own temporal dynamics. As exemplified by Carswell, Chambers and De Neve (2018, 3), encounters with the state can be experienced by people 'through different temporal rhythms which combine, intersect and flow into each other'. Through exploring bureaucratic encounters in India, they discovered how 'waiting for the state' was texturing the daily life of people who were engaging with the state for routine paperwork. People are exposed to different patterns of 'waiting for the state' as some groups of people seen as less worthy are exposed to longer waiting than others, constructing hierarchies, creating particular types of subjectivities and producing particular citizens through specific patterns of waiting. The state's documenting regime is, in other words, directly engaged in the production of citizens not only through paper power, but also through temporal dynamics. Caroline Humphrey (2008, 360) has noted that 'it is a commonplace of anthropology-speak these days that human "subjects" or "individuals" are created/constructed, and yet the temporal implications of the fact that creation happens in time have hardly been explored'.

While Humphrey refers to specific frameworks of time and 'decision-events' (364) that play into the subject construction, there is also a growing literature on citizenship, particularly on transnational citizenship and experiences of asylum seekers and migrants, that specifically attends to the temporal dimensions of citizenship practices (Nyers 2013; Pascucci 2016). This literature's exploration of various subject statuses beyond legal citizenship illustrates how a person's status in relation to the political community is marked with temporality. This temporality comes to the fore both as a potentiality and a threat of transformation in one's status, entailing a possible inclusion in or exclusion from the territory or the political community one seeks to be a member of (Hepworth 2014). The importance of temporality is also reflected in a state's possibility to capture the time of its subjects. For example, Mariane Ferme

(2004) explores how the power of the state is experienced as a control over space-time, as it attempts to control subjects through their access and movements in the territory, as well as through the control of time by assigning durability to documents. Moreover, anthropologists have contributed to the scholarship on citizenship by focusing on citizenship as processual and as a site for contestation, something that is constantly being remade, and thereby is in itself marked by temporality. In addition, the anthropological concern with an ethnographically based analysis of citizenship and the temporalities of social life also orientate our focus on how the evaluation of present experiences of citizenship are layered with the conceptualisation of the past and imagination of possible futures.

All the scholarship mentioned above clearly indicates how the various state manifestations explored in this thesis, borders, documents and citizenship, are textured by temporal dimension, affecting people's experiences of them, interactions with them and marking the contingent nature both of the materiality of these manifestations and the social realities that they shape,

Scholarship on the State in Central Asia

The topic of the state is not new to the scholarly literature on Central Asia in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular. Quite the contrary. The state is one of the most covered topics in the academic literature on the region. Most of these works foreground the exploration of these countries' transitory success or failure from the Soviet socialist regime (Collins 2006; Cummings 2012). However, anthropologists' increased contribution in expanding ethnographically based analyses of processes in the region throughout the last two decades has brought more detailed and nuanced knowledge of the region. Anthropologists have engaged in exploring various aspects of the political manifestations within the region, starting from the various regimes' ideological performances, power of political elites, clan politics and practices of political institutions and organisations in rural areas (Schatz 2004; Gullette 2010; Adams 2010; Ismailbekova 2014; Reeves, Rasanayagam and Beyer 2014, Beyer 2016; Ismailbekova 2017; Pelkmans 2017). Another important aspect of statehood that has received scholarly attention is the territorialisation of the new nation-states. This topic is particularly well covered concerning the Ferghana Valley where the borders of three Central Asian states – Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan – intersect and meet, making borders a well-studied and documented topic in the academic literature on Central Asia. Madeleine Reeves (2014) and Nick Megoran (2017) have produced comprehensive and sophisticated work on the Uzbek–Kyrgyz–Tajik and Uzbek–Kyrgyz borders, thus providing both rich ethnographic and detailed historical accounts, as well as developing elaborate analyses and important theoretical advancements in understanding the border processes in the region. Megoran's bibliographic approach towards the borders gives a detailed account on the development of the Uzbek–Kyrgyz border. In his work, he stresses the significance of material assertions of the state as important prerequisites in making borderland inhabitants acquire a sense of dwelling in a separate nation state, contrasting it to the integral border life during the Soviet period and in the immediate aftermath of the union's dissolution. In a similar vein, Reeves, in her exploration of the state spatialisation processes along the borders of the Ferghana Valley, describes how the material reification of the border and appropriation of space became important in making the border work. At the same time, she points

out that the border is continuously both made and undone. Building on these works and advancing the argument on the importance of the material manifestations of the state, such as borders, this thesis illustrates how the material aspects of the borders become incorporated into the borderland's landscape and how it affects social life, becoming an integral part of cross-border social relations. While a growing volume of anthropological literature has made an important contribution in exploring the particularities of political manifestations and processes in the region, an understudied and undertheorised field of inquiry is the bureaucratic practices of the state. This thesis attempts to shed more light on the bureaucracy in Kyrgyzstan through looking at people's engagements and encounters with the state's bureaucratic apparatus, contributing to the limited literature on this topic.

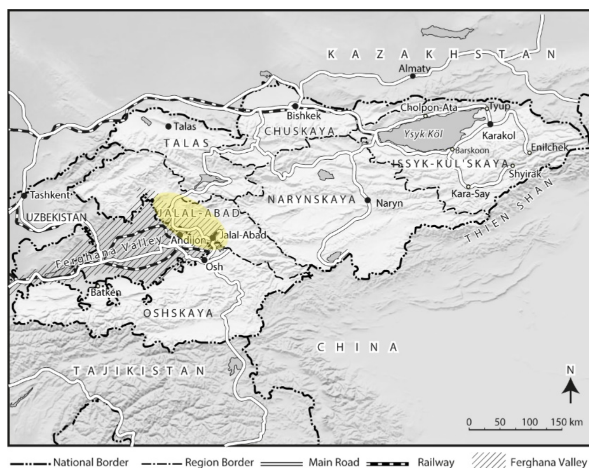
This thesis focuses on the Uzbek population living in the rural border areas in Kyrgyzstan, particularly the stateless people. Except for a few NGO reports, there is hardly any literature on statelessness in Central Asia, making statelessness poorly accounted for and little explored in this region. While in the recent years the statelessness situation has been rapidly changing in the Central Asian countries, due to internationally promoted campaigns, the ethnography in this thesis captures a moment in time when statelessness was still present in Kyrgyzstan. It describes the reasons behind the emergence and protraction of statelessness, as well as people's contemplations and reflections in evaluating their stateless status, as they navigate their lives along and across a militarised border without formal state citizenship. While statelessness has been an untouched subject of inquiry in the region, the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan has received some scholarly attention. Scholars have explored the Uzbek communities' role and status as a large minority group and their interactions with state-building processes in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (Fumagalli 2007; Hierman 2010; Liu 2012; Megoran 2017). Other scholars have focused on the Uzbek community in relation to the violent ethnic conflicts between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz that took place both in the 1990s and 2010 (Tiskhov 1995; Matveeva, Savin, and Faizullaev 2012; Ismailbekova 2013; Kutmanaliev 2015). However, much of this literature has ignored Uzbeks living in rural areas and focused on Uzbek elites or urban Uzbek populations. This thesis complements the existing literature on the Uzbek

community in Kyrgyzstan by giving an account of a rural Uzbek population, a group not well covered by the existing literature.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This PhD project started as a part of the ‘Eurasian Borderlands’ research project at the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen. Funded by the Norwegian Research Council, the ‘Eurasian Borderlands’ project was aimed at conducting a comparative ethnographic research on border transformations and their effects in various post-Soviet peripheries. My PhD project was designed according to the topical framework of this larger research project and set out to explore how the changes in the border and citizenship regime since the dissolution of the Soviet Union had affected the largest group of stateless people in Kyrgyzstan: the stateless Uzbek women living along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border. The following sections give an overview of and provide background information on the research project, covering the research methodology, fieldwork and collection of ethnographic material as well as reflections on the issues of positionality and considerations of ethical aspects related to this research.

Fieldwork Location



Map of the Ferghana Valley. The area marked in yellow is where the fieldwork was conducted. Map drawn by Kjell-Helge Sjøstrøm.

This dissertation is based on my 10-month-long fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan from September 2013 to June 2014. The ethnographic data presented here

was gathered in three rural villages/towns along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border. All three are located in Southern Kyrgyzstan, in the Ferghana Valley, Jalal-Abad oblast. While all the three places are situated in the same region, they differ from each other in size, ethnic composition and their proximity to or distance from the border.

The first field site: The local market and Soviet period monument with the word 'peace' in many languages.

Due to the fact that Kyrgyzstan was a new fieldwork area for me, the first fieldwork location was my initial entry point into the field, a town to which my pre-fieldwork networks and connections gave me access. This was a town with a population of 7,000, and it was located approximately three kilometres from the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border. The town was established in the 1950s in connection with the construction of a hydropower plant near it. This large-scale construction project engaged a large work force recruited from all over the Soviet Union, creating an ethnically diverse population. Yet, today the population is overwhelmingly Kyrgyz in its ethnic composition. The town has a small market, schools, kindergartens, library, police station, bank office, several shops and other service facilities. My hosts during the stay in the town were ethnic Kyrgyz, which limited my interactions and restricted my access to the local Uzbek community. The inter-ethnic violence that occurred in the area in 2010 had left its marks as tensions and resentment between the two ethnic groups in the town were still felt and also expressed by my Kyrgyz interlocutors. Therefore, while staying there, I pursued the possibility of changing the fieldwork site to allow me greater access to the Uzbek

community and put me in more direct contact with Uzbeks. After a period of two months, I was finally able to relocate to another village through one of my new acquired interlocutors employed in a non-governmental organisation working on statelessness.

Village road at the second field site.

Local villagers working in the fields at the second field site.

The second fieldwork site was an exclusively Uzbek village located on the border itself. The village consisted of approximately 45 households; however, it used to be much larger, but became divided into two parts by the now established international border. Just across the border one could see the other part of the village that today is located on the territory of Uzbekistan, separated from the Kyrgyz side by the barbed wires and trenches of the borderline. The division of the village meant that, after the closure of the border, the Kyrgyz side had to establish a new school, medical clinic and cemetery on their side of the border as these facilities ended up being in Uzbek territory and became inaccessible to them. In addition, the village also had one small shop that provided locals with a selection of essential food products. All the inhabitants were engaged in agriculture and farming, which were their main sources of income, in addition to the remittances from those who had travelled to work in Russia and Kazakhstan. This second site turned out to be a very fortunate, productive and valuable fieldwork location for several reasons. Firstly, it allowed me to observe everyday life in a place where the consequences of the new militarised border regime had such a profound effect as the village itself became divided in two. Secondly, it not only gave me access to an Uzbek community, but also put me in direct contact with stateless

people as some members of my host family were stateless themselves. Unfortunately, after three months, I once again had to search for a new fieldwork location due to my hosts' and my own security concerns after undesired attention from state security personnel. Through my already established network in the area, I managed to find a new location site for my already ongoing fieldwork.

The third field site with the main road going through it.

The third village was a predominantly Uzbek village located approximately 600 meters from the border. The village was situated along a busy road in one of the most populous areas in the region. Due to the expansion of the settlements along this main road, the village had no clear-cut boundaries, but was rather inconspicuously growing into the neighbouring settlements, making it hard to estimate its accurate population size. However, the size of this village in comparison with the two other fieldwork sites, was somewhere in between. People were engaged in both agriculture and farming, but in addition, the location of the village allowed them to commute to the nearby towns for work in small factories and other production facilities. The father of my host family in this new location had a mixed ethnic background, which both gave me access to the

Uzbek community living there, but also provided my interlocutors and myself with a safety net with regard to the unwanted attention from the Kyrgyz security forces. I stayed in this village for the remaining five months of my fieldwork.

While these three settlements were my main fieldwork sites, other places that I got to know during my fieldwork also formed my knowledge and gave insights about the region that this dissertation draws upon. In the course of my fieldwork, I visited a number of populated places adjacent to my fieldwork sites, as I was familiarising myself not only with the particular sites of my residence, but also with the neighbouring settlements. Moreover, I travelled with my interlocutors across the Jalal-Abad oblast, accompanying them in their visits to places where their relatives were living, and in their leisure activities, joining them in their trips to markets, state offices and other shorter and longer travels that were part of their daily lives. Likewise, the urban centres of Southern Kyrgyzstan, namely the cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh were important places that I got to know through my frequent visits there, as well as the city of Bishkek, where I spent some time while settling paperwork for my stay in Kyrgyzstan. The knowledge of these urban areas allowed me to better understand the lives of the rural population and compare it with that of their urban counterparts, shedding light on the differences in the lives led in these various locations.

The long-term immersion in one particular locality that many anthropologists aim at in their fieldworks was not the case for this fieldwork. While fieldwork is a planned and organised data collection activity, it is not pre-directed. The unpredictable paths that ethnographic fieldwork takes is an inescapable part of the anthropological research practice that we as anthropologists have to work around and with. Yet, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) have criticised the emphasis on serendipity that anthropologists often put in their narratives on the choice of fieldwork sites. While their call for more reflexivity on ‘where’ the anthropological fieldwork is done, and ‘how’ particular locations become field sites are important points to make, Judith Okely (2013) has taken a more positive stance towards the role of chance in finding a field site. Through conversations with various anthropologists, Okely shows how chance has been an integral part of many fieldwork experiences. She emphasises how anthropologists who encounter challenges in their fieldwork sites that prove to be either unsuitable,

problematic or unfit can thereafter draw on these experiences and acquired knowledge to make informed choices once opportunities for new field sites open up. Thus, the field sites that might be considered to be discovered ‘by chance’ are still locations about which deliberate and conscious choices are made. Likewise, my relocations of field sites were guided by my acquired knowledge through particular experiences; however, these relocations were not without challenges.

The total composition of my fieldwork, namely, the change of fieldwork locations that occurred three times, had an inevitable impact on the research project. While this was neither planned nor desired, it did provide particular insights that have shaped this thesis, but it also brought particular challenges. The challenges that such relocation of fieldwork sites posed were several. Importantly, it involved building new relationships with people at every new site. The establishment of rapport and development of trustful relationships with interlocutors was a time-consuming process that was interrupted every time I moved to a different locality. However, I attempted to maintain relationships with the interlocutors in all three villages throughout my entire time in Kyrgyzstan and visited all my fieldwork villages from time to time. The limited time spent in each specific place also affected my knowledge of the places, as I was not able to observe the whole year cycle in one location. Moreover, the total time in Kyrgyzstan itself did not allow for a full year cycle. But, despite the limited time spent in each location, the fact that the three places varied in their ethnic composition and their proximity to the border allowed me to have a comparative perspective in observing life along the border. In addition, it also gave me a wider view of the experiences of rural Uzbeks living in this area.

Another aspect to note on the geographical and physical locations of my fieldwork is that border scholars have expressed epistemological concerns for studies that are situated only on one side of the border (Zhang 2013). While the possibility to conduct fieldwork on both sides of the border and collect ethnography across the border contributes to illuminating cross-border life on a wider scale, such an approach is also dependent on the nature and aim of each individual research project. This work focuses on the effects of border regime changes on the Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan. The cross-border immobility of my fieldwork is also a reflection of the life situation at the

border during the period of the fieldwork when the border was closed for regular crossings. On a more practical note, it also has to be said that the time constraints that many of today's research projects are bound with have implications for what type of fieldwork anthropologists manage to conduct. Likewise, the political situation within states and specific localities often determine and influence what kind of research is possible and to what kind of localities it is possible to gain access. For example, Uzbekistan, at the time of my fieldwork, was not an easily accessible place for researchers. Thus, fieldwork sites are not only shaped by the existing geopolitical situation, but are also reflections of it.

Interlocutors

The role serendipity plays in anthropological practice relates not only to fieldwork locations, but also to people the anthropologist meets while in the field. Yet, the accidental and unpredictable nature of such encounters is supported by systematic work in search for particular interlocutors, people with certain knowledge or experiences, or people living in certain places. As a result, although the individuals we meet and the relations we establish with them are dependent on circumstances beyond our control, the search for interlocutors is always a well-structured, organised and planned part of the anthropologist's methodological approach.

The rapport that the anthropologist establishes with interlocutors is often perceived as a marker of how successful the fieldwork has been. Good, close and lasting relations with interlocutors are seen as an indicator of people's acceptance of the anthropologist and as a proof of the access that the anthropologist has gained to the field. The importance given to the rapport with interlocutors within the discipline's methodology stems from the fact that it is the social interactions and relationships one builds in the field that give the anthropologist a possibility to immerse herself in the social worlds of people that she studies (Emerson 2001). However, while intimate rapport with the research participants is seen as the gold standard, many anthropologists have admitted challenges in both forming and maintaining such relationships with interlocutors. In some cases, neither the field site setting nor the subjects involved in the research (researcher and research participants) are able to develop such relations. For example, Jane Mulcock (2004) describes how the limited rapport that she established with her interlocutors was a result of various combined factors, such as diverging personal agendas between her as a researcher and her interlocutors who were members of a New Age movement, the multi-sited structure of the fieldwork and challenges of accessing people in their busy lifestyles. Candid fieldwork accounts, such as those of Mulcock, complicate the notion of a 'successful fieldwork' and questions what exactly it entails and means. Management of human relations in the field is a complex matter that involves many aspects ranging from the context and setting to the personalities involved, in addition to being bound up with serendipity – an inevitable part not only of the fieldwork but also of the human condition in general.

While the change of field sites caused interruptions in the relationships that I was forming in the field, I still managed to establish rapport with people at all three field sites. The closest relationships I developed were with the families who opened the door to their homes and kindly allowed me to stay with them during my fieldwork time. I shared everyday life and living space and spent most of my days with them, and we developed close, trusting and warm relationships. These families and their wider networks were also the primary sources of my general knowledge of the everyday life in the rural borderland areas.

After the initial phase of getting acquainted with people at the fieldwork sites, I pursued and developed closer relations with some people more than others. In some cases, this was done with intent, seeing how certain people's experiences and life situations were relevant to the topics of my research, and in others, it simply resulted from our social interactions. These relations often involved people who later became my key informants. For example, in one of the villages, I shared a room with several female family members – the grandmother of the family and an aunt (sister of the host family's father) who was a stateless person. The aunt, whose particular status made me interested in her life story, was likewise fascinated by my presence in the village and my life story. This mutual interest in each other's lives developed into a close friendship. She became not only one of the closest people on a personal level from my fieldwork site, but also one of my key informants. Other interlocutors became key persons in this ethnography because of their personal stories that I came across by accident as, for example, Ermek whose story is described in the second article of this thesis.

The demographics of the interlocutor group was relatively balanced, although some groups were more represented than others. With regard to gender balance, women were the most numerous amongst my interlocutors. This occurred partially because of my own gender and the engagement in women's everyday practices and tasks and because the majority of the stateless persons were women. Nevertheless, my role as an outsider researcher also allowed me to access male spheres. The male heads of my host families played an important role in providing me with access to the spheres dominated by men as they actively invited me to gatherings and events that female members of

the family were not attending. As to the age of my interlocutors, I engaged with people from different generations spanning from the small children, whom I helped to watch and did homework with, to the eldest generations in the community, as I shared living space with some of them, paid visits to and chatted with them on the village streets and listened to their stories and memories about life in the borderlands in the Soviet period where they made comparisons with today. My personal attachments were with these borderland people who, during my fieldwork, shared their stories and experiences on the life along the border. This was quite different from the relationship I had with the government authorities and representatives of NGOs with whom I had more formal communication. In the course of the fieldwork, I conducted interviews with both international and local representatives of central and regional offices of the UNHCR, several local NGOs and lawyers engaged in statelessness issues as well as government officials from the State Registration Services under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic and officials from local municipalities (*aiyl okmotu*[10]). However, the emphasis in this work was on the borderland people's experiences, prioritising those over a more institutional perspective.

In relation to the ethnic composition of my interlocutor group, Uzbeks living in rural areas along the border made up the majority as they were the primary focus of the project. However, ethnic Kyrgyz were also represented amongst them. As noted earlier, the members of my first host family were ethnic Kyrgyz as well as those in their wider network that I was introduced to while staying in their village. In addition, many of my friends and acquaintances in Osh and Jalal-abad who were important sources of knowledge and information on such topics as the Kyrgyz state, bureaucracy, corruption, border management and inter-ethnic relations were also Kyrgyz. Moreover, all the state representatives who were interviewed in the course of my fieldwork were ethnic Kyrgyz. An important point to note is the positionality of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. This group occupies a particular position both in the physical landscape (living in rural areas) and in the social fabric of the Kyrgyz state and society (Uzbeks being a minority group). The ethnography presented in this work is based on the perspectives,

[10] Transliteration from the Kyrgyz language.

experiences and points of views of this particular group. Gupta (1995, 390) has pointed out that ‘all the constructions of the state have to be situated with respect to the location of the speaker’. Thus, it has to be kept in mind that the descriptions depicted in this work would not necessarily fit with the life realities of other state subjects, as for example, ethnic Kyrgyz living in urban places such as Bishkek. Issues of positionality were not only of relevance for my interlocutor group but were likewise important to consider in relation to me as the researcher.

On Positionality

Each anthropologist has their own story about how their personal trajectories brought them to the topics of their research, and how their personal background has affected their interest in certain areas of the world. Likewise, my arrival in a village along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border to study statelessness was part of a journey that had started long before this research project began.

I was born in 1984 in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Latvia. While being too young to remember and understand the complexities of what life in Soviet Latvia involved, I still have vivid memories of what growing up in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s was like and of a turbulent time during the transformative 1990s. In addition to memories that were imprinted on a child's mind at that time, such as access to previously limited goods such as chewing gum, bananas, Western soda drinks, animation movies, denim clothing and the sudden excess of second-hand T-shirts with English printing, there are also recollections and experiences that are of relevance for this work. Being brought up in post-Soviet Latvia also meant seeing how the newly re-established state was trying to deal with its Soviet legacies in a time of heightened nationalism. One of the most highly, publicly debated topics during the 1990s was the issue of the Russian speaking population residing in Latvia. The ethnic composition of Latvia's demographics upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union was perceived as problematic and worrying by many Latvians, as ethnic Latvians made up 52% of the total population and Russians 34%.[11] Many Latvians saw the large numbers of Russians living in Latvia as threatening the very future of the independent Latvian state since it was assumed they would be more loyal to Russia than to Latvia. Consequently, in the 1990s Latvia introduced strict and protective citizenship policies that favoured ethnic Latvians over other ethnic groups. According to the citizenship law introduced in 1991, only people who had had Latvian citizenship before 1940 (prior to Latvia's occupation by the Soviet Union) and their descendants were given Latvian citizenship.

[11] Centre of Demography. Statistics on the Ethnic Composition of Population in 1989. Accessed September 19, 2019. http://www.popin.lanet.lv/en/index_eng.html

In 1995, Latvia introduced a new citizenship law[12] creating a particular legal category of people called non-citizens (*nepilsoņi*). Non-citizens of Latvia were considered the citizens of former Soviet Union republics who were residing in Latvia but did not have Latvian or any other citizenship. With the strict naturalisation policies that the Latvian state subsequently pursued, the number of Latvia's non-citizens, estimated at 220,000[13] people, remains high even today. While the Latvian state considers non-citizens as a specific legal category, under the operation of international law, Latvian non-citizens are regarded as stateless. The question of stateless, Latvian non-citizens, born or raised in Soviet Latvia, remains a sensitive and emotionally charged political issue in Latvia today.

These experiences have had a direct impact on my interest in statelessness issues and the legacies of the Soviet regime in the post-Soviet spaces. While anthropologists have been accused of being too focused on exploring the ideas of otherness, and statelessness to a certain extent can be seen as a form of otherness, my approach to the topic of statelessness has been more an inquiry into something that is close and familiar, rather than strange and exotic, while at the same time, located in a very different part of the post-Soviet space and within a different political, cultural and social context.

My background played a role not only in leading me to the subject of my research, but also was of relevance in the field. The fact that I came from a former Soviet country served as a door opener in many settings as it allowed me to establish a common ground for conversation topics, particularly with the older generations. Nevertheless, my background was not unproblematic and was sometimes even perceived in negative terms. The reputation of Baltic states with regard to their anti-Soviet sentiments and their active engagement and role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union was not always evaluated positively, especially as many people in Kyrgyzstan perceived the Soviet past in positive terms. Still, the common history of the Soviet past was something that I could draw on in my conversations with people. Likewise, the

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[12] Likums: "Par to bijušās PSRS pilsoņu statusu, kuriem nav Latvijas vai citas valsts pilsonības".Accessed September 19, 2019. https://likumi.lv/doc.php?id=77481

[13] The Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs. Accessed September 19, 2019. https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/assets/ISVP_Latvija_pec_VPD01072019.pdf

case of statelessness in Latvia allowed me to establish some commonalities with the stateless people in the field, making it easier for interlocutors to relate to the topic of my research, my interest in the subject and also to me as a person who has some awareness and familiarity with the issue. Therefore, while still being a stranger and outsider, my personal background allowed me to reduce some of the initial distance between me and my interlocutors.

Ethnographic Material

A great deal has been said about ethnography – what it is and what it is not, what it entails and how such terms as 'ethnography' and 'ethnographic' are applied in social science research. Some scholars describe ethnography as a methodology, others assert that it is a practice, an approach, research process, and some equate ethnographic with anthropological work, while some argue against such comparisons (Ingold 2008; O'Reilly 2012; Hockey and Forsey 2012; Ingold 2017; Shah 2017). While the viewpoints on this topic vary amongst the anthropologists and other social scientists engaging with ethnography, many still agree upon the general aim of ethnography that, simply put by Ingold (2017, 21), is 'to describe life as it is lived and experienced, by people, somewhere, sometime'. Adding to the descriptive aspect of ethnography, Madeleine Reeves (2011, 907) notes that 'methodologically ethnography entails a commitment to trying to understand the world from another's perspective through sustained engagement in their social environments and participation in the practices that render those environments meaningful'. It is precisely this sustained engagement and exploration of meaningfulness that I perceive as the core elements in the anthropological project, as well as seeing ethnography and anthropology as mutually constituting each other.

Accounts of ethnographic data collection usually discuss methods applied at the field site. Yet, I would argue that the beginning of fieldwork is not the anthropologist's physical arrival at the field site, but rather, that it starts with her engagement with the field while still 'out of the field'. For my part, following the news prior to the fieldwork both on the events unfolding at the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border and on statelessness issues was not only a useful way to prepare for the upcoming fieldwork, but also served as an important source of information throughout the entire duration of my PhD project. Moreover, once in Kyrgyzstan, the bureaucracy involved in obtaining research and residence permits required that I had to be personally engaged with some of the state actors, practices and manifestations that I explore in this work, such as borders and bureaucracy. Thus, the ethnographic material was gathered not only at the field site per se, but through wider experiences while being engaged with the field.

For example, securing documents for my own stay in Kyrgyzstan gave me insights into the bureaucratic practices of the Kyrgyz state through personal experiences. When applying for a visa extension, I visited the visa division at the Department of Registration Population Settlement in Bishkek while being accompanied by Aselya, a representative from my host university. Aselya advised that we should be at the office building at least two and a half hours before its opening in order to take our place in the queue. Following her advice, we were there at 7 o'clock in the morning, and even so, a small crowd had already gathered by the gates of the visa office building making us number 15 in the queue. While waiting for the visa office to open, more and more people joined the queue that formed a dispersed crowd waiting outside the building. Knowing that queueing was a time-consuming matter, people were attempting to use this time productively by managing other daily tasks and activities in the meantime. For example, one woman reserved a place in the queue and thereafter left to accompany her young son to the kindergarten. Others simply stopped by with their cars to reserve a place in the queue and drove off only to come back a couple of hours later.

Another example is one of my visits to a local passport office (*pasportnyy stol*)[14] where I accompanied my Kyrgyz acquaintance, Gulnara, who wanted to make inquiries about obtaining a passport for her son who was turning 18. Upon entering the passport office, we were met by the attentive look of an elderly man sitting behind one of the two desks covered with piles of papers and folders. Gulnara greeted him and enquired about the documents needed for her son's passport. The man demonstrably disregarded Gulnara's questions and was scrupulously looking at me. Gulnara introduced me as a guest from Latvia, to which he firmly replied: 'Passport!' At first, I thought that there had been some misunderstanding, and I reiterated that I was a visitor from Latvia. The man behind the desk continued in a stern voice: 'From Latvia. But where is your passport?' as he stretched out his arm and opened his hand, supposedly waiting for me to hand over my passport. My excitement about meeting possible interviewees who could enlighten me on the issues of documents disappeared and was replaced with

[14] Transliteration from the Russian language.

anxiety that I was under suspicion and being interrogated. Instead of getting to question the bureaucrat behind the desk, I found myself being questioned by this man with a hostile and sceptical look who was challenging the legality of my stay in the village. Even though I knew that all my papers were in order, a sense of insecurity had struck. Having been previously warned by expats that I should avoid giving my passport to police and other state officials who might demand it on uncertain grounds in order to solicit bribes, I attempted to evade his request by explaining that all my documents were in order. Sensing uneasiness about the situation we had found ourselves in, Gulnara and I made a quick exit out of the passport office excusing ourselves with other engagements.

This illustrates how personal experiences can be important in gaining an understanding of how government (or governmentality) is practised locally. Through my own engagements with state bureaucracy, the waiting, queuing and unpredictability of state officials became familiar components. Such encounters were particularly important in the initial stages of the fieldwork as my experiences provided me with knowledge and insights that I could later explore with my interlocutors. Likewise, other anthropologists working on bureaucracy and documentation practices have noted how the researcher's own experiences can be an important source of information and knowledge about the field one is working on. For example, Lowenkron and Ferreira (2014) describes how their work on documents to receive a permit authorising their research was already in a sense ethnographic data gathered before they actually entered the intended 'field'. The bodily engagement of anthropologists, that is, the usage of researchers' bodies through which particular knowledge is collected, is well acknowledged in the anthropological literature (Okely 2013). If one approaches 'ethnography as a mode of knowing that privileges experience' (Poole and Das 2004, 4), then ethnography is achieved not only through knowledge acquired through interlocutors, but also through observations and experiences made by the researcher herself.

Such personal experiences and secondary sources were more important in the first stages of my fieldwork. In addition, another important source of ethnographic knowledge that I drew on in the beginning of the fieldwork was formal interviews with

people working on statelessness issues. These were semi-structured interviews with government officials who were working at state institutions, such as passport offices and state registration services, both at regional and local levels. This provided me with knowledge on legal matters concerning Kyrgyz citizenship legislation as well as procedures around naturalisation process. Moreover, the visits to the state offices also allowed me to observe not only the visual and physical characteristics of these state offices, but also the bureaucratic practices unfolding in these places. For example, in some places, the passport offices were located in the same buildings as the police station. This posed a challenge for stateless people as many of them were trying to avoid the police, fearing control of their documents and detentions. Likewise, observations of queuing practices, waiting and interactions between state officials and the visitors provided me with important knowledge on how people were experiencing and engaging with state institutions and the temporal aspects involved.

Information posters at a regional passport office and a local administrative building with a passport office and a police station.

In addition to the formal interviews with state officials, I also interviewed representatives of NGOs, both international and local at the national and regional levels. UNHCR was the main international actor, playing an important and decisive role in tackling statelessness issues in the country. Interviews with UNHCR representatives gave me an insight into both national and regional processes addressing the gaps in the citizenship legislation, as well as state practices that had contributed to the creation and perpetuation of statelessness issue. Ferghana Lawyers Without Borders was the organisation amongst the local NGOs with the most expertise and experience in working with stateless people. Lawyers who were helping these people

with legal counselling and support in their quest for citizenship gave me insights into the general situation of stateless people and an understanding of the diverse and complex personal documentation situations through sharing with me interesting cases that they had encountered in their work. In total, I conducted over a dozen formal interviews throughout the fieldwork with different state and NGO representatives. Some of these were also followed up with more informal conversations as I stayed in touch with several of the representatives throughout my time in the field.

In contrast to these formal interviews, life at the field site locations involved a different type of data collection techniques, namely practices associated with participant observation. Alpa Shah (2017, 48) has asserted that 'participant observation is not merely a method of anthropology but is a form of production of knowledge through being and action'. This 'being' in the field, immersing oneself in the lives of people, was filled with daily activities that varied from season to season: from lying on a *toshok*[15] (thick, double-sided quilt) in the coal heated rooms during the cold winter months and watching old Indian movies broadcasted by Uzbek channels with the family's grandmother, to joining younger women in their work in the fields during the scorching heat of the summer months, and all the mundane everyday activities in between. Likewise, attending important life events such as weddings, funerals, and important celebrations as *Nooruz*[16] (new year/spring festival) were all important events that gave me an understanding of the people's social worlds and their lived environments.

Wedding in the village.

Host family members and I working in the fields.

[15] Transliteration from the Kyrgyz language.
[16] Transliteration from the Kyrgyz language.

While such an immersion in the lives of the people was filled with observations of daily life, it also exposed me to the topics of my research. The border was an integral element of the village life in many ways and guises. For example, I would take a stroll with some of the women in the village on one of our daily walks in the village while the border guards right next to us were patrolling on horseback or while observing us from their watchtowers. While such border encounters were part of daily life in the village, on some occasions, people would show me particular places to tell specific border stories. For example, once I was taken to a marketplace in a different village just to be shown a bridge that used to connect people across the border. The bridge was closed and dilapidated, indicating the changes that have taken place along with the closure of the border. But, despite the closures and interruptions in cross-border life, there was still active communication across it as people would engage with each other through the border fences. On other occasions, cross-border life also entailed audible experiences. For example, while celebrating *Nooruz* and sitting late at night by the fireplace preparing the traditional *Nooruz* dish *sumolok*[17], we could hear people having celebrations on the other side of the border, singing and playing music as the social life was spilling over the border fences and trenches connecting the people on both sides of them.

The state made itself visible in the everyday life of people through the profound infrastructure of the border, and through the subject of documents. Documentation was a reoccurring topic in mundane conversations in relation to border crossings, illegality or the legality of person's stay in the country and access to the welfare benefits or other type of resources, and through people's attempts to disentangle their document predicaments. However, the focus of this thesis on the material manifestations of the state is guided by the initial interests at the outset of the research project and the particularities of this fieldwork. In addition to a long-term immersion in the field, being fluent in the language of the people that the anthropologist studies has been seen as the self-evident precondition for a successful fieldwork within the discipline. However,

[17] Transliteration from the Kyrgyz language.

contemporary realities in much of anthropological fieldwork deviate from this idealised Malinowski type of fieldwork but are seldom talked about. Alex Borchgrevink (2003), discussing the language proficiency of anthropologists and the usage of interpreters in anthropological fieldwork, has highlighted the scarcity of candid accounts on the language issues and anthropologists' own silence on challenges related to language competences. Not only does this silencing inhibit the discipline from openly discussing a fundamental element at the core of its methodology, as Borchgrevink has asserted, it also contributes to the perpetuation of this idealised type of fieldwork in the minds of many young anthropologists who are struggling to carry it through under the growing restraints of time and resources.

My main language of communication in the field was Russian. I learned Russian at an early age through the exposure to the language in media and public space in Soviet Latvia and at school. While my Russian was a bit rusty when I first arrived in Kyrgyzstan, I still consider myself fluent in Russian. While I learned some basic Uzbek and Kyrgyz during the fieldwork that allowed me to communicate and engage with people on simple everyday topics, I did not become sufficiently fluent to meaningfully explore various topics with interlocutors who did not know Russian. Knowledge of the Russian language varied amongst the people with whom I interacted. The elderly generations in the villages knew it quite well, and so did those amongst the younger generations who had engaged in labour migration to Russia. Others had limited knowledge of it. Fluency in the Uzbek language would undoubtedly have given me different insights into the topics discussed in this thesis. However, it also could have led me to completely different issues. Fieldwork is an embodied experience in which the personal aspects of the anthropologist play a crucial role, providing researchers with different insights. There is no doubt that a researcher who is fluent in Uzbek and Kyrgyz would have experienced a different fieldwork and gained different data. While acknowledging the fundamental impact language proficiency has on fieldwork, I also believe that 'anthropological sensitivity to social processes and cultural contexts may be as important for communication as are specific language skills' (Borchgrevink 2003, 108).

Despite its various shortcomings, this research still provides valuable insights. George Marcus (2007, 356) has noted that one often finds rhetoric of incompleteness in ethnographies as researchers seem to give 'a pro forma apology' for all the possible inadequacies in their work. However, according to Marcus, the open-ended character of anthropological inquiry involves incompleteness as a dimension of possible ethnographic terrains. He suggestes that, by acknowledging the partiality of knowledge, the norm of incompleteness should be embraced rather than be feared and be a source of anxiety for the researchers (356). So, while acknowledging the partiality of the knowledge on the topics discussed in this work, I still argue for its validity, significance and importance. The focus of this work, namely, the various manifestations of the state, has been shaped both by my own personal abilities as a researcher in this concrete context and the contingencies of the ethnographic terrain that I explored. Poole and Das (2004, 4) asserts that 'ethnography is a mode of knowing that privileges experience - often going into the realms of the social that are not easily discernible within the more formal protocols used by many other disciplines. As such, ethnography offers a unique perspective on the sorts of practices that seem to undo the state at its territorial and conceptual margins'. Following their arguments and that of Penny Harvey (2005), I contend that engaging ethnographically with the material traces and manifestations of the state opens up for closer scrutinisation of state practices and structures and allows us to explore the particular ways they interact with people and how people engage with the state at its margins. Therefore, such manifestations are particularly fruitful sites for ethnographic explorations of the state.

Ethical Considerations

Collecting, documenting and, not least, publishing ethnographic data involve various ethical considerations. During the data collection stage, the transparency of the research project and informed consent by those who become participants of the research project are crucial elements in establishing appropriate ethical research practices. While I, to the best of my abilities, informed people about the aims, purposes and topics of my research, my anthropological research was still puzzling to some of my interlocutors. The reasons for my prolonged presence in the small settlements were not comprehensible to many of my initial interlocutors, to whom both the anthropological discipline and doctoral education in itself were not known terms. Nevertheless, I did the uttermost to explain both the educational purposes of my PhD status, my affiliations with the University of Bergen and the reasons for my research. The approval from the community and my interlocutors to collect ethnographic data was based on the relationship of trust I established with them. Such relationships which take effort and time to establish are not only rewarding on a personal level but also necessary for anthropologists to gain access to meaningful data in the first place. This trust, also entails a significant responsibility on the behalf of the researcher to both treat the ethnographic data with integrity and respect and to provide confidentiality for the people whose stories she exposes in her work. Due to security issues that I encountered during the fieldwork, I was concerned to safeguard my interlocutors both during fieldwork and after when producing ethnographic accounts. Firstly, confidentiality was secured in the initial data collection process as no personal data were transcribed or recorded in my field notes. In addition, field notes were taken in the Latvian language in order to minimise chances for unauthorised people to comprehend them. Moreover, as I was working with a group of people many of whom had an ambivalent legal status in the country, I was particularly cautious and conscious of not revealing any information on particular individual's statelessness status or activities that would be considered illegal by the authorities, such as illegal border crossings or falsification of identification documents. All the names of the persons and places (of towns and villages) have been changed, and any personal data presented here have been modified in order to protect the confidentiality of the individuals who are described in this thesis.

Working with marginal populations, for example, vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities, as was the case for this particular research, and working in sensitive areas, such as borderlands, pose extra challenges both with regard to access, data and ethics. Particularly when one is working with marginal communities, the ethnographic approach offers insights that are difficult to gain with more formal approaches of inquiry, making it a more suitable approach of study. Avoiding unnecessary risks for my interlocutors and myself as a researcher was an issue that I reflected upon both during the fieldwork and in the recording and presentation of the ethnographic data. However, this was done not only by me, but also by my interlocutors. For example, while living next to the border, particularly at the beginning of my stay in the village, people would notify me concerning situations and contexts that I had to be careful about while being next to the border. Likewise, I would be protective of my interlocutors both when talking about my field location with other people in Kyrgyzstan and when presenting the ethnographic data at conferences and in written accounts. While research with marginal groups and work in sensitive areas pose various, specific ethical challenges, amongst which security concerns and protection are key elements, understanding the lived worlds that are often rendered invisible and the people who inhabit them is nevertheless an important task to undertake in order to illuminate the variety of social worlds humans inhabit and enhance our understanding of life in the margins.

THE ARTICLES

Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004, 4) in their influential collection of works *Anthropology in the Margins of the State* have noted that an anthropological exploration of the margins of the state 'offers a unique perspective to the understanding of the state, not because it captures exotic practices, but because it suggests that such margins are a necessary entitlement of the state, much as the exception is a necessary component of the rule'. This thesis places itself within Das and Poole's approach, both with regard to the spatial positioning and the subject of ethnography. The study is situated at the physical margins of the state as the ethnography is located at the borders. Furthermore, the work focuses on the experiences and practices of people who find themselves at the margins of two states, as they are both excluded from the wider society due to their ethnic background and some of whom are also excluded from legally belonging to any of the states they have attachments to. I contend that, through examining various forms of state manifestation on its margins, this thesis provides novel insights into the issue of statelessness and the ways people in the margins interact with these state manifestations.

The following three articles draw on ethnographic material to show how the state both materially and symbolically has become present in the lives of the people living in the borderlands of Kyrgyzstan. Focusing on such practices as border demarcation and materialisation, documentation practices and citizenship configurations, this work explores sites where the state manifests itself in the everyday lives of the stateless borderland community. Ethnic Uzbek overrepresentation amongst the stateless population of Kyrgyzstan has also necessitated that the focus of this thesis has been directed towards the Uzbek community. Much of the literature on the Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan has examined the Uzbek population in urban settings (Fumagalli 2007a; Liu 2010; Ismailbekova 2013), leaving the local worlds of rural Uzbek communities less explored. Moreover, the Uzbek community's interactions with the state structures have been situated within the context of either elite or urban settings. This work contributes to the limited literature on rural Uzbek communities in Kyrgyzstan and statelessness in Central Asia and explores how the world around this

community is both shattered and coalesced through various political projects that temporarily both inhibit and facilitate the existence of their cross-border social worlds. Together, the three articles explore how the state is instantiated in the daily lives of people who live on the periphery of the state with regard to the physical location and legal framework and how they manage the entrapment between the political projects of two nation-states while being in discord with the territorial, nationalistic and documentation practices of the state. My concern here is with the material manifestations of the state in a context where the state excludes, violates and marginalises people who are simultaneously attached to two states. The three articles illustrate how people's life trajectories are shaped and changed by the material manifestations of the state in the form of border, citizenship and identity documents.

The first article, 'With a Border Fence in the Backyard: Materialisation of the Border in the Landscape and the Social Lives' of Border People', turns attention to how the borders are material constructs whose physical properties affect the social worlds of borderland communities, in this case, the rural Uzbek communities living along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border. It particularly emphasises the need to incorporate the morphology of the border in the exploration of how borders affect the social lives of people living along the borders. The materiality of the border has been disregarded in the anthropological discipline until quite recently, and the article underscores the need to address the material aspects of the border. The article illustrates how the physical capacities of the border affect the social life along and across the border by reconfiguring the social relations within the borderland community, thus shaping new ways of communication and interaction.

The second article, 'From Mice-Eaten Passports to Fingerprint Scanning: Fluctuating State Presence and "Entangled Documents" along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek Border', demonstrates how, by locating the state within quotidian elements, such as documents, new dimensions of state spatialisation practices come to the fore. By focusing on documents and people's engagement with them, this article provides an insight into how the state has been unfolding into the everyday lives of Uzbeks living in the Kyrgyzstan–Uzbekistan borderland. It describes how the anthropological focus on people's engagement with documents can be a useful tool in exploring the temporal

dynamics of the state's presence in people's everyday life. Through exploring people's relations to and engagement with identity documents, the article offers a nuanced view on how the state is interacting with its subjects through documenting regimes. This article turns attention to documents as through these tangible elements people engage with the state, while they are also means by which the state penetrates people's lives. It thus explains how documents can be important tools in researching the volatile character and the dynamics of temporality of the state in everyday life on its margins.

The third article, 'Without the State, between the States: Statelessness amongst the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan', offers an insight into how statelessness is experienced and understood by the stateless Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, shedding light on the divided lives spread across the international boundary of the two Central Asian states. The article gives an insight into a largely unknown situation of statelessness in Central Asia. In examining the precarious status of stateless Uzbeks and their lived worlds, the article highlights how the marginalised position of the Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan determines people's experience, understanding and evaluation of statelessness and citizenship. It illustrates how the stateless Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan are manoeuvring their everyday lives both within the Kyrgyz state and across the militarised Kyrgyz–Uzbek border in a challenging and post-turmoil social and political environment. By attending to neglected dimensions of citizenship and statelessness, namely, the spatiality of social life and document aspects of legal statuses, it underlines the ambivalences and contradictions that the stateless persons' precarious legal status puts them in with regard to inclusion/exclusion in different communities, their (im)mobility and alternative spaces of belonging. Finally, the article explains how statelessness can be a pragmatic strategy in navigating life in a volatile and unpredictable political landscape.

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ARTICLES

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II

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From mice-eaten passports to fingerprint scanning: fluctuating state presence and ‘entangled documents’ along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border

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ABSTRACT
This article focuses on engagement with identity documents among the rural Uzbek population in the borderlands of Kyrgyzstan. By exploring the materiality of the documents and people’s concern with these material artefacts of bureaucracy, this article illustrates how the state has been moving in, out and through the lives of the people living on the margins of the state. People’s engagement with documents illuminates the temporal dynamics of the state’s spatialization practices and highlights the fluctuating presence of the state. In addition, this article exposes the discrepancies between the classificatory bureaucratic order and the changing realities of everyday life. Gaps between these two domains are filled with what I refer to as entangled documents. People’s attempts to disentangle documents reveal how people on the margins of the state manage encounters with state bureaucracy and provide insight into the internal dynamics of a local bureaucracy.

KEYWORDS
Entangled documents; bureaucracy; state spatialization; Kyrgyzstan

Introduction

The state, appearing as an overarching political institution, seems to be ubiquitous in the lives of people by framing and setting preconditions for their lived worlds. The abstract idea of the state becomes concrete as the state materializes in the lives of people through various objects, practices, performances and enactments, both symbolic and material (Nyers 2006). A whole range of things come to represent the state: flags, coats of arms, military uniforms, border fences and buildings housing state institutions are only some of the elements that represent the state in its material form. Besides the vivid, the apparent and the spectacular (Adams 2010), the state often materializes and substantiates itself in people’s everyday lives through simple materialization of bureaucratic mechanisms and their tools, namely documents (Hull 2012a). Yael Navaro-Yashin (2012, 124) argues that ‘documents are among the most tangible phenomena that induce state-like effects’. Not only are documents the pivotal elements of the material culture of the state bureaucracies, but they also reveal how the state penetrates the quotidian

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lives of people. It is precisely through documents that the state enters the private and the mundane lives of people – through the simple acts of identifying and categorizing individuals, surveilling them with the help of various registers, and controlling their actions through permits and authorizations. While passports are the most prestigious documents signifying belonging to a state, people usually encounter the state through other types of quotidian documents (Das and Poole 2004): birth certificates, marriage certificates, driver licences, identity cards, taxpayer cards. These ordinary documents 'bear the double sign of the state's distance and its penetration into the life of the everyday' (15).

The significance of documents and their materiality are well established in the anthropological literature, where much of the work underlines their distinctive and integral role in producing and structuring state governance (Riles 2006; Cabot 2012; Gupta 2012; Hull 2012b; Lowenkron and Ferreira 2014). Following that work, this article advances the scrutinization of such documents as an important tool in exploring state spatialization processes. A focus on the concrete material expressions of the state allows us not only to locate the state in the particular and disclose 'the constructed and fragile nature of the state effect of ordering and encompassment' (Rasanayagam, Beyer, and Reeves 2014, 10), but also to trace the temporal dynamics of state spatialization. Ferguson and Gupta (2002) have highlighted verticality and encompassment as the key features of the state spatialization process. This article highlights *fluctuating presence* as an additional image of the state that highlights the dynamics of its temporality.

Being a constitutive feature of the state bureaucracy, documents also open the bureaucratic realm for closer scrutinization. Anthropological work on bureaucracy has studied bureaucratic practices, capacities, self-representations, knowledge and bureaucratic encounters (Herzfeld 1993; Nuijten 2004; Feldman 2008; Stoler 2010; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Hoag 2014). Colin Hoag (2011) has pointed out that much of the anthropological scholarship on bureaucracy is embedded in normative discourse that is dominated by notions of what bureaucracy should be with regard to its objectivity, rationality, efficiency and functionality. Hoag proposes that one way to approach bureaucracy, avoiding the analyses predetermined by idealized notions, is not only 'to write about the gap' but 'to find ways to write from it', exposing aspects that 'complicate the legal realism of bureaucratic discretion' (85). Guided by Hoag's suggestion, this article explores document predicaments and illuminates the widening gaps between the classificatory order of the state bureaucracy and people's lived realities.

This article draws on ethnographic data collected during ten months of fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan in 2013–2014. The work was conducted in three villages along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border in Jalal-Abad Province. The three field sites varied in size, ethnic composition, proximity to the border, economic activities, and exposure to the ethnic violence that took place in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. Material presented in this article stems from conversations, observations and everyday engagements with the local Uzbek population in these villages throughout the duration of the fieldwork. Data were also collected through informal conversations and formal interviews with state representatives, local bureaucrats and representatives of local and international non-governmental organizations operating in the area. My personal background, as a Western-trained scholar from the Baltics, allowed me to freely engage with both the local Uzbek population and representatives of the Kyrgyz state, as I was largely perceived as impartial to internal domestic power dynamics. Yet, the shared Soviet past provided a common ground for

interactions with the interlocutors. The main language of the fieldwork was Russian, in addition to some basic Uzbek and Kyrgyz.

The first part of the article introduces ethnographic material on engagement with identity documents in the rural Uzbek community living along this border and explores how such engagements have changed over time and how they are marked with various degrees of state presence, consequently illuminating the fluctuating presence of the state in the lives of these borderland people. Using documents as a heuristic tool I wish to highlight how the state has been moving in, out and through the lives of the ambiguous citizens produced by changing state regimes. In the second part, I propose the concept of *entangled documents* as a tool useful in exploring the gaps between the state bureaucratic order and the lived realities that have been changing along with the fluctuating presence of the state. The last part of the article not only shows that entangled documents expose such gaps and reveal the space between these two domains, but also gives insight into the internal dynamics of local-level bureaucracy and illustrates how people on the margins are managing their encounters with the state.

From mouse food to plastic bags and fingerprint scanning

Ferguson and Gupta (2002) argue that verticality and encompassment are the two key principles in state spatialization practices: these two metaphors work together to embody the spatial and scalar image of the state that is produced through mundane bureaucratic procedures. Building on their work, I propose an additional imagery of the state that illuminates the temporal and dynamic aspect of the state spatialization process, namely the fluctuating character of the state. My argument here is also indebted to the work of Madeleine Reeves, who has explored the process of state spatialization in rural Central Asia through dynamics of border work, illustrating how the state can sporadically intensify its presence through particular events and moments in time (Reeves 2014). She has also pointed to temporality as an important aspect in the bordering process (Reeves 2016).

While the state might appear as an all-encompassing and constant entity framing the lives of its subjects, the presence of the state is always fluctuating. This has particularly been the case for the rural communities of Kyrgyzstan, where throughout recent decades people have experienced profound and extensive changes in the 'states' of being. Following Ferguson's and Gupta's inquiry into the ways bureaucratic practices relate to state spatialization, I argue that people's engagement with documents is a particularly useful vantage point for tracing the fluctuating presence of the state. 'Documents' in this case is understood as a generative term for paperwork people engage with in relation to the state. My interlocutors would often use the generic term *dokumenti* (documents) to refer to any kind of paperwork requested or produced by the state.[1] Peirano (2002, 5) has succinctly described such documents as 'those legal papers that harass, torment, or facilitate the life of the individual in modern society'. For the rural Uzbek community living along the border of Kyrgyzstan these were ID cards, passports, residence registrations, marriage certificates, birth certificates and other legal documents such as official statements and agreement letters. People's engagement with these documents illustrates how the state has been moving in and out of the space inhabited by minority ethnic Uzbeks.

Ermek's visit

One of the most compelling examples of the changes in people's attitudes and engagement with documents was the case of a lost and found passport I encountered during my fieldwork in a small Uzbek village right at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. On one occasion my host family was visited by their Uzbek neighbour, Ermek. He was seeking advice and help from my host family's father, Maksatbek, regarding some problems with his documentation. Maksatbek was contacted from time to time by villagers with similar requests for help. This was due to his connections with the local administrative system, as well as his command of written Kyrgyz, which many local Uzbeks did not have. He was also considered impartial to the recent ethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, due to his mixed ethnic parentage.

Ermek explained that he was trying to get a passport for his daughter but was having problems with documentation, as his daughter had a foreign birth certificate and his wife did not have a valid passport. Although Ermek's family lived in a village on the Kyrgyz side of the border, his daughter was born in Uzbekistan. Before the closure and militarization of the border beginning in the mid-2000s, it was common for Uzbek women in the village to give birth in Uzbekistan – among other reasons, that is where the closest hospital was. Due to their daughter's foreign birth certificate, both parents needed to confirm that they agreed to her applying for Kyrgyz citizenship. Ermek himself had a valid passport, but his wife had only an old Soviet passport issued in Uzbekistan, which was not valid identification for signing the documents. Because of this, Ermek's daughter's application had not been accepted. Ermek explained that he was told at the local passport office that he needed to provide either a valid passport for the mother or a notarized agreement (*soglasheniye*) in which the mother agreed to her daughter's obtaining Kyrgyz citizenship. However, the notary refused to sign the agreement, as the mother did not have a valid passport. Ermek had decided to try to write such an agreement without the help of a notary and was now asking Maksatbek for help in writing it.

However, Maksatbek and Ermek disagreed about how such a document should be written. Maksatbek said that instead of an agreement (*soglasheniye*), it should be a statement (*zayavleniye*). Ermek insisted that he was told by the local authorities that it should be an agreement (*soglasheniye*). While Ermek was concerned about providing the exact document he was asked for, Maksatbek was more concerned about the logic behind the type of document required. According to him, an agreement is made between two parties, but this document concerned only the mother, so it was more logical to write a statement, not an agreement. After several minutes of discussion Maksatbek started to laugh and exclaimed: 'Look, we have plenty of such people whose passports are eaten by mice!' Also laughing, Ermek reached into the inner pocket of his dark-brown leather jacket and pulled out a passport. I recognized it by its dark red colour: it was one of the old Soviet passports. As he handed it to me I noticed that one corner was missing. Not a small part, but a big chunk of it was not there. It seemed to have been torn away. As I flipped through the pages, which were stuck together, Ermek explained that his wife's passport had gone missing for a long time. He was unsure of how long, but it was long enough that he and his wife had assumed that they no longer had it. But then they had recently found it at home. Only, a mouse had eaten some of it.

I asked whether they had tried to exchange the Soviet passport before it went missing. He explained that his wife had no need for a Kyrgyz passport. His wife was from

Uzbekistan, and though when they married she moved to live on the Kyrgyz side of the border, she still continued to work in school in a nearby village across the border. Another reason they did not change the passport was that it involved many complicated bureaucratic procedures in Uzbekistan. Now, while Ermek was explaining the difficulties with passport changes, Maksatbek became agitated. He said that Ermek did not know anything. He called him stupid and accused him of being ignorant of the law.

> He does not know the laws and regulations. He does not follow anything and is afraid. So they [Uzbeks] keep sitting with their heads down. There are plenty of them here in the village. City Uzbeks are not like this, they know the law, and they fight and get what they want. But the village Uzbeks, they are all illiterate, and so they continue to live like this.

Although Ermek tried to argue with Maksatbek, on seeing Maksatbek's anger he gave up and just tried to get the help he had come for. And eventually, Maksatbek agreed to write a draft of the document.

The next day I met Ermek at the village administration office where he was waiting for the administration secretary accept the documents for his daughter's passport application. In the evening Maksatbek and I met Ermek again and learned that he was unsuccessful because the people in the administration had gone to a seminar. Maksatbek asked how much Ermek had to pay for his daughter's passport. Ermek told him that he had to pay an extra 1000 som and that this was the way to do it (*Tak nado. Bez etogo nevozmozhno*).[2] He also noted that next time he would go to the administration with a friend who would help him submit all the necessary papers. Maksatbek later elaborated that the friend Ermek referred to was an intermediary (*posrednik*) to whom the money would be passed. A couple of days later Ermek called me to say that he had managed to submit all the papers and that the passport would be ready in a month.

Overarching presence of the state

The case of the old, mouse-eaten Soviet passport illustrates how people's attitudes and engagement with the documents have changed over time, reflecting the fluctuating presence of the state.

In the Soviet period, the life of rural communities in the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) was structured in and around the collective agricultural farms of the state (*kolkhoz, sovkhoz*). Thus, the Soviet state with a highly regulative socialist regime had a strong presence in the lives of the people. The categorization of the population and the 'passportization' of this community also occurred during Soviet rule. The internal Soviet passports[3] were introduced in Kyrgyzstan in 1932 and thereafter gradually distributed to the population (AKI Press 2018) marking the beginning of the documentation of this community. When I asked about their Soviet passports, people would often refer to the fact that passports were distributed to them by the state itself, suggesting that this was not an issue of individual concern. They would recall that passports were handed out at the local school or working place, indicating that the passportization occurred on the initiative of a state institution rather than the individual citizen. For this community, the Soviet period was also marked by a highly active cross-border life that was barely regulated or surveilled but rather encouraged and supported (Megoran 2012; Reeves 2014; Troscenko 2016). Thus, while it was an important document, the passport was not a prerequisite in the daily

lives of these borderland inhabitants. John Torpey (2000) notes that in the Soviet Union the passport was an essential part of everyday life, particularly because a passport and a residence registration (*propiska*) were linked to employment, housing, and access to goods and resources. However, once a person was registered and settled in a collective farm in a rural area, as was the case for the borderland inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan, these documents were much less important, despite being 'the backbone of a system of controls' (Torpey 2000, 131). The paternalistic and authoritative Soviet state handled people's documents, and in the settled life of the *kolkhoz,* in this rural borderland context, people did not have to concern themselves about them very much.

Withdrawal of the state

The strong and overarching presence of the Soviet state abruptly ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The period of transition from Soviet rule was accompanied by economic chaos and the dissolution of state systems (Pelkmans 2017). Under the transition period's 'shock therapy', which included liberalization of the market, privatization of collectively owned land, houses and state-owned companies, and significant cuts in state services, 'Kyrgyzstan's state system crumbled and fragmented' (28). Particularly in the rural communities, these changes were painfully visible: workplaces disappeared with the collapse of the formerly state-owned companies and collective farms, and the state withdrew its services and welfare provision to a large degree. The retreat of the state was also clearly visible in the immediate landscape through decaying infrastructure, such as deteriorating roads and dilapidated buildings. In many rural places the state became almost nonexistent in daily life, and these changes were accompanied by a general 'sense of abandonment by a state' (Reeves 2017, 714). During this transition period, the absence of the state was also reflected in people's lack of concern with documents.

With the collapse of the Soviet state, Soviet citizens and citizenship officially ceased to exist. The new countries, the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz Republic, introduced regulations according to which people could exchange their old Soviet passports for new ones.[4] However, not everybody managed to acquire a new passport. Many did not fulfil the legislative requirements for Kyrgyz citizenship, such as having a residence registration in the Kyrgyz SSR. In particular, many of the people living in the borderlands found themselves unable to provide all the required paperwork, as they had documents issued by several Soviet republics. Others were simply not interested in dealing with bureaucratic processes; living in an environment from which the state was absent and where residents' everyday issues were settled through informal networks, they saw no need for formal papers. Also, throughout the 1990s and into the mid-2000s people living along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border could continue to engage in cross-border mobility without any formal documents due to the lack of border control (Reeves 2014; Megoran 2017). Thus, the documents were not of particular concern for the rural borderland inhabitants.

Ermek's case echoes the same attitudes: his family's cross-border life during this period did not require any documents, and therefore it was considered unnecessary to settle identity documents for his wife. The mouse-eaten passport bore the visible signs of this state absence: the most prestigious document pertaining to the individual's formal attachment to the state was lost to rodents.

Resurgence of the state

After the first decades of independence, the Kyrgyz state reasserted itself in these rural territories. With the increased state presence, in the form of a militarized border zone and the professionalization of state structures, a new concern and need for documents appeared. While the lost and forgotten mouse-eaten passport was not required for a long time, now passports were valuable commodities. Since people were forced to engage in difficult bureaucratic procedures and pay large amounts of money for their passports, these were now meticulously cared for. The particular ways people take care of their documents today is a case in point.

During my fieldwork, I would frequently travel in shared taxis between cities along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border. These taxis were often used by people travelling to the few open border-crossing points. On one such trip, I shared a taxi with three Uzbek women travelling together on a border-crossing trip. Just before the taxi reached the border crossing, the women pulled neatly wrapped documents out of their handbags. They each unrolled the transparent plastic bags and took out two documents: a green Uzbek passport and a blue Kyrgyz marriage certificate. Those were the necessary documents for crossing the border.[5] After looking through and double-checking their documents, the women carefully folded them back together, neatly wrapped them in the plastic bags for extra protection and placed them safely back in their handbags.

These carefully handled and plastic-protected documents stood in sharp contrast to Ermek's wife's mouse-eaten passport. The value and importance given to the documents had significantly changed with the state's territorialization and resurgence. This was displayed through the particular attention paid to these material objects. Now they were prerequisites for sustaining cross-border sociality and essential tools for enhancing people's mobility. As illustrated by Ermek's quest for his daughter's documents, they were also essential for education and work. Moreover, as the state was digitalizing its surveillance systems a new type of population control was being established. Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary elections in 2015 were the first elections where all voters needed biometric registration, marking a profound change in the state's legibility and control over the population. According to the state services, over 2.7 million people (from a total population of 6 million) had registered for new biometric ID cards that would allow them to vote in the elections. Newspapers reported:

> Voters were given ballot papers only after they underwent an electronic fingerprint check. As electoral officials processed the voter's biometric data using the fingerprint scanners, an image of the voter appeared on the monitor. Additionally, the device's screen flashed red when it detected any irregularities (Lee 2015).

One's identity and legality were now materializing not only in physical paper documents but also in the fingertips that were meticulously screened to detect one's right to participate in the political life of the state. The state was gaining control over the population by asserting itself in the lives of the citizens in new and profound ways.

Entanglements

Within a short period, the rural borderland inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan experienced various modes of state presence: the Soviet regime's overarching presence, the collapse and

withdrawal of the state during the turmoil of the 1990s, and the resurgence and territorialization of the independent Kyrgyz nation-state from the 2000s onwards. In this landscape of fluctuating state presence, people's attitudes and engagements with the pivotal artefacts of the state – documents – were changing, displaying the temporality and the dynamics of state presence throughout several decades. However, not only did people's engagement with documents change, but also the documents themselves were caught up and entangled in the changing everyday realities the bureaucratic state order was attempting to capture. Following Gupta's (2013, 437) argument on messy bureaucracies, which have to fill in 'the gap between the classificatory order of bureaucracy and the world that such an order refers to', I suggest the concept of *entangled documents* as illuminative of such processes of gap filling and as revealing of the gaps themselves. Entangled documents illustrate how bureaucratic papers become intertwined in changing bureaucratic practices and the dynamics of social, political and economic realities, which are a difficult match to the neatly categorized bureaucratic order. They also expose how bureaucracies themselves can become entangled in the web of messy realities, changing state regulations and baffled by unclear jurisdictions among the various state agencies.

In the scholarly literature the notion of entanglement has been used to describe connections, networks, dependence, entrapment and complex systems in general (Thomas 1991; Hodder 2011; Ingold 2010). My usage of the term resonates more with Ian Hodder's (2011) application of it. Calling for a more integrated perspective in archaeological theory, Hodder is using the concept of human–thing entanglement to describe entrapment and the mode of being caught up. Similarly, my usage of the term *entangled* points to intertwinedness and messiness, indicating a state of entrapment caused by a relation of interdependency.

Entangled documents

Entanglement with various personal documents was not uncommon in the rural border areas of Kyrgyzstan. In interviews, representatives of state authorities acknowledged that the problems with documents in the border areas were widespread and well known. Problems included expired passports, lack of identification papers, lack of marriage and birth certificates, and problems with residence registration and passports among women who had married across the border from Uzbekistan.

A local lawyer assisting people with document problems explained this situation as a side effect of the bureaucratic system that was inherited from the Soviet period. An important bureaucratic legacy from this time was the system of residence registration (*propiska*). The interconnection of various documents and their attachment to the *propiska* system often proved problematic. For example, some people were unable to receive Kyrgyz citizenship after the dissolution of the Soviet Union due to their *propiska* in the Uzbek SSR. Others who had moved across the border from Uzbekistan were unable to deregister themselves from Uzbekistan due to complicated bureaucratic practices in that country. Consequently, they could not obtain legal residence in Kyrgyzstan. But the problems with the *propiska* system were not limited to the border areas. My friend's brother, who was living in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, deregistered from Kyrgyzstan due to prolonged employment in Russia. After returning to Bishkek he had to renew his expired ID card, but he could

not do this without a *propiska*. However, when he attempted to get the *propiska*, he could not do so because he did not have a valid ID card. He was stuck in a bureaucratic quagmire, where he needed the one document to get the other, and vice versa.

This resonates with other cases in post-Soviet space, where the Soviet system of *propiska* was inherited by the new bureaucracies. Karolina Szmagalska-Follis (2008) describes how in Ukraine's bureaucratic system various documents are intertwined with the *propiska*. She describes how prisoners in Ukraine are dispossessed of their identity documents, which are not returned to them after they have served their term. To obtain new identity documents, they need a *propiska*. But they cannot get a *propiska* without identity documents. For these former inmates, a bureaucratic dead-end locked them in a circle of social and legal exclusion that was difficult to disrupt without proper knowledge or means of tricking the system.

Another entangled document legacy related to the Soviet period is linked to the integrated cross-border life that was promoted by the Soviet authorities in this region. Many borderland inhabitants had attachments to both bordering countries and therefore possessed documents issued by both Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (from the Soviet period and from the 1990s). This often created problems when dealing with the bureaucracies of the independent states, as illustrated by Ermek's case. In other cases, as mentioned above, people did not have any documents at all, as they had no need for them in rural areas where the state used to be absent. A new problem that has become more apparent in recent years is the lack of marriage certificates. With the religious revival in the country, religious wedding ceremonies have gained new prominence. Many marriages conducted by religious instructors are not registered with the state, and therefore many people lack marriage certificates. This in turn creates problems with birth certificates, since a marriage certificate is requested by the local rural authorities for the issuing of a child's birth certificate. Because various documents are intertwined within the bureaucratic state system, the lack of one document can mean complications with other documents.

The documents also become intertwined in new and unexpected ways as the political realities of the border landscape change. Documents produced for one bureaucratic purpose or one type of population control are now being used by the state for other purposes. One example is the marriage certificates carried by the women in my shared taxi. These documents had moved beyond just representing the established legal partnership between two persons and their families. In a changing context where the two neighbouring states were diverging politically, the formerly close relationship between them was replaced by strong nationalistic policies, which revealed themselves in strict border-crossing regulations (among other ways). With the militarization of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, marriage certificates had become important travel documents.

All these examples are cases of entangled documents that arise in relation to changing political, social and economic realities. The entangled documents of this rural border community are connected to the Soviet state's bureaucratic practices and its legacies; Soviet policies of regional integration; the subsequent absence of the state, producing a lack of concern for documents; the new territorialization of the state; and the state's loss of control over some spheres of social life, such as marriage. While some anthropological writings have explored gaps within the institutional practices of bureaucracy, like the work of Anna Tuckett (2015), this article rather focuses on how these entangled documents illustrate the gaps that exist between the current bureaucratic order and

people's lived realities. Moreover, they illuminate the genealogy of these gaps, as these documents themselves are the material traces of the changing political, social and economic landscapes people inhabit.

Muddled bureaucracies

Disentangling these entangled documents was not a straightforward process. People who were attempting to deal with their document predicaments, like Ermek, noted how difficult it was (almost impossible) to resolve problems in meetings with bureaucrats. The local bureaucrats also shared their frustrations, complaining about the challenges they faced when dealing with such documents. Lack of knowledge, misperceptions, disagreements, conflicting practices of state agencies and the increasing demands on the local bureaucrats from the central government were recurring topics in my conversations with and about the state agencies regarding their bureaucratic practices. The local bureaucrats struggled to manage the entangled documents.

Along with the professionalization of the central state and the proliferation of the state apparatus in recent years, local bureaucrats have had to deal with the central state to a larger degree than before. New regulations and legislative acts, which have to be implemented locally, have placed new demands on the local bureaucrats, which they were struggling to meet. Continuous changes in the legislative acts and local bureaucrats' lack of comprehension of the legislation were important aspects fostering discordancy.[6] The secretary of the local administration noted that understanding the legislation was a challenge for bureaucrats in these rural areas due to language problems. First, few of the local bureaucrats were able to understand the juridical terminology. Second, the language of the legislative texts was an issue in itself. Kyrgyz state has two official languages, Kyrgyz and Russian, but knowledge of both languages varies in the population. Particularly in the southern part of the country, people are less fluent in Russian. The secretary described how the fact that the legislation documents were usually sent in Russian[7] affected and complicated the work of the administration:

> I read it to the rest of the staff, but either way only 80% of it is understandable. They could have at least sent it in the Kyrgyz language. They send these long decrees in juridical language with all the juridical terms. It is very difficult to understand. … We are trying ourselves to understand the law and the different situations people are in. And that is how we are fighting our way through it.

The same difficulties were echoed in other people's accounts of the work of bureaucracy. A representative of an NGO working on document related issues noted:

> Many of these people [people working in the local administrations] do not understand the legal terminology used in the legislative documents, so they do not understand the law. Sometimes the laws and regulations are sent to them in Russian, but they do not speak Russian. On other occasions they receive such a bad copy of the new legislation that it is simply unreadable. These people earn the equivalent of 10–20 dollars a month, so the motivation is also not at the top. Sometimes they even have to buy their own stationery equipment, because there is no state money. How can they give advice?

The local bureaucrats also pointed to inconsistencies in the laws and conflicts among the various state agencies as contributing to the confusion of entangled documents. A

representative of local authorities illustrated this with the complicated *propiska* system already mentioned. She described how hospitals required *propiska* upon women's hospitalization during childbirth.

> But if we give it [confirmation of residence registration] to women who have Uzbek passports, then we get the police at our door. They show us documents where it is written that we cannot give such confirmation to them, and they call it a criminal case. The laws are also changing all the time – they are unstable, and there are many inconsistencies.

Discordant bureaucratic practices reveal tensions and confusions within the state apparatus, both between different state agencies and between bureaucrats themselves. Discrepancies in the work of state agencies were also mentioned by NGO representatives working on statelessness issues.

> There are in general many disagreements between government agencies. For example, the simplified procedure of getting residence permits [introduced by the central authorities to ease the situation for stateless individuals] was not really working, as it was not acknowledged by local authorities.

Another explained that

> People often do not know who to approach within the government. Or if they approach them, they get shuffled around in and between government agencies. The authorities themselves are not well informed about their responsibilities. And this is a general problem in Kyrgyzstan.

The lack of skills and knowledge, combined with little support yet greater demands from the central government, was putting new strain on the local bureaucrats. The local administration had to deal with a constant flow of new regulations from the central state, which they struggled to comprehend and adapt to their settings. As Colin Hoag (2011, 82) has pointed out, 'idealized rules are never specific enough to fit a local context, bureaucrats' work is to interpret them (under a range of constraints)'. The bureaucratic processes around the entangled documents highlight how the local bureaucrats are struggling to bridge the gap between the bureaucratic state order and world realities as they themselves are enmeshed in the changing legislation, contradictory regulations and conflicting areas of jurisdiction of various state agencies. Not only were the documents entangled in a web of bureaucratic interdependency and changing realities, but the bureaucracy itself was caught up in the state production of legal documents they were unable to understand and follow.

Disentangling the entangled

While challenges, such as the ones discussed above, within the state bureaucratic apparatus contributed to discordant bureaucratic practices at the local level, people's encounters with the bureaucracy were also marked by other discrepancies. For people trying to solve their document problems, encounters with the bureaucracy (and the state) were marked by arbitrariness, contingency, unpredictability and waiting. Although the particular role of an individual bureaucrat in these encounters was acknowledged, the encounters became metonyms for the troublesome experience of engaging with the state. For these people, successful disentangling of document predicaments depended on possession of particular knowledge, personal networks and the ability to engage in informal payments.

Knowledge and connections

Indeterminacy, and the unpredictable, arbitrary and inscrutable character of bureaucracy, fosters a sense of opacity, which, as noted by Hoag (2011, 82), 'empowers bureaucracies and bureaucrats – they become gatekeepers, with control over the flow of information and resources'. In his classic work on bureaucracy, Max Weber (1978) argued for the importance of knowledge and its position within the realm of bureaucracy. Knowledge as a tool of empowerment, control and domination plays a particular role in relation to bureaucracy, as one needs access to particular bureaucratic knowledge to be able to comply with it. My interlocutors often lacked this knowledge: they were unsure what the various bureaucratic documents meant and what the appropriate procedure was to attain them. The arbitrariness of the bureaucratic system was reflected in inconsistent and random information dissemination regarding how to settle one's document issues. Many people experienced leaving the offices without having attained clarity on how to settle their document problems, as they were often referred to other offices or asked to provide other documents they were unable to get a hold of. Many were not accustomed to dealing with bureaucracy and struggled with navigating the documenting practices of the state. But it was not only the formal knowledge of procedures that was of crucial importance in successfully navigating the bureaucracy. Gupta (2012), in his study of bureaucracy in India, notes how his informants were well aware of other types of knowledge as important prerequisites in managing the bureaucracy, namely, who to talk to in the administration, whom to approach, and what should be offered for certain services. Gupta suggests that people's cultural information on how the bureaucracy works and their socio-political connections are essential tools in successful dealings with the bureaucracy. This was also the case in Kyrgyzstan.

In Ermek's case, the lack of knowledge about the formal documents and his lack of awareness of the culture of bureaucracy had forced him to seek advice outside the administrative offices of the state. The need to write an 'agreement' that Ermek had little knowledge about made him turn to his neighbour for help. The discussions about the aim, purpose and character of such documents demonstrated Ermek's lack of familiarity with the documenting practices and templates of bureaucratic communication. Ermek struggled with both the format of the necessary document and the language employed by the bureaucracy. Gupta (2012, 36) likewise has pointed out that 'writing is a prime modality of engaging the state', which is always a disadvantage for the poor and the marginal, who often lack knowledge of the formalities of a particular bureaucratic language. For the people of the rural Kyrgyz borderlands, who were not accustomed to engaging with the state through formal correspondence, the requirements regarding a certain mode of formal communication through specific types of written documents created difficulties. Not only the bureaucratic language but also engaging with the state in one of the state languages, Russian or Kyrgyz, was a problem. Many Uzbeks living in the Kyrgyz borderlands did not have a written command of the Kyrgyz language[8] and had little knowledge of Russian. While they understood spoken Kyrgyz, they were often not fluent enough in its written form to provide the well-written documents required by authorities. The increased presence of the state brought a need not only for documents but also for skills in new forms of engagement and communication with the state.

Many Uzbeks living in the rural borderlands also lacked the socio-political network and connections that could help them navigate the bureaucratic realm of the state. Drawing on personal connections, kin relations and patronage links were important in managing social, political and economic interests in Kyrgyzstan. The importance of networks and their function as a safety net, survival strategy and means for accessing resources in the post-Soviet context has been explored and acknowledged by many scholars (Ledeneva 1998; Werner 2000; Rasanayagam 2011; Pelkmans 2017). However, as a minority in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks had lost the position within the larger society that would allow them to draw on their kinship and networks as a resource in managing the bureaucratic state apparatus. The Uzbek population in Kyrgyzstan, being the largest minority group in the country, having experienced violent ethnic conflicts and residing in the regions bordering the state of their ethnic belonging, has received some scholarly attention (Fumagalli 2007; Megoran 2007; McBrien 2011; Liu 2012; Ismailbekova 2013; Megoran 2017). Much of this literature has highlighted the politicization of ethnic identity in Kyrgyzstan, along with growing nationalism in the country. Specifically, from 2005,[9] the Kyrgyz state pursued nationalistic policies that entailed gradual ethnicization of the Kyrgyz state apparatus as administrative offices were increasingly taken over and controlled by ethnic Kyrgyz (Pelkmans 2017). In 2010, this process intensified after ethnic violence in southern Kyrgyzstan between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, after which Uzbeks lost both their economic position and their political representatives in the local state administration (Ismailbekova 2013). This further marginalized Uzbeks within Kyrgyz society as their networks of support within the political, economic and the bureaucratic realm of the state were shattered and their opportunities in life were directly determined and limited by their ethnicity (Hierman 2015). Uzbek interactions with the Kyrgyz state became increasingly defined through the power relations between these two ethnic groups (Hierman 2010, 2015). As many Uzbeks living in rural areas lacked the required knowledge and connections, their meetings with the bureaucracy took place on unfavourable terms – terms they sought to overcome through other means.

Informal payments

A case in point is again the story of Ermek, who, unable to find the solution for his entangled documents through encounters with bureaucrats, resolved it through informal payments. While employing one's connections and network is a common everyday practice in Kyrgyzstan, which is enmeshed in webs of reciprocity, patronage and social obligations (Ismailbekova 2014), there is still a widespread understanding that corruption is an institutionalized part of the state system. Many informants noted that corruption had permeated the whole state system: even state positions were up for sale. Such accounts resonate with Johan Engvall's (2016) work on the corruption of the Kyrgyz state. He shows that the state offices are being commercialized: the state has become an investment market, in which positions are purchased for the access to resources. People remarked that passport offices in particular were one on the most corrupt state institutions in Kyrgyzstan. Interlocutors described how particular extortion strategies were employed by officials at passport offices.

> When I went to the passport office to collect the passport, they told me time and again that it was still not ready. And that is how they do it. You go once, twice, three times, and they only

> drag it on, saying that they do not have it, come back another time. Until you offer them yourself to pay those 500 som. Because you are going to spend 50 som going there and back, over and over. So it is better to pay them.

This appeared to be a common money-making strategy used by officials, as such stories of extortive and predatory behaviour by state officials were widespread. The morality of such monetary payments to state officials varied by context. While the prevalent corruption in the Kyrgyz state system was usually referred to in negative terms, it was also evaluated according to the specifics of the situation, particularly to the official's position and salary and the size of the payment. As one informant noted in describing the corruption, state officials were so poorly provided for that they had to buy their own stationery. Similarly, Madeleine Reeves (2013) notes how in Russia in some cases informal payments to the police by migrant workers seemed socially acceptable, because state pay cheques could not provide a means of sustenance. Cynthia Werner (2000, 18) notes that in Kazakhstan

> in popular discourse, views on the morality of bribery are context-specific in that people factor in the content of the bribe, the official's personality and generosity, his or her regular salary, the estimated amount of income received from bribery, how this income compares to other official's in the same position, and whether or not the bribes are voluntarily presented.

In some cases, informal payments were even considered a functioning element of the Kyrgyz system that actually allowed one to settle things. As Reeves (2013) has pointed out, in post-Soviet contexts bribery can lubricate relations in the space where the law and bureaucracy are inscrutable and ambiguous. This applied also to the Kyrgyz context. Many people who found themselves in a predicament with documents that did not have a legal solution used informal payments to resolve it, like my friend's brother who found himself in a deadlock with his *propiska*. When I asked how he solved the situation, my friend raised her hand and rubbed two fingers against the thumb, indicating money, and said, 'How else can you solve a situation like this if the country has such stupid regulations and you simply cannot solve it according to the law?' Sometimes document predicaments were even defined in monetary terms, that is, the solution was seen as an issue of payment. A local NGO member working with statelessness issues, which essentially derived from problems with documents, said: 'Statelessness is a problem among poor people. The ones who can afford to pay can settle document problems very fast. Corruption here is so widespread that this can easily be sorted out.'

However, while informal payments were a common element in dealing with the state system, many rural Uzbeks struggling with document issues found it difficult to engage in these activities. Gupta (1995, 381) in his influential work 'Blurred Boundaries', notes that bribery is closely associated with cultural capital, as successful negotiations of particular services require 'a great deal of performative competence'. Many rural Uzbeks lacked knowledge of how to navigate the system and, in fear of repercussions, turned to intermediaries. Caroline Humphrey (2012) points out that intermediaries play a particular role in economic transactions in instances where people lack connections of their own. In exploring the role of favours in the higher education system in Mongolia and Russia she describes how intermediaries have become more common and prominent as the economy of favours has expanded. Similarly, the proliferation of state bureaucracy, with its ever-changing regulations and increasing demands for documents, along with the intensified presence of the state, had created a new need and a new market for

intermediaries in the rural borderlands of Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, with the devastating impact of the ethnic violence of 2010 on Kyrgyz–Uzbek relations, intermediaries became even more important in engagements between the ethnicized Kyrgyz state apparatus and the marginalized Uzbek population. According to my interlocutors, each village typically had two or three intermediaries. Each specialized in their own sphere or a particular type of document. Intermediaries were described as people who had a talent for making arrangements and making things happen. They had connections; they knew who to approach within the system and the prices of various services. People noted that as Uzbeks had to make larger payments in the state system than Kyrgyz, then the engagement of intermediaries had almost the same cost. In addition, it also helped them avoid troubling encounters with bureaucrats.

The new presence of the state required new engagements with the state bureaucracy. But successful navigation of these encounters was framed through personal links, connections and knowledge of the system. People in the margins of the state often lacked the particular connections and cultural bureaucratic knowledge to successfully navigate the bureaucracy, even with informal payments. Especially for rural Uzbek people, who were excluded from the state apparatus due to their ethnic background, engagements with the state were often made through a third party, an intermediary, who enabled them to disentangle the entangled documents. Aksana Ismailbekova (2014, 92) points out that engagements labelled as corruption have to be contextualized, as 'in a Kyrgyzstani context, diagnoses of corruption fail to account for the complexity of social life and the degree to which it is structured by mutual obligations, exchanges, and the demands of community membership'. Caroline Humphrey (2012) also argues that even in a monetarized and power-differentiated landscape not all economic actions can be reduced to simple exchanges. While contextualization and attentiveness to the character of informal payments are important aspects in highlighting the various natures of economic actions, they are also important in revealing the particular positioning of actors engaging in these transactions. In the case of the rural Uzbek community in Kyrgyzstan it highlights how the state has re-entered their lived worlds and also how they have been sidelined from the realm of the state.

Conclusion

Recent anthropological work on the state has focused on how the state is experienced and how it comes into being in everyday relations and practices. It has been argued that these processes of construction of the state allow us to capture the imagined state in specific elements in people's everyday lives. Likewise, much of the recent literature in political anthropology has explored the various ways the state materializes in people's lives. A focus on the material aspects of state–subject interaction enables us to locate the state in the concrete and particular, making it readable and tangible for closer scrutiny. This article has focused on some of the most tangible elements of the state bureaucracy, its documents. By exploring people's engagement with documents, I have highlighted how documents can illuminate the temporal dynamics of state spatialization practices, advancing anthropological understanding of state manifestation processes. Moreover, the article contributes to the growing scholarly literature on the state in Central Asia by filling the gap in the anthropological knowledge of the rural Uzbek population's

engagements with the Kyrgyz state. Ethnography from the rural borderlands of Kyrgyzstan shows that over several decades the state has been moving in, out and through the lives of people living in this landscape. People's concern, engagement with and management of identity documents allow us to trace this fluctuating presence of the state. Furthermore, a focus on documents gives us an insight into people's encounters with the state bureaucracy. In particular, the document predicaments that are widespread in the Uzbek community living along the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border reveal the gaps between the classificatory order of the state bureaucracy and the state's subjects' lived realities. Entangled documents highlight how these gaps have been widening with the changing realities of borderland people. Attempts to disentangle the entangled documents reveal the inner dynamics of local bureaucracies and illuminate how people are tackling encounters with the state on its margins.

Notes

1. Fieldwork for this study was conducted primarily in Russian. Transliterations in this article are from the Russian language.
2. The som is the national currency of Kyrgyzstan. In 2014, 1000 som were worth about USD 18.
3. For more details on the Soviet passport system see Hirsch (2005), Luryi and Zaslavsky (1979), and Torpey (2000).
4. For more information on Kyrgyz passports, see Landinfo (2013a) and AKI Press (2018). For more information on Uzbek passports, see Landinfo (2013b).
5. During the time of fieldwork in 2013 and 2014 the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border was closed for regular crossings, with some exceptions. One exception was for people who were citizens of one country and married to a citizen of the other country. This was the kind of border crossing my fellow taxi passengers on this particular occasion were to engage in.
6. For more on citizenship legislation in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, see Farquharson (2011).
7. Although Kyrgyz legislation states that the Kyrgyz language should be the primary language used by government agencies, the central authorities mostly use Russian (Aminov et al. 2010).
8. Uzbek and Kyrgyz both belong to the Turkic language group. In the southern part of Kyrgyzstan, where the large Uzbek minority lives, most people understand and have mutual intelligibility of both languages. For more on language issues in Kyrgyzstan, see Orusbaev, Mustajoki, and Protassova (2008) and Aminov et al. (2010).
9. In 2005 Kurmanbek Bakiyev became the president of Kyrgyzstan, and introduced more nationalistic policies.

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III

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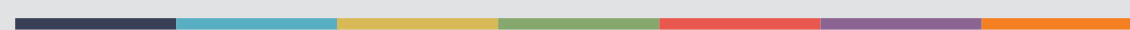

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