

## POLITICAL CLANS OF KYRGYZSTAN: PAST AND PRESENT

Asyl BOLPONOVA

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Assistant Professor, Department of Baccalaureate,  
Academy of State Administration under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic  
(Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)*

### ABSTRACT

**T**he author traces the history of the clan system and its evolution as part of the political processes unfolding in Kyrgyzstan. She relies on facts to demonstrate that the clan system of our days is a product of classical unification of tribes into clans.

**KEYWORDS:** *clan, kin, tribe, tribalism, nomads, nomenklatura clans, political-family clan, ethnoregionalism, Kyrgyzstan.*

### *Introduction*

The clan system and tribalism, which figure prominently on the political scene of Kyrgyzstan, can be described as the country's greatest problem. It adds vehemence to the power struggle between clans, breeds corruption, ignites clash of interests, encourages nepotism and political patronage, etc.

Normally, scholarly studies of the role of the state in democratization concentrate on classes and political parties and ignore the negative role of informal ties and relations that weaken the regime and destabilize it. Meanwhile, it was social groups tied together by informal rules and regulations that moved to the fore in independent Kyrgyzstan; this means that the phenomenon of tribal cohesion and the resultant regulatory tools deserve the close attention of our academic community.

Clans and their role in the political processes unfolding in Kyrgyzstan constitute a relatively recent trend of social studies in the republic that calls for a comprehensive approach. Much of what is said about these phenomena in the academic and analytical communities shows inadequate knowledge of the subject; the social response to the results of academic and analytical deliberations could develop into a behavioral model. This makes my contribution objectively important and well-timed: we need theoretical foundations to identify the trends in future studies of these problems.

### **The Clan as a Target of Study**

The academic literature brims with identifications of clans, while the methodologies of studies of the clan as a phenomenon is burdened by the use of different, yet semantically close, terms: "clan community," "lineage," "tribalism," "nepotism," "the Asiatic mode of production," and "nomenkla-

tura” of the Soviet period are used in historical contexts; “elite” and “patronage networks,” in political contexts; “identity,” “mentality” in philosophical contexts; “social stratification” in sociological contexts, etc.

Terminologically, the Gallic “clann” literary means “seed”; in the broader sense, the word means *children, offspring, descendants*.<sup>1</sup> At first, the term “clan” as “kin” (rarely, tribe) was widespread among the Celts (the Irish, Scots, and Welsh people). During the disintegration of clans, the term was applied to groups of close relatives with the same ancestor; the Scots put Mac (son) in front of the family name to point to common roots; the Irish use O’ (grandson) for the same purpose.

Anthropology of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century applied the term “clan” to tribal entities typical of the Asian and African margins and the Pacific islands, common relatives and common territory being the basic descriptions. The twentieth-century ethnology brought more order to the ideas about clans: a group of blood relatives originating from a common ancestor, either male or female (unilineality). The interpretation of the clan offered by American ethnographer Lewis Morgan, who described the clan as a unit of descendants from the same male ancestor (patrilineal group), should be taken into account. Frederick Engels relied on Morgan’s ideas in his *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, one of the fundamental works of Marxism.<sup>2</sup>

A clan unites several lineages, groups of relatives who can trace their roots to common ancestors. Clans and lineages are regarded as corporate groups bound by a feeling of unity and, frequently, common property. Prominent British ethnologist Edward Evans-Pritchard who studied the political order of British-Egyptian Sudan described lineage as genealogical kinship and clan segmenting.<sup>3</sup> He treated the system of lineages, in societies where there was no supreme power, as a functional method of control and brokering of social conflicts.

“Tribe,” the most frequently used term, is applied to a certain aspect of a clan: a small group of people united by common kinship or common territorial origins. There are several types of tribalism: political, social, and historical-cultural, political tribalism being the most prominent type today.

Western and Russian academics prefer the term “identity” when writing about tribalism and clan. Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, Erik Erikson, Heinrich Lubbe, and Samuel Huntington offered their own concepts of identity. Lubbe speaks of identity and “historical individuality”<sup>4</sup>; in his *Who Are We?* Huntington wrote about identity as uniformity that keeps individuals together: common culture, common territory or common political, economic and social interests.<sup>5</sup>

Anthony Giddens, Zhan Toshchenko, and linguist Sergey Ozhegov did not include a “group tied by blood kinship and common ancestors” into the definition of clan.<sup>6</sup> They wrote about the clans as we know them: people tied together by common traditional, cultural, and religious identities and also mutual interests and obligations.

It should be said that the problem has been well studied<sup>7</sup>; there is a more or less common opinion that clan ties are the most prominent feature of power structures. In fact, globalization and integra-

<sup>1</sup> See: “Spravochnik iuridicheskikh terminov,” available at [<http://www.assured.ru/dictionary/index.php?l=18&id=206>]; Ch.K. Lamazhaa, “Klan’: poniatie v sotsialnykh naukakh,” *Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie*, No. 2, 2008, pp. 121-131.

<sup>2</sup> See: F. Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*, Penguin Books, 1972.

<sup>3</sup> See: E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: A Description of the Modes of Livelihood and Political Institutions of a Nilotic People*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

<sup>4</sup> H. Lubbe, “Istoricheskaia identichnost,” *Voprosy filosofii*, No. 4, 1994, pp. 108-113.

<sup>5</sup> See: S. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America’s National Identity*, Simon&Schuster, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> A. Giddens, *Sociology*, Polity Press, 2011; Z.T. Toshchenko, “Elita? Klany? Kasty? Kliki? Kak nazvat tekhn, kto pravit nami,” *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 11, 1999, p. 131; S. Ozhegov, *Tolkovy slovar*, available at [<http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ogegova/83466>], 15 May, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See: M.B. Olcott, *Central Asia’s New States: Independence, Foreign Policy and Regional Security*, Washington, 1996, pp. 9-10; K. Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from the Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics*, Vol. 56,

tion of contemporary societies has given rise to and popularized the term “political clan” consisting of political, regional, economic, and financial elites. Today, any political clan relies on friendship, kinship, ethnic ties and the ties based on territorial kinship, common business and professional interests, and administrative relations.

According to American academic Slavomír Horák, the newly independent states produced political-family clans as a new type of elite group: a relatively narrow group of people (the national or regional political elite proper) and its retinue.<sup>8</sup> They are kept together by a system of direct personal (friendly, ethnic, and common territory) or business (professional, property, administrative, etc.) relations, each of them differently affecting the clan structure. In all cases, however, family-clan and tribal relations are of fundamental importance. The family does not limit its presence to the top state positions: it is actively involved in all sorts of financial, economic, and public foundations, projects, and communities. Family control of the media helps its members to move into important official posts (the government, parliament, etc.).

This means that in the post-Soviet period, the classical definition of clan no longer corresponds to what students of nomadic societies wrote in their time. According to Chimiza Lamazhaa from Russia, today clans are based on direct or indirect personal relations tied by common economic interests. The clan system of our day consists of clearly outlined social groups that share informal regulations and obey informal rules. The revolutionary events of 2005 and 2010 in Kyrgyzstan were a tragic example of the danger of allowing clans to control state power.

## Nomadic Society and the Clan and Tribal System among the Kyrgyz

The clan structure among the Kyrgyz stemmed from the specifics of information and property transfer among the nomads; it is much older than the state and its institutions. An analysis of the objective course of history, socioeconomic development, and the genesis of society suggests that clan identity was created by the ecological niche and its natural and climatic specifics. Nomadic cattle-breeding proved to be the most adequate form of material production; settled agriculture was kept strictly outside by never-slacking efforts to preserve the wellbeing, specifics, homogeneity, and independence of ethnic communities. Indispensable information was transferred from generation to generation along patrilineal channels, which explains the predominance of the genealogical system of kinship and the genealogical organization of the system of social aggregation of nomadic communities. This type of state structure functioned among the nomads from the beginning of nomadism to the middle of the 2nd millennium A.D. Here I would like to mention the works of Russian and Ukrainian academics who studied Central Asian nomadism.<sup>9</sup> By the late twentieth century, the CIS gave

---

No. 2, January 2004, pp. 224-261; N. Masanov, “Kazakhskaiia politicheskaiia intellektualnaia elita: klanovaia prinadlezhnost i vnutrietnicheskoe sopernichestvo,” in: *Evrázia: Lyudi i mify* (collection of articles *Vestnik Evrazii*), Compiled and edited by S.A. Panarin, Natalis, Moscow, 2003, pp. 235-241; Ch.K. Lamazhaa, *Arkhaizatsia obshchestva v period sotsialnykh transformatsiy (sotsialno-filosofskiy analiz tuvinskogo fenomena)*; Doctoral thesis, Moscow, 2011, 41 pp.; Sh. Kadyrov, “Institut prezidentstva v klanovom postkolonialnom obshchestve,” in: *Evrázia: Lyudi i mify*, pp. 337-364.

<sup>8</sup> See: S. Horák, “Transformatsia identichnosti sredneaziatskikh elit: traditsia i sovremennost,” available at [<http://slavomirhorak.euweb.cz/bibliography-ru.htm>].

<sup>9</sup> See: S.I. Vainstein, *Mir kochevnikov tsentra Azii*, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1991; N.N. Kradin, *Politicheskaiia antropologia*, Textbook, Ladomir, Moscow, 2011; A.M. Khazanov, *Kochevniki i vneshniy mir*, Almaty, 2002; N. Kradin, “Kochevniki, mir-imperii i sotsialnaia evoliutsia,” *Almanakh Vostok*, No. 11/12 (35/36), November-December 2005, pp. 314-335.

rise to national ethnological schools; the Kazakhstan school demonstrated the best results in the study of nomadism.<sup>10</sup>

The process of natural integration of nomadic societies led to the emergence of territorial confederations: wings (tribal unions) were an important step toward a new social organization. By the fifteenth century, the Kyrgyz acquired a dual ethnopolitical organization—*on kanat* and *sol kanat*—which strongly affected the future of their social and political development.<sup>11</sup> According to Omurkul Karaev, the dual ethnopolitical system appeared in the latter half of the fifteenth century, at the concluding stage of the emergence of the Kyrgyz people in Tien Shan. Anvarbek Mokeev writes that the Kyrgyz inherited the dual ethnopolitical organization from the Turks in the sixteenth century. He relies on Chinese (*Xi Yu Zhi—A Record of the Barbarian Countries in the Western Region*) and Arabic sources compiled by the 1770s.<sup>12</sup> The genealogy of the Kyrgyz and the origins of ethnopolitical organization among the Kyrgyz were registered in the source *Majmu at-tavorix* written by Saif ad'din Ahsikendi in the early sixteenth century.<sup>13</sup> The earliest information about the Kyrgyz clans belongs to the sixteenth century.

There is any number of versions of the history of the Kyrgyz tribes and clans, each deserving attention and analysis. Here I have relied on the materials of the archeological-ethnographic expedition gathered in 1953-1956 by S. Abramzon and Ya. Vinnikov.<sup>14</sup> The right wing consisted of three large branches—Tagay, Adigine, and Mungush—which, in turn, included Sarybagysh, Bugu, Solto, Tynymseiit, Sayak, Cherik, Ckekir Sayak, Zhediger, Azyk, Kara-Bagysh, Monoldor, and Chonbagysh. The tribes of the left wing were Saruu, Kushchu, Mundus, Kytay, Basyz, Tebey, Nayman, Chon Bagysh, and Zhetigen. The third group Ichkilik consisted of the tribes Kypchak, Nayman, Teit, Zhoo-Kesek, Kangdy, Boston, Noygut, Døeløs (Tøeles), Avagat (Avat), Kydyrsha, and Ilik.<sup>15</sup>

The dual system proved to be perfectly suited to the nomadic organization of territories and populations. The names of clans and tribes should be interpreted as a purely geopolitical factor. Each zone has its own cultural-historical specifics.

It should be said that until the fifteenth century nomads set up state structures for expansion. Later, in the Modern Times, the nomads set up state structures to regulate relations between the nomadic and settled agricultural worlds at the sites of their direct contact. In peacetime, these structures played a minimal role or no role at all in social life; this explains their predominantly amorphous nature. Indeed, forced to fight, the Kyrgyz had to close ranks, while their nomadic lifestyle required segmentation. Two prominent historians from Kyrgyzstan (D. Dzhunushaliev and V. Ploskikh) discovered new positions from which the tribal-clan identity of Kyrgyz society can be discussed and reappraised.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See: Zh.B. Abylkhozhin, *Traditisonaia kultura Kazakhstana. Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie aspekty funktsionirovaniia i transformatsii (1920-1930-e gg.)*, Alma-Ata, 1991; K.I. Nurov, *Pravovaia i ekonomicheskaia modernizatsia traditsionnoy struktury Kazakhstana (XIX-XX vv.)*, Gylm, Almaty, 1995; N.E. Masanov, *Kochevaia tsivilizatsia kazakhov: osnovy zhiznedeiatel'nosti nomadnogo obshchestva*, Almaty, 1995; idem, *Sotsialno-ekonomicheskieskie otnosheniia v kazakhskom kochevom obshchestve*, Almaty, 1997; Z. Muzalin, "Korporativnost kak politicheskaia traditsia v Kazakhstane," *Mysl*, No. 8, 1998, pp. 24-25; N. Amrekulov, "Zhuzes and Kazakhstan's Social and Political Development," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3, 2000, pp. 100-115.

<sup>11</sup> See: *Kyrgyzy: istochniki, istoria, etnografia*, Compiled by O. Karaev, K. Zhusupov, Bishkek, 1996, 524 pp.

<sup>12</sup> See: A. Mokeev, "Etapy etnicheskoy istorii i sotsialnoy organizatsii kyrgyzov na Tian-Shane v XVI-XVIII vv.," *Izvestia AN Respubliki Kyrgyzstan. Obshchestvennye nauki*, No. 4, 1991, pp. 43-54.

<sup>13</sup> See: *Saif al-din ibn da-mullo Shakh Abbas; Majmu atut-Tavorix*, Akyl, Bishkek, 1996, 128 pp.

<sup>14</sup> See: *Trudy Kirgizskoy arkheologo-etnograficheskoy ekspeditsii*, Vol. 3, Moscow, 1956-1959.

<sup>15</sup> The names of tribes are cited from *Trudy Kirgizskoy arkheologo-etnograficheskoy ekspeditsii*, Vol. 1, p. 137; Vol. 3, pp. 36-37.

<sup>16</sup> See: D. Dzhunushaliev, V. Ploskikh, "Tribalism and Nation Building in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3, 2000, pp. 115-123.

## Traditional Kyrgyz Society Reformed in the 19th-20th Centuries

The Russians replaced the traditional social system with a territory-state administrative system. Under the decree of the Russian emperor of 2 July, 1867, the Turkestan General-Governorship of five regions appeared: Syr Darya, Ferghana, Samarkand, Semirechie, and Trans-Caspian.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the region acquired a unified system of state-territorial domination of Russian autocracy. As part of the Turkestan General-Governorship, Kyrgyzstan was divided between several regions: the north of Kyrgyzstan became part of the Semirechie (Issyk Kul and Tokmak districts); the Talass Valley joined the Syr Darya Region as the Aulie-Atin District; and the south was divided between the Ferghana and Samarkand regions (the Andijan, Osh, Namangan, and Khujand districts and the Pamir area). The Russian authorities found the social, economic, clan, and legal statuses that divided the local people highly advantageous: they raised the traditional social institutions to the supra-group level to create institutions of power that relied on the elite and aristocracy. As a result, the traditional nomadic and the Russian (colonial) systems of governance became an integral whole. The traditional clan and tribal organization helped Russian czarism to adapt its novelties to the local conditions. Nikolay Grodekov wrote in his time that the Central Asian lands received an indirect system of governance that left the local social structures intact.<sup>18</sup> The local peoples individually associated themselves with clans or tribes. Colonialism did not change the traditional Kyrgyz nomadic community; it used and exploited it as an integral whole. The czarist government failed to change the traditional governance system of Kyrgyz society no matter how hard it tried.

Soviet power, the totalitarian system, and its dominant ideology, likewise, tried to push clan and tribal loyalty to the backburner. The history of Kyrgyzstan tells us that no matter how hard Soviet officials tried in the 1920s-1930s to impose a Soviet identity on the people and each of its members, the clan and tribal identity prevailed. In the 1930s, the traditional ideas of power survived in the course of enforced settlement of the nomads; collectivization abolished private property in cattle and communal property in land. The clan and tribal system was anathematized; the means and tools of production became state property, while collective and state farms were set up everywhere, albeit with little success: the traditional clan and tribal system absorbed all the novelties. In the 1920s-1930s, "the nomadic mentality" triumphed over the Soviet reforms of state structures, which demonstrated little or no viability. In fact, the clan and tribal system received a new lease of life within the totalitarian regime to become the most important attribute of state governance in Kyrgyzstan, where society preserved its traditional culture and demonstrated the highest degree of survivability.

Throughout the Soviet period, a totalitarian-traditional symbiosis at the top level of power appeared: the top official posts were privately distributed among members of clan and tribal elites.<sup>19</sup> The system of dual standards concentrated power within a fairly narrow circle of national elites that gradually developed into a new nomenklatura clan known as euronationals, a term coined by Russian ethnologist Leokadia Drobizheva.<sup>20</sup> The nomenklatura elites needed wider rights as an indispensable external and internal condition of successful careers.

---

<sup>17</sup> See: *Kyrgyzstan-Rossia: Istoria vzaimootnosheniy v sostave imperii i SSSR (vtoraia polovina XIX v.-1991 g.)*, Collection of documents and materials in two books, Book 1, Bishkek, 2000, pp. 22-23.

<sup>18</sup> See: N.I. Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i kara-kyrgyzy Syrdarinskoy oblasti: iuridichesky byt*, in 2 vols., Vol. 1, Tashkent, 1889, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> See: S. Toktogonov, *Iz istorii proshlogo Kyrgyzstana*, Osh, 1995, pp. 25-26.

<sup>20</sup> See: L.M. Drobizheva, "Intelligentsia i natsionalizm: opyt postsovetskogo prostranstva," in: *Etnichnost i vlast v politnichnykh gosudarstvakh*, Materials of International Conference 1993, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 1994, pp. 71-84.

## Emergence of Political-Family Clans in Sovereign Kyrgyzstan

During the years of independence, the archaic institutions of the Middle Ages were revived against the background of social modernization. It has become absolutely clear that society remained as loyal to the traditions rooted in Kyrgyz culture as ever and that the deliberate strategies and sub-conscious trends of their preservation survived amid the nostalgia and idealization of the past. This awakened the Kyrgyz to the need to find their own identity and “their own path,” as well as rehabilitate and legalize the culture of tribal mutual assistance. It was then that regional and clan elites appeared. In the course of time, clan and tribal institutions became tools of political self-identification, nepotism in the corridors of power, patronage networks, and corruption being the most prominent negative results. The regional and clan elites have not only preserved their basic traits and traditions: they preserved the patronage networks and, through them, their ability to openly affect state-building. It was a model of modernized Kyrgyz society based on archaic consciousness set up to improve the mechanisms of administration.

National self-identification and an interest in the past are two objective phenomena typical of all new states. The Asian and African post-colonial states experienced this in the 1960s. Early in the 1990s, Francis Fukuyama wrote about “the currently ‘reawakening nations’ in Soviet Central Asia” eager “to ‘rediscover’ historical languages and cultures.”<sup>21</sup> He saw this phenomenon as a natural cyclical phase in the emergence and development of national identity. Rauf Garagozov has explained the reviving subcultures and ethnonational myths by the response of the developing countries to globalization challenges.<sup>22</sup> To my mind, however, archaic elements in power are a negative phenomenon. On the one hand, they create a rigidly centralized system of governance and ensure political and economic stability, while on the other, the clan system spreads at all levels of power. Democracy is pushed aside by bureaucrats who are members of one and the same clan and who, therefore, are always ready to sweep misdeeds or even crimes of their cronies under the carpet.

The following factors are partly responsible for the stronger position of clans and tribalism in the corridors of power:

1. The rapidly developing market economy created economic problems for the people, who had no choice but to close ranks on the basis of blood kinship.

Society, which has no confidence in future, turned to the much clearer past; the struggle for survival, one of the basic instincts, pushed natural mechanisms to the fore. Corporate consciousness and cohesion, as well as the social mobilization (clans and tribes) typical of the Kyrgyz society at all times were the first steps toward the clan system and patronage networks in state power. The nomadic heritage—the instinct of self-preservation, the clan and tribal structure of nomadic society, and collective thinking at the subconscious level—had an important role to play. Indeed, in crises and periods of transition, collectives, rather than individuals, stand a better chance of living and surviving. The nomads, vehicles of nomadic civilization, acted according to this pattern. This explains why, after gaining their independence, the Kyrgyz united into corporate entities based on kinship and mutual support to cope with the social, economic, and political challenges. The same principle was applied at the very top where patronage-client relations became the main tool of political

---

<sup>21</sup> F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Avon Books, 1993, p. 269.

<sup>22</sup> See: R. Garagozov, “Collective Memory and National Identity in the Globalization Era (Empirical Studies of the Azeri Youth),” *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 3, Issue 3, 2009, pp. 104-114.

mobilization and efficient ties between the elites and the masses and played an important role in obtaining and distributing public resources. The clan principle applied everywhere, from the center to the remote regions, made clans part of the country's political context. Status is all-important: the higher the post of one of the clan members, the wider the foundation of the clan pyramid.

2. Kyrgyz society responded with clan cohesion to Western influence and globalization, which irrevocably damaged the moral principles of the Kyrgyz, the centuries-old traditions of collectivism, clan democracy, and mutual support and infringed on the authority of the older generation.

Looking back at Askar Akaev's time, we can say that Kyrgyzstan was ready to accept Western-style democracy. According to Kyrgyz academic Sergey Kozhemiakin, it was the wrong model of democracy: it presupposed Westernization under the pressure of Western civilization and Western values, which pushed the country dangerously close to a social, economic, political and cultural crisis. In its political development, Kyrgyzstan tried different types of modernization,<sup>23</sup> but, from the very beginning, all the Western models of state governance were ill-suited to Akaev's regime. Their failure left a vacuum, which became rapidly filled by centuries-old traditions and maximum unity based on common culture, traditions, and norms; collectivist thinking prevailed over individual, while solidarity and tribal and clan identities reached the highest point. This led to clan cohesion in the corridors of power, as well as nepotism and stronger patronage ties. President Akaev gradually developed into a despotic ruler.

3. National identity, cultural heritage, and historical roots became the pivotal points.

Many of the post-Soviet states, the Central Asian countries in particular, lived through a period of myth creation. It seems that Kyrgyzstan, very much like its neighbors, was seeking a revival of national spirit. Huntington, who made the question "Who Are We?" the title of one his works,<sup>24</sup> proved beyond doubt that the question of identity was actualized when the post-Soviet states were acquiring their independence, Kyrgyzstan being no exception. The official course toward revival of the past and consolidation of traditions was indispensable for state-building in all the Central Asian countries. They moved back to their cultural heritage: forgotten traditions (*sanjyra*), kurultais, and genealogy. In one way or another, this strengthened the government. Revival of cultural heritage was expected to contribute to the unity of the people, their national identity, and continuity of the generations, as well as promote traditional education based on the genetic memory of the people. In short, cultural heritage was seen as a substitution for Soviet ideology and a new filling of the ideological vacuum of the early independence period. Indeed, revival of the traditions of patriarchal-feudal society looked like the best option and justification of the titular nations' historical mission. The Central Asian leaders are searching the past for the present self-identities of the autochthonous population and justification of their claims to leadership. Actualization of traditions revived negative features: nepotism, patronage, and corruption. This eventually led to the creation of political-family clans at the top and the strong authoritarian regimes of Akaev and Bakiev. They ignited rioting sentiments among the masses and led to the revolutions of 2005 and 2010.

---

<sup>23</sup> See: S.V. Kozhemiakin, *Osobennosti modernizatsii traditsionnykh obshchestv v usloviakh globalizatsii*, Author's abstract of Ph.D. thesis: 23.00.04, Bishkek, 2009, pp. 10-15.

<sup>24</sup> See: S. Huntington, op. cit.

Polish researcher Piotr Załęski has rightly pointed out that the clan system (tribalism) or the “political culture of ties” is a typical feature of the Central Asian mentality. The “political culture of ties” is responsible for the personality cults of the leaders and the domination of family clans and “leading families.” In short, the leaders exploited traditionalism in their interests.<sup>25</sup>

Late in the twentieth century, the political-family clans had reached a nearly absolute political and economic monopoly in their ethnic regions; regional governors were, as a rule, the closets clients of the heads of informal groups. The amendments and additions to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic of 5 May, 1993 (additions of 10 February, 1996 and 17 October, 1998) increased their influence. Bigger constituencies gave the ruling family more levers of control over the local political and bureaucratic circles. V. Khanin has pointed out that the clan leaders gradually appropriated all types of power resources—from an informal mechanism of mobilization of ethno-tribal loyalty to control of elections and local administrations.<sup>26</sup> Piotr Załęski described concentration of power in the hands of the president and his clients as “degradation of the regime.”<sup>27</sup>

Local elections revealed the monopoly of political clans in the regions.

The clan of the close relatives of former President Akaev (who were part of the political elite of Kyrgyzstan) was a symbiosis of the political elites and big financial business. Petr Svoik from Kazakhstan described this phenomenon as “the economies of nephews.” This fully applies to Bermet Akaeva (the daughter of President Akaev): from 2003 to 2006, she was official curator of the Aga Khan Development Network in Kyrgyzstan; in 2005 she was elected to the Zhogorku Kenesh. Her husband, Adil Toygonbaev, controlled the most important economic branches (aviation, energy, network communications, alcoholic beverage industry, private TV and the *Vecherny Bishkek* newspaper) from 1997 to 2005. In 1999-2001, Aydar Akaev, the former president’s son, was director of the Kyrgyz office of Kazkommertsbank; in 2001, he was appointed advisor to the finance minister; in 2004, he became chairman of the Olympic Committee; and in 2005, he was elected to the Zhogorku Kenesh. Toychubek Kasymov, former governor of the Issyk Kul Region and head of the presidential administration, was born in the same village as First Lady Mayran Akaeva.

Under Akaev, the northern tribes (Sarybagysh, Kushchu, Solto, Tynay, Sayak, Bugu, Saruu) gained a lot of political weight; Akaev and his closest circle enjoyed even more influence than other members of the same clans. The Chuya clan, represented in the corridors of power by M. Ashirkulov, I. Bekbolotov, Ch. Abyshkaev, K. Kozhonaliev, and F. Kulov, had the public prosecutor’s office, the defense and security structures, and the Security Council under its control. Former governor of the Issyk Kul Region T. Kasymov, famous writer Ch. Aitmatov, and Foreign Minister A. Aitmatov can be described as the most successful members of the Talass clan. The closest circle of the First Lady controlled the media, banking, and law-enforcement structures. Turdakun Usabaliev, former First Secretary of the C.C. Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, was one of the most powerful members of the Naryn clan (the Sarybagysh and Sayak tribes) that looked after regional governorship and the middle-ranked political elite; the Issyk Kul clan (the Bugu tribe) controlled the governors, the foreign ministry, science, culture, and art.

There are two groups (they call themselves Ichkilik and Otuz Uul) in Southern Kyrgyzstan, a densely populated part of the country with a predominantly Uzbek and Tajik population. Uzbeks, who constitute over 30% of the local electorate, can be described as the key ethnic group of voters.<sup>28</sup> The influence of Russian culture in the south is much weaker than in the north.

<sup>25</sup> See: P. Załęski, *Kultura polityczne więzi w Azji Centralnej*, Warsaw, 2011, pp. 365-370.

<sup>26</sup> See: V. Khanin, “Kyrgyzstan: Ethnic Pluralism and Political Conflicts,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3, 2000, pp. 126-127.

<sup>27</sup> P. Załęski, op. cit., p. 253.

<sup>28</sup> See: A.R. Zhooshebekova, “Etnicheskie aspekty migratsii naselenia iuga Kyrgyzstana,” in: *Problemy politnicheskogo obshchestva v Tsentralnoy Azii: vyzovy i vozmozhnyye reshenia*, Materials of an International Scientific Conference, Bishkek, 2013, pp. 113-117.



Under Soviet power, the knowledge of Russian among the Kyrgyz brought them closer to European civilization and was an important career factor. Usabaliev, who remained First Secretary of the C.C. Communist Party of Kirghizia for twenty years (1960-1980), did nothing to incorporate southerners into the republic's political hierarchy. Under Akaev, likewise, the south was poorly represented in the higher echelons of power. The Ichkilik clan had slightly more members in the political elite than Otuz Uul.

In fact, the legislative assembly was an organ of regional, rather than national power. On the other hand, members of the Talass and other northern clans, as well as the clan and tribal elite of Sarybagysh and its "liberal-democratic" cronies closed ranks around the presidential administration and the government. This explains the regularly rekindled conflicts between the "progressive" president and the "conservative" parliament. The biggest of these conflicts flared up in the fall of 1994 over the commission of a corruption investigation in the legislative and executive structures. The Zhogorku Kenesh was disbanded; the referendum that followed empowered Askar Akaev to carry out constitutional reform.

The lower segments of the clan structures play an important role in their regions. Today, they consist of clan and former nomenklatura elites and the so-called new plutocracy, by whom I mean private entrepreneurs who, very much like their colleagues in the CIS countries, had to operate in market economies still dominated by the bureaucracy and seek patrons from among officials and politicians of different ranks to gain access to state contracts and other resources in exchange for money and other services. Civil service and its broad possibilities are the best option for those businessmen who seek personal and political safety.

The majority rightly believe that the political crisis of 2005 was rooted in the Kyrgyz specifics of state policy.<sup>29</sup> The crisis was coming to a head in the shadow part of social life; the state proved unable to guarantee the rights of the regions and the influential clans or resolve the contradictions; the state and the elite failed to find a common language. This led to the March 2005 coup, which brought Kurmanbek Bakiev, a member of the southern clan and former prime minister, to power. Five years later, in April 2010, another coup removed him from the republic's political scene.

Brought to power by the 2005 revolution, Bakiev preferred to ignore one of the key demands of the Kyrgyz opposition: the need to uproot the clan system in the echelons of power. During his five years in power, tribalism, albeit camouflaged, developed into the central principle of state governance. The March 2005 revolution consolidated the position of the southern clans; the presidential election that followed on 23 July, 2009 (expected to ensure a second presidential term for Bakiev until 2014) made the split between the North and South very real and consolidated the position of the ruling class. Kurmanbek Bakiev filled all the key and politically important posts in the state power structures, including the Supreme Court, national security structures, army, foreign ministry, and economically efficient companies with his close relatives and most loyal supporters, mainly from the south and, more specifically, from the Jalal-Abad Region.

Even before Bakiev became president, his closest relatives had already captured certain posts in the local and central power structures. Kanybek, Zhusup, Marat, and Zhanysh Bakiev worked in the state structures; Akhmat and Adyl Bakiev were businessmen; later Zhusup Bakiev moved to the post of chairman of the Jalal-Abad City Council of Deputies and became president of the State Fund at the Ministry of Emergencies. Kanybek Bakiev headed a village council in the Suzak District; Zhanysh Bakiev served as Deputy Chairman of the National Security Service between March and September 2006, where he headed counterintelligence and represented Kyrgyzstan in the SCO; in June

---

<sup>29</sup> See: S. Luzianin, "Color Revolutions in the Central Asian Context: Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-Kazakhstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (35), 2005, p. 18; B. Baimatov, "Indigenous Dimensions of 'Civil Society' in Kyrgyzstan—Perspectives from the Margins," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (40), 2006, pp. 16-22.

2008, he was appointed head of the Presidential State Security Service; in 2005, Marat Bakiev was sent to the FRG as the republic's ambassador.<sup>30</sup> Marat Bakiev, Kurmanbek Bakiev's eldest son, was appointed Deputy Chairman of the National Security Service in April 2010.

In the fall of 2009, President Bakiev set up the Central Agency for Development, Innovation and Investment under his youngest son Maxim Bakiev, which placed him in control of the executive financial and industrial sphere of the state budget. He supervised the most profitable economic projects, was engaged in funding the building of the Kambarata Hydropower Plant, privatized the Bitel Mobile Communications Company and the Kyrgyz Public Educational Radio and Television Company, and organized sales of state property. Members of the Bakiev family climbed very high and filled many important posts at the two top levels.

The third level was represented by relatives who filled the top posts in economic, military, and law-enforcement structures. They were distributed in the following way.<sup>31</sup> Adakhan Madumarov was torag of the Zhogorku Kenesh in 2007-2008, secretary of the Security Council in 2008-2009, and vice premier in 2005-2006. Marat Sultanov filled the posts of chairman of the National Bank between July 1994 and December 1998 and finance minister between January 1999 and July 1999, as well as from January 2009 to April 2010. From November 2009 to April 2010, Elmyrza Satybaldiev was the president's national security advisor; in April 2010, he was Public Prosecutor General; and between October 2006 and May 2008, he headed the State Security Service. Bakytbek Kalyev was defense minister between May 2008 and April 2010; in November 2005, the Zhogorku Kenesh appointed Kambaraly Kongantiev as public prosecutor general (he remained in this post until March 2007). His younger brother Moldomusa was minister of internal affairs between January 2008 and April 2010. In 1999-2005, under President Akaev, Marat Kayypov was a judge at the Constitutional Court, and from September 2005 to 2008, he was minister of justice. Between July 2006 and September 2008, the post of military prosecutor and deputy of the republic's Prosecutor General was filled by Nurlan Tursunkulov, who was later (in September 2008) appointed as minister of justice; he remained in this post until November 2009. Kamchybek Tashiev was minister of emergencies in 2007-2009; and Akhmatbek Keldibekov headed the state tax service under the government of Kyrgyzstan from October 2008 to November 2009. In fact, practically all posts in the presidential administration were filled with people from the south who worked hand in glove with the president and his family.

The northern elite was pushed aside: in April-June 2010, many of them lost the high posts to which they had been appointed in October/December 2009: Prime minister D. Usenov; Z. Kurmanov, Speaker of the Zhogorku Kenesh; A. Musaev, Minister of Education and Science since February 2009; M. Mambetov, Minister of Health Protection since December 2007; I. Aydaraliev, Minister of Agriculture; T. Turdumambetov, Minister of Public Property; and A. Ryskulova, Minister of Labor, Employment and Migration. The southern clan established its absolute hegemony in the corridors of power.

In 2009-2010, the southern elite strengthened its position; after the 2009 presidential election, its members climbed even higher up the pyramid of power.

By that time, the clan principle of distribution of power and property had exhausted its consolidating and stabilizing potential. Personal property, organizational skills, personal ties, kinship, and friends were gradually coming to the fore to eclipse ethnic origins and regional affinity. However, although the clan factor should not be overestimated, its importance should not be underestimated either. A. Dzhusupbekov pointed out that it was under President Bakiev that the so-called

<sup>30</sup> See: A. Pobedimov, "Bolshaia semeyka," available at [<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/589685>].

<sup>31</sup> See: "Kto est kto: statistika," available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/person.php>].

identity shift (belonging to the southern clans as a sign of high prestige) came to the fore<sup>32</sup>: many in the political elite suddenly discovered the southern roots of their family trees.

In April 2005, members of the northern and southern elites, Felix Kulov, Kurmanbek Bakiev, and Dzhemshbek Nazaraliev, began their presidential campaigns.<sup>33</sup> The sides reached a compromise: Bakiev from the south became president, while Kulov from the north received the post of prime minister.

Political and economic crises bared separatist sentiments and regional disintegration. In 2006–2007, for example, the northern opposition exacerbated the regional problems.<sup>34</sup> The clash between the elites made it absolutely clear that certain political circles were pursuing their interests at the expense of national interests; the northern opposition did not spare words when criticizing the southern president.

During its years of sovereignty and independence, Kyrgyzstan restored its culture, legalized traditionalism, and national identity, political and family clans in the republic being a byproduct.

As a result, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the clans moved to the center of domestic policy. Political-family clans set up to ensure political power and material wealth were allowed, with certain limitations, to rule the country. At the grass-roots level, clan leaders personified the whole range of ethnosocial values and interests. Under the Akaev and Bakiev families, the clans blended with state governance to become political-family clans; they relied on personal loyalty and dedication to oligarchic interests far removed from the interests of the ordinary people. The top political nomenklatura and big business guaranteed the stability of the presidential families, while patronage ties, nepotism, and corruption added stability to political clans. Ethnic, regional, and clan identities drawn into the game by those who sought and gained power gradually degenerated into ethno-regionalism and tribalism.

- While the clans of Akaev and Bakiev were cementing their inner solidarity, the influential families inside the clans squabbled over property and spheres of influence; the clans gradually disintegrated, which did nothing for the state of affairs in the country.
- In the post-Soviet period, likewise, the informal political institutions—political clans as a product of symbiosis of traditional feudal relations and the Soviet party-nomenklatura system—proved to be flexible enough in post-Soviet times.
- The clan system was growing stronger in a weakening state; this means that mutual assistance inside the clan became all-important; the interests of one ethnoregional identity or one of its groups, rather than the nation, were promoted and protected.
- Patronage networks and nepotism served as the foundation of the political-family clans; tribalism and the clan system revealed that corruption, nepotism, and kinship outweighed objective merits, making democratic development impossible.
- Reliance on clans endangered the state's stability and integrity; separatism and regionalism were on the rise. Under the first two presidents, the North-South disagreements became full blown and turned into a potential threat to the country's national and territorial unity.

<sup>32</sup> See: A.K. Dzhusupbekov, *Etnicheskaia identichnost nomadov*, Ilim, Bishkek, 2009, p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> See: K. Bakiev, "My s Kulovym ne ssorilis... Vozmozhno soiuз eshche slozhitsia" (Verbatim report of press conference of Acting President of Kyrgyzstan K. Bakiev in Moscow), available at [<http://www.centrasia.org/newsA.php4?st=1115699520>]; Dzh. Nazaraliev, "O samovydvizhenii," available at [<http://www.svoboda.org/programs/tw/2005/tw.042705.asp>].

<sup>34</sup> See: M. Omarov, "Tribalism kak zerkalo kyrgyzskoy politiki, ili Fenomen tribalizma u kyrgyzov," available at [<http://www.easttime.ru/analytic/1/4/202.html>].

- The family clans of both presidents gained enough political weight to stir regional opposition, the core of which was formed by prominent members of regional elites, into action.
- The political, social, and economic crisis caused marginalization of big population groups, intensified migration, and increased poverty. In fact, the country has come close to marginalization of its entire population; part of the nation came too close to the state of a crowd, a “monster of power,” a term used by sociologists to describe the behavior of depersonalized masses that destroy their present and future deliberately and recklessly.

There are several important points that make the events of 2005 and 2010 in Kyrgyzstan very different. In 2005, the opposition, which needed stability and therefore controlled the masses, avoided at least the worst outbursts of violence. In 2010, it was the masses that poured into the streets; the opposition leaders joined the process at the last stage. The street violence is explained by the fact that Bakiev’s clan reached the apex of power within a very short time and was much more consolidated than that of his predecessor’s. Personal devotion and the patronage system explain the fierce resistance put up by Bakiev’s clan.

The events of 2005 and 2010 were the product of the country’s internal problems: the economic crisis, the system of power based on family and clan ties, as well as the president’s personal power, which excluded true power of the people, and inefficient executive structures infected with excessive bureaucratization (interests of the bureaucracy rather than the interests the people) and corruption. This revived traditionalism and caused regional North-East identities to clash, which threatened the country’s continued existence as a unified state. Western influence in both crises was not that important. Rotation of the political elites, a natural and indispensable tool of state governance, acquired specific features in Kyrgyzstan and presupposed the use of force; the latest political technologies tested elsewhere in the post-Soviet space were used in Kyrgyzstan during the street riots. The April revolution of 2010 was a continuation of the March revolution of 2005, which had not resolved the problems that caused it in the first place and resurfaced in 2010.

Under Akaev and Bakiev, the clan system was set up and consolidated as one of the key tools of state governance.

## *Conclusion*

Throughout the history of the Kyrgyz people, the clan system developed as an integral social organism. All attempts to reform it at different stages of its development failed; all reforms designed to liquidate the clan and tribal identity of the Kyrgyz incorporated it into state governance.

In the nineteenth century, the clan system played a positive consolidating role. In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, when the country entered the period of industrialization and gained its sovereignty, the clan system became a negative phenomenon. It affected state governance: the post-Soviet political and family clans created wide and ramified patronage networks; they encouraged protectionism, nepotism, and corruption at the very top of the pyramid of power. The disturbances of 2005 and 2010 were stirred up by the rule of clans and patronage networks: at the turn of the twenty-first century, the traditional, classical clan degenerated into a clan system in the corridors of power.

- Clan and tribal relations, therefore, should be discussed as part of the historical memory of the Kyrgyz and kept apart from the system of state governance of contemporary Kyrgyzstan. The idea that clan and tribal relations are acceptable in the system of state governance

should be disavowed; the nation needs an industrial society and a state ruled by the law and national policy based on a commonly accepted system of political and civil values, that is, political ideology.

- It is necessary to study the history of the Kyrgyz in order to avoid falsifications and distortions of their cultural heritage.
  - Our historical experience has demonstrated that in sovereign Kyrgyzstan political-family clans created patronage systems, nepotism, and corruption, therefore, the regulatory-legal base of the state should be amended and extended, up to and including the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic on civil service, the status of judges, the Public Prosecutor office, and the investigatory committee to create an effective barrier to nepotism and rule out its negative effects.
-