

**The Red Ritual:
The Soviet Wedding Rite in Postwar Kyrgyzstan**

By
AMANGELDI DZHUMABAEV

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of History

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor, Charles Shaw
Second Reader: Professor, Matthias Riedl

Budapest, Hungary

2016

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

Copyright in the text of this thesis rests with the Author. Copies by any process, either in full or part may be made only in accordance with the instructions given by the Author and lodged in the Central European Library. Details may be outlined from the librarian. This page must form a part of any such copies made. Further copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the written permission of the Author.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I remember two years from now when I received my admission letter that I was going to study at History department. I would never have imagined how challenging it was going to be. But such kind of experience is what makes us a better person. I am grateful that I had a chance to take courses from number of brilliant professors who have excelled in their areas of specialization. They are Matthias Riedl and Charles Shaw. My second and first supervisors whose critiques and commentaries were indispensable during my studies and period of thesis writing. Nadia Al-Bagdadi and Aziz Al-Azmeh for their insightful courses that broke all my previous assumptions in the fields of religious and gender studies. Alexei Miller for helping to understand the bigger picture of empire of nations. Carsten Wilke for opening completely unknown world of Jewish history both in Europe and in Central Asia. Istvan Rev, András Mink, Csaba Szilágyi, Olga Zaslavszkaja and Iván Székely for guiding through the intricate peculiarities of the work at Archives and beyond.

Next are the professors in the medieval department whom I always considered as integral part of my studies at CEU. Marianne Saghy for her inspiration, József Laszlovszky for his excellent knowledge in archeology and skill of getting people`s attention that I want to acquire. Cristian-Nicolae Gaşpar who taught two weeks of most revealing Latin course. Zsolt Czigányik, for helping me with the discourse of utopia in my works. András Gerő, for first-hand experience with Austro-Hungarian Empire in Central Europe. And of course my study here would not be possible without our departments` coordinators: Aniko Molnar, Esther Holbrook, Annabella Pál, Agnes Bendik and Mónika Nagy who are simply one of the most committed coordinators I have seen. Our Academic Writing Center without whom my progress in writing would be much difficult: Malgorzata Kruszevska and Vera Eliasova. I also want to mention a number of

motivating students with whom I spent two years studying and sharing moments of accomplishment and hardship. Levente Olosz, my dear friend who exposed me to the culture of Transylvanian Hungarians, Harrison King for his kindness, Kelechi Ahunanya, for his affection and a glimpse of art, and Stephen Pow for his early help in editing my papers. And lastly my family whose advice and encouragement push me to keep going.

June, 2016 Budapest

Amangeldi Dzhumabaev

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of socialist life-cycle ritual practices in the postwar period in Kyrgyzstan. The work has two primary goals: the first is to unveil the administrative mechanism that introduced new rites and rituals into everyday life practices of people of Kyrgyzstan and second is to closely explore the role of a wedding rite in establishing continuity between newly constructed Soviet spirituality and the beliefs of Kyrgyzstani citizens. Once considered to be a quintessentially religious rite, the wedding became a civil Socialist rite through the secularization process of Soviet propaganda. By analyzing newspaper articles, archival documents and Soviet manual brochures a discourse analysis of early “Komsomol” weddings is provided while considering the problems of coping of old versus new traditions and their determining role in Soviet and contemporary Kyrgyz society. My argument reveals the contradictions on a regional level that Kyrgyz Soviet ideologists encountered in the course of transforming religious and national rites by inclusive Soviet multinational ritual elements. Ultimately, this work seeks to trace the dynamics of modernization in Central Asia where wedding as the first institutionalized rite from 1917 had multiple implications: carrying an unprecedented potential to radically challenge the aspects of national identity and impacting on social, political as well as individual lives.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
METHODOLOGY	6
Chapter I. THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK	13
1.1. Godbuilding in the Revolution of 1917.....	13
1.2. Terms of Modernization.....	24
1.3 Secularization of the Religious Ritual.....	31
Chapter II. MAKING SENSE OF NEW RITUALS: A CONSTANT SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY	36
2.1 Working the New Rituals.....	36
2.2 Harmfulness of Traditions: Religious vs. National	42
Chapter III. IMPLEMENTING THE NEW RITUAL.....	51
3.1 The Wedding Clubs.....	51
3.2 The Soviet Wedding versus the Traditional Wedding	56
CONCLUSION.....	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81
Primary Sources	81
Secondary Sources	83
APPENDICES	88

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND TABLES

Figure 1. A symbolic representation of all of Soviet Union's nationalities attending a Kyrgyz wedding feast.	8
Figure 2. The original work “Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzstan” by Semen Chaikovsky. 1948.	21
Figure 3. The modern day remake of “Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzstan”	22
Figure 4. The old square in Bishkek during the mass celebration. Next to the marching column is the building of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Council of the Kyrgyz SSR. Circa 1970... ..	40
Figure 5. A typical view of Kyrgyz Muslim cemetery. The picture is taken in Tüz, a village in Naryn oblast of central Kyrgyzstan.	44
Figure 6. The new ritual: the name giving ceremony in the kolkhoz "Tört-Köl", in the Ton region, Issyk-Kul oblast.	52
Figure 7. The traditional wedding in 1987 in the rural village in Tien-Shan oblast (Naryn).	53
Figure 8. The Lenin`s club in kolkhoz. A place where new rites and celebrations will take place. June 5, 1965.	54
Figure 9. The First Secretary of Central Committee of Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan Absamat Masaliev congratulating the newly married couple.	55
Figure 10. One of the elements of Kyrgyz culture is <i>shyrdak</i> that decorates the floor of the main wedding hall.	61
Figure 11. A torch used during the registration ceremony in main hall of the wedding palace. ..	63
Figure 12. The central view of the wedding palace.	65
Figure 13. The marriage statistics for 1970 from the new wedding palace.	67
Figure 14. The marriage statistics for 1970 from the old wedding palace.	68
Figure 15. The former wedding palace or palace of happiness “ <i>Bakyt</i> ” (Togolok Moldo, 21) opened in 1967.	69
Figure 16. The modern outlook of former wedding palace.	70
Figure 17. The First Secretary of Central Committee of Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan Absamat Masaliev (second from right) and secretary of Central Committee of Communist Party of Soviet Union Aleksandra Birukova (forth from right) during the official registration ceremony at the new wedding palace. Frunze, 1987.	71

Figure 18. The modern outlook of the entrance to the main hall where the first secretaries stood thirty years ago.....	72
Figure 19. The central wall in the wedding hall that couples face during their registration ceremony.....	73
Figure 20. The couple preparing to ascend towards the main wedding hall accompanied by their parents. (Source: author`s personal collection).....	74
Figure 21. Facing the ritual altar and a ritual specialist during the process of registration.	75
Figure 22. The Kyrgyz traditional wedding rite in national dress in the yurt. Issyk-Kul region, 1990.....	88
Figure 23. Drinking champagne, the Soviet symbol of high culture during the wedding registration.	89
Figure 24. The Ait namaz (Ramadan) in Frunze (Bishkek), 1956.....	90
Figure 25. The stairs of wedding palace leading to the main wedding hall.....	91
Figure 26. The main entrance into the wedding palace.	92
Figure 27. The architectural layout of the new wedding palace in Bishkek.....	93
Figure 28. The main wedding hall in its full pomposity.....	94
Figure 29. The stylistic outlook of chairs at the wedding palace placed on each side of the main hall. (Source: author`s personal collection)	95

INTRODUCTION

The postwar period extending from the end of WWII up until the collapse of Soviet Union marked the process of comprehensive program of introduction of new ritual system into everyday life of Soviet citizens. This process touched each union republic including Kyrgyzstan. Having predominantly a Muslim population but also substantial number of Russian people and other nationalities, the inculcation of Socialist civil rites took on unexpected turns of contestation and compromise of national and religious sentiments that as a result produced new creative rites infused with local practices. Though many rituals had been neglected after the Soviet era, some elements particularly in the wedding rite still find their way to be celebrated and redefined until nowadays.

Soviet history of early 20th century as it continues further into the second half bears increasing trends of cultural experimentation and symbolic innovation that present a complex historical phenomenon of history of revolutionary ideas, conflicts and symbols. The avant-garde interpretation of ideas and symbols mixed with revolutionary perspectives bred new vision for old customs, cultivating feelings of uncertainty on one hand and forced tolerance on the other. Questions that often raised in the course of cultural experimentation soon turned into the main mechanisms of imposition by early revolutionary dreamers: what would be a new culture like? How should a new moral code be assessed? And where should be a place of religious feelings?¹

The Soviet history traditionally parts into two major periods: the 1917 October revolution and the Second World War and its aftermath. My research will be concentrated on the second half when during the postwar years Soviet Union started generating new cultural traits as a

¹ Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

continuation of its earlier campaign on cultural transformation of people of Soviet Union. For ordinary citizens living in the peripheries like Kyrgyzstan such transformation meant an overriding concern with wide range programs aggressively taking over all spheres of life. Primarily my aim revolves around the study of ritual-in-making through examination of new socialist wedding rite evoked in the process of celebration of what Smolkin calls: Soviet spirituality.²

The problem of rituals within the Soviet context was a serious issue already before the Revolution of 1917. Since religion gradually was taken away, something had to be substituted instead. Mikhail Kalinin on this occasion is known for quoting the peasants “who were asking him for surrogate rituals.”³ As an important aspect of moral orientations, the implementation of ritual ceremonies involved careful planning from the side of Soviet committees. Rituals were not merely for fulfilling the aesthetic needs of people but were also a mean for managing the “power relations”.⁴ In this sense by participating in the process of a ritual act, people were openly submitting themselves to the programs of “cultural management” which became one of the tools in forging a new type of Soviet society.⁵ The intentional cultivation of values and exertion of social control gradually transformed into a “sustained and general campaign” that reached its zenith in the postwar era soon acquiring the all-union scope.⁶ Specifically the postwar marked the state of increasing administrative as well as ideological pressure on main religious rites and

² Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, “‘A Sacred Space Is Never Empty’: Soviet Atheism, 1954–1971” (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 219, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdthss/docview/1322073107/abstract/FE66F020FEAB4BEEPQ/1>.

³ Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 109.

⁴ Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 3.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

holidays such as religious wedding *nike kyiu*, the birth of a son and his circumcision, the funeral rite, *janaza* and fasting, *Kurban Ait* (Eid al-Adha) and *Orozo Ait* (Ramadan).

This thesis addresses the ritual of wedding and its interplay among the conflicting parties, and it also explores the role of religion and its intricate relation to the definition of national traditions. Once considered to be a quintessentially religious rite, the Soviet wedding is an interesting case to explore to check how Soviet propaganda placed a considerable accent on its secularization process making it a civic socialist rite. The Soviet modernity sought to take under its auspice the major events occurring in the lives of Soviet citizens. The wedding rite as one of these important moments that along with birth and death ceremonies was the major life-cycle ritual that people undergo during their lifetime. It presented a serious dilemma for Soviet authorities: how and in what way it should be celebrated in the new Soviet setting. The mass spread of progressive elements into the traditional lifestyle, was seen on the one hand as the way for eradication of ‘obsolete’ practices and on the other hand a cultivation of modern culture that gradually supposed to replace them. Many attributes had to be implemented anew such as special place for ritual ceremony, music, songs, dress, and even food. Thus the Soviet wedding underwent several stages of transformation in terms of structure which eventually was standardized throughout other Soviet republics and autonomous regions. In the light of these processes the questions raised aim at capturing thoroughly these moments of conflict and expectation. Were the ritual novelties fully assimilated into the traditional Kyrgyz` view of wedding rite? Was the complexity of ritual performance in Kyrgyzstan a result of an attempted blend of traditional ceremony with a generally established Soviet modesty?

At the dawn of WWI, the Soviet Union inherited a population and culture of great diversity from its former predecessor, the Russian empire. Central Asia or also known as

Turkistan became part of this entity and like other union republics underwent a dual reorganization both politically and culturally integrating into the whole system of a newly created “Soviet legality”.⁷ The domination of Soviet Union for almost seventy years (1924-1990) was an overwhelming process especially as its heritage still carries on. Studying this era helps to untangle the cultural memories that I had also inherited. It poses a challenge as how one should interpret them or otherwise reconstruct for future generation.

The major interaction between the atheist rulers and the local traditional Muslim population resumed after a period of relative ease of religious intolerance where Soviet bureaucrats embraced what came to be known "a legitimization of religion" from 1943-47.⁸ However the relative revival of religious activity among the population caused renewed attempts by central authorities to counter religiosity (1947-1954). Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign of 1958-1964 was the result of strengthening the central ideology: “The current generation of Soviet people will live under communism!”.⁹ The Brezhnev's reign on the other hand did not bring radical changes in terms of administration except the prominence of stability that the Soviet leadership enjoyed between 1965 to 1981. This period also marks the “normalization” stage when Soviet officials tried to negotiate the place of religion within the Soviet society: “a *modus operandi* that would enable it to co-exist with religion, making it clear, however, that religion was being tolerated as a necessary evil and not encouraged.”¹⁰ Overall Brezhnev's period could be equated to the golden age in Soviet history with massive industrialization as well as urbanization taking place across the union republics. During this time Kyrgyzstan's cultural

⁷ Eren Murat Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943–1991” (Ph.D., Harvard University, 2010), 2, <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtthss/docview/634237124/abstract/EC7A8B7CB0894E09PQ/1>.

⁸ Yaacov Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union. From the Second World War to Gorbachev* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 10.

⁹ From Khrushchev's report at the 22nd Congress of CPSU in 1961.

¹⁰ Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union. From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, 10.

capital of Frunze turned into a massive reconstruction site where in 1981 the building of central committee and the central square along with Lenin`s museum had been fully completed. Turdakun Usubaliev became one of the representatives of this emerging new secular elite who ruled Soviet Kyrgyzstan uninterruptedly for almost 25 years (1961-85) as part of Brezhnev`s “stability of cadres”.¹¹

In the meantime the intense interaction between the Central Party-state and the Kyrgyz authorities reveal a complex platform of continuous institutional exchange and linguistic homogenization. Named a “propaganda state”, Soviet Union heavily involved in displaying its utopian dreams and revolutionary ideals that mobilized thousands people.¹² Creating festive ceremonies, the Soviet ideological front devised powerful mechanism of introducing new rituals and holidays where the rise of ‘red days’ ultimately changed the fate of Central Asian community.

¹¹ Adeeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. (University of California Press, 2007), 86.

¹² Malte Rolf, *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991*, Jonathan Harris (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013), 1.

METHODOLOGY

The research on Soviet ritual covers a large array of topics that involve multiple terminologies of ritual making, tending towards a broader generalization where ritual should not be viewed as a single separate phenomenon but rather as an integral part of a larger discourse on nation building, engaging numerous actors in the dissemination and performing of rituals. The Soviet approach to ritual was very pragmatic. It was to perform “ideological, regulatory, social control function.”¹³ The norms manifested in the act of ritual are thought to be clearer by providing a “graphic example of conduct” expressed in dress, speech, use of space etc. that effecting on consciousness increases the communal solidarity making possible in the long-run to mobilize the people on behalf of common Soviet identity.¹⁴

The process of establishment of new Soviet traditions required detailed explanation and answers to question why certain forms of religious and cultural remnants (*perezhitki*) continued existing. According to Soviet interpretation whether the content of tradition progressive or reactionary “it is always mediated by the previous ideological heritage.”¹⁵ So for instance the New Year originally ancient custom when adopted by religious groups, it became celebrated as Christian holiday. Soviets argued that in contemporary conditions the form of this custom is preserved whereas the religious content is disappeared. On one hand, new Soviet customs widely used mimetic character where they take the religious customs as role model i.e. copy the form but fill with socialist content. By calling religion as violent appropriator where it “stole the commonly accepted human norms and principles of moral” the specialists argue for the

¹³ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case*, 19.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Berlik Soltonbekov, *Novye Sovetskie Tradicii i Obychai i ih rol v Borbe s Perezhtkami Proshlogo v Bytu* (Ministry of Culture of Kyrgyz SSR, 1969), 12.

importance of converting the previously religious customs like wedding rite and christening into Soviet practices while granting them wider civil rights and recognition.¹⁶

In soviet terminology the understanding of tradition was distinguished between custom (*obychai*), ceremony or rite (*obryad*) and ritual. According to Kyrgyz Soviet author, Soltonbekov while tradition is a historically sustainable social phenomenon, the custom is very specific act pertaining to everyday life and family relations. The progressive customs (*progressivnye obychai*) are thought to be refined over time and passed over to next generations. However, in a class society there are also harmful reactionary customs (*reaksionnye obychai*) that preserved i.e. the religious holidays. The ceremony or rite (*obryad* or *rasym* in Kyrgyz language) have relatively stable order that turned into a habit of social groups, classes or the nation, used in the conduct of political, civil or familial acts. Rituals on the other hand attached to ceremonies are responsible for exterior design, enhancing the visibility and effectiveness of the ceremonial procedure. The continued existence of religious remnants is thought to a certain degree connected to those rituals that equip the religious ceremonies with solemnity. Therefore, Soviet officials greatly accounted for the significance of tradition and customs because precisely through them people in families, schools or universities could learn and perceive certain feelings, thoughts, ideas and images where soviet traditions and customs could become an active force only when they reach the point of mass celebration (*massovyi*) shaping thoughts and feelings of people.

This thesis is a descriptive analysis of ritual system. In the current framework I am specifically interested in the wedding rite as a form of new constructed ritualism. Studying this subject from the empirical perspective as a part of a broader theme of celebration I will pay

¹⁶ V. Kuzina, "O Tradiciyah I Obryadah. Davaite Obsudim.," *Komsomolec Kirgizii*, March 11, 1964.

special attention to the ritual scenarios as made appropriate to canons of socialist behavior. In this sense the introduction of new rites and traditions was undertaken under the close supervision of various ritual committees who were responsible for their monitoring and implementation. I will examine the shortcomings and controversy associated with the wedding ritual in the course of its development especially the narratives that involved contestation between religious versus national customs. The outcome of the implementation of policies of introducing of new traditions into everyday life is to understand the extent of the ideological front, the successful mechanism used and the gradual transformation of the wedding rite that to this day continues to exist and practiced.



Figure 1. A symbolic representation of all of Soviet Union's nationalities attending a Kyrgyz wedding feast.

A painting from the former Lenin's museum in Bishkek. One can observe the wedding ritual used as a symbolic consolidation of people of different nationalities. (Author is unknown)

(Source: <http://www.rferl.org/media/photogallery/24896930.html>, last accessed May 31, 2016)

Three basic features that rituals possess include first of all a degree of standardization, followed by its repetitive sequence, and a moderate continuity that through the use of symbols come to express the social relations.¹⁷ In particular settings and under certain ideological frameworks rituals come to be associated more and more as a nonreligious set of acts. It takes places in a specifically allocated space performed in its own prescribed manner. Emile Durkheim reveals the discourse of collectivity of ritual as “a way of simultaneously creating, testing, and validating collective beliefs that revive and continually renew a sense of community and that help individuals to internalize the social world around them.”¹⁸ Community and collectivity are the keywords that make people performing the ritual attached to each other; where beliefs expressed through rituals bring people closer to their surrounding expressed with intense emotionality.

Clifford Geertz hints another side of ritual formula that provides not just a framed ritual act but properties through which the so-called “a model of” and “a model for” work in different social context.¹⁹ According to Geertz religion is first of all a system of symbols that generates a conception of an order of existence where ritual establishes a social relationship between an individual and a group. Specifically the “model of” predominates when social context had been slightly altered, only temporarily affecting that relationship framed in the ritual act. However, when there occurs a significant gap between ideological definition of the relationship and the relationship that actually influences the people, then this is a “model for” aspect.²⁰ In case of wedding rites the model for aspect is dictated by ritual specialists who maintain the ideological

¹⁷ Rolf, *Originally Published as Das Sowjetische Massenfest*, 9.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Geertz Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), 93.

²⁰ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case*, 12.

stance of the social context within which the ritual act is taking place. But as political elite start exerting more social control over social relationships the other ‘model of’ aspect is becoming increasingly limited, signaling that ritual turns into an effective mechanism for manipulating the aspects of social life.²¹

Sources

The current study on one part is based on the periodicals from the postwar era in Kyrgyzstan (*Agitator i Propagandist Kirgizstana (Bloknot Agitatora)*, *Komsomolskaya Kirgiziya*, *Sovetskii Kirgizstan*, *Komsomol Kirgizii*, *Narodnayay tribuna*, *Trudovaya Slava*) and number of brochures published between the period of 1970 up until the late 1980s. I use these articles published in the periodicals throughout my second and third chapters to unveil the interesting debates on the nature of rites, their pros and cons in relation to national customs but also in relation to broader Soviet ideology; number of reportages are examined from the early wedding rites that provide evidences of how the wedding evolved from a sporadic attempt into a conventional form by the late 1970s with very specific prescriptions describing each step during the ceremonial act. Newspapers from the postwar period are subjective and ideologically driven in the sense that one has to be constantly aware about their ideological agenda and make use of several sources to make the argument compelling. On the other hand the brochures published by local authors, atheists and ritual specialists are quite explicit and help to see the dividing line between the traditional and Soviet wedding rites. Their accounts mainly written for methodological purposes based on their practical observations present a great source and a guide tool in the field of ritual studies. I especially like that fact that their work was written at a time when the process of devising and implementing the new rituals was still under the process of

²¹Ibid.

criticism and awaiting its confirmation. Furthermore, I conducted two interviews: one with the senior ritual specialist of palace of wedding, Lamira Djukeshovna who is still actively carries out her duty as a ritual specialist by solemnly registering the couples. Thus continuing the originally Soviet tradition yet in a slightly new manner. The second respondent was one of the architects of the wedding palace, Aleksandr Klishevich who revealed the details of the construction site and its meaning in past and present. In addition, I make use of participant observation capturing a sense of wedding rite either at the wedding palace or at simple house by constantly keeping aware myself of links and gaps in the execution of new as well as old forms and methods of celebration.

The present work also makes use of the archival materials. The Central Archive of Films and Photos (*Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Kinophotophonodokumentov KR (TsGAK)*) had provided amazing graphical captions of ceremonies and rituals of the late Soviet era portraying the ritual itself and people involved in the whole process. The graphical representation of life cycle rituals helps to understand the extent the ceremonies penetrated into people's everyday life. I collected many letters and reports about the religious situation in prewar Kyrgyzstan from another Archive, the Central State Archive of Kyrgyzstan (*Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki (TsGA)*) that was useful in reasserting my assumption of religious situation in prewar Kyrgyzstan though many of these letters and reports still await their future research. The Central State Archive of Political Documentation (*Tsentralnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Politicheskoi Dokumentasii KR (TsGAPD)*) had also generously provided me with the access to work with all of the holdings of *Znanie* (Knowledge) Society Kyrgyzstan. *Znanie* Society was responsible for dissemination and cultivation of knowledge in all of Soviet Union republics including Kyrgyzstan. I was examining the print publications from 1970s that were used as

lecture guides at meetings at universities or atheist houses. The information from there contributed to my argument on the soviet discourse of religious versus national traditions in the course of introduction of socialist rituals.

Thus, the first chapter of the thesis presents a historical background necessary to understand the link between the earlier modernization as well as secularization processes taking place in Central Asia. Specifically the role of early godbuilders will be of particular interest as they appear first to construct the new nonreligious rites and holidays. In addition, the role of local actors like Jadids is examined whose own views of modernization greatly overlapped with the general Soviet modernization campaign; their contribution of re-evaluating the place of women in conservative society gives an alternative pattern of development and therefore the competing viewpoints against those of Bolsheviks.

Chapter two and three are heavily based on the discussion and analysis of primary sources. I engage into the debate of harmfulness of traditional customs raised among the local intelligentsia; how relevant and meaningful their discourse was to the topic of maintaining more moderate customs as against the old and costly practices. Moreover, the role of wedding rite is examined from the local, traditional and Soviet perspectives where the symbolical representation of the wedding palace comes into scene. As Kyrgyzstani society became greatly influenced by Soviet policies of new ritual introduction, they also became more and more responsive to new challenges starting to adopt new elements and forms into their daily life.

Chapter I. THE HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Godbuilding in the Revolution of 1917

“...to say the revolution is itself utopia of immanence is not to say that it is a dream, something that is not realized or that is only realized by betraying itself. On the contrary, it is to posit revolution as plane of immanence, infinite movement and absolute survey, but to the extent that these features connect up with what is real here and now in the struggle against capitalism, relaunching new struggles whenever the earlier one is betrayed.”

— Gilles Deleuze/Felix Guattari²²

Utopia in a sense is a driving force of a great imagination; or rather, utopia is a side effect of willingness to change for better. Despite its tantalizing name and ardor of airing impossibility, utopia appears quite simple in nature, and ambitious in execution. In as much as contending with the definition of Karl Mannheim that “utopia contains the direction, the point of view, the perspective, and the set of questions from which the present and the past first become comprehensible at all,” I am cautiously inclined to its hidden dangers that could potentially result in the binary directives of human thinking and development.²³ Having a clear message from its inception, the fate of utopian ambitions voiced during the soviet Revolution of 1917 was transformed undergoing the socio-political changes of the struggle against God, which was among the major challenges for the Bolsheviks. After coming to power in 1917, they encountered the problem of reconverting the believers into non-believers or, more precisely, reconverting them into the believers of the Soviet-Marxist ideology of socialist life. As an ideal

²²Gerald Raunig, *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, SEMIOTEXT(E) ACTIVE AGENTS SERIES (The MIT Press, 2007), 9.

²³Lyman Tower Sargent, “Ideology and Utopia: Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (October 2008): 264, doi:10.1080/13569310802374479.

image of a symbolic war against God, an archetype of the Old Order, it was utopian vision, imagination, and culture-changing movements that were their main catalysts.

The ambivalence and uncertainty concerning the issue of God in general takes different forms dating much before the actual revolution, around 1870s. Even though atheism was long in the air, many used religious tone to promote their revolutionary ideas in an attempt to reach the peasantry. In the midst of this turmoil, the tendency of moderate religious faith takes its own forms constructing new moral codes, structure and rites and even language – ‘secular in aim, but religious in spirit’.²⁴ The first experiments varied in structure from going out and preaching the Christian peasants to using the religious thematic in socialist propaganda. The main ideologist Mikhail Bakunin, even though fundamentally opposed to the ideas of Marxism, expressed his indifference and contempt towards religion, saying, “It is now the freethinkers’ turn to pillage heaven by their audacious impiety and scientific analysis.”²⁵ Clearly, the proponent of pragmatic views, Bakunin was among many others who come to be known as the early Godkillers, ultimately expressing their opposition in pompous manners. Downplay of God and uncompromising pursue of science and secular knowledge emerged as the moving force of this movement. Yet, the bigger concern is whether the movement that had a strong dogma but less developed ritual and ethic could still exert confidence in their ideas and beliefs into the masses.

The efforts of Godkillers did not go in vain, as already between the period of 1905 and 1917 the problem of God was given the wide public attention. Intelligentsia criticized religion leveling it with than reoccurring problems in society such as crime, sexual morality, and degradation in art. This pretext partly resulted in the appearance of movements known as the Godseekers and Godbuilders. Judging by their names, Godseekers was the movement that set to

²⁴Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 102.

²⁵Ibid., 101.

find God “within the context of an enlightened intelligentsia.”²⁶ Although, they were Christians themselves it did not prevent them from taking part in one of the most subversive groups in the Revolution of 1917. Godbuilders, on the other hand, directly came from the Godseekers, who had the initial aim of refashioning religion in accordance with socialism thus ‘constructing’ a new God-like system.²⁷ Numerous individuals inspired the movement, which was part of a collective prophetic spirit, before and after the Revolution. Some of the prominent and well known to us are Anatoly Lunacharsky and Maxim Gorki, the author of *Confession (Isповed')*, 1907 where the terms Godbuilding and Godseeking were first coined.

The Zigzag Line of Relationship between Revolution and Art

Initially drawing his major inspiration from his two-volume book called *Religion and Socialism* (1908-11) Lunacharsky enthusiastically pushed forward the theory of human spiritual bond. According to it, the true essence of religion could in fact be accomplished without the help of God or any otherworldly assistance. This partly illustrated the way in which he came to the idea of Godbuilding (*bogostroitelstvo*), as he was actively involved in search for “spiritual regeneration.”²⁸ Being a Marxist himself he wholeheartedly interested in art valuing religion for its emotional bond that connected people to each other. His vision of art consecrated revolution as his primary focal point. The very key to understanding his idea of human spiritual bond lies in his concern about religion where it has the possibility for realization of human potential through religious impulses that kept people attached to each other; and where socialism was supposed to frame this new humanistic religion: “religion is enthusiastic and without enthusiasm, people can

²⁶Ibid., 102.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Nina Tumarkin, “Religion, Bolshevism, and the Origins of the Lenin Cult,” *The Russian Review* 40, no. 1 (1981): 41, doi:10.2307/128733.

create nothing great.”²⁹ The deification of human potential culminated in his articulation of a socialist religion:

The faith of an active human being is a faith in mankind of the future;
His religion is a combination of the feelings and thoughts which make
Him a participant in the life of mankind and a link in that chain which
Extends up to the superhuman... to a perfected organism ... If the essence
Of any life is self-preservation, then a life of beauty, goodness, and truth is self-realization.³⁰

For Lunacharsky revolution was a platform where he experimented with his ideas and stubborn beliefs. It was about “bringing ideas of remarkable breadth and depth.”³¹ And Art in this sense was deemed to be the defining element of his aspirations for the implementation of artistic forms: ““if revolution can give art its soul, then art can give revolution its mouthpiece.”³² He persisted that art is indispensable to state exactly for agitation because its forms could evoke effects of sense impression in a way that it can activate the masses: “agitation, he used to say, can be distinguished from propaganda by the fact that it excites the feelings of the audience and readers and has a direct influence on their will. It, so to say, brings the whole content of propaganda to white heat and makes it glow in all colors.”³³ The potential of universal artwork, *gesamptkunstwerk* was to seek to integrate the masses by merging of various art genres in order to incorporate the spiritual of people of all nationalities and in so doing art could transform from mass celebration into the “expression of national ideas and feelings.”³⁴ It is hard to contest that

²⁹Ibid., 42.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Raunig, *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, 12.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., 14.

³⁴Ibid., 16.

art did not play a major role in the revolution precisely because of its effective, enthusiastic use in agitating the masses and expressing definite forms in the revolutionary policies. As Richard Wagner writes, art is a “social product”, a “faithful mirror image of the dominant spirit of the public”.³⁵ For him it was revolution that follows art, as opposed to Lunacharsky who thought otherwise, art follows the revolution.

Struggling to thrive though, Lunacharsky and his followers had conflicting ideas on many crucial points with the central authorities. There was certain divergence on the role that religion should have played in the Soviet political reorganization. Links that existed between Bolshevism and religion diverged Lenin from his fellow comrades. Along with two other prominent Bolsheviks at the time Leonid Krasin, the Commissar of Foreign Trade and Vladimir Bonch-Bruyevich, Secretary of the Council of People’s Commissars, Lunacharskii was actively engaged in the spiritual development when the discrepancy between the opposing views grew on the art form of revolution. Unlike Lenin, who perceived revolution and the ‘festival’ component as a surge of energy awakening the masses, Lunacharski approached it from the religious point of view: “the balance of freedom and order could be achieved through a religious sense of community, periodically exhibited in public festival.”³⁶ Yet for Lenin religion in any form was a stupor similar to oblivious action of human activity. He was very hesitant on Godbuilding as he was afraid it was too close to traditional religions. His classical formulation based on Marx’s notion that religious belief was an ‘opiate’ to the masses as a means of exploiting them was one of his breaking arguments. He dismissed God in his letter from 1913, as “a set of ideas that aroused and organized social feelings”.³⁷ Soon after he would

³⁵Ibid., 10.

³⁶Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 98.

³⁷Ibid., 102.

However, on the other hand, after a period of consideration one could see that *weltanschauung* of both revolutionaries mutually excluded each other. The mobilization of masses for modernization carried out by Lenin resulted in a number of deficiencies in his program of New Economic Policies.³⁸ Similarly Lunacharsky's effort to mobilize the masses through art seemed too grandiose but fortunately or not realistic in the end. Based on the idea of expressing the national feelings, his blunt enthusiasm had no precedence in achieving the total uniformity: "and just think what character our festive occasions will take on when, by means of General Military Instruction, we create rhythmically moving masses embracing thousands and tens of thousands of people—and not just a crowd, but a strictly regulated, collective, peaceful army sincerely possessed by one definite idea."³⁹

The Proletarian Morale

As revolution served the platform for new life and rebirth, it was also a basis for new elements of political – revolutionary topics of drastically emerging new order. The new order that with the help of the mechanism of secular upbringing produced a new ritual life. The notions of revolutionary and communist were once more revisited, questioning the very nature of what should be regarded as modern, rational, and healthy. Any reference of bourgeois world that hindered the process of building a new culture was quickly discarded as un-revolutionary. Numerous examples of the right, correct behavior dominated the minds whereas improper actions were harshly condemned. Drunkenness, for instance was seen as a rude violation of

³⁸The NEP program (the New Economic Policy) from 1921 to 1928 aimed at recovering the economy from the years of civil war. But it was very disappointing to Anatoly Lunacharsky because in addition to its totalizing downturn, he was deeply concerned with cultural-political effects of Lenin's economic novelties that resulted in impoverishing the state necessity for art. From his perspective, art was an important factor in the social movement and as a result of disappearance of agitational theaters; it prompted the appearance of alternative places of corrupted public space that became a scene of gross consumption of alcohol, brutality and prostitution harming greatly the general populace.

³⁹Raunig, *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*, 17.

proletarian rank. The symbolic appearance of political figures as the models of cultured Bolsheviks served the youth as role models to resemble for. The promotion of pioneer clubs (*pionerskie kluby*) educated the youth with all the necessary skills of modern responsible and well-rounded citizens, in all the areas imagined: theater, film, photography, sewing, and reading. The new ritual life encapsulated in enormous formalism made a sharp line of permissible symbolic expressions whether be it dancing, talking, or just behaving that if acted otherwise associated with a titled frivolity. In other words *kulturnyi* (civilized) in everyday life was highly praised as vivid attributes of Soviet-style the citizens as opposed to backwardness.⁴⁰

The far-reaching aspiration of becoming the most culturally advanced country in the world signaled its imagined superiority to others. One could view such tendency of spreading culture to its distanced regions the right model of *kulturnost* as a form of its civilizing mission. The everyday life, or *byt* in Russian Bolshevik terminology, dictated the moral codes of behavior that sought its obligation to uplift the peasants, shepherds, workers, and generally common people of close and far away parts of Soviet orbit of influence. The famous work of art of Semen Chuikov “Daughter of Soviet Kirgizia” (*Doch` Sovetskoy Kirgizii*) completed in 1948 became a symbol of renewed life of Kyrgyz people, where the artist saw his subsequent monumental representation of a new hero, of a new men of the homeland. The portrait represented a simply dressed girl from rural Kyrgyzstan, who is determined, civilized, and independent in her decision-making. Holding a book in the left hand, she appears not to be afraid of challenges ahead, as she, bravely steps forward embracing the fine grains of education aspiring for career outside of her native village. Breaking the old stereotypes of culture and tradition, she became the model for many young Kyrgyz girls and boys of the time; she represented the collective

⁴⁰Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams*, 118.

image of true Soviet-ness, of what it brought and where it was leading. The idealistic image, the hallmark of Soviet modernization project set to massively transform the society from within.

Today after almost a generation past, this picture still did not lose its authenticity and hidden message. Modern developments and new challenges drove the brave rural girls to adjust the current fast-growing technologies. At least this was the plan of ambitious Bishkek graffiti men who captured “the daughter of Soviet Kirgizia” in one of downtown schools. According to authors, this piece of art differs from the original in that they ‘transferred’ a thoughtful heroine from the wheat fields into the modern times, ‘arming’ her with a tablet and earphones instead of a book and the central building of downtown area in the background. She even has a name of ‘i-Gul’, prototype of name series like i-phone. ““The Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzstan” - is a wonderful image. We took it and altered a bit to a modern twist. The idea was to combine the old and the new, the past and the reality, and create a kind of cultural and historical mix.”⁴¹

⁴¹Limon KG. “BishkekскиеХудожникизавershili 12-metrovuyu I-Gul” <http://www.limon.kg/news:63374>(last accessed 13.04.2016)



Figure 2. The original work “Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzstan” by Semen Chuikov. 1948.



Figure 3. The modern day remake of “Daughter of Soviet Kyrgyzstan”

What Godbuilders aspired for and dreamed of turned into the fine process of recreation of a ‘new men’ under the banner of scientific socialism. The time when according to Leonid Krasin will be the liberation of humankind using all the mightiness of science and technology. The Soviet state in fact did employ the full potential of scientific world fulfilling the earlier agendas of Revolution thus keeping the utopias of life under the men’s earthly capabilities alive. However, what perhaps has been overlooked that these utopias were subject to change and the Soviets at times were not ready to accept them. The uncertainties of the 1920s became evident as different views clashed in an uncompromising struggle between those of stubborn ideologist and those of illusionary perfectionist. The establishment of Soviet state is so unpredictable that following series of events had to reaffirm its position at all times as a nation of revolutionary

ideals masked in an atheist euphoria. Abandoning the religious essence of people's faith and creation of new instead, suffocated the niche of Soviet intelligentsia, which was renewed after the first wave of red terror. After all the imagined revolution by many appeared beautiful and flawless, turning Moscow as the center of Soviet pilgrimage; yet the group of contenders in the governing circles were often not univocal in their ambitions and ideals of heroism.

1.2. Terms of Modernization

*Cry, cry o Turkestan*⁴²

May soulless bodies swing, cry o Turkestan

Is there a nation like ours, sunk in infamy?

Deceived into foolishness, devoid of chastity?

Mirmuhsin Shermuhammadov⁴³

The abdication of Tsar and the rise of Bolsheviks refashioned the conditions under which Islam existed in Central Asia. The new meaning of what being a Muslim start reappearing in various discourses questioning the very nature of religion Islam and its role in Central Asia. The Jadids, the new emerging elite of Central Asia at the turn of the twentieth century, became among the first catalysts of progress and neo-enlightenment in the region, propagating the transformation of society including the women's role yet justifying their position through the reformation of Islamic terms of modernization. Although their ambitions were high, the alteration of conservative social order by dramatically readjusting the old elites with the new one paved the roadmap for them to readily adopt the innovative ways of articulating religion and numerous cultural forms. As growing challenges required more immediate action from the part of Jadids, they responded by cultivating a more modernist interpretation of Islam.

Jadids elaborated a new concept of elementary education, namely *usul-i-jadid*, a new method where pupils are taught the Arabic language and alphabet applying the phonetic method

⁴² The name Turkestan was used to identify the territory of modern day Central Asia. In the current context this term applies collectively to people residing in this region.

⁴³ Mirmuhsin Shermuhammadov (1895-1929) was the second generation of Jadids in Turkestan. A very outspoken in his criticism of the old order and the role of ulama in it. Quoted from Adeeb Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia* (University of California Press, 1998), 104.

of instruction.⁴⁴ The new method schools became a platform for new ways of looking at the world process where notions of *madaniyat* (culture) and *taraqqiy* (progress) defined the main campaign of Jadids. Although later these schools are turned into the Soviet schools, the appropriation of modern science and the understanding of Islam based on scriptural sources came to be seen progressive, without numerous commentaries developed by “centuries of scholars”.⁴⁵ By making education available for all, Jadids had an uncompromising commitment to change and acquire the “cultural capital”.⁴⁶ In this manner, they were also posing a challenge positioning themselves as an enlightenment circle of the Central Asian region, whose potential enriched from around the world deeming them to shape a new critical discourse. But the major challenge of the mindset was not just to cultivate one’s potential as a response to more advanced nations, but through overcoming irrational, unnecessary practices arrive at modern educated society. The widening network of communication and opening of new routes of exchange such as pilgrimage enabled the intellectuals of Jadidist movement keep aware of the world trends in education that even more persuaded them that the sole way to access the fine grains of ‘enlightenment’ was through the relentless cultivation of oneself.

In wake of transformational chains, the Central Asian women underwent perhaps the heaviest bulk of so-called modernization process, what one at times calls a brutal change of an unveiling campaign; with its consequences directly and indirectly effecting their emancipation both in political and personal spheres of life. The wider narrative of modernization of women reveals the major key points why they were viewed as an important target in bringing the rest of Central Asia closer to integration. Especially the Bolshevik’s unveiling campaign of “*hujum*”

⁴⁴Adeeb Khalid, “The Fascination of Revolution: Central Asian Intellectuals, 1917-1927,” in *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, UyamaTomohiko (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007), 138.

⁴⁵Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia.*, 42.

⁴⁶Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia*, 103.

assault that sought to find support, seeing in the women potential substitute of a working class that in the words of Gregory Massell, acquired a new symbolic meaning of a “surrogate proletariat.”⁴⁷ Prior under the Russian colonial rule women’s legal status have suffered considerably. The traditional ulama was conservative and had exclusive right of interpreting the sacred text of Koran. The elected qazis oversaw the issues of matters of family status where under the Islamic law women’s right for marriage and divorce was lower than that of men. If a woman called for divorce, the Islamic law gave permit only in case of her abandonment by a husband. On the contrary men had unlimited rights in questions of divorce but in that case he could not claim *kalym*.⁴⁸

Abdurauf Fitrat, was one of the most well-known Jadids of Central Asia who had an overarching impact on the discourse of modernity and the question of women. He asserted that marriage was to produce children, and that arranged marriage even at the young age like fifteen was solution for all of women of Turkistan.⁴⁹ Born in 1885 in Bukhara to the family of intelligentsia he first studied in traditional Muslim schools, *maktabs* and later moved to famous madrasah of Mir-i Arab (*Madrasa-ye mir-e arab*). In addition serving for a short time as a minister of education, Fitrat carried out important reorganization and preservation of cultural heritage. His inspiration of change and progress emanating from within exemplified the Muslim nations of the time like Turkey that was rooted in the birth of nationalist movements. He framed his arguments using the religious sub tone in his major points that elaborately addressed men, women and religious scholars alike. In a society with strong conservative cultural traits he approached Islam that regarded both men and women equally entitled to access education: “if

⁴⁷Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia.*, 74.

⁴⁸Marianne Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism.* (University of Washington Press, 2006), 24.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 43.

you refer to the Noble Quran, you see that aside from two or three commands, in all matters the declarations to men and women are the same...In light of the fact that every single person carries out religious and worldly duties, women are also required to learn knowledge.”⁵⁰This in fact stood not just for a new representation of Islam but also for a new direction in learning practices. To have enough courage to challenge in times the oppressive readings of the sacred text is an opportunity to break out into a more humane and equal interpretation, particularly in questions concerning the role of women: “by engaging in creative *ijtihad* – modern Islamic authority could very well reform and renew the position of Islam on the issue of the status of women.”⁵¹More broadly *ijtihad*, ‘opening the door of interpretation’ appeared symbolic enabling the study of modern sciences and languages as well as spreading a new system of education a real possibility.⁵² The continuing efforts for a new understanding of Islam more and more came to mean that “no one has a monopoly over the meaning of what God says.”⁵³

Both parties the Jadids and the Bolsheviks were “revolutionaries”: in transforming culture, founding the modern schools and elevating the women’s role. Yet the ideological gap between the two was fundamentally opposing each other. For Bolsheviks it was a tactical move, conquering the trust of locals making the Soviet rule extremely “indigenized”. If Jadids saw the question of women prerequisite to forming a new face of a modernized region, the Bolsheviks saw it as a warranty for their hold of the region. As Jadids accessed the political elite forming the core of new local intelligentsia, they became closely associated with the communist party’s

⁵⁰Khalid, *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia*, 40.

⁵¹AsmaBarlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam. Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 3.

⁵²Vladimir Bobrovnikov, “Islam in the Russian Empire,” in *The Cambridge History of Russia. Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, Dominic Lieven, vol. II (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 219.

⁵³Barlas, “*Believing Women*” in *Islam. Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’an*., 1.

regime. The conviction that the reform including the transformation of women could be brought from above drove the Jadids to perceive the state “as an agent of change”.⁵⁴

Law became that instrument of agent of change. Between the periods of 1917-and-1924 the sharia still possessed limited judicial authority even though immediately after 1924, all the legal declarations would be refashioned under the Soviet codes. December of 1917 was the year of first successful attempt towards the secularization of wedding ritual where a degree established the state`s direct control of marriages.⁵⁵ The first marital rituals required the conduct of civil ceremony where couple`s presence was indispensable as to give a voluntary consent for marriage. As a result new elements start appearing in the traditional norms that Massell articulates as follows: “in their norms, forms and procedures and personnel, and in their massive and detailed concentration on sexual equality, Soviet initiatives in Central Asia were meant to pose a fundamental challenge to the structure and life style of local communities.”⁵⁶ A first deliberate step towards the new manifestation of Soviet life, this was a time of contrast and merging between the Soviet and Central Asian values where modern wedding meaning Soviet, required men and women to be present at the same event, rather than Old Style, in which men and women celebrated separately.⁵⁷

The civil code became a symbolic act of inevitable process of pain of modernization underestimating already existing religious institutions of ulama: “the main object of the civil law was not to express traditions and customs but, rather, to alter those traditions and customs along with the introduction of a new family structure running parallel to the requirements of

⁵⁴Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism.*, 33.

⁵⁵Ibid., 69.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Marianne Kamp, “The Wedding Feast: Living the New Uzbek Life in the 1930s,” in *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Zanca Russell et al (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

modernity.”⁵⁸ The establishment of a civil ceremony along with the recognition of free marriage and minimum age for marrying gradually outcast certain practices like polygyny and kalym but to a lesser extent succeeded in transforming all the traditional family customs. The founding of Uzbekistan Soviet Socialist Republic greatly contributed to the passing of the legislation on Family, Marriage and Child-Support where ZAGS mentioned for the first time in 1928 became the powerful authoritative organ for supervising and control of one of the most important life cycle rites.

In many aspects the both parties of the Bolsheviks and the Jadids fulfilled their goals of transforming the culture but from fundamentally different ends. Having a radical vision of restructuring the former Russian Empire, the new emerging Soviet state represented by different strata of intellectuals, officers, and professional agitators in its collective Universalist vision dreamed to create a new kind of Soviet citizen where the role of New Soviet Woman was out of question. The account that was brought by them with their understanding of Central Asia and role of women did coincide with that of liberal Jadids but on different terms. Precisely, the implying rationale of modernization of faith became the diverging element that Bolsheviks and Jadids could never find the common ground. The Bolsheviks openly discarded religion as “real wretchedness”.⁵⁹ Moreover Bolsheviks sensed the danger of contestation of their authority in the region and on this basis could no more tolerate the Jadids who by the time rose to prominence. The complications that soon will result in a massive assault, where religion comes to be seen as a cover for ‘counterrevolutionary elements’, transforming into a fatal upheaval. Jadidson the other hand having similar vision of Turkistan`s modern future with greater autonomy and educated society were not completely denouncing the role of Islam, yet still stood on the opposing sides

⁵⁸Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*.

⁵⁹Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia.*, 115.

with the society of ulama (*ulamo jamiyati*). As an aftermath of Soviet assault on Islam, Soviet regime sought to replace the attributes that had links with religion and backward practices with the new elements of Soviet content and ideology.

The Jadids legacy as the pioneers of Central Asian reformist mood bears its seeds until nowadays but was not finished in the due time. In a way their legacy was stolen by the Soviets who acclaiming all their deeds to their own stake actively degrading them. After the first wave of red terror in 1938, the role of Jadid's reformation process diminished abruptly leaving them in disgrace as bourgeoisie nationalists. After all, Jadids imagination of establishing modern schools in vernacular, the improvement of women's position did come true but only without them. Now there was a different understanding, not of what it means to be Muslim but what it means to be Soviet and Muslim at the same time.

Bolsheviks challenged many traditional hierarchies that existed in Central Asia for centuries. They saw the archaic customs throughout the region as an obstacle towards modernization. Islam in this context was perceived as the main target that had to be eliminated in order to "transform social bonds and cultural mores at a basic level and create a constituency loyal and grateful to the new regime."⁶⁰ Yet as the observance of Islamic rites remained popular and was out of sight of Soviet institutions, it did not have direct political implications: "ritual was not a priori subversive or even political."⁶¹ In truth the understanding of being Muslim was not anymore countering to being Soviet, rather on the contrary started gradually complement it.

⁶⁰Ibid., 74.

⁶¹Ibid., 85.

1.3 Secularization of the Religious Ritual

The struggle against religion is not a campaign, not an isolated phenomenon, not a self-contained entity; it is an inseparable component part of the entire ideological activity of Party organizations, an essential link and necessary element in the complex of communist education.

Pravda, January 12, 1967⁶²

The challenge of studying the period of postwar is that it provokes the conceptualization in relation to a number of issues. The term postwar is used to define the period of World War II stretching to the end of Soviet Union that effectively portrays the close fitting interaction between the Soviet Central Party system and Central Asian Muslims. An attempt aimed to restore an order in Central Asian religious affairs, which saw the birth of institutional establishments like CARC and SADUM as virtual hallmarks of postwar normalization of religious life.

The search for common ground of two opposing worldviews the Communist and Islamic had driven Islam towards legally recognized frameworks. On such conditions its role was regulated through the authority of a centralized Islamic muftiate known as SADUM (The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan). A region run by atheists and populated by denominational Muslims experienced number of mechanism of separating the role of religion in the lives of local people. Although Stalin's years saw the relatively static mode of religious development, the Communist Party still held to its mission of eradicating religion defending a harder line of executing its policies. Officially tolerated Islam was turned into a religious policy giving a start to a new organization CARC (the Council for the

⁶²David E. Powell, *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion* (Cambridge, Mass. : M.I.T. Press, c1975, n.d.), 1.

Affairs of Religious Cults), that kept to the principle that “anti-religious struggle must consist solely in ideas, with no violation of the believers’ constitutional rights to freedom of conscience.”⁶³ Especially after the horrific experience of pre-war anti-religious violence where according to Shoshana Keller “more than 14, 000 Muslim clergy were arrested, killed, exiled from their homes or driven out of the USSR”, the new religious reforms introduced by Stalin set to regulate the Muslim life as well as propagate the sense of stability that ultimately expressed through the institutionalization of Islam in postwar Soviet Central Asia.⁶⁴ The religious reforms headed by CARC evolved around three main positions: “the development of a comprehensive program for modernization, enlightening the population and the strict observance of Soviet legality.”⁶⁵ This practically required the supervision of religious organizations and their compliance with Soviet legislation.

Socialist Ritualism

The postwar Soviet secularity saw an ideological vacuum created as a result of state’s harsh antireligious campaign of 1959-1964 when the renewed policy to compensate this vacancy employed full scale state support. The rapidly growing pool of specialists of scientific atheism set to reenact the new proposed “Soviet spirituality”.⁶⁶ However the ideological staff and specialists in the field of scientific atheism soon realized that their efforts in creating the Soviet spirituality thrust into the problems of rituals. Exactly the ritual, prerequisite of Soviet spirituality was the stumbling block in solving the main question, what needs to be thrown out

⁶³Tasar, “Soviet and Muslim,” 1.

⁶⁴Ibid., 3.

⁶⁵Ibid., 2.

⁶⁶Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, “Problema ‘obyknovennoi’ sovetskoi smerti: materialnoe i dukhovnoe v ateisticheskoi kosmologii,” *Gosudarstvo Religia Tserkov*, no. #3-4(30) (2012): 430–61.

and what needs to stay in the course of revolutionary blast “towards the total transformation of society, culture and the human nature”.⁶⁷

The “socialist ritualism” that revived at the end of 1950s started to be systematically developed and inculcated towards the midst 1960s coinciding with Khrushchev’s religious campaign of 1959-1964 which though shortly applied the hard line towards religion.⁶⁸ Socialist ritualism regarded as an important factor of communist and especially of atheistic upbringing: that “only through satisfying the objective needs for ritual conduct that is significant for individuals and communities, can we resist the influence of people of religious rites”.⁶⁹ The specialists of atheist education realized already by mid 1960s that program of Soviet atheism was not finished. And the revival of re-ritualization processes was yet another mission to “secularize” the Soviet reality.

Researchers of “socialist ritualism” divide its establishment into three main periods. The first stage was set between 1917 – midst 1930s, when new rites or so-called “red rituals” were inculcated.⁷⁰ During this time Soviet authority introduced: the “red weddings”, “red Christmas”, “red christening” (“*oktyabriny*”, “*zvezdiny*”), civil funerals known as “red funerals”. The second stage of socialist ritualism starts from midst 1930s – to 1950s that accounts for official recognition of “professional holidays” dedicated to various occupations usually of middle working class: miners, railroad workers, engineers and so on. Yet this stage did not get to develop to its full potential mainly due to increasing chaos of collectivization, the red terror and the upcoming war. And finally the third stage (1960-1980s) marks the active years of postwar

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 434.

⁶⁹ Alla Vazeroва and Alexey Molkin, “‘SOCIALIST CEREMONIALISM’ OF MUSLIMS IN THE 1960-1980TH (ON THE EXAMPLE OF CENTRAL VOLGA AREA),” *Elektronnyinauchno-praktichnyijurnal “Sovremennyyenauchnyeissledovanie i innovacii,”* accessed May 6, 2016, <http://web.snauka.ru/issues/2015/02/46418>.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

developments when scientific research gets to the front of situating the place of rites and rituals in contemporary Soviet society. Unlike the early years of 1920s, this period of introduction of new forms of ritualism and atheist teachings was much sober and goal-oriented with establishments in the region of committees on Soviet traditions, holidays and rites. *Znanie* Society was among the institutional bodies that carried out such functions.

The quickly changing circumstances made readjustments in the Muslim religious activity in Kyrgyzstan. According to CARC's representative in Osh oblast in the mid-1950s, the Muslim clergies started reconciliation with the Soviet rule, especially when only few followers began attending the mosques.⁷¹ During the sermons the imams strictly followed the religious questions leaving out the public issues and even making considerable concessions in terms of customs that were no longer acceptable or were under supervision: the wearing of paranja, visiting of mazars and praying at the tombs of ancestors. By 1960s even more proselytization of masses took place where the observance of Islam was gradually reduced to the point that the "observance of Islam's precepts was an expression of respect for one's national customs and traditions."⁷² And this whereby the early 1980s witnessed one's Islamic affiliation as a mere definition of national identity. But all in all, this should not deceive the perception, as the life-cycle rituals were widespread and followed by all social groups including even the party members. Late 1960s registered in total four thousand instances where clergy of Osh oblast performed the rites.⁷³

Transformation is the key term during the pre and postwar periods because customs and rituals accompanying were either damaged or saw an attempt of replacement. The development of an extensive program for modernization of population gradually thought to eliminate the

⁷¹Ro'i, *Islam in the Soviet Union. From the Second World War to Gorbachev*, 439.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 512.

religious component. Namely the universal education that became an overall tool for ideological mobilization as well as modernization. But one aspect where the Soviet rule did not get a strong grip was the rural areas. Despite the nonstop efforts to link the urban mainstream with rural lifestyle, it persisted the attempts of miscommunication that partly was caused by stronger ties to the national traditions that “itself and act of passive resistance to the Soviet regime which believed in urbanization as a method of mobilization and modernization.”⁷⁴ Observance of traditional life cycle rituals was certainly higher in villages than in cities.

The Soviet Islam in postwar period on the one hand experienced massive secularization, which expedited through the economic factors of industrialization in addition to growing number of local women participating in the labor force and migration of Russians and Ukrainians from the European parts of Soviet Union.⁷⁵ On the other hand Islam continued having Muslim holidays celebrated but already with a renewed interpretation that will be examined in details based on primary sources in the second chapter. The religious individuals “no longer acquainted with Islamic dogma, he fulfilled its precepts selectively.”⁷⁶

⁷⁴Ibid., 446.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Rolf, *Originally Published as Das Sowjetische Massenfest*, 447.

Chapter II. MAKING SENSE OF NEW RITUALS: A CONSTANT SEARCH FOR AUTHENTICITY

2.1 Working the New Rituals

“The current generation of Soviet people will live under communism! Our goals are clear, our objectives are set, let`s get to work, comrades! “

Nikita Khrushchev, at the historic 22nd Congress of Communist Party of SU, 1961.

The period following 1954 antireligious campaign in large defined the course of Soviet education towards new Soviet Men of communist era. The 1960-to-1970 was an active phase of reconsidering the introduction of new Soviet holidays and customs as a counterweight to religious holidays and rituals. The Central Committee of Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan and Council of Ministers of Kyrgyz SSR passed a resolution in 1964 on “the introduction into life of new civil ceremonies”. As a matter of fact this was a response to earlier decree passed in Moscow on 18th of February of the same year on “the introduction of new civil rituals into the everyday life of Soviet people”. The outline reads as follows “in most autonomous republics, *krais* and *oblasts* there is an important work on the introduction of new civil holidays and customs that contributes to the cultivation of Soviet patriotism, the communistic attitude to work, the strengthening of family relations, and the overcoming of religious prejudices and superstitions.”⁷⁷ And instantly the same decree reads about the need for “use of this experience in accordance with the local specificities and traditions, as one of the conditions of communist

⁷⁷S. N. Kovalenko, “O Vnedrenii v 1960 v Byt Sovetskikh Ludei Grazhdanskikh Obryadov (Po Materialam Leningradskoi Oblasti),” *Sarskoselskie Chteniya*, no. № XIX / том I / 2015 (n.d.): 45.

education of people and overcoming of remnants of the past in mind.”⁷⁸ The objectives set on each specific step are quite descriptive attributed also to specific organization that could carry it out in places. The typical soviet hierarchy of executional structure relies on city, rayon, township and countryside representatives. The executives committees (*исполнительные комитеты*) on each level should make sure that aforementioned goals had been properly accomplished.

The Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan obliged the Ministry of Culture to take active part in organizing the national holidays and introduction of modern rituals and moreover in cooperation with union of writers and composers of Kyrgyz SSR prepare the ritual repertoire of new music and songs. For instance the musical composition to the registration ceremony had local as well as international pieces used during the event which still put on to these days. Felix Mendelsohn, “the wedding march” is the most widely used music composition throughout the Soviet Union along with Petr Chaikovskii’s “ceremonial march”. The local compositions include old generation musicians Karamoldo Orozov “Ibarat”, Toktogul Satylganov “*Toguz kairyk*” and composers who were influenced by Soviet music tradition Kalyi Moldobasonov, the board secretary of union of composers of USSR overture to the musical comedy “be careful, the bride” and Abdylas Moldobaev another famous Soviet Kyrgyz composer. His piece “the festive sinfonia” was also staged during the wedding rites.⁷⁹ Moldobaev played a major role in the creation and development of Kyrgyz Soviet songs, appearing as the founder of new Kyrgyz genres of hymns-songs, marches, love songs and children's songs, choruses, oratorios and cantatas. Thus the new forms of music and songs had been adjusted to satisfy the growing demand for aesthetic, spiritual need of ‘Soviet’ people using the local cadres.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ L.I Kruchkova, *Obryad Brakosochetaniya* (Frunze: Ministry of Culture of Kyrgyz SSR, 1987), 30.

The state committee on Print of Councils of Ministers of Kyrgyz SSR issued in 1966, more than two brochures about the experience of conducting soviet holidays and non-religious rituals. These brochures usually published after major congress (*s`ezd*) of Communist Party of Soviet Union. It is unclear how successful were these brochures in disseminating and propagating to the wider public the nature of rituals. It seems general public had very limited idea on some holidays proposed by the state committees. Most probably the rayon, and countryside executive committees were encouraged to make reference to these printed works. It is true though that specialist in certain rituals for instance in the wedding rite were familiar with the literature published on the topic and were effectively using them in their work. On city, rayon and countryside level, the government tried to create committees that oversaw the conduct of rituals into everyday life. In party organization of Jalal-Abad all the work on the introduction of new rituals and customs and its propaganda was overseen by city public council. The public council included the representatives of party, komsomol organization, and the city councils of executive committees, educational institutions, military enlistment office (*voenkomat*), medical institutions and public organizations. The use of administrative measures was common by involving many relevant ministries in carrying out the tasks of implementation of new holidays and mass celebration.

Jalal-Abad public council had 14 committees that occupied itself with cultivation and conduct of rites and rituals. It included organizations like the committee on festive wedding rite ceremonies, committee on handing out the passports, committee on registration of newly born. Often the main criticisms resonates that these committees are not paying enough attention in their work such as not providing proper conditions for ZAGs registries in the conducting of civil rituals. This was closely connected to another reason of persistence of religious holidays and

rites. And it seems that this cannot be simply fixed by mass propaganda of new holidays. This was the logic that Soviet officials were employing: the mass celebration (*massovost*) as an effective factor of propaganda of new customs that involves big organizational skills and resources to oust the religious practices. The party officials understood that new Soviet traditions do not simply become ‘personal to all.’ So as a result, traditions should be cultivated step by step. They emerge in response to inquiries of communist building, first in one working collective and gradually spreading to other collectives: to people of one profession and then to residents of the whole city. Celebration, thus in the Soviet context always stressed a well-developed planning apparatus. So for instance, the movement of excellent workers (*udarnikov*) of communist labor for the last 10 years turned into massiveness. Only in Jalal-Abad in quest for communist labor 158 youth komsomol brigades were involved, and 72 already acquired this high recognition. The meaning of these movements for communist labor was not only grounded in increasing the productivity but also in developing “fine moral qualities of people.”⁸⁰

On the next meeting of Frunze city council, the *ispolkom* reviewed the questions on the coordination of activities of state and public organization on introduction of Soviet traditions, holidays and customs. It was noted that city and rayon committees doing certain work in this direction. Yet each time the same reaction: “the city continues having civic rituals” with new elements appearing on new reports. This time it was new forms of conducting the celebration of streets and microrayons. The use of administrative pressures by mid 1980s started to turn into a normal trend in ‘producing new cultural elements’. The cities were turning into Soviet offices of cultural operations where the constant administrative supervision discouraged formalism in organization of events and holidays. The scheme of 1927 celebration still replicated in “how a

⁸⁰Soltanbekov, *Novye Sovetskie Tradicii i Obychai i ih rol v Borbe s Perezhtkami Proshlogo v Bytu*, 41.

celebration was arranged, how it was choreographed, and what it was about was the same everywhere and had political slogans previously devised for the entire union by the Central Committee.”⁸¹ But in fact as the central party’s monopoly continued increasing it became harder for local municipalities to fulfill the outlined programs. This ultimately led to even more formalism and superficial approach to the organization matters.



Figure 4. The old square during the mass celebration in Bishkek. Next to the marching column is the building of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet Council of the Kyrgyz SSR. Circa 1970

⁸¹ Rolf, *Originally Published as Das Sowjetische Massenfest*, 54.

Obsession with massiveness (*massovost*) as a way to demonstrate the harmonious nature between the party and the masses of workers: “rituals of submission to the absolute will of those in power”.⁸² Yet, “display of unity” of not just among the communist leaders and the working class but also between different nationalities living in the republic. A clear make-up of Moscow’s model of rally is visible especially with Brezhnev’s picture hanging on the main wall of the building as if he is standing on the Kremlin observing the parade and waving to people.

(Source: <http://www.open.kg/photo-gallery/306-gorod-frunze-v-74-80-godah.html>, last accessed June 1, 2016)

⁸²Ibid., 87.

2.2 Harmfulness of Traditions: Religious vs. National

“It would be wrong to consider the national tradition only those that distinguishes one national culture from another or those that’s connected with the past of people, their history, that reflects their difficult life under the condition of social and unsocial oppression. It is necessary to vigilantly see and support new traditions, the common characteristics that formed in mutual interrelations of soviet socialist nations in the course of communist building.”

Mikhail Suslov, the chief ideologue of the Communist Party of SU in his speech at the meeting of party and government secretaries with representatives of science and culture in 1969.⁸³

The Soviet perception of religion was built on an uncompromising supervision of Islam along with Russian Orthodox Church. The lectures on the topic of religion always used the chance to discredit religion the every possible way, calling many traditional customs like circumcision and christening as religious remnants that contributes to peoples division based on religion and nationality. Religious observance of people of major traditional Islamic holidays like Kurban ait and Orozo ait was strongly discouraged and cost the communist membership for those in party. The categories used by Soviet officials to counter balance the influence of Islam was to reinforce even stronger the work of atheist education of workers. The case in the Issyk-Kul region where such work had been carried out unsystematically had been reported to have formalism and incompetency in questions dealing with those communist who are "playing" with religion, not informing about them to ideological actives of party organization expressing tolerance and liberalism towards them. As a result the raykom did not in time reacted to the deeds of former teacher Jakshylykov who being a communist, was also listed as an active imam since 1979. Only after nine years was he expelled from the ranks of CPSU.

⁸³Soltanbekov, *Novye Sovetskie Tradicii Obychai i Rol v Borbe s Perezhtkami Proshlogo v Bytu*, 36.

Moreover the rayon is criticized for insufficient introduction of the socialist rituals and customs. As a result the funerals rites often entail in them the religious moments, along with christening of children and religious wedding in churches. There are cases of erecting from expensive materials pompous tombs whereas many cemeteries are left unattended. Certain monuments and memorials of nation's defenders, museums and halls of military and labor glory are not properly taken care of. The whole towns of mazars are built in the near of Jumgal, At-Bashi, Issyk-Kul, and Ak-Talaa regions. Except family and first names of the deceased, there is inscription of Muslim prayers, and kin association. This is the clear water galvanization of outdated habits of *bai*'s (kulaks), an attempt to root-in the everyday religious 'survivals'. There is another side to this problem, according to comrade Djekshenov from Rybachie (Balykchi) often tourists take photos against the background of the tombstones in the cemetery and wonder why people do not care of the graves.



Figure 5. A typical view of Kyrgyz Muslim cemetery. The picture is taken in Tüz, a village in Naryn oblast of central Kyrgyzstan.

The big mazars strongly discouraged by Soviet officials dominate the panoramic view. (Source: <http://www.novastan.org/photos/tuz-k>)

At the same time, the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan thinks that mass media is not objectively portraying such a delicate sphere of spiritual life as national traditions and customs. We should not agree with the statement of newspaper “*Socialisticheskaya Industriya*” who presented the funeral process of Seidimanov as completely religious, reactionary-Islamic rite and all the participants of the funeral including the secretaries, communists, komsomols, as double-minded that do not deserve the political trust of people. On the contrary the funeral as other everyday family rites is first of all based on humane, universal moral values. Publications have been remarked for lack of objectiveness and preciseness in dealing with facts, respectfully addressing the culture of multinational dialogue to the predominant public opinion. Similarly the secretary of filmmakers of Kyrgyzstan Bolot Shamshiev particularly highlighted the need for careful treatment to national traditions and traditions that in fact has nothing to do with religious

content, but has the wisdom of nation. However in the course of antireligious campaign some workers prefer the administrative bans.

The antireligious campaign of 1954 was fundamental in setting the categories with which the Soviet administration dealt with religion. The truth is that regime weakly differentiated between celebration of local feasts and organized religiosity. And in this wave, the distinction between the religious and national traditions was thinly visible. However even local people themselves could not properly distinguish what was religious and what was not because some Islamic elements were inherently infused in traditions, which does not automatically mean it was religious. Another issue was also the backward traditions that in the eyes of atheists was seen un-socialist and not withstanding with Soviet morale. Such was the case of *tois* the Kyrgyz word for feast that usually takes place after the celebration of happy occasion like wedding. It gradually attained a negative connotation especially when this term consistently brought up by number of propaganda outlets like *Propagandistas* domain of rich people, *bai*'s. Moreover, *tois* were seen irrational with large spending and a consequence of failure of non-religious traditions to become celebrated in mass. One way to fix it was to introduce a different rite system like komsomol marriages, name-giving, wedding rites that had a moderate tendency in celebration. Report summarized that in average in ninety seven kolkhozes people have 5-to-7 housewarmings, 4-to-5 weddings all accompanied with *toi*'s. This number went even higher in the village "Oktaybr" of Kara-Suu region where in 107 kolkhozes in the last five years 50 houses were built, annually up to 10 families had housewarmings, 3-4 weddings. As a result the village in average had 15 – 18 *tois*.

S. Aristanbekov, a research fellow at the Institute of philosophy and right at the Academy of Science of Kyrgyz SSR writes that what makes this tradition reactionary is that it always

accompanied with “*khatmi*”, reading of certain suras from Koran in the name of God (Allah) as a reassertion for one’s good intentions: “*Omin, kudaim kush bakchylsyn*” (Amen, let God bring joy), “*Omin kudaim bereke bailyk bersin, toigo toi koshulsun*” (Amen, let God bring wealth, may more toi’s to take place).⁸⁴ These strokes especially reversed the understanding how religion came to take role in socialist transformation where all the wealth accumulated from people’s labour was thought to be ascribed in the name of Allah: “toi ceremonies are a breeding ground for all sorts of remnants of the past.”⁸⁵ The participation of head of kolkhozes are said to justify the slaughter of ten heads of cattle. People are being distracted from their work with younger generation falling under the contagious influence of “*khatmi*”. A resident of a village in Batken rayon comrade M. had toi where more than 350 people were invited. For their table more than twenty cattle were slaughtered. During the reading of “*khatmi*” children were also present. Because of toi 350 people did not go to work, that affected the economic performance of kolkhoz. What was seen also outrageous, the presence of communists and komsomols during the feast. Toi tradition considered as activating the religious sentiments of people that as a result inflicted great damage to ideological front, and education of the working masses. The feast of course should be held but first of all it need be cleaned from religious and other harmful layers. Esengeldiev S. the lecturer at the Znanie Society of Kyrgyzstan reflects on the emergence of toi as a factor affected by kinship division and rivalry where “ash” and “toi” are done in order to proof the status group of one side over another which meant to keep up with other kin in terms of expenses and income so as to avoid falling in disgrace in their eyes.⁸⁶ As a matter of fact, toi in principal was not a Muslim ritual or holiday rather it was a celebration given to relatives, friends

⁸⁴S. Aristanbekov, “V ChemVredToev?,” *Propaganda and Agitation Department of CC of CP of Kyrgyzstan*, *BlognotPropagandistaiAgitatora*, no. # 13 (July 1965): 44.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶S. Esengeldiev, “ProtivopolojnostNacionalnyh I ReligioznyhTradicii,” *Znanie Society Kyrgyzstan*, 1969, 15.

and own family to highlight the important life-cycle rituals of mainly wedding and circumcision where in return the host received their blessings. Kyrgyz communists who took part in it thought of it as a way of reassertion of their identity and as part of their spiritual enrichment. Adeeb Khalid accounts its social perspective where *toi*, “cemented social bonds between neighbours and various other relations of mutual obligation, it allowed the host to assert his status in society and it served to distinguish Central Asian from others living in the midst. These occasions were all seen as “Muslim” celebrations, not only because they centred around religious rituals but also because non-Central Asians did not celebrate them.”⁸⁷ *Toi*, as part of traditional practice was a way of sustaining the Kyrgyz culture, marking the belonging to a particular cultural heritage based on family kinship and mutual help. On the other hand, the popular Soviet discourse was based on the thought that religion cannot serve as the basis for national tradition. It said to strongly affect the psyche of people accompanied by emotional feelings. The new Soviet rituals had a goal of not just finding alternative ways of celebrating the life-cycle events but eventually lead people through the common rituals towards the process of merging of people of different nationalities (*sbliizhenie*). And even than the Soviet front on top of its religious component, felt that *toi* was an irrationally wasteful practice of valuable resources that otherwise could be directed to something more socially useful.

Sbliizhenie, the overcoming of differences between various nationalities where aspects of culture and everyday life deemed to merge forming one whole entity started to be strongly elaborated during the time of Brezhnev. Many aspects came under this term including the problem of language. Already before Nadezhda Krupskaya, the wife of Lenin was known for her work in cultural education and in this milieu she highlighted the importance of learning Russian

⁸⁷Khalid, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia.*, 101.

by non-Russian nationalities: “The learning of Russian language by the children of non-Russian nationalities has not only immense educational meaning, it attaches them to progressive Russian culture, but also great educational value – merges all nations of our homeland and most importantly cultivates the sense of love towards the most revolutionary nation of the world – the Russian people. The knowledge of one common language – Russian, except your native one – even more bring together all nations of USSR.”⁸⁸ The language policies unlike new traditions had better experience in becoming the mutual tool of not just communication but means of everyday life. It was a first step towards coming together as more nations within Soviet Union interacted between each other in one language, Russian. According to population census from 1959, more than ten million representatives of non-Russian groups of Soviet Union claimed Russian as their native language.⁸⁹ As this number might be dubious, it certainly signals the increasing role the Soviet attributed to language standardization. This is also partly reflected in the number of books printed in the vernacular as opposed to Russian in Kyrgyzstan. As a result in 1965 the number of books printed amounted to 959 thousand in contrast to 419 thousand in Kyrgyz language. The number of journals and other periodical editions for the same year was 54 thousand, as opposed to 18 thousand in Kyrgyz language.⁹⁰

Moreover the question of language as a tool of multinational communication had been widely elaborated by Chyngyz Aitmatov, the most renowned Kyrgyz Soviet writer of the post-war. Our contemporary national consciousness, new socio-ethnic component in history, special ethno-historic-psychic reality was formed and developed under the enormous influence of

⁸⁸ Chyngyz Aitmatov, “Pisma Ob Internation. Chyngyz Aitmatov: Moi Kommentarii,” *Sovetskii Kirgizstan*, 1985.

⁸⁹ S.B. Dorzhenov, “Druzhba Narodov i Religia” (*Znanie Society of Kyrgyz SSR*, 1969), 14, F. 4644, O.1, D.166, Archive of Political Documentation.

⁹⁰ *Narodnoe Khozyastvo Kirgizskoi SSR*, Tsentralnyi Statisticheskoe Upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov Kirgizskoi SSR (Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1975), 337.

Russian culture. Aitmatov, born to a well-known leader of early years of Soviet Kyrgyzstan Törökul Aitmatov who was assassinated during the red terror had masterly acquired Russian in addition to his native Kyrgyz language. Although he asserted the Russian influence as a multinational force, he also stressed the need for constructive double language policy, Russo-Kyrgyz cultural scheme that intelligently combines in itself national and international interests. Aitmatov perfectly understood the consequences of Brezhnevian policy of *sblizhenie* but all he could do was at least to save the Kyrgyz heritage through using the discourse of internationalism and equality within Soviet Union. His iconic term *mankurt* a man who was brainwashed losing all the cultural links with his native kin was used in his novel, “The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years” that well reflects Aitmatov’s attitude towards people’s alienation of their history.

In the meantime the tendency was less successful in the religious front. Religious rituals stood on the way of spiritual rapprochement of people: “the differences of people according to religious customs and rites are eliminated relatively slowly; some people still strongly adhere to many religious rites, thinking of them as national.”⁹¹ The stumbling block was thought to be customs coated in religious overtone. They had to be first of all separated from religious notion and then need to be overcome as a whole. Practice of circumcision for example originally Islamic rite was seen negatively as such customs creates ‘gaps’ between Muslims and workers of other nationalities, a wall of mistrust. But even more serious when it gets on the way of mixed marriages between titular nationality and other representatives of non-Muslim denomination where people refuse to marry their daughters to uncircumcised men. According to the survey of kolkhoz Ala-Too of Jety-Oguz region of Issyk-Kul, the percentage of people who made

⁹¹Dorzhenov, “Druzhiba Narodov i Religia,” 14.

circumcision out of believe that it was a national tradition was 48, 1 % out of 84, 3%. The youth also had expressed similar opinions: 68% of Kyrgyz male students of Kyrgyz state university and 57% of female Kyrgyz students at women`s pedagogical institute think that funeral rites that require big financial resources and conducted by imams as national customs. The general Soviet response to such misconceptions was that Church people disguise the reactionary customs of the past as “holy” national traditions: “the Churches tried to present the countering against such traditions` as violation of national values.”

Chapter III. IMPLEMENTING THE NEW RITUAL

3.1 The Wedding Clubs

The rapid growth of first wedding registration in clubs started already in the prewar era where clubs served in addition to wedding registration three other essential functions: improving the young talents, teaching the Lenin-Marxist ideology and collectivizing the institution.⁹² In this context the clubs were not just laboratories of "cultural transformation" but also the frequent sites visited from the young age where besides educating the masses, the regional representatives also cultivated a new vision of life "persuading them to abandon rituals based on nomadic or Islamic traditions."⁹³ This was relevant especially in rural areas that were far from the urban centers. Nonetheless the countryside also experienced the change brought by Soviet transformation perhaps to a lesser extent. The local school named after Chkalov in the Naryn region started to implement new traditions and customs with the help of komsomols who in 1964 festively handed out new passports to students.⁹⁴ Similarly were given out the komsomol memberships to new students. The old communists, komsomol veterans, and best workers were invited to give advice, share their experience, and stories on young heroes who died in establishing the Soviet rule in Tien-Shan (Naryn). Moreover Akimkanov K., instructor of propaganda and mass culture reported that kolkhozes "*Kulanak*", "*Emgekchil*", "*Jany-Talap*" had successfully celebrated the komsomol weddings and the children's birthdays (name-giving). The ceremony started with warm congratulations of couples and young mothers. The chair of village council awarded them with their certificate of marriage and the others with the certificate of birth. Although this was

⁹²Ali Igmen, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent. Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, Douglas Northrop (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 22.

⁹³Ibid., 46.

⁹⁴K. Akimkanov, "NovyeObryady Na Sele," *KomsomoleckKirgizii*, 1960.

only one example of introduction of new rituals in villages, by late 1960`s most of the standardized rituals practiced in cities start appearing in rural areas.



Figure 6. The new ritual: the name giving ceremony in the kolkhoz "Tört-Köl", in the Ton region, Issyk-Kul oblast. Presumably the man holding the child was the village *ispolkom*. (Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinoduments, I-29393\IO2)



Figure 7. The traditional wedding in 1987 in the rural village in Tien-Shan oblast (Naryn).

People in villages practiced many local traditions even though the bride's white dress signals the adherence to new wedding fashion. Depicted is the ritual of testing the bride's skills of milking a cow. (Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinodocuments, 0-54657\IO2)



Figure 8. The Lenin's club in kolkhoz: a place where new rites and celebrations will take place. June 5, 1965.

Depicted are the Kyrgyz youngsters in Kalpaks walking hand-in-hand with their Russian-European counterparts praising multiculturalism and adherence to proletarian culture. (Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinodocuments, 1-6110\IO1)

The numerous reportage of komsomol weddings from 1964 were published in newspapers "*Komsomoles Kirgizii*" often reported about the organization of such weddings by activist of youth organization. Typically, as part of the ceremony the Volgas, Soviet cars of the Khrushchev's thaw used for transportation of couples to the office of local *gorkom* (the city committee). The office became the actual wedding pilgrimage room prior to wedding houses or house of culture where Erkin Mambetov one of the first secretary of *gorkom* of Komsomol conducted the ritual ceremony wishing the warm wishes and extending the affection from the

fellow workers. The first secretaries' presence during the ceremony will remain crucial until the end of Soviet Union as sign of recognition and attention from the state. Even though the Komsomol weddings did not last long it laid the first attempts of revoking the continued efforts of modernization the wedding ritual. The Komsomol wedding received support for having a progressive symbolism at least in that it countered the paying of *kalym*, the price for a groom and encouraging women and men to equally take part in the ceremony.



Figure 9. The First Secretary of Central Committee of Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan Absamat Masaliev congratulating the newly married couple. As part of his obligation, the first secretaries were in fact part of the official ceremony. They were there mainly to give the event the state's recognition and support for weddings as well as contribute to event's emotional and unforgettable memories. (Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinodocuments, 0-53945\IO2)

3.2 The Soviet Wedding versus the Traditional Wedding

The multinational culture... takes from each national culture exclusively its consistent democratic and socialist elements.

Lenin⁹⁵

Lamira Djukeshovna, a senior ritual specialist, is the longest serving employee who have conducted the registration of many couples at the wedding palace “*Bakyt Örgösüü*” (the Yurt of Happiness) for many years now. Her story perhaps is the best reflection of change in the ritual ceremony in Kyrgyzstan stretching from the late Soviet period to contemporary Kyrgyzstan. She first started working in ZAGs in Taraz, Kazakhstan SSR in 1978. Since then, she said many things have changed. Initially all the weddings rituals were conducted in Russian. So to say the multinational ritual had its formal attribute and one of them clearly was in the language usage. According to her it did not really matter whether the couple was of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uighur or Uzbek origin, the ritual was standardized and same to all. Although the national traditions were thinly followed, the early brochures published from mid-1980s about wedding rites by republican commission on propaganda and introduction of Soviet holidays, rites and rituals mention the details of local tradition during the wedding ceremony.⁹⁶

The wedding in Soviet Kyrgyzstan can be grouped in two categories those of traditional and those of modern. Although the main common element of both weddings was the registration in the village or city office of ZAGs, in the rest they differed considerably. The marriage through the matchmaking (*kызды кудалашып беруу*) is the most common wedding mainly among the Kyrgyz people, though even that is undergoing some changes. Usually it takes place under the

⁹⁵K. Kalilov, *Novye Obryady I Tradicii U Kirgizov*, Ph.D A.I. Narynbaev (Frunze: Izdatelstvo “Ilim,” 1983), 14.

⁹⁶L.I Kruchkova, *Obryad Brakosochetaniya* (Frunze: Ministry of Culture of Kyrgyz SSR, 1987), 20.

mutual agreement of parents and young people themselves who are not opposing the union. This means the visit to the bride's house by representative of the groom (*juuchular*) to negotiate the day of wedding (*svadba- toi*). The major expenses fall to the relatives of the groom. If the wedding last only one day, then first it takes place in the father's house of the bride and later moves to the father's house of the groom. The day of the wedding is traditionally very joyful with songs sung from sides of the groom and the bride (*sarmergen*). The singing and reading of poems are dedicated to highlight the major achievements in work or study, the mutual love of couples, wishing both the amicable relations in life. Plentiful of food provided with traditional games played throughout the celebration. In some villages the tradition of singing the farewell song as the bride leaves the father's place is still practiced (*koshok koshuu*). Usually the registration in ZAGs take place before or after the wedding. Under the parent's decision the *moldo* (imam) is invited to conduct the wedding rite (*nike kyi* in Kyrgyz language) in a separate room with the presence of couples and the witnesses. After the ritual is over the *moldo* receive money and the witnesses receive cloth. According to Soviet ethnographer of ethnic Kyrgyz people Abramson Saul such wedding rite where imam conducted *nike kyi* was very rare "observance of such rite in most cases had only a formal character, that is done out of respect to the elders."⁹⁷ In any case the traditional wedding rite of *nike kyi* had an important message of adherence to family traditions and attachment to community believes. After the birth of first baby there is a tradition when the child is put in a cradle (*beshek -toi*). When the baby first starts walking the *tushoo-toi* is being celebrated and finally the circumcision for boy's *sunnot-toi* is also significant lifecycle rituals that typically takes place in the lives of each Kyrgyz child. As these were the particularities pertaining to Kyrgyz wedding ceremony over the course of

⁹⁷Kalilov, *NovyeObryady I Tradicii U Kirgizov*, 45.

inculcation of new rituals especially in the cities observance of some of the previously mentioned rites found slight changes especially regarding the traditional wedding rite of *nike kyiu*.

Although the discussion of reforming and introducing new holidays happened during the prewar era, the actual steps towards the formation of new soviet wedding ritual starts from 1960s and spread all over the Soviet Union.⁹⁸ The modern weddings became much simple using shorter time, less financial resources, and involving fewer people. Their ceremonial was greatly debated during the seminars by ritual specialists. There was no standardized non-religious wedding ritual only sporadically conducted komsomol weddings. The local wedding practices with national particularities of different nationalities were still widely used. Nonetheless what was stressed at least at the beginning was the registration of the wedding and the wedding night. It was important that couples remembered that day for long time that eventually hoped to turn it into the familial tradition. In the course of overcoming of old remnants of the past, the new rituals had to be staged properly evoking emotions as much as possible. If previously the family was a private business, now it had become a public affair. The new wedding rite in this sense had more an educational message, a new morale where unlike traditional weddings it was thought that the formation of family was based on mutual love as opposed to material benefits: “the wedding rites stress the interest of society in the individual and individual obligations to society as well as expressing Soviet moral norms on family life.”⁹⁹ The intention to marry each other should not be based upon the relatives or other`s decision that it that case was seen as a violation of freedom of expression. This was judicially backed in the Kyrgyz constitution from 1969, 26 December “Code on Marriage and the Family of the Kyrgyz SSR”.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸Ibid., 35.

⁹⁹Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case*, 75.

¹⁰⁰Kruchkova, *ObryadBrakosochetaniya*, 21.

The wedding ritual in Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet time as such presented an organic combination of new and traditional with certain elements and stages of sequences. The scheme of contemporary Soviet wedding rite was composed according to the principles of adherence to the common canons of socialist way of life, taking into account the experience of all union republics and respect to peculiarities of local traditions. The following ceremony was applicable to all the nationalities with the possibility of using their positive local forms. The 'traditional' Soviet wedding had four parts that is done in order for ritual to be complete, meaningful and significant.

- 1) The blessing ceremony of groom and bride
- 2) The act of registration
- 3) The wedding itself
- 4) And the care for the newlyweds

While most of aforementioned points bear more formal character, some ceremonials coincide with traditional wedding but in different sequence. It is quite possible that ritual specialist in the course of devising the celebration often based their observation on traditional or religious weddings replacing the content and borrowing some practical forms. The new blessing ceremony had a function of not mere mutual presentation of couples to each other but recognition from those to whom they were presented. The bride after showing the groom to her parents, presents him again at her working place to all of her fellow workers. As a result the blessing evolves from close circle of relatives to include the broader audience and as such attributing to the ceremony more significance. The same is done from the side of the groom. During the visit of the groom's parents to the parents of the bride, they should avoid from expensive presents especially money because it goes against the humanistic and moral

establishment of family relations. Interestingly also this visit should take place only after the couple presented themselves to their working colleagues. This was probably done in order to weaken the influence of parents on the choice of the children in choosing their own spouses by gaining wider recognition not just of family but also of outsiders. Another feature of adherence to such sequence was the awareness against the old customs. The often misinterpreted tradition of *ala-kachuu* kidnapping of the bride was strongly condemned along with the tradition of bride's price, *kalym* which in the eyes of Soviet administration was nothing more than buy and sell operation.

Next integral part of the Soviet style wedding ceremony was the official festive registration of marriage in the rooms of houses of culture or clubs that specifically were decorated for that purposes. Earlier the rituals were carried out either in small offices of local ZAGs or rayon secretaries. If in case some regions had no wedding palaces than large and well-equipped facilities had to be provided. In those premises as in the wedding palaces, in an obligatory manner the following attributes must be present: the state flags and emblems of USSR and Kyrgyzstan, the portrait of Lenin, and the torch symbolizing the continuity of life. Although the wedding palace in the Bishkek had no bust of Lenin, it still had the emblem of Soviet Kyrgyzstan. But in overall the decoration of the palace was done using a lot of local attributes.



Figure 10. One of the elements of Kyrgyz culture is *shyrdak* that decorates the floor of the main wedding hall.

A carpet done using Kyrgyz national motives. Such attribute adds additional emotions of attachment to the place and the ritual ceremony. (Source: author`s personal collection)

The ceremony of registration was standard with cars arriving to the main entrance with friends and relatives accompanying them. Bride and groom go to their separate rooms where they make minor preparation for the official ceremony. At certain time, the couples with their parents behind are lead into the wedding hall with typical music of Felix Mendelsohn`s the Wedding March playing in the background. After the independence this part was changed as couples frequently asked to put the music in their native languages. For instance for Kyrgyz wedding ceremony the music would be *jar-jar* (my half). The ritual specialist opens the ceremony addressing them with the following words:

Dear bride and groom! Today in Your lives and lives of your parents, relatives and friends is a bright and joyful day, which will be remembered for the whole life. You will go on the path of life hand in hand, loving and respecting each other. Today on the start of Your family I would like to wish You all the best, most importantly – the happiness, let your future family be strong and friendly, deeply respect each other, love each other, be real friends. We wish you an interesting, meaningful life. The happiness of your family is in Your hands.¹⁰¹

In all accordance with the laws of Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic about marriage, family, on your mutual agreement and will, the marriage between you is now being registered here. Please come to the table and forge your familial union with your signatures. The couple approach the table and sign-in in the acts of records of marriages – first the bride and then the groom and exchange the rings. Let's wish the couples much happiness. The couple then kisses each other as the guests are applauding. The final moment is the certificate of marriage that was given to the groom.

Although text slightly varied depending on the region, the ritual practices also had regional variations. For instance at the wedding palace the groom and bride solemnly lit the torch from an eternal flame as symbol of mutual love. Earlier there was the practice of drinking the water from bowls (*choichok*) “the water of loyalty”. But overtime it was abandoned because there were complains. "If people brought their own bowls we do it, even not, than it is not hygienic." Today people continue adding new elements like putting on traditional headscarf (*joluk*) and ritual specialists take this into account and introduce such elements. Lamira Djukeshovna still asserts that the Soviet times all of this was missing; it was all in monotonous style.

¹⁰¹Kalilov, *Novye Obryady I Tradicii U Kirgizov*, 57.

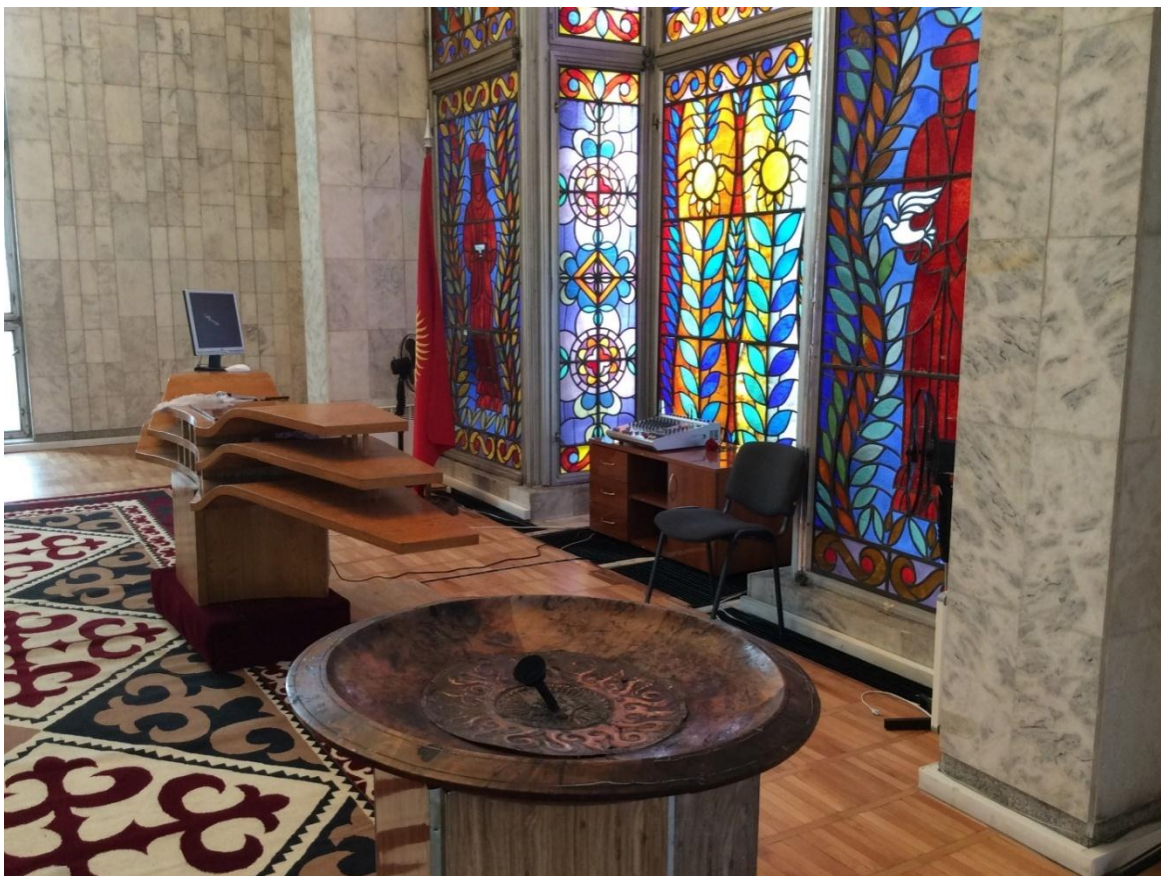


Figure 11. A torch used during the registration ceremony in main hall of the wedding palace. Couples lit the eternal flame as a symbol of love and warmth that prevail in the family. (Source: author`s personal collection)

The palaces of happiness or palaces of weddings were wide spread in the Soviet Union. Also in Kyrgyzstan each big city had its own wedding house: Osh, Tokmok, Jalal-Abad, Maily-Sai, Kok-Jangak, and Kyzyl-Kiya. Villages had houses of culture, the clubs of kolkhozes, or village councils. Yet, there was only one specifically built palace for ritual ceremonies that had the weddings rites, name-giving, silver and golden marriages all conducted in one place. Though today only wedding rite have survived as such with golden marriages still practiced. Originally the palace in Bishkek was planned to be constructed by 1984 for the 60th anniversary of the foundation of Kyrgyz Socialist Republic but it was only finished by 1987. Its architects Aleksandr Klishevich and Alesandr Mikhailovich Agap-Logunov before the construction

travelled to Vilnius and Leningrad to see the palaces of weddings built there. The closest city that also had the wedding palace was Alma-Ata, but as Aleksandr Klishevich remarked they got some interesting ideas from here and there. According to the architects the healthy Soviet family was the major aim of the palace. All the rituals was planning to be held here starting from the registration of children: “We were thinking of multifunctional palace, where first and second floor was given to registration of children, consultation of mothers (the center of family).”¹⁰² Another idea that architects brought from Vilnius was the tradition of singing. During the ceremony we had live choir music. The balcony extended to the main hall from the lobby so the sound was heard on both sides. The wedding palace thus was made as much as possible to combine the best traditions from around the country but at the same time keep the local flavor.

¹⁰² Aleksandr Klishevich, *Idea Stroitelstva Dvorca Brakosochetanii*, January 21, 2016.



Figure 12. The central view of the wedding palace.

The idea was to reproduce a druse like structure, which is a group of finely fused crystals, as link to natural characteristics of mountains of Kyrgyzstan. The vertical vitrines remind the crystal elements. The limos standing at the front are used during the ceremonials for driving around the memorial sites as part of the wedding ritual. The circular around the fountain is used for cars to drive in and out. Today the renting of cars for wedding services became a lucrative business. (Source: Aleksandr Klishevish, 2015)

The statistics for 1990 show that out of total 512 people registered at the new place the biggest percentage was taken by Russian nationality with 39% of wedding registrations. This is still less than in 1970s, when their percentage almost made 50%. The Kyrgyz nationality came in second with 30% over all, considerably higher than 1970s statistics. The third place with 22% was the mixed marriages. Many mixed marriages were mainly between Russians and Ukrainians, Belarusians, Koreans or Germans. The marriages between Russian and Kyrgyz were quite rare, only few were detected in the 1990s statistics. Moreover, there is decline of some nationalities; if

for instance the percentage of registered Ukrainians from 1970s was 1, 7%, already by 1990 the number fell down to 0, 4%. In comparison, the percentage of other Muslim people like Uzbeks, Uighurs and Tatars increased. For example Tatar`s registration percentage rose from 1% in 1970s to 2, 1% in 1990s.

The old wedding house which was built in 1967 was the predecessor of the new wedding palace. There out of total 458 couples registered, almost 50% were of Russian nationality whereas mixed marriages made up 30%. Kyrgyz constituted only 12%. Such low number of registered Kyrgyz couples could be explained by the fact that the capital Frunze in Soviet times was predominantly populated by Russian speaking people. This does not suppose that Kyrgyz did not register their wedding rites. Yet, the increase of registration of Kyrgyz couples by 1990 was evident. Twenty years later more people of titular nationality started adhering to urban rituals. Wedding ritual unlike the funeral rites was relatively easily accepted. One of the reasons ritual became successful is due to its adaptability to local forms where as a result both traditional and modern forms could be integrated.

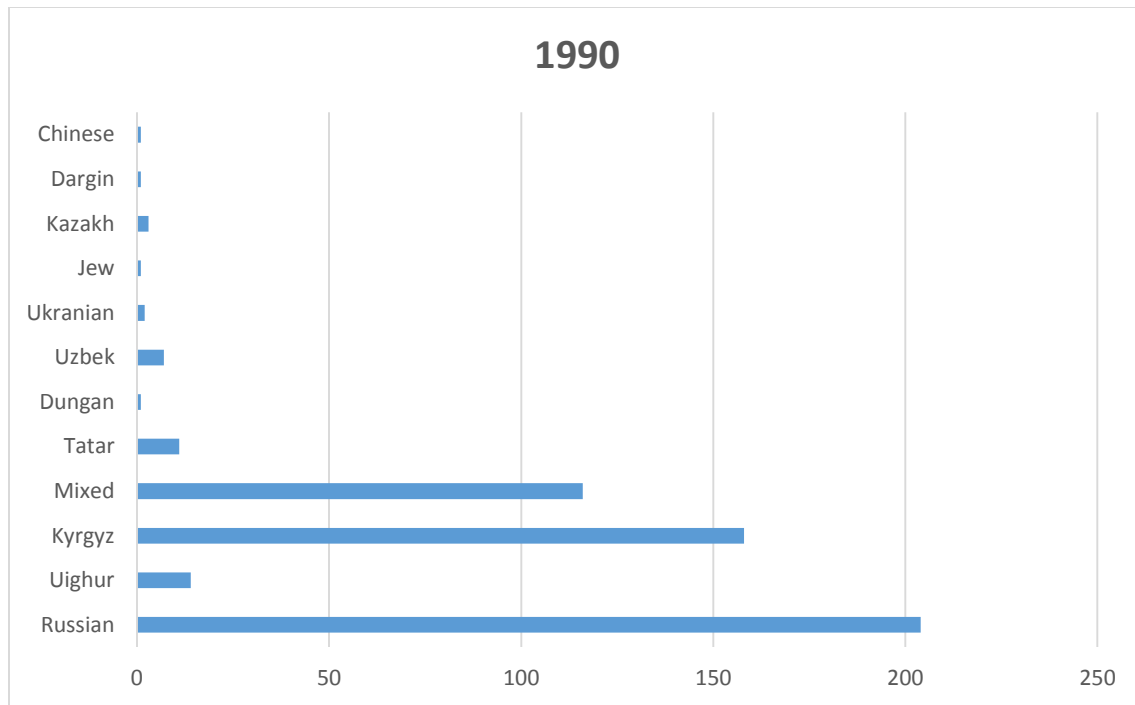


Figure 13. The marriage statistics for 1970 from the new wedding palace.
 As Russian marriage registration still dominates, more Kyrgyz couples started registering too. Compared to 1970 Kyrgyz already outnumbered the mixed marriages. There is minor increase in numbers of other nationalities like Uighur and Tatar. (Source: author`s personal collection)

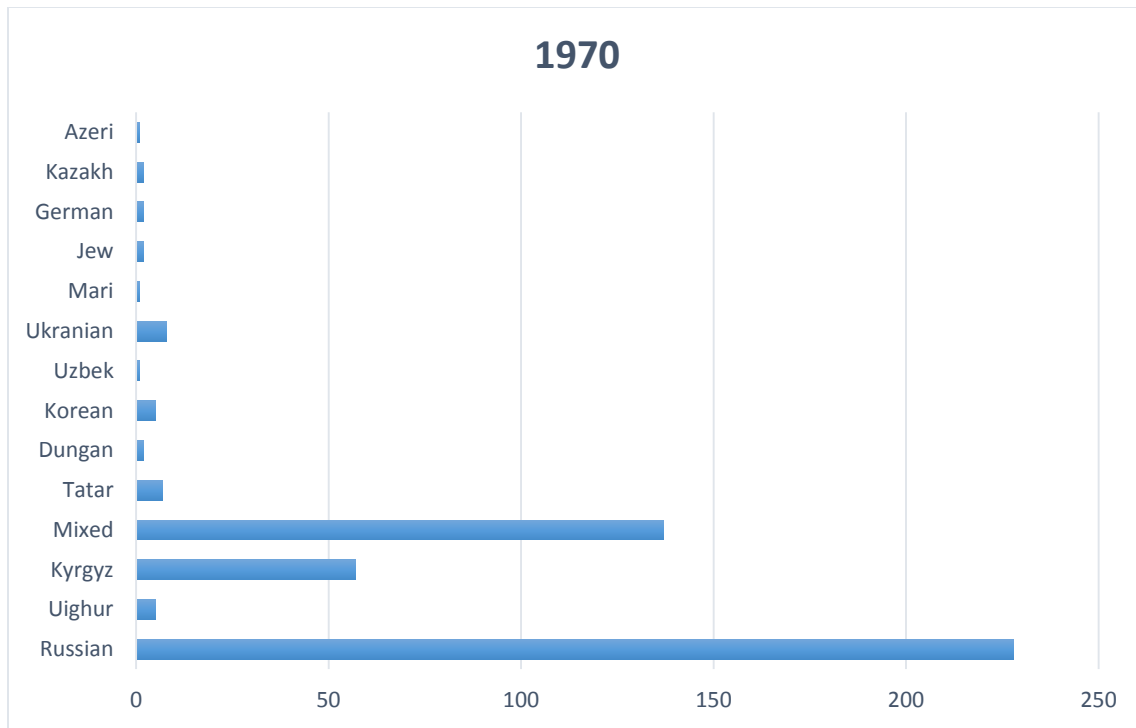


Figure 14. The marriage statistics for 1970 from the old wedding palace.
Clearly the number of Russian and mixed marriages outnumber all other nationalities taken altogether. One could say that earlier the wedding ritual at the palaces of weddings was seen as European, Russian style. (Source: author`s personal collection)



Figure 15. The former wedding palace or palace of happiness “*Bakyt*” (Togolok Moldo, 21) opened in 1967.

It casually occupied the first floor of an apartment building. It had all the functions as the current wedding palace: halls for registration of regular weddings, name-giving, including the registration of silver and gold weddings.

(Source: <http://www.open.kg/photo-gallery/306-gorod-frunze-v-74-80-godah.html>, last accessed June 1, 2016)



Figure 16. The modern outlook of former wedding palace.
The entrance in the shape of a swallow where cars drive in and out. Today the place is used as an art center for children. (Source: author's personal collection)



Figure 17. The First Secretary of Central Committee of Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan Absamat Masaliev (second from right) and secretary of Central Committee of Communist Party of Soviet Union Aleksandra Birukova (forth from right) during the official registration ceremony at the new wedding palace. Frunze, 1987

The highest ranking Soviet female politician, Aleksandra Birukova accompanied Margaret Thatcher during her state visit to USSR in 1987.

(Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinodocuments, 0-53946\IO2)



Figure 18. The modern outlook of the entrance to the main hall where the first secretaries stood thirty years ago.

It was designed by the architect Alexander Klishevich, who was also one of the two main architects of the wedding palace. (Source: author`s personal collection)



Figure 19. The central wall in the wedding hall that couples face during their registration ceremony.

In the center is the national emblem of Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The work had been completed by renowned Kyrgyz-Soviet artist on stained glass Syrnev Viktor. The composition reminds the church structure where except the cross are the national attributes.

(Source: author's personal collection)



Figure 20. The couple preparing to ascend towards the main wedding hall accompanied by their parents. (Source: author`s personal collection)



Figure 21. Facing the ritual altar and a ritual specialist during the process of registration. Witnesses from both sides signing the document. (Source: author`s personal collection)

CONCLUSION

“Lenin lives; he secretly walks the earth and watches over the Soviet power.”

Caucasian legend from 1926¹⁰³

The Soviet campaign on introduction of new rites and rituals in the wedding ceremony did fulfill its main precepts of presenting uniformity and compliance with Soviet legality throughout the county. Yet this campaign was done in ways very creative especially in Muslim Central Asia. Most wedding rites in post-Soviet space combined modern with religious wedding ceremonies. According to Soviet ethnologist Lobacheva the transitional wedding rite was the most common ceremonial that people in Central Asia practiced.¹⁰⁴ The wedding rite which under the influence of Soviet ideology had partial modifications, compromising between the old traditional and the new Soviet practices where “ritual forms have been shortened and adapted to modern living.”¹⁰⁵ In fact Soviet ideologist did not completely disregard the local traditions and on this occasion the ‘positive local forms’ that fitted the general canons of socialist living were accepted. The wedding that consisted solely of socialist content was quite rare especially among the Muslim nationalities of Central Asia. Maybe this was not the case in mixed marriages or in urban localities where multinational practices of weddings were much more common. Therefore the transitional wedding was the most common rite where ZAGs registration became part of an official venue as much as inviting imams became a standard procedure.

¹⁰³Tumarkin, “Religion, Bolshevism, and the Origins of the Lenin Cult,” 36.

¹⁰⁴ N. P. Lobacheva, *O formirovanii novoi obryadnosti u narodov SSSR.*, 4 (Sovetskaya etnografiya, 1972), 15.

¹⁰⁵Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case*, 80.

On a broader scale integrating both forms of ritual, the national and Soviet is one possible way approaching the outcome of Soviet campaign of introduction of new rituals. Soviet officials probably never imagined how originally socialist rite taking up the local forms could generate a unique combination of cultural and social patterns that, in turn, contributed to the conscious planning of family events which often altered the previously conservative forms of celebration. Marianne Kamp on this occasion argues that Soviet state made a big change in the way Uzbek women lived their lives both socially and economically.¹⁰⁶ The increasing appearance of women in public, made possible because of universal education and the right to equal labor opportunities that were among the positive shifts in everyday life. However what was not accomplished is the transformation of gender ideals. Uzbek activists clearly differentiated between the gender roles of husband and wife. The red wedding where both men and women were present in contrast to old style when they celebrated separately did not change the differences in gender perception where marriage was seen more as the union resembling companionship rather than equality.

Talking about the acceptance of the Soviet wedding rite in contemporary Kyrgyz society brings almost no contradiction as it ceremonial does not oppose the traditional wedding practices where registration at the wedding palace with its elaborate ritual is seen as part of state registration and the overall ceremony. However, as state's imposition on ritual supervision was weakened after the breakup of Soviet Union, the new cultural elements of pre-Soviet, and ethno-centered practices started slowly reappearing. In addition the Western and Islamic influences also found their way to contribute to the diversity of forms and values in the formation of family

¹⁰⁶ Kamp, *The New Woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism.*, 230.

relationships and the wedding rite itself.¹⁰⁷ According to Julie McBrien in the late 1990s and beginning 2000s some parts of traditionally established wedding practices had been altered especially the gender incorporated evening parties.¹⁰⁸ People started to differentiate the place of women and men during the celebration. Although people say it is religiously motivated it could also have economic reasons behind such as extra spending to the evening part. (*vecher*) Overall the emergence of such new wedding forms is a result of growing alternative interpretation of Islamic ideas that lead to contested feelings, challenging the previous assumptions of the proper place of culture and religion in these processes. I agree with Mathijs Pelkmans that the broader picture should be sought in the historical process of religious evolution in Soviet Union where religious transformation was always present “shaped by historically rooted discourses of religion and nationality.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore ambivalent reactions to new weddings had its origin in the internal discourses of religion and culture that was silenced over the past Soviet period.

The wedding was the first religious rite to become institutionalized even before the establishment of Soviet Union in 1917, when Vladimir Lenin along with Yakov Sverdlov, the chairman of Central Executive Committee signed a decree about civil marriage, children and introduction of special act of records: "the Russian Republic further recognizes only civil marriages."¹¹⁰ On the basis of this document the legal right of registration in churches had been annulled i.e. from now on the wedding rite in churches became the private affair of believers. Today all weddings have to be registered by the state. (Article 36, paragraph 4 of the

¹⁰⁷ Lesia Nedoluzhko and Victor Agadjanian, “Arranged and Forced Marriages in Kyrgyzstan: Persistence or Change?” (Transitions in the spousal selection process, Paris, 2013), 1, <http://iusp.org/en/event/17/programme/paper/3692>.

¹⁰⁸ Julie McBrien, “Listening to the Wedding Speaker: Discussing Religion and Culture in Southern Kyrgyzstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 343, doi:10.1080/02634930601022591.

¹⁰⁹ Mathijs Pelkmans, “Religion, Nation and State in Georgia: Christian Expansion in Muslim Ajaria,” *Taylor & Francis, Group, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22, no. No. 2 (2002): 343.

¹¹⁰ Kalilov, *Novye Obryady I Tradicii U Kirgizov*, 16.

Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic) Even when couple decides to have a religious rite, the registration must take place before or after the ceremony. And as people conduct registration in the wedding palaces the Soviet legacy of wedding rite continues to exist. This serves as an evidence of unconscious conformity with post-Soviet rituals by couples, who still drive to eternal flame and monuments around the city. Yet it also shows how shared Soviet ideals continue to live on through such ritual practices.

When I asked the owner of Mercedes-Benz S-Class at the wedding palace about the services he offered. He responded that for a price of ten thousand som (around 150 dollars) he will drive to the house of bride, pick her from there, tour around the cities` monuments and bring the couple back to the groom`s place. Today it became a routine called collectively *zags* that followed almost in every wedding ceremony. There is a general consensus among ritual specialists that during Soviet times the rituals were "too uniform, impersonal, overweighed with speeches and lacking in symbolism."¹¹¹ Earlier, the ritual specialists were given less freedom in terms of expressing their will to contribute to the ritual ceremony making it more personal and responding to the wishes of registering couples. However today what makes wedding rite in the wedding palaces attractive and acceptable is its traditional forms where the earlier Soviet practices are becoming increasingly indigenized. In addition, we see many elements such as food and drinks that are also creatively integrated into the whole process of wedding ceremony. Champagne, the hallmark of Soviet representation became an important attribute in the wedding tables combined often with traditional tea drinking. *Tamada* a Georgian term for toastmaster is another feature that had been inherited from Soviet multinational practices of celebration. A

¹¹¹ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case*, 240.

painting of wedding feast from the former Lenin museum in Bishkek effectively portrays such curious symbiosis.

So as such rituals are never static. For people upholding the traditional practices, ritual serve as an assertion of their belonging but even this process of reassertion constantly renews with time, producing newer forms. Interestingly other life-cycle rituals particularly the name-giving never made its way through, instead the old traditional holiday *tushoo kesu* (cutting the ropes when children first start walking) have continued. Perhaps one of the reasons one can say that Soviet wedding rite survived until now, is that it had been legally backed up as part of an obligatory registration. Yet others can say that a continuous modernization process that started a century ago was inevitable where the wedding site still serves as a powerful symbol of unfinished imagined modernity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Archival Materials

Tsentrалnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki (TsGA) [Central State Archive of Kyrgyz Republic]

Tsentrалnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Politicheskoi Dokumentatsii KR (TsGAPD) [Central State Archive of Political Documentation]

Tsentrалnyi Gosudarstvennyi Archiv Kinofotofonodokumentov KR (TsGAK) [Central State Archive of Films and Photos of Kyrgyz Republic]

Doev, A. "Pravda ob Islame." [The Truth about Islam] Znanie Society of Kyrgyz SSR, 1969. F. 4644, O.1, D.166. Archive of Political Documentation.

Dorzhenov, S.B. "Druzhba Narodov i Religia." [Friendship of People and Religion] Znanie Society of Kyrgyz SSR, 1969. F. 4644, O.1, D.166. Archive of Political Documentation.

Esengeldiev, S. "Protivopolojnost Nacionalnyh i Religioznyh Tradicii." [The opposition of national and religious traditions] Znanie Society of Kyrgyz SSR, 1969. F. 4644, O.1, D.166. Archive of Political Documentation.

Petrash U. G. "Kritika Modernisticheskikh Tendencii v Sovremennom Islame." [Critics of modernist tendencies in modern Islam] Znanie Society of Kyrgyz SSR, 1969. F. 4644, O.1, D.166. Archive of Political Documentation.

Newspapers, Journals and Brochures

Aitmatov, Chyngyz. “*Prisma Ob Internation. Chyngyz Aitmatov: Moi Kommentarii.*” [My commentaries] *Sovetskii Kirgizstan*. 1985.

Akimkanov, K. “Novye Obryady Na Sele.” [New Customs in the Village] *Komsomolec Kirgizii*. 1960.

Aristanbekov, S. “V Chem Vred Toev?” [What is the harmfulness of toi?] *Propaganda and Agitation Department of CC of CP of Kyrgyzstan*, Blognot Propagandista i Agitatora, no. # 13 (July 1965): 42–44.

Kalilov, K. *Novye Obryady i Tradicii u Kirgizov*. [New customs and traditions of Kyrgyz people] Ph.D A.I. Narynbaev. Frunze: Izdatelstvo “Ilim,” 1983.

Klishevich, Aleksandr. *Idea Stroitelstva Dvorca Brakosochetanii*. [Idea of building the wedding palace] Interview January 21, 2016.

Korneva, Larisa and Tamila Tutlis. *Krasivo, Torzhestvenno, Pamyatno*. [Beautiful, Festive, Memorable] K. Slepenco. Frunze: Izdatelstvo “Kyrgyzstan,” 1966.

Kruchkova, L.I. *Obryad Brakosochetaniya*. [The wedding rite] Frunze: Ministry of Culture of Kyrgyz SSR, 1987.

Kuzina, V. “O Tradiciyah i Obryadah. Davaite Obsudim.” [About tradition and customs. Let’s Discuss] *Komsomolec Kirgizii*. March 11, 1964.

Narodnoe Khozyastvo Kirgizskoi SSR. [National Statistics of Kyrgyz SSR] Tsentralnyi Statisticheskoe Upravlenie pri Sovete Ministrov Kirgizskoi SSR. Frunze: Kyrgyzstan, 1975.

Povyshat Kulturu Byta, Utverjdat Novuy Obryadnost. [Improve the culture of life, Establish new rituals] *Sovetskya Kirgiziya*. May 18, 1988, #115 (17890) edition.

Nurkhalieva, Lamira. *Obrayd Brakosochetaniya*. [The Wedding Rite] Interview January 22, 2016

Soltonbekov, Berlik. *Novye Sovetskie Tradicii Obychai i ih rol v Borbe s Perezhtkami Proshlogo v Bytu*. [New Soviet Tradition and Customs and their role in Fighting with the remnants of the past in everyday life] Ministry of Culture of Kyrgyz SSR, 1969.

Slepenko, K. *Yarko, Krasivo, Prazdnichno*. [Bright, Beautiful, Festive] Frunze: Izdatelstvo “Kyrgyzstan,” 1968.

Vnedryat v Byt Novye Tradicii I Obryady. [Introduce into Everyday Life New Traditions and Rituals] *Sovetskya Kirgiziya*. 1984.

Secondary Sources

Barlas, Asma. “Believing Women” in Islam. *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur`an*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002.

Bobrovnikov, Vladimir. “Islam in the Russian Empire.” In *The Cambridge History of Russia. Imperial Russia, 1689-1917*, Dominic Lieven., II:202–23. Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Clifford, Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures. Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973.

Dobson, Miriam. “The Social Scientist Meets the ‘Believer’: Discussions of God, the Afterlife,

and Communism in the Mid-1960s.” *Slavic Review* 74, no. 1 (2015): 79–103.

doi:10.5612/slavicreview.74.1.79.

Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. “Marriage, Modernity, and the ‘Friendship of Nations’: Interethnic Intimacy in Post-War Central Asia in Comparative Perspective.” *Central Asian Survey* 26, no. 4 (December 2007): 581–99. doi:10.1080/02634930802018489.

Igmen, Ali. *Speaking Soviet with an Accent. Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*. Douglas Northrop. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012.

Kamp, Marianne. *The New Woman in Uzbekistan. Islam, Modernity, and Unveiling under Communism*. University of Washington Press, 2006.

———. “The Wedding Feast: Living the New Uzbek Life in the 1930s.” In *Everyday Life in Central Asia: Past and Present*, Zanca Russell et al. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007.

Kendzior, Sarah. “Redefining Religion: Uzbek Atheist Propaganda in Gorbachev-Era Uzbekistan.” *Nationalities Papers* 34:5 (2006): 533–48

Khalid, Adeeb. *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*. University of California Press, 2007.

———. “The Fascination of Revolution: Central Asian Intellectuals, 1917-1927.” In *Empire, Islam, and Politics in Central Eurasia*, Uyama Tomohiko., 137–52. Sapporo: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007.

———. *The Politics of Muslim Cultural Reform. Jadidism in Central Asia*. University of California Press, 1998.

- Kovalenko, S. N. "O Vnedrenii v 1960 v Byt Sovetskih Ludei Grazhdanskikh Obryadov (Po Materialam Leningradskoi Oblasti)." *Sarskoselskie Chteniya*, no. № XIX / том I / 2015 (n.d.).
- Lane, Christel. *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society - The Soviet Case*. Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Lewis, David C. *After Atheism. Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia*. Caucasus World. Routledge, 2014.
- Lobacheva, N. P. *O formirovanii novoi obryadnosti u narodov SSSR*. 4. Sovetskaya etnografiya, 1972.
- McBrien, Julie. "Listening to the Wedding Speaker: Discussing Religion and Culture in Southern Kyrgyzstan." *Central Asian Survey* 25, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 341–57.
doi:10.1080/02634930601022591.
- Nedoluzhko, Lesia, and Victor Agadjanian. "Arranged and Forced Marriages in Kyrgyzstan: Persistence or Change?" 1–31. Paris, 2013.
<http://iussp.org/en/event/17/programme/paper/3692>.
- Northrop, Douglas. *Veiled Empire. Gender and Power in Stalinist Central Asia*. Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Pelkmans, Mathijs. "Religion, Nation and State in Georgia: Christian Expansion in Muslim Ajaria." *Taylor & Francis, Group, Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 22, no. No. 2 (2002).
- Powell, David E. *Antireligious Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Study of Mass Persuasion*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, c1975, n.d.

- Raunig, Gerald. *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century*. SEMIOTEXT(E) ACTIVE AGENTS SERIES. The MIT Press, 2007.
- Ro'i, Yaacov. *Islam in the Soviet Union. From the Second World War to Gorbachev*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Rolf, Malte. *Soviet Mass Festivals, 1917-1991*. Jonathan Harris. University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013.
- Sargent, Lyman Tower. "Ideology and Utopia: Karl Mannheim and Paul Ricoeur." *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (October 2008): 263–73. doi:10.1080/13569310802374479.
- Smolkin-Rothrock, Victoria. "'A Sacred Space Is Never Empty': Soviet Atheism, 1954–1971." Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley, 2010.
<http://search.proquest.com/pqdtss/docview/1322073107/abstract/FE66F020FEAB4BEE/PQ/1>.
- . "Problema 'obyknovennoi' sovetskoi smerti: materialnoe i dukhovnoe v ateisticheskoi kosmologii." *Gosudarstvo Religia Tserkov*, no. #3-4(30) (2012): 430–61.
- Stites, Richard. *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Tasar, Eren Murat. "Soviet and Muslim: The Institutionalization of Islam in Central Asia, 1943–1991." Ph.D., Harvard University, 2010.
<http://search.proquest.com/pqdtss/docview/634237124/abstract/EC7A8B7CB0894E09P/Q/1>.
- Tumarkin, Nina. "Religion, Bolshevism, and the Origins of the Lenin Cult." *The Russian Review* 40, no. 1 (1981): 35–46. doi:10.2307/128733.

Vazerovala, Alla, and Alexey Molkin. ““SOCIALIST CEREMONIALISM’ OF MUSLIMS IN THE 1960-1980TH (ON THE EXAMPLE OF CENTRAL VOLGA AREA).”

Elektronnyi nauchno-praktichnyi jurnal “Sovremennye nauchnye issledovanie i innovacii.” Accessed May 6, 2016. <http://web.snauka.ru/issues/2015/02/46418>.

APPENDICES



Figure 22. The Kyrgyz traditional wedding rite in national dress in the yurt. Issyk-Kul region, 1990.

The woman in front preparing to cover the bride's head with a white scarf (*juluk*) as sign of welcome to a new family. (Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinoduments, 0-57620\IO1)



Figure 23. Drinking champagne, the Soviet symbol of high culture during the wedding registration.

The chairman of *gorispolkom* (the city executive committee) A. Takyrbashev congratulating the newlywed U. Doroshenko, a concrete worker and O. Ekonomova, the employee at the city drug store (*apteka*). Frunze, 1971. (Source: the Archive of Kinophotophinodocuments, 1-15498\IO1)



Figure 24. The Ait namaz (Ramadan) in Frunze (Bishkek), 1956.

The people attending are mainly the aged men. Even during anti-religious campaign people did not stop celebrating Islamic holidays that are in ways infused with local identity and cultural heritage. (Source: <http://www.foto.kg/galereya/1020-musulmanstvo-prazdnichnyy-namaz.html>, last accesses May 26, 2016)



Figure 25. The stairs of wedding palace leading to the main wedding hall. The emblem of Soviet Kyrgyzstan is clearly visible through the door. The idea to build the ascending stairs came from Vilnius where the architects travelled before starting the construction of building. (Source: author`s personal collection)



Figure 26. The main entrance into the wedding palace.
The sign writes both in Kyrgyz and Russian languages for Wedding Palace under the State Registration Service of Government of Kyrgyz Republic. (Source: author`s personal collection)

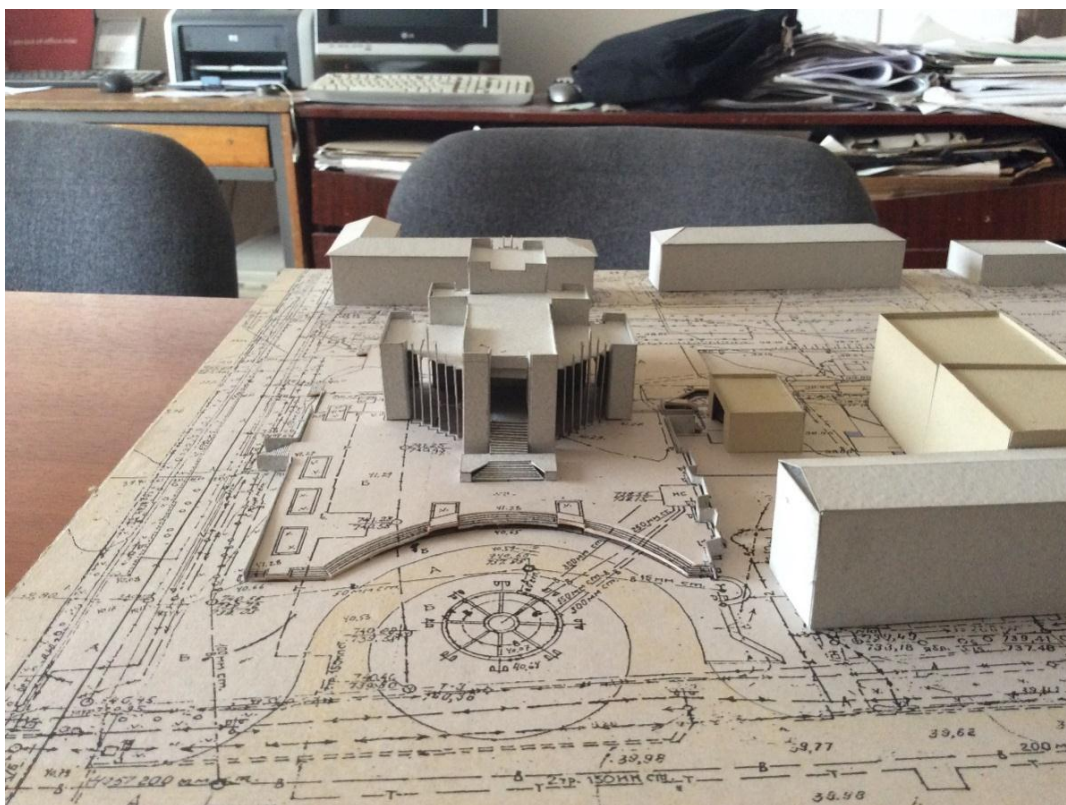


Figure 27. The architectural layout of the new wedding palace in Bishkek. The architects spend several months before presenting the final draft to the Central Committee. (Source: author's personal collection)

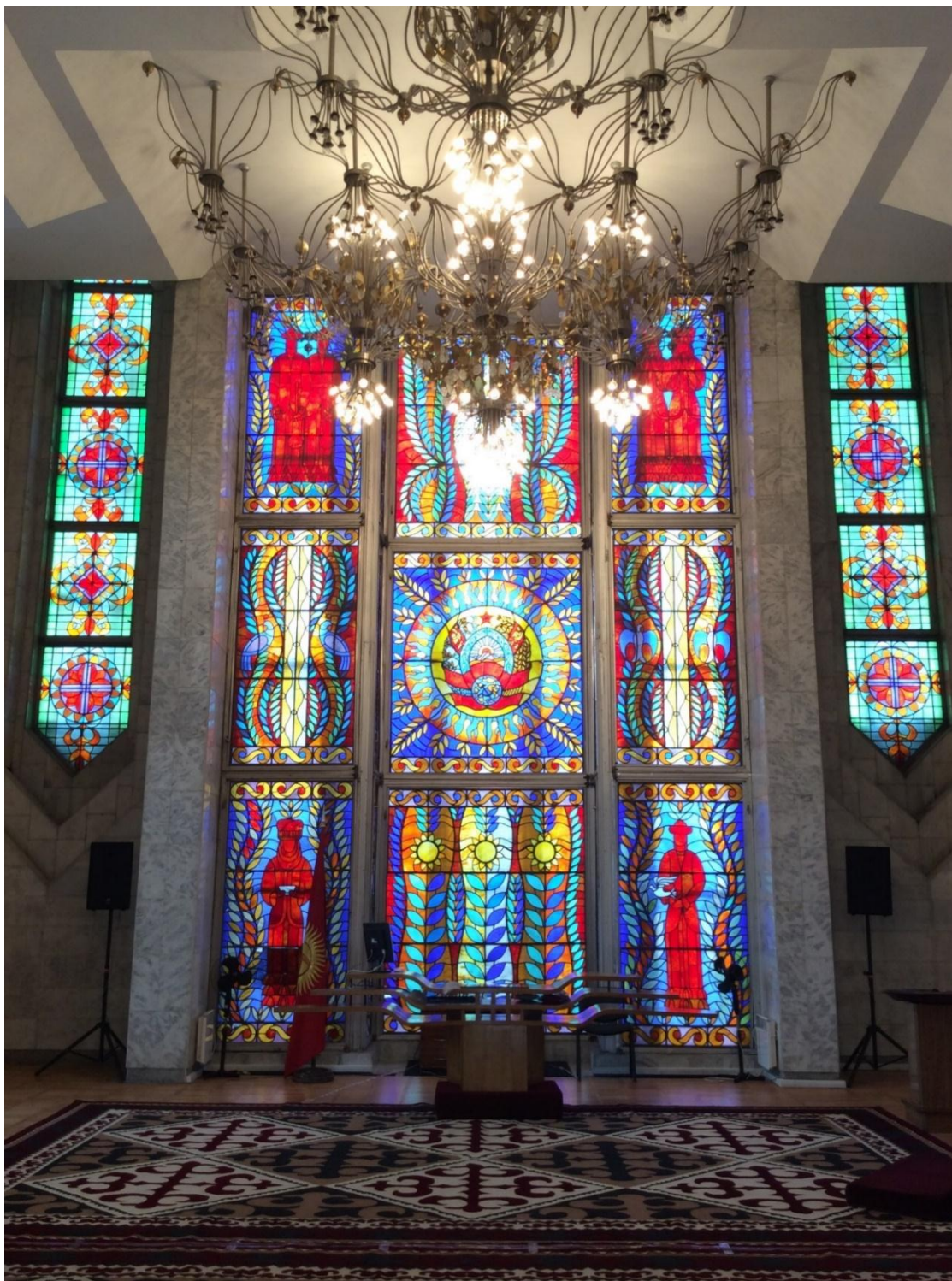


Figure 28. The main wedding hall in its full pomposity.
Previously the flag of Soviet Kyrgyzstan occupied the flagpole, today the flag of Kyrgyzstan replaced the former attribute. (Source: author`s personal collection)



Figure 29. The stylistic outlook of chairs at the wedding palace placed on each side of the main hall. The resemblance of chairs to chairs in the classical churches is very close. (Source: author's personal collection)