

Why do sultanistic regimes arise and persist?

A Study of Government in the Republic of

Turkmenistan, 1992-2006

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This candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates why extreme forms of personal rule arise and endure in the contemporary international system. More particularly, it seeks to answer the puzzle of why the regime of President Saparmurat Niyazov (Turkmenbashi), in the Central Asian republic of Turkmenistan, has paradoxically proven to be one of the region's most stable states between 1992 and 2006, notwithstanding the fact that it is characterised by Niyazov's unchecked personal power, barely functional political institutions, endemic corruption and a pervasive cult of personality.

The study develops the theoretical approach most commonly applied to this type of regime and produces an original empirical study of a strategically important gas-rich state that has hitherto received almost no attention from the academic community. Specifically, the thesis engages with two theories of sultanistic regimes advanced in 1990 by H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz. The research findings demonstrate that, while the essential insights of the theories remain valid, they require careful revision and refinement if they are to successfully incorporate postcommunist regimes into their paradigm.

The project uses a mixture of interviews, field observation, and primary and secondary documents to answer the research problem. It finds that the structural legacies of the pre-Soviet and Soviet period, allied to a favourable strategic context, enabled Niyazov to secure power and sideline potential rivals. The thesis argues that a combination of different domestic control techniques, of which the cult of personality forms an essential part, has been deployed by Niyazov to maintain his position. Taken together, these techniques form a 'disciplinary-symbolic' nexus aimed at preventing the emergence of opposition groups, while simultaneously promoting Niyazov as the sole guarantor of national unity and prosperity. The thesis also explores popular responses to sultanism, concluding that Turkmen adopt a complex and contradictory web of personal strategies in their dealings with the regime, ranging from engagement, accommodation and indifference, through to covert resistance and outright opposition.

Finally, the thesis assesses the interaction between sultanistic regimes and external actors. It finds that, far from exposing rulers to greater pressure from the international community, the end of the Cold War actually increased the autonomy of many sultanistic rulers. No longer shackled by the disciplines of superpower patronage, most sultanistic rulers, including Niyazov, have been able to function with minimal constraints on their domestic behaviour.

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List of Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFP	Agence France Presse
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
bcm	billion cubic metres
BP	British Petroleum
CA-C	Central Asia – Center (gas pipeline)
CACO	Central Asian Cooperation Organisation
CARs	Central Asian Republics
CAU	Central Asian Unit (BBC Monitoring)
CDPSP	Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPD	Congress of People’s Deputies
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPTu.	Communist Party of Turkmenistan
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
DPT	Democratic Party of Turkmenistan
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organisation
EEC	European Economic Community
EIA	Energy Information Administration (US)
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EU	European Union
EurAsEC	Eurasian Economic Community

FERF	Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund
FSB	<i>Federal'naya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti</i>
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GW	Global Witness
HRC	Human Rights Centre
ICG	International Crisis Group
IFI	International Financial Institution
IHF	International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights
ILHR	International League for Human Rights
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Network of OCHA
IWPR	Institute of War and Peace Reporting
KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i>
KKK	Korpedze – Kurt-Kui (gas pipeline)
KNB	<i>Komitet Natsional'noi Bezopasnosti</i>
L-NE	Lexis-Nexis Executive
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MNS	Ministry of National Security (see KNB)
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCA	News Central Asia
NCIS	National Criminal Intelligence Service (UK)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPM	National Patriotic Movement

OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE)
OGDF	Oil and Gas Development Fund
OMRI	Open Media Research Institute
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSI TP	Open Society Institute Turkmenistan Project
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PDMT	People's Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan
RCA	Reporting Central Asia
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RMFA	Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs
SARF	State Agency for the Registration of Foreigners
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SFSR	Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SRT	Sultanistic Regime Theory
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TAP	Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline <i>or</i> Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline
TCA	Times of Central Asia
tem	trillion cubic metres
TDD	Turkmenistan Daily Digest
TF	Turkmenistan Foundation
THFHR	Turkmenistan Helsinki Federation for Human Rights
THI	Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative
TIHR	Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights
TOL	Transitions Online
TWNB	Turkmenistan Weekly News Brief

UDFT	United Democratic Forces of Turkmenistan
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USDSIIP	US Department of State International Information Program
USS	Union of Sovereign States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter One: Introduction

Outline and Aims of the Study

The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in December 1991 created fifteen new states, the subsequent political trajectories of which have since been substantively different. At one end of the spectrum, the Baltic republics of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia effected the transition to parliamentary democracy and the market economy fairly rapidly, and have been absorbed into Euro-Atlantic security and economic institutions. By contrast, the five Central Asian republics (CARs) have been characterised by political stagnation at best, and outright repression at worst. In the cases of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the political and cultural spaces opened by *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the late 1980s have been firmly closed, as former Communist Party bosses have moved to quell challenges to their rule from whatever quarter they may arise. Yet, while the office and the image of the presidency shape political life throughout the region, even in this context, the Republic of Turkmenistan is exceptional.

President Saparmurat Niyazov, renamed as Turkmenbashi ("Father of the Turkmen"), completely dominates formal political structures within the country¹. Previously First Secretary of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan (CPTu) during the Soviet era, Niyazov is President for life, Prime Minister, leader of the only legal political party, and Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. He also chairs the country's highest representative political organ, and has been known to intervene in the judicial process arbitrarily during Cabinet meetings and televised speeches. Niyazov personally negotiates all significant commercial contracts with state agencies and even decides the date on which cotton and grain, the country's principal agricultural crops, can be both sown and harvested, often with deleterious consequences.

There is very little continuity or stability within Niyazov's government. He has dismissed in excess of 130 Cabinet ministers in the period 1992 to 2006, many of whom have subsequently been imprisoned. Regional governors and other senior officials are rotated with similar frequency. Cabinet meetings are frequently shown live on national television, and often consist of Niyazov berating and humiliating his ministers in the

¹ Niyazov became known by the title Turkmenbashi in 1993, but is referred to as Niyazov throughout this thesis, apart from the citation of works where Saparmurat Turkmenbashi is specifically stated as the author.

most derogatory terms². In short, Niyazov governs in a highly idiosyncratic fashion without any discernible accountability or restraint.

In order to strengthen his control, a cult of personality has been constructed around Niyazov that pervades Turkmenistan's cultural life. His book *Ruhnama* ("Book of the Soul") is compulsory reading for all schoolchildren, university students and professional workers, and now must be studied instead of the Turkmen Highway Code by learner drivers. In March 2006, Niyazov suggested that those who read *Ruhnama* aloud for one hour every morning and evening would be more likely to go to heaven (IS 3). The Turkmen media is controlled entirely by the state and reports very little other than Niyazov's movements and pronouncements. Similarly, Niyazov issues frequent injunctions on the type of dress and personal appearance he considers acceptable (for example, commenting negatively on beards, men with long hair and women with gold teeth), which are then acted upon by his subordinates (TV First Channel, 23 February 2004 in TWNB, 20-26/02/04)³.

Niyazov's image and pronouncements litter the urban landscape of the capital Ashgabat, and are highly prominent in other cities, in the form of monuments, statues, slogans and portraits. Niyazov has renamed the days of the week and the months of the year after

² Niyazov's eccentric policy of hiring and firing officials is demonstrated by the dismissal of Suhanberdi Bayramov, the Head of the Hydrometeorology Committee of Turkmenistan, on 30 March 2004 for inaccurate weather forecasting, telling a Cabinet session on live television: "The meteorological service keeps giving all the same old weather forecasts every day. How is it possible to work that way? He [Bayramov] is cheating the state, the people. He said that it would be 29C yesterday but today he keeps repeating the same thing. However, there was no such heat. All of his weather forecasts are like that. You [Bayramov] are fired! How could you write a weather forecast like that? You said it was 29C yesterday and 29C today. Where is the heat? Where is yesterday's heat? All of your information was not up to scratch even before this. You said there will be no rain but it rains. You could not forecast the recent three days of rainfall saying that there would be no rain in the near future. What are you doing there working as a whole team? You are fired! Leave the session. Let his forecast at least be somehow realistic. It does not even come close to reality. There is a guy who graduated from the Hydrometeorology Institute of Leningrad [Saint Petersburg], from Birata [eastern Turkmenistan], appoint him. He is publishing a magazine. He tries to do his best - but you pay no attention to that" (Altyn Asyr television channel, BBC Monitoring Central Asian Unit (CAU), in Turkmenistan Weekly News Brief (TWNB), 26/03/04-01/04/04). Similar instances of unusual sanction abound. On 31 March 2001, Niyazov ordered his Deputy Minister for Energy and Industry Annaguly Dzhumaglydzhov to train for three months as an ordinary electrician to acquire a practical trade (Internet Source [IS] 1). Niyazov has also specified that newsreaders should wear no make-up on television because he found it impossible to tell apart men and women on national television (IS 2).

³ Students and public sector employees reportedly were refused entry to lectures and workplaces unless their gold teeth were removed (International War and Peace Reporting [IWPR] Reporting Central Asia [RCA] No. 279, 20 April 2004). Both Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and Benito Mussolini issued similar injunctions, in Mussolini's case dress, speech and greeting codes intensified after Achille Starace became Fascist Party Secretary in 1931 (Falasca-Zamponi: 1997, 110-113).

himself and prominent figures from Turkmen history. The cult of personality is manifested toponymically through the renaming of countless towns, cities, natural landmarks and man-made projects either after Niyazov, or those figures comprising the extended vocabulary of his cult. Niyazov has introduced numerous unusual public holidays, marked by choreographed spectacles and ritualised processions, which are then subsequently relayed on television for days and weeks afterwards. In short, Niyazov has seemingly built a state around his own image and predilections.

This project seeks to answer the puzzle of why the Niyazov regime, and others similarly characterised by their ruler's largely unchecked personal power, barely functional political institutions, weak civil society, and endemic corruption, initially arise, and why they are able to remain such a durable form of governance in the contemporary international system. In doing so, this study develops the theoretical approach most commonly applied to this type of regime and produces an original empirical study of the Republic of Turkmenistan.

In order to answer the research questions, I utilise the theoretical framework developed by H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz in their seminal study of Cold War sultanistic regimes (1998c). Their work has frequently been cited in comparative government or specific country studies (for example, Hague and Harrop: 2001, 31-46; Eke and Kuzio, 2000; Kahn: 2002, 189-234; Cummings and Ochs: 2001) but, with the exception of a series of articles on "durable authoritarianism" in the Middle East by Jason Brownlee (2002a, 2002b, 2004), has rarely been subject to sustained critical analysis. In order to achieve the objective of developing our understanding of sultanism, sultanistic regime theory (SRT) is interrogated, revised, and refitted for the contemporary political environment.

The empirical objective of the thesis relates to the chosen case study. Turkmenistan is arguably the least known of the former Soviet republics. To date, there has been no full-length published work or completed doctoral thesis in English on Turkmenistan's contemporary political system, virtually nothing of value in the Turkmen language, and only a very limited selection of useful materials in Russian⁴. Apart from Adrienne Edgar's monograph on early Soviet Turkmenistan (2004), there has been no recent satisfactory study of the Turkmen people or lands. As such, this project aims to make a

⁴ I collaborated with Dr Shokhrat Kadyrov in compiling the first full bibliography of English, Russian and Turkmen language materials on Turkmenistan for the Open Society Institute's Turkmenistan Project. I prepared the English language section, completed in spring 2005, which is available online at <http://www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/files/Bibliography.doc>.

substantial and original contribution to our knowledge of a country largely overlooked by scholars of all disciplines.

Such a study also has significant policy relevance. Turkmenistan shares substantial land borders with Uzbekistan, Iran and Afghanistan, three highly unstable and conflict-prone states. It lies at the heart of a volatile and complicated Eurasian regional security complex, of great strategic importance to Russia, China, the US and other regional actors. Moreover, Turkmenistan possesses the fourth largest reserves of natural gas of any state in the world, and oil reserves of considerable regional potential⁵. It is emerging as a world-class supplier of gas to East Asia, through the construction of new pipelines (ITAR-TASS, 17 January 2006 in TWNB, 13-19 January 2006), and to Europe via the Russian gas transit system. Finally, political and religious instability in the Fergana Valley, allied to gradual improvements in counter-narcotics capacities in northern Afghanistan, has led Afghan heroin traffickers to shift their attention to the largely unpoliced desert border with Turkmenistan. According to the US Government's 2006 Narcotics Control Strategy Report, "Turkmenistan remains a key transit country for the smuggling of narcotics and precursor chemicals" from Afghanistan to Europe, with "persisting reports that senior [government] officials are directly linked to the drug trade" (IS 6). 90% of heroin used in the UK can be sourced to Afghanistan (IS 7), and very little is known about the Turkmenistan-Caspian-Russia smuggling route into Europe.

Turkmenistan is therefore worthy of study both on its own terms, as a fascinating country with a unique desert culture, shaped by centuries of physical isolation, and for its emerging strategic and policy importance both within Central Asia and the wider region.

⁵ Accurate data on recoverable oil and gas reserves is difficult to obtain, and varies according to source. The estimate given in the BP Statistical Review of World Energy (June 2005) of 2.9 trillion cubic metres (tcm) of natural gas, or 2.9% of global reserves is almost certainly an underestimate, made because of the failure of the Turkmen government to publish verifiable data on the extent of its reserves (2005: 20). This is not unusual in the states of the former Soviet Union (FSU), which regard data on energy reserves as an issue of national security. Nevertheless, the chairman of the Turkmen state agency for geological analysis did release a declaration on oil and gas reserves on 14 November 2005 (IS 4) that stated recoverable natural gas reserves at 20.415 tcm or approximately 10% of global reserves, behind only Russia, Iran and Qatar. Given the gap between Qatar, the third highest proven reserve holders (25.78 tcm) and Saudi Arabia, the highest next highest proven reserve holder (6.75 tcm) by BP's estimates, it is likely that Turkmenistan falls in between and thus ranks fourth. VNIIGaz of Russia's estimate of 7.84 tcm would confirm this approach (Skagen: 1997, 6). A similar discrepancy exists between BP's very conservative estimate of Turkmen oil reserves at 500,000 barrels (2005: 4) and the 14 November 2005 Turkmen declaration (see reference above) of 171 billion barrels. The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) steers a middle course, estimating 1.7 billion barrels proven and a further 38 billion barrels possible, which would put Turkmenistan in the same potential production league as Mexico and Brazil once offshore reserves are developed (IS 5).

The relationship between the theoretical approach and the case study is intended to be symbiotic. Careful analysis of the Turkmen case will assist in the reworking, development and refinement of the SRT framework which, in turn, will develop our understanding of Turkmenistan's transition from outlying Soviet republic to independent nation-state.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows: in the next section, the three dominant theoretical approaches to the study of post-communist political behaviour are examined to consider how they might contribute to our understanding of post-Soviet Turkmenistan's political trajectory. Although retaining considerable value in their own right, none are considered to be appropriate for either the particular case study or objectives of this project. The following section critically examines regime theory as an alternative theoretical approach. Situating SRT within this literature, the case is made, firstly, for identifying this type of regime as a distinct sub-type and, thereafter, for adopting this theoretical framework for the project. The fourth part of this chapter elaborates on the rationale for the selection of Turkmenistan as the project's case study. The penultimate section explains the methodological orientation of the study, research design and techniques selected, and the sources utilised. The final section sets out the structure of the remainder of the thesis.

Explaining Political Change and Behaviour in Post-Communist states⁶

The theoretical approach chosen stemmed from dissatisfaction with prevailing explanations of Turkmenistan's political trajectory after 1992. Prior to developing our analysis, it is worth reflecting on why these frameworks, despite their value in other contexts, were not considered appropriate for this project.

The relatively sudden collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of a new Eurasian political and security architecture, attracted considerable attention from comparative political theorists. As a consequence, several theoretical perspectives have been operationalised in an attempt to explain the processes of regime collapse and subsequent consolidation, and transition to the market economy. The three most commonly used approaches can be categorised as transition theory (or transitology), theories of empire

⁶ I am grateful to Dr. Neil Melvin for helping to frame my thinking on explanations of post-communist political change.

and nationalism, and theories of political culture: transition theory emphasises the role of contingency and human agency, while theories of empire and political culture fall within the “prerequisites” school that privileges historical, path-dependent constraints on political behaviour (Rustow: 1970, 346-361; Posusney: 2005, 3). Nevertheless, these competing approaches are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and scholars have argued for the integration of elements of each perspective in order to develop a synthetic analysis (Mahoney and Snyder: 1999). While transition theory has undoubtedly proven to be the most widely employed conceptual framework, none of the approaches has found anywhere near complete acceptance among scholars. For this project, it is contended that, while each has explanatory value, none provides a suitable theoretical framework to explain regime behaviour in post-Soviet Turkmenistan.

(i) Transition theory:

Although transition theory has gained great currency among scholars of post-communism, an examination of its claims and flaws reveals it to be an unsuitable conceptual platform for this project. Transition theory deploys concepts and insights developed by comparative political theorists analysing the processes of regime change in Latin America and Southern Europe during the 1960s and 1970s. The central component of transition theory is its privileging of contingent factors above structural processes as critical drivers of regime change. Thus, while structural conditions at most delimited the possibilities of transition, they did not explain the determinants of democratisation (Przeworski: 1986, 48). Instead, the role of elite actors was emphasised, both in effecting regime change and in crafting new institutions. In empirical terms, transition theorists focused on the interactions of regime reformists (“softliners”), the military, and moderate opposition elements as the “craftsmen” of democratisation in Brazil, Peru, Uruguay and other Latin American states, and then in Greece (in 1973), Portugal (in 1974) and Spain (in 1975) (O’Donnell and Schmitter: 1986; O’Donnell *et al.*: 1986).

Despite the often forcefully expressed misgivings of area specialists (Terry: 1993; Bunce: 1995a; 1995b; 1995c), the transition approach has retained considerable currency in the CEE cases, and can be regarded as the dominant paradigm for analysing post-communist regime change (Bova: 1991; King: 2000; McFaul: 2002). From an early stage, transitologists were alive to the dangers of “conceptual stretching” in applying universalistic principles to cross-regional and cross-temporal comparisons of regime change. Schmitter and Karl also recognised that there were significant differences in the

timing, sequencing and modes of transition between the Latin American and the CEE/FSU cases (1994, 175). The withdrawal from power of the military juntas was exercised in a more choreographed, but ultimately less complete fashion, than the abrupt ruptures of political elites that characterised the Eastern European revolutions of 1989. Moreover, Schmitter and Karl concede that the process of successor regime consolidation in CEE has been, in many cases, lengthier and ultimately less conclusive than in the earlier cases (1994, 173-185).

Notwithstanding these differences, Schmitter and Karl argued, firstly, that regions were cultural constructs and that there was no inherent barrier to cross-regional comparison (1995: 967-968). More specifically, they identified notable cross-regional similarities in the process of regime transition. These included the “diffusion” or “demonstration” effect of regime transitions generating political upheaval in neighbouring states; the generally peaceful, pacted transitions in CEE/FSU states from what were soft authoritarian/weak post-totalitarian regimes by the late 1980s; the important role played by international institutions in both cases (for example, Spain and Portugal’s relatively swift admission to NATO and the EEC) to “pull” states towards democratisation and civilian control of the military; and, most importantly, the fact that the CEE regimes transited definitively towards democracy (Karl and Schmitter: 1995, 973-976).

Although the insights of transitologists do have considerable analytical value, principally in tracing modes and patterns of regime breakdown and reconsolidation, there are both general and specific objections to their use as a theoretical perspective for the study of Turkmenistan. As Terry (1993) and Bunce (1995a; 1995b; 1995c) have pointed out, the sheer number and diversity of post-communist states in CEE/FSU precludes generalisable conclusions. Each of the 27 states involved followed different post-communist trajectories, ranging from swift absorption in to Europe’s largest economy in the case of the German Democratic Republic, to a protracted, clan-based civil war in rural, mountainous Tajikistan. Intra-regional comparisons were difficult enough without attempting to trace a monolithic transition path that could be compared to Latin America and Southern Europe. Moreover, the focus on elite pacting and contingency risked marginalising important structural and historical factors, such as earlier forms of political organisation, patterns of social stratification and economic development, and, crucially, differentials in the type of regimes from which the post-communist states were transiting.

Moreover, whereas the earlier cases all had pre-existing capitalist economies and the process of transition was exclusively political, the post-communist states were also faced

with the simultaneous task of transition to market economies and, in several cases, of actually defining the borders of their states and formulating new national identities. As Carothers notes, transition theory has assumed that democratisation was being constructed upon coherent, functioning states, when this was by no means always the case (2002: 8). Moreover, post-communist states were more industrialised and had inherited much more substantial state welfare provision than their Latin American counterparts, which would shape political expectations, priorities and trajectories. They were also far more ethnically heterogeneous than their Luso-Hispanic counterparts which, in turn, engendered specific challenges of assimilation and, in some cases (such as Moldova, Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh), civil and military conflict. The physical borders in the earlier cases were by and large settled, and so the question of “stateness” was less germane than in post-communist cases.

The profile of civil society was also at variance. The Catholic Church and trade unions could be significant political players in Luso-Hispanic democratic transitions. With the exception of Poland, the role of these institutions in Eastern Europe was marginal. While civil society undoubtedly existed within communist states (either above or underground), associational life was defined, in many cases, by its relationship (good or bad) with the state, and its contribution to the overthrow of the communist order was markedly different.

Specific factors also complicate the application of this framework to Central Asia, and Turkmenistan, in particular. Firstly, the focus of transitions research has predominantly been on CEE states. In effect, transitologists have sometimes self-selected their samples by declining to investigate seriously the more “difficult” cases further east. Thus, detailed analysis of post-communist institutional formation in Central Asia has largely been left to area specialists. Secondly, the lack of attention to “stateness” and nationalism misses the important nationalising role of political elites. Thirdly, transitions theory has made sweeping assumptions on the destinations of postcommunist regimes. As James Hughes has observed:

Transition studies are a rather loose embodiment of political science approaches and ideas about the nature of political and economic development. A transition is defined broadly as the interlude between one regime and another. The common thread uniting the diverse transition approaches is a central assumption that the historical experience of transformation from authoritarianism to democracy, and

the emergence of capitalism in the states of Western Europe and North America in the eighteenth century, provides generalisable lessons and an analytical framework for understanding and promoting similar processes of change and outcomes in other states. The basic premise is self-evidently normative and linear (2000: 21).

In the case of the Central Asian states, these assumptions simply cannot hold up, given their post-Soviet political trajectories. Political freedoms have declined in at least three out of five Central Asian states since the late Soviet era. In Turkmenistan's case the dissonance between the transitions paradigm and political reality is even starker.

Finally, transitions literature tells little about how postcommunist regimes develop, operate, reproduce authority, and endure. In other words, it does not address a central component of the study, which is to discover the reasons for the seemingly paradoxical survival and durability of the Niyazov regime. There is, therefore, a fatal shortage of scope in the literature for this project. Nevertheless, transitions literature has yielded important insights into the way in which agential factors can influence transition outcomes. Moreover, cross-regional comparison, when used sensitively and carefully, is a valid analytical tool which can do much to develop both theoretical and empirical insight. However, the range of variables involved in comparing such a large number of states undergoing diverse transition paths from very different types of regimes to very different destinations means that analytical depth has sometimes been sacrificed in the process.

(ii) Theories of post-imperialism

The second theoretical approach examined was the literature that frames the collapse of the Soviet Union as a breakdown of empire, engendering post-imperial legacies similar to those that have afflicted sub-Saharan Africa. Central to this approach is the contentious assumption that the Soviet Union was, firstly, an empire and, secondly, in some way analogous to that of earlier twentieth century European empires. Thus, according to Kolars, "Communism was a tool enabling Russia to resist successfully that liquidation of colonialism carried out elsewhere in the world" (quoted in Beissinger: 1995, 149).

The first assumption to be examined is whether the Soviet Union can be properly classified as an empire, and whether Turkmenistan can be appropriately analysed within that paradigm. It is beyond the scope of this study to address this question fully.

Nevertheless, the balance of modern scholarship, based on newly opened Soviet archives in the outlying republics, has increasingly turned to the view that it did have particular characteristics of an empire, but that there were huge differences in the mode of governance, “colonial practices,” and nationalities policy with other modern empires (Michaels: 2000; Slezkine 2000; Martin: 2001; Northrop: 2000; 2004).

The Soviet leadership’s anti-imperialist rhetoric required it to establish political structures that gave the non-Russian Soviet republics at least the nominal appearance of having joined the Soviet Union voluntarily. According to Suny (1993), it was the filling out of these “empty capillaries” with real political meaning during the systemic crisis of the late Soviet era that provided the platform and a rationale for rising ethnic consciousness and nationalism. Thus, by promoting indigenous cadres, transferring resources to the periphery rather than to the metropole as previous imperial powers had done, and by framing the political organisation of state and society in terms of ethnic identity in order to forestall accusations of imperialism, the Soviet elite inadvertently created the instruments of its own demise⁷.

This perspective has fed into explanations of post-Soviet political behaviour, not least because of the continuing discourse of empire within the FSU. Russia is perceived by other former Soviet states as having imperial designs, exemplified in the pressure applied to Ukraine, the Baltic and the Caucasian states in particular, over ethnic Russian citizenship issues, military basing rights, peacekeeping operations, and hydrocarbon extraction and transit disputes. As Beissinger argues, perceptions matter and do have an impact on policy (1995: 150). The terms of political debate in Russia have also contributed to this discourse. At one level, right-wing Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovskiy has called for the re-establishment of Russian hegemony across the former Soviet space. At another level, the influential oligarch Anatoly Chubais advocates the creation of a “liberal empire”, through the acquisition of strategic industries in the FSU states. Recent indications are that Chubais’ vision is being realised as Gazprom, Vimpel, Unified Energy System (UES), Rosneft, Rusal, Alrosa and other Russian energy and industrial giants gain control over power networks, oil and gas reserves, telecommunications, metals, construction, mining and chemical sectors throughout the FSU states, often in exchange for state debt write-offs.

⁷ Soviet passports, for example, categorised holders according to ethnicity. Ethno-territorialism threw up some extremely complex border demarcations. The small, mountainous Republic of Adygeya sat as an enclave within Krasnodar krai, itself part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) of the Soviet Union. There are seven ethnic enclaves in the Fergana Valley that persist, and have given rise to numerous low-level border conflicts.

Looking at the challenges faced by post-Soviet states through a post-colonial lens does yield some important insights, in that it brings to centre stage the issues of nationalism and ethnicity, and deep-rooted structural legacies of external domination that will prove to be of value for this project. Nevertheless, such explanations can be interpreted as somewhat narrow in range, particularly for an empirical study of Turkmenistan.

Firstly, to classify the Soviet Union as an empire, at least in the orthodox sense, may be somewhat misleading. For much of the Soviet period, certainly before the discovery of natural gas reserves in Turkmenistan, Moscow expended considerable energy and expense in building an administrative, economic and educational infrastructure in the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), and in developing its cultural identity, most notably through the standardisation of the Turkmen language.

Secondly, the emphasis on the rise of nationalism, meticulously charted by Beissinger (2002), tends to obscure many other significant factors in the breakdown of the Soviet system, not least the gradual slowdown of the Soviet economy, and the inherent contradiction engendered by Gorbachev's attempt to liberalise the political system, while still retaining a hegemonic role for Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) structures. The post-colonial approach also downplays wider processes of economic and social change in post-Soviet Central Asia, and the influence of extra-regional factors such as external state actors (Turkey, the US, Iran) or Islam.

Thirdly, the Turkmen SSR was notable for the almost complete *absence* of nationalist sentiment during *glasnost* and for its determined attempt to retain its political relationship with Moscow. Unlike most other Soviet republics, for example in the Caucasus and Baltic regions, the CPTu did not face a significant struggle to combat influential nationalist caucuses both inside and outside of Party structures. As a consequence, Turkmenistan's experience does not tie in with central assumptions of the post-colonial approach.

Fourthly, the predominantly structural approach in theories of imperialism downplays the role of contingent factors, such as the choices made by significant political actors, in the same way that the transitions approach does not generally accord sufficient weight to structural factors. A more integrative approach, proposed by Long (2002), and Posusney (2005), is required that produces a more rounded analysis, allowing for the self-conscious

deployment of structural resources by political actors, whose behaviour, in turn, is modified by changing environments (Mahoney and Snyder: 1999, 25).

Finally, theories of post-imperialism do not say enough about subsequent regime trajectories or durability: Their principal focus instead is on the process of decolonisation, the struggles against the metropole, rather than any systematic study of its consequences. The central question of this project is to understand not only how and why sultanistic regimes arise, but also why they persist.

Thus, while there is much of value, both empirically and methodologically, within the post-imperial/historical framework, the emphasis on structural constraints it imposes means that it is best suited as a contributory component to the conceptual ordering of the project, rather than as its theoretical platform.

(iii) Political Culture

Theorists of political culture frame post-Soviet political dynamics principally in terms of the continuity of public and elite values, and of institutions, actors and policies within longstanding socio-political traditions. Thus, Broken (1996) and Shlapentokh (1996; 2001) have argued that post-Soviet Russia retains features of early feudalism, pre-Revolutionary authority relations, and Soviet political practices. Richard Pipes has argued that the “totalitarian” origins of the Soviet Union lay in Russia’s national culture (1990). More recently, an analogy can be made with Daniel Goldhagen’s controversially rooting of the Holocaust within a German tradition of anti-Semitism (1996),⁸ while Huntington has sought to explain political conflict between Western democracies and Muslims as a clash of civilisational cultures (1997). In the post-Soviet states, political continuity and engrained habits of political domination and psychological passivity are emphasised in culturalist accounts (Holmes: 1996, 26). Data on post-Soviet political attitudes is gained through surveys of public and elite opinion, and these are interpreted within a predominantly historical framework (Hahn: 1995, 112-136).

The culturalist approach was not considered appropriate for this project for a number of generic and specific epistemological and methodological reasons. Firstly, political culture as an analytical tool is notoriously subjective and amorphous. It evades precise definition, and is therefore difficult to isolate as a variable. Secondly, assigning a set of cultural

⁸ As Hay (2002: 97-100) has pointed out, this paradoxically absolves, at least partially, individual or group perpetrators of atrocities from responsibility in the Holocaust.

values to any state or nation is dangerously imprecise. It is extremely difficult to identify anything approaching universally held values within any society. Thirdly, political culture is a rather static explanatory tool. People change their attitudes, learn new ways of thinking, and develop their consciousness. Political culture explanations capture past rather than emerging agendas. Finally, culturalist explanations tend to overlook the interplay of political, economic and social factors. Early culturalist arguments, for example, emphasised the incompatibility of Catholicism and democracy in Spain without considering the range of other factors giving rise to the Franco regime (Linz: 2000, 18). More recent studies have posited the incompatibility of Islam or Confucianism with democracy (Huntington: 1991, 72-85), despite contrary examples such as Turkey, Indonesia or Japan, or the positive participation of Muslims in democracies around the world.

Aside from these *a priori* concerns, there are also specific objections to a purely culturalist analysis within the context of this study. Firstly, it is unclear how popular elite values either influence policy or attitudes within Turkmenistan given that state and society is almost entirely disconnected, and that there are minimal outlets for its manifestation or expression. Even during the Soviet period, letter-writing was a form of sanctioned feedback for the CPSU, and “tolerated feuds” could occur within the academic establishment through journals and conferences (Barghoorn: 1973, 53-70). None of this is now acceptable in Turkmenistan. Secondly, it is difficult to envisage how we can actually measure the claims made by political culture theorists in Turkmenistan. It would not be methodologically feasible to conduct formal surveys of either elite or popular values in Turkmenistan. Attempting to interview respondents without building up some form prior relationship, or at least confidence, would incur considerable suspicion and fear. It is also likely to result in almost immediate detention by the Turkmen authorities. Thus, not only is the data received likely to be distorted or compromised, the process of data collection itself would be hazardous to the researcher.

Therefore, although theories of political culture can make an important contribution to our understanding of continuities and legacies from the pre-Soviet and Soviet eras, most notably in forms of political symbolism and the design of institutional structures used as instruments of regime legitimation, they do not carry the breadth or precision necessary to sustain a detailed treatment of regime behaviour⁹.

⁹ An example of the usefulness of political culture explanations in the Soviet context is the investigation of the messages, rituals and symbolism of revolutionary iconography, cinema and

Regime Theory

Although the approaches previously outlined all contribute to our understanding of post-Soviet political dynamics, they do not capture or explain significant and peculiar facets of the Niyazov regime – specifically, the emergence of a strongly personalist character to the regime, the conversion of functioning public institutions inherited from the Soviet system into instruments of personal power, Turkmenistan's deliberate disengagement from interaction with regional partners and international institutions and, most importantly, the paradoxical durability of the regime, notwithstanding its manifold dysfunctional characteristics.

While other members of the CPSU *nomenklatura* adroitly donned the mantle of nationalism following the Soviet collapse, and some, such as Heidar Aliyev in Azerbaijan and Imomali Rakhmonov in Tajikistan, attempted to project themselves as the embodiment of their new republics as part of an exaggerated nation-building posture, none has gone remotely as far as Niyazov in actively trying to reshape the social and political dynamics of the state so extensively in their own image.

To answer the Turkmen puzzle, this study has turned to theories of non-democratic regimes and, in particular, the SRT framework, which emanated from earlier seminal studies of totalitarianism and authoritarianism authored by Linz during the 1970s. Before we focus more closely on the work of Chehabi and Linz, however, it is worth situating sultanism within the wider theoretical literature on non-democratic regimes.

Although no overarching theories of non-democratic governance have gained wide currency (Brooker: 2000, 7), particular sub-types of such regimes have been the subject of sustained theoretical development. The most widely accepted distinction between non-democratic regime types is that between totalitarian and authoritarian systems, although the difference between the two may not always be as complete as theorists allow.

(i) Totalitarianism

The principal characteristic of a totalitarian system is its aspiration, and capacity, to mobilise its subjects, usually through the medium of a single, exclusionary party headed by a charismatic leader-figure, in order to participate in the attainment of the regime's

art, in order to obtain a sense of the image of itself that the Soviet regime was attempting to project (Bonnell: 1994; 1997).

transformational goals. Although totalitarianism was described in 1952 by Hannah Arendt, writing in the aftermath of Nazi Germany and at the apotheosis of High Stalinism, as “permanent domination of each single individual in each and every sphere of life” (quoted in Brooker: 2000, 8), recent research on the Third Reich in Germany (Housden: 1996) and on the Soviet Union (Fitzpatrick: 2001; Merridale: 2000; Petrone: 2000) attests that, even at the height of Nazi power and Stalinist repression in the late 1930s, ordinary individuals maintained a private, and sometimes thriving, social life away from the eyes of the state.

Under totalitarian conditions society was, to some extent, atomised, and “lonely” people often built social connections through the regime’s own “civil society” structures, forming a kind of pseudo-community (Thompson: 2002, 82). Nevertheless, the extent to which this strategy shaped everyday life was clearly not total. Arendt also privileged the role of terror as a core constituent of totalitarian power; however, more recent theorists, including Linz, have argued that, while terror may have been inflicted by totalitarian regimes, it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of their existence, given that some totalitarian regimes were able to function without consistent mass repression, and even with a substantial degree of popular support (Linz: 2000, 101).

Although Arendt’s classification of totalitarianism has enjoyed enduring popular and journalistic resonance, scholarly literature on totalitarianism has moved on. Three distinct strands of analysis have developed, most accurately summarised as the political science-structural typology, the historic-generic version, and totalitarianism as a socio-religious phenomenon. Space does not permit an extended critique of these typologies, but they do provide an important backcloth to the subsequent framework of SRT, not least because Linz emerged as such an influential theorist within this paradigm.

The political science-structural typology of totalitarianism was initially developed by Friedrich and Brzezinski who identified six traits common to totalitarian regimes: an overarching ideology; a single party; a terror police; a monopoly on communications; a monopoly on weapons; and a centrally directed economy, all married and interwoven with a seventh characteristic, a mythical and heroic leader figure (1965). Schapiro later added in to this formula the capacity to mobilise society (1972). However, Friedrich and Brzezinski were exiles from both Stalin and Hitler. Their vested interest lay in nesting two essentially different regimes together in order to influence US foreign policy towards the Soviet Union during periods of intense Cold War confrontation. Moreover, their definition is static - it fails to explain persuasively, for example, how the Soviet Union

evolved during its existence. Important elements of Stalinist rule were not congruous with that of either Lenin or Brezhnev, much less Khrushchev or Gorbachev.

The second strand of totalitarian regime classification is the historical-generic version advanced by Ernst Nolte, Richard Shorten and others, which argues that totalitarianism can be viewed as a response to structural conflicts and crises in specific societies facing an abrupt transition to modernity. Totalitarianism therefore results from a form of anomie brought about by rapid and dislocating economic change. It comes to embody a promise, and “consists in a once and for all event which represents a solution, however irrational, to unresolved problems of mass, industrial society” and, as such, it is “an outgrowth of modernity rather than the simple antithesis of liberal democracy” (Shorten: 2002, 25). From this perspective, totalitarian regimes are not a type as such, but rather as an “experience” or “deviation”, attempting to bring into existence a utopia in which a new man is created (Nolte: 1998, 109-127). Although capturing the dynamic element of totalitarian regimes, this approach fails to account for their gradual institutionalisation. It would, therefore, appear to be more suited to descriptions of Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy, wherein the system could not outlive its leader, than the Soviet Union, where it did.

Thirdly, totalitarianism has been categorised as a socio-religious phenomenon geared to mobilising and, in the process, transforming individuals in the pursuit of a utopian model of society (Girginov: 2004, 28). In this analysis, Marxism-Leninism is presented as a form of political religion combining a sacral and political monopoly of belief and power, in which an intelligentsia longs for an inner-worldly salvation brought about by the utopian design of a revolutionary community, and the creation of a socialist paradise (Riegel: 2005, 97-126). While this approach can quite effectively capture some of the cultural manifestations of totalitarianism – its rites, iconography, cults of personality, and use of certain practices such as confessions at show trials – it overlooks entirely the deeper political and economic processes that give rise to, and sustain, such regimes.

Linz essentially drew from, and substantively developed, the political science perspective, firstly to liberate analysis of totalitarian regimes from the ideological reflexes of the Cold War and, secondly, to account for regime evolution by introducing a more sophisticated typological agenda. He stressed three crucial characteristics of totalitarianism: (i) a monistic, but not monolithic, centre of power, in which whatever pluralism exists is mediated through, or derives its legitimacy from, the centre, usually through the form of an exclusionary ruling party; (ii) an exclusive, autonomous ideology beyond a specific political programme, that encompasses some ultimate meaning, sense

of purpose, or interpretation of social reality; (iii) the encouragement, demand and reward of active citizen participation in collective social tasks that are channelled through either a party or monopolistic secondary groups, in which passive obedience or apathy are considered undesirable (2000: 70). Thus, although totalitarian regimes can and do commit acts of terror and widescale coercion, the unique feature of totalitarian episodes, according to Linz, is that these are ideologically driven and justified by a “law of the revolution” that supersedes legal-rational norms.

Linz, along with Stepan, further significantly refined his typology by introducing the concept of post-totalitarianism to describe those “post-Thaw” CEE states in which a charismatic, all-powerful leader had been replaced by a collective bureaucratic leadership, guarding against the re-emergence of a single, dominating figure. According to Linz and Stepan (1996: 42), post-totalitarian regimes were signified by the persistence of outward forms of a totalitarian society, the formal hegemony of the Party and the continuation of political ritual, but where informal pluralism - a second, “shadow” culture that allowed privatisation of individual space - had emerged. Consequently, while the guiding ideology of the state was still formally intact, participation was increasingly perfunctory, with tendencies of duplicity, boredom, cynicism and withdrawal increasingly common.

Therefore, Linz persuasively restates the case for totalitarianism to be retained as a political concept, but within a more refined and less ideologically charged framework, much more capable of tracing the changing coordinates and patterns of authority relations within the regimes in question.

(ii) Authoritarianism

In an early, influential essay critically analysing the regime of General Francisco Franco in Spain, Linz formulated the now classical definition of authoritarianism:

Political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without either extensive nor intensive political mobilisation, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones (quoted in Linz: 2000, 159).

Essentially, Linz is distinguishing totalitarianism from regimes in which the ideological/mobilisational dimension is either not formally translated into policy, is much weaker, or is entirely absent (Linz: 2000, 129-139; Brooker: 2000, 163; Thomas: 1984); these often stable systems he describes as authoritarian.

Brooker has developed this notion by identifying three broad types of authoritarian regime: party-based, military, and personalist (2000: 36-58). Party-based authoritarianism may originate in revolutionary or mass "movement-regimes" of the kind that characterises early post-colonial governance in Africa (a typical example being Zanu-PF in Zimbabwe), they may be exclusionary in nature such as the National Party in apartheid era South Africa, or they may simply be entrenched in power for decades, as was the Institutional Revolution Party (PRI) in Mexico between 1929 and 2000.

Different typologies of authoritarian military rule have been developed by Perlmutter (1981), Nordlinger (1977) and Huntington (1967) among others. Such regimes can be categorised as having three broad sets of governing functions (the contemporary examples are my own): firstly, the military acting as direct ruler with ambitious reach across society, exemplified in Myanmar; secondly, the military as arbiter, moderator or guardian of a particular ideological path (such as secularism in Turkey) or ruler (for example, President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela); thirdly, what Huntington, drawing on the post-war history of Latin America, calls the "praetorian society" in which middle-ranking officers stage coups to promote, and later protect, the interests of middle-class nationalists as opposed to oligarchic elites represented by the senior officer corps.

The third form of authoritarian rule can be defined as personalist. Weber contrasted traditional or charismatic rule, where legitimacy is derived principally from the position or qualities of the leader, with "legal-rational" forms of governance, in which the ruling system can function impersonally, independent of the preferences and personality of its chief executive (Brooker: 2000, 52).

Linz further classified personal rulership into four distinct sub-categories (Linz: 2000, 143-157). Oligarchic democracy is used to describe the blend between traditional and modern authority structures found in the Maghreb (particularly Morocco and Tunisia), and in South East Asia (notably Thailand and Malaysia), in which strong, traditional authority figures, usually monarchs, are effectively buttressed by economic underdevelopment and an unmobilised population who, nevertheless, enjoy a range of

circumscribed civil liberties, and are able to elect partially democratic political institutions as a weak and often temporary counterweight to executive power.

The second group of personal regimes is described as *caudillismo* rule, found in Central and Latin America, and essentially consisting of rule by armed patrons, usually large landowners and nobles, whose authority is based on social ties of kinship and clientelism, in which the ruler would appear to provide a measure of security, conditional upon loyalty to him and his group. Linz observed such trends in Latin American military dictatorships and, although *caudillismo* rule is generally underinstitutionalised and characterised by violence, it can sustain relatively stable links with business, foreign governments and social forces, particularly the commercial middle classes, for significant periods (Linz: 2000, 156).

Caciquismo forms of rulership can be distinguished from *caudillismo* by virtue of the vertical links rulers have with local bosses or “chiefdoms”. It thus stands as a more heterogeneous set of patron-client relationships in which centrally based political figures are connected through a chain of vertical interlocking patronage interlocking networks to the local “machine” boss or *caciques*. These political arrangements have formed the political infrastructure of many Luso-Hispanic states (Linz: 2000, 156), and appear to mirror political arrangements in Sicily and Calabria (Catanzano: 1992).

The fourth subcategory of personal rulership adapted by Linz from Max Weber’s early typological breakdown of regime is described as sultanistic, a form of rule characterised by distinctive origins, manifestations and trajectories, and, unlike *caudillismo* and *caciquismo*, found across diverse regions and cultures.

(iii) Terminological and Historiographical Issues in Sultanistic Regime Theory

It is important at the outset of the study to clarify our use of the word sultanism. Given that sultanism invariably carries negative connotations of arbitrary, kleptocratic, bizarre and often brutal forms of governance when applied to recent or contemporary regimes, there is a danger that its usage may be perceived as orientalist or anti-Islamic. As Chehabi and Linz are at pains to note (1998a, 6), and I reiterate, no such intention is meant. The term was originally coined by Max Weber in the 1920s. Although Weber may well have had in mind certain Middle Eastern rulers when constructing the regime typology, he also applied the term “sultanistic” to rulers in China, which indicates that he did not intend the

usage to be specific to any region. In the period since Linz revived the term in 1975 for his seminal study, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (2nd ed. 2000), it has been used to describe regimes in states as geographically and culturally diverse as Nicaragua, Haiti, Central African Republic, Zaire, Belarus, Romania, Iran, Libya and the Philippines. In this sense, sultanism as a term of political analysis appears to have outgrown any regional associations it might once have (weakly) had. Finally, unlike the caliphate, a sultanate was a secular office carrying no specific religious connotation.

Chehabi and Linz formulated SRT from the earlier work of Linz on authoritarian regimes (1990; 2000), and a workshop of leading scholars convened by Samuel Huntington at the Center for International Affairs, Harvard University in June 1990. The workshop was planned and held at a point at which the bipolar international system was in the throes of breakdown, yet the contours of the post-communist political order were still unknown. The focus of SRT case studies was, understandably, on authoritarian regimes that were used as Cold War proxies to further the regional ambitions of the US and, to a lesser extent, the USSR. Several longstanding sultanistic rulers in formerly strategically sensitive regions of Central America, Africa and the Middle East found that their style and practices of authoritarian governance, which had been either overlooked, or even encouraged by their erstwhile superpower patrons during the struggle for global ideological supremacy, were now unacceptable to an international community that was holding to account regimes failing observe minimum standards of human rights and political pluralism. Accordingly, the *context* of SRT development was one of great ideological fluidity, but its *content* was innately reflective and historical. An important task of this project is retune SRT into a very different geopolitical environment to that which prevailed at its formulation.

(iv) What are Sultanistic Regimes?

Although a full critique of SRT will be undertaken in the following chapter, establishing the characteristics of sultanistic regimes at the outset of the thesis has value in introducing the regime type, and establishing the parameters of the thesis. Building on the earlier work of Linz on presidential systems (Linz: 1990), and on Alfred Stepan's theoretical insights into differential revolutionary or democratic outcomes of regime change (Stepan: 1986), Chehabi and Linz recognised that there existed vast structural differences between authoritarian regimes (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 6). They developed their analysis of sultanistic behaviour, therefore, to describe a system in which a predictable pattern of governance is subverted and even dismantled by the personal, arbitrary decisions of rulers, who feel they have no need to justify their preferences,

either on ideological or policy grounds. The broad initial definition of this regime type was adapted from Weber's path-breaking *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, written in the mid-1920s. Weber defined a sultanistic system as one in which:

Traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely personal instruments of the master...where domination is primarily traditional... it will be called patrimonial authority; where indeed it operates primarily on the basis of discretion it will be called sultanism. Sometimes it appears that sultanism is completely unrestrained by tradition, but this is never in fact the case. The non-traditional element is not, however, rationalised in impersonal terms, but consists only in an extreme development of the ruler's discretion. It is this which distinguishes it from every form of rational authority (1978, 231-232).

Using Weber's broad definition, Linz and Chehabi firstly enumerated the manifestations, characteristics and bases of sultanistic regimes – essentially a typological snapshot of a “typical” sultanistic regime, in order to create a theory of sultanism. They then developed a second theory, which essentially sought to encapsulate a teleological perspective, to explain the structural preconditions for sultanistic regime development, and account for their subsequent trajectories and patterns of regime breakdown. A supplementary theoretical chapter authored by Richard Snyder sought to combine structural and voluntarist perspectives to explain how both domestic and external political actors interact to negotiate paths out of sultanistic regime situations.

Absence of legal-rational norms: According to Linz and Chehabi, the central characteristic of a sultanistic regime is the absence, or erosion through time, of legal-rational norms of governance (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 7-17). The ruler exerts power with minimal restraint, through a matrix of fear and rewards. Accordingly, administrative and bureaucratic rules are disregarded or subverted by the imposition of arbitrary personal decisions. The career paths of staff in the civil service, state enterprises and armed forces, for example, are not determined by a set of abstract criteria that would lead to promotion on professional merit. Instead, the sultanistic ruler hires and fires staff on a personal whim, or on the basis of family connections.

Government officials are frequently rotated or dismissed to prevent the emergence of alternative power bases. Sultanistic rulers, such as President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and Mohammed Reza Shah Pahlavi in

Iran, did periodically bring in technocratic expertise to reorganise and streamline state structures. However, the principal purpose of this exercise was to extract foreign credits and aid from international lending institutions and, once these had been secured, the ruler effectively subverted or ignored International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank strictures by introducing sufficient exceptions so as to render the plans meaningless.

Similarly, Jean-Claude Duvalier (“Baby Doc”) brought in a number of technocrats to “impress the United States” but within “...a short time... he had dismissed a number of them, some due to his wife’s objections, and others because they actually intended to fulfil the assignment” (Green in Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 12). Ministers are frequently rotated, dismissed and reinstated in sultanistic regimes on the whim of the ruler, with Mobutu and Duvalier having a particularly high turnover of officials.

Nepotism and Corruption: The subversion of legal-rational norms is also manifested by a fusion of state and regime, specifically in the dispensation of privileges and favours. Thus, the regime is invariably endemically corrupt. Family members are placed in key political positions, the wives of such rulers often exert an inordinate influence on policy, and there is frequently a dynastic element to the regime, with sons especially playing a prominent, and often destructive, role in the political arena. Imelda Marcos, Elena Ceausescu, and both Simone Ovide Duvalier and Michele Bennett, married respectively to Francois and Jean-Claude Duvalier, all forged “conjugal dictatorships”, politically dominating their husbands to an increasing degree as their regimes eroded (Thompson: 1995; Behr: 1991, 139-142; Nicholls: 1998, 159).

As in Haiti, where Jean-Claude Duvalier succeeded his father François in 1971, there were dynastic successions in Nicaragua, where Anastasio Somoza Garcia was succeeded by his sons Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle in 1956, in North Korea, where Kim Jong Il followed Kim Il Sung in 1994 and, most recently in February 2005, when President Gnassingbe Eyadema, who ruled Togo for 39 years as a personal dictatorship, was succeeded by his son, Faure Gnassingbe, in direct contravention of the succession arrangements in the Togolese constitution.

However, there has, as yet, been no successful dynastic transition to a third generation. The sons of first generation sultanistic rulers are, almost without exception, political liabilities. Having been born into privilege, they lack the political cunning of their fathers and, in the cases of Tommy Suharto, Nicu Ceausescu, Marko Milosevic, Uday and Qusay Hussian, among several others, squander both the resources and political capital their fathers acquire. By contrast, most first generation sultanistic rulers emanate from

socially marginal backgrounds which, for them, are a frequent source of insecurity and embarrassment. Leaders such as the Duvaliers, Fulgençio Batista of Cuba, President Omar Bongo in Gabon, Reza Shah and Anastasio Somoza Garcia all “married up” to acquire legitimacy, to co-opt the support of traditional elites, and to access wealth and business connections (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 17).

The nepotism of the regimes is reflected in the corrupt activities of the wider families (Hartlyn: 1998, 95). Reza Shah’s twin sister, Princess Ashraf, had “a near legendary reputation for financial corruption,” as did her son (Katouzian: 1998, 199). Jean-Bedel Bokassa, President (and later self-designated Emperor) of the Central African Republic, allowed his wife and mistress to operate monopoly concessions on the manufacture and supply of school uniforms, which led to a rebellion by schoolchildren in April 1979, resulting in over 100 deaths (Decalo: 1989, 8). The close relatives of Ferdinand Marcos controlled customs and taxation bureaus, the Central Bank, the Medicare Commission, and even Marcos’ aged mother headed the monopoly supplying rice and corn (Thompson: 1998, 221). Among contemporary sultanistic regimes, Ali and Pascaline Bongo are Defence and Foreign Ministers respectively under their father, who has ruled Gabon continuously since 1967, and President Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo of Equatorial Guinea, the nephew of President Francisco Nguema, served as head of the presidential administration before seizing the presidency by overthrowing and executing his uncle in 1979.

Constitutional Hypocrisy: If the extended family represents the core political “unit” of the sultanistic ruler, the official political arrangements of sultanistic states are characterised by what Linz and Chehabi term as “constitutional hypocrisy” (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 17). Formal political parties may exist but they are normally devoid of content or function. The opposition Martom party, for instance, existed only on paper in Reza Shah’s Iran (Katouzian: 1998, 193). The programmes and policies of these phantom parties are essentially designed to provide a fig leaf of pluralism for external consumption and, as such, are simply instruments of the regime (Hartlyn: 1998, 94). The formal political arrangements of sultanistic states frequently embody the use of earlier constitutions or representative bodies to produce a façade of democracy but, in reality, the regime remains securely in control of the political process, manipulating the outcomes of elections and referendums (if, indeed, they are held at all) to enhance its legitimacy (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 17; Booth: 1998, 141). Linz and Chehabi also note that some rulers exercise the “politics of understudy” (*politique de doublure*) by not always adopting formal positions of power. Kim Jong Il, Manuel Noriega in Panama, the

Somozas, and Trujillo, all preferred not to occupy the post of formal head of state (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 17; Buzo: 1999).

The relationship between rulers and other public institutions can be problematic. Although, as has been noted, rulers might utilise the services of external technocrats to modernise and streamline the state sector, where the regular military has a tradition of autonomy and professionalism, and a defined career structure, it may present a significant problem to sultanistic rulers. In these instances, the military is either subject to close political control, or else marginalised. Instead, paramilitary forces, such as the Duvaliers' feared Tontons Macoute in Haiti, the security services and a personally loyal presidential guard, often function as a parallel set of security institutions (Nicholls: 1998, 164-165). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the armed forces frequently occupy the crucial interstices of power between opposition forces and the ruler should the regime begin to break down (Booth: 1998, 148; Thompson: 1998, 226-229).

Personalist traits: The cultural dimension of sultanistic regimes invariably revolves around glorification of the ruler. According to Chehabi and Linz, the most prominent manifestations of this trait are the tendencies of sultanistic leaders to acquire or invent titles, and to construct a pseudo-ideology of self-justification (1998a, 14-15). Thus, Reza Shah became *Aryamehr* ("Light of the Aryans"), Ceausescu was named *Conducator*, Idi Amin awarded himself a CBE ("Conqueror of the British Empire"), and Bokassa proclaimed himself Emperor. Texts attributed to Reza Shah, Mobutu, Ceausescu and Marcos all became required reading in schools and universities. National movements and official ideologies, such as Francois Duvalier's *noirisme*, the *Jamahiriyya* regime of Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi, and Mobutu's *authenticité* were created as exaggerated state-building projects. Sultanistic leaders have also left their mark through toponyms, naming cities after themselves, such as Ciudad Trujillo and Duvalierville, and natural landmarks, notably Lake Idi Amin and Macias Nguema Island.

In sum, sultanism has been identified by Chehabi and Linz, and adopted by other comparative political theorists, as a distinctive sub-type of authoritarianism in which the ruler acquires and exercises more or less unchecked power, governs with scant regard for legal-rational norms, subverts or remodels pre-existing political and security institutions for his short-term political interests, operates the state treasury as his own and his family's private exchequer, and constructs around himself a pseudo-ideological framework, to justify his policies, predilections and prejudices.

Chehabi and Linz stress that no regime can conform to an “ideal-type” in all its manifestations. However, as a discrete categorisation of a subset of authoritarianism, there is a sufficiently distinctive set of common traits to warrant further investigation and study. It is true that sultanism is exceptional, but that should not preclude systematic investigation. The study of exceptional and unusual cases allows us to probe the limits of “normal” cases and the logic that governs them. It provides greater contextualisation for the study of orthodox authoritarian governance, generates new research questions, and may reveal a larger universe or pattern of exceptions than has hitherto been realised, that in itself may be worthy of further examination (Schatz: 2004, 112).

(v) Sultanistic Regimes as a Distinct Sub-Type

Given the traits outlined above, it is important to pin down how and why the rule of a sultanistic leader including Niyazov differs from that of earlier totalitarian leaders, particularly Stalin, with whom Niyazov is most commonly compared (Kleveman: 2003; IS 8). Superficially, there are similarities. In fact, a favourite adjective used to describe Niyazov’s rule among journalists and regional specialists alike is “Stalinist”. In both cases, the style of governance is arbitrary. Rule is by fear or coercion (more so under Stalin it would seem), although favours are sometimes surprisingly dispensed. Unlike Hitler who, apart from specific military operations and urban planning, was often uninterested in policy detail, both Niyazov and Stalin immerse themselves in the minutiae of state affairs, including cultural policy.

Both Stalin and Niyazov’s worldview is one in which nature provides a *tabula rasa* for domination, exploitation and modification. For example, Stalin used Gulag inmates to build the huge and largely unused Stalin White Sea Canal (Applebaum: 2004), great store was given to making the Far North habitable (Widdis: 2003, 219-240; McCannon: 2004, 241-260), Moscow was substantively redesigned (far more so than Hitler’s Berlin) pursuant to a plan personally approved by Stalin in July 1935 (Overly: 2004, 223), and Stalin’s architectural ambitions were manifested in the unbuilt Palace of the Soviets (Hoisington: 2003, 41-68) and the enormous domestic housing experiments such as the Narkomfin Communal Complex in Moscow (Buchli: 2000, 99-135). Niyazov shares this gigantomania, transforming the urban landscape of Ashgabat with miles of fountains, parks, monuments, statues and kitsch buildings. Niyazov insisted on the completion of the Karakum canal despite its disastrous effects on the ecology of the Aral Sea. A huge

reservoir in the Karakum desert, one of the hottest places on earth, is under construction (IS 9).

Similarly, extensive cults of personality have been constructed around both men, manifested in texts, rites, parades, slogans and portraits. An argument advanced later in this study is that Niyazov has consciously appropriated many of the appurtenances, instruments and iconography of Stalinism into his own regime, possibly as a result of peculiarities in his own upbringing¹⁰.

Yet, despite these similarities in the *manifestations* of their rule, which might suggest that Niyazov is more appropriately studied as a totalitarian, there remain crucial distinctions with Stalinism in the regime's *content* that disqualify Niyazov and other sultanistic leaders from categorisation under this rubric. As a preliminary comment, although Linz disqualified terror as a necessary condition of totalitarianism, he did point out that it was a feature of many totalitarian regimes at some point in their existence. It is worth noting therefore that Niyazov has never resorted to the sort of mass terror that characterised Stalinism (regardless of whether it was personally authorised by Stalin [Fitzpatrick: 2000]).

Taking the characteristics of sultanistic regime behaviour set out above, it is clear that such systems differ substantively from both totalitarianism and other strands of authoritarianism in several fundamental respects. Firstly, sultanistic regimes do not possess the crucial mobilisational element or ideological dimension characterising totalitarian societies, most notably Stalin's Soviet Union, Nazi Germany and Mao's China. In a sultanistic regime, the "heroic" leader-figure embodied by, say, Hitler or Mao, is not present, nor is he backed by a powerful party that aims to transform society. This is certainly the case in Turkmenistan, where the only legal political party is effectively a shell. For a sultanistic ruler, by contrast, mere obedience is sufficient. Sultanistic regimes are therefore more likely to be characterised by a flattened political landscape and an absent or severely diminished civil society, than a party state of an orthodox authoritarian hue might be.

Secondly, sultanistic regimes are singularly dependent on the personal network surrounding the leader, comprised principally of close and extended family and trusted acolytes, such as bodyguards and drivers drawn from the leader's personal retinue. This

¹⁰ For recent, illuminating discussions on the cult of Stalinism see Ennker (2004a; 2004b) and, more generally, Plamper and Heller (2004).

network is instrumental both politically and economically in fusing state and regime, through their appointments to formal positions within government bureaucracy and their control over lucrative monopolies and trading concessions. In authoritarian systems based on military junta, party rule or revolutionary “movement-regimes”, such overt nepotism is either absent or much weaker, and in totalitarian states, the party has an autonomous structure and rationale set apart from the leader.

Thirdly, a sultanistic ruler’s relationship with state institutions is much more problematic, particularly in societies where a pre-existing tradition of professional autonomy in government bureaucracy or the armed forces. The regime’s penetration within both government and public institutions is much more uneven than under either totalitarian regimes or those linked to the military. They therefore represent a potential threat that must either be eliminated through continual purges and rotation of staff, or sidelined and bypassed by the creation of parastatal institutions such as a powerful presidential guard loyal to the ruler, or a shadow presidential administration that carries informal authority above the state bureaucracy.

Fourthly, sultanistic regimes lack the predictability of authoritarian governments where power is diffused among a ruling oligarchy, the military or party structures. The caprice and whim of the ruler becomes an important calculation in domestic politics, as the ruler becomes less constrained by legal-rational norms. Inevitably such traits then impact on the coherence of the policy field itself, with frequently contradictory and confusing results.

To summarise, Chehabi and Linz viably identify, within the various strands of non-democratic governance, the distinct characteristics of a particular sub-type of regime. They stress that while no regime can completely conform to an “ideal-type” in all its manifestations, there do appear to be common traits across cultures, regions and time spans to warrant a discrete categorisation of a sultanistic subset of authoritarianism, worthy of further investigation.

(vi) The case for using Sultanistic Regime Theory

What, then, is the specific case for using SRT in this particular study? Firstly, SRT provides a valid macrostructural framework, albeit in need of some renovation and development, to explain the emergence of extreme personalist systems of governance. Although SRT underplays the agential element in the formation of sultanistic regimes (an omission addressed in this thesis), partly understandable by the general nature of the

theory, it does provide a workable set of preconditions for the emergence of a discrete strand of extreme personalistic rule.

Secondly, SRT captures the principal characteristics of extreme forms of patrimonial behaviour quite effectively, and convincingly makes the case for a distinctive sub-type of regime nested within the totalitarian/authoritarian regime classification. Unlike the other theoretical approaches, it actively engages with the influence of external factors on domestic political outcomes. It also draws out the centrality and implications of the rejection of legal-rational norms and the imposition of a “fear and rewards” culture within domestic politics.

Thirdly, SRT offers an explanation for regime trajectories – how sultanism develops, regresses and disintegrates. Although SRT omits to analyse how those subjected to this type of governance respond to, or resist, sultanistic rule, SRT does capture effectively the process of regime collapse *in those cases where sultanism has collapsed*. It therefore offers an opportunity to build into the theoretical framework those cases, of which Turkmenistan is one, where the regime has proven to be durable.

Finally, SRT makes cross-regional and cross-temporal comparisons that invigorate and extend theoretical enquiry. In order for successful comparative political analysis to be conducted, a detailed appreciation of dynamics within each country is required. In other words, comparative theory is dependent on area studies specialisms. This project fits in with this paradigm. By developing what was an essentially reflective and historical theoretical framework into the contemporary post-communist context, supplemented by a detailed case study of intrinsic empirical value, the project aims to expand the data set and, by doing so, contribute to the development of comparative political theory generally, and regime theory more specifically.

In sum, SRT has many of the elements missing from alternative explanations of post-communist transition in Central Asia. It is situated within an established regime theory literature, captures the critical elements of regime behaviour effectively, and utilises sophisticated cross-regional and cross-temporal comparisons without undue conceptual stretching. It is therefore well-suited for adaptation to post-Soviet regime dynamics, both as an empirical analytical tool, and as a means to reinvigorate and develop the theoretical framework itself.

(vii) Case Selection: Why Turkmenistan?

There were several candidates for a possible case study of the sultanistic regime type among the FSU states, including the regime of President Alexander Lukashenka in Belarus, Azerbaijan under the late President Heidar Aliyev, President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, and President Imomali Rakhmonov in Tajikistan. A dual or triple country analysis within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) between two of Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, was considered. However, it was rejected both on the grounds of feasibility (it was difficult enough to conduct fieldwork on one country), and because the principal aim of the project was to test a case study in order to develop the theoretical framework, rather than to undertake a regional comparative study of the processes of transition or systems of governance between former Soviet states. Accordingly, it is intended that the in-depth, intrinsic, single case study (Silverman: 2000, 111-112) can be extrapolated cross-regionally and even cross-temporally, rather than compartmentalised into a transitological paradigm.

In terms of the parameters of the study, Turkmenistan was a good fit. To begin with, it has the most developed sultanistic traits of all of the regimes, illustrated by the examples of Niyazov's behaviour and policies provided at the start of the chapter. On a personal level, I had gained fairly substantial prior knowledge of the country through independent and business travel, previous postgraduate focus on Central Asia, and by working as a political analyst covering Central Asia for a business risk consultancy.

In relation to the chosen theoretical framework, the current regime came to power in its present form after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union (and thus after the symposium that substantively developed SRT). The regime of Saparmurat Niyazov is not, therefore, a Cold War "holdout" of the sort that persists in sub-Saharan Africa or the Maghreb, and so is also an intriguing test of sultanism emerging within a post-communist and post-Cold War context. Furthermore, prior to incorporation into the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan had no prior history of independent statehood and still retains very strong tribal allegiances, which frequently overlay nationalist loyalties. Since independence, Turkmenistan has pursued a policy of permanent neutrality and disengagement from regional security institutions and economic integration mechanisms. As a case study, therefore, it tests several of the

structural conditions for sultanism analysed in the following chapter pertaining to pre-existing state cohesion, persistent crises of sovereignty, and external interference.

Finally, Turkmenistan's economy is also highly dependent on revenues derived from the export of hydrocarbons. Natural gas accounts for approximately 70%, and crude oil and petrochemical products a further 23%, of the country's entire export earnings (IS 10). Turkmenistan is therefore a classic rentier economy of the type my hypothesis suggests are associated with sultanistic regimes. In sum, the Turkmen case appears to accord closely with the typology established by Chehabi and Linz, and fits well with the broader objectives of the thesis.

Methodological Orientation and Research Techniques

It was decided at an early stage that the most appropriate methodological orientation for the project would be to conduct qualitative research based on unstructured interviews and field observation, supplemented by analysis of official documents, domestic and foreign news sources, analytical reports, and a range of other secondary data. Given the subject matter of the thesis and restrictions on conducting fieldwork in Turkmenistan, quantitative methods were not deemed to be either practical or appropriate for the overall research strategy. Preparing questionnaires and conducting surveys on the opinions of Turkmen towards the regime was out of the question. Turkmenistan is ranked 165th out of 167 countries in the Worldwide Press Freedom Index 2005 prepared by Reporters Without Borders, above only Eritrea and North Korea (IS 11), and is designated as one of the world's least free states by Freedom House, scoring seven (the highest possible mark) for limitations on both political rights and civil liberties (IS 12).

Access to the country would have been refused had notice been given of an intention to do survey work. Alternatively, attempting to conduct surveys without official permission would have undoubtedly resulted in not only my detention, but almost certain interrogation and punishment for any survey respondents¹¹.

(i) Interviews

The decision to conduct unstructured interviews was determined by several factors. Firstly, I did not want to "close off" the interview at the outset by restricting the

¹¹ A Swedish colleague, conducting quantitative research on the social legacy of "closed" cities in the much less restricted environment of northern Kazakhstan in 2001, was investigated by the local security services in Ust-Kamenogorsk, detained for several days in prison, and had the entirety of his research notes confiscated.

information that I was seeking. Unstructured interviews often provide a richer array of data by encompassing issues that do not initially occur to the interviewer (Burgess: 1984, 102). Secondly, I was conscious of the need to build trust with the interviewees, several of whom were very cautious about the process, fearing potential repercussions should knowledge of our discussion reach the Turkmen authorities. Accordingly, my questions were as flexible and conversational as possible in order to allow an opportunity for interviewees to relax, and offer uninterrupted responses in their own manner and time-frame. Thirdly, in accordance with the methodological literature on interview techniques, I was conscious of allowing interviewees to develop their own chronology in order that a free-flowing, comprehensive, clear and contextualised picture of their understanding of events and processes could be developed (May: 1993, 101; Gray: 2003, 107-125). Sequential interviewing was particularly useful for the two interviews with respondents recently granted asylum status in the UK, both of whom were somewhat traumatised and alienated in their new surroundings (Interviews 1 and 22).

The decision to undertake a small number of elite interviews with those artists, architects and sculptors responsible for the creation of the visible symbols of Niyazov's cult of personality was motivated by the rare opportunity to acquire knowledge on the secretive commissioning process, and to seek to understand how and why they became "court artists," and what their feelings were about Niyazov's regime. The value of elite interviews has been well-documented in the methodological literature (Ethridge: 1990, 193; Richards: 1996, 200-201; Devine: 2002, 208-215), but there are also drawbacks to this approach, notably the difficulties in gaining access to the respondents, the more practised and skilled "closing down" of questioning that is perceived to be hostile, and the self-serving and hence unreliable responses of interviewees keen to either claim credit or shift the blame on particular issues. The interview data acquired in this manner has therefore been interpreted and used in a reflexive and cautious manner (Ekinsmyth: 2002, 184).

Almost all published studies of sultanistic regimes using in-country field interviews have been completed retrospectively, after the ruler has died or been deposed. The reasons for the limited number of contemporaneous sources on sultanistic regimes became apparent as I began planning fieldwork in Turkmenistan. The country is effectively closed to foreign visitors, apart from a small number of tourist and essential business visas granted each year. All letters of invitation are subject to approval from the State Agency for the Registration of Foreigners (SARF). Having been granted two business and two tourist visas by SARF (probably because of the very low numbers of tourists to Turkmenistan), I

faced the problem of contacting interviewees, maintaining confidentiality in the interview process and obtaining permission for internal travel. I was able to enjoy freedom of movement in the capital city of Ashgabat without an official minder. I had obtained initial contacts in the city beforehand with the assistance of an academic and diplomatic network based outside the country, and these interviews provided the basis for the first set of data. Telephone lines in Turkmenistan and Internet activity are subject to close monitoring by the authorities. The hotels in which I was staying were equipped with listening devices, and a member of the *Komitet Natsionalnoi Bezopastnosti* (KNB)¹², the country's internal security service, was assigned to follow me covertly, although they were often not particularly competent or discreet in their work. The utmost care was therefore taken in arranging and conducting interviews, and all fieldwork notes were coded.

Travelling outside Ashgabat city limits was not permitted without a guide appointed by an approved travel agency. Fortunately, the guide I was assigned was an ethnic Russian with no ties to the regime and who operated on the margins of legality¹³. He had little interest in monitoring my activities, and I was therefore accorded latitude in meeting with local residents in the places where we stayed. In four separate research visits, I was based in Ashgabat but also stayed in Mary, Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk) on the Caspian Sea coast, Balkanabat (formerly Nebit Dag), Nokhur (a remote tribal village at the Iranian border in the Kopet Dag mountains), and in the settlements of Erbent and Darvasa in the centre of the Karakum desert. Given the strong regional and tribal identities in Turkmenistan, it was important to visit and undertake interviews in a diverse number of locations in order to obtain an urban-rural, ethnic, tribal and geographical balance of respondents. Niyazov's home region is in the Ahal region, which includes Ashgabat. Travelling to other parts of the country was useful from the perspective of field observation in that it allowed me to gauge, to some degree, the reach and penetration of the cult of personality surrounding Niyazov. This, in turn, sheds light on both the scope of the government's ambitions and the cult's target audience.

With the exception of meetings held with official national sculptors and architects, it was not possible to conduct interviews with Turkmen government officials. All interviews with Turkmen citizens in Turkmenistan were conducted without official permission and, in most cases, undertaken covertly. As noted above, two dissidents from Turkmenistan,

¹² The KNB is still known by this title throughout the country, despite being officially renamed as the Ministry of National Security (MNS) by the government in 2002. The KNB is the successor of the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB), the State Security Committee of the USSR.

¹³ For more details, see the biography of Interviewee 24.

who fled the country following their involvement in the November 2002 coup attempt, and were subsequently granted political asylum in the UK, were also traced and interviewed in depth¹⁴. Finally, a handful of interviews were conducted with foreigners who have had considerable experience of living and working in Turkmenistan. Information on the dates and locations of all the interviews used, and the biographies and ethnicities of the interviewees, is given in the Appendices Three and Four.

(ii) Field Observation

Field observation is a research technique more associated with the disciplines of anthropology, ethnomethodology and critical geography than political science (Shurmer-Smith: 2002). However, it was considered the most appropriate method for understanding manifestations of the cult of personality, embodied in the processes of urban regeneration for monumental construction, the formulation of a hegemonic national political memory (Etkind: 2004, 40), and the relationship between politics and public sculpture, official ritual and national symbolism (Fowkes: 2004; 2002, 65; Kertzner: 1988, 175; Benton: 2004b). Field observation was used on all four research trips: in 2002 and 2003 to observe the rush of new memorial complexes constructed in and around Ashgabat, including at Kipchak, Niyazov's birthplace; in November 2004 to observe the destruction of residential areas in Keshi and central Ashgabat to make way for new memorial complexes and projects; and in May 2005 to observe the remembrance ceremonies and celebrations in Ashgabat for the 60th anniversary of victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Field observation proved to be an interesting and instructive method of charting the modulations in Niyazov's cult of personality. To take one example, at the observation level near the top of the Arch of Neutrality, Ashgabat's tallest monument, I recorded the entire urban landscape of Ashgabat in a series of photographs in October 2002 and

¹⁴ Gunmen opened fire on Niyazov's motorcade on the morning of 25 November 2002 as it travelled from Niyazov's country residence to the presidential palace. Niyazov had gained intelligence of the plot and was not travelling with the motorcade. Following an intensive four week manhunt, former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov, believed to have been in exile, was arrested in Turkmenistan and charged with organising the coup. It transpired that Shikhmuradov had been in contact with the US embassy and had sheltered in the Uzbek embassy for several days after the incident. Turkmen agents raided the embassy, searched diplomatic cars and bags, and interrogated embassy staff in breach of diplomatic protocol. The details of the plot have never been definitively established, with some analysts claiming that it may have been fabricated as a pretext to arrest potential opponents. The interviews conducted with those associated with the incident (Interviews 1 and 22), alongside analysis of textual sources, indicate that the coup attempt was genuine. The mass arrests and alleged torture of family members of those allegedly involved that followed triggered the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism, for the first and only time since 1993, to investigate alleged human rights abuses.

November 2004. Comparing the two records in montage revealed striking differences in the number of portraits of Niyazov visible across the city on each set of photographs, which corroborated evidence from interviews and other sources of the evolving symbolism and vocabulary of the cult of personality. This and other examples convinced me that undertaking an interdisciplinary research topic requires a researcher to adopt similarly flexible interdisciplinary research methods.

(iii) Textual Sources

The Turkmen government publishes only a very small quantity of official documentation, and even this is not openly available. For example, despite extensive research, only a handful of the country's official laws and official decrees could be located. The national archives are closed to all foreign scholars and are used by a handful of approved local researchers, loyal to the regime. The academic establishment in Turkmenistan has been decimated since 1991. The Turkmen Academy of Sciences was closed in December 1997, and several universities and individual faculties have either been abolished or reorganised since 1993. An indication of this is the decline in the number of students in higher education from approximately 40,000 in 1994 to 3,500 in 2004 (IS 13). There are no research institutes pursuing projects independent of government, and the media is under close state control.

All national television news programmes and newspapers focus almost exclusively on the daily activities of Niyazov, and there is very limited reporting of either domestic or international news. One of my research visits coincided with the Al Qaeda bombing of a Bali nightclub on 12 October 2002. This event received almost no coverage in the official media. Similarly, several murders in the southern city of Mary during June and July 2005, believed to be the work of a serial killer, went entirely unreported in the Turkmen official media, leading to the proliferation of rumours and panic in the city (IWPR RCA 401, 4 August 2005).

Consequently, a patchwork of source materials has been used in order to construct a systematic picture of how Niyazov's regime operates. In addition to fieldwork interviews and official data, the texts of Niyazov's speeches, published either in *Miras*, the country's only academic journal of note, or on the official website have been studied¹⁵. Turkmenistan is highly unusual in that there appears to be no *samizdat* material

¹⁵ <http://www.turkmenistan.gov.tm>.

circulating, at least not any that has come into the possession of foreigners. Checks were carried out with Turkmen nationals based both within and outside the country, and with sources from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but they also had no record of internally produced dissident documents, other than anti-Niyazov leaflets once placed in residential mailboxes overnight (THI Bulletin: 12 August 2004).

The most comprehensive source of official data and analysis on the country is the Turkmenistan Weekly News Brief (TWNB) published by the Open Society Institute Turkmenistan Project (OSI TP). TWNB collects and reprints domestic and international news stories from official and unofficial domestic and foreign media sources in a weekly bulletin. Every bulletin of TWNB has been carefully analysed since its inception in February 2003. The principal sources used before (and after) this date include the Turkmenistan Daily Digest (TDD), Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Turkmen Service (RFE/RL TS) and the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (CDPSP). Every RFE/RL TS weekly bulletin published since 1997 has been scrutinised.

There are inherent dangers in relying on these source materials. The OSI was founded by the billionaire financier and currency speculator George Soros with a defined political mission which “aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, legal, and social reform...and build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses” (IS 14). The OSI has either been refused entry or ejected from all the Central Asian states apart from Kazakhstan, where it is subject to close government scrutiny.

Similarly, RFE/RL is funded by US Congress, and has operated in various forms since 1949, firstly as an instrument of propaganda warfare against the Soviet regime, and latterly as a vehicle to spread democratic values across the FSU. The self-proclaimed mission of RFE/RL is “to promote democratic values and institutions by disseminating factual information and ideas... based on democracy and free-market economies” (IS 15).

Notwithstanding these qualifications, both TWNB and RFE/RL TS do report to a high standard and, in the case of the former, reprint without comment domestic sources on internal developments. Nevertheless, in case of selection bias on the part of the editors of these publications, I have supplemented and cross-checked their publication with weekly reviews of the CDPSP, the News Central Asia (NCA) agency, and the Lexis-Nexis Executive (L-NE) and Factiva news databases. International institutions such as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe Office for Democratic Institutions

and Human Rights (OSCE ODIHR), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the IMF, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) provided data on human rights issues and economic performance. Finally, I refer to reports and bulletins prepared by a variety of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as International Crisis Group (ICG), International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), Turkmen Initiative for Human Rights (TIHR), Memorial Human Rights Centre (Memorial HRC), Institute for War Peace Reporting (IWPR) Reporting Central Asia (RCA) service, Transitions Online (TOL), Turkmenistan Helsinki Initiative (THI), and items on opposition websites such as Gundogar (<http://www.gundogar.org>), Watan (<http://www.watan.ru>), and Dogry Yol (<http://www.dogryyol.com/eng/>). Accordingly, as complete a data set as possible has been assembled in the time available, covering political, economic, social and cultural developments in Turkmenistan since 1991.

Thesis Structure

The remainder of the thesis comprises six substantive chapters and the conclusion. Chapter two examines the theoretical framework used for the project in greater depth. The central argument advanced is that, while SRT provides some important clues for scholars seeking to explain the emergence of sultanistic behaviour, the causal analysis is substantively underdeveloped, both in the lack of attention paid to the (potentially) pivotal role of agency in effecting transition to sultanism, and also in their explanation of the structural basis of sultanism. The chapter interrogates the bases of sultanism with more rigour, and then goes on to consider the function and manifestation of power more abstractedly in order that we can identify explanations for the longevity of such regimes.

Chapter three explores the structural conditions that facilitated the development of sultanism in Turkmenistan. Through historical analysis of the Turkmen peoples and lands, it locates several core factors linked to the traditional political and social order, patterns of economic development and the experience of external control under the Soviet system, which go some way to explaining how Niyazov was able to accumulate power, and the techniques and motifs he has deployed to maintain his position. The chapter takes care to link the Turkmen case with comparative societies and with the theoretical framework.

Chapter four focuses down on the specific political ascent of Niyazov, and the political and policy choices made by both himself and the Soviet elite at critical junctures in the breakdown of the Soviet Union. It is argued that these help to explain how Niyazov was

able to sideline opponents and mould the new political order according to his particular conception of power and democracy. However, the chapter argues that power cannot be located in sultanistic societies purely through analysis of formal institutions. Accordingly, the chapter seeks to map some of the informal power networks that both sustain and threaten Niyazov's hegemony.

Chapter five considers the techniques employed by the regime to exercise and reproduce power. It is argued that Niyazov uses three specific techniques - coercion, patronage and cultic symbolism – which, when combined, create a “disciplinary-symbolic” complex of power. In particular, the chapter considers how the cult of personality surrounding Niyazov is used to manipulate and activate space, symbols, texts and memory in support of the regime.

The purpose of chapter six is to develop the theoretical framework substantively by looking at the complex and contradictory responses sultanism in Turkmenistan has engendered. Arguing that SRT's “top down” approach to looking at the regime misses out on important nuances of sultanistic rule, it suggests that the range of responses and typology of resistance that regime provokes is a significant factor in the Niyazov regime's paradoxical durability.

Chapter seven places the Niyazov regime within an international context. It seeks to understand how the regime has successfully managed to avoid being subject either to sustained pressure from an external patron, or to severe international censure. The principal argument advanced is that Niyazov's strategy of disengagement, neutrality and pursuit of carefully circumscribed functional bilateral relations with specific partners, has paid dividends in effectively keeping him off the radar screen of the international community. The empirical findings of this chapter are then used to update and refine the theoretical framework.

The concluding chapter aims to tie up the strands of the hypothesis by revisiting the central research question, in the light of the empirical investigations. It suggests that, while the theoretical approach selected is the most suitable and rewarding explanation for the emergence of sultanistic regimes, it requires development and refinement if it is to remain valuable in the contemporary environment. It briefly considers how the project's findings may contribute to emerging research agendas focusing on cross-regional and cross-temporal comparison, may also shed light for historians seeking to account for the rise and durability earlier personalist rulers, and help those seeking to explain the

rationale for, and effects of, superpower sponsorship of such regimes during the Cold War. The conclusion also looks at Turkmenistan itself, assessing possible regime trajectories for Niyazov and the opportunities and challenges presented after he leaves office. It suggests that while the cultic paraphernalia associated with Niyazov might be quickly shelved and forgotten, the failure to attend to basic state-building tasks in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union is likely to create an egregious legacy for his successor.

Chapter Two: Sultanistic Regime Theory

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we situated the conceptual framework of the project within the wider theoretical literature, established the core tenets of sultanistic regime behaviour, and set out the rationale for its application to a study of Turkmenistan. The principal objective of this chapter is to consider the theoretical framework in greater depth. In particular, the preconditions for the emergence of sultanistic regimes laid out by Chehabi and Linz are subject to critical interrogation. A critical component of SRT is the relationship between sultanistic rulers and external actors. The case is made for a substantial revision of the assumptions relating to the role of foreign “patrons” in sustaining contemporary sultanistic regimes. Finally, the chapter seeks to extend the scope of SRT by locating the sources of power and authority within sultanistic regimes and integrating them into the SRT framework, in order that we can attain a more sophisticated understanding of how sultanistic rulers operate and maintain their hegemony.

While SRT has been operationalised by several scholars attempting to make sense of contemporary regime behaviour in Africa, the Middle East and the FSU, there has been only limited critical appraisal of either the content, or context, of SRT itself in order to assess its applicability to the contemporary political environment. This issue is especially salient given that SRT was developed in order to examine personalistic variants of authoritarian rule that emerged largely in response to the exigencies of the Cold War.

The essential argument advanced in this chapter is that SRT remains a valuable theoretical tool for the examination of systems of extreme personal rule. However, the framework does have several important core deficiencies and lacunae that require further interrogation. In particular, SRT remains underdeveloped in its analysis of the basis and mechanics of sultanistic rule, and of the responses engendered by it: in essence, how sultanistic governance arises, functions and maintains itself. In this chapter, I will specifically address the theorisation of the basis of sultanism offered by Chehabi and Linz, and tighten this up by sorting through, clarifying and substantively developing their analysis.

Secondly, the chapter considers how SRT can be developed to account for the longevity of many sultanistic regimes. Thinking about the way in which sultanistic rule is applied

and reproduced led to wider reflection on the nature and practice of power. The maintenance of control is identified in sultanistic situations by the application of physical coercion, in combination with the extensive use of patronage and the cultural management of social relations through the production, appropriation and manipulation of space, concrete and verbal symbolism, ritual, texts, and memory. More specifically, I argue that this mixture of “hard” and “soft” techniques of control form a “disciplinary-symbolic” complex in Turkmenistan that explains why Niyazov’s seemingly dysfunctional regime remains surprisingly durable (Wedeen: 1999). These control techniques are then addressed in more detail in chapter five of the thesis.

Thirdly, SRT remains silent on the reactions engendered by sultanistic rule amongst its recipients. Mapping out responses to sultanistic behaviour stimulated thinking about how complicated and highly personal strategies of accommodation and opposition to government could be in manifestly unfree societies, traversing a spectrum from outright and open hostility from a handful, covert resistance from a minority, and “the politics of duplicity” (Kligman: 1988) and accommodation from the majority, in which participation, compliance, deceit and resistance are practised by the same person, often on the same day. Analysis of responses to sultanism adopted by those on the receiving end of personalistic rule is vital, in order to tell us more about the regime-type itself, and how its power is reproduced or undermined. Chapter six extends this “resistance analysis” through fieldwork interviews and observation conducted as part of the case study.

Finally, the relationship that Chehabi and Linz describe between sultanistic regimes and external powers requires careful evaluation following the reconfiguration of the global security environment engendered by the end of the Cold War. In short, what impact has the withdrawal of superpower sponsorship had on contemporary sultanistic regimes? The case is made in this chapter for a substantial revision of the assumptions relating to the role of foreign “patrons” in sustaining contemporary sultanistic regimes, notably in that for contemporary sultanistic regimes, the absence of an external patron now strengthens rather than diminishes the survival prospects of the ruler. This theme is developed empirically in chapter seven.

Reconfiguring, and to some extent rebuilding, the theoretical framework has thus been an interdisciplinary exercise, embracing political economy, history, anthropology, urban geography, subaltern and cultural studies, undertaken with the aim of developing a rounded picture of a how an unusual variant of authoritarian rule emerges, functions and

survives. As a consequence, I have developed a solid understanding of the political dynamics in comparator states as discrete as Gabon (Yates: 1996), the Philippines (Thompson: 1995), Libya (Vandewalle: 1998; Anderson: 1999), Chile (Remmer: 1989, 149-170) and Romania (Kligman: 1998; Deletant: 1994; Behr: 1991); gained insight into the economic trajectories of states as diverse as Haiti (Nicholls: 1998), Congo-Brazzaville (Bayart *et al*: 1999; Clark: 2002), Qatar (Chaudhry: 1994), Angola (Hodges: 2001), Bahrain (Herb: 1999) and Venezuela (Karl: 1997); and acquired an appreciation of the cultural-political strategies of Stalinism (Dobrenko and Naiman: 2003; Plamper and Heller: 2004; Brooks: 2000; Fitzpatrick: 2001; Petrone: 2000), “mature” Eastern bloc socialism (Crowley and Reid: 2002; Crowley: 2004; Apor *et al*: 2004), Kemalism (Kinross: 2001), fascism (Falasca-Zamponi: 1997; 2004) Nazism (Spotts: 2000; Kershaw and Lewin: 1997; Housden: 1996), Asadism (Wedeen: 1999, 1999) and Maoism (Terrill: 1999)¹⁶. I have also glimpsed the terrain and tactics of resistance to repressive governance in Malaysia (Scott: 1985), the American Deep South (Scott: 1990), Ecuador (Korovkin: 2000), and the German Democratic Republic (Kopstein: 1996). Although not laying claim to expertise in any one of these subdisciplines, condensing and distilling cross-regional and cross-temporal comparisons has enabled me to contextualise and theoretically ground the empirical in-country knowledge gained from the chosen case study.

The Bases of Sultanism

After setting out their typology of sultanism’s defining characteristics, Chehabi and Linz attempt to identify the factors giving rise to this form of rule (1998b). Although this aspect of their analysis is somewhat underdeveloped, the conditions identified in facilitating the emergence of sultanistic tendencies do provide clues as to how and why such regimes can be so durable.

Firstly, Chehabi and Linz place their emphasis on “macrostructural” factors common to sultanistic regimes, but overlook the agential factors, the idiosyncratic and personal motives which “often possess important explanatory value” (Decalo: 1989, 11) particularly in a context of underinstitutionalisation. This point is worth developing briefly, given that structure and agency each form part of a common ontology (Hay: 2002, 113). Both structure and agency are interdependent and mutually constitutive. They should not be analysed, as Giddens suggests, as opposite faces of a coin, but rather

¹⁶ As Jackson has pointed out, culture has emerged as “a domain in which economic and political contradictions are contested and resolved” (1989: 3), and is a key source for tracing the relations and negotiations of dominance and subordination. Where culture is, in its broadest anthropological meaning, so is there politics.

“as metals in the alloy from which the coin is forged” (Hay: 2002, 127; Marsh and Furlong: 2002, 17-41). Thus, although structure and agency remain analytically separable, agential factors should be woven into the analysis to make it more nuanced and textured, rather than set up as an alternative set of causal explanations.

Decalo stresses the influence of contingent, behavioural dynamics in fluid societies with power vacuums, lifeless institutions, and a prostrate civil society (Decalo: 1989, 189). Such contexts are congenial to power plays and political gambits by aberrant and maladjusted personalities with political aspirations. Clearly, Chehabi and Linz could not realistically be expected to map out the circumstances of each sultanistic ruler’s rise to power. However, their analysis misses something of the situational dynamic developed by Dogan and Higley (1998), which attempted to conceptualise elite choices at acute regime crisis points, in order to capture the agential dimension of political rupture. Accordingly, in the case study of Turkmenistan that forms the central part of this thesis, Niyazov’s patterns of decision-making during the period 1989 to 1991, when the Soviet government’s reach across the Union republics began to recede, will be studied carefully in order to examine their subsequent influence on the mechanics and trajectory of the post-Soviet regime. A single case study is therefore valuable as “thick description” on which to base further comparative scholarship.

Secondly, the analysis of factors “favouring the emergence of sultanistic regimes” (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 26) is somewhat thin. These factors are divided into two causal explanations: socioeconomic conditions and persistent crises of sovereignty, together comprising a “macrostructural” subset (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 26-33); and the breakdown of clientelist democracy, and the decay of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (which is somewhat confusing given the claim made by Chehabi and Linz that sultanism itself represents a variant of authoritarianism), forming the second “political institutional” subset (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 33-37). The remainder of this section will seek to critique and develop these causal factors in order that we can anatomise sultanistic regimes more effectively.

(i) Macrostructural factors in the emergence of sultanism: socio-economic conditions

Chehabi and Linz isolate three economic conditions necessary for sultanism to develop: “a modicum of development” and “a certain modernisation of transport and communications”; the presence of “easily exploitable natural resources whose production is in the hands of one or only a few enterprises with high profits can provide the resources for such a regime, especially when elites are weak” (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b,

27); the influx of “massive doses of foreign aid or loans can encourage corruption, especially if the aid is unconditional” (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 27).

The first of these conditions is too vaguely formulated to be testable, particularly as it could be argued that almost all nation-states now have “a modicum of development” and some degree of modernisation. The third condition does have a partial degree of explanatory power. It is true to say that massive influxes of foreign loans and aid can be corrupting, but this has been the case regardless of whether the regime is, or becomes, sultanistic or not, as the case of Russia, where the Yeltsin administration received \$22 billion in IMF loans between 1992 and 1998, has amply demonstrated. However, such loans do constitute a form of economic rent which, when considered alongside the second condition, the high profits from a country’s natural resource endowment, adds up to a more general proposition that *unearned income*, rather than aid or loans *per se*, might be a factor in the emergence of sultanistic regimes. To investigate this further, it is necessary to develop the passing reference Chehabi and Linz make to the “rentier economy” (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 27).

Economic factors can impact considerably on the notion, form and development of the state and the efficiency of its functions (Beblawi and Luciani: 1987a, 5). Moreover, economic growth, as measured by a year on year increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), does not necessarily reinforce or stabilise a particular government. In fact, if revenue is predominantly derived from external economic rents, GDP growth can generate such increased expectations as to require the government to “buy off” actual or potential opponents (Beblawi and Luciani: 1987a, 7).

Rent can be defined in this context as “reward for ownership of land and resources – income from the gift of nature” (Beblawi: 1987, 49). Rents can take different forms: they can be extractive (e.g. the liquidation of finite reserves of resources such as oil and gas), locational (e.g. transit royalties on pipelines or waterways such as the Panama or Suez canals), portfolio (interest on existing investments), labour remittances from nationals working overseas (particularly important for developing countries), or capital receipts from drawdown of reserves (Stauffer: 1987, 25-26).

Where rents are derived from the extraction of natural resources, the state tends to mediate access to, and rewards from, the relevant sector. What emerges is a circulation, rather than a production economy, in which the principal aim of political actors is simply to access the rent circuit. Thus, rather than extracting tax from, and redistributing income to, its citizens, thereby creating a relationship in which the government can be held

accountable for its actions, the state's function in a rentier economy is simply to allocate rents received. Economists classify allocation (or exoteric) states as those which receive more than 40% of their income from one source *and* where government spending consists of a substantial share of GDP. Luciani cites Oman, where oil accounts for 90% of government revenues and the state expends 55% of GDP, as a classic rentier state (1987: 71).

Economic dependence on one commodity derived from natural resource endowments particularly, has the capacity to greatly affect and shape political institutions. Bergesen and Haugland's comparative study of two petro-states, Angola and Azerbaijan, bears this out:

Natural resource endowment has not been positively correlated with economic development and social progress. Rather the contrary, international statistics show that countries rich in natural resources had a performance which is markedly poorer than those countries that have possessed few natural resources (2000).

The principal economic impact is in the form of "Dutch Disease", named after the sudden influx of revenues from North Sea natural gas exports in the Netherlands during the 1960s. In this scenario, the domination of foreign export earnings causes the exchange rate to appreciate, which then negatively affects other sectors of the domestic economy. Domestically manufactured goods become increasingly uncompetitive, leading to an increase in imports, and the decline of the non-resource sectors of the economy (Hodges: 2001, 3). Moreover, the government's focus on the resource base providing the rental income frequently leads it neglect these other sectors, leading to what Gelb (1988, 8) calls "dual depletion" of both the prime commodity reserves themselves, and also those of the neglected sectors (Clark: 1997, 67-68).

In political terms, the ready stream of rental income frees the state from the need to enact fundamental political and economic reforms, to extract revenue and, in extreme cases, even to formulate a basic macroeconomic policy. If the state does not require anything from its citizenry, it has no need, in turn, to consult with them, leading to a breaking of the accountability linkage between government and people (Ross: 2001, 332).

The political outcomes of such a fracture between government and citizenry have several facets. Firstly, government, with the ruler at its head, becomes the apex of a pyramid of patronage networks, granting monopoly concessions or licenses to favoured supporters,

and buying off potential or actual opposition. To take one example, the political loyalty of historically prominent trading families who might come into conflict with the oil monarchies of Kuwait or Qatar is thus purchased through the granting of exclusive sponsorships for foreign goods, such as luxury car dealerships, or through preferment in lucrative government construction contracts (Crystal: 1989, 430-432; Beblawi: 1987b: 53-62). Similarly, the leaders of Congo-Brazzaville expanded the civil service massively with meaningless jobs to furnish extensive patronage networks once oil rents began to accrue (Clark: 1997: 68).

The case of Libya, in which the Jamahiriyya regime of Colonel Mu'ammār al-Qadhafi exhibits many classic sultanistic tendencies, offers an instructive case study of an extreme oil/gas rentier state:

In distributive states such as Libya, where rulers make few compromises with their citizens to obtain revenues, the nature and structure of political and economic institutions reflect that relative autonomy of the state... in a highly peculiar fashion. Because of the unique way in which revenues accrue, rulers do not have to create elaborate tax gates, rules, or mechanisms to help decide whom to tax, or when, or at what level. Creation of wealth in such states does not rely on the traditional categories and mechanisms of nature, markets, or effective economic statecraft. It does not require the state to elicit more than perfunctory loyalty or enforce good behaviour. Conflicts over distribution and welfare can be avoided as long as distributive largesse can be maintained; the state only adjudicates in rudimentary fashion" (Vandewalle: 1998, 171-172)¹⁷.

The tendency to expand patronage networks is exacerbated by the limited lateral linkages natural resource extraction has to other sectors of the economy. Firstly, a resource *nomenklatura* (Hodges: 2001, 139) emerges, often related by marriage or clan, to patrol and modulate access to the rent circuit. Secondly, limited lateral linkages leave untouched pre-existing patronages networks in the rural economy, inhibiting development or reform of that sector (Karl: 1997, 63). Thirdly, limited linkages to non-resource sectors mean that there is great polarity in income between those who are part of

¹⁷ However, there are inherent limitations in extrapolating Libya's case further because, with Qadhafi's aim being the pursuit of statelessness, and the Jamahiriyya's failure to advance a national political idea, allied to sparse institutional resources and the absence of political participation, the country's post-oil future may be uniquely bleak (Vandewalle: 1998, 181-183).

the rent circuit, together with those who work in the relatively small number of technical professions associated with resource extraction, and those who have been excluded from the rent circuit altogether.

The concentration of revenue streams from a single, defined (and therefore much easier to control) source into a state apparatus that lacks strong, well-developed institutions, usually leads to a fusion of state and regime. The ruler becomes the sole provider in the dispensation of national wealth. State coffers and the personal treasuries of the ruler become intertwined, leading to the emergence of a kleptocratic economy based on plunder (Bayart *et al*: 1999, 71). President Bongo of Gabon was conservatively estimated to be worth \$500 million in 1996 (Yates: 1996, 210-212). The assets of Reza Shah's Pahlavi Foundation, a charitable front group fostering official corruption, were calculated at \$1.05 billion in 1977 (Katouzian: 1998, 1999). Mobutu's nationalisation of Zaire's diamond and copper mines enabled him to accumulate personal wealth estimated at between \$4 billion and \$7 billion by the time he was deposed in 1997 (Wrong: 2001, 92-93).

Senior military officers may be co-opted into the rent circuit by being given lucrative concessions to control the process of arms procurement but, otherwise, the middle-ranks of the regular military may be excluded from patronage networks. Instead, rulers use resource revenues to create parastatal forces, such as a Presidential Guard or paramilitary militias to protect the rent circuit and its chief patron. Resource economies are characterised by their abnormally high spending on internal security functions, giving rise to what Ross terms "the rentier-absolutist" state, characterised most obviously by Pahlavi Iran and contemporary Saudi Arabia. The social base of the regime is eroded as dialogue between civil society and government diminishes or ceases (Najambadi: 1987, 218). Democracy, to the extent that it exists, becomes "stultified" (Yates: 1996, 36), not least because there is no political pressure to sustain the educational levels and occupational specialisation that nurture a pluralist society (Ross: 2001, 337).

Instead, the government tends to undertake large-scale capital projects as a means to absorb domestically the influx of petro-(or other resource) dollars. Karl's detailed study of the effects of oil on Venezuela found that many of these projects are ill-conceived, poorly planned, and disastrously executed (1997, 64).

The management of resource wealth is a challenge for any society, regardless of its institutional strength. However, rulers of rentier economies almost always fail to adequately sterilise revenues abroad to alleviate the economic distortions inflicted by

large inflows of extractive rents (Karl: 2000, 37-40). Even fewer attempt to enhance the state's underlying capacity by creating an interlocking institutional infrastructure that protects property and contract rights, and undercuts entrenched patronage networks (Chaudhry: 1994, 1-7).

Thus, although Chehabi and Linz do not develop their hypothesis of the socio-economic causes of sultanism with any great rigour, one of the three conditions they cite, albeit with the one treated in an extremely abbreviated form, is likely to be an important structural precondition of sultanistic regimes. Rentier economies provide rulers with the economic "insulation" and concomitant freedom to effectively dispense with political institutions and any form of accountability. They furnish rulers with the means to either subsidise or, through heavy investment in internal security functions, neutralise potential opponents. Rentier economies sustain and nurture patronage networks. They enable rulers to acquire the instruments of internal repression that represents "hard power" as well as the financing of elaborate "soft power" techniques associated with cults of personality. In short, they enable a ruler to introduce the techniques of "disciplinary-symbolic" control that are the defining modes of political domination in sultanistic regimes.

(ii) Macrostructural factors in the emergence of sultanism: crises of sovereignty

Chehabi and Linz contend that a common factor in sultanistic regimes is that "throughout their contemporary history their independence was ambiguous and often not respected by more powerful neighbours" (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 28). Most of the states cited in this respect are located in Central America. Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama and the Dominican Republic have all been subjected to official or unofficial interference by successive US governments in the twentieth century. Pahlavi's Iran and the Philippines under Marcos were *de facto* US protectorates, whose economic and foreign policies coincided with US interests. Francophone Black Africa was, and still is, subject to considerable political and economic influence from France. The case made for Romania is weaker. Under Ottoman rule until the Congress of Berlin in 1878, Romania nevertheless was one of a number of Balkan, and indeed European, countries which gained sovereignty as a result of the parcelling out of spheres of interest by the Great Powers after the Russo-Turkish War ended in 1877. It is difficult to argue that this event precipitated the extremes of Ceausescu's rule, particularly as Bulgaria and the territory of what was to become Yugoslavia, had equal if not more traumatic infringements to their independence in the same period. Instead, the persistent weakness of the Romanian state might be a more useful explanation.

The substantive argument therefore appears to be that states with a history of external interference, be it in the context of formal or “informal” empire, are more predisposed to sultanism. Chehabi and Linz give two possible explanations for the intervention of larger states. Firstly, the intervention by more powerful states arises from their sensitivity to the strategic location of the client state (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 31). For example, the US has long been aware that, for all its historic strategic immunity, Central America is the one “soft underbelly” susceptible to left wing movements acquiring political power. Secondly, the inability of the client state to service its debt invites external subsidy, in the form of loans or aid, in order to prop up the regime (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 31-2). This, in turn, forms part of the rent circuit that sustains sultanistic behaviour.

Neither of these two explanations appears to be entirely satisfactory. Both would appear to describe situations that might sustain a sultanistic ruler *in situ*, but not account for the emergence of sultanistic behaviour in the first place. However, as with their analysis of the socioeconomic basis of sultanism, Chehabi and Linz may be making an important point that requires further development.

Theories of empire, as Michael Doyle has argued (1986: 22-30), have tended to be either metrocentric, focusing on the disposition of forces in the metropole that leads to imperial expansion, or pericentric, focusing on the colonial experience from the perspective of the colonised. Doyle suggests understanding of the continuous process of interaction between metropole and periphery, within a dynamic international system, is also crucial to developing a comprehensive and nuanced theory of imperialism. Part of this entails tracing the influence that formal imperial rule has on the structures and reach of post-colonial governance and, secondly, the continuing relationship between the former imperial power and its colony after decolonisation – for instance, the transfer from formal to informal empire that characterises the political structures and processes in contemporary Francophone Africa.

Where external power is projected into a region, the shape, reach and textures of the political institutions created match the requirements, predilections and ideals of the external power. In the European colonial experience, this translates, most notably, into the creation of territories that served the administrative needs of empire but did not reflect the heterogeneity of the populations within that territory. Once decolonisation occurred, these administrative territories then emerged, often ill-suited to the task, as new nation-states. A second problem was that colonial government only engaged with a small elite of the titular population. Consequently, early post-colonial elites were faced with the task of melding fractured and politically disengaged societies into viable nation-states,

without the overlay of empire to arbitrate and mediate between internal differences. According to Decalo, authoritarianism was, “for insecure political elites, the preferred (easiest) and possibly most culturally sanctioned modality of governing complex, multicleavaged societies” (1989, 3).

Thus, the activation of “culturally sanctioned” patronage and clientelist networks within a weak and “unembedded” institutional setting, bequeathed by departing colonial powers, proved to be a congenial political setting for rulers to develop distinct, more or less “institutionless” and often dysfunctional polities based around the will of the chief patron, thereby creating a “dynamic world of political will and action that is ordered less by institutions than by personal authority” (Jackson and Rosberg: 1982, 12). Sultanistic regimes are therefore more likely to emerge from “artificially” constructed weak states, stretched across ethnically, politically and economically inchoate spaces, wherein pre-modern political technologies, clustered around traditional authority structures in which a single political leader predominates, might be the most amenable formula for governance.

If formal empire sets an important condition for sultanism’s emergence, the role of the subsequent informal relationship has, as Chehabi and Linz point out, been important in accelerating the emergence of existing sultanistic tendencies. Early post-colonial political elites quickly learned to exploit the strategic salience of their countries during the proxy struggles between the US and USSR for political dominance in the developing world. African leaders played off potential patrons in order to maximise aid and loans with minimal constraints on their use. In the minds of US strategic planners, the exigencies of the Cold War necessitated political choices between regimes of varying degrees of congeniality. Concerns over domestic corruption or abuses of human rights assumed a lower order of importance, which allowed sultanistic practices to flourish. Rulers such as Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (later the Democratic Republic of Congo) played upon concerns of internal fragmentation by successfully repeating the mantra “Mobutu or Chaos?” to the US and France in order to secure and then misappropriate vast amounts of aid and loans before his overthrow in 1997 (Chabal and Daloz: 2001, 115-119). The exploitation of strategic salience was particularly acute in Central America, where the likes of the Duvaliers in Haiti were supported both by successive US administrations fearful of the spread of Communism from Cuba, and by France’s attempts to prop up its declining influence in the Caribbean region.

The relationship between sultanistic rulers and the US government was undeniably close during the Cold War. To take just three examples, Marcos was supported by five

successive US presidents; President Richard Nixon's Secretary of State Henry Kissinger described Reza Shah as "an unconditional ally"; the US Navy deployed warships in 1971 to prevent the return of political exiles who opposed the transfer of power from François Duvalier to Jean-Claude Duvalier in Haiti (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 31). In 1977 and 1978, French, Belgian and Moroccan troops saved Mobutu from incursions by Angolan mercenaries into the Shaba region of Zaire (Snyder: 1998, 66). Relationships of mutual dependence developed: sultanistic leaders provided ideological correctness and domestic quiescence, and the US and regional powers secured a favourable strategic environment.

If sultanistic leaders were sustained by Great Power sponsorship during the Cold War, the withdrawal of external patronage could also lead to their demise. Some, like Manuel Noriega of Panama and Jean-Bedel Bokassa, outlived their usefulness to the US and France respectively. Some, like Duvalier, became an embarrassment and were abandoned before they were overthrown. Others, such as Marcos, were eased out to prevent moderate opposition forces being outflanked from the left. What is clear, however, is that US patronage could, and did, either cause or accelerate the collapse of several sultanistic regimes.

In this respect, modes of termination of sultanistic regimes would appear dissimilar to that of other authoritarian regime transitions. O'Donnell and Schmitter contended that: "it seems fruitless to search for some international factor or context which can reliably compel authoritarian rulers to experiment with liberalization, much less which can predictably cause their regions to collapse" (1986: 18). In contrast, Snyder, whose contribution to the volume edited by Chehabi and Linz stands as the third component of SRT, argues that "a focus on international actors is crucial" because "sultanistic dictators are often dependent on foreign patrons, who supply critical military aid and material resources that can help fuel their domestic patronage networks" (Snyder: 1998, 58). Snyder's analysis, backed by a series of comparative case studies of regime breakdowns, appears to hold for the sultanistic regimes described by Chehabi and Linz.

However, Brownlee points out, that the focus of the case studies chosen by Chehabi, Linz and Snyder is on those regimes that collapsed (2002b; 2004). What, Brownlee asks, about the survivors – sultanistic states such as Libya, Syria and Iraq (until removed by an overwhelming external invasion in 2003), or more moderate neopatrimonial regimes such as Egypt and Tunisia? Brownlee argues that these states survived serious crises principally because their income streams were not significantly disturbed and they had no superpower patrons and, as such, were far less subject to external interference or conditionality. In fact, he argues that the lack of international leverage proved to be

decisive, for example, in Asad's bloody suppression of the Brotherhood rebellion in Hamah in 1982 that claimed up to 25,000 lives, or Qadhafi's quelling of an army rebellion in 1993. The case of Saddam Hussein's ouster from Iraq in 2003, is exceptional because, in many ways, the US-led invasion of Iraq that led to it was wholly exceptional.

Accordingly, the scholarly explanations for paths out of sultanism/neopatrimonialism are contested, with Snyder, Linz and Chehabi arguing that the dependence of sultanistic regimes on external patronage is decisive for their continued survival. Brownlee, following O' Donnell and Schmitter, argues that domestic factors, principally the importance of maintaining rent circuits and patronage networks, are the decisive factor. However, Brownlee (2002b; 2005) takes as his case studies what could be called "Cold War hold-outs", states which may have had relationships with one, both or neither of the superpowers during the Cold War, but which fell short of a relationship of full dependence. This is understandable, given that the focus of Brownlee's research is on durable authoritarianism.

What of those sultanistic states that came into being after the end of the Cold War, notably in the former Communist bloc? Does their relationship with external powers affect their longevity? The answer, from a small dataset, would appear to be yes, where the rulers impinge on the interests of external powers and no, where they do not. The regime of President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia descended into sultanism after 1997, but its actions in Kosovo in 1999 generated sufficient ire in NATO member countries to precipitate the chain of events that led to his eventual downfall in October 2000. By contrast, those sultanistic states which tend to maintain a relatively low foreign policy profile such as Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have endured relatively mild censure from the international community.

To summarise, therefore, Snyder's argument that superpower sponsorship could make or break a sultanistic regime appears to have weight for the Cold War era. In fact, the domestic misdemeanours of sultanistic rulers might even lead them to be jettisoned, as was the case with Marcos and Duvalier. Paradoxically, despite the rhetoric from international institutions about holding despotic regimes to account, sultanistic rulers are much safer in the post-Cold War era, so long as they do not upset the international community through breaches of the diplomatic system (for example, by invading a neighbouring state or region). It can, therefore, be argued that, although the US frequently sustained sultanistic regimes, it also *constrained* and disciplined them, a function now no longer undertaken by anyone.

Thus, an element of SRT that requires testing and possible revision is whether Turkmenistan's self-imposed foreign policy isolation, exemplified by its failure to participate in regional security institutions and its declaration of permanent neutrality and non-alignment, represents a successful survival strategy for sultanistic leaders not factored into the framework of SRT developed by Chehabi, Linz and Snyder. The further implication of this hypothesis is that sultanism therefore persists, not because of the granting or withdrawal of external support, but because the leader is able to keep the system ticking over internally, through the maintenance and supply of elite rent circuits and patronage networks.

(iii) Political Institutional factors in the emergence of sultanism: decline of clientelist democracy

Chehabi and Linz contend that where "clientelist democracies" have begun to disintegrate, the conditions exist for sultanistic tendencies to emerge (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 33). They frame this explanation in the context of those countries that experienced sultanistic rule after a period of democratic government. Cuba's government was democratic between 1939 and 1952 until "clientelistic politics that revolved around personal attachments rather than doctrinal commitments made the system vulnerable to shifting partisan arrangements and manipulation from above" (Aguila in Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 33-34), resulting in the usurpation of power by Fulgenio Batista in March 1952. Similarly, the Philippines enjoyed a rough and ready democracy, dominated by alternations in government between the fluid, patronage-based Liberal and Nationalist parties, until Marcos declared martial law in 1972 (Thompson: 1998, 208).

Chehabi and Linz do not elaborate on the role of clientelism or patronage (the two terms are often used interchangeably) beyond these rather bald observations. However, looking more closely at how government functions when administrative bureaucracies are transformed from instruments of policy into clientelist networks dispensing favours and patronage without rational basis (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 34), reveals that they are virtually indispensable to the development and functioning of sultanism.

According to Lemarchand and Legg, clientelism is:

a personalised and reciprocal relationship between an inferior and a superior commanding unequal resources; moreover, in contrast with the "ideal type" of bureaucratic relationship, the norms of rationality,

anonymity and universalism are largely absent from the patron-client nexus... Political clientelism, in short, may be viewed as a more or less personalised, affective and reciprocal relationship between actors or sets of actors, commanding unequal resources and involving mutually beneficial transactions that have political ramifications beyond the immediate sphere of dyadic relationships (1972, 151-2).

Loyalties in clientelist networks are unstable and somewhat conditional because the friendship is asymmetrical and driven by resource exchange. Clientelism can work in the absence of institutional structures, or become nested therein although, in the latter case, it is likely to work against the grain of statutory frameworks and official bureaucratic rules (Lemarchand and Legg: 1972, 153), perhaps replicating Lemarchand's view that clientelism cuts across the boundaries of tradition and modernity (Lemarchand: 1972, 69). This insight has been developed by leading theorists of African politics, who argue that African leaders (and many Africans more generally) operate in dichotomous registers, fusing pre-modern and post-modern sensibilities, epitomised by successful and cosmopolitan African elites consulting with witchdoctors in their home towns by mobile telephone (Chabal and Daloz: 2001, 144-147; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga: 2000).

The crucial elements in clientelistic relationships are their regularity and multifunctionality. They encompass different components of social existence, are fundamentally hierarchical and, in some degree, competitive. Patrons must compete for clients. If patrons cannot deliver material resources and/or security, clients are likely to switch to those patrons who can. If patrons can deliver, clients may compete with one another in their allegiance to the patron (Clapham: 1982, 6-7). Ultimately, however, clientelist networks hinge upon one group having access to a material surplus that they can sell in order to purchase power, loyalty or acquiescence.

In the contemporary political environment, material surpluses have usually come from state revenues. The patrimonial model therefore "implies an instrumentally profitable lack of distinction between the civic and personal spheres" (Chabal and Daloz: 2001, 5). The implications for policy lie in the insertion, entrenchment and, frequently, predominance of informal networks in formal policy making structures. Stable patterns and trajectories of policy-making are subordinated to the requirements of the patron-client relationship, and legitimacy resides not in political office itself but "in nourishing the clientele" on which its authority rests (Chabal and Daloz: 2001, 15). The state,

according to Chabal and Daloz, gradually becomes a “d cor masking the realities of deeply personalised political relations... [political] legitimacy is firmly embedded in the patrimonial practices of patrons and their networks” (2001: 16).

The effect, as these authors point out, can lead to a retraditionalisation of society – a reversion to tribal identity, superstition and ritualism (Chabal and Daloz: 2001, 45-83). Yet, such networks can also be very fluid, not least because where private patronage networks do exist, they are contingent and conditional, relying in the first instance on a favourable context for the patron to exercise his authority, for a patron who is himself subject to higher political authority will find his actions circumscribed, and secondly, on the continued provision of benefits to both sides in the transaction. As William Reno discovered in his illuminating study of the impact of “warlordism” on the African state, where the political and social fabric of the state is strained or disintegrates, patrons and, to a lesser extent, clients can quickly withdraw from mutual commercial/security alliances (Reno: 1998).

However, clientelist networks can also be remarkably durable. Their essence lies in the deferred consideration for goods rendered. A favour done must be repaid, but as long as there is the expectation of the favour being repaid, the patron-client relationship can endure. If the clientelist relationship is embedded within an institutional framework, the likelihood of repayment is enhanced by virtue of the security which the institution’s permanency provides. Thus, “neopatrimonialism does undermine formal rules and institutions... nevertheless... when patrimonial logic is internalised in the formal institutions of neopatrimonial regimes, it provides essential operating codes for politics that are valued, recurring, and reproduced over time” (Bratton and van de Walle: 1997, 63).

In practice, friends are placed “in the strategic synapses of power and mechanisms of control” (R niger: 1994, 10), their positions based around resource extraction and allocation rather than abstract notions of equality and conformity with bureaucratic-legal norms. Neopatrimonial rule becomes, in short, “an extension of the big man’s household” (Bratton and van de Walle: 1997, 61). Politics exists as a business, with control over appointments bought and sold. “Governmental authority and the corresponding economic rights tend to be treated as privately appropriated economic advantages” (Medard: 1982, 179). The state becomes analogous to the ruler’s private estate, and the wider clientelist system that is personalised, vertical, and ultimately disordered.

Patronage dovetails with rent-seeking behaviour to form the bedrock of patrimonial rule. In unconstrained form, patronage subverts legal-rational norms and is conferred with legitimacy above that of the law. Where the ruler himself uses patronage without restraint and has access to high rents, distortions within the polity arise that create the conditions for sultanistic behaviour. To return to the original proposition offered by Chehabi and Linz, that sultanism arises in states where clientelist democracies deteriorate, the key component is not that the state was a democracy, as Chehabi and Linz go on to say by discussing the propensity of post-authoritarian or post-totalitarian regimes to degenerate into sultanism. Rather, it is the existence of patronage networks *per se*, buttressed by the resources available from rent seeking in the context of weak, inchoate state structures, that provides the basis for sultanistic regimes.

(iv) Political Institutional factors in the emergence of sultanism: decay of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes

The fourth factor leading to the emergence of sultanistic behaviour arises from regime degeneration, usually associated with a ruler staying in office for many years. Chehabi and Linz argue that the post-colonial regimes in Africa assumed an authoritarian character because of their lack of traditional legitimacy. This is linked to the cultural heterogeneity of the state's composite population, allied to the legacy of colonial government, which bequeathed an authoritarian form of governance into which new elites had been socialised (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 35). Although the former claim about cultural heterogeneity has substance, it is effectively a variant of the 'crises of sovereignty' argument advanced previously. The secondary hypothesis about the impact of colonialism does not enable us to distinguish between those post-colonial governments, like Botswana, which have made a rather effective transition to democracy, from those, such as Senegal or Benin, which had an authoritarian streak but did not generate in sultanism, to those which have acquired a sultanistic caste, for example the Central African Republic under Bokassa, Zaire/DR Congo during the presidency of Mobutu and, perhaps, the regime of President Robert Mugabe in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Chehabi and Linz do not provide an explanation as to why certain regimes are predisposed to lapsing into sultanism. Puzzlingly, they cite Francoist Spain in this category, although the country would appear to conform to the sultanistic in few respects during the post-war period. They also cite three examples of totalitarian regimes degenerating into sultanism: Romania under Ceausescu, the Soviet Union in the last days

of Communist Party First Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, and Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime in Iraq after the first Gulf War of 1991 (Chehabi and Linz: 1998b, 35-37).

These examples are problematic too. Firstly, Chehabi and Linz do not say why these regimes became sultanistic, except that they did. The implied reason is that the rulers went on too long, and simply "lost the plot". How or why is not explained. The observation would appear to be purely descriptive. Secondly, no distinction is drawn between totalitarian or authoritarian regimes, and why it was necessary to divide them. Thirdly, it is highly debatable whether all of the regimes could be categorised as totalitarian or sultanistic. In the Soviet case, it is correct that certain members of the Brezhnev regime were corrupted, notably Yuri Churbanov, Brezhnev's son-in-law, who was imprisoned in 1988 (Vaksberg: 1991). Moreover, the Soviet leadership at that time was undoubtedly senescent. However, the system itself was very far from the deideologised, deinstitutionalised regimes that characterise the sultanistic model. Moreover, Soviet specialists have questioned whether the Soviet system at this point could actually be described as totalitarian (Hough: 1983, 37-60; Brown: 1983, 61-80). Instead, Chehabi and Linz might have focused on whether command, or at least centrally directed, economies associated with post-totalitarianism, might develop predispositions towards sultanism, given the resources at the state's disposal, once the ideological/mobilisational component has been lost.

This point is particularly salient for the analysis of post-Soviet regimes. Communist Party bosses effectively headed pre-existing patronage networks, where Party control overlaid rather than replaced engrained clientelistic hierarchies, particularly in Central Asia, as will be discussed in chapter five. In this sense, the situation of Party elites in certain parts of the former Soviet Union was analogous to indigenous elites primed to assume control of their states as part of the wave of post-War decolonisation.

Reflecting on causal factors of Sultanism

To summarise, while the identification by Chehabi and Linz of natural resource and external dimensions in the emergence and functioning of sultanistic regimes is useful, it remains an underdeveloped tool in explaining the structural preconditions for this regime type to emerge. Fleshing out their "crises of sovereignty" hypothesis further, the lack of pre-existing statehood, usually through a prior experience of imperialism, or the chronic brittleness of a weak state, exacerbated by a subsequent informal imperial relationship

with a former metropole, goes some way to explaining the emergence of sultanistic tendencies in the first instance.

Sultanistic regimes are thus a legacy of formal and informal empire, in states where there is little pre-existing ethnic, social or economic cohesion. Subsequent “crises” of sovereignty, exemplified in the utilisation of sultanistic regimes by more powerful states for their own geostrategic interests, assists in explaining how external resource flows supplement other revenue streams to help sustain sultanism, but do not by themselves explain why sultanism arises. Similarly, the mere receipt of income from external rents, from whatever source, does in itself not solely account for the emergence and durability of such regimes. Instead, large rents purchase the opportunity for leaders to shape politics, and as will be considered below, buy in “hard” internal security capacity and the materials to formulate “soft” control mechanisms. Thus, it is what leaders do with rental income, rather than its existence *per se*, that determines the longevity of sultanistic regimes.

As with their analysis of macrostructural factors, the political institutional conditions of sultanism cited by Chehabi and Linz require further development and refinement. Their political-institutional focus is on a teleological argument, describing how regimes break down from a pre-sultanistic situation to a sultanistic regime, without elaborating on the reasons for degeneration. However, they do touch tangentially on important considerations. Clientelism is clearly an important structural prerequisite for sultanism, as it is the mechanism through which a ‘fear and rewards’ culture can be operationalised. However, clientelism is not anatomised and nor is it explicitly related as a causal factor in facilitating sultanistic behaviour. Similarly, the predisposition of certain pre-sultanistic regime types is also crucial to build a path-dependent explanation for sultanistic behaviour, yet no substantive attempt is made to discuss how this might occur.

Analysis of the causes of, and conditions for, sultanistic behaviour can be distilled into three main factors, with the option of a fourth where the state involved is a command economy.

Firstly, sultanistic states are able to exist only by virtue of their access to a steady stream of external rents, which alleviate their dependence on popular support, and enable them to govern with very limited accountability or, in exceptional cases, with virtually none at all. These resources can then be used to create a rent circuit that can be expanded or retracted to include or exclude potential supporters or rivals.

Secondly, patronage networks are used to operationalise the rent circuit by purchasing support and buying off rivals. However, where regime opponents are recalcitrant, rents also enable the ruler to purchase internal security hardware to suppress potential opposition.

Thirdly, sultanism is allowed to flourish because of certain defects wired in to the state. There may, for example, be limited consensus over the boundaries or membership of the state, or conflict between different ethnic or tribal groups. These deficits can usually be attributed to external interference in the form of formal or informal empire. As rulers may provide a degree of overlay that offers a chimera of state cohesion, external patrons might provide further rental income in the form of aid or loans that sustains and encourages sultanistic behaviour. The larger state is usually motivated by concerns over state collapse, regional instability or, from a more realist perspective, the geopolitical and economic advantages that might accrue from sponsoring a strategically well-placed regime.

Fourthly, the salience of the pre-existing economic system remains problematic. Chehabi and Linz were writing in 1990-1. There was little evidence that they had comprehensively updated the core tenets of their analysis by the time their work was published in 1998. Thus, they were not in a position, or chose not, to comment on the impact of transition out of a command economy might have on sultanistic behaviour. The examples explored in the volume were all authoritarian capitalist or mixed economies, although subject to erratic intervention by the state. Chehabi and Linz hint in their references to Ceausescu and Brezhnev that Communist societies could descend into sultanism and, even briefly mention the regimes of Niyazov and President Alexander Lukashenka of Belarus as potential candidates, but the specific legacy of the command economy or Party control is not explored.

Having thus attempted to rework sultanistic regime theory to account for the emergence and existence of this type of governance, it is necessary to look in greater detail at the specific techniques used by sultanistic rulers to remain in power. Why, if regimes such as that of Qadhafi aim at a condition of statelessness, or like those of Mobutu and Marcos, systematically subvert or dismantle state institutions and loot the country for their own ends, do their regimes remain so consistently durable? How do such manifestly erratic, unpredictable and underperforming regimes operate? Chehabi and Linz do not explore the specific techniques used by sultanistic rulers to maintain themselves in power. Extending sultanistic theory further, therefore, will equip us to examine this paradox in greater depth.

Locating and Exercising Power: Hard and Soft Techniques of Political Control

So far, I have argued that if contemporary sultanistic rulers avoid becoming too dependent on external patrons, or entangled in incidents that stimulate international controversy, and if they have access to externally derived rents that keep pre-existing and new patronage networks serviced, they have in place the instruments that ensure the longevity of their regimes. These components of sultanistic rule are specifically explored in relation to the case study of Turkmenistan in chapters five and six of the thesis. However, what they only partially explain is how the regime actually functions and maintains control. Exploring the techniques used by personalistic rulers to sustain their regimes requires a closer look at the nature of power itself.

Foucault identified the locus of power in practice as much as in institutions (Gordon: 2002, xxv). He argued that the emergence of threats to power networks after the eighteenth century led to the development of a new architecture and technology of power, both material and psychological. New surveillance networks were complemented by a disciplinary architecture in the form of factories, hospitals, schools, asylums, barracks and penal colonies. Foucault may overstate his case. Espionage, imprisonment and education existed throughout Europe and elsewhere from the Middle Ages onwards (Groebner: 2002). What changed, in fact, was the rate at which such institutions multiplied after the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution.

However, in *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault correctly identified that the state began consciously to treat “the body as object and target of power” (1990, 136). The attempt to make bodies docile proceeded from the state’s ability to distribute individuals in space (Foucault: 1990, 136). This acquired several forms (the examples are my own, not Foucault’s): enclosure in prison and psychiatric institutions; prevention of citizens from leaving the country through visa regimes; partition and classification through identity cards and other documents, and the consequent checking of the same; the creation of functional sites such as factories, barracks and schools; the ranking of groups and individuals in classes, hierarchies and through state imposed targets; the timetabling of work, education and leisure; body-object exhaustion through excessive labour demands, military drills, travelling and waiting; body-object articulation through gestures, salutes and physical coding; and elaboration of the act through marching, drills and choreography (Foucault: 1990, 142-156). Thus, through the play of spatial distribution, coding, organisation of time and a combination of all three, the state was able to dissociate power from the body and practice discipline, what Foucault calls “normalising individuation” (Foucault in Hirst: 2005, 168)

Although James C. Scott made only fleeting reference to Foucault's work in *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, he effectively developed the point by arguing that the drive for an administrative order was driven by the need of the state to construct a "map of terrain and people" (1998, 2). By rationalisation, standardisation and simplification, society becomes more legible to the state, and governance becomes more effective and convenient. Such a social order is, of course, constructed for the benefit of the state rather than society, and without regard to what Scott calls *metis*, the practice and knowledge of everyday life. Instead, it consists of sweeping, hegemonic social engineering informed by high modernist ideology. Scott was also concerned with the visual and aesthetic implications for the urban order of such schemes, the social alienation caused by the static urban grid (a debatable hypothesis given the vibrancy of, for example, Manhattan), and the displacement of the poor.

If Foucault expressed power in terms of the body and its arrangement in space, Scott and Henri Lefebvre (1991: 401-423) expressed power in terms of its control of absolute space, social space and abstract space. According to Lefebvre, spatiality is not only a product, but also a producer and reproducer of the relations of production and domination, an instrument of both allocative and authoritative power (Soja: 1985, 110). Space, a term used by Lefebvre literally, metaphorically and allegorically (Shields: 1988), is therefore simultaneously the object of power and an instrument of power. The power of architecture in an urban setting exemplifies this. Power therefore operates as a technique to arrange bodies in space, and to control absolute space, social space and abstract space. Finally, space itself is used to reproduce and distribute power. Thus, politics has spaces, and spaces have politics.

Applying these concepts in practice, what implications do they have for the practice of power by sultanistic regimes? If we take the Foucaultian perspective, analysis of the manner in which regimes operate - what will be called "hard" power - involves direct coercion, imprisonment, restriction, purging of officials, forced movement and resettlement, political hospitalisation, limitations on travel and movement, restrictions on freedom of worship, injunctions on conduct, dress and bodily appearance, persecution of minorities and dissidents, restrictions on media activity and information flows; and requires examination of how the regime and leader functions, and what the formal and informal parameters exist to its/his rule.

However, Scott and Foucault do not explicitly identify the cultural imprint of power. Foucault is aware, in *Power/Knowledge*, that:

If power were anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one could be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things; it includes pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression (Foucault in Hirst: 2005, 168).

Foucault does not develop this point but appears to be referring to the cultural transmission of power: the use of symbols, naming, rituals, texts, memorials and monuments, buildings, music, art, movement, spectacle and the manipulation of memory to produce desired political outcomes.

These modes of transmission do not involve explicit physical coercion, although there is clearly some cross-over between hard and soft power in the mass choreographed propaganda spectacles, sometimes involving thousands of children, which characterise sultanistic regimes such as North Korea (DPRK) and Turkmenistan. Instead, they rely on symbols to forge a relationship, a unity, between representer and represented (Blomqvist: 1987, 7); to activate, and to articulate in public space the regime's construction of its own self image (Bell: 1998, 207); to restate official memory through visual symbols of power (Vale: 1999); to order, through art, the way in which people look at the world in a specific manner so as to create a homogenous and docile political body (Falasca-Zamponi: 1997, 5); through insistent rhetoric, to establish a grammar and register through which people learn to speak (Wedeen: 1999, 32); in organised political spectacles, to "show that the authorities are able to compel citizens to enact the choreographed movements that iconographically configure worship of the leader, representing his power both visibly (in the display) and tangibly (in each participant's body)" (Wedeen: 1999, 21-22). At their most cynical, such symbols simply "clutter public space with monotonous slogans and empty gestures, which tire the minds and bodies of producers and consumers alike" (Wedeen: 1999, 206).

Cultural power is a strategic resource which, when effective, "may, by conveying the impression of actual power and the will to use it, economise on the actual use of violence" (Scott: 1990, 9). Political symbolism, as practised by sultanistic leaders and totalitarian dictators, therefore represents much more than a leader's path to immortality

(Mornement: 2003, 54), a representation of desired self-image, or an aestheticisation of politics; rather, it is a political technique used as an alternative to, or augmentation of, material coercion in order to induce loyalty and negate dissent. Michael Walzer argued: “the state is invisible; it must be personified before it can be seen, symbolised before it can be loved, imagined before it can be conceived” (Walzer in Kertzer: 1988, 6).

In sultanistic states, however, the adage that ‘men possess thoughts, but symbols possess men’ needs to be adjusted. The paradox of these regimes is that, in contradistinction to mobilisational and heavily ideological regimes such as Maoist China, Stalinist Russia or Nazi Germany, popular belief levels in regime rituals, texts and symbols actually appear to be much lower. Performance at mass spectacles can be often (but not always) perfunctory, attendance begrudging and, if the regime degenerates as, for example, that of Ceausescu did, such rituals increasingly become more a source of comfort to the ruler, than a tool of political persuasion.

If the grandiose claims made by the regimes are not believed and, indeed are often half-heartedly propagated, then what role does “soft” power have in sustaining the sultanistic ruler? Chehabi and Linz touch on the issue only tangentially. They argue that the cultic dimension of sultanistic power is purely for self aggrandisement, and therefore, imply that it carries little weight as a persuasive instrument. They cite the propensity of rulers to self-award titles as described in the preceding chapter, and to write (or have ghost written) ideological treatises such as *An Ideology for Filipinos*, *The White Revolution* or *Les grands texts du Mobutisme* by Marcos, Reza Shah and Mobutu, respectively (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 14-15). However, these are regarded as a craving for charisma and exaltation, rather than being a component of a wider strategy to transmit regime legitimacy and control. Yet the projection of soft power, despite being often innately ridiculous, even to its recipients, can remain strangely effective in sultanistic regimes, perhaps tying ruler and ruled together in the complicity of a lie. Exploring this anomaly may indicate the hold retained on power by sultanistic rulers.

Cultural power in sultanistic regimes is manifested most commonly in a cult of personality surrounding the leader. Modern personality cults, “the organisation of society around a single person and the symbolic expression of this organisation through cult products in multiple modern media” (Plamper: 2003: 45), have complex origins rooted in national politico-religious culture, the ideological template set out by the regime, the personal characteristics of the leader himself, and also in more functional attributes of the polity, such as under-institutionalisation of the state. The cult-building that was a feature

of the Bolshevik regime, for example, was rooted in a “special inflection” of pre-revolutionary monarchical cults, and a culture rooted in patriarchy, allied to a complex Stalinist dialectical dissolution of the individual into the many, that promoted *lichnost* (personality) as an exemplar of collective potential (Plamper: 2004, 20)¹⁸, producing the reification of Stalin, his acolytes, and selected heroes such as the miner Alexei Stakhanov, the aviator Valery Chkalov and the polar explorer Otto Schmidt (McCannon: 2003, 241).

The sultanistic personality cult varies from those surrounding, say, Stalin or Maoism in the sophistication of their content, the breadth of their vocabulary, and the level of popular participation they require. Communist cults fitted into a larger transformational ideological system, which could outlast the ritual dramas and monuments performed and constructed for the individual leader. The goals of sultanistic leaders are more modest: the preservation and projection of power, economisation on the use of violence - what Marin called “the placing in reserve of force in signs” (Marin: 1977, 7) - nation-building, and the invention of tradition.

What is missing from the very sparse literature on cults of personality, however, is recognition that, in sultanistic regimes at least, they spawn an economy of cult production in the public and private sectors, which can sustain cults even when they are latently dysfunctional and disbelieved. In effect, leader cults may retain their prominence because there is a segment of the population that retains an interest in their continuation. The cult of personality surrounding Niyazov, and the possibilities that it opens as a potential terrain of resistance to the regime are explored in chapters five and six respectively.

Responses to Sultanism

A major omission of SRT is that it overlooks the question of how the subjects of sultanistic governance respond to and resist this form of rule. In this, SRT mirrors recent empirical studies of authoritarian regimes, which likewise give only very cursory treatment to the responses engendered by authoritarian governance.

One task of this thesis is to address this gap by mapping out some of the forms that resistance has taken to sultanism in Turkmenistan. By building a typology of resistance in

¹⁸ Stalin reportedly told his son, Vasily: “You are not Stalin and I am not Stalin. Stalin is Soviet power” (Davies: 2004, 30).

Turkmenistan, we can attain two separate objectives. Firstly, our understanding of how the regime in Turkmenistan operates is enhanced. Tracking resistance patterns allows us to examine both the claims and actions of Niyazov's regime from a different, "consumer" perspective. It locates and gauges strengths and weaknesses of the regime, in essence where it is effective in stifling dissent and thus contributing to the regime's durability, and where there is infrastructural and institutional brittleness that prevent the regime from eradicating resistance. This, in turn, opens the potential for regime opponents to identify the most favourable terrain for resistance. The second objective is theoretical. We have noted how strikingly common the characteristics of sultanism are between regimes that emerged in different geopolitical, institutional, historical, economic and cultural contexts. Mapping resistance in Turkmenistan opens the possibility that these findings can be used to build up a typology of resistance to sultanistic regimes more generally.

Thus far, accommodation and dissent under conditions of sultanism has rarely been broached, much less systematically examined. Accordingly, chapter six aims to bridge both an empirical gap in relation to Turkmenistan by providing the first synthesis of data on opposition activity, and to contribute to theory development both in the context of SRT and resistance to non-democratic regimes more broadly.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to interrogate critically and thereafter extend the theoretical framework used in the thesis. Chehabi and Linz offered a series of explanations for the emergence, continuation and collapse of sultanistic rule. Although they signposted important structural causes of sultanism, this chapter has argued that their explanatory framework should be substantively revised if it is to be of continued relevance within the contemporary political environment.

Specifically, this chapter has suggested that the key to understanding the emergence of sultanism lies in an "alloy" of structural and agential factors. These include the political choices available to, and selected by, the leader at critical junctures, working in conjunction with underlying structural causes - principally access to, and utilisation of, external rents which "fill the capillaries" of new or pre-existing domestic patronage networks in order to maintain loyalty and buy off potential opponents. It also suggests that these rents have two further functions: firstly, they provide the means to buy in internal security capacities for coercive purposes; secondly, they enable rulers to construct a repertoire of "soft" cultural power, often taking the form of the cult of

personality, in order to bind the populations fate to that of their leader, even if that ties is based on complicity in a lie.

Thirdly, the chapter has also addressed the issue of external involvement in the emergence and demise of sultanism. Whereas Chehabi, Linz and Snyder have argued that superpower patrons had the capacity and, just as importantly, the will to make and break sultanistic regimes during the Cold War, I argue that despite the reinvigoration of rhetoric about global standards of human rights within international institutions, sultanistic leaders who “keep their heads down” on the international scene, retain access to rents, and are willing to use force domestically to retain power, are actually much better placed to survive *in situ* than their Cold War predecessors.

Finally, we made the case that responses to sultanism ought to be integrated within the SRT framework, in order to increase our understanding of the effects and implications of sultanistic rule and to chart a potential terrain of resistance that might either undermine a sultanistic ruler, or transform a sultanistic situation in some way.

The next two chapters both extend and focus the project by introducing the chosen case study in depth. Chapter three provides the essential context for Turkmenistan’s emergence as an independent nation-state by looking at some of the structural issues that impacted on, and facilitated, the form of governance that the Niyazov regime has imposed, while chapter four focuses on the specific political and policy choices made by Niyazov, essentially the agential factors, on his route to power before and after Turkmenistan attained independence.

Chapter Three: Turkmenistan – The Historical and Structural Context

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the necessary historical and political context for the development of the chosen case study. The chapter provides an analytical historical overview of the Turkmen people and state from their earliest origins up to the late Soviet period. In doing so, it has four functions integral to the project.

Firstly, it engages with the theoretical framework, by exploring whether the underlying structural preconditions for sultanistic regimes, discussed in the previous chapter, are applicable in the Turkmen case or, indeed, whether there are additional historical-structural characteristics in Turkmenistan, which may be important to our understanding of the Niyazov regime, and possibly even salient to other sultanistic situations.

Secondly, the chapter sets out the wider historical context for the emergence of the Republic of Turkmenistan and the regime of Saparmurat Niyazov in the post-Soviet period. This, in conjunction with the following chapter, will enable us to consider the extent to which Niyazov's variant of sultanistic governance is dependent on the strategic options chosen by Niyazov, and the degree to which these options were either constrained or facilitated by deeper allegiances and identity patterns within Turkmen society. Thus, the chapter will allow us, in due course, to pose such questions as whether Niyazov's style of rule has any form of concrete precedent in Turkmen society, whether there exist peculiar national circumstances in Turkmenistan that have given rise to a lack of institutional constraints on Niyazov's authority, or whether Niyazov's regime is principally a product of political opportunism. Therefore, in order to understand how the Turkmen system under Niyazov functions, and to explain the continuing failure of any substantive, coherent, organised political opposition or civil society to emerge, it is crucial to examine the long-range patterns of political, social and economic activity in Turkmenistan, both as important building blocks for the explication of contemporary regime dynamics and, also, to illuminate the deeper structure – agency debate at the heart of explanations of political continuity and change.

Thirdly, substantive historical analysis allows us to interrogate more carefully the *content* of the cult of personality; in essence, why certain motifs, slogans, symbols, texts, and rituals are selected, used, adapted and manipulated by the ruler as political techniques in sultanistic situations. The small literature devoted to political personality cults has largely

focused on cult development, form, process, and aftermath. Comparatively little attention has been given to the messages that cults seek to project. There are two feasible explanations for this omission. One is that constraints on undertaking fieldwork while the regime is in power means that almost all accounts of leader cults are written after their demise (an important exception being Lisa Wedeen's (1999) influential study of the personality cult of President Hafiz Al Asad of Syria). As most modern regimes with leader cults have collapsed in ignominious circumstances, the content of the cult is viewed solely in retrospect, and is frequently presented as kitsch, banal, or simply pitiful. Comparatively little attention has been given to the very real power that cults can exercise when they are in currency. Secondly, apart from the cases of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, limited work has been conducted on responses to regime propaganda in societies where political personality cults have operated, with the consequence that the very complex interaction between cult production, transmission and reception, which is often genuinely ambiguous, as the fieldwork for this thesis will illustrate, is underplayed. In order to undertake analysis into the appeal, or "pull", of personality cults, an appreciation of the national historical metanarrative, from which the raw materials for political cults are so often drawn, becomes a prerequisite.

Finally, unlike virtually all other states where sultanistic regimes exist, or have existed, there is no extant, satisfactory historical overview of Turkmenistan available that could contextualise the case study. There are, in short, no scholarly short cuts to introduce the case study. This chapter therefore attempts to weave a coherent narrative from a patchwork of Western, Russian and Turkmen sources, all of which are, in themselves, incomplete for a variety of reasons.

V.V. Barthold's short study, *A History of the Turkmen People* (1962), part of his wider *Four Studies on the History of Central Asia*, was largely, but not completely, free of the ideological straitjacket imposed on Soviet historiography from Stalin onwards. Moreover, Barthold's account effectively concludes in the early nineteenth century, and glosses over the Russian conquest of the Turkmen lands in the late nineteenth century in most cursory fashion. Mehmet Saray's *The Turkmens in the Age of Imperialism* (1989) provides much useful material on the Russian imperial conquest, but is an explicitly pan-Turkish work, which tends to downplay accounts of inter-tribal feuding in the nineteenth century, in favour of a deterministic account of the coalescence of Turkmen tribal confederations against Russian aggression.

Soviet sources, as Yuri Bregel comprehensively demonstrated, systematically subordinated accurate historical scholarship to ideological conformity, particularly in their accounts of the extent of the nomadic economy in Turkmen society and, from the Stalin era onwards, the terms of Russian imperial conquest of Central Asia (Bregel: 1981; 1996). However, these sources can provide useful data, albeit requiring careful critical evaluation, on the extent of socio-economic development during the Soviet period.

Little if anything of scholarly note has been published in Turkmenistan since independence was attained in 1992. The standard textbook used in Turkmen schools and universities is Niyazov's *Ruhnama*, which is more of value for what it tells us of Niyazov's own methods of governance, than what it says about Turkmen history. Niyazov's casual disregard for historical accuracy is illustrated by his decree, issued in September 2000, recalling all copies of a new high school history textbook because it traced the ethnogenesis of the Turkmen to the Mongolian Altai region, while Niyazov erroneously insists instead that Turkmen were of European ethnic origin (RFE/RL TS, 5 October 2000). As Bregel, referring to the scholarly trends for historical revisionism under post-Soviet leaderships in Central Asia, states, "such theories and statements are not part of scholarly enquiry: they are just examples of the continuing tendency to use history for building national identities – a purpose which the authors of such works do not try to conceal" (1996, 26). The 'glorious past' invented by politically compliant post-Soviet scholars "belongs to the realm of politics not history as its main goal is not to clean the history of Central Asian nations from the stains of Soviet distortions, but rather to repaint it in fresh nationalist colours. It is not a rediscovery of history but an invention of nationalist mythology" (Bregel: 1996, 26).

However, three recent works have, in part, filled the scholarly lacunae in the field of Turkmen history. Yuri Bregel's own magisterial *Historical Atlas of Central Asia* (2003) is extremely useful on the period up to 1917, but frames the region's historical development in terms of military conquests and the ebbs and flows of empire, rather than providing detail on the fabric of social and economic existence. Paul Georg Geiss has done much to illuminate Turkmen tribal structures in the pre-Tsarist period (2003). Adrienne Lynn Edgar's *Tribal Nation* is excellent on the period from 1917 up to 1940 (2004). There is little reliable historical scholarship on the later Soviet period. Therefore, the overview of Turkmen history in this chapter constitutes the first synthesis, in English, to the writer's knowledge, of Turkmen history from its origins to the present day.

The remainder of the chapter is structured into six sections. Initially, the chapter will focus on the migration of the forerunners of the Turkmen people from the Altai region of Mongolia, across the southern Siberian steppe, to the Aral Sea delta, and from there to the Mangishlaq Peninsula on the eastern seaboard of the Caspian. The crystallisation of distinct Turkmen tribes and their interaction will be traced with the great Eurasian empires of the medieval period, notably the Mongols, Timurids and Persians, alongside the emergence of distinct, often inimical, Turkmen tribal confederations in this period.

The second part, covering the Early Modern period, charts the ambiguous relationship between Turkmen tribes and the proto-states of Persian-ruled Khorasan (contemporary northern Iran) and Arabshahid-ruled Khorezm (the region centred on the southern Aral Sea delta – now part of Uzbekistan), followed by the impact of waves of tribal migrations between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries from Mangishlaq to the southern, southwestern and eastern regions of what is now Turkmenistan. The migrations, along with the encounters with imperial Russian forces, are critical to the authorised historical metanarrative of Turkmen national unity, shaped and propagated by the Niyazov regime. The period between the first substantive Russian imperial expedition to Turkmenistan (or Transcaspia as the Russian Tsarist administration called it) to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 is, therefore, a crucial antecedent to Turkmenistan's independence.

The third section focuses on the Turkmen political, social and economic order prior to the Bolshevik Revolution. It is to this period that Niyazov has turned for inspiration in the development of political culture and concrete institutions in the post-independence era. Niyazov's claim to be reconstructing the traditional and "natural" Turkmen political order can therefore be tested against what is known of socio-political and economic structures prevalent in the period.

The fourth section comprises an analysis of political and economic developments in the Turkmen SSR, essential in order to interpret the emergence and crystallisation of Turkmen self-identity during the Soviet period, and to explain the context for Niyazov's own political ascent to First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPTu in 1985.

The penultimate section of the chapter summarises the historical overview by suggesting that, despite some similarities to the other Central Asian republics emerging from the rubble of the Soviet Union, important historical, cultural, religious and socio-economic characteristics developed that are peculiar to Turkmen state and society, and that the

country must therefore be analysed within this perspective, rather than absorbed in to a general narrative of Central Asia's historical development.

The final section tracks back to the theoretical framework of SRT used in the previous chapter. It considers how closely the Turkmen state conforms to the patterns on which sultanistic regimes are predicated, and how the peculiarities of the Turkmen path to independent statehood may not only help explain the emergence of sultanistic governance under Niyazov, but may also have furnished him with both the practical and symbolic tools to consolidate his authority.

Westerly migration and the emergence of Turkmen identity (5th Century CE - 985)

From information based on archaeological discoveries and the chronicles of the tenth century geographer Maqdisi (Barthold: 1962, 77), the ethnic origins of the Turkmen, like those of other Turkic peoples, are believed to lie in the emergence of a Turkic *qaghanate* in the Mongolian Altai region in the middle of the sixth century Common Era (CE). The *qaghanate* can itself be traced to the Ashina clan, part of the Xiongnu tribes who nomadised in western China in the early fifth century CE. The Ashina were attacked by the rival Rouran clan, and subsequently resettled in the Altai, uniting with local tribes and adopting the name Turk.

In common with other Central Asian *qaghanates* and empires through to the Early Modern period, the Turk *qaghanate* adopted a bipartite structure, splitting into Western and Eastern wings, the latter coming under pressure from the Tibetan and Tang empires in eastern Central Asia during the early seventh century, before finally collapsing in 630.

During this period, most of the territory of modern day Turkmenistan is thought to have been uninhabited. Even the Arabs who conquered Sasanid Iran, absorbing it into the Umayyad Caliphate in 651, rarely ventured beyond the Kopet Dagh mountains that form most of Turkmenistan's natural southern boundary with northern Iran. However, the ethnically Persian Soghdians in the ancient city of Merv (close to the southeastern Turkmen city of Mary) did feel Arab predations in the seventh and eighth centuries, as the latter raided down the course of the Amu Darya to the Aral Sea delta (Bregel: 2003, 16).

While the Turkmen lands were largely unaffected by the interaction of warring armies across Central Asia from the seventh to the tenth centuries, the successors of the Western

wing of the Turkic qaghanate, self-designated as Oghuz by the ninth century, roamed westwards across the southern Siberian steppe to north and east of the Aral Sea between 750 and 1000, occasionally encroaching into the Samanid empire further south, but principally based in the region of Ifsijab, near the modern city of Chimkent in southern Kazakhstan.

The Seljuk Empire (985-1194)

One contemporary source, Ibn Al-Athir, suggests that the Turkmen had, by the early tenth century, already distinguished themselves from the Oghuz, as much by the construction of a distinct, but artificial, genealogy as by outward customs and appearances (Barthold: 1962, 80-81). However, the terms Oghuz and Turkmen also appear to have been fairly interchangeable in this period. Oghuz tribes nomadising between the Ust-Yurt plateau,¹⁹ Aral Sea delta and along the lower course of the Amu Darya, usually wintered at the settlement of Yangikent. In 985, an Oghuz army commander named Seljuk fell out with the tribal chieftan (*yabghu*) at Yangikent, and fled with his followers to Jend, 100 km upstream. Seljuk converted to Islam and founded the Seljuk dynasty which, through his sons, came to rule an empire which covered much of the Greater Middle East. The adoption of Islam, according to the seventeenth century scholar Abul-Ghazi, the principal source on the period, became a distinguishing characteristic between the Seljuks and the Oghuz (Barthold: 1962, 158-159).

Seljuk's sons Musa, Mikail and Israel, followed by Mikail's sons, Toghril Beg Muhammad and Chaghri Bek Dawud, enlarged the Seljuk state rapidly in the early eleventh century, defeating the Ghaznavids in decisive battles at Nissa (near Ashgabat) in 1034, at Serakhs and Nishapur (in northern Iran) in 1038, and finally at Dandaqagan (near Merv) in 1040. The Seljuk empire, forged on the battlefield, effectively inherited the remnants of the Ghaznavid empire, and expanded substantially in the ensuing fifteen years until Toghril Beg was able to enter Baghdad in 1055, marry the daughter of the Abbasid Caliph, and receive the formal title of 'King of the East and the West' (Soucek: 2000, 95). Toghril's successors, Alp Arslan (1061-1072) and Malik Shah (1072-92), continued the growth of the Seljuk empire into Syria and Anatolia in the West, and against the Qarakhid empire in the east, capturing Bukhara and Samarkand in 1089, and subsequently raiding as far as Uzgend in modern Kyrgyzstan (Bregel: 2003, 28).

¹⁹ The Ust-Yurt plateau is a remote region in south western Kazakhstan, close to the Mangishlaq Peninsula.

However, the Seljuk Empire suffered from a typical case of imperial overreach and decay. The steady demise of the Seljuk Empire under the reigns of Malik's successors, Bark Yaruq (1092-1105), Muhammad Tapar (1105-1118), and Ahmed Sanjar (1118-1157), was caused as much by internal dissent as by defeat on the battlefield to rival imperial powers. Independent Oghuz/Turkmen tribes from the lower Amu Darya sacked Balkh in 1153, and the Khorezmshahs based in the Aral delta repeatedly rebelled, extending their power west to Mangishlaq and south to Khiva, effectively creating an empire within an empire. Before this, Qara-Khitay tribes from Mongolia had expanded southwest, and threatened the eastern fringes of Sanjar's empire, defeating him at Samarkand in 1141.

The Seljuk period has emerged as a symbolic centrepiece in contemporary Turkmenistan, one that confers greatness, legitimacy and potency on the Niyazov regime. Statues of the Seljuk sultans, while being nowhere near as common as those of Niyazov, are prominently situated in Ashgabat. The eight-pointed star of the Seljuks is used emblematically by Niyazov and inserted inappropriately into virtually all state occasions²⁰. The demise of the Seljuk state, which effectively occurred with the death of Sanjar in 1157 (although Seljuk rulers retained *de jure* authority until the death of Toghril III, the last Seljuk sultan, in 1194), is a theme frequently raised in President Niyazov's authorised reading of Turkmen history (Turkmenbashi: 2002, 218-223). The predations of Oghuz/Turkmen tribes against Seljuk power are, according to Niyazov, an example of how a house "divided against itself will fall" - a warning to contemporary Turkmen of the consequences that flow from placing tribal preferences above national unity.

Two important themes emerge from this period. Firstly, although Turkmen as an ethno-tribal self-designation was in use, there was no clear distinction between Turkmen, Seljuk and Oghuz tribes. All were essentially nomadic groups seasonally occupying an arc sweeping from the Mangishlaq Peninsula, across the Ust-Yurt plateau to the Aral sea basin, southeast along the Amu Darya river course, and west to Merv and northern Khorasan. The heartland of modern Turkmenistan – the Karakum desert, the steppe north of the Kopet Dagh mountain range, and the area along the eastern Caspian seaboard – remained either empty or barely inhabited and, crucially, separate from the network of

²⁰ An example of this tendency directly witnessed by the author was the commemoration ceremony for the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in Ashgabat on 8 May 2005 discussed in chapter five (Plates Eighteen and Nineteen).

overland trade routes connecting the Mediterranean ports to East Asia, known collectively as the Silk Road.

The contemporary political significance of this demographic vacuum for the Niyazov regime is that the organic, primordial connection between “blood” and “soil” posited by Niyazov cannot be said to have meaningfully existed. Niyazov has therefore been forced to circumvent this inconvenience by claiming that the Turkmen people actually descended from a mythical warrior named Oghuz Khan, himself a descendant of the Biblical prophet Noah (Turkmenbashi: 2003, 79). Niyazov does not state with clarity when Oghuz Khan lived, but one can infer from *Ruhnama* that his empire existed in approximately 3000 BCE. Niyazov states that the reign of Oghuz Khan was a “golden age,” which “illuminated the path of the Oghuz people, our ancestors, for thousands of years” (Turkmenbashi: 2003, 100). Crucially, the land that Oghuz Khan ruled is situated, according to Niyazov, almost coterminously with the boundaries of the modern state of Turkmenistan, suggesting an intimate connection between homeland and people lacking in orthodox historical accounts of the ethnogenesis of the Turkmen people.

The second important theme is that, while the land of what is now Turkmenistan was largely uninhabited, a fact that would, in succeeding centuries, give Turkmen socio-economic life and culture its regionally unique insularity, the Seljuk state interacted with civilizations from the Arabian Gulf to Herat (Afghanistan) in the south, Anatolia in the west, the Volga basin (Russia) in the north and the borderlands of China in the east. Although Seljuk rulers conversed in Turkic dialects, the language of court life and literature remained Persian. Thus, the political sweep and power exercised by the Seljuk empire exposed Seljuk Turkmen to much more cosmopolitan cultural systems and diffused them west and south, creating the broader ethnic Turkmen or ‘Turcoman’ communities that comprise significant minorities in the modern states of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. In contrast, the later generations of “pure” Turkmen, who came to comprise the core ethnic group of Turkmenistan, and with whom this study is concerned, were content to nomadise in isolation around the remote eastern Caspian seaboard and Ust-Yurt plateau.

The Mongol Conquest and the Timurid Empire (1194-1506)

The Mongol conquest, begun in northern China a year after Chingis Khan was proclaimed the supreme ruler of the Mongols in 1206, impacted on Turkmen tribal lands in 1221/2 with the sacking and destruction of Merv and Nissa, and the incorporation of

northerly Turkmen nomadic lands into the Mongol empire (Man: 2005). However, such was the remoteness of the western plateaus around Ust-Yurt and Mangishlaq, that Mongol suzerainty was nominal.

After the death of Chingis in 1226, his conquests were divided and subdivided into appanages and *ulus*, ruled by his sons and grandsons (Man: 2005). The northern half of modern day Turkmenistan fell under the supreme rule of, firstly, Jochi, the eldest son of Chingis, and then Jochi's second son Batu. The Western portion of the Mongol empire was divided into the Aq-Orda (White Horde) and the Kök Orda (Blue Horde). The latter, which nominally controlled the nomadic regions inhabited by the Turkmen, fell under the direct rule of Batu's older brother, Orda, although Batu remained in supreme authority. However, as the areas west of the Aral Sea delta to the Caspian Sea were unfit for horse breeding, the Turkmen/Oghuz tribes nomadising there were largely left to their own devices. The youngest son of Chingis, Toluy, was given control of Khorasan, covering northern Iran and the southern part of Turkmenistan. Toluy's son, Hulegu, founded the Ilkhan dynasty, and had largely inimical relations with the Kök Orda, prefiguring the fractures in the Mongol empire that characterized fourteenth century Central Asia (Bregel: 2003, 38).

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Mongol ruling dynasties converted to Islam, and became progressively Turkicised. The emergence of an Islamicised Turko-Mongolian culture, increasingly interwoven with an urban, sedentary Sart (Iranian) culture and economy in the region's major trading centres, defined both the political order and socio-economic development of early modern Central Asia (Manz: 1994, 6). Tangible evidence of this is present in the rise of Turkicised Mongol tribes such as the Qongrats and Uzbeks in Khorezm (in northern Turkmenistan), and the Jawn-i-Qurban in the Atrek river basin of northern Khorasan (now southwestern Turkmenistan) (Bregel: 2003, 40).

The demise of the Mongol aristocracy in Khorasan came with the death of Abu Said in 1335, and was followed, after an interregnum of puppet khans controlled by Persian tribal amirs, by the rise of the Timurid empire after 1360. Tamerlane became head of the *ulus* of Chaghatay in 1360, before annexing the neighbouring regions of Khorezm and Fergana and then, in the period from 1370 to his death in 1405, expanding his empire through conquests as far afield as Iran, Georgia and Syria in the west, to Delhi and western China in the south and east (Marozzi: 2005). The Turkmen tribes nomadising in the Ust-Yurt and Mangishlaq regions, and along the Uzboi (the river connecting the Aral

Sea to the Caspian Sea that dried up in the sixteenth century), came under the nominal suzerainty of the Timurids but were, as with the Mongols, largely unaffected in practical terms by Timurid rule, either in Tamerlane's lifetime or in those of his successors, Shahrukh (ruled 1409-1447), Ulugh Beg (1447-1449), Abu Said (1451-1469), and Sultan Husayn Bayqara (1470-1506) (Soucek: 2000, 125-143).

Thus, the Turkmen tribes nomadising in the Mangishlaq, along the Uzboi and, to a lesser extent, along the Amu Darya river, remained almost wholly isolated from the currents of political and social change enveloping the region, with the consequence that a much more purely Turkic (but, to the Turco-Mongolian mind, inferior) culture developed. Therefore, while Islamic learning and law was incorporated into the social and legal systems of the Chaghatay, Ilkhan and Timurid empires, the Turkmen, in the absence of madrassahs or a tradition of Islamic scholarship, continued to rely on *adat*, an essentially secular, unwritten, but nonetheless complex, code of customary law.

Similarly, political continuity in Turco-Mongolian societies was maintained through the dynastic principle exercised by a Chingisid "white bone" noble caste (Olcott: 1995, 14), whereas Turkmen tribes did not operate a system of hereditary khanship, but instead continued to elect their leaders, or *yabghus*, by consensus and on merit, and only then for specific periods, such as the duration of an *alaman* (raid on a neighbouring settlement) (Geiss: 1999, 348).

The insularity from the wider political, religious and socio-economic currents of Central Asia, which began with the demise of the Seljuk state, became embedded and entrenched over succeeding centuries with far-reaching implications for the Turkmen. The formation and crystallisation of lasting ethnically and culturally distinct identities differentiated Turkmen tribes not only from other individual Central Asian ethnic groups, but also, more broadly, from a loose, collective Central Asian political and social culture, a trend reinforced by the principal point of contact between Turkmen and the region's urbanised societies being almost solely in predatory or conflictual circumstances.

This socio-political distinctiveness undoubtedly influenced early Soviet ethnographers and political commissars in their decision to give Turkmen full Union Republic status at the formation of the Soviet Union in 1924, in preference to absorption in to an enlarged Uzbek SSR, while denying much stronger *prima facie* claims from Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks, who received full Union Republic status only several years later. It was also to influence the more liberal approach adopted by the Bolshevik leaders on religious, legal

and linguistic issues, which was to stress the importance of maintaining the isolation of the Turkmen SSR from potentially malign Islamic currents of thought emanating from the Uzbek SSR. This Turkmen “special case” mentality has also impacted on both external and internal perceptions of socio-political development into the post-Soviet period.

Arabshahid Rule and the Migrations of the Turkmen (1506-1869)

As Bregel points out, the isolation of the Turkmen tribes nomadising in the region east of the Caspian Sea, means that comparatively little is known by historians about the structure of Turkmen society and economy and of tribal movements between the Mongol conquest and the rise of the Arabshahids in the early sixteenth century (2003, 72). Thereafter, however, the Arabshahid scholar Abul Ghazi furnishes us with important data on the history and genealogy of the Turkmen tribes, and their interaction with the Arabshahids, in his work, ‘The History of the Mongols and the Tatars,’ written in the third decade of the seventeenth century (Barthold: 1962, 158-159).

The Turkic Arabshahid tribes gained control of Khorezm in 1511 with a formidable military force under the leadership of Balbars and Ilbars, the sons of Burge Sultan, thus enabling, for the first time in over three centuries, an external power to subjugate several core Turkmen tribes, albeit for only a brief period between 1511 and 1523. The temporary extension of Arabshahid power in to the vast, arid wastes of Mangishlaq, Ust-Yurt and the western Karakum desert disrupted long-established patterns of short-range nomadism with sheep and dromedary camels among the Turkmen, and prefigured a period of more extensive engagement with the other sources of political power that were gradually closing in on Turkmen tribes in western Central Asia.

Uzbek military units under Arabshahid control were increasingly able to cross the Karakum desert on raids from north (Khorezm) to south (Khorasan), experiencing contact with outlying Turkmen shepherds (Bregel: 2003, 52). Nomadic Kalmyks and Kazakhs simultaneously exerted increasing pressure from the north, displacing smaller Turkmen sub-clans down the eastern Caspian seaboard, where the latter encountered outposts of Khorasanian power. Moreover, the fluid conflicts between the Arabshahids and the neighbouring eastern empire of the Abulkhayids in the late sixteenth century reached across the southern Karakum, to Durun, Merv and Nissa, and as far west as the Caspian Sea on occasion. These external pressures, together with the consolidation of Khorezm’s political power around its new capital, Khiva, between 1603 and 1622, and a shortage of

available land in the Mangishlaq for livestock breeding, provided the rationale for the first of wave of Turkmen migrations commencing in 1639 (Bregel: 1981: 29).

The great tribal migrations between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries effectively diffused the Turkmen people, hitherto concentrated in an area of what is now western Kazakhstan, and northwestern Turkmenistan, across the territory of contemporary Turkmenistan and beyond. The senior Salor tribe migrated down the Caspian seaboard to the Khorasanian mountains, themselves displacing smaller Turkmen tribes en route. Another ancient tribe, the Chowdur, split into two sections, the first migrating north to the lower Volga basin; the second moving west to Khorezm (Bregel: 1981, 32).

Other tribes moved greater distances. The Ersari moved from the Garabogaz inlet on the Caspian seaboard, north of the modern city of Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk), first to the northern Karakum desert, then to Khiva, and finally to the Amu Darya river. The Kara-Choqa branch of the Yomuts emulated the Salors by moving south along the Caspian seaboard, while the Bayram Shali branch moved northeast to Khorezm, where they embarked on a long and troubled relationship with the Khorezmian authorities culminating in periodic expulsions from the relatively new Khivan khanate, following rebellions in 1744-7, 1771-9 and 1804-06 (Bregel: 2003, 72). The numerically largest tribe, the Teke, moved southeast, displacing the smaller Yemreli tribe in the process, in order to settle north of the Kopet Dagh mountains (around the location of the current capital, Ashgabat), to a region nominally part of Khorasan, but which was, in practice, beyond the northern boundary of effective political control. The less numerous El-Ali tribe moved away from the dry bed of the Uzboi in the western Karakum desert, splintering into three groups, which migrated to the Murghab (in Afghanistan), along the Amu Darya to Khiva, and south to Khorasan, respectively (Bregel: 2003, 72).

The Legacy of the Migrations

The wave of migrations by Turkmen tribes, dispersing from their area of greatest concentration between the Caspian Sea and the Aral Sea, had several enduring political, social and economic implications.

Firstly, the broadly contemporaneous demise and collapse of the Arabshahid empire between 1694 and 1727, together with the weakness of the Safavid dynasties, enabled Turkmen tribes to emerge as a diffuse, entirely disunited, politically unsophisticated, but sporadically potent politico-military power in the region. In short, the emergence of

violent Turkmen nomadic raiding parties injected a further dose of anarchy into an already chaotic and combustible regional environment. Turkmen tribes thus represented an additional ingredient to be factored into the political calculations and machinations of local elites.

Secondly, the patterns of distribution of the Turkmen tribes in this period have remained fairly stable since, apart from the further phased large-scale migration of Teke groups to the southeast region, around the Merv oasis, between the mid-1830s and 1857. Thus, the migrations of this period have produced, and still reflect, the spatial configurations of different tribes in contemporary Turkmenistan, with their clear implications for contemporary political dynamics.

Thirdly, the dispersal of different tribes, sub-tribes and clans across large distances, from southern Russia to contemporary Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iraq as well as the relatively large geographical space that constitutes the contemporary republic of Turkmenistan²¹, illustrates the lack of political unity among the Turkmen. Not only were there no political authority structures binding together Turkmen tribes, there were barely any *within* individual tribal or sub-tribal configurations. Thus, the self-identification of individual Turkmen with their tribe rested on no greater affiliation than that of (often imagined or invented) genealogical descent lines. A member of a Turkmen tribe or sub-tribe was, until the mid-nineteenth century, far more likely to experience conflict within his own, or with other Turkmen tribes, than with external political forces. Relations between tribes, as will be seen later, could be complex and punctuated by temporary alliances and rivalries, but the most common intra-tribal relationship, for the larger tribes at least, could probably best be categorised as “cold peace” (Geiss: 2003, 97-125). The legacy of tribal disunity was to prove a major challenge to the circumscribed nation-building project instigated by the Bolsheviks, and remains an enduring characteristic of Turkmen domestic politics in the post-Soviet era.

The fourth legacy of the migrations was to actively generate and fuel enduring inter-tribal hostility. Little is known about the incidence of inter-tribal conflict while Turkmen tribes were practising short-range nomadism in seclusion between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, there was likely to be some sort of internal “push” factor behind the waves of migrations, probably economic pressure, which is likely to have been manifested in violent conflict. The act of migration may have dissolved these

²¹ Turkmenistan is approximately the same size as France.

tensions but certainly created new ones, as long-established but smaller tribes, along the Caspian seaboard and north of the Kopet Dagh mountain range, were displaced by larger groups. The principal perpetrators of tribal displacement were the most numerous tribe, the Tekes, who displaced the Yemreli from the Ahal oasis (proximate to Ashgabat), and the Sariq from the Merv oasis in the mid-nineteenth centuries (Saray: 1989, 20-23). The impact of these episodes resonated in the mixture of cooperation and resistance to Russian invasion between 1869 and 1885 (motivated by the possibility of tactical gains by other tribes against the Tekes), and in the delicate balancing act undertaken by Soviet officials in making senior political and academic appointments. It also still resonates in contemporary Turkmenistan, in the perception of many Turkmen that the Tekes are too politically dominant, a reality that, as a Teke himself, Niyazov is obliged to confront (Kadyrov: 2004).

The fifth and final legacy of the migrations was that they ended the lengthy political isolation of the Turkmen tribes. While the religious, cultural and legal characteristics of Turkmen society were formed and distilled in the long period of nomadising in the remote Mangishlaq, Ust-Yurt and Uzboi regions, with limited exposure to the cross-currents of Central Asian socio-economic development of the period, the migrations effectively ended Turkmen isolation and accelerated greater engagement with political forces closer to the geographical heart of Central Asia which, in turn, shaped the Turkmen political order. The principal outcome of higher levels of interaction with the Arabshahids in Khorezm to their north and east and the Persians of Khorasan to their south, was periodic loss of political autonomy. The Turkmen had participated in the ouster of the Arabshahid sultan Abul Ghazi by Isfandiyar in 1631. After Isfandiyar died in 1642, and Abul Ghazi returned to power, he banished Turkmen tribes across the Karakum to northern Khorasan and the Tejen valley south west of Merv (now the border region between Turkmenistan and Iran) and, together with his son Anusha, continued to launch raids from Khorezm on the tribes for the remainder of the century. Similarly, Turkmen tribes in the southwestern Atrek valley and along the Caspian seaboard were pressured by raids from both the northern Kalmyk tribes and the Persian Governor of Astarabad during the later seventeenth century.

However, although the Turkmen could be the victims of the expansion of their neighbours' military influence, equally they could benefit from the concomitant political vacuums created by the retraction of this power. The fall of the Safavid empire in Iran in the late eighteenth century, for instance, offered opportunities for Turkmen tribes to settle unhindered in the areas around Nissa and Duran, north of the Kopet Dagh mountains.

The consolidation of Central Asia's sedentary regions under the control of the three khanates of Bukhara, Khiva (Khorezm) and Kokand in the early nineteenth century, also offered opportunities for Turkmen tribes to profit (Trotter: 1882, 539). Turkmen nomads became prolific suppliers to the infamous slave market at Khiva, and Yomuts emerged as a feared, quasi-autonomous core of the Khivan army, defending the khanate's borderlands in a relationship broadly analogous to that enjoyed by the Cossacks with the Russian state.

Thus, on the eve of Russian expansion into Central Asia in the mid-nineteenth century, a somewhat ambivalent and volatile relationship had developed between Turkmen tribes and the sedentary populations of Khorasan, Bukhara and Khiva, characterised by frequent raids, diplomatic hostility, mutual profit, and even, in the case of Khorezm, indentured service into the khanate's military forces.

As noted above, however, there was little uniformity in the interactions between tribes, or often even within them. Thus, Yomuts in the service of Khorezm enjoyed tax privileges, preferential access to the slave market, and senior office in the Khorezmian army, and were likely to enthusiastically pursue *alamans* against the Tekes of Ahal and Merv (Saray: 1989, 101-105), while other Yomuts nomadising on the fringes of Khorezm may well have had inimical relations with the political centre in Khiva and, perhaps, intermittently friendly relations with other tribal groups.

The end of Turkmen isolation therefore had a number of temporary and permanent consequences. It altered regional political dynamics by introducing highly mobile and effective nomadic raiders capable of disrupting the caravan trade and threatening military outposts. It established a spatial distribution of tribes that has broadly held ever since. It fuelled both inter- and intra-tribal hostilities over economic issues (land and water usage), and in respect of the variegated relations tribes experienced with neighbouring sedentary communities. Finally, it led to the development of a network of fluctuating and contradictory relationships with Khorasan and the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, which were to shape responses to Russian imperial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Russian Conquest and absorption into Tsarist military-political structures

The Turkmen response to the expansion of Russian political and military influence into the lands on which they cultivated and nomadised was neither uniform nor coordinated. As there was no pre-existing history of political unity between Turkmen tribes, this was hardly surprising. However, the pincer-like nature of the Russian invasion is also an explanatory factor. The long-term strategic goal of the Tsarist administration in Central Asia appears to have been twofold. Firstly, Russia was keen to ensure that as much of Turkestan (as the region was then more commonly known) as possible came under Russian influence in the shortest possible time. The logic of imperial expansion was to pre-empt the projection of British power into the region from India and Afghanistan, which might, in its turn, threaten the southern rim of the Russian empire (Hopkirk: 2001). The second Russian policy objective was, in common with the other great European powers of the age, to secure an empire, potentially rich in resources and prestige, under the guise of political and social liberation. Each conquest then had to be reinforced by a strategic buffer zone. Consequently, the overland expansion of Russia's empire was driven by a self-fulfilling logic – it grew to protect the gains that that had been previously accrued.

The conquest of Turkmen lands fulfilled both of these criteria. From the north and northeast, the attack on Khiva, notorious for its slave market, in June 1873 fulfilled the mission of liberation (Carrère d'Encausse: 1994, 147). From the west, the establishment of the port of Krasnovodsk in November 1869 established a strategic foothold east of the Caspian Sea that would protect Russian possessions in the Caucasus, and thwart the expansion of British or Persian power from the southeast.

The Yomuts nomadising in southwest Turkmenistan, along the Caspian seaboard, generally welcomed the establishment of the Russian base at Krasnovodsk (Saray: 1989: 85). Persian attacks on Yomut and Goklen tribes in the Atrek Valley in 1836 had led Yomut *obas* (headmen) to petition Russian merchants for protection. Moreover, the Russians proved willing to trade, buying camels and sheep from the Yomuts, and to make gifts to tribesmen as part of a non-aggression pact. Krasnovodsk and a base further north at Mangishlaq (later to become part of Kazakhstan) were incorporated in the Governor-Generalship of the Caucasus, headed by Tsar Alexander II's brother Michael, in February 1870. An early test of the relationship came in October 1870, when Teke raiders launched an attack on a Russian party exploring the western Karakum desert. In order to repulse the assault and pursue the raiders, Russians bought or commandeered supplies from

Yomuts, underlining the lack of political unity among the Turkmens at this juncture (Saray: 1989, 90).

The military base established at Krasnovodsk by Col. G. Stoletov also served as an important point to launch one arm of the operation to defeat the Khivan khanate. The separate khanate of Kokand, centred on the Fergana Valley, incorporating parts of the modern states of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, had fallen in 1866 (Tashkendi: 2003, 42-78), and been absorbed into the new Governor-Generalship of Turkestan. The emirate of Bukhara had been overrun in 1868. The emirate remained intact, but as a Russian protectorate. Russian pressure thus increased on Khiva, ostensibly because of its slave markets, many hundreds of whose victims were Russian, and because of the predations across Khorezm's western steppe of the northern branch of Yomuts, who formed a significant part of Khorezm's military forces, but who, in reality, functioned more as unreliable paramilitary irregulars.

Simultaneous expeditions were launched from Krasnovodsk in the west and from the Kazakh lands in the northeast in April 1873 under the command of General Konstantin von Kaufman, the first Governor-General of Turkestan (Geiss: 2003, 198; Saray: 1989, 106). Khiva surrendered in June 1873, but the Yomuts fought on. Kaufman gave the Yomuts an unrealistic ultimatum of two weeks for the payment of £42,500 as a war indemnity. When this was not paid, the Yomuts were pursued and, with their families, brutally massacred by the Russians at the desert settlement of Hazavat. Interestingly, the post-Soviet regime has not incorporated this encounter into the national historical narrative, in the way that the defeat of the Tekes at Geok-Deppe nearly a decade later, has become emblematic of Turkmen bravery against superior foreign arms. This may, perhaps, be because Khiva itself does not fall within Turkmen territory, but is more likely to be because the victims were northern Yomuts, with whom Niyazov has long had an uneasy relationship.

The expansion of Russian influence into Turkmen lands was recognised by the creation of a Transcaspian military district in April 1874, headed by General A. Lomakin. The ambiguous relationship between Russian forces and the local population was exemplified by, on the one hand, frequent skirmishes between imperial forces and Tekes on the central steppe between 1874 and 1879, as the former steadily advanced eastwards, and, on the other hand, the fulsome provisioning of the same Russian expeditionary forces to the tune of 1000 camels by Yomuts in the west (Saray: 1989, 119).

The fate of the Tekes, and the Turkmen more generally, was decided at two battles, on 9 September 1879 and 24 January 1881, both at the fortress of Geok-Deppe, 45 km west of Ashgabat, itself only a small encampment at this time (Matley: 1994, 98). The Ahal and Merv (Mary) Tekes had come together and appointed Nur Verdi Khan as their *serdar* (military leader), and, in the first battle, he repulsed a force led by Lomakin, albeit sustaining heavy losses (Boulger: 1880, 234-250). Lomakin was replaced by General M.D. Skobelev in March 1880, and a better prepared force secured relations with the Yomuts by purchasing 2500 camels (although some Yomuts refused to deal with the Russians and migrated across the Atrek river to Persia), and then offered punitive peace terms to the Tekes, which were refused (Carrère d'Encausse: 1994, 147-148).

The death of Nur Verdi Khan in May 1880 dealt a blow to Teke fortunes and the Tekes proved unable to defend Geok-Deppe when Russian sappers mined its fortifications. 6500 were killed in the battle, and a further 8000 were cut down, mainly women and children, fleeing into the Karakum desert (Saray: 1989, 205-216). In later years, Soviet historians were to simply airbrush this battle from history, stating that Turkmen and Russians had come together amicably (Skozyrov: 1956: 18).

Turkmen resistance to the Russian forces was effectively broken at Geok-Deppe. The Merv Tekes accepted peace terms more amicably on 31 January 1884. The only pocket of Turkmen land not under Russian control by now was the far southeastern area bordering Afghanistan. In order to secure this region, and complete the closure of the gap with British India and its client Afghan state, Russian forces assisted Saryk and Salor tribesmen in a dispute with Persians and Afghans over land and water use. After securing their rights, these tribes tendered their submission to General Komarov in January 1885.

A joint Russo-Turkmen force inflicted heavy losses on the Afghans to claim a section of Penjdeh valley in March 1885, prompting the establishment of a joint Anglo-Russian border survey, which concluded its work in 1887 with a definitive border treaty that still forms the contemporary international border between the two states (Saray: 1989, 239). Thus, the subjugation of the Turkmen was finally completed, and the parameters of subsequent Turkmen statehood established, thereby formally delivering some of the last stateless peoples and territories into the international diplomatic and state system.

Turkmen society prior to the Bolshevik Revolution

Constructing an accurate picture of Turkmen society prior to its incorporation into the Soviet Union is complicated by a lack of available sources. There are very few extant Turkmen materials available, as Turkmen society was almost universally illiterate, although the Turkish scholar Mehmet Saray has utilised *Jakname*, an important document authored by Abd-ul-Sattar Kazi (more commonly known as Kady) in the 1850s. Some materials on the pre-conquest era were also collected by the Soviets (*Materialii*: 1968) and feature in Saray's work, but the bulk of evidence on the period comes from Russian and other European travellers, many of whom participated in the nineteenth century "Great Game" between Russia and Britain for geopolitical influence in Central Asia, and who lived amongst the Turkmen, observing the structure of their society, their customs and habits. The work of Paul Georg Geiss, who has analysed these materials in conjunction with the two major anthropological studies of the Turkmen undertaken by the East German ethnographer W. König in the mid-1950s (1962), and William Irons in the 1960s (1975), has produced a persuasive, if somewhat unsystematic, picture of pre-Tsarist and Tsarist Central Asia (Geiss: 2003).

Synthesising the materials and interpretations of Saray and Geiss, together with the eyewitness accounts of European travellers, in a critical fashion, we are able to develop a reasonably coherent picture of Turkmen political order, economic patterns and socio-cultural development in the late nineteenth century.

(i) The Turkmen political and social order before the Bolshevik Revolution

Notwithstanding their formal incorporation into Tsarist military-administrative institutions, the structure of Turkmen society changed very little after the Russian conquest. The Transcaspian military district was given the civilian political status of an *oblast*, which was then incorporated into the Turkestan Governor-Generalship in 1897, in place of the increasingly impractical and illogical jurisdiction of the Viceroy of the Caucasus. The main themes of this period were the creation by Russian administrators of a very small number of Russian language schools intended to educate an elite cadre of native bureaucrats, the completion of the Transcaspian railway, and the conversion of large tracts of Turkmen land along rivers and near oases to the production of cotton in order to supply the growing domestic Russian market.

However, there was little regulation or interference by colonial administrators in religious affairs, the court system and local forms of governance. In fact, there was actually very little evidence of a “civilising” imperial mission. Consequently, Turkmen political and social life remained relatively unaltered by the Russian occupation, particularly in outlying areas.

Analysis of the available sources suggests several key characteristics of the Turkmen structure of authority relations and social practices in the periods before and shortly after the Russian conquest, which enable us to construct a picture of the internal dynamics of Turkmen society.

Firstly, most sources agree that the Turkmen political order was acephalous – that is to say, it lacked a political leadership endowed with enduring authority and furnished with a permanent staff (Vambery: 1865, 249; O’ Donovan: 1977, 166; Geiss: 2003, 7-8; Irons: 1975). The British officer Lieutenant Colonel C. E. Stewart, for example, noted in 1881 that the Merv Tekes had “no regular chiefs for internal affairs” (Stewart: 1977: 166). Order was therefore maintained by all adult males. Political representation did not exist because all males were roughly equal members of the political community. Leadership did exist but it was entirely situational – equally conferred and withdrawn by consent. The spokesmen (and sometimes women) appointed by each extended family group had no authority to make decisions or fix obligations on behalf of the group. Community decisions were taken by the *maslakhat*, a council with fluid membership comprising elders or *aksakals* (“white beards”) and influential members of the community, occasionally including mature women. *Maslakhat* members were chosen not by dint of hereditary principle, but through experience, ability, wealth and standing in the community. As Adrienne Edgar notes:

The Turkmen lacked a hereditary aristocratic stratum or tribe that monopolised positions of leadership. Leadership within each community was based to a large extent on seniority; personal qualities, wealth and membership in a well-respected lineage were also important (2004, 26).

In dealing with external groups, *obas* (headmen) were elected, but this position came without privileges and an *oba* could be summarily removed by the *maslakhat*. When embarking on an *alaman*, or military expedition, temporary authority for the duration of the campaign was invested in a *serdar* (military leader). A *serdar* had unfettered

authority over the life and death of his followers for the duration of the campaign, but once booty had been shared, his authority ceased (O' Donovan: [1884] 1977, 202-203).

Decisions of the *maslakhat* had to be consistent with *adat*, the code of customary law, and were binding. Geiss believes that the *maslakhat* "represented the condensed public opinion of the group which balanced the usurping ambitions of a single tribesman" (2003, 98). Should a community member dissent from the opinion of the *maslakhat*, the decision was usually deferred, and then reconsidered at a later point. This may occur on several occasions until a consensus or compromise could be reached. Teke tribes had a slightly more hierarchical variant of this community structure in that the *maslakhat* might appoint a khan as a semi-permanent representative of the group. Nevertheless, Teke khans were not appointed on the Chingisid hereditary principle, but on ability and standing.

F.H. Skrine and Edward Denison Ross, British travellers to the region in the late nineteenth century, noted that Teke khans were subject to immediate recall, with the *maslakhat* pronouncing "You are Khan!" to appoint a leader, but with the authority to pronounce "You are not Khan!" at any future meeting in order to terminate the appointment (Geiss: 1999: 349). According to Kady (quoted in Geiss: 1999, 349), the first Teke khans were only created in 1830, with the appointment of Oraz Khan, who organised and headed the invasion of the Tejen and Murghab regions to expel the Salor and Saryk tribes previously resident there. It would appear, therefore, that the fundamental difference between the position of *serdar* and khan lay in the duration of the post, with the latter being a more open-ended arrangement.

Although a rough but effective form of democracy would appear to have operated, it is, however, worth noting that certain members of each group were excluded from the political community. Women were usually excluded from the decision-making process, although where they were particularly capable, had great standing, or when males were absent, women might be given *maslakhat* membership. Interestingly, for example, in the negotiations for Russian annexation between the imperial forces led by General Skobelev and the Merv Tekes during the winter of 1883-4, the Merv delegation was headed by the widow of Nur Verdi Khan, a Teke leader, rather than by other senior male Teke khans (Saray: 1989, 226-230; Field observation, Mary Regional Museum, 22 November, 2004).

Moreover, slaves (*guls*) and individuals without the requisite pure proof of lineage, such as the offspring of unions between Turkmen and slaves or other low-status groups such as Kurds (*yannicha*), and even small "client" tribes, were also excluded from membership of

the political community (Edgar: 2001, 271), although some elasticity was possible should circumstances dictate. Thus, although Turkmen communities were internally stratified, genealogies were malleable enough to enable new allies or community members to be “discovered” and “written in” to existing lineages (Edgar: 2004, 25). Moreover, small “saintly” tribes of Arab or Persian descent, who frequently fulfilled spiritual or healing functions were accorded separate respect and status. Thus, while Turkmen political identity was conceptualised to a significant degree through genealogy, it remained, as Edgar notes, essentially “a backward projection of present concerns and relationships in to the past” (2004, 25).

If the form of Turkmen traditional political structures embodied an element of primitive democracy and afforded, to some degree, the ability for individuals to both assert and protect their rights within the group context, this was tempered by the joint liability of extended family members for the transgressions of individuals. Thus, the homicide of a slave required the payment of ‘blood money’ by all those who could trace their relation to the perpetrator as far back as seven generations, so called *gan dushar* (“blood reach” in Yomut Turkmen) (Geiss: 2003, 33). The killing of a pure Turkmen gave rise to a group responsibility to rectify the trespass, and a group liability for retribution, normally a counter-homicide that would restore amicable relations. This practice finds expression in contemporary Turkmenistan, through the detention and punishment of the relatives of criminals and dissidents, who are regarded by the government as being as culpable as the perpetrator himself for any transgressions (IHF Report: April 2004, 19), although the practice also has its antecedents in the Soviet era, particularly during Stalin’s rule (Service: 2003, 210-253).

Political authority was sanctified and legitimised through adherence to *adat* (or *dap*), Turkmen common law. Although Islamic *shariat* law was known to the Turkmens, its implementation was selective, and its strictures were subordinated to *adat* (Edgar: 2004, 26). The preference for custom over religion crucially differentiates Turkmen from the sedentary communities of Uzbekistan, in particular, the *mahallas* (local Uzbek residential districts), in which *shariat* law was practised. *Adat* embodied community values and norms, covering social and family customs, criminality, together with the coordination and regulation of land, irrigation and livestock issues. Thus, *adat* provided a way of life as much as a legal code, functioning as a system of accreting, multi-layered and polyvocal expressions of social norms, gradually evolving and adapting to changing mores, social pressures and economic circumstances, in a manner not dissimilar to English common law. It also, as Geiss notes, reinforced patterns of kinship identity in

contrast to, say, Uzbek interpretations of *shariat* law, which served to reinforce residential communal commitment at *mahalla* (neighbourhood) level (2001, 102). Consequently, Turkmen political identity was fixed in non-spatial terms, which would prove a challenge to Soviet officials and ethnographers in later years.

The regulation of relations with other Turkmen tribal groups was also coded through a system of subtle, complex and dynamic socio-political norms. Following the work of Irons on the Yomuts who nomadise along the Perso-Turkmen borderlands in the Gurgan valley, Geiss has advanced the notion that the framework of inter-tribal interaction could be described as that of a “checkerboard order” (Irons: 1975, 64; Geiss: 2003, 101-102). For example, the Yomut tribe was subdivided into *Chony* and *Seref* branches, which were largely inimical to one another. However, conflict was relatively rare, because the branches resided in alternate strips between the mountainsides and the riverbeds in a form of checkerboard (Irons: 1975, 65). The group’s joint liabilities in the event of conflict meant that any tribesman who transgressed social norms found that his tribal unit was hemmed in by inimical tribal units on either side, which were, in turn, contained by inimical units on their outer. Thus, Turkmen tribes maintained a complex strategic balance based on an artificially created parity that Geiss describes as “segmentary opposition” (2003, 103).

The observations of Charles Marvin, a Victorian traveller who witnessed the Russian military campaign against the Turkmen, and resided with the Merv Tekes in 1880-1, would appear to confirm the hypothesis advanced by Geiss (Marvin: 1881, 30). Marvin noted that the Teke constructed over a hundred small canals on each bank of the Murghab river, the right being used by Otamysh branch of the Teke, and the left by the Tokhtamysh branch. Edmund O’Donovan, who lived as an honoured guest of the Tekes for a time shortly after Marvin’s visit, confirmed these arrangements (O’Donovan: [1884] 1977, 201-202). Where a numerical imbalance arose that might cause a disagreement in the amount of water usage claimed by each branch, the deficient branch supplemented its numbers by drawing additional manpower from other regions, thus ensuring the continuation of strategic parity.

Geiss therefore concludes that the acephalous structure of the Turkmen, combined with the system of customary law and the construction of a geographically arranged balance of power, placed constraints on inter-tribal conflict and ensured that responses to inter-tribal transgressions remained proportionate (2003, 106). What Geiss does not explain, however, is how relations were regulated between small tribes, between more or less purely nomadic groups who did not grow crops, or between those nomadic Turkmen

tribes living adjacent to, or amongst, sedentary communities of Turkmen or non-Turkmen. However, it is clear that, in order for such complex systems of conflict prevention and resolution to evolve, enmities between tribal groupings were commonplace, if not prevalent. The Russian military commander, General Kuropatkin, appears to confirm this perception when he observed in 1879: "The hatred of the various Turkmen clans towards one another is scarcely less than their hatred towards other people" (Edgar: 2004, 17). Barthold, writing in the early Soviet period, in the present tense, arrived at the same conclusion: "Single clans, even those belonging to the same tribe, are often hostile to one another. They band together only when they come out against members of another tribe or people... national consciousness is very slight" (1962, 169).

(ii) The Turkmen tribal economy

In the same way that constructing a picture of the pre-revolutionary Turkmen political order requires the careful piecing together of data from diverse sources, so there is only a limited array of materials to assemble a picture of the traditional Turkmen tribal economy.

To begin with, in the absence of census data, it is unclear how many Turkmen existed within or around the subsequent borders of Turkmenistan. Bregel analysed the suppressed, but "more or less reliable" data from the infamous Soviet census of 1926 (1981, 11), concluding that the Turkmen population probably exceeded 700,000 in the mid-nineteenth century, of which around 30% were Teke, 21% Yomut, 16% Ersary, with the Goklen, Salor, Sariq, and Chowder making up a further 16 %, and smaller tribes the remainder.

The extent to which Turkmen economy was nomadic is also unclear. Soviet historians and ethnographers were keen to underplay the degree to which the Turkmen engaged in nomadic stock-breeding, not least because nomadism itself was ideologically problematic for the Bolsheviks, due its lack of a clear distinction between an exploiter and exploited class. Stalin unconvincingly attempted to designate nomadic economies as "feudal-patriarchal", which does not make sense in the Turkmen (or, indeed, possibly any) context (Bregel: 1996, 8). By claiming that they had sedentarised prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, it was possible to telescope the Turkmen economy into the capitalist age, and thus identify and remove the class of wealthier stockholders and landowners. The reality, however, appears to have been much more complex.

Firstly, Bregel rejects the Soviet analysis, arguing that, from the sources available, including Abul-Ghazi, the contribution of arable agriculture to the Turkmen economy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was insignificant (1981, 28). The settlement of the Amu Darya by the Ersari and Salor tribes in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries did introduce a significant minority of Turkmen to crop production. However, the Yomuts of western Turkmenistan and the Sariqs remained almost exclusively pastoral stock-breeders. Large numbers of Turkmen, in fact, became either 'semi-nomads', spending a proportion of each year nomadising in collapsible dwellings – a way of life still being conducted in remote Yomut areas of southwestern Turkmenistan (Interview 11) – or 'integrated nomads,' living in one place but nomadising from their base year round. Bregel asserts that, as late as 1926, as many as 116,000 Turkmen (16% of the population) could be described as "pure nomads" (1981, 37). The process of sedentarisation led to the emergence of distinctions between *chomur* (settled) and *charva* (nomadic) Turkmen, the latter being generally more prosperous, and viewing mobility as a source, symbol and ultimate guarantor of political freedom (Geiss: 2003, 58, Edgar: 2004, 23).

A further significant obstacle for Bolshevik ideologues lay in the very limited incidence of individual land ownership. Observations of the Teke, for example, noted that the community accorded rights for land and water use on a temporary basis to individual family units on the basis of need, rather than permanent ownership rights (Massell: 1974, 50). These usage rights were subject to reapportionment each year by consensus, depending on whether each family had expanded or contracted. The outcome was that, not only had enduring property relations not been established (undercutting Marxist preconceptions of economic development) but that enduring authority relations were also absent. The absence of a permanent bureaucratic stratum to fix and enforce economic relations, and to distribute resources and favours, produced a remarkably egalitarian socio-economic system.

However, this lack of orthodox economic development had serious implications for Turkmenistan's later prospects, as the newly formed Turkmen SSR had almost no industrial base on which to build in the early Soviet period (Sivorov: 1962, 159, 162, 170-171). There was little in the way of permanent infrastructure or even much more than subsistence agriculture. Thus, the Turkmen SSR represented something of a *tabula rasa* in which Soviet officials could introduce the Stalinist productionist ethos (McCannon: 2003), as well as a showcase to the developing world of the benefits of rapid industrial development along the Soviet model. As a result, underdevelopment led to an emphasis

on setting and attaining output targets above all other measurements, a *leitmotif* still informing the economic policy of Niyazov's government in the post-Soviet era (IS 1).

The economic activity for which the Turkmen were most widely known, however, was their participation in the slave trade. Turkmen raiding parties were notorious for attacking caravans travelling the Silk Road and for seizing villagers from *alamans* in Khorasanian territory. The captives were often taken to Turkmen settlements where they were used as slaves, although some were subsequently integrated into the local community, albeit at a lower status than indigenous Turkmen. Alternatively, Turkmen tribesmen would pass them on to Uzbek slave traders in Khiva and Bukhara where, according to Lt. Col. C.E. Stewart's 1881 account, up to 100,000 slaves resided ([1881] 1977, 156). Stewart's estimate appears to be corroborated by the release of 30,000 slaves of Persian origin alone by Russian forces after the storming of Khiva in 1873 (Geiss: 2003, 227).

The importance of the slave trade for the Turkmen lay not only in its economic function (or, indeed, for the human tragedy perpetrated on those involved), but in the rationale it provided for Russian expansion. An important justification in the European rush for empire that characterised the second half of the nineteenth century was the civilising mission that colonisers could perform. With the Turkmen, Russian imperial forces had, in the slave trade, found a reason for squeezing the diminishing zone between the Russian and British empires, notwithstanding the fact that Tsar Alexander II had only abolished serfdom in 1861 (Pipes: 1977), a mere eight years before Russia established its first outpost in Turkmen lands at the new Caspian outpost of Krasnovodsk.

The Turkmen political, social and economic order at the eve of Russian imperial conquest was one in which complex unwritten political and social codes, clustered around an amorphous, elastic but effective body of customary law, *adat*, governed behaviour and conduct. There was little, if any, evidence of pan-Turkmen, much less pan-Turkic, nationalism at this juncture. The notion advanced by Saray that a Turkmen proto-state existed (1989, 50-55) is contradicted by a consensus of contemporary witnesses and subsequent scholarship. The boundaries of Turkmen identity were tribal or, more likely, sub-tribal, reinforced by broad linguistic differences between tribes.

What then, did being a Turkmen, or 'Turkmenness' mean? One answer is almost certainly that it was meaningless until or unless Turkmen came into contact with non-Turkmen, in which case Turkmen knew that the 'Other' did not share certain speech patterns and customs relating to dress, religious observance, marriage rites and so on. 'Turkmenness' was therefore defined by default, in effect what it was not. However, one

thread that could be said to bind Turkmen together was the mythology surrounding their common genealogy. As Edgar notes, unlike neighbouring sedentarised communities such as Uzbeks or Tajiks, Turkmen identity was fixed by genealogy (2004, 22), in effect, by time rather than space. The adding of a spatial dimension by the Bolsheviks, through the creation of an ethno-territorial Turkmen republic in 1924, did much to alter Turkmen self-perception and foster a nascent national identity. In the post-Soviet era, Niyazov has sought to fuse the two strands, frequently extolling the connection between the Turkmen and their landscape with topographical references and imagery, while also emphasising, through the publication of (fictitious) written genealogies, the blood ties between himself and the wider Turkmen nation, notably with Oghuz Khan, the Seljuks, and other illustrious figures such as the national poet Makhtumkuli.

The Bolshevik Revolution and the creation of the Turkmen SSR

Although the Turkmen experienced episodes of political violence during the revolutionary period (1917-1919) and subsequent civil war (1919-1922), they could not be said to have been at the epicentre of revolutionary events leading to the consolidation of Bolshevik power. As with the tumultuous tides of empire and warfare that swept and then receded across Central Asia over the preceding millennium, the Turkmen remained somewhat at the margins. Nevertheless, it could be argued that they did rather well out of the early Soviet period. Formerly an inchoate nation in an inchoate space, the Turkmen gained a territory, a capital, even one or two cities in Dashoguz and Charjou that could barely be described as Turkmen, a political infrastructure, and the prospect of substantial resources from the Soviet centre in Moscow.

It is unsurprising, therefore, that the response of Turkmen Bolshevik leaders to the final national delimitation plan in 1924 was “ecstatic” (Edgar: 2004, 65). How then was an ethno-national territory of mutually inimical tribes formed so swiftly? Why were Turkmen able to readily adapt to Soviet nationalities policy, and with what consequences? What were the legacies of incorporation into the Soviet Union for succeeding generations up to and including the regime of Saparmurat Niyazov, himself a model of Soviet advancement and Communist Party loyalty until he was over 50 years of age?

Although tension between the indigenous population and their Russian colonisers predated World War I, the declaration of war by Russia against Ottoman Turkey caused the Turkic peoples of Central Asia increasingly to question their loyalty to the Tsarist regime. The decision, made in late 1914, to fix cotton prices but to allow grain prices to

float freely, caused great hardship and discontent across the region. This was magnified by the lack of political direction from the colonial administration, caused by the recalling of the Governor-General A.V. Samsenov to lead the 2nd Army (Keller: 2001, 13). The trigger for widespread rebellion, however, came with the decree on the drafting of non-Russians to the front. Opposition to the draft was widespread and violent among the Turkmen but, as Arne Haugen points out, “there was scant evidence of all-Turkmen solidarity”, and “patterns of mobilisation largely corresponded to tribal boundaries” (2003, 44), with the predominantly nomadic Yomuts of western Turkmenistan now among the most militant anti-Russians.

The growth of the Jadidist movement in other parts of Central Asia did not really penetrate Turkmen areas. The Jadids were young, radical, secular reformers, aiming to modernise Central Asia rapidly through mass education and economic development. Although they were pan-Turkic in orientation, there was considerable scope for tactical alliance with Bolshevik revolutionaries in their mutual opposition to the Tsarist government and the quasi-feudal protectorates of Khiva and Bukhara. However, Jadidism was essentially an urban movement based in Bukhara and sponsored by wealthy merchants (Haugen: 2003, 47-58). Although a tiny Turkmen intelligentsia, educated in Tsarist Russian language schools, absorbed Jadidism, unlike among the other Central Asian nations, notably the Uzbeks, it never gained a hold over the predominantly rural and illiterate Turkmen (Edgar: 2004, 33).

The rupture between the Bolshevik leadership in Moscow and local Muslim radicals came in December 1917 when the 4th Muslim Congress of Turkestan in Kokand took Bolshevik propaganda about national self-determination at face value, and declared Turkestanian autonomy, in contravention to a preceding pronouncement from the exclusively Slavic Turkestan Council of People’s Commissars (Turksovnarkom) a month earlier (Soucek: 2000, 212). Stalin took the decision to crush the Muslim Congress, and the city of Kokand was destroyed on 18 February 1918, paving the way for the eventual establishment of Bolshevik control across Central Asia.

A renegade faction of Turkmen Socialist Revolutionaries had seized power in Ashgabat in July 1918, however, and formed an unlikely alliance with a detachment of British forces, known as the Malleson mission, which had been despatched to northern Persia in order to prevent both German designs on India, and the expansion of Bolshevik influence along the Persian and Afghan borders. In a little known episode, the British army exercised *de facto* political control over the Turkmen for several months, before eventually withdrawing after the German surrender (Sargent: 2004). This facilitated the

eventual occupation of the entire Transcaspian *oblast* by the Red Army in 1919-1920 (Carrère d'Encausse: 1994, 232).

A separate political dynamic was at work among the northern and eastern Turkmen. The Turkmen tribal leader Junaid Khan gained effective control of the Khivan khanate in 1916, only to be deposed by an alliance of Bolsheviks and Jadidist 'Young Khivans' in January 1920. The Emir of Bukhara was overthrown in October 1920, and in both territories, which had significant Turkmen minorities, People's Soviet Republics were declared. However, Bolshevik authority remained, at this stage, severely circumscribed and tenuous.

In order to win over local support and implement Bolshevik nationalities policy, a more conciliatory line towards the Turkmen was pursued. Turkmen "sections" were created in the Kerki and Charjou *oblasti* of the Bukharan republic in October 1923, an executive Committee of Turkmen sat in the Khivan government, and Transcaspia was renamed as an autonomous Turkmen province (Carrère d'Encausse: 1994, 236; Karriyeva *et al*: 1978, 354-355). However, real authority was exercised by the *Sredazburo* (Central Asian Bureau) which, between 1920 and its disbandment in 1934, acted as the plenipotentiary of Moscow in Central Asia (Haugen: 2003, 3).

The decision made by Lenin and Stalin, who was the Bolsheviks' principal expert on nationality affairs, to create ethno-territorial republics in Central Asia owed much to Marxist ideology, or rather the lack of it on the national question. Both Soviet leaders adopted the view that nationalism among the colonised and oppressed could be both a progressive and reactionary force. The progressive element was that, as Edgar notes, "a people had to become a nation before it could move on to the more advanced socialist and internationalist stages of existence." (quoted in Haugen: 2003, 106). Thus, nationalism was an inevitable, historic step on the path to communism.

However, Stalin was aware that the same sentiments could be used by opponents of Soviet power as a focus for resistance to the regime. This transpired to be the case in Central Asia, where so-called Basmachi rural guerrilla forces adopted a variant of nationalism to seriously disrupt Soviet governance across the region, including Turkmenistan, until the mid 1930s.

Stalin was convinced that if nationalism could be harnessed and directed in the service of Bolshevism, it could be to the benefit of the Party. To get the Party's message across, the Soviet regime had to overcome mistrust, and utilise local languages. Thus, instead of

being, in the famous phrase of Robert Conquest, a “breaker of nations” (Conquest: 2000), Yuri Slezkine, Ronald Suny and others have persuasively argued have argued that the Soviets actually became “makers” or, at the least, “incubators”, of nations, Slezkine going so far as to say that the Soviet regime suffered from “chronic ethnophilia” (Slezkine 1994 and 2000; Suny: 1993; Haugen: 2003, 16). In the Turkmen case, this would appear to be accurate. The Soviets first created and, during the life of the Soviet Union, nurtured a potentially independent state by virtue of the establishment of full Soviet Republic political and bureaucratic structures. To forestall the accusation of colonialism, these structures had to replicate those of an independent nation-state, regardless of their *de facto* powers. Donald Carlisle reaches the same conclusions in his analysis of the formation of the Uzbek republic: rather than a reaction to the crystallisation of national consciousness, “it would be more accurate to characterise the process as the establishment of state units in order to encourage emergent or artificial nations” (1994, 114).

In reality, as Francine Hirsch has demonstrated, the Soviets implemented a variant of Western colonial policy, assimilating the republics into both Communist ideology and the infrastructure of the Soviet Union, with almost no strategic input from the native populations, thereby creating what she calls an “empire of nations” (2000).

The final decision to create ethno-territorial republics was made by the Bolshevik leadership in January 1924, and work proceeded quickly, resulting in the delimitation of republic borders by late summer 1924, adoption of the proposals in September 1924, and formal ratification, and thus incorporation of the new Turkmen SSR into the new Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, at the third all-union Congress of Soviets in May 1925 (Karriyeva *et al*: 1978, 355-357).

Why then, was Turkmenistan, unlike other Central Asian nationalities such as the Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Tajiks, accorded, with Uzbekistan, full Republic status, when there was almost no pre-existing nationalist movement, or even consciousness, among Turkmen, and why did the Turkmen so readily adopt nationalist discourse with Bolshevik officials? There is no straightforward answer to either question, but a series of possible explanations can be put forward. Edgar argues that the location of the Turkmen province, some distance from Russian territory, together with its size, militated against ready assimilation (2004, 50). The history of separate administration in Turkmenistan, through Transcaspia and the Caucasus rather than Turkestan, in the early years of Tsarist colonisation may have been a factor, as might the cultural and linguistic singularity of the Turkmen discussed earlier in the chapter. However, an important consideration may also

have been that the Turkmen shared highly sensitive international borders with Persia and Afghanistan, both client states of the British Empire with substantial Turkmen diasporas. By upgrading the Turkmen province to full Republic status, the Soviets could seek to attract those Turkmen who, in the chaotic revolutionary period, had simply emigrated with their flocks to pastures south and southwest²². A Turkmen Republic could act as a showcase both to Turkmen and *de facto* subjects of British rule of the benefits of Soviet power.

The enthusiasm of the small cadre of ethnic Turkmen Communist Party officials, whose work was closely directed and supervised by *Sredazburo*, for ethno-territorial division is, perhaps, more understandable. The most obvious explanation for this is that the process was manifestly operating in their favour. In addition to securing the Turkmen heartlands during the delimitation process of 1924, Turkmen officials asked for, and obtained, Turkmen parts of Khorezm/Khiva, including the predominantly Uzbek cities of Konye Urgench and Dashoguz, and Turkmen parts of Bukhara, including the right bank of the Amu Darya and also the city of Charjou, on the grounds that the Turkmen required an urban market to trade livestock and buy produce (Haugen: 2003, 174; Edgar: 2004, 67).

A second reason was the fear of, and need to counter-balance, Uzbek domination, felt by both Turkmen and Slavic officials. Inter-ethnic relations were already poor along parts the Amu Darya²³, and further north in Khiva, especially after the Turkmen warlord Junaid Khan had seized the city in 1916. Lenin's successors were keen to adhere to his dictum that republics should remain as ethnically homogenous as possible in order not to oppress smaller nationalities. Incorporation of the Turkmen into an Uzbek dominated structure would violate that principle, as the Turkmen well knew.

Finally, supporting a national republic was an entirely rational response to the struggle for resources from the Soviet centre. In order to secure funding, Turkmen officials played the "backwardness card", isolating Turkmen as a special ethnic case in need of urgent development (Haugen: 2003, 176-7). In other words, as Edgar notes, Turkmen Communists, most of whom had been educated in Russian language schools and, in many cases (through being orphaned), had "lost" their tribal identities, rapidly learned to "speak Bolshevik" to articulate their objectives (2004, 10-12). Thus, Haugen points out that "in an environment in which nationality appeared an increasingly important political category, it was rational to make nationality the currency of one's investments." (2003,

²² The population of Turkmenistan is estimated to have declined by 20% between 1915 and 1920, as a result of famine, war and emigration.

²³ As they still are in many regions.

178). That is not say that tribal affiliations withered after 1924. Far from it; rather, they were tactically subordinated by Turkmen CP officials for a period in their pursuit of greater political objectives. Between 1917 and 1924, Turkmenistan was still predominantly an arena of "clan struggle" rather than "class struggle" (Massell: 1974, 69).

Politics in Soviet Turkmenistan

The organisation and conduct of political life in Turkmenistan during the Soviet period can be characterised by three overarching themes: the fluctuating influence exerted by European as opposed to native Turkmen CP officials and, thus, the concomitant direct influence over national political affairs exercised by the political centre in Moscow; the uneven extent of the CP's penetration into society, and the acceptance or resistance thereby engendered; and the policies adopted by Moscow to either eliminate or balance tribal differences - in essence, the formulation and implementation of Soviet "tribal policy"²⁴.

Even more than other Central Asian nationalities, the Turkmen lacked, at the outset of Soviet rule, a stratum of ideologically aware, politically committed, literate and pro-Bolshevik native officials who could execute Soviet policy. The Turkmen SSR CP was dominated, until 1937, by three extremely able ethnic Turkmen figures, but lacked the depth of native personnel to effectively challenge European control of Republic CP structures. The three leading officials of the early Soviet period were: Gaigasiz Atabayev (1897-1937), who served as head of Sovnarkom; Nadirbai Aitakov (1894-1937), who was head of the Central Executive Committee; and, Halmirad Sahetmiradov (1898-1937), the First Secretary of the Turkmen CP Central Committee up to 1937. Although Aitakov was a Yomut, and Atabayev and Sahetmiradov were Tekes from Tejen and Ashgabat respectively, they shared several similarities, notably in their perspectives of how Soviet policy should be implemented in Turkmen society. All were young and carried no pre-Revolutionary political baggage; all were Russophones, who could comfortably communicate and, most importantly, mediate between Moscow and their often sceptical Turkmen constituents; and Atabayev and Aitakov were both orphans, and so did not have the same depth of tribal affiliation that was felt by most Turkmen.

Without compromising their Bolshevik credentials, all three canvassed for a moderate, cautious line on the implementation of religious policy, measures for emancipating

²⁴ Unlike the burgeoning literature on Soviet nationalities policy, very little scholarly attention has been given to Soviet policy on tribal differences.

women, the pace of collectivisation, and on language standardisation and reform. However, although they commanded significant local influence in that they were able to gauge how policy might be received, political authority undoubtedly resided with European Co-Chairmen of the Central Committee prior to World War II. A succession of Europeans appointed by Moscow therefore wielded real political power.

Unlike in other republics, where Europeans held the post of Second Secretary of the Central Committee of the Republic's Communist Party, in Turkmenistan, Moscow simply appointed its nominee as Co-First Secretary, thereby demonstrating the lack of regard in which local cadres were held. In all, seven Europeans, from the Latvian Ivan Mezhlauk to the Russian M.M. Fonin, held the Co-Chair post between 1925 and 1947. Undoubtedly the most difficult period was the tenure of Iakov Popok between 1930 and 1937. He sidelined or overrode the Turkmen 'Big Three' and demonstrated little appreciation of realities on the ground, most notably in relation to the violent resistance engendered by collectivisation between 1930 and 1932. He accused Aitakov and Atabayev of pursuing a secret nationalist agenda with an underground organisation called *Azadlig* ("Independence"), but the allegations could not be made to stick, probably because the organisation was an OGPU (secret police) creation. However, Popok was instrumental in laying the groundwork for the 'Great Terror' of 1937-38, which claimed the lives of Aitakov, Atabayev and Sahetmiradov, as well as Popok himself, who was also later caught up in its excesses (Edgar: 2004, 126-128).

The historiography of the Great Purges has, in general, neglected Central Asia. However, a short research article by Oleg Klevniuk based on archival research in Moscow has demonstrated that, at the height of the purges between August 1937 and February 1938, the OGPU in Turkmenistan not only reached, but exceeded its quotas for arrests and executions (1998, 199-200). This illustrates the very real reach and penetration of the political centre into the most remote Soviet republics. However, Klevniuk's analysis also notes that the majority of the victims were not political, as in Party officials, as was the case elsewhere in the Soviet Union, but rather economic, that is to say, kulaks or wealthy peasants. There are various possible explanations for this phenomenon. One is that after the push for collectivisation was eased in 1932, there were still a number of wealthy farmers who had retained their position. Another feasible explanation is that the Purges were an overlay of tribal conflicts and revenge killings, concealed or wrapped up in ideological rhetoric – another example of Turkmen learning to "speak Bolshevik" in order to achieve short-term tribal advantage.

The period from 1947 to the rise to power of Niyazov in 1985 was characterised by an increase in the responsibilities of native cadres, exemplified in the reversion to the orthodox system of a native First Secretary. Although this indicates the emergence of a generation of Turkmen Party officials in whom Moscow had more confidence, the European Second Secretaries continued to hold significant political authority. The system used in appointing a local First Secretary also illustrates Soviet tribal policy in action. As Edgar notes, Soviet policy alternated between attempting to eliminate tribal differences (*sliyanie*) in social policy, and to balance (*sblizhenie*) tribal differences in the political sphere (Edgar: 2001, 268).

Collectivisation of agriculture, a uniform programme of mass education, and the creation of a standard national language in place of the numerous tribal dialects were examples of attempts to extinguish descent based affiliations in favour of a Sovietised non-tribal peasantry/proletariat. Simultaneously, however, appointments to Party posts were carefully regulated to ensure tribal parity and, particularly, to prevent the dominance of the Ahal Tekes, whose native region included the Republic's capital, Ashgabat.

Thus, no Ahal Teke served as First Secretary of the Central Committee between 1958 and 1985, and, between 1947 and 1985, the post rotated between representatives of five districts/tribes, culminating in the long tenure of the Brezhnev acolyte Muhammednazar Gapurov, from Charjou, between 1969 and 1985 (Geiss: 2004; Kadyrov: 2004). The risk in balancing tribal appointments was, ultimately to institutionalise differences, a situation not assisted by the division of the Turkmen Republic into five regions that closely corresponded to boundaries of tribal residence.

The Soviets came to expect that each First Secretary would bring to the top post a retinue of retainers from their own region although, in the middle to upper ranks of the Party apparatus, there was representation from a mixture of communities. The solution, apart from Gapurov's period in office, was to rotate the First Secretary position between groups with relative frequency to ensure evenness of representation. The situation was therefore analogous to that in the Kyrgyz SSR, where the First Secretary position alternated between largely inimical northern and southern clans for the entire post-War period²⁵. Kadyrov also argues that the long gap between Ahal Teke First Secretaries

²⁵ The breakdown of the Kyrgyz system in the post-Soviet context occurred when the presidency of Askar Akayev, a northerner, was seen to push the boundaries of nepotism too far. He was overthrown in March 2005 to be replaced by a southerner, Kurmanbek Bakiyev. The continuing instability in Kyrgyzstan is essentially the playing out of clan differences overlaid by contestation over representation, religion, and language, and even, in the protests of late October 2005, organised criminal activities.

testifies to the diminished importance of the city of Ashgabat for two decades after the devastating earthquake of 1948, although that assertion is difficult to verify (2004).

Thus, the long period of the Turkmen Republic's political docility after the final extirpation of Basmachi groups in the 1930s, can be attributed to a rather pragmatic programme of privileging the accommodation of tribal differences in the Party apparatus, over their elimination, an approach that contrasts to the social and economic policies implemented in the same period.

Society and Economy in Soviet Turkmenistan

The configuration of Turkmen society and economy during the Soviet period can be characterised as a combination of rapid industrial development, a considerable degree of penetration of Soviet ideology into social practices and yet, at the same time, the continuing resilience of traditional beliefs, practices and structures. In essence, the Turkmen experience conformed in many ways to the concept of the "divided self" used to describe social existence under totalitarianism - outward accommodation and tactical use of the system for personal and family gain, often concealing inner non-conformity and the retention of traditional rituals and practices (Kligman: 1998).

The growth of the Communist Party cells in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, appeared to be impressive but, on closer examination, often proved to be a simple continuation of the *maslakhat* structure under a Party name, but with absolutely no ideological content (Edgar: 2004, 107-9).

The campaign against polygyny, underage marriage and *qalin*, the tradition of bride-price which is still prevalent in rural areas, had similar results²⁶. Although there were varying degrees of resistance to the Soviet project to emancipate women, a common tactic was outwardly to conform to Soviet policy but, often with the connivance of sympathetic local CP officials, work around or ignore the new laws. Thus, the criminalisation of *qalin*, which became an imprisonable offence in 1928, was subverted by *gashlik*, or bride exchange, between families (Edgar: 2003, 142-3). The creation of new laws to allow women the freedom to divorce in 1925 was undermined by the use of the legislation to repeat "sell" brides for profit (Edgar: 2003, 144). Patterns of popular response ranged from begrudging acceptance, partial accommodation, evasion and retribution (including, between 1925 and 1927, numerous riots and disturbances over changes to customary

²⁶ The author's fieldwork in the small mountain community of Nokhur on the Turkmen-Iranian border revealed that bride-price is set at approximately \$1000, an enormous sum for livestock farmers.

law). However, as Douglas Northrop has pointed out, the fact that women in Turkmenistan were not veiled by the *chachvan* and *paranji*, or secluded (*zatvornichestvo*) deprived the Soviets of a public, even theatrical act of individual emancipation that symbolised the *hujum*, or assault on the veil, in Uzbekistan (Northrop: 2004, 69-101). Women were undoubtedly identified, in the absence of clear class development (and analysis), as a “surrogate proletariat” by Soviet reformers in Central Asia before World War II (Massell: 1974). As Massell notes, women could be and were used to create sexual and generational tensions that might engender conflict and provide leverage for the disintegration and reconstitution of the old system (1974, xxiii). This was to become a central political issue for the Soviet government across Central Asia in the 1930s, particularly in Uzbekistan. In the Turkmen case, however, the heritage of nomadism, with its historically more emancipated role for women, together with the lack of an Islamic scholarly tradition to provide theological justification for patriarchal gender roles, militated against the issue of women’s emancipation becoming a potential “regime breaker”.

Similarly, Soviet attacks on Islam were met with a mixture of accommodation, evasion and opposition. The significant difference with Uzbekistan was that there were fewer *waqf* lands (essentially similar to church estates) to confiscate, mosques to close, clergy to harass, and *madrassahs* (Islamic schools) to infiltrate. Consequently, opposition lacked a focus and a pattern of the type described by Shoshana Keller in her study of the Soviet campaign against Islam in Uzbekistan (2001: 175-212); nevertheless, as Keller also notes, “the Party could deal a tremendous blow to the public face of Islam but could not dislodge it as Central Asia’s cultural centre” (2001, xvi).

This was evident in the Soviet response to the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Turkmenistan was the Soviet republic with the longest border with Iran, a largely mountainous boundary that could be porous even during the Brezhnev period. David Nissman has charted intensified concern over the infiltration of radical Islamist ideas in the years after 1979; notwithstanding that Iranians were Shi’ites and Turkmen Sunnis (1983, 53). The tenor of Soviet media reports suggested that the upheavals in Iran had awakened a general interest in Islam that had penetrated CP structures in Turkmenistan. It is difficult to gauge whether Soviet investigators found what was already there, having been prompted to look by the events in Iran, or whether there was a genuine upsurge in religious interest during the period.

Nevertheless, Nissman’s analysis of reports from the newspapers *Soviet Turkmenistan* and *Adebiyat* does indicate concern in the continuing surreptitious practice of *qalin*, study

of the *Koran*, and the popularity of “criminal”, “swindling” “pseudo-mullahs” who took advantage of “continuing shortcomings in conducting atheistic propaganda appropriately and militantly” (1983, 54-57). In fact, the activities recorded indicate a revival of the Zoroastrian folkloric superstitions (over which, at times, the patina of Islam is very thin in Turkmenistan), such as pilgrimages to graves, or rituals at sites of natural importance usually trees and springs²⁷. To counter this, there was a short-lived intensification of local lectures on atheism, although the impact of this must have been limited at best.

If Soviet penetration into society could be uneven, the record of socio-economic development was, from the Soviet perspective, unambiguous. Soviet sources, if we are to fully accept them, point to a rapid and massive increase in the number of children educated (Skozyrov: 1956, 21; *Istorii*, Volume II: 1978, 112-113, 186-187). The number of higher educational establishments increased from none in 1927-8 to seven by 1955, with 12,160 students enrolled (*Kulturnoie*: 1958, 214-215). The number of schools increased from 58 in 1915 to 1186 by 1955, the number of teachers from 272 to 12,407 and the number of pupils from 5283 to 224,743 in the same period (*Kulturnoie*: 1958, 42-43, 118-119). By the mid-1950s, Stalin’s drive for industrialisation had transformed the Turkmen SSR’s economic profile. In 1952, according to official statistics, industrial production accounted for 75% of the republic’s economy, and the cotton yield was expanding year on year, a 35% increase being posted between 1945 and 1954 (*Istorii*, Vol I, 1978, 32-35, Skozyrev: 1956, 21).

However, economic expansion, especially in the highly water-intensive and wasteful cotton industry, brought with it problems of severe environmental degradation. The construction of the immense Karakum canal across southern Turkmenistan from the Amu Darya, commenced in 1954 and only completed in 1988, in order to service the cotton sector, was a significant cause of the desiccation of the Aral Sea, described as one of the world’s greatest ecological catastrophes. The creation of a cotton monoculture absorbed natural, material and human resources, but failed to diversify employment opportunities, damaged soil, wasted water and has incurred almost incalculable social and health costs across Central Asia (ICG Asia Report No. 93: 28 February 2005, 16-29).

²⁷ The folk practices and songs of contemporary Turkmen women have been superbly recorded by Carole Blackwell (2001). During the author’s own fieldwork in rural areas, numerous examples of Islamo-pagan superstition were noted, ranging from the use of Evil Eye amulets, to complicated rituals involving the balancing of stones, circling of trees and sitting in small mountainside rock crevices at traditional fertility sites in the Kopet Dagh mountains (see also Bezanis: 2005). There appears to be no geographical concentration of these practices, as they were observed as far apart as Turkmenbashi (formerly Krasnovodsk), Ashgabat, Mary, Darvasa and Erbent in the central Karakum desert, and deep in the Kopet Dagh mountains close to the Iranian border.

Although the Turkmen SSR had evolved as a significant domestic oil producer in the post-War period, the most significant economic development in the Soviet era was undoubtedly the discovery of major reserves of natural gas in the Turkmen SSR in 1951. The gas sector rapidly expanded, as a massive network of pipelines, collectively known as the Central Asia-Center complex, was constructed to connect Central Asian gas fields to Russia and, by extension, to the 'Friendship' and 'Brotherhood' gas pipeline complex in Eastern Europe. Turkmenistan's potential as a globally important gas producer was underlined by the discovery of the connected Dauletebad-Donmez/Sovietabad fields in 1974 and 1982 near Serakhs in southeastern Turkmenistan. These giant structures alone are believed to hold potential reserves in excess of 6200 bcm of natural gas (Skagen: 1997, 13-14).

The Soviet government quickly ramped up production in the field after engineers had resolved complex technical issues surrounding the structure's high formation pressure and sulphur content, so that, by 1989, production had reached almost 90 bcm per year, the fourth highest in the world at that point. Since that peak, a combination of poor management and deteriorating infrastructure has limited production capacity to around 50 bcm per year. Although the current recoverable natural gas reserves of 20,415 bcm, as stated in the Turkmen government's 2005 national gas audit (IS 2; also see the review of Turkmen oil and gas reserves on page 4), must be treated with great caution, the country's potential as a world-class natural gas supplier, with the requisite injection of capital and technical expertise, is clearly recognised throughout the global gas industry.

In summary, the social and economic consequences of Soviet rule were, as was the case with the other Soviet Central Asian republics, complex and ambiguous. Significant improvements in industrial output, education, healthcare, the status of women and social services, had to be balanced against environmental degradation, an inefficient monocultural cotton economy, the assault on traditional lifestyles, the attack on religion, and the requirements to conform to Party edicts. Although objective accounts of life in Soviet Turkmenistan are extremely sparse, the picture would appear to be one in which, as the Soviet Union entered its period of final decline and decay, Turkmen took what they could from the new system, and kept what they could get away with from the old system.

Turkmenistan in comparative historical context

Several important themes therefore emerge from the foregoing overview of Turkmen history. The first is that Central Asia's historical development was largely shaped by the interaction between the sedentary Perso-Iranian (Sart) communities based in the regions

major urban centres, and the nomadic Turco-Mongolian culture of the steppe. Although the Mongol and Timurid conquests impacted on Turkmen tribes, to a large extent their isolation in the Ust-Yurt plateau and along the Mangishlaq peninsula insulated them from the wider currents of imperial expansion and contraction. The principal legacy of the strategic immunity enjoyed by the Turkmens was cultural and social. The Turkmen language, unlike other Turkic languages of the region such as Kazakh and Uzbek, developed in relative isolation as part of the separate Oghuz, southwestern Turkic family. Turkmen traditional music is of great interest to ethnomusicologists because the isolated nature of its development has produced extraordinary tonal peculiarities. Traditional Turkmen carpets are highly prized for their unique regional character. The nomadic lifestyle of the Turkmen inhibited the growth of *madrassahs*, or other sites of Islamic learning. Consequently, pagan beliefs were, and still are, only sketchily overlaid by Muslim theology.

Secondly, the principal unit of social organisation and identity for the Turkmen was, and still is, the descent group (Kadyrov: 2003, 12). The Westphalian model of state construction, which is embodied in the international state system, fixes national identity in space. The long history of Turkmen “statelessness” led to a chronic lack of national consciousness and little sense of ethnic unity. This presented a conceptual and practical challenge to Soviet “nation-builders” that has still not been fully resolved. Niyazov’s attempt to engender a unified national identity around his own persona, can by its very definition, be only temporary. Thus, post-Niyazov political elites will, in the absence of viable alternatives, have to embark on nation and state reconstruction anew.

Thirdly, the acephalous structure of political authority in traditional Turkmen society stands in stark contrast to the relatively formal hierarchical systems of power, founded on Chingisid descent lines, present in sedentary Central Asian states, notably the emirate of Bukhara and the khanates of K hiva and Kokand. This, in turn, shaped the Turkmen’s subsequent response to imperial and Communist rule, which was often complex, ambiguous, provisional and conditional. Russian/Soviet authority was also complicated by the historic lack of interaction between Turkmen and Russians. The first substantive contacts between the two nationalities were after 1869. Within 15 years, the Turkmen lands had been fully annexed, and within 50 years, a full-scale project was underway to completely remodel Turkmen society. By contrast, other Central Asian nationalities had either much greater exposure to Russian culture and had forged longstanding diplomatic relationships (e.g. the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz), or experienced stronger intellectual currents of modernisation and reform (e.g. Jadidism among the Uzbeks), whereas Turkmen lacked

elementary economic development, educational institutions, international commercial networks, or even population centres capable of generating intellectual exchange.

The Turkmen are frequently analysed in conjunction with other Central Asian nationalities. All have their own distinct histories, customs, mores and perspectives. However, there are strong grounds for arguing that the Turkmen had and still have characteristics that substantively differentiate them from the other states and peoples of the region which, in turn, help us understand how the regime of Saparmurat Niyazov emerged, and why it functions as it does.

Conclusion: Turkmenistan within the SRT framework

Returning to the principal objectives of the chapter, we are better able to consider whether the historical experience of the Turkmen chimes in with the structural preconditions for later sultanistic behaviour identified in chapter two, and whether there may be other structural components that have facilitated the sultanistic traits of the Niyazov regime.

The possession of globally significant natural gas reserves and the development of a substantial energy infrastructure in Turkmenistan under the Soviet regime clearly provides the rents, or unearned income, that forms the basis of most, if not all, sultanistic regimes. Even when operating substantially below capacity and charging its customers, principally Russia and Ukraine, only around 20% of global spot prices, Niyazov still has access to considerable sums of hard currency for very little input. Turkmenistan's natural resource endowment, developed in the Soviet period, is essential to the functioning of the regime. However, possession of easily convertible natural resources is, itself, insufficient to create a rentier economy. Arguably as significant is the historic lack of diversification in the economy of the Turkmen. Prior to the Russian conquest, the Turkmen relied on subsistence pastoral and arable farming. Colonial and Soviet officials may have increased industrial output, but growth was lopsided in favour of a largely ruinous cotton monoculture, conversion from which has been extremely difficult for all of the cotton-producing former Soviet Central Asian republics. However, cotton itself is currently a source of only 6% of Turkmenistan's export earnings (ICG Asia Report No. 93: 28 February 2005, 10) and thus, while effectively suppressing the development of other agro-industrial sectors, it does not provide a sufficient alternative to the dominance of natural gas in the national economy.

The second macrostructural factor precondition of SRT is persistent crises of sovereignty. Turkmenistan clearly conforms to this condition, not having experienced formal state sovereignty in any form prior to Russian conquest and the establishment of the Soviet Union. Turkmenistan emerges as something of an “artificial” state in this respect, reasonably homogenous ethnically but certainly not tribally and, most importantly, with little experience of mutual cooperation between its constituent communities. The historic emphasis on genealogy above geography, of time over place, a trait of many nomadic societies in the absence of fixed spatial landmarks of identity, has embedded tribal antipathies deeply into the Turkmen psyche. The legacy of the great migrations, frequent *alamans*, the differentiated response to Khorezmian overlordship, Russian conquest and Soviet power, allied to the institutionalisation of tribal difference within Soviet cadres policy and entrenched social practices such as endogamous marriages, has fixed identities within Turkmen society to the point at which overcoming entrenched tribal divisions is, according to Niyazov, of paramount importance for the Turkmen state²⁸.

Resilient tribal identity is also of great significance for the emergence and maintenance of clientelist networks, one of the political-institutional factors identified in SRT in chapter two. In a 13-year period, Niyazov had sacked over 130 ministers and dismissed the governors of each of the five regions on average eight times (IS 3). A significant proportion of the reasons publicly given for these dismissals is for tribal patronage and nepotism. Although these reasons cannot be externally verified, fieldwork interviews conducted in-country (Interviews 3, 10 and 24) indicate a strong clientelist dynamic, reinforced by the Soviet practice of creating collective farm units and work brigades coterminously with extended family units (Roy: 1999, 109-121).

The final structural condition for sultanistic behaviour considered in our analysis of SRT was that of totalitarian/authoritarian regime decay. This factor is closely linked with the macrostructural issue referred to previously under the rubric of persistent crises of sovereignty, in that it accentuates the importance of the legacy of the presultanistic regime in creating the conditions amenable for sultanism to develop. It is, in effect, the “path dependence” explanation. The Turkmen people had no prior experience of unified nation-statehood, let alone common governing institutions, in the period prior to Russian imperial conquest. Between 1873 and 1917, some or all of the Turkmen in Turkmenistan were formally designated as colonial subjects. Between 1919 and 1991, Turkmen were

²⁸ The success of Niyazov’s attempts to downgrade tribal identity is debatable. There is very little independent data on contemporary tribal divisions, and Turkmen are generally extremely reluctant to discuss these issues. However, Interviewees 1 and 10 grudgingly praised Niyazov for attempting to eliminate tribal differences, while Interviewees 11, 13 and 24 all recounted instances of inter-tribal conflict in markets over trading disputes, over marriage, and in student halls and army dormitories.

subject to Soviet authority. Regardless of whether the Soviet Union could strictly be described as an imperial state, this legacy, together with the absence of any common political norms and institutions or collective memory associated with pre-imperial and pre-Soviet governance, can lead us to safely conclude that Turkmenistan after the demise of the Soviet Union conforms to the classically weak, artificial post-colonial state, of the type that enables sultanistic regimes to emerge.

A further significant factor shaping Turkmenistan's subsequent development was, as noted above, the physical isolation of its people. A further line of research into sultanistic regime origins would be to explore if the period prior to crises of sovereignty and external domination (frequently the period to which post-colonial or post-totalitarian regimes refer in order to recraft and legitimise new political institutions), was marked by relative isolation from important international political and intellectual discourses. Contemporary sultanistic regimes such as Belarus (Eke: 2000), which was a quiet, landlocked backwater of the Russian Empire, and Libya (Vandewalle: 1998, 42-44) where, prior to Italian fascist occupation, its three provinces of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fazzan were remote, undergoverned and underinstitutionalised outposts of the Ottoman Empire, were largely bypassed in the development of the modern state. In contrast, comparable post-colonial/post-totalitarian states that did not succumb to sultanism may not have had a deep democratic heritage but they did, at least, have some pre-existing national institutional hardware on which to build. However, to develop this structural consideration fully, further comparative analysis would be required, beyond the scope of this study.

In addition to the historical-structural characteristics in Turkmenistan that appear to be salient to the subsequent development of sultanistic behaviour, Niyazov has selectively appropriated historic motifs and totems of traditional Turkmen society in order to enhance his political legitimacy. In other words, Turkmenistan's path of historical development is not only a structural cause of sultanism, but has been used in an agential sense by Niyazov in order to actively develop sultanistic mechanisms of governance. This issue will be analysed in greater depth in chapters four and five, when we look more closely at how the regime functions and obtains compliance and acquiescence. However, it should be noted that Niyazov has selectively and symbolically revived (and subverted) traditional components of the pre-Tsarist Turkmen political and legal order, since 1992. He frequently refers to himself as *Serdar*, a term that can also be seen on the numerous billboards adorning public buildings in Ashgabat and other Turkmen cities, an appellation that has distinctive connotations of military leadership, particularly for Tekes. Niyazov

also created the *Khalk Maslahaty* (People's Council), elevating it to the status of the country's supreme legislative body in 2003, in order to reconnect the country's contemporary political order with its past, thereby legitimising his regime. However, unlike the original *maslakhat*, Niyazov's council is hand-picked by his circle; open debate and expressions of dissent are absent. The political unity that Turkmen prized is therefore achieved not by careful and patient discussion and compromise, but simply imposed from above. The *Khalk Maslahaty* exists only to symbolically affirm Niyazov's political will, reminiscent of the way that the Congress of People's Deputies (CPD) followed policies formulated by the CPSU during the Soviet period.

Ruhama, Niyazov's philosophical treatise, is clearly intended to fulfil the function of *adat*, an all-encompassing code by which to live life and on which to base social and legal conduct. It is, for example, compulsory reading for workers on duty in all public institutions (Interviews 1 and 22). In penal policy also, for example, Niyazov announced the resumption of forced resettlement of "undesirable" elements, essentially unemployed young Uzbek men in Dashoguz region, stating that: "Turkmens' ancestors used this humane and effective measure in their time and that this measure helped to rid society of people who have lost respect, and at the same time helped them to clear their sins with hard but good work" (quoted in Decaux: 2003, 38). The concept of collective culpability for misdemeanours has resulted in family members of political activists being arrested and mistreated (Interviews 1 and 22; IHF Report: 2004, 9-11; ICG Report No. 85, 2004, 4-5).

Niyazov has also controversially raised the genealogical issue, stressing the need for ethnic purity for those in state service, notwithstanding the fact that Niyazov's own mother is widely believed to have been a Kurd, a suggestion given some credence by the fact that Niyazov's hometown of Kipchak, 25 km west of Ashgabat, is situated in an area of concentrated Kurdish settlement (Field observation, 10 August 2003). Niyazov has published as posters, family trees setting out his own patrilineal descent line, introduced background checks on state employees to ensure ethnic purity and, following the failed attempt on his life on 25 November 2002, for which the half-Armenian former Foreign Minister Boris Shikmuradov stood accused, stressed in openly racist language, the superiority of "pure" Turkmen above those of mixed race (Decaux: 2003, 28-35). In common with traditional Turkmen society, mixed race or non-Turkmen are accorded fewer rights in society, particularly in the employment sector (Interviews 1 and 22; TIHR: Bulletin 163, 15 November 2005). On a symbolic level, Niyazov has plundered Turkmen history to appropriate the Seljuk Empire and the battle of Geok-Deppe in 1881

to legitimise his regime (Field observation: Geok-Deppe, 15 November 2002 and Ashgabat, 8 May 2005). Niyazov set out the rationale for his preference for 'traditional' structures and norms in a pamphlet prepared in 2004:

We came to the conclusion that we would be better understood if the foundation of our state is based on the type of social relations that were historically traditional to our people and served as a backbone of all state entities of Turkmen[sic] throughout their history (Turkmenbashi: 2004, 49).

This chapter has sought to trace the development of the Turkmen people from earliest times to the late Soviet period prior to the ascent to power of Saparmurat Niyazov as the last First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan in 1985. Its purpose has been to provide substantive historical detail and analysis on Turkmen political, social and economic development unavailable elsewhere. It also provides essential context both for the rise of Niyazov and the functioning of his regime. The Turkmen case would appear to validate the broader SRT framework previously set out by confirming a close match between the macrostructural and political-institutional factors sketched by Chehabi and Linz, and then substantively developed and refined in this study. It also suggests new avenues of comparative theoretical exploration by pointing to the relative isolation of the Turkmen people as potentially an additional structural factor in the emergence of sultanistic regimes.

In addition to the structural dimension, we have seen the agential opportunities the inchoate and fractured nature of Turkmen society offers for exploitation. Thus, in addition to the tools presented by a rentier state, clientelistic social practices and persistent crises of sovereignty - the absence of institutional strength, allied to particular elements of the Turkmen legal-political heritage, such as *adat* and the *maslakhat* could be actively converted to support sultanistic rule. The entire contextual picture is therefore one where the operational parameters, resources, and materials – in effect, the structures and the tools, for sultanistic behaviour were in place in Turkmenistan by the late Soviet era. That is not to imply, however, that a sultanistic outcome to the dissolution of the Soviet Union was inevitable. As emphasised in the previous chapter, sultanistic rule hinges to a great degree on the strategies, actions, opportunism and ambition of the ruler himself, particularly in a deinstitutionalised or *deinstitutionalising* environment as that which existed in the Soviet Union in 1991. Thus, while the historical analysis points out the structural preconditions for Niyazov's regime, it also contextualises the agential choices available to Niyazov to forge, consolidate and sustain his authority. This theme

will be developed more fully in the discussion of the emergence of Niyazov's political hegemony, and Niyazov's own role in this process, in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Sultanism in Turkmenistan

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, we introduced the case study. We identified notable congruencies between the structural preconditions for sultanism elaborated in the earlier critique of SRT, and the patterns of economic development, social organisation and national identity formation in Turkmenistan. Although there is no satisfactory historical overview of Turkmenistan extant, analysis and interpretation of the available sources therefore suggested that underlying conditions existed that could facilitate the emergence of a sultanistic regime.

However, as we discussed in chapter two, structural conditions are, in themselves, insufficient to explain the existence of a sultanistic regime. It is difficult to improve upon Marx's famous dictum that "men make history, but not under circumstances of their own choosing." Marx may have been making a call for revolutionary practice, but his sentiments are also applicable to a state's journey into sultanism. Without a congenial setting, the leader's bids for power and subsequent actions would be impossible. Without the ambitions, calculations and manoeuvres of the rulers themselves, a sultanistic outcome would not occur. An important component of any analysis of a sultanistic regime, therefore, is both to elucidate the context that allows the leader to seize power, and to map out clearly the formal and informal calculations and processes created to sustain and reproduce his authority thereafter.

The specific objectives of this chapter are threefold: firstly, to set out the immediate political context for Niyazov's rise to prominence in the Turkmen SSR; secondly, to consider how Niyazov has been able to skilfully position himself, firstly as a disciple of Gorbachev's reformist internationalism and then, after the demise of the Soviet Union, as the guardian of Turkmen national values; thirdly, to consider the options available, and strategies adopted, in the construction of the new political order in Turkmenistan that gave increasingly free rein to Niyazov's sultanistic behaviour.

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. Initially, I set out the mosaic of inter-connected challenges that faced Niyazov upon his appointment as CPTu First Secretary in December 1985. Secondly, I look at Niyazov's record in the late Soviet period and argue that, despite the subsequent portrayal of him in the Western media as a Brezhnevite 'dinosaur' (Pope:1992), Niyazov's career under Gorbachev in fact prospered

because he was perceived as an adherent of *perestroika*, who had also managed to successfully maintain order, and contain both nationalism and Islam. This, in turn, left him well-placed to assume the presidency as Moscow's hold over the republics receded. Thirdly, I look at the strategies adopted by Niyazov in the wake of the Soviet Union's disintegration, focusing specifically on the construction of new political institutions and processes that formally promised democratic evolution but, in practice, entailed increasingly arbitrary and dysfunctional governance. Fourthly, I summarise the formal and informal configuration of power in the republic as it has developed, as a precursor to the discussion in subsequent chapters on the specific political strategies employed by the regime to consolidate and extend its reach. The concluding section revisits the SRT framework to tie in the findings with the broader objectives of the thesis.

The Turkmen SSR in the late Soviet period

In common with the other Soviet republics, the Turkmen SSR steadily accumulated a multitude of pressing problems in the long period of *zastoi* (stagnation) that characterised Leonid Brezhnev's tenure (1964-82) as Soviet leader. Brezhnev's successors, Yuri Andropov (1982-84) and Konstantin Chernenko (1984-85), respectively had neither the time nor the inclination to make an impression before their deaths. Ominously for the Party leadership in Central Asia, however, was a KGB investigation, instituted by Andropov in 1983, that used satellite imagery to uncover massive corruption and fraud in the Central Asian cotton sector, and led to the downfall (and probable death) of Sharaf Rashidov, the long-serving First Party Secretary of the Uzbek SSR (Anderson: 1997, 56). The so-called 'Uzbek Affair' resonated across the Central Asian republics, not least because the incumbent First Party Secretaries, as beneficiaries of Brezhnev's 'stability of the cadres policy', had been in power for a considerable period, and each had created their own intricate, clan-based webs of patronage and corruption to cement their positions (Luong: 2002)²⁹. As Andropov's favoured successor, Gorbachev's appointment in March 1985 promised much closer scrutiny of Central Asian affairs than before³⁰.

Although over-reporting of irrigation and harvesting figures in the cotton sectors was undoubtedly a significant issue for economic reformers in Moscow, a review of sources

²⁹ Rashidov was First Party Secretary in the Uzbek SSR from 1959 to 1983. The other regional First Secretaries in Central Asia who served under Brezhnev were Turdakun Usubaliyev (1961-85) in the Kyrgyz SSR, Dinmukhamed Kunaev (1959-86) in the Kazakh SSR, Jabbor Uljabaev (1961-82) and his acolyte Rakhmon Nabiev (1982-85) in the Tajik SSR, and Mukhamednazar Gapurov (1969-85) in the Turkmen SSR. As with other senior Republic and regional officials, this 'Old Guard' was cleared out by Gorbachev within two years of his becoming leader.

³⁰ On patron-client relations within the Soviet elites, see the essays in Brown (1989).

of the period also indicates that a range of other factors, predominantly local in character, occupied CPTu elites at this time. Taking the texts of nine major speeches by Niyazov, from soon after his appointment as CPTu First Secretary in December 1985, up to September 1991, shortly before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, together with official data, and analysis of press reports from the late Soviet period undertaken by Murat and Simmonds (1977), Morison (1982), Brown (1988, 1990), Bohr (1989, 1990) and Ro'i (1991), a clear picture emerges of the critical issues that threatened to destabilise the Turkmen SSR.

Of particular concern was the state of inter-ethnic relations, not least because this issue challenged Soviet policy on a number of levels, including the economy, education and language status, all of which affected the entire population of the Republic. The need for inter-ethnic stability is a central theme of more than half of Niyazov's speeches studied, and increasingly occupied the attention of journalists and Komsomol officials. The principal fault line was between ethnic Turkmen and ethnic Russians.

Murat and Simmonds date the revival of "ethnic consciousness" among the Turkmen to the Khrushchev era "thaw" when local journals, such as *Edebiyat we Sungat* ('Literature and Art'), stated in 1963 that: "the Turkmen language constitutes our national purity...we have no right to discriminate against it" (1977, 319). Although evidence of open inter-ethnic conflict prior to *glasnost* is scant, Morison's (1982) comparison between Turkmen and Russian language newspapers' coverage of the Ashgabat centenary celebrations in 1981 is particularly instructive. *Sovet Turkmenistany*, the Turkmen language newspaper, barely covered the celebrations at all, while the Russian language publication *Turkmenskaia Iskra* reported in detail on the preparations and content of the festivities.

For many Turkmen, dating the existence of Ashgabat to 1881, the year of the battle at Geok-Deppe which saw the annihilation of thousands of Tekes resisting the Russian advance, was an affirmation of colonialism, implying that Turkmen history effectively began at the point at which the Turkmen were forcibly absorbed into the Russian empire. Interestingly, the celebrations were organised by Niyazov, then First Secretary of the Ashgabat Party Committee, and he felt compelled to pen an article in *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, entitled "In One United Family," extolling the importance of good inter-ethnic relations in the Turkmen SSR, a sure indication that this was not the case.

The theme of national victimisation, aired by most of the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union during Gorbachev's tenure, resurfaced during the *glasnost* era when the

small native Turkmen intelligentsia raised a number of cultural demands, including raising the status of the Turkmen language, rehabilitating the victims of Stalinist terror (an issue of increased salience following the discovery of a mass grave near the northern village of Dilevar in December 1990), reviewing Soviet teaching on the incorporation of Turkmenistan into the Russian empire, and reducing the number of Russian toponyms in the Turkmen SSR (Bohr: 1990; Draft Platform of Agyzbirlik Society in Forted and Chandler: 1992, 577).

Inter-ethnic conflicts were not confined to Turkmen and Russians, however. Tensions also surfaced between Turkmen and other minority nationalities, notably Armenians and Uzbeks. Riots in Ashgabat and Nebit Dag, on 1 and 9 May 1989, were allegedly caused by Armenian traders increasing bread prices during periods of shortage (Bohr: 1989), although Ro'i believes that these disturbances may have been manipulated by elements of the KGB in order to convince the Central Asian leadership to preserve their ties to Moscow (Ro'i: 1991, 22). Likewise, in April 1988, Turkmen officials in the eastern province of Charjou suspended broadcasts of Uzbek television stations, probably over local land and water disputes between Turkmen and Uzbek farmers. The conflicts eventually necessitated an extremely rare bilateral high-level meeting between Niyazov and Uzbek Republic First Secretary Rafiq Nishanov in June 1988 to resolve matters (Brown: 1998).

However, the main grievances of ordinary ethnic Turkmen were essentially economic. According to the Soviet census of 1989, ethnic Turkmen comprised 72%, and Russians only 9% of the Turkmen SSR's population of 3.5 million (Ochs: 1997, 333), yet Turkmen only constituted 4.2% of the much higher paid industrial sector workforce (Bohr: 1990). Interviewee 24 explained to me how Russians, working at oil and gas fields near the city of Nebit Dag, thought little of flying to Moscow for week-end drinking sprees in the 1970s and early 1980s. This stranglehold of Russians over technical and professional appointments contributed to a sense that ethnic Turkmen were second-class citizens in their own country, exacerbated by a growing problem of hidden unemployment, poor health and chronic poverty in rural areas (Remnick: 1990).

Economic grievances had several dimensions. Gosplan, the Soviet central economic planning organisation, complained in 1985 that the Turkmen SSR had failed to fulfil its five year agricultural plan, the formal reason given for the dismissal of CPTu First Secretary Mukhamednazar Gapurov in December 1985. Moreover, by 1989, 21% of the Turkmen SSR budget was coming in the form of subsidies from Moscow (Bohr: 1990).

The insinuations were that the Turkmen were lazy, and not pulling their weight for the Soviet cause.

Yet, in the Turkmen SSR, debate centred on the extent to which the Republic had become a raw materials appendage to the more industrialised regions of the Soviet Union. The local argument was that Moscow had distorted the Turkmen SSR's economic development by focusing on cotton production, at considerable cost both to the local environment and health of the ethnic Turkmen rural workforce and was, moreover, buying the Turkmen SSR's natural gas at only 10% of export prices. Local agronomists pointed to the salinisation of most of the soil around the zone of the newly constructed Karakum canal, and the disastrous impact of the chemical treatment of crops on infant and adult mortality, disease and livestock (Bohr: 1990; Remnick: 1990). A central component of the platform of the nascent Agyzbirlik opposition group, issued in July 1991, focused on the need to address environmental issues, for the Turkmen SSR to acquire full control over its natural resources, and for the sale of gas and cotton to be increased to world market prices (Draft Platform of Agyzbirlik Society in Forted and Chandler: 1992, 579-581).

Of scarcely less importance was the persistence of inter-tribal conflicts among the Turkmen. Very little information about the nature of these conflicts was published, but interviews with both Turkmen and non-Turkmen about this period suggest that fights in university halls of residence, military barracks and workplaces, particularly between Yomuts and Tekes, were a frequent occurrence (Interviews 1, 3, 10 and 24). Significantly, Niyazov alluded to such problems when he warned the Komsomol Congress in 1987 that incidents of "family-clan hostility" and "the creation of student groupings according to family and clan" would not be tolerated (*Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 15 February 1987), and then returned to the theme in an interview with *Turkmenskaia Iskra* on 5 May 1988 when he said: "feuds between tribes are a ruinous occurrence in our life that hampers the development of the republic and often leads to tragedy" (cited by Bohr: 1990). An important facet of Niyazov's determination to remain in the Soviet Union, even after the failure of coup by Communist hardliners in August 1991, appears to be the fear that without strong political overlay of some form from Moscow (and later himself), Turkmenistan would descend into innumerable inter and intra-ethnic conflicts (speech to the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies on 3 September 1991, reprinted by Reuters, 4 September 1991).

A further issue of concern was the state of the CPTu itself. In common with other longstanding Central Asian First Party Secretaries, Niyazov's predecessor, Gapurov, had surrounded himself with subordinates from his home region of Charjou, in effect a decampment of the Ersari clan to Ashgabat, the traditional centre of Teke power. There was no high profile scandal surrounding the CPTu analogous with the "Uzbek Affair", but the CPTu was investigated twice in the period between 1980 and 1984, without noticeable censure. However, Gapurov, like Kunaev in the Kazakh SSR and Usualiev in the Kyrgyz SSR, had merely bought himself some time during Chernenko's interregnum. *Pravda's* highly critical article of the CPTu leadership on 19 August 1985 signalled the beginning of the end, and Gapurov was pensioned off in December of that year (Forted and Chandler: 1992, 584). Yet the problems did not lie solely with Party elites. Wider Party activities and organisation at this time reflected both a dearth of indigenous talent and embedded clan networks from work brigade and kolkhoz level, right up to the highest echelons of the republican Party structures. As a consequence, the Turkmen SSR was effectively run through a web of nepotism and corruption.

The Turkmen SSR has been generally characterised as a quiescent, isolated Soviet republic, one of those least affected by *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Unlike the Baltic and Caucasian republics, it developed no articulate or widely supported nationalist movement, nor did it experience the extensive or prolonged inter-ethnic or inter-clan conflicts of the sort that claimed thousands of lives in the Kyrgyz and Tajik SSRs. However, serious economic and social problems did exist. The rates of infant mortality were the highest in the Soviet Union, pollution along the course of the Karakum canal had devastated the local environment, unemployment was a considerable problem among ethnic Turkmen, and inter-ethnic and inter-clan tensions bubbled under the surface. In this context, it is unsurprising that those Party officials, military and KGB officers, and others with access to resources, utilised them to benefit their family and clan, reinforcing pre-existing patronage and clientelist networks.

None of this was particularly compatible with Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* initiatives, as Party officials discovered when investigations were conducted which led to confiscations of property, arrests, disgrace and expulsion from the Party and, in at least one high profile case, retaliatory murder (Forted and Chandler: 1992, 594 and 597). For Niyazov, however, being something of a clan outsider, the appointment of Gorbachev, the instigation of anti-corruption investigations and the formulation of *perestroika*, represented a considerable political opportunity, which he was able to grasp with great success.

The Rise of Saparmurat Atayevich Niyazov

Niyazov's political ascent in the late Soviet period, and the creation of a personalistic system of governance thereafter, was facilitated by a combination of his personal background and suitability, the condition of the CPTu and the Turkmen SSR more generally, and the broader Soviet political currents that ensued from Gorbachev's succession to the Soviet leadership in March 1985.

Niyazov was born on 19 February 1940 to a Teke family in the village of Kipchak, approximately 30 km west of Ashgabat³¹. The village is now a shrine to both him and his parents. In addition to large monument complexes devoted to Niyazov and his mother, a huge mosque, the largest in Central Asia, was constructed and opened in 2004, within the grounds of which lies Niyazov's personal mausoleum³². Niyazov's father, Atamurat Niyazov, joined the Red Army and was captured and killed in North Ossetia in 1943³³ (Turkmenbashi: 2002, 31), and Niyazov was orphaned at the age of eight when the major earthquake that struck Ashgabat on 6 October 1948 claimed the lives of his mother, Gurbansoltan Eje, and his two brothers³⁴.

This tragedy had several enduring implications. On a psychological level, it would appear that Niyazov has never fully come to terms with the loss of his mother, with the result that she is the secondary figure in the extended imagery and vocabulary that comprises his cult of personality. To give two brief examples, both the Turkmen word for bread (*chorek*) and the month of April were renamed Gurbansoltan Eje in 2002. Moreover, surviving the earthquake appears to have inculcated the belief in Niyazov that he was destined to lead the Turkmen: "When I learned to read and write, I realised that my homeland was a captive and an orphan like me" (Turkmenbashi: 2002, 154). The more immediate and practical impact, however, was that the remainder of Niyazov's childhood

³¹ As noted in chapter three, Niyazov's political opponents in exile state that Niyazov's mother came from a Kurdish family, something Niyazov has subsequently attempted to conceal. Kipchak is situated close to Kurdish villages, and Kurds occupy a fairly low place in the country's social hierarchy. The "allegation" appears to be designed to discredit Niyazov, although the claimants say that there are still elderly people in the area who will confirm that Niyazov is half-Kurdish (IS 1).

³² In this respect, Niyazov appears to be emulating President Felix Houphouet-Boigny, the former dictator of Cote d'Ivoire, who constructed the world's largest church in his home town of Yamoussoukro.

³³ Niyazov's political opponents contend that Atymrat's father was actually thrown to his death from a train on its way to the front, following a violent dispute. As such, he never saw military action in the Caucasus (reference as above).

³⁴ It is estimated that 110,000 people were killed in the earthquake, which measured nine on the Richter scale.

was spent in a state orphanage. Not only was Niyazov detached from Teke clan networks, he would have been exposed to the pervasive High Stalinist cult of personality. As we saw with Aitakov and Atabaev in the early Soviet period, the regime was keen to utilise and promote orphans in order to circumvent and break down traditional clan allegiances. For the young Niyazov, surrounded by the rituals and iconography of Stalinism, the Soviet leader would possibly have been viewed as a personal saviour and perhaps a substitute father figure.

Niyazov graduated from the Leningrad Polytechnical Institute in 1959, and returned to Turkmenistan to work as an instructor in the Territorial Committee of the Geological Prospecting Workers' Union, joining the CPSU in 1962. From thereon he worked first as a foreman, and then senior foreman at the Bizmein power plant near Ashgabat (ITAR-TASS, 15 July 1990). Moving into Party work full-time in 1970, he held a variety of posts, rising to chair the Industry and Transport Department of the CPTu, before becoming the First Party Secretary of the Ashgabat City Committee in 1980. In August 1984, Niyazov was transferred to Moscow to undertake organisational work for the CPSU Central Committee for a period of six months. This placement was almost certainly used to assess Niyazov's suitability to lead the Party in Turkmenistan, and within six months he was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Turkmen SSR, a position clearly designed to presage his eventual elevation to First Party Secretary once Gapurov had been retired.

The reasons for Niyazov's advancement are not entirely clear. However, several factors suggest themselves. Firstly, at 44 years old he was relatively young, at least by the standards of other First Secretaries, and had had a Russian education in Leningrad. Secondly, he had capably organised the Ashgabat centenary celebrations in 1981, no doubt bringing himself to the attention of the Moscow leadership and, in the process, proving himself to be thoroughly "internationalist" (meaning Russified) on the nationalities issue. Thirdly, although Niyazov was not beholden to close clan networks, he was, nevertheless, an Ahal Teke from the Ashgabat region which, according to Kadyrov, would consolidate the chain of command from Moscow, create stability and ensure the execution of Soviet policy, without incurring the resistance that a representative of a smaller tribe might engender (2004).

Niyazov has been portrayed as an old school survivor of the pre-Gorbachev era but analysis of speeches and interviews reveals that, in public at least, this was not the case. He spoke repeatedly of the unworkability of the "conventional forms and methods of

Party work that took shape in the seventies” (speech to the 27th Congress of the CPSU, 28 February 1986 in Furtado and Chandler: 1992, 559), and the “historic irreversibility of perestroika – the need to implement reform” (speech to Supreme Soviet plenum on constitutional change, 30 November 1988 in Furtado and Chandler: 1992, 563). Niyazov also pursued a resolutely pro-Moscow line on the issue of language and inter-ethnic relations at this time, stating that everyone should have an adequate mastery of Russian because “Russian is the language of Lenin” (speech to Komsomol Congress, BBC Monitoring CAU translation from reprint in *Turkmenskaia Iskra*, 15 February 1987). Moreover, Niyazov also supported Gorbachev’s efforts to eliminate corruption within the Party. He instigated a wide-ranging investigation into Party activities in Tashauz (Dashoguz) *oblast* (coincidentally a stronghold of Yomuts and ethnic Uzbeks) in 1986, and dismissed several senior officials for “whitewashing and bribery, deceiving the state, and distortions in implementing personnel policy [code for clan-based appointments]” (speech to CPTu Central Committee Plenum on 18 October 1986 in Forted and Chandler: 1992, 588). By 1988, 80 out of 330 members of the Turkmen Supreme Soviet had been removed, and 31 members of the CPTu Central Committee had been expelled (speech to the 19th All Union CPSU Conference on 2 July 1988, *Pravda*, 9 July 1988). As late as 1990, Niyazov stated in an interview with *Pravda* that “we have declared an all-out struggle against the negative phenomena in the Party, against passivity and inertia. And we are doing all this openly, in the spirit of *glasnost*” (21 September 1990).

A review of Niyazov’s speeches after his appointment as Party First Secretary in December 1985 also suggests that he was attempting to respond to serious and sustained criticism of the CPTu in Moscow. In his first set piece speech to an all-Union audience at the 27th Congress of the CPSU in February 1986, Niyazov argued that the Turkmen economy had stagnated for the previous fifteen years because:

In the late seventies and early eighties personnel in our republic were promoted on the grounds of personal devotion and local favouritism, which in turn led to the spread of servility and careerism, and produced an atmosphere of mutual protection, abuses, lack of exactingness [sic] towards cadres, and irresponsibility (Furtado and Chandler: 1992, 559).

The picture that emerges of Niyazov in his first three years as CPTu First Secretary is of a loyalist and careerist, probably more in tune with Gorbachev’s brief *uskorenie* (acceleration) drive, manifested in anti-corruption initiatives, than with economic liberalisation. Although there was limited material to work with in terms of industrial

capacity in the Turkmen SSR, Niyazov's policy record on economic reform following introduction of the Law on Cooperatives in 1987 suggests that he was focused more on prestige infrastructural projects, such as completing the 35 year construction of the Karakum canal, rather than on encouraging small enterprises. Virtually all of the light industrial enterprises in the republic in 1989 had been established during the 1920s, during the initial wave of rapid industrialisation (*Ashkhabad* No. 5: 61, quoted in Bohr: 1996, 352), and by January 1989, there were a mere 447 cooperatives registered in the Turkmen SSR, compared to 3616 in the much smaller, and conflict-prone, Armenian SSR (Bohr: 1990).

Nevertheless, despite the lack of results in the economic sphere, Niyazov was effectively able to consolidate his dominance of the CPTu during the *perestroika* period for several reasons. Firstly, he received strong support from the all-Union government. Niyazov was both personally loyal to Gorbachev and could point to specific initiatives on corruption and Party reform in line with the Soviet leadership's agenda.

Of equal importance was that the Turkmen SSR remained quiescent. Compared to rising anti-Soviet nationalism in the Baltic republics, inter-Republic nationalism in the Caucasus, and inter-ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Fergana Valley, the Turkmen SSR remained an oasis of tranquillity. Moreover, when ethnic conflicts did surface in 1989, Niyazov adopted a resolutely orthodox line and did not succumb to the temptation to play the nationalist card that characterised Party elites in several other republics.

Thirdly, Gorbachev had intended the process of liberalisation to be managed by the Party and from the centre. In the event, this proved to be a contradiction in terms. Niyazov's approach to reform indicated that in the Turkmen SSR, the process of incremental liberalisation from above was being pursued without significant levels of disorder.

Fourthly, unlike most other Soviet republics, there was neither a cadre within the Party ranks, nor a particularly strong movement outside, that was outflanking Niyazov with a nationalist agenda. The Party elite, many of whom were Tekes, had no desire to risk the imposition from Moscow of a non-Teke, or even a non-Turkmen, as Party First

Secretary³⁵. At the same time, Niyazov was able to draw much of the fire from the Agyzbirlik movement by selectively implementing its platform.

Yet, several trends emerged in this period that also suggest Niyazov's future political trajectory. Agyzbirlik was a collection of teachers and writers from the southern city of Mary, and did not represent a serious threat to the hegemony of the CPTu. While nationalist movements in other Republics began registering after the 19th Party Conference of June-July 1988 partially ended the CPSU's political privileges, Agyzbirlik was unable to secure the 700 signatures required to do so, and mutated into a weekly political discussion club (Ponamarov: 2004). Nevertheless, Niyazov perceived them as a threat. He devoted a significant portion of his speech to the Republic conference on mass media on 28 April 1989 to an attack on Agyzbirlik, accusing it of being "an enemy of *perestroika*" and "pandering to fashion" by simply copying its programme from Baltic nationalist groups (Furtado and Chandler: 1992, 564-566). Significantly, Niyazov argued that, as the CPTu had forums for debating issues such as ecology, inter-ethnic relations and the economy, why was there then a need to create "a blind and absurd imitation" outside Party structures (Furtado and Chandler: 1992, 564-566).

Niyazov clearly had not come to Gorbachev's conclusion at the 19th Party conference that the CPSU was not only incapable of solving the country's problems, but had become part of the problem itself. Consequently, Niyazov emerges as a monist, unable to comprehend the validity of a multiplicity of different political perspectives or organisational forms. This is demonstrated in his intervention at the 28th Party Congress in July 1990, when he argued that "the unity of the party and the country provides us with the only way out of this crisis" (Xinhua General Overseas News Service, 6 July 1990, retrieved from L-N E on 23 January 2006).

Nevertheless, Niyazov clearly realised that the nationalist mobilisation affecting the other Soviet republics, including the neighbouring Uzbek SSR would sooner or later impact in some way on the Turkmen Republic, and took steps to capture and direct such sentiments through Party structures. Accordingly, Niyazov subsequently appropriated much of Agyzbirlik's programme, most notably in the adoption of the Law on Language on 27 May 1990, which declared Turkmen as the official state language to be phased into all

³⁵ Gorbachev replaced Kunaev with Felix Kolbin, an ethnic Russian *from Russia*, as Party First Secretary of the Kazakh SSR in December 1986, sparking several days of intense civil disorder in Almaty, which was finally suppressed by troops drafted in from the Russian SFSR (Alexandrov: 1999, 12).

branches of the administration and schools within a decade³⁶. Similarly, Niyazov pursued a cautious nationalist/*glasnost* agenda in revisiting debates over the incorporation of the Turkmen into the Russian empire, by acknowledging the defeat at Geok-Deppe in 1881 as a national tragedy; by sanctioning the republication of *Gorkut Ata*, the chronicles tracing the mythological origins of the Oghuz Turkmen that had been banned in 1951; and finally, through the posthumous rehabilitation of 3500 victims of Stalin's Great Purges.

Alongside these orthodox and nationalising trends, Niyazov convened a Council of Elders in 1989, scheduled to meet regularly at *velayet* level with Niyazov chairing each session. Although the body was entirely consultative, it marked a major departure in the principles of political organisation in the USSR and, moreover, allowed Niyazov a much greater level of contact than hitherto with opinion formers and senior community members in each region. The Council's novelty, and the prestige associated with membership, ensured that no member would jeopardise his seat by criticising Niyazov. As such, it became, and remains, a tightly controlled vehicle of ritual support for Niyazov's policies. When taken in conjunction with the opening of the first functioning mosque since World War II in Ashgabat, and the reinstatement of *Kurban Bairam* as a national holiday, both in July 1989, a pattern emerges of Niyazov starting to engage in the selective retraditionalisation of the Turkmen SSR's political life which would, by definition, exclude the minority nationalities within the Republic.

What emerges from this fusion of specifically Turkmen elements, alongside cautious modernisation within a framework of broad Soviet orthodoxy, is a relatively underdeveloped nationalist ideology, in which the ethnic and civic components began to rest more uneasily with one another. Part of the reason for this was a rejection of Yeltsin's programme to remodel and promote Russian national identity on more progressive, civic lines. In effect, Russian liberal elites could afford a more generous and inclusive conception of "Russianness" by virtue of the relative dominance of ethnic Russians within the RSFSR, and its status as the core republic in the Union³⁷. For the Central Asian republics, whose political experience consisted of domination from Moscow, and who had numerically and economically significant ethnic Russian minorities, such a stance would have been paradoxical – in a sense, symbolically

³⁶ Interestingly, the law also specifies that Arab characters be reintroduced, although Niyazov subsequently shifted to a Latin alphabet after independence.

³⁷ The official term *rossiskii* refers to citizens of Russia, regardless of ethnicity, and is used in constitutional documents. *Russkii* is used to describe ethnic Russians.

acknowledging the dominance of an external power that was in the process of abdicating its authority. In practical terms, fusing tradition and nationalism with loyalty to the Soviet elite, meant that Niyazov, like Heidar Aliyev in the Azerbaijani SSR, Mintimer Şärip ulı Şäymiev in the Russian Republic of Tatarstan and others, was quietly carving out his own fiefdom, nested within increasingly unstable and ineffective Soviet institutions.

The Collapse of the Soviet Union

In common with other Republic elites, Niyazov followed, in almost every respect, the Soviet leadership's lead in implementing the constitutional changes of the late Soviet period. Thus, following the all-Union elections to the newly empowered USSR CPD in March 1989, the Turkmen CPD held similar semi-competitive elections on 7 January 1990, with two or three candidates contesting each of the 175 seats. Mirroring the all-Union CPD elections, approximately 10% of seats went to non-members of the CPSU. The Turkmen CPD then elected a Supreme Soviet and, again following the all-Union example, which had elected Gorbachev as its Chairman, the Turkmen Supreme Soviet, duly installed Niyazov as Chairman of the Turkmen Supreme Soviet on 19 January 1990.

Formally, the Turkmen SSR was staying in line with the other Soviet republics at this stage including the RSFSR. Elections to the Russian CPD on 4 March 1990 had resulted in 20% of the seats going to non-CPSU members, not a great advance on the Turkmen figure, but a sign that the political debate over Russia's role in the Union was running ahead of the other republics. This was reinforced by the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the RSFSR on 12 June 1990 which signalled, according to Alexei Zverev, "the Russian people's unwillingness to carry the burden of empire" (quoted in Sakwa: 2002, 17). The Turkmen SSR's Declaration of Sovereignty on 21 August 1990 should therefore be construed as a purely defensive and reactive measure to Yeltsin's declaration, rather than as a nationalising attempt move out of the Soviet orbit.

In essence, if the Union's most important component (Russia) was signalling that it had the right to secede, the danger was that the USSR would continue to exist without its core member. The so-called "war of the laws" in 1990-1 was therefore an attempt to define the juridical status of the Union's constituent parts to the disintegrating centre, and put in place a legal mechanism, however imperfect, that would allow secession.

The consolidation of Niyazov's personal authority within the republic is confirmed by the first direct election to the new post of President of the Turkmen SSR on 27 October 1990. The post had been created to follow Gorbachev's conversion of the Chairmanship of the Supreme Soviet to a presidency, although Gorbachev famously never stood in a direct election. Niyazov ran unopposed in the election gaining 98.3% of the vote, officially because no other candidate could muster sufficient nominations, but in reality because Niyazov's hold on Party structures ensured that not only was he nominated, but that no other candidate would be allowed to stand. In this respect, Niyazov conformed to a Central Asian pattern in that the Party leadership viewed the creation of the presidency as a formality, an exercise in confirming the Supreme Soviet elections earlier in the year. They also suggested that Niyazov's purges of regional party structures had been sufficiently successful to enable the installation of loyal cadres in most regions.

Niyazov's continuing commitment to an all-Union tier of governance is illustrated by the outcome of the referendum on the draft Federation Treaty held on 17 March 1991. In retrospect, the Treaty was doomed before the referendum. Six of the 15 republics boycotted the vote, which effectively condemned the Union to some form of split in any event. Of the remainder, the proposal to remodel the federation on the basis of a voluntary derogation of republican powers to the centre was supported by 75.4% of the electorate, from a turnout of 76.2%. The Turkmen SSR was notable in that 97% of an almost unanimous turnout approved the draft Treaty. The results, although probably reflecting the broad will of the Turkmen republic's population, were notable not only because they indicated Turkmen enthusiasm for USSR membership, but that they also showed Party control of the political process remained monolithically complete. This was demonstrated by a further referendum on independence, held on 26 October 1991, after the failed August coup, in which 94% of the population voted in a diametrically opposite way for independence.

Niyazov's response to the August coup underlines his reactive approach and lack of political self-confidence at this juncture. Initially he welcomed the coup, as a means to restore order, and portraits of Gorbachev began to be removed from official buildings. This stance was probably an act of political self-preservation by Niyazov, but also partly motivated by the recognition that Turkmenistan would still have to deal with whoever was in power in Moscow on fairly supplicant terms³⁸. However, once the coup had failed, Niyazov swung back behind his erstwhile patron, pointedly arguing that "we've

³⁸ Anderson (1997) discusses the reactions to the August 1991 coup of the various Communist Party First Secretaries in Central Asia.

thrown way too many stones at Mikhail Sergeyevich” at the Emergency Congress of the all-Union CPD in Moscow on 3 September 1991.

This CPD session actually voted to abolish itself in favour of a new USSR Supreme Soviet (that never met). A State Council, chaired by Gorbachev, and comprising the heads of the 12 remaining Soviet republics was created instead to govern the Soviet Union in the period between September 1991 and the formal dissolution of the USSR on 31 December 1991. Niyazov remained a strong advocate of a Union formula, was one of a dwindling number of Republic presidents willing to put his name to a new treaty creating a Union of Sovereign States (USS) in late November 1991, and was still arguing for a Soviet confederation during a five-day official visit to Turkey in early December 1991 (IS 2). In the event, it was western Ukrainian nationalists who ensured Turkmen independence by refusing to participate in USS structures. Without Ukraine, the USS was deemed to be dead in the water by Russian president Boris Yeltsin, and he signed a trilateral agreement (the so-called “Belovezh Accords”) on 8 December 1991 with Ukraine and Belarus to establish a Slavic Union. The reaction of the Central Asian leaders, who had received no notification of Yeltsin’s negotiations, was to seek accession to the new body at a meeting convened by Niyazov in Ashgabat on 12 December 1991. This they achieved by virtue of the Alma Ata Treaty signed on 21 December 1991, which also effectively dissolved the USSR as a legal entity, thereby creating, by default, the new Republic of Turkmenistan.

Constructing the new political order

Although independence was neither sought nor desired by the Turkmen leadership, Niyazov acted quickly in putting together the political framework of the new state as the old order collapsed. This consisted of five strands: the creation of a national constitution, the remodelling of political institutions and processes, the development of a new political party, establishment of relations with important regional actors, and managing the disentanglement of national structures from the web of Soviet economic and military institutions of which the Turkmen SSR was formerly a part.

The formation of a new political party of power was undertaken before the USSR formally ceased to exist. In contrast to Yeltsin, who banned the CPSU shortly after the August coup, the CPTu remained as the only legal and functioning political party in the

republic, with Niyazov at its head until December 1991³⁹. Only after the Belovezh Accords irrevocably doomed the Union did Niyazov decide to dismantle the CPTu. This was achieved in surreal fashion on 16 December 1991, when the 25th Congress of the CPTu formally voted the Party out of existence, and then reconvened later that day in the same venue as the founding conference of the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), with Niyazov as its Chairman (Ochs: 1997, 323).

Although the DPT, as the formal successor to the CPTu, inherited the latter's infrastructure and organisational networks and remains the only legally registered political party, its subsequent profile has been entirely marginal. Whereas President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has invested political capital in his successor party, Otan, and President Islam Karimov has sponsored several "official" political parties to project a formal semblance of multiparty politics in Uzbekistan (Yalcin: 2002, 168-176), Niyazov virtually disregards the existence of the DPT altogether. At the opening session of the third convocation of the Majlis on 1 February 2005, Niyazov explicitly ruled out the creation of political parties until 2020 (IS 3), indicating that the DPT is not really a functioning political vehicle.

The formal reasoning behind Niyazov's opposition to political parties is twofold. Firstly, he argues that they result in an unnecessary contestation for power that is contrary to the Turkmen tradition of unity. He considers that parties result in "fractured democracy" and could "generate the risk of infringement of interests of some groups," which perhaps suggests that local parties might become organised along clan or kinship lines. Secondly, Niyazov argues that as everybody knows "important" people in their neighbourhood, there is no reason to organise elections on a party basis.

Yet through these arguments, Niyazov is allowing no space for genuine contestation of ideology or policy. He appears to be suggesting that communities simply put forward their *oba* for affirmation. By doing so, Niyazov empties public institutions of their political content. This achieves compliance through the creation of a "prepolitical" consensus determined by himself, fusing political community, national ideology and government policy, and thereby closing out alternative prescriptions of governance or policy⁴⁰. From a practical perspective, Niyazov is no doubt also aware that institutions

³⁹ No separate Communist Party existed for the RSFSR, because of fears that it would dominate the CPSU, and therefore Yeltsin simply appropriated CPSU assets on Russian territory.

⁴⁰ Andrew March's study regime of legitimation in Uzbekistan was valuable for this argument (2003: 24-25).

such as political parties can, even if created “top down,” generate a political momentum and autonomy of their own. Alternative parties entail alternative political leaders, which for Niyazov, is unacceptable. In contrast, Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan has resolved this dilemma, by very effectively adopting the role of manager and arbiter between legal party and clan factions. Thus, although both leaders remain above domestic criticism, Niyazov has achieved this *prior* to, rather than as part of, the political process.

Having defined and then circumscribed the parameters of party political activity, Niyazov moved quickly to formulate a new constitution. The process was commenced in late February 1992 and work began immediately. In fact, Turkmenistan was the first post-Soviet state to put in place a new constitution, reflecting Niyazov’s haste to cement his political position in the wake of the Soviet collapse. It also indicates that there was almost no discussion, comparable to the other new Central Asian states, over the balance between executive and legislative authority. Pauline Jones Luong describes an intensive bargaining game between central and regional elites in the Kazakh and Kyrgyz republics leading to the adoption of new constitutions in spring 1993 (2002: 156-188, 213-252). Even in Uzbekistan, where President Islam Karimov’s control of the levers of power was much more close, the debate over the form of the constitution was not resolved until December 1992, after lengthy submissions had been received from powerful regional elites over the course of the year (Luong: 2002: 189-212). By contrast, Turkmenistan’s constitution was prepared, approved and adopted by the Supreme Soviet (now renamed the Majlis) on 18 May 1992, less than eleven weeks after Niyazov had initially announced that a new constitution was required, and without any of the strategic bargaining that characterised constitutional formation in neighbouring republics⁴¹.

The Constitution itself describes Turkmenistan as a presidential republic (Article One), “based on the principle of the separation of powers into legislative, executive and judicial powers which function independently, checking and balancing each other” (Article Four), and guarantees “the right to form political parties” that operate peacefully and do not advocate racial or national animosity (Article 28). This liberal formulation, essentially lifted from the French model, belies an internal contradiction caused by the powers of the *Khalk Maslahaty* (People’s Council) established by Articles 48 – 53.

The *Khalk Maslahaty* has a membership of over 2500, and consists of the executive, legislature, judiciary, ambassadors, Council of Elders, and elected representatives from

⁴¹ Tajikistan is exceptional having fallen into civil war in 1992.

the districts. It does not sit permanently but meets when called by the government usually for a week-long session once every year. It thus functions as a branch of the executive in approving the strategic direction of government policy, but also has the power to amend and interpret the Constitution, nominate presidential candidates, and even make oral submissions on sentencing in criminal trials for treason. The unique fusion of powers enjoyed by the *Khalk Maslahaty*, described as a “the highest representative organ of popular power” is broadly analogous to the village meeting or *maslakhat* of the pre-Tsarist political order, with Council members functioning as *aksakals* or *obas*. The significant difference, however, is that while the *maslakhat* was acephalous, investing authority only temporarily in a *serdar* (commander) for military purposes, Niyazov sits as the *Khalk Maslahaty*’s permanent Chairman⁴². The exception to the traditional acephalous pattern of Turkmen authority structures was in nineteenth century Ahal Teke communities, where permanent khans or *serdars* were appointed. In this respect, the appointment of Niyazov as permanent Chairman of the *Khalk Maslahaty* would appear to reflect symbolic Teke dominance of national political institutions, a complaint made by Turkmen dissidents (Kadyrov: 2003), and accentuated by the obligation of *Khalk Maslahaty* members to wear the *tahya* (skull cap), which historically differentiated Tekes from non-Tekes (Trotter: 1882, 536).

In theory, the *Khalk Maslahaty* is a form of traditional democracy, wherein each community sends its representative to a community meeting. However, the unwieldy size of the body, the large proportion of deferential political “backwoodsmen,” and the preliminary vetting and selection of appointed members, ensures that *Khalk Maslahaty* sessions involve little more than members seeking to outperform one another in acts of ritual obeisance to Niyazov⁴³.

The Majlis (the former CPD), which, after 1994, was reduced to 50 members elected in single-member districts every five years, has been trusted to a much lesser degree by Niyazov. Although entirely obedient to the Cabinet of Ministers (chaired by Niyazov) in

⁴² By mid-1992, the term *Serdar* was already in use to describe Niyazov and has now become a popular alternative title used throughout the country. The word has been carved in giant white lettering across a mountainside in the Kopet Dag range south of Ashgabat, and *Serdar* is the most popular vodka on sale in the country, the bottle carrying a mirror portrait of Niyazov on the bottle’s interior.

⁴³ The *Khalk Maslahaty* is analogous to Colonel Mu’ammar al-Qadhafi’s *Jamahiriyya* (People’s) committees, created as a form of extreme democracy to counterbalance state authority. In practice, these too are subject to close government control.

passing routine legislation⁴⁴, many Majlis members had been CPTu officials, and some of these predated Niyazov's own rise to power. Whereas the *Khalk Maslahaty* brought into the political framework the heads of rural villages, many Majlis members retained both the internationalist perspective of the Soviet era, and residual ties to Moscow through links with the security services, the military, and economic planning structures.

The three Majlis elections held since independence, in 1994, 1999 and 2004 have, on each occasion, provided Niyazov with an opportunity to purge the chamber of any real or imagined hostile elements. In the first election in December 1994 (turnout of 99.8%), 51 candidates stood for 50 seats to give a nominal impression of multicandidate competition. The 1999 election (turnout 98.9%) provided greater choice, with 104 candidates, all but one of whom were members of the DPT, contesting the seats, this time confirming nominally that the elections were not single-party in nature. The really significant change was in the December 2004 election, which was contested by 131 candidates, in that turnout fell back to 76.88%. The reduced official turnout has marked a significant break with the government's previous official policy of near unanimity, and may be intended to draw the sting from international human rights bodies, who have ridiculed previous claims of near unanimous turnout with anecdotal reports of virtually empty polling stations throughout polling day.

Although putative Majlis members are screened prior to nomination for election, the chamber is perceived by Niyazov to be a venue for the so-called Euro-Turkmen (ex-CPSU members) to coalesce. These fears were confirmed by the failed coup/assassination attempt of 25 November 2002, when its alleged organiser, former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov, apparently admitted that the plotters planned to intercept Niyazov en route from his country residence to the presidential palace, and then arraign him before the Majlis, where he would be formally impeached and forced to resign.

There is no evidence to suggest how many Majlis members, if any, would have turned against Niyazov so suddenly. However, the fact that the plotters were willing to take this chance fuelled Niyazov's suspicions, and he quickly moved, at the emergency session of the *Khalk Maslahaty* convened in late December 2002, to shift the formal responsibilities for constitutional amendments and selection of presidential candidates from the Majlis to the *Khalk Maslahaty* itself. Given its new responsibilities, Niyazov has argued unconvincingly that the *Khalk Maslahaty* could be convened within one day should he be

⁴⁴ The first decree passed by the Majlis in 1992 was for the unlimited production of copies of state portraits of Niyazov.

incapacitated. This is highly unlikely given the size of both the body and the country, and the remote location of many members. Should Niyazov die in office, therefore, there is, at present, likely to be a temporary constitutional vacuum in which potential successors might undertake an intense struggle for power.

Following the promulgation of the constitution, Niyazov moved quickly to formalise his position as head of the independent state (rather than president of the Turkmen SSR) by calling a presidential election for 21 June 1992, whereupon he was elected unopposed, improving his vote from 98.3% in October 1990 to 99.95% on a turnout of 99.8%. Although *Agyzbirlik* had immediately announced Nurberdi Nurmamedov as their candidate, Niyazov had ensured that only the Majlis could nominate candidates, and they refused to allow any other candidates. This was the first and so far only presidential election in Turkmenistan. Yet the more completely Niyazov stamps out political dissent, either within or without political structures, the more magnified is even the slightest manifestation of opposition.

This was demonstrated by the formation in Moscow of the Turkmenistan Foundation (or Fund) (TF) in July 1993. Led by former Foreign Minister Avdy Kulyev and a senior *apparatchik* Murad Esenov, the group had negligible political support within Turkmenistan, but began smuggling in dissident materials on the train service connecting Moscow to Ashgabat (Ponamarov 2004). After some TF literature had been discovered, Niyazov decided to expedite a referendum to extend his presidency for a further eight years. This was rapidly organised and held in January 2004, receiving the approval of 99.99% of the population, from a turnout of 99.99%. Esenov was abducted in November 1994 for a period (Pannier: 2005, 12), and Kulyev has been subject to beatings by unknown assailants in Moscow over the past decade (Pannier: 2005, 81).

The near unanimous turnouts owe much to Soviet-era practice, but they also reflect the tradition of unanimity that characterised Turkmen community decision-making prior to the Soviet era. As Ochs noted in relation to the high turnout figures, “it appears more important for the regime to publicise the results as a show of unanimity and unity” than for any intrinsic political value (Ochs: 1997, 322). An unequivocal result reflects not only the satisfaction people have with the government, but also the unity of both the political elite and the people, for from the perspective of the Turkmen regime, dissent does not only question government policy, but also institutions, territory and national identity, in other words, the legitimacy of the state.

To summarise, given the overt internal contradictions within the Turkmen constitution, and Niyazov's determination to frustrate a plurality of political parties from operating, the liberal elements of the Turkmen constitution may appear to be puzzling. The explanation for the anomaly appears to lie in a mixture of what Chehabi and Linz termed "constitutional hypocrisy" (1998a: 17) and the haste with which the constitution was adopted. In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse, the Central Asian republics were wholly ill-equipped for formal statehood. Insecurity over sovereignty, and the lack of both diplomatic representation and contacts abroad (in contrast to Russia, which simply inherited the Soviet diplomatic infrastructure), caused the new leaders to seek early acceptance from international institutions, notably the UN and OSCE. Taking a liberal constitutional model "off the shelf" was part of the process of gaining international acceptance and achieving conformity as quickly as possible.

However, Turkmenistan is unique among post-Soviet states in that there appears to be no record of a dialogue over the type of constitutional model to be adopted, even between Turkmen political elites. Nor does it appear that there was any domestic expectation that the content of the constitution would be realised even though, under Article 16, the rights of citizens under the new constitution were inviolable and inalienable, in contrast to Soviet constitutional principles, where individual rights were conditional upon conformity with socialist ideals and the policies of the CPSU⁴⁵.

Niyazov's Conception of Power and Democracy

This "democratic deficit" in national political life has been explained away by Niyazov on numerous occasions in speeches and interviews, often through the use of separate and incompatible arguments within the same context⁴⁶. Arguably the most specious of these was the claim to the Russian newspaper *Trud* in March 1998, that there is democracy but that there is simply no opposition to the government (interview reprinted in *Transitions: March 1998*, 13). Whether Niyazov is being either consciously disingenuous or engaging

⁴⁵ Article 52 of the fourth and final Soviet Constitution of 1977, for example, granted freedom of expression as long as this was not in contravention of Party policies.

⁴⁶ Western media reports on Niyazov frequently refer to him as "crazy" in connection with some of the more unusual decrees and statements, but Interviewee 1, an experienced doctor, offered the opinion that, from studying his behaviour and speech patterns on television, Niyazov may have organic symptoms of mental illness by virtue of his constant flitting between unconnected subjects.

in wishful thinking is open to question, but this line of defence tends to accord with other statements of the same type⁴⁷.

Niyazov has also framed his conception of democracy in terms of the provision of welfare and security, and quoted Socrates in that “real democracy presumes strong rule” (Khramov: 2001, 86), not to ensure democratic practice, but rather for its own sake. Democracy is connected by Niyazov to group and, more particularly, state interests rather than the alienable rights of the individual, rather like the Soviet constitution was. As such, Niyazov has argued that Turkmenistan enjoys a healthy democracy.

The third argument asserts that the country is, in fact, democratic was used in a keynote speech to the Makhtumkuli Youth Congress on 7 May 2004. Here Niyazov baldly asserted that “any group may form an independent or non-governmental party” before adding that “it should not be an artificial formulation and let nobody look for a straw in another person’s eye” (Miras: 2/2004, 25). This would appear to be a straightforward reiteration of Article 28 of the Constitution (see above) although bearing little resemblance to reality.

On other occasions Niyazov has conceded that Turkmenistan is not democratic, but has offered different explanations for this. The first is one of immaturity – Niyazov argues that European states have had 250 years to evolve into liberal democracies, whereas Turkmenistan has been in existence for barely a decade, and is only just putting laws onto the statute books that define the political process. Niyazov argues that the country needs time for political institutions to strengthen and evolve before entrusting voters with choices, and that society is not “ripe” enough to choose between different presidential candidates⁴⁸.

The second argument stresses that Turkmenistan’s political model will emerge according to its own “history and condition”. In an interview with *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (26 October

⁴⁷ In his New Year address for 2005, for example, Niyazov stated that on *Gadyr Gijesi* (the Night of Omnipotence that marks the end of Ramadan), 9000 prisoners were amnestied and “since then no one in Turkmenistan has committed a crime” and every prisoner has “started a peaceful and constructive life,” (IS 4) a statement flatly contradicted by interviewees and contacts in Turkmenistan, nearly all of whom reported a significant increase in petty crime and burglary following the amnesty.

⁴⁸ The clear anomaly is that the institutions will not evolve unless they are in some way accountable to the electorate. This is demonstrated by the indifference of many citizens to the Majlis elections despite the officially high voter turnout figures.

2005), Niyazov elaborated this explanation as follows: “Today, while developing democratic institutes in the country, we try to make sure that this process corresponds to the world outlook of our people, to the system of values tested by centuries.” Part of this national tradition involves appointing a leader, obviously Niyazov, “with special powers and enjoying special trust” (Khramov: 2001, 86). Niyazov has elaborated on this theme in *Ruhnama*, likening the country to a ship, with each citizen an oarsman: “If all the oarsmen obey one captain, and row in accordance with the orders of the captain, the ship will be put out to sea” (2002: 68).

The range of arguments Niyazov uses to explain and defend the formal political system are a mixture of functional explanations based on Turkmenistan’s precarious sovereignty and internal stability, a shifting of the conception of democracy established in the constitution to a more group rights focus, analogous with the Soviet constitution, a messianic belief in the centrality of a strong leader and, finally, claims about the extent of pluralism and the opposition, which are insupportable by any objective analysis.

In this sense, Niyazov therefore aligns closely with those sultanistic leaders described by Chehabi and Linz who “pay lip service to constitutions that provide for elected chief executives and parliaments, and in some cases even multiparty systems. The leaders often make a point of extolling democracy while redefining it,” often by writing extensive treatises on the subject (1998a: 18).

If Niyazov’s formal defence of the political system is intellectually incoherent, how then can we understand the rationale behind the construction of such a strongly personalist regime. The answers are likely to lie in a combination of personal and functional factors. Firstly, it is necessary to consider Niyazov’s understanding of the nature of political power. He conceptualises individual rights as subordinate to the requirements of political stability. He therefore places a premium on social cohesion. Multivocality in the political system threatens the unity of the community by engendering discussion, debate and disagreement. To avoid this, power should emanate from one source alone. As the incumbent source of power, Niyazov is responsible for the maintenance of social solidarity. He is therefore responsible not only for executing state policy, but for the production of a national ideology – an ideal for living - of which state policy forms a part. Any disaggregation of power threatens not only the legitimacy and efficacy of state policy (“who gets what, when and how”) but also the rightness of national ideology and, ultimately, the nation itself.

In the bordering state of Uzbekistan, a similar fusion of state and regime has forged a highly defensive mentality which views reality external to the state as comprising a multitude of threats – consumerism, permissiveness, radical Islam, airborne disease – all of which erode the traditional, organic unity of Uzbek society (Megoran: 2003). In the official version, only President Islam Karimov has the foresight and qualities to protect the community and guide the state through the minefield presented by globalisation and religious extremism. In Niyazov's conception, there is no such presupposition of organic Turkmen unity. By contrast, his historic mission is to save ethnic Turkmen from naturally inimical relations and the prospect of internal disintegration through the construction of a political system that privileges, even demands, complete political unity.

Ironically, Niyazov's policy of frequently rotating or purging government personnel inadvertently reinforces and deepens the tribal solidarities that he is trying to dissolve. Officials know they have very limited time in post, and therefore extract everything they possibly can for themselves and their family/clan while the resources are available (Interviews 3 and 21). Indeed, it could almost be argued that the purges function as an equitable form of distribution of state resources between clan groups.

Niyazov was helped by the fact that Turkmen political elites were neither well-travelled nor politically cosmopolitan in comparison to those of other Soviet republics. The Soviet approach to governing the Turkmen SSR, particularly after Stalin's death, was to allow existing authority patterns to persist so long as they did not conflict with the Party's broader goals or result in civil disorder. There was even less reason for extensive intervention in Turkmenistan than other Muslim republics because of its historically low levels of religious observance, and the fewer restrictions on women's appearance.

After the Soviet collapse, the badges of socialism were taken off leaving traditional authority structures still intact. The physical and cultural isolation of the Republic left it somewhat adrift from the currents of political debate that penetrated the Communist East. This isolationism has since been perpetuated by the blanket ban on government officials from leaving the country, except on official business, the ban on foreign media and the very low levels of Internet usage.

Although these factors might explain the ideological dimension of Turkmenistan's political framework, they do not explain why Niyazov finally designated himself as the sole, formal instrument for formulating, articulating and symbolising national ideology and government policy. The early influence of Stalin as a leader who negotiated periods

of rapid national trauma and transition is clear from the productionist ethos and gigantomania of the state, and many of the visual manifestations of the cult of personality that emerged from 1992 onwards, discussed in more detail in chapter five. However, Niyazov is also likely well have derived significant *political* (as opposed to aesthetic) inspiration during the initial period of state formation in 1991-92 from the example of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey.

It is clear from his public statements and his commitment to Gorbachev's last-ditch attempt to form the USSR that Niyazov hoped that some form of reconstituted Soviet umbrella could be salvaged as late as early December 1991, shortly before the Belovezh Accords. Only after that point was Niyazov required, by simple force of circumstance, to consider alternative options. Interestingly, during the first week of December 1991, he made his first recorded trip outside the Soviet Union to Turkey, for an unusually long, five-day visit. The formal purpose of the visit was to develop economic relations, secure short-term aid, and lay the groundwork for Turkey's eventual diplomatic recognition of Turkmenistan. However, Niyazov's own published foreign policy diary records a visit to the vast Kemal Ataturk mausoleum complex and exposure to the posthumous cult of Kemalism that pervades Turkish public life. In the following year (1992), the Turkmen government's most intensive foreign contacts by far were with Turkey, Niyazov receiving ten official delegations between December 1991 and April 1993, and personally visiting Turkey on a further three occasions during 1992 alone.

There were mutual benefits to such intensive interaction. The Turkish government hoped to exploit the geopolitical void left by Russia's abrupt withdrawal from the region, and President Yeltsin's initial lack of attention to the "Near Abroad". Although ethnic kinship was an attraction in itself, Turkey is energy deficient and cultural synergies could be used as a card to gain access to the oil and gas reserves of the Caucasus and Central Asia⁴⁹.

The practical attractions for Niyazov lay in the willingness of Turkey to help cover shortages in staple goods in the chaotic aftermath of the imposition of "shock therapy" in Russia in January 1992, and the element of prestige in establishing diplomatic contacts. More substantively, however, Niyazov saw in Turkey a potential role model. Like

⁴⁹ Turkey's energy policy towards the region reached its fruition in early 2006 when the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which has a capacity of one million barrels of oil per day, was filled, to be followed later in 2006 by the completion of the South Caucasus gas pipeline (SCP) linking Azerbaijan to the Turkish gas pipeline network. With proposals for a subsea oil pipeline link to Atyrau in Kazakhstan, and the expansion of both the oil and liquefied natural gas tanker fleets in the Caspian Sea, the BTC and SCP projects effectively link Turkey to Central Asia's hydrocarbon fields.

Niyazov, Ataturk had formed a new state from the rubble of a collapsed empire. Moreover, he had forcibly fast-tracked the country through a rapid process of modernisation and industrialisation through top-down, statist methods inspired by Stalin (and, to a lesser extent, by Benito Mussolini in Italy). Ataturk's methods involved a combination of strategic vision in the way that Turkey was projected abroad - nationalist, isolationist and secular – and also arbitrary and personal micro-management, for example by changing the calendar, issuing decrees on acceptable dress styles (criminalising the fez and veiling) (Chehabi: 2004, 214). These measures encapsulated a style of governance Niyazov could recognise, understand and imitate. Niyazov has publicly acknowledged Ataturk's achievements in subsequent speeches, not only in diplomatic settings with Turkish ministers, but also in general surveys of both domestic and foreign policy, singling out Ataturk as a leader of special significance in twentieth century state-building projects (Khramov: 2001, 76).

The influence of Kemalism was immediately apparent in several of Niyazov's early policies. Like Ataturk, Niyazov swiftly acquired close control over the Islamic clergy (formerly the responsibility of the Soviet Spiritual Board for Muslims based in Tashkent). He formed a national *kaziyat* (state religious body) in June 1992 followed by the *Gengeshli* (Presidential Council for Religious Affairs) in April 1994, which brought the entirety of national religious activity under Niyazov's personal control. Even the Chief Mufti was appointed as a *de facto* Cabinet member, with a ministerial salary and car (Bezani: 1995; Akbarzadeh: 2001). The role of political parties was also analogous. Although Turkey, like Turkmenistan, remained a one-party state throughout the Kemalist republic, the Turkish People's Party had a minimal input into policy, until it was reactivated in the 1930s to oversee a state guided revival of civil society and the organisation of ritualistic displays of support for the regime (Zürcher: 2004, 106-108)⁵⁰.

The Kemalist model also stressed national self-sufficiency in explicitly statist, but not expansionist, form. Ataturk was not a pan-Turkist, his central foreign policy precept being "Turkey does not claim an inch, but will not concede an inch." Niyazov's swift detachment from the mechanisms binding the CIS, policy of permanent neutrality, relative lack of interest in the large Turkmen diasporas in Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq, and resolutely non-interventionist approach to regional security issues, are all policies in line with a Kemalist template.

⁵⁰ Kemalist political celebrations organised by the People's Party included mass spectacles, such stadium gymnastic displays and parades, largely imitating similar festivities in Fascist Italy (Zürcher: 2004, 110).

Most obvious, however, are the parallels in the way in which Ataturk's persona came to unite and embody the modern Turkish state. The name Ataturk means 'Father of the Turks'. By early 2003, Niyazov had formally adopted the name Turkmenbashi, ('Head of the Turkmen') or Serdar ('Military Commander'). Vital to this impression is likely to have been the manner in which Ataturk, more than any other secular leader of a modern Eurasian state, has been venerated after his death. His legacy is tangible, not only in the Turkish political and military establishment's continuing commitment to Westernisation and secularism, but also physically in portraiture, statuary and the urban landscape, symbolised most dramatically in the monolithic Speerian mausoleum in Ankara. Crucially, however, the cult of Ataturk is essentially posthumous, with Ataturk symbolically representing modernity, progress and national unity to Turks, whereas Niyazov's decision to sanction a living cult of personality around himself entails a different set of political dynamics intimately connected with his own predilections and idiosyncrasies, entirely distinct from the more formalised and structured collective memory of Ataturk.

Mapping power in Turkmenistan

The formal map of political power in Turkmenistan provides for a strong presidency, balanced by an elected legislature (Majlis), and a unique political institution in the *Khalk Maslahaty* that comprises all three branches of government, and is designed to express the popular will, approve the broad direction of government policy, and undertake any necessary constitutional amendments. In practice, the Majlis simply puts executive decisions into a legislative format, with very little amendment or scrutiny. Political debate is entirely absent. Similarly, the *Khalk Maslahaty* does not formulate or evaluate government policy, and appears to meet principally to bestow ritual acclamation on Niyazov, and to receive his yearly report card on the government's achievements.

If we are unable to gain a clear sense of where the sources of power lie from an analysis of formal institutions, it is necessary to look at informal political mechanisms in order to establish how the Turkmen regime functions in practice. This is a very difficult task. The media, which is completely controlled by the government, gives far less away than in the Soviet period, where letters from readers and certain approved articles provided an insight into the flow of policy debate and clues as to the locus of power. Elite political culture in Turkmenistan is almost entirely closed, not least because of the omnipresent threat of arbitrary arrest and detention for officials who speak out. Nevertheless, the

sources available do allow us to construct a picture, in some places rather sketchily, of how the regime operates.

The most appropriate place to begin is the Cabinet of Ministers, chaired by Niyazov himself. Niyazov also acts as Prime Minister and does not have a Vice-President, having claimed that to appoint one might "poison" him politically (Pannier: 2005, 2). Niyazov is also the Prime Minister, having acquired significant additional powers in 1992, to oversee the initial process of disengaging from Soviet structures and implementing market reform⁵¹. Beneath Niyazov are usually two or three Deputy Prime Ministers, usually whichever ministers are most in favour at any particular time. The formal Cabinet also includes the Turkmen Ambassadors to the US and UN, and the Chair of the Central Bank.

Cabinet meetings are usually broadcast on state television, sometimes live. Cabinet ministers do not speak unless directly addressed by Niyazov, and sessions normally consist of long, uninterrupted monologues by Niyazov. Frequently, Cabinet ministers stand before him with their heads bowed, while he berates them for incompetence, often revealing intimate details of their life in the process. There is no dialogue or detailed discussion of policy in the sessions.

Niyazov clearly has strategic oversight over the main lines of government policy. There appear to be several strands to the way power operates. Niyazov frequently identifies a general preference without specifying when, how, or whether this should be translated into policy. Officials then interpret and act on Niyazov's utterances as far as they are able, particularly where it constitutes a relatively insignificant matter (such as students with gold teeth) over which officials are capable of exercising control, and which displays their attentiveness and loyalty.

Related to this is the tendency to enact policy measures in expectation of Niyazov's preferences, and thus without his direct knowledge or assent. Kershaw's analysis of Hitler's style of governance described this as "working towards the Führer", whereby Hitler would often lay out the most general framework of strategic preferences at the outset, which would then be developed into detailed policy initiatives, and subsequently reinterpreted and reproduced further down the chain of command, until initiatives would

⁵¹ Niyazov almost certainly followed the lead of President Boris Yeltsin, who persuaded the Russian CPD to confer additional powers on the presidency in 1991, to put into effect rapid economic reform.

be generated in anticipation of Hitler's wishes rather than on his orders (Kershaw: 1997, 88-106). In the case of Turkmenistan, this is most often manifested in cultural policy, and most closely associated with the production of the cult of personality, discussed in more detail in chapter five.

Thirdly, Niyazov will micro-manage policy in specific areas, often with disastrous results. Niyazov insists on personally setting the date on which cotton harvesting can officially commence each year. In recent years he has miscalculated, damaging the cotton yield, although mistakes are never admitted, and the blame is laid elsewhere. In 2002, the cotton yield was only 25% of the stated government target, prompting Niyazov to dismiss four out of five regional governors, the Agriculture Minister and a Deputy Prime Minister. Similarly, in November 2004, the Deputy Prime Minister and Governor of Ahal and a Deputy Prime Minister were dismissed for the poor harvest in the Ahal region. In recent years, farmers, in collusion with officials, have simply over-reported the cotton harvest by as much as 300% to avoid sanctions (ICG Report No. 93, 2005).

A similar situation has arisen in the production of wheat. Niyazov initially sets wholly unrealistic targets for the grain harvest. He also notifies the dates for both sowing and harvesting. Many farmers are forced to harvest unripe wheat, leading to a poor yield. Officials then seek to cover up their failure to reach state targets by either over-reporting or, in 2005, impounding without compensation a volume of imported flour from Russia and Kazakhstan. The importers are told that their flour is not required because the state targets for domestic production have been met. Subsequently, the imports are passed off as being domestically produced (IWPR RCA No. 414, 8 October 2005). In this way, the agricultural sector has become increasingly dependent on the manipulation of statistics and the multiplication of lies to cover earlier deficiencies. Niyazov also personally negotiates agreements to supply gas to Russia and Ukraine with officials from their state-owned companies Gazprom and Naftohaz, and has detailed input into gas transit agreements and hydrocarbon exploration licensing, an area in which he displays more technical competence (Interviews 3 and 12; Eurasia Daily Monitor, 24 January 2006).

In between these two extremes, there is considerable inertia both in the formulation and execution of policy. Niyazov will often set out policy objectives in general terms, but due to a combination of reasons these are only erratically implemented. The most common reason for the lack of policy coherence is the rapid turnover of senior officials and constant reshuffling of ministers. This has several implications. Efficiency is diminished as each new post-holder has to master their brief. Moreover, many officials believe that

the only way that can retain their post is to initiate some noteworthy project, however ill-conceived or unnecessary, that would convey the impression that they were competent, energetic and proactive. Few of these projects are completed and most simply absorb resources. Interviewees 3 and 21 described how several successive departmental heads in the Central Bank set about attempting to establish a national stock exchange within 12 weeks without any significant progress. Finally, knowing that their time in post is limited, many officials seek to install as many friends and relatives as possible on the payroll, and embezzle as much money as they can before being found out or demoted. The banking, cotton and energy sectors are all synonymous with high-level corruption and nepotism.

In some sectors, there appears to be either no control at all, or the chain of authority has been compromised all the way up to Cabinet level. The former Foreign Minister Boris Shikmuradov, imprisoned in December 2002 for organising the November 2002 coup plot, allegedly sold five Su-17 military aircraft in 1994 on a private basis (IS 5), and Yolly Gurbanmuradov, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of the Fuel and Energy Sector was imprisoned in May 2005 for allegedly embezzling \$188 million from illicit oil trading. Other senior officials, many of whom are now part of the small, exiled opposition parties have been implicated in similar scandals. An investigation was launched by the Ukrainian Security Services in July 2005 into an international smuggling racket in the gas trade between Turkmenistan and Ukraine that may involve losses to both countries of in excess of \$1 billion (The Moscow Times, 28 July 2005). Niyazov himself has almost certainly profited from corruption and embezzlement, through the channelling of oil and gas revenues into the off-budget Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund (FERF) under his direct control. Given the extensive reach of the KNB and the Presidential Guard it is highly likely that Niyazov tolerates a significant degree of corruption among senior officials, secure in the knowledge that it can be used against them at any point. Those closest to Niyazov, such as Gurbanmuradov, who may have compromising material on Niyazov, do not even appear to face trial, but are simply imprisoned or, more likely, eliminated when they fall from favour.

The Gurbanmuradov case is instructive on a number of levels. Firstly, it indicates that Niyazov's power is not absolute, and that he must take care not to overreach himself. Secondly, it sheds light on the corruption networks and the actual operation of ministerial power. Thirdly, it illustrates the central role of the General Prosecutor's Office in sustaining Niyazov in power.

Gurbanmuradov had been a powerful figure in the regime since 1992, one of only a handful of insiders to avoid Niyazov's purges. He was indisputably the most important figure in the country's energy sector, controlling upstream, downstream and trading operations. His principal rival was Rejep Saparov, the head of the Presidential Administration. Niyazov allowed each man to feed him compromising material about the other, and both were reportedly "beyond the reach" of the KNB. One or both may have overstretched themselves, and they were purged within weeks of one another in summer 2005. Significantly, Niyazov did not feel secure enough to risk purging both rivals simultaneously, indicating fear of a possible backlash.

Secondly, the removal of Gurbanmuradov was followed by a string of dismissals across the energy and financial sectors, including the heads of the state oil and gas companies, the country's largest oil refinery, and the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Central Bank, and a considerable number of lesser officials (IWPR RCA Special Report No. 402, 12 August 2005). Gurbanmuradov had consolidated power by installing a whole chain of followers in different sectors, complicit in his large-scale embezzlement. Political power immediately below the presidential level appears to operate as a complex clientelistic network utilising income from external rents. Once Gurbanmuradov was removed, it was also necessary to remove a whole echelon of officials that comprised his entourage, and would not be expected to work with another patron.

Thirdly, both Gurbanmuradov and Saparov were, in common with other ministers and dissidents, brought to book by the Chief Prosecutor, Kurbanbibi Atajanova, who retains the confidence of Niyazov and wields an enormous amount of power. Atajanova has been instrumental since 1997 in assembling compromising evidence and pursuing prosecutions against ministers and senior officials, including senior KNB officials. That she is indispensable is demonstrated by her political rehabilitation following removal from by armed guard from a Cabinet meeting in December 2003, in connection with allegations that she controlled a large-scale drugs trafficking operation from Afghanistan. Within weeks, however, Atajanova was reinstated and successfully assembled a case against her accuser, Poran Berdiyev, the head of the KNB. Her return to power, according to sources inside the regime cited by subsequent reports, was due to her unrivalled track record in extracting compromising material on senior government officials, although she also fell from grace again in April 2006 (RFE TS 28 April 2004; IS 6).

Corruption unsurprisingly extends beyond licit goods into the narcotics trade. Smuggling is very likely to be sanctioned at a high level of government. Interviewees 23 and 24 gave

eye-witness accounts of official drug convoys travelling along the Ashgabat-Darvasa-Dashoguz highway across the Karakum desert. Former officials report the storage of heroin at Niyazov's presidential palace, and one strongly documented case exists of the discovery in 1997 of a container holding 400kg heroin at Ashgabat airport by a state border guard, Major Vitaly Usachev, who was immediately then court-martialled and shot (IS 7).

Government policy is executed dysfunctionally and in some cases, with scant attention to legality by senior officials. There is little stability within government ministries or state enterprises. This filters down to lower levels because senior officials insert family and clan members into junior positions as soon as they are able. The principal reason given for dismissals at regional level, following the general terms of "shortcomings in work" is for clan-based appointments. The outcome is that policy is not developed and implemented with much degree of consistency or rationality.

To enforce control in this environment Niyazov relies on an extensive internal security apparatus. Very little hard information is released about the various security agencies operating inside the country, and what does come into the public domain tends to emerge only in times of rupture and reorganisation. Protecting Niyazov personally is the Presidential Guard, the only agency apparently trusted completely by Niyazov. The Guard forms a bridgehead between Niyazov and other governmental agencies, and has gained oversight over the KNB, with which there is believed to be considerable bureaucratic rivalry and animosity. The Guard is comprised of elite former KNB agents and bodyguards, and retains significant privileges, with headquarters in the complex of buildings formerly housing the National Library (now closed) adjacent to the Presidential Palace.

Wider internal security functions are controlled by the KNB, which reportedly runs over 5000 full-time agents. The KNB operates with virtually no public oversight or accountability, and is believed collect to extensive records on public sector officials, foreign workers and tourists, aided by large network of informers (ICG Report No. 44: 2003, 8). This gives the KNB much greater reach into society, and it is therefore the most informed component of the internal security apparatus. Arrests can be made arbitrarily by the KNB, with suspects subject to incarceration in psychiatric hospitals and desert penal colonies. Interviewee 1 had inspected several of these facilities, singling out penal institutions in Tejen, Sady and Turkmenbashi as having extremely high mortality rates.

Although the security services are the cornerstone of internal security capabilities, their loyalty has been called into question by Niyazov, most notably in March 2002, when most of the upper echelons were purged, and the KNB was reorganised into a government ministry to allow Niyazov more personal oversight into its activities. Conflicting reasons have been given for the purge. One interpretation is that there existed a cadre of senior officials who remained loyal to former Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov and were willing to participate, or at least facilitate, a coup attempt against Niyazov (IS 8). The second version is that the head of the KNB, Mukhammed Nazarov, who Niyazov hitherto regarded as unimpeachably loyal, was plotting to succeed Niyazov. Nazarov was subsequently jailed for 20 years, and 80% of the leadership was removed. Niyazov presented the purge publicly as a populist measure to crack down on the KNB's illegal detentions, house searches and involvement in drug smuggling (ICG Report No. 44: 2003, 9). Interviewee 1, who was part of Shikhmuradov's circle, offered the more mundane explanation that Nazarov and the bulk of the senior KNB were loyal, but had simply fallen victim to Niyazov's paranoia. Paradoxically, however, the act of thoroughly purging the KNB had disenchanted many of the remaining officers, some of whom were prepared to participate in the coup attempt of November 2002.

The military is also regarded with suspicion by Niyazov, to the extent that it has been thoroughly deprofessionalised, and is now used as a source of cheap labour in hospitals and the municipal administration. Niyazov has, nevertheless, been careful to cultivate senior officers by earmarking luxurious apartments in Ashgabat for their exclusive use, turning over Ashgabat's Central Hospital to the military, and issuing decrees that officers and their families receive free medical treatment (IS 9). The relatively minor political role of the military is discussed further in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Returning to the theoretical framework established in chapter two, we noted that Chehabi and Linz underplayed the extent to which contingent, agential factors contributed to the emergence of sultanistic regimes. The two preceding chapters have sought to elucidate the process by which the Turkmen government assumed many of the characteristics of sultanism, and how the system functions.

The country has many of the macrostructural and political-institutional factors elaborated in the critique of SRT. Combined with these underlying preconditions was the political strategy adopted by Niyazov. This entailed working within the Soviet system as an

orthodox operator, adapting to Gorbachev's *perestroika* reforms in order to consolidate personal power, and then moving quickly to sideline nascent opposition groups by selectively appropriating their reform programmes. Niyazov's remoteness from clan networks and willingness to apply coercion where required ensured that he has been able to secure loyalty and compliance across a relatively inchoate society.

In the immediate aftermath of the Soviet Union, Niyazov effectively codified his supremacy through the rapid adoption of a favourable constitution, and by weighting both political institutions and processes heavily in his own favour. Although Niyazov acted opportunistically, his new political order also reflected Soviet and pre-Soviet political traditions in the requirement for political unanimity and unity clustered around a pre-packaged ideology centred on Niyazov himself. The post-Soviet Turkmen political order is therefore a product of Soviet norms, political and cultural isolation, and the determination of a single ruler to imprint his own conception of authority on the institutional framework of governance. Once the regime was in place, Niyazov has had fewer and fewer checks placed upon his authority. With virtually untrammelled power and no tangible domestic opposition to visualise, Niyazov has, to some extent, fallen victim to paranoia, which the result that his court is fuelled by intrigue, purges and rivalry.

Several themes emerge from mapping these specific power structures. Firstly, the government is characterised by a general absence of trust - between Niyazov and senior ministers, between Niyazov and the instruments of internal security, and between the ministers and institutions themselves. Niyazov therefore profits as the only stable and fixed point in a shifting constellation of actors. Moreover, the opacity of government structures both helps and hinders Niyazov. Other political actors are not able to work in concert to challenge Niyazov because they are unable to make informed risk calculations about what is known of their activities by (other) security agencies. Chehabi and Linz correctly state that "sultanistic rulers typically maintain an atmosphere of distrust among various branches of the military and encourage mutual espionage to protect themselves from a coup" (1998a, 12). But crucially, although the ruler has the greatest quantity of information at his disposal, he does not necessarily "hold all the cards", but is still only as informed as his sources wish him to be. This has led to interviewees 1, 10 and 12 questioning precisely how much Niyazov does know about the state of the country, and about the activities of senior officials. Niyazov may be the major player in the game, but he is still only a player nonetheless.

Secondly, formal political institutions, with the exception of the presidency, have been ascribed only a marginal place in the system. Even within an institutional framework, power is exercised almost without restraint by Niyazov, and with a disregard for what Weber described as legal-rational norms that was not the case in the Soviet period. In December 2005, for example, the journalist Khudaiberdy Kurbandurdyev was arbitrarily sentenced to eight years imprisonment by Niyazov in a Cabinet session without any sort of trial (IS 10). This tendency to play “fast and loose” with legal principle is not confined to the presidency. When Boris Shikhmuradov made a televised confession of guilt for the coup plot before an emergency session of the *Khalk Maslahaty* in December 2002, it was they who were called to decide upon his punishment, a legal procedure without constitutional or legislative precedent.

Thirdly, political power is exercised in a profoundly dysfunctional and uneven fashion. While the regime is able to successfully control dress codes, ban recorded music at weddings and introduce *Ruhnama* into mosques, it is unwilling or unable to combat large-scale fraud, embezzlement and drug-trafficking, or effectively administer the economic sectors under its control. As a consequence, the regime and those affected by it become complicit in a web of deception over the perceived and real competencies of the government in which Niyazov also participates, either knowingly or not.

The simultaneous over-control and destructuring of governance in Turkmenistan cannot be explained purely by the preconditions laid out in the previous chapter. High external rents, clientelistic networks and the legacies of the Soviet era have provided the opportunities, instruments and channels for policy (and often non-policy) to become material. The more immediate structural context, shaped directly by Niyazov’s calculations, choices or selective inaction, since he came to power is also fundamental to any understanding of the regime’s behaviour. With the Turkmen people short of a developed cultural identity, a unifying theme or symbol of national unity at the time of independence, Niyazov quickly settled on himself, as being the embodiment of the state. However, unlike Ataturk, whose persona symbolised a specific and separate reform project with permanent consequences, Niyazov has been unable to articulate or enact a similar strategy. Instead, he has fallen back on the notion that state policy is simply what Niyazov orders, rather than a set of objectives towards which he is working. In this sense, the agential element provides a complementary analytical framework to the structural preconditions articulated in the previous chapter.

Having considered in detail how the regime operates, the following chapter builds on this platform by analysing specific techniques of domestic political control - coercion, patronage and the cult of personality – that enable the regime to remain durable and, despite its clearly dysfunctional characteristics, relatively stable.



Plate One. Ruhuyet Palace, Ashgabat (August 2003). The Kopet Dagh mountains behind form the natural border with Iran.



Plate Two. Ministry of Fairness (formerly Justice), Ashgabat (August 2003). A typical example of the new urban order in Ashgabat. Note the statue of Niyazov's mother, Gurbansoltan Eje, who has become the national symbol of justice.



Plate Three. Houses demolished in Keshi (November 2004). Niyazov reportedly ordered their removal because he found them to be unattractive when he drove past.



Plate Four. Houses demolished in central Ashgabat. People were still living in the ruins of their homes (November 2004). Residents were either offered unsuitable alternative accommodation, or none at all.



Plate Five. Satellite dishes in central Ashgabat (May 2005). Russian television is the only access Turkmen have to foreign media. Niyazov has reportedly contemplated banning satellite dishes, but has not yet done so.



Plate Six. The National Carpet Museum, Ashgabat (November 2002). Gurbansoltan Eje is pictured and is the symbol of the virtue and skill of traditional carpet-makers.



Plate Seven. Niyazov immortalised in Balkanabat, formerly Nebit Dag (May 2005). The monuments to Niyazov are not as well-maintained in this city, which is a stronghold of the Yomut tribe. This ensemble, with the Little Balkan mountains behind, was situated in desert scrubland, completely decontextualised from its surroundings.

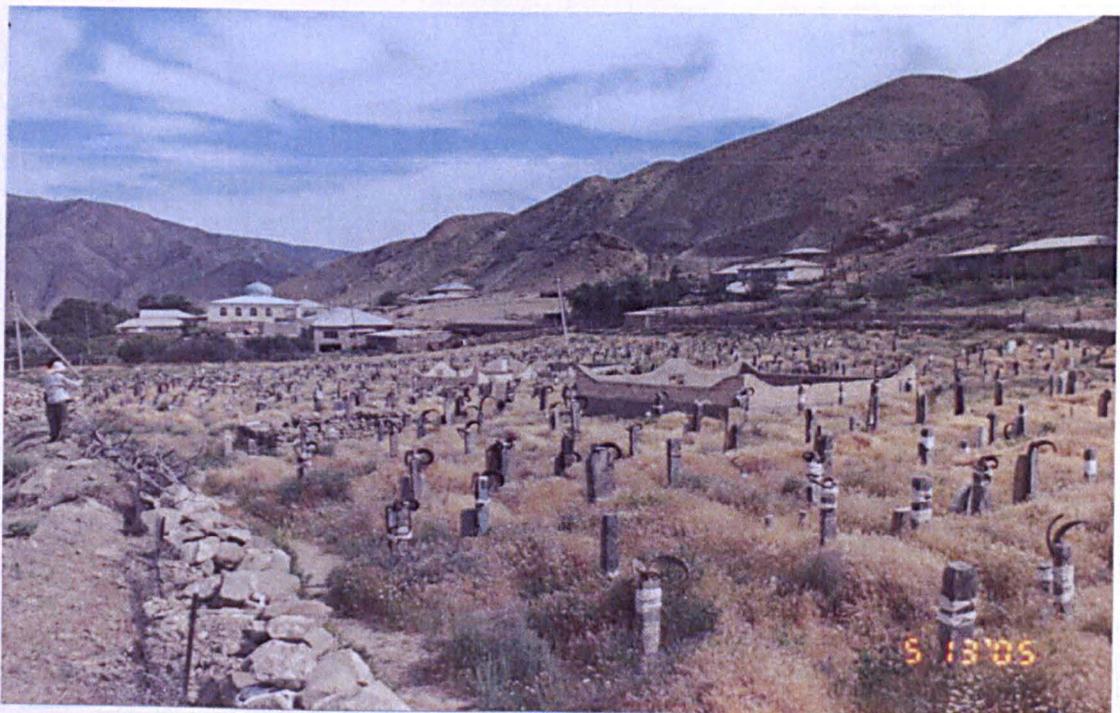


Plate Eight. A graveyard in the mountain village of Nokhur, near the Iranian border (May 2005). Nokhurli (Turkmenistan's only blue-eyed tribe) were never integrated into the Soviet system, farming privately and exempted from the military draft. They marry endogamously, and follow a form of Islam fused with Judaic and Zoroastrian components. Graves are marked with the horns of wild sheep.



Plate Nine. State Ritual, Ashgabat (2004). Public holidays, of which there are at least 15 every year, are usually marked by state-sponsored rituals, fusing a mythical pre-Soviet past with lavish praise for Niyazov. The connection endows Niyazov with legitimacy and signifies the unity of the Turkmen tribes, despite the inimical relations that actually existed (and, to some extent, still persist). Behind the procession is the Arch of Neutrality. A golden statue of Niyazov mechanically revolves to face the sun.



Plate Ten. Children's Concert, Mary in southeastern Turkmenistan (November 2004). The children sing songs praising Niyazov and extolling *Ruhnama*. The girl is holding a board with the cover of the book. All the participants are obliged to wear traditional costume.



Plate Eleven. Turkmen women chatting at the opening ceremony of the restored mausoleum of Sultan Sanjar, Merv (November 2004). Although participation in state celebrations is compulsory, the women appeared to enjoy the occasion and the opportunity it provided to meet up.



Plate Twelve. Cult Production 1. Bronze busts of Niyazov stored in the garden of a leading court sculptor, Ashgabat (November 2004).



Plate Thirteen. Cult Production 2. A painting of Niyazov working on *Ruhnama* at the studio of a leading court painter, Ashgabat (November 2004). Providing inspiration for Niyazov is a fusion of the traditional (Oghuz, Islam) and the new (the modern cityscape of Ashgabat, the young woman, and the national flag). The bust of the national poet, Makhtumkuli, sits on the desk and the cup of tea reflects Niyazov's sobriety. The framing of the background with a heavy red curtain curiously suggests that the images are a theatrical creation rather than a reflection of history/reality.



Plate Fourteen. The mosque in Kipchak under construction (August 2003). Niyazov displays his religious credentials, although portrayed conspicuously in conservative Western attire, suggesting circumspection about wholesale identification with Islam.



Plate Fifteen. Kipchak mosque (November 2004). The mosque attracted domestic and international criticism over its cost (\$120 million), and because the minarets and interior are decorated with slogans from *Ruhnama* in Turkmen, rather than with Koranic inscriptions in Arabic. This indicates the ongoing fusion of Sunni Islam and Niyazov's cult of personality.



Plate Sixteen. Darvasa, centre of the Karakum desert (August 2003). The village grew in the Soviet era with the development of a nearby potassium mine. The mine closed and the settlement lost its supply of gas and electricity after independence. Villagers subsisted on small-scale farming and supplying travellers crossing the desert. Lying on the major overland heroin trafficking route from Iran to Russia, drug addiction became endemic. Niyazov flew over the settlement in 2004 and ordered that the village be destroyed. Residents were reportedly given two hours notice to leave and not offered alternative accommodation.



Plate Seventeen. A painting on display at a gallery in central Ashgabat (November 2002). A metaphor for domestic politics?

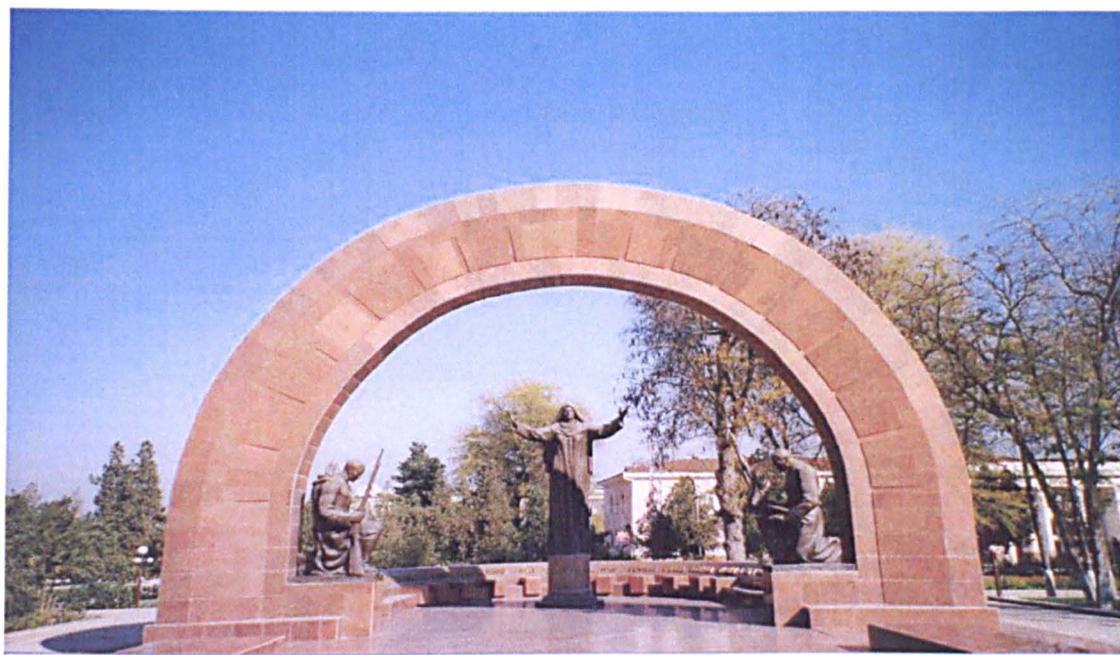


Plate Eighteen



Plate Nineteen.

Remembering the Great Patriotic War, Ashgabat (2004 and 2005). Plate Eighteen forms part of a larger ensemble. The statue in the middle is of a grieving mother. The soldiers on either side, a Russian and a Turkmen, appear united in sorrow by the arch. Plate Nineteen is the new memorial, representing Niyazov's father Atamurat, strangely rendered with the features of a Teutonic warrior. The new memorial is not approachable, being surrounded by water. Note the Seljuk star, a symbolic Turkmen "intervention" in a traditionally Russian commemoration. Both memorials are the work of the same artist, S. B. (Interviewee Six).

Chapter Five - Mechanisms of Control: Coercion, Patronage and the Cult of Personality

Introduction

The critique of the theoretical framework conducted in chapter two focused on the structural preconditions favouring the emergence of sultanistic regimes. These were distilled into the following factors: legacies of domestic political incoherence and external domination; an under-institutionalised political context favouring individual opportunism; and the availability of revenue streams from sources of unearned income (normally derived from a significant natural resource endowment) which, in turn, enable a ruler to: (i) buy in internal security functions, and (ii) lubricate pre-existing and newly formed patronage networks. However, SRT offers only a cursory account of the specific mechanisms used by sultanistic rulers to retain power for any significant period. The purpose of this chapter is to extend our understanding of how the domestic authority of sultanistic rulers is sustained and reproduced, notwithstanding the manifold dysfunctional characteristics of their regimes, by investigating the techniques used to maintain political control by the Niyazov regime in Turkmenistan.

The theoretical framework set out by Chehabi and Linz does not dwell on this issue at any great length. The main orientation of their comments is on purely tactical manoeuvres, such as the forging of temporary alliances with established church or civil society groups, or the use of ‘constitutional hypocrisy’ (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 17-19) as a political instrument designed to co-opt domestic elites, and secure the support of external sponsors. The discussion of the coercive functions of the state is confined to noting that internal security is frequently arrogated to irregular parastatal forces, such as the *Tontons Macoutes* in Haiti under the Duvaliers, or the “Mongoose Gangs” of Grenadan leader Eric Gairy (Chehabi and Linz: 1998a, 12)⁵².

However, the findings of this chapter suggest that the “technologies of domination” constructed by sultanistic rulers, are far more complex and variegated entities than Chehabi and Linz allow. In particular, three interlocking mechanisms – the use of coercion, patronage and the cult of personality - are identified that, in combination, form

⁵² The Army Veterans in contemporary Zimbabwe, and the popular militias formed by Qadhafi to enact waves of *zahf* [assault] against regime opponents in Libya (Vandewalle: 1998, 134), are contemporary examples of the tactic of using personally loyal forces to undercut the professional autonomy of the regular military.

a nexus increasing the reach and depth of control that the regime may exert. Taken together, they form a “disciplinary-symbolic” complex that goes some way to explaining why sultanistic regimes are likely to remain durable⁵³.

The remainder of the chapter considers how these mechanisms have played out in post-Soviet Turkmenistan. The first section looks at the repertoire of coercive techniques brought to bear in order to assert physical control over the Turkmen population. In addition to orthodox surveillance networks and the prevention of independent civic and political activity, the regime deploys a range of other coercive practices, including: restrictions on movement, residential settlement, and information flows; disruption of education, health and welfare provision; monitoring of religious belief; and regulation of the status and activities of ethnic minorities. Although sometimes unevenly implemented, these measures amount to a spatial ordering of individuals that very effectively prevents autonomous social interaction and cohesion, occupational professionalism, and freedom of worship.

However, the Niyazov regime does not simply regiment and extract from society. In the absence of strong, functioning institutions, governance is also structured around clientelistic relationships, many of which are coterminous with regional and clan affinities. Chehabi and Linz principally view access to unearned income as an opportunity for rulers to seek self-enrichment: as they put it, “the main aim is to extract resources” (1998a: 22). While self-enrichment is unquestionably a motive for sultanistic rulers, of perhaps more importance is the opportunity that rental income affords rulers to act as “superpatrons” at the apex of a network of clientelistic arrangements permeating through the national economy, and thereby to reproduce the ruler’s authority. Accordingly, the second section considers how Niyazov’s exceptional access to oil and gas rental income has shaped the structure of the Turkmen economy, and contributed to the durability of the regime.

The third section focuses on the “soft” control techniques used by the Turkmen regime to engender discipline and unity. The ensemble of artefacts, rites and texts that comprise this source of authority is clustered into a pervasive cult of personality surrounding Niyazov. Interrogating the cult produces findings that challenge several assumptions

⁵³ This term is used by Wedeen (1999) in a much narrower sense to explain how obedience to some of the more absurd traits of the regime of President Hafiz al-Asad in Syria effectively disciplines Syrians by forcing them to “act as if” the regime’s claims are true (see chapter six for more detail on this). However, the term is also fit for a broader interpretation that encompasses the explicit “discipline” function of the state’s coercive apparatus.

made in SRT about the purpose and function of cultural manifestations of personalist rule. Rather than being purely vehicles for self-aggrandisement, leader cults emerge as a complex phenomenon, working simultaneously as disciplinary devices, instruments of social integration, paradigms for good behaviour, and as strategic resources for a range of political actors, all of which variants combine to make the regime more durable.

Finally, a short concluding section ties up the findings from the case study and assesses their implications both for development of the theoretical framework, and the durability of Niyazov's rule in Turkmenistan.

Coercion

The focus of SRT analysis, and theories of authoritarian rule more generally, is on the role played by the panoply of security agencies at the disposal of the political elite. Brownlee (2005) and Bellin (2005; 2004) both argue that the longevity of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa hinges on the robustness of their coercive apparatuses, and the willingness and ability of ordinary recruits to crush internal dissent. However, very little is said about the form that this takes. The aforementioned Middle Eastern specialists, along with the other contributors to the SR volume (such as Hartlyn: 1998; Booth: 1998; Nicholls: 1998), all focus on the suppression by the regimes in question of incidences of orthodox political dissent or revolt. The examples of regime coercion cited by Brownlee (2004; 2005, 43-62), for example, all involve major rebellions, such as the Syrian Hama revolt in 1982, the abortive Libyan army coup of 1993, and the rebellion by Shias and Kurds in Iraq in 1991.

However, as noted in chapter two, Foucault identified that the exercise of power constitutes a wider 'technology' and 'architecture' of domination that, at its most generic, involves the ability of the ruler to arrange, regiment and distribute individuals in space. Although political responses to sultanism, in the form of active protest and resistance, are undoubtedly important, and these form the basis of chapter six, a strong case can be made for interpreting the definition of coercion and control more widely to encompass the impact of government policy in a number of sectors, such as travel, education, health, the penal system, media and the treatment of ethnic minorities. By looking at the way in which people are regulated, restricted, defined, denied or channelled by and into certain activities, we can make a more rounded and textured assessment of the sultanistic state's coercive capacity and its durability.

(i) **Setting Boundaries: movement and surveillance**

The most unambiguous manifestation of the Turkmen government's control over the population is the introduction of a range of decrees regulating the physical movement and activities of its citizens, and of foreign visitors. Connected with this are new mechanisms of surveillance aimed at tightening internal security. The aim of these measures is, without doubt, to improve the "legibility" (Scott: 1998) of society – to make it easier to read, classify and control.

All governments do this, including what we perceive to be the most liberal states in the international system. However, the crucial difference is that for the great majority of the population in democratic states, surveillance in the form of closed circuit television cameras or a greater police presence, is normally a benign presence, activated only when something – a crime, an accident, or a disturbance perhaps – requires official recording and intervention. In Turkmenistan, the balance is shifted to the extent that restriction of movement is an *everyday*, active process, part of the quotidian. To take a mundane example, a simple journey to another *velayet* requires travellers to justify to KNB or internal border guards why the trip is necessary or reasonable.

Internal movement. At the most basic level, the government has placed restrictions on internal movement, and has periodically introduced exit visas in order to curtail foreign travel. Several districts, particularly those situated close to international borders, restrict access to both Turkmen and foreign nationals (Interviews 11 and 24). The entire northern *velayet* of Dashoguz, including the city itself, remains a restricted area, off-limits to foreign nationals without a special permit granted at the discretion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There are document checks by the military and KNB officials at each district border, and vehicles entering Ashgabat city are subject to routine searches⁵⁴. Perhaps most restrictive of all is the requirement to register with the local police for any night spent outside the *velayet* of residence.

Exit Visas. Foreign travel is regulated even more strictly. Exit visas were enforced periodically during the first decade of independence, but were introduced in more comprehensive form between January 2003 and February 2004, following the coup attempt of November 2002. The granting of exit visas in this period was at the discretion of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and normally entailed the payment of significant fees

⁵⁴ Observation, 2002, 2004, 2005.

and bribes (*Nemeteskaya Volna*, 27 May 2003 in TWNB, 01/06/03). The restrictions were only relaxed in 2004, after the US State Department threatened to reintroduce the Jackson-Vanik amendment, which would have imposed damaging sanctions on the domestic textile sector (THI Report, undated February 2004).

Even after the formal restrictions on foreign travel were formally lifted in 2004, the government continued to impose severe informal sanctions to prevent people boarding flights. Unmarried women under 35 years old, men of military draft age, journalists, serving and former government officials and their families, and military personnel were all ineligible to leave the country. Moreover, more than 700 travellers were recorded as having been removed from flights shortly before take-off in the month after exit visas had been officially abolished (Ataeva: 2004). Interviewee 11, an ethnic Turkmen, described the great difficulty in obtaining permission to travel to see friends in the US. When, after numerous attempts, approval was granted in 2005, it was conditional upon her leaving her two small children in Turkmenistan. Ataeva (2004), quoting well-placed sources from inside the KNB, described a blacklist of those not permitted to travel containing 30,000 names, divided into seven categories. In addition to those who had applied for visas and fell into the categories named above, the blacklist contained those who, though not otherwise categorised, had applied for exit visas while they were in force. Thus, people who sought to travel abroad during the period in which exit visas were in place were automatically deemed to be suspect. Moreover, there was no official procedure to challenge or remove oneself from the blacklist, except either by bribing KNB officials sums between \$800 and \$1000 to delete the name, or by paying between \$200 and \$500 to a customs official to stamp a blacklisted passport, with the date and identity of the official smudged or obscured (IWPR RCA No. 278, 20 April 2004).

Cross-border movement. A decline in cross-border movement on foot or by car was achieved implicitly after 2002 with the introduction of a \$6 fee for each land border crossing to and from Uzbekistan. This has led to a significant increase in local tension, not least because the fees were prohibitive for poor cross-border shuttle traders, but also because it prevented both Turkmen and Uzbeks visiting family members and cemeteries situated across what used to be an internal border (ICG Report No.33, 4 April 2002, 10). Foreign travellers entering Turkmenistan are also subject to stringent KNB monitoring and surveillance. Embassy staff and their families are obliged to notify the government in advance should they wish to travel outside Ashgabat (NCA, 12 June 2004), and a database was introduced in June 2003 to track the movements of all foreign visitors (TV First Channel, 3 June 2003 in TWNB, 08/06/03).

Evolution of policy and rationale. Two queries arise from this policy. Firstly, how do these restrictions compare with those in force during the Soviet era; and, secondly, what justification is provided by Niyazov for the prevention of foreign and internal travel? No data was found that specifically covered internal travel restrictions in Soviet Turkmenistan, but it seems reasonable to assume that the regulations enforced in the Turkmen SSR were similar to those applicable in other parts of the Soviet Union.

In this case, citizens of the Turkmen SSR received an internal passport at the age of sixteen, and movement inside the country was regulated through the *popriska* system, the Soviet record of residence. Officially, there were no restrictions on internal travel, but the Soviet authorities determined that the requirements of central economic planning dictated that free movement of the population was impractical. In reality, *popriski* had three functions: firstly, they were an instrument of surveillance; secondly, they prevented uncontrolled internal migration to urban areas, specifically Moscow, in times of scarcity; thirdly, *popriski* carried data, entitling the holder to higher education and health care, but also providing information on the holder's political record, such as whether they belonged to the CPSU, or had been convicted of any ideological misdemeanours. Movement around the Soviet Union and, later, the Communist CEE states was not necessarily discouraged for its own sake though. As Gorsuch (2003, 760-785) has found in her study of travel in late Stalinism, Soviet tourism was actively promoted, albeit oriented towards purposeful sightseeing in contrast to the "aimless" bourgeois tourism of the West (2003: 781).

There are, however, crucial distinctions between the Soviet period and the situation in post-Soviet Turkmenistan under Niyazov. The first lies in motive – Niyazov's restrictions on travel are neither based on an economic imperative nor on channelling and controlling the forms of internal movement for any higher purpose, such as education, work or tourism. In the Soviet period there was often positive encouragement to travel, obviously on the terms of the system, and many older people from the FSU recall with great affection their trips to Eastern and, occasionally, Western Europe. In Turkmenistan, travel is discouraged outright. Presidential Decree No. 126, signed in April 2004, for example, invalidated all degrees gained outside Turkmenistan since 1 January 1993, unless specifically authorised under an interstate agreement (www.ricn.ru, 2 June 2004 in TWNB, 03/06/04; Tracz: 2004; RFE/RL TS, 7 May 2004).

A further distinction lies in degree. Notwithstanding the restrictions of the *popriska* system, there was still latitude to travel around the Soviet Union. In post-Soviet Turkmenistan, Niyazov has brought into the service of the regime a whole range of new technologies, including relatively sophisticated IT systems installed by Israeli companies, which enhance the regime's ability to regulate internal movement. According to Interviewee 24, who travelled regularly across the Soviet Union and within Turkmenistan, the number of internal border controls and the frequency of documentation checks multiplied greatly from the late Soviet era. Thus, the reach and intensity of regulations has altered and the purpose of the restrictions has shifted to focus purely on the security of the Niyazov regime, as distinct from the broader social, economic and security requirements of the state itself.

The rationale behind the travel restrictions is rarely enunciated, and official reasons for the refusal of visas are not given. When visa restrictions were formally (but not informally) lifted in early 2004, Niyazov announced on television that "you can move within this country as freely as you can beyond its borders" (Ataeva: 2004). This statement was, of course, double-edged. However, in the same address, he stated that "dishonourable people" would be excluded from the easing of travel restrictions, a loose and puzzling definition, implying that the government reserved the right to regulate the movement of individuals on an arbitrary basis. Niyazov's second justification was more disingenuous, stating that there was no need to travel abroad because "foreign lands cannot compare with our country" (NTV, 13 June 2005 in TWNB, 16/06/05), a reference to the country's natural beauty rather than, as would be perhaps the case in the Soviet period, the superiority of the political and economic system.

Several themes emerge from the regime's control over the movement of Turkmen citizens. Niyazov has clearly built on a pre-existing infrastructure inherited from the Soviet period. However, whereas the Soviet system had an ideological, economic and security rationale (no matter how misplaced and repressive), it did at least have an internal logic. However, the Niyazov regime's overlay of this inherited infrastructure has been, by turns, quixotic, arbitrary, often capricious, and yet simultaneously open to abuse. Corruption among customs and KNB officials also provides a strong institutional incentive for the system to remain in place. Allied to this, there is no legal redress for the aggrieved. As a consequence, the system remains oddly effective, sustained by its unpredictability, unaccountability and the incentives it offers for embezzlement.

In more abstract terms, the forcible restriction of movement means that the regime determines spatial boundaries. It is able to compartmentalise the population within physical parameters set by the state. Theorising space more generally, the prevention of travel reduces the exposure of Turkmen to other cultures, peoples and ideas – in other words, the finding and development of mental/ social space (Lefebvre: 1991). Connected to the strict controls on the importation of media, the curtailment of academic endeavour and extensive internal censorship, discussed below, the bounding of physical space available also quite effectively prevents the emergence of *possible* space.

(ii) Controlling space: housing, prisons, psychiatric detention and harassment of minorities

If restrictions on internal movement and travel abroad set the boundaries of physical space available to Turkmen, and contribute to closing off potentialities of mental/social space, Niyazov's policies on housing, the penal system, and the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities illustrate the coercive capacity of the state to direct, arrange and control people, physically and mentally, *within* the set space allowed by the regime.

At first glance, there appears to be little to connect these issues. However, what unifies them is the regime's use of forcible relocation or detention as a coercive political tactic. Adapting the infrastructure of the pre-*perestroika* Soviet state, the Niyazov regime has learned that resettlement to remote penal colonies, political hospitalisation, informal harassment, house arrest, and continual physical interference and pressure from the KNB, all atomise potential or suspected regime opponents, prevent autonomous socialisation, and dismantle networks of solidarity based around ethnicity or belief.

Housing and relocation of minorities. The rapid destruction of residential housing without formal redress is examined more substantively in chapter six, because it is one of the few issues that has engendered a substantive political response to the regime between 1992 and 2006. However, it is worth noting that a common pattern has emerged since 2003, in which established residential areas in Ashgabat, Turkmenbashi and other towns, are subjected to arbitrary demolition with minimal if any compensation for householders.

The numbers of those affected can be considerable. The homes of 500 Kazakhs resident in Turkmenbashi were reportedly destroyed in 2003 (IS 1). The whereabouts of the community is unknown but it is assumed it was relocated to the remote Kazakh village of Bekdash near the Turkmen-Kazakh border. 180 houses, affecting 300 families, were

demolished in Tyaze Oba near Ashgabat in February 2004, in order to make way for a new park in honour of Niyazov's mother. Residents were reportedly given 24 hours to leave by KNB agents (THI bulletin, 16 February 2004). The land between u.Bitaraplyk and u.Garashsyzyk in central Ashgabat was cleared in summer 2004 to make way for a children's theme park. Visiting the site to record the damage in November 2004 (Plate Four), residents confirmed to me that they were provided with inadequate alternative accommodation or, if they lacked the requisite papers, no compensation at all (Interview 15). Some residents were still residing in the ruins of their homes in October/November 2004.

Most of the Kurdish village of Baghir, close to the ruins of the Parthian city of Nissa, was demolished in July 2004 (RFE/RL TS, 21 July 2004). The town of Keshi, also near Ashgabat, was subject to arbitrary demolition with ten days notice, affecting between 500 and 900 people (Plate Three; IWPR RCA No. 301, 21 July 2004), generating the protests discussed in chapter six. The settlement of Darvasa in the Karakum desert, which was visited as part of the research project in August 2003 (Plate Sixteen), was demolished in its entirety in August 2004, reportedly after Niyazov flew over the village and was displeased by its sprawling, untidy appearance. 200 soldiers gave the residents an hour to leave, and most were relocated to Yerbent and Bokurdak, two other desert settlements over 100 km away. It is not known how this affected the grazing rights and water usage of the residents, or of those in the villages to which they were displaced.

What emerges from these episodes is that the areas targeted appear to be disproportionately occupied by ethnic minorities. This links to other reports of forced resettlement of ethnic Uzbeks away from border areas on the right bank of the Amu Darya to unpopulated desert and salt marshes inland. In December 2003, Russian and US sources reported the forced relocation of Uzbeks into the interior of Dashoguz and Lebap *velayets* to ease high unemployment and housing shortages (USDSIIP, 10 December 2003 in TWNB, 18/12/03; www.centrasia.ru, 15 December 2003 in TWNB, 18/12/03). There has been no published follow-up on the state of these communities, but given the harsh terrain and lack of resources and basic facilities, it is difficult to envisage that the settlements are sustainable. Some Uzbek communities subsequently opted to save their homes by self-redesignation as ethnic Turkmen rather than suffer the same fate (TIIR, 29 June 2004).

Minority religious congregations. The spatial reordering and displacement of minority ethnic communities is mirrored on a more intimate level in the treatment meted out by

government officials to religious communities, particularly those of minority faiths. As noted in the previous chapter, close scrutiny of officially approved Islam, increasingly incorporating elements of *Ruhnama*, was a feature of Niyazov's religious policy after 1992. Nevertheless, in common with other FSU states, the increased interest in religious observance following the collapse of the Soviet Union splintered into other faiths and denominations.

Niyazov has followed a dual-track approach in dealing with these groups. Firstly, the Law on Religion passed in 1997 necessitated the re-registration of all religious establishments. This allowed the government to eliminate any mosques which were showing signs of Wahhabite influence (RFE/RL TS 20 May 2000). Only mosques preaching official (i.e. government approved) Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church were registered and allowed to function. However, in both cases, pressure has been increasingly placed on clerics to incorporate elements of *Ruhnama* into religious services. For example, an order was issued in February 2005 that all mosques and churches must display copies of the book prominently, and incorporate readings from *Ruhnama* into sermons (IS 2). The exaggerated profile of *Ruhnama* in religious worship is illustrated by the inlay of passages from the book around the minarets and in the interior of the huge mosque at Kipchak (Plates Fourteen and Fifteen). The main entrance to the Kipchak mosque has an inscription in Turkmen across a gateway that states ambiguously: "*Ruhnama* is a holy book: the Koran is Allah's book"⁵⁵.

Those clerics and congregations not using *Ruhnama* have been subject to harassment and intimidation. Seven mosques were demolished in 2004, reportedly because of their failure to use *Ruhnama* with sufficient frequency (Forum 18 - 2004 Yearly Summary: 4 January 2005). Similarly, the trigger for the removal and imprisonment of long-serving Chief Mufti Nasrullah ibn Ibadullayev was his refusal to describe Niyazov as "a messenger of God", although officially he was caught up in the backwash of the failed November 2002 coup attempt (IWPR RCA No. 401: 4 August 2005). Niyazov also decreed in March 2004 that no more mosques would be built and that all imams and prayer leaders must be appointed and screened by the state (Altyn Asyr: 30 March 2004 in TWNB, 01/04/04).

⁵⁵ The site was visited twice, while under construction in August 2003 and when completed in October 2004. The interior is lavishly appointed and is capable of holding 10,000 worshippers, all of whom could dine at a huge outdoor complex adjacent to the mosque. However, there were only a handful of worshippers and visitors to the mosque during my attendance.

A revised Law on Religion, which came into force in February 2004, ostensibly liberalised the position of minority denominations by enabling them to register on payment of a \$100 fee. Possibly hoping to capitalise on this shift, EU and OSCE representatives bestowed praise on Niyazov. The small Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness, Baptist, Bahai and Hare Krishna congregations all duly sought and eventually obtained registration, although other congregations, such as Lutherans, the Armenian Orthodox church and the Catholic church were all refused registration and, in fact, the long-established Armenian church in Turkmenbashi was subsequently demolished without explanation or compensation (IS 3). In practice almost nothing changed. Harassment of all these groups continued unabated throughout 2004 (IS 4) and individual worshippers have either been imprisoned or incarcerated in psychiatric institutions, should their religious beliefs be compounded with some other misdemeanour⁵⁶.

Although the treatment of religious dissenters has entailed some physical relocation, Niyazov's religious policy is essentially predicated on the almost complete closure of any space for unapproved religious worship. Any freedoms granted appear to have been tactical manoeuvres to increase Niyazov's personal prestige or to appease international campaigners. Notwithstanding the restrictive, but still rational, official legal frameworks surrounding religious worship, Niyazov has thus effectively sought to prevent any form of uncontrolled religious worship from legally taking place. The persecution of religious minorities is not uncommon in other FSU states. However, the activities of approved churches, providing that they do not stray into political territory, have normally been left undisturbed. The unusual aspect of Niyazov's approach therefore is that it seeks to actively shape the content of purely religious worship in previously sanctioned settings, for example, by introducing *Ruhnama* into ordinary religious services and weekly prayers. Thus, the regime may have successfully neutered freedoms and powdered religious dissent domestically but, in doing so, has paradoxically turned both clergy and congregations into doctrinal dissenters within their own wider religious communities.

Penal policy. The atomisation that characterises government policy in other sectors is also evident in the legal and penal system. Little is known about the structure and functioning of Turkmen criminal procedure. Neither crime itself nor criminal trials are reported in the media as a matter of government policy. Ordinary criminal trials are

⁵⁶ An Amnesty International report on Turkmenistan identified other minority believers, mainly Jehovah's Witnesses who had been imprisoned for their beliefs (2003).

closed affairs. However, following the pattern of other post-Soviet states, the conviction rate of those defendants arraigned before the court is almost certainly around 100%.

Similarly, there is limited data on conditions in Turkmen prisons, but the sketchy reports that have emerged suggest that they are extremely poor. A German newspaper reported in May 2004 that the bodies of prisoners beaten to death by a special punishment battalion were left to rot in the prison yard at Turkmenbashi's maximum security prison to serve as a deterrent to other prisoners (Deutsche Welle, 24 May 2004 in TWNB, 27/05/04). Women prisoners at the D3/K8 prison colony in Dashoguz were reportedly forced to sleep in the open air or in the mortuary. Their work tasks included sorting wool, in conditions which subsequently caused severe lung complaints (TIHR Press Releases 123 and 151, 24 July 2005 and 24 October 2005). Interviewee 1 undertook medical inspections at both army barracks and prisons during and after the Soviet era. He described conditions at the prisons in Tejen, Sady and Turkmenbashi, where political opponents of the regime are housed, as being "truly terrible" (*iskrenniye uzhasniye*) and "much worse" (*khuzhiye*) than in the Soviet period.

Two significant features of the penal system under the Niyazov regime illustrate the arbitrariness of the judicial procedure. The annual amnesty of around 60% of the total recorded prison population, defined very broadly as petty criminals, at the end of each Ramadan, is designed as an act of mercy to showcase Niyazov's religious credentials and his magnanimity as a traditional, patrimonial ruler. Although the crime rate in Ashgabat reportedly climbs exponentially in the weeks after the amnesty, and those slated for release are included only after the payment of hefty bribes to prison officers, Niyazov frequently uses the amnesty in setpiece speeches as an example of the state's lenience and concern for prisoner welfare.

Parallel to this, is the activation of Soviet methods of psychiatric detention to contain political and religious dissenters. Data is again sparse, but the leading studies of the Soviet period suggest that political hospitalisation was very rarely used as a means of stifling opposition in Central Asia. Nearly all of the recorded detainees in Smith's survey of Soviet psychiatric practice were of European (i.e. Slav, German or Baltic) extraction (1996, 82). Working through Smith's statistics further, although Turkmen and Uzbeks together amounted to 5.8% of the Soviet population in 1970, they constituted only 0.4% of psychiatric detainees (1996, 82-88), and only one of 674 recorded hospitalised dissidents in the 1970 survey was an ethnic Turkmen. Bloch and Reddaway's register of victims of Soviet psychiatric abuse (1977, 347-398), the definitive published source in

English, supports this analysis. The vast majority of listed detainees were nationalists or Jewish, Orthodox and Buddhist activists from the European SSRs, and no ethnic Turkmen are listed in their record.

The explanation for this bias against using psychiatric detention in Central Asia is not given. However, possible reasons might be that dissent in Central Asia took the form of continued observance of Islam, rather than expressions of nationalism. Practising Islam is, perhaps, easier in private. Other possible explanatory factors might be the greater proportion of the population living in rural areas, different community norms of dealing with dissent, or the lack of surveillance and detention facilities which prevented “dynamic observation”, the process of surveillance and harassment by which a case was covertly built up by the KGB.

The instrumental use of psychiatric hospitalisation against political dissidents and worshippers from minority faiths in post-Soviet Turkmenistan therefore appears to be somewhat puzzling. One possible explanation is that state psychiatric abuse was ongoing in the CARs during the Soviet period, but was simply not picked up in the major Helsinki Commission (1989) and *Medecins sans Frontiers* (1990) reports which produced such devastating indictments of Soviet psychiatric practice. However, this is unlikely because Muslims in other Soviet republics, including those in the Russian SFSR, were also not subject to psychiatric detention. Therefore, it would appear that Niyazov has acquired a Soviet practice after it had become redundant in most other FSU states.

The main distinction between use of political hospitalisation in the Soviet period and under the Niyazov regime is that, in the former case, the process of detention was systematic, notwithstanding the great variability in the standards and definition of diagnosis. In the Turkmen case, there is minimal data available, but what there is suggests that psychiatric incarceration is, firstly, entirely punitive and, secondly, unsystematic. In the recorded Turkmen cases, there appears to be no attempt at political re-education or, at a clinical level, punitive/rehabilitative use of pharmaceuticals.

Turkmenistan’s Law on Psychiatric Care (1993) could have been lifted in entirety from the statute books of most liberal democracies. It guarantees the right of patients to receive legal representation, to contest involuntary hospitalisation, and to receive regular examinations to determine the continuation of inpatient treatment. In practice, however, the rare cases that have been fully documented suggest that those incarcerated for

political/religious reasons are simply deposited in the institutions with the mentally ill and the criminally insane, without either serious diagnosis or re-education.

Hare Krishna Consciousness Society member Cheper Annaniyazova was committed to detention in July 2005 without apparent cause or subsequent diagnosis (IS 5). The Jehovah's Witness, A.B. Soyegov, refused to undertake military service on the grounds of conscience. He was interrogated for ten days before being removed to a psychiatric hospital. He was diagnosed by Dr Altyn Amanova, the hospital's psychiatrist, as being in good health but was simply moved to a high security ward with other mentally ill patients (Forum 18, 19 December 2005). The most comprehensively documented case is that of Gurbandurdy Dyrdykulyev, an elderly opposition activist held in psychiatric confinement for over two years until his release in April 2006. Dyrdykulyev reported that his appeals against incarceration were not acknowledged, and that he was visited by a health commissioner on only one occasion, whereupon he was pronounced as neither physically nor mentally ill (RFE/RL TS 12 April 2006).

The prevalence of political confinement in Turkmen psychiatric hospitals is not known⁵⁷, but its existence appears to represent a departure in practice in the Turkmen SSR from the Soviet period. Contrasted with this approach is the indiscriminate release of anti-social and sometimes dangerous criminals every year without regard for public safety, or recognition of rehabilitation. The profile that emerges from analysis of the penal system under Niyazov mirrors policy in both the housing sector and towards minority groups. Government policy is uneven and often unstructured. Co-existing with severe and arbitrary infringements on the freedoms and rights of individuals and specific groups are underlying inefficiencies, neglect and endemic corruption that combine to create an inchoate mixture of policy.

Formally, the legal framework in all three sectors (housing, penal and minorities policy) could be described as soft authoritarian. Articles 22, 105 and 108 of the Turkmenistan State Constitution respectively guarantee that "the home is inviolable", that criminal proceedings are open, and that there is the right of access to professional legal advice at all stages of the judicial process. In new states, constitutions are aspirational documents and should not necessarily be taken at face value. What is peculiar to Turkmenistan, however, and definitively distinguishes the Niyazov regime from the governments of comparable FSU states (for example, Uzbekistan) is that the government does not feel the

⁵⁷ THI has repeatedly argued that official statistics stating the prison population at around 15,000 are inaccurate.

need to justify either domestically or internationally the disparity between its legal obligations and its policies. Instead, there is closure and denial. As a consequence, the absence of any platform for dialogue is one of the regime's most effective instruments of coercion.

(iii) Manipulating social space: media and education policy

Restrictions on movement and forced relocation/detention enable the Niyazov regime to coercively patrol the boundaries of permissible physical, social and political space in Turkmenistan. Taking Lefebvre's (1991) conceptualisation one stage further, we can enquire how the regime floods, dominates and manipulates the remaining sanctioned social space available in order to reinforce its control.

A significant part of this strategy is directed through the cult of personality surrounding Niyazov, discussed in greater detail in the third section of this chapter. However, there is also an important coercive corollary, designed to eliminate as far as possible sources or manifestations of autonomous social activity that might offset, or detract from, both the cult of personality and the broader project of identity creation developed by the Niyazov regime following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Media Control. The manipulation of cultural, political and social space can be seen most clearly in the regime's strict control of media outlets. The state broadcasting company TMT has a monopoly on television and radio broadcasting. The four state television channels produce a monotonous diet of traditional music and encomia to Niyazov. The importation of, and subscription to, foreign print media has been incrementally banned, ostensibly on moral grounds, Niyazov stating in 2004 that they publish "images unworthy of Turkmen citizens," presumably nudity (TCA: 28 October 2002; THI: 23 August 2004). However, a more persuasive explanation might be that they carry schedule listings for Russian satellite television, upon which Turkmen depend for their knowledge of external affairs (*RIA Novosti*: 15 April 2005 in TWNB, 21/04/05). The strategies used to receive foreign media by Turkmen are discussed in more detail in the following chapter, which analyses responses to the regime, but the issue of Russian satellite television and the possession of satellite dishes more generally is clearly an important and vexed question for Niyazov.

The regime's approach has generally been to maintain a close eye on foreign broadcast output and to intervene periodically and incrementally where it feels necessary.

Therefore, radio broadcasts in Russian were ended in 1998 and Radio Mayak, an independent radio station broadcasting from Russia, had its license revoked and its transmitter dismantled in June 2003, officially for technical reasons but, in reality, almost certainly for its occasionally critical output (ITAR-Tass: 12 July 2004 in TWNB, 15/07/04). As of 2006, the Russian television channel ORT can be received 5-6 hours a day, while anodyne history and culture programmes have been purchased for one of the state channels from the Turkish Eurasia channel (Interviews 14 and 24). The issue of a possible crackdown on Russian television has been periodically raised by Niyazov in Cabinet meetings. Comments made criticising the output from cable channels did lead to the temporary sequestration of satellite dishes in some apartment blocks by KNB agents, but the campaign never gained momentum (RFE/RL TS: 22 July 2002; RFE/RL TS: 25 July 2002), partly because increased state control over the Russian media under President Vladimir Putin, with whom Niyazov maintains an important gas trading relationship, has ensured that critical news items about Turkmenistan are rarely aired in Russia. However, Niyazov may also be wary of the potential repercussions of such a move for regime security. Several interviewees (1, 8, 10, 14 and 22) were sure that cutting access to ORT by forcibly seizing satellite dishes would constitute a major risk that might lead to sustained protest.

In contrast, restricting the flow of print media has been achieved more easily. According to TCA's media review (28 October 2002), there were 20 state owned printed media sources in the country in 2002, with a combined circulation of 112,000 which, at 22 copies per 1000 citizens, representing one of the world's lowest circulation figures. Crucially, however, these publications may only print news from two sources - *Turkmen Khabarlay* (the state information agency) and the Presidential Press Service - and there are no accredited foreign correspondents officially allowed to file copy in the country. However, even approved print media and publishing outlets have progressively diminished. Niyazov reduced funding to state newspapers by 50% from 1 January 2005 (*Altyn Asyr*: 18 August 2004 in TWNB, 26/08/04) and, in March 2005, all public libraries across the country, with the exception of Ashgabat Central Library, were summarily closed (TIHR: 3 March 2005 in TWNB, 03/03/05).

The accumulated impact of these measures has ensured that Turkmenistan remains one of the world's lowest ranking states in terms of media freedom (see Chapter One), compounded by very low levels of internet usage (see Table 1). The closure of media space means that Turkmen have diminishing sources of knowledge about the world

outside their country, and very little reliable information about events occurring domestically.

Table 1: Household PC Penetration and Internet Usage in Turkmenistan: 2000-2003

(Source: Euromonitor International Global Market Information Database)

	2000	2001	2002	2003
Internet users ('000)	6.0	8.0	64.2	98.0
PC penetration (per 100 households)	1.4	1.8	2.2	2.5
PC households online (% of PC households)	27.0	33.1	41.8	49.7

Euromonitor sources: National statistical offices, International Telecommunications Union, World Bank, Trade source, Jupiter Research,

The effects of this policy were discussed at length with Interviewee 10, a South Asian expatriate political journalist resident in Ashgabat. He suggested that the effective media blackout in Turkmenistan could have contradictory consequences. In the absence of reliable information, information spreads verbally and, as a result, is frequently mixed up with rumour and exaggeration. Because the state media is not trusted, official rebuttals are actually taken as confirmation that something has occurred, intensifying the earlier speculation. The potentially destabilising consequences of strict censorship were in evidence among the traders of Tehran who precipitated the overthrow of Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1979 and, more recently, during the Andijan rebellion of May 2005 in eastern Uzbekistan, when rumours of casualties multiplied to the point that as of May 2006, it is still unknown how many deaths occurred.

The alternative outcome, and the one that accords more closely with the dynamics of Turkmen society (which are substantially different from those prevailing in the Fergana Valley region of Uzbekistan), is that Niyazov's policy of closing autonomous social and cultural space, and flooding the media with sanctioned messages, has actually been extremely effective. Censorship means that potential dissidents are unable to make an informed risk-calculation about whether to come out onto the streets. Without any established, broad-based opposition party or an explosive trigger factor, there is little incentive to take the requisite risk. In contrast, the relatively free media that prevails across the Caspian Sea in Azerbaijan has allowed opposition groups to mobilise and focus on their objectives much more effectively than is the case in Turkmenistan.

Education. The reorganisation of the education sector has also formed a crucial component of the Niyazov regime's "technology of domination" and has closely reflected both the regime's broader priorities and Niyazov's personal predilections. Changes to the content of the curriculum to incorporate rote learning of *Ruhnama*, and the wholesale physical and legislative reordering (or disordering) of the system have represented some of the most dysfunctional characteristics of the Niyazov regime.

The basis of post-Soviet education reform in Turkmenistan lay in the formulation and adoption in 1993 of a new educational philosophy and programme instituted under the umbrella term *Bilim*. The legislative basis of *Bilim* was provided by two of Niyazov's most important presidential decrees signed on 1 October 1993⁵⁸ and the overarching aim of the programme is twofold: to "play a key role in the national economic and social development of the state" and "to promote native Turkmen traditions and national spiritual values"⁵⁹. The first objective is uncontroversial. However, the second raised a number of practical questions about the status of minority languages, and that of ethnic Russian and Uzbek students more generally.

The implementation of the *Bilim* programme has had deleterious consequences for the education sector. Funds have drained out of higher education, reducing the number of higher education students in university in 2004 (approximately 3000) less than 10% of their number of a decade earlier⁶⁰. 12,000 school teachers have been dismissed, the length of schooling has been cut from ten to nine years, and the length of degree study reduced from four to two years, with a compulsory two year gap between school and college enforced in 2003 (THI Report: May 2004, 2). Instruction in the Kazakh, Uzbek and Russian languages had all but ceased by 2006. Equally damaging has been the decimation of the vocational school and college system. The Oil and Gas Institute was closed in 1994, a number of technical and music colleges followed and the medical schools in Mary, Turkmenabat and Balkanabat all ceased to admit students after 2003 (TIHR Press Release 180: 19 December 2005). Those that remained devote 17 hours out of a 34 hour week to studying *Ruhnama* or about Niyazov's life, philosophy and achievements (THI Report: May 2004, 5-7). The shortage of school books and equipment, lack of repairs or lighting in schools, and the late payment of teachers' salaries are commonplace across the

⁵⁸ These are the Decree on Education and the Decree on Ratification of the State Programme on Implementation of New Education in Policies of President Saparmurat Niyazov in Turkmenistan, 1993-1997.

⁵⁹ Sourced to a report for Eurasianet (www.eurasianet.org) entitled *Turkmenistan Wrestles with Child Labour Issue as Cotton Harvest Approaches*, 1 September 2004.

⁶⁰ See notes 58 and 59 above.

poorer FSU states, but the practice of using child labour to pick cotton between September and November each year remains a particular problem in Turkmenistan (TIHR Press Release 154: 25 October 2005). The running down of state educational provision has led parents to look to the small number of private Turkish schools operating in Turkmenistan. However, these have also come under close government scrutiny because of fears that they have become vehicles for the propagation of Islamist ideology (IWPR RCA No. 395: 11 July 2005).

The running down of state education provision conforms to a wider pattern of dysfunctional practice in the public sector in the period 1992 to 2006. Similar problems beset other CARs, notably Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, but whereas, firstly, the decline of standards was caused by economic factors and, secondly, the quality of education “bottomed out” in the late 1990s in these countries but then began to recover, government policy in Turkmenistan has severely compounded unavoidable structural deficits. Disruption to the education sector has been mirrored in other public services. In 2005, for example, all hospitals outside Ashgabat were closed, to be replaced by inadequate regional diagnostic clinics, and 15,000 medical orderlies and nurses were summarily dismissed, to be replaced by untrained military conscripts (RCA NO. 356: 11 March 2005). The report prepared by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Health (Rechel and McKee: 2005), while admittedly not based on first-hand access, was a devastating indictment of the unchecked spread of infectious diseases, ranging from HIV to bubonic plague, confirmed by Interviewees 1 and 22, both of whom are experienced medical specialists.

Media censorship and public sector policy, particularly with regard to education, intersect in several ways. The most obvious is in the secrecy that prevents the practical recording of declining educational standards or, say, the public reporting of infectious diseases. However, the underlying commonality lies in the conscious decision to deny the population information that might be of personal value, but which might also lead either to the expression of dissatisfaction with government policy, or the forging of horizontal communicative networks. Although not, therefore, entailing overt violence by the state, these practices constitute a core component of the regime’s coercive apparatus.

Patronage

(i) Theoretical and Historical Context

In chapter two we evaluated the macrostructural and political-institutional factors identified by Chehabi and Linz as instrumental in the emergence of sultanism. These insights, while valuable in establishing a template, required further focus and refinement. In particular, the observation that the presence of easily exploitable natural resources appeared to be associated with sultanism was developed, in conjunction with the economic literature on rentierism, to establish the proposition that access to uninterrupted unearned income flows was an essential instrument in allowing sultanistic rule to emerge.

According to Chehabi and Linz, a critical political factor in the emergence of sultanism was the breakdown of clientelist democracy. This may, indeed, have been the case. However, this condition was too narrow in that it failed to encompass numerous cases of sultanism in weak post-colonial states with no democratic heritage to draw upon. Accordingly, drawing on recently published work on post-colonial African politics, we made the case that the presence of clientelist networks more generally, dovetailed with, and furnished by, revenue streams from rents, provided the economic platform for sultanistic behaviour.

Collating the disparate materials on the Turkmen economy from first-hand accounts of travellers, Soviet statistical committee reports and the small amount of published work available, we were able to construct a picture of the absorption of the traditional Turkmen tribal economy, based principally on nomadic stock-breeding, into the Soviet system. The most important feature of this transformation was the large-scale shift towards a damaging cotton monoculture and, in the later Soviet era, the extraction of large quantities of natural gas.

However, we also noted in chapter three that certain social patterns and practices from the pre-Soviet era remained resilient. The most important of these was the continuing salience of tribal identity. Throughout the Soviet period, the “line of least resistance” was followed by Soviet officials (many of whom had only a tenuous hold on the loyalty of rural communities) through the creation of work brigade and *kolkhoz* units which were coterminous with pre-existing family and tribal hierarchies. Thus, despite the wrenching modernisation experienced under Soviet rule, patronage networks based on real and

fictive tribal allegiance continued to flourish both economically and administratively right up to the senior echelons of the CPTu bureaucracy.

Given that rentier economies normally function through the allocation of resources by the state, most obviously through the distribution of public sector posts, it is hardly surprising that the pre-existing structural disposition of the Turkmen economy would favour the entrenchment of clientelist networks in the post-Soviet period, with Niyazov functioning as a form of “superpatron” in dispensing favours in exchange for political docility. The shifting balance of population growth away towards urbanisation might, in the longer-term, affect patronage patterns (see Tables 2, 3 and 4), although the likelihood is that pre-existing networks are transplanted or projected from rural areas into the city.

Table 2: Population by Urban/Rural Location: 1990-2015 (Source: Euromonitor International Global Market Information Database)

Population	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Urban	1,632	1,850	2,062	2,292	2,612	2,987
Rural	1,986	2,307	2,541	2,684	2,759	2,791

TOTAL ('000s) 3,618 4,157 4,603 4,976 5,371 5,778

Euromonitor sources: National statistical offices, UN

Table 3: Population by Urban/Rural Location (% Analysis): 1990-2015 (Source: Euromonitor International Global Market Information Database)

% of total population	1990	1995	2000	2005	2010	2015
Urban	45.1	44.5	44.8	46.1	48.6	51.7
Rural	54.9	55.5	55.2	53.9	51.4	48.3

TOTAL 100.0 100.0 100.0 100.0 100.0 100.0

Euromonitor sources: National statistical offices, UN

Table 4: Population by Urban/Rural Location (Growth): 1990-2015/2000-2015

(Source: Euromonitor International Global Market Information Database)

% change	1990-2015	2000-2015
Urban	83.05	44.85
Rural	40.51	9.85
TOTAL	59.70	25.53

Euromonitor sources: National statistical offices, UN

Augmenting this legacy, Niyazov, in common with other post-communist leaders, enjoyed two distinct advantages over Cold War sultanistic rulers. The first was incumbency. By the time the Soviet Union collapsed, Niyazov had already been in control of the Turkmen SSR for over six years. He knew the system inside-out, and indeed had been able to shape its political development in his own favour during the late Soviet era by sidelining any political rivals. Other sultanistic leaders, who came to power through coup, revolution or election, operated from a “standing start” and had to cut deals and make compromises with other significant actors or corporate elite interests.

The second advantage lay in the particular economic legacy bequeathed by the Soviet system. While other sultanistic rulers, located in the Middle East, North Africa and Central America, were required to construct, appropriate or, through tactical alliance and marriage, buy into patronage networks, Niyazov essentially inherited control of the entire national economy when Turkmenistan attained independence in 1992. In this respect, post-communist sultanistic leaders such as Niyazov, Aliyev, Karimov and Lukashenka, have been uniquely favoured. Rather than struggling with large (usually foreign) corporations over the terms of production rights, mineral royalties and taxation regimes, the new sultanistic regimes have been able to appropriate large revenues more or less completely unchecked. This distinction represents one of the key differences separating Cold War and post-Cold War sultanistic regimes.

However, in Turkmenistan, Niyazov has gone even further than other post-communist leaders by personally taking over the functions of Gosplan (the Soviet economic planning ministry). Thus, it is Niyazov who sets production targets for state commodities, negotiates export volumes with foreign customers directly, signs individual commercial contracts with foreign investors and, as noted in the previous chapter, personally sets the date for crops to be sown and harvested. As a consequence, Niyazov departs from the archetypal sultanistic ruler in that he is not content simply to allocate the resources of a

rentier state. Instead, he is actively involved in key investment and production decisions as well. Given that these decisions are often not reached according to any rational criteria, the legacy of Niyazov's economic mismanagement is likely to be deleterious to say the least.

(ii) The Structure of the Post-Soviet Turkmen economy

The first point to make in any survey of the Turkmen economy is that reliable data is extremely hard to come by. According to the government's official web site, GDP growth has averaged over 20% per annum since 2001, reaching 23.1% in 2003 before falling back to 20.7% in 2005 (IS 6) (Table 5).

Table 5: Key Macro-Economic Data – Turkmenistan Official Sources (Source: Global Insight)

Economic Projections	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
GDP Growth %	23.1	21.4	20.7	20.2	17.4	14.5
GDP US\$ bn	15.2	18.8	23.2	31	38.7	45.3
GDP P/Capita US\$	3,041	3,695	4,480	5,902	7,277	8,404
Inflation (CPI) %	11.7	12.0	11.8	11.5	11.1	10.6

Global Insight Sources: Historical data from selected national and international data sources. All forecasts provided by Global Insight.

NOTE: Global Insight forecasts are based on official Turkmen statistical sources, which may not be reliable.

None of the major international financial institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, IMF, EBRD, ADB or established analytical sources, concur with the government's own figures but, given the paucity of information released about the economy, can themselves only make broad assessments as to economic growth (See Table 6). The EBRD estimated that a more realistic figure would be around 11% per annum for 2004 (Strategy Report: 23 June 2004, 1), almost wholly attributable to the global spike in oil and gas prices since 2002.

Table 6: Key Macro-Economic Data – Turkmenistan (Source: World Bank)

Economic Projections	1984-94	1994-04	2003	2004	2004-08
Average annual GDP Growth %	-4.5	9.8	16.9	17.0	7.5
GDP US\$ bn	(1994) 2.8	-	5.8	6.2	-

The precise explanation for the production of such inaccurate official data is unknown, but the most likely explanation is that officials report inflated output and exports all the way up the government chain in order to preserve their posts and better the previous year's target, and senior officials, presumably including Niyazov, are happy to maintain this fiction. The breakdown of IFI analysis on the Turkmen economy accelerated after 2002, prompting the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) to note in 2004 that "almost no budget data have been released since 2002, suggesting that the government is finding it increasingly difficult to present the budget accounts in such a way as to hide a growing structural deficit" (Country Profile: 2004, 33).

What is known, however, is that the Turkmen economy has all the structural characteristics of a rentier economy. Natural gas and petrochemical products account for in excess of 80% of all export earnings, with the remainder comprised of cotton yarn, textiles and the small-scale export of quantities of wheat and grape products (IS 7). As would be expected with an oil/gas rentier state, however, the energy sector absorbs very little employment, notwithstanding the very tight local content stipulations with foreign investors (Interview 12). Agriculture remains the dominant employment activity, comprising 48.2% of the active labour force, in comparison to only 13.8% occupied in the industrial sector (IS 8). Turkmenistan was the least industrialised Soviet republic and, apart from a few flagship projects, there has been little further development in the production of finished goods⁶¹. Although unemployment has officially remained stable at around 2.5 % since the Soviet era (IS 9), the reality is wholly different, as even a cursory walk around the country's cities would confirm. The CIA Fact Book assessment of 60%

⁶¹ One of the industrial enterprises, which I visited as part of field observation, is the textile factory established by the influential Turkish businessman Ahmet Chalyk near Ashgabat. Chalyk gained Niyazov's confidence in 1993 and since then has been a hugely influential domestic entrepreneur, to the extent that Niyazov appointed him Deputy Minister for Textiles, despite Chalyk not having Turkmen citizenship. Along with Niyazov's other favourite foreign businessman, the Israeli Yosef Maiman, Chalyk acts a broker to western companies seeking to invest in Turkmenistan. Maiman's company, Merhav, and Chalyk's company, GAP (not the western clothing firm), are lead contractors on a variety of projects (Interview 10).

unemployment is not verifiable (IS 10), and ignores the shadow economy, but it may not be too far from reality.

The structure of the Turkmen economy departs from previous sultanistic norms by virtue of the economic legacy of Soviet socialism, principally through the state's domination of the economy, but also in the deeply engrained expectations for welfare provision. This has shaped Niyazov's subsequent strategy in that, through unfettered control of state revenue streams, he has not only been able to appropriate a great proportion of national wealth under his direct control, it has enabled Niyazov to position himself as a 'superpatron' both directly through subsidies to key commodities and, indirectly, through a cascade of patronage networks operating informally throughout the public sector.

(iii) Niyazov as patron and kleptocrat

One feature that distinguishes the Turkmen economy from nearly all others in the international system is the extraordinary state accounting procedure that enables Niyazov to manipulate and siphon off nearly all foreign currency earnings. Essentially, most of the country's revenues from natural gas and other exports do not enter the state budget at all, but have been systematically transferred to a private account with Deutsche Bank, directly controlled by Niyazov.

An important Global Witness (GW) report released in April 2006 revealed that Niyazov held two private accounts, respectively named the Foreign Exchange Reserve Fund (FERF) and the Oil and Gas Development Fund (OGDF). The FERF receives 50% of all hard currency gas revenues and 30% of oil and cotton revenues. The OGDF receives 25% of gas revenues (2006: 16). GW investigations were conducted over a four year period,⁶² and the gas price used to calculate the amount siphoned off was the 2002/2003 contract price of \$44 per 1000 cm, of which only 50% was payable in cash. The yearly contract for gas sales to Ukraine in 2002 was worth \$1.68 billion. Split 50:50 into cash and barter, means \$840 million was payable in cash, and so \$420 million was paid into the FERF and \$210 into the OGDF. However, by 2006, Turkmen prices had risen to \$60 per 1000 cm, all payable in cash, meaning that well in excess of \$1 billion is being transferred into the FERF alone during 2006. The balance of the Deutsche Bank account was confirmed

⁶² It should be noted that I was interviewed by GW researchers and responded to a series of questions by email between 2002 and 2004 during the research for this report. However, I did not supply any of the data cited in this project. GW specialises in investigating the misuse of oil and gas revenues by state officials.

to GW by a confidential source at around \$1.8 billion and rising (GW Report: 2006, 16), and a second known private account in Switzerland holding a further \$1 billion is also in existence (GW Report: 2006, 16). Neither the FERF nor the OGDB are subject to any formal accounting procedures, and it is widely assumed that the FERF funds the construction of the prestige monuments and statues prevalent in Ashgabat, all of whom have been constructed either by Bouygues or Polymex, the French and Turkish construction companies.

The FERF and OGDF appear to be classically sultanistic ruses for the appropriation of state revenues as the ruler's own private estate, conforming to the patterns of kleptomania associated with Mobutu, Ceausescu, Bongo and others. Following Chehabi and Linz, self-enrichment is deemed to be the ruler's primary goal. Niyazov is clearly no exception. Even though relations with other members of his family are known to be strained (Interviewees 10 and 24), they have been allowed access to state coffers. Niyazov's son Murat has been involved in an unprofitable hotel construction scheme and reportedly lost \$8 million in one night at a Spanish casino (Scott: 1996).

However, rental income streams do not only signify self-enrichment. They also have profound implications for the regime's longevity. By retaining exclusive access to substantial funds that ought to be an integral part of the state treasury, Niyazov is able to project himself as a "superpatron", at the apex of a pyramid of lesser patrons, dependent upon his largesse.

Without doubt, a substantial proportion of FERF funds are used for costly projects associated with Niyazov's cult of personality. \$120 million was spent on building the largest mosque in Central Asia in Niyazov's home village of Kipchak (Plates Fourteen and Fifteen)⁶³. The gigantic reservoir under construction in the Karakum desert, which is likely to cost upwards of \$6 billion over 10 to 20 years, will absorb significant off-budget funds⁶⁴.

However, the significance from a governance perspective is that Niyazov is able to control a far larger resource base than any potential domestic rival and, in comparative terms, more than many previous sultanistic rulers, due to the state's inherited ownership

⁶³ This estimate was provided by Interviewee 18, the First National Architect.

⁶⁴ This project may be Niyazov's "White Sea Canal". Environmental experts predict that given the intense heat in the Karakum desert, there will be substantial evaporation problems and significant saline pollution (RFE/RL TS, 30 August 2004).

over economic assets, further reinforced by ongoing control over economic activity, through the compulsory state purchase of cotton and wheat.

Niyazov is therefore in a strong position to arbitrate on the allocation and distribution of resources to each sector. For those with public sector posts, salaries are, by regional comparison, not ungenerous, averaging \$250 per month, although many are paid late and some not at all. However, the most direct use of state patronage is in the subsidisation of many essential goods and services. Despite significant difficulties caused by the degraded infrastructure and natural climate, water supplies are free to most city dwellers. Rents on state owned apartments have historically been low. Gas is provided to all residential homes free of charge and to industrial users at nominal cost. Fuel for motor vehicles is essentially free with only a nominal charge levied to cover the wages of attendants. Salt is free and flour is sold at very low cost. Once permission has been obtained to travel internally, the cost of airfares and train tickets is also nominal, a flight from Ashgabat to Turkmenbashi typically costing no more than \$2 in 2005. The minimum living standards effectively guaranteed by these subsidies have probably blunted some internal and international criticism of the regime.

At the same time, expectations of subsidies are socially embedded and regarded as part of a trade-off for the relative lack of political freedoms and civil liberties enjoyed in comparator states. In chapter two, we described how theories of patronage describe a compact between patron and client. Should that be broken in a far-reaching way through, say, price liberalisation on subsidised goods and services, the client would be tempted to withdraw from the relationship. Absent the subsidies and Niyazov would be able to offer little more than internal stability. Symptoms of social unrest caused by the rising prices would negate even that guarantee, which would make the regime still more vulnerable. Therefore, even though revenue streams were disrupted by trade disputes over gas exports in 1997, Niyazov was more willing to risk temporary shortages of bread and fuel, rather than lift price controls.

Patronage networks also play out within government ministries and regional administrations on a much more constrained scale. It is expected that regional officials with the power to make staff appointments bring in members of their family and, if possible, wider clan networks, who then donate a proportion of their salary to their immediate patron or provide some other favour. For those officials who manage to stay in post for any length of time, their demise is usually followed by accusations of tribalism and nepotism. The extensive purging and reorganisation of the state oil and gas sector in

mid-2005, for example, brought to light a system of tribally based appointments throughout the bureaucracy and refining complexes situated in western Turkmenistan (RFE/RL TS: 24 August 2005). Similarly, investigations into the poor cotton harvest in autumn 2005 led to the discovery of a complex cross-regional patronage network between regional and district governors to enable each district to reach its allotted state target of cotton and wheat production (NCA: 7 October 2005)⁶⁵.

Patronage has evolved into an essential tool of governance under the Niyazov regime. The ready availability of relatively large inflows of revenue from gas export earnings absolves Niyazov from the responsibility of enacting economic reform and development of any serious productive capacity in the industrial sector. He is also able to sidestep the construction of effective bureaucratic structures or the development of a set of administrative procedures for orthodox fiscal management. Finally, the creation of a framework of commercial law and competent judicial function is obviated by the arbitrariness of macroeconomic decision-making. As a consequence, it is in the economic sphere that the sultanistic elements of the Niyazov regime correspond most closely to the template laid down by Chehabi and Linz, and developed in our earlier critique of SRT.

Running an economy as a personal fiefdom leads to chronic structural instabilities, deep contradictions and, in certain non-energy sectors, systemic failures (Gunes-Ayala: 1994, 19-28). These can, just about, be masked and managed under Niyazov's rule. Exceptional and exclusive access to rents enables Niyazov to prevent the emergence of alternative patrons and therefore forms an essential explanatory tool for the longevity of his rule. His cadre policy, perhaps unwittingly, reinforces his primacy. On a basic level, the permanent revolution in the staffing of key ministries removes potential rivals. However, it also keeps different factions, usually coterminous with tribal affiliation, interested in the "game" and provides them with reasonable expectation of restocking their patronage networks with regularity. In other words, the very instability that characterises economic management under the Niyazov regime, in conjunction with basic subsidies, serves to keep the system afloat. Behind this there lurks the omnipresent contextual dependency of access to export markets. Yet, the intensified search for energy security that has increasingly characterised the global energy market means that such a threat has become an increasingly second order consideration for the regime between 2003 and 2006.

⁶⁵ Niyazov sacked two regional governors and 11 district governors in a cabinet session devoted to the affair on 6 October 2005.

Cult of Personality

The third instrument in the complex of techniques used by the Niyazov regime to reinforce control and engender support is the pervasive cult of personality surrounding Niyazov⁶⁶. Although portrayed in the popular media as a project of warped self-aggrandisement⁶⁷, the objectives, content and outcomes of the cult are complex and multi-faceted. What emerges from a more detailed investigation of the cult is a multiplicity of motives, actors and structures that serve to define the vocabulary of the cult and “enact” cultic practices in a variety of settings, often for quite separate and even contradictory purposes. The study of such discourses reveals much about the operation of power, how categories of inclusion and exclusion are constructed and, particularly in societies under personalist rule, how power itself is exercised (Petroni: 2000, 9).

The existing scholarly literature on political cults of personality, as opposed to those associated with new religious movements,⁶⁸ is still relatively sparse, although new material has begun to emerge on the Stalin cult and communist leader cults in post-war Eastern Europe (Plamper: 2004; Rees *et al.*: 2004; Dobrenko and Naiman: 2003). Plamper has argued that the leader cult belongs to a western tradition of anthropomorphising the centre of political power that began in the modern era with the cult of the Tsar and Louis Napoleon (2004a, 19; 2004b, 303). Following World War I, cults recharged the political arena with some of sacredness lost due to war, atomisation and rapid industrialisation (the death of God, leading to the deification of Man), successfully feeding off the emergence of a consumer society and modern mass communication techniques to channel sacral aura

⁶⁶ There is no standard definition of a personality cult. The first recorded use of the term, according to Plamper (2004a, 25), is by Karl Marx in 1877. Marx was rejecting the idea of a cult forming around himself and Friedrich Engels. As noted in chapter two (page 64), Plamper describes a personality cult as “the organisation of society around a single person, and the symbolic expression of this organisation through cult products in multiple modern media” (2003: 45). A more extensive definition is that provided by Rees: “A leader cult is an established system of veneration of a political leader, to which all members of the society are expected to subscribe... It is a deliberately constructed and managed mechanism, which aims at the integration of the political system around the leader’s persona” (2004, 4). This definition does not assume the actual depth and reach of the cult that Plamper does, but captures more closely the systemic features of the cult, rather than its very varied outcomes.

⁶⁷ Broadsheet newspapers periodically send journalists to Turkmenistan to file short pieces on the Niyazov regime. The implications for those sponsoring their visa entry are never discussed. Examples of such articles are: Michael Jack “His Own Little USSR”, *Financial Times*, 7 December 2002; Robert G. Kaiser, “Personality Cult Buoy ‘Father of all Turkmen’”, *Washington Post*, 7 August 2002; Justin Huggler, “Is this the world’s craziest dictator?” *The Independent*, 14 April 2004.

⁶⁸ Recent scholarship on religious cults has focused on their relationship with the state and propensity for violence (Bromley and Melton: 2002; Reader: 2000). While leaders of religious cults tend to have an apocalyptic mentality, political leader cults revolve around a much more optimistic conception of nation and community.

into the political sphere. While the collapse of communism saw the end of several remaining personality cults (such as those surrounding Tito, Hoxha and Ceausescu), they have persisted in several states such as North Korea, Cuba, Libya and Equatorial Guinea, and new personality cults have emerged in Chechnya (Ahmed Kadyrov), Azerbaijan (Heidar Aliyev) and, possibly, Venezuela (Hugo Chavez).

Utilising the small specialist literature on cults, alongside contributions on the political use of urban space, art, ritual, text and memory, and in conjunction with field observation, interviews and regime texts, it is possible to develop a relatively comprehensive appreciation of the cult dynamics of the Niyazov regime. In order to structure the analysis, I look in turn at specific political objectives within the context of their particular manifestations.

(i) The Niyazov cult as an expression of visual-spatial power

The most immediate and obvious attribute of the personality cult is its visual power. Personality cults dominate space, particularly urban space. As Paul Hirst (2005: 3) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) have argued, space can be configured and used as an important strategic resource by power. In the case of Turkmenistan, the Niyazov regime (I do not attribute the decision-making about cult production directly to Niyazov himself, for reasons examined below) has used space for both an immediate and tangible political objective – that is, to render the physical landscape more legible and amenable for the exercise of control – and also for the longer range and less material objectives associated with the regime's cultural dynamics.

The visual manifestations of the Niyazov cult are indisputably centred on Ashgabat. The expansion of small-scale private trading, the possibility of finding work, and the city's proximity to the country's arterial transport routes means that Ashgabat's economic and political importance has increased after the Soviet period. The new Ashgabat city landscape (Plate One) is a draw for many Turkmen based in, or originating from, provincial areas. It has become a source of national prestige and pride (Interviewees 11 and 21). As the centre of political and commercial activity, the home region of the country's largest tribe and Niyazov's native city, Ashgabat is the national showpiece and, thus, the point from which the personality cult is projected. None of the other major cities visited (Turkmenbashi, Balkanabat and Mary) had been subject to urban remodelling in any way comparable to Ashgabat since 1992.

Ashgabat during the Soviet era was typical of many small to medium sized cities in the Soviet Union. In common with two other Central Asian capitals, Almaty (1908) and Tashkent (1966), Ashgabat suffered a devastating earthquake, in 1948, which effectively destroyed the existing city. Consequently, the urban centre was physically rebuilt around a standard grid pattern and organised according to Soviet principles (Harloe: 1996, 1-30; Garriyev *et al*: 1974). *Mikroraiions*, or neighbourhood districts, were constructed, comprising an aggregate of neighbourhood living spaces, usually low-rise apartments or traditional one-storey apartments in Ashgabat, and serviced by local welfare, leisure and public transport facilities. As Smith points out, urban living had particular significance for the Soviet system as “a progressive force encouraging collective rather than individual identity” (1996: 71). Thus, city planning had an important political function in the Soviet period, even in outlying CARs (see also Young and Light: 2001, 941-955).

However, cities were not only venues for the *practice* of socialist living. They also had an important symbolic function. Crowley and Reid’s study of ‘socialist spaces’ in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union between 1947 and 1991 argues that “the architectural form of the city and the planning of urban space were vested with a social-transformative role in the lives of its residents. The configuration of cities was the strongest factor ‘for organising the psyche of the masses’” (2002: 11).

Niyazov has developed both of these aspirations in the post-Soviet era by using urban planning both as a form of social control and as the visible symbol of the new state realised in his image. This parallel process has enhanced the Niyazov regime’s “reading” of the city and allowed it to advance its own desired self-representation – how it wants itself to be seen both domestically and internationally. The physical landscape of the city has been transformed since 1992, and Ashgabat has been justifiably described as one of the world’s fastest changing capital cities. The visual theme is white marble and glass throughout (Plate Two). Vast spaces in the city centre have been cleared to be replaced by shadeless parks, one of the largest fountain systems in the world, and huge monument complexes devoted to Niyazov and various cult accessories, notably as his mother and his book, *Ruhnama*. The colossal scale of the construction projects might evoke comparison with such high modernist projects as Brasilia or Chandigarh, but there is no comparable sense of aesthetic unity behind the urban redesign of Ashgabat.

The clearance of complex urban spaces, which are commonly characterised by more traditional housing and their autonomous community life, described earlier in the chapter, has broken up Soviet utopian geography and replaced it with another less equitable and

accessible imagining. The paradox is that the city has given its residents new places to gather - typically parks and squares - but their overwhelming size, even by Soviet standards, is such as to be alienating, and there is no supportive commercial infrastructure or facilities (water, shade, toilets, play areas, picnic tables) that would make them amenable. The result is rather bizarre – swathes of the city centre, dedicated to the leader cult and replete with immaculately maintained grass and fountains, are completely devoid of human life. The result is in no way comparable to Ceausescu's disfigurement of central Bucharest in 1977, which bankrupted the state and displaced 40,000 inhabitants, but the rationale behind the project is similar in that the superimposition of monumental complexes has been a political choice rather than an urban solution (Cavalcanti: 1992, 283; Barris: 2001).

The new structures have been derided as dictator kitsch, and the designs of the Arch of Neutrality (background of Plate Nine) and the Monument of Independence have some of the clunky retro look of other monuments from the Communist bloc such as Berlin's Fernsehturm, albeit making references to traditional Turkmen objects⁶⁹. Combined with the multiplicity of golden and bronze statues of Niyazov, the regime is not so much inviting identification, as impressing its power through the spatial order. The new spaces created also act as a venue for the exercise of power. The performative dimension of state ritual transforms the city into a stage and shrine of power (Schatz: 2004, 127; Anacker: 2004, 515-533).

The Turkmen state has also micro-managed the spatial order toponymically. Street names "concretise and reflect specific power relations and ideological dispositions" (Azaryahu: 1997, 480) to produce a natural order of things. If street names are approved rendition of the past, the decision to decommission an original name is also an overtly political act. Azaryahu (1997: 479), in his analysis of street renaming patterns in postcommunist East Berlin, considers renaming "a demonstrative act of substantial symbolic value and political resonance, introducing the political ideological shift into ostensibly mundane and even intimate levels of human activities and settings." As Gill notes in his study of urbanism in post-Soviet Moscow (2005: 480), the renaming of streets and parks therefore entails the manipulation of symbolism in order to generate legitimacy.

⁶⁹ The Arch of Neutrality represents the tripod on which a traditional Turkmen cooking pot rests. The Monument of Independence (nicknamed the sink plunger) represents a traditional pointed hat worn on special occasions by Turkmen girls.

In the case of Ashgabat, the city administration originally renamed streets from the usual panoply of literary figures and Bolshevik heroes to more “Turkmen” names, before, in August 2003, ordering that all except nine streets, those bearing the names of Niyazov and his family, be replaced by a four digit number system (IS 12). The regime therefore used toponyms initially to loosen residents from the familiar moorings of the Soviet era, before deciding that no names unconnected with Niyazov were acceptable. The numerical grid system chimes in with Scott and Yiftachel’s observation about the desire to rationalise and classify terrain through urban (re)design in order to increase the power of the state (Scott: 1998, 2; Yiftachel: 1998, 395-406. See also Grant: 2001, 219-241).

Accordingly, the Soviet urban order in Ashgabat has been decisively replaced. The new city-form has acquired two functions: to be amenable to social control, and to showcase the Niyazov cult. As such, it constitutes the most visible segment of the cult project and attempts to render permanently the symbols of sultanistic rule.

(ii) The Niyazov cult as instrument of social integration

A secondary function of cults of personality is that they promote social integration. This occurs in several ways. Stalin’s cult, for example was a product of the “Great Break” of 1928. Young people of peasant background “came in” to the Soviet system through the process of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation. They brought with them a much more conservative moral outlook, opposed to the abstraction and streak of social libertarianism that characterised early Bolshevism (Stites 1989). Plamper (2004a: 40) notes, “the Stalin cult was both made for them and by them [industrialised peasants]” using the visual techniques and traditions that could appeal to a stratum of the population with still limited levels of literacy (Bonnell: 1997, 4). As such, the Stalin cult became an instrument of unity, “the single expression of general will, the synecdochic expression of the state in one person” (Plamper 2004a: 38).

This could function on many levels. Socialist Realism, for example, was neither an egalitarian nor a commercial art form, but was created by an elite for the masses. Yet, artistic representations of Lenin and Stalin performed an integrative function “by making visual kitsch the vehicle of elitist ideas (Groys: 1992, 11). Similarly, the ritual of Red Funerals “joined horizontal and vertical space [the holding of icons] in a web of sensations and impressions” (Smith: 2003, 99) that fused successfully the sacred and the secular, the traditional and the revolutionary. Tumarkin (1983: 2) and Paltiel (1983: 49-

64) record how enacting the cult of Lenin through an organised system of rites and symbols created an emotional bond between participants, spectators and the CPSU.

Nor was this phenomenon confined to the Soviet Union. Falasca-Zamponi explains how the symbols and uniforms that led to the auratic mythicisation of Mussolini as an “envoy from God,” would help establish an orderly world and ensure “the cohesion of otherwise inchoate ‘masses’, and their shaping into a homogenous political body” (1997: 5).

Cults order national history by appropriating cultural memory. In doing so, they lend the ruler legitimacy and gravitas, embedding them within a national meta-narrative. Thus, Hitler was the apotheosis of the thousand-year Reich and Reza Shah Pahlavi was the “Light of the Aryans”. As a result, cult producers draw on traditional cultural motifs and continuities. Rolfe (2004, 198) views Soviet cults as the secular veneration of saints, seeing “striking homologies of icon corners in peasant huts and their Soviet equivalents, the Lenin and Red Corners”, thereby providing a comforting bridge between the *batiyoshka* Tsar and the fatherly Lenin of the Soviet era.

Yet paradoxically, the repudiation of the previous political order also requires an unambiguous rejection of the trappings of the old regime and the creation of a new set of symbols, such as the calendrical revisions, liberty trees and cockades that became sacred signs of the French Revolution (Hunt: 1986, 54). Connerton believes that control of memory conditions the hierarchies of power, legitimising or delegitimising past social orders accordingly. Thus, where institutions are revoked, new rites emerge marking their revocation. However, such rites can also implicitly recall what was revoked (1989, 9-12). Thus, the “new beginning” of the post-Soviet era of national independence also requires “concerted forgettings” (Gillis: 1994b, 7). Inimical tribal relations, the Soviet past and Niyazov’s service as a Communist Party boss are all consigned to organised oblivion by the revision of national memory (Koonz: 1994, 258).

The Niyazov regime has thus used the cult of personality as a vehicle to re-imagine a past of national unity, organic connection with the Turkmen lands and, through spatial and temporal commemorative loci (Zerubavel: 2004, 233) such as monuments, rituals and national holidays, insert Niyazov into that drama as the culmination of the national meta-narrative. Spatially, foundation myths are expressed in monuments, littered around the parks and squares of Ashgabat, to Seljuk sultans such as Alp Arslan and Sanjar. By themselves, however, these are insufficient. Reuben Fowkes is correct, when discussing the role of public sculpture in Stalinist Hungary, to say that monuments demonstrate the

strength and permanence of a new political order and allow regimes to dominate public space (2002: 65)⁷⁰. However, it is the process of articulation and “telling” of these myths that gives them flow, organisation, dynamism and power (Corney: 2004, 3), in a way that a static monument cannot.

Accordingly, ritual and text are brought into play as part of the multiple commemorative forms (ultimately clustered around Niyazov’s identity) deployed to develop the cult’s integrative function. National holidays are attended by choreographed processions and parades in (sometimes newly invented) national costume (Plates Nine, Ten and Eleven). These spectacles have overlapping functions. They recall and embody the aesthetics of discipline and principles of order that characterised the synchronised mass movement displays of late communism (for example, the gymnastic displays and *sportsfests* common in Romania and the German Democratic Republic).

Moreover, as Edensor (2005: 17) and Roubal (2003, 8-9) have persuasively argued, they create an analytical time and space. Each participant occupies a space, often in an invisible geometric grid, and conforms, through music, to a disciplined rhythm that orders bodies in that time and space to make them legible and docile. Thus, while the spectacle itself conveys the Niyazov regime’s power to spectators, the participants within the spectacle are themselves the objects of that power⁷¹. Simultaneously, the purpose of the spectacle is to reach into an imaginary history of ethnic and tribal unity in order to overlay Turkmenistan’s historic internal divisions. While the following chapter discusses the emotions and attitudes of the participants in more detail, it is sufficient to say that while they may enjoy participation in the spectacles, there was little tangible evidence to me of the regime’s larger message being internalised.

The manipulation of national memory can also be seen in the commemoration of World War II which, of course, looms large in Soviet consciousness. I attended the 60th anniversary celebrations of VE day in Ashgabat on 8 May 2005. The main celebration was held at the Soviet memorial, an ensemble comprising four huge obelisks and, to its side, an arch stretching over a statue of a grieving mother. Under each end of the arch are statues of Russian and Turkmen soldiers (Plate Eighteen), an expression of Soviet “friendship of peoples.” The celebration was very well-attended by an ethnically mixed

⁷⁰ See also Ladd’s discussion of political monuments in East Berlin in the late German Democratic Republic (2002: 91-104), Forest and Johnson’s excellent analysis of national identity and Soviet-era monuments in post-Soviet Moscow (2002: 524-547) and, more generally, Knauer and Walkowitz (2004: 1-18)

⁷¹ On political spectacle, and its relationship to art, see Edelman (1995; 1988).

crowd of all ages. Long processions of people came to leave flowers at the obelisks and be photographed with proud medal-wearing veterans of both sexes. Tellingly, however, an official wreath of the Seljuk eight-pointed star was strategically placed in front of the Soviet memorial. Thus, the flowers had to be laid before a symbol of Turkmen rather than Soviet power.

Interestingly, the celebration was not conducted before the new War Memorial completed in 2004 (Plate Nineteen), which depicts Niyazov's father as the Hero of Turkmenistan (somewhat improbably rendered as a Teutonic knight). Indeed, there were no flowers spontaneously left there at all by ordinary people. Returning to the site later in the day, a similar Seljuk star had been placed before the new memorial, together with an orderly arrangement of official bouquets that, of course, had none of the emotion or resonance of the disorderly placed offerings at the Soviet memorial. This tells us that with a genuinely important and "popular" commemoration of national memory, there is an instinctive attraction to the comfortable sites of memory associated with the pre-Niyazov era. Confronted with this, the regime makes a strategic intervention (the Seljuk star) by ensuring that this commemoration cannot physically be directed at the Soviet past and must be mediated through a newly constructed Turkmen identity. Meanwhile, the symbol of "Niyazov's war", the new memorial, is furnished with flowers from official sources to conceal popular neglect. Thus autonomous memory, as opposed to the contrived public holiday spectacles, emerges as a site of negotiation and struggle for the Niyazov cult to impose itself.

The "telling" of history in *Ruhnama*⁷² is a device that fuses the construction of the nation's historical narrative with Niyazov's own persona – using an integrative formula to simultaneously bind national identity in with the legitimacy of the incumbent regime. Niyazov stresses that *Ruhnama* is "a book about the lessons of philosophy and the moral experiences of past generations" but is emphatically not a history book or religious book (Turkmenbashi: 2002, 7, 21, 44). This assertion is directly contradicted by its incorporation into religious observance, detailed earlier in the chapter and by the confirmation of two interviewees (8 and 9) that it is used as the sole history text in schools. Its content is a loosely structured mixture of Turkmen genealogy, mysticism,

⁷² The stringent requirements to incorporate readings of the book into disassociated educational and professional settings have been recounted. For non-Turkmen particularly they cause resentment. Interviewee 22, an ethnic Uzbek paediatric neurologist from Dashoguz, described the exasperation felt by her colleagues when the compulsory two hour Saturday morning *Ruhnama* sessions interfered with ward rounds. The practical imposition of the book, in this case, has the opposite of the intended effect.

history, memoir, homilies and moral injunction. However, there are consistent themes that run both explicitly and obliquely through the text that coincide with the broader agenda of the personality cult.

The first integrates Niyazov into the national narrative. He is the architect of national independence who “did not rest by day or night until your [the Turkmen people’s] head could be held high” (2002, 252). He is not just part of Turkmen history, he actively shapes its destiny. Turkmenistan is likened to a galley, with each citizen an oarsman: “If all the oarsmen obey one captain, and row in accordance with the orders of the captain, the ship will be put out to sea” (2002, 68).

The second theme emphasises Niyazov’s role as guarantor of national unity, the heir of the mythical founder of the Turkmen race Oghuz Khan (2002, 92), without whom the country might fall prey to the various dangers that Niyazov describes, of which regional, tribal and sectarian discord are the most serious (2002, 270). Niyazov argues that Turkmen should “give up the idea of tribe from now on. Debates on tribe should be things of the past” (2002, 52). Significantly, Niyazov refrains from making reference to specific tribal fault lines (such as between Teke and Yomut), probably to avoid giving them credence or solidity. Instead, there are repeated abstract references to how the timelessness of the country’s varied landscapes (themselves metaphors for regional/tribal differences) are metaphors for the eternal Turkmen spirit.

Thirdly, *Ruhnama* seeks to locate a unified Turkmen identity and then, in turn, place that identity within both world history and the contemporary international environment. It is a didactic attempt to construct a national space and a monolithic official history around which Turkmen can and should coalesce. Central to both this text and official ritual is Niyazov as an indispensable medium of social integration. Thus, *Ruhnama* and other cult paraphernalia are not a contribution to history, identity and destiny as such. Rather, they actually define the parameters, character and content of these sentiments and then promptly closes the debate, closing down any alternative conception or explanation for national identity and, of course, any alternative prescriptions of governance or policy.

(iii) The Niyazov cult as instrument of political socialisation

An important facet of cults is their use as an instrument of political socialisation. Deployed in this way, the regime is able to establish a paradigm for good conduct and determine the limits of acceptable behaviour. Lenin’s monumental propaganda scheme

launched in 1918, through which Bolshevik heroes were immortalised in localities across Russia, were not only about “spreading the word”, they concretised exemplary revolutionary conduct into the regions (Stites: 1989, 90). Lenin himself quickly became the embodiment of socialist virtues after his death. The cult surrounding him had a strong normative function, especially for children who were encouraged to follow ‘Volodia’s’ industrious example at school (Tumarkin: 1983, 225; Kelly: 2004, 102-122). The cult of Stakhanovism that commenced in 1931 idealised workers as an attempt to increase industrial production, and the vocabulary of Stalinism in the 1930s was gradually broadened to include notable individuals, such as explorers and aviators, as “positive heroes” (Clark: 2003, 4) encapsulating cardinal public virtues, although Stalin himself was not to be, and could not be, emulated. Political cults in post-War Eastern Europe fulfilled similar functions (Behrends: 2004, 161-178; Wien: 2004, 194-207; von Klimo: 2004, 47-62).

In the case of Turkmenistan, although Niyazov’s fortitude after being orphaned as a child is sometimes played on, Niyazov himself is essentially elevated beyond comparison or emulation. For example, Presidential Administration spokesman Kakamurat Balliyev wrote an article on 21 May 2001 in *Neutralny Turkmenistan*, the country’s widest circulation newspaper, entitled ‘The Spell of the Prophet’, in which he claimed that Niyazov was semi-divine (RFE/RL TS: 23 May 2001), while government propaganda routinely refers to the “Holy Life of Turkmenbashi”. The function of political socialisation is therefore arrogated into the broader vocabulary of the cult. The principal subjects of emulation are Niyazov’s parents, and the mechanism through which socialisation is pursued is *Ruhnama*.

Chehabi and Linz state that, after the cult of personality, dynasticism is the second most significant trait of extreme personalist rule (1998a, 13-15). Their focus, however, is on the role that wives, brothers and children play in a political capacity. In Turkmenistan, dynasticism of this type is not present. Niyazov’s wife (a Russian Jew) and daughter, resident in Moscow and Israel respectively, are invisible. His son, who is domestically unpopular on account of his spendthrift habits, may conceivably emerge as a compromise figure to succeed Niyazov, but between 1992 and 2006 has had no political profile to speak of. The extended lexicon of the cult has therefore not been generationally projected either laterally or forward. Instead, Niyazov’s long deceased parents have been elevated as exemplars of traditional Turkmen values of courage, honour, sacrifice and the strong family unit.

The cult, at least partly, would appear to stem genuinely from Niyazov's own initiative. He has, for example, had constructed a mausoleum at the huge mosque in his home village of Kipchak (Plate Fifteen) at which he has conducted ceremonies to symbolically re-inter the ashes of his parents. The Turkmen word for bread (*chorek*) and the month of April has been renamed Gurbansoltan after his mother. His book *Dear Friends*, released in October 2005, is a 350 page meditation on his mother. In this, Gurbansoltan is woven into the mythic narrative of Niyazov as a national saviour. Niyazov recalls how he was discovered by a doctor in the aftermath of the 1948 Ashgabat earthquake in which she died. Asking how he was found, the doctor replied: "The spirit of your mother asked me to save you" (AFP: 25 October 2005).

The episode is most spectacularly immortalised in the Earthquake Memorial in central Ashgabat, in which a huge bronze bull tosses the earth on its horns. Out of the earth, a dying mother holds up a golden child to be saved for the world. Gurbansoltan's sacrifice is only matched by her womanly virtues. She is the perfect mother, outstanding carpet maker (Plate Six)⁷³, symbol of justice analogous to the Greek goddess Themis (Plate Two), and inspiration to the women of Turkmenistan during World War II. By contrast, Niyazov's father, Atamurat, is an altogether more shadowy and unpromising candidate for cult status. In 2004, declared officially as the Year of Atamurat Niyazov, some of the details of his life were fleshed out. In Turkmen "scholarly" journals he emerges as a school teacher and accountant in the service of the Soviet bureaucracy who nevertheless stands up to the KGB when they requisition his father's sheep and grapevines (Amansaryyev: 134-135). However, it is as a martial symbol of courage, derived from his death in World War II and bound up in Soviet war iconography, that he is most frequently projected.

The incremental elevation of Niyazov's parents to be the secondary figures of the cult of personality and, as such, the primary instrument of the cult's socialisation function has two principal explanations. The first is that a cult surrounding them is politically safe, both for its producers and for Niyazov. Initiatives by subordinates to promote Gurbansoltan and Atamurat are likely to meet with Niyazov's approval. However, the cult also represents no political threat to Niyazov. Family members enjoined to leadership cults have the potential to become rivals. President Francisco Macías Nguema of Equatorial Guinea was overthrown by his nephew Teodoro Obiang Nguema in 1979. President Hafiz Al-Asad's brother Rifat attempted to engineer a coup during his brother's

⁷³ Carpet making is still the base economic and household skill required of Turkmen women.

indisposition in 1984. The power and profile of Rakhat Aliyev, the son-in-law of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, increased to a dangerous level until he was diplomatically “exiled” to Austria in 2001. Sharing public space with long deceased family members, however, alleviates the monotony of Niyazov’s cult without diluting his personal authority.

Secondly, Niyazov’s parents fill a void in Niyazov’s own *curriculum vitae*. A significant proportion of *Ruhnama* is devoted to the retraditionalisation of Turkmen family life. The theme of unity in the family is repeatedly used as a metaphor for the unity of the state, as well as being a desirable objective in its own right. The absence of Niyazov’s own family (which, in any event, is ethnically diluted) could therefore create comment. Niyazov’s parents function as a model of kinship and duty, rendered movingly by their own ‘martyrdom’. Similarly, the absence of military service in Niyazov’s biography is leavened by the hagiography of his father Atamurat, notwithstanding the latter’s rather contentless form.

While the names and images of both parents are pervasive both toponymically and in school texts, magazines, television music recitals, portraits and other media, socialisation is principally conducted through *Ruhnama*. Its penetration into professional, military and educational life is necessary because it “cultivates personality” and sets out “the moral obligations of society” (Turkmen: 2003, 130-131). It is “a bridge to the world of moral values and the rich cultural heritage of the Turkmen people” (Nepesova and Tugiev: 2001, 127), a “mirror of the national soul...making the heart wiser and kinder” (Odekov: 2001, 131) and will be “a source of power and striving to reach the [economic] targets of Turkmen’s Golden Age” (Amansariyev: 2003, 117).

Although very few interviewees had read *Ruhnama*, Interviewees 8 and 9, from different perspectives, confirmed its centrality as an educational tool. Interviewee 8, a British archaeologist, had worked for three years with schools No. 13 and 6 in the Bairamali *etrap* (district) of Mary *velayet*, which educated age groups 6 to 11 and 11 to 16 respectively. In these schools, *Ruhnama* was used as a core text book. The book had to be purchased by parents and was taught for at least one hour per day or in a block lesson of four hours per week. It constituted one of the very few teaching materials and was used separately in history lessons. Teaching followed a very didactic Soviet pattern with a passage being chosen for recital and instruction. Some teachers voiced private opposition to its use but not in a group environment for fear of losing their jobs. For a number of teachers, *Ruhnama* was not viewed as a teaching opportunity but as a task to be

completed before teaching could properly commence. After 2001, *Ruhnama* has been increasingly embedded into the school curriculum, but such was the shortage of other teaching materials, Interviewee 8 considered that the appearance of a second volume in 2004, was probably gratefully received as an additional resource to alleviate the monotony of teaching solely from the first volume.

For Interviewee 9, a young teacher in a primary school in central Ashgabat (name not given to avoid identification), *Ruhnama* was a source of inspiration and was used liberally outside of its fixed place in the curriculum. Situations from *Ruhnama* were incorporated into mathematical problems and, most conspicuously, into art lessons. Walking around the school, most of the artwork displayed on the walls portrayed themes from *Ruhnama*, particularly those reifying family life or the unity of the Turkmen people. For this teacher, a strong supporter of Niyazov (at least to me, a foreign researcher), *Ruhnama* was viewed an opportunity for teaching national culture, rather than a protocol to be got finished as quickly as possible.

Thus, from these interviews, the cult as an instrument for the political socialisation of children appeared to be relatively well advanced. The cornerstone of this cult function is undoubtedly *Ruhnama*, but a complex of images, increasingly centred on Niyazov's parents and disseminated in various media, also provides a significant proportion of the cult content used for this objective.

(iv) The Niyazov cult as a strategic resource

Although cults typically signify the lofty ideals that their creators seek to communicate, they also have very practical political uses central to their creation and evolution. They are used both by elites seeking to position themselves within the political elite and as a tool to gain resources by those lower down the chain. Rolfe argues that, in the Soviet context, "leader cults... can be understood as multiple strategies by very different political protagonists, strategies to defend a self-interest within hierarchies of power and influence" (2004a, 204).

The cult of personality as a political resource dates at least back to the early Soviet period, when Stalin's famous "oath" speech at Lenin's funeral in January 1924, signalled his intention to manoeuvre for the Soviet leadership. Stalin's panegyrics were designed to position himself as the sole guarantor of Leninism just as, a decade later, cult-building around Stalin by leading Bolsheviks was an important survival strategy during a period of

intense bureaucratic upheaval (Ennker: 2004a; 2004b), as it was in post-war European states (Sretenovic and Puto: 2004, 208-223).

In Turkmenistan, the cult-building process is conducted in a similar way. Interviews with the regime's leading architects and sculptors illustrated this process. Interviewees 2 and 18 were respectively the Chair of the Architecture, Faculty of the Turkmen Polytechnical Institute and the First National Architect also based at the Institute. Given the radical changes imposed on Ashgabat's urban landscape under Niyazov's rule, and the weight placed on visual representations of the cult in the city, they occupied powerful and politically sensitive positions within the elite.

Interviewee 2 described how Niyazov would look at aerial and ground photographs of Ashgabat from different perspectives before giving general comments about how the city might be developed. Senior officials (including the interviewees) then developed the outline plans in conjunction with representatives of Polymex and Bouygues. This intermediate stage appears to be the point at which officials insert the cultic component. Crucially, the designs are then formally approved or altered by Niyazov. Interviewee 18 separately confirmed that this process was followed with the construction of the huge Kipchak mosque.

Given the rapid turnover in ministerial personnel and crossover between employment in state agencies and ministerial positions, competition in the production of cult content between elites can be swiftly transformed into political influence if the outcomes please Niyazov. Interviewees 5 and 6, both of whom occupy privileged positions as Niyazov's favoured court artists, similarly discussed the process of commissioning public sculpture, which is the focal point of the cult in Ashgabat. Public organisations, often government ministries, petition for a portrait or sculpture in a particular place. If the Ministry of Culture approves the request, the sculptors are approached and the latter then submit various preliminary sketches for consideration by the Ministry and Niyazov himself. Two or three ideas are then chosen and detailed designs are prepared from which Niyazov will choose one. There are no competitions between the sculptors or between designs. Thus, the idea for a new public sculpture does not originate with Niyazov, but the initiative from within ministries is clearly a pitch for political favour. Nevertheless, Niyazov is quite intimately involved in choosing the final design, suggesting that while cult products might originate autonomously, their output is subject to relatively close control. Supplementing formal commissions are private initiatives, such as that shown in Plate

Thirteen, whereby powerful individuals might seek to increase their prestige and influence by commissioning portraiture not necessarily destined for public consumption.

However, the inner circle of officials is not the only source of cult production and its propagation in approved journals (Odekov: 2001, 130-132; Amansariyev: 2003, 116-118; Amansaryyev: 2004, 134-136; Nepesova and Tugiev: 2001, 127-129). Provincial officials also use such tactics as part of a strategy for bargaining resources from the political centre. The propagation of cults for local advantage is not new. A cult grew around Lazar Kaganovich in Voronezh in the 1930s, on the basis of his one visit there, because local officials were seeking an elite patron to secure additional resources. Similarly Valerian Kuibyshev, the head of Gosplan, was adopted by various Siberian towns through which he had passed, in recognition of the importance of personal connections in the Soviet economy (Rolfe: 2004a, 200).

This regional dimension is important for understanding the genesis and development of the Niyazov cult. Former Foreign Minister Avdy Kuliyyev (1997, 60) described how the promotion of the Governor of Mary *velayet*, when he had named a Peasants' Union after Niyazov in early 1992, quickly galvanised regional and local officials into producing portraits and commissioning their own sculptures, renaming factories, collective farms, streets, hospitals and squares after him in order to secure promotion and material resources. The first decree passed by deputies of the new Majilis formed in May 1992 was to order the mass production of portraits of the president. The Council of Elders, unsure of its position in the new constitutional framework, passed a resolution in May 1993 for the erection of monuments to Niyazov in every village. Located in a non-Teke region, the Krasnovodsk city administration, probably fearful of political and economic marginalisation, voted to rename itself Turkmenbashi in November 1993. A similar wave of renaming came into currency after the secondary cult of Niyazov's parents developed, providing further opportunities to solicit resources.

Rolfe (2004a, 205) argues persuasively that originating and participating in a leader cult means engaging symbolic resources to secure other types of resources. Not only are cults a powerful communicative strategy of the leader to legitimate authority, they are used within elite structures to gain political influence and favours. Within local and regional contexts they reinforce the position of existing power structures and are used to secure the patronage upon which the Turkmen system economically hinges. The imagery and vocabulary, and the objects and narratives of cult behaviour therefore conceal a fairly orthodox struggle for resources. Crucially, they also provide the impetus for the

continued reproduction and reinvention of cult products, as different actors seek to gain leverage or an edge over rivals similarly bargaining for resources.

(v) Cult dynamics

There is a temptation in examining different facets of leader cults to consider them as static entities, probably connected with the strong association of leader cults with monumental public sculpture. However, cults have strong spatial and temporal dynamics. Clark's (2003, 8) study of the spatial content of Stalinism suggests that the Soviet Union was organised into a "cartography of power" in which there was a hierarchy of spheres of political sacredness. Reflecting the monism of power, cults are focused in capital cities and, if it is different, the leader's home region. Resources are poured into magnifying the cult where it can be a showpiece. In outlying or economically unimportant regions, the trappings of a leader cult are often less evident. Research trips to the more remote regions of Turkmenistan bear this out. The photograph I took of Darvasa from a nearby hill in August 2003 (Plate Sixteen) does not show any visual evidence of the cult. Apart from a slogan over a footbridge, there were no statues or public sculptures of Niyazov visible in the mountain village of Nokhur (Plate Eight). Some of the variation may be connected to tribal differences. Niyazov's support in Yomut regions is considered to be weaker than in other areas (Interviewee 24), and the rather unkempt site of the monumental complex in the western city of Balkanabat in May 2005 (Plate Seven) would apparently bear this out. However, the lack of visual representation in outlying regions is, to some extent, compensated by the countless renamings of natural landmarks, farms and villages but these names take some time to percolate into common usage.

Cults also have shifting temporal co-ordinates. The cult of Lenin waxed and waned in counterpoint to that of Stalin, whose own cult varied in intensity at various points between 1928 and 1953 (Shukman: 2003; Thompson: 1988, 99-128; Walker: 2004, 45-59). With Mao, the shifts were even more complex both within and beyond his lifetime. As a leader, he was viewed as a "genius" and a "saviour" but in the period 1961-1964, he was gently disregarded. The 'Thought of Mao' enjoyed a separate life of its own, raging as "the brightest red sun" in 1969, to being derided as "a harmful influence" in 1979, before being subsequently resurrected (Terrill: 1999, 322, 469). More recently, portraits of Kim Jong Il were removed from ministry buildings in November 2004 (AFP: 25 November 2004, Christian Science Monitor: 1 December 2004) and the cult surrounding Colonel Mu'ammarr Qadhafi has been subtly reconfigured during his tenure as Libyan leader.

In Turkmenistan, there has been some variation in intensity of cult display, and the trends are probably analogous with those of the North Korean leadership. Interviewee 12, the most long-term Western expatriate resident in Ashgabat, described in 2003 how the portrait of Niyazov directly opposite his apartment was sometimes changed, removed and replaced, always during the night. There were significant variations in the number of portraits on display in Ashgabat in the four research trips conducted over a four year period, and some bronze statues, such as that of Niyazov outside the Majilis building, were lodged back at the gardens of the sculptors who created them (Interview 6; Plate Twelve), before being returned for display. Inexperienced journalists have speculated whether these might presage a regime change (IS 12) and, while the removal and restorations are never fully explained, Turkmen sources have suggested that Niyazov himself is the initiator, believing that Turkmen will tire of his image if he is over-exposed (RFE/RL Central Asia Report, 31 May 2004).

Cults of personality have shifting co-ordinates, by turns anticipating and responding to external stimuli. In order to remain effective, the vocabulary, imagery, frequency and distribution of cult objects require constant revision. Just as the cults of early Stalinism and late Stalinism, the latter forged by victory in World War II, can be readily distinguished, so it can be expected that Niyazov's own cult, which has already undergone variation of tone and content, will also continue to evolve.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to move SRT forward by looking in more depth at the techniques used by sultanistic rulers to stay in power. Chehabi and Linz identify the coercive capacity of regimes as a factor in their longevity, but do not develop their analysis to look at the range of specific tactics, beyond the suppression of open political dissent, deployed by rulers at a stage *prior* to the emergence of political opposition. Similarly, they correctly identify kleptocratic practices and the fusion of public and private wealth as a distinguishing feature of sultanistic behaviour, but do not link this to its political use as a technique to maintain the allegiance of a compliant client base and to eliminate potential claimants to the ruler's throne. Finally, SRT assumes that the principal function of leader cults is self-glorification – a technique to bridge a fatal charisma deficit. However, cults of personality work in complex ways, not acknowledged in the theoretical literature, that do a great deal to reinforce a ruler's hegemony, while also

providing opportunities for a range of other actors to acquire political and material leverage.

Although considered separately, these three very disparate techniques of political control are interwoven through quite complicated relationships. Readily accessible material resources are necessary to purchase the practical and symbolic instruments of control. The chain of command in government bureaucracies, security agencies and the armed forces can mirror and "play out" existing patronage networks. The cult of personality surrounding Niyazov can become a strategic resource for those excluded from existing networks. The techniques of hard and soft control can merge. To take one example, choreographed spectacles involving hundreds of schoolchildren are designed to express the monumentality, harmony and aesthetic aspirations of the regime. Yet mass display also involves intensive discipline and synchronisation of bodies sufficient to make them "docile" and "legible", a practice more associated with coercive control techniques than symbolism. Thus, while process and output can be distinguished, they can also be conflated into an overall strategy designed to protect existing configurations of power.

The Niyazov regime is far from alone in deploying a disciplinary apparatus for its self-preservation. That is the nature of power. The tools for the setting of permissible space, and its subsequent penetration and manipulation, were inherited from the Soviet period. On this, Niyazov has superimposed his own template through a much more active, interventionist approach that provides fewer of the trade-offs in terms of education and self-betterment that were offered by the Soviet system. In fact, the deterioration of the health and education sectors signifies an almost wilful attempt to dismantle some of the infrastructure that made Soviet life comfortable. What is left is a reduced menu of subsidised essentials and the promise of periodic access, through patronage and clan networks, to the largesse of the state's export earnings. Patronage therefore disciplines as much by expectation as by provision.

The symbolic part of the complex of control aims to make sense of the past and present for Turkmen cut adrift from the certainties of communism. The focus on Turkmen identity, ethnically defined, immediately marginalises minority communities. It seeks to fashion an exclusive Turkmen political community and to regulate the behaviour of that community through devices of varying sophistication and adequacy. The dominant medium is, of course, Niyazov himself, but other features of the cult have become increasingly important and, as the following chapter illustrates, can even be turned back against the regime for the political and economic advantage of their recipients.

Chapter Six - Opposition and Accommodation: Popular Responses to Sultanism in Turkmenistan

Introduction

SRT provides a useful theoretical and analytical tool to explain the emergence, functioning, and durability of the Niyazov regime in post-Soviet Turkmenistan. However, it only takes us so far. It does not give us, to any rigorous degree, a ground-level perspective on how the regime's policies are received by its consumers, and does not provide answers to a series of fundamental questions: are sultanistic leaders popular or disliked outside their close circle of cronies and the security forces in receipt of their largesse? To what extent is sultanism opposed and, if so, how successful is resistance? Can opposition groups force concessions and tactical retreats, or does the regime silence and fragment resistance effectively? How can we account for covert "hidden transcripts" of resistance (Scott: 1990), genuine ambivalence towards, or even accommodation with, the ruler and the regime? Not only is the existing theoretical literature on sultanistic, authoritarian and extreme patrimonial regimes not particularly helpful in dealing with these queries, recent empirical studies (for example, Yalcin: 2002; Herb: 1999; Vandewalle: 1998; Karl: 1997; Yates: 1996; Thompson: 1995) have also given only cursory treatment to the responses engendered by non-democratic governance.

Chehabi and Linz say nothing about popular responses to sultanism in the elaboration of their theoretical work. Linz subsequently recognised this lacuna in the introduction to the second edition of his classic study *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*: "one gap...in my work is the neglect of the unsuccessful but not nonexistent, dangerous and heroic resistance against totalitarianism" (2002: 26). Although Linz excluded authoritarianism, principally because he had previously published a substantial study of opposition to the Franco regime in Spain (1973), he might well have counted sultanistic regimes as an omission. Snyder's supplementary contribution to SRT does consider paths out of sultanism, but focuses on the interaction between political elites and foreign actors. In the process, he overlooks popular responses to sultanism during the currency of the regimes (1998: 53-74). As such, Snyder's analysis is retrospective, working backwards from the collapse of the regime, rather than developing a critique of attitudes to sultanistic regimes while they are in power.

Consequently, the principal objectives of this chapter are to bridge both a theoretical and an empirical gap. By examining responses to sultanism, we can develop our

understanding of the regime-type, assess its strength and durability, and whether any brittle components or control chokepoints prevent the regime from eradicating resistance. We noted in chapters one and two how startlingly common the characteristics of sultanistic behaviour are between regimes that emerged in disparate geopolitical, institutional and cultural contexts. Mapping out patterns of opposition to sultanism opens the possibility that broader patterns of resistance to non-democratic regimes can be detected. In his seminal anthropological study of the Malaysian peasantry (1985), and his further work on patterns of “offstage” resistance in the American Deep South and elsewhere (1990), Scott has argued for the development of “a technology and practice of resistance analogous to Michel Foucault’s analysis of the technology of domination” (1990: 21), discussed in chapter two.

Aside from the broader theoretical objective, there is a narrower but nonetheless important empirical task. There is no published compendium of opposition activity in post-Soviet Turkmenistan available, and there has been no published survey of popular opinion carried out on any subject in Turkmenistan since 1991. What information there is in the public domain is scattered, patchy and must be carefully sifted and evaluated. What this chapter aims to do, within the severe constraints imposed on in-country fieldwork, is very tentatively to sketch a picture of how Turkmen view the regime, and to what lengths they have gone to oppose or adapt themselves to a sultanistic political environment.

It should be stated at the outset, however, that empirical findings in this chapter can be no more than guarded and provisional. Open expressions of political dissent in Turkmenistan are rare. The consequences are usually severe. NGOs such as Memorial HRC, IHF, OSI TP, Amnesty International and others have accumulated evidence that dissidents and protestors have been subject to psychiatric hospitalisation, imprisonment, forced resettlement to uninhabited desert regions, and victimisation in the workplace. Relatives of those involved have also been targeted, regardless of their age or vulnerability. In March 2006, for example, two local journalists who gave a fairly anodyne interview to RFE/RL TS were detained for nearly a fortnight and, upon release, one was diagnosed with serious kidney problems consistent with sustained beatings (RFE/RL TS, 22 March 2006).

Given these outcomes, and the constant KNB surveillance of foreign visitors, the opportunities to locate and conduct substantive interviews with Turkmen were severely circumscribed. Respondents were extremely reticent to begin with, even when discussing non-political subjects, no doubt fearing serious consequences should their views be

recorded and reported to the authorities. However, once a rapport had been established, and the respondents were secure in my identity and intentions, several offered their opinions on the regime unprompted. The interviews were normally conducted in Turkmen and Russian, sometimes with an interpreter, or in English, and were written up carefully in code as soon as possible, prior to full transcription back in the UK.

Nevertheless, the limited number of interviews conducted over a three-year period on four research trips is testament to the dangers entailed in establishing and arranging in-country contacts. Formal survey work would have created formidable practical and methodological difficulties. Instead, focus was placed on interviewing as large a cross-section of interviewees as possible. These covered urban and rural locations, different ethnic and tribal groups, and a range of professions. Four out of Turkmenistan's five *velayets* (regions) were visited. There is no attempt to suggest that I have obtained sufficient interview data to present general conclusions on public opinion in Turkmenistan. The conclusions from this source alone are necessarily impressionistic and provisional. Nevertheless, they represent a modest start and, when combined with participant observation and scrutiny of reliably sourced reports compiled by NGOs, dissident groups and reputable news sources, a more rounded, complex, and ambivalent picture of popular responses to the Niyazov began to emerge.

The substance of this chapter is predicated on the assumption that the locus of response and resistance can be found in the terrain of power. The technologies and tactics of control deployed by Niyazov's regime structure the patterns and forms of dissent. Interviews, opposition web sites and printed sources all testify that responses to authority cluster and fixate on the personality and actions of Niyazov. That in itself is a significant finding, for although on a daily basis Turkmen treat the propaganda and paraphernalia of the cult surrounding Niyazov as "wallpaper", largely irrelevant to their lives, when they do engage with political issues, Niyazov's persona looms large. This is equally true of the opposition in exile. Dissident politics is constellated around the 'Niyazov problem', frequently to the detriment of substantive policy issues.

The remainder of this chapter follows this theme but attempts to broaden out the analysis by examining responses to Niyazov's rule as against its own claims, ambitions and actions. In doing so, it is structured in to five further sections.

Firstly, the totalising nature of the regime, that is to say, the implications of its conscious strategy of closing down any and all public space, is briefly outlined in order to frame

discussion of efforts to develop an ideological, programmatic opposition both domestically and in exile.

Secondly, the bleak story of attempts to open some formal political space in the system by opponents of the regime is told. Its failures are deemed to reflect deeper trends and divisions within Turkmen society, and the comparative strength of the coercive apparatus at Niyazov's disposal.

The third section looks at patterns of political activity engendered by the regime's own performance claims. These have led to scattered and sporadic incidents of open issue-based dissent, normally from previously apolitical sources. This response has often taken the form of "rightful resistance" (O' Brien: 1996), that is to say, holding regimes to account against their own claims. While often effective against other non-democratic regimes, such tactics have enjoyed much less success in Turkmenistan. This section offers possible explanations as to why this has been the case.

The government's ritualisation of political power, and the concomitant disconnection between state and society that is assumed to ensue, forms the fourth part of the analysis. The rentier economy has allowed the regime to jettison all but the most rudimentary forms of formal political accountability. The linking mechanisms between the state and citizenry are principally to be found in the imagery and vocabulary of Niyazov's cult. How does this play out? This section finds that while the classic repertoire of offstage dissent in the form of satire, backhandedness, duplicity and *stiob*⁷⁴ exists, a more ambivalent attitude to the regime, redolent of developed Brezhnev-era socialism, is also in evidence.

The final section of this chapter ties up these strands by formulating the reasons why, despite the uneven but persistent incidences of resistance in various guises, Niyazov's regime has, uniquely among FSU states, managed to inoculate itself almost completely against sustained popular opposition. Returning to the theoretical framework, we can then begin to approach the broader possibilities and difficulties that confront opponents of durable sultanistic regimes, and consider with greater sophistication, how popular responses to sultanistic behaviour can be more effectively mapped.

⁷⁴ This is a Russian term best described as ironic over-identification with authority to the point whether the power structures are unable to distinguish whether the action is genuine enthusiasm or subtle dissent.

The politicisation of the apolitical

Niyazov's regime has totalising ambitions. It has aimed for, and to a great extent achieved, the closure of formal and informal political space. Furthermore, it has also sought to determine the parameters and content of social space, defined more broadly. As discussed in chapter four, opposition political parties are not allowed to function in Turkmenistan. There are no independent-minded parliamentary deputies. The media is closely controlled by the state. Individual opposition activists are imprisoned, hospitalised or exiled. *Samizdat* publications are extremely rare.

To reinforce the control of social space, the urban environment is flooded with the regime's imagery and vocabulary. Discourse in schools, universities, workplaces and in those permitted areas of associational life, is circumscribed and framed by official texts and rituals. Even further down the scale, Niyazov and his circle have aimed at the transformation of individual consciousness and behaviour through injunctions on the "correct" way to speak, dress, look, work, and organise one's family and home, encapsulated most obviously in Niyazov's book, *Ruhnama*.

Two points arise here. Firstly, although Niyazov speaks regularly of the need for political unity and stability, he rarely enunciates directly the regime's totalising ambitions in the social sphere; secondly, although the state is highly effective in closing off political space, it is unevenly successful in doing so with social space, partly because of a lack of resources, but also because of a curious half-heartedness on the part of government officials, that probably has more to do with various dysfunctional characteristics of the regime. Indeed, the paradoxical impact of the accretion of surveillance, laws and injunctions governing the minutiae of social behaviour, particularly in urban areas where it can be most effectively regulated, serves to politicise actions that were hitherto simple expressions of social solidarity.

When Niyazov does declare the purpose of his social injunctions – normally during televised Cabinet meetings – it is usually as an aside, rather than as a formal statement of policy. Thus, in September 2003, he ordered that walls and fences between private houses in Ashgabat should either be demolished or replaced by wire fences because "everyone must know about each other" (*Gundogar*: TWNB, 20 September 2003). A few months later, Niyazov ordered the installation of closed circuit television (CCTV) across Ashgabat in order that the government would know "if a fly quietly buzzes by...not due to lack of trust, but to avoid disorder" (*Altyn Asyr*: TWNB, 23 February 2004).

Interestingly, on two subsequent research visits to Ashgabat, in November 2004 and May 2005, neither order appears to have been fulfilled.⁷⁵

In contrast, the state's ability to regulate behaviour, as opposed to physical space, has been much more vigorous and effective, reputedly bolstered by a large network of informers in apartment complexes and village neighbourhoods. Thus, unregulated civil society activities are discouraged. The establishment of independent clubs for sports and hobbies, or civic functions such as cleaning up the local environment, is not permitted (IS 1). There are also severe limitations on religious worship. Even the few non-Muslim religious groups that have been legally registered, notably a small number of Baptist, Hare Krishna, and Seventh Day Adventist congregations, have been subject to harassment and threats from local KNB agents (IS 2).

The government has also successfully suppressed social gatherings for specific events as well as for ongoing activities, although formal reasons are rarely given for the restrictions. Thus, parties celebrating Turkey's success in the football World Cup of 2002 were forcibly dispersed, presumably to prevent any unsanctioned articulation of pan-Turkic solidarity that might evolve into anti-regime chants and slogans. Large wedding parties and high school graduation celebrations were prohibited in 2003, possibly because they simply involved a substantial, uncontrolled gathering of people consuming alcohol. Karaoke machines were removed from cafes and bars in 2005, perhaps because they deflected attention from the heavily stylised form of patriotic traditional music sponsored by Niyazov (IWPR RCA no. 203, 14 May 2003; IWPR RCS No. 410, 17 September 2005; *Neutralny Turkmenistan*: TWNB, 23 August 2005).

The effect of these sanctions has been the reverse of their intention. Instead of eliminating dissent, hitherto anodyne and uncontroversial activities have been politicised. A group of men meeting to socialise and watch a football match on satellite television becomes an illicit and political act, a government decree effectively creating dissidence where previously there was none. Such measures also create possibilities for small acts of defiance and disobedience that simultaneously reaffirm solidarity and individuality. Thus,

⁷⁵ In the former case, it would be impractical to destroy the walls of the small courtyards separating traditional dwellings, particularly as the walls function as a means to keep animals in and burglars out. The practical task of doing so in Ashgabat, let alone other urban centres would be considerable. It is likely that a lack of funds, technology and political will is responsible for the failure to install surveillance cameras comprehensively. Although a small number of CCTV cameras were erected on major roads, these could just as well be to monitor traffic flows and record accidents.

the regime's attempts to flatten political life actually create politicisation and potential dissidence at every turn.

Scott has argued that there are two potential and contrasting outcomes to this form of totalising power (1990: 9). The first is that the pressure to wear an outward mask of conformity creates a countervailing pressure that can be difficult to contain. Thus, the greater the regime's demands, the more radical becomes the "hidden transcript" of dissent, and the more inclined people become to dissent in no matter how small a way. The second outcome is that the public mask will eventually cause the face to fit it: the mask becomes normalised and is viewed as inevitable, legitimate and just. This was the intention, and often the reality, of socialisation in the Soviet period, most successfully during Stalinism (Fitzpatrick: 2005; Brooks: 2000; Petrone: 2000; Jones: 2004).

In Turkmenistan, this binary distinction does not appear to capture a more complex and subtle reality of genuine ambivalence on the part of Turkmen, discussed below, in which different attitudes, emotions and actions often co-mingle. Nevertheless, interviews and field observation in Turkmenistan suggested that those respondents who had been educated almost exclusively in the post-Soviet era, *and* had profited from the regime by gaining university places, were more likely to accept the restrictions and requirements of the government (Interview 17), than those educated abroad (Interviewees 3 and 16) or older citizens who had lived through the Soviet era, and who were much more inclined to be cynical about Niyazov (Interviewees 7, 11, 13, 14, 20, 23 and 24).

Interviewee 8, a British archaeologist who had worked in schools and colleges over a six year period purely on archaeological projects, had noticed a changing pattern of increasing socialisation among children and students into the regime's cultural output. This view was reinforced by participants in a workshop on Turkmenistan at Oxford University in June 2004 (probably the largest conference that has occurred in Western Europe of people with experience of the regime), many of whom who expressed the view that Niyazov was successfully creating a nation of "sheep," principally through the repetitive use of *Ruhnama* in schools.

In what way do these findings relate to political responses to Niyazov's governance? The reach and efficacy of the Niyazov regime's totalising ambitions are a reflection of the strength of the state. As Skocpol pointed out, mass disaffection towards a regime is a relatively rare phenomenon (1979). Revolutions indicate as much, if not more, about the strength of the state apparatus than of those forces that seek the regime's demise. In

Turkmenistan's case, the state has limits, but has had enough penetration to see off political threats. In terms of physically controlling the behaviour of individuals or small groups, these are human tasks that the security agencies can complete robustly and effectively. In sultanistic systems, long-term strategic thinking is subordinated to the caprice of the ruler. Instead, there is huge occupational insecurity, a significant turnover of personnel, and the demand for immediate, demonstrable outcomes. Accordingly, discrete and labour-intensive security operations, such as dispersing unauthorised gatherings, produce concrete results that can be reported back up the chain of command. Constructing a more sophisticated architecture of repression requires greater technical expertise, capital, political will and continuity. It does not yield results in the short-term and, therefore, officials in district and municipal administrations in Turkmenistan have much less interest in its implementation.

The closure of formal political space

(i) The role of opposition political parties

How has this regime strategy played out in relation to orthodox, programmatic political party dissidence in the period 1992 to 2006? An important dimension of understanding how and why sultanistic regimes prove to be durable necessitates an examination of political responses to sultanism, and an explanation of why alternative political forces often fail to cohere, notwithstanding the chronic inadequacies of the regime and idiosyncrasies of the ruler. To summarise, the political response to sultanism in the Turkmen case has been extremely weak. Opposition parties, largely functioning from exile, as distinct from sporadic single-issue protests (examined in the next section), have singularly failed to make any domestic political impact following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It could be argued that their activities have even been counter-productive, given that their leaders have, in most cases, not provided the integrity that would have beneficially contrasted with Niyazov's behaviour. Indeed, most opposition leaders actually served happily in his government until they fell from favour, usually amid allegations of malfeasance.

Between 1992 and 1994, the political opposition was effectively organised from exile in Moscow. Under the banner of the Turkmenistan Foundation (TF), it was headed by the former Soviet diplomat and first Turkmen Foreign Minister, Avdy Kuliyeu, who resigned and fled abroad in August 1992, ostensibly in protest at Niyazov's emerging cult of personality. Although well-respected and not believed to be personally corrupt, Kuliyeu

had a reputation for being difficult to work with, and his commitment to democratisation while in government was minimal (Ochs: 1997, 323). Nevertheless, he is believed to have used his contacts within the former Soviet diplomatic elite to secure the support of a section of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RMFA) for a coup attempt in 1993-94. However, the importation of TF materials by train from Russia in 1993, allied to rumours that a coup was being prepared by former Spetsnaz commandos with the aid of one Turkmen military unit, prompted Niyazov to act quickly. He hastily arranged a referendum, held in January 1994, to prolong his rule for a further eight years, purged the government of any officials believed to be sympathetic to the coup, and arranged quietly for the subsequent detention in Tashkent of some of those involved (Ochs: 1997). Remaining TF sympathisers then fled to Moscow, further diminishing the core of domestic opposition activists.

Further secret cells of Turkmen opposition groups emerged after 1994 (Ponamarov 2004). Recruitment and organisation for a potential coup was stepped up while Niyazov underwent heart surgery in the US during late 1997. However, any chance of ousting Niyazov was almost certainly missed at this point. Kuliyeu arrived in Ashgabat in early 1998 with the intention of seeking registration for an opposition party, and with an alleged promise from the Russian government to support regime change if demonstrations were sufficiently large and prolonged. However, Kuliyeu was detained at the airport on arrival and, after three days, agreed to take safe passage back to Moscow, dismaying his supporters and probably damaging his credibility permanently.

There are several aspects to this episode that remain unclear. Ponamarov (2004) and Kadyrov (2004) both raise the possibility that the 1994 and 1998 proposed coup attempts were orchestrated by the KNB to flush out potential opponents from within the regime. It is also unclear at what level, if at all, Kuliyeu's activities and plans were sanctioned and supported by the RMFA. The Russian government was notoriously inchoate during the Yeltsin presidency, with different ministries frequently pursuing diametrically opposed agendas. Contradictory policy sometimes emanated from within the same ministry. Niyazov's nationalising rhetoric may have concerned senior Russian government officials, who saw in Kuliyeu a potentially more compliant "Euro-Turkmen" or neo-Soviet political figure. Nevertheless, it is far from certain whether these threats were simply designed to test Niyazov's resolve during a period in which prices for gas exports were under dispute, or whether the RMFA could have successfully organised a coup in any event, given the elevation of ethnic Turkmen to senior positions within the internal security apparatus by the mid-1990s.

The opposition parties currently operating from exile are poorly regarded, both within Turkmenistan, and by international human rights bodies and foreign governments. There are five main parties, essentially small splinter groups, comprised of former ministers and ambassadors, most of whom are believed to have embezzled large sums from the state and then defected abroad.

The activities of TF diminished after Kuliyeu was subjected to beatings in Moscow by unknown assailants (presumed to be either Turkmen KNB agents, or elements of the Russian FSB working on the KNB's behalf). The Watan ("Homeland") party, led by Khudaberdy Orazov, the former head of Turkmenistan's Central Bank who is wanted on charges of embezzlement, represents northern Yomuts abroad. The National Patriotic Movement (NPM), a tiny groupuscule, is comprised of western Yomuts. The Republican Party, led by former Turkmen ambassador to Turkey Nurmukhammet Khanamov (also sought on embezzlement charges) promotes the interests of southern Turkmen, notably the Salor tribe from the Tejen region.

Although representatives of these parties met in Vienna on 13 June 2002 to form an opposition umbrella group named the Union of Democratic Forces of Turkmenistan (UDFT), after that meeting virtually no further cooperation has materialised. Notably absent from the Vienna summit that created the UDFT was the People's Democratic Movement of Turkmenistan (PDMT), the political vehicle of the former Foreign Minister Boris Shikmuradov, who was almost certainly in Turkmenistan at this point preparing the November 2002 coup attempt, for which he was subsequently sentenced to life imprisonment⁷⁶. The PDMT represents minority and mixed-race groups but has remained aloof from cooperating with other parties almost certainly because of personality clashes and enmity on ethno-tribal lines.

The failure of the opposition parties to work government and public opinion in the US and Europe effectively, can be attributed to several discrete factors. Firstly, the opposition parties in exile have little in common other than their opposition to Niyazov. There is scant evidence that they are committed to political pluralism or economic reform, Shikmuradov, for example, was fairly open about the need for a period of authoritarian governance following Niyazov's departure. The parties are controlled by individuals who were happy to serve Niyazov loyally over many years, and defected

⁷⁶ There has been no information about Shikmuradov's whereabouts or condition since early 2003. He is presumed to have been killed in prison.

largely because other groups around Niyazov were prepared to expose the extent to which they were corrupt. Moreover, the differing sequence of defections has resulted in inimical relations between some of the cliques involved. Thus, the mutual hostility of the TF and PDMT stemmed from Shikhmuradov serving as one of Niyazov's most outwardly loyal ministers for a decade after Kuliyevev had defected. Indeed, Shikhmuradov was even instrumental in formulating the Khalk Maslahaty resolution that confirmed Niyazov as life president in December 1999. Thus, there is an absence of programmatic synergy between the various parties other than to support the removal of Niyazov from power.

The second main obstacle to unity between opposition parties is, according to Kadyrov (2004), that they have been constructed along ethno-tribal lines, and function principally to promote their clan interests. Kuliyevev, who is a product of Soviet diplomatic training, has stood alone in advocating a secular, centralised political system in order to eliminate tribalism. The more regionally based parties have preferred a federal solution, underpinned by a national parliamentary system, in order to balance tribal interests, and disseminate power away from Ashgabat (and the Ahal Teke) to the regions⁷⁷. Although these could be perceived as tactical disagreements, Watan, the Republican Party and the NPM effectively privilege the carving out of spheres of interest based along clan lines because their support bases begin and end at this level. This issue flags up one of the most acute political challenges to be faced by the post-Niyazov political elite, and also mirrors the variations in Soviet tribal policy, described in chapter three, between those CPSU elements who sought to balance tribal differences, with those who strove to eliminate them altogether.

The third reason why the opposition in exile has proven to be ineffective is that it has had very limited grass-roots support within Turkmenistan. According to Interviewees 3 and 10, these parties are perceived as corrupt, self-serving and remote, with little connection to most Turkmen. Their political activities are viewed as predominantly self-serving, either as hobbies or as self-promotion in an elite power game. The partial exception to this is Shikhmuradov. Firstly, as the highest ranking non-pure ethnic Turkmen in government he was considered by Russians, Armenians, Uzbeks and other ethnic minorities as their patron. Secondly, he showed himself genuinely prepared to take a personal risk to oust Niyazov in November 2002. As noted, it is unknown whether

⁷⁷ Occasionally, the parties have publicly disagreed on their Internet forums about which tribes constitute the more authentic ethnic Turkmen, while Niyazov's alleged mixed Kurd – Turkmen parentage is discussed in disparaging terms.

Shikhmuradov died in prison in 2003 but, if alive, he could have a role in shaping a post-Niyazov succession scenario.

The very few attempts to form a political party domestically have been terminated at an early stage. Taking the constitution at its word, 63 year old Gurbandurdy Dyrdykulyev from Suvuchi, near the western city of Balkanabat, wrote to the municipal authorities in February 2004, requesting permission to hold a peaceful protest and to make preparations to form an opposition political party. He was detained and transferred to a psychiatric institution in Bojunazan, a remote part of Lebap *velayet* situated 450 miles away (Memorial HRC in TWNB, 13 February 2004), and his wife was later informed that any attempts to speak to foreign media outlets would lead to the termination of her visiting rights (Memorial HRC in TWNB, 7 May 2004).

The totalising aspirations of the Niyazov regime have therefore had several effects on the way that mainstream political opposition functions. At an individual level, the regime has effectively atomised the population, to make potential opposition activists feel politically "lonely", as can be seen most obviously in the Dyrdykulyev case. The squeezing of political space has also shaped the development of opposition parties. No credible émigré opposition force has emerged to unite the Turkmen around obvious themes such as the regime's corruption, political repression and lack of democracy. Opposition parties are fatally compromised by their previous involvement with Niyazov and the well-documented instances of corruption involving their leaders. Although they have provided principled opposition to the use of *Ruhnama* as the main focus of the education system, leading opposition figures were also instrumental in promoting Niyazov's cult of personality when it was personally beneficial to do so. In short, they offer little other than a change of team within the elite and the prospect of increasing tribal tensions. As a consequence, they have remained marginal to the limited efforts of the international community to promote democratisation within the country.

Finally, the vast majority of emigrants from Turkmenistan since 1992 have been ethnic Slavs or Germans, most of whom have had little interest in political activism after their departure. The invalidation of foreign higher education degrees obtained after 1 January 1993, pursuant to Presidential Decree No.126, has resulted in a declining number of students being educated abroad. Niyazov has publicly made clear his opposition to Turkmen students attending foreign universities, apart from under strictly controlled agreements reached at official level. The payment of remittances to students abroad from their parents has also been curtailed, and exit visas have periodically come into force

after 1992. The families of any students that failed to return to Turkmenistan would almost certainly lose their jobs and face official harassment. As a result, there is barely any stratum of politicised, educated Turkmen abroad that is capable of formulating a sustained and coherent critique of the regime, can liaise intelligently with NGOs and foreign state actors, and has political credibility within Turkmenistan. Thus, while directly preventing the formation of domestic political opposition through coercion, Niyazov has also proven to be effective in curtailing the development of functioning opposition movements outside the country.

(ii) The Military as Political Actor

The only other opposition activity designed to replace Niyazov appears to have been orchestrated principally by non-Teke Turkmen, ethnic minorities and those of mixed race. The two known plots involving army officers in March 1998 and the November 2002 coup attempt, where it is believed a small number of troops and border guards were implicated, appeared to be driven to some degree by the gradual nativisation of the military and security agencies.

The 1998 military plot was recounted by Interviewee 1, at that time a senior military officer in command of the Turkmen army's medical services unit. No supporting documentary evidence of this episode was found and, therefore, Interviewee 1's account should be viewed cautiously. Nevertheless, he presented as a reliable and realistic interviewee in relation to other questions and had nothing to gain personally by inventing or embellishing the action.

Interviewee 1 described how Niyazov had circulated an order in 1997 stipulating that all senior officers in the armed forces must be pure ethnic Turkmen. The army, in particular, had historically taken a high proportion of Turkmen citizens of Russian, Uzbek or mixed ethnicities. The decree effectively placed an arbitrary ceiling on the career paths of many young soldiers, while effectively ending the careers of several senior officers. In response, Interviewee 1 described how an underground political circle was formed, organised by mixed race and ethnic minority army officers, and led by Rustam Jumayev (a Turkmen-Tajik), who had close links with then Foreign Minister Boris Shikhmuradov

(himself Turkmen-Armenian). Shikhmuradov covertly supported the group and promoted his client Jumayev to be a Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs⁷⁸.

An important member of the group was an unnamed ethnic Uzbek major, based in the eastern town of Kazanaryk (in an ethnic Uzbek region of Lebap *velayet*). According to Interviewee 1, who knew of but did not participate in the plot, in March 1998, the major and his son (also an army officer) gathered their followers, seized military equipment and vehicles, and set off to Ashgabat to stage a coup. Although the actual numbers involved in the rebellion were relatively small (under 30), they were able to travel more than 200 km before being eliminated by a combination of regular army tanks and attack helicopters. The rebellion was spontaneous, weakly planned and highly unlikely to have succeeded, although it indicates the depth of opposition to Niyazov that appears to have developed.

The involvement of the military in the 2002 coup attempt is more difficult to trace definitively, due to the number of conflicting versions of events that circulated. However, Interviewee 1, who fled the country after the arrest of Jumayev and Shikhmuradov, advised that many of those who knew in advance of the action, including some ethnic Turkmen officers, were dissatisfied with Niyazov's nativisation policy. A number of non-Turkmen were arrested and tried for their involvement, including Turks and Azerbaijanis. Of the 46 ethnic Turkmen sentenced in connection with the plot, over 70% were non-Ahal Tekes, and many emanated from northern and eastern regions of the country associated with ethnic Uzbeks, Yomuts and Ersaris (Kadyrov: 2004). Some of these had links to border guards and KNB officers. Interviewee 22, an ethnic Uzbek paediatric neurologist from the northern city of Dashoguz, explained how her husband had been able to utilise contacts within the KNB and border service to assist those involved in the plot to escape to Uzbekistan. Her husband was eventually arrested, however, and sentenced to 15 years hard labour in a desert penal colony.

Moreover, the 1998 (if true) and 2002 coup attempts raise the issue of the extent to which the armed forces could emerge as significant political actors in Turkmenistan. In situations where other sultanistic leaders have faced crisis, the military has often acted as the broker with emerging political forces, or as a neutral guarantor of national stability. More rarely, the army has taken the lead in ousting the ruler - the cases of Jean-Claude

⁷⁸ Jumayev was one of those arrested and imprisoned for allegedly helping Shikhmuradov to organise the November 2002 coup attempt.

Duvalier in February 1986 and Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner in February 1989 being two prominent examples.

The November 2002 coup attempt should rather be read as a last attempt to seize power by a mixture of forces that had formerly prospered under Niyazov but had subsequently found themselves to be marginalised, as a result of racism or their own acquisitiveness and political ambition. There is no guarantee that it would have succeeded even if the KNB had not located and successfully “broken” key organisers beforehand. There has been little evidence to suggest that the upper ranks of the military are likely to engage in any coordinated attempt to remove Niyazov.

In Turkmenistan’s case, the military is increasingly unlikely to emerge as either a major political threat to the regime or as a pivotal player in a post-Niyazov transition. Not only has Niyazov ensured that senior military officers are “well looked after” financially and in terms of personal benefits, by 2002, the upper and middle ranks had been thoroughly nativised, with barely any non-ethnic Turkmen wielding any position of power. Interviewee 1’s own career is a case in point. As an ethnic Talysh originally from Azerbaijan, he was advised that in order to stay in the army, he would be required to learn Turkmen. When he did so, passing language proficiency examinations, he was still discharged notwithstanding his competence and experience.

More generally, the political role of the military across the FSU states has been constricted after 1992, despite often severe damage to its corporate interests. Brian Taylor contends that the prevailing organisational culture in the Soviet military was one of non-involvement in politics, and that this has carried over beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union (2001: 924-953). He cites the army’s reluctance to intervene in the Russian political crises of August 1991 and October 1993 as the outcome of a definitive ceding of political power to the CPSU during the Soviet period. While Taylor does not extrapolate his findings beyond Russia, the same preferences would certainly appear to hold true in other FSU states. On the very rare occasions when the army in an FSU state has openly come out against the government, notably in Azerbaijan in 1993, the causes were exceptional and specific (a failed war against Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh), and once the crisis was resolved, the army quickly returned to the barracks and has not been a political actor of consequence since.

Although Niyazov emerged stronger from the 2002 coup events by effectively flushing out any opponents within military, internal security and other structures, Kadyrov (2004)

has argued that he has increased the number of Ahal Tekes in senior positions. Conscripts and junior officers would not have the following or seniority to present a threat to the regime. Of the senior ministers, the carefully sequenced purging of Yolly Gurbanmuradov (from the Chukan tribe) and Rejep Saparov (a northern Yomut) in 2005, for example, would confirm the trend that Niyazov decided to rely increasingly on cadres from his own tribe.

However, tribal favouritism is in no way institutionalised. Niyazov has built his political reputation on suppressing tribal disunity. Turkmen from the smaller tribes, such as Interviewee 11, conceded that Niyazov's record on tribal appointments could be much worse. There remains the strong possibility that an Ahal Teke successor would exercise much greater tribal discrimination in the military, and security services. Accordingly non-Teke Turkmen may well have calculated that they can still attain senior positions and privileges under Niyazov, and thus he represents a more attractive proposition than potential alternative leaders.

Issue-based Protest: The Success and Failures of 'Rightful Resistance'

The anatomy, content and reach of political power in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, clustered materially and symbolically around the persona of Niyazov, has determined, to a significant degree, the form and strategies of Turkmen opposition movements and parties. The instruments of power – law, policing, the security agencies, political hospitalisation – all of which promote and protect the totalising ambitions of the Niyazov regime, and reinforced by distinct structural peculiarities within Turkmen society, have combined to stunt orthodox, programmatic challenges to the government.

In an analogous fashion, the government's discourse about its own performance is an integral component of its legitimacy, has shaped the context and outcomes of the few single-issue protests against the Niyazov regime. As Scott notes, "the weakness of ideological hegemony is that its claims can then be tested against its promises" (1985: 389). Thus, the Turkmen regime's own ludicrous boasts (for example, year on year GDP growth exceeding 20%) provide a setting and an opportunity to oppose the regime within its own framework of reference (Scott: 1990: 104). Scott termed this critique "rightful resistance", the use of the rhetoric and commitments of the powerful to curb their own excesses, thereby turning the instruments and values associated with domination and control to new purposes (O'Brien: 1986, 33). Resistance of this sort "works the territory

between elites and challenges malfeasors using an approved discourse” (O’Brien:1986: 34), in order to make elites “prisoners of their own rhetoric” (Thompson: 1975, 263).

There are two important advantages to pursuing resistance by critiquing a regime along the grain of its own ideology. Firstly, such an approach is less laden with risks for those involved, as it relies on the appropriation of established and approved principles, statutes and values. Secondly, it also uses existing opportunity structures, exploiting divisions within an elite by co-opting influential advocates within the regime, and by using a persuasive and congenial normative language, while simultaneously disavowing revolutionary alternatives (O’Brien: 1986: 51).

As a consequence, “rightful resistance” has proven to be a useful tactic in the armoury of those without formal, constitutional channels of redress. Its lineage in the modern age can be traced to the appeals of machine-breakers in the Industrial Revolution (Hobsbawm and Rudé: 2001), the naïve monarchists who followed Emilian Pugachev in eighteenth century Russia, and the “rebels in the name of the Tsar” associated with the Bezdna and Chigrin Affairs in the nineteenth century (Field: 1989, 31-207). More recently, “rightful resistance” has been a frequent occurrence in communist societies. In rural China, for example, villagers have regularly accused Communist Party cadres of being inauthentic communists in order to further local complaints (O’Brien: 1986: 36-36). Industrial workers in the German Democratic Republic employed the egalitarian language learned from Communist Party officials to voice wage demands and undermine the Stakhanovite ‘Activist’ movement of the early 1950s (Kopstein: 1996, 395-423). Polish workers in the 1970s and 1980s similarly accused Communist Party officials of behaving like a “Red Bourgeoisie” (Scott: 1985, 339).

The successful use of “rightful resistance” as a mechanism to frame demands for policy change lies principally in the regime’s own responsiveness. If concessions are made, perhaps by dismissing certain corrupt officials or by freezing prices on essential goods, a rudimentary contract is established between the protestors and the government, which can potentially be reproduced elsewhere. In essence, the protestors have established a relationship with their rulers, forged around a common awareness of rights and use of the regime’s own vocabulary, which then tests the state’s ideological commitment and serves as a pattern for future resistance.

In post-Soviet Turkmenistan, resistance of this sort has framed virtually all of the significant social protests that have occurred in sporadic and uncoordinated form since

1992, but with only a mixed degree of success. The first verifiable episode of this type was a spontaneous protest on 12 July 1995 in Ashgabat against non-payment of wages, shortages of bread, and the termination of water supplies to city centre apartment blocks. At this point, the country was, in common with other former Soviet states, undergoing severe economic contraction. The EBRD estimates that GDP had fallen by 20% on the previous year in 1994, with inflation simultaneously rocketing to 2400% (IS 3). Economic reforms had been introduced sparingly in Turkmenistan, principally in the form of limited liberalisation of the agricultural sector and the introduction of a new taxation regime. Although protests over living standards were not uncommon in other Central Asian republics, the rarity of the Ashgabat protest meant that it was perceived as a major threat to regime security (Ponamarov: 2004).

The protestors were apparently leaderless and focused entirely on their immediate grievances. According to Ochs (1997: 343) and Ponamarov (2004), they went out of their way to reassure local ethnic minority residents, some of whom had been scapegoated in the economic crisis of the late Soviet period, that the protest was aimed at the state and that they (principally Russians and Armenians) should join the demonstration. An important trigger for the protests was Niyazov's claim, made the same week, that the country's oil and gas reserves were transforming Turkmenistan into another Kuwait. In order to reinforce the impression of rapid urban modernisation, residential water supplies had been diverted to service a prestige complex of newly constructed fountains in central Ashgabat (IS 4). Thus, the demands of the protestors, who were mostly middle-aged women, was framed in terms of holding Niyazov to account against his rhetorical performance claims. The outcome was that the demonstration was forcibly suppressed by the security services, and the ringleaders arrested and castigated on state television, somewhat implausibly, as drug addicts and hooligans (IS 5). However, the government also moved to restore residential water supplies and restock local kiosks (Ochs: 1997, 344) which would suggest that, while the protest organisers no doubt paid a heavy price, the framing of protest within the government's own discourse was, in this instance, effective.

There were no further demonstrations recorded until April 2002, when another group of women protested about the treatment meted out to their imprisoned relatives by KNB agents. The women appealed to Niyazov to intervene personally in the matter, effectively petitioning him to make good on his rhetorical statements about the rights and freedoms enjoyed by Turkmen citizens (RFE/RL TS, 22 April 2002). Niyazov used the protests as a pretext to purge the upper echelons of the KNB, whom he wrongly suspected of

plotting against him⁷⁹. Although conditions temporarily improved in prisons, it would appear that the protests were exploited by Niyazov as a mechanism to reinforce his political dominance, rather than to correct the excesses of his subordinates. Nevertheless, the perceived success of this protest appears to have encouraged a group of around 200 women to petition Niyazov outside the presidential palace in Ashgabat on 1 August 2002 to crack down on corruption in the education system and in local government (IS 6). Niyazov had, during 2001 and 2002, been particularly active in dismissing and imprisoning senior officials with almost bewildering frequency on embezzlement and corruption charges. The close proximity of the earlier protest is likely to have encouraged the women in the belief that a peaceful appeal to Niyazov, framing the protest within current official discourse on the importance of clean government, might result in remedial action. On this occasion, however, the authorities reacted within 20 minutes, by bundling the women onto buses and detaining them at various detention centres.

The third recorded set of protests occurred in July 2004 in the Ashgabat suburb of Keshi. Niyazov gave an order that a number of streets were to be demolished with ten days notice, on the grounds that he had passed through the area each day en route to the presidential palace, and found the roadside dwellings not to be in keeping with Ashgabat's new urban landscape. Sources differ on the number of people affected by the decision but the estimates varied between 500 and 900 families (Plate Three; IWPR RCA No. 301, 21 July 2004; RFE/RL TS, 21 July 2004; IHF, 16 July 2004). A group of 70 women formed a protest group to oppose the decision, in this instance framing their demands in terms of Turkmenistan's international commitments as signatories of the United Nations Charter, rather than pursuant to government policy or Niyazov's informal statements. The entire settlement was subject to house arrest for three days. Women from neighbouring areas who brought in provisions were transported forcibly out of the area. The affected community was decanted to scrubland in an empty region north of Ashgabat. Undeterred, the government ordered the arbitrary demolition of further well-established residences in central Ashgabat, between u.Garashsyslyk and u.Bitarplyk, in October 2004 to make way for a new children's theme park (Plate Four). Attending the site to interview residents and observe the demolitions (Interview 15), residents explained to me that they had been offered inadequate housing and been granted an insufficient

⁷⁹ Interviewee 1, as a senior army officer in 2002, explained that, while mixed race army officers had wanted to depose Niyazov to prevent the indigenisation of the armed forces in the late 1990s, the KNB actually remained entirely loyal throughout. The purging of almost 80% of senior KNB officers in April 2002 was therefore the result of Niyazov's paranoia, rather than out of any concrete evidence of disloyalty. Other sources (e.g. ICG Reports) disagree. Ironically, the purges probably served to estrange Niyazov from the KNB. As a consequence, it is now the security agency upon whose loyalty Niyazov can least count.

time to vacate their properties and obtain alternative accommodation⁸⁰. Although the displaced residents expressed anger and great anxiety about the process, the crackdown in Keshi a few weeks earlier had deterred them from organising formal protests although, according to Interviewee 2, the Chair of the Faculty of Architecture at the Turkmen Polytechnic Institute, some residents had lodged (unsuccessful) claims to prevent the demolitions under city planning law.

Holding the regime to account on its own performance claims through “rightful resistance” has been a tactic employed with diminishing success by protestors in Turkmenistan. It cannot be determined for certain whether Niyazov knew of the security services’ response to the two protests held in 2004. However, the likelihood is that he did, given the rarity of political protests within the country, and the security concerns implicit in protests outside the presidential palace and along Niyazov’s daily route to his office. There has been no official reporting of the incidents in 2002 and 2004, and thus it is difficult to gauge the rationale for the regime’s very robust response to protests organised by women who had very specific, local grievances, rather than deeper political objections to the regime.

However, in the 1995 demonstration, it would appear that the regime was simply under-prepared to respond to the protests, and quickly caved in to prevent an escalation in the number and demands of the protestors. The second protest offered a convenient opportunity for Niyazov to pose as a populist (the only time he has done so in response to public action), while moving to strengthen his hold over the security apparatus. Protests after this date could be contained and there was no incentive for Niyazov to meet the demands, not least because to do so would have entailed a reversal of policy that he periodically originated. The regime has, therefore, successfully resisted being drawn into a bargaining game with single-issue protestors that would presage the sort of “contractual” relationship likely spill over into other areas. Following Bellin’s analysis of patterns of contemporary state coercion in the Middle East and North Africa (2005: 25-41), it would appear that the Niyazov regime’s willingness to curtail protests, violently if

⁸⁰ A similar event occurred in September 2004 when Niyazov flew over the settlement of Darvasa, situated in the centre of the Karakum desert. Niyazov apparently made disapproving remarks about the sprawling nature of the village and, within days, 200 soldiers were dispatched to destroy the settlement. The residents, mostly camel herders and roadside traders, were reportedly given one hour to collect all their belongings and leave. They were not offered alternative accommodation or compensation. A new mosque was demolished. One possible reason behind the destruction of the village is that its residents were mostly ethnic Uzbeks (Field observation in Darvasa, 6 August 2003; Memorial HRC, 24 September 2004).

necessary, has been an important determinant of the extent and outcome of popular mobilisation.

In summary, sultanistic rule frames social responses by the inflated claims it makes about its own performance. When reality does not match these claims, an opportunity is opened to hold the regime to account on its own terms, against its pledges and alleged achievements. In the case of Turkmenistan under Niyazov, such protests have been sporadic, brave but not particularly well-organised. Although concessions were made by the government after the largest protest in Ashgabat in 1995, Niyazov has not had forced upon him the sort of “contractual” relationship that developed under late socialism in Eastern Europe. The protestors did not have links to sympathetic officials within security structures, and the ringleaders are believed to have suffered harsh punishments. Accordingly, women protesting against illegal detentions and arbitrary housing demolition in 2003 and 2004 attempted to activate the normative commitments made by the Turkmen government when it gained accession to the UN and the OSCE. Although these institutions have been sympathetic, their impact has been essentially marginal, temporarily embarrassing Niyazov without altering government policy.

Thus, despite the often chaotic and arbitrary nature of policy execution, Niyazov has successfully atomised the Turkmen population by disrupting horizontal domains of communication and spaces for social connection and declining to institute vertical spires of communication with the protestors. By doing so, unprogrammatic social resistance, based on exposing the regime’s fraudulent performance claims, has been relatively unsuccessful, serving to underline the central importance of robust and loyal coercive apparatuses in neutralising opposition activities.

The Ambiguities of Everyday Life

In the previous sections, we evaluated the weak political and social resistance offered to Niyazov’s rule by political parties functioning from exile and sporadic domestic protests organised around single issues. Separately, we can also move beyond the simplistic explanations of social behaviour offered by those who view Soviet and post-Soviet societies as pervaded by a passivity engendered by Communist orthodoxy⁸¹. Social

⁸¹ Such viewpoints are invariably coloured by the author’s own ideological standpoint. One recent example, which erroneously appears to negate the notion of individual or corporate agency in Soviet society, is the assertion by Frank Ellis that: “*Homo Sovieticus* could never be more than a mouthpiece for the party’s ideas and slogans, not so much a human being then, as a receptacle to be emptied and filled as party policy dictated” (1998: 288).

responses to hegemonic rule have a number of complex facets. Anthropological scholarship, influenced by the pioneering work of James C. Scott and, thereafter, by the Subaltern Studies network that emerged in post-colonial India, has focused in particular on patterns of “everyday resistance” by communities which enjoy very little formal political and economic power.

In his seminal study of a Malaysian village conducted in the late 1970s, Scott observed a variety of informal practices, including sabotage, dissimulation, pilfering, false compliance, feigned ignorance, tardiness, absenteeism, gossip, character assassination and so on which, taken together, he described as “small arms fire in the class war” (Scott: 1985, 17). This form of covert, disruptive resistance, “a carefully hedged affair that avoids all or nothing confrontation” (Scott: 1985: 285), required no organisation or leadership yet, when accumulated, could “make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their [the perpetrators’] superiors in the capital” (Scott: 1985, xvi). Moreover, these tactics could represent more than a daily conflict or negotiation over time, dignity and material resources; they also embodied a struggle for control of symbols (symbolic compliance masking material defiance), memory, tradition, and the moral order⁸².

Scott developed his critique in a later, more general survey which argued that “regimes of domination”, characterised by relatively unfettered personalist rule of the sort associated with sultanism, shared important structural similarities. Such regimes create “public transcripts” – discursive affirmations of patterns of domination which produce “the self-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen” (Scott: 1990: 18). Such transcripts create an illusion of a unified elite and willing subordinates. They serve to conceal or misrepresent what elites do not want the powerless to see, often through the use of euphemisms, symbols, and signs which both sanitise and legitimise aspects of domination. The purpose of such transcripts is therefore to sever autonomous horizontal ties within society, instead creating “a living tableau of centralised discipline and control” (Scott: 1990, 59-60).

To counter this hegemony, the powerless sequester their own social space and create a separate discourse or “infrapolitics” (Scott: 1990, 20), in which resistance rebuilds the horizontal domains of communication disrupted by the powerful. This is often done unobtrusively, without manifestly impacting on the formal political system. Tracing the

⁸² Some scholars have questioned whether actions such as pilfering and sabotage might not be confused with simple delinquency. Korovkin argues that the test should be whether the actions are supported by a significant section of the local community (2000: 3).

patterns of cloaked resistance thus entails investigating the political landscape during periods of outward quiescence, thereby also extending our understanding of how and why sudden political ruptures occur when they do.

Other scholars have developed Scott's work in their studies of everyday life under sultanistic regimes. Gail Kligman examined the Ceausescu regime's attempt to control reproduction in Romania through the infamous Abortion Law 770 of 1966, as a lens through which to explore engrained patterns of duplicity in social conduct (1998). Kligman argued that, by the end of Ceausescu's rule, public representation and personal belief had diverged to the point of "transforming dissimulation and deceit into customary forms of interpersonal exchange" (1998: 37), thus compromising Romanian society as a whole. Lisa Wedeen's ethnographic study of the regime of President Hafiz Al-Asad in Syria focused on the way in which the numerous manifest absurdities of the cult surrounding Asad afforded the opportunity for disguised forms of resistance, notably the creation of subtle satire out of the ambiguities of official discourse and rhetoric (1998; 1999). This, in itself, creates a paradox. Wedeen argued persuasively that the Asad regime actually derived its power from engendering compliance to the ridiculous aspects of the cult, forcing Syrians to "act as if" the regime's claims for Asad were true. Yet, these aspects, in turn, provided the material for, and symbolic language of, everyday resistance.

The studies of Scott, Kligman, Wedeen and others undoubtedly offer crucial insights for any analysis of responses to sultanistic rule in Turkmenistan. They furnish us with an extended range of hitherto concealed data to evaluate, a more nuanced appreciation of social dynamics under conditions of personal rule, and a framework for understanding the way in which ordinary people can, in Eric Hobsbawm's phrase, "work the system to their minimum disadvantage" (1973: 3).

Yet, important though the work of these scholars is, it presumes a form of subtle opposition to the hegemonic regime that might not, in reality, necessarily pertain. The subjects of Kligman's study were simultaneously duplicitous towards, and complicit in, Ceausescu's system. Like the practice of *Ketman* in *The Captive Mind*, Czeslaw Milosz's famous study of life under Communism in post-War Poland (2001: 54-81), Romanians were required to produce lies as part of a schizophrenic survival strategy. Underpinning Kligman's analysis, therefore, is that *dedublare* in fact masked real feelings of opposition, in order to perpetuate a myth of national/socialist achievement. What, however, if this complicity/duplicity binary also concealed genuine ambivalence towards

the regime in question, separate from the public self/private conflicts described by Milosz, Vaclav Havel (1986) and Slavoj Zizek (1991)?

In his ethnographical study of the last Soviet generation, Alexei Yurchak perceptively identifies “a seemingly paradoxical coexistence of affinities and alienation, belonging and estrangement, meaningful work and pure formality” (2006: 98). Such an accommodation may have been accomplished by a “performative shift” enacted in different settings but was, nonetheless, expressive of genuine attachment to elements of the ruling system that was distinct from simple dissimulation. Thus, although people “worked the system”, they also valued elements within it, built associational life around it, and retained positive memories of it, despite the fact there was limited appreciation of, and belief in, its constative dimensions.

What has developed in recent anthropological scholarship, therefore, is the charting of a complex array of social responses to ideological hegemony, traversing a wide spectrum between wholehearted support from a minority, to complete rejection by a smaller minority. In between, there are various responses - some genuine, some duplicitous and some in between which, taken together, represent a range of tactics deployed by ordinary people simply to get by in societies where there is great circumscription of political freedom.

Field observation and interviews conducted in Turkmenistan illustrate an assortment of similar tactics in operation. They can be divided into four discrete categories to be looked at in turn: manipulation of the system in order to secure material or social advantage in the face of ideological hegemony; the use of satire or *stioj* in order to de-anchor and subvert the regime’s messages; withdrawal and abstention from the official framework of moral imperatives; and also an acceptance of, and accommodation with, elements of official discourse and practice.

(i) Manipulation and commodification

The Niyazov regime’s dysfunctional characteristics afford significant opportunities for the manipulation of the system’s failings for personal gain. In this respect, the situation in Turkmenistan reflects that prevailing in other post-Soviet states, albeit in more extreme form. Unique to Turkmenistan, however, are the possibilities that the regime’s own instruments of power, notably the paraphernalia of the cult around Niyazov, offer for commercial exploitation and even subtle forms of resistance. Such is the extent of the

Niyazov cult, that it has been semi-captured and commodified by autonomous trading entities for profit. As such, the “soft” instruments of sultanistic rule also mould a range of social and even economic responses to the regime.

Taking the initial point made about the regime more generally, it is evident from undertaking only a limited amount of field observation that the confusion in government policy provides openings for profit and, in some cases, actually necessitates corruption and duplicity. It is beyond the scope and purpose of this study to enumerate these in great depth, not least because this phenomenon is partly the product of more general patterns of post-communist transition. To take a few brief examples, Interviewee 11 supplemented her income with cash in hand translation work, Interviewee 14 was involved in the import and export of contraband goods, Interviewee 20 was an unlicensed private hire taxi driver, and Interviewee 24 was involved in the illegal importation of goods from the United Arab Emirates with Turkmenistan Airlines cabin crew.

Niyazov’s personal intervention in the restructuring of the agricultural sector provides evidence of responses to systemic failure. Turkmenistan remains a predominantly rural society and, although the livestock and arable sectors form only a relative small component of national GDP, they do provide the livelihood for a significant proportion of the population. In the first case, the unusual restructuring of the livestock breeding sector after 1992 converted former state sheep flocks and wells in desert areas to a form of associational ownership, subject to state quotas. Meagre state payments are made in cash, rather than in animals as the farmers had preferred, thereby providing an opportunity and impetus to freeload their own animals, including privately owned camels, on state resources for private gain (Lunch: 2003, 188)⁸³.

Similarly, arable farmers are required to sell their grain to a state company at a fixed price of \$2 per 100 kilograms, approximately 8% of its market value. In January 2004, Niyazov announced a record grain harvest of 2.5 million tons, three times domestic requirements, and ordered that 700,000 tons would be exported to Ukraine (IWPR RCA No. 262, 30 January 2004). According to local officials, the real harvest was nearer 480,000 tons, and the shortfall led to KNB officers forming specialist squads to carry out farm inspections, in order to requisition grain to make up the export quota. Those farmers caught concealing grain were prosecuted for sabotaging the food supply. The

⁸³ Also field observation in Yerbent and Darvasa, August 2003.

interrogation methods and charges, reminiscent of the Stalinist period, encouraged farmers to under-report and either conceal or consume their harvest.

The final case, from the banking sector, also illustrates how policy anomalies create the conditions for state officials to resort to manipulation and deception. Niyazov's insistence on fixing the official exchange rate for the non-convertible Turkmen manat at a rate of 5200 to the dollar, four times more than the currency's real exchange value, illustrates how duplicity and corruption are embedded at all levels in the system. In 2004, the Central Bank was reportedly selling between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per day on the black market, thereby acquiring manats at a quarter of their official price (IWPR RCA No. 336, 21 December 2004). These were then taken either as personal profit or used for essential government expenditure, such as wages and pensions. Introducing dollars into the black market also kept the illicit rate stable⁸⁴. Niyazov's micromanaging tendencies thus encourage duplicity and corruption across the state sector both from those who form part of it and those who face it, both in order to keep the system functioning and for reasons of personal and economic security.

A more unusual way of turning the regime back upon itself is to move beyond the exploitation of its systemic failures, and to manipulate the very symbols of power themselves for profit. This can be seen most strikingly in the commodification of Niyazov's own image, and even that of his mother. Small traders interviewed at the Tolkuchka and Russki bazaars in Ashgabat between 2002 and 2005 advised that, before the country's few foreign visitors (usually business executives from CIS countries) depart, they frequently purchase a souvenir of the country linked to the presidential image. Indeed, Niyazov is also undoubtedly the country's biggest draw for "rogue state tourists". Interviewee 10, who had access to senior officials, confirmed that private entrepreneurs and the managers of state companies obtain permission to brand goods with Niyazov's image and official titles. Niyazov is flattered by the requests, and senior officials presumably believe that by permitting such items to be sold, they are both gaining Niyazov's favour and disseminating the iconography of the regime more widely. Thus, a theatrical troupe in Ashgabat was able to profit from a production about the president's mother in October 2005 (THI Press Release No. 143: 5 October 2005). A bottle of vodka or packet of tea carrying Niyazov's image means that he is "on display"

⁸⁴ "The most curious feature of Turkmenistan's [currency] black market is that although it is entirely prohibited, and is by definition subversive of rigid state controls, the government recognises its existence and even intervenes to modify the illicit exchange rate" (IWPR RCA No. 21 December 2004).

in each home. Meanwhile, the small traders are naturally stocking such products in order to sell more goods but, during the conversations conducted with the sellers, it became clear that they were aware that the items were actually being bought for their amusement value and, from observations of several transactions with foreign customers, traders initiated conversations in which they joked about Niyazov.

The traders' economic response to the Niyazov regime, regardless of their personal views of the man, has been to market it for commercial purposes, knowing that the goods are valued less for their intrinsic utility than their kitschness. Indeed, on several second-hand stalls, "Turkmenbashiana" sits alongside similar products with Lenin and Stalin's image. Although the commodification of leadership cults is nothing new, and is probably most prevalent in Cuba, what distinguishes the Turkmen case is the simultaneous duplicity and complicity exercised by small traders in their unspoken compact with both suppliers and customers about the nature, intention and purpose of the purchases. In this sense, the situation is analogous to that prevailing in Syria under President Hafiz al-Asad. As noted earlier, Wedeen records that the most important principle of public conduct was to act "as if" the regime's pronouncements made sense (1998, 503-523). What binds the trader to both supplier and customer in Turkmenistan is complicity in a lie, a common secret, in which all stand to benefit. Therefore, what appears, superficially, as an expression of pride in the ruler actually emerges as a nuanced combination of material gain, satire and resistance, often expressed through a series of complex negotiations within the regime's own political and aesthetic boundaries.

(ii) Satire and subversion

Given the closed political culture prevalent in Turkmenistan and the unknown but probably significant penetration into society by the KNB, any satirising of the regime must necessarily be expressed either in a secure private environment, or in such an oblique way as to eliminate the risk of sanction. No printed material could be located that satirises the regime, although opposition web sites maintained from outside the country have periodically shown rudimentary animations and cartoons caricaturing Niyazov personally, particularly accentuating his predilection for expensive jewellery.

The jokes told about the regime by Interviewees 14, 21, 23 and 24 closely resembled and, in some cases, recycled jokes made about Soviet leaders, most commonly Lenin⁸⁵. In particular, they focus on the prevalence of Niyazov's image across the media (the television set itself is referred to as the "Niyazov" because Niyazov's image appears in the corner of all domestic TV programmes), or his self-aggrandisement, with God deferring to Niyazov on spiritual issues rather than the other way around.

However, when jokes were told against the regime during interviews, there appeared to be some uneasiness, perhaps due to the presence of a foreigner, partly because of a fear of being overheard and partly, in the case of ethnic Turkmen, because they may be perceived to be disloyal or unpatriotic. Interviewee 21 became uncomfortable telling *anekdoti* about Niyazov, not only because he considered them to be disrespectful, but also because he viewed Niyazov as irrelevant to the country's broader problems. Undoubtedly the most openly cynical interviewees were those of minority ethnicities. Interviewee 20, an Armenian from Ashgabat, jokingly compared Niyazov to both Stalin and God. Interviewee 19, a Westernised mixed race Ukrainian-Turkmen, joked about Niyazov's mental health, while Interviewee 22, an ethnic Uzbek from the northern city of Dashoguz, also satirised Niyazov as a "madman".

However, open dissent was rare. Interviewee 16 was highly unusual in being the only ethnic Turkmen who publicly ridiculed Niyazov in my presence. A young, highly intelligent, and somewhat impetuous education officer on the Merv Project, he pretended to polish the gold leaf busts of Niyazov displayed in the lobbies of the larger hotels and, when travelling around Ashgabat and Mary, he openly ridiculed statues of Niyazov in different poses, despite the fact that KNB officers were present and listening. He may have (wrongly) supposed that employment on a UK funded project afforded him some protection, or was over-compensating his cynicism to impress a foreigner. Nevertheless, his behaviour clearly alarmed members of staff in the hotel. Similarly, ethnic Russian store assistants in Ashgabat's airports joked about the ubiquity of Niyazov "endorsed" products, including books, wine, vodka and tea available for sale. The guarded response of most Turkmen interviewees undoubtedly restricts the access that a foreign researcher

⁸⁵ A number of jokes told about Niyazov correspond to the *anekdoty* compiled by Bruce Adams (2005), with the names of Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev and so on now transcribed to Niyazov, where the context dictates. The celebrations held in 1970 across the Soviet Union to commemorate the centenary of Lenin's birth were widely viewed as a disaster. As Tumarkin notes, the overexposure of his image (such as the suspension of huge portraits from hot air balloons) provoked cynicism and disdain rather than enthusiasm (1983: 263). The Lenin jokes told during this period are dusted down and used about the iconography that surrounds Niyazov's cult.

has to the full array and textures of anti-regime satire of *anekdoty*. It also requires Turkmen citizens to be subtle and inventive in their humour.

Yurchak describes how, in the Brezhnev era, *stiob* was used by younger people as a creative and absurdist form of dissent that confused those in authority, while affording some insulation against retribution – a sort of comedic variant of rightful resistance (2006: 252). Interviewee 24, an ethnic Russian and former Soviet army officer, had the confidence to enact this sort of performance. In August 2004, we travelled to the settlement of Darvasa in the centre of the Karakum desert, 350 km north of Ashgabat. Approximately 120 km into the car journey we were stopped at a remote roadside checkpoint in the heart of the desert. Despite obtaining permits for the journey, a KNB officer requested that we return to Ashgabat to secure a signature to accompany the official stamp. In an extremely angry mood at the intransigence of the officer, Interviewee 24 drove us back to Ashgabat, secured the corrected permit and purchased a T-shirt from the market sporting a large picture of Niyazov. Upon reaching the checkpoint again, the guards were clearly unsettled by his attire. As an ethnic Russian, a community increasingly discriminated against in Turkmenistan's public life, the wearing of the shirt was clearly suspect, an ironic gesture aimed at the officiousness of those representing his government. Interviewee 24 congratulated the officers for their diligence in spotting the error on the permit, advising them that Niyazov (pointing to the face on his shirt) would praise them for ensuring that national security had been upheld. When asked why he was wearing the shirt, he responded that by doing so he would be closer to Niyazov, who would be with him in bed and also at the toilet. Interviewee 24 was obviously pushing the boundaries by displaying “superpatriotism” of this sort, and yet he was effectively protected by speaking back to authority (albeit in the form of fairly low ranking security officials) with the messages that the regime itself was giving out about Niyazov's omnipotence. Interviewee 24 was effectively “deterritorialising” the regime's discourse by illustrating its absurdity, at the same time as remaining (almost) formally compliant.

(iii) Withdrawal and Autonomy

A less risk-laden response to the Niyazov regime is simply to minimise as far as possible any interaction with authority structures or the state media. In rural areas the cult surrounding Niyazov, expressed in statues, portraits and slogans, is far less pervasive. Study sessions on *Ruhnama* in workplaces appear to be enforced less rigorously outside the major cities, although *Ruhnama* does form an integral part of the school curriculum,

even in towns as remote as Darvasa in the central Karakum desert, and Nokhur, situated in the Kopet Dagh mountain range on the Iranian border⁸⁶. Scott noted this trend when he described the Malaysian peasantry removing themselves “from the institutional circuits of symbolic power” (1985: 321), and Polish workers deliberately leaving home for the duration of state television new broadcasts in the 1980s (1990: 139-140).

In Turkmenistan, the pattern of withdrawal follows that of other contemporary regimes where media output is subject to close state control. Hardly any interviewees watched domestic television, which is unsurprising given that it has virtually no drama, sport or documentary output. Samples of national news output were taken on each research visit. Between 14 November and 17 November 2004, for example, the First Channel devoted its first four news items to exactly the same subjects on each day, these being Niyazov’s attendance at an Oil and Gas Exhibition in Ashgabat, meeting oil and gas executives at the exhibition, extending congratulations to a conference on Sanjar Sultan, and congratulations received by Niyazov from other countries to mark Eid-ul-Fitur. The final items reported production figures at bottling plants and a wool factory. There was no international news coverage.

As in Havana and Tripoli, apartment complexes in Ashgabat are festooned with satellite dishes providing an ear to the outside world, and to Russian television programmes in particular (Plate Five). Residents in apartment blocks pool resources to install satellite dishes on the roof which, with some creative electrical work, can be connected to every residence (RFE/RL TS, 25 July 2002). In the desert settlement of Darvasa, where there were no electricity power lines,⁸⁷ a small generator had been rigged up to a television and satellite dish outdoors enabling residents to watch an international football match⁸⁸. In Nokhur, residents watched Iranian television, despite their inadequate command of Farsi⁸⁹.

As visitors to the FSU states will testify, television plays an important part in post-Soviet society, functioning as the principal form of home entertainment. In Turkmenistan, this

⁸⁶ Field observation in both locations, August 2003 and May 2005.

⁸⁷ Soviet era power lines had fallen into disrepair further south.

⁸⁸ Field observation in Darvasa, 5-7 August 2003.

⁸⁹ Field observation in Nokhur, 11-12 May 2005. Although Niyazov has occasionally issued orders for a crackdown on access to satellite television (RFE/RL TS 22 July 2002; RFE/RL TS 25 July 2002), he has not yet attempted to ban access to foreign television outright, possibly fearing a major backlash but also perhaps aware that the Russian, Uzbek and Iranian media offers very little direct comment on events in Turkmenistan.

was particularly apparent in all the places stayed during fieldwork. If Russian television was not available, most hosts had a stock of well-worn videotapes to play. Interviewees also constructed their social networks and their leisure away from the regime's gaze.

Despite official injunctions by Niyazov to read *Ruhnama* every day for at least one hour, hardly any of the interviewees had read the book. The exceptions were Interviewee 9, a primary school teacher, and Interview 17 conducted with students at the Turkmen Polytechnical Institute, who were the most outwardly orthodox of all the respondents. Other attempts to create officially sanctioned leisure activities also appeared to be unsuccessful. Despite the fact that they offered free entry, and were the coolest and most well-appointed buildings in Ashgabat's city centre, the National Museum, the National Carpet Museum, the city art gallery and the museum at the Independence Monument were completely empty on every visit made. Similarly, the vast parks and fountain complexes constructed in Ashgabat, Balkanabat and Turkmenbashi, which contained statues, amphitheatres, tableaux, monuments and, in one case, a giant mechanical copy of *Ruhnama*, were deserted.

Turkmen appeared to have removed themselves from state directed leisure spaces in the same way that Yurchak records how late Soviet citizens lived *vnye* (outside), simultaneously within the regime's formal constraints and yet not following its parameters (2006: 128). Yurchak likened this process to a temporary internal emigration, in which people did not openly reject the Soviet system, but rather periodically absented themselves from it, in favour of *obscheniye* (discussion and companionship) in informal *svoi* (autonomously constructed) social networks. This was also apparent in Turkmenistan, where freely chosen sociality appeared to be almost always separate from, although officially operating within approved boundaries.

(iv) Accommodation and acceptance

The principal ambition of Subaltern Studies is to uncover the ways in which ordinary people create room for manoeuvre in societies where there is a marked disparity in power between the elite and the rest. As such, it has made an impressive contribution to recording the "hidden transcripts" of resistance to regimes marked by outward quiescence. What Scott, Wedeen and others did not quite capture, however, was the genuine ambivalence that often exists towards systems of hegemonic personal rule.

As discussed in the second section of the chapter, Scott mentions how the wearing of “public masks” (i.e. the obligation of outward conformity) eventually causes the face to fit them, to the extent that the mask becomes normalised and viewed as inevitable, legitimate and just (Scott: 1990, 9). However, Scott’s observation is never fully developed, notably because the focus of his study was on the “hidden transcripts” of resistance that lay behind the mask of public obedience.

The point about the acceptance and accommodation of hegemonic rule takes us back both to the tactics of rightful resistance detailed earlier and those of the native Turkmen Bolsheviks who, as Edgar noted, quickly learned to “speak Bolshevik” in order to advance Turkmen territorial claims during the Soviet border delimitation process. However, genuine ambivalence goes beyond individuals and groups using the regime’s own language cynically or duplicitously to achieve tactical gains, and towards the possibility that some Turkmen find actual comfort, togetherness and identity in the Niyazov regime’s practices, rituals and iconography. Official government propaganda would say so, but it is far removed from reality in so many areas as to be worth scant consideration. Scholarly and journalistic work on the Niyazov regime would appear to definitively exclude the possibility of the Niyazov regime “working” in a positive sense.

The leading work on the nature and impact of Soviet ritual is not particularly helpful. Lane viewed Soviet rites as principally a device for cultural management, but does not record how they were actually received and processed (Lane: 1981, 260). Kertzer’s seminal study of ritual in politics takes broadly the same line, focusing on ritual as “the propagation of a message through a complex symbolic performance,” shot through with a condensed, polyvocal ambiguity that enables the regime to speak clearly to a wide audience, which can then take its own meanings from each sign (1988: 11). What these meanings might be, he does not elaborate. Returning to Yurchak’s analysis of the lived experience of late Soviet socialism takes us further. He argues, from detailed ethnographic study of contemporaneous letters and diaries, that the last Soviet generation took Soviet ideals more seriously than has hitherto been recognised (2006: 98-128). Although they ignored or manoeuvred around parts of the system, perhaps by purchasing contraband items or doing their homework during Komsomol meetings – small tricks to escape the formal aspects of Party work and life – these should not be confused with a desire to disparage or bring down the Soviet system as a whole. On the contrary, unlike dissidents such as Vaclav Havel or Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who took Soviet official discourse at face value and urged their readers to “live in truth”, many Soviets could

selectively ignore or pick up different aspects of official discourse as it suited them to do so.

In Turkmenistan, this same pattern could be discerned when interviewing Turkmen about their views of the Niyazov regime. Interviewees 10 and 20, both critical of Niyazov, noted admiringly that, in diplomatic negotiations, he was a “cunning fox”, outsmarting other regional leaders. Interviewees 1 and 3, both opponents of Niyazov, spoke respectively of their respect for the way in which he had successfully overlaid tribal differences, provided cheap fuel and food, and prevented the growth of organised crime and radical Islam. Interviewees 4, 11 and 19 all conflated Niyazov as the head and symbol of the state with the identity of the Turkmen state itself. Thus, while they believed Niyazov’s regime was corrupt and disagreed with the insertion of *Ruhnama* into educational and occupational settings, they stopped short of condemning Niyazov outright, as this would be the equivalent of expressing disloyalty towards the country as a whole.

Observing and circulating at concerts and celebrations in Ashgabat in 2002, ceremonies to open the Sultan Sanjar mausoleum in Merv and Mary in 2004 (Plates Ten and Eleven), and the VE Day celebrations in Ashgabat in 2005 (Plates Eighteen and Nineteen), it became clear that the state’s authorised gatherings did provide an opportunity for people to dress up, meet, sing and socialise. Although participation by the performers was obligatory, the performances themselves were not necessarily perfunctory. Similarly, although attendance at the outdoor concerts and ceremonies was encouraged and, in the case of Merv required, the audience still manifestly enjoyed the events on their own terms as opportunities to mingle, flirt, dance and show off.

The Niyazov regime’s official imagery is undoubtedly one-dimensional and its vocabulary is constricted and tedious. Few attending the performances are likely to take its rhetoric at face value, just as the innumerable portraits and statues of Niyazov littering the urban landscape in Turkmenistan are “wallpaper” to most Turkmen, only noticeable when they are removed. That should not mean that other elements of the regime are unanimously rejected. Niyazov’s modest policy achievements were recognised by some interviewees, and his creation of the state in his own image has been sufficiently effective as to mitigate criticisms of the regime on the grounds of patriotism. Even the ritualistic and iconographic elements of the regime can evoke genuine pleasure, although perhaps not on the terms that the regime would like. In this, the responses to Niyazov’s rule evoke the polyvocality recorded by Plamper in his study of East German responses to Stalin’s

death— a complex mixture of sorrow, fear, excitement and relief (Plamper: 2004b, 326-327). As a consequence, the full horizon of responses to the Niyazov regime encompasses significant complexities and ambiguities that attend to its claims and requirements.

Conclusion

Looking at comparator FSU states, Turkmenistan can be viewed as an anomaly. In Azerbaijan, Presidents Heidar and Ilham Aliyev have retained firm control over the levers of power but have not prevented a “rough and tumble” semi-democracy emerging, with a vibrant and frequently militant civil society. Although President Nursultan Nazarbayev governs autocratically in Kazakhstan, liberal oligarchs have been able to construct their own political formations, complementing vociferous pressure groups advocating pensioners’ rights and improved housing provision. The opposition to President Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan does not have either constitutional or media outlets. Although fragile and clandestine constitutional parties operate, responses to the Uzbek regime have increasingly taken the form of increasingly desperate and violent Islamist factions, seeking to establish *shariat* law in a regional caliphate stretching from the Caucasus to western China.

President Niyazov, by contrast, has faced no coherent domestic political opposition of any consequence since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Periodic attempts by political parties based abroad to oust Niyazov have failed dismally. These parties, which are broadly constructed along ethno-tribal lines, have limited and diminishing connections inside the country. Moreover, they have almost all been formed and funded by former government ministers forced to flee abroad once their nefarious criminal activities had been uncovered. As such, they have limited credibility among ordinary Turkmen. Single-issue protests have been spontaneous and sporadic. The authorities have dealt with them ruthlessly. Although protestors have attempted to utilise the regime’s own performance claims and rhetoric to frame their demands, Niyazov has refused to be drawn into a “contractual game” by making concessions. Appeals to international institutions have largely failed to elicit a meaningful response from Niyazov.

Any explanation for the failure of opposition groups to mobilise against Niyazov must address some underlying structural factors. Nomadism deprived Turkmen society of both the tradition and infrastructure of religious learning, which were to prove crucial to post-Soviet opposition movements in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The failure to develop strong

academic institutions in the Turkmen SSR deprived the republic of a strong core of intellectual enquiry and potential dissidence. The comparatively small European population meant that Turkmen were far less exposed to currents of reformist thinking on democratisation and human rights issues than in, say, Kazakhstan or the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus. Ethno-tribal divisions have also played their part in limiting cooperation. Augmenting these factors is the government's rapid and ruthless deployment of the state's coercive apparatus, itself nurtured by exceptional access to rental income, in order to eliminate or atomise any nascent signs of protest.

Social responses to Niyazov's rule run the panoply of everyday resistance tactics already charted by anthropologists of societies in which hegemonic rule is prevalent. Without political power, ordinary Turkmen seek to manipulate the systemic contradictions of sultanistic rule for personal protection and economic gain. Some of these tactics have taken new and surprising forms not hitherto covered in the extant literature. One such is selling back Niyazov's cultic iconography through the production and marketing of goods bearing his image and slogans. By doing this, traders occupy a niche in which ideological orthodoxy and satire blend together in a profitable arrangement. Other tactics involve sly subversion, satire and "internal emigration" from the regime's messages. Nevertheless, such complicity/duplicity might also conceal genuine ambivalence in popular attitudes towards Niyazov. The creation of an independent Turkmen state, albeit embodied by Niyazov, does provide Turkmen with a sense of much-needed identity, however warped and incomplete. Moreover, Niyazov does provide some of life's essentials, notably water, salt and fuel, at no cost. Even the rituals and texts of the regime provide a comforting continuity with the Soviet period for some, to the extent that authorised gatherings can fulfil a genuine social function, bringing together people at the regime's behest, but ultimately relegating Niyazov to an incidental component of a wider set of social relationships.

Attitudes and responses to sultanistic rule are barely covered in extant theoretical and empirical studies, and not at all in SRT. The case of Turkmenistan has uncovered a more complex array of resistance and accommodation than has hitherto been recorded or, in fact, was expected at the outset of the study. This is, in itself, significant for deeper scholarship on responses to personalist/sultanistic rule. Drawing from these findings, it is far too simplistic to dismiss ordinary Turkmen simply as downtrodden, passive subjects of the Niyazov regime. While there has been limited overt resistance, a range of strategies, some more overtly political than others, have been adopted in order to reclaim social space.

An important question arising from these tactics, however, is the extent to which, in the long run, they prolong the regime's continuation or hasten its demise. Kligman's conclusion about Romania under Ceausescu is that they did both. Discussing the practice of formally upholding state policy while illegally facilitating abortions, she argues: "this intermeshed yet dual system of everyday life simultaneously chipped away at the system's formal structure and secured its increasingly fractured continuation" (1998: 39). The same could be said in Turkmenistan about the freeloading of private flocks and the grain hoarding that characterises the agricultural sector, or the informal currency trading that enables public sector wages to be paid. Even the sale of "Turkmenbashiana", which reduces Niyazov to the status of a niche tourist attraction, sustains the regime. Not only does it bring in hard currency, it still requires traders, suppliers and officials to behave "as if" the regime's claims ring true.

Tying up these strands, the broader objective of the thesis was to account for the durability of sultanistic regimes, notwithstanding their manifestly dysfunctional character. Analysing popular political and non-political responses to sultanism leads to some key conclusions. Firstly, Bellin's (2005: 21-41) and Posusney's (2005: 1-18) argument that contemporary Middle Eastern monarchies are sustained by the will and capacity of the state's coercive apparatus to suppress opposition holds good in the case of Turkmenistan. Yet this conclusion is insufficient on its own. Bellin, Posusney and Brownlee (2005: 43-62) all stop short at looking for deeper social responses to the regimes.

In Turkmenistan, two supplementary factors linked to these responses are at work. The very dysfunctional practices that distinguish the regime contribute to its longevity by forcing people to work around the system to survive, either by manipulating its failings, withdrawing as far as possible from the regime's strictures, or via the safety valve of satire in its various forms. Secondly, following Foucault's dictum that if power only ever says no it will cease to be obeyed, when the regime composes its public transcripts competently and comprehensively, it is able to garner a degree of genuine accommodation, if only to forms and structures that permit Turkmen to engage in other forms of socialisation. Given that Niyazov benefited from the long shadow of such practices under the Soviet system, it is unsurprising that they have continued to be effective after its demise.

Chapter Seven - Sultanistic Regimes in the International System

Introduction

In the preceding chapters, we traced the internal dynamics of the Niyazov regime from four perspectives. Chapter three considered the structural context presented by an isolated, traditionally acephalous and inchoate Turkmen society, endowed with rich natural resource potential. Chapter four traced the emergence of Niyazov as the central political actor and architect of the post-Soviet political order in Turkmenistan. Chapter five offered an explanation of how the regime exercises control domestically through “disciplinary-symbolic” mechanisms, essentially a combination of coercion, patronage and the cult of personality. Chapter six analysed the complex responses engendered by sultanistic rule. This chapter takes the analysis a stage further by developing some of the theoretical insights made in chapter two in relation to the international dimension of sultanistic rule. Chehabi and Linz, and Snyder, separately stress the centrality of the relationship between sultanistic rulers and external actors to the emergence, continuation, and demise of sultanistic regimes. Any thorough critique of SRT must therefore engage with this aspect of their framework.

In doing so, the remainder of this chapter is structured into four sections. Firstly, the theoretical component of the international dimension is revisited and extended in order to frame the empirical analysis. The second section looks at the three core elements of Turkmenistan’s foreign policy under Niyazov: internationally recognised permanent neutrality; detachment from, and/or non-participation in, international institutional structures; and, carefully proscribed functional cooperation with other regional state actors. This section goes on to discuss the rationale for this relatively isolationist stance, in the context of the Turkmen government’s geopolitical positioning, commercial interests and regional security dynamics. The third part examines the response of external state and institutional actors towards the Turkmen regime, in order to consider the extent to which Niyazov’s actions have been limited, or in any way affected, either by *realpolitik* or the global discourse on human rights that has developed after the Cold War. A short concluding section ties the findings back to the theoretical framework and suggests that, if Niyazov’s regime is to be constrained, a different terrain of opposition, focused on domestic actors, may need to be explored.

Sultanistic regimes in the international system: the theoretical context

In chapter two, we reviewed the macrostructural factors instrumental to the emergence of sultanism. Chehabi and Linz argued that the states in which sultanistic regimes are, or were, present, have been characterised by persistent crises of sovereignty. They contended that many of these states had been subject to continual external interference, short of outright colonialism, citing the examples of various Central American states that have fallen periodically under US influence. Alternatively, sultanistic regimes may come to power in states with a formal history of colonialism, possibly with an additional legacy of post-colonial “informal” empire of the kind that characterises the relationship between various sub-Saharan countries and France. They also mentioned the influence of external loans and aid in sustaining the rent circuits that perpetuate sultanism (1998b: 28-33).

Developing this theme in the critique of their theory, we considered how sultanistic leaders exploited their strategic leverage during the Cold War in order to attract patronage from one or other of the global superpowers (usually the US). As the ideological rivalry between the US and USSR wound down from the mid-1980s, so too did the willingness of superpower patrons to invest in their sultanistic clients. Contradicting the orthodox view of regime change in authoritarian societies, developed by O'Donnell and others, which placed primary emphasis on domestic drivers as agents of democratic transition in authoritarian regimes, Snyder argued that, when tracing the paths out of sultanistic regime behaviour, a focus on international actors was also crucial, because a change in the relationship of dependency often removed revenues that sustained internal security capabilities and patronage networks (1998: 58-62; 1992).

Chehabi and Linz found that, when faced with sustained resistance, “soft liners” in the sultanistic leader’s entourage begin either to defect or to open back channels of communication with both moderate opposition forces and the foreign patron in order to explore exit strategies for regime elites. Citing the examples of Jean-Claude Duvalier, Ferdinand Marcos and Reza Shah amongst others, Chehabi and Linz describe how sultanistic regimes frequently crumbled very quickly, often leading to a confused interregnum in which regime associates sought to retain power⁹⁰. In most instances following leadership changes, they conclude, “prospects for democracy are bleak” (1998b: 44).

⁹⁰ Although the Ceausescu regime collapsed quickly, regime “soft liners” assumed power without foreign assistance.

Brownlee's study of the persistence of "neopatrimonialism" sought to build on the work of Chehabi, Linz and Snyder, by introducing cases of "non-transition" regimes. Taking as his case studies four Middle Eastern and North African regimes, Brownlee's comparative analysis argued that the earlier studies had neglected to incorporate personalist regimes that had successfully faced down resistance, and survived in tact (2002b).

Thus, SR theorists had focused on modes of transition out of sultanistic regimes, while neglecting the question of whether such regimes had undergone the process of transition in the first instance. Central to Brownlee's case was the ability *and* willingness of patrons, the US in particular, to exert a measure of constraint on the actions of the earlier sultanistic regimes discussed by Chehabi and Linz. Brownlee certainly does not deny the crucial role of external patrons in making and breaking these sultanistic rulers. Instead, he argues that where that constraint is missing – in effect, where there is no "disciplinary" relationship of patronage with an external power – personalist regimes (and presumably their more extreme sultanistic variants), can be resilient and survive unscathed. Therefore, while Brownlee's study did not invalidate the comparative studies of Chehabi, Linz and Snyder, it provided an additional dimension by offering a more nuanced interpretation of the relationship between the regimes in question and external actors.

The objective of this chapter is to develop these findings in relation to our study of Turkmenistan. Brownlee's own case studies were of Iraq, Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, all of whose leaders were in power both during and after the end of the Cold War. The regime in Turkmenistan emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union. It therefore adds in the perspective of a state that could not be described as a "Cold War holdout", but came into being within a different geopolitical order, and without a specific patron, although the case for Russia being regarded as such is examined in detail below.

The argument developed in this chapter is that Brownlee's broad findings also have value in explaining the resilience of Niyazov's regime. Moreover, it may be possible to extend Brownlee's conclusions. The attitude of the international community towards contemporary sultanistic regimes also challenges assumptions beyond the immediate scope of this study - on the limits of state sovereignty, the ethics and practice of humanitarian intervention, the measurement of violations of human rights, the holding of political leaders to account legally for their domestic actions, and evaluation of minimum standards of domestic conduct. Yet, what is apparent from this study is that Niyazov's regime has survived not in spite of the reconfigured international system, but rather because of its inherent features. Cold War sultanistic rulers could often be made, and

broken, by their sponsor. The central argument of this chapter, therefore, is that where such a complex relationship is absent or diminished, where international norms are not substantively breached by the regime⁹¹, and where there is continued access to the rent circuit, the sultanistic ruler may, paradoxically, experience less constraint on his behaviour than during the Cold War, when the international monitoring of human rights was largely subservient to ideological orthodoxy and superpower patronage. To paraphrase Franklin D. Roosevelt, sultanistic rulers have a better chance at survival when they are nobody's "sons of bitches" rather than "our sons of bitches."

In the remainder of the chapter, we look at how and why Turkmen foreign policy has evolved in an isolationist direction, the international responses thereto, and their contribution to the longevity of the regime, in order to develop the central point further.

Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy since 1991

(i) Neutrality

Turkmenistan's relationship with the outside world since 1992 has been largely predicated on its policy of permanent neutrality and consciously limited interaction with both states and international institutions⁹². Turkmenistan is, as a consequence, often described as isolationist, a closed society, or a "hermit kingdom," comparable with very few states in the international system. Given the nature and extent of the cult of personality surrounding Niyazov, the most common comparison is with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). However, unlike Turkmenistan, the North Korean regime has developed an elaborate ideology of self-reliance, known as *Juche*, which blends traditional concepts of family and belonging linked to Confucianism, with the culture and productionist ethic of Stalinism, to create a "garrison state" in which over 25% of a population of 23 million are either in regular armed service, or are reservists (Cumings: 2004, 158)⁹³. The DPRK and much of the international community (headed by the US) has been in more or less persistent conflict since 1994 over efforts to lever the North Korean government into the International Atomic Energy Agency's inspection regime, in order to establish the extent of its weapons-grade plutonium stocks. Given the

⁹¹ For example, through the invasion of another state or "gross" (itself a contested term) violations of human rights.

⁹² See Sadykova (2002) and Sabol (2002) for brief discussions of Turkmen foreign policy.

⁹³ The cultural origins of the North Korean regime are debated but, according to Moon Woong Lee, "the religion-like cult surrounding Kim Il Sung... appears to be in large part an unplanned outgrowth of Confucian values placed in a new context... a new and well-integrated family state that, in certain respects, resembles Confucian society" (quoted in Cumings: 2004, 196).

unresolved conflict with the Republic of Korea, the DPRK is therefore viewed as a significant source of global insecurity.

In contrast, Turkmenistan's brand of isolationist foreign policy is not perceived as in any way threatening to the regional security environment. Indeed, most scenarios of Central Asian instability involving Turkmenistan revolve around a presumption of internal state collapse, rather than external aggression⁹⁴. Turkmenistan's armed forces remain weak in comparison with those of Iran and Uzbekistan, its principal bordering states, and Niyazov has stated his strong opposition to the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. There is no evidence that Niyazov possesses or intends to acquire such technology. In short, Turkmenistan cannot conceivably be described as a regional aggressor, sponsor of terrorism, or agent of insecurity in Central Asia or the Middle East.

Instead, Niyazov has set in place the concept of positive and permanent neutrality as the cornerstone of Turkmen foreign policy. The central presumption of political neutrality is neither to start nor participate in wars. In order to make that stance credible to other parties, a state should not accept obligations in peacetime that could lead to involvement in wars. The obligations of neutral states under international law were set out at the Hague Conference of 1907, and subsequently revised at further conferences in London (1909), Havana (1928) and Geneva (1949) (Karsh: 1988, 23-25). These established the principles that warring parties must not violate the territory of the neutral state for military purposes, including the transportation of troops, weapons and communications across the land, airspace and waters of the neutral party. In exchange, neutral states must not participate in blocs or alliances that lead to wartime obligations, and must not discriminate ideologically, politically, or through trading relationships, between warring parties (Vukadinovic: 1989, 36-40; Windsor: 1989, 3-9).

Niyazov initially articulated Turkmenistan's preference for neutrality at an early stage of Turkmenistan's independence by refusing to sign the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST) in Tashkent on 15 May 1992, which provided a security guarantee of mutual assistance to CIS states attacked by external forces. The principle of "non-interference in the internal affairs of other governments" (Article Six) was enshrined into the State Constitution adopted on 18 May 1992, and this was followed by the first explicit

⁹⁴ This observation is taken from participation since 2003 in the Central Asian and Caucasian Prospects roundtable at the Royal Institute of International Affairs (part of its Russian and Eurasia programme), as well as participation in Foreign and Commonwealth Office briefing sessions on Turkmenistan in 2005.

declaration of positive neutrality at the Helsinki summit of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (later the OSCE) on 10 July 1992. International affirmation for Turkmenistan's stance was given at the third summit of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO)⁹⁵ in the Islamabad Declaration of 15 March 1995, before the 90th plenary session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) formally recognised the country permanently neutral status on 12 December 1995 (UNGA Resolution: A/RES/50/80). Finally, the resolution was codified into a Law on Permanent Neutrality approved by the Khalk Maslahaty on 27 December 1995 (Sadykova: 2002), in the amended State Constitution (Article One), and the state's official military doctrine in 1996. Turkmenistan also formally joined the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) on 20 October 1995 at the Cartagena summit in Colombia⁹⁶.

Since that date, neutrality has been projected by Niyazov as "the greatest achievement of our people" (TCA, 14 December 2005), and the term "independent and permanently neutral" prefaces any mention of Turkmenistan in news bulletins or formal state announcements. Neutral status has been immortalised in material form through the construction of the country's tallest monument, the Arch of Neutrality, a tripod tower in central Ashgabat at the top of which the 12 metre golden statue of Niyazov rotates each day to follow the sun.

The 1995 UNGA resolution, passed unanimously and to which no state had reasonable grounds for objection, is routinely described as an astonishing foreign policy achievement on Niyazov's part, for which the nation must be eternally grateful. The anniversary of the UN vote, declared a public holiday, is marked by ritual celebrations and keynote speeches by Niyazov on the "hard and thorny path" to neutrality (TCA, 14 December 2005)⁹⁷. In one respect, Turkmenistan's incorporation of neutrality and non-alignment into national ideology mirrors the stance taken by many small, post-colonial states

⁹⁵ The ECO was originally established in 1964 by Iran, Turkey and Pakistan as the economic arm of the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), a pro-NATO security organisation. It enlarged in 1992 to include the five former Soviet republics of Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan.

⁹⁶ Neutrality, which essentially means non-participation in global diplomacy, should be distinguished from neutralism and non-alignment. The latter involves an independent foreign policy that involves a much more active role in world affairs, and which does not preclude positive identification with certain states over specific policy issues. Most NAM founder members, including Yugoslavia, India and post-independence Ghana, inclined towards the Soviet Union (Crabb: 1965).

⁹⁷ The most substantive foreign policy speech by Niyazov, and arguably his most wide-ranging and widely distributed speech, is his lecture entitled 'Neutrality of Turkmenistan: History, World Outlook and State Strategy' delivered on the 5th anniversary of the UN Resolution on 12 December 2000.

searching for identity, security, internal political balance and strategic leverage with more powerful regional actors (Crabb: 1965, 41-76).

Interestingly, Latter has argued that Switzerland is predisposed towards neutrality because of its three distinct linguistic communities, implying that neutrality acts as an overlay to keep disparate communities within a single state (1991: 2). At the same time, smaller neutral states, such as Finland, can act effectively as “honest brokers,” particularly where situated as buffer states between more powerful neighbours (Lyon: 1963, 91-119). Thus, in generic terms, Turkmenistan’s decision to adopt neutrality conforms to a tradition of inchoate, smaller, newly independent states seeking a relatively cost-free foreign policy course, which would alleviate tensions in a variegated and potentially conflictual regional security complex.

(ii) Disengagement and Isolation from Institutional Actors

Putting Turkmen neutrality into practical effect meant a process of disengagement from CIS structures and non-participation in regional integration mechanisms. Niyazov has selectively attended CIS heads of state summits since 1992, usually only when they coincide with other business relating to the sale or transit of natural gas. In addition to opting out of the Tashkent CST of 1992, Turkmenistan declined to become a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the permanent body created to administer the renewed Treaty, which was approved in April 1999.

The Turkmen government has also not become involved in any CIS peacekeeping missions in FSU states, the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly or the Interstate Bank and, since 1999, has not even forwarded economic data to the CIS Interstate Statistical Committee (*Izvestiya*: 3 June 2004). Moreover, Niyazov has gradually disengaged from those CIS structures in which the government formerly participated, for example withdrawing from the CIS common visa agreement in 1999 (Pomfret: 2001, 165). Niyazov opted not attend the CIS Heads of State in Kazan (Russia) in August 2005, sending his former bodyguard and Deputy Prime Minister Aganiyaz Akiyev in his place. At the summit, Akiyev submitted an application to downgrade Turkmenistan to Associate status, the first member country to apply to leave the organisation. Given that states such as Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan, all of which have had more strained bilateral relations with Russia at one time or another, have not contemplated leaving the CIS, Turkmenistan’s application was significant. The Russian government was incensed, fearing that Turkmenistan would cause the break-up of one of the few multilateral

organisations in which Moscow retained significant prestige and undisputed influence (*Russica Izvestia*, 27 August 2005). While Niyazov's absence at Kazan was not unexpected, it was taken as a lack of respect. Accordingly, contrary to claims in the Turkmen press that a resolution was adopted downgrading Turkmenistan's status (IS 1), the Russian delegation stated that the matter had not been discussed, could not be addressed in Niyazov's absence and, in any event, noted that Turkmenistan had not withdrawn from any of the constitutional documents (IS 2).

Niyazov has also rejected any other attempts at regional political, security or economic integration. He has declined to participate in the CIS Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) (which boasts other regional isolationists Uzbekistan and Belarus), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and also withdrew in 1994 from the Central Asian Commonwealth, which later mutated into the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), a vehicle for economic cooperation between the Central Asian states.

Interaction with those organisations in which Turkmenistan still retains membership has varied at levels between perfunctory and just short of complete disengagement. Although Turkmenistan was Central Asia's first signatory to NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme on 10 May 1994, participation has been sporadic at best, a civil emergency planning seminar held in Ashgabat in September 2005 being the only significant activity of note since 2000 (IS 3). Indeed, such has been the fall-off in cooperative endeavour, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer issued a thinly veiled warning to the Turkmen government on 21 October 2004 that without additional effort on its part, the conditions would not exist for enhanced cooperation under PfP (IS 4).

Involvement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to which the country gained accession on 22 September 1992, has followed this trend, with the Turkmen government as of 31 December 2005 having no payments committed to the fund, and no outstanding purchases or loans in train (IS 5). Similarly, Turkmenistan has no lending programme with the World Bank, with the only cooperation as of 2006 confined to low-level implementation of the Small Grants Programme (IS 6). The ECO has not achieved a great deal since its inception, and the introduction of seven new members in 1992 has, in practice, made very few demands on Niyazov and, as such, he has been happy to continue with Turkmenistan's membership.

The overall pattern of engagement between the Turkmen regime and international institutions was one of initial, cautious engagement in the period 1991 to 1994, followed by a phased reduction in participation, retaining only nominal membership of institutions in most cases. Attempts by other states, notably Kazakhstan, to promote regional cooperation in the economic, political or security sectors have been rebuffed, with Niyazov insisting that projects are best pursued through bilateral relationships rather than multilateral frameworks. Niyazov's principal motive in following this trajectory appears to have been twofold: firstly, to limit the capacity of international institutions to intrude too closely into Turkmenistan's internal affairs; secondly, to reduce Turkmenistan's treaty commitments to a bare minimum particularly where these might be directed at a third party. Nevertheless, retaining nominal membership of the various institutions also allows Niyazov to project the illusion domestically that Turkmenistan remains a player in regional affairs.

(iii) Circumscribed Bilateralism with Regional State Actors

If the Turkmen government's stance towards international institutions is characterised by gradual detachment and isolationism, bilateral relations with other states have developed within strictly circumscribed parameters linked to specific projects. A brief analysis of Turkmenistan's relations with three important regional neighbours, Turkey, Iran and Uzbekistan, illustrates Niyazov's policy of limited collaboration for specific tactical gains, rather than as part of a trend to create wide-ranging or enduring partnerships that might produce functional spillover into other areas of strategic cooperation.

In the immediate aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey was Niyazov's choice of regional partner and, as noted in chapter four, a number of high-level exchanges occurred in Turkmenistan's first year of independence. However, much of the aid and investment promised at earlier summits did not materialise. Central Asian leaders were also not keen to exchange external domination from one source (Moscow) with that from another (Ankara). Consequently, ideas for the creation of a Turkic Commonwealth or Common Market, mooted by Turkish President Turgut Ozal in 1992, quickly evaporated (Winrow: 2001, 201).

The inspiration that Niyazov gained from the model of Ataturk's creation of modern Turkey set the template for Niyazov's ambitions and his early style of governance. However, as a more specifically Turkmen nationalist model crystallised and Niyazov reduced contact with the outside world, so the overt Kemalist influence on Niyazov's

policies has waned. Kemalist ideology was as much about state-building as nation-building, and Niyazov has shown little interest in the former. Allied to this, no major bilateral project in the energy sector has materialised that would bind together the two countries' economies on a functional level. Proposed gas pipelines via Iran and across the Caspian Sea linking Turkmen gas fields to Turkish markets have never got beyond the planning stage.⁹⁸ Military contacts remain relatively few and far between. Apart from close relations with individual Turkish businessmen such as Ahmed Chalyk, who was appointed a Deputy Minister and is effectively in control of the country's textiles sector, the volume of high-level contacts has substantially diminished after the mid-1990s.

Given their long joint border, Niyazov understandably also prioritised relations with Iran shortly after independence. Given the latter's diplomatic and economic isolation after the 1979 Revolution, there was a keen mutual interest in developing a strong bilateral friendship. As of 2006, Turkmenistan remains the only state that has a significant land border with Iran without either a US troop presence or close military relationship with the US. Although periodic proselytising forays across the border were made by Iranian clerics during the early 1980s, the Iranian government has not attempted to sponsor a religious revival in post-Soviet Turkmenistan, the main reason being that the Sunni and Sufi religious traditions of the Turkmen are not particularly compatible with the radical Shi'ite brand of Islam propagated from Tehran. Unlike in the Turkish case, however, a symbolic project linking the two countries did come to fruition in 1997 with the opening of the Korpedze – Kurt-Kui (KKK) gas pipeline along in the south eastern seaboard of the Caspian. The KKK line does not, however, service directly any of Iran's northern population centres which, allied with Iran's prodigious domestic natural gas reserves, has ensured that annual throughput has never been more than a third to a half of its 14 bcm per annum design capacity (Roberts: 2001, 61).

Bilateral relations were constructed almost entirely on the personal trust developed between Niyazov and former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Consequently, the election victory in June 2005 of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a religious purist with little

⁹⁸ The Trans-Caspian gas pipeline project was under active consideration in 1998 but did not proceed due to Niyazov's erratic negotiating tactics, and a dispute between the Azerbaijani state oil company SOCAR and the Turkmen side over the proportion of Turkmen gas that would be allowed to fill the pipeline as it traversed Azerbaijani territory. Niyazov prematurely held a ceremony in 1994 to inaugurate a Trans-Iranian gas pipeline. However, the construction of the Blue Stream gas pipeline across the Black Sea from Dzhugba in Russia to Samsun in Turkey, allied to the South Caucasus gas pipeline linking from Baku to Erzerum in Turkey, has effectively saturated the Turkish domestic gas market for the foreseeable future, so any future Transcaspiian line must now be predicated on gas sales to Central and western European customers (Roberts: 2001, 60-63).

time for Niyazov's attempts to fuse Islam with his own cult of personality, subsequently placed a limit on the scope for further cooperation. Although Niyazov would not participate in, or support, international action against Iran's nuclear programme, he is likely to remain outside any process of mediation convened to resolve Iran's conflict with the international community.

Relations with Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan's principal bordering state, were characterised by much greater hostility after 1992. Firstly, it is accepted that Niyazov and President Islam Karimov have never enjoyed close personal relations. For example, their first bilateral meeting surprisingly did not occur until 1996, five years after independence, and Niyazov opposed Karimov's appointment as the first president of the International Fund for the Aral Sea in 1997 (Horsman: 2001, 76).

Secondly, the Soviet Union's demise left a complex infrastructural legacy that was highly likely to create tension. The delimitation of the national republics in 1924 granted to the Turkmen SSR territory on the right bank of the Amu Darya, populated almost exclusively by ethnic Uzbeks. The creation of independent states in 1991 reactivated and exacerbated inter-ethnic tensions which, allied to the inadequate border delimitations in sparsely populated regions, numerous local territorial claims and incursions, has caused several shooting incidents between border guards (ICG Report No. 33: 2002, 9-10). Energy sector assets and grain silos were situated across the border from the communities and enterprises they served. The road and railway network now straddled the border. Communities were arbitrarily cut off from other family members, jobs, farmland, and traditional burial sites. The mutual reliance on irrigation agriculture from the Amu Darya became a potential source of inter-state conflict, with each leader unwilling to back down or engage in meaningful negotiations and Niyazov threatening to divert more water into the Karakum canal. Rumours even surfaced in Russian newspapers in 1995 about Uzbekistan's contingency plans to occupy parts of northeastern Turkmenistan (Horsman: 2001, 77).

Although bilateral relations stabilised in the late 1990s, serious tensions resurfaced in late 2002, when it transpired that Boris Shikhmuradov had been sheltered in the Uzbek embassy in Ashgabat for two weeks after his abortive assassination/coup attempt on Niyazov in November 2002. The Turkmen security services raided the Uzbek embassy after Shikhmuradov's departure, searched diplomatic cars and bags in contravention of protocol, and expelled Uzbek Ambassador Abdurashid Kadyrov on 21 December 2001. In response, Uzbek armoured infantry units stationed in its Bukhara, Khorezm, and

Kashkadryo oblasts were reportedly moved closer to the country's borders with Turkmenistan (IS 7). Although both countries preferred not to escalate the matter into military conflict, bilateral contacts were effectively suspended for two years, and not renewed until Karimov initiated a meeting in Bukhara on 19 November 2004.

This summit proved exceptional probably because both leaders had a compelling and urgent mutual interest in reviving relations. Petrol smugglers from Turkmenistan were increasingly circumventing Uzbekistan's punitive tariffs on imported products, thereby undermining its domestic economy. Moreover, an incident in October 2004 at the Tuyamuyun hydro-electric station on the Turkmen-Uzbek border, in which 25 Uzbek police officers were detained by Turkmen border guards for over a month, had threatened to escalate (Islamov: 2 December 2004). For Niyazov, a belligerent and much more powerful Uzbekistan represented the biggest threat to his regime's security. With the Uzbek government facing a significant threat to internal security from radical Islamist groups, Niyazov was anxious to avoid any of these groups basing themselves within the ethnic Uzbek population of northern Turkmenistan, which could provide a pretext for Uzbek occupation of lands that it claimed in any event. Moreover, the offer made by Karimov to monitor the movements of suspected Turkmen dissidents in Uzbekistan (although ironic given Uzbek complicity in the 2002 coup/assassination attempt) kept Niyazov aware of the activities of regime opponents in exile. Nevertheless, the agreements reached at the Bukhara summit were limited in scope, and designed to defuse immediate tensions, rather than provide a framework for a durable strategic partnership.

If a common thread can be detected in these three sets of important bilateral relationships, it is one that is consistent with the pattern of disengagement that has characterised the Turkmen regime's relationship with international institutions. Officially, Niyazov has argued that he would privilege bilateral contacts ahead of multilateral engagement, but this has not occurred in practice⁹⁹. In the first two years of his presidency (1992-1993), Niyazov made over 20 foreign trips, including to the US, UK, France and to several international summits in Europe. In a comparable period in 1999 and 2000, only five foreign trips were made – to Turkey, Russia and Iran. In the period from 2000 to 2006, that number has fallen yet further and, despite numerous invitations from important

⁹⁹ A notable exception was the hosting by Niyazov of peace talks to end Tajikistan's civil war in 1995 and 1996. Turkmenistan was a neutral-conflict-free zone situated between the protagonists, who were domiciled in Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran (hay: 2002, 38-43).

current and potential gas customers, such as Ukraine, Niyazov's only visit abroad in 2005 was for the 60th anniversary VE celebrations in Moscow¹⁰⁰.

(iv) The Rationale for Niyazov's Foreign Policy

The isolationism and disengagement that has characterised Niyazov's foreign policy since 1994 is explicable by a range of factors, some of which are common to other smaller post-Soviet states, and some of which are symptomatic of Niyazov's idiosyncratic approach to diplomatic relations.

The disengagement from CIS structures might initially seem puzzling. Faced with volatile Islamist states in Iran and Afghanistan along its southern borders, and a potentially revanchist threat from a much more powerful and aggressive former Soviet neighbour in Uzbekistan, it would appear logical that, as one of the Soviet Union's most loyal supporters, Niyazov would orient Turkmen national security interests through multinational structures and seek security guarantees directly from Russia¹⁰¹. In fact, the explanation for Niyazov's foreign policy trajectory lies in several interconnected factors.

The first is the perceived loss of sovereignty that would have been entailed in signing up to the CIS Tashkent Treaty. While the Turkmen SSR was politically part of a larger entity, the USSR, it was one constituent of a single geopolitical actor. Although theoretically a union of equals, the CIS was a club of independent states, in which larger and more populous republics, principally Russia, but also Ukraine and Uzbekistan, could potentially yield disproportionate influence in the same way that France and Germany have historically done in EU structures. Thus, Turkmenistan could find itself being bound to policy positions that were inimical to its own interests and even, in the case of Afghanistan, potentially threatening to national security. For Turkmenistan, subordinating national interest to collective CIS positions could potentially mean putting itself on the frontline against states with which it had no individual quarrel. Opting out of CIS military and security structures therefore maximised Niyazov's room for manoeuvre

¹⁰⁰ The data on overseas trips is taken from aggregating recorded state visits between 1991 and 2000 (Khrarov: 2001), supplemented by my own detailed analysis and summary of various local and international news sources between 2000 and 2006 (see section on methodology in chapter one). Niyazov may have made some private overseas trips in this period that are not recorded, although he has shown a marked unwillingness to leave the country at all since 2000, generally holidaying near Krasnovodsk on the Caspian Sea coast (Interview 24).

¹⁰¹ Other geographically marginalised Soviet republics with small populations, notably Armenia and Tajikistan, opted to develop close security alliances with Russia.

with Iran and Afghanistan and, in the early days (1992), left open the potential for a deeper partnership with Turkey.

The Tashkent Treaty and the CSTO also had limited practical use for Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all faced urgent security imperatives by virtue of their geographic locations bordering China, which still held substantial territorial claims on Central Asia dating from the nineteenth century. That China might go to war over these was evidenced by its history of territorial expansion and the Sino-Soviet border conflicts of 1969, some of which had occurred in the Kazakh SSR. Absorbing national defence capacities into a multilateral framework under Russia's control, and with a nuclear deterrent as a last resort, therefore afforded these relatively weak states a degree of protection. By contrast, the only real claims on Turkmen territory emanated from within the CIS itself, namely Uzbekistan and, if one includes disputes over the median line division of the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan (Roberts: 2001, 65). Given that the Tashkent Treaty of 1992 was silent on conflicts *between* CIS member states, and did not provide for conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, its utility as an instrument for Turkmenistan's national security was severely limited.

Unlike Ukraine, whose official neutrality was rooted in careful geopolitical positioning between EU and NATO structures on the one hand, and persisting cultural, linguistic and economic affinities with Russia on the other hand, Turkmenistan's neutrality was predicated on two objectives: firstly, to maximise its customer base for sales of natural gas; secondly, not to prejudice potential transit routes to any customers. Accordingly, Niyazov has sought to pursue a studiously balanced policy with all the states in the region, restricting meaningful contacts only to those governments that could purchase or facilitate gas exports (Badykova: 2001, 231-243).

As a consequence, Niyazov has run against the grain of the security policies adopted by other regional leaders. President Karimov, for example, has been highly suspicious of Iran's attempts to develop bilateral relations in the region (Herzig; 2001, 176), while other CIS states, notably Azerbaijan, have been careful not to draw criticism from extra-regional allies such the US and European states by developing close ties to Tehran.

However, the clearest illustration of the centrality of natural gas exports is Niyazov's little documented relationship with the Taliban in Afghanistan between 1994 and 2001. The possibility of a gas pipeline connecting Turkmenistan's massive south eastern Dauletebad gas fields to the South Asian market was first raised by Pakistani Prime

Minister Nawaz Sharif at an ECO meeting in Ashgabat in May 1992 (Esenov: 2001, 247). Subsequent meetings in 1993 led to Niyazov signing a memorandum on a projected pipeline with Pakistani President Benazir Bhutto in May 1995. No Afghani representatives were present, and the memorandum was strongly criticised by Afghanistan's *de jure* president, Burhanuddin Rabbani (OMRI Daily Digest, 7 March 1995).

As has been exhaustively reported, the Taliban was the chosen instrument of Pakistan Inter-Service Intelligence operatives to develop Pakistan's long-range geopolitical goal of attaining strategic depth to its north and west (Rashid: 2000, 17-30). The Taliban was used to secure trade cargoes from Turkmenistan from a very early stage after its formation, probably winter 1994 (Esenov: 2001, 249). Furthermore, as the Taliban's offensive rapidly advanced to the Turkmen border in 1994-95, it received a consignment of supposed humanitarian aid by rail which, given the poor state of the Turkmen economy at the time, was either an extremely generous gesture or, more likely, a shipment of arms.

Thus, while the CIS Collective Security Council formed a working group in October 1996 to consider the most appropriate method of securing borders and countering any aggressive expansion across Afghanistan's northern frontiers,¹⁰² Niyazov refused to participate, citing Turkmenistan's neutrality and its principle of non-interference in the affairs of other states. However, it would appear that Niyazov was actually cultivating the Taliban for two separate reasons. The Taliban, contrary to their later policy of poppy eradication, vigorously pursued a policy to maximise heroin trafficking outlets between 1994 and 1999 (Rubin: 2002, xxiv-xxv). Turkmenistan, according to Esenov, turned into "one of the main transit routes for transporting drugs from Afghanistan and Pakistan to CIS countries and, via Russia, to Europe" (2001, 251), almost certainly with official sanction and involvement (ICG Asia Report No. 44, 15-21; ICG Asia Report No. 85, 18-20). Secondly, two foreign oil companies, Unocal and Bidas, were vying to construct oil and gas pipelines across Afghanistan to Pakistan and gained agreements with all the parties, including the Taliban, to commence construction (Rashid: 2000, 157-182).

Notwithstanding the US cruise missile attacks on alleged Al Qaida training camps in Afghanistan during August 1998, Niyazov was prepared to host Taliban leaders for three days in Ashgabat in May 1999 and signed the only formal set of economic agreements

¹⁰² A Taliban anti-aircraft missile downed a domestic civilian flight in southern Tajikistan in 1997, killing all on board.

with the Taliban of any head of state. Only the imposition of US sanctions against the Taliban in July 1999, in response to the Taliban's formal grant of asylum to Osama bin Laden, led to the shelving of the TAP project by Bridas and Unocal, although serious attempts have been made to revive the plans since 2002, only this time with President Hamid Karzai as a partner.

A further indication of Niyazov's unwillingness to antagonise gas export routes or customers is the relatively low profile adopted on national defence issues (Table 7). Although the Ministry of Defence has been comparatively well-funded, much of the expenditure is directed towards retaining the privileges of senior officers (notably preferential housing, healthcare and education) rather than investment in training and hardware. As noted in the previous chapter, Niyazov's principal concern appears to be to ensure that the military does not become a hostile political actor. Any cursory observation of Turkmen regular forces, mostly conscripts from poor backgrounds whose main function appears to be to absorb youth unemployment, confirms the impression that they would be wholly ill-equipped to conduct even the most rudimentary defence of the country's borders.

Table 7: Turkmenistan's Armed Forces (Source: The Military Balance, 2005-2006)

Branch of Armed Forces	No. of Personnel (1)	Equipment
Army	21,000	702 T-72 tanks; 942 Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicles; 488 artillery pieces; 53 SA-8 and SA-13 Surface to Air missiles; 70 Air Defence Guns
Navy	700	Minor base at Turkmenbashi port with plans to acquire 5 boats
Air Force	4300	92 combat capable aircraft including 65 SU-17s and 22 MIG-29s; 10 MI-24 attack helicopters and 8 MI-8 support helicopters; 50 SA-2 Surface to Air missiles

(1) The vast majority of the armed forces consist of conscripts with 2 year terms of service. By contrast, of Turkmenistan's bordering states, Uzbekistan has 55,000 active members of the armed services, with a further 36,000 paramilitary troops (91,000 in total). Kazakhstan has 65,800 active members of the armed services, together with a further 34,500 paramilitary troops (100,300 in total). Iran has 420,000 active members of the armed forces, 40,000 paramilitary troops and 350,000 reservists (potentially 810,000 troops in total). Afghanistan's National Army is under development but, as of May 2006, has 33,000 trained recruits.

Moreover, Niyazov refused Turkmenistan's share of the Soviet Caspian fleet in 1992 and, as a consequence, Turkmenistan has much the smallest naval forces of the Caspian littoral states, numbering only 700 personnel (Kozhikov and Kaliyeva: 2002, 3-5). The implication of this (non-) posture is that the budget for national security has been oriented almost exclusively towards internal rather than external threats¹⁰³, and that national security from external penetration almost exclusively hinges on whatever legal protection is afforded by the UNGA neutrality resolution of 1995.

How is Turkmenistan viewed by international actors?

Any comparison between the Cold War sultanistic regimes discussed by Chehabi and Linz and the Niyazov regime in Turkmenistan should be clarified by two important distinctions. Firstly, in the former cases, the role of the UN and other international institutions was much less significant. Secondly, the involvement of the superpower patron was much greater. An important question for the durability of contemporary sultanistic regimes, therefore, is whether external leverage on rulers has increased or decreased since the end of the Cold War. In other words, have evolving international norms of human rights, allied to the increasing frequency of armed humanitarian intervention, rendered contemporary regimes more or less vulnerable to external interference?

The case of Turkmenistan would indicate that the post-Cold War international security environment has actually increased the domestic security of rulers like Niyazov. To consider how this situation has arisen, it is worth examining, in turn, the Niyazov regime's relationship with Russia, the closest state to an external patron, and the international community more broadly, to gauge the extent to which either actor would or could exercise leverage over Turkmenistan's internal affairs.

(i) Russia as Patron?

Russia's interests in post-Soviet Central Asia are conditioned by three broad issues: the wider regional security environment and, in particular, the implications for Russia's vulnerable southern flank of the insertion of hostile non-state actors (Islamist groups) and state actors (US military bases); the set of energy supply relationships that Russia has established across Eurasia, that involve the CARs as both source and transit states; and

¹⁰³ One such internal threat is heading off any unrest in the military.

the rights of ethnic Russians residing in the region, which can occasionally be a useful pretext for Russian policy-makers to pursue more substantive geopolitical and commercial objectives.

All three of these factors are relevant to Russo-Turkmen relations. The absence of strong border controls across the empty steppes and deserts dividing the Central Asian Republics (CARs) means that the southern borders of the Soviet Union have remained as Russia's *de facto* frontiers. This fact in itself has provided the rationale for a self-appointed Russian *droit de regard* over Central Asian security arrangements. However, in the case of Turkmenistan, the energy relationship is of much greater salience than the security issue. Unlike in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan has been neither a source nor a target of radical religious or separatist groups intent on destabilising the region. Unlike in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, autonomous organised crime groups have not been able to penetrate the upper echelons of the political elite in Turkmenistan. Moreover, unlike the three aforementioned states, there has been no US military presence in Turkmenistan since the terrorist attacks on New York on 11 September 2001.

Russia's relatively strong relationship with Iran since 1979, allied to Tehran's studious non-intervention policy in the Chechen conflict, means that Turkmenistan's long border with Iran is not viewed as a source of significant insecurity in Moscow. The border with Afghanistan is potentially more problematic. However, under the regional hegemony of General Abdul Rashid Dostum, a longstanding ally of the former Soviet states, the Turkmen/Uzbek – Afghan border zone has been the quietest region of Afghanistan since 1979.

Furthermore, Niyazov's isolationism and manifest inability to project military force beyond the country's borders does not make Turkmenistan a significant player in the regional security complex. This perception is magnified by the country's virtually non-existent profile in Eurasian security affairs since the 11 September terrorist attacks. Given that Turkmenistan enjoys long land borders with both Afghanistan and Iran, it is surprising that US (and, reactively, Russian) engagement with Niyazov was so slight. As Niyazov makes very little contribution to regional diplomacy, and does not impact any other state's affairs, it would therefore appear to suit all the region's principal geopolitical actors to leave Turkmenistan as a "strategic black hole" in the heart of Central Asia, particularly given that Turkmenistan's very weakness and vulnerability to a pre-emptive assault could further disturb the region's security situation.

Consequently, the principal security issue arising for Russia is the potential for the internal fragmentation of the Turkmen state after Niyazov leaves office and, in particular, the implications this might have for control of the country's largest gas fields, given that they lie significant distances from Ashgabat, in regions not populated by the dominant Ahal Teke tribe.

The energy relationship between Russia and Turkmenistan centres on the export of significant quantities of Turkmen natural gas to Russia. Apart from a small volume of gas (approximately 5-7 bcm per year) exported through the KKK pipeline to Iran, the entirety of Turkmenistan's export output transits the Central Asia – Center (CA-C) pipeline, controlled by the Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom. CA-C links to the huge "Friendship" and "Brotherhood" gas pipelines connecting Russia with Central and Eastern Europe, thereby connecting Turkmenistan to the wider European network. Turkmen gas export volumes via the Russian pipeline network have fluctuated since 1992, in part due to pricing disputes, but also due to the degradation of the Turkmen gas infrastructure. Export volumes have run at between 30 and 45 bcm per year on average. However, there is significant potential for expansion and, in April 2003, Niyazov signed a 25-year contract with Gazprom providing for the supply of up to 70-80 bcm per year from 2009 (Stern: 2005, 77). These ambitious projections are unlikely to be realised given the erratic management of the Turkmen state gas complex and the continuing lack of domestic refining and transit capacity.

Despite these problems, Turkmen gas has become increasingly important to Russia since the late 1990s. The main reason is that Gazprom has historically purchased Turkmen gas at rates well below global spot prices. Until 2003, Gazprom was typically paying \$44 per 1000 cm of gas, half of which was receivable in barter goods¹⁰⁴. Gazprom was able to resell Turkmen gas with a mark-up of over 500% to its western European customers and, as a result, delay the massive capital investment required to put its vast Arctic gas fields into early production.

So, do the constitutive components of this relationship imply that Russia could be categorised as a patron to the Niyazov regime and, moreover, if so, is its position analogous to that of the patronage relationships with external sponsors that characterised Cold War sultanistic regimes? The answer is not straightforward, largely because of the

¹⁰⁴ Many of the barter goods and services had minimal value, including the infamous delivery of 12 million pairs of Russian galoshes, a ludicrous arrangement given that Turkmenistan has a population approximately 5 million, and is mostly covered by one of the hottest deserts on earth.

evolving dynamics between the two states. The Russian government could, if it desired, uses its monopsonistic position to close off the Central Asia-Center pipeline complex, thereby halting 85% of Turkmenistan's gas exports. This did occur for three months during 1997 over a pricing dispute, with seriously deleterious effects for the Turkmen economy. However, the pattern between 2001 and 2006 has actually been reversed, with Niyazov unilaterally cutting off gas exports temporarily to Turkmenistan's Russian and Ukrainian customers in search of higher prices (Stern: 2005, 79).

The reasons are twofold: firstly, Niyazov is aware that in order to service its European contracts, Gazprom has been operating at near full capacity since 2000. The supply that Turkmenistan has provided has become progressively more vital to Gazprom in the short to medium term, a factor that Niyazov has been able to play on to extract more value from Turkmen exports, particularly as Gazprom has become increasingly conscious of its image as a major corporate player in the global energy market.

The second factor is the transformation of the transit and energy security dynamic across Eurasia since 2003. The rapid expansion of the Far Eastern and South Asian economies has caused the Indian and Chinese governments in particular to seek new sources of energy security. Iran has been diplomatically and commercially isolated since Turkmenistan became an independent state in 1992 and, as of 2006, is likely to remain so for the short to medium term. As such, it has been an unattractive venue for major foreign investors. The overthrow of Afghanistan's Taliban regime in late 2001 also revived a potential energy corridor to South Asia. Concerns of energy security in Western Europe, precipitated by the Russia-Ukraine gas pricing dispute in January 2006, prompted EU member-states to seek to reduce their dependence on Russia as Central Europe's principal gas supplier.

The rapid evolution of the Eurasian gas complex between 2003 and 2006 quickly moved beyond the notional and into material projects. The Chinese government, through the state-owned company Sinopec, has proven its ability to construct long-distance oil and gas pipelines quickly, with the completion in December 2005 of the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline connecting Kazakhstan to western China. A projected 6700 km gas pipeline linking the Urtaublok gas condensate field, situated on the right bank of the Amu Darya river in eastern Turkmenistan, to Guangzhou, Shanghai and the Yangtze river delta in China was approved when Niyazov made a rare foreign visit to Beijing in April 2006 (TCA 8 December 2005; *RIA Novosti*, 6 April 2006). The pipeline is intended to carry 30 bcm per year and be operational by 2010.

The TAP project, linking the Dauletebad gas field in southeastern Turkmenistan to key Pakistani and Indian urban centres, has had a more troubled gestation period. Although there has been considerable political drive behind its construction, its future construction is likely to be problematic given the delicate state of Indo-Pak relations, the continued absence of a major commercial operator, and the uneven security profile inside Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the plans have continued to be developed through a series of high-level working groups and they have provided a reminder to Gazprom and the Russian government that it should not take the reserves from Turkmenistan's largest gas fields for granted (NCA, 9 March 2006).

Alongside these developments, the European Parliament's External Relations and Trade Committees approved a draft trading agreement in April 2006 for the direct supply of Turkmen gas (RFE/RL TS 28 April 2006). Such an agreement has the potential to revive the Caspian Sea gas corridor by taking liquefied natural gas (LNG) by tanker to the newly constructed BP South Caucasus Pipeline linking Baku to Erzerum in Turkey which, in turn, connects to the main southeastern European gas networks.

Notwithstanding concerns about recoverable reserves, domestic management and the time-lag involved in putting in place new pipelines and tanker fleets, this panoply of new trading and transit networks significantly multiplied Turkmenistan's export options. The critical geopolitical corollary of this shift has been to diminish quite rapidly the leverage Russia retains over the Turkmen economy. Put simply, in the period 2003 to 2006, Russia's ability to exert economic and, therefore, political pressure on the Niyazov regime probably peaked, as alternative suppliers of rental income have come into play. The Niyazov regime has therefore moved away from a position in the immediate post-Soviet period when Russia might have been fairly described as a patron, to one in which Niyazov has extracted the country from any regional institutional commitments and become the object of a number of commercial suitors for the country's gas reserves.

An indication of this, relates to the third and least important factor on Russia's agenda – the treatment of ethnic Russians in Central Asia. Although Niyazov's plan, outlined in 2003, to abolish the longstanding dual citizenship arrangement for ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan, was temporarily suspended, no new dual citizenship applications would be processed and, in practice, the system is being phased out. Interviewee 24, one such ethnic Russian, found that his application for dual citizenship was not processed in late 2003. The Russian government's stance indicated quite clearly that the gas trading

relationship with Turkmenistan would not be sacrificed in order to preserve the rights of ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan

An important proposition developed earlier in this study is that contemporary sultanistic rulers who play their diplomatic hand carefully are paradoxically much less likely to be subject to external interference in the post-Cold War environment than they would have been under US patronage during the Cold War. The explanation for this anomaly lies partly in the erosion of the patronage relationship and partly in the failure of international institutions to bridge the “disciplinary” gap left by the erstwhile patron. Once Cold War sultanistic regimes had either outlived their political and strategic usefulness to the US (for example, General Manuel Noriega in Panama), or there was a danger that repressive internal security actions by the ruler would unleash potentially unfavourable revolutionary forces (as with President Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines), such rulers were manoeuvred out of power by successive US administrations.

The Russo-Turkmen bilateral relationship since 1992 has not mirrored the role that the US played out as an external sponsor of various Cold War sultanistic regimes. Changing geopolitical alignments and the proliferation of global commercial networks have reduced the scope for the creation of patron-client relationships between newly independent states and more powerful regional players. Moreover, with the exception of sporadic and rather perfunctory concerns about ethnic Russians residing in the FSU states, the normative dimension in Russia’s ‘Near Abroad’ policies has been almost entirely absent.

More pragmatically, in the immediate post-Soviet period, Turkmenistan was simply not geographically proximate or strategically significant enough to Russia to warrant close and sustained attention. Although it has been, and remains, Turkmenistan’s principal gas customer, Russia’s economic influence over the Niyazov regime remains strong, but is likely to erode with the gradual reorientation of oil and gas supplies away from Soviet transit networks in the medium-term. The limitations of foreign patronage, in this case from Russia, has meant that a source of constraint on Niyazov’s domestic policy preferences has been largely absent, and other potential economic patrons, perhaps China, are unlikely to seek to wield a comparative influence over Niyazov’s domestic behaviour.

(ii) The (Non-) Influence of International Institutions

Parallel to Russia's relationship with Turkmenistan has been the inability of international institutions to make a significant impact on the Turkmen regime's behaviour. External military intervention or judicial sanction under the auspices of UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) remains a rare occurrence, historically triggered by substantial breaches of the sovereignty of neighbouring states (UNSCR 661 following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, 1990), civil war (UNSCR 794 creating the UN Unified Task Force for Somalia, 1992) or major human rights violations (UNSCRs 955 and 978 in Rwanda, 1994). Turkmenistan clearly does not fit into any of these categories and is thus unlikely to fall under the purview of a UNSCR.

Nevertheless, a UNGA Resolution, passed on 20 December 2004 by 69 votes to 47, which called on Turkmenistan to release prisoners of conscience and ensure freedoms of thought, conscience, religion and belief (IS 8) did unsettle the regime temporarily, principally because the earlier 1995 UNGA Resolution, recognising Turkmenistan's permanent neutrality, has been such a source of such domestic prestige for Niyazov. UN single country resolutions are not binding. Their weight is principally symbolic, and the 2004 resolution was opposed by a number of developing countries (there were also 63 abstentions), the Pakistani Ambassador to the UN arguing that adopting such resolutions targeted developing countries unfairly (IS 8). Given that the EU sponsored the resolution, and then subsequently sought a major gas trade deal with Turkmenistan (possibly to be ratified by the EU Council of Ministers in mid-2006), the critical resolution has been undercut by its proponents in any event (The Guardian, 21 April 2006).

Pressure from the OSCE has arguably had marginally more impact. Niyazov publicised his attendance at OSCE summits in the immediate post-Soviet period, not least because they were important photo opportunities that could portray him conversing with the leaders of Western European states as a political equal. However, complaints by Turkmen dissidents, following the expedited trials of the suspects in the coup attempt of 25 November 2002, triggered the OSCE's Moscow Mechanism for the first time since the conflict in the former Yugoslavia escalated in 1993. This component of the OSCE's Human Dimension mechanism allows member states to mandate an investigation into specific allegations of human rights violations into a third member country (IS 9). The resulting report, prepared by Professor Emmanuel Decaux, was highly critical of the policy of interrogating relatives of the suspects, of the conditions of the detention, and the judicial process right through to sentencing (Decaux: 2003).

Notionally, membership of the OSCE entails formal commitments on the part of the state to respect certain norms, notably in the sphere of human rights. In the later period of the Cold War, Eastern European dissident groups, such as Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, used the "Third Basket" issues contained in Article Seven of the Final Act of the 1975 Helsinki Accords as a mechanism to highlight domestic human rights abuses. The Helsinki obligations proved to be an important component in transforming both domestic political agendas and the wider framework of East-West relations. They provided a symbolic and legal commitment around which activists and the international community were able to unite (Thomas: 2001; Sowula 2005). The use of the Decaux report by domestic activists in Turkmenistan might, in theory, represent a form of response to sultanistic rule that could potentially unsettle the Turkmen regime. However, it is more likely that Niyazov viewed both the UNGA resolution and the OSCE Moscow Mechanism report of 2003 simply as irritants, in the knowledge that few people in Turkmenistan were probably aware (or cared) about their content or implications. UN and OSCE resolutions are thus more likely to provide the normative platform for the recognition of a successor government, rather than a mechanism to disrupt or hold to account the activities of the incumbent regime.

The attention of the international community on the domestic situation in Turkmenistan increased in the period after 2002. Nevertheless, there is little evidence to suggest that it has modified Niyazov's behaviour or acted as a deterrent in respect of future violations of international human rights norms. Bilateral pressure from individual EU member states has been slight and, while the US embassy in Ashgabat has successfully intervened in a handful of individual cases, the overall impact of US State Department criticisms of the regime has been negligible. To summarise, the UN and OSCE have not exerted significant influence on the behaviour of the Turkmen regime since 1992. Indeed, it could be argued that the critical UNGA Resolution of 2004 actually solidified a body of support for Turkmenistan from similarly criticised states in the developing world. As such, global discourses of human rights and democratisation that gained currency at the end of the Cold War do not appear to have restricted the Niyazov regime's room for manoeuvre to any significant degree and, indeed, may actually have give Niyazov breathing space.

Conclusion

SRT holds that sultanistic regimes were often the beneficiaries of superpower sponsorship. When the relationship with the patron disintegrated and access to rent circuits was reduced, sultanistic rulers became vulnerable to regime breakdown. Accordingly, the relationship between sultanistic regimes and external actors was crucial to their continuation. Brownlee looked further at this issue by examining those regimes which had proven to be durable over extended periods. He found that the common thread in their durability lay in the shedding or absence of a patron-client relationship and the regime's continued access to rental income.

As a post-Cold War sultanistic regime, Turkmenistan adds a new dimension to this paradigm. Looking at Turkmenistan's foreign policy trajectory under Niyazov, it becomes clear that the regime has largely adopted a policy of selective and minimal institutional engagement. Posing no threat to other states, it can be overlooked in regional calculations. Previous sultanistic leaders such as Mohammed Reza Shah spent inordinate amounts on military equipment, in the process unsettling neighbours and creating problems for their patron (Pollack: 2004, 101-140). Niyazov has avoided this mistake. Bilateral relations with other states have been confined to specific issues, notably the sale of oil and gas. Turkmenistan's policy of neutrality has ensured that it remains outside security organisations and military alliances. As a consequence, the amount of leverage that can be exercised on the regime by regional security institutions and neighbouring states is severely circumscribed.

Although Turkmenistan lacked many of the orthodox attributes of statehood on attaining independence, it did not fall into a conventional patron-client relationship with Russia. This was partly due to Russia's own lack of interest, as Turkmenistan did not, in the immediate post-Soviet period, hold a great degree of strategic salience for Moscow. However, as the oil and gas sector has emerged as the central driver of Russia's post-Soviet economic resurgence, and as its principal instrument for reasserting geopolitical influence, Turkmenistan has come back onto Moscow's foreign policy radar. While Russia has retained a monopsony over Turkmen gas exports, a new web of commercial possibilities has opened for Turkmenistan, separate from the Soviet gas infrastructure, which requires Russia to behave less as a patron and more as a senior strategic partner. Moreover, Russian policy-makers have exhibited far less interest in the domestic policies of their regional partners/clients than their US counterparts historically did with their earlier sultanistic clients.

Generalising further, by adding in both Brownlee's case studies and others in Africa, notably Zimbabwe, it would appear that the end of the Cold War did not, as scholars of sultanistic regimes suggest, necessarily spell the beginning of the end for personalistic leaders (Snyder: 1992). Instead, for those regimes like Turkmenistan that either escaped or were not subject to full-blown external sponsorship, the post-Cold War security environment has proven to be one of the guarantors of regime survival. As long as the rulers do not disturb the international system in the forms previously noted, the international community is likely to leave them to behave internally with virtual impunity. By contrast, when leaders transgressed certain norms during the Cold War, the US was prepared, under certain circumstances, to intervene by shifting its support to the opposition. International institutions such as the UN, OSCE, EU or NATO have largely been unwilling to step into the breach by policing the behaviour of sultanistic regimes, except in the two very specific and exceptional cases of Serbia/Kosovo (where President Slobodan Milosevic was not deposed in any event) in 1999, and Iraq (where Saddam Hussein was removed) in 2003, both of whose leaders had a history of expanding their regime's power into areas not formerly either under its *de facto* or *de jure* control.

As a consequence, broader assumptions made about the beneficial legacies of the end of the Cold War, the enhanced role of international institutions, the increased accountability of leaders, both internally and externally, and wider concepts of order and justice in the international system are brought into question by the durability of the Niyazov regime and others of similar type. If those sultanistic regimes that continue to enjoy secure rental income streams have fewer external constraints on their behaviour than previously, SRT's hitherto "top down" focus must be necessarily modified and extended in order to capture the domestic political and social responses to sultanistic behaviour examined in the previous chapter.

Chapter Eight – Conclusion

Introduction

The research question posed in this thesis can be summarised as follows: how do personal regimes like that of President Saparmurat Niyazov come to power, and how do they remain so durable? To answer this puzzle, the two theories of sultanistic regimes formulated by H.E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz in 1990 were employed to frame an in-depth case study of government in the Republic of Turkmenistan between 1992 and 2006.

However, conducting the theoretical and empirical enquiry revealed a series of additional puzzles. How do sultanistic regimes in the contemporary international system differ from the Cold War predecessors described by Chehabi and Linz? What influence do external sponsors or the international community have on the behaviour of sultanistic rulers? Given that these regimes are frequently characterised by acute policy failure and administrative chaos, how do they avoid being overthrown or collapsing? Do the ordinary subjects of sultanism truly believe in the often ludicrous claims made by and about their ruler? How do people actually live under sultanistic rule? Beyond these general questions, the choice of Turkmenistan as the focus of the thesis raised a different, but nonetheless taxing, set of methodological and empirical questions, not the least of which concerns Turkmenistan's political trajectory once Niyazov leaves office.

To engage with these queries, the remainder of this concluding chapter is structured into three parts. Firstly, the principal questions considered in the thesis are summarised and its main findings discussed, together with their implications for development of theoretical and comparative study. The second part looks at the challenges that Turkmen society will confront once Niyazov leaves office. Reconstructing the political order and managing the state's oil and gas revenues equitably, within the framework of a unified state, will almost certainly present a formidable task. Unfortunately, the track record of states in similar situations is decidedly mixed. Reviewing the scenarios for political change cannot be based on hard evidence but brief consideration of this issue is vital from a policy perspective, given Turkmenistan's location, volatile neighbours and globally significant gas reserves. The concluding section briefly considers some further research questions arising from this project.

Research findings

The first and most generically important findings of the project relate to the theoretical framework. By the time the collection of papers comprising the survey of sultanistic regimes was published, in 1998, it had the feel of a work of contemporary history. All the rulers evaluated in the country studies had long since departed the scene. Yet, at the same time, many of the core features of the Pahlavi, Marcos, Duvalier and Batista regimes could be discerned in contemporary states. Some these were survivors, the “Big Men” of post-colonial African politics and the charismatic dictators, like Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein and Colonel Qadhafi, who had successfully played off the superpowers against each other during the Cold War.

Other leaders, though, were new to the international scene, and emerged out of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Most were loyal Communist Party bosses who found themselves having to navigate their previously comfortable fiefdoms into the hazardous waters of independent statehood. Some, such as Presidents Nazarbayev, Aliyev and Rakhmonov, presided over Soviet republics that were seemingly held together only by the overlay of Soviet power, which had acted as an arbitrator and enforcer of rival claims. Within that group, a handful rejected the formal dissemination of authority across different branches of national and local government, preferring instead to retain power within their immediate circle. The Soviet command economy handed these new rulers the keys to the national treasury, providing opportunities for self-enrichment as well as unfettered power. Within this milieu, techniques of Soviet political persuasion, both material and symbolic, were brought back into play. Of these, the regime of President Saparmurat Niyazov stood out as one in which the traits of personal rule had advanced furthest. The transitions undergone in several of these states appeared to contradict conventional explanations of postcommunist political behaviour. Indeed, far from moving towards democracy and the market economy, a handful of ex-Soviet republics appeared to be even losing the freedoms granted under *perestroika*. Alternative explanations, centred on post-imperial or political culture, proved to equally problematic, for the reasons set out in chapter one.

The thinking behind this project therefore was to move to a different explanatory framework by testing whether these post-Soviet regimes, which had begun to outwardly resemble those described as sultanistic by Chehabi and Linz, actually possessed deeper structural congruencies with the earlier examples, notwithstanding the substantively different geopolitical environments in which they were operating. If that were the case

then, through cross-temporal and cross-regional comparison, we might be able to acquire deeper understanding of the process of regime formation, operation and evolution in certain FSU states.

Initial investigations were made to determine whether the SRT framework was fit for its purpose. Careful interrogation of its content revealed that while SRT's basic tenets were sound, they needed to be put on a much more rigorous and firmer footing. Thus, the work undertaken on SRT had two components: firstly, introducing a situational dynamic that acknowledged the influence of contingency and opportunism in deinstitutionalised contexts; secondly, examining and developing the authors' analysis of structural causes of sultanism more carefully. By doing so, it became clear that certain assumptions needed to be revised.

Work on the structural causes identified the need to sharpen up the macrostructural explanations for sultanism. The relatively loose formulation of the socio-economic conditions favouring sultanistic outcomes was tightened down to the prevalence of revenue streams derived from rental (unearned) income, normally from a natural resource endowment. These revenues have multiple functions: they liberate the ruler from having to tax heavily and the concomitant requirement to account for spending decisions. This blunts the edge of calls for political representation. Secondly, they provide the ruler with funds to buy in hard security provision. Thirdly, they enable the ruler to activate and direct new and pre-existing patronage networks that reinforce traditional socio-economic arrangements, sideline rivals, and keep a good number of political actors interested in maintaining the political status quo. Finally, the rentier economy permits the ruler to indulge in the trappings of "soft" power, most frequently evident in forms of political symbol that glorify and legitimate the existing regime.

The second substantive revision to SRT required a reconceptualisation of the relationship between sultanistic regimes and external actors. Chehabi and Linz made the important correlation between external interference, either through formal empire or external sponsorship, and sultanistic regimes. As such, SRT theorists argued that Great Powers could "make or break" sultanistic regimes. Therefore, when the US withdrew its support from the Marcos and Duvalier regimes, the game was up for these leaders fairly quickly. Similarly, a number of longstanding African leaders became vulnerable at the end of the Cold War after the region had ceased to host proxy conflicts between the superpowers. However, theorists of durable authoritarianism queried this interpretation. Instead they focused on those cases in the MENA region where the regime had survived intact and,

indeed, prospered without the direct interference of external powers. What emerged from this dichotomy is a realisation that SRT had tended to focus on those regimes that had collapsed, rather than on the survivors. Looking at the Cold War “holdouts” such as Qadhafi, Asad, and other leaders who exhibited varying tendencies towards personalism, it became clear that, in the post-Cold war era at least, it was an asset *not* to have an external patron.

Thirdly, SRT said very little about the nature and exercise of power itself – in short, after acquiring political control, how the ruler maintains his hegemony. This required a more sophisticated conceptualisation of power in order to capture the full panoply of techniques deployed by rulers not only to counter opposition activities, but to prevent them emerging in the first place.

Finally, a significant lacuna in SRT was the absence of any perspective from those required to negotiate sultanistic rule. By adding in these voices, we could obtain a more nuanced assessment of the regime’s social impact which would, in turn, contribute to our understanding of both its durable elements and its weaknesses.

Applying these propositions to the Niyazov regime in Turkmenistan was a challenging task, not least because of the paucity of data and the practical difficulties in conducting field research, engendered by the Turkmen government’s reluctance to grant visas to foreign researchers. The first and most basic task, therefore, was to determine how the research could be physically accomplished. Obtaining visas for field research, while problematic, was only the starting point. Once in the country, it was clear that spending time only in Ashgabat would not capture the complexities of the rural/urban, tribal, regional and ethnic cleavages within Turkmen society. Travel outside the capital brought me into greater contact both with the regime, principally through its security functions, and also with Turkmen who did not share the more metropolitan mindset of Ashgabat residents. Many were curious about my motives for visiting Turkmenistan and, in particular, straying outside Ashgabat, as foreign visitors were so rare. The novelty of my presence worked in my favour in that people proved more willing to discuss the regime frankly than I had expected, although I tried to remain as aware as possible of the impact of my role as a foreign researcher might have on the answers given.

Nevertheless, it was possible, with the addition of data from other sources, to piece together a fairly full picture of the distinctive historical and structural characteristics that favoured the emergence of Niyazov as a sultanistic ruler from a fairly orthodox career as

a Soviet bureaucrat, the formal and informal map of power within the country, the rationale behind the regime's policies, and the responses to these policies by those most affected by them.

The principal empirical findings were, firstly, that historical and structural legacies, from both the pre-Soviet and Soviet period, were crucial in the emergence of sultanistic rule in Turkmenistan. Inimical tribal relations, the legacy of external domination and enduring geographical isolation provided a setting and a rationale for Niyazov's accumulation of increasingly unchecked power. The collapse of the Soviet Union provided a favourable strategic context for Niyazov's opportunism, aided by the delivery of a significant natural resource base into his hands.

Having acquired power, Niyazov has kept it by adopting three interlocking and mutually dependent control mechanisms. Unafraid to suppress dissent by force, he supplemented coercive techniques by acting as a "superpatron" supplying heavily subsidised essential goods direct to the population, while presiding over a system that permitted embedded clientelistic relationships to continue at regional and local level.

The third element of the nexus was the creation of a pervasive cult of personality centred on Niyazov, his deceased parents, and his book, *Ruhnama*. The disciplinary, integrative and socialisational functions of the cult saturate public space, leaving little or no room for the autonomous civil society activities that might function as an alternative to the regime. A varied pattern of responses to the regime was gauged, ranging from sporadic, compromised and poorly organised political opposition in exile, through to an ambivalent acceptance of, and accommodation with, the regime within Turkmenistan. This, in itself, signified that Niyazov was not in imminent danger of removal.

Marrying up the theoretical and empirical perspectives, the Niyazov regime conformed very closely to the sultanistic regime template laid down by Chehabi and Linz. However, in order to make their work relevant in a contemporary setting, particularly for those postcommunist leaders displaying sultanistic tendencies, their theoretical framework had to be revisited and renovated. This thesis has been a contribution to that process.

After Niyazov

While the research findings can give us a more fine grained appreciation of the political processes at work in Turkmenistan, they cannot predict how the political situation will

evolve with any degree of certainty. Although Niyazov periodically makes statements to the effect that he will retire, these are rarely taken seriously, either domestically or by the international community. Niyazov raised the issue of holding a presidential election in 2008 or 2009 with the *Khalk Maslahaty* in 2005 but the motion was, as expected, unanimously voted down. The timetable for elections will not be considered again until 2009. Given Niyazov's past troubled health, it is entirely likely that he will die in office.

As of 2006, Niyazov has no apparent heir. His son Murat could be a short-term solution and it is noteworthy that constitutional amendments enacted in 2005 lifted the prohibition on non-Turkmen holding the presidency (Murat is mixed race Turkmen-Russian Jewish). However, Murat has almost no elite support and showed little political ambition between 1992 and 2006. The lack of a natural successor illustrates the potential for a systemic crisis in the immediate post-Niyazov period. A number of major players and possible successors within the Turkmen political elite, notably Yolly Gurbanmuradov and Rejep Saparov, were both imprisoned in 2005 for long terms on embezzlement charges.

The constitutional arrangements for death in office are wholly inadequate as of mid-2006. The *Khalk Maslahaty* should be recalled to choose an interim successor but the time taken to arrange this convention, given that many delegates are based in remote parts of the country, allied to the lack of clear procedures for choosing a successor, means that Turkmenistan could become very vulnerable either to a *coup d'état* or to an intervention by an external power, possibly Russia or Uzbekistan. Moreover, the Cabinet of Ministers is in such a state of permanent flux that it is impossible to predict who would be *in situ* when "the music stops". A more stable scenario therefore might be if Niyazov were to become incapacitated, for example through a stroke or heart attack. In this eventuality, the transition of power could be managed in more stable form.

Snyder (1988) identified several paths out of sultanistic regimes, depending upon the strength and agenda of opposition groups, the historic role of the military, and the degree to which the ruler's patronage networks had successfully penetrated both state and society. In the case of Turkmenistan, the comparative weakness of the military, both in absolute terms and as a political actor, militates against it playing a role analogous to that in the Philippines, Haiti, or even Romania during the overthrow of Ceausescu (Nicholls: 1998; Behr: 1991; Thompson: 1998).

The likelihood of Niyazov being ejected forcibly from office by popular unrest like Reza Shah, Somoza or Batista (Katouzian: 1998; Booth: 1998; Dominguez: 1998) also appears

to be relatively slim. Although the regime might be fundamentally quite brittle, the risk of incarceration or worse that faces protestors still outweighs the very uncertain benefits of popular mobilisation. Moreover, even though the management of the oil and gas sector leaves much to be desired (partly because many competent officials have been dismissed, and partly due to infrastructural legacies from the Soviet era), there is no sign that Niyazov cannot continue to subsidise the essential commodities that take the edge off popular discontent.

The more likely scenario for Niyazov's forcible removal is an ultimatum delivered by senior officials, supported by the upper echelons of the KNB and the military. In this instance, the role of the Presidential Guard, which retains a powerful and privileged position, would be decisive, as would the terms offered for his resignation. Should he be granted an honourable exit in the form of legal immunity, an honorific title and a generous settlement, Niyazov might cut his losses. However, there is, as of 2006, no evidence of a cabal forming that would be capable of challenging Niyazov. A factor in his political longevity is the ability to prevent any official forming an alternative power base, and it would require a substantial breakdown in Niyazov's personal surveillance networks for this situation to arise.

Perhaps a more pertinent question than the individual fate of Niyazov is the country's political trajectory after he dies or steps down. The failure to develop the state's administrative capacity or a bureaucratic structure with an autonomous professional culture may cause significant difficulties if the patronage networks, upon which the system currently depends, are disrupted by the departure of the chief patron. The principal fault lines within Turkmen society are ethno-tribal in character. There is a strong likelihood that these identities might reassert themselves fairly rapidly without the overlay provided by Niyazov. The country's two major gas fields are both located in the southeast (Dauletebad) and the west (Nebit Dag to offshore) of the country, outside the traditional strongholds of Niyazov's powerful Ahal Teke tribe based in Ashgabat. Regional elites, resentful of the diversion of resources to fund Niyazov's expensive construction projects in the capital, may seek the reconfiguration of the political order to accommodate regional interests, possibly via a federal solution.

On the other hand, it is entirely feasible that, in the event of a lengthy and confused political interregnum, that power would be devolve by default to regional administrations. The aftermath of President Askar Akayev's ouster from the Kyrgyz presidency in March 2005, has illustrated how fragile the cohesion of a society can be

where clan and regional identities supersede those of nationality. Given the size and relatively sparse population of Turkmenistan and the relatively compact Uzbek minorities resident along border areas (analogous to the ethnic Uzbek community in southern Kyrgyzstan), the possibilities of either political interference from Tashkent or Uzbeks emerging autonomously as significant agents of political change (either as perpetrators or victims) is a salient consideration.

The role of those officials imprisoned by Niyazov and the opposition based abroad could also be an unpredictable ingredient in any reordering of hierarchies, not least because some of the leading exiled figures reputedly have significant largesse to dispense following their embezzlement of state funds and manipulation of gas export volumes for pecuniary gain.

The spectre of state collapse after Niyazov has been raised in several influential NGO reports (ICG Report No. 44: 2003; GW Report: 2006) and in policy-making and academic circles. Given the rarity of state failure in the international system, and the interests of the region's leading gas consumers in the country's internal stability, an informally mediated accommodation at elite level (if not in the regions) may be constructed in the medium-term. An apposite comparison might be with the bargaining games conducted over monarchical successions in the Middle East. In the Gulf dynastic monarchies, the patterns of succession are often keenly contested. However, Herb (1999: 47-49) persuasively argues that elites, crucially including those out of favour, bargain hard but then pact relatively quickly to avoid jeopardising what they have gained in the negotiations. Second best, it seems, is better than nothing. Given the regional and tribal dynamics at work in the Turkmen case, the Gulf model could be an interesting case for further comparative research.

The political and economic uncertainties that Niyazov will bequeath are virtually self-evident given the highly personal nature of the regime. What, however, will be the fate of the cult of personality surrounding Niyazov after he leaves office? Is it a durable construction, analogous to that of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk in contemporary Turkey, or will the cult system perish with its object like that of Ceausescu? Although in the short-term, Niyazov's successor might seek to base his political credentials on being Niyazov's authorised choice, the prospects of the cult of personality enduring in the form that it took when Niyazov was in power, remain slim.

That is not to suggest that the decultification process will be straightforward. Recent scholarship (Jones: 2004, 227-245) has revealed that the Stalin cult, far from disappearing overnight, proved surprisingly resilient and popular among many Russians. The explanations lie in the extent of the cult's penetration into society, the syncretic assimilation of older traditions in the cult's principal motifs and, crucially, the association of Stalin with victory in the Great Patriotic War. For many veterans, repudiating Stalin equated to the devaluation of the sacrifices they had made in wartime. The preservation of the Atatürk cult in Turkey is based not so much upon the individual, but rather his embodiment of Western mores and codes, and the secularism of the Turkish state.

By contrast, Wedeen (1999) has argued that belief in the cult of Asad was much lower and, as such, the regime's discourses had not been internalised. Interviewees 11 and 24, respectively Turkmen and Russian, both believed that the cult would die with Niyazov, although the influence of teaching *Ruhnama* incessantly to a new generation of Turkmen children may have problematic consequences. A politically pain-free way for Niyazov's successor would be through criticism of the cult on aesthetic rather than political grounds. This could lead to the removal of much of the statuary and portraiture, while delaying or gradually lowering the socio-political dimension of the cult.

Concluding Remarks

The questions raised by this study might appear to apply to a small and diminishing number of states. However, given the human rights issues that they raise, allied to their invariably large natural resource base, they cannot simply be ignored by the international community, particular if their salient characteristics are replicated cross-regionally and cross-temporally. Moreover, the cases of Turkmenistan, and other similar states, enable us to raise more general questions about, to take three examples, the viability of isolationism in the international system, the role of international institutions in dealing with moderate but persistent human rights abusers, and the relationship between natural resource endowment and governance.

The unusual characteristics of sultanistic regimes also permit further cross-disciplinary enquiry into the nature of belief and unbelief and the potential collision or fusion of the two, or the politics of urban space or everyday life under sultanistic regimes. Given this potential it remains surprising that non-democratic regime theory has not attracted more scholarly attention. It is hoped that this thesis takes a very modest step towards rectifying that situation.

Appendix One: Map of Central Asia



Appendix Two: Map of Turkmenistan



Base: R02344 (R01131) 12-94

Appendix Three: Biographies of Interviewees

1. Dr. M.T.

Location: Leeds, UK

Date: 8 September 2005

Ethnic Talysh originally from Azerbaijan, aged 46, graduated from Baku Medical Institute in 1983, then worked as a Soviet army doctor. Promoted to rank of captain and placed in charge of Turkmen army's medical supplies unit by 1998. Experience of medical service in armed forces and prisons. Part of underground circle of army officers who opposed Niyazov's decree of 1997 that only ethnic Turkmen should serve as army officers. A close associate of Rustam Jumayev., (half-Turkmen, half Tajik) who became Deputy Foreign Minister under longstanding Foreign Minister, Boris Shikhmuradov (half Turkmen-half Armenian). Part of circle of senior non-Turkmen, mixed race and "internationalist" officials involved in 25 November alleged 2002 coup attempt. Detained by police, but released and fled to Turkey and then UK, where he received political asylum in 2004. Interviewed for specialist knowledge of political elite, military and prison system.

2. M.A.,

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 16 November 2004

Ethnic Turkmen. Senior position in the Faculty of Architecture and responsible for the plan to reconstruct the city centre of Ashgabat. M.A. works closely with President Niyazov to design and approve plans for new buildings, monuments and transport routes. Interview arranged informally with no official involvement. Interviewed for first-hand knowledge of commissioning process of public sculpture and urban redesign.

3. M. N.

Location: Ashgabat

Date 16 November 2004

Ethnic Turkmen. M.N. is 26 years old, a former Chevening scholar and graduate of the University of Birmingham. He was formerly head of the department of the Central Bank tasked with creating a national Stock Exchange, but now works as a financial manager for the Swiss company, Militzer & Münch Turkmenistan Ltd. Interview arranged

informally with no official involvement. Interviewed for insights into functioning of Central Bank.

4. N. Z.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 17 November 2004

Ethnic origin unknown (probably Russian), Age mid-60s. Widow of prominent Soviet sculptor. An important figure in the visual arts in Turkmenistan, N.Z. runs a studio used by promising young artists and sculptors and has her own gallery. She organises exhibitions of Turkmen art from all over the country. Interview arranged informally with no official involvement. Interviewed for knowledge of cult production.

5. B.A.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 15 November 2004

Ethnic Turkmen, born in 1941. Prominent national sculptor, one of Niyazov's favoured "court" artists, and responsible for many of the sculptures of Niyazov and monuments to other mythical Turkmen figures on display in Ashgabat and around the country. Graduate of the Art Academy in Ashgabat, he worked in Tashkent during the Soviet period. Chairman of the Turkmen Artists' Union between 1991 and 2002. Interview arranged informally with no official involvement. Interviewed for information about cult production and public sculpture.

6. S.B.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 15 November 2005

Ethnic Turkmen, born in 1948. Graduated from Surikov Art Institute, Moscow and has exhibited in Moscow, Poland and Turkey. Turkmenistan's most prominent national sculptor, widely praised for the Soviet war memorial opened in 1985. Also responsible for most of the more ambitious monumental commissions, including the new War Memorial depicting Niyazov's father Atamurat Niyazov, the Earthquake Memorial and the statue of Niyazov on top of the Arch of Neutrality. Works closely with Niyazov and Ministry of Culture and is regarded as Niyazov's senior "court" sculptor. Interview

arranged informally with no official involvement. Interviewed for information about cult production and public sculpture.

7. N. K.,

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 20 November 2004

Ethnic Russian, born 1967. One of Turkmenistan's few successful commercial photographers. Married to an ethnic Russian paediatrician, so also provided information on the state of hospitals and the replacement of qualified non-Turkmen medical personnel with unqualified Turkmen staff and untrained soldiers. Interview arranged informally with no official involvement. Provided insight on health system and treatment of Russian minority.

8. Dr. T.H.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 19 November 2004

British academic. Dr. H. has worked extensively in Turkmen primary and high schools in the Bairamali *etrap* of southern Turkmenistan, explaining to local students his work as head of the Merv Project. Dr. H. has lived and worked in Turkmenistan, on and off, for six years and has a detailed knowledge of Niyazov's policy on arts and culture, the education sector at all levels, government bureaucracy and the use of *Ruhnama* in schools and universities. His lengthy period of residence in Turkmenistan has enabled him to observe patterns of change in arts and education policy, and deal with a succession of ministers and senior officials. Provided information on education sector.

9. M. G.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 17 November 2004

Ethnic Turkmen, late 20s. Teacher at high school and art college in central Ashgabat. Showed students' work, and explained role of *Ruhnama* in school curriculum and daily routine of students. Adopted a very strong nationalist stance in the interview and pictures of Niyazov around the room and on his desk. Appeared to be a genuine and enthusiastic regime loyalist. Interview arranged informally with no official involvement. Provided information on education sector.

10. T. T., Journalist

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 5 August 2003

One of Turkmenistan's few resident independent journalists. Works for international news agency which provides daily updates on political and economic developments in Central Asia. Privately a trenchant critic of Niyazov regime but publicly neutral in order to work unhindered. Provided a great deal of unofficial information on Niyazov's background, method of governance, elite infighting and alleged assassination attempt of 25 November 2002. Excellent knowledge of national politics and Niyazov's inner circle.

11. A.T.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 6 August 2003

Ethnic Turkmen. Age 26. Yomut married to Teke with two children. Expert on tribal structure, Turkmen customs, and carpets. Provided comprehensive information on tribal histories and customs, inter-tribal relations in the Soviet period and following independence, and use of *Ruhnama* and other regime symbols and texts in schools.

12. W.C.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 7 August 2003

British, late 50s. Turkmenistan's longest continuously resident western expatriate, working in Turkmenistan from 1995 to 2004. Headed up most successful and profitable Western company in Turkmenistan, working oilfields around Nebit Dag area of western Turkmenistan. Provided much information about the process of doing business in Turkmenistan, bureaucratic structures, legal environment, and informal political configurations within the Turkmen elite.

13. G.N.

Location: Nokhur

Date: 12 May 2005

From the Nokhur tribe in the Kopet Dag mountains on the Turkmen-Iranian border. Late 50s, married with a large family. The Nokhurli are regarded by Turkmen as the "Jews of

Turkmenistan” for their commercial acumen and insular marriage patterns. Most are devout Muslims and they speak a Farsi-Turkmen dialect. G.N. was unusual in that he spoke Russian, was formerly in the Soviet army. He is now a prosperous sheep farmer and family patriarch. Provided information on inter-tribal relations and rural Turkmen customs.

13. B.C.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 18 October 2002

Ethnic Turkmen graduate, fluent in English. Mid-20s. Worked for an import-export agency and as an assistant at academic conferences. He was extremely critical of the Niyazov regime, of the role of *Ruhnama* in society and the monuments and symbols of the regime. He indicated that were the regime to face difficulties, he would be actively involved in protests. Not entirely trustworthy and possibly worked for the government. Provided insights into reception and responses to cult of personality and regime more generally.

14. Residents and workers in area between Garashsyslyk and Bitarplyk streets, Ashgabat

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 14 November 2004

Interviews with ethnic Turkmen residents facing forcible eviction from homes in central Ashgabat that would be demolished to make way for a new children’s theme park proposed by Niyazov. Many residents remained in half-destroyed buildings having not been offered alternative accommodation by the government, and provided with only a few days notice and no compensation to move out. Also, interviews with workers employed to demolish the homes. All workers were from outside Ashgabat, mostly from the Mary *velayet*.

15. G. A.

Location: Mary

Date: 15 November 2004

Ethnic Turkmen from Mary region. Early 20s. Protected to some degree by his job, G.A. expressed almost open contempt and mockery for ministry officials and the security

services. Openly ignored or obstructed government officials at an academic conference, and ridiculed portraits of Niyazov. Provided information on the attitude of Turkmen students who had studied outside the country.

16. Students at Turkmen Polytechnical Institute

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 16 November 2004

Two separate sets of short interviews were conducted with students at the architectural faculty and mathematics faculty. The architecture students (five, all ethnic Turkmen, all male) appeared to be from wealthy backgrounds and were very assured. They were clearly from elite families and stated their loyalty to the regime and Niyazov unprompted. They provided details of their study schedules and curricula, and job prospects after graduation. The mathematics students (two female, both Turkmen) provided details as to their course and the amount of time spent studying *Ruhnama* as an important component of their course. They appeared to be less cosmopolitan and assured than the architecture students.

17. Professor A.E.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 16 November 2004

Ethnic Turkmen. Professor A.E. is in control of planning design in Ashgabat, and is responsible for designing and/or approving the designs for new buildings, monuments and public spaces. He has drawn up the 2020 city plan for Ashgabat, together with Niyazov, and works closely with senior officials from various ministries as well as international construction companies such as Bouygues and Polymex to implement the approved architectural plans. Interviewed for first-hand knowledge of commissioning process of public sculpture and urban redesign.

18. N.K.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 15 October 2002

Mixed Turkmen-Ukrainian heritage. General interview about position of mixed race officials in Turkmen government, and general interview about her views on Turkmen politics and Niyazov. Useful for insights in to official attitudes towards ethnic minorities.

19. G.E.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 14/15 November 2004

Ethnic Armenian, late 60s. G.E. provided a great deal of information on the situation of Caucasian ethnic minorities in Turkmenistan. Armenians, caricatured as successful, and sometimes miserly, traders in Turkmenistan faced significant discrimination during the Soviet period. Following the war between Armenian and Azerbaijan that began in 1988, many Armenian residents of Baku were airlifted across the Caspian Sea to prevent pogroms spreading from the Azerbaijani coastal town of Sumgait to the capital. The arrival of Armenians triggered riots in Nebit Dag and Ashgabat in 1989, over allegations that the incoming Armenians had been given preferential treatment in the allocation of new apartments. Armenian market traders were also accused increasing bread prices during food shortages in 1990. G.E.'s loyalties lay with the Soviet government, and he repeatedly compared Niyazov to Stalin. Interviewed to obtain perspective from Armenian minority, who were involved in inter-ethnic violence with Turkmen in late Soviet period.

20. M.A.

Location: Ashgabat

Date: 6 August 2003

Ethnic Turkmen, early 20s. Ambitious young Central Bank official who claimed that he did not have an outlet for his abilities. Married and lived in Bakharden (100km west of Ashgabat) with his family. Muhammedgeldi was clearly deeply frustrated with the short-termist working practices in the Central Bank. He insisted that he was apolitical, and was much more interested in Islam. Like other younger interviewees, he was eager to explore the possibility of study in Europe. Interviewed to obtain information on functioning of government bureaucracy and responses to regime.

21. Dr. N.A.

Location: Barnsley, UK

Date: 7 November 2005

Dr. N.A. is an ethnic Uzbek from Dashoguz, aged around 40. Her husband worked for a private Uzbek-Turkmen trading company and was a frequent visitor to the Uzbek embassy in Ashgabat. He was viewed as a suspect in the alleged attempt to assassinate Niyazov on 25 November 2002. He was subsequently charged with assisting fugitives to

cross the border into Uzbekistan. He was subsequently charged and sentenced to 15 years in a hard labour penal colony. Dr. N.A. had faced racial discrimination in her employment as a paediatric neurologist, and had lost her job to a less qualified ethnic Turkmen. She provided a great deal of information on the problems facing Uzbeks in Dashoguz, on health policy and the state of Turkmen medical care and on events surrounding the assassination attempt in November 2002.

22. B.K.

Location: Yerbent

Date: 6 August 2003

Ethnic Turkmen, late 40s. B.K. was an excellent interviewee because, as the owner of one of the very few chaihanas in the Karakum desert on the main north-south road connecting Ashgabat to Dashoguz, he was able to pick up a lot of informal information about official involvement in drug trafficking, about opposition to Niyazov, and about the political and economic situation in different parts of the country. Although B.K. displayed a picture of Niyazov in his window, this was clearly a perfunctory display of loyalty to assist him in dealing with government officials. In private he expressed criticism of Niyazov's cult of personality. His wife was more wary about discussing these issues with a stranger. Interviewed to obtain perspective of regime from someone resident outside Ashgabat by somebody potentially affected by residential clearances.

23. O.M.

Locations: Ashgabat, Yerbent, Darvasa, Nebit Dag (Balkanabat), Nokhur, Turkmenbashi

Dates: 3-8 August 2004, 7-15 May 2005

Ethnic Russian born in Turkmenistan, mid-40s. University graduate and former Soviet and Turkmen Army officer. Formerly worked as a smuggler of contraband goods. Married three times. O.M. was the designated companion for trips outside Ashgabat. Rarely for a Russian, he spoke Turkmen and great affection and respect for the Turkmen people. He was extremely critical of Niyazov and, through his wide travel, commercial, military and educational experiences extremely knowledgeable and impartial on issues such as inter-tribal relations, the Soviet legacy, the state of the Turkmen armed forces, and government policy towards minority ethnic groups.

Appendix Four: Note on Ethnicity of the Interviewees

Of the 24 interviews used in the thesis, 21 were conducted with citizens of Turkmenistan, two with British citizens and one with a Pakistani citizen, resident in Turkmenistan.

Of the 21 citizens of Turkmenistan, 14 were ethnic Turkmen, of which eight were from regions other than Ashgabat.

Of the remaining seven interviewees, their ethnicity was as follows:

Three ethnic Russians born in Turkmenistan;

One mixed Ukrainian-Turkmen heritage born in Turkmenistan;

One Armenian, born in the Armenian SSR, and resident in Turkmenistan for many years;

One Talysh (an Iranian minority) from Azerbaijan SSR, resident in Turkmenistan for 20 years, now resident in the UK pending decision on asylum status;

One ethnic Uzbek born in Turkmenistan, now resident in the UK pending decision on asylum status.

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