

Newcastle University

Optionality and Peace in Kyrgyzstan: Exploring, Critiquing, and Rethinking Understandings and Practices of Peace.

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Abstract:

This thesis proposes a novel approach to rethinking peacebuilding and peace studies beyond the limitations of the liberal/post-liberal binary, bringing together theory and practice in order to develop and implement this approach. The thesis explores understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan in both the everyday context and in the context of a peacebuilding project undertaken by the country's largest peacebuilding NGO. In order to do so the concept of optionality is developed and expounded methodologically, as a critical device, and, finally, as a reconstructive norm. Developed through a symptomatic reading of the works of Karl Mannheim, Hans Morgenthau, and Hannah Arendt, optionality has three key aspects: the recognition and facilitation of the context-bound nature of knowledge and the resultant condition of epistemic perspectivity; the recognition and facilitation of plurality and natality as essential human conditions; and a resultant opposition to essentialising, instrumentalising, or totalising approaches to knowledge: in short, an opposition to the imposition of knowledge. In its application as methodology, optionality operationalises these aspects in an approach *towards* the field that recognises the contingencies and conditionalities of the general human condition and epistemic perspectivity. As a critical device, optionality is employed to examine the understandings and practices of peace of the NGO and their project, operating as a yardstick that detects and deciphers totalising/standardising/functionalising approaches to peace. In its subsequent role as a reconstructive norm, optionality presents the normative conditions of the possibility for peace, building upon its critical assessment to develop an explicitly normative rethinking of peacebuilding and expounding a related series of practical approaches that embody this reconstruction.

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Төмөндөгү адамдарга өзгөчө ыраазычылыгымды билдиргим келет. Алар Дарика Ибраимова, Канат Байке, Динара Алиева. Мен кыргыз үй бүлөлөрү менен жашап мен өлкө, жашоо жана өзүм тууралуу көп нерсе үйрөнө алдым десем жаңылышпайм. Steppe Learning KG мектебине мени жумуш менен камсыз кылып, колдоо көрсөткөнү үчүн алкышым чексиз. Алар болбосо менин Кыргызстанда жашап кетишим кыйынга турмак. Кесиптештерим жана досторум Айнура Сагынбаева, Аида Жолдошева, Каныкей, Бактыгүл, Айданек, жана албетте Карлыгач Урматбек кызына чогуу иштеп жатканда жана андай кийин да көрсөткөн колдоолору үчүн ыраазычылыгымды билдирем. Мен Бишкекте жашап жатканда мага кыргыз тилин үйрөткөн мугалимдерим Бегимжан Атабекова, Жанара Каденова жана Бегайым Артыкбековалага дагы өзгөчө ыраазычылыгымды билдиргим келет. Аягында мен үчүн эң маанилүү болгон жакшы көргөн адамым жана болочоктогу жубайым Жылдызга кыйынчылыкта жанымда болуп, сабырдуулук менен колдоо көрсөткөндүгү үчүн, Кыргызстанда, Италияда жана Улуу Британияда өткөргөн эсте калаарлык сонун көз ирмемдер үчүн чын жүрөгүмдөн ырахмат айткым келет.

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Contents

Introduction:	ix
PART ONE - ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE CONCERNING PEACE, CONFLICT, AND KYRGYZSTAN.	1
Chapter One - Kyrgyzstan, Peace, and Conflict: Delimiting the Academic Focus.....	3
1.1 - Conflict: The Origins and Reasons for the Outbreak of Violence.....	3
1.2 - Soviet Policy and Ethno-territorial Settlement	5
1.3 - Kyrgyz fears about Uzbeks challenging the integrity of the state.....	9
1.3 - Political Instability and Crisis.....	23
1.4 - Institutional Weakness.....	27
1.5 - Poverty, Unemployment, and Lack of Economic Opportunity	30
Chapter Two - Peace and Peacebuilding.....	36
2.1 - The Liberal Peace	38
2.2 - The Post-Liberal Peace	56
2.3 – The Need to Rethink Peace	64
2.4 - The Spaces Beyond: Rethinking Peace.....	68
PART TWO: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND METHODS	79
Chapter Three - The Theoretical Framework: Expounding Optionality.	79
3.1 - Cognising Optionality	80
3.2 - A Beginning	83
3.3 - Why Mannheim, Morgenthau, and Arendt?	86
3.4 - Optionality, Epistemology and Karl Mannheim	89
3.5 - Standortgebundenheit, Morgenthau and Optionality.....	95
3.6 - Optionality in Political Practice: Hannah Arendt and the Human Condition.....	106
Chapter Four: Optionality, Methodology, and Method	119
4.1 - Operationalising Optionality: A Methodological Framework	120
4.2 - Ethnography, Method, and Optionality	141
4.3 - Additional Methodological Considerations: Participant Observation and the Figure of The Anarch	152
PART THREE: THE EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS	179
Chapter Five - Epistemic Environments and the Contexts of Understandings and Practices of Peace in Kyrgyzstan: An Epistemological Approach to Peace and Peacebuilding.	179
5.1 - The Wider Context: Understandings and Practices of Peace in Kyrgyzstan	181
5.1.1 - Kyrgyz/Traditional	189
5.1.2 - The Influence of Islam: Convergence, Divergence, and Amalgamation	215
5.1.3 - The Legacies of the Soviet Union	225
5.1.4 - Conclusions: The Wider Context	235

Chapter Six: The Specific Context: The NGO, the Peacebuilding Project and its Epistemic Environment.....	238
6.1 - Epistemic Environments	241
6.2 - A Procedural Approach.....	242
6.3 - The Organisation and the NGO: The Nature of the Project in their Own Words.....	245
6.4 - The Processes of the NGO: The Project's Structure in Their Own Words	252
6.5 - Education, Comprehension, and Dissemination	257
6.6 - Changing Procedure: A Broadening Disconnect with the Wider Context and the Reinforcement of the Epistemic Environment	276
A SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	302
Bibliography:.....	311

List of Figures:

<i>Figure 1: the major elements of optionality and their corresponding authors.</i>	<i>118</i>
<i>Figure 2: A table identifying the basic set of methods employed.</i>	<i>138</i>
<i>Figure 3: triangulation diagram.....</i>	<i>181</i>
<i>Figure 4: photo taken near Osh bazaar by the author, 2021.....</i>	<i>186</i>
<i>Figure 5: these photos were taken by the author at Rukh Ordo in 2021. The photo on the left shows a cabinet with a collection of different editions of Aitmatov's work, in many different languages, alongside portraits of the author, (on the right), characters from his novels (centre and left), and Sayakbai Karalaev, (the largest at the top). These are accompanied by traditional Kyrgyz motifs and art. The two above are large portraits of Aitmatov at different stages of his life.</i>	<i>191</i>
<i>Figure 6: (Taken from https://24.kg/english/205543_New_Yntymak_II_park_opened_in_Bishkek_/).....</i>	<i>203</i>
<i>Figure 7: yntymak advert one - a screenshot taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5_Qcdile3I. The full video can be watched here.</i>	<i>204</i>
<i>Figure 8: yntymak advert two - a screenshot taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5_Qcdile3I. The full video can be watched here.</i>	<i>205</i>
<i>Figure 9: the first photo demonstrates the kymboz. The second shows the monument to the Great Urkun in Boom Gorge, on the boundary between Chui and Issyk-Kul regions, (both taken by the author).</i>	<i>227</i>
<i>Figure 10: table of terminology.</i>	<i>239</i>

Introduction:

The Political Problem

This thesis is an attempt to address the political problematic of peace and how we can move towards it. The theoretical approach expounded in these discussions is explored through the empirical example of post-independence Kyrgyzstan; a country which has strong connections to peacebuilding and considerations of peace. An outbreak of intercommunal violence in 1990, on the eve of independence, set the stage for a series of tumultuous events and conflicts which have prevented the effective maintenance of peaceful order in the country and established Kyrgyzstan as a locus of peacebuilding initiatives and academic considerations of peace and related issues. Since 2005, three of Kyrgyzstan's presidents have been overthrown in revolutions, two currently living in exile and the other serving a lengthy prison sentence.¹ Most recently, Kyrgyzstan's fifth president was overthrown through a popular protest which led to the setting alight of the presidential White House, clashes with riot police, and the establishment of military checkpoints across all major routes in or out of the capital, Bishkek. In addition to these conflicts at the heart of government, Kyrgyzstan has also seen substantial intercommunal violence in its southern regions, most notably in 1990 and then again in 2010 leaving 400-500 dead, hundreds of thousands internally displaced and extensive damage to property.² This thesis intends to contribute towards the search for an effective approach that works towards the establishment and maintenance of peaceful order in the face of such upheavals, conflicts, and violence.

There is considerable academic literature on the subject, and such attempts have already been made by international peacebuilding organisations, state organisations, and by many individuals and groups from within and outside of Kyrgyzstan. This leads us on to the academic problematic which this thesis aims to address, differentiating this attempt from the others and explaining this thesis' key contributions.

¹ Sullivan, Charles J., *Battle at the Border: An Analysis of the 2021 Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Conflict*, *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 52, Iss. 03, (2021): p. 529.

² Heathershaw, John et al., 'Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan', SIPRI_OSF Policy Brief, June 2014, p. 2.

The Academic Problem

The approaches towards the political problem of conflict and peace in Kyrgyzstan is characterised by two main approaches in both the academic literature and in its practical manifestations. These are the liberal and post-liberal peace. This thesis argues that these two approaches not only have significant problematic issues in both theory and in practice, but that they exist together in a theoretical stalemate that prevents them from effectively pursuing peaceful order theoretically and in practice. This problematic has a significant relation to the political problem which this thesis addresses: without an effective theoretical basis for practical approaches towards peaceful order, the problem of conflict and peace in Kyrgyzstan will remain exactly that; a problem. This thesis thus addresses and intends to contribute to the burgeoning academic literature which aims to rethink peace beyond the limitations of this binary, making space for an *approach towards* understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan in a contextualised, non-imposed, and epistemically open manner. Therefore, in addition to the practical problem of conflict and the need for peace in Kyrgyzstan, this thesis addresses the academic issues surrounding how we approach such a problem.

However, before continuing, the idea of peace and peaceful order requires some more explanation in order to explain the position adopted by this thesis in relation to the term and the ideas it can encompass. The term 'peace' is never defined, as such, in the course of this thesis. This is a decision I made in line with the principles outlined according to the main theoretical concept developed in this thesis, optionality: i.e., avoiding imposition, instrumentalisation, or authoritative claims to knowledge. Without a clear definition, 'peace' opened up to discussion, and thus pluralistic understandings and practices of 'peace' are free to emerge in the epistemic environment which is explored through the practical and methodological operationalisation of optionality in this thesis and in relation to understandings and practices of peace as they exist in Kyrgyzstan, including an NGO whose policies I studied empirically in some detail. Thus, this thesis is not concerned with an objective or absolute definition of peace. Instead, it is concerned with the 'conditions of the possibility' of peace: that is, the epistemic conditions for a space in which pluralistic dialogue enables conflict parties to negotiate their differences. This is as close to a definition as this thesis comes. Peace is understood as fundamentally requiring a negotiation of difference, as difference is understood to be the foundational root of conflict, and peace as the process of

its negotiation. Peace is thus not an 'end-goal', but a continuous process in the face of the fundamental human condition of difference in plurality, along with the epistemological conditions of contingency, context, and perspectivism in which humanity finds itself.

Research Aims and Guiding Questions

In summary, this thesis sets out to address the problem of peace and how we can move towards it, going beyond the limitations of the existing predominant approaches and contributing towards the expanding literature on rethinking peace. This will be undertaken through developing and expounding optionality; a novel theoretical framework that will be operationalised as methodology (and thus determine the methods of research), applied as a critical device to expose and explore the disconnect between situated knowledges and imposed essentialisms in peacebuilding practice, and finally to form the basis of a rethinking of peace as a reconstructive norm. This is all undertaken in relation to fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan, providing an empirical basis for the development, explanation, and operationalisation of optionality. This fieldwork involved an uninterrupted eighteen-month period of living and working in Kyrgyzstan: I lived and worked with families, stayed in communities in six of Kyrgyzstan's seven regions, and worked within a peacebuilding project undertaken by a large and well-known international peacebuilding organisation.

This thesis is guided by the following research questions:

- In theoretical terms, what concepts and considerations form the basis of optionality as a novel approach to rethinking peace?
- How can this be operationalised as an approach *towards* the field?
- In methodological and methodical terms, how can optionality be operationalised?
- How does optionality relate to existing understandings and practices of peace relating to localised, situated knowledges and essentialised, internationally applied contexts? What does it tell us about the relationship and interaction between these and how this can be rethought?
- In the process of rethinking peace, how does optionality reimagine these relations and propose alternative conditions of the possibility for peace? In what manner does optionality contribute towards rethinking peace?

With regard to the empirical focus upon Kyrgyzstan that undergirds this thesis, the following questions are explored in order to facilitate, evidence, and develop those outlined above:

- What understandings and practices of peace characterise the wider context of peaceful order in Kyrgyzstan?
- What understandings and practices of peace are embodied by the international peacebuilding organisation operating in Kyrgyzstan and their specific context?
- What is the relationship between these contexts?
- What kind of epistemic environments emerge from this interaction?
- What does the application of optionality as a critical device tell us about this?
- How can optionality be envisaged as a reconstructive norm in relation to the observations made?

Structure

In order to achieve this, this thesis is structured as follows. **Part One** addresses the political problem through a critical review of the literature concerning conflict and peace in Kyrgyzstan and in the academic literature. **Part Two** develops and expounds the theoretical framework which underpins the thesis, explaining the concept of optionality and situating it in relation to the academic and political problems outlined. A methodological approach built upon the operationalisation of optionality is also developed here along with a discussion of ethnographic methods in light of this theoretical framework. **Part Three** contains the empirical chapters of this thesis that stem from eighteen months of fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan, including the study of a Western-based peacebuilding non-governmental organisation (NGO). This fieldwork attempted to examine and disclose understandings and practices of peace in the wider context of Kyrgyzstan in general, and in the specific context of one of this organisation's flagship peacebuilding projects. Chapter five examines the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, and Chapter six looks at the specific context of such understandings and practices held and enacted by this NGO. Together, these chapters demonstrate the disconnect between the two and the need to rethink peace beyond the limitations of the liberal/post-liberal binary. People, places, and other identifying features have been excluded in order to maintain anonymity and protect those who may face repercussions if their identity was known. This includes the names of

people, the locations of events and villages, and anything which might overtly identify the international organisation and their peacebuilding project under study. This thesis is concluded through a summary, conclusion, and the presentation of considerations for future study.

This thesis thus has two main components. In theoretical terms, it is an attempt to develop and espouse a concept of optionality as a means of rethinking peace beyond the theoretical and operational limitations of the liberal/post-liberal peace binary. In empirical terms, this thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature concerning understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan by applying optionality methodologically, as a critical device, and as a reconstructive norm in relation to this literature and, most notably, through ethnographic fieldwork conducted across eighteen months in the country. In this manner, optionality conditions the research process, functions critically in relation to existing practices of peacebuilding, and serves as the basis through which a normative reconstruction is envisioned. Optionality is therefore presented in this thesis as a potential set of conditions for the possibility of peace. Optionality is to be understood as a conceptual force against the imposition upon, instrumentalisation, and totalisation of knowledge, manifest as an approach which opens up knowledge and political practice in a manner sensitive to geographically and epistemically singular, localised contexts. In addition, it addresses existing considerations of peace and peacebuilding in general across peace studies and specifically in relation to Kyrgyzstan, reinforced by the fieldwork conducted. This fieldwork was undertaken for the most part in Kyrgyz language, of which I am a competent speaker. Therefore, unless stated otherwise, all translations presented in this thesis should be understood as having been undertaken by myself.

Contributions and Positioning

This thesis is positioned as a substantive theoretical and empirical addition to the literature which attempts to rethink peace, demonstrating the issues and limitations of the two predominant contemporary approaches, the liberal and the post-liberal peace, and providing an alternative approach. The concept of optionality is thus one of the central contributions of this thesis. Furthermore, this thesis aims to contribute to the literature concerning understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, bringing this theoretical framework to

bear and providing important insights in this regard methodologically, epistemologically, and in practice. It aims, therefore, to not only contribute towards the theoretical discussion within peace studies, but also towards empirical discussions of ideas and actions concerning peace in Kyrgyzstan in a manner sensitive to the Kyrgyzstani context.

Since this thesis employs a great amount of literature, and since optionality is built mainly upon readings of Karl Mannheim, Hans J. Morgenthau, and Hannah Arendt, a brief methodological discussion of the manner of reading employed is necessary.³ This thesis will pursue a 'symptomatic' (or 'relational') reading of Morgenthau and Arendt.⁴ Such a reading consists of three things: firstly, political and philosophical thinking regarding the interpreted text based on anti-essentialist ontologies - that is, allowing for a criticality of rationalities of unity and ideas of *essence* regarding the text. Secondly, it requires a guiding question/perspective to be in mind and to be applied in interpretation. Lastly, there must be an ethics of interpretation.⁵ According to Althusser, "there are no innocent readings... every reading merely reflects in its lessons and rules the real culprit: the conception of knowledge underlying the object of knowledge which makes knowledge what it is".⁶ The guiding question applied in symptomatic reading serves as a recognition of this lack of innocence, allowing the production of a deep problematic in the text which otherwise would have existed only allusively.⁷ The questions/perspectives applied in order to reveal this problematic make the objects of our study visible; in this case, the perspective of optionality reveals such a problematic within Morgenthau and Arendt. A reading must be sought which engages such problematics visible in the *oeuvre* of certain authors and drafts a way of engaging them, being inspired instead of enslaved or manipulatively appropriative.⁸ Symptomatic reading is, therefore, the production of a question from a set of readings, one that figures the political relation between a text and its reader.⁹ It breaks from an essentialist 'ideological' reading by revealing what a theoretical field does but cannot see;

³ The following section is taken from my master's thesis, entitled 'Knowledge, Practice, and Optionality: An Explorative Exposition through the Works of Hans J Morgenthau and Hannah Arendt'.

⁴ As outlined in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar's *Reading Capital* and, again, elaborated upon in the related discussion in Behr's *Politics of Difference*.

⁵ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 17.

⁶ Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Étienne, *Reading Capital*, (London: NLB, 1970): p. 34-35.

⁷ Ibid: p. 32.

⁸ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 17-18.

⁹ Rooney, Ellen, 'Better Read than Dead: Althusser and the Fetish of Ideology', *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 01, Iss. 88, (1995): p. 200.

what it produces, but is unable to describe.¹⁰ This thesis attempts to achieve such a reading of/through optionality in the works of Morgenthau and Arendt, avoiding systematisation, holisms and ‘logical’ explanations, instead pursuing a normative agenda in search of a problematic, in a series of texts I recognise as being intrinsically ambiguous and potentially discontinuous.¹¹

In addition to considering the hermeneutic approach of this thesis, a brief discussion of its epistemological position with regard to the ideas of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ knowledge is required. Despite its consideration of Kyrgyzstan and the operation of a Western organisation within the country, this thesis is not concerned with the imposition of ‘Western’ knowledge upon ‘the non-West’: instead, it is concerned with *the imposition of knowledge as such*. The central concern is with providing a potential theoretical framework to prevent such imposition, and create an epistemic environment in which plurality, contextual contingency and, ultimately, the perspectivist nature of knowledge is recognised and enabled. It does not matter if understandings and practices of peace are Western or not. It only matters if they are conducive to the conditions of the possibility for peace in the context of this thesis. Although this thesis could be seen as employing ‘Western’ political philosophy in a ‘non-Western’ context, this is not understood as a significant or detrimental issue. Optionality is proposed as a *potential* framework, rather than being the *only* framework which could be employed to achieve the aims of this thesis. This is done under the assumption that there are a plurality of ideas, concepts, and authors from across the world who could contribute to this debate, better realise this potential, or otherwise assist in this project. The limitations of this thesis regarding the authors used stem from the limitations of the researcher themselves. The concept of optionality was developed through my engagement with Mannheim, Morgenthau, and Arendt, and they are therefore integral to my understanding of it and my ability to express it. Although alternatives surely exist, I am not familiar with them, and thus lack the capacity to effectively or meaningfully represent them in the context of my arguments. Any attempt to do so in this manner would be a kind of imposition itself, going against the very arguments made in this thesis.

¹⁰ Solomon, Samuel, ‘L’espacement de la lecture: Althusser, Derrida, and the Theory of Reading, *Décalages*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2, (2013): p. 15.

¹¹ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 21-22.

PART ONE- ESTABLISHING THE CONTEXT: REVIEWING THE LITERATURE CONCERNING PEACE, CONFLICT, AND KYRGYZSTAN.

Part one critically reviews the literature relevant to this thesis, introducing its central topics and analytical foci, situating the discussion within the context of existing debates, and determining its position and contributions of this. This chapter also provides an important contextual discussion regarding Kyrgyzstan, providing a backdrop for later discussions.

This part begins with an introductory section and then identifies the two relevant themes within the literature: *conflict* and *peace and peacebuilding*. This literature is critically reviewed, exposing and analysing the key discussions in the context of this thesis. The thesis is differentiated from discussions of conflict alone and is instead related to those concerning peace and peacebuilding. The first chapter examines conflict in Kyrgyzstan, exploring the reasons for the outbreak of conflicts and thus demonstrating the subsequent concerns with peace and peacebuilding that have developed in the country. The second chapter explores the dominant conceptions and practices of peace and peacebuilding as they appear in the literature through three categories: the liberal peace; post-liberal peace; and efforts to rethink peace. This is examined theoretically and through the literature concerning Kyrgyzstan which employs these approaches. Chapter two culminates by distancing the approach undertaken in this thesis from those of the liberal and post-liberal peace, instead situating it alongside attempts to rethink peace beyond the confines of this binary, something that constitutes a gap in the literature when it comes to applying such approaches to Kyrgyzstan. The main contributions of this thesis are therefore in the development of a novel approach to rethinking peace (optionality), operationalising it in the Kyrgyz context, and providing original insights into this context through the fieldwork undertaken. The literature which focuses on the origins and causation of conflict in Kyrgyzstan is important in exploring and delineating the issues that underpin the outbreak of

conflict. However, the mitigation of these issues is an issue of peace and peacebuilding. Although there is ample literature which addresses this theme, it is predominantly built upon liberal or post-liberal approaches and frameworks. A review of this literature demonstrates inconsistencies and problematics that undermine their academic integrity, theoretical foundations, and/or empirical validity, thus undermining the exploration of peace and peacebuilding through them.

Chapter One - Kyrgyzstan, Peace, and Conflict: Delimiting the Academic Focus

As a result of the turmoil endured by many of the post-soviet republics, Kyrgyzstan's post-independence period brought a notably new focus to the region; that of conflict and the pursuit of peace. After acquiring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and during the first presidency of Askar Akaev, Kyrgyzstan was seen as an 'island of democracy'.¹² Despite electoral irregularities, nepotism, and autocratic tendencies, Akaev presented Kyrgyzstan as a burgeoning democracy building a uniquely 'Kyrgyz' democratic state from the ashes of the Soviet Union. However, this progressive imaginary was built upon questionable foundations and was rapidly undermined by political and social unrest. In response to the upheaval, revolution, and intercommunal conflict which marred post-independence Kyrgyzstan, the focus of academics and national and international organisations turned to peace and peacebuilding. The following sections explore the discussion of first conflict, then peace within the literature concerning Kyrgyzstan.

1.1 - Conflict: The Origins and Reasons for the Outbreak of Violence

In 1990, as Kyrgyzstan inexorably moved towards independence, bloody intercommunal violence swept the south of the country,¹³ marking the development of conflict as an academic and institutional focus which has never left the region. Conflict has featured prominently in the political history and academic study of the young Kyrgyz state. Political upheaval and popular protest have become almost routine to many in Kyrgyzstan:

Since 2005, three of Kyrgyzstan's heads of state (Askar Akaev (1995–2005), Kurmanbek Bakiev (2005–2010), and Sooranbai Jeenbekov (2017–2020)) have been overthrown in coups, two (Akaev and Bakiev) currently live in exile, and one (Almazbek Atambaev) is serving a long prison sentence.¹⁴

¹² Anderson, John, 'Creating a Framework for Civil Society in Kyrgyzstan', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 52, Iss. 01, (2000): p. 78.

¹³ Ibid: p. 79.

¹⁴ Sullivan, Charles J., Battle at the Border: An Analysis of the 2021 Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Conflict', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 52, Iss. 03, (2021): p. 529.

During my time in Bishkek during the 2020 election cycle, a common joke was ‘today we vote, tomorrow we overthrow the government’. I was living in Bishkek during the overthrow of Jeenbekov, which was likewise met with a mixture of jokes and resignation with many telling me not to be concerned: it was a Kyrgyz tradition to remove the president every few years. As a result, Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia are often portrayed as a locus of danger by academics, development agencies, and think tanks,¹⁵ in need of rescue from the dangers it poses to itself and others.¹⁶ Throughout the 1990s the idea that Kyrgyzstan was a dangerous place figured extensively within the academic literature,¹⁷ and the contemporary focus on conflict demonstrates the continuity of this perspective. In the years surrounding Kyrgyzstan’s declaration of independence, violent conflicts occurred throughout Central Asia,¹⁸ reinforcing this idea. According to Madeleine Reeves, the region is discursively cast as “dangerous and crisis-ridden because it does not fit normative accounts of the ‘proper’ relationship between the territory, ethnicity and citizenship”.¹⁹ This focus upon conflict often attempts to explain its underlying origins.

Considerations of conflict are diverse in the literature, exposing, exploring, and analysing a multiplicity of aspects related to the conflicts and their wider contexts. However, the most prominent discourse concerns the *origins and reasons* for conflict.²⁰ A comprehensive categorisation of this is expounded by Nick Megoran, Elmira Satybaldieva, and John Heathershaw, who identify five common aspects of conflict in Kyrgyzstan in 1990 and 2010:

tensions created by soviet-era ethno-territorial settlement; poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunity; Kyrgyz fears about Uzbeks challenging the integrity of the state; political instability and crisis; and institutional weakness.²¹

¹⁵ Karagulova, Anara and Megoran, Nick, ‘Discourses of Danger and the ‘War on Terror’: Gothic Kyrgyzstan and the Collapse of the Akaev Regime’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2011): p. 32.

¹⁶ Heathershaw, John, and Megoran, Nick, ‘Contesting Danger: A New Agenda for Policy and Scholarship on Central Asia’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 87, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 589-612.

¹⁷ Megoran, Nick, ‘The Critical Geopolitics of Danger in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan’, *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 23, Iss. 04, (2005): p. 555-580.

¹⁸ Bisig, Nicole, ‘Working with Conflicts in Kyrgyzstan: PCIA Based on Analysis of the Conflict Situation in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, <https://www.oecd.org/countries/kyrgyzstan/35114534.pdf>, [accessed 12/04/2022].

¹⁹ Reeves, Madeleine, ‘Locating Danger: *Konfliktologia* and the Search for Fixity in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, Iss. 01, (2005): p. 67.

²⁰ For example: Asankanov, Abilabek, ‘Ethnic conflict in the Osh region in summer 1990: Reasons and lessons’, in, Rupesinghe, Kumar and Tishkov, Valery (eds.), *Ethnicity and Power in the Contemporary World*, (Paris: United Nations University, 1996): p. 116-124, and Tishkov, Valery, ‘Don’t Kill Me, I’m a Kyrgyz!’: An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict’, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, Iss. 02, (1995): p. 133-149.

²¹ Heathershaw, John et al, ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, *SIPRI-OSF Policy Brief*, (2014): p. 1.

These notions are prominent across the literature and are explored thematically in the following sections.

1.2 - Soviet Policy and Ethno-territorial Settlement

Kyrgyzstan is often presented as historically intertwined with the Soviet Union. In the words of Chingiz Aitmatov, a celebrated figure in Kyrgyz literature and culture, “we all derive from the Soviet system... the first priority at that time was to define oneself as a Soviet individual. Only after that came the question of who one was by nationality”.²² In August 1991, following the failed coup against the President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, Kyrgyzstan gained independence²³ and inherited statehood.²⁴ Understanding Kyrgyzstan as a post-colonial space, transitioning from a soviet identity, is considered essential to comprehending the difficulties of independence: like other such de-colonised spaces, the need to recreate and reinforce national identities, and the interlinked issues regarding social harmony and political stability, are identified as some of the young state’s greatest challenges.²⁵ Since independence, the Kyrgyz elite have had the task of reconstructing social and political order to legitimate their independence, one given rather than fought for,²⁶ and have been hampered by the legacies of Soviet policy.

The cultivation of a new national identity following independence was an especially sensitive and difficult task in Kyrgyzstan²⁷ as pre-Soviet forms of identity construction were loose, highly variable, and did not conform to the kinds of rigid categories and definitions employed in the European context.²⁸ Amongst Central Asians, the predominant distinction was between nomadic and settled peoples, “with ethnic labels holding little meaning in a

²² Aitmatov, Chingiz in Murzakulova, Asel and Shoeberlein, ‘The Invention of Legitimacy: Struggles in Kyrgyzstan to Craft an Effective Nation-State Ideology’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, Iss. 07, (2009): p. 1234.

²³ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 8.

²⁴ Marat, Erica, ‘Imagined Past, Uncertain Future: The Creation of National Ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, Iss. 01, (2008): p. 12.

²⁵ Hanks, Reul R., ‘Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Conundrums of Ethnic Conflict, National Identity and State Cohesion’ *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, Iss. 02, (2011): p. 178.

²⁶ Pétric, Boris-Mathieu, ‘Post Soviet Kyrgyzstan or the Birth of a Globalized Protectorate’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, Iss. 03, (2005): p. 319.

²⁷ Lowe, Robert, ‘Nation Building and Identity in The Kyrgyz Republic’, in Everett-Heath, Tom, *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003): p. 106.

²⁸ Ibid: p. 108.

society that did not operate along such lines”.²⁹ Local affiliations were the most important divisions, and “as the Kyrgyz rarely settled, clannish and tribal ties, rather than a sense of precise locality, provided the foremost elements of their identity”.³⁰ The great Bolshevik project for the revolutionization of the former Tsarist empire which followed the 1917 revolution was, therefore, a political project which required the fundamental reconstruction of society,³¹ irreversibly reshaping life and identity in Central Asia.³²

The transformations enacted under Stalin’s General Secretariat are widely accepted in the literature as the formative basis for the establishment of Central Asian nations through the process of national territorial delimitation³³ and the creation of the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). Prior to this act of geographic and political division, many authors contest that ethnicity had been largely insignificant, contextually determined and inconsistently practiced.³⁴ However, through this process of delimitation, it was elevated to the key categorisation for discerning nationality and a region’s status as a nation through the development of SSR’s.³⁵ Through the enactment of this policy, the USSR is presented as having institutionalised ethnicity in a federal structure which, in turn, “enshrined the paradoxical combination of ethnic and civil nationalism”: although the civic notion of a Soviet nation was a fusion of peoples of all ethnic backgrounds, the USSR codified and institutionalised ethno-centric nationality through the creation of republics based upon singular, dominant ethnic groups.³⁶ “Soviet administration resulted in more than just constructing municipal infrastructure, increasing economic capacities, or consolidating political control; it resulted in the actual making of the modern Central Asian person”.³⁷ The notions of ethnicity in

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid: p. 109.

³³ Lottholz, Phillip, ‘Old Slogans Ringing Hollow? The Legacy of Social Engineering, Statebuilding and the ‘Dilemma of Difference’ in (Post-) Soviet Kyrgyzstan’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12,. Iss. 03, (2018): p. 408.

³⁴ **Despite this argument having significant presence and influence in the literature, there are nonetheless contesting voices, notably from academics local to the region but from some foreign scholars as well. The idea of contemporary understandings of ethnicity stemming from Soviet-era policy runs contrary to many modern nationalist discourses, clashing, for example, with the primordial understandings of the Kyrgyz having remained an organically distinct group since the time of Manas.**

³⁵ Lottholz, Phillip, ‘Old Slogans Ringing Hollow? The Legacy of Social Engineering, Statebuilding and the ‘Dilemma of Difference’ in (Post-) Soviet Kyrgyzstan’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12,. Iss. 03, (2018): p. 408

³⁶ Megoran, Nick, ‘On Researching ‘Ethnic Conflict’: Epistemology, Politics and a Central Asian Boundary Dispute’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, Iss. 02, (2007): p. 256.

³⁷ Liu, Morgan Y., *Under Solomon’s Throne: Uzbek Visions of Renewal in Osh*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012): p. 76.

contemporary Kyrgyzstan were thus developed through the influence of Soviet anthropological theory. This was predominantly a process employing language as the prime marker of ethnicity and identity, using linguistic divisions to craft national republics from Central Asia's ethnic mix.³⁸ Kyrgyz language was thus given a script, (Arabic, then Latin, then Cyrillic), an expanded vocabulary, grammar, dictionaries, and other elements to develop it into a distinct Turkic language and marker of ethnic identity.³⁹ As a result, fundamental divisions in identity were established within the political and social terrain of Kyrgyzstan, continuing long after independence.⁴⁰ The national identity of independent Kyrgyzstan became tied to those identified by the Soviet Union as the titular ethnicity,⁴¹ and their position as the nation's owners became a growing theme within Kyrgyz statehood.

The labels 'Kyrgyz', 'Kazakh', 'Uzbek', 'Tadjik', and 'Turkmen' were only developed as national categories in the 1920's, obtaining their lasting substance in the decades that followed.⁴² The USSR's requirement for a political and ideological mobilizing force around which ideas of 'the people' could be deployed against a fragmentary and uncertain existing social terrain⁴³ facilitated the marked ethno-national divisions evident in Kyrgyzstan today. These ethno-national categories gained further significance "when the overarching Soviet civic administrative structure made way for sovereign national territories, often with negative consequences for minorities".⁴⁴ "The Soviet nationalities policy politicised ethnicity and created a hierarchic ethno-political system, which caused different modes of ethnic competition at different levels",⁴⁵ giving a perceptual ethnic entitlement within a certain territory to the titular group.⁴⁶ This is framed in the literature as a significant developmental factor in the origins and causation of conflict.

Although the Soviet state pursued a policy of territorial delimitation based upon titular, linguistically defined ethnic groups, the socialist republics of Central Asia nevertheless

³⁸ Lowe, Robert, 'Nation Building and Identity in The Kyrgyz Republic', in Everett-Heath, Tom, *Central Asia: Aspects of Transition*, (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003): p. 109.

³⁹ Ibid: p. 109-110.

⁴⁰ Tishkov, Valery, 'Don't Kill Me, I'm a Kyrgyz!: An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 32, Iss. 02, (1995): p. 133.

⁴¹ Melvin, Neil, 'Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence', *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 8.

⁴² Pelkmans, Mathijis, *Fragile Conviction*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017): p. 31.

⁴³ Ibid: p. 36.

⁴⁴ Ibid: p. 33.

⁴⁵ Rezvani, Babak, 'Understanding and Explaining the Kyrgyz-Uzbek Interethnic Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan', *Anthropology of the Middle East*, Vol. 08, Iss. 02, (2013): p. 63.

⁴⁶ Ibid: p. 64.

retained a notably multi-ethnic composition.⁴⁷ “The Soviet system intended to provide different ethnic groups with ethno-territorial autonomy. However, these ‘ethnic homelands’ were not ethnically homogeneous and many ethnic groups found themselves in the homeland designed for another ethnic group”.⁴⁸ This is widely discussed within the literature as a significant factor in the genesis of conflict, providing fertile ground for ethnic grievances, tensions, and confrontations.⁴⁹ As a result of the establishment of titular ethnic majority groups as part of the Soviet’s policy of ethno-territorial settlement, the post-independence political and social landscape of Kyrgyzstan is seen as one of the promotion of the ethnic majority and the marginalisation of minority groups.⁵⁰ During the Soviet period, any existing conflicts were diffused and contained by the imposition of an overarching political ideology and the suppression of mobilisation through the Soviet political apparatus.⁵¹ In addition to this, members of minority groups were able to travel to other Soviet Republics for work and education, diminishing their position as a minority group limited to a particular territory, and this easing tensions. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union led to a meteoric rise in ethno-nationalism, and the collapse of these ideological, political, and generally authoritarian governance frameworks resulted in an initial outbreak of ethnic, or intercommunal clashes, sowing the seeds for future conflict. The collapse of the Soviet Union left an ideological vacuum, creating the need for a new model for and program of nation-building, in order to develop an identity and ideology to replace that of the former Soviet Union. New and emerging ethnic tensions during this period have, as a result, been the product of this nation-building effort in the post-Soviet space, reflecting the formation of compartmentalised and hierarchical notions of identity and belonging which have emerged as a result.⁵² Although this rise in ethno-nationalism as a form of nation-building is a relatively new, and certainly post-Soviet condition, it has its roots in Soviet era policy and the ethno-territorial settlement of the Central Asian SSRs. The development of ethnic identities, the creation of republics builds upon titular ethnic groups, and the cementing of ethnicity in

⁴⁷ Gengchen, Liu, ‘Ethnic Harmony and Conflicts in Central Asia: Origins and Policies’, in Zhang, Y. and Azizian, R., (eds.), *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998): p. 74.

⁴⁸ Rezvani, Babak, ‘Understanding and Explaining the Kyrgyz-Uzbek Interethnic Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, *Anthropology of the Middle East*, Vol. 08, Iss. 02, (2013): p. 66.

⁴⁹ Agadjanian, Victor, ‘Exclusion, Violence, and Optimism: Ethnic Divides in Kyrgyzstan’, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 20, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 459.

⁵⁰ Ibid: p. 457.

⁵¹ Ibid: p. 459.

⁵² Agadjanian, Victor, ‘Exclusion, Violence, and Optimism: Ethnic Divides in Kyrgyzstan’, *Ethnicities*, Vol. 20, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 459.

the political sphere during this period is widely understood as a significant factor in laying the foundations for ethnicity to feature prominently in considerations of conflict in Kyrgyzstan. Megoran highlights the importance of the idea of ethnicity, although approaches the notion with great caution to avoid undue reification, suggesting that “‘look for ethnicity’ we must because, as the 1990 and 2010 incidents of widespread violence in Osh show, it can be a deadly salient ingredient in social relations”.⁵³ Reeves bolsters this statement, linking the importance of ethnicity as a construct to Soviet policy and framing this as a significant factor in why this construction has become a concept which matters so much in the region, arguing that, despite its lack of ontological status, ethnicity has an everyday salience in Kyrgyzstan, specifically in the Ferghana Valley.⁵⁴

1.3 - Kyrgyz fears about Uzbeks challenging the integrity of the state

The legacy of the Soviet Union is, therefore, a significant aspect of considerations of the origin and causation of conflict within the literature, notably through reflection upon its policy of national territorial delimitation through ethno-territorial settlement. However, an accompanying theme is also identifiable, highlighted again by Megoran, Satybaldieva, and Heathershaw; that of fears about Uzbek challenges to the state. As Murzakulova and Shoeberlein argue, post-independence nationalism in Kyrgyzstan has carried a subtext concerning “who defines the directions of statebuilding”, an ongoing process since independence, and has been accompanied by an “assumed threat of loss of identity, statehood, and social cohesion”. This is framed through the problem of inter-ethnic conflict; often specifically through the notion of fear concerning Uzbek minority groups.

Although Uzbeks have always been a minority in Kyrgyzstan, since the establishment of the current territorial divisions of the modern Kyrgyz Republic they have existed as a majority ethnic group in many southern areas close to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border.⁵⁵ In addition, Uzbeks have a certain demographic weight in Central Asia as the largest ethnic group, with large numbers in each of the Central Asian republics.⁵⁶ When the grip of the Soviet Union

⁵³ Megoran, Nick, ‘Shared Space, Divided Space: Narrating Ethnic Histories of Osh’, *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 45, Iss. 04, (2013): p. 895.

⁵⁴ Reeves, Madeleine, ‘A Weekend in Osh’, *London Review of Books*, No. 32, Iss. 13, (2010): p. 17–18

⁵⁵ Rezvani, Babak, ‘Understanding and Explaining the Kyrgyz-Uzbek Interethnic Conflict in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, *Anthropology of the Middle East*, Vol. 08, Iss. 02, (2013): p. 66.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

loosened in the waning years of Soviet rule, tensions built upon understandings of ethnicity erupted, notably in the large-scale clashes seen in the south of the country in 1990.⁵⁷ A notable proportion of the literature focuses on these tensions as part of examining the origins and causes of conflict, with particular emphasis on the tensions between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in the south. One of the prominent aspects in this regard is identified as the fears relating to Uzbek separatism, ethno-nationalism, and irredentism. Movements and organisations relating to these purposes are identified in the literature; Babak talks about Uzbek separatist agitation during the 1990s and the organisation of elements of the Uzbek community in Osh into the *Adolat* organisation, aiming to promote Uzbek cultural rights, autonomy, and even separatism and the move to incorporate parts of southern Kyrgyzstan into Uzbekistan.⁵⁸ Although highlighting such movements, even noting support for them amongst certain elements within Uzbekistan, Babak acknowledges their limitations after independence: “although such sentiments might have existed among a segment of Uzbeks and the perception existed amongst the ethno-nationalist Kyrgyz... that Uzbeks are separatists... no meaningful active separatism existed in 2010”.⁵⁹ This highlights the importance of the element of *fear* with regard to intercommunal tensions and the origins and causes of conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities. Despite this lack of concrete action, Uzbeks were nevertheless seen as being “capable of posing serious separatist and irredentist demands”.⁶⁰ This attitude is highlighted often in this capacity: Megoran, writing in 2013, states that “distrust between Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities remains high, with many segments of Kyrgyz society fearful of the intentions of the Uzbeks”.⁶¹ He links this insecurity to the increasing force of nationalism which emerged after independence, suggesting that Kyrgyz nationalism is “marked by a profound insecurity about the very survival of the country, and the fear that Kyrgyzstan is primarily endangered”, threatened by disunity and external geopolitical forces, along with perceived threats to the Kyrgyz language from minority languages; notably Uzbek.⁶² As a result, Uzbeks are seen “to represent a fundamental existential threat to the state, because they are perceived to be

⁵⁷ Ibid: p. 61.

⁵⁸ Ibid: p. 66.

⁵⁹ Ibid: p. 61.

⁶⁰ Ibid: p. 68.

⁶¹ Megoran, Nick, ‘Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism’, *Chatham House*, Russia and Eurasia Program Paper, (2012-2013): p. 2.

⁶² Ibid.

aligned to external powers and not investing in the national project of unity”.⁶³ Fumagalli echoes many of these statements, although framing them slightly differently. With regards to the origins and causes of conflict, Fumagalli gives prominence to socio-economic factors, yet nevertheless argues that is manifested along ethnic lines and was articulated in terms of ethnicity, including “requests for recognising Uzbek as an official language and for incorporating parts of Kyrgyzstan’s territory to Uzbekistan”.⁶⁴ Overdorf and Schwartz again demonstrate similar considerations of the origin and causes of conflict in relation to fears over Uzbek separatism, yet suggest that the destabilising narratives regarding this, which served as the formative basis for the eruption of violence, were themselves “fake news”, most notably concerning the sexually assaults which allegedly took place on Kyrgyz students during the 2010 conflict, and the widespread opinion that Uzbek separatists were making their move to join the south of Kyrgyzstan with Uzbekistan.⁶⁵

The identification of Kyrgyz fears concerning the Uzbek minority groups relating to separatism is accompanied in the literature by a more general analysis of popular and political perspectives towards Uzbeks which are explored as origins and causes of conflict in Kyrgyzstan. These are reasonably diverse in nature, but often refer to Kyrgyz (ethno-)nationalism as a focal point for such negative perspectives. Considerations within the literature thus go slightly beyond the categorisation set out by Heathershaw et al, although in this instance remain within the broad theme. Although not simply dismissed in the literature as a negative force for conflict, nationalism is still recognised to form a significant contributory factor towards the eruption of conflict through its influence upon attitudes towards ‘the other’. Megoran accepts that nationalism is an indelible aspect of modernity; one of which has been the engine of liberation movements across the world, but highlights the contextual particularities of the Kyrgyz context:

Under nationalism, the *raison d’être* of a nation-state is to embody and express the character and defend the interests of the territorialized nation.

In Central Asia this has meant the “titular” nation: thus, for example, state legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic has promoted the use of the Kyrgyz language,

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Fumagalli, Matteo, ‘Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: The Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, Iss. 04, (2007): p. 572.

⁶⁵ Overdorf, Rebekah and Schwartz, Christopher, ‘Subtle Censorship via Adversarial Fakeness in Kyrgyzstan’, <https://arxiv.org/pdf/1906.08021.pdf>, [accessed 20/04/2022].

given preferential access to citizenship for ethnic Kyrgyz immigrating from abroad, required that the president be fluent in the Kyrgyz language, adopted a flag with explicitly Kyrgyz ethnic symbols, and so on.⁶⁶

This is a significant aspect within the literature which relates to origins and causes of conflict in Kyrgyzstan, specifically in relation to fears and negative perspectives concerning Uzbek groups. The following section, therefore, will briefly outline the political context, as it is portrayed within the literature, into which the evolution of Kyrgyz post-independence nationalism fits.

As the previous sections have explained, Kyrgyzstan's independence came, not as the result of a long-running, unified campaign for national independence, but was inherited almost by default after the collapse of the USSR. This independence arrived in the aftermath of a period of turmoil for the emergent state; in June 1990, tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities in Osh Oblast, compounded by land and resource competition, resulted in violent confrontations and hundreds of deaths.⁶⁷ Such a process of independence in the face of discord presented the Kyrgyz state with the simultaneous tasks of building a new, sovereign nation after the collapse of an empire, and healing the rifts that had erupted in Kyrgyz society after the USSR had withdrawn, along with restructuring the new nation state out of the ashes of the old Soviet order, outlined in the previous discussion. At a fundamental level these are both inherently problems of *nation-building*. The successive governments since independence have faced the task of creating a Kyrgyz nation from the ashes of the USSR and have chosen the vehicle of nation-building as a peacebuilding tool;⁶⁸ the creation of an integrated national community has increasingly become a priority of the Kyrgyz state,⁶⁹ both in order to create a national identity in the face of independence and to use this identity to consolidate the state and unify the nation as a vehicle for peace. However, this section will deal only with the effects of nationalism and nation-building with regard to the origin and cause of conflict: the following chapter deals explicitly with peace and peacebuilding. Since the Osh events of 1990 and declaring independence, Kyrgyzstan

⁶⁶ Megoran, Nick, *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyzstan Boundary*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): p. 14.

⁶⁷ Melvin, Neil, 'Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence', *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 8.

⁶⁸ Isakova, Zamira, 'Understanding Peace Processes in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks Happily Ever After?', *MA Dissertation*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, OCSCE Academy, 2013): p. 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid: p. 8.

has seen the overthrowing of two successive governments through violent revolt, in 2005 and 2010, and a second bout of interethnic conflict between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities, the bloodiest in the newly independent nation's history.⁷⁰ Intermittent outbreaks of violence have marred Kyrgyz society in between these major historical events; for example, anti-government protests in 2010 in the town of Tokmok developed into clashes between Kyrgyz demonstrators and Dungan and Uighur communities, and, later the same year, a land dispute between Kyrgyz villagers and Meskhetian Turks resulted in damage to 28 homes and the loss of 5 lives, with around 28 injured.⁷¹

Although, as later sections will identify, nation-building can be a vehicle for reconciliation and for building peace in the wake of such conflict and can even be a means of softening the ethnic divisions that emerge as a result,⁷² this section will explore its comprehension in the literature in terms of conflict. The first presidency of Kyrgyzstan (under Askar Akaev) to some extent reflected these values in its approach to nation-building as peacebuilding; however, the foundations were laid for successive governments to increasingly promote ethno-nationalism as a nationalism of exclusion by way of nation-building, attempting to secure peace through the 'Kyrgyzification' of the state. A prominent metaphor under Akaev was the idea of Kyrgyzstan as 'our common home'; increasingly, the notion of a home became one shared by the 'master' and their 'guests', implying that such guests of the Kyrgyz state "must recognise that the landlord takes precedence when it comes to deciding cultural and social rules, and that he only accepts guests thanks to his own good will".⁷³ Ethnic tensions as a cause of conflict are explained by the lack of recognition of this dynamic by minority groups, in the face of the good and tolerant nature of the Kyrgyz state.⁷⁴ Thereby the possibly, at least initially laudable project of nation-building as peacebuilding has resulted in a polarising effect in Kyrgyz society,⁷⁵ and these initial attempts to promote interethnic harmony have

⁷⁰ Although these episodes differed significantly in terms of the nature and level of violence which occurred, they are often considered together in the literature as part of considerations of conflict in general in the country.

⁷¹ Melvin, Neil, 'Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence', *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 16.

⁷² Simonsen, Sven Gunnar, 'Nationbuilding as Peacebuilding: Racing to Define the Kosovar', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 11, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 289.

⁷³ Laurelle, Marlène, 'The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 43.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Isakova, Zamira, 'Understanding Peace Processes in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks Happily Ever After?', *MA Dissertation*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, OCSCE Academy, 2013): p. 10.

become one of identity manipulation through ethno-nationalism to gain and hold power.⁷⁶ The following sections detail the emergence of ethno-nationalism, and examine its position in the successive governments since independence, with an emphasis on how the increasingly problematic use of ethno-nationalist political and social discourse is understood within the literature as an origin and cause of conflict in relation to promoting fear and distrust towards Uzbek groups within the country.

Askar Akaev: Nation-building and the Origins of Post-independence Ethno-nationalism

In the immediate post-soviet period and shortly following the Osh events of 1990, Askar Akaev became Kyrgyzstan's first president. Distinguishing himself from the previous conservative communist leadership, Akaev entered office promoting liberal political and economic reform,⁷⁷ doing so in the face of the unravelling of the USSR and a general sense of instability and political and ethnic confrontation.⁷⁸ As a means of consolidating the state during this initial period of turmoil, Akaev "proactively incorporated into his government leaders of all ethnic communities who supported economic and political reform",⁷⁹ and his ascension to office was marked by a concern for interethnic cooperation and stability, in response to the destabilising violence which had occurred in Osh.⁸⁰ In an attempt to unify Kyrgyzstan in the face of its sudden independence and recent violence, Akaev even adopted the slogan, 'Kyrgyzstan - our Common Home', attempting to convey the message that all inhabitants of the new republic, irrespective of ethno-national or religious background, were integral to independent Kyrgyzstan.⁸¹ This was bolstered by the founding of the 'Assembly of the Peoples', a talking-shop for minority issues, the founding of Osh's Kyrgyz-Uzbek University, the creation of an Uzbek pedagogical faculty at Osh State University, and the manufacture of Uzbek language textbooks, vital to Uzbek students due to the thick veneer of state patriotism and Latin script use in those from Uzbekistan.⁸²

⁷⁶ Kaufmann, Chaim, 'Possible and Impossible Solutions to Ethnic Civil Wars', *International Security*, Vol. 20, Iss. 04, (1996): p. 136.

⁷⁷ Spector, Regine A., 'The Transformation of Askar Akaev, President of Kyrgyzstan', *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series*, (2004): p. 6.

⁷⁸ Ibid: p. 7-8.

⁷⁹ Ibid: p. 8.

⁸⁰ Pelkmans, Mathijis, *Fragile Conviction*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017): p. 25.

⁸¹ Pelkmans, Mathijis, *Fragile Conviction*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017): p. 25.

⁸² Megoran, Nick, 'Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism', *Russia and Eurasia Program Paper – Chatham House*, (2012): p. 6.

Here, the role of nation-building, and the creation of a civic and national identity, can be seen as being a vital component of state-led peacebuilding efforts in Kyrgyzstan.⁸³ Akaev's presidency, emerging at a time of conflict and instability, can be seen as embodying the beginnings of a link between nation-building and peacebuilding in the republic, something which will be expanded upon in the second chapter on peace and peacebuilding. This section will instead focus upon the notably unintentional result of this policy: the origins of the emergence of ethno-nationalist discourses and policies within the framework of peacebuilding through nation-building and their contribution to the causes of interethnic violence as portrayed within the literature.

Despite such promising beginnings, the new president and his policy were marked by controversial impulses regarding national development; the people of the Kyrgyz state were presented, in both Akaev's political writing and his emergent policy, as simultaneously a single group, and yet one which is divided into Kyrgyz and 'others'.⁸⁴ Due to the legacy of SSR planning, Akaev "was presented with the dilemma of creating an identity based on Kyrgyz ethnicity, while simultaneously avoiding a policy of exclusion".⁸⁵ As the first president of a newly-formed republic, and one which had been 'given' its independence rather than having united to fight for it, Akaev was tasked with building a national identity from the ground up.⁸⁶ Although he came to office in pursuit of interethnic unity, diversity and tolerance, his emphasis on the country's cultural heritage and traditions resulted in the emergence and strengthening of ethno-nationalist sentiments.⁸⁷ The adoption of an ethno-symbolic approach to solidifying the Kyrgyz nation through promoting a common identity, and thus laying the foundations for peace,⁸⁸ paved the way for an increasingly exclusionary

⁸³ Isakova, Zamira, 'Understanding Peace Processes in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks Happily Ever After?', *MA Dissertation*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, OCSCE Academy, 2013): p. 8.

⁸⁴ Baruch Wachtel, Andrew, 'Kyrgyzstan Between Democratization and Ethnic Intolerance', *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 41, Iss. 06, (2013): p. 961-986.

⁸⁵ Hanks, Reuel R., 'Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Conundrums of Ethnic Conflict, National Identity and State Cohesion', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, Iss. 02, (2011): p. 182.

⁸⁶ Handrahan, Lori M., 'Gender and Ethnicity in the 'Transitional Democracy' of Kyrgyzstan', *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, Iss. 04, (2001): p. 470.

⁸⁷ Lottholz, Phillip, 'Old Slogans Ringing Hollow? The Legacy of Social Engineering, Statebuilding and the 'Dilemma of Difference' in (Post-) Soviet Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 410.

⁸⁸ Isakova, Zamira, 'Understanding Peace Processes in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks Happily Ever After?', *MA Dissertation*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, OCSCE Academy, 2013): p. 12-13.

‘Kyrgyzification’ of the state in successive governments, and laid the foundations for future eruptions of conflict, strengthening tensions and providing ideological substance for disputes

The major policy which reflects such an ethno-symbolic approach and reinforcement of ethnic Kyrgyz nationality under Akaev were his revival of the epos of Manas. “It is hard, possibly impossible, to find a Kyrgyzstani citizen who has not heard of the epic and who does not know at least a little bit about it”.⁸⁹ Despite having played a role during Soviet rule, following independence the half a million line poem was revitalised to fill the ideological gap left by the demise of communism, operating as a symbol for the unity of the Kyrgyz people.⁹⁰ Shortly after independence, Akaev announced that the epic was a symbol of the unity and spiritual revival of the Kyrgyz nation, showing a distinctly patriot face to the general population.⁹¹ The epos was elevated to the status of ‘national epic’, with the image of Manas appearing on currency and his story becoming part of the national curriculum.⁹² A special governmental committee on cultural and education affairs was formed, deriving seven maxims from the epos which were adopted as official state ideology.⁹³ The use of the epos, and the maxims derived from it, were tools for the reconstruction of national identity, promotion of ethnic tolerance, respect for elders, care for the young, and other traditional Kyrgyz social obligations and principles.⁹⁴ Akaev was careful to point out the international character of the story, highlighting Manas’ friendship with people of varied ethnicity.⁹⁵ The seven maxims were accompanied by celebrations of the epic’s supposed thousandth anniversary in 1995; in the late 1990’s, “virtually every kiosk in the capital had a painting of Manas on a horse or the words ‘Manas 1,000’ on them”.⁹⁶ However, some of the literature suggests that some were unhappy with this glorification of Manas. Some have suggested that non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups could not identify with a distinctly Kyrgyz folkloric symbol,⁹⁷ seeing its use as “a particularistic effort of building an ethno-nation around the Kyrgyz

⁸⁹ Van der Heide, Nienke, *Spirited Performance: The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan*, (Amsterdam: Rozenburg Publishers, 2008): p. 21.

⁹⁰ Ibid: p. 18.

⁹¹ Ibid: p. 24.

⁹² Hanks, Reuel R., ‘Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Conundrums of Ethnic Conflict, National Identity and State Cohesion’, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, Iss. 02, (2011): p. 182.

⁹³ Marat, Erica, ‘Imagined Past, Uncertain Future: The Creation of National Ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan’, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, Iss. 01, (2008): p. 15.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Van der Heide, Nienke, *Spirited Performance: The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan*, (Amsterdam: Rozenburg Publishers, 2008): p. 25.

⁹⁶ Ibid: p. 21.

⁹⁷ Ibid: p. 25.

majority”.⁹⁸ The epos of Manas is exclusively anchored in *Kyrgyz* culture and history, and its political application became antithetical to ‘Kyrgyzstan – our common home’.⁹⁹ It is identified in the literature as a prominent symbol of exclusion for Kyrgyzstan’s non-Kyrgyz citizens.¹⁰⁰ The application of such a historical imagination envisages the formation of Kyrgyz political and social forms from a vision of an exclusively Kyrgyz nomadic past, employing notions of ‘unity’ and ‘concordance’ which designate the nation as particularistically Kyrgyz. However, this vision is sometimes understood as having posited different ethnic groups, most prominently the Uzbek minority and their elites, as representing an existential threat to the Kyrgyz state, as they align to external powers and do not invest in the national project of Kyrgyz unity.¹⁰¹ They are excluded through the reliance of the Manas epos on ethnic Kyrgyz culture, history and language. This would have been an unintended side-effect for Akaev, who had intended his policy to neither offend nor alienate the non-Kyrgyz population.¹⁰² The promotion of Manas is seen in some sections of the literature as an extension of the ‘Kyrgyzification’ which emerged in a significant way with the adoption of Kyrgyz as the official language in 1989; this had been seen by minority groups as an infringement upon their linguistic and cultural rights,¹⁰³ and the use of Manas became the threat of Kyrgyz nationalistic symbolism.¹⁰⁴ Despite this argument featuring in the literature, I never encountered this view or anything which suggested it throughout my eighteen months in the country. While it may have had an impact politically, helping to shape the emergence of ethno-nationalism after the fall of the Soviet Union, it does not appear to be understood in this manner in people’s everyday lives.

Akaev can be seen to have pursued contradictory strategies in order to obtain the solidarity of different audiences:¹⁰⁵ on the one hand, his initial intention of tolerance and unity; on the other, the beginnings of ethno-nationalism through the adoption of the Manas epos. He

⁹⁸ Pelkmans, Mathijis, *Fragile Conviction*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017): p. 25.

⁹⁹ Hanks, Reuel R., ‘Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: Conundrums of Ethnic Conflict, National Identity and State Cohesion’, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, Iss. 02, (2011): p. 182.

¹⁰⁰ Pelkmans, Mathijis, *Fragile Conviction*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2017): p. 20.

¹⁰¹ Megoran, Nick, ‘Averting Violence in Kyrgyzstan: Understanding and Responding to Nationalism’, *Russia and Eurasia Program Paper – Chatham House*, (2012): p. 2.

¹⁰² Van der Heide, Nienke, *Spirited Performance: The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan*, (Amsterdam: Rozenburg Publishers, 2008): p. 25.

¹⁰³ Chotaeva, Cholpon, ‘Language as a Nationbuilding Factor in Kyrgyzstan’, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 26, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ Van der Heide, Nienke, *Spirited Performance: The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan*, (Amsterdam: Rozenburg Publishers, 2008): p. 25.

¹⁰⁵ Murzakulova, Asel and Shoeberlein, ‘The Invention of Legitimacy: Struggles in Kyrgyzstan to Craft an Effective Nation-State Ideology’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, Iss. 07, (2009): p. 1239.

needed to appeal to both the minority groups affected by the violence of 1990 and the Kyrgyz population and pursued a policy of nation-building which was intended to build and foster peace through a unification through common history and state ideology. Akaev sought to build a nation and to restore peace as a simultaneous project, through the policy of 'our common home' and the development of a national traditionalist moral and social code through the epos of Manas. "The building of a national community is important in the building of a sustainable peace",¹⁰⁶ but, for Akaev, such a process became interlinked with the beginnings of ethno-nationalism, through both excluding non-Kyrgyz from the ideological ideas of the nation, and by beginning a practice of 'Kyrgyzification' which paved the way for an increase in such sentiments. Although his period in office was marked by a significant attempt to foster unity and interethnic harmony, the adoption of the Manas epos is identified within the literature in a manner at odds with its officially intended aims: as a policy which marked the beginnings of an upsurge in ethno-nationalism within the Kyrgyz state's path to nation-building, and thus as an origin and cause of conflict.

The Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev, and the Rise of Ethno-nationalism

The so-called Tulip revolution of 2005 ousted Akaev after 14 years in office. The rather questionably democratic parliamentary elections of February 2005, amongst manifold other grievances, led to protests and violent clashes which culminated in the former president fleeing to Moscow,¹⁰⁷ becoming a university lecturer. In the June elections, a new president was elected: Kurmanbek Bakiyev who, in contrast to Akaev, originated from the south of the country, and had been leader of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan during the protests. "With Akaev gone, the rhetoric of Kyrgyzstan as 'a common home' disappeared and the brittle arrangements to manage interethnic relations that the former president had instituted and manipulated collapsed".¹⁰⁸ Bakiyev himself was considerably more orientated towards the ethnic Kyrgyz than his predecessor,¹⁰⁹ advocating "a more affirmed Kyrgyz

¹⁰⁶ Stephenson, Carol, in Isakova, Zamira, 'Understanding Peace Processes in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks Happily Ever After?', *MA Dissertation*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, OCSCE Academy, (2013): p. 10.

¹⁰⁷ Matveeva, Anna, 'Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism', *Crisis States Working Papers Series*, No. 02, (2010): p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Melvin, Neil, 'Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence', *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ Aitmatov, Chingiz in Murzakulova, Asel and Shoerberlein, 'The Invention of Legitimacy: Struggles in Kyrgyzstan to Craft an Effective Nation-State Ideology', *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, Iss. 07, (2009): p. 1244.

nationalism” as a key driver of his policies.¹¹⁰ As such, he is commonly understood within the literature to represent a significant point of deterioration of the relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, and even between the north and south of the country as a whole. This had a lot to do with Bakiyev’s origins in the south of the country. Akaev, as a northerner, needed to develop support in the south, choosing to build relations with the Uzbek community in order to achieve this. His policies demonstrate this, with his focus upon intercommunal relations and Kyrgyzstan as ‘our common home’. Bakiyev, on the other hand, was born in Jalal-Abad, and his support base was therefore already based in the south. He did not need the support of the Uzbek community and, as a result, developed a policy built upon the intensification of Kyrgyz ethnic nationalism. For example, in 2009 Bakiyev attempted to develop a more pronounced popular patriotism through amendments to the law on state symbols, and in Parliament a debate was held “over the idea that for each official commemoration all be obliged to sing the national hymn with a hand held to the chest”.¹¹¹ Alongside this, many of the political leaders involved in the ousting of Bakiyev openly and strongly advocated Kyrgyz nationalist views, engendering unrest amongst national minorities.¹¹² Adakhan Madumarov, southern member of parliament, ally of Bakiyev, and staunch opponent of Akaev openly espoused his ethno-nationalist convictions, declaring that the Kyrgyz are the masters of their ‘house’, and the ‘others’ are only renters.¹¹³

Ethnic violence was also a feature of the post-revolution period; in February 2006, clashes in the predominantly Dungan village of Iskra, injuring twenty and damaging 30 homes.¹¹⁴ There were also smaller incidents involving Meskhetian, Uighur and Kurdish communities.¹¹⁵ The unrest and turmoil of the Tulip revolution is understood within the literature to have heightened the problems surrounding interethnic relations in Kyrgyz politics and, in the year following the revolution, many became alarmed by the notable increase in nationalist rhetoric employed by Bakiyev’s administration.¹¹⁶ Bakiyev himself promoted patriotism

¹¹⁰ Laurelle, Marlène, ‘The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 42.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Matveeva, Anna, ‘Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism’, *Crisis States Working Papers Series*, No. 02, (2010): p. 2.

¹¹³ Kto v Kirgizii khoziain, June 30, 2008. Easttime.ru.<http://www.easttime.ru/news/1/4/599.html>(accessed 18.03.11) In Laurelle, Marlène, ‘The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 42.

¹¹⁴ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 12.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

through various slogans connected to the notions of 'my house', 'my town' and 'my region' amongst others,¹¹⁷ demonstrating the shift from Akaev's 'common home' to Bakiyev's home with a Kyrgyz landlord and his deferential guests. The program of nation-building as peacebuilding begun under Akaev is portrayed in the literature as being a policy neglected in favour of an open move towards ethno-nationalism.¹¹⁸

The related theme of 'imperilled sovereignty', to which many references are made within the literature,¹¹⁹ also grew during the Bakiyev era as a result of the state's increasing ethno-nationalisation of the nation-building project. Since the Tulip Revolution, Uzbek political mobilisation and commitment had increased; silent and tacitly supportive under Akaev's more harmonious and inclusive approach, in 2006 the Uzbeks of Jalalabad protested in the street against their lack of recognition in the south and the growing 'Uzbekophobia' amongst law enforcement.¹²⁰ This was followed by an intensification of demands for official recognition of the Uzbek language, mainly from younger local leaders and businessmen.¹²¹ Alongside this increase in political involvement, Kyrgyz politicians and media began to denounce the movement of Tajik and Uzbek families into arable land previously deserted by Kyrgyz migrants, suggesting that it constituted a 'creeping migration' which would lead to the changing of state borders between these nations.¹²² Combined with the increasing ethno-nationalist rhetoric from Bakiyev's administration, this notion of imperilled sovereignty is understood in the literature to have damaged the nation-building project, and thus severely impacted upon its ability to deliver peace through national consolidation. It also significantly increased the purchase of the Bakiyev regime's ethno-nationalist Rhetoric and is portrayed as having paved the way for further conflict and discord.

¹¹⁷ Laurelle, Marlène, 'The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 42.

¹¹⁸ Isakova, Zamira, 'Understanding Peace Processes in the Aftermath of Ethnic Violence in the South of Kyrgyzstan: The Kyrgyz and Uzbeks Happily Ever After?', *MA Dissertation*, (Bishkek: Kyrgyzstan, OCSCE Academy, 2013): p. 12-13.

¹¹⁹ **For example, see:** Laurelle, Marlène, 'The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 39-49; Fumagalli, Matteo, 'Stateness, Contested Nationhood, and Imperilled Sovereignty: The Effects of (Non-Western) Linkages and Leverage on Conflict in Kyrgyzstan', *East European Politics*, Vol. 32, Iss. 03, (2016): p. 355-377; and Lottholz, Phillip, 'Old Slogans Ringing Hollow? The Legacy of Social Engineering, Statebuilding and the 'Dilemma of Difference' in (Post-) Soviet Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 405-424.

¹²⁰ Laurelle, Marlène, 'The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 44.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

The Overthrow of Bakiyev

By 2010, the Bakiyev regime was facing rising popular discontent, with protests against corruption, rising crime levels, the growth of presidential power, and the severe increases in energy costs. Kyrgyzstan entered another period of instability as the opposition mounted, moving from small-scale demonstrations in the northern region of Naryn to large-scale violent protests in the capital; violence between protestors and government forces led to the deaths of over 80 people and widespread destruction.¹²³ Bakiyev, faced with such violence and opposition, fled with many of his relatives to Jalalabad in the south. As a result, "just as with the Tulip revolution, the collapse of central authority led to violence against minority communities".¹²⁴ Anti-government protests in the northern town of Tokmok in April led to violence against Dungans and Uighurs, and in the village of Maevka, locals reported that 28 Meskhetian homes had been attacked, some burned to the ground, with the loss of 5 lives.¹²⁵

The 2010 Violence

The increasing ethno-nationalism of the Bakiyev regime, the growing discourse around the theme of imperilled sovereignty and the collapse of central authority after the revolution culminated in a further outbreak of violence in Osh and Jalal-Abad.¹²⁶ The June 2010 inter-communal violence was the single worst crisis in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan, leaving 400-500 dead, hundreds of thousands internally displaced and extensive damage to property.¹²⁷

The situation of the Uzbek minority in the south is portrayed as having deteriorated significantly under Bakiyev, where increasing ethno-nationalism and a decreasing access to power at all levels of government and media¹²⁸ led to a heightening of Uzbek political involvement. With the ousting of Bakiyev, some Uzbek leaders felt "that the time was right to provide clear political support for the provisional government and to seek ways to

¹²³ Melvin, Neil, 'Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence', *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 15-16.

¹²⁴ Ibid: p. 16.

¹²⁵ Ibid: p. 15-16.

¹²⁶ Laurelle, Marlène, 'The Paradigm of Nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. Evolving Narrative, the Sovereignty Issue, and Political Agenda', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 45, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 39

¹²⁷ Heathershaw, John et al., 'Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan', SIPRI_OSF Policy Brief, June 2014, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Matveeva, Anna, 'Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism', *Crisis States Working Papers Series*, No. 02, (2010).

improve the position of the Uzbek community in the country”.¹²⁹ Their main focus was to ensure Uzbek representation in the new, provisional government and new constitution in draft, alongside the areas of language and education.¹³⁰ Although many did not pursue these aims, the impact of those who did is notable. In May 2010, supporters of the now ousted Bakiyev attempted to regain control on behalf of their president, seizing government buildings by force and holding the newly appointed governor hostage.¹³¹ The provisional government called upon the mobilised Uzbek community to demonstrate an active resistance to the pro-Bakiyev group, which culminated in expulsion of these groups from government buildings, and the burning of Bakiyev’s nearby house.¹³² Such a mass mobilisation of Uzbeks in the south, combined with their involvement in the destruction of Bakiyev’s house and the violent removal of pro-Bakiyev protestors led many Kyrgyz to perceive this as an Uzbek attack on the Kyrgyz population: comments on TV from Uzbek leader Kadyrzhan Batyrov, where he reportedly encouraged mass Uzbek involvement in statebuilding and stressed their prominent role in supporting the government, only further increased popular Kyrgyz distrust.¹³³

The combination of the increasing ethno-nationalism of Bakiyev, the growing theme of imperilled sovereignty, and the increasing Uzbek involvement served as catalysts for the June 2010 violence which swept the south of the country. The causes of this violence are deeply contested within the literature, and even within Kyrgyzstan itself. The official Kyrgyz government report firstly blamed an alliance of Uzbek ‘separatist’ politicians and leaders, alongside the supporters of Bakiyev.¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch presented a narrative of violence erupting after the clash of Uzbek and Kyrgyz mobs in a series of smaller incidents which quickly escalated.¹³⁵ However, the conflict is usually portrayed as one between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks in academic literature, that of international organisations, and indeed in the opinions I encountered during my time in Kyrgyzstan. The increasing ethno-

¹²⁹ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 16.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid: p. 17.

¹³² Ibid

¹³³ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 17.

¹³⁴ Heathershaw, John et al., ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, SIPRI_OSF Policy Brief, June 2014, p. 2.

¹³⁵ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 25.

nationalism of the Kyrgyz state's nation-building narrative, which started with the intention of being a force for peace, can therefore be seen to have played a role in the emergence and framing of the conflict. The Kyrgyz view of Uzbek mobilisation, and the Uzbek response emerged as a result of the increasingly ethno-nationalist state narrative under Bakiyev, and the deteriorated position in which the Uzbek community had found itself in as a result. The reaction of both groups can be seen to have emerged, to a significant degree, from the result of the increasingly ethno-nationalist character of the Kyrgyz state's nation-building project. The literature thus portrays a movement from the use of Manas and Kyrgyz history as a means to develop peaceful order and intercommunal harmony, to the development of increasing ethno-nationalism and, as a result, further conflict.

1.3 - Political Instability and Crisis

The additional focus within the literature concerning the origin and causation of conflict, that of *political instability and crisis*, is also made evident in the preceding discussion surrounding ethnonationalism, political upheaval, and the ensuing negative effects upon intercommunal relations. The previous section highlighted the rather substantial level of political upheaval to which Kyrgyzstan has been subject to in its short time as an independent state, following on from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the relatively chaotic scenes which ensued. This section will draw attention to this specific focus as it is represented within the literature, demonstrating that not only are these events understood to be causes of conflict through their detrimental effect upon Kyrgyz Uzbek relations, but also through their very nature as events of political instability and crisis, again building upon the useful categorisation made by Heathershaw et al.

This particular aspect is notably prevalent in journalistic considerations of the country, from popular books to articles in major news outlets. In terms of reflections upon the origins and causes of conflict in Kyrgyzstan, discussions of political instability and crisis are thus to be seen as holding a marked sway in popular understandings; something which is also reflected in the academic literature. This relates to the preceding discussion surrounding discourses of danger, with the journalistic discussion and academic discussion displaying a noteworthy similarity when looking at conflict in the region. News articles demonstrate this most clearly, framing the political elite, their roles, and their very positions, as demonstrative of

Kyrgyzstan's ostensibly inherent instability and penchant for extended periods of crisis. For example, an article in France 24 in September 2021 states that "for prime ministers in Kyrgyzstan... the job description invites the very real prospect of jail", going on to highlight and detail the corruption charges levelled against former premiers since the recent election of Sadyr Japarov in January 2021 and arguing that "Kyrgyzstan is no stranger to crackdowns", and yet is experiencing an unprecedented scale of politically driven arrests.¹³⁶ Japarov has become a locus of discussion relating to the notions of political instability and crisis in the media: reports have highlighted claims of corruption and electoral irregularities, along with his accusations of an armed coup forming against him in the early days of his presidency.¹³⁷ In addition to calling attention to instability within the formal political sphere and discussing the crises within it, media reports have also brought attention to the crises and instability related to intercommunal conflict and border disputes. Most recently, this included reporting on the two Tajik civilians killed in the latest violent border disputes along the contested Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border, described as "the latest deadly flare-up" in an area in which "communities regularly clash over land and water supplies, with border guards often involved".¹³⁸ This general, or popularised view of Kyrgyzstan as politically unstable and subject to crises which engender conflict is further represented in the journalist Philip Shishkin's 2013 book, entitled 'Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia'. The introduction begins in a manner overtly representative of the tone and focus of the book itself:

Imagine a region so rife with tensions and intrigue that in less than a decade it managed to produce two revolutions in the same country, murders straight out of a thriller... a drug smuggling superhighway, and corruption schemes so brazen and lucrative they would be hard to invent.¹³⁹

The book is a dramatised journalistic work, built upon selected interviews and anecdotes and the observations of the author. It focuses exclusively on revolutions, violence, state

¹³⁶ n/a, 'Kyrgyzstan Instability Looms as Five PMs Jailed', <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210924-kyrgyzstan-instability-looms-as-five-pms-jailed>, [accessed 02/05/2022].

¹³⁷ n/a, 'Kyrgyzstan Holds Election After Year of Instability', <https://www.dw.com/en/kyrgyzstan-holds-election-following-year-of-instability/a-59959941>, [accessed 02/05/2022].

¹³⁸ n/a, 'Two Civilians Killed as Guards Clash at Kyrgyz-Tajik Border', <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/1/28/guards-clash-again-on-kyrgyz-tajik-border-ceasefire-falters>, [accessed 02/05-2022].

¹³⁹ Shishkin, Philip, *Restless Valley: Revolution, Murder, and Intrigue in the Heart of Central Asia*, (London: Yale University Press, 2013): p. ix.

corruption and nepotism, murder and criminality, with a significant section devoted to the conflicts of the Ferghana Valley, providing justification for the title *Restless Valley*. It includes chapters such as “Land of Perpetual Revolution” and “Dark Years in Kyrgyzstan”. Although Kyrgyzstan is of course no stranger to conflict, instability, and violence, the book demonstrates a clear and completely one-sided focus upon it, to the exclusion of everything else, demonstrating a focus upon political instability and crisis as origins of conflict in an exemplary manner.

The academic literature mirrors this focus in a more considered and analytical manner, without the reliance upon drama and selective sensationalism displayed by Shishkin. The term ‘instability’ is notably present in the literature, most obviously in the titles of the articles themselves,¹⁴⁰ and is explored in depth within them as an origin or cause of conflict in Kyrgyzstan. For example, Vicken Cheterian argues that “Kyrgyzstan increasingly resembles a failed state and lacks the resources necessary to cope with its problems”¹⁴¹ which, he states, stem in part from the relationship between the country’s elite and regional clans, who are “deeply divided and engaged in a ferocious power struggle, further undermining state consolidation and pacification”.¹⁴² This idea of ‘clan’ or regionally-based divisions as a significant component of political instability, and therefore as causative factors in the outbreak of conflict, is thus a noteworthy part of the discussion within the literature concerning political instability. Bond and Koch, for instance, discuss “clans, kinship, and regionalism” as not only “important elements of politics” but as promoting a “winner takes all approach to politics among indigenous elites”,¹⁴³ encouraging instability in the political sphere. However, this is not a universally held opinion: a significant proportion of the literature sees clan, kinship, and tribal systems¹⁴⁴ as forces for peace and stability in the

¹⁴⁰ For example, see: Agadjanian, Victor and Garina, Evgenia, ‘Economic Swings, Political Instability and Migration in Kyrgyzstan’, *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 35, Iss. 02, (2018): p. 285-304; Cheterian, Vicken, ‘Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Instability’, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 55, Iss. 05, (2010): p. 21-27; Aslam, Sabah, ‘Kyrgyzstan: Internal Instability and Revolt in 2010’, *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 31, Iss. 01-02, (2011): p. 241-260; and Herd, Graeme P. and Ryabkov, Maxim, ‘State, Civil Society Actors, and Political Instabilities In Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: The Changing International Context’, in Zeigler, Charles E., (ed.), *Civil Society and Politics in Central Asia*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2015): p. 311-332.

¹⁴¹ Cheterian, Vicken, ‘Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s Island of Instability’, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 55, Iss. 05, (2010): p. 22.

¹⁴² Ibid: p. 23.

¹⁴³ Bond, Andrew R. and Koch, Natalie R., ‘Interethnic Tensions in Kyrgyzstan: A Political Geographic Perspective’, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 51, Iss. 04, (2010): p. 536.

¹⁴⁴ A variety of terms of used to describe this aspect of the social and political structure in Kyrgyzstan, and the correct terminology in the English language is certainly a contested topic within the literature. However, much

country.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, such considerations still consider these aspects of Kyrgyzstan's society and politics in relation to conflict; albeit as mitigating structures and systems of stability which stand against the instability and recurring periods of crisis through which the country is often characterised, as previous sections on discourses of danger and conflict have highlighted. For example, Collins characterises clans as rational actors, pursuing the interests of their members and operating in a weakly institutionalised state and creating an "arena within which informal social networks (rather than formal political or social organizations) jostle, contend, and combine in pursuit of their interests".¹⁴⁶ She gives the example of political structures and appointments under Kyrgyzstan's first president, Akaev, who's clan relations occupied prominent or leading roles positions in the national bank, security services, and even the constitutional court, creating a kind of authoritarian and nepotistic political security through minimising competition and centralising decision making and political processes. In addition, Aksana Ismailbekova frames patronage and kinship relations as an essential force, helping to enable the functioning of socialism in the Soviet system and later embedding the key tenets of liberal democracy into the state structure in place of the socialist system.¹⁴⁷ She argues that, far from being a diminishing 'primordial' form of political organisation, surpassed by the advent of modernity, they have found a new life in the post-Soviet space, and have become "integrally tied to the democratic and nation-building processes", helping to establish political alliances and secure economic cooperation during hard times.¹⁴⁸

Although such structures of patronage and kinship are occasionally understood as positive forces, helping to maintain an authoritarian political stability, or adapting with the collapse of the Soviet Union to form the social and political vehicle for democratisation within the literature, they are nevertheless also presented as structures which lead to crisis and, as a result, engender political instability through their influence upon political and social life and

of the relationships involved in these relationships (of clan, kinship, or what is occasionally referred to as tribal) are those of patron-client since the collapse of the USSR, as identified in Ismailbekova's excellent book, *Blood Ties and the Native Son*. She questions the "oversimplified notion of clan politics" and the "negative connotations" of the use of the term 'tribalism' (p. 8-9). See this work for an expansive discussion of this issue.

¹⁴⁵ For further reading, see: Ismailbekova, Aksana, *Blood Ties and the Native Son: Poetics of Patronage in Kyrgyzstan*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).

¹⁴⁶ Collins, Kathleen, 'Clans, Pacts, and Politics in Central Asia', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, Iss. 03, (2002): p. 143.

¹⁴⁷ Ismailbekova, Aksana, *Blood Ties and the Native Son: Poetics of Patronage in Kyrgyzstan*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017): p. 7.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid: p. 40.

structures in Kyrgyzstan. The Tulip Revolution of 2005 is a prime example. It is often portrayed in the literature as having embodied anti-corruption, or even democratic aims, “sparked by a popular rejection of rampant corruption, clan structures and well-established organized crime, which led to the mobilisation of the masses against the ruling regimes”.¹⁴⁹ Therefore, although the nature of patronage or kinship-based relations and practices in Kyrgyzstan is contested in the literature, it is predominantly framed in some capacity in relation to the concepts of political instability and crisis, either in a causative or mediating role.

1.4 - Institutional Weakness

The focus within the literature on political instability and crises as an origin or cause of conflict can also be seen to embody underlying concerns with institutional weakness, the two aspects being closely related in the literature when the origins and causes of conflict in the country are being explored. This link can be seen through the effect that institutional weakness is portrayed as having upon political (in)stability and crisis. In one article, Bleck and Logvinenko underscore the fact that Kyrgyzstan has been consistently ranked in the bottom quartile of state effectiveness according to the State Fragility Index, and such institutional weakness “makes it difficult for the regime to police political elites, bureaucrats, and other employees who seek to supplement their salaries with private payments in exchange for patronage”.¹⁵⁰ They further suggest that the main symptoms of this institutional weakness are “the absence of rule of law, an ineffective tax system, and widespread corruption”, with the judicial system arguably the weakest branch of government and corruption topping the list of citizen’s concerns in several polls.¹⁵¹ In this capacity, the preceding sections concerning Kyrgyz fears about Uzbeks challenging the integrity of the state and political instability and crisis, alongside the empirical discussions of the revolutions, intercommunal violence, and the more generalised precariousness of

¹⁴⁹ Kupatadze, Alexander, ‘Organized Crime Before and After the Tulip Revolution: The Changing Dynamics of Upperworld-Underworld Networks’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, Iss. 03-04, (2008): p. 279.

¹⁵⁰ Bleck, Jaimie and Logvinenko, Igor, ‘Weak States and Uneven Pluralism: Lessons from Mali and Kyrgyzstan’, *Democratization*, Vol. 25, Iss. 05, (2018): p. 810.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

political and social stability serve to highlight the fundamental aspects of institutional weakness at play as they are portrayed in the literature.

These various aspects, considered causative in relation to the advent of violence in the country, come together in the literature as causes and markers of institutional weakness. Each revolution, intercommunal clash, or advent of violence is often traced back to this web of issues, with the idea of institutional weakness undergirding each aspect. Conflict is considered to be enabled by this weakness: although the roots and causes might differ, the emergence of conflict into the public sphere, and its subsequent continuation, often boils down to considerations of the inability of the state to provide essential services, enact preventative measures, or to even prevent outbreaks of violence.

The literature explores many aspects of institutional weakness in Kyrgyzstan, with a wide range of perspectives concerning how this is manifest in practice, the effects this has upon citizenship, the economy, and peace, to name but a few, and contextualised explorations of how institutional weakness is manifest and negotiated in business, politics, and everyday life. However, corruption is a recurring theme across much of the literature, framed as an almost archetypal example of the weakness of institutions, most notably state institutions. According to John Engvall, “scholars, journalists, and politicians have increasingly noticed that public offices are bought and sold in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan”,¹⁵² a practice of corruption which he argues has undermined “the integrity, professionalism, and performance of the state” and turned ostensibly ‘public’ goods into private goods through systems of informal payments which characterise the only effective path to access.¹⁵³ He highlights the practice of judges selling court verdicts as a prime example of such a system in action, suggesting that the police and law enforcement organisation in the country operate more or less as commercialised organisations.¹⁵⁴ Murat Cokgezen builds upon this focus on corruption as a significant factor in institutional weakness through developing a fourfold thematic characterisation of corruption breaking the general idea of corruption into four factors: economic factors, referring to the low income of the country in general, the low wages of civil servants, and the resulting attraction of additional income in return for favours; political factors, in which the level of corruption depends upon the relative weakness of each state

¹⁵² Engvall, John, ‘Why are Public Offices Bought and Sold in Kyrgyzstan?’, *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 30, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 67.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid: p. 79.

institution; judicial factors, referring to the poor operation of the judicial system, lack of transparency, and low repercussions for engaging in corrupt practices; and, lastly, cultural factors, conveying the idea of country-specific cultural norms as playing a significant role in determining the nature and level of corruption.¹⁵⁵ As Engvall demonstrates, these themes are common in the literature in relation to corruption. For example, despite being predominantly a discussion of the relationship between an ostensibly ‘weak state’ and foreign extractive enterprise, specifically gold mining, Asel Doolot and John Heathershaw’s article also identifies “the inability of the state to maintain security and the rule of law” and “the state as a source of rents for officials who grant and rescind licenses in exchange for formal and informal payments”,¹⁵⁶ corresponding the idea of judicial, economic, and political factors. In terms of cultural factors, Gulzat Botoeva has written an excellent article which discusses the social acceptance, practice, and function of small-scale hashish production in Issyk-Kul region, detailing the way in which corruption, institutional weakness, and illegality intermesh in cultural practices which have become entrenched in everyday life.¹⁵⁷ For example, one woman whom I met bought an apartment under construction in Bishkek, a common practice as the cost is considerably lower than after completion and was asked to contribute towards a bribe required for environmental inspection. Once the money had been collected, the tenants discovered that the state body who had requested the money had been dissolved. In this way, corruption through political and economic factors can be seen to have become almost routine in many aspects of everyday life, and the institutions involved are subject to the same instability which led to the normalisation of corruption.

The idea of uncertainty in relation to institutional weakness is another evident aspect of the literature. Uncertainties concerning the short-term future of the state and state bodies, exemplified by the situation described above, “explain why analysts have started to shift their attention towards the larger issue of state capacity”.¹⁵⁸ In their article, Ruget and Usmanalieva suggest that the implication of this terminology is that “democracy will not be

¹⁵⁵ Cokgezen, Murat, ‘Corruption in Kyrgyzstan: The Facts, Causes, and Consequences’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 23, Iss. 01, (2004): p. 81.

¹⁵⁶ Doolot, Asel and Heathershaw, John, ‘State as a Resource, Mediator and Performer: Understanding the Local and Global Politics of Gold Mining in Kyrgyzstan’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 34, Iss. 01, (2015): p. 93.

¹⁵⁷ Botoeva, Gulzat, ‘Multiple Narratives of Il/legality and Im/morality: The Case of Small-scale Hashish Harvesting in Kyrgyzstan’, *Theoretical Criminology*, Vol. 25, Iss. 02, (2019): p. 268-283.

¹⁵⁸ Ruget, Vanessa and Usmanalieva, Burul, ‘The Impact of State Weakness on Citizenship a Case Study of Kyrgyzstan’, *Post-Communist and Communist Studies*, Vol. 40, Iss. 04, (2007): p. 442.

sustainable as long as Kyrgyzstan remains a weak state”.¹⁵⁹ This highlights a pattern in the literature concerning the focus on institutional weakness as a cause of conflict, in which the idea of Kyrgyzstan as a ‘weak’ state is connected to its ability to function democratically, and thus to maintain the kind of liberal democratic ‘stability’ which is all too often presented as the fundamental foundation for lasting peace. They highlight this focus on institutional and political instability within the literature, showing its development since the Tulip Revolution in 2005.¹⁶⁰ They again list “widespread corruption and the capture of state institutions by business interests and criminal organizations”, “low salary and morale of government employees”, and “the state’s inability to provide essential services” as major factors in this instability, mirroring some of the factors previously outlined.¹⁶¹ However, they also add “the inability of the central government to exercise its monopoly over the use of force” and “insufficient institutionalisation” as additional factors in engendering endemic institutional weakness.¹⁶² Citing an International Crisis Group report, they frame these factors as contributing to the delegitimization of the state and highlight the “frequent demonstrations, picketing, strikes, uprisings, land seizure, prison revolts, as well as a rise in criminality” as the results of this delegitimization. This clearly demonstrates the link made explicitly and implicitly within the literature between institutional weakness and conflict through a weakening of institutions and the state apparatus and an enabling of criminality, be it through corruption or otherwise.

1.5 - Poverty, Unemployment, and Lack of Economic Opportunity

The final factor of Megoran, Satybaldieva, Lewis and Heathershaw’s analysis of the factors behind conflict in 2005-2010 is that of poverty, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunity.¹⁶³ “Following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the former Central Asian republics have undergone a process of fundamental political and economic change”,¹⁶⁴ something made evident in the first section concerning the legacies of Soviet ethno-

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid: p. 443.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Heathershaw, John et al, ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, *SIPRI-OSF Policy Brief*, (2014): p. 1.

¹⁶⁴ Howell, Judy, ‘Poverty and Transition in Kyrgyzstan: How Some Households Cope’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, Iss. 01, (1996): p. 59.

territorial resettlement. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 led to a dramatic decline in living standards across the post-Soviet territories, including Central Asia.¹⁶⁵ Making the transition to a free-market economy proved harder than the new political leaders had expected: “as key macro-economic indicators plummeted, living standards throughout the region began to decline”,¹⁶⁶ and the “deep economic crisis of the post-Soviet period”¹⁶⁷ began. Kyrgyzstan was no exception to this decline, and the eager embracement of the transition to an open market made by these new leaders, to the delight of Western governments, was followed almost immediately by a severing of links with other former Soviet republics and an economic crisis.¹⁶⁸ International donors acted quickly with emergency relief, financial advice, and technical assistance, yet there were nevertheless drastic consequences for the Kyrgyz economy.¹⁶⁹ Although the political situation and accompanying economic situation in the Central Asian post-Soviet republics gradually began to stabilise, there were significant disparities between the level of development in each new republic: Kazakhstan, endowed with significant natural resources, experiences a vigorous economic expansion in comparison to Kyrgyzstan, its poorer neighbour to the South.¹⁷⁰ Kyrgyzstan experienced “a much more modest rate of development, which has been further impaired by bouts of political instability”.¹⁷¹ This is indicative of the links often alluded to in the literature between poverty and economic instability, and political instability and crisis. Although Kyrgyzstan experienced a period of economic recovery following the collapse of the Soviet Union and achieved important gains in poverty reduction and addressing inequality, such improvements have proved unstable and lacking in sustainability.¹⁷² The levels of income inequality, poverty, and economic growth are understood as closely related, with measures to improve the economic situation through improving income distribution are

¹⁶⁵ Agadjanian, Victor et al., ‘Economic Fortunes, Ethnic Divides, and Marriage and Fertility in Central Asia: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Compared’, *Journal of Population Research*, Vol. 30, Iss. 03, (2013): p. 197.

¹⁶⁶ Howell, Judy, ‘Poverty and Transition in Kyrgyzstan: How Some Households Cope’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, Iss. 01, (1996): p. 59.

¹⁶⁷ Agadjanian, Victor et al., ‘Economic Fortunes, Ethnic Divides, and Marriage and Fertility in Central Asia: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Compared’, *Journal of Population Research*, Vol. 30, Iss. 03, (2013): p. 198.

¹⁶⁸ Howell, Judy, ‘Poverty and Transition in Kyrgyzstan: How Some Households Cope’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 15, Iss. 01, (1996): p. 59.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid: p. 59-60.

¹⁷⁰ Agadjanian, Victor et al., ‘Economic Fortunes, Ethnic Divides, and Marriage and Fertility in Central Asia: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Compared’, *Journal of Population Research*, Vol. 30, Iss. 03, (2013): p. 198.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Doğan, Seyhun, ‘Income Inequality, Poverty, and Growth in Transition Economies: The Case of Kyrgyzstan’, *Journal of Qadqaz University*, No. 26, (2001): p. 97.

understood as preventative measures regarding conflict in society.¹⁷³ The prominent example within the literature which concerns the relationship between these economic issues and the emergence of conflict is that of the Osh events in 2010. The Osh region of southern Kyrgyzstan was severely affected by the economic and social tensions which emerged as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, resulting in the development of divided societies and border tensions in the Fergana valley.¹⁷⁴ The 2010 conflict has received significant attention in the literature and, despite a wide variety of considerations regarding its origin and causation, is commonly understood to have emerged in a significant part due to economic factors. Although the conflict is primarily understood as having been built upon ethnic divisions, as the previous section concerning Kyrgyz fears over alleged Uzbek political actions has demonstrated, these fundamental ethnic divisions are understood in light of economic factors and competition over economic resources. KGB reports following the outbreak of violence in 1990 suggest that, although the violence had multiple sources, there was a strong perception amongst ethnic Kyrgyz that Uzbeks were becoming more prosperous and beginning to control the markets.¹⁷⁵ This fear, built upon the experience of economic uncertainty, hardship, and unemployment following independence, retained its pertinence in the south and continued to follow these ethnic lines. According to Lewis and Sagnayeva, the economic prosperity of the Uzbek community was increasingly exaggerated, despite many Uzbek residents remaining as poor as their Kyrgyz neighbours, and the prominence of Uzbek business leaders in the city only served to increase tensions.¹⁷⁶ Despite the economic influence of Uzbek elites never being matched by political power, this view prevailed.¹⁷⁷ According to Gullette, the strain on resources, poverty, and inequality were among the main ingredients of the unrest, yet these must be considered in tandem with the ethnic tensions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks.¹⁷⁸ Here, the links between poverty and economic inequality, political instability and crisis, and ethnic tensions becomes apparent in the literature. The three often go hand in hand in considerations of the origins and causes of conflict in the country, with each occupying a different degree of prominence in

¹⁷³ Ibid: p. 100.

¹⁷⁴ Lewis, David and Sagnayeva, Saniya, 'Corruption, Patronage and Illiberal Peace: Forging Political Settlement in Post-conflict Kyrgyzstan', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 81.

¹⁷⁵ Lewis, David and Sagnayeva, Saniya, 'Corruption, Patronage and Illiberal Peace: Forging Political Settlement in Post-conflict Kyrgyzstan', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 81.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Gullette, David, 'Kyrgyzstan: Components of Crisis, *Open Democracy*, (2010): p. 2.

explanations of violence, but often with all three grouped together as inextricably linked. The situation in southern Kyrgyzstan demonstrates that, behind the prominent discourse of ethnic tension there are much deeper issues, such as poverty, social marginalisation, and unequal access to resources; ethnicity becomes a vehicle for articulating these grievances and giving stereotypes political form.¹⁷⁹

One rather revealing demonstration of the importance of these deeper issues can be found in the literature which considers some of the most marginalised in society. In this manner, the issues of poverty and unemployment are exemplified through their particular adverse effect upon women. In one survey across Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, the overwhelming majority of female respondents were concerned about poverty and unemployment, and around a quarter were seriously concerned with general economic issues in the countries.¹⁸⁰ Most respondents had a notable lack of confidence in the state's capacity to solve their existing economic problems, stating their belief that their governments had dealt inadequately with the economy and public services, and almost all thought the same regarding unemployment.¹⁸¹ The authors highlight the consensus among scholars that there is a climate of long term economic uncertainty in the region, and that this had disproportionately affected women due to a shrinking labour market as a result of the post-independence state's impulses to eliminate the support granted to female employment under the Soviet Union.

The preceding discussion has demonstrated the validity and manifestation of: Soviet-era ethno-territorial settlement; poverty, unemployment and lack of economic opportunity; Kyrgyz fears about Uzbeks challenging the integrity of the state; [political instability and crisis; and institutional weakness in terms of the reasons for conflict in Kyrgyzstan. Although the literature demonstrates a larger variety of considerations and perspectives than those outlined through the five factors discussed in this chapter, these factors represent the main avenues of analysis and attitudes concerning the origins and causes of conflict in Kyrgyzstan. However, the reasons behind conflict are not the sole focus across the literature: such

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Commercio, Michele E., 'The Politics and Economics of Retraditionalisation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, Iss. 06, (2015): p. 533.

¹⁸¹ Commercio, Michele E., 'The Politics and Economics of Retraditionalisation in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 31, Iss. 06, (2015): p. 533.

considerations are accompanied by considerations of peace and peacebuilding in the country.

The following chapter will therefore address this focus, critically reviewing the literature which concerns peace and peacebuilding in general and in specific relation to Kyrgyzstan through the lens of the three major approaches which have characterised understandings of peace and practices of peacebuilding since the end of the cold war, the liberal peace, post-liberal peace, and the attempts to rethink peace beyond this binary. The section will conclude by situating the approach and standpoint of this thesis within these emergent attempts to rethink peace. This chapter has a three-fold purpose: firstly, to develop an understanding of the liberal, post liberal, and efforts to rethink peace; secondly, to review the literature which adopts these perspectives in relation to Kyrgyzstan; and thirdly, to situate this thesis within attempts to rethink peace.

Although considerations of conflict, especially those related to origins and causation, are vital in understanding the manner in which conflict emerges and the reasons behind it, they are not the focus of this thesis. There is manifold literature which concerns the nature and origins of conflict and, although this is important for understanding the conditions of conflict, that is, a condition without peace, it does not necessarily tell us anything about peace itself. Conflict is to a large extent the antithesis of peace and, as such, does not directly tell us about peace. Its study only shows us the situations, contexts, practices, and perspectives which engender conflict, and to suggest that the antithesis of these understandings and practices are the building blocks of peace is too simplistic. For example, certain aspects of a particular conflict might not necessarily have to be removed in order to reach a state of peace; instead, these may be things which can exist in a process of mutual negotiation. Therefore, although vital for understanding how conflict emerges in certain contexts, the study of the origins and causation of conflict does not help in achieving the goals of this thesis; namely, to examine understandings and practices of peace in a particular series of contexts. This thesis is thus distanced from these conflict-centric considerations, instead focusing on peace and peacebuilding both in terms of developing an approach towards peace through optionality, but also in exploring understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through the methodological use of optionality and its position as a critical device. The next chapter examines the literature concerning approaches in peace studies and in Kyrgyzstan. This is predominantly understood through two core approaches:

that of the liberal and post-liberal peace. The aim of this section is to demonstrate the limitations, problems, and conceptual stalemate which had emerged amongst and between these two approaches, demonstrating the need to rethink peace both in general and in relation to understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The last part of this chapter will address this issue. Optionality, and the resultant arguments within this thesis, are positioned as a conceptual means and practical manifestation of going beyond the limitations of this binary, contributing methodologically, epistemologically, and in practical terms to the study of understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding approaches in general, and also specifically in relation to Kyrgyzstan. In this manner, Kyrgyzstan serves as the empirical example to which optionality is applied and through which it unfolds in these terms.

Chapter Two - Peace and Peacebuilding

As a result of Kyrgyzstan's history of conflict and the academic focus which has developed around it, Kyrgyzstan has been subject to manifold peacebuilding initiatives and peacekeeping efforts on the international, national, and local levels, stemming from both internal and external actors. The focus on conflict outlined in previous chapter, combined with Kyrgyzstan's pre- and post-independence struggle for stability, has engendered an additional focus within academic considerations of the region: in addition to focusing on the nature, causes, and developments of conflict, a parallel focus emerged concerning peace and peacebuilding. Kyrgyzstan became a focus for international support for peace and democracy, being perceived as belonging to a group of fragile states and as one which was grappling to overcome a legacy of violence.¹⁸² In addition to the notion of 'danger', the idea of Kyrgyzstan as an 'island of democracy' and the relatively liberal political terrain compared to its post-Soviet Central Asian neighbours,¹⁸³ resulting from Kyrgyzstan's proportionally more receptive attitude towards the foreign initiative which engendered this terrain, encouraged the participation of international organisations in peacebuilding efforts. Many of these were linked to ideas of democracy promotion and other aspects of the ostensible practice of liberal peacebuilding. This has, in turn, attracted scholarly attention in relation to the pursuit of peace in the country. Kyrgyzstan has received significantly more scholarly attention in this regard than elsewhere in Central Asia. In part, this is a result of Kyrgyzstan's shift from an ostensible 'Switzerland of Central Asia' to a somewhat more tenuous position in the eyes of the West. In the academic literature, Kyrgyzstan discursively transitioned from "an international development success into a complex emergency, which would require considerable humanitarian assistance".¹⁸⁴ Although the development of discourses of danger concerning Kyrgyzstan is contested within the literature, with some suggesting that it is the result of both the epistemic impositions of external foreign policy and domestic

¹⁸² Fiedler, Charlotte, 'On the Effects of International Support to Peace and Democracy in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan in the Aftermath of Interethnic Violence', *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 53, Iss. 02, (2016): p. 314-315.

¹⁸³ Megoran, Nick, 'The Critical Geopolitics of Danger in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan', *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 23, Iss. 04, (2005): p. 568.

¹⁸⁴ Matveeva, Anna, 'Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism', *Crisis States Research Centre*, Working Paper No. 79, (2010): p. 1.

political manoeuvring,¹⁸⁵ such an imaginary goes some way to explain the interest of international peacebuilding programs in Kyrgyzstan: they are seeking to “remake” the country as a “stable and peaceful society” in response to outbreaks of violent conflict.¹⁸⁶

This chapter serves a two-fold purpose. Foremost, it is a review of the established, prominent, and emerging literature which characterises the broad trends of peace studies as it is represented within published academic debate. In this capacity it will establish and review three of the most significant branches of peace studies as they appear thematically within the literature: the liberal peace; the post-liberal peace; and the spaces beyond the post liberal. In this capacity, the liberal peace is understood as the long-established paradigm of peace studies and peacebuilding, colouring early approaches to peace and peacebuilding, with post-liberal approaches evident as the established and dominant critique of this paradigm. In this manner, the spaces beyond the post-liberal are critiques of a critique, developing novel, theoretically informed, and innovative approaches to peace and peacebuilding, and providing new approaches and avenues of reflection and analysis which expose the recessive issues which reside within previous approaches to peace. In addition, this process of engagement, analysis, and review is intended to locate the notion of optionality as an approach to peace within the established literature and ongoing debates. The additions and contributions which optionality makes stem from its position as a novel and theoretically informed approach which contributes to the process of rethinking peace beyond the problematic binary of the liberal/post-liberal. This area of the literature review will thus serve to frame optionality in relation to what has come before it, (namely the liberal and post-liberal), and within the emergent literature which is opening up a ‘space beyond’ this binary. This is accompanied by an analysis of the literature which concerns peace and peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, using the typology of the liberal, post-liberal, and the spaces beyond to categorise this literature.

However, before the liberal and post-liberal approaches to peace and peacebuilding are discussed, the manner in which they are understood within this thesis requires additional clarification. These two terms, and the approaches which they represent, are understood in

¹⁸⁵ For further discussion, see: Karagulova, Anara and Megoran, Nick, ‘Discourses of Danger and the ‘War on Terror’: Gothic Kyrgyzstan and the Collapse of the Akaev Regime’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2011): p. 29-48.

¹⁸⁶ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 6.

theoretical rather than political terms. In other words, they are cognised through the concepts and theoretical understandings which underpin them, rather than through their political manifestations or the manner in which they are presented politically. For example, the following section explains the liberal peace through its origins in the work of Immanuel Kant and Democratic Peace Theory. This does not characterise it as politically liberal, but instead explores its theoretical basis and conceptual character in order to develop an understanding of what constitutes the liberal peace in peace studies. It is, in fact, an arrogant reading of Kant's writings rather than a direct representation, necessitating a discussion of its conceptual characteristics rather than its ostensible 'liberal' political nature. The same approach is pursued in relation to the post-liberal peace. The post-liberal peace is an approach which positions itself in direct opposition to what is understood as the liberal peace, adopting this arrogant reading as it is represented in liberal peace literature and practice as the object of its critique. The post-liberal peace is therefore presented in this thesis through its theoretical basis and conceptual characteristics rather than as being politically 'post'-liberal: rather than being an approach which exists after that of the liberal peace, or even one which goes beyond it as the term 'post' might be understood as signifying, it is presented through this basis and resultant characteristics.

2.1 - The Liberal Peace

The primary aims of this section are to develop an understanding of the notion of 'the liberal peace' through a review of its foundational, representative and critical literature. The subsequent aim is to demonstrate the importance, prominence and impact of this notion within the field of peace studies. This will be done by reviewing its historical prominence, followed by illustrating its continuing influence in academic understandings and political practice, and finally through a brief discussion of the contested debates surrounding this term and its conceptual and practical characterisation.

These aims will be discussed as follows: to begin with, after introducing the discussion surrounding the liberal peace, its *foundational literature* will be reviewed; this will consist of a brief discussion of the purported theoretical influence of Immanuel Kant in its conceptual formation and an interlinked discussion of democratic peace theory (DPT) as its empirical

foundation. The later parts of this section will gather, review, and analyse the *representative literature* of the liberal peace, demonstrating the manner in which the liberal peace is represented in the literature, focusing on its characteristics in action and the manner in which they are discussed, alongside its continuing impact on understandings and practices of peace within peace studies and peacebuilding. The section will conclude by identifying the problems within the liberal peace and the resultant critiques which have led to the emergence of the 'post-liberal' in considerations of peace and peacebuilding. However, a few caveats are required at the outset of this discussion in order to avoid misunderstandings regarding the aims and purpose of this discussion. This section is intended as a literature review concerning the constructions, terminologies, and frameworks represented within the academic literature regarding peace, peace studies and peacebuilding. In this capacity it seeks to explore debates and outline predominant notions within this literature, providing an insight into the contemporary condition of these areas of study rather than attempting to provide definitive definitions.

Introduction: What is Understood by 'The Liberal Peace'?

"A spectre has haunted European scholars of peace and conflict studies since the end of the cold war. This spectre is the liberal peace".¹⁸⁷ For its advocates and critics alike, 'the liberal peace' is generally understood as the prevailing peacebuilding model,¹⁸⁸ aiming to replicate liberal institutions, norms, and political, social, and economic systems across the globe. Such purportedly *liberal* approaches to peacebuilding emerged in the post-Cold-War epoch of international relations¹⁸⁹, predicated upon the advancement of the ostensible pacifistic benefits theorised by classical liberals to be an inherent aspect of the liberal democratic state.¹⁹⁰ The liberal peace is thus commonly outlined within academic literature as a mode of peacebuilding guided by the paradigm of liberal internationalism, manifest as an "enormous experiment in social engineering – an experiment that involves transplanting Western

¹⁸⁷ Heathershaw, John, 'Towards Better Theories of Peacebuilding: Beyond the Liberal Peace debate', *Peacebuilding*, Vol. 01, Iss. 02, (2013): p. 275.

¹⁸⁸ Paris, Roland, 'Saving Liberal Peacebuilding', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, Iss. 02, (2010): 337-365. **See also** Richmond, Oliver and Mac Ginty, Roger, 'Where now for the Critique of the Liberal Peace?', *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 50, Iss. 02, (2015): p. 171-189.

¹⁸⁹ Campbell, Susanna, Chandler, David and Sabaratnam, Meera, *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peace-building*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

¹⁹⁰ O Neal, John R. and Russett, Bruce, 'Is the Liberal Peace Just and Artifact of Cold War Interests? Assessing Recent Critiques', *International Interactions*, Vol. 25, Iss. 03, (1999): p. 213-241.

models of social, political and economic organization into war shattered states in order to control civil conflict: in other words, pacification through political and economic liberalization".¹⁹¹ It is understood to be a practice exclusively pursued by Western, liberal states; to be motivated by liberal objectives; and one which strives to promote liberal-democratic institutions, values, governance, and the process of economic liberalisation as the most effective means of promoting peace and prosperity.¹⁹² Its key tenets in the pursuit of these aims are routinely outlined as democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, alongside the enabling and promotion of capitalist market economies.¹⁹³

These are identified as such within a multitude of author's works, from within both advocative and critical camps: Richmond, speaking from a critical perspective, identifies the "main components" of the liberal peace as "democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalised markets, and neo-liberal development".¹⁹⁴ These terms are echoed in Mac Ginty, Joshi and Yong Lee's paper; although they acknowledge the contextually and temporally shifting nature of what exactly constitutes "the liberal package", they nevertheless observe the generalised inclusion of democracy promotion, the rule of law, human rights, and security and governance sector reforms under the general umbrella of an ostensibly liberal approach,¹⁹⁵ along with the additions of market economy-oriented reforms¹⁹⁶. Paris, an advocate of saving the liberal peacebuilding project due the ostensible lack of preferable or alternative approaches, also defines this project through its efforts to promote liberal democratic governing systems and market-oriented economies.¹⁹⁷ He understands liberal systems of government as democratisation and respect for civil and political rights.¹⁹⁸

These notions of the liberal peace extend across the literature concerning peace and peace studies: "peace built upon shared values – democracy and political and economic

¹⁹¹ Paris, Roland, 'Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism', *International Security*, Vol. 22, Iss. 02, (1997): p. 56.

¹⁹² Zaum, Dominik, 'Review: Beyond the Liberal Peace', *Global Governance*, Vol. 18, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 122.

¹⁹³ Wallis, Joanne, 'Is There Still a Place for Liberal Peacebuilding?', in, Wallis, Joanne et al, *Hybridity on the Ground in Peacebuilding and Development: Critical Conversations*, (Canberra, ANU Press: 2018): p. 83.

¹⁹⁴ Richmond, Oliver, 'The Problem of Peace: Understanding the 'Liberal Peace'', *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 06, Iss.03, (2006): p. 291-301.

¹⁹⁵ Joshi, Madhav et al., 'Just How Liberal is the Liberal Peace?', *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 21, Iss. 03, (2014): p. 366-368.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid: p. 371.

¹⁹⁷ Paris, Roland, 'Saving Liberal Peacebuilding', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, Iss. 02, (2010): p. 337.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid: p. 340.

freedom”¹⁹⁹; “based on assumptions around the pacifying effects of open and integrated societies and markets framed by a liberal state and... law and norms”²⁰⁰; “the rule of law, democratic participation, social justice (welfare and rights)”²⁰¹. These are generally essentialised themes: that is, they are often part of a theoretical or academic discussion of the liberal peace, rather than relating to its varied practical manifestations. However, despite being essentialised in this manner within the academic literature, they are nonetheless considered in general to be the defining features of this approach towards peace. These themes continue into articles which address the liberal peace ‘in practice’, referring to its concrete application in conflict sites as the establishment of the “institutional, social and economic arrangements that comprise a liberal state, including the rule of law, democratic institutions and a liberal economy”²⁰², and arguing that in in theory and practice “economic interdependence has long been linked to peace”, and that “linking democracy and peace” is a defining characteristic of liberal peace practices and interventions²⁰³.

However, more critical literature concerning the nature of the liberal peace has suggested that academic analysis “has sometimes tended, misleadingly, to claim that the liberal peace has had only a singular logic and set of assumptions”²⁰⁴. It is instead understood to contain different conceptualisations of peace, manifest as a series of graduations in which there is a lack of consensus amongst actors (such as the UN, NGOs and major states) as to which of the ‘essential’ aspects outlined within the previous literature should always be included in the procedure of peacebuilding²⁰⁵. In fact, as soon as it emerged as an international discourse, the initial proponents of the liberal peace were immediately challenged by advocates of alternative approaches to post-conflict intervention²⁰⁶, many of whom were quick to outline

¹⁹⁹ Owen, John, ‘How Liberalism Produces Democratic Peace’, *International Security*, Vol. 19, Iss. 02, (1994): p. 97.

²⁰⁰ Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, (ed.), *Rethinking the Liberal Peace: External Models and Local Alternatives*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 1.

²⁰¹ Joshi, Madhav et al., ‘Just How Liberal is the Liberal Peace?’, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 21, Iss. 03, (2014): p. 367.

²⁰² Mullin, Corinna, ‘Islamist Challenges to the ‘Liberal Peace’ Discourse: The Case of Hamas and the Isreal-Palestine Peace Process’, *Millennium*, Vol. 39, Iss. 02, (2010): p. 529.

²⁰³ Bindi, Idrissa Tamba and Tufekci, Ozgur, ‘Liberal Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: A Critical Exploration’, *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 1159.

²⁰⁴ Sabaratnam, Meera, ‘The Liberal Peace? A Brief Intellectual History of International Conflict Management, 1990-2010’, in Campbell, Susanna et al, *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, (London: Zed Books, 2011): p. 1.

²⁰⁵ Richmond, Oliver, ‘The Problem of Peace: Understanding the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 06, Iss.03, (2006): p. 292.

²⁰⁶ Heathershaw, John, ‘Unpacking the Liberal Peace: The Dividing and Merging of Peacebuilding Discourses’, *Millennium*, Vol. 36, Iss. 03, (2008): p. 599.

this imprecise nature. Sabaratnam observes that “the composition of conflict management discourses and practices rapidly shifted over time to incorporate a set of changing ontologies, values and methods”²⁰⁷, suggesting a distinct lack of coherence. Richmond, despite his clear and repeated identifications of and focus upon *the* liberal peace, also suggests that it contains diverse conceptualisations of peace and instead is the author who suggests that it is manifest as a series of graduations²⁰⁸. Many authors discuss and acknowledge the contested nature of the liberal peace and the significant level of critique which has emerged in response²⁰⁹: nevertheless, it persists within peacebuilding practices and peace studies literature. It recurs as a rhetorical construction; as a prominent and summary term; and as a recurring analytical conceptualisation. In this capacity, the liberal peace often serves at least as an established framing for loosely defined understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding. However, this construction occurs within particular parameters that, although somewhat contested, allow us to talk about *the* liberal peace.

Although the liberal peace has been developed, understood, and applied in different forms, it is still understood within the literature as particular theoretical and practical consolidation though the recurring identification of a common set of assumptions, most notably including the rule of law, democratic participation, social justice, and the promotion of market economies²¹⁰. These commonalities stem from the *rhetoric* of the liberal peace, not necessarily its particular practice or outcomes. As Joshi et al outline through their identification of the core themes of the ‘liberalism’ of the liberal peace by examining seminal international policy documents, the ideas of liberalism, at least rhetorically, have been consistently imbedded into international conceptualisations and practices of peacebuilding²¹¹. The loose assumptions which underpin the conceptualisation of the liberal peace within the literature; peace through democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, free and globalised markets and neoliberal development, exist as a series of rhetorical and theoretical assumptions which are prevalent in most policy documents associated with

²⁰⁷ Sabaratnam, Meera, ‘The Liberal Peace? A Brief Intellectual History of International Conflict Management, 1990-2010’, in Campbell, Susanna et al, *A Liberal Peace? The Problems and Practices of Peacebuilding*, (London: Zed Books, 2011): p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Richmond, Oliver, ‘The Problem of Peace: Understanding the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 06, Iss.03, (2006): p. 292.

²⁰⁹ Joshi, Madhav et al., ‘Just How Liberal is the Liberal Peace?’, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 21, Iss. 03, (2014): p. 365.

²¹⁰ Ibid: p. 367.

²¹¹ Ibid: p. 365.

peace and security²¹². Richmond identifies what he terms a “weak consensus” between the UN, major states, agencies and NGOs which suggests that all international interventions should be contingent upon this rhetoric²¹³. This rhetoric has been deployed both literarily and practically in most cases of international peacebuilding since the post-war reconstruction of Europe, Germany and Japan²¹⁴. Richmond also employs the notion of the ‘peacebuilding consensus’. This conception establishes a reasonably unitary construct in relation to a ‘liberal peace’ and goes some way to delineating *the* liberal peace, enabling a concrete discussion of the manifold understandings and practices which condition this umbrella construct. This facilitates his understanding of the main components of the liberal peace as democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, and free and globalised markets²¹⁵. The peacebuilding consensus is therefore understood as the idea that ever-broadening attempts to intervene, reconstruct, democratise and liberalise failed states as a form of peacebuilding is a liberal imperative bound by strategic imperatives²¹⁶. According to this perspective, peacebuilding has thus become a process where establishing a liberal democracy has become the ultimate goal²¹⁷; constructing a well-functioning democratic state which attains its legitimacy from free and fair elections is understood as an essential component of almost all post-Cold War peacebuilding interventions²¹⁸.

The Foundational Literature of The Liberal Peace

This section will review the foundational literature concerning the liberal peace, examining its links to and foundational basis within ‘democratic peace theory’ (DPT), along with the ostensible basis of DPT in the work of Immanuel Kant. This discussion will expand upon the general review of literature concerning peacebuilding and, as a result, contribute towards situating this thesis and its discussion of peace within the preceding, prevailing and

²¹² Richmond, Oliver, ‘The Problem of Peace: Understanding the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 06, Iss.03, (2006): p. 292.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Tellidis, Ioannis, ‘Review: The End of the Liberal Peace? Post-Liberal Peace VS. Post-Liberal States’, *International Studies Review*, Vol. 14, Iss. 03, (2012): p. 430.

²¹⁵ Richmond, Oliver, ‘UN Peacebuilding Operations and the Dilemmas of the Peacebuilding Consensus’, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 11, Iss. 01, (2004): p. 85.

²¹⁶ Ibid: p. 94.

²¹⁷ Ibid: p. 95.

²¹⁸ Körppen, Daniela, ‘Space Beyond the Liberal Peacebuilding Consensus: A Systemic Perspective’, in Körppen, Daniela et al (eds.), *The Non-linearity of Peace Processes: Theory and Practice of Systemic Conflict Transformation*, (Barbara Budrich Publishers, Michigan: 2011): p. 81.

predominant conceptions against which it stands, and out of which it has emerged. The discussion of Kant is not only important in this thesis for explaining the foundations of the liberal peace, but will also be employed to critique the post-liberal peace and to develop the notion of the *conditions of the possibility for peace*, an idea central to the development and operationalisation of optionality.

Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) and Immanuel Kant

In the 1980s, Michael Doyle interpreted a two-hundred-year absence of conflict between democratic states as empirical evidence of what he would later present as one of the only truisms and laws in IR.²¹⁹ This sparked the inception of Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) as ‘one of the most important research programs in the social sciences of our time’.²²⁰ DPT stems from ‘the empirical observation that democracies rarely fight each other’²²¹ and, in order to explain this phenomenon, ‘many refer to the political writings of Immanuel Kant’.²²² In the 1990s, these arguments became foreign policy prescriptions for many states, as well as the UN and EU.²²³ This transition from empirical observation to an operationalised aspect of foreign policy gave rise to the common understanding of liberal democracies as mutually pacifistic entities.

²¹⁹ See: Miklian, Jason, ‘The Past, Present and Future of the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 38, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 493, Levy Jack S., ‘The Causes of War: A Review of Theory and Evidence’, In: Husbands JL. et al, (eds.), *Behaviour, Society and Nuclear War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): p. 270, and Roy, Oindrila, ‘Understanding Security Cooperation in the Light of Democratic Peace Theory’, *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 11, Iss. 01, (2008): p. 398.

²²⁰ Caranti, Luigi, ‘Kantian Peace and Liberal Peace: Three Concerns’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 24, Iss. 04, (2016): p. 446.

²²¹ Diehl, Paul et al., ‘The Democratic Peace and Rivalries’, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62, Iss. 04, (2000): p. 1173.

²²² Archibugi, Daniele, ‘Immanuel Kant, Cosmopolitan Law and Peace’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 1, Iss. 04, (1995): p. 429 and Freerk, Boedeltje et al., ‘Thinking Beyond the Liberal Peace: From Utopia to Heterotopias’, *Acta Politica*, Vol. 47, Iss. 03, (2012): p. 293.

²²³ See: Miklian, Jason, ‘The Past, Present and Future of the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 38, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 493, Levy Jack S., ‘The Causes of War: A Review of Theory and Evidence’, In: Husbands JL. et al, (eds.), *Behaviour, Society and Nuclear War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989): p. 493-507; Caranti, Luigi, ‘Kantian Peace and Liberal Peace: Three Concerns’, *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 24, Iss. 04, (2016): p. 446-469; Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. 1992. *An Agenda for Peace*. New York: UN; Ponzio, Richard J., ‘Transforming Political Authority: UN Democratic Peacebuilding in Afghanistan’, *Global Governance* Vol. 13, Iss. 02, (2007): p. 255-275; Mercer, Kristen, and Barbara Rieffer, ‘US Democracy Promotion: The Clinton and Bush Administrations’, *Global Society*, Vol. 19, Iss. 04, (2005): p. 385-408; and Paris, Roland, ‘Peacebuilding and the Limits of Liberal Internationalism’, *International Security*, Vol. 22, Iss. 02, (1997): p. 54-89.

This led to their promotion as an ostensibly sustainable practice of peacebuilding,²²⁴ grounded in the assumption that Kant's arguments profess a theory of a natural evolution to a state of harmony among nations.²²⁵ This is the foundational basis for the liberal peace and is commonly understood as so throughout the literature.

Doyle directly indicates DPT as 'the thesis I drew from Kant',²²⁶ referring to Kant's *Towards Perpetual Peace* as 'a coherent explanation' of 'regularities' in world politics. He thereby reads into Kant the notions that liberal states do not make war against each other, but only against 'nonliberal' states.²²⁷ Doyle takes Kant's 'Three Definitive Articles' from *Towards Perpetual Peace* and reduces them to the 'Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace'. These are: republican, representative democratic governance; liberal principles, ensuring individual rights; and interliberal normative commitments via material incentives (liberal free market economics).²²⁸ Bruce Russett mirrors this reading of Kant, alongside John Oneal, suggesting that *Towards Perpetual Peace* constitutes a 'recipe' for peacebuilding. Russett's reading similarly identifies representative democracies, international law and organisation and economic, free market interdependence as the basis of DPT.²²⁹

The transition of this understanding of Kant to the liberal peace follows this rationale through 'the design of projects, based on science and reason, which will lead to progress and social transformation' in a manner perceived as conducive to peace.²³⁰ The link between DPT and notions of the liberal peace and liberal peacebuilding is clear throughout the peace studies literature. On the side of its proponents, Doyle makes the assured argument that 'the peaceful intent and restraint that liberalism does manifest in limited aspects of its foreign affairs announces the possibility of world peace',²³¹ suggesting the basis for the project of liberal

²²⁴ Hameiri, Shahar, 'The Crisis of Liberal Peacebuilding – Is Statebuilding Endangered?', *International Politics*, Vol. 51, Iss. 03, (2014): p. 317.

²²⁵ Molloy, Seán, *Kant's International Relations: The Political Theology of Perpetual Peace*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2017): p. 7-8.

²²⁶ Doyle, Michael et al., 'The Democratic Peace', *International Security*, Vol. 19, Iss. 04, (1995): p. 182.

²²⁷ Ibid: p. 180.

²²⁸ Doyle, Michael, 'Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace', *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, Iss. 03, (2005): p. 464.

²²⁹ Oneal John R, and Bruce Russett, 'The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950-1985', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Iss. 02, (1997): p. 268.

²³⁰ Alberg, Jeremiah, Laban Hinton, Alexander, and Giorgio Shani, *Rethinking Peace*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. xvii.

²³¹ Doyle, Michael, "Kant, Liberal Legacies and Foreign Affairs", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (1986): p. 206.

peacebuilding is rooted in the pacifistic qualities of liberal democracy.²³² This argument is echoed by Roland Paris, who recognises a strong link between DPT (written as ‘the liberal peace thesis’) supposedly articulated by Kant, and what he describes as ‘the global experiment in post-conflict peacebuilding’.²³³ This unitary understanding of the foundational aspects of the liberal peace is also evident on the critical side: Oliver Richmond writes: ‘The liberal peace framework rests on conceptions of liberal-internationalist thought, on liberal-institutionalism, on the democratic peace hypothesis’.²³⁴ Jan Selby, although suggesting liberal peacebuilding to be a ‘myth’, also acknowledges that its roots are ostensibly within the classical liberal theories of Kant and suggests that it embodies the principles of DPT.²³⁵

DPT, The Liberal Peace’, and “Towards Perpetual Peace”

The unpacking of the reading of Kant within DPT, which has been carried over into ‘the liberal peace’, is essential in order to identify the foundational ideas appropriated in order to develop the notion of the liberal peace. Although these notions are exemplary of the liberal peace as it is understood within the literature, the incorporation of Kant as a foundational theorist rest upon practices of selective, negligent and arrogant reading, occurring through the interpretation of Kant’s arguments as a series of *concrete laws for peace*. In “Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace”, Doyle attempts to expose the persuasive core and internal logic of ‘the liberal peace’.²³⁶ He does so through a certain reading of *Towards Perpetual Peace* that focuses exclusively on Kant’s “Three Definitive Articles”. This reduction of Kant’s ideas is exemplary across the liberal peacebuilding literature. Although, in a section entitled ‘Kant and Liberal Internationalism’, Doyle does list and briefly examine Kant’s “Preliminary Articles”, vaguely suggesting their role within Kant’s work as confidence building measures and *an addition* to institutions, he nevertheless makes the general argument that “perpetual peace

²³² Selby, Jan, ‘The Myth of Liberal Peacebuilding’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 13, Iss. 01, (2013): p. 61.

²³³ Paris, Roland, ‘Saving Liberal Peacebuilding’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, Iss. 02, (2010): p. 337.

²³⁴ Richmond, Oliver P., *A Post-Liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 4, and Tom, Patrick, *Liberal Peace and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Africa*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017): p. 60.

²³⁵ Selby, Jan, ‘The Myth of Liberal Peacebuilding’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 13, Iss. 01, (2013): p. 61, Bindu, Idrissa Tamba and Tufekci, Ozgur, ‘Liberal Peacebuilding in Sierra Leone: A Critical Exploration’, *Journal of African and Asian Studies*, Vol. 58, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 1, and Philipsen, Lise, ‘When Liberal Peacebuilding Fails: Paradoxes of Implementing Ownership and Accountability in the Integrated Approach’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 08, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 62.

²³⁶ Doyle, Michael, ‘Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, Iss. 03, (2005): p. 463-466.

will be guaranteed by the widening acceptance of (the) *three definitive articles* of peace”.²³⁷ “When all nations have accepted the Definitive Articles in a metaphorical ‘treaty’, perpetual peace will have been established”,²³⁸ suggesting that they constitute the totality of Kant’s argument. Thereby, Kant’s understanding of the “conditions of the possibility” is lost.

This thesis argues that Kant’s discussion centres around hypothetical and normative aims, which are based upon an elaboration of the conditions of the possibility of peace, (rather than the establishment of a recipe of concrete laws), setting normative guidelines for international politics²³⁹. It implies a deep-seated tentativeness and caution, and frames *Towards Perpetual Peace* as a *contribution* to building peace²⁴⁰, rather than a definitive textbook. Kant’s ‘Three Definitive Articles’, therefore, “provide... not the concrete possibility of eternal peace but the conditions of the possibility of eternal peace”²⁴¹. This is representative of the level upon which Kant makes his argument as a whole. He is writing philosophically on the conditions which would be necessary to enable the possibility of peace, *not establishing a program for peacebuilding*. He is outlining the positive and negative criteria which are necessary for *moving towards* the goal of perpetual peace. This approach, and the idea of proposing the conditions of the possibility for peace in open and normative terms, is adopted by this thesis in its development and operationalisation of optionality. This is intended to stand in antithesis to the kind of essentialised and instrumental use of Kant that forms the foundation of the liberal peace.

In spite of this, the ‘three pillars’ – democracy, liberal institutions and norms, and liberal market economics, understood as a simplified version of Kant’s “Three Definitive Articles”, recur again and again within the liberal peace literature as a means of describing the content of the liberal peacebuilding programme. Doyle’s name and his particular reading have been consistently connected with Kant’s political philosophy and DPT, with most authors assuming

²³⁷ Doyle, Michael, ‘Three Pillars of the Liberal Peace’, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 99, Iss. 03, (2005): p. 463-466.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ Behr, Hartmut, *A History of International Political Theory: Ontologies of the International*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): p. 131.

²⁴⁰ Friedrich, CJ, ‘The Ideology of the United Nations Charter and the Philosophy of Peace in Immanuel Kant 1795-1945’, *The Journal of Politics*, Iss. 09, Vol. 01, (1947): p. 17.

²⁴¹ Behr, Hartmut, *A History of International Political Theory: Ontologies of the International*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009): p. 133.

the authenticity of his reading.²⁴² There has been almost no alternative interpretation of Kant in peace studies and International Relations (IR), despite the observations by various scholars that Doyle's interpretation is at odds with Kant's texts and basic premises.²⁴³ Within the post-liberal literature, Richmond also identifies the liberal peace as "a (...) system that replicates liberal institutions, norms and political, social, and economic systems",²⁴⁴ and thus defines 'the liberal peace' by adopting the simplified version of Doyle's "Three pillars". These three pillars are, therefore, representative of the foundational literature of the liberal peace. From the pacifistic assumptions of DPT, through the (mis)reading of Kant as the purveyor of concrete laws for a liberal peace, to Doyle's three pillars and their recurring prominence in the literature, we can see the emergence and foundational basis of the liberal peace as it is understood in the literature. As a result, concrete laws of peace are established through an arrogant reading of Kant, creating an essentialised vision of what peace *is* and how to create it. This essentialisation is the foundation of the liberal peace and has resulted in instrumentalised practices of peacebuilding that aim to realise this vision. Peace is thus totalised in both its understanding and practice, leaving no room for alternatives.

The following section will continue by discussing the *representative* literature with regard to the liberal peace, examining the manner in which the foundational ideas previously discussed are developed into essentialised, concrete approaches to peace and peacebuilding within the literature. This will begin by exploring the theoretical and practical characteristics of liberal peace approaches, followed by a consideration of its continuing relevance as a concept and practice and persistence within the literature, both in its continuing practical and analytical use and as an object of critique.

The Representative Literature

As the previous discussion illustrates, the term 'liberal peace' has its foundations in DPT and a particular (mis)reading of Kant, developing a concrete basis for peace in the ostensible three pillars of liberalism outlined by Doyle. The term thus originally applied to theories about peace and conflict *between* democratic and economically independent states and,

²⁴² Cavallar, Georg, 'Kantian Perspectives on Democratic Peace: Alternatives to Doyle', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 27, Iss. 02: p. 231.

²⁴³ Ibid: p. 231-232.

²⁴⁴ Richmond, Oliver P., *A Post-Liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 1.

while it is still employed in this manner today, it is more often understood in peacebuilding literature as referring to the mechanisms of conflict management *within* states.²⁴⁵ In this capacity, it has come to refer to the institutions of democracy, free markets, and the rule of law as the vehicles of peaceful relations²⁴⁶ within a particular post-conflict state or region. A significant proportion of the literature which deals with the liberal peace does so in this manner, standing in contrast to the more theoretically oriented considerations which set the foundations for the concept. This is understood here as the *representative* literature; literature which concerns the practices of liberal peacebuilding internationally and in specific contexts and in peacebuilding policy and practice.

One example of the representative literature of the liberal peace can be found in Millar's paper, 'Local Experiences of Liberal Peace: Marketization and Emergent Conflict Dynamics in Sierra Leone'. According to Millar, scholars have repeatedly highlighted the complexity of the relationships between conflict, peace, and economics, discussing the nuances of these relationships in depth.²⁴⁷ Despite these considerations, he argues that the practices of peacebuilding are far less nuanced, pinning the hopes of post-conflict states on establishing a liberal and ostensibly peace-promoting economics without assessing the impact of such a policy.²⁴⁸ Millar thus identifies the existence of a foundational framework or the liberal peace, built upon the three pillars outlined by Doyle, which he explicitly references. The article examines how the policies of marketisation are experienced in local settings, and whether they promote localised peace or exacerbate local tensions through looking at the experiences of individuals in a bio-energy project organised by national and local elites in Sierra Leone.²⁴⁹ This article is exemplary of the representation literature concerning the liberal peace, examining understandings and practices of peace in concrete post-conflict settings through an analysis of the actualities and effectiveness of the application of the foundational ideas of the liberal peace. It does this by contributing empirical evidence regarding the assumption with the liberal peace, as the dominant peacebuilding approach,

²⁴⁵ Millar, Gearoid, 'Local Experiences of Liberal Peace: Marketization and Emergent Conflict Dynamics in Sierra Leone', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 54, Iss. 04, (2016): p. 569.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid: p. 570.

that free-market reforms are one of the pillars of peaceful society, referencing Doyle as the foundational theory behind his understanding of the liberal peace.²⁵⁰

This kind of discussion and analysis is typical of what is understood here as the representational literature. Although not always employing an empirical example, this literature is manifest as a discussion of the nature, efficacy, and practical enaction of the liberal peace as it exists in institutions, policies, and peacebuilding practices across the world. Millar highlights the extent of this discussion, referencing McGinty, Richmond, Doyle, Chandler, and Sabaratnam as additional authors who share his focus upon the specific value and function of liberal marketisation in the practice of liberal peacebuilding.²⁵¹ He suggests that although some of these authors share this focus in a critical capacity, their focus nevertheless substantiates the dominance of the liberal peace in policy and peacebuilding, reinforcing the idea that there is such a unitary construct, manifest as a problem-solving, technocratic, tool-kit approach.²⁵²

Other examples of the representational literature concerning the liberal peace share this understanding of the liberal peace as a unitary construct in line with Richmond's discussion of a peacebuilding consensus, using this as a basis to examine the nature, efficacy, and practical enaction of the liberal peace in specific contexts and institutional settings across the globe. These examples include Nkongho and Pemunta, who examine the disjuncture between the policy transposition of "The Liberal Peace Project" from the local context of South Sudan.²⁵³ As the quote demonstrates, their argument is built upon a unified conception of the liberal peace, one which they argue focuses on urban political institutions to the exclusion of local needs, restricting access to formal education.²⁵⁴ Their conclusion rests upon the idea that the addition of a framework which prioritises extended access to vocational education would be "a more credible establishment for sustainable civil peace", and thus a contextually informed beneficial addition to the liberal peace project in South Sudan.²⁵⁵ They suggest that this project must be tailored towards local concerns, and the

²⁵⁰ Millar, Gearoid, 'Local Experiences of Liberal Peace: Marketization and Emergent Conflict Dynamics in Sierra Leone', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 54, Iss. 04, (2016): p. 570.

²⁵¹ Ibid: p. 569.

²⁵² Ibid: p. 570.

²⁵³ Nkongho, Eno-Akpa and Pemunta, Ngambouk, 'The Fragility of the Liberal Peace Export to South Sudan: Formal Education Access as a Basis of a Liberal Peace Project', *Journal of Human Security*, Vol. 10, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 59.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

aims which they attribute to it must be developed contextually to engender their meaningful practical application.²⁵⁶ In this manner, the article can be seen as belonging to the representational literature of the liberal peace, as it proceeds from the adoption of a unitary understanding of the liberal peace to a description and analysis of this approach in practice, developing considerations of the liberal peace beyond the theoretical (as in Doyle) towards contextually situated analyses and even expansive recommendations.

Considerations of the liberal peace within the representational literature also go beyond empirical examples or specific case-studies in order to address the manner in which the liberal peace is represented *institutionally* or *organisationally*. A prominent example of this can be found in the discussions concerning transitional justice as a form of liberal peacebuilding. An excellent consideration of these processes in action can be found in Alexander Laban Hinton's book, *The Justice Façade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia*. Laban Hinton understands transitional justice as:

An assemblage of discourses, institutions, capital flows, technologies, practices, and people devoted to providing redress for mass human rights violations and enabling a transformation of a society from this violent past to a better future.²⁵⁷

This "better future" is conceptualised in different ways yet, as Laban Hinton argues, it is most often framed in terms of democratic liberalisation, something he terms "the transitional justice imaginary".²⁵⁸ This imaginary is manifest as an attempted teleological transformation from a state of authoritarianism to one of liberal democratic being, employing secondary assumptions in this process, such as utopianism, progressivism, universalism, essentialism, and globalism.²⁵⁹ Laban Hinton thus demonstrates the transitional justice imaginary as one built upon the core tenets of the liberal peace, manifest as a universalised, essentialised, and imposed understanding of its main understandings and practices. As an example of the representational literature, Laban Hinton's book

²⁵⁶ Nkongho, Eno-Akpa and Pemunta, Ngambouk, 'The Fragility of the Liberal Peace Export to South Sudan: Formal Education Access as a Basis of a Liberal Peace Project', *Journal of Human Security*, Vol. 10, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 59.

²⁵⁷ Laban Hinton, Alexander, *The Justice Façade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): p. 5.

²⁵⁸ Ibid: p. 6.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

demonstrates not only the enaction of the liberal peace as a unitary construct, but also the manifold ways in which it is represented as an understanding and practice of peace.

This section has demonstrated the foundational literature and the representative literature of the liberal peace, providing a picture of its underlying character in theoretical and conceptual terms, and the discussion of the ways in which it is represented in practice. The examples discussed demonstrate the ways in which the essentialisms developed through an arrogant reading of Kant are operationalised in practice. They explore the enaction and effects of the concrete laws of peace expounded by the liberal peace and show the ways in which it is represented in practice as an instrumental imposition of them. The following section discusses the literature concerning the liberal peace and its enaction in Kyrgyzstan.

Liberal Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, societies across Central Asia have increasingly engaged with international peacebuilding organisations and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)²⁶⁰ in an external and internal pursuit of peaceful order. This is a subject which receives considerable attention in the literature and forms the backbone of considerations of peace and peacebuilding in the region. This includes studies such as Heathershaw's *Post-conflict Tajikistan: The Politics of Peacebuilding and the Emergence of Legitimate Order*,²⁶¹ David Lewis' *Central Asia: Contested Peace*,²⁶² and Kirill Nourzhanov's *International Domestic Norms and Domestic Socialization in Kazakhstan: Learning Processes of the Power Elite*,²⁶³ to name but a few. The literature relating to the liberal peace in Kyrgyzstan is varied: in the last decade, an expanding body of literature has examined the promotion of good governance, rule of law, democracy, and human rights across Central Asia, characterised by an EU-centric approach and concern with external efforts of

²⁶⁰ Lewis, David, 'Central Asia: Contested Peace', in Pogodda, Sandra, Ramović, Jasmin and Richmond, Oliver, (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2016): p. 393.

²⁶¹ Heathershaw, John, *Post-conflict Tajikistan: The Politics of Peacebuilding and the Emergence of Legitimate Order*, (London: Routledge, 2009).

²⁶² Lewis, David, 'Central Asia: Contested Peace', in Pogodda, Sandra, Ramović, Jasmin and Richmond, Oliver, (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Disciplinary and Regional Approaches to Peace*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2016): p. 387-397.

²⁶³ Nourzhanov, Kirill, 'International Democratic Norms and Domestic Socialization in Kazakhstan: Learning Processes of the Power Elite', in Kavalski, Emilian (ed.), *Stable Outside, Fragile Inside? Post-Soviet Statehood in Central Asia*, (London: Routledge, 2010).

democratisation.²⁶⁴ Some considerations focus on the influence, impact, and nature of these efforts in practice and their relationship to local actors and processes of appropriation and adaptation.²⁶⁵ Others, in contrast, examine the nature and influence of the increasingly prominent Russian approach to peace and peacebuilding, namely *konfliktologiya*,²⁶⁶ with additional studies considering the changing approach of the international community to particular events and conflicts in Central Asia,²⁶⁷ to give but a few examples.

Kyrgyzstan is no exception, hosting a large number of peacebuilding and reconciliation programs²⁶⁸ and, on occasion, requiring either intervention, humanitarian aid, and/or military equipment and supplies from actors such as the United Nations,²⁶⁹ the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the United States, Russia, and the European Union.²⁷⁰ Kyrgyzstan is thus subject to significant scholarly focus concerning international peacebuilding efforts, owing in part to the sheer number of NGO, international organisations, and peacebuilding projects in the country in comparison to its neighbours, and the relatively open nature of the state and civil society, facilitating research efforts and providing considerable opportunities for study. Within Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan was the most open country in relation to international prescriptions of political and institutional reform.²⁷¹ In the 1990s, international donors invested millions of dollars in promoting democratisation in Central Asia, following a “civil society orthodoxy” approach “which assumed that democracy could be fostered by building a civil society from scratch through the creation of NGOs”.²⁷² Akaev supported a neoliberal model of development, hoping that this influx of NGOs would help alleviate the new nation’s struggles with poverty and manifold socio-

²⁶⁴ Pierobon, Chiara, ‘European Union, Civil Society and Local Ownership in Kyrgyzstan: Analysing Patterns of Adaptation, Reinterpretation and Contestation in the Prevention of Violent Extremism’, *Central Asian Survey*, (2021): p. 1.

²⁶⁵ Ibid: p. 1-18.

²⁶⁶ Reeves, Madeleine, ‘Locating Danger: *Konfliktologiya* and the Search for Fixity in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, Iss. 01, (2005): p. 67-81.

²⁶⁷ Lottholz, Philipp and Sheranova, Arzuu, ‘Governing, but not Producing Security? Internationalised Community Security Practices in Kyrgyzstan’, *IQAS*, Vol. 52, Iss. 01, (2021): p. 55-77.

²⁶⁸ Heathershaw, John et al., ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, SIPRI_OSF Policy Brief, June 2014, p. 1-8.

²⁶⁹ Gidathubli, R. G., ‘Turmoil in Kyrgyzstan: Power Play of Vested Interests’, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 45, Iss. 28, (2010): p. 27.

²⁷⁰ Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 32.

²⁷¹ Lottholz, Philipp, *Post-Liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia: Imaginaries, Discourses and Practices of Social Ordering*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022): p. 76.

²⁷² Pierobon, Chiara, ‘European Union, Civil Society and Local Ownership in Kyrgyzstan: Analysing Patterns of Adaptation, Reinterpretation and Contestation in the Prevention of Violent Extremism’, *Central Asian Survey*, (2021): p. 3.

economic issues, providing generous financial support to them.²⁷³ As a result, “international organizations, Western European governments, and private organizations, such as the Soros foundations, have all been involved in promoting democracy in the region”,²⁷⁴ demonstrating the influence of the liberal peace model upon peacebuilding actions undertaken.

This legacy of international intervention has led to the identification of “a Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary which strongly informs people’s thinking about the country’s economic and political development path”.²⁷⁵ Foreign governments and Western NGOs “have spent tens of millions of dollars to promote democratisation in the region”,²⁷⁶ and liberal economic reforms proposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank resulted in the enactment of a macroeconomic policies including reducing budget deficits, freeing controlled prices and interest rates, reducing trade barriers, privatisation, property rights, and the promotion of competition.²⁷⁷ A majority of the literature concerning peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan identifies or discusses this ‘liberalisation’ following independence, with many identifying this as a process of liberal peacebuilding through the ‘traditional’ avenues of democratisation, liberal economic reforms, and the pursuit of liberal civil society. For example, Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh focuses on the economic aspects of liberal peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan, discussing the state’s early, rapid, and indiscriminate implementation of privatisation, financial liberalisation and trade liberalisation, framing this as a fundamental aspect of the pursuit of liberal peace in transition economies, as “the project of liberal peace was meant to prevent the risk of violence while demonstrating the alleged supremacy of democracy and market economy as the path to progress”.²⁷⁸ Adamson, on the other hand, focuses on the pursuit of democratisation as another fundamental aspect of liberal peacebuilding in the country, suggesting that much of the money spent there has financed

²⁷³ Pierobon, Chiara, ‘European Union, Civil Society and Local Ownership in Kyrgyzstan: Analysing Patterns of Adaptation, Reinterpretation and Contestation in the Prevention of Violent Extremism’, *Central Asian Survey*, (2021): p. 3.

²⁷⁴ Adam, Fiona B., ‘International Democracy Assistance in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: Building Civil Society from the Outside’, in Glenn, John K. and Mendelson, Sarah E., *The Power and Limits of NGOs: A Critical Look at Building Democracy in Europe and Eurasia*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002): p. 177.

²⁷⁵ Lottholz, Philipp, *Post-Liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia: Imaginaries, Discourses and Practices of Social Ordering*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022): p. 76-77.

²⁷⁶ Adamson, Fiona B., ‘International Democracy Assistance in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: Building Civil Society from the Outside’, in Mendelson, Sarah and Glenn, John, *The Power and Limits of NGOs*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2002): p. 177.

²⁷⁷ Tadjbakhsh, Shahrbanou, ‘Conflicted Outcomes and Values: (Neo) Liberal Peace in Central Asia and Afghanistan’, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 16, Iss. 05, (2009): p. 637.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

“strategies and programs that are designed to strengthen civil society”, including the creation of local advocacy NGOs to help provide the impetus for democratic reforms and transition.²⁷⁹

However, the literature which identifies and discusses liberal peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan often does so in light of its failures, in which the effectiveness, implementation, and overall results are subject to debate. Despite their attractiveness to donors, liberal peacebuilding activities are presented as lacking significant or long-lasting impact.²⁸⁰ This is a sentiment echoed across the literature: Charlotte Fiedler argues that international peacebuilding efforts lacked substantial backing from national actors and their respective societies, leading to their inefficacious implementation.²⁸¹ Neil Melvin suggests that the involvement of the international community was ineffective and unwilling,²⁸² an argument further expanded upon by Philipp Lottholz, who makes the link between the ineffective nature of these attempts and the clash between the international and the national; “beyond the politically straightforward humanitarian and infrastructural aid and compensation payments, programs and practices were often contested by authorities and supposed beneficiaries”.²⁸³ He refers to “the pitfalls of building peace in diverse societies”,²⁸⁴ suggesting the difficulties involved with the implementation of blueprint approaches to peacebuilding. The impact of context is further exemplified by Lewis and Saniya Sagnayeva, who build upon recent research concerning authoritarian political settlements to examine those which developed in the wake of the Osh events of 2010, arguing that such consideration provides “new theoretical insights into why post-conflict societies have often rejected liberal peacebuilding prescriptions” and instead depended upon “hierarchical and exclusionary political and economic structures” to engender peaceful order.²⁸⁵ Such considerations of the failures of

²⁷⁹ Adamson, Fiona B., ‘International Democracy Assistance in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan: Building Civil Society from the Outside’, in Mendelson, Sarah and Glenn, John, *The Power and Limits of NGOs*, (New York: Colombia University Press, 2002): p. 178.

²⁸⁰ Heathershaw, John et al, ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, *SIPRI-OSF Policy Brief*, (2014): p. 1.

²⁸¹ Fiedler, Charlotte, ‘On the Effects of International Support to Peace and Democracy in Kenya and Kyrgyzstan in the Aftermath of Interethnic Violence’, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 53, Iss. 02, (2018): p. 323.

²⁸² Melvin, Neil, ‘Promoting a Stable and Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: Overcoming the Causes and Legacies of Violence’, *Central Eurasia Project Occasional Paper Series*, Iss. 03, (2011): p. 35.

²⁸³ Lottholz, Phillip, ‘Old Slogans Ringing Hollow? The Legacy of Social Engineering, Statebuilding and the ‘Dilemma of Difference’ in (Post-) Soviet Kyrgyzstan’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 412.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Lewis, David and Sagnayeva, Saniya, ‘Corruption, Patronage and Illiberal Peace: Forging Political Settlement in Post-conflict Kyrgyzstan’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 41, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 77-78.

the liberal peace are not limited to Kyrgyzstan: in fact, their increasing prominence in the literature led to the development of a critical framework in opposition to the liberal peace – the post-liberal.

The preceding section has critically reviewed the literature concerning the liberal peace, both as a general approach and in relation to Kyrgyzstan as an empirical focus. It has identified failures within and as a result of the application of the liberal peace both in terms of its theoretical underpinnings and empirically. With regard to the former, the misreading of Kant upon which the liberal peace rests, along with the manifold critiques of its theoretical basis within the literature, shows us its issues and resultant limitations as an approach and framework for peacebuilding. This is reinforced by the variegated failures in its practical application represented by the critical empirical considerations discussed within the literature. Both of these critiques are evident in the literature concerning Kyrgyzstan and the liberal peace. The preceding section thus demonstrated the need to rethink peace beyond the confines of the liberal peace evident within the literature. The most prominent attempt to do so building upon these critiques and limitations in the literature can be found in the notion of the post-liberal peace, something which the next section will address.

2.2 - The Post-Liberal Peace

Since the late 1990s, scholars, commentators, and political actors have increasingly contested the merits of ‘the liberal peace’ and liberal peacebuilding within both the academic literature and the international system.²⁸⁶ This has resulted in the development of manifold critical frameworks²⁸⁷ which dissect and challenge its underlying assumptions and practices,²⁸⁸ and even a sizable body of literature which critically reflects upon the critical frameworks themselves.²⁸⁹ Some are even sceptical of the existence and validity of ‘the liberal peace’

²⁸⁶ Zaum, Dominik, ‘Beyond the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Global Governance*, Vol.18, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 121, Owen, Catherine et al (eds.), *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia: Critical Perspectives on Peace and Conflict*, (London: Roman and Littlefield International Ltd, 2018): p. 1.

²⁸⁷ For an overview, see: Chandler, David, ‘The Uncritical Critique of Liberal Peace’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, Iss. 01, (2010): p. 137-155.

²⁸⁸ See: Wallis, Joanne, ‘Is There Still a Place for Liberal Peacebuilding?’, In *Hybridity on the Ground in Peacebuilding and Development*, Bose, Srinjoy et al. (eds.), (Canberra: ANU Press, 2018): p. 83-98, Richmond, Oliver P., *A Post-Liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011), and Mac Ginty, Roger, ‘No War, No Peace: Why So Many Peace Processes Fail to Deliver Peace’, *International Politics* Vol. 47 Iss. 02, (2010): p. 145-162.

²⁸⁹ For example, see: Hameiri, Shahar, ‘The Crisis of Liberal Peacebuilding – Is Statebuilding Endangered?’, *International Politics* Vol. 51 Iss. 03, (2014): p. 316-333, Selby, Jan, ‘The Myth of Liberal Peacebuilding’, *Conflict, Security and Development*, Vol. 13, Iss 01, (2013): p. 57-86, and Owen, Catherine et al (eds.), *Interrogating Illiberal Peace in Eurasia: Critical Perspectives on Peace and Conflict*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2018).

itself,²⁹⁰ advocating for the abandonment of such terminology and the creation of a discursive space to reconsider peace without resorting to an analytically ineffective notion which only serves as “an effigy for the pyre of critical peacebuilding scholarship”.²⁹¹ There are, therefore, many different approaches which critique the liberal peace.²⁹² The focus of this section, however, is on a more particular region of this critical landscape: the ‘post-liberal peace’. This is for heuristic purposes and a result of the prominence of this critique within this scholarly field, represented most notably through the work of Oliver Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty.

The focus upon these particular authors is necessary for a number of reasons, beginning with their prominent and influential position within the field. Richmond is a leading figure within peace studies, and his book *A Post-liberal Peace* brings much of the critique against the liberal peace together, has been a foundational text for both sympathetic and critical extensions of his work, and has been the focus of much of the metacritical literature which followed. Most notably, Richmond’s work labour under the self-identification as ‘post-liberal’. Roger Mac Ginty is also a prominent figure, not only co-authoring with Richmond but developing and expanding upon most of the central ideas within what Richmond outlines as the post-liberal within his own work, (hybridity, ‘the local turn’, a particular critical stance to the liberal peace, amongst others). Together, they embody the core problematics and concerns of what this section refers to as ‘post-liberal peace’.

The post-liberal approach is somewhat diverse, having been established for some time. However, it addresses a series of common problematics identified within the liberal peace, building its vision for a new approach to peace off the back of its critique. Common ideas within the post-liberal are that of hybridity, ‘the local’, and ‘the everyday’, ideas that will be addressed later in this section. These ideas have a shared critical foundation in disassembling the reductionist and liberal-universal claims made across the foundational and representative literature of the liberal peace.²⁹³ It attempts to deconstruct the universalised foundations of the liberal peace identified in the previous sections in both theoretical and practical terms, aiming for “the construction of radical local agency beyond liberal-universal

²⁹⁰ Zaum, Dominik, ‘Beyond the ‘Liberal Peace’’, *Global Governance*, Vol.18, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 122.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Chandler, David, ‘The Uncritical Critique of Liberal Peace’, *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 36, Iss. 01, (2010): p. 139.

²⁹³ Finkenbusch, Peter, ‘Post-liberal Peacebuilding and the Crisis of International Authority’, *Peacebuilding*, Vol. 04, Iss. 03, (2016): p. 247.

epistemology”.²⁹⁴ In this capacity, the central argument of the post-liberal peace builds upon a Foucauldian governmentality critique, presenting intervention in liberal peacebuilding as a kind of civilising mission, imposing a top-down, instrumental and essentialised template for peace upon diverse and disparate post-conflict contexts. This can be seen in Oliver Richmond and Sandra Pogodda’s edited volume, in which various empirical examples of the failures of the liberal peace are identified and discussed, arguing that the organisations involved are driven “by their own interests and naturalised norms... founded on external political frameworks, legitimacy, and norms”, and that “such mechanisms have been lacking in their capacity to engage with a contextual, critical, and emancipatory epistemology of peace”.²⁹⁵ This highlights the central approach and aims of this critique: it is predicated upon an opposition to the imposition of epistemic universals of ‘peace’ ostensibly built upon the liberal tradition, and aims to engender a contextualised, localised, and ultimately emancipatory approach to peace that puts local knowledges and approaches at the forefront. It thus identifies the imposition of Western, liberal universals and proposes a radical reshifting of the focus of peacebuilding towards local agency, and it was the identification of these problematics that led to the emergence of the post-liberal approach. This critique can be seen to resonate with the previous section on the liberal peace, which identified the essentialisms, instrumentalism, and totalising approach of the liberal peace.

As the addition of the ‘post’ signifies, the post-liberal peace is principally an attempt to *go beyond* the liberal peace. This is manifest as a critical interrogation of the *concept* and *practice* of the liberal peace.²⁹⁶ A such, the post liberal peace should be seen as an attempt to go beyond the liberal peace via two central critical components; a *theoretically driven critique* existing alongside an *empirical/practical critique*. In Richmond and Mac Ginty’s words, this is manifest as an interrogation of the “foundational claims and operational impacts of the dominant form of internationally supported peacebuilding”.²⁹⁷ The theoretical critique of the liberal peace begins from an examination of its internal

²⁹⁴ Ibid: p. 248.

²⁹⁵ Pogodda, Sandra and Richmond, Oliver, ‘Introduction: The Contradictions of Peace, International Architecture, the State, and Local Agency’, in Pogodda, Sandra and Richmond, Oliver (eds.), *Post-Liberal Peace Transitions: Between Peace Formation and State Formation*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016): p. 1-26.

²⁹⁶ Mac Ginty, Roger and Richmond, Oliver P., ‘Where Now for the Critique of the |Liberal Peace’, *cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 50, Iss. 02, (2014): p. 171.

²⁹⁷ Mac Ginty, Roger and Richmond, Oliver P., ‘Where Now for the Critique of the |Liberal Peace’, *cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 50, Iss. 02, (2014): p. 171.

contradictions; these are rooted in its claim to offer a *universal epistemological basis* for peace and provide it with a *definite teleology*.²⁹⁸ In terms of the practical/empirical critique, the focus is upon the process, (and negative impacts of this process), which has been prescribed through its universal epistemic approach and which results from the practical application of its unequivocal teleology.²⁹⁹

The critical-theoretical aspect of the post liberal rests upon an unpacking of the historical and theoretical basis for intervention and power as they relate to peacebuilding in IR.³⁰⁰ In order to achieve this, it employs Foucauldian conceptions of power through the notions of governmentality and biopolitics,³⁰¹ rejecting the prescriptive biases of the universal epistemic approach of the liberal peace³⁰² which creates a mode of peace which merely reflects Western/Northern concerns and priorities.³⁰³ The post-liberal also engages post-colonial and subaltern understandings of peacebuilding in what has commonly been referred to as ‘the local turn’, attempting to lay the basis for a more emancipatory mode of peacebuilding which gives priority and emphasis to “local contexts”.³⁰⁴ In its theoretical capacity, the post-liberal critique is thus manifest as an attempt to escape the theoretical confines of the liberal peace, and to “take a stake in a much broader discussion of peace”.³⁰⁵

The pinnacle of this critique results in the notion of ‘hybridity’; a conception meant to transcend the problems of the universalised epistemological basis and telos which are characterised as fundamental to the liberal peace. Hybridity begins with a recognition of the messy and dispersed nature of politics and society in post conflict spaces and serves at its core as a process of negotiation between the manifold sites of power and knowledge in these spaces.³⁰⁶ Unlike the universalism of the liberal peace, hybridity is not a laboratory-produced solution which emerges ready-packaged, but instead attempts to reach an accommodation between the local and the international spheres of peacebuilding.³⁰⁷ It

²⁹⁸ Richmond, Oliver P., *A Post-Liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 186.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Mac Ginty, Roger and Richmond, Oliver P., ‘Where Now for the Critique of the [Liberal Peace]’, *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 50, Iss. 02, (2014): p. 172.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Ibid: p. 184.

³⁰³ Ibid: 178.

³⁰⁴ Richmond, Oliver P., *A Post-Liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 189.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Mac Ginty, Rodger and Oliver Richmond, ‘The Fallacy of Constructing Hybrid Political Orders: The Reappraisal of the Hybrid Turn in Peacebuilding’, *International Peacekeeping* Vol. 23, Iss. 02, (2016): p. 220.

³⁰⁷ Ibid: p. 222.

encourages the critical reappraisal of the orthodox ways of knowing presented by the liberal peace, and, as such, ostensibly allows us to move past the rigidity and binary categories which it uses to represent peace and conflict, instead engendering a focus on fluidity and the “leaching of identity, institutions and ideas”.³⁰⁸ In its ultimate form, hybridity amounts to a rejection of the universalism of the liberal peace; of the idea that conflicts can be ‘understood’ through the correct formula and sufficient data, and instead embodies a critical epistemological project which, in direct antithesis to the liberal peace, takes seriously multiple sources of agency,³⁰⁹ serving as the purported antidote to the universal epistemic and teleological prescription of the liberal peace.

In practical/empirical terms, this critique is levelled at the problematic processes through which the liberal peace realises its telos and universalised epistemic standpoint. This often exists through a discussion concerning the lack of material benefits and increased inequalities which have emerged through the liberal peace, as a result of its top-down approach, lack of legitimacy, and contextually unsuitable, coercive and undesirable practices, which themselves are indicative of the imposition of external interests and “contextually unfeeling and insensitive” manner in which this telos is pursued.³¹⁰ This critique stems from the theoretical considerations of epistemology and teleology discussed above but focuses itself upon its practical/empirical aspects. The pursuit of these theoretical features of the liberal peace has resulted in the application of “template style interventions”, where, for example, even the progress of peace is measured through standardised techniques which have narrowed our analyses of conflict and peace.³¹¹ Such interventions are, in the post-liberal critique, enacted by institutions and organisations which are structurally insufficient with regards to the hybrid local-international interaction which Mac Ginty and Richmond normatively espouse.³¹² Here, the practical impact of the fixity of the liberal peace approach emerges as certain structural forms of power held by institutions and organisations involved in liberal peacebuilding such as technocratic systems, which prevent feelings of local ownership amongst target conflict parties, lack human interfaces and involve the blanket

³⁰⁸ Ibid: p. 224.

³⁰⁹ Ibid: p. 225.

³¹⁰ Richmond, Oliver P., *A Post-Liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 186.

³¹¹ Mac Ginty, Roger, ‘Introduction: The Transcripts of Peace: Public, Hidden or Non-obvious?’, *The Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 07, Iss. 04, (2013): p. 423-424.

³¹² Mac Ginty, Roger, ‘The Limits of Technocracy and Local Encounters: The European Union and Peacebuilding’, *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 39, Iss. 01, (2018): p. 168.

application of standardised systems which are often managed from afar.³¹³ Here, a top-down approach, lack of legitimacy, and contextually unsuitable, coercive and undesirable practices results in technocratic practices which hinder local-international hybridity, local ownership, and serve as *practices* of epistemic imposition. This problematic means that a liberal peacebuilding program, enacted in the name of a certain community, struggles to gain traction and, ultimately, struggles to build sustainable peace. The aim of the post-liberal peace, in practical terms, is to build a capacity to consider localised rights, needs and agency within a practice of peacebuilding, engaging with the local and contextualised understandings of peace alongside those of the international.³¹⁴ The following sections explores the ways in which the post-liberal approach has been applied to Kyrgyzstan.

Post-liberal Considerations of Kyrgyzstan

Post-liberal approaches have become an established part of peace studies³¹⁵ and the literature relating to Kyrgyzstan reflects this. Ideas and arguments relating to the ‘local turn’ within are becoming increasingly widespread,³¹⁶ exploring micro-level dimensions of peacebuilding and including a diverse range of actors in contrast to the international, institutional ‘liberal peace’ framework.³¹⁷ As with discussions concerning the liberal peace in Kyrgyzstan, the broadly post-liberal considerations in the literature are diverse in nature. Nevertheless, they predominantly focus upon a conception of the ‘local’³¹⁸ and the

³¹³ Ibid: p. 169.

³¹⁴ Mac Ginty, Roger and Richmond, Oliver P., ‘The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 34, Iss. 05, (2013): p. 764.

³¹⁵ Heathershaw, John et al, ‘Evaluating Peacebuilding Interventions in Southern Kyrgyzstan’, *SIPRI-OSF Policy Brief*, (2014): p. 2.

³¹⁶ See, for example: Mac Ginty, Roger and Richmond, Oliver, ‘The Local Turn in Peace Building: A Critical Agenda for Peace’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 34, Iss. 05, (2013): p. 763-783, or Leonardsson, Hanna and Rudd, Gustav, ‘The ‘local turn’ in Peacebuilding: A Literature Review of Effective and Emancipatory Local Peacebuilding’, *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 36, Iss. 05, (2015): p. 825-839.

³¹⁷ Heathershaw, John, Khamidov, Alisher and Megoran, Nick, ‘Bottom-up Peacekeeping in Southern Kyrgyzstan: How Local Actors Managed to Prevent the Spread of Violence from Osh/Jalal-Abad to Aravan, June 2010’, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 45, Iss. 06, (2017): p. 1121.

³¹⁸ The word ‘local’ is written in single speech marks to highlight its problematic nature as a notion, and to demonstrate the fact that this thesis does not adopt this term: instead, this thesis is concerned with context and situated knowledges and practices. The term ‘local’ in terms of peacebuilding and peace studies is often associated with the ‘local turn’, something closely connected to the post-liberal peace. As a result, the use of this term carries with it all of the problematic baggage of this approach. These issues are particularly well summarised by Giorgio Shani, who argues that such approaches “fail to go beyond liberal peacebuilding. Instead, they reproduce its central tenets while simultaneously constructing a space outside of its interventionary practices – the ‘local’ – which does not exist in reality”, (Shani, Giorgio, ‘Saving Liberal Peacebuilding? From the ‘Local Turn’ to a Post-Western Peace? In Albergh, Jeremiah, Laban Hinton, Alexander,

understandings and practices of peace which emerge from the 'local level', and which are excluded by the liberal peace.

For example, Anna Kreikemeyer explicitly mentions the post-liberal in her discussion of local ordering and peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan.³¹⁹ The article argues that "the post-liberal debate can profit from taking experiential perspectives from the ground up (emic) more seriously".³²⁰ Kreikemeyer uses Kyrgyzstan as an empirical example to achieve this, examining the interplay between societal conflict, ordering, and peacebuilding interventions.³²¹ The article attempts to grasp and represent these localised, experiential perspectives in Kyrgyzstan; "with reference to the post-liberal debate on localization in peacebuilding", the article "examines how communal actors and institutions in Kyrgyzstan contribute to ordering and peace formation".³²² Kreikemeyer thus discusses the localised, informal, and communally driven understandings and practices of patronism, hierarchical and gendered structures of order, village elders, collective labour, informal women leaders and youth leaders, framing these as "everyday communal practices relating to ordering" and alongside "everyday practices of harmony", such as avoidance and ritual politeness.³²³ These are understood in the article as practices of peaceful order which operate locally, in specific contexts, and outside of the nexus of liberal peace and Western institutions. As such, this article demonstrates a clear post-liberal engagement with peace and peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan³²⁴.

The influence of the post-liberal approach and its conceptual basis for considering peace and peacebuilding is evident even in those articles which do not employ the term. Its use in this manner, beyond the scope of authors and works which situate themselves as directly belonging to this approach, demonstrates the prominence of its theoretical basis and conceptual approach in considerations of peace and peacebuilding, highlighting the aspects

and Giorgio Shani, *Rethinking Peace*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019, p. 47). This thesis makes a similar argument concerning the post-liberal's inability to escape the confines of the liberal peace and, as such, does not wish to get caught-up in the use and thus further development such a problematic term.

³¹⁹ Kreikemeyer, Anna, 'Local Ordering and Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan: What Can Customary Orders Achieve?', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 14, Iss. 04, (2020): p. 501-517.

³²⁰ Ibid: p. 501.

³²¹ Ibid: p. 502.

³²² Ibid: p. 511.

³²³ Ibid: p. 508.

³²⁴ Oliver Richmond's book, *A Post Liberal Peace*, highlights this focus as a core part of the post-liberal approach in relation to his conception of the 'local': "this includes customary processes and institutions, as well as indigenous forms of knowledge, traditional authorities, elders, chiefs, communities, tribes, and religious groups", (Richmond, Oliver, *A Post-liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011, p. 153).

of post-liberal considerations which have entered the mainstream of scholarship which situates itself against the norms outlined through the liberal peace. One example of this which relates to Kyrgyzstan is Megoran and Ismailbekova's article considering the role of women in peacebuilding activities in the south of the country. Despite never employing the term, this article shows how the conceptual framework and theoretical considerations brought about through the advent of the post-liberal peace have influenced scholarship across peace studies. The article highlights the informal role of women in peacebuilding processes, exploring this in relation to the violence in Osh in 2010.³²⁵ It has an explicitly 'local' focus, outlined in the title, "How Women Contribute to Local Peace", with the argument focusing upon the stories and experiences of women leaders as promoters of dialogue and mediators of conflict.³²⁶ The 'bottom-up' approach of the argument is evident from the structure of the discussion; "starting with the family, moving to the neighbourhood, and then to the national and international scales".³²⁷ This approach reflects the post-liberal commitment to building peace and peace processes from the grassroots, taking into account the perspectives, practices, and existing roles of local actors. The post-liberal approach imagines just such an approach to peacebuilding; built from the bottom up and incorporating the 'local' along with engaging with the international.³²⁸ The article examines female leadership in southern Kyrgyzstan and the peacebuilding initiatives, activities, and processes which stem from the involvement of such women. They aim to grasp "societal actor's everyday concepts, practices, and trans-local navigations",³²⁹ focusing on "the local level".³³⁰ Although the article employs the idea of authoritarian conflict management to describe the area-specific "reliance upon hierarchical structures to defuse, de-escalate or prevent conflict", it does so "in opposition to liberal peacebuilding methods",³³¹ thus exploring 'the local' and the understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding which emerge in opposition to the liberal peace. The idea of authoritarian conflict management employed in this article rests upon empirical observations: it is not a

³²⁵ Ismailbekova, Aksana and Megoran, Nick, 'Peace in the Family is the Basis for Peace in the Country: How Women Contribute to Local Peace in Southern Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 14, Iss. 04, (2020): p. 483.

³²⁶ Ibid: p. 484.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Richmond, Oliver, *A Post-liberal Peace*, (London: Routledge, 2011): p. 201.

³²⁹ Ismailbekova, Aksana and Megoran, Nick, 'Peace in the Family is the Basis for Peace in the Country: How Women Contribute to Local Peace in Southern Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 14, Iss. 04, (2020): p. 484.

³³⁰ Ibid: p. 485.

³³¹ Ibid: p. 489.

novel theoretical framework which rethinks peace, but instead an observation of localised, contextually situated understandings and practices of peace in a particular geographical area. To achieve this, the article employs the basic conceptual framework of the post liberal peace, focusing on ‘the local’, developing an understanding of peace from the bottom up, and employing studies of subaltern knowledge and practice through its focus upon women. The article seeks to describe the interactions between ‘the local’ and the national and international levels of peacebuilding in the region, following the post-liberal concept of hybridity in all but name. This basic conceptual tool is employed to examine the relations of knowledge and power in a post-conflict space, seeking an accommodation between the local and international spheres of peacebuilding. It explicitly rejects the universalism of the liberal peace, embodying the critical epistemological project explicitly outlined in post-liberal approaches and, specifically, in the notion of hybridity: taking multiple, localised, subaltern sources of knowledge and agency into account in order to develop practices of peacebuilding which take the into account. This shows the influence of post-liberal concepts and theoretical approaches upon contemporary peace studies scholarship in general, which often adopts the fundamental basis of the post-liberal approach without the addition of novel theoretical frameworks in order to move beyond the liberal/post-liberal binary.

2.3 – The Need to Rethink Peace

The need to rethink peace beyond this binary can be seen in existing critiques of the post-liberal peace and in its adoption of the arrogant reading of Kant that this thesis has explored. To begin with, a discussion of a few existing critiques will be undertaken. The selection of these particular approaches is done only to demonstrate some of the major currents and aspects relevant to the concerns of this thesis. The two examples chosen will be explored in depth later in the thesis: they are discussed here in order to show how they frame *the need to rethink peace*, and their substantive arguments will be outlined in the following subchapter.

One example can be seen in Hartmut Behr’s “peace in difference” perspective.³³² Behr presents this approach as suggesting “a novel epistemology and ontology of peace thinking

³³² Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace in Difference – Peace Through Dialogue About and Across Difference(s): A Phenomenological approach to Rethinking Peace’, in Alberg, Jeremiah, Laban Hinton, Alexander, and Giorgio Shani, *Rethinking Peace*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 173-190.

and peace practice that a postliberal perspective does not include in its yet very important critique and suggestions to overcome ‘liberal peace’”.³³³ He critiques the post-liberal approach in terms of its lack of “an own theoretical (i.e. ontological and/or epistemological foundation”, arguing that it rests upon “a hybrid blend of Western and local peacebuilding instruments” that is “theoretically based on a Foucauldian and post-colonial critique of Western, statist politics and its discursive and institutional power apparatus”.³³⁴ In this way, it represents *only* critique, focused almost exclusively upon the liberal peace, and does not provide a profound or comprehensive rethinking of peace to go beyond this. As such, it reproduces many aspects of the liberal peace in its critique without constituting a genuine attempt to go beyond it. The need to rethink peace is evident in this lack of criticality and ability to transcend the liberal.

Morgan Brigg highlights another issue that requires a rethinking of peace. He suggests that the central notion of the post-liberal; that interveners in peace and conflict settings can “enter into a mutually appreciative relationship”, belies the asymmetrical power relations that underscore peacebuilding settings.³³⁵ This further addresses the issue of hybridity that is raised by Behr. It suggests that any attempt to engender genuine hybridity is hampered by the pre-existing power relations that underlie peacebuilding and often post-colonial contexts. Brigg argues that the language of partnership in a hybrid relationship can be maintained, but “interveners maintain firm control of key knowledge, political, policy, bureaucratic, administrative and resourcing levers”.³³⁶ In this way, “the idiom of relationships can operate while changing very little about how diverse peoples and difference are approached”.³³⁷

This critique of hybridity and the genuineness of mutual relationships between the intervener and intervened in the post-liberal approach raises another question, one address

³³³ Ibid: p. 184.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Brigg, Morgan, ‘From Substantialist to Relational Difference in Peace and Conflict Studies’, in Alberg, Jeremiah, Alexander Laban Hinton, and Giorgio Shani, *Rethinking Peace*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 198.

³³⁶ Brigg, Morgan, ‘From Substantialist to Relational Difference in Peace and Conflict Studies’, in Alberg, Jeremiah, Alexander Laban Hinton, and Giorgio Shani, *Rethinking Peace*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 198.

³³⁷ Ibid.

directly by Giorgio Shani: “what is meant by the ‘local’?”.³³⁸ This question draws attention to another facet of the need to rethink peace. Shani welcomes the shift away from “the Eurocentric grand narratives of liberal peace building” represented within post-liberal approaches.³³⁹ He too, however, argues that the ‘emancipatory’ approaches within the post-liberal peace that “aim to empower individuals and communities through a reification of ‘local’ agency” effectively fail to go beyond liberal peacebuilding.³⁴⁰ Instead they “reproduce its central tenets while simultaneously constructing a space outside its interventionary practices – the ‘local’”, which does not exist.³⁴¹ These approaches reproduce aspects of the liberal peace by failing “to engage with ‘local’ target populations on *their own terms*”.³⁴² It reifies the ‘local’ as distinct from the ‘international’ or ‘global’ ignoring the role of colonialism in the construction of such spaces. The post-liberal critique thus reproduces the linear and normative assumptions of the liberal peace, seeking to “emancipate the individual from the constraints upon its agency” imposed by ostensibly ‘primordial’ attachments such as kinship, ethnicity, and religion.³⁴³ For Shani, the ‘local turn’ entails “the *translation* of liberal, normative values into the *vernacular*”, and the apparently critical approach of the post-liberal peace continues “to speak to, for, and on behalf of the ‘subaltern’, who are reduced to silence even when they engage with the ‘local’”.³⁴⁴

The purpose of optionality within this thesis is to provide a novel framework for *a genuine rethinking of peace* beyond these limitations and problematics. The limitations and problematics identified in the previous section not only necessitate the need to rethink peace beyond this binary, but also the necessity of developing and operationalising any such reconsidered approaches in light of particular contexts to avoid essentialisation and generalisation. Optionality is intended to represent a novel theoretical foundation for peace thinking and action that goes beyond critique alone, along the lines of Behr’s critique. It is suggested as a potential means of negotiating the questions raised by Brigg, addressing the control of knowledge and of the terms of relationships within peacebuilding processes,

³³⁸ Shani, Giorgio, ‘Saving Liberal Peacebuilding? From the ‘Local Turn’ to a Post-Western Peace? In Alberg, Jeremiah, Laban Hinton, Alexander, and Giorgio Shani, *Rethinking Peace*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 47.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ Ibid: p. 47-48.

³⁴⁴ Ibid: p. 48.

facilitating the ability of individuals and communities to develop peace on their own terms. This speaks to the critique raised by Shani. Optionality further attempts to avoid the reification of the 'local', instead focusing upon epistemic environments and the imposition of knowledge without resting upon the binary division of the local and international.

Another issue, raised in this thesis, concerns the reductive dichotomies and their naturalisation and hypostatisation displayed in the circular use of Kant in the liberal and post-liberal peace. If we do not move beyond these, we entrench constrained prospects for change in understandings and practices of peace. A dichotomy emerges out of the arrogant misreading and misuse of Kant: that of the *international* and the *local* as framings for peace and peacebuilding. The idea of an international architecture of peace, manifest as a series of concrete policy prescriptions and undergirded by the argument for its universal relevancy and applicability, stems from the liberal peace and the misreading of Kant therein. The post-liberal peace is the main approach which has emerged in opposition to this established architecture, presenting a re-focusing of peacebuilding upon the understandings and practices of peace which emerge from what it terms the 'local'. As shown, this represents, at its core, the increasing emphasis upon local context, local agency, and dealing with local partners in peacebuilding. This approach, however, is developed as a direct critique of the liberal peace and is built upon the same misreading of Kant, albeit in a critical capacity. This creates a limiting dichotomy in peacebuilding, in which the focus moves between the *international* and the *local* yet the foundation for both proponents and critics of the liberal peace remains the same arrogant reading of Kant. The post-liberal peace thus cannot genuinely go beyond the liberal peace, as its critical capacity; indeed, its capacity for rethinking peace beyond the liberal is blunted by this foundation. Optionality stands as a novel approach that does not rest upon this foundation, and thus constitutes a genuine attempt to rethink peace beyond the liberal and post-liberal.

This literature review has endeavoured to show the problems of the liberal and post-liberal approaches and, in doing so, the problems with employing these approaches alone in relation to Kyrgyzstan. This is intended to set the scene for optionality as a novel approach to peace and for its application to the context of Kyrgyzstan. The positioning of this thesis in relation to the literature discussed and the considerations and approaches of peace and peacebuilding therein therefore has two components. Firstly, in reviewing this literature this thesis aims to show the issues and limitations of the liberal and post-liberal approaches in

relation to peace and peacebuilding, both in general and in relation to Kyrgyzstan specifically. Secondly, this thesis intends to demonstrate the resultant need to rethink peace beyond the limitations of this binary, again in terms of peace studies and peacebuilding approaches in general and specifically in relation to Kyrgyzstan. This thesis thus attempts to contribute the original conceptual framework of optionality for this purpose, paving the way for a novel rethinking of approaches towards peace through the empirical example of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. Optionality serves as a novel departure from this stalemate and provides novel insights into understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through its methodological, epistemological, and practical contributions to peace studies, something which later sections will address in detail. The following section will therefore illuminate this idea of 'rethinking peace' in order to situate this thesis within this movement and beyond the confines of this binary before concluding by presenting optionality as the means of achieving this.

2.4 - The Spaces Beyond: Rethinking Peace

However, such post-liberal approaches and critical perspectives are themselves not without their own critiques. Considerations of peace and peacebuilding have not been limited to the confines of the liberal or post-liberal frameworks and, as a result, a multiplicity of spaces beyond this limiting binary have emerged in the academic literature, manifest as a multifarious consideration of alternative understandings and practices of, and approaches towards, peace and peacebuilding. These are substantially manifest as critical appraisals of the liberal and post-liberal, building upon these critiques to suggest diverse and divergent approaches towards peace and peacebuilding which attempt to solve the issues identified by such critique.

The critical reappraisals and alternative approaches which are discussed here under the term 'the spaces beyond' are grouped together not because they share a unified perspective, but because they share a critical approach towards the two dominant schools of peacebuilding and peace studies: the liberal and post-liberal peace. This critical approach is notably diverse in character but can be cognised in its most fundamental form as an attempt to 'rethink' peace beyond the confines of the liberal and post-liberal. The development and application

of optionality should be understood as an attempt to *rethink* peace in precisely the same manner as the approaches outlined in this section, and will be situated not only alongside them, but as related to them; the ‘seeds’ of optionality will thus be identified within the examples given, demonstrating the links and contributions of optionality with regard to the process of rethinking peace.

The acknowledgement of the complexities of peacebuilding has led to the emergence of varied critical engagements which aim to demonstrate that the universalised problem-solving approach of the liberal peace cannot deliver sustainable solutions, grossly generalises the causes of conflict, and imposes predefined and instrumental approaches to peacebuilding as a result.³⁴⁵ Randazzo identifies the post-liberal notion of the ‘local turn’ as the point of association for these critiques, highlighting their focus on the narratives, experiences, and struggles which have been muted by the kind of formalised, elite-based approaches pursued under the banner of the liberal peace.³⁴⁶ She understands the local turn as an attempt to engage with these marginalised communities through a critique of these practices and an attempt to bring their perspectives to light through engaging with them.³⁴⁷ This links together with the previous discussion concerning the emergence and approach of the post-liberal, bringing the notion of the local turn to the fore. However, this appraisal of the current state of peace studies is followed by a key critique, undermining the manner and capacity of such an engagement with the other. According to Randazzo, the post-liberal engagement with the other is ostensibly an attempt to undermine the primacy and hubris of the liberal peace and empower local communities.³⁴⁸ However, she argues that this engagement does not deal with the legacies of liberal peacebuilding, has reproduced its core elements in practice, and has been blind to the power structures left as a result.³⁴⁹ Despite the ostensible adoption of some of these critiques by the post-liberal scholarship, Randazzo’s work highlights its shortcomings in this regard, arguing that it has been unable to provide the clear grounds or theoretical basis required for an alternative model of

³⁴⁵ Randazzo, Elisa, ‘The Local, The Indigenous and the Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 15, Iss. 02, (2021): p. 141.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Randazzo, Elisa, ‘The Local, The Indigenous and the Limits of Rethinking Peacebuilding’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 15, Iss. 02, (2021): p. 141.

³⁴⁹ Ibid: p. 144.

empowerment.³⁵⁰ Randazzo therefore joins what she identifies as an emergent scholarly consideration of “the need for an ontological and epistemological revolution in peace-thinking”,³⁵¹ something which she pursues through considerations of relationality and decoloniality in relation to peace. Randazzo’s arguments present the need for “a turn towards radically different modes of thinking about local experiences and struggles... a deepening of the initial intentions behind the local turn”.³⁵² This has the explicit aim of enabling scholars “to think about peacebuilding beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and to push analyses of social and political interactions toward materially significant and context-specific struggles”.³⁵³ This critical appraisal of the liberal peace, and proceeding critique of the post-liberal peace, is exemplary of what is understood in this thesis as the literature belonging to the spaces beyond these dominant branches of peace studies; of an attempt to *rethink peace*.

The seeds of optionality as an approach towards rethinking peace can be observed in Randazzo’s article in four main aspects. Primarily, optionality provides a clear theoretical basis for developing an alternative approach towards rethinking peace, attempting to develop what Randazzo refers to as an “epistemological revolution in peace-thinking”³⁵⁴ through its novel theoretical contributions. Randazzo also refers to the need to deepen the initial intentions behind the local turn, pushing analyses towards context-specific struggles. This again represents the core aims of the approach developed through optionality; one in which this theoretical basis facilitates the central aims of the local turn in a theoretically informed manner, advocating for and enabling a context-specific approach towards peace and peacebuilding.

Randazzo’s arguments for rethinking peace are further exemplified in the edited volume entitled *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue* by Hinton Laban, Shani, and Alberg. This volume was integral to the development of this thesis and has served as both an inspiration and guiding framework in its induction and development. The book emerged from the Rethinking Peace project and was developed out of the final conference

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid: p. 142.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

of the project at Tokyo Christian University. The keynote speakers of the conference (Ashis Nandy, Shin Chiba, and Johan Galtung), attest to the diversity and inclusivity of the attempts to rethink peace made across the chapters it contains. Not only do these scholars represent a diversity of understandings of peace and peacebuilding, but also understandings developed from variegated cultural and geographical backgrounds. According to the editors, these speakers were invited due to both their pioneering work in establishing peace studies as a discipline and their diversified questioning of the assumptions upon which it is based.³⁵⁵ The book reflects the commitments to a diversity of perspectives and approaches demonstrated in this foundational conference, uniting scholars from different backgrounds and disciplines in a common commitment to rethink peace, asking the questions “what does it mean to rethink peace?”, and “what needs to be rethought (in peace studies)?”.³⁵⁶ As such, the chapters do not provide a definitive or singular answer, instead loosely focusing around generative, open-ended, and processual approaches to peace,³⁵⁷ a process which this thesis has incorporated through the idea of an approach *towards* understandings and practices of peace, as the methodological chapter of this thesis will make clear. The authors within *Rethinking Peace* attempt “to subvert what is taken for granted and naturalized in the study of peace and IR and, by so doing, to imagine new paths forward for an interdisciplinary field of peace studies”.³⁵⁸ This is a core aspect of what is understood in this literature review as rethinking peace in the spaces beyond the dominant approaches; subverting these approaches and imagining a multitude of alternative ways forward in their stead. In this capacity, the chapters within the volume focus upon ideas such as silence, relationality, a consideration of graphic narratives, and alternative writing and representational styles as a means of rethinking peace.³⁵⁹ They highlight and interrogate the normativity and teleology of peace, built upon a foundational critique of particular aspects common to conceptualisations of the liberal and, to some extent, post-liberal peace. The basis of this critical perspective is outlined in the introduction of the volume:

³⁵⁵ Alberg, Jeremiah et al, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Peace Studies’, in Alberg, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. xiii.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Ibid: p. xiv.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Alberg, Jeremiah et al, ‘Introduction: Rethinking Peace Studies’, in Alberg, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. xiv.

First, peace is often *hypostasized*, or imagined as a substance or concrete reality (e.g., a 'thing' as opposed to a dynamic process). Second, peace is often assumed to have a *teleology*, or end point (as opposed to being open and multidirectional). Third, this *telos* is often intertwined with a set of *normative* goods, ones often linked to a particular genealogy and the Judeo-Christian tradition (as opposed to alternative traditions and beliefs that, if sometimes acknowledged, are largely pushed out of sight).³⁶⁰

This fundamental critique is one adopted, advanced, and employed by this thesis through the notion of optionality. As the theoretical framework chapter will explore in greater detail, optionality builds upon this critical framework, standing in direct opposition to the hypostatisation of peace and peacebuilding, instead providing the theoretical underpinnings for a dynamic process of peace in the form of peace-through-optionality. The seeds of optionality can also be observed in the opposition to teleological understandings of peace and the provision of normative goods relating to Western constructions and traditions this book develops. Optionality aims to develop a multi-directional, unobstructed approach to peacebuilding which, rather than being built upon the imposition of external understandings and practices, is an *approach towards* specific contexts and an open basis for developing peaceful relations built upon the ideas and activities within. However, in *Rethinking Peace*, these ideas form a general basis upon which the diverse approaches towards and considerations of peace and peacebuilding build, with diverse authors adding their own ideas, particular perspectives, and novel approaches. This thesis employs the notion of optionality in a manner which not only brings the bases of these critical perspectives together but does so in relation to a concrete empirical example. *Rethinking Peace* demonstrates the breadth and capacity of theory in relation to the process of rethinking peace, and the potential of novel and diverse perspectives to contribute to this process. This thesis intends to contribute to this debate through developing and presenting optionality as one such novel approach. However, the intention is also to go beyond the outline of only a theoretical addition, but to demonstrate the approach and application of this theory in a particular empirical context.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

The book is split into four sections that demonstrate this breadth and capacity, highlighting the diversity of approaches and avenues within the literature attempting to rethink peace: these are *discourse, memory and temporality, translation, and dialogue*. The section on discourse is begun by Ashis Nandy's contribution; *The Inner Battles of Peace Studies: The Limits and Possibilities*.³⁶¹ In this chapter, Nandy compares the black holes of astrophysics with the 'black holes' of political science and international relations, highlighting the issues and events, experiences and perspectives that are "pushed towards extinction" within peace studies.³⁶² He attempts to "acknowledge the underside of peace studies – the disposable subjectivities and noncultures ignored, exiled, or museumed as irrelevant".³⁶³ Details of everyday life, emotions, values, theories of social transformation, visions of an ideal society, and experiences of suffering are lost from myriad cultures as "they do not match the official expectations from a proper sub-discipline spawned by political science and IR".³⁶⁴ Nandy suggests that the role of human subjectivities has been underestimated, and proposes that peace studies should be liberated from these limitations and impositions.³⁶⁵ He argues that this liberation lies in peace studies "freeing itself from the clutches of the dominant cultures of political science and IR and acquiring the self-confidence to walk a lonelier, more ambitious path".³⁶⁶ He thus argues for an opening-up of discourse surrounding the questions of peace, setting the foundation for an approach that makes room for alternative, subjugated, or otherwise marginalised discourses in order to engender a genuine rethinking of peace. This is something that sits at the core of optionality as an approach, as the theoretical framework chapter will outline in depth.

The second avenue highlighted within *Rethinking Peace* is memory and temporality. Leigh Payne writes an excellent chapter here concerning silence. She suggests that silence, when chosen and not imposed, has the power to facilitate effective expression and to protect. "its power to communicate advances the memory politics of – and promotion of peace through

³⁶¹ Nandy, Ashis, 'The Inner Battles of Peace Studies: The Limits and Possibilities' in Albergh, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. 5-14.

³⁶² Ibid: p. 5.

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid: p. 10.

³⁶⁶ Ibid: p. 11.

– ‘never again!’’.³⁶⁷ In remembering past violence, sometimes silence is the only way to communicate lived horrors, providing a more effective means of expressing past events, and some silences protect victims of violence by providing protection from additional, greater harms.³⁶⁸ In addition, silence is sometimes the only way of speaking out when living in oppressive, dangerous conditions, such as authoritarian regimes. She gives an example of the silent vigil: stencils of bicycles used by disappeared students still appear on the walls of Rosario in Argentina; “quiet bones from the Cambodian killing fields are still piled up at the former Tuol Sleng prison”; and in Santiago, Chile, outside the former Villa Grimaldi Torture Centre, rose bushes have been planted and named after women tortured there.³⁶⁹ Silent reflections such as these represent the enormity of loss and grief,³⁷⁰ expressing “what is not there, what is no longer with us, what continues to have power over us in memory”.³⁷¹ In these ways, silence can be a speech act: a silent expression of something that cannot always be vocalised.³⁷² Silence can also be a subversive act for victims of violence and suffering: violence begets violence, and therefore living with silence and the pretence of not knowing can protect against the reoccurrence of violence after the fact.³⁷³ Payne highlights the everyday recognitions of the power of silence, such as ‘there are no words’ and ‘I am speechless’, showing the power of silence to express things that words sometimes cannot. This chapter demonstrates a starkly different approach to the one expounded in this thesis, as the focus of optionality is upon the negotiation of difference through dialogue. However, it attests to the diversity of efforts to rethink peace.

Translation is introduced in the book by Jeremiah Alberg. He posits a reflection on the notion of dialogue in relation to the pursuit of peace, and the way in which we ‘translate’ identities determines whether what gets through after the changes and transformation inherent to the process has a valid claim to standing for the original.³⁷⁴ Translation presumes a lack of mutual understanding and works to overcome this with the knowledge that this might

³⁶⁷ Payne, Leigh A., ‘Silence: Do Not Confuse It with Any Kind of Absence’, in Alberg, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. 109.

³⁶⁸ Ibid: p. 109-110.

³⁶⁹ Ibid: p. 111.

³⁷⁰ Ibid: p. 112.

³⁷¹ Ibid: p. 113.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid: p. 117.

³⁷⁴ Alberg, Jeremiah, ‘Rethinking Peace: Translation’, in Alberg, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. 123.

replace this lack of understanding with positive misunderstanding, leaving parties in a worse position.³⁷⁵ “The road to mutual understanding is always long and almost always crooked. We do not move from mutual incomprehension to comprehension except through miscomprehension”³⁷⁶ However, translation in this capacity can still ‘get the message through’, preserving identity in the midst of change and allowing communication.³⁷⁷ Translation can thus be seen in Alberg’s discussion as an essential part of any process moving towards peace, as this process is fundamentally about the negotiation of differences and occurs across manifold contexts and a diversity of languages – “we cannot ignore those who deserve a place at the table but do not understand the language being spoken at that table”.³⁷⁸ A consideration of translation is thus presented as fundamental in rethinking peace beyond the mere imposition of dominant, European approaches and in making the endeavour inclusive, non-essentialist, and non-instrumental.

The final section addresses this issue in greater depth under the heading *dialogue*. Morgan Brigg’s chapter provides an excellent example of such considerations. He posits the (re)conceptualisation of human difference and a fundamental challenge for peace and conflict studies, arguing that the predominant approaches, built upon European-derived scholarship approaches, limit conceptions of difference to substantialist and identarian approaches.³⁷⁹ Seeing difference in substantialist terms renders the social world a series of things and entities that are internally consistent, having an intrinsic substance that sets them apart from one another.³⁸⁰ This thinking is also identarian, suggesting that such ‘things’ converge wholly and exclusively with themselves. This heritage, he argues, has limited conceptions of difference in peace and conflict studies, which have since conceived of individuals, social groups, organisations, and nation-states as discrete things.³⁸¹ This has stifled thinking about difference in the field. Instead, he posits that “cultures, religions and groups are not internally consistent or mutually exclusive”, and that such dominant

³⁷⁵ Ibid: p. 124

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid: 125.

³⁷⁸ Ibid: p. 123.

³⁷⁹ Brigg, Morgan, ‘From Substantialist to Relational Difference in Peace and Conflict Studies’, in Alberg, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. 191.

³⁸⁰ Brigg, Morgan, ‘From Substantialist to Relational Difference in Peace and Conflict Studies’, in Alberg, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. 191.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

substantialist approaches have crowded out other approaches *towards* human diversity, domesticating and suppressing the differences of diverse peoples in the schema of European knowledge.³⁸² He proposes a rethinking of difference by conceptualising it not in these terms, but as something simultaneously *relational* and *essential*. To do this he identifies four sources of inspiration for such an approach. These are: the burgeoning relationality scholarship; Indigenous traditions; foundational thinking in the conflict resolution field; and feminist scholarship.³⁸³ Realising a relational-essential approach requires “demoting the sovereign knower in peace and conflict studies in order to return to the world and enter into exchange and relation with diverse peoples and their knowledges”.³⁸⁴ This foundational approach to rethinking peace can also be seen in the work of Hartmut Behr concerning phenomenological peace.

The core argument made by Behr suggests that difference(s) should be perceived in a non-essentialised manner, allowing the development of a view towards, and practice of acting upon, difference in a manner conducive to peaceful relations.³⁸⁵ This is built upon “a phenomenological reading of the problem of difference”, understanding difference to be an irreducible, experientially founded aspect of all social and political relations and thus developing an approach to peace in difference through the maxim of political dialogue through a phenomenological lens.³⁸⁶ Behr frames the contributions of this article as towards the critique of the liberal peace in terms of its essentialising of difference and imposition of a universal script, yet also suggests that issues remain in the post-liberal critique regarding their understanding of and approach towards difference. Although the article sympathises with the post-liberal critique, sharing its critical stance regarding the liberal peace (outlined in previous sections), the notion of peace-in-difference is framed as contributing “a novel ontology and epistemology of peace thinking and peace practice that a post-liberal perspective does not yet include in its yet very important critique”.³⁸⁷ The article thus goes

³⁸² Ibid: p. 191-192.

³⁸³ Ibid: p. 192.

³⁸⁴ Ibid.

³⁸⁵ Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace in Difference: A Phenomenological Approach to Peace Through Difference’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 335. See also Behr’s similar and related contribution to the previously referenced book entitled ‘Rethinking Peace’: Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace-in-Difference: Peace through Dialogue about and across Difference(s)’, in Albergh, Jeremiah et al, *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield: 2019): p. 173-190.

³⁸⁶ Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace in Difference: A Phenomenological Approach to Peace Through Difference’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 336.

³⁸⁷ Ibid: p. 345.

beyond a simple direct critique of the liberal and post-liberal approaches which previous examples demonstrate, providing a whole new way to addressing the nature of, and path towards, peaceful relations. The article therefore demonstrates another aspect of the literature, concerning the rethinking of peace, which the spaces beyond are comprised of. Although it provides a novel critical perspective based upon a phenomenological perspective, the article also develops a novel way of approaching the issue of peace which expands upon the foundations of the post-liberal critique. In this manner, the article rethinks the question of peace from a novel theoretical perspective and, in its own words, is part of a process of “going beyond”³⁸⁸ the preceding predominant understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding.

The seeds of optionality are again evident in this approach to rethinking peace, as both share fundamental aims and a core approach towards peacebuilding. Both aim to open-up spaces for the articulation of difference built upon free and positive dialogue, providing the theoretical foundations for this dialogue in a manner which exceeds the limitations of the liberal/post-liberal binary and culminates in a form of ‘dialogue-for-peace’.

Methodologically, optionality adopts and develops the principles of the phenomenological approach to peace, focusing on situated knowledge and the interrogation and interlocution of diverse ontologies and epistemologies in concrete post-conflict contexts in a manner profoundly sensitive to those contexts. This thesis, however, employs optionality in a manner in which phenomenological peace as yet to be employed: in the field and actively in relation to existing understandings and practices of peace. Optionality thus not only contributes a novel theoretical framework which supports and builds upon that of phenomenological peace but helps to bridge the gap between such theoretical considerations of peace and empirical research concerning actual understandings and practices of peacebuilding.

Lastly, another important branch within the scholarship concerned with rethinking peace can be found in feminist approaches. These approaches are of course very diverse in nature, and span manifold issues and divergent approaches to them. However, a brief and partial summary will be provided here to show the main streams and contributions of these approaches. Many of these approaches “explore peace, security, and feminism as interlinked”, asking questions about “what peace means or could mean when it is attendant

³⁸⁸ Ibid: p. 335.

to the everyday lives of women and girls”.³⁸⁹ In a similar fashion to some of the approaches outlined above, this demonstrates a focus upon situated knowledge and lived experience, examining the conditions of knowledge and epistemic hierarchies. In this way, feminist approaches can often diverge “from a state-centric, neoliberal, neocolonial and patriarchal concept of peace”, building upon the notion of intersectionality as an approach towards power.³⁹⁰ They expose the invisibility of women and their lived experiences in conflict and peacebuilding, deconstructing notions of women as victims and stereotypes of women as peaceable rather than political leaders.³⁹¹ A feminist peace in these terms thus offers “more radical possibilities in untangling complex and interlocking structures of violence and insecurity, beyond what might be traditionally defined within ‘conflict’ and ‘post-conflict’ settings”.³⁹² While there is a spectrum of approaches within feminist approaches towards rethinking peace, “a unifying aspect... is how they are attendant to everyday life and the intersecting oppressions that shape individual and collective security”;³⁹³ themes that can be found within the wider efforts to rethink peace too.

In exploring the considerations of conflict, along with the liberal and post-liberal approaches towards peace in general and in relation to Kyrgyzstan, this critical literature review has sought to establish the problems with these approaches, the need to rethink peace, and the position of optionality in relation to this. The following chapter propounds the concept of optionality, presenting it as the theoretical framework of this thesis through the detailing of its theoretical foundations and conceptual character. Later chapters will apply optionality to the Kyrgyz context, demonstrating the contributions of this thesis in applying such a novel concept to expand and develop the academic study of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan itself.

³⁸⁹ Smith, Sandra and Yoshida, Keina, ‘Introduction: Conversations on Feminist Peace’ in Smith, Sandra and Yoshida, Keina, (eds.), *Feminist Conversations on Peace*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022): p. 1.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid: p. 3.

³⁹² Ibid: p. 4.

³⁹³ Ibid.

PART TWO: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, METHODOLOGY, AND METHODS

Chapter Three - The Theoretical Framework: Expounding Optionality.

This chapter explores and expounds the concept of 'optionality' through a reading mainly of the works of Hans J. Morgenthau and Hannah Arendt, the former as a means of grounding the concept in the epistemological, the latter in the arena of political practice. Optionality can be summarised as the ability, (both recognised as pre-existent within the human condition and, as a result, intended to be facilitated politically) of individuals to choose how to 'be', allowing the perennial construction of individual 'life-worlds' in a contingent and temporal manner. Such a conception stands in opposition to all totalities and standardising practices and aims to enable the unfolding of the inherent plurality of distinct 'personal contexts' through an understanding of epistemic perspectivity. Optionality influences the methodology and methods of this thesis, is employed as a critical device in relation to existing understandings and practices of peace and is developed as a reconstructive norm for peacebuilding as the conditions of the possibility for peace. The focus of this chapter, therefore, is upon presenting the general concept of optionality, allowing subsequent chapters to develop and apply the concept. However, the conclusions of this chapter will present the foundations of optionality as a critical device, reconstructive norm, and as the proposed conditions of the possibility for peace.

With regards to the authors used, Karl Mannheim's notion of *Standortgebundenheit* and its adoption in Hans J. Morgenthau will be explored in order to form an epistemological base for optionality. This will be done through the understanding of epistemic perspectivity which emerges through his application of *Standortgebundenheit*, alongside his conception of the 'human condition of politics'. This will bring such understandings down to the level of the individual, facilitating the understanding of epistemic perspectivity on the individual level,

and thus concluding with a recognition of the epistemic human condition elaborated by Morgenthau as the epistemological foundation for optionality.

Its foundation in political practice, pursued through Hannah Arendt, will begin with her conception of 'action'. Action will be understood as comprising of two further notions, those of human plurality and natality, which, all understood together, will create a second foundation of optionality. Humans are cognised by Arendt as possessing an intrinsic uniqueness/distinctness, in opposition to animals, which gives action meaning; without this plurality, human action would be an "unnecessary luxury". This plurality is conditioned by an understanding of natality. Natality refers to the beginning inherent in human birth, and the ensuing human capacity to inaugurate 'something new', enacting their free choice of action(s). Human plurality, alongside the condition and capacity of natality will be understood together as the basis of optionality in political practice. This chapter will then finish by bringing these together before presenting the foundations of optionality as a critical device, reconstructive norm, and as conditions of the possibility for peace.

3.1 - Cognising Optionality³⁹⁴

A brief and introductory discussion of the intended meaning of the term 'optionality' is required. Terminologically, optionality is employed little within academic literature. The few explicit examples suggest optionality to be merely "the overall ability to do, choose or achieve things... defined as the possession of open options".³⁹⁵ Although this is somewhat incorporated in the understandings presented within this thesis, I hope to develop a conception possessing greater depth and profundity through the works of three specific and expansive authors. Expressed in the form of a single sentence, optionality should be understood as: *The ability, (both recognised as a potential existing within the human condition and, as a result, intended to be facilitated politically) of individuals to choose how to 'be', allowing the perennial construction of individual 'life-worlds' in a contingent manner and standing in opposition to all totalities, functionalities, and standardising practices, enabling the unfolding of the inherent plurality of distinct personal contexts.*

³⁹⁴ The following chapter is developed from my master's thesis. Although it contains many additions and has been substantially reworked, some sections have been included ad verbatim.

³⁹⁵ Ramaswamy, Sushila, *Political Theory: Ideas and Concepts*, (Delhi: PHI Learning Private Ltd., 2014): p. 295.

At its core, optionality is an attempt to 'unobstruct' political discussion surrounding the fundamental order of things: it serves as a critical and reconstructive project functioning prior to epistemological assumptions and political parameters, opening-up discourse and facilitating free deliberative thought and action. Optionality thus facilitates a plurality of 'options' within epistemology and political practice through which the individual is free to 'choose how to be' in togetherness with others. Knowledge and political practice are opened-up to deliberation in a process opposed to obstructive assumptions, functionalities and totalities. Optionality (in its 'pure' form) can therefore be seen as a conceptual embodiment of epistemic/political possibility, revealing and enabling a total plurality of epistemic and political 'options' and allowing the contingent construction of individual life-worlds and the political structures/systems beyond. Optionality is normatively proposed as the conceptual vehicle of an epistemic and political 'unobstruction', providing a means of epistemological and political orientation for the self through togetherness and shared life-worlds. In this regard, optionality creates a 'non-presumptive agency': an agency existing prior to assumptions and maintaining an open individual in relation to each political and epistemic 'encounter'. Each new encounter is understood as a new beginning and creation of meaning, with circumstance and context possessing a deep importance. One cannot rely on, and should normatively reconsider, any knowledge presumed to be 'established' and its corollary of 'necessary' political practice; we must begin from/with something new, enabling epistemic perspectivity and facilitating the inherent plurality of human thought and action. Once established, optionality functions beyond the individual level, impacting politics on a collective level through epistemology and the innate 'togetherness' of political practice, as will become evident through the proceeding exploration of Morgenthau and Arendt.

Here, we can see the seeds of optionality as the conditions of the possibility for peace. In this capacity, optionality is the conceptual amalgamation of an *approach towards peace*, providing the conditions for a space in which there can be an open and unobstructed dialogue for peace. Optionality conditions such a space by rejecting epistemological assumptions and pre-determined political parameters which limit considerations of the plurality of understandings and practices of peace. The operationalisation of optionality in a concrete conflict context aims to open-up discourse, facilitating and maintaining plurality, perspectivity, and situated knowledge in a manner sensitive to the particularity of contexts. By recognising and enabling a plurality of understandings and practices of peace, the

contextual contingency of knowledge, and operating against epistemic impositions, totalising approaches to peace, and the instrumentalisation of conflict parties, optionality establishes the conditions of the possibility for peace. Optionality thus rejects blanket templates for peace, such as that presented as the liberal peace, which ignore the particularity of contexts, the context-boundness of understandings and practices of peace and impose a pre-determined path to peace without empathy towards the other.

As the conditions of the possibility for peace, optionality can be summarised as functioning on two levels: as a critical device and reconstructive norm. As a critical device, optionality detects and deciphers totalising/standardising/functionalising practices: it begins prior to the epistemological and political assumptions upon which they are formed, examining the attribution of meaning itself and opening a space for alternatives. As such, it combats both standardising practices of peace and, totalising and functionalising claims to fixed knowledge, critically expanding the understanding of the parameters under which existing approaches to peace exist. Essentially, optionality facilitates the discussion of assumptions and antagonistic meanings in relation to questions of knowledge and practice, acting as an ‘unobstructing’ critical device. Critique, nevertheless, always requires a foundational normative background, necessitating a reconstructive vision through which it becomes balanced.³⁹⁶ Optionality is thus manifest in parallel as a reconstructive norm. In this capacity, optionality serves to enable plurality, conceptualised through Arendt, as an alternative to ideologization, recognising the ‘context/situation-boundness’ (*standortgebunden*) nature of knowledge presented through Mannheim and Morgenthau. It facilitates a non-presumptive agency from which a rethinking of peace can begin, existing as the normative conceptual foundation for this reconstructive process. However, we cannot discuss the limitations of concrete approaches to peace and practices of peacebuilding in a concrete context, and the potentiality of alternatives within that context, without first establishing the theoretical foundations of optionality.

³⁹⁶ Without a normative foundation, critique appears nihilistic and purposeless; a normative reconstructive vision is understood in this thesis as being both necessary for effective critique and, above all, inherent to the process of deconstruction itself. However, this raises many questions and refers us to a gigantic field of study which, unfortunately, cannot be pursued due to word constraints. However, an exploration of the relationship between the position of critical device and reconstructive norm, and deconstruction and normativity, would be both of great intellectual interest and also a great addition to the discussion and understanding of optionality.

3.2 - A Beginning

An additional consideration which adds clarity to his preliminary outline of optionality is the notion of *beginning*.³⁹⁷ A question inherent to the study of politics, indeed to any endeavour, is 'where to begin?' Aristotle stated that "we must begin from what is known", claiming that certain aspects of knowledge exist within human thought "without qualification".³⁹⁸ Certain 'facts' are plain to the observer and do not require explanation. Such a view of epistemological beginning has come to epitomise the 'Western' tradition,³⁹⁹ and it is such a view that optionality stands against. An illuminating notion for optionality in this regard can be found in Edward Said's notion of the 'intransitive beginning'.

In its most basic sense, a beginning is the initial start-point of *having begun* something in space and time.⁴⁰⁰ However, for Said beginning is not merely such an *action*; 'it is also a frame of mind, a kind of work, an attitude, a consciousness. It is pragmatic... and it is theoretic'.⁴⁰¹ Said further develops this understanding of beginning into two related distinctions: that of the intransitive, 'pure' beginning, and a transitive, problem/project-directed beginning.⁴⁰² The former notion conceives of beginning as a 'radical starting point'; in other words, a beginning which has no object but its constant clarification – "a beginning *at the beginning for the beginning*".⁴⁰³ The latter is a beginning with/for an anticipated end, possessing the expectation of continuity:⁴⁰⁴ it is enacted in the process of a rational mind intervening in a rational activity, such as when a historian wishes to write a history of x and must identify a suitable point from which to begin the task.⁴⁰⁵ In the context of this thesis, we are interested in the former conception. As outlined, Said conceives of such a beginning as a "*radical starting point*";⁴⁰⁶ as the ultimate, tautological beginning,⁴⁰⁷ one which Said recognises as "our permanent concession as finite minds to an ungraspable absolute".⁴⁰⁸

³⁹⁷ 'Beginning' here is understood in relation to Edward Said's conception of 'intransitive beginning' in *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (see also the related discussion in Hartmut Behr's *Epistemologies of Peace: Politics of Difference*).

³⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1959): 1095^a17, p. 5.

³⁹⁹ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 95.

⁴⁰⁰ Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975): p. xiii.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid: p. xi.

⁴⁰² Ibid: p. 50.

⁴⁰³ Ibid: p. 73.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975): p. 50.

⁴⁰⁶ Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975): p. 73.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid: p. 73-77.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid: p. 77.

Ideas of intransitive beginnings challenge all continuities which charge cheerfully forward with faith in the possession of a perceived 'fixed' beginning.⁴⁰⁹ Instead the intransitive beginning envisions and creates alternatives to the established/fixed meanings and notions which have conditioned social and political relations.⁴¹⁰ Said, referring to such a beginning, writes that, "we must deal with the unknown whose nature is by definition speculative".⁴¹¹

A beginning, then, is necessarily the first step in the production of meaning: the pure intransitive beginning is the very first production of such meaning,⁴¹² prior to assumptive or totalising constructions. It is about *making* and *producing difference*.⁴¹³ As a result, it can be conceptualised as a task or creative and productive *process*, one which is aware of the existence of (and relations among) differences. It therefore does not seek to extinguish difference, but to maintain and cultivate it.⁴¹⁴ Such beginnings are necessarily creative and productive, being an initial start-point that must inevitably develop and manufacture difference through the creative production which invariably stems from such a start-point. The intransitive beginning thus endlessly reproduces difference, on the understanding that any attempt to suppress or unify difference constitutes a practice of political violence.⁴¹⁵ A *prioris*, including paradigms and ideologies, are understood in this process as tools for silencing discourse.⁴¹⁶ Consequently intransitive beginnings, through the production of meaning and difference, envision alternatives to the existing meanings which have conditioned social and political relations, serving as the vehicle for alternate constructions.⁴¹⁷ They are "hypotheses about, and creations of, other ways of being"; an alternative to established hegemonic, hierarchical and violent modes and achieving such a vision through temporalized, de-essentialised and transformative understandings towards the plurality of difference and the creation of critical and open-ended discourse.⁴¹⁸ Beginning as a process therefore must consist, in part, of the performance of a "ceaseless criticality and self-criticality as the practice of an ethics of responsibility to the infinity of

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁴¹⁰ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 97.

⁴¹¹ Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975): p. 75

⁴¹² Ibid: p. 5.

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p.96.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid: p. 97.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid: p. 99.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid: p. 97.

⁴¹⁸ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p.97.

differences”, as the silencing of a critical discourse harms such an infinity.⁴¹⁹ In short, intransitive beginnings serve “to create and envision alternatives to those meanings which have conditioned social and political relations” through the recreation and production of meaning and difference.⁴²⁰

Optionality can be more expansively understood in relation to this discussion of intransitive beginning; at its foundation, it is a process of beginning itself. The above understanding cognises beginning as the first step in the creation and inauguration of other productions of meaning, manifest as a creative and productive process which cultivates and maintains difference. This is the core of optionality as the conditions of the possibility for peace. The space for open and unobstructed dialogue curated and conditioned by optionality is intended to enable such beginnings, presenting the cultivation of difference and, therefore, necessary inclusion of situated knowledges as the prerequisite of sustainable, positive peace. The intransitive beginning also occurs as a performance of ceaseless criticality, practicing an ethics of responsibility towards such an infinity of difference⁴²¹ in a manner opposed to assumptive and totalising practices. The intransitive beginning is, therefore, not merely a hypothesis about, but the actual creation of, “other ways of being”.⁴²²

Optionality approaches epistemology and political practice as a series of fresh encounters, constituting such a process of perennial beginning. At its procedural foundation, optionality functions as a beginning through its position as a critical device and reconstructive norm. The cultivation, maintenance and responsibility towards the infinity of difference therein can be observed in optionality as the recognition of the inherently open-ended nature of meaning within questions of epistemology and political practice; although these are often presented in a totalised/fixed form, they possess the capacity to contain an infinite ‘difference’ of content, one which optionality recognises and facilitates as a process of constant beginning. As a critical device optionality, in the same manner as the intransitive beginning, is against *a prioris* and is performed as a ceaseless critical project. In terms of its position as a reconstructive norm, it envisions new and alternative ways of being, creating the capacity to ‘begin again’ and thus reconstruct. The normative core of optionality thus aims to open-up and unobstruct the dialogical process of building peace through cultivating

⁴¹⁹ Ibid: p. 98.

⁴²⁰ Ibid: p. 97.

⁴²¹ Ibid: p. 98.

⁴²² Ibid.

a process of intransitive beginnings. It is, therefore, a mode of beginning which enables free deliberative thinking in the context of a plurality of discourse. As a critical device, optionality detects and deciphers epistemic and political assumptions in the manner of a perennial critical 'beginning', recognising the inherent plurality of meaning, facilitating the creation of alternative meanings and thus the ability of conflict parties to express and negotiate their differences.

3.3 - Why Mannheim, Morgenthau, and Arendt?

Before the theoretical exploration and grounding of optionality in the works of Morgenthau and Arendt can commence, a brief methodological reflection regarding the choice of authors and method of textual interpretation is required. Firstly, a reflection on the decision to use Arendt, Mannheim and Morgenthau is essential. As academic writers, we are the products of certain sociologies of knowledge: both reading and writing are conditioned by, and bound to cultural, political, and historical circumstances, including personal and group interests.⁴²³ This notion is represented in the work of authors such as Karl Mannheim, who makes the claim that modes of thought themselves cannot be understood if their social origins remain obscured.⁴²⁴ Instead, thought must be comprehended "in the concrete setting of an historical-social situation"⁴²⁵ through an investigation of the social determination of thinking itself.⁴²⁶

Therefore, the decision we make regarding our area of study, conceptual or ideational focus, and choice of authors in whom we found our understandings, is directly related to our existing knowledge and socio-political context. My initial selection of Morgenthau and Arendt stems from a pre-existing familiarity with their works and the fact that my understanding of optionality emerged through a reading of them. I am open to the suggestion that alternative authors may also be employed to explicate the concept of optionality. However, such alternatives must be able to ground optionality with the same

⁴²³ Behr, Hartmut and Kirke, Xander, 'People on the Move – Ideas on the Move: Academic Cultures and the Question of Translatability in the Humanities and Social Sciences', in Röscher, Felix, (ed.), *Émigré Scholars and the Genesis of American International Relations: A European Discipline in America?* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): p 21-22.

⁴²⁴ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1976): p. 2.

⁴²⁵ Ibid: p. 3.

⁴²⁶ Ibid: p. 239.

level of profundity which is achieved through Morgenthau and Arendt, something which is explored later in this section. Although I cannot make the claim that they are the best possible means of providing a theoretical foundation for optionality, I believe both authors provide important and profound theoretical insights and that they are more relevant to optionality than other authors I am familiar with. Since their writings were central to my own formulation of optionality, they are, in my eyes, integral to it. Here, a quote from Mannheim is particularly apt:

Every formulation of a problem is made possible only by a previous actual human experience which involves such a problem... (and) in selection from the multiplicity of data there is involved an act of will on the part of the knower... forces arising out of living experience are significant in the direction which the treatment of the problem follows.⁴²⁷

Nevertheless, an explanation of *how* their writings were integral to my formulation of optionality, and *why* their work was more relevant to the ideas it espouses than other theorists, is an important consideration. This is the result of the interconnections between these authors; the ways in which their ideas not only compliment but also further develop one another. These interconnections and the ideas that emerge from this process is the foundation for optionality.

Mannheim provides the epistemological basis for optionality through his exploration and elaboration of the temporal and spatial contingency of knowledge. As the following section demonstrates, his work shows how knowledge is bound to the context of its formulation and expression and is neither universal nor objective. It must be understood in light of this context and is inherently pluralistic as a result of the multiplicity of contexts in which it can be developed and expressed. Morgenthau's work explicitly builds upon Mannheim's ideas in this regard. He elaborates upon this spatial and temporal contingency, pointing towards the inherent plurality of meaning(s) in questions of epistemology. His work can be seen as furnishing Mannheim's foundational ideas with an understanding of epistemic perspectivity, something which he roots in what he terms *the human condition of politics*. In this way, Morgenthau presents human beings as the architects of this contingency. Arendt's work connects to Morgenthau's in this regard. She further develops this idea in *The Human*

⁴²⁷ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1968): p. 240.

Condition and presents a clear image of its denial and antithesis in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt explores this human condition of politics highlighted by Morgenthau through the notions of plurality and natality, further developing this idea and giving it considerable depth. These ideas form the political foundations for optionality. *On Totalitarianism* explores the conditions in which these fundamental conditions are denied, and thus the epistemological considerations of Mannheim and Morgenthau are repudiated.

Together, these authors and the interconnections observed through my symptomatic reading of them form the epistemological and political foundations for optionality. The discussions within their works not only compliment but develop one another. The concerns that they identify and the way in which these concerns interrelate and mutually progress each other demonstrates their fundamental importance to optionality. Other authors which I am familiar with would not have come together in such a productive and illuminating manner and would not have formed a cohesive whole in the same way. My reading of their works developed a progression of ideas, building from epistemological foundations that emphasise the contingency of knowledge to considerations of the human condition and inherent human plurality. This reading and the connections identified forms the basis and development of optionality itself, and other authors would have been less effective, in my perspective, than these three. However, I am open to the idea that the ideas expressed by optionality are evident in many others work and could have been developed in interesting and illuminating ways through them.

Finally, a reflection upon the method of textual interpretation is required. This thesis will pursue a 'symptomatic' (or 'relational') reading of Morgenthau and Arendt.⁴²⁸ Such a reading consists of three things: firstly, political and philosophical thinking regarding the interpreted text based on anti-essentialist ontologies - that is, allowing for a criticality of rationalities of unity and ideas of *essence* regarding the text. Secondly, it requires a guiding question/perspective to be in mind and to be applied in interpretation. Lastly, there must be an ethics of interpretation.⁴²⁹ According to Althusser, "there are no innocent readings... every reading merely reflects in its lessons and rules the real culprit: the conception of

⁴²⁸ As outlined in Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar's *Reading Capital* and elaborated upon in the related discussion in Behr's *Politics of Difference*.

⁴²⁹ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 17.

knowledge underlying the object of knowledge which makes knowledge what it is".⁴³⁰ The guiding question applied in symptomatic reading serves as a recognition of this lack of innocence, allowing the production of a deep problematic in the text which otherwise would have existed only allusively.⁴³¹ The questions and perspectives applied to this problematic make the objects of our study visible: in this case, the question of optionality reveals such a problematic within Mannheim, Morgenthau and Arendt. A reading must be sought which engages and reveals such problematics in the *oeuvre* of certain authors and drafts a way of engaging them, being inspired instead of enslaved or manipulatively appropriative.⁴³² It breaks from an essentialist 'ideological' reading by revealing what a theoretical field does but cannot see: what it produces, but is unable to describe.⁴³³ This thesis undertakes such a reading through optionality in the works of Mannheim, Morgenthau and Arendt, avoiding systematisation, holisms and 'logical' explanations, and instead pursuing a normative agenda in search of a problematic in a series of texts I recognise as being intrinsically ambiguous and potentially discontinuous.⁴³⁴

3.4 - Optionality, Epistemology and Karl Mannheim

We can now begin to ground optionality within these author's texts, commencing with Mannheim, Morgenthau, and the epistemological foundation of optionality and leading on to Hannah Arendt and its basis in political practice. *Standortgebundenheit*, presented as the central concept in this foundation, will be incorporated into optionality through the notions of epistemic perspectivity and individual 'contextualisation', both of which will be elaborated through Karl Mannheim and Morgenthau's related texts. These authors are understood here as being representative of a particular mode of political thought which considers knowledge to be a product of specific historical, social and political circumstances, instead of postulating universals and ideas of objective 'reality'.⁴³⁵ This mode of thought is represented as having

⁴³⁰ Althusser, Louis and Balibar, Étienne, *Reading Capital*, (London: NLB, 1970): p. 34-35.

⁴³¹ Ibid: p. 32.

⁴³² Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 17-18.

⁴³³ Solomon, Samuel, 'L'espacement de la lecture: Althusser, Derrida, and the Theory of Reading, *Décalages*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2, (2013): p. 15.

⁴³⁴ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 21-22.

⁴³⁵ Behr, Hartmut and Heath, Amelia, 'Misreading in IR Theory and Critique: Morgenthau, Waltz and neo-realism', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 35, Iss. 02, (2009): p. 331.

emerged in Mannheim's work, influencing and being subsequently developed in Morgenthau. Although Morgenthau only referred to his Mannheimian influence on three occasions, (firstly in a talk entitled *The Intellectual and Political Functions of a Theory of International Relations*, given at the University of Maryland in 1961,⁴³⁶ secondly in his trilogy of 'Politics in the 20th Century', and lastly in a single footnote in 'Politics Among Nations'),⁴³⁷ "his entire work reflects that his epistemology is strongly influenced... by Mannheim's concept of *Standortgebundenheit*".⁴³⁸ Morgenthau even met Mannheim in the 1920's at the *Frankfurt Institut für Sozialforschung*, and his book *Ideology and Utopia* had a lasting effect upon his thought and work.⁴³⁹ *Standortgebundenheit* will form the most significant conception for optionality's epistemological foundation yet will be posited alongside other related aspects of Morgenthau's thought, including his critique of positivism and ideology, in order to strengthen this foundation. Preliminarily, *Standortgebundenheit* should be understood as a concept which signifies an awareness of the spatial and temporal conditionality and contingency of knowledge.⁴⁴⁰ Although originally Mannheim's notion, *Standortgebundenheit* is developed by Morgenthau, who provides it with a wider political scope and applicability and thus facilitates a deeper foundation for optionality. In order to achieve this, the concept must be elucidated as it exists in Mannheim's work, in order to develop a complete understanding prior to examining its expansion in Morgenthau.

Mannheim's 1929 book *Ideology and Utopia* contains the principal account of *Standortgebundenheit* within his *oeuvre*.⁴⁴¹ However, in order to fully cognise this notion, it must be understood in relation to the arguments which surround it, and from which Mannheim constructed it. The book is predominantly concerned with examining human thought as it operates in political life, cultivating the understanding that it exists as an "instrument of collective action", and not as it is normally presented in, for example, textbooks on logic.⁴⁴² Mannheim argues that the process of political thinking gains

⁴³⁶ Behr, Hartmut, 'Common Sense', Thomas Reid and Realist Epistemology in Hans J. Morgenthau, *International Politics*, Vol. 50, Iss. 06, (2013): p. 763.

⁴³⁷ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, 'The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau', in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 116.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Jütersonke, Oliver, *Morgenthau, Law and Realism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): p. 151.

⁴⁴⁰ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, 'The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau', in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 116.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Merton, Robert K., 'The Sociology of Knowledge', *Isis*, Vol. 27, Iss. 03, (1937): p. 497.

theoretical concreteness once it is conceived of as conditioned by group interests,⁴⁴³ And was therefore interested in how political thought functions in public life. For too long, he claims, philosophers have only concerned themselves with their own thinking, writing about thought only in terms of their own, through the history of philosophy, or according to specialist fields such as physics or mathematics.⁴⁴⁴ However, an analysis of such modes of thought renders results and observations which are not transferable to other spheres of life: thinking in this manner only refers to specific dimensions of existence, a quality which does not suffice for human beings attempting, as Mannheim is, to comprehend their *world*.⁴⁴⁵ He sought to move away from such grounding of knowledge in the intellectual capacities of the 'knowing subject', instead seeking a solution to what he portrayed as a central problem of modernity.⁴⁴⁶ This problem, which Mannheim refers to as "one of the anomalies of our time", is that the methods of thought by which we make our most crucial decisions and guide our political destiny remaining unrecognised and unanalysed.⁴⁴⁷ We must, he argues, reflect upon the *social roots of knowledge*.⁴⁴⁸ The mental processes of the individual cannot be analysed alone in order to grasp in totality the structure of the intellectual world. Although thought as an instrument of collective action requires the experiences and productive responses of individuals, its structure cannot be found in analysing an integration of such individual experiences.⁴⁴⁹ Mannheim proposes what he refers to as the 'sociology of knowledge' as a means of analysing the wider relationship between knowledge and existence, tracing the forms this relationship has taken in the intellectual development of mankind.⁴⁵⁰ Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is an investigation of ideas with respect to their social determination,⁴⁵¹ building upon the thesis that there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood so long as their social origins remain obscured. As such, the sociology of knowledge:

⁴⁴³ Ascoli, Max, 'On Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia', *Social Research*, Vol. 05, Iss. 01, (1938): p. 101.

⁴⁴⁴ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 1.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Scott, Alan, 'Politics and Method in Mannheim's Ideology and Utopia', *Sociology*, Vol. 21, Iss. 01, (1987): p. 42.

⁴⁴⁷ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 1.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid: p. 5.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid: p. 52.

⁴⁵⁰ Phillips, Derek L., 'Epistemology and the Sociology of Knowledge: The Contributions of Mannheim, Mills and Merton', *Theory and Society*, Vol. 01, Iss. 01, (1974): p. 64.

⁴⁵¹ Coombs, Robert H., 'Karl Mannheim, Epistemology and the Sociology of Knowledge', *The Sociological Quarterly*, Vol. 07, Iss. 02, (1966): p. 233.

Seeks to comprehend thought in the concrete setting of an (sic) historical-social situation out of which individually differentiated thought emerges... it is not men in general who think, or even isolated individuals... but men in certain groups who have developed a particular style of thought in an endless series of responses to certain typical situations characterizing their common position.⁴⁵²

It is this understanding, gained through the sociology of knowledge, which Mannheim employs to solve the apparent 'anomaly of our time', and which forms the basis of *Standortgebundenheit*. However, the sociology of knowledge is, in Mannheim's work, a result of his theory of ideology, which must be explored first to fully cognise the sociology of knowledge and, as a result, *Standortgebundenheit*. In Mannheim's words, "in order to understand the present situation of thought, it is necessary to start with the problems of 'ideology' ".⁴⁵³

In short, Mannheim presents ideology as "divergent and conflicting modes of thought which (unknown to the thinking subject) order the same facts of experience into different systems of thought, and cause them to be perceived through different logical categories".⁴⁵⁴ In this way, an individual's thought becomes analogous to that of fellow group members or those within a particular social stratum.⁴⁵⁵ Ideology is thus the process whereby certain groups construct particular and systematic views of events and the nature of the world itself⁴⁵⁶ in a static definition of reality.⁴⁵⁷ Mannheim gives the example of ruling groups who have become so intensively interest-bound in their thinking that they cannot see certain notions which undermine their sense of domination.⁴⁵⁸ In these situations, the "collective unconscious" of such groups obscures the real conditions of society, thereby stabilising their ideological group perspective.⁴⁵⁹ This insight gives rise to perhaps the most important aspect of Mannheim's discussion of ideology: the observation that human thought arises and

⁴⁵² Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 3.

⁴⁵³ Ibid: p. 49.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid: p. 91.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid: p. 53.

⁴⁵⁶ Ackroyd, Stephen, 'Utopia or Ideology: Utopia and the Place of Theory', *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 50, Iss. 01, (2002): p. 42.

⁴⁵⁷ D'Alton, Steve, 'Ideology – A Static Definition of Reality', *Australian Left Review*, Vol. 01, Iss. 31, (1971): p. 37.

⁴⁵⁸ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 36.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid.

functions only in a sociological milieu, a phenomenon referred to by Mannheim as the “existential determination of thought”.⁴⁶⁰

Mannheim proceeds to “disentangle all the different shades of meaning which are blended... into a pseudo-unity” in ideological thought, making four conceptual distinctions.⁴⁶¹ These distinctions are key to understanding ideology and are central to Mannheim’s text.⁴⁶² In the first, most general sense, he makes a division between the ‘particular’ and ‘total’ conceptions of ideology.⁴⁶³ The ‘particular’ conception is when the term ‘ideology’ “denotes that we are skeptical of the ideas and representations advanced by our opponent”.⁴⁶⁴ It relates to one idea in the total context of ideas,⁴⁶⁵ ascribing socio-historical determination to the motives behind the particular ideas of a particular person.⁴⁶⁶ Such motives are conscious disguises of the real nature of a certain situation, where a true recognition would be contrary to the thinker’s interests.⁴⁶⁷ The particular conception becomes even clearer in comparison to the ‘total’ conception. The total conception, instead of relating to one idea in the total context of ideas, refers to the *total* context itself.⁴⁶⁸ It denotes the ideology of an ‘age’ or concrete socio-historical group, attempting to grasp the total structure of the mind of an epoch or community and calling into question an opponent’s *Weltanschauung* and conceptual apparatus as merely the “outgrowth of the collective life” of the group or period in which they exist.⁴⁶⁹ These distinctions precede Mannheim’s other, related distinction between the ‘specific’ and ‘general’ formulations of ideology,⁴⁷⁰ a distinction of particular importance in the path to *Standortgebundenheit* in Mannheim’s work. Steve D’Alton explicates this differentiation in a clear and insightful manner:

⁴⁶⁰ Carlsnaes, Walter, *The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: A Critical Examination of Its Usage By Marx, Lenin and Mannheim*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981): p. 180.

⁴⁶¹ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 49.

⁴⁶² Jütersonke, Oliver, *Morgenthau, Law and Realism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): p. 152.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 48.

⁴⁶⁵ D’Alton, Steve, ‘Ideology – A Static Definition of Reality’, *Australian Left Review*, Vol. 01, Iss. 31, (1971): p. 39.

⁴⁶⁶ Carlsnaes, Walter, *The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: A Critical Examination of Its Usage By Marx, Lenin and Mannheim*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981): p. 182.

⁴⁶⁷ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 50.

⁴⁶⁸ D’Alton, Steve, ‘Ideology – A Static Definition of Reality’, *Australian Left Review*, Vol. 01, Iss. 31, (1971): p. 39.

⁴⁶⁹ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul Ltd., 1968): p. 50.

⁴⁷⁰ D’Alton, Steve, ‘Ideology – A Static Definition of Reality’, *Australian Left Review*, Vol. 01, Iss. 31, (1971): p. 39.

‘Specific’ ideology relates to the ideality of a definite group, raised to the status of objective validity and seen by that group as the datum from which views of opponent groups may be assessed as distortions of this reality and consequently labelled ideologies. This view is seen by Mannheim to precede the recognition by all groups of the relativity of their own reference frames. In this final phase, labelled ‘general’ by Mannheim, there is a reflexive recognition by all groups that not only are their opponents’ views ideological but its own are open to the same construction.⁴⁷¹

The conceptions important to the elucidation of *Standortgebundenheit* are the ‘total’ conception in the first phase, and the notion of the ‘general’ in the final phase. Mannheim makes the importance of these concepts clear: “with the emergence of the *general* formulation of the *total* conception of ideology, the simple theory of ideology develops into the sociology of knowledge. What was once the intellectual armament of a party is transformed into a method of research in social and intellectual history” (emphasis added).⁴⁷² The sociology of knowledge recognises the vital importance of context in understanding thought and knowledge, attempting to comprehend thought through the concrete setting of its situational determination. A movement away from the particular towards the total conception occurs at this point: instead of merely demonstrating an adversary’s thought to be ideological, the total structure of consciousness and thought is subjected to such ‘ideological’ analysis.⁴⁷³ Ideology is no longer invoked a critique of a singular group but becomes a reflexive recognition of the socio-historical and political determination of thought itself. The thought of every group is now understood as arising out of its “life conditions”, and a recognition of the situational determination of thought thus emerges as an all-inclusive principle.⁴⁷⁴ All points of view are subjected to the ideological analysis,⁴⁷⁵ resulting in the recognition that all thinking is “bound up with the concrete position in life of the thinker”.⁴⁷⁶ Here, *Standortgebundenheit* emerges as a distinct concept in Mannheim through this recognition, and the dependence of knowledge upon social

⁴⁷¹ D’Alton, Steve, ‘Ideology – A Static Definition of Reality’, *Australian Left Review*, Vol. 01, Iss. 31, (1971): p. 39.

⁴⁷² Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972): p. 69.

⁴⁷³ Ibid: p. 68.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid: p. 69.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid: p. 70.

position becomes a conceptual awareness of the “temporal and spatial conditionality and contingency of knowledge”.^{477 478}

3.5 - Standortgebundenheit, Morgenthau and Optionality

The adoption of this principle by Morgenthau is apparent in more than just his association with, or references to Mannheim: his entire work reflects the epistemological influence of Mannheim’s concept of *Standortgebundenheit*.⁴⁷⁹ This subchapter demonstrates how *Standortgebundenheit* marked Morgenthau’s thought and how his expansive considerations of the concept form the epistemological foundation for optionality. Three paragraphs in Morgenthau’s widely read, (and even more widely misinterpreted), *Six Principles of Political Realism* explicitly explain his Mannheimian influence and the implications of *Standortgebundenheit* within his thought.⁴⁸⁰ The most straight-forward example of this appears in the third principle:

Realism assumes that its key concept of interest defined as power is an objective category which is universally valid, but *does not endow that concept with a meaning that is fixed once and for all...* The kind of interest determining political action in a particular period of history *depends upon the political and cultural context* in which foreign policy is formulated. The goals that might be pursued by nations in their foreign policy *can run the whole gamut of objectives any nation has ever pursued or might possibly pursue*. The same observations apply to the concept of power. Its content and the manner of its use are *determined by the political and cultural environment...* the contemporary connection between

⁴⁷⁷ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, ‘The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau’, in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 116.

⁴⁷⁸ For further discussion and an in-depth consideration of Mannheim and optionality, please see Behr, Hartmut and Devereux, Liam, ‘The Melodrama of Modernity in Karl Mannheim’s Political Theory’ in Kettler, David and Meja, Volker, (eds.), *The Anthem Companion to Karl Mannheim*, (New York: Anthem Press, 2018): p. 117-136.

⁴⁷⁹ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, ‘The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau’, in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 116.

⁴⁸⁰ Behr, Hartmut, ‘Security, Politics and Public Discourse: A Morgenthauian Approach’, in Bevir, Mark, Daddow, Oliver and Hall, Ian (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).

interest and the nation state is *a product of history*, and is therefore *bound to disappear in the course of history*,⁴⁸¹ (emphasis added).

Here, Morgenthau presents the heuristic outline of a 'map' for analysing politics⁴⁸² where the conceptions of power, interest, and morality appear as conceptual 'signposts' which allow us to perceive and understand the knowledge-power relations which shape political reality at a particular time and in a particular space.⁴⁸³ Morgenthau's adoption of *Standortgebundenheit* is thus a rejection of power, interest and morality as absolute or a priori categories, emphasising their indeterminacy and flexibility.⁴⁸⁴ The temporal and spatial context in which these concepts are understood requires acknowledgement and reflection, as the notions are understood as *standortgebundene*⁴⁸⁵ and thus, as Morgenthau explicitly writes, the "content and the manner of (their) use are determined by the political and cultural environment" in which they are formulated.⁴⁸⁶ Although he proposes them as universally *valid* categories, he does not prescribe them with absolute meanings. Instead, their meaning is fluid and historically-dependant, the objects to which they could refer being almost limitless.⁴⁸⁷ As a result, they only serve the role of signposts not objective categories, demanding differentiated social, political, and ethical analysis and judgement depending upon their context and use as a result of *Standortgebundenheit*.⁴⁸⁸

Morgenthau's use of *Standortgebundenheit*, therefore, can be seen as an epistemological recognition of the impossibility of objectivity (understood in a positivist sense) and absolute, a priori knowledge. His work contains a profound awareness of the spatial and temporal contingency of knowledge: for Morgenthau, the idea of a rational, calculable universe in which such absolutes could exist is a mere folklore encouraged by modern scientific

⁴⁸¹ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978): p. 10-11.

⁴⁸² Ibid: p. 5.

⁴⁸³ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, 'The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau', in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 117-118.

⁴⁸⁴ Williams, Michael C., 'Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 58, Iss. 04, (2004): p. 638.

⁴⁸⁵ The adjective form of *Standortgebundenheit*; to be read as 'situation/context-bound'.

⁴⁸⁶ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978): p. 11.

⁴⁸⁷ Williams, Michael C., 'Why Ideas Matter in International Relations: Hans Morgenthau, Classical Realism, and the Moral Construction of Power Politics', *International Organization*, Vol. 58, Iss. 04, (2004): p. 638.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid: p. 660.

endeavours.⁴⁸⁹ We cannot possess a direct representation of reality through which objectivity would become possible.⁴⁹⁰ He thus understands his thought as set apart from popular yet “abstract” and “unhistoric” considerations of international politics, which have taken on board this folklore in an attempt to embody rationalist principles taken from the natural sciences and “abstract propositions with a predicative function”⁴⁹¹, instead of recognising the intrinsic contingency and conditionality of knowledge.

The denial of epistemic absolutes, objectivities and a priori knowledge goes hand in hand in Morgenthau with a recognition of the inherent plurality of possible meanings in questions of epistemology. The inherent diversity of the situations and contexts in which knowledge arises furnishes the knowledge which emerges from them with an inherent plurality. We can see the same argument in Foucault’s presentation of genealogy. Instead of pursuing a linear or teleological history on a single history, Foucault aims, in a much more general sense, to trace the emergence and dissolution of ideas and practices, focusing on the unities those practices temporarily form. This process embodies the aims and process of Foucauldian genealogy: Foucault wants to know *how various subjects and objects* are produced by *discourse* historically, and how “they appear in their distance and difference within the systems and discourses that display and define them”.⁴⁹² These systems and discourses, and their temporary unities, form contexts for the development and articulation of knowledge. We can observe many different ‘contexts’ throughout history, which together demonstrate the plurality and divergence of the kinds of knowledge developed and articulated within them. The observation of these varied contexts and knowledges leads invariably to the notion of *epistemic perspectivity*, a notion which will be returned to and presented in greater depth through the work of Morgenthau, as it forms the epistemological cornerstone of optionality. However, an exploration and elaboration of the wider related aspects of Morgenthau’s work must first be pursued in order to cognise the epistemological basis of this notion.

⁴⁸⁹ Morgenthau, Hans J., ‘The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning’, *Ethics*, Vol. 54, Iss. 03, (1944): p. 177.

⁴⁹⁰ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, ‘The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau’, in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 117-118.

⁴⁹¹ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics in the Twentieth Century, Volume I*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962): p. 65.

⁴⁹² Scott, Charles E., ‘Foucault, Genealogy, Ethics’, *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, Vol. 34 No. 04, (2009): p. 355.

Morgenthau's application of *Standortgebundenheit* stems from a wider argument - his critique of ideology. Morgenthau sees ideology as a characteristic of all contemporary politics, existing as a tool which conceals the immediate goals of political action⁴⁹³ and justifies and rationalises the struggle for power contained therein.⁴⁹⁴ Such "ideological disguises"⁴⁹⁵ conceal actual political forces through ideological pretences and epistemic frameworks erected by the actors themselves, intentionally or otherwise.⁴⁹⁶ The concept of ideology employed by Morgenthau is, again, a concept taken from Mannheim: in a footnote in *Politics Among Nations*, he reveals that "the concept of ideology used... corresponds to what Karl Mannheim has called 'particular ideology' ".⁴⁹⁷ As discussed, this term denotes that we are sceptical of the knowledge advanced by our 'opponent', regarding it as a disguise of the real nature of a situation.⁴⁹⁸ The 'particular' conception designates only a part of the opponent's assertions as ideological, in direct reference to the content of the assertion in question, operating primarily on the basis of a 'psychology of interest', where a certain vested interest is seen as initiating an ideological deception.⁴⁹⁹ As it never departs from the psychological level, the point of reference of particular ideology is always the individual,⁵⁰⁰ where it ascribes socio-historical determination to their given idea.⁵⁰¹

Morgenthau argues that such ideology promotes creative mediocrity, as human beings cannot utilise their creative potential if they are constrained within ideological frameworks.⁵⁰² People yielded to the temptation of ideologies as a result of their yearning to provide ontological security for their world, giving it meaning through the development and acceptance of certain legitimated ideological structures of knowledge.⁵⁰³ As a result, their creative abilities were relegated to the role of supporting such an 'ideologised' reality at the expense of alternatives and more *creative* realities.⁵⁰⁴ For Morgenthau, an important

⁴⁹³ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978): p. 103.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid: p. 101.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid: p. 104.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid: p. 113.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid: p. 101.

⁴⁹⁸ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1972): p. 49.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid: p. 50-51.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid: p. 49.

⁵⁰¹ Carlsnaes, Walter, *The Concept of Ideology and Political Analysis: A Critical Examination of Its Usage By Marx, Lenin and Mannheim*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981): p. 182.

⁵⁰² Rösch, Felix, 'The Human Condition of Politics: Considering the Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau for International Relations', *Journal of International Political Theory*, Vol. 09, Iss. 01, (2013): p. 5.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

example of such 'ideologisation' exists in of the application of rationalism and positivism to the social sphere. This critique is presented in its most concise form within *The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning*, although a similar argument is evident across Morgenthau's writings. Within this critique, the basis of his adoption of *Standortgebundenheit* and its place in his epistemology is further evidenced, and it serves as an excellent means of expanding upon his rejection of absolute and a priori knowledge and the way in which this rejection promotes epistemic perspectivity, itself the epistemological cornerstone of optionality.

"Rationalism has left man enriched in his technical mastery of inanimate nature", writes Morgenthau, "but it has left him impoverished in his quest for an answer to the riddle of the universe and of his existence in it".⁵⁰⁵ In critiquing ideology, Morgenthau shows his concern with the application of the model of the natural sciences to the social. "Since reason reveals itself most plainly in nature, nature became the model of the social world, and the natural sciences the image of what the social sciences one day will be".⁵⁰⁶ He suggests that this has established a paradigm, based upon the singular acceptance of 'scientific truth', whereby the development of rationalism has established the belief that the same kind of knowledge holds true in the social world.⁵⁰⁷ However, he argues, the "logical coherence" of the natural sciences finds no adequate object within the social sphere:⁵⁰⁸ the cause/effect relationship upon which the positivism of the natural sciences is built cannot be found with the same coherence in the social sphere.

The central assumption in the application of this positivism is the belief that the world exists as "a logically coherent system which virtually contains... (and) will actually produce, all rules necessary for the decision of all possible causes".⁵⁰⁹ It aims at exposing "the causal connections between means and ends"⁵¹⁰ and establishing concrete cause-effect relationships. However, a singular cause can create an indefinite number of effects within the social sphere, and an effect can equally stem from an indefinite number of causes.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁵ Morgenthau, Hans J., 'The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning', *Ethics*, Vol. 54, Iss. 03, (1944): p. 174.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid: p. 175.

⁵⁰⁹ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics in the Twentieth Century, Volume I*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962): p. 283.

⁵¹⁰ Ashley, Richard K., 'The Poverty of Neorealism' *International Organization*, Vol. 38, Iss. 02, (1984): p. 232.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

Firstly, this is because of the social-determination of the cause itself: it is a product of social interaction, comprising of a multitude of individual actions, reactions, physical and psychological causes, which cannot be known or controlled.⁵¹² The course of events depends to a large degree upon individual behaviour and the role of human imagination and agency,⁵¹³ adding further contingencies and unpredictabilities. Where the natural sciences are able to present reasonable cause-effect relationships between certain objects, the social sphere, on the contrary, is in perpetual doubt over the occurrence of concrete causes and their concrete effects.⁵¹⁴

Political reality, especially epistemologically, is therefore, (and must be understood as being), replete with contingencies and systemic irrationalities.⁵¹⁵ The conception of a rational, calculable universe is "a kind of folklore of science which receives its dignity from tradition and the longing for intellectual security... but not from... (Its) inherent truthfulness".⁵¹⁶ The natural sciences have been elevated beyond their actual scope to an ideological model of certainty to which the social and political must aspire - to a "mythological level of absolute certainty and predictability" which cannot exist⁵¹⁷ outside the dogma of ideology. As a result, Morgenthau sees the predicament of epistemic orientation: no longer can one discover a 'rational' singular meaning within the world.⁵¹⁸ Through this argument, Morgenthau expands upon his epistemological argument against absolute and a priori knowledge; one which, although evident in his critique of rationalism, emerges from his adoption of *Standortgebundenheit* and can be observed in the same manner in his cognising of power, interest and morality. There can be no absolute knowledge in a world in which knowledge is bound to a the perennially fluid and plural nature of diverse epistemic contexts.

⁵¹² Morgenthau, Hans J., 'The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning', *Ethics*, Vol. 54, Iss. 03, (1944): p. 175.

⁵¹³ Ibid: p. 179.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid: p. 176.

⁵¹⁵ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics among Nations*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978): p. 10.

⁵¹⁶ Morgenthau, Hans J., 'The Limitations of Science and the Problem of Social Planning', *Ethics*, Vol. 54, Iss. 03, (1944): p. 177.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid: p. 179.

⁵¹⁸ Paipais, Vassilos, 'Between Politics and the Political: Reading Hans J. Morgenthau's Double Critique of Depoliticisation', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 42, Iss. 02, (2014): p. 362.

Morgenthau further elaborates his critique of rationalist/positivist ideology in the social sphere through an analogy, comparing a photograph and a painted portrait. For Morgenthau, the difference between politics as it is, and a rationalist theory derived from it:

Is like the difference between a photograph and a painted portrait. The photograph shows everything that can be seen by the naked eye; the painted portrait does not... but it shows, or at least seeks to show, one thing that the naked eye cannot see: the human essence of the person portrayed.⁵¹⁹

This analogy shows Morgenthau's dismissal of the application of positivist and rationalist conceptions of knowledge to politics⁵²⁰ and his recognition of the importance of what he terms the 'human condition of politics'. The photograph is capable of representing and making visible political reality, yet it cannot portray the 'human essence' represented in, and conveyed by, a painted portrait. For Morgenthau, this 'essence' refers to the impact of human imagination and agency upon the constitution of political reality.⁵²¹ The analogy summarises his critique of ideology. The application of rationalism to the social sphere is an attempt to create a 'photograph', or objective and truly representative image of what actually *is*. However, it cannot replace the 'portrait' stemming from the human element which constitutes, and is inherent to, political reality.⁵²² Morgenthau argues that such ideologisation has effectively 'dehumanised' socio-political life, a problematic which he counters in his work through the normative reintroduction of the human factor to political life.⁵²³ This dehumanization denies the contingencies and systemic irrationalities which Morgenthau identifies as inherent to political reality. It does this by removing the 'human' element of this reality: the diversity of political constellations and their spatio-temporally contingent forms created by human agency.⁵²⁴ Together, Morgenthau's expansive considerations of *Standortgebundenheit*, critique of ideology, and his reintroduction of the human factor into political life form the epistemological foundation for optionality. In order

⁵¹⁹ Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics among Nations*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978): p. 10.

⁵²⁰ Behr, Hartmut, 'Security, Politics and Public Discourse: A Morgenthauian Approach', in Bevir, Mark, Daddow, Oliver and Hall, Ian (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 161.

⁵²¹ Morgenthau, Hans J., edited by Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, *The Concept of the Political*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): p. 38.

⁵²² Behr, Hartmut, 'Security, Politics and Public Discourse: A Morgenthauian Approach', in Bevir, Mark, Daddow, Oliver and Hall, Ian (eds.), *Interpreting Global Security*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 163.

⁵²³ Rösch, Felix, 'The Human Condition of Politics: Considering the Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau for International Relations', *Journal of International Political Theory*, Vol. 09, Iss. 01, (2013): p. 1.

⁵²⁴ Ibid: p. 41.

to fully elaborate this, his conception of the 'human condition of politics' requires further discussion.

The beginning of what can be understood in Morgenthau as the 'human condition of politics' is evident in the focus upon the human within his work. His use of Mannheim's particular conception of ideology, with its emphasis upon the individual, sets the scene for an increasing focus upon the weakened (ideologised) conditions under which humans exist. However, Morgenthau's work demonstrates the important role of human beings in the construction of political reality, and his work normatively espouses this role. His critique of ideology demonstrates the role of human beings in the contingency of the political: the natural sciences cannot find logical coherence in the social sphere due to the impact of individual behaviour, imagination and agency. The analogy of the photograph and the painted portrait reveals the fundamental importance of such a human element for grasping political reality itself. Morgenthau does not conceptualise politics as a 'system', as it appears through a rationalist lens, but as a fluid arena principally characterised by its temporal and spatial conditionality, the result of this human element.⁵²⁵ Through ideologisation/scientification, politics has become imbalanced through the denial of the spatial and temporal particularities of social life in favour of rationalist, structural consolidation: a direct renunciation of its human essence and a process of dehumanisation.⁵²⁶

This human essence, or 'human condition of politics', is central in the construction of political knowledge as the key factor responsible for its conditionality, contingency, and *standortgebunden* nature, as human beings are the "creator and creature" of political order⁵²⁷. This human condition of politics therefore has epistemological dimensions, shaping the conditions of knowledge through the impact of human imagination and agency. The conditionality and contingency they introduce ensures that knowledge is pluralistic, and context bound - that it is *standortgebunden*. This is represented in the complete plurality of meaning and content which Morgenthau ascribes to the terms power, interest, and morality. The human mind and human agency play a distinct role in the interpretation of the world,

⁵²⁵ Rösch, Felix, 'The Human Condition of Politics: Considering the Legacy of Hans J. Morgenthau for International Relations', *Journal of International Political Theory*, Vol. 09, Iss. 01, (2013): p. 2.

⁵²⁶ Morgenthau, Hans J., edited by Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, *The Concept of the Political*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): p. 3.

⁵²⁷ Ibid: p. 42.

providing it with meaning through theoretical understanding.⁵²⁸ Ostensible ‘facts’, terms like power, interest and morality and, indeed, all claims to knowledge, are *not* to be seen as eternal and absolute: they must instead be recognised within their spatial temporal constellations.⁵²⁹

This epistemic condition, stemming from the human condition of politics, can be observed in its most basic form in any examination of ideas in their historical dimensions. What constituted legitimate knowledge in the enlightenment, for example, in comparison to the rise of poststructuralism and postmodern understandings reveals a huge disparity which signifies the plurality and contingency of knowledge itself. Different epistemic contexts contain different imaginations, situations, and actors, and therefore reflect the perspectivist character of knowledge. Accepted knowledge is always bound to the context in which it is formulated and appears as legitimate only within this context, something we learnt from Mannheim’s analysis of ideology. The application of rationalism and positivism to the social sphere results, therefore, in an inherent contradiction: such claims to objective knowledge deny the conditionality and contingency which is essential to the human condition.⁵³⁰ Such an ignorance of the conditionality of knowledge which stems from this condition must be perceived as hubris and a rebellion against the intrinsic epistemic contingencies of human life,⁵³¹ being unable or unwilling to comprehend the perspectivist nature of knowledge which Morgenthau’s adoption of *Standortgebundenheit* reveals. This provides us with the first aspect of optionality’s epistemological foundation: the recognition of epistemic perspectivity and the *standortgebunden* nature of knowledge itself.

However, this epistemic condition can be observed at the individual, as well as historical level, something which Morgenthau’s human condition of politics highlights. The contingency and conditionality of politics in his work stems from the fundamental plurality of human beings: if all people were the same, thought and action would be uniform in all places and at all times. This provides the second aspect of optionality’s epistemological foundation: the recognition of epistemic perspectivity and the *standortgebunden* nature of

⁵²⁸ Morgenthau, Hans J., edited by Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, *The Concept of the Political*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): p. 37.

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Paipais, Vassilos, ‘Between Politics and the Political: Reading Hans J. Morgenthau’s Double Critique of Depoliticisation’, *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 42, Iss. 02, (2014): p. 368.

⁵³¹ Behr, Hartmut and Rösch, Felix, ‘The Ethics of Anti-Hubris in the Political Philosophy of International Relations – Hans J. Morgenthau’, in Troy, Jodok, (ed.), *Religion and the Realist Tradition: From Political Theology to International Relations Theory and Back*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014): p. 118.

knowledge at the level of the individual. The denial of objectivity, absolutes and a priori knowledge which emerges from his critique of rationalism and ideology and the notion of epistemic plurality which results from it reveals, as outlined, the perspectivist, *standortgebunden* nature of all knowledge. The introduction of the human condition of politics into these considerations brings this epistemic condition down to the level of the individual, framing the impact of human thought and agency as the central, contributing factor to this condition. The lifeworlds, ideas, and actions of the individual are thus understood to be as context-bound and replete with contingencies and epistemic plurality as the multiplicity of historical contexts in which they exist. Each individual thus possesses a unique 'personal context' which must be acknowledged. The denial of this would be akin to the process of dehumanisation which Morgenthau attributes to the application of rationalism and positivism to the social sphere.

In summary, epistemic perspectivity emerges in Morgenthau's writings through his adoption of Mannheim's *Standortgebundenheit* and the resulting considerations which his expansive treatment of the notion endows upon it. Morgenthau makes an explicit argument across his work against (positivist) objectivity, epistemic absolutes and a priori knowledge; this can be observed most clearly in the third principle of political realism, where power, interest and morality are demonstrated as *standortgebunden* and therefore possessing a potential plurality of epistemic content, and in greater detail within his critique of ideology. This establishes the impossibility of objectivity and a priori knowledge when applied to the social sphere, reveals the importance of the individual through the human condition of politics (via the metaphor of the painted portrait) and applies *Standortgebundenheit* to reveal that there can be no absolute knowledge in history, which is inherently bound to perennially fluid and plural series of epistemic contexts. *Standortgebundenheit* in Morgenthau thus reveals the contextualised nature of knowledge and, as a result, its basis within both historical and individual perspectives. The ensuing notion of the human condition of politics demonstrates the central importance of the individual within the nature of knowledge; humans are the creators of political knowledge through the impact of their imagination and agency, and are thus responsible for its *standortgebunden* nature, creating knowledge which *cannot* be seen as eternal and absolute. The principle of *Standortgebundenheit* must be applied to the level of the individual as a result of these considerations; any denial of this intrinsic condition constitutes a denial of what it is to be human.

The recognition of the *standortgebunden* nature of knowledge, both at the individual and wider contextual level, is the epistemological foundation of optionality. This foundation rests upon the acceptance of the resultant epistemic perspectivity alongside the plurality and contingency of individual contexts, allowing them to 'unfold' free from totalising and functionalising practices and the imposition of objectivity.

Here, the two interrelated modes in which optionality functions when operationalised become evident. Firstly, optionality operates as a critical device. In this capacity, optionality is intended to function prior to epistemological assumptions, opening up a critical epistemic space for the deliberation of alternatives in opposition to standardising, functionalising, and totalising understandings and practices. This stems from its epistemological foundation in Morgenthau, embodying his rejection of absolute and a priori knowledge as a result of his adoption of *Standortgebundenheit* and recognition of epistemic contingency. Optionality combats claims to absolute/static knowledge, detecting and deciphering totalising/standardising/functionalising practices and, as a result, facilitating the discussion of a plurality of worldviews without imposition of pre-determined limitations. Optionality thus facilitates the deliberation of alternatives to established, unquestioned understandings and practices in the manner of an intransitive beginning, acting as an 'unobstructing' critical device. This sets the stage for optionality as a reconstructive norm: the recognition of epistemic perspectivity, especially once brought down to the level of the individual, implies a normative reconstructive vision on the basis of recognising/enabling the inherent epistemic plurality inherent to humanity and acknowledging, and aiding the realisation of, individual epistemic perspectivity. Recognising such conditionalities and contingencies as fundamental to the human condition requires their normative facilitation. To impede this would be dehumanising in the manner Morgenthau attributes to rationalism and ideology. This paves the way for the following section, presenting optionality in political practice through the work of Hannah Arendt. Arendt's work shows an acknowledgement and concern with such plurality as a fundamental aspect of the human condition, expanding these discussions and assisting in the development of optionality in political practice.

3.6 - Optionality in Political Practice: Hannah Arendt and the Human Condition

This section builds upon a symptomatic reading of Arendt's work, most notably *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and *The Human Condition*, developing an understanding of optionality in political practice. This provides a practical element to the preceding epistemological discussions. Firstly, optionality will be posited against the mode of political practice which it most ardently stands against; namely, totalitarianism. Although the following discussions focus upon the notions of action, plurality and natality in *The Human Condition*, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* provides an understanding of the conceptual antithesis of optionality and demonstrates the origins of Arendt's later emphasis on human plurality and natality⁵³² and passionate defence of human life within *The Human Condition*,⁵³³ *The Origins of Totalitarianism* being her first major political work.⁵³⁴

The Origins of Totalitarianism is a work of political anthropology which attempts to lay out the elements which characterise the unique and absolute evil of totalitarianism, an ideology which attempts to render humanity as superfluous.⁵³⁵ Written following the horrors of National Socialism and Stalinism, it seeks to grasp the near-incomprehensible experiences of a generation to which Arendt belonged, who were exposed to such nightmarish political practices. It asks the question of how and why such practices had come about.⁵³⁶ This chapter, however, is predominantly interested in Arendt's argument relating to the relationship of totalitarian political practice to the human condition. For Arendt, the terrors and systemic murders of totalitarian regimes can be understood only in ideological terms. Events such as the holocaust and Stalin's purges are colossal, systematic and organised, yet their motivations only make no sense when considered through the lens of ideology: as the manifestation of an approach which appears utterly fictitious to all but its adherents.⁵³⁷ Totalitarianism is thus "the rational putting into practice of a phenomenon", where ideological claims were made which pertained to 'laws of nature' and the freedom of

⁵³² Canovan, Margaret, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): p. 27.

⁵³³ Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 7.

⁵³⁴ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd: 1974): p. 16.

⁵³⁵ Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 101-102.

⁵³⁶ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd: 1974): p. 16.

⁵³⁷ Ibid: p. 18.

populations was considered irrelevant.⁵³⁸ These claims were spread through the use of propaganda and, once total domination was established, were maintained in ideological indoctrination.⁵³⁹ In this denial of choice, the illusion is created that those involved are obeying a will far greater than that of a human being. Whereas previous tyrannies have been defined by lawless examples of arbitrary will on the part of the ruler, totalitarianism seeks to deny any place for human plurality and action in an ideologised world defined by history and the laws of nature.⁵⁴⁰

This is the aspect of “total domination” which Arendt discusses in her book. Such a program of political practice “strives to organize the infinite plurality and differentiation of human beings as if all of humanity were just one individual... possible if every person can be reduced to a never-changing identity of reactions... The problem is to fabricate something which does not exist, namely, a kind of human species resembling animal species”.⁵⁴¹ This fabrication is an attempt to destroy the intrinsically human qualities of individual distinctness and the capacity of independent thought and action,⁵⁴² ultimately aiming to “transform the nature of man”.⁵⁴³ This process can be understood in terms of a political aspiration to omnipotence, the price of which is “human plurality and spontaneity, and therefore human nature itself”.⁵⁴⁴ For Arendt, the emergence of concentration camps represented the practical application of totalitarian ideology: the camps committed not only the mass extermination of human beings, but represented the elimination of their spontaneity and plurality, and thus transforming the human being into a “mere thing”.⁵⁴⁵

Optionality should be understood as a conception diametrically opposed to totalitarianism, in both its ideological expression and its manifestation in political practice. As the recognition and facilitation of the individual's ability to choose how to *be*, optionality seeks to allow the perennial construction of contingent and temporal individual ‘life-worlds’, building upon the recognition of epistemic perspectivity at the level of the individual which forms its epistemological foundation. This is inherently a process antagonistic towards

⁵³⁸ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd: 1974): p. 16.

⁵³⁹ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd: 1966): p. 341.

⁵⁴⁰ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd: 1974): p. 18.

⁵⁴¹ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd: 1966): p. 438.

⁵⁴² Canovan, Margaret, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): p. 25.

⁵⁴³ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd: 1966): p. 347.

⁵⁴⁴ Canovan, Margaret, *Hannah Arendt: A Reinterpretation of her Political Thought*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995): p. 27.

⁵⁴⁵ Arendt, Hannah, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd: 1966): p. 348.

totalising or standardising practises, both in epistemic terms and in political practice. Its manifestation in political practice thus follows Said's notion of the intransitive beginning, allowing the constant construction and reconstruction of diverse ways of being in a space unobstructed by teleological, ideological, and totalitarian understandings and practices. However, in order to present optionality's foundation in political practice, Arendt's *The Human Condition* and the notions of action, plurality, and natality it presents must be examined.

The first chapter of *The Human Condition* begins with the notion of the *vita activa*. Through the use of this term, Arendt designates her field of examination as "the basic conditions under which life on earth has been given to man"⁵⁴⁶ and, through these conditions, the manner and creation of a world of men and man-made things.⁵⁴⁷ She is asking the question 'what does an active human life consist of? What do we do when we are active?'⁵⁴⁸ In order to answer these questions, Arendt employs an "age-old distinction" between "two distinct ways of life", the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa*, a distinction which we encounter across the Western tradition of philosophical thought right up to the threshold of the modern age.⁵⁴⁹ These distinctions correspond to an 'active life' and a 'contemplative life', the difference being that between the active life of humanity in the world and the solitary, "monkish vocation" of a life spent in thought and contemplation.⁵⁵⁰ The *vita activa* has, across its history, been naturally understood from the perspective of the *vita contemplativa* and those following a contemplative life, as such understanding necessarily requires contemplation. Seen from the absolute quiet of contemplation, all human activity appeared as being characterised by its inherently 'un-quiet' nature. It does not matter what disturbs the quiet of contemplation, merely that it is disturbed.⁵⁵¹ Arendt rejects this approach: she does not see contemplation as being hierarchically above activity, and instead presents a series of categories dividing the *vita activa* which are worthy of retention and elucidation in

⁵⁴⁶ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 11.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid: p. 23.

⁵⁴⁸ Arendt, Hannah, 'Labour, Work, Action', *Amor Mundi: Boston College Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 26, Iss. 01, (1987): p. 29.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ McCarthy, Mary in Arendt, Hannah, *The Life of The Mind: One/Thinking*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978): p. 241

⁵⁵¹ Arendt, Hannah, 'Labour, Work, Action', *Amor Mundi: Boston College Studies in Philosophy*, Vol. 26, Iss. 01, (1987): p. 29.

their own right.⁵⁵² These categories are central in optionality's foundation in political practice.

The *vita activa*, or "human life as it is actively engaged in *doing* something,"⁵⁵³ (emphasis added), is broken-up by Arendt into three fundamental human activities: labour, work, and action. Labour corresponds to the biological processes of humanity and the fulfilment of the needs of the body, consisting of activities vital to the life-process itself. As such, "the human condition of labour is life itself",⁵⁵⁴ the production and consumption in order to ensure the survival of the species.⁵⁵⁵ The consumption of the fruits of labour, such as food, barely survive the act of their production, returning after a brief stay in the world of men into the natural process which bore them.⁵⁵⁶ On the contrary, work is the activity which reflects the un-naturalness of human existence, referring to the activity of creating the artificial world of 'things' and human artefacts which often outlast and transcend the individual who created them.⁵⁵⁷ It thus refers to the work of our *hands*, as distinguished from the labour of our *bodies*.⁵⁵⁸ For Arendt, "the human condition of work is worldliness".⁵⁵⁹ The final demarcation within Arendt's human condition, however, is the most important for grounding of optionality in the arena of political practice and lies at the very centre of Arendt's thought itself.⁵⁶⁰

Action is the only activity which cannot occur when a person is in isolation⁵⁶¹, being the singular category within the *vita activa* which occurs directly *between human beings*, without the intermediary of things or matter.⁵⁶² It is beyond the dictates of nature and is carried out between individuals in the public realm in the creation of a web of actions and relationships through word and deed. These are "the modes in which human beings appear to each other"⁵⁶³, and the means by which each unique individual 'reveals' themselves in the world.⁵⁶⁴ Action is both the result and direct correspondent of the human condition of

⁵⁵² Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 17-18.

⁵⁵³ Ibid: p. 23.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid: p. 9.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid: p. 10.

⁵⁵⁶ Ibid: p. 84.

⁵⁵⁷ Ibid: p. 9-10.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid: p. 119.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid: p. 9.

⁵⁶⁰ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1974): p. 58.

⁵⁶¹ Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 77.

⁵⁶² Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 9.

⁵⁶³ Ibid: p. 176.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid: p. 59.

plurality; “the fact that men and not man live on the earth and inhabit the world”. It refers to the fact that “we are all the same... in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live”.⁵⁶⁵ Action is thus manifest in the expression of the self, in which each unique and differentiated individual reveals themselves⁵⁶⁶ in both the public and private realm. In elucidating plurality in the private realm, Arendt uses the example of the experience of pleasures, pains, desires, and satisfactions. These are “so ‘private’ that they cannot even be adequately voiced”.⁵⁶⁷ Here, the intrinsic plurality of the human experience is evident in the individual’s unique experience of feelings and emotions. Plurality is manifest in the public sphere in the transference of these individualised, unique perceptions into action, creating distinct words and deeds from the plurality of individuals who together make up the public, political sphere. Human plurality is, therefore, the basic condition for action: the capacity for action and speech is enabled by the human condition of plurality, a result of its twofold character of ‘equality’ and ‘distinction’.

If humanity was not equal, “they could neither understand each other and those that came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them”.⁵⁶⁸ If individuals were not distinct, with, “each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood”.⁵⁶⁹ Human beings are thus equal in their distinctness from one another, unified by the underlying condition of human plurality which they share. Human plurality is thus the “paradoxical plurality of unique beings”⁵⁷⁰ in which humanity is united by the singularity of its individual members. Each individual is able to express their uniqueness and distinction with others in word and deed. We are simultaneously united by this ability and divided by our singular uniqueness.⁵⁷¹ The Human condition of plurality is thus a defining part of being human. The fact that human plurality is inherent to action provides humanity with the unmatched ability “to perform what is infinitely improbable”.⁵⁷² This is the core understanding in the foundation of optionality in political practice.

⁵⁶⁵ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 9.

⁵⁶⁶ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M Dent and Sons Ltd, 1974): p. 59.

⁵⁶⁷ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 124.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid: p. 156.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid: p. 156.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid: p. 9.

⁵⁷² Ibid: p. 158.

While all aspects of the *vita activa* are somehow political, this notion of plurality is both the essential and causative condition of political life itself: it is not only the “*conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam* – of all political life”.⁵⁷³ For Arendt, life in the political sphere is a series of ‘startling beginnings’, instigated through action as word and deed and initiating responses from all who observe them.⁵⁷⁴ Of all the activities attributed to humans, word and deed can most accurately be called political.⁵⁷⁵ The expression of plurality in such action is the political activity *par excellence*.⁵⁷⁶ They are the composite parts of human action which only take place on the interpersonal level - on the level of politics. Plurality is the essential component of such action. Action would be an unnecessary luxury if humanity was the mere reproduction of a singular model with a uniform and predictable nature.⁵⁷⁷ Without plurality, action and speech would be unnecessary, and the interpersonal nature of the political would be impossible. Not only would a life without action cease to be political, but such a life would even cease to be human.⁵⁷⁸ One can be human without working or labouring, but one cannot be human without action and expressing human condition of plurality. Arendt uses the example of ‘to be among human beings’ (*inter homines esse*) and ‘to live’, alongside ‘to cease to be among human beings’ (*inter homines esse desinere*) and ‘to die’ as having been synonyms in the Roman world, demonstrating the importance of expressing this condition and the position of action and plurality as the basic existential conditions of human life on earth.⁵⁷⁹ A life without action and the plurality it entails has ceased to be a political or even a human life: such a life is “dead to the world”, as it is “no longer lived amongst men”.⁵⁸⁰

Human plurality is therefore central to Arendt’s thought. Action is facilitated and conditioned by the condition of plurality, a key to both the human condition and the concept of the political. This is important for grounding optionality in political practice, as it highlights the fundamental condition of plurality which underscores not only all human interactions but is part of what it means to be human. Action is integral to all human encounters, which themselves are enacted through word and deed. These encounters are always

⁵⁷³ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 10.

⁵⁷⁴ Elmarsafy, Ziad, ‘Action, Imagination, Institution, Natality, Revolution’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 19, Iss. 02, (2015): p. 134-135.

⁵⁷⁵ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 25.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid: p. 11.

⁵⁷⁷ Elmarsafy, Ziad, ‘Action, Imagination, Institution, Natality, Revolution’, *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 19, Iss. 02, (2015): p. 134-135.

⁵⁷⁸ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 156.

⁵⁷⁹ Arendt, Hannah, *The Life of the Mind: One/Thinking*, (London: Secker & Warburg, 1978): p. 74.

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid: p. 157.

overshadowed by the condition of human plurality, as each individual involved is unique and capable of expressing that uniqueness. In relation to political practice, therefore, optionality not only recognises this fundamental human condition, but aims to facilitate it in spaces for open and unobstructed dialogue. As a critical device, optionality detects and deciphers political practices which stifle or deny plurality, the extreme example being that of totalitarianism. As a reconstructive norm, optionality seeks to enable plurality through action, allowing individuals to choose how to 'be' in togetherness with others. It aims to reconstruct political practices in a manner not only amenable to, but actively enabling plurality in action. However, a third interlinked concept emerges within Arendt's work which helps to explain optionality in political practice as a reconstructive norm: this is the notion of natality.

At its core, natality is the enabling factor for the human condition of plurality, and the conception which facilitates and gives meaning to action. As the preceding section established, the condition of plurality renders each individual "capable of acting in relation to his fellows in ways that are individual and original, and in doing so of contributing to a network of actions and relationships that is infinitely complex and unpredictable".⁵⁸¹ However, this is made possible by the more fundamental human condition of natality. All three activities in Arendt's *vita activa* are connected to natality and mortality, which she presents as the fundamental conditions of human existence.⁵⁸² At its most basic level, this refers to the fact that we are all born into the world, and all leave it through death. However, the focus of Arendt's work is upon natality. She sees this as a continual process, one which impacts upon the individual throughout their lives and possess a vital importance from the start of life itself. Out of the three divisions of the *vita activa*, action has the closest connection with natality: "the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities".⁵⁸³

⁵⁸¹ d'Entreves, Maurizio Passerin, 'Hannah Arendt', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), (Accessed 08/08/15), [<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/arendt/>].

⁵⁸² Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 10.

⁵⁸³ Ibid: p. 10-11.

This sentence alludes to Arendt's rather particular and profound understanding of the condition of natality. Through her use of this notion, Arendt "sings an ode to the uniqueness of every birth" and praises the ensuing human capacity to inaugurate a constant succession 'new beginnings' throughout the course of their existence.⁵⁸⁴ In Arendt, natality does not refer to the universal fact of birth alone. Instead, she employs the term to denote the *idea* of birth as a way of speaking about one's insertion into social space.⁵⁸⁵ She calls upon notions of birth and rebirth in order to explain the enaction of human plurality in the world, using the analogy of the initial beginning of birth to refer to the succession of new beginnings which each unique individual is able to make in the world through the enaction of plurality in word and deed. The use of the term natality in her work is often accompanied by the terminology of 'beginning', using birth to represent the initiation of a constant succession of 'new beginnings' which stem from, and add to, the unique life-world of an individual.⁵⁸⁶ Each unique individual is thus to start something new, to enact their plurality in the free choice of actions.⁵⁸⁷ Natality thus provides the ontological ground for action,⁵⁸⁸ enabling human plurality to appear in the world. In writing about action, Arendt is inevitably discussing "the fact that every human being represents a new beginning in the world, and has the capacity to change things, to start something new, to do or say something that could not have been foreseen or expected".⁵⁸⁹ This ability is enabled by the fact of human plurality. Every human being represents something new and unique, and therefore is capable of unexpected action which no prescriptions can foresee.⁵⁹⁰ In Arendt's words:

With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁴ Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 8.

⁵⁸⁵ Champlin, Jeffrey, 'Born Again: Arendt's 'Natality' as Figure and Concept', *The Germanic Review*, Vol. 88, Iss. 02, (2013): p. 151.

⁵⁸⁶ Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 8.

⁵⁸⁷ Miguel Vatter, 'Natality and Biopolitics in Hannah Arendt', *Revista de Ciencia Política*, Vol. 26, Iss. 02, (2006): p. 137.

⁵⁸⁸ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 222.

⁵⁸⁹ Canovan, Margaret, *The Political Thought of Hannah Arendt*, (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd, 1974): p. 58.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid: p. 59.

⁵⁹¹ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 157.

A full experience of natality would therefore consist of an initial physical birth, an affirmation of the uniqueness of each individual created in birth through a realisation of human plurality in action, and, finally, the understanding that this is a perpetual process.⁵⁹²

Natality is not a normal beginning, like the beginning of the day. “It is not the beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself”.⁵⁹³ In this manner, it is comparable to Said’s intransitive beginning, as “a beginning *at* the beginning *for* the beginning”.⁵⁹⁴ In creating the category of action in the *vita activa*, explaining its inherent link to human plurality and uniting the two in the conceptual framework provided by natality, Arendt is vindicating what many have referred to as ‘freedom’.⁵⁹⁵ Through her elaboration of action, plurality and natality, Arendt expounds a recognition of what it means to be human, with particular emphasis upon political practice. These three notions allow the human being to possess what Nathan Van Camp terms “a mode of temporality that expresses the freedom of life”.⁵⁹⁶

The concept of natality allows us to understand action as a constant process of differentiation between individuals, one which continually underscores and reaffirms their uniqueness through the enaction of human plurality. Action thus serves as the means by which each individual can enact such ‘new beginnings’ and perform the unexpected in the realisation their own uniqueness in togetherness in the arena of political practice. It is in this process in which optionality is conceptually established in terms of political practice. Optionality is grounded in the facilitation and realisation of plurality and natality in political practice. It aims at re-considering dialogue in political practice through these understandings of human plurality and the capacity to begin something new, represented in natality. It recognises that the denial of this in any human being is both a denial of what makes us human and a rejection of the political itself. Since speech and action, the core constituents of political practice, are the modes in which human beings reveal their unique distinctness

⁵⁹² Kristeva, Julia, *Hannah Arendt*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001): p. 192.

⁵⁹³ Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959): p. 157.

⁵⁹⁴ Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1975): p. 73.

⁵⁹⁵ Including, but not limited to, Nathan Van Camp, Margaret Canovan and Julia Kristeva. Arendt herself also uses the term, however she uses the term in a rather particular way, denoting a particular set of characteristics in relation to action and natality.

⁵⁹⁶ Van Camp, Nathan, ‘Neither Beginning nor End – The Anarcho-Atelic Even of Natality’, *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 16, Iss. 01, (2012): p. 113.

and are the means by which the constant succession of beginnings originates, then the capacity to express these things must be facilitated through deliberation.

Through Arendt, optionality is grounded in political practice through the recognition and facilitation of plurality and natality. As an attempt to 'unobstruct' discussion and dialogue, and facilitate free deliberative thought and action, optionality aims to conceptually embody human plurality and natality, creating the conditions for a space in which they can flourish.

This 'unobstruction' takes the form of opening up existing political practice and parameters to the multitude of alternative perspectives and practices which are not only potential, but manifest in the world. This occurs through optionality as both a critical device and reconstructive norm. As a critical device, optionality expands the understanding of the parameters upon which political practices are built, undermining assumptions, totalising practices and claims to 'necessity': for example, in terms of peacebuilding, the claims made by the liberal peace to be a blanket template for peace; a roadmap of the necessities of peaceful order. Optionality instead serves to recognise and enable human plurality and natality in political action, and thus open-up political practice through the open deliberation of alternatives to the plurality and capacity of beginning the unexpected which Arendt demonstrates to be an essential part of the human condition. In its pure form, optionality can therefore be understood as the embodiment of political possibility. A recognition of the inherent capacity of human beings to enact their plurality is, at the same time, a recognition of the inherent openness and possibility of action in political practice. As a reconstructive norm, optionality serves as the conceptual conditions for a space in which such a process can occur. It thus aims to reconstruct political practice according to the inherent capacity for plurality of the actors within it.

Such a political practice, reconstructed through the application of Arendt's thought, is one in which the individual is free to choose how to be; where the realm of political practice is opened-up to deliberation in a process opposed to assumptions, functionalities and totalities. Optionality in political practice begins with something new: the plurality and capacity for natality inherent to human action. It continues on as an intransitive beginning, allowing for the constant enaction and re-enaction of this plurality in a series of new beginnings. In this manner, optionality facilitates a non-presumptive agency from which the reconstruction of political practice can begin. The limitations of existing political practice are

opened-up to the potentiality of alternatives and new beginnings which human plurality and natality in action can provide.

This chapter has outlined the core theoretical framework of optionality through the authors and ideas upon which it was developed. Optionality thus has an epistemological grounding, in the works of Mannheim and Morgenthau, and a basis in political practice stemming from the work of Hannah Arendt. Epistemologically speaking, optionality embodies a recognition of the perspectivist, *standortgebunden* nature of knowledge, recognising the inextricable link between the articulation and enaction of knowledge and the manifold influences of spatial, temporal, and epistemic context, both historically and at the level of the individual. This epistemological condition can be seen to arise out of the plurality intrinsic to the human condition, enacted in the never-ending process of natality, through the grounding of optionality in political practice via the work of Arendt. When these are brought together, as optionality they can be summarised as:

The ability, (both recognised as a potential existing within the human condition and, as a result, intended to be facilitated politically) of individuals to choose how to 'be', allowing the perennial construction of individual 'life-worlds' in a contingent manner and standing in opposition to all totalities, functionalities, and standardising practices, enabling the unfolding of the inherent plurality of distinct personal contexts.

Optionality is thus the conditions of a space for open, unobstructed dialogue, and is ultimately presented in this thesis as the conditions of the possibility for peace through its operationalisation in concrete conflict contexts. However, optionality serves as the conceptual framework of this thesis in three ways. Initially it serves as the basis for its methodological approach, building upon the recognition and facilitation of epistemic perspectivity, plurality, and natality, along with the rejection of the imposition of knowledge, to develop an approach towards different ontologies and epistemologies in particular peacebuilding contexts. This allows the exploration and delimitation of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, in which a triangulation of general characteristics is established in order to provide a picture of the wider context of ideas and actions related to peace in the country. Optionality is then employed as a critical device in relation to an NGO and particular peacebuilding project, examining how this project excludes this wider context, denies epistemic perspectivity, and precludes the plurality of understandings and practices

of peace within it, operating in opposition to the conditions of optionality. Finally, and as a response to the problems and limitations identified in this project, optionality is expounded as a reconstructive norm through the notion of 'peace-as-optionality'. This norm proposes optionality as a potential conceptual vehicle for rethinking peace, beyond the limitations of the predominant liberal and post-liberal approaches, and beyond those of the peacebuilding project in question, in a manner sensitive to the particularity and diversity of contexts, empathetic to human plurality and natality, and in a manner ultimately more conducive to positive peace. The following chapter begins this process through exploring the operationalisation of optionality as a methodological approach, undergirding both the ethnographic fieldwork undertaken in the course of this thesis and the approach taken by me in my relation to the field and those under study.

<p>Optionality and Epistemology:</p>	<p><i>Karl Mannheim and Hans Morgenthau.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standortgebundenheit, the denial of epistemic absolutes, objectivities, and claims to a priori knowledge. • Recognition of the context-bound nature of knowledge at individual and group levels. • The resultant recognition of epistemic perspectivity, plurality, and contingency, leading optionality to operate as an approach <i>towards</i> contexts without epistemic imposition.
<p>Optionality and Political Practice:</p>	<p><i>Hannah Arendt.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optionality as the antithesis of totalitarianism. • The acknowledgement of the intrinsic nature of human plurality, expressed through action and as a defining feature of the political. • Optionality detects and deciphers practices that obstruct this, setting the normative conceptual conditions for their reconstruction in manner that recognises the human conditions of plurality and natality. • Optionality thus further serves an approach towards diverse contexts and knowledges that emerge from these conditions.

Figure 1: the major elements of optionality and their corresponding authors.

Chapter Four: Optionality, Methodology, and Method

The purpose of this chapter is threefold: firstly, to outline the general methodological approach employed in the course of the research undertaken; secondly, to discuss the additional methodological considerations which emerged during the process of conducting fieldwork; and thirdly, to explain the methods used in relation to the general methodological approach undertaken.

To begin with, this general methodological approach and the additional methodological considerations built upon it must be delineated. Therefore, a distinction will be made between the *methodological framework*, which delineates the general approach to conducting fieldwork, and the proceeding *methodological considerations* necessitated by the complexities of fieldwork and the conditionalities and contingencies which underlie any research undertaken 'in the field'. The former is preparatory in nature and is developed prior to conducting fieldwork, whereas the latter is developed during this process. Nevertheless, it should be understood that these aspects of methodology are united in this thesis, as both are conditioned by, and align with optionality as the overarching theoretical framework. Although they emerge at different points, they nonetheless emerge through the application of this framework.

Once delineated, this framework and the subsequent considerations will be explored in depth, establishing the methodological approach undertaken in its entirety. This will consist of two main sections. In the first section, optionality will be operationalised, developing the concept into the general undergirding methodological framework through which research was planned and conducted. This process of operationalisation does not attempt to move optionality from theory to practice, as it were, but instead engenders a shift from optionality as a purely theoretical construct to the development of a methodological *approach towards* the field built upon its core theoretical principles. This section will conclude with the use of Paul Feyerabend's 1975 work *Against Method* as a means of demonstrating and expanding upon the core principles of this approach and framing the methodological framework as one which stands against *methodological coercion*. The subsequent section provides a discussion of ethnography as the series of methods best able to embody this methodological approach,

providing this research with the appropriate, performative practices required to enact it. A general outline of ethnography as a research method will be followed by an examination of the central problematics associated with this approach, with the methodological framework developed through optionality posited as an ameliorative addition to the central issues of ethnographic research. The final section will expand upon the additional methodological considerations which emerged as a consequence of the challenges which developed in the course of the research, dealing with my own experiences of the inherent unpredictability and uncertainty of fieldwork.⁵⁹⁷ This section will employ Ernst Jünger's novel *Eumeswil* to develop an approach towards these additional considerations and navigate the challenges which emerged in the field. Together, these sections will outline the methodological approach of this thesis.

4.1 - Operationalising Optionality: A Methodological Framework

In order to operationalise optionality in the form of a methodological framework for this thesis, a distinction must first be made between *methodology* and *method*. This is essential, both to delineate these clearly in this thesis and to enable a clear understanding of the purpose of this chapter. To great detriment, method and methodology have often been confused, and even used interchangeably, both colloquially and in academic literature.⁵⁹⁸ However, when the distinction is upheld, it is commonly built upon the division between method as the technique or way of proceeding in gathering data, and methodology as the underlying theory and analysis of how research should proceed.⁵⁹⁹ Although this thesis follows, to some extent, this basic division regarding method and methodology, the distinction is more nuanced, and therefore requires more in-depth consideration in order to fully cognize this aspects of research and explain the arguments made in relation to methodology within this thesis.

Although method and methodology are, to some extent, intrinsically linked in a research project, they nevertheless form distinct aspects of the research process and retain their own

⁵⁹⁷ Dolson, Mark S., 'The Role of Unpredictability in Ethnographic Fieldwork', in Steven W. Kleinknecht, Sanders, Carrie B., and van den Scott, Lisa-Jo K. (eds.), *The Craft of Qualitative Research: A Handbook*, (Vancouver: Canadian Scholars, 2018): p. 17.

⁵⁹⁸ Kirsch, Gesa and Sullivan, Patricia K., (eds), *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, (1992): p. 2.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

categorical distinctness. This distinctness is key in understanding the division between the methodological framework and subsequent considerations and their relation to the research undertaken, along with the use of ethnographic method as the most complimentary and suitable series of methods for this research. In this thesis, methodology is understood as a series of epistemological reflections; a process which develops “the theoretical arranging of concepts structuring the discussions”.⁶⁰⁰ Method, on the other hand, is “a reflection of the tools for organizing empirical material and practical research design”.⁶⁰¹ In this sense, methods are performative within the research process, rather than being representational in relation to it.⁶⁰² As such, methods reflect the methodological approach which undergirds them. Methods are performative practices which experimentally connect and assemble aspects of the underlying epistemological, ontological, and theoretical foundations of a research project: they are *not* simple techniques of extracting concrete information from reality and aligning it with bodies of knowledge.⁶⁰³ Instead, they should be seen as the *results* of a certain methodological position. In this chapter, the distinctness and connectivity of methodology and method will be explored, and the fundamental determining influence of the methodological framework, developed from the concept of optionality, will be shown to determine the parameters of the research undertaken in the field and thus the methods used in practical research design and enaction.

The process of operationalising optionality, in order to elaborate this methodological framework, must necessarily begin with outlining the core principles established through the preceding discussion of optionality as a purely theoretical framework. Optionality should be seen as embodying three core theoretical principles:

- The recognition and facilitation of the context-bound nature of knowledge and the resultant condition of epistemic perspectivity.
- The recognition and facilitation of plurality and natality as essential human conditions.
- A resultant opposition to essentialising, instrumentalising, or totalising approaches to knowledge: in short, an opposition to the imposition of knowledge.

⁶⁰⁰ Aradau, Claudia and Huysmans, Jef, ‘Critical Methods in International Relations: The Politics of Techniques, Devices and Acts’, *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 20, Iss. 03, (2014): p. 597.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid: p. 598.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

It is from these core principles that optionality is operationalised; through their coming together to form the methodological approach towards the “interrogation and interlocution of different ontologies and epistemologies in local peacebuilding contexts”.⁶⁰⁴ When expounding optionality as the theoretical framework of this thesis, the synopsis of the concept presented in earlier chapters is particularly useful in enabling an understanding of its general purpose and content. This is particularly useful in explaining the manner in which these three principles form the basis for optionality as a methodological framework:

The ability, (both recognised as a potential existing within the human condition and, as a result, intended to be facilitated politically) of individuals to choose how to ‘be’, allowing the perennial construction of individual ‘life-worlds’ in a contingent manner and standing in opposition to all totalities, functionalities, and standardising practices, enabling the unfolding of the inherent plurality of distinct personal contexts.

This sentence not only outlines the fundamental character of optionality as a theoretical construct, but also alludes to the manner in which this construct can be operationalised. The “recognition of individuals to choose how to ‘be’”: this designates an approach towards the field which recognises the contingencies and conditionalities of the general human condition and epistemological condition in which humanity finds itself. It reflects the perspectivist character of knowledge, closely linked to the human condition of plurality, and the ability of individuals to actualise the condition of natality. In order to facilitate such an unfolding, and maintain the unobstructing approach required to enable this, a methodological approach which stems from optionality must act “in opposition to all totalities, functionalities, and standardising practices”, demonstrating the necessity of such an approach being open and against the imposition of knowledge. The idea of “enabling the unfolding of the inherent plurality of distinct personal contexts” serves as a maxim for this approach: an epistemically open, unobstructing, and non-imposing approach towards the field.

Optionality is thus conceptually opposed to the objective, concrete, and closed ‘traditional’ methodological approaches upon which the social ‘sciences’ have often been predicated.

⁶⁰⁴ Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace in Difference – Peace Through Dialogue about and across Difference(s): A Phenomenological Approach to Rethinking Peace’ in Albergh, Jeremiah; Laban Hinton, Alexander, and Shani, Giorgio (eds.), *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 185.

Instead, a recognition of the context-bound nature of knowledge, epistemic perspectivity, and human plurality and natality engenders an approach which recognises and facilitates them throughout the research process, avoiding a 'totalitarian' approach to methodology and thus those under study. A discussion of this problematic can be found in Susanne Hoeber-Rudolf's paper *The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World*. In the paper, Hoeber-Rudolf describes her research experiences in rural Tamil Nadu in 1957, conducting a survey on political consciousness. Their approach employed survey results as representative data concerning "what the citizens thought they were experiencing and doing",⁶⁰⁵ imagining they were "plumbing the true underpinnings of the Indian experiment in democracy".⁶⁰⁶ However, during the course of research, methodological issues and complications with their method emerged: "what we had not counted on was that American ideology... would shape the very concepts and methods we used to acquire knowledge an unfamiliar society and its politics".⁶⁰⁷ This is the kind of methodological imposition, manifest as a kind of totalitarian approach to the research subject, which optionality as a methodological framework stands in stark contrast and opposition to.

When interviewers returned from the villages, they described a "radical disconnect between their training experience, modelled on best U.S. practice at the time, and their field experience".⁶⁰⁸ Their training, the basis of their methodological approach and understanding of the field, was built upon the notion of one-to-one interviews, recording the personal opinions of a particular subject in a simple, two-person interaction. This model highlights the assumptions of methodological individualism built into their research approach, according to Hoeber-Rudolf, and those which characterised the hegemonic approaches of the day.⁶⁰⁹ Instead of compliantly revealing these opinions, participants instead managed "to arrange the staging and enlarge the cast", opening-up the discussion to family members, relatives, and village notables, causing the response to a survey question to become "a matter of collective deliberation, a veritable seminar".⁶¹⁰ This experience demonstrated that "the individual was not the unit of opinion. Indeed, the singular, private, and personal were alien

⁶⁰⁵ Hoeber-Rudolf, Susanne, 'The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 03, Iss. 01, (2005): p. 5.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Hoeber-Rudolf, Susanne, 'The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 03, Iss. 01, (2005): p. 5.

to the life-worlds of Indian towns and villages”.⁶¹¹ The radically democratic assumptions upon which their methodological approach rested encountered the alien constructs of the caste hierarchy, patron-client relationship, and other situated knowledges which it had not been able to account for or represent. Hoeber-Rudolf frames this as “the problem of exporting homegrown concepts and methodologies to alien places, where... the ‘other’ lives”,⁶¹² as a result of the unavoidability of employing Anglo-American concepts and methods in research areas: this was their “toolkit” and means for “entering complex and unfamiliar non-Western environments”.⁶¹³ Without these, writes Hoeber-Rudolf, researchers “would not know where to look and what to look for”.⁶¹⁴ The highlights the position of the methodological framework employed in a research project as one which sets the parameters of the research – what it is looking for, and where to find it; in other words, the object of study and its location. In this capacity, this framework conditions the research project, undergirding the very approach to the field, the type of research conducted, and the manner in which it is undertaken. However, the issue with a closed, pre-defined, and totalising methodological framework, built on assumptions about the nature and life-worlds of those under study, and determining the best approach to studying them prior to any experience in the field. Instead of employing a closed, pre-determined, and ‘objective’ *understanding of the field* optionality promotes an open, epistemically unobstructed *approach towards* which, instead of operating on preconceived assumptions, seeks to embrace and enable the epistemic perspectivity, plurality, and situationally determined nature of those under study and all encounters *with* them. Although the formulation of a methodological framework is a perquisite of any research project, it is the epistemological nature of this approach which matters. The difference between an instrumental and absolute understanding of the field and a theoretically informed and epistemically open approach towards the field, which does not instrumentalise or impose upon the field, is fundamental, determining the epistemological nature of a research approach and, as a result, the relationship between the researcher and those under study. Hoeber-Rudolf’s article highlights the complications and difficulties which arise through the application of the

⁶¹¹ Ibid.

⁶¹² Ibid: p. 6.

⁶¹³ Ibid.

⁶¹⁴ Ibid.

former as a methodological approach, highlighting the need for an approach which embodies the nuances of the latter.

Hoeber-Rudolf describes this problematic as one of the *imperialism of categories*, and defines this problematic as follows:

The academic practice of imposing concepts on the other-the export of concepts as a part of a hegemonic relationship.⁶¹⁵

Although optionality does, to some extent, import concepts from the location of their development in the West to the encounter with the other in a manifoldly diverse locale, the theoretical framework upon which it was developed aims to avoid such imposition. Instead of conditioning the researcher to follow a universalised methodological approach and naturally corresponding method, however, it seeks to promote an adaptive, open approach, built upon a theoretically informed openness towards situated knowledge and the complex specificities of context, alongside temporal, cultural, and geographical particularities. Such an imperialism of categories, built into a methodological approach, employ ideal-type dichotomies which represent themselves as “ways to analyse phenomena in a systematic manner”, yet readily manifest themselves as stereotypical.⁶¹⁶ They are “universalist schemes”, using “concepts and categories fashioned out of the Anglo-American experience and deny difference by not recognizing the autonomy, authenticity, and agency of the other”⁶¹⁷, The alternative to this instrumental universalism is an approach towards situated knowledge. Situated knowledge “recognizes time, place, and circumstance, and assumes that individuals and their capacities are marked by them. It proceeds from specificities and works upward... rather than downward from a priori assumptions”.⁶¹⁸ Optionality as methodology embodies such an approach, working to enable situated knowledges through an approach towards them, rather than imposing pre-determined methodologies, understandings, or applying other universalist schemas which are developed above and outside of the research context through its epistemological basis in the works of Mannheim and Morgenthau and the insights developed from Arendt’s writings. Hoeber-Rudolf argues that an approach towards situated knowledge “takes into account local knowledge and

⁶¹⁵ Hoeber-Rudolf, Susanne, ‘The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World’, *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 03, Iss. 01, (2005): p. 6.

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid: p. 11-12.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid: p. 12.

practice-how denizens perceive and interpret their world” and is “marked by place, time, and circumstance”, relying on the excavation of meaning.⁶¹⁹ When operationalised as a methodological framework, optionality aims to embody this approach, and is developed from a theoretical foundation which “is committed to the validity and significance of local knowledge”.⁶²⁰

An expansive addition to these discussions, and one which serves to further our conception of optionality in its incarnation as a methodological framework, can be found in the work of Paul Feyerabend; most notably, in his book *Against Method: Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge*. Although the title of the English language version posits the argument as one ‘against method’, this is rather misleading; a better and more insightful synopsis of the argument would be against methodological coercion⁶²¹. Feyerabend’s writing is not against *methods*, but against the standardisation, instrumentalisation, and domination of *methodological monism* in the form of rationalism, positivism, and the idea of a unified, authoritative, and definitive ‘scientific’ approach. Feyerabend argues that science is a fundamentally anarchic enterprise, and that “theoretical anarchism”, as he terms it, is a more humanitarian approach, more likely to progress knowledge than the “law and order” alternatives personified in rationalism and established ‘scientific’ method.⁶²² This approach encourages researchers to begin where the well-established theories of their field left off, keeping their work aligned to established scientific paradigms.⁶²³ The development of progression in science can instead only be reached through radical methods, he argues, using several historical examples to highlight this process.⁶²⁴ Feyerabend’s argument stands in stark opposition to the idea of a fixed method, built upon firm, unchanging and absolutely binding principles, arguing that such principles do not stand up when confronted with a historical consideration of their application in the realm of science.⁶²⁵ Given that new knowledge must necessarily sit outside of existing knowledge structures, Feyerabend

⁶¹⁹ Hoeber-Rudolf, Susanne, ‘The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World’, *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 03, Iss. 01, (2005): p. 12.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ The German Translation of this book actually adopts this title whereas the English version remains, rather controversially and more than slightly misleadingly, ‘Against Method’, (my thanks to Hartmut Behr for the translation from the German *Wider den Methodenzwang*).

⁶²² Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010).

⁶²³ Swift, Joseph, ‘Moving Beyond the Paradigm’, *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, vol. 370, (2020): p. 771.

⁶²⁴ Ibid.

⁶²⁵ Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010).

concludes that there cannot be a pre-defined methodology for discovering it;⁶²⁶ this would inherently be restricted by the limitations of the epistemic paradigm in which it was formulated, limiting the potential scope of inquiry and potential for the progression of knowledge. According to Feyerabend, violations of the 'rules' and an outright rejection of a 'law and order' approach are not only reasonable and necessary, but are the prerequisites for the progression of knowledge.⁶²⁷ He states that research paradigms and approaches are mere reflections of the training researchers have undertaken: a well-trained rationalist will adopt the mental image of their "master", conforming to their standards of argumentation no matter how great their confusion, and will become incapable of realising that "the voice of reason" which guides their research is nothing but a causal aftereffect of their training.⁶²⁸ The thesis of *Against Method* is that an anarchical approach is required to develop knowledge, and that even ostensibly 'law and order' approaches which reflect the status quo can only be successful if anarchistic moments are permitted to take place.⁶²⁹ Through a discussion of Aristotelian refutations of the movement of the earth and Galileo's use of the telescope and radical, anarchistic approach to science, he paints a picture of science "as pluralistic and disunified, socially situated, unavoidably value-laden, complexly bound up with socio-political concerns",⁶³⁰ arguing that modern science only survived, and certainly only progressed, as a result of transgression of the established scientific reason of the time, and that science and rationality are not universal measures of excellence, but rather particular reified traditions which are unaware of their historical grounding.⁶³¹ The consistency tradition, demanding that new hypothesis agree with accepted theories is, according to Feyerabend, unreasonable, as it merely preserves the older theory rather than the better theory.⁶³² The idea of a fixed method or rationality rests on too naïve a view of man and his social surroundings, and "there is no idea, however ancient and absurd, that is not capable of improving our knowledge".⁶³³

⁶²⁶ Swift, Joseph, 'Moving Beyond the Paradigm', *American Association for the Advancement of Science*, vol. 370, (2020): p. 771.

⁶²⁷ Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010).

⁶²⁸ Ibid: p. 9.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Kidd, Ian James, 'What's so Great about Feyerabend? Against Method, Forty Years on', *Metascience*, vol. 24, iss. 03, (2015): p. 344.

⁶³¹ Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010): p. xxxii.

⁶³² Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010).

⁶³³ Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010): p. xxx1.

First published in 1975, the book emerged during the heyday of positivism in the social 'sciences'. The general approach prescribed by the positivist approach posited that what must come first in any 'rational' enquiry must be method. In this manner, everything was subjugated to positivist methodological axioms, from epistemology to ontology. The result of this subjugation was a condition of methodological monotheism in the social sciences, built upon what could be measured, causality, prediction, and falsification. Much of the research at the time was built upon statistical research and mathematical formulas in a rather totalising manner. Alternative methodologies and 'radical' methods which emerged counter to this narrative were ridiculed as non-scientific, non-rigorous, and as standing against the existing 'scientific' paradigm. It is against this backdrop, and as part of the ridiculed rebellion, which Feyerabend's book stood and, to some extent, still stands. It is in this context, and in this capacity, that the arguments made in this book are understood in light of this thesis. The book is a critique of methodological monism, a call for epistemic pluralism, and an account of the esteem given to science as a preeminent social and epistemic authority, focusing on the presentation of science as methodologically unified and value free.⁶³⁴ It is these fundamental arguments concerning methodology and plurality which are of central concern to this thesis, expansively developing optionality as a methodological framework. Through Feyerabend's arguments, the need for such a perspectivist, plural, and context-sensitive approach will be further elaborated, and the idea of optionality in this capacity as an *approach towards the field*, rather than an imposition upon it, is made clear.

Feyerabend advances the fundamental idea that "knowledge is obtained from a multiplicity of views rather than from the determined application of a preferred ideology",⁶³⁵ promoting the importance of pluralism in theory and methodology as an essential component of a humanitarian outlook.⁶³⁶ In addition, he argues that a plurality of ideas is essential:

That well-established theories are never strong enough to terminate the existence of alternative approaches, and that a defence of such alternatives, being almost the only way of discovering the errors of highly respected and comprehensive points of view, is required.⁶³⁷

⁶³⁴ Kidd, Ian James, 'What's so Great about Feyerabend? Against Method, Forty Years on', *Metascience*, vol. 24, iss. 03, (2015): p. 345.

⁶³⁵ Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010): p. 32.

⁶³⁶ Ibid: p. 47.

⁶³⁷ Feyerabend, Paul, *Against Method*, (London: Verso, 2010): p. 132.

Although he argues that all rules have limits and that there is no comprehensive 'rationality', he does not suggest that we should proceed *without* rules and standards⁶³⁸: instead, he seeks to open up the "interesting possibilities" which remain out of sight as a result of firmly insisting on the status quo.⁶³⁹ In relation to methodology, this is manifest as an opposition to absolute and imposing methodological approaches, built upon a fixed 'rationality' and pre-determining both the object of study and the 'best' and most 'effective' manner of approaching it. Feyerabend instead suggests the role of "a guide who is part of the activity guided and is changed by it"⁶⁴⁰ as a model for the development of an approach *towards* the object of study, thus built upon certain rules and standards, but epistemically open and endorsing plurality in both the foundations, nature, and methods of its enquiry. This approach is also shaped by the process of enquiry, being adaptive and fluid rather than fixed and unyielding, resisting any 'streamlining' or instrumentality and instead employing all means available and desirable to advance knowledge in the face of a particular academic focus.

After all, who can say that the world which so strenuously resists unification really is as educators and metaphysicians want it to be – tidy, uniform, the same everywhere?⁶⁴¹

When applied as a methodological framework, optionality aims to cultivate these methodological and epistemological conditions to enable the application of this kind of approach in the research process. However, the critique of methodological monism and the a priori application of unified rationalities which Feyerabend's book presents, must not be confused with an opposition to methodology itself. We should not seek to get rid of methodology, but instead those tendencies within and conceptions of methodology which presuppose a need for fixed rationalities and comprehensive internal unities, both theoretical and practical, with the approach to research. As such, optionality as methodology is not an approach which rejects methodology but aims to develop an approach which enables the perspectivist, pluralist, and fluid conditions outlined by Feyerabend. According to Feyerabend, methodological coercion occurs through the immovable and predetermined application of established, unquestioned methodological approaches, built upon the

⁶³⁸ Ibid: p. 242.

⁶³⁹ Ibid: p. 244.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid: p. 243.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid: p. 244.

standardisation, instrumentalisation, and domination of established, 'rational' methodologies. They are manifest as unified, authoritative, and definitive approaches, aligned to dominant 'scientific' paradigms, as can be seen in the application of the positivist methodological axiom. The term 'axiom' is particularly apt here in describing the nature of this fundamental approach. In opposition to this, he proposes a perspectivist, pluralist approach to knowledge which stands in opposition to such methodological absolutism and the imposition of any fixed, predetermined approach which is not open and adaptable in the face of the complexity of the human epistemic condition. For Feyerabend, "a pluralism of ideas and forms of life is an essential part of any rational enquiry concerning the nature of things". The use of the term 'rational' is a little misleading here: instead of implying a kind of scientific rationality, along the lines of those he critiques, the use of this term is more a reflection of approaching research in line with the actual epistemic and ontological conditions which are a fundamental part of the human condition. Optionality as a methodological framework is intended to embody this approach and, although existing as a framework prior to experience, somewhat comparable to the fixed, 'rational' approach which Feyerabend critiques, instead aims to open up a space for exploration and deliberation which is open towards the field. It is a framework which creates a space for a perspectivist, pluralist approach to research, harking back to Feyerabend's statement that (methodological) standards are not to be done away with in their entirety, but must instead come to better reflect the human condition and the conditions necessary for the progression of knowledge.

Feyerabend's writing displays a stark rejection of positivism as the reified guiding principle of scientific research, an argument which, as this section has demonstrated, can be applied to the application of absolute, instrumental, or 'objective' methodological frameworks in a general sense. However, in order to situate optionality fully within these discussions, the differences between a positivist approach and that undertaken through its operationalisation must be undertaken. So far, optionality has been posited as a methodological framework which stands in opposition to more 'traditional', limiting, and closed approaches. This critique has rested on the limitation imposed upon those under study by methodological frameworks which inflict static and predetermined ideas *upon* the field, rather than developing an approach *towards* the field. However, all methodology is necessarily built upon a framework, and it is the task of this section to differentiate the

framework built upon optionality from the positivist frameworks which it stands in opposition to. This will be undertaken by exploring the nature of positivism and the framework developed and applied in the course of positivist research with that of optionality, demonstrating that optionality makes an important departure from positivism in the social sciences and represents a novel framework which *approaches* those under study, rather than subsuming them to an authoritative external approach which not only determines what can be studied and what constitutes research, but also the nature of those under study themselves.

Positivism has a long history, one which began in the natural sciences and inexorably crept across into the social sciences. Positivism is built upon the epistemological foundation that legitimate knowledge has only two sources – logic and reason, and empirical experience – and the notion that there is no true knowledge beyond the analytical knowledge which emerges through mathematics and the application of scientific method. For positivists, theory is merely a deductive system which concerns itself with the logical relationships between statements. As an approach to research, positivism presents itself as a logical analysis which allows many philosophical questions, formerly “obscured by the fog of metaphysics” to be answered “with precision, and by objective methods”.⁶⁴² Knowledge is ‘positive’ in the sense that it emerges, through the application of reason and logic, from a posteriori empirical experience. However, positivism is, like all approaches to research, built upon a predetermined epistemological framework.

The positivist framework has several core components which keenly display its stark contrast to the approach developed through optionality. Positivism is built upon the idea of “scientific truthfulness... the habit of basing our beliefs upon observations and inferences as impersonal, and as much divested from local and temperamental bias, as is possible for human beings”.⁶⁴³ This highlights two foundational aspects of the positivist approach. Positivism is, first and foremost, built upon the idea of truth, and thus develops a singular and objective approach to discover this truth built upon scientific method. This approach is divorced from all context: it is universally applicable and fixed across time and space. As such, it rests upon a “harmony between theory and practice, truth and facts”, and turns philosophical thought into affirmative thought, stigmatising non-positive ideas and

⁶⁴² Russell, Bertrand, *A History of Western Philosophy*, (London: Unwin Hyman Ltd.: 1990): p. 789.

⁶⁴³ Ibid.

approaches as mere speculation, dreams, or fantasy.⁶⁴⁴ Positivism thus defames alternative modes of thought which contradict its established and severely limited universe of discourse, setting up a self-sufficient world of its own, “closed and well protected against the ingression of external factors”.⁶⁴⁵ It is this unchanging internal unity which sets the limits on positivist research, limiting not only what can be researched but which aspects are meaningful and which are not, getting to ‘the truth of the matter’ through the application of a methodological framework built upon scientific truth. However, in practice it matters little what the conditioning and limiting factors of a methodological approach are; whether they are scientific, mathematical, or built upon tradition and customary practice, they nonetheless form a framework which determines the nature, focus, and results of any research undertaken through its prism. The application of such a prism ensures that, “in one way or another all-possible meaningful predicates are prejudged”.⁶⁴⁶ The basis for this prejudgment is not necessarily important with regard to its effects. This could be a dictionary, a code of practice, or merely a convention; what is important is the fact that, “once accepted, it constitutes an empirical a priori which cannot be transcended”.⁶⁴⁷ For positivism, this is its radical empiricism and scientific criteria of truth and validity. However, the individual who experiences and expresses that experience is only expressing what is given to them; that is, as a result of such “factual repression, the experienced world is the result of restricted experience, and the positivist cleaning of the mind brings the mind in line with the restricted experience”.⁶⁴⁸

Through adopting specific, predetermined, and immovable criteria for validity and truth which cannot be transcended, the positivist methodological framework sets strict limits to what can be researched, how it can be researched, and which results can be considered truths. This results in the exclusion of all knowledge which does not conform to this epistemological framework built upon the radical acceptance of the empirical and a zealous adherence to its own perception of scientific method. This creates, to use the phrase of Marcuse, a one-dimensional researcher producing one dimensional research.

⁶⁴⁴ Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man*, (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1968): p. 140.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid: p. 147.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid: p. 148.

With all its exploring, exposing, and clarifying of ambiguities and obscurities, neo-positivism is not concerned with the great and general ambiguity and obscurity which is the established universe of experience.⁶⁴⁹

It is these very ambiguities and the inherent contingencies and seeming irrationalities of the human experience to which optionality speaks and is directed and, when developed into a methodological framework, it is against these very ideas of universal, absolute, and instrumental methodology which optionality stands. Positivism discredits or 'translates' experience⁶⁵⁰ according to its criteria of truth and scientific method as a repressive structure in relation to human experience; optionality, on the other hand, seeks to open-up research directly to the experiences and life-worlds of those under study without the imposition of such objective criteria. Whereas positivism is an obstruction of the experience of those under study, delimiting, determining, and defining truth in an abstract manner prior to any engagement with the other, optionality is an unobstructing framework to ensure that the practice of the researcher is, to all possible extent, devoid of such preconceptions. In other words, although both positivism and optionality must by necessity deploy predetermined methodological frameworks, the former does so in the form of a closed, delimited system which is imposed upon the subject, whereas the latter adopts an approach in-line with Feyerabend's work; that is, one which accepts the contingencies and conditionalities of the human experience and seeks to facilitate and enable them in the research process. A quote from a textbook on ethnography, part of a series on understanding qualitative research, highlights the understanding of methodology which optionality opposes, demonstrating its basis in positivist principles which have spilled over from the natural sciences:

Methodology references established norms of inquiry that are by and large adhered to within a distinct research tradition.⁶⁵¹

This understanding of methodology embodies many of the principles discussed above and is all too common in the social sciences. Here, methodology concerns established, pre-conceived theories and understandings which have set methods, adhering to a particular (scientific) standard, and are dominant and almost unescapable within the ostensible 'tradition' to which the researcher belongs. This is a closed system of research, delimiting

⁶⁴⁹ Marcuse, Herbert, *One Dimensional Man*, (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1968): p. 148.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁵¹ Kwame Harrison, Anthony, *Ethnography*, (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2018): p. 16.

the 'appropriate' mode of inquiry depending upon the field to which one belongs, and thus creating a series of templates which the budding researcher merely has to take off the shelf and apply. The development of optionality as a methodological approach is an attempt to develop an approach *towards* those under study which is not only open and adaptive but opposed to this kind of methodological imposition.

To conclude this discussion of optionality as an a priori methodological framework, two further concepts will be employed in order to further define this framework and the approach it embodies, alongside ensuring that the links between the conceptual character of optionality and its operationalisation as a methodological approach are clear. These are namely optionality as a critical device and optionality as an intransitive beginning and have already been outlined in-depth in the theoretical framework. However, they provide expansive insights with regard to the methodological operationalisation of optionality, and therefore require additional discussion and a brief integration here.

As the theoretical framework chapter outlined, optionality as a critical device detects and deciphers totalising, standardising, and functionalising understandings and practices, essentially operating as a critical habitus against epistemic imposition. This habitus begins before the epistemological and political assumptions upon which such impositions are built, manifest as an *unobstructing critical device* which facilitates the exposition and negation of assumptions and impositions and, in turn, facilitates the pluralistic and perspectivist discussion of antagonistic meanings, understandings, and practices. This critical habitus of epistemic unobstruction serves as the first step in operationalising optionality as a methodological framework. In order to develop the methodological approach demonstrated through the use of Feyerabend's work, optionality as methodology must first adopt such a critical habitus in order to avoid imposition, recognise epistemic perspectivity, and engage with the human condition of plurality. As the conditioning concept of the methodological approach *towards* the object of study undertaken, optionality must constantly, critically reflect upon itself, its practice, and the object of study in order to maintain the core principles explored within this section and enables the space for this approach.

An additional notion which helps to develop and cognise the development of optionality as a methodological approach towards those under study is the concept of the *intransitive beginning*, taken from Edward Said's book *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. This concept was previously outlined, but requires a brief re-elaboration in order to better understand

optionality as methodology. The intransitive beginning is a ‘radical starting point’; in other words, a beginning which has no object but its constant clarification – “a beginning *at* the beginning *for* the beginning”.⁶⁵² Ideas of intransitive beginnings challenge all continuities which charge cheerfully forward with faith in the possession of a perceived ‘fixed’ beginning;⁶⁵³ instead the intransitive beginning envisions and creates alternatives to the established/fixed meanings and notions which have conditioned social and political relations.⁶⁵⁴

A beginning, then, is necessarily the first step in the production of meaning; the pure intransitive beginning is manifest as the very first production of such meaning,⁶⁵⁵ prior to assumptive or totalising constructions. It is about *making* and *producing difference*.⁶⁵⁶ As a result it can be conceptualised as a task or creative and productive *process*, one which is aware of the existence of (and relations among) differences; it does not seek to extinguish such difference, but to maintain and cultivate it,⁶⁵⁷ understanding that any attempt to suppress or unify difference constitutes a practice of political violence.⁶⁵⁸ *A prioris*, including paradigms and ideologies, are all considered by this process as tools for silencing discourse.⁶⁵⁹ Consequently intransitive beginnings envision alternatives to the existing meanings which have conditioned social and political relations, serving as the vehicle for alternate constructions.⁶⁶⁰ They are propositions about, “and creations of, other ways of being”; an alternative to the hegemonic, hierarchical and violent modes which are already established, achieving such a vision through temporalised, de-essentialised and transformative understandings towards the plurality of difference, and the creation of critical and open-ended discourse.⁶⁶¹ Beginning as a process therefore must consist, in part, of the performance of a “ceaseless criticality and self-criticality as the practice of an ethics of responsibility to the infinity of differences”, as the silencing of a critical discourse harms such an infinity.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵² Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: Granta Publications, 2012): p. 73.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁴ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 97.

⁶⁵⁵ Said, Edward, *Beginnings: Intention and Method*, (London: Granta Publications, 2012): p. 5.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁷ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 96.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid: p. 97.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid: p. 99.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid: p. 97.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶⁶² Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2014): p. 98.

Optionality as an approach *towards* the object of study is, at its foundation, a process of beginning itself. It is a performance of ceaseless criticality, practicing an ethics of responsibility towards such an infinity of difference.⁶⁶³ It approaches epistemology and political practice as a series of fresh encounters, thus constituting a process of perennial beginning. The cultivation, maintenance and responsibility towards the infinity of difference therein can be observed in optionality as the recognition of the inherently open-ended nature of meaning within questions of epistemology and political practice; although these are often presented in a totalised/fixed form, they possess the capacity to contain an infinite 'difference' of content, one which optionality recognises and facilitates as a process of constant beginning. In its operationalisation as a methodological approach, the concept of the intransitive beginning serves to highlight the manner in which such an approach proceeds: as a process which recognises, maintains, and cultivates difference, recognising and facilitating epistemic perspectivity and plurality in an approach which stands in opposition to imposition. In this capacity, each encounter in the field is understood through the idea of an intransitive beginning; that is, a constantly self-critical approach *towards* those under study, remaining open towards perspectivism and plurality as it is expressed as a methodological framework committed to a theoretically informed epistemological openness.

With regard to empirical research, the effects of this practically concern the approach of the researcher to those under study, and the manner in which the researcher conducts their research. In the course of conducting my fieldwork, this was undertaken in two main ways: firstly, through the maintenance of a critical habitus following the principles of optionality as a critical device; and secondly, through my practical approach when undertaking research. The negative aspects of the intransitive beginning concern challenging continuities in a non-hierarchical or hegemonic manner, avoiding the suppression of difference, and the performance of a continuous (self)criticality towards difference. This formed the basic framework of the mindset adopted towards the research process, attempting to maintain and cultivate the expression of difference in the research process in opposition to imposition. This was evident in practice through the ways in which I conducted participant observation and research more generally. I constructed the interpretation of my observations inductively and built the whole research process upon what was gathered from

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

the field, rather than attempting to export a template for researching and deploying it universally. Each encounter was approached without expectations, and the process of conducting research was adopted in relation to each fresh encounter. Round tables with central government officials, conferences, workshops, and campaigns, along with living with participants and working in their local communities were all, to a greater or lesser degree, unique as contexts, research situations, and in terms of the individuals, communities, and hierarchies involved. This meant that, although similarities emerged, each encounter was approached as a novel beginning in the sense that I was open and adaptive towards the contextual particularities, unique research difficulties, and other specificities of distinct people, places, and spaces. In following sections, this will become evident in the adoption of the figure of the anarchist in order to negotiate difficulties and particularities of a rather specific research context.

This discussion notwithstanding, optionality as a methodological framework nevertheless requires a method for its *practical* operation in the field. The following section will outline ethnographic method as the most suitable method for a methodological approach built upon optionality. Optionality as a theoretical framework will also be shown to be an ameliorative contribution to the central problematics of ethnographic research, resulting in an approach in which optionality as methodology and ethnography as method form a complementary and mutually reinforcing research program. This program forms the basis on which fieldwork was conducted, and upon which additional methodological considerations were developed. These considerations, however, will be discussed in the subsequent section. The following section begins by outlining the general data collection methods used, presenting a table with some brief explanations to provide an overview of the basic methods employed in the course of the fieldwork. This is then expanded upon by eliciting the understanding of ethnography upheld in this thesis, leading on to a discussion of the major problematics in contemporary ethnography and an examination of the ways in which the core principles of optionality ameliorate these problematics.

Figure 2: A table identifying the basic set of methods employed.

<p>An Ethnographic Approach Informed by Optionality:</p>	<p>The methods undertaken throughout the research process are informed by optionality as a methodological framework. This works as a complimentary and expansive addition in tandem with an ethnographic approach that embodies thick description, a commitment to immersion and context-sensitivity, and an opposition to epistemic imposition in recognition of epistemic perspectivity.</p>
<p>Participant Observation:</p>	<p>Participant observation was the main method used throughout the research: this is most notable in the research conducted with the NGO and project and in the time spent staying with local communities. A description of participant observation, its enaction, and its tensions will be given in a later section. The NGO was selected due to its global and national prominence in Kyrgyzstan, and due to their large scale projects, both in terms of funding and size. The project was chosen mainly as it was the largest project they were conducting related to peacebuilding – most of their other projects at the time concerned working with those who had returned from Syria and Iraq after joining ISIS from Kyrgyzstan. Although this certainly concerns peace, it would not have worked in relation to the goals and theoretical ambitions of this thesis.</p>

Semi-structured Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were often used to build upon observations gleaned through participant observation. Such interviews were conducted with NGO and partner organisation staff, project experts, local government representatives, and sometimes with project participants. The selection of participants was done in different ways: with the NGO, I spoke to each and every staff member, but during the project I was only able to talk to a limited number due to the large numbers of participants. I therefore spoke with those with whom I developed relationships, who were open to discussion, and sometimes simply with those with whom conversations naturally started up. Semi-structured interviews were then arranged during breaks, in quiet moments, and sometimes whilst out on a walk. However, it was a less-effective method for a few reasons. Semi-structured interviews are not an appropriate method for all situations and circumstances. In post-Soviet Central Asia, any formality or overt structuring in this manner can be viewed with suspicion. The nature of everyday life and the interactions I had with people often lent itself to a less rigid, flexible approach without overt formality and attempts to structure interactions and experiences.

<p>Everyday Interactions, Observations, and Encounters:</p>	<p>As a result, a large proportion of the ‘data collection’ occurred through everyday interactions, observations, and encounters. Fieldwork is complex, full of uncertainties, and contingent upon ever changing moments, situations, and locations. Therefore, I remained open to all encounters in line with optionality, and attempted to pursue each and every opportunity as it arose. Sometimes things would drift towards a participant-observer dynamic, but often interactions and encounters were fleeting, with strangers, or in other ways not amenable to the application of a rigid research method. Participants were not selected but instead were part of everyday encounters and life in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, the undergirding of all the research conducted by optionality as methodology is the defining feature of the methods conducted.</p>
<p>Other Sources Used:</p>	<p>This thesis draws on other sources outside of the above. These include: Kyrgyz oral traditions and folklore; government documents and announcements; and the wealth of existing literature concerning the issues and ideas it discusses concerning Kyrgyzstan.</p>

4.2 - Ethnography, Method, and Optionality

Contemporary Ethnography

The central aim of ethnography is to provide rich and holistic insights into people's understandings, actions, environment, and worldviews.⁶⁶⁴ Although there is disagreement upon its exact focus, ethnography encapsulates the elicitation of cultural knowledge, the detailed investigation of social interaction, and the comprehensive analysis of societies.⁶⁶⁵ It is a practice of qualitative research where the researcher forms the instrument⁶⁶⁶ of both the collection and inscription of the 'data', collecting passing events, conversations and observations, and inscribing them into an account which exists outside of the event: one which can be consulted again once the moment has passed.⁶⁶⁷ This ensures that the flow of social discourse and the perishable nature of such events, conversations, and observations is made amenable to academic study.⁶⁶⁸ In terms of method, ethnographers rely principally upon participant observation,⁶⁶⁹ producing detailed field-notes for later analysis.⁶⁷⁰ However, in participant observation, listening is as important as observing, leading researchers to conduct interviews with informants,⁶⁷¹ both structured and unstructured.

Most research within ethnographic fieldwork involves observation by default, and observing the practices and behaviours of others is, as outlined, fundamental to the basis of ethnographic method. However, observation, as the concept of thick description will demonstrate, is not a simple application of predetermined and thus restricted frameworks to real-life encounters with a nod of the hat to scientific method.⁶⁷² Observations made inherently involve the partnership of the subjects themselves, as ethnography is not a

⁶⁶⁴ Hodges, Brian David, Kuper, Ayelet and Reeves, Scott, 'Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 337, Iss. 7668, (2008): p. 512.

⁶⁶⁵ Atkinson, P. and Hammersley, M., *Ethnography: Principles and Practice*, (London: Tavistock Publications, 1983): p. 1.

⁶⁶⁶ Conquergood, Dwight, 'Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics', *Communications Monographs*, Vol. 52, Iss. 08, (1991): p. 180.

⁶⁶⁷ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): p. 19.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid: p. 20.

⁶⁶⁹ Atkinson, P. and Hammersley, M., 'Ethnography and participant observation', in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc., (1994): p. 248-261): p. 248.

⁶⁷⁰ Hodges, Brian David, Kuper, Ayelet and Reeves, Scott, 'Qualitative Research Methodologies: Ethnography', *British Medical Journal*, Vol. 337, Iss. 7668, (2008): p. 512.

⁶⁷¹ Tsuji, Takaaki, 'Ethnography', in Ishida, Toru, (ed.), *Field Informatics*, (Berlin: Springer, 2012): p. 59.

⁶⁷² King, Margery R. and Line, William, 'Cross-Cultural Research', *The Journal of Educational Sociology*, Vol. 29, Iss. 07 (1956): p. 286.

natural science experiment in which the inanimate is merely perceived and quantified; it involves human relationships, conversation, and interpretation, all of which take place in an environment in which the researcher must actually *be*. The nature of ethnographic research and the necessarily involved position of the researcher precludes a definite connection between the researcher to the researched. We do not observe from a position above and superior to that of the observed; we observe from *within* the living process which we share, with all the dignity and confusion inherent to it.⁶⁷³ Participation is, therefore, an essential component of observation if any reasonable depth of understanding is to be achieved, especially in a cross-cultural context.

Ethnographic methods often consist of small-scale, detailed investigations with unstructured data (without a closed set of analytic categories) and an explicit practice of interpretation when it comes to this data, which mainly takes the form of descriptions and explanations.⁶⁷⁴ At its most basic level, ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, keeping a diary; “but it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, which define the enterprise”.⁶⁷⁵ In contrast, however, what defines it is the underlying basis of its methodology, i.e., the type of intellectual effort which it embodies. This is embodied in the concept of “thick description”.⁶⁷⁶ Ethnography *is* thick description, and the ethnographers are those doing the describing.⁶⁷⁷ What differentiates ‘thick’ description from what might be termed ‘thin’ description is that thin descriptions are the mere description of mute acts; thick description gives the act a place in “a network of framing intentions and cultural meanings”.⁶⁷⁸ Originating from Gilbert Ryle, thick description entails an account of the intentions, expectations, circumstances, settings, and purposes that give meaning to action,⁶⁷⁹ concerning itself with the framing intentions of an act and the culture and wider context to which those intentions relate and in which they become significant .⁶⁸⁰ It does

⁶⁷³ Ibid: 288.

⁶⁷⁴ Atkinson, P., & Hammersley, M., ‘Ethnography and participant observation’, in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc., (1994): p. 248-261): p. 248.

⁶⁷⁵ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): p. 6.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid: p. 16.

⁶⁷⁸ Greenblatt, Stephen, ‘The Touch of the Real’, *Representations*, Special Issue - The Fate of Culture: Geertz and Beyond, Iss. 59, (1997): p. 14-15.

⁶⁷⁹ Greenblatt, Stephen, ‘The Touch of the Real’, *Representations*, Special Issue - The Fate of Culture: Geertz and Beyond, Iss. 59, (1997): p. 16.

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid: p. 17.

not, however, attempt to exhaustively explain an act or a context, or provide any *essential* meaning to these things, but instead aims to *construct a reading of other people's constructions within a particular context*;⁶⁸¹ to begin to interpret them by recording the "circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode. It is the interpretive characteristic of description rather than detail per se that makes it thick".⁶⁸²

Methodologically speaking, ethnography is therefore centred on the issues of interpretation and reflexivity. The basis of thick description entails a concern with interpretation; as stated above, ethnography is fundamentally the construction of an interpretative reading of people, places, contexts, and cultures. Social reality is thus understood as an object of perception and construction.⁶⁸³ This perception is manifest as a 'self-conscious reliance on interpretation'⁶⁸⁴ as the means of achieving deep and considered description and analysis. However, the tissue of social life is not always directly observable; the meanings of objects and events can be revealed through "practices, reactions, cursory comments and facial expressions... indirectly through actions as well as words".⁶⁸⁵ The ethnographer is therefore faced with a multiplicity of complex structures, often knotted together, which are unfamiliar, irregular, and inexplicit; their task, thorough interpretation, is to grasp and then to render them meaningful in their narrative.⁶⁸⁶ Epistemologically speaking, ethnography can thus be seen to embody a recognition of the subjectivity of knowledge, relating to the experiences of those people who constitute and construct the life-world under study.⁶⁸⁷ It operates with an explicit understanding that their cultural knowledge (alongside the knowledge created by the ethnographer) is socially constructed.⁶⁸⁸ Ethnography is consequently focused upon examining situated and contextualised knowledge and practice through the process of thick description.

⁶⁸¹ Springs, Jason A., 'What Cultural Theorists Have to Learn from Wittgenstein; Or, How to Read Geertz as a Practice Theorist', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 76, Iss. 04, (2008): p. 951.

⁶⁸² Schwandt, T. A., *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Enquiry*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2007): p. 296.

⁶⁸³ Bourdieu, Pierre, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1990): p. 130.

⁶⁸⁴ Herbert, Steve, 'For Ethnography', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 24, Iss. 04, (2000): p. 553.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): p. 10.

⁶⁸⁷ Morrison, Marlene and Pole, Christopher, *Ethnography for Education*, (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003): p. 5.

⁶⁸⁸ Baker, Douglas, Green, Judith L., and Skukauskaitė, Audra, 'Ethnography as Epistemology', in Arthur, James et al., (eds.) *Research Method and Methodology in Education*, (London: SAGE, 2012): p. 310.

The ethnographic construction of a thick description also necessarily entails a vital concern with reflexivity and the social positioning of the researcher in relation to their “subjects”.⁶⁸⁹ Reflexivity denotes an explicit recognition of the interrelationship of the researcher and the researched, understanding the research act and its product as constitutive of, not separable from, the world under study.⁶⁹⁰ This consideration is requisite in order to prevent the imposition of the researcher’s own cultural biases, which would render thick description meaningless. Ethnography also brings into focus the constitution of the situated meanings and practices that it interprets through the process of academic writing.⁶⁹¹ The interpretations, observations, and classifications involved in such research and writing are “heuristic tools invented for practical purposes” and, as they are constructions of the author and not objective reflections of reality,⁶⁹² require reflexive analysis. Since ethnographers often argue that order should emerge from the field rather than being imposed upon it,⁶⁹³ reflexivity is vital as the process of a researcher looking inwards upon themselves, “their habitus, that is, the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world”,⁶⁹⁴ and acknowledging their influence upon it. Epistemologically, this results in acknowledging the social, political, and epistemic position of the researcher, allowing the unfolding of the situated knowledge of the subject without imposition or instrumentalisation, attempting to ‘represent’ the people, group, or society under study.

Issues in Contemporary Ethnography: Interpretation and Representation

One of the most pressing issues facing ethnography relates directly to interpretation. This is the question of whether, or not, the particular modes of analysis employed in ethnography reflect what the ‘natives’ think, or whether they are “merely clever simulations, logically equivalent but substantively different”⁶⁹⁵ This is the ‘issue of representation’. Since “an

⁶⁸⁹ Jordan, Steven and Yeomans, David, ‘Critical Ethnography: Problems in Contemporary Theory and Practice’, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 16, Iss. 03, (1995): p. 394.

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Lillis, Theresa, ‘Ethnography as Method, Methodology, and Deep Theorizing: Closing the Gap between Text and Context in Academic Writing Research’, *Written Communication*, Vol. 25, Iss. 03, (2008): p. 355.

⁶⁹² Gobo, Giampietro, *Doing Ethnography*, (London: SAGE, 2008): p. 17.

⁶⁹³ Herbert, Steve, ‘For Ethnography’, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 24, Iss. 04, (2000): p. 552.

⁶⁹⁴ Bourdieu, Pierre, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1990): p. 131.

⁶⁹⁵ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): p. 11.

ethnographer's material is always a representation",⁶⁹⁶ a common accusation levelled at ethnography is one of subjectivity: are its findings merely particular interpretations by the researcher, amounting to little more than opinions?⁶⁹⁷ This critique is levelled at the epistemological and methodological basis of ethnography,⁶⁹⁸ calling into question the viability of thick description in the face of its reliance on interpretation.

However, ethnography is not more than the 'construction of a reading' built upon interpretation. Ethnographic research cannot arrive at the 'correct' reading, i.e., at one which would rule out all other interpretations.⁶⁹⁹ This is a problematic shared with, and one explored deeply within, the study of hermeneutics and textual interpretation more generally. Nevertheless, ethnographic research has significant advantages over textual interpretation: the researcher is directly involved with the research subject(s) and is, therefore, able to observe and participate within their cultural and social contexts. These contexts can be thickly described,⁷⁰⁰ providing the necessary level of background and contextualisation concerning how the particular events, rituals, customs, ideas or whatever else the research is concerned with are shaped and situated.⁷⁰¹ This embeddedness within the context in which acts occur and the thick description of it, places the researcher in a deeper and more profound position in relation to the meanings and understandings conveyed by those under study. This level of involvement and the corresponding increase in the basis for comprehension allows the researcher to make interpretative claims which are evidenced beyond the ability of textual interpretation alone. Such involvement also facilitates the questioning of the researcher's assumptions, allowing for the discovery of new ways of thinking⁷⁰² rather than acting as a basis for the imposition of their pre-existing knowledge. Ethnography makes no claims to possess privileged, objective data, but provides

⁶⁹⁶ Herndl, Carl G., 'Writing Ethnography: Representation, Rhetoric, and Institutional Practices', *College English*, Vol. 53, Iss. 03, (1991): p. 321.

⁶⁹⁷ Morrison, Marlene and Pole, Christopher, *Ethnography for Education*, (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003): p. 15.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Skinner, Quentin, 'Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts', *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, Iss. 02, (1972): p. 393.

⁷⁰⁰ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): p. 14.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid: p. 9.

⁷⁰² Alpa, Shah, 'Ethnography?', *Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, Vol. 07,. Iss. 01, (2017): p. 47.

great depth in relation to the particular.⁷⁰³ This allows a level of contextualisation and detail which is unique to the discipline.

The issue of representation is often levelled as a critique by researchers from a more positivist tradition. This argument proposes that instead of gaining a more objective understanding of acts and events through quantitative methods, ethnography merely makes subjective characterisations about a particular and limited location.⁷⁰⁴ However, this critique assesses ethnography by epistemological characteristics to which it does not aspire.⁷⁰⁵ So long as ethnographers do not make positivist or absolute claims, and recognise that their research is a reflexive interpretation, such criticisms are largely irrelevant.⁷⁰⁶ Ethnography recognises the subjective reality of the experiences of those under study,⁷⁰⁷ and is reflexive about the position and positionality of the researcher in relation to the collection of this data.

The issues of representation and interpretation are also central considerations within my own research and are central concerns in the operationalisation of optionality. The question of whether particular modes of analysis can determine what those under study 'really think', or whether they create substantially different simulations, is a pertinent one for all models of research. "No researcher gathers data without a conceptual apparatus"⁷⁰⁸, these apparatuses require considerable methodological consideration in relation to this question. As an approach *towards* those under study in the manner previously outlined, optionality as a methodological framework aims to recognise epistemic perspectivity and human plurality, facilitating these conditions during the research process in a manner opposed to imposition. In this regard, this approach employs a methodological framework which attempts to lay the theoretical foundations for, rather than 'representing' those under study, moving *towards* them through the practice of a self-critical ethnics of responsibility towards difference.⁷⁰⁹

The combination of optionality as a methodology and ethnography as method helps to ameliorate the issue of representation through providing the conceptual conditions of a

⁷⁰³ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): p. 23.

⁷⁰⁴ Morrison, Marlene and Pole, Christopher, *Ethnography for Education*, (Berkshire: Open University Press, 2003): p. 15.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid: p. 5.

⁷⁰⁸ Herbert, Steve, 'For Ethnography', *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 24, Iss. 04, (2000): p. 552.

⁷⁰⁹ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2014): p. 98.

research space with allows the unfolding of personal contexts, adopting a pluralist and perspectivist approach to interactions in the field. Nevertheless, interpretation is unavoidable, no matter how or why research is conducted. Ethnography is the construction of *an* interpretation, not *the* interpretation, of people, places, and events. This occurs through the process of thick description as the *practical* vehicle for a deeper and thus more justified interpretation, and optionality as an undergirding methodological framework provides a conceptual framework for thick description which helps to further enable and theoretically justify this interpretation. In this capacity, optionality provides the *conceptual* vehicle for an epistemically open, unobstructive thick description. It also serves to bolster the connection with context that ethnography aims to achieve by explicitly recognising the context-boundness of knowledge and providing a methodological framework which recognises and facilitates this.

Issues in Contemporary Ethnography: Practice, Ethics and Reflexivity

In ethnographic research, ethics and practice are inextricably intertwined. Although procedural ethical considerations are just as important as in any other research method, ethnography goes beyond straightforward 'tick-box' pro formas to an "ethics-in-practice" approach.⁷¹⁰ The cornerstone of this approach is "epistemic responsibility", which "requires us to be aware of our intentions, our interpretations and our relations of power".⁷¹¹ Not only are ethics and practice thus interlinked, but the ethical considerations of ethnography are intrinsically related to its methodological approach in relation to reflexivity. Reflexivity is crucial in addressing the ethical considerations of research,⁷¹² and functions alongside the more forthright procedural ethical considerations of informed consent, confidentiality, and accuracy. Informed consent means that subjects must be informed regarding the nature and consequences of research and participate voluntarily in it; and confidentiality requires that personal data are anonymised, safeguarding participants identities in case of harm through exposure; finally, accuracy denotes that the data must not be fraudulent or omissive.⁷¹³

⁷¹⁰ Jones, Helen, 'Being Really There and Really Aware: Ethics, Politics and Representation', in Jones, Julie S. and Watt, Sal, *Ethnography in Social Science Practice*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010): p. 34.

⁷¹¹ Ibid.

⁷¹² Donnelly, Michele K. and Joseph, Janelle, 'Reflections on Ethnography: Ethics and Inebriation

⁷¹³ Christians, Clifford, 'Ethics and Politics in Qualitative Research', in Denzin, N.K and Lincoln, Y.S, (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research: Third Edition*, (London: SAGE, 2005): p. 144-145.

Ethically, these practices are *outwardly* concerned with the subject of research. Reflexivity, on the other hand, is the researcher's critical reflection upon their *own* social/political/epistemic position, and is thus an *inward-looking* ethical consideration, albeit one with significant external impact. It is an important tool for understanding the nature of ethics in ethnographic or qualitative research in general, revealing how *ethical practice* can be achieved.⁷¹⁴ On the one hand, reflexivity is an important ethical consideration in ethnography due to the "crisis of legitimation", which challenges the ethnographer's ability to free themselves from their own context and background,⁷¹⁵ and to what extent their claims can represent, beyond their personal or social biases, their object(s) of study.⁷¹⁶ Without critical self-reflection, the researcher cannot fulfil the procedural criteria of accuracy as outlined above. The researcher risks making an imposition onto the subjects of the research, as, without this reflection, they cannot acknowledge their own influence over the research or understand the process of knowledge production which led to their research outcomes. This is both dishonest, as such a lack of acknowledgement runs the risk of presenting bias as reflexive interpretation, and risks inaccurate, instrumental data as a result. As the interpretative intermediary between the research subject and the written text, the researcher must be reflexive to acknowledge the influence which their social, political, and epistemological position has upon their interpretation. By being provided with an elaboration and discussion of the 'position' of the researcher, the reader can see the angle and viewpoint from which their observations and findings arose.⁷¹⁷

Reflexivity should thus be seen as a natural and vital extension of procedural ethics,⁷¹⁸ and as the cornerstone of an ethical ethnography. Reflexivity encapsulates and simultaneously extends the concerns of procedural ethics and is integral to the *practice* of ethnography.⁷¹⁹ It is the concept that fuses ethics and practice into a simultaneous motion in the moment of research. "Research ethics committees cannot help you when you are in the field and difficult, unexpected situations arise, when you are forced to make immediate decisions

⁷¹⁴ Gilliam, Lynn and Guillemin, Marilys, 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 262-263.

⁷¹⁵ Knoblauch, Herbert, 'Focused Ethnography', *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, Vol. 06, Iss. 03, (2005): p. 3.

⁷¹⁶ Lichterman, Paul, 'Interpretative Reflexivity in Ethnography', *Ethnography*, Vol. 18, Iss. 0, (2017): p. 35-45.

⁷¹⁷ Salzman, Phillip Carl, 'On Reflexivity', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, Iss. 03, (2002): p. 806.

⁷¹⁸ Gilliam, Lynn and Guillemin, Marilys, 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 269.

⁷¹⁹ Gilliam, Lynn and Guillemin, Marilys, 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 269.

about ethical concerns”.⁷²⁰ In order to operate effectively as an ‘ethics-in-practice’, the reflexivity of the researcher must be a perennial concern: “a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and the data but also to the researcher, participants and the research context”.⁷²¹ It focuses on the factors which influence the researcher’s construction of knowledge, alongside the inter-personal moments which are the core of ethnography: the interactions between researcher and participant.⁷²² In this capacity, reflexivity enables the researcher to better respect the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of the participants, recognising the potential for harm caused by failing to do so, going far beyond the basic requirements of procedural ethics and informed consent.⁷²³ Reflexivity as ethics involves a consideration of ‘micro-ethics’; the ethical dimension of the everyday and ordinary research practices,⁷²⁴ in a habitus of constant self-criticality, accessing the research process as a whole and each ethical dilemma as it arises. These are the “ethically important moments” in research practice, and reflexivity is the means of preparing for them and addressing and responding to them as they arise.⁷²⁵ Reflexivity can thus be seen as the cornerstone of ethnography and of the ‘ethics-in-practice’ which it embodies.

Optionality as a methodological framework shares the concerns of ethnographic research with regard to reflexivity and the operation of a self-critical ethics-in-practice. It exists as a theoretically informed methodological framework to facilitate and improve the reflexivity of the researcher through its concern with perspectivity and plurality. Ethnography requires a research approach which practices a certain ‘epistemic responsibility’, is aware of its intentions, interpretations, and position in relation to those under study. Research can never escape the positionality of the researcher (and of those researched) - there is no view from nowhere – but it can develop and adopt an approach *towards* those under study, rather than imposing standardising or totalising templates and assumption upon them. It can be open towards difference, accepting plurality and the perspectivist character of knowledge, instead of importing ‘one size fits all’ research methodologies and methods in an ostensibly objective manner. Optionality seeks to embody these considerations as an approach

⁷²⁰ Ibid: p. 273.

⁷²¹ Ibid: p. 275.

⁷²² Ibid.

⁷²³ Ibid.

⁷²⁴ Ibid: p. 276.

⁷²⁵ Ibid.

towards those under study, bolstering the necessary reflexivity which is a fundamental component of ethnographic research through providing a theoretically informed methodology which encapsulates it and furnishing the researcher with a conceptual framework for informing the practice of a reflexive analysis.

Ethnographic method is therefore a not only suitable but complimentary method for the process of operationalising optionality as a methodological framework and, as such, was deployed during the fieldwork undertaken in the course of this thesis. However, pursuing such a reflexive 'ethics-in-practice' in the research process involves both recognising your own viewpoint in the light of a perspectivist understanding of knowledge and being able to reflect upon this process of observation itself.⁷²⁶ The experience of the researcher must be turned back upon them, enabling them to take the attitude of the 'other' towards themselves.⁷²⁷ This process must take the form of both simple, daily habitual actions, and a conscious, considered, and theoretically-driven effort to consider the 'unconsidered' in all aspects of my research process.⁷²⁸ Serious problems may arise when confronted with serious and/or unexpected ethical dilemmas, which could not have been foreseen. Gillam and Guillemin give the example of conducting ethnographic research into women's experience of heart disease; during an interview, the participant, when asked about the impact of heart disease upon her life, begins to cry and reveals that, although she is coping with the disease, she has just discovered that her husband has been sexually abusing her daughter since childhood.⁷²⁹ Although researching peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan is a far cry from this setting, such unexpected ethical considerations may just as easily occur. When interviewing people about conflict in a setting where extreme violence has occurred, many things may be revealed that would prompt an immediate ethical consideration, including the revelation of previously unknown crimes as in the above example. Examples of this are to be found frequently in the literature, both ethnographic and otherwise. However, a stark and notable example is one of many in Alexander Laban Hinton's book *The Justice Façade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia*, a book which concerns the transitional justice imaginary through the

⁷²⁶ Gilliam, Lynn and Guillemin, Marilys, 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 274.

⁷²⁷ Strauss, Anselm, *The Social Psychology of George Herbert Mead*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956): p. 231.

⁷²⁸ Bolton, Gillie and Delderfield, Russell, *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development*, (London: SAGE, 2018): p. 8.

⁷²⁹ Gilliam, Lynn and Guillemin, Marilys, 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and 'Ethically Important Moments' in Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, Vol. 10, Iss. 02, (2004): p. 261.

empirical example of the truth commission in Cambodia after the collapse of the Khmer Rouge. During his description of court proceedings in the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia, one of the survivors of the Cambodian genocide, named Bou Meng, is on the witness stand as a civil party in a case against former members of the Khmer Rouge and the perpetrators of the genocide. After recounting his suffering, and after breaks and intervention from psychological support staff after being asked to show the scars covering his body to the court, Bou Meng has but one question for Dutch, the previous head of the prison camp in which he was tortured, starved, and forced to work. Bou Meng was arrested with his wife, and never saw her again after this moment. His only question was to ask Dutch “tell me where she was killed or smashed. Then I would go to that location and just get the soil... to pray for her soul”.⁷³⁰ After Dutch replies that, since it was a decision of his subordinates, he cannot know precisely, yet gives a rough idea of where she may have spent her final moments, Bou Meng breaks down into tears. The trial may have been directed at the perpetrators of the genocide, focused generally on international justice as a tool for transition, yet the trauma it exhumed was not merely a national trauma, or a subject for the history books, but one which was embodied in the everyday lived experiences of individuals, and which could have far-reaching and profound effects upon their wellbeing. ‘Ethics-in-practice’ here comes into the foreground. As a researcher, a decision must be made about your course of action, and this must be made as an ethical decision in the course of research practice. As much as you might plan for these events, which is a vital part of your ethical considerations prior to undertaking fieldwork, the decision in the field, in the moment, is still the place where the ethical decisions actually *happen*. This is representative of the fundamentally *unpredictable* nature of research, and ethnographic research in particular. This unpredictability in the field not only concerns having to make spur-of-the-moment ethical decisions, but also affects the research methods, the scope of the research, and even the day-to-day operation of research. Plans can change, people can change their minds, and the research question can examine itself into irrelevance, demonstrating its own lack of foundation through observation and analysis in the field. This unpredictability additionally affects the methodological approach undertaken by the researcher, as situations can arise which require additional methodological considerations. Therefore, this thesis reflects upon

⁷³⁰ Laban Hinton, Alexander, *The Justice Façade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): p. 166-167.

the additional methodological considerations which were made in the field in response to the experience of that unpredictability.

4.3 - Additional Methodological Considerations: Participant Observation and the Figure of The Anarch

The idea of additional methodological considerations is intended to convey the idea of methodological considerations which emerged as a *result* of my experiences in the field, and after the formation of optionality as the undergirding methodological framework. They were dependent upon particular experiences, emerging from observations, complexities, and unforeseen circumstances in the field. Hoeber-Rudolf's experience, as discussed above, demonstrates the unpredictable nature of fieldwork, the issues which arise from importing rigid, standardising, and assumption-laden methodologies and approaches to a space or circumstance in which they were not developed. The additional methodological considerations discussed here are, therefore, those which emerged as a result of conditions in the field yet are still methodological considerations built upon the theoretical framework of optionality. As the methodology chapter of this thesis demonstrates, optionality stands against methodological monism and the application of rigid, pre-determined methodologies without consideration of the context in which they are applied. In the course of this research, the context in which research was being undertaken necessitated a new methodological approach to deal with particular situations within a particular context. In this way, these additions do not go beyond optionality as the undergirding methodological framework of this thesis, but instead add to it by following on from its core principles. The considerations which are discussed below are aligned with, and influenced by optionality, and this relationship will be discussed in greater detail towards the end of this section. The following section outlines the additional methodological considerations which were undertaken during the fieldwork aspect of this thesis, the specific circumstances involved, and the measures taken to adapt and ameliorate any difficult situations which emerged.

In order to explore these considerations, participant observation will be discussed as a general research practice, followed by an exploration of the inherent duality which this approach brings to the researcher's positionality. This duality will be elucidated through

what is controversially-termed the 'schizophrenic' aspect of participant observation.⁷³¹ This exploration will be briefly expanded upon through a discussion of 'The Anarch', a conceptual figure taken from Ernst Jünger's 1977 novel *Eumeswil*. This concept will be employed as a means of metaphorically exploring the position I attempted to occupy during a particular aspect of my research in order to negotiate the tensions and contradictions exposed through the notion of a 'schizophrenic' duality in relation to participant observation as ethnographic research. This section will thus demonstrate the additional methodological considerations which were undertaken in the context of their emergence, establishing the framework which was developed, as they arose, to mitigate their potential negative impact upon the research project. In order to conclude this section, a brief discussion of emotion in research will be undertaken in order to highlight the personal effects of this research position upon myself as the researcher. The 'schizophrenic' duality which emerged in the course of my research had effects which went beyond merely methodological considerations and, in order to develop my account of this position and explain the manner in which I approached my research after becoming aware of it, a discussion of emotion in research and of my own emotions in relation to this issue is central in producing a 'thicker' and more considered account.

Participant Observation and My Research

Participant observation is essentially "a method in which a researcher takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture".⁷³² It is an inherently "humanistic, interpretative approach, as opposed to supposedly 'scientific' and 'positivist' positions",⁷³³ and is often portrayed as the "defining method which distinguishes ethnography from other qualitative research designs".⁷³⁴ Although ethnography has become

⁷³¹ The term 'schizophrenic' is used in some of the ethnographic literature from the late 1990s to early 2000s to describe the nature and experience of the kind of tensions which are developed in the course of this section. However, the term itself is not a particularly accurate nor sensitive one, mischaracterising schizophrenia as only a split personality disorder and reducing the seriousness of the condition to a metaphor. The use of this term in this thesis is therefore done only to reflect its usage in the literature, and to help to capture the nature and experience of tension which this section addresses.

⁷³² DeWalt, Billie R. and Musante, Kathleen, *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*, (Plymouth: Roman and Littlefield, 2011): p. 13.

⁷³³ Atkinson, P., & Hammersley, M., 'Ethnography and participant observation', in N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc., (1994): p. 249

⁷³⁴ DeLyser, Dydia, et al (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Geography*, (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010): p. 126.

an increasingly expansive term for a whole range of methods and methodologies, the practice of participant observations is still substantively relied upon as a central component to ethnographic research.⁷³⁵ Some ethnographers take this notion even further, suggesting not only that participant observations is a foundational core in the development of ethnography as a distinct research practice, but that participant observation has simply been renamed ethnography, demonstrating its centrality as a significant feature of any consideration or practice of ethnography.⁷³⁶ My own research relied, by and large, upon participant observation as its primary research practice. This took the form of living in The Kyrgyz Republic for eighteen months, working with both language schools and a peacebuilding NGO, alongside participating in the peacebuilding project. I was, therefore, both a participant in, and observer of, everyday life, of the work and practices of a NGO as a whole, and in relation to the peacebuilding project, its local participants, and their wider communities. The project was entitled “Youth-led Civic Campaign for Cohesive Communities in Kyrgyzstan”, and was predominantly concerned with, according to the final report:

(The) youth’s improved civic engagement in democratic political processes by promoting a new supportive youth identity from May to December 2021. The overall goal of the project was to promote a new supportive identity among youth for improved civic engagement in democratic political processes⁷³⁷, (*emphasis added*).

In practice, its consisted of training workshops with youth participants (mostly from previous projects undertaken by the NGO), online and offline campaigns to promote the project and to disseminate the outcomes of training in local communities, local round tables to discuss the impact, effectiveness, and future possibilities for the project on the local level, and nation round tables to discuss these issues with central government and national NGO representatives. The project focused on instilling the values of a liberal democracy in participants as a vehicle for peace and trying to create youth leaders in order to spread this message locally and nationally.

As a result of both the importance of participant observation to ethnographic research, and the adoption of both broadly ethnographic and specifically participant observation research

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Gans, Hebert J., ‘Participation in the Era of Ethnography’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Vol. 28, Iss. 05, (1999): p. 542.

⁷³⁷ Taken from the Final Report.

practises as the central and defining aspects of my own research practices, the notion and practice of participant observation requires a critical consideration and must be explained in relation to, and situated within, my own research design and practices in the field. The following section will identify and explain the central problematic raised by the notion and practice of participant observation, using this exemplary issue to demonstrate how this practice was employed and this issue ameliorated in the enaction of my research, along with further developing the remedial connections between my theoretical framework and my enaction of ethnographic methodology in the field. This issue emerged as a result of working with the NGO and the specific conditions this work imposed upon my research. I became a researcher and staff member, sometimes at different times and places, sometimes simultaneously, as a result of my position in relation to the NGO, who effectively set the parameters of this tension by including and excluding me at different point during the enaction of the project.

Participant observation, although an immensely effective and reasonably easily deployed approach to my research generally in the field, did not translate well to the office context once the activities of the project had finished. The office was a world of meetings, zoom calls, and discussions with donors, government officials, and groups of experts. Although I was involved in a conference, which the organisation held, sat through every meeting related to the project I was working with, and joined in with office life (to an extent), my involvement was limited due to my position and status in the office. I was considered an intern and was often not informed of important events in the office and beyond, such as staff meetings, discussions with experts, and even concerning the actual scheduled events of the project. A good example of this passive exclusion was my inclusion in a WhatsApp group, supposedly to 'keep me in the loop' concerning these events. However, the messages were almost entirely in Russian; a language I do not speak, and I became an afterthought in the everyday workings of the NGO. This effect was further compounded by Russian being the language of choice for everyday office life and most official events which occurred in the office and in relation to the donor organisation. In order to mitigate these effects, and to adapt my use of participant observation to the office as a new fieldwork site, I became as involved as I could in the final, document-centric stages of the project after its operational stages, maximising my involvement by co-authoring the final report. The report was the documentary culmination of the project and would be given to the donor for publication as

part of their quarterly report. As such, it contained both quantitative and qualitative data concerning the activities undertaken in the course of the project, beginning from a project description and leading to achieved results, stories of impact from participants, and recommendations and lessons learnt. I was asked to write the sections which concerned the goals and objectives of the project, conduct the interviews of participants, transcribe them, and write them into the report in terms of the project's impact, along with writing the project achievements. My participation in the writing the report was, from a researcher's perspective, an extension to the participant observation I had already conducted: as a kind of documental participant observation in which I participated through reflexively writing and observing the actions, attitudes, and directions of the others involved. In addition to directions that I received regarding the content and structure of the report, I intended to further analyse this process through observing other staff member's interactions with me and with each other, attempting to interpret their questions, observations, and attitudes, alongside the texts they produced and how they edited those which I produced. I looked at the interplay between the content I produced and that produced by others, taking care to note the directions I was given and how they were controlled and later edited.

As outlined, participant observation is often a key approach for ethnographic researchers in one form or another, moving beyond simply asking questions to study a group through active participation in their daily lives and activities. However, this approach is not without issue. Participant observation not only embodies the two issues discussed above in relation to ethnography as a general research approach, highlighting their impact upon the enaction of research, but also exemplifies some further problems that build upon these essential considerations. Not only does participant observation further demonstrate the issues of interpretation and representation, alongside that of reflexivity and research ethics, but it also brings with it problems regarding the position of the researcher; the interrelationship of researcher and researched, and the co-constitutive nature of research and the world under study. *In producing a substantial portion of this report, I became both the critic and the critiqued, simultaneously enacting both positions through my active involvement.* This issue emerged due to the blurring of the line between an 'inside' and 'outside' research position; a key issue in participant observation, albeit one amplified by the particularities of my research. This is the central problematic of participant observation, and a key issue within ethnographic research more broadly.

The first issue raised in the preceding discussion of ethnographic research was that of interpretation and representation. This raised the issue of whether the modes of research and analysis in ethnographic research actually reflect the ideas and context of the object under study, or whether they are merely a simulation, stemming more from the researcher themselves. However, ethnographic research operates under the caveat that ethnographic material is *always a representation*; a constructed 'reading', similar to a textual interpretation, which makes no claims to objectivity. Instead, it aims to create reasoned interpretations and representations through embeddedness within the context and lifeworld of those under study, which is the fundamental basis of participant observation as ethnographic method.

This issue came to the forefront during my involvement in writing the final project report, a process which both exemplifies and somewhat extends this problem. Participating in writing the report created a rather particular position in which I was the researcher of the NGO at the same time as working for them and writing the report. As a result, this issue came to the forefront of my work. This demonstrated the core problem of interpretation within the practice of participant observation whilst also extending it beyond these preliminary considerations of the common issue within ethnography more generally. In becoming one of the authors of the text, I was *simultaneously occupying the positions of researcher and researched, of the critic and the critiqued*. I was representing the organisation in an official capacity through my *participation* in the report, whilst also representing them analytically through my ethnographic *observations*. This is a core issue in the very notion of participant observation: there must necessarily be a duality in relation to the position of the researcher in which they are both *inside* and *outside* the object of their research, acting as an *internal participant* and an *external observer* at the same time. This is the problematic which I will develop throughout this section, culminating in the notion of a 'schizophrenic' or dualistic research position taken from ethnographic literature and used here to epitomize the issues raised in conducting my own research.

The second issue raised through the preceding discussion of ethnographic research (and one again particularly relevant to participant observation) is that of reflexivity. As outlined throughout this chapter, ethnography has a fundamental concern with reflexivity, manifest as a kind of 'ethics in practice' which essentially requires the constant consideration and reconsideration of the researcher's positionality. This concerns their relationship to the

object under study and their perspectivity in relation to it. In this manner, ethnography embodies reflexivity as an ethical and methodological foundation. This was previously highlighted and discussed through the notion of the 'crisis of legitimisation'; the challenge levelled against ethnographic interpretations and representations which asks how the ethnographer can remain free from their own positionality, bias, and the impacts of their own personal, social, and cultural context. In the field of ethnographic research, this is commonly addressed through appeals to reflexivity, requiring the researcher to continually acknowledge and reflect upon these things as a tool for avoiding imposition. This also connects to the ideas of interpretation and representation, as it is an essential component in the process of recognising how the construction of an ethnographic account occurs. Ethnography broadly embraces the idea that ethnographic works are not objective accounts and are inherently tied to the researcher's positionality. During my own research, particularly during my work concerning the final project report, the issue of reflexivity was again a subject of notable consideration. I was both 'inside' and 'outside' the object under study in this moment, again demonstrating the duality of my position in being the critic and critiqued as a central issue relating to participant observation as an ethnographic practice. This issue has a significant relationship to the issues surrounding positionality and reflexivity, along with requiring some essential practical and ethical considerations.

The issues raised concerning interpretation, representation, and reflexivity, and their necessary consideration in relation to the authorship of the final project report, are best and most clearly raised through the notion of 'schizophrenic' duality in research; a term used in ethnographic literature in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The next section, therefore, will bring these issues together through this notion, culminating in a discussion of the figure of 'The Anarch' as an ameliorative concept in relation to them. This section will develop an understanding of these issues through this concept, using my participation in the final project report and an illustrative example and the anarch as an explanatory and metaphorical notion in the demonstration of my methodological framework.

Ethnography, Participant Observation, and the 'Schizophrenic' Research Position

Ethnographic research inherently contains issues relating to 'studying over' the group or organisation the researcher is part of; an issue compounded by the use of participant

observation. The problem of 'studying over' emerges from the attempt to study and work *within* a particular group whilst, at the same time, studying it *from above*:⁷³⁸ being simultaneously 'inside' and 'outside' the object of study is a difficult balancing act, brimming with contradictions and tensions. Although this is an integral and therefore well-documented and analysed aspect of ethnographic research,⁷³⁹ the tensions between being simultaneously inside and outside, along with the contradictions thus entailed, were notably deeper and more pronounced in my fieldwork compared to more orthodox approaches to participant observation. This was the result of my participation in the final report as part of my analysis and critique. This tension and its resulting problematic will be explored in the following section through the idea of a 'schizophrenic' research position. This is a term taken from ethnographic literature and one which serves to best exemplify the nature of this tension.

The term 'schizophrenic' crops up in relation to considerations of participant observation as a mode of ethnographic research and represents an important discussion concerning some of the key problematics related to ethnographic research and, more specifically, participant observation. This section will, therefore, engage with this term and its use within the literature; however, once the key problematics which it represents have been elucidated upon, the term 'duality' or 'dualistic' will be used instead, avoiding the rather controversial implications of using the term 'schizophrenic' in this particular context. Participant observation is, nevertheless, understood as "a schizophrenic activity" within a particular segment of the literature. The term refers to the inherent *duality* of the researcher when undertaking participant observation: the researcher must participate without becoming "totally absorbed", remaining sufficiently detached in order to facilitate observation and analysis⁷⁴⁰ while at the same time being an included, active, and entrenched participant. The term 'schizophrenic' therefore refers to the intrinsically *dual nature* of participant observation: being *at once* a participant *and* an observer.⁷⁴¹ This term frames this implicit

⁷³⁸ Markowitz, Lisa, 'Finding the Field: Notes on the Ethnography of NGOs', *Human Organisation*, Vol. 60, Iss. 01, (2001): p. 42.

⁷³⁹ Brewer concisely summarises this problematic and the general approach to it by noting that problematic to be "the recurring theme within participant observation" and argues that achieving a proper balance between being an 'insider' and an 'outsider' allows the researcher to be simultaneously a member and non-member; to be both inside and outside the research setting, allowing participation to occur at the same time as analysis, (Brewer, John D., *Ethnography*, (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2005): p. 60-62).

⁷⁴⁰ Merriam, Sharan B., *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009): p. 126.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid: p. 137.

issue within ethnographic research; remaining simultaneously both inside and outside the object of study, able to participate and exist within it at the same time and retaining the necessary academic distance to enable critical analysis. Researchers “are rarely total participants or total observers. Rather, there is often a mix of roles (...) Although the ideal (...) is to get inside the perspective of participants, full participation is not always possible”.⁷⁴² The description of participant observation as ‘schizophrenic’ therefore refers to the duality of the position in which the researcher finds themselves and their inability to remain either inside or outside of the research object. The researcher must enact these two positions simultaneously, unable to occupy only one position at a time. The ‘participant’ part of participant observation implies an insider perspective and research position, whilst the ‘observation’ aspect of this approach suggests maintaining a critical and analytical distance as well as the acknowledgement of the researcher’s position as an outsider. The challenge in conducting this kind of ethnographic research is to combine participation and observation in order to enable the understanding of the setting as an insider whilst remaining able to examine and analyse the very same setting from the perspective as an outsider/researcher. It is this necessary positional duality which is described through the use of the term ‘schizophrenic’, implying a sense of ‘split personality’. There is an intrinsic level of marginality involved in this position, one which engenders a continual sense of insecurity as the result of “living simultaneously in two worlds, that of participation and that of research”.⁷⁴³ In addition to this, a further aspect of this ‘split personality’ emerges as a result of the attempt to remain both inside and outside of the group under study: this is the issue of “divided loyalties”.⁷⁴⁴ The term ‘schizophrenic’, therefore, not only relates to the duality of the researcher’s position, but also to the duality of their attitude and approach, as during the activity of participant observation the researcher is both acting within and alongside the activities and aims of the group under study, whilst simultaneously using them as an object for analysis and critique. Not only do these positions necessarily stand at odds with one another, but also have the potential to become mutually conditioning to the point of seriously affecting the viability and legitimacy of both genuine participation and effective analysis. This idea will subsequently be referred to through the terms ‘duality’ or ‘dualistic’, in order to both better represent the fundamental ideas entailed by it, and to avoid the

⁷⁴² Ibid: p. 135.

⁷⁴³ Atkinson, Paul and Hammersley, Martyn, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, (London Routledge, 2003): p. 89.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid: p. 90.

issues which emerge from the appropriation of the term 'schizophrenic' in a context which does not pertain to mental health.

In relation to my own participant observation, this term highlights the central issues involved in my research, most notably through my participation in writing the final project report. This activity is not only exemplary in relation to this issue but expands upon it. Although this issue is an essential part of all participant observation, and thus the majority of my fieldwork, writing the final report demonstrates these issues in their clearest and most impactful form, whilst also expanding upon them by exploring the deeper and more profound problematic they represent which would not have emerged from more traditional forms of participant observation. By participating in the writing process, I was not just *participating* in the activities undertaken by the organisation, but also helping to *produce* the official account of their work. I was not just observing a situation as it unfolded, but creating the image of these situations and, to some extent, determining their nature myself. I was thus producing my own object of study in a manner which does not usually occur in participant observation. More orthodox examples of participant observation involve participating in and observing actions and activities *determined and enacted by the group or object under study*. In this instance, I am participating in, and observing, an action and activity *which I was involved in determining myself*. The issues of interpretation, representation, and reflexivity are, therefore, particularly pronounced in my research. Regarding the issue of interpretation, the ability of the researcher to become embedded within a particular context, and thus enable an effective thick description of this context, is hampered by the tensions inherent to occupying such a dualistic research position. Occupying two positions simultaneously ensures that neither position can be fully realised and ensures that a tension always remains between them. This means that the researcher is never simply a participant, but that their very participation is coloured by their simultaneous role as an academic observer. The issue of representation is equally affected by this problematic. In occupying such a dualistic position, the researcher can easily end up representing themselves in their analysis, by shaping the object of study through active participation. Without a distance between participation and observation, between being the critic and the critiqued, achieving a legitimate or remotely authentic representation of the object under study becomes a confusing and potentially cyclical process. This affects the issue of reflexivity to a significant degree. The critical reflection upon one's own positionality

in the field is, as discussed, an essential aspect of ethnographic research. When the positions of participant and observer, critic and critiqued, inside and outside, become blurred in a manner akin to the notion of split personality, the potential for substantively reflexive research is greatly diminished.

I simultaneously represent the organisation officially, in their own terms through my contributions to the report, and as a component of my research through analysis and critique. The tension and contradictions which emerge as a result of this duality results in an enhanced and accelerated dualistic research position. There is not only the tension between the critic and critiqued and divided loyalties, as outlined in the previous sections, but also a kind of 'playing along with' or *adoption* of the separate roles. The tension is accelerated by the fact that I actually *performed* the different roles, shifting my position beyond being simply immersed to having an active and determining role. As a result of this, my research requires a rather particular set of methodological considerations in order to ameliorate these tensions and develop an approach to 'deal with' this problematic. The following section will introduce the figure of 'the Anarch' as an explorative and explanatory tool in the process of developing the methodological basis for such an approach.

The Anarch

This duality highlights and explicates the tensions and contradictions inherent to participant observation. It exemplifies the tension between 'inside' and 'outside': being simultaneously an active participant *and* an academic observer. My participation in the authorship of the final report and my use of this report in my research only increased these tensions. As a result, a brief additional methodological discussion is required. This discussion will centre upon Ernst Jünger's notion of the 'Anarch' from his 1977 book *Eumeswil*. The purpose of this discussion is to develop and present the approach and practices that were employed as a means of dealing with this tension and 'schizophrenic' position. The figure of the anarch helped me in navigating the problematic aspects of participant observation, and the issues that arose in my own research, and therefore requires some elaboration as an additional methodological approach. The use of the anarch as a heuristic device is two-fold. Firstly, it serves to present and develop the concept of 'distance' in relation to my research position and the object under study, vital as a means of navigating this problematic. Secondly, the

concept helps to facilitate and enable my research position (through this distance), building metaphorically upon the attitude and approach personified in the figure of the anarch.

Jünger, The Anarch, and Eumeswil

In order to explain the notion of the anarch, a little context and a small caveat is required relating to Jünger. Jünger is a controversial figure in some respects, in part owing to his writings concerning the aesthetics of war and “the heroic aspect of the military experience”,⁷⁴⁵ his anti-democratic and national-socialist sentiments,⁷⁴⁶ alongside some additional contentious publications. One publication, entitled “Jews and the National Question”, concerned his belief that Jews and Germans could not share the same national culture⁷⁴⁷. Jünger was, however, a figure whose intellectual ideas and associations shifted throughout his life. His friends before the war included Bertolt Brecht and the anarchist Erich Mühsam, alongside several figures of German conservatism and the active right wing.⁷⁴⁸ His inclusion in this section, nevertheless, is not to be read as a vindication or adoption of his worldview and the multifarious ideas manifest within his oeuvre and the actions of his life but is instead intended to be a demonstration of the importance of a singular concept within a particular work.

The novel *Eumeswil* is not Jünger’s most famous work, but yet remains perhaps one of his most philosophical. The novel follows the protagonist, Manuel Venator, and is set in a dystopian world; specifically, in a state ruled by ‘the Condor’, a tyrant. Venator is by day a historian and by night works in the Condor’s bar and is the narrator and protagonist of *Eumeswil*. His character develops the notion of the anarch. The anarch embodies an existential revolt without, however, providing any concrete action against the power relations in which they exist. In this sense, the anarch is built upon Jünger’s differentiation between the metaphysical and the street rebel,⁷⁴⁹

⁷⁴⁵ Dobrokhoto, Alexander L. and Mikhailovsky, Alexander, ‘Fjodor Stepun and Ernst Jünger: Intellectuals at War’, *Studies in East European Thought*, Vol. 66, Iss. 01, (2014): p. 82.

⁷⁴⁶ Morat, Daniel, ‘No Inner Remigration: Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger, and the Early Federal Republic of Germany’, *Moder Intellectual History*, Vol. 09, Iss. 03, (2012): p. 661-662.

⁷⁴⁷ Neaman, Elliot, ‘Foreword’, in Jünger, Ernst, *A German Officer in Occupied Paris: The War Journals*, (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2018): p. xi-xiii.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid: xiii.

⁷⁴⁹ Neaman, Elliot Y., *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism*, (California: University of California Press, 1999): p. 239.

the latter being concerned with active opposition and the former with individual sovereignty through internal and passive criticality and resistance. Jünger understands human nature as fundamentally anarchic,⁷⁵⁰ and the anarch as the individual who has become conscious of this, aiming to develop their own sovereign individualism without external action against the power to which they are outwardly subject to. This is the first key theme for the figure of the anarch: individual sovereignty.

Individual Sovereignty

For the anarch, individual sovereignty is achieved through maintaining a perennially skeptical attitude against authority and the pursuit of an internal, personal autonomy manifest within the self.⁷⁵¹ Jünger contrasts this figure to that of the monarch:

The monarch wants to rule many, nay, all people; the anarch, only himself. This gives him an attitude both objective and skeptical (sic) toward the powers that be; he has their figures go past him-and he is untouched, no doubt... (he is) not the adversary of the monarch but his antipode.⁷⁵²

The anarch thus remains free of commitments,⁷⁵³ living in a state of internal ‘freedom of the self’ and in an external world which they do not take seriously.⁷⁵⁴ Unlike the *anarchist*, the anarch retains a pronounced sense of the rules to which they are outwardly subject to, outwardly displaying “normal behavior”.⁷⁵⁵ They allow the impact of power and authority to bypass them, resigned only to the inescapable whirlwinds generated as a result of their application and use.⁷⁵⁶ For the anarch “freedom is not his goal; it is his property”.⁷⁵⁷

⁷⁵⁰ Jünger, Ernst, Eumeswil, (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1994): p. 41.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid: p. 43.

⁷⁵² Ibid.

⁷⁵³ Ibid: p. 99.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid: p. 111.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid: p. 154-155.

⁷⁵⁶ Jünger, Ernst, Eumeswil, (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1994): p. 280.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid: p. 280.

A Perennial Critical Habitus

The second theme characterising the figure of anarch is the maintenance of a perennial critical habitus. Although the anarch refrains from direct action, instead retaining an internal freedom of the self and living within the structures and power relations to which they are outwardly subject, this does not mean they are not critical of them. From the perspective of the anarch, “opposition is collaboration”,⁷⁵⁸ and they operate under the belief that attacking a false system would merely harm the attacker.⁷⁵⁹ However, this belief is manifest in the anarch as the maintenance of a neutral position vis-à-vis power in the state and in society,⁷⁶⁰ a position that enables them to play their own game within the framework of external authority whilst making the least waves against it:⁷⁶¹ an *active inaction*.

This reveals the anarch’s fundamental critical habitus: although recognising no law, the anarch studies all laws meticulously⁷⁶² and, through such analysis, retains a perennial criticality towards them.

As an anarch, who acknowledges neither law or custom, I owe it to myself to get at the very heart of things. I then probe them in terms of their contradictions, like image and mirror image.⁷⁶³

The process of maintaining internal individual sovereignty necessitates and develops the anarch’s critical faculties through constantly examining the sovereignty placed upon them by others. However, this perennial critique is also linked to the anarch’s outwardly inactive position: constant critique from a neutral position means they are also critical of action itself and cannot commit themselves to it.

Together, these two aspects form the framework for understanding the figure of the anarch. They are the foundational aspects from which their

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid: p. 227.

⁷⁵⁹ Braun, Abdalbarr, 'An Essay on Ernst Jünger's Concept of the Sovereign Individual' *The Norwich Conference Network*, www.norwichconference.com/?p=386, [Accessed on 23/03/2015].

⁷⁶⁰ Jünger, Ernst, *Eumeswil*, (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1994): p. 250.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² Ibid: p. 280.

⁷⁶³ Ibid: p. 242.

positionality, perspective, and the nature of their approach to power and authority stem. The following section will explore the manner in which these notions, developed and exemplified through the figure of the anarchist, contribute towards ameliorating the issues outlined in relation to ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation. The use of the anarchist in this thesis is as a heuristic figure of thought which allows us to capture a particular methodological experience through metaphorical and analogical reasoning.

The Anarchist, Distance, and the Issues of Participant Observation

In this argument, the term 'distance' is intended to refer to *intellectual* distance: the maintenance of a distance of the mind from one facet of fieldwork whilst conducting another (and vice-versa) in order to retain a level of independence and to avoid the pitfalls of attempting to occupy two positions *at the same time*. The inherent tension between inside and outside within participant observation reveals a contradiction in its position at the core of ethnographic approaches. This tension is exemplified in, and accelerated by, the particularities of my own research: namely, my position as critic and critiqued in relation to the final report. In order to ameliorate this inherent duality, and to enable my research position and effective, legitimate research, there must be a two-fold intellectual distance maintained during my research. This consists of:

- Distance from my fieldwork (and my own academic perspective) when authoring the report (or engaging with the NGO's institutional perspective).
- Distance from the report (and the institutional perspective which it entails) when critiquing it from my academic perspective and through my observations gathered from the field.

During the course of conducting my participant observation, especially during my involvement in writing the final report, I sought to maintain an intellectual distance between these two spheres. The maintenance of this distance served as a means of avoiding the development of a dualistic research position.

Without this distance, the positions of participant and observer, critic and critiqued, would become blurred and begin to mutually condition.

In order to ameliorate this problematic, an intellectual distance must be maintained between the two positions to avoid the tensions and contradictions outlined through the term 'schizophrenic'. The final report demonstrates both these tensions and contradictions in action, and how the process of detachment, developed through the figure of the anarch, serves to ameliorate them. The report required me to participate directly as an insider, performing the institutional perspective of the organisation through writing and having to ensure that I represented this perspective accurately. At the same time, the report, and the institutional perspective which it represents formed part of my analysis and, as such, required me to occupy the position of academic 'observer' in relation to it. The attempt to occupy both roles simultaneously without any attempt to retain a level of intellectual distance will result in a series of problematics that undermine the researcher's ability to interpret, represent, and remain reflexive.

The notion of individual sovereignty personified by the anarch is key in maintaining this distance. This is evident in its emphasis on understanding and acknowledging authority, structures of power, and institutional perspectives, without allowing them to take hold of the observer. In this manner, the institutional perspective of the organisation and donor are cognised without being adopted. The perspective, approach, and understanding embodied by the organisation and donor required in order to write an acceptable and representative report are *understood*, but an intellectual distance is kept from them through the establishment of a position reflecting the individual sovereignty held by the figure of the anarch. This involves an outward acceptance and cognition of rules, systems, and structures, whilst maintaining an inner world of the self.

The second aspect of the anarch that enables this distance is their perennial critical habitus. This is interlinked with individual sovereignty: the deep understanding required to cognise, and thus represent and act within, a certain institutional perspective or power structure is facilitated by the establishment and maintenance of a perennial habitus. Such constant criticality in relation to all external structures and influences enables a deep and thorough understanding of them, as effective critique requires a comprehensive understanding of its subject. Since this critical habitus is perennial, it also prevents the adoption of the perspectives, structures, and influences under criticism, thus serving as an intellectual tool for maintaining individual sovereignty. In this manner, the perennial critical habitus personified in Jünger's anarch helps to facilitate a constant intellectual distance from the activities and ideas in which one outwardly participates through a form of internal, intellectual resistance.

A two-fold basis upon which the notion of intellectual distance is developed thus stems from the figure of Jünger's anarch.

The discussions outlined above demonstrate the additional methodological considerations which were made as a result of the difficulties and tensions which emerged during the course of research. These methodological considerations, as the introduction of this chapter outlined, are not entirely divorced from the methodological framework employed from the beginnings of this research: both are conditioned by optionality as the overarching theoretical framework of this thesis as a whole. While the connection between optionality and the methodological framework has been made clear, the connections between optionality and these considerations requires some elaboration. As the discussion of Feyerabend has highlighted, optionality encourages the adoption of a fluid, eclectic, and open approach that entails the ability to change, develop, and adopt theories and concepts as and when they become useful to the research process. Optionality operates in line with his opposition to fixed methodological principles, built upon firm and unchanging principles which are intended to be binding for the duration of the research process. As an approach *towards* those under study and one built

upon the idea of plurality, optionality facilitates and encourages such adaptive methodological considerations as a means of negotiating the tensions and unexpected difficulties encountered in the field.

In this manner, an adaptive approach towards those under study is inherently aligned with optionality. The notion of individual sovereignty personified in the figure of the anarch relates to optionality's opposition towards imposition: the process of maintaining intellectual distance through individual sovereignty ensures that each research position (critic and critiqued) remains separate from the other, without imposition. This ensures that the mutual conditioning which occurs between these positions can occur without the insight gained from one position simply imposing itself on that gained from the other. The idea of maintaining a perennial critical habitus also aligns with optionality's opposition to imposition, albeit through the process of 'unobstruction' previously outlined. Optionality's process of detecting and deciphering totalizing, functionalising, and standardizing understandings and practices in this regard is exemplified in the figure of the anarch, demonstrating the influence of optionality with regard to the additional methodological consideration undertaken during my research.

Coping with this Tension and Performing the Figure of the Anarch

The preceding discussion outlining the figure of the anarch, its key aspects, and their contribution to ameliorating the tension described through the notion of a dualistic research position nevertheless leaves two key questions unanswered.

How can I cope with this tension in practice, and how is the figure of the anarch and its key aspects performed in the course of my research?

These questions are essential in explaining *how* the ideas of distance developed from the anarch are manifest in practice, and how this methodological approach is actually performed. To begin with, these questions will be discussed in relation to the mutual conditioning of the positions of the critic and critiqued.

Although the positions of the critic and critiqued are separated during their enaction by the practice of intellectual distance within my research, they nevertheless remain mutually conditioning roles. However, this mutual conditioning is a positive process: it is fundamentally a process of mutual *enabling*. In short, my ability to participate in the writing of the report is enabled by the understandings which I have gained from my fieldwork, and my fieldwork is informed and strengthened by the insight gained from participating in writing the report. This mutual conditioning extends to participant observation in a more general sense: the position of participant informs that of the observer, and vice-versa. However, my participation in writing the report takes these positions one step further, incorporating a further division into the more conventional participant/observer binary: that of the critic/critiqued. When conducting my fieldwork, I am the critic; during the writing of the report, I am the critiqued. My participation in writing the report, as parts of this chapter have sought to highlight, is exemplary in relation to these issues. However, these two positions are also mutually conditioning, and the following section will demonstrate how this process contributes towards coping with the tensions inherent to my research.

Firstly, regarding the position of the critic, the insights I have gained from conducting my fieldwork and wider research condition my ability to effectively adopt the position of the critiqued; that is, to adopt and display the organisation's institutional perspective. My engagement with the literature concerning the liberal peace, post liberal peace, and the manifold endeavors to rethink peace beyond this limiting binary has provided an academic insight into the epistemic, thematic, and formalistic content and construction of manifold approaches to peace and peacebuilding, contributing towards understanding the institutionalised understandings and practices of the organisation with whom I worked. In this manner, the position of critic provides the necessary knowledge and understanding required to adopt the role of participant or critiqued in relation to my own research. I was able to understand, and thus observe and replicate, the themes, ideas, and actions of the organisation and the perspective which they embodied.

My critical approach to the liberal peace, the expansive literature concerning the post-liberal peace and the critical responses to it, along with the 'alternative' approaches and the critical perspectives attempting to rethink peace⁷⁶⁴ provided a further critical understanding, allowing me to examine this perspective from an external, critical perspective of my own. This insight allowed me to outwardly adopt and employ the understandings and practices of the organisation whilst not adopting them inwardly myself. In this manner, I navigated the tension inherent to this undertaking through adopting this role, comparable to that of an undercover agent.

Vice-versa, the understandings and insights gained from participating in the final report inform and develop my analysis and critical perspective. As such, my position as critic is mutually enabled and conditioned by my participation in writing the report. Through this process, I become embedded within the institutional perspective and organisational worldview of the organisation I am researching, giving me a deep and contextualised comprehension of them. This is a significant factor in developing critical faculties and enabling my analysis. In this manner, the 'inside' and 'outside' positions of participant and observer, critiqued and critic, can be seen to mutually enable each other in a positive capacity. This mutual conditioning enables me to navigate both positions effectively, as they support and reinforce each other.

This is bolstered by maintaining an intellectual distance in relation to both positions during their adoption, ensuring that the tension outlined through the notion of a dualistic research position is mitigated and effectively ameliorated to the point of allowing me to conduct such research without undue impediment. The positions are not occupied simultaneously, but one at a time, allowing space for them to mutually condition one another in a manner conducive to enacting and studying them effectively, without allowing them to become blurred or to become meaningless divisions. The following section will outline the manner in which these positions and theoretical

⁷⁶⁴ Such as those undertaken in Laban Hinton's *The Justice Façade: Trials of Transition in Cambodia*, Alberg et al's *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation, and Dialogue*, and Hartmut Behr's *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, to name but a few.

considerations were put into practice during the course of my research, providing a short vignette to demonstrate how these ideas manifest during the research process.

I was tasked with writing the 'objectives' and 'achievements' sections of the final report, which formed the bulk of the text of the report as a whole, as much of the report took the form of tables, numbers, and short testimonies, rather than blocks of text. My contribution to writing the final report is exemplary of the concept of distance in action in its first incarnation: distance from my fieldwork and individual/academic perspective. The first practice which ensured that I was able to separate my contribution to the final report from my own perspectives concerning the work of the NGO was ensuring that I facilitated my direction by the NGO staff. This took the form of ensuring that I asked questions, followed specific guidance as and when it was given, and made sure that my contributions did not deviate in form or content from those provided by others. However, I was met with a further challenge at this point: when I asked for descriptions of what was required of my contributions, and what the NGO was looking for, I was not provided with any information or particular direction. For example, when I asked what they understood by 'achievements', the reply was "I don't have any information on achievements. Do you see (any) achievements?". This was representative of the wider attitude and subsequent (lack of) direction provided by staff. They saw the completion of the project itself as the achievement and struggled to break it down further, or to go deeper than the simple idea of completion itself as constituting the project's total contribution.

As a result of this lack of direction, I was forced to develop the sections myself, providing content as I saw fit. This required maintaining an intellectual distance from my fieldwork and personal, academic perspective on the project in order to produce a document which would be amenable to the staff, organisation, and donor, to whom it was ultimately submitted. This was enabled by my very perspective itself. My critical habitus, maintained perennially in relation to the NGO and its activities as a whole, enabled a deep understanding and the effective cognition of the organisation, its perspective

of itself, and how it wished to be seen and understood by others, in this context, namely the donor and future donors. The prime example of this is the issues relating to the hierarchy of knowledge throughout the project. I had read the relevant documentation provided by the NGO, which suggested that the project was built upon a bottom-up approach to learning and project development, going into local communities and listening to participants and their needs. I had, however, observed the opposite in practice. My own critical appraisal of this issue, and the conversation I had with staff concerning it, allowed me to understand the manner in which the NGO saw itself and wished to be seen, allowing me to frame the activities in the final report as activities which contributed to this aim to some degree, despite my own critical habitus. This process was built upon the maintenance of an intellectual distance between my fieldwork and the critical perspective which it embodies, and the organisation and their self-understanding and self-image. This process required me to write intentionally *against* my critique, yet at the same time stemmed from the insights gained by my critique. In this manner, I maintained my 'individual sovereignty' (to use the language of the anarchist) and my perennial critical habitus, through outwardly adopting the perspective of the organisation whilst maintaining my own, in a process of both mutual opposition and mutual reinforcement.

I had also spent considerable time reading the previous documents written by the organisation, concerning this project and preceding projects. This allowed me to mirror what I had seen. My criticality gave me a deeper insight into the nature, form, and content of the report, while the maintenance of 'individual sovereignty' as a form of intellectual distance ensured that I did not adopt the forms and perspectives contained therein. I observed that the successful completion of the project objectives, no matter how open, loose, or numerically based, was often the marker of achievement for the organisation, and so I structured my contribution accordingly, describing each objective, the actions undertaken to complete them, and the manner in which these actions were successful, resulting in 'achievements'. I kept this intellectual distance throughout, with my critical habitus informing my writing and my 'individual

sovereignty' ensuring that they ultimately remained separate from my writing. I was referred to some of these previous documents by the organisation itself, with some being suggested as templates. I was thus able to condition my observations, gathered critically as part of my research process, into the format and content desired by the organisation. The peak, and most challenging moment in maintaining this distance came as I was asked to falsify certain parts of the report. Some meetings (offline campaigns) had not been attended neither by me nor representatives of the organisation. We therefore did not have accurate information concerning the numbers of participants, the exact details of activities undertaken, or other basic information required to present them as successes and 'achievements' in the final report. I was therefore directed to write information which fitted the broad pattern of the project (this only occurred in two instances). This would have been impossible without the maintenance of an intellectual distance, and difficult without the deep understanding of the organisation and its self-image gained through my critical habitus. It would also have been unwritable without keeping my own perspectives separate through the maintenance of the individual sovereignty of the anarchist.

However, this process did not take place in a vacuum, so to speak. As the person who noticed and subsequently occupied this difficult position, I was affected by this in a capacity beyond that of methodological considerations. As I began to become more involved in the work of the NGO, I took on roles increasingly involved in the work of the NGO. I began to not only participate and observe the project as a somewhat independent researcher, but to collect interviews, take observational notes, and engage with participants for the NGO. I was asked to collect 'success stories' from participants in the form of recorded interviews, collect data about the numbers of students and their sex, and help with texts concerning the project. As I was traveling to visit round tables and campaign events which the NGO was not, I was given these tasks to gather additional data for use in the final report. This created a tension between my individual perspectives and position and those of the NGO. This was particularly noticeable when I recorded interviews with participants for

the NGO, asking questions which they had prepared and having to explain this to participants. Immediately, their attitude changed. When I had been talking with them as part of my own participant observations, they were relaxed and open, knowing that I was not sharing anything they said with those running the projects and treating me as independent of it. I was thus able to have conversations which would not have happened if I had been working for the NGO in an 'official' capacity; for example, one participant confessed that they mainly participated in the projects in order to get supplies and equipment for their school. When I asked 'official' questions for the NGO and had to explain my change in role to participants, I struggled to get interviews, and those I managed to get were vague, used the language of the project, and discussed the project in the way they thought the NGO wanted them to.

At this stage, I began to find this tension difficult on a more personal level. I had known many of the participants for several months, stayed in their houses, worked with their families, and helped out in their schools. As a result, I was forced to consider the emotional implications of conducting field research, and how my own attitude and emotions were a core part of how I would deal with such tensions in practice.

Emotions and Research

A particularly useful discussion of the importance and role of emotion in academic research can be found in the work of feminist researchers, where considerations of lived experience and its role as an undeniable part of the political is of significant importance. They draw attention to the fact that it is usual for researchers to attempt to remove themselves from their research, keeping their emotions to themselves and even sometimes intentionally omitting those of their research subjects.⁷⁶⁵ Attempts to incorporate emotions as part of the research process "could evoke criticism of our research objectivity, paint us as weak, or raise concerns about our capacity to do

⁷⁶⁵ Sylvester, Christine (ed.), 'The Forum: Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher', *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, iss. 04, (2011): p. 687.

fieldwork”.⁷⁶⁶ However, if the researcher attempts to write their emotions out of their research, they undertake an unrealistic and dishonest approach which can create fragmented research outputs.⁷⁶⁷ By silencing themselves in their work, the researcher implies that their position “as the objective researcher remains unaltered by the intimate and highly interactive experiences of research itself”,⁷⁶⁸ assuming there is “some ideal objective social science researcher” and that legitimate scholarship is “objective and rational”.⁷⁶⁹ “Researchers are not anonymous bodies/voices in relation their research; we are, rather, constructed by desires, emotions, interests and politics while doing research”⁷⁷⁰ and, therefore, locating yourself within your work is not about narcissism or personal biography, but about reflexivity; about emphasizing “the ways in which the consumption, exchange, and witnessing of emotions through research alters and affects the researcher and the research process”.⁷⁷¹

With this in mind, this next section will discuss the culmination of these tensions in my participation in the final project report and the manner in which these tensions were manifest on a personal and emotional level. This is not only a practice of reflexivity but serves to underline the *tension* of the situation and qualify the use of the term ‘schizophrenic’ to refer to the duality of my research position. The previous example, concerning my experiences working *for* the NGO rather than alongside them, served to illustrate the ways in which this tension began to unfold during the course of my research, and how it began to affect me on a more personal level.

The ‘schizophrenic’ research position outlined in this chapter, along with the

⁷⁶⁶ MacKenzie, Megan H., *Their Personal is Political, Not Mine: Feminism and Emotion* in Sylvester, Christine (ed.), *The Forum: Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher*, *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, iss. 04, (2011): p. 691.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁸ MacKenzie, Megan H., *Their Personal is Political, Not Mine: Feminism and Emotion* in Sylvester, Christine (ed.), *The Forum: Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher*, *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, iss. 04, (2011): p. 692.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ Parashar, Swati, *Embodies ‘Otherness’ and Negotiations of Difference*, in Sylvester, Christine (ed.), *The Forum: Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher*, *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, iss. 04, (2011): p. 696.

⁷⁷¹ MacKenzie, Megan H., *Their Personal is Political, Not Mine: Feminism and Emotion* in Sylvester, Christine (ed.), *The Forum: Emotion and the Feminist IR Researcher*, *International Studies Review*, vol. 13, iss. 04, (2011): p. 692.

ameliorative measures which were developed through the figure of the anarch, occurred alongside tensions of a more personal and emotional nature. During my time working with the NGO, I became friends with many of the staff, including the head of the project and regional coordinator, adding pressure to my contribution for the final report as I was not only looking to represent the organisation to the donor as they wished to be seen themselves, but also attempting to do so in a way which did not alienate myself from the staff, or cause issues within the office environment. On top of this, as the participant told me, I had seen many benefits, material and otherwise, throughout my time participating in and observing the project, and had come to understand that, in many cases, the existence of this peacebuilding effort was better than there being no effort at all. I had seen schools gain materials, community initiatives receive much needed funding, and youth receiving training which could help them secure good employment and help their status locally. I was aware that what I was doing would impact the future funding opportunities available to the NGO, and therefore the opportunities which would be provided to participants and partner organisations. Although my own perspective was highly critical of many aspects of both the project and the NGO itself, I was partially responsible for portraying them in the light required to ensure future projects.

When I was asked to write part of the report, I felt a sense of 'split personality' in the sense that I was writing a representation of the NGO's perspective, not wishing to rock the boat, whilst still holding my own, highly critical perspective concerning both the project and the NGO itself. This caused me anxiety; I was concerned that I would create an untenable position for my own research, undermining my position and adopting a role which risked reducing the data available to me by becoming both the critic and the critiqued. The figure of the anarch helped to reduce the anxiety caused by this tension by helping to mentally compartmentalize the two aspects of this tension whilst allowing for the mutual conditioning required for the development of my research. The separation of these two aspects during my research, by adopting each role independently of each other in different times and places, was also assisted

by adopting this approach to the emergence of this additional methodological consideration. This demonstrates that this tension is not just related to methodological considerations, but to emotion and, specifically, personal anxiety. The figure of the anarchy is therefore not just a methodological device, but a useful, practical device which enabled me to navigate this tension and overcome this anxiety in the research process. In this sense, we can begin to see why the term 'schizophrenic' was considered apt when it was employed to describe this tension. The term itself was intended to describe the 'split mind' of those with the condition, highlighting their perceived split from reality through combining the Greek *skhizein* (to split) and *phrēn* (mind).

The previous chapters have established the context, theoretical framework, and methodological underpinnings of this thesis, along with discussing the methods employed and the aims of the thesis as a whole. The following part, split into two chapters, forms the empirical component, putting these considerations into practice. The next chapter, the first of the empirical component, begins by examining the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through a methodology and method built upon optionality, moving on to employing optionality as a critical device in relation to the specific context of the NGO and peacebuilding project with whom research was conducted.

PART THREE: THE EMPIRICAL CHAPTERS

Chapter Five - Epistemic Environments and the Contexts of Understandings and Practices of Peace in Kyrgyzstan: An Epistemological Approach to Peace and Peacebuilding.

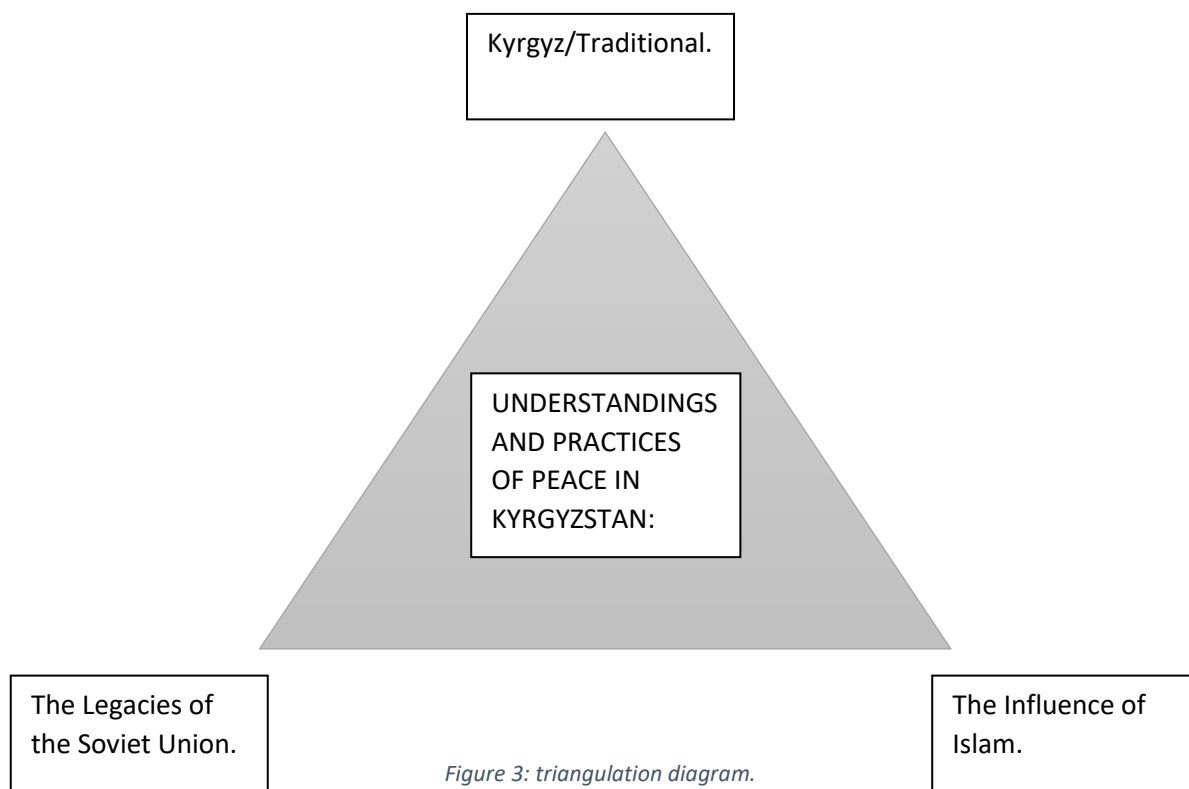
At the centre of this thesis is a concern with epistemic environments and their relationship to the conditions of the possibility for peace. Through optionality as a normative theoretical framework, it attempts to outline the kind of epistemic environment which is not conducive to peace, proposing optionality as a potential concept for introducing the epistemic conditions for the possibility of peace. This is undertaken through a comparative consideration of the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, and the specific context of the NGO and the peacebuilding project within which a significant amount of my research was conducted. The chapter five concerns this wider context, presenting a general characterisation of the understandings and practices of peace presented within it and a characterisation of the complexities and enmeshments within the fluid epistemic environment in which they exist. This is followed in chapter six by a consideration of the specific context of the NGO and project, which focuses on its disconnect from this wider context and the resultant implications for peace and peacebuilding, using optionality as a critical device and normative framework. This comparative consideration highlights not only the disconnect between the specific context of the project and the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through the exclusion of any consideration of these understandings and practices but, more specifically, the project's fundamental opposition to their fluidity, contingency, and context-dependency. Chapter five outlines a general character of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through a particular process of triangulation in order to demonstrate this fluidity, contingency, and context-dependency in their invocation and enactment. In contrast, chapter six presents the

specific context of the project as one built upon a blanket template for peace which results in the denial of this fluidity and contingency.

Together, these chapters present the empirical narrative of this thesis, drawn from an extended period of living, working, and traveling across Kyrgyzstan, and from participating in the peacebuilding project of an NGO. Optionality is employed in relation to this narrative as a critical device to consider the relationship between these epistemic environments, demonstrating the disconnect between them and the imposition of the latter upon the former, which sets the stage for its presentation as a reconstructive norm. Through the lens of optionality this disconnect, and the nature of the epistemic environment of the project itself, are understood as antithetical to the conditions for the possibility of peace, demonstrating the authoritative, hierarchical, and instrumental nature of the project and presenting it as not only disconnected from the environment of its operation, but as an imposition upon it. As a whole, these chapters intend to provide the empirical grounding for a discussion of optionality-as-peace. It is worth explaining at this point the relationship between optionality and the observations and narratives that are provided in the following chapters. The following chapter is concerned with everyday narratives and observations, approached through the lens of optionality, that resonate with considerations of peace. In doing so, they are thematised and presented separately through the notion of triangulation. As the following section shows, this does not imply their distinctness or unitary nature, but is done as an analytical device. This thesis does not attempt to explore these narratives in exhaustive depth, as it is not concerned primarily with the traditions, attitudes, and religious imperatives with which they are concerned. The intent is instead to develop a general characterisation that explores, through optionality, the situated knowledges, through narratives, that relate to peace and the conditions and processes through which they are imposed upon and denied. This section therefore applies optionality as a critical device in relation to the exclusion of situated knowledges relating to peace within a particular project. This is intended as means of exploring the critical potential of optionality and paving the way for its consideration as a reconstructive norm that establishes the conditions of the possibility for peace that go to address the concerns raised within this critique. The triangulation developed in part one consists of three aspects: the Kyrgyz/traditional; the legacy of the Soviet Union; and the influence of Islam. These aspects are not considered at equal length: instead, the amount of discussion regarding each aspect represents their

relative importance in relation to understandings and practises of peace according to my observations and the literature. However, before all else, the particular notion of triangulation adopted requires elaboration, as it not only differs substantially from more established uses of the term, but also serves at the major contribution of this section to the literature concerning understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan.

5.1 - The Wider Context: Understandings and Practices of Peace in Kyrgyzstan



To begin with, the triangulation undertaken in this thesis requires explanation. This framework, and the individual aspects of the triangulation, are primarily developed from my own observations and experiences. Nevertheless, I am not the first to identify these aspects in relation to peace and peacebuilding, with considerations of them replete within the literature. References to these are employed throughout the following section alongside my own observations by way of reinforcement. For example, with regard to the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, Kreikemeyer builds upon the post-liberal concern with the 'local' through providing experiential perspectives of bottom-up navigations of ordering and peace formation, asking the questions "how do communal actors and institutions contribute to

local ordering and peace formation”, and “what can they achieve, and what explains their successes and failures”.⁷⁷² In this way, she concerns herself with understanding “customary orders” as representations of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace. Lottholz also addresses this aspect through his examination of processes of peacebuilding and statebuilding, identifying “tradition and culture” as one imaginary in this capacity. Toktogulova is a good example of the considerations of Islam in the literature, focusing on how the state redefines Islam in accordance with nation-building processes and demonstrates the influence of Islam in this manner upon peaceful order.⁷⁷³ The legacy of the Soviet Union receives a great deal of consideration too, with authors such as Lottholz examining the history of Soviet Union policy and its impact upon the outbreak of conflict in the country. Through a territorialised and essentialised understanding of ethnicity, he argues, the preconditions for the outbreak of interethnic violence were sown, and such essentialisations continue to affect understandings of peace and practices of peacebuilding to this day.⁷⁷⁴

However, although these aspects receive widespread consideration, this is done predominantly with an individual focus upon each aspect, with some considering aspects in tandem and making specific arguments as to how they influence one another or interrelate. Lottholz’s work represents a notable departure from these considerations, in that he alludes to the complexity of these interrelations and their manifold incarnations in official and everyday understandings and practices of peaceful order. When discussing “tradition and culture” in this manner, he argues that, although such “thinking and practices” exist in people’s lived realities, they can be the subject of stylisation and hybridisation in considerations of the politics of sovereignty, and there exists an amount of instrumentalisation and invention with regard to customs and traditions.⁷⁷⁵ This begins to capture what the concept of triangulation employed in this thesis seeks to demonstrate: that these aspects do not necessarily exist alone, employed one at a time to justify or explain a

⁷⁷² Kreikemeyer, Anna, ‘Local Ordering and Peacebuilding in Kyrgyzstan: What Can Customary Order Achieve?’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 14, Iss. 04, (2020): p. 502.

⁷⁷³ Toktogulova, Mukaram, ‘Islam in the Context of Nation-Building in Kyrgyzstan: Reproduced Practices and Contested Discourses’, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 110, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 51-63.

⁷⁷⁴ Lottholz, Philipp, ‘Old Slogans Ringing Hollow: The Legacy of Social Engineering, Statebuilding and the ‘Dilemma of Difference’ in (Post-) Soviet Kyrgyzstan’, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, Vol. 12, Iss. 03, (2018): p. 405-424.

⁷⁷⁵ Lottholz, Philipp, *Post-liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia: Imaginaries, Discourses and Practices of Social Ordering*, (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022): p. 94.

certain thought or activity, or even as simple convergences of ideas from two aspects, where there is a simple relation of influence between the two. Instead, they can be manifest and deployed in complex webs of interrelation, in which they converge, diverge, and amalgamate with and from one another. Although they can be the individual foundation of certain understandings and practices of peace, such ideas and activities can emerge from the complex connections between them, be presented as solely 'traditional' whilst drawing upon central ideas from other aspects, or any combination thereof.

The concept of triangulation, intended to reflect this complexity, is thus the central contribution of this section in relation to the existing literature concerning these aspects in Kyrgyzstan. Lottholz's book draws attention to this complexity but does not provide a theoretical framework for cognising it. This section, therefore, does not seek to provide a better or more profound account of these understandings and practices, as excellent, dedicated accounts already exist. Instead, it seeks to provide a conceptual addition to these accounts that better captures their reality in practice and the complex relations between them. The purpose is to use this concept and the three aspects to provide a general characterisation of the epistemic environment of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, allowing for chapter six to situate the work of the NGO and peacebuilding project in relation to it. As such, chapter five serves as the framing for the empirical and epistemological critique of the peacebuilding project through the lens of optionality. However, before this account can begin, the specific use of the concept of 'triangulation' requires elaboration.

The triangulation presented here does not follow the standard conception of triangulation presented in trigonometry or the social science literature, and thus requires explanation. The basic notion of triangulation stems from surveying, being the means of determining a particular point in space through measuring the angles towards it, taken from two alternative and known points which serve as a baseline. This basic notion of using multiple points to determine and define a third carries through into its application in the social sciences. Here, the term refers "to the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods, or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct".⁷⁷⁶ The term is often used to denote the use of multiple methods, data, sources,

⁷⁷⁶ Rahman, Khan Ferdousour, 'Triangulation Research Method as the Tool of Social Science', *BUP Journal*, Vol. 01, Iss. 02, (2012): p. 156.

or researchers as an aspect of good research practice.⁷⁷⁷ This can be three, as in this thesis, or more. This is intended to increase the validity of research through uniting multiple considerations in the study of a singular phenomenon.⁷⁷⁸ In this sense, 'triangulation' implies combining theoretical perspectives or empirical approaches to better understand a research object. However, the triangulation in this thesis goes beyond this fundamental understanding. Instead of consisting of three parts, two of which serving to elucidate the third, the aspects of the triangle here (*Kyrgyz/Traditional, Soviet, Islamic*) retain their analytical individuality while, at the same time, are co-constitutive and mutually reinforcing.

Although each aspect of the triangulation is a distinct analytical aspect in its own right, remaining independent, co-original, and irreducible, together they can exist in a variegated process of interrelation.⁷⁷⁹ They are, therefore, *gleichursprünglich* in the Habermasian sense: irreducible yet co-constitutive. Despite this interrelation each aspect is neither suspended nor invalidated throughout the process of their invocation, and while one or two aspects may be superseded by another in a particular time or place, they retain their independent existence as part of the development of something new, or in refutation of the prevailing aspect. This interrelation is best described through the notions of convergence, divergence, and amalgamation. The term convergence is intended to represent the invocation or presentation of two or more aspects in parallel: the different aspects interrelate in tandem to one another, neither amalgamating nor replacing one another. The idea of divergence is the opposite of this, where the aspects are presented as opposites, or as being incompatible. The idea of amalgamation denotes the process of interrelation as combining, intertwining, or intermingling, in which aspects are presented together in the creation of something new. This is comparable to the notion of *aufhebung* in Hegel, which describes the obsolescence of something, yet its preservation through incorporation in something new and in which it nevertheless persists. In this manner, an aspect is superseded by another/others, yet is conserved in a new form. All three aspects of the triangulation can, therefore, relate to each other and mutually condition one another, persisting in a mutual capacity as original analytical aspects whilst operating in a process of interrelation.

⁷⁷⁷ Mathison, Sandra, 'Why Triangulate?', *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 17, Iss. 02, (1988): p. 13.

⁷⁷⁸ Rahman, Khan Ferdousour, 'Triangulation Research Method as the Tool of Social Science', *BUP Journal*, Vol. 01, Iss. 02, (2012): p. 156.

⁷⁷⁹ The following section and discussion of triangulation draws upon a forthcoming publication by Hartmut Behr entitled *Reversibility: Politics under Conditions of Uncertainty* (forthcoming with McGill-Queen's University Press).

There is also a temporal element to this process: all three aspects are not necessarily present at any one time, and their (inter)relation is contingent, depending upon the moment and circumstances of their use. Context is, therefore, the driving rationale behind this temporality, determining which aspect(s) of the triangulation are present at any given time. However, even if one aspect is dominant at a particular time, this does not necessarily mean that the other aspects are not present: they are merely temporally/contextually less significant. For example, the problems facing Kyrgyzstan in the path to peace, and the understandings and practices people saw as solutions to these problems, differed greatly in this regard. Whilst staying in a village in the south, I observed community relations to be the most important thing for residents, who highlighted the Kyrgyz/Traditional concept of *yntymak* alongside the Islamic notion of *ashar* as key to promoting peace in this capacity. I helped out with the harvest, and ensuring the crops were collected before the first frost and in time for the bazaar entailed cooperation, sharing equipment, and forms of mutual aid in line with these concepts. In this manner, the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect converged with an Islamic understanding to address the problems this community saw as most pressing in promoting peaceful order. However, during a day spent with a religious man, educated in Saudi Arabia, in the capital, I was told that the spread and strengthening of Islam was the only path to peace: they frowned upon Kyrgyz customs as deviations and promoted sharia law and corporal punishment in line with their religious beliefs as the cornerstones of peaceful order. This contrasted with the time I spent working with older women in a project for female entrepreneurs. They spoke highly of the stability of the old Soviet order, stressing their Soviet identity and blaming the loss of this order for the decline of peaceful order. However, there were also instances in which these aspects were interwoven in more complex ways.



Figure 4: photo taken near Osh bazaar by the author, 2021.

I met a woman while I was talking to traders in Osh Bazaar in Bishkek who demonstrated the potential for these aspects to interrelate in manifold ways through diverse contexts.⁷⁸⁰ Bishkek is famed for its bazaars, where locals sit on blankets on the pavement, traders stand at market stalls, and sellers occupy shipping containers, selling everything from second hand clothes to Soviet uniforms and seventh century antiquities. Osh Bazaar sits on the edge of the city centre; a maze of buildings, gazebos, and kiosks which spreads over nearly a kilometre. Every weekend, at the edge of the main bazaar, locals spread their wares across the pavements in what is locally known as the “dog bazaar”, displaying an eclectic collection of anything and everything from the brand new to the near unidentifiable.

During a conversation with one of the traders, a friend approached, excited and already talking quickly. She was an English teacher at a Bishkek university. After introductions, we ended up at a near-by café, talking and drinking coffee. The conversation illustrates the three aspects of the triangulation and is a representative example of the ways in which these aspects are enmeshed and interwoven, forming a relationship of convergence, divergence, or

⁷⁸⁰ The following section is shared in common with a co-authored paper: Devereux, Liam and Behr, Hartmut, ‘Phenomenological peace: Searching Beyond the “Liberal” and the “Post-Liberal” Peace, with field observations from Kyrgyzstan’, which is currently awaiting a decision after peer review in *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*.

amalgamation with one another. As the conversation progressed, and her story unfolded, it illustrated the movement and transformation inherent to her ideas and actions.

She began by talking about her childhood, explaining the stark changes in her life which had occurred as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Money, she argued, had become the central issue for the post-independence citizens of Kyrgyzstan. People had become poorer, struggling to find work after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They had experienced the disintegration of the financial and social equality of the Soviet period, along with the diminishing education and employment opportunities this entailed. The Soviet period was, she explained, a period of *stability*. As this relative stability was shattered in the process of independence, the roots of conflict emerged. Under Soviet rule, education, work, and social security was provided for all, and the state ensured that everyday necessities, such as bread and milk, were readily available to all. Now, she said, the millionaires took what they wanted, and conflict emerged in the instability that was left for everyone else. In this way, her narrative embodied the legacies of Soviet understandings and practices of peace, in which a centralised, authoritarian model of stability was at the core of peaceful order.

However, after this discussion she began to talk about the Manas epos, an oral epic poem narrating the life of the eponymous hero, Manas, the historical unifier of the Kyrgyz people. The epos is considered an essential part of being Kyrgyz, and “it is hard, possibly impossible, to find a Kyrgyzstani citizen who has not heard of the epic and who does not know at least a little bit about it”⁷⁸¹. The epos was elevated to the status of “national epic”, with the image of Manas appearing on currency and his story becoming part of the national curriculum (Hanks, 2011; 182). She suggested that the Manas epos was the code of life for the Kyrgyz people, and that from listening to it, one could ‘learn the Kyrgyz soul’. She presented the epos as a source for principles for living a good life, engendering a new kind of stability, a Kyrgyz, traditional stability based upon the moral order which the epos develops.⁷⁸²

⁷⁸¹ Van Der Heide, Nienke, *Spirited Performance: The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan*, (Amsterdam: Rozenburg Publishers, 2008): p. 21.

⁷⁸² The notion of ‘stability’; notably the idea of peace as stability, is a recurring theme in this chapter. The Kyrgyz word equivalent to ‘stability’ (туруктуулук – *turuktuuluk*) is somewhat formal and academic and did not often feature in conversations I had; only in those concerning the intimate details of politics or Kyrgyz history. Instead, descriptions were given of events and other words were used to characterise them, such as *tynch*, which I discuss in detail in this thesis. The idea of ‘stability’ is therefore my own interpretation and characterisation of the events and ideas expressed to me, rather than a representation of the precise wording

Her narrative thus demonstrated the impact of the legacies of the Soviet Union as well as the influence of Kyrgyz/Traditional ideas upon her understandings and practices of peace. The two *converged* in her narrative through the idea of stability as the basis of peaceful order. Despite her adoption of Soviet principles as the basis for peace, and the clear influence this had had upon her life, she nevertheless had incorporated traditional Kyrgyz narratives into this perspective, explaining to me how the loss of order following independence could be replaced by the reification of the Manas epos. Interestingly, this was a policy pursued by the Kyrgyz government after independence, when a special governmental committee on cultural and education affairs was formed, deriving seven maxims from the epos to be adopted as official state ideology⁷⁸³ to engender intercommunal peace.

She also compared these beliefs and experiences with those of her husband who, after many hardships throughout his life, had become an increasingly pious practitioner of Islam. At first, he tried to convince her to wear the hijab, practice namaz,⁷⁸⁴ and to convert. She refused, arguing with her husband that these were not Kyrgyz traditions: they were Saudi Arabian rules from a different culture, one which was not compatible with the Kyrgyz way of life and practice of religion. God is in your heart, she said, not in a book. When they had married, she had lived with her husband's family, as is the Kyrgyz tradition, for nine months. During this time, she became increasingly ill, eventually losing her sight and ending up in hospital. She explained that her mother- and father-in-law had never liked her. Initially, they had refused to bless the marriage. Only after her husband refused to marry anyone else, and his grandmother intervened, did they soften to the idea. She was convinced that the reason she had become ill was due to her mother-in-law, who she suspected of visiting "Moldos" and wise men and asking them to curse her. The couple moved out, her vision returned, and she refused to enter the house again.

used in conversation. As my method and methodological discussions have shown, this is integral to ethnographic research and is meant as a way of thematising discussions and ideas rather than misrepresenting them.

⁷⁸³ Marat, Erica, 'Imagined Past, Uncertain Future: The Creation of National Ideologies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan', *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 55, Iss. 01, (2008).

⁷⁸⁴ Namaz, also known as salah, refers to the common practice of prayer in Islam.

Through this story, she expressed the *divergence* between what she considered to be Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices, and those of Islam, suggesting initially that Islam was a threat to such ideas and had been a threat to her personally. For her, the kind of Islam her husband adopted was a force against the stability which could emerge from following Kyrgyz traditions. In expressing her attitudes in this way, she also demonstrated the *amalgamation* of Soviet and Kyrgyz attitudes towards such a form of Islam. She suggested that her husband had converted because of the difficulties in his life and began to become more pious as she became more ill. She presented it as a crutch for him, in much the same way as religion was presented in Soviet propaganda. She interwove this with her belief in the importance of Kyrgyz traditional ideas, presenting Islam in Kyrgyzstan as a foreign imposition which distorted and disabled traditional, established ideas and actions. As such, it was a force against the vision of stability as peaceful order which she had outlined at the start of her narrative. This conversation demonstrates the complexity of social and political relationships, and the impact of historical, situational, and personal contexts upon this manifestation.

These ideas thus changed from place to place, moment to moment, and person to person, depending upon the context in which they were articulated and the context of the speaker. Aspects were sometimes expressed together, sometimes in opposition to each other in the form of an argument, and sometimes amalgamated together. This is exemplary of this process within the proposed triangulation, demonstrating the fluidity, contingency, and context dependency of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through the temporal, contextual, and situational determination of the general aspects it presents. The following sections will outline each aspect of the triangulation, elaborating upon its nature and importance, establishing the general character of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan.

5.1.1 - Kyrgyz/Traditional

This begins with a discussion of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect. By way of a beginning, the importance of this aspect and its inclusion requires explanation, along with its analytical usefulness and capacity for elucidation in relation to understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The general social and cultural importance of this aspect will first be

demonstrated through a brief discussion of Chingiz Aitmatov's book, *The Day Lasts More Than One Hundred Years*, highlighting the importance of both the author and the concept of the 'mankurt', taken from the book, in Kyrgyzstan.

Aitmatov wrote predominantly in the Soviet period as member of the intellectual establishment. He occupied prominent positions in the Soviet Union: seats on the governing board of intellectual and cultural institutions; head of the Kyrgyz Filmmaker's and Writer's Union; and as a roaming correspondent for *Pravda*. He also achieved political status as a member of the Supreme Soviet and delegate to party conferences, winning many national honours⁷⁸⁵. Aitmatov was a speaker for the USSR at home and abroad, including Eastern Bloc-sponsored peace conferences post-1991.⁷⁸⁶ He was a member of the Kyrgyz parliament and, after independence, served as the country's ambassador to the EU, NATO, UNESCO, Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands⁷⁸⁷. However, his importance for Kyrgyzstan's culture was even more significant: he is described as the father of the Kyrgyz people, second only to Manas.⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁵ Clark, Katerina, 'Foreword' in Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*, (Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1988): p. xiii-xvi.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Pritchard, Maureen, 'Creativity and Sorrow in Kyrgyzstan', *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 48, Iss. 02, (2011): p. 188.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid: p. 190.

Kyrgyzstan's former ambassador to Ukraine attested to this importance, describing Aitmatov as "a symbol of the Kyrgyz People", and his work as having great "social significance" and retaining perpetual relevancy.⁷⁸⁹ Kyrgyz literature in the Soviet Union and post-independence had a notable effect upon politicians and public figures in searching for a new identity to replace the lost Soviet identity.⁷⁹⁰ Aitpaeva suggests that this search "took place



Figure 5: these photos were taken by the author at Rukh Ordo in 2021. The photo on the left shows a cabinet with a collection of different editions of Aitmatov's work, in many different languages, alongside portraits of the author, (on the right), characters from his novels (centre and left), and Sayakbai Karalaev, (the largest at the top). These are accompanied by traditional Kyrgyz motifs and art. The two above are large portraits of Aitmatov at different stages of his life.

predominantly through the revival of the Kyrgyz language and traditions",⁷⁹¹ citing Aitmatov's significant political and social influence. I observed a physical demonstration of this at Rukh Ordo (Рух Ордо), an exhibition centre on the shore of Issyk Kul with a name that translates as *spiritual court* or *spiritual centre*, in which Aitmatov formed the central focus.

The inclusion of Sayakbai Karalaev is indicative of Aitmatov's connection to Kyrgyz tradition and culture. Karalaev was a friend of Aitmatov and famous 'Manaschi', an interpreter and performer of the Manas epos. His incorporation here further suggests Aitmatov's importance by placing him alongside one of Kyrgyzstan's most famous reciters of the epos:

⁷⁸⁹ Shapiro, Zh., 'Chingiz Aitmatov is a Symbol of the Kyrgyz People', (<https://mfa.gov.kg/en/Menu---Foreign-News/Interview/An-article-of-the-NPP-of-the-Kyrgyz-Republic-in-Ukraine-by-J-Sharipov-in-the-magazine-Ukraine-Business-Chingiz-Aitmatov-is-a-symbol-of-the-Kyrgyz-people>), [Accessed 17/08/2022].

⁷⁹⁰ Aitpaeva, Gulnara, 'Kyrgyz Prose During Perestroika: Anticipating or Constructing the Future?', *Cahiers d'Asie Centrale*, Vol. 24, (2015): p. 68.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid.

something referred to by a former president as “our spiritual foundation. ... The epic has been the Kyrgyz nation’s spiritual leader throughout a long development process, a search for identity and the creation of our state. ... Each Kyrgyz carries an element of this epic in his heart”.⁷⁹² Aitmatov employed the successful and innovative incorporation of Central Asian myth and folklore in his works, combining the language and style of Soviet contemporaneity with the lyricism of Kyrgyz folklore and oral traditions⁷⁹³, the Manas epic being a central source of inspiration.⁷⁹⁴ This prominence in Kyrgyzstan, and for Kyrgyz culture, facilitates the following use of one of Aitmatov’s novels as a demonstration of the importance of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect though his importance within contemporary considerations of this aspect and his promotion of Central Asian culture more generally.

Although set in Kazakhstan, focusing upon a Kazakh man’s attempt to follow the traditional Muslim rituals of Kazakhstan, Aitmatov’s 1980 novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* emphasizes the revival and importance of national traditions⁷⁹⁵. Occurring in the course of a day, the story follows Yedegei, a railroad worker, and his journey to bury his friend Kazangap according to traditional practices. It recounts a history of Soviet collectivisation on the way,⁷⁹⁶ alongside developing an interconnected subplot in which two cosmonauts encounter extraterritorial life and travel to another planet. However, the focus of this section is upon the term ‘mankurt’, developed in the novel. This is an imagined historical practice of attaching a wetted camel skin cap to the heads of prisoners of war, releasing them into the heat of the desert until the cap dries and tightens, crushing their skull and removing their memories and conscious minds until they no longer remember their name, family, or humanity.

However, this concept is used in a wider metaphorical capacity, giving rise to its incorporation in this discussion. When attempting to bury his friend, the main character discovers that the cemetery has been fenced off. He requests entrance from a guard, who insists that they speak Russian and refers them as outsiders, unable to understand the

⁷⁹² Akaev, Askar, ‘*Kirgizskaja Gosudarstvennost’i Narodnii Epos Manas*’, (Bishkek: Uchkun, 2002).

⁷⁹³ Mozur, Joseph P., *Parables from the past: The Prose Fiction of Chinghiz Aitmatov*, (London: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995): p. ix-xi.

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid: p. 11.

⁷⁹⁵ Clark, Katerina, ‘Foreword’ in Chinghiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More Than A Hundred Years*, (Indiana University Press: Indiana, 1988): p. v.

⁷⁹⁶ Mkrtchian, Levon, ‘Discussing Aitmatov’s Novel A Blizzard Waystation’, *Soviet Studies in Literature*, Vol. 25, Iss. 02, (1989): p. 25.

cultural significance of the cemetery or his fellow countrymen's mission.⁷⁹⁷ He is presented as a modern-day *mankurt*, who has turned his back on his people, heritage and culture.⁷⁹⁸ Aitmatov deploys this idea in the wider framing of the Soviet attempts to diminish the importance of culture, identity, and language.⁷⁹⁹

During my time in the field, I encountered this idea, and specifically this term, on many occasions. The term and its underlying concepts have since been co-opted into the everyday vernacular in the form of an insult. The term *mankurt*, and the notion of '*mankurtchuluk*', are used to refer to a person alienated from their language, culture and history; a person who has no connection to their roots and neither knows nor respects their cultural and historical origins and thus cannot know themselves. Such a person acts in their own self-interest and against cultural norms. An example given to me on several occasions was the widespread corruption in petty officials, who have turned their back on 'the people'. The term was also used as a joke when others misspoke in Kyrgyz, displayed a lack of knowledge when it came to Kyrgyz culture and history, or could only express certain words or ideas in Russian. The term is often used towards those who are Russified and do not speak Kyrgyz well. It has spread beyond Central Asia and entered the political sphere: during the fourth Issyk Kul forum, a discussion-platform conceived by Aitmatov for the free discussion of global issues, Turkish president Erdoğan singled-out the term.⁸⁰⁰ Identifying it as a person estranged from himself, his family, his society, his nation, his past, and his culture, he stated his aim of ridding the region from such people.⁸⁰¹

Aitmatov and the idea of the *mankurt* highlight the importance and relevance of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect through demonstrating the status of Kyrgyz culture through the figure of Aitmatov, and the popular attitude towards those who do not recognise this status through the figure of the *mankurt*. This figure underlines the centrality of tradition and the scorn reserved for those who do not accept and enact it, underlining the importance of Kyrgyz/Traditional considerations in Kyrgyzstan and introducing the ways in which adherence to tradition is often reinforced; though positive notions of solidarity, as Yedegei

⁷⁹⁷ Mozur, Joseph P., 'Doffing Mankurt's Cap: Chinghiz Aitmatov's *The Day Lats More Than a Hundred Years and the Turkic National Heritage*', *The Carl Beck Papers*, Iss. 605, (1987).

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁰ N/A, (<https://www.tccb.gov.tr/en/news/542/128232/president-erdogan-attends-chingiz-aitmatov-4th-international-issyk-kul-forum->), [accessed 19/08/2022].

⁸⁰¹ Ibid.

demonstrates through his commitment to his people and their traditions despite hardship and in the face of death, and through the negative, shameful reinforcement implied by the term *mankurt* and its subsequent adoption as an insult. The following section explores the importance of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect in relation to understandings and practices of peace, building upon this idea of positive and negative reinforcement through a discussion of Kyrgyz words and their relationship to these understandings and practices.

Uiat, Ynytymak, and Tynchtyk: Stability as Peaceful Order

This idea of the importance of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, and the prevailing negative attitudes towards those who do not adhere to the understandings and practices it entails, brings us on to the following discussion of its more precise manifestation in language and action. This will be conducted through an examination of the concepts of *тынчтык* (*tynchtyk*), *уят* (*uiat*), and *ынтымак* (*yntymak*) as they exist in various aspects of life. These are not only exemplary of this aspect, but are the most commonplace representations of it, as evidenced by my own fieldwork and the wider literature. Through this discussion, the ideas of stability and order are presented as the central characterisation of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace. To begin with, *tynchtyk* is explored, characterising the notions of stability and order in the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect. This is followed by a discussion of *uiat* and *yntymak*, as the negative and positive mechanisms of ensuring this stability. This is done through empirical examples from my own experience alongside important discussions in the literature.

Tynchtyk is often translated as ‘peace’ and used synonymously in this manner in Kyrgyz language. However, when translated literally, it is ‘quietness’, *tynch* being ‘quiet’ and the suffix *tyk* being the rough equivalent to *-ness* in English, turning the adjective into a noun and denoting the state, condition, or quality of something. In Kyrgyz, as in English, the word ‘quiet’ can be used to describe a lack of noise, people, or another situation in which there is little ‘going on’. For example, after the attempted revolution of 2020, once the streets had cleared, the police had vanished, and before the military checkpoints had been established, the situation was often described to me as *tynch*. Not only was there little noise, but there was also little action as the demonstrators had gone home, the police had retreated, and the streets had been cleaned, returning the situation to *normal*. This condition of normality in

relation to the lack of such disturbances was described to me as *tynchtyk*. Furthermore, the term *tynchtyk* was used to refer to peace both in relation to Western conceptions, in the literature and seminars of NGOs, but also to this condition of quietness: of nothing going on; of a lack of disorder; of the maintenance of stability. This distinction helps to clarify the conceptions of order and stability as the core characteristic of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace.

The term embodies both of these meaning simultaneously as a 'peace-in-quietness': a condition where life is lived in line with the status quo, without disturbance to tradition, custom, or traditional authority: a form of stability. *Uiat* and *yntymak* serve to ensure that behaviour is in line with this and, it is important to note, the invocation of these terms is often done through reference to *салт*, (*salt*), or tradition. The understandings and practices of peace included in this aspect thus rest on the maintenance of stability, resting upon tradition, and a lack of disorder manifest as transgressions of the status-quo. There is, however, a kind of superstructure behind the referencing of tradition; one which provides the authority and legitimacy required to make such a reference and reinforce it through the invocation of *uiat* and *yntymak*. This is comprised of social scales of kinship and hierarchies of age. Aksana Ismailbekova provides a pertinent and considered account and examination of these factors,⁸⁰² drawing attention to the complex web of kinship relations and patronage networks which affect almost every aspect of life in Kyrgyzstan, the hierarchies involved, and the authority granted to those who occupy exalted or prominent positions within this web. These are justified through reference to tradition, being established as ostensibly traditional practices and relations despite having been subject to manifold historical shifts in their nature and manifestation.⁸⁰³ Such relations of kinship or patronage exist alongside hierarchies of age; another aspect of the superstructure behind references to tradition and the invocation of *uiat* and *yntymak*. In general, and readily observable across Kyrgyzstan, respect must be given to those elder than you, and both family members and members of communities receive respect and authority accordingly. For example, during my time living with Kyrgyz families, the children did not eat alongside me and their parents: this was a sign of the separation of status within the families, and of my elevated position in the households

⁸⁰² Ismailbekova, Aksana, *Blood Ties and the Native Son: Poetics of Patronage in Kyrgyzstan*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017).

⁸⁰³ For additional reading, please see: Ismailbekova, Aksana, *Blood Ties and the Native Son: Poetics of Patronage in Kyrgyzstan*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2017): p. 22-41.

as a guest. The children did not often question their parents, and relations between them were authoritative and hierarchical. Through a conversation with a Kyrgyz-born academic, now living in Europe, I learned that this had become a point of contention between her and her children: those who were born in Europe had begun to argue with their parents, breaking, in part, with this strict respect for elders. They explained to me that they had never argued with their parents back in Kyrgyzstan, and it was a noticeable change for them to experience.

Despite the fact that the actual content of the 'traditions' referred to are often contingent in relation to the moment and context of their utterance, they nonetheless rest upon this idea of stability as the core of understandings and practices of peace. The above discussion concerning the superstructure behind such references to tradition This section does not attempt to provide a list or definitive analysis of fixed *traditions*, but instead seeks to present an argument as to how the invocation of tradition relates to understandings and practices of peace as order and stability. As such, the use of the term 'traditional' in this aspect refers to that which is presented or invoked as such, or through reference to it. It does not refer to a delimited, fixed, or ancient series of ideas and practices which are the same across all time and contextual variation.

To begin with, the use of the concepts of *uiat* and *yntymak* requires some justification. A consideration of linguistic terms in this manner allows us to explore the manifestation of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace through their invocation. These understandings and practices can be recognised in the population at large through the use of these terms, allowing us to talk more generally about such understandings and practices rather than only describing a particular scenario in a particular locale. In this manner, the terms employed in this analysis are presented as representative of the general character of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace: they are concepts which aim to engender stability and order, maintaining the status-quo through negative (*uiat*) and positive (*yntymak*) reinforcement, and this stability is shown to relate to a conception of peace-as-quietness (*tynchtyk*). While they are only small parts of the plethora of understandings and practices related to peace in Kyrgyzstan, they provide considerable insight into their general character.

Uiat: The Efficacy of Shame

Uiat is a ubiquitous term across Kyrgyzstan, “hurled at children to stop improper behaviour and thrown by adults to evaluate conduct”.⁸⁰⁴ Although *uiat* is most often translated as *shame*, it is more complex, existing as a relational practice that textures everyday life, engenders discomfort, genders and ages its subjects, and sets the boundaries of propriety.⁸⁰⁵ It marks, prevents, or halts an unacceptable act, interrupting an immediate moment or process and engendering an “amorphous future malignancy”.⁸⁰⁶ It surfaces most often in stratified, hierarchical relations, marking the authority of the speaker and the relative subordinate positionality of the subject, be that the result of gender, age, social or familial status, and is commonly directed at the non-adherence to tradition. As such, it is a negative ordering force, resting upon “the anxiety that someone might lose social face”.⁸⁰⁷

Despite its translation of *shame*, *uiat* does not refer to “an already established inventory of all things shameful”, but rather aims to cultivate discomfort and mark out *correctness* as a means of *stabilising* “the sometimes-blurry boundaries of propriety”.⁸⁰⁸ As such, it is a force for maintaining order and stability. However, it is fluid and context dependent. Although it refers to the non-adherence to tradition, traditional values, or the undertaking of behaviour not considered proprietous, the understandings and manifestations of these notions differ depending upon location and situation. “In greater or lesser ways it is not quite the same in one place, or time, as it is in another”.⁸⁰⁹ Nevertheless, it is “utterly a part of everyday life”, with its repetition as a stabilising and ordering exclamation naturalising its prescriptions until they become second nature.⁸¹⁰

Ismailbekova compares the use of *uiat* to that of another concept, *namyc* (*namys*), commonly translated as *honour*. She explores the dual, instrumental use of these concepts

⁸⁰⁴ Mc Brien, Julie, ‘On Shame: The Efficacy of Exclaiming *Uiat!* in Kyrgyzstan’, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 48, Iss. 04, (2021): p. 462.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid: p. 463.

⁸⁰⁷ Schröder, Philipp, ‘The Economics of Translocality – Epistemographic Observations from Fieldwork on Traders in (between) Russia, China, and Kyrgyzstan’, in Schröder, Philipp and Stephan-Emmrich, Manja, (eds.), *Mobilities, Boundaries, and Travelling Ideas*, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018): p. 263-288.

⁸⁰⁸ Mc Brien, Julie, ‘On Shame: The Efficacy of Exclaiming *Uiat!* in Kyrgyzstan’, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 48, Iss. 04, (2021): p. 463.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid: p. 470.

in Kyrgyz lineage associations⁸¹¹, suggesting that “the injunction to be honourable is always accompanied, always, by a sub-text of shame”.⁸¹² Ismailbekova’s writing supports the idea of *uiat* as a control practice, enforcing discipline and reminding others to act honourably through this underlying subtext. Temirkulov frames *uiat* as an informal tool in this regard, operating through existing authority structures to maintain stability through social control. He presents it as “a sanction” which exposes “unworthy behaviour”, with condemnation occurring both publicly and privately and sometimes resulting in the isolation of an offender.⁸¹³ The concept of *uiat*, therefore, can be seen as a process of engendering a peaceful order through enforcing stability as alignment with the status quo. Although the precise nature of this status quo is, to some extent, in flux, as the traditions and customs upon which the invocation of *uiat* draws are contextually and situationally determined, these invocations nonetheless refer to ‘tradition’ as their source of legitimacy, and draw upon traditional structures of authority to ensure compliance, such as aksakals (community elders), heads of the family, mothers, etc, corresponding to the superstructure behind the ability to authoritatively invoke tradition; namely, the prevalence of social scales of kinship and hierarchies of age. Corresponding to the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect of the triangulation, *uiat* can be seen as a negative force, ensuring stability in the actions of individuals and communities through identifying the non-adherence to traditions and customs, and invoking a shame designed to promote compliance.

Therefore, the ideas of *tradition* and *custom* require a little elaboration to show what is meant by these terms, and how they relate to the concept of *uiat* and the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, before providing examples of *uiat* from my own experiences. In Kyrgyz, the term which refers to tradition or custom is *salt*, It is a frequently used term and, whenever someone declares something to be ‘according to *salt*’, “they are formulating what they consider righteous and appropriate behaviour in a given situation”.⁸¹⁴ Although this is presented as a series of concrete laws, sometimes codified when referring to common issues

⁸¹¹ Lineage associations in Kyrgyzstan are fundamentally patrilineal kinship associations built upon a group’s common ancestry. The kinship groups they represent, as Ismailbekova identifies, are an important feature of Kyrgyz life and politics. There are forty such kinship groups in the country, understood as the founding basis of the Kyrgyz as a distinct people.

⁸¹² Ismailbekova, Aksana, ‘Mapping Lineage Leadership in Kyrgyzstan: Lineage Associations and Informal Governance’, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Vol. 143, Iss. 02, (2018): p. 202.

⁸¹³ Temirkulov, Azamat, ‘Informal Actors and Institutions in Mobilization: The Periphery in the Tulip Revolution’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, Iss. 03-04, (2008): p. 321.

⁸¹⁴ Beyer, Judith, *The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2016): p. 6.

such as land, property, and punishment, it is nonetheless context-dependent and situationally determined in its invocation and content.⁸¹⁵ Beyer notes that, when disputes arose concerning issues relating to *salt*, they mostly concerned its correct interpretation as its relative fluidity meant that the term was used as a stronghold, providing rhetorical refuge to those who invoke it and helping them evade accountability, determine the course of action with help from the authority of tradition, or justify their own actions.⁸¹⁶ Beyer refers to salt as “a reflexive cultural technique” by means of which speakers can employ the purported stability and order of tradition whilst still being able to dynamically adjust its principles and rules.⁸¹⁷ “Presenting *salt* as unchanging while at the same time engaging in its customization provides people (...) with the opportunity to frame their world as an orderly place”.⁸¹⁸ This is not to say that there are no traditions or customs, but instead to suggest that the invocations of such traditions and customs is bound to its context and situation, often employed to provide legitimacy and authority to a statement or imperative instead of referring to a list of ‘genuine’, unchanging traditions. Although some undoubtedly exist, they are nonetheless open to interpretation and manipulation. A referral to traditions and customs is the underlying basis for the invocation of *uiat* or *yntymak*: both rest upon the legitimacy and authority granted referring to tradition whilst at the same time sharing the same kind of contextual and situational fluidity as the traditions and customs themselves.

Although the literature is somewhat sparse when it comes to considerations of *uiat*, my own observations attest to these discussions and the importance of the term. During my time living with Kyrgyz families in Bishkek, the term was often used with children. During my first week with one family, on my way out of the house the father asked where I was going. When I explained that I was on my way to the shop, he called his eldest son into the room and had me explain to him what I needed, so that he could go for me. He explained that, as a guest, it would be *uiat* for me to go myself: he wanted to provide for me as if I was his eldest. The term was also used during my time teaching English: when we were going for a beer after work, one of my married female colleagues explained that, if she was to come with me, we would need to ensure that at least one other woman was present, as “people will talk”, and it would be *uiat* to be seen with men who were not her family. During this

⁸¹⁵ Beyer, Judith, *The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2016): p. 6.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid: p. 10.

instance, the accompanying phrase used to explain this situation of *uiat* was эл эмне дейт? (*el emnye deyt?* What will people say?), a common and immensely impactful phrase which illustrates the power of invoking *uiat*. The concept of *uiat* is thus reinforced by the often-public nature of its invocation. Adherence to traditions, customs, and social norms is assured by the gaze of others, and the feeling of shame is often partnered with the idea 'what will people say?'. The term is so commonplace that a fast-food restaurant has opened in Bishkek called 'Эл Эмне Жейт?', (*El Emnye Jeyt?*), a play on words which translates as 'what will people eat?'.

I observed another example of this phrase's connection to *uiat* during a visit to a friend's house one evening. During our conversation, it emerged that his wife had been previously married, and one of their children was from her first marriage. This is somewhat unusual in Kyrgyzstan, as there can be considerable emphasis placed on virginity and youth when it comes to a bride-to-be. Nevertheless, they had fallen in love and decided to get married. The husband's mother, however, was not happy about the arrangement, and despite the marriage having lasted almost 2 years by this point, she had refused to condone it, and refused to meet her granddaughter, who was born not long after the couple got married. This was explained using the phrase *el emnye deyt?* and through the concept of *uiat*, as her reasons for doing so were grounded in her concerns about shame: specifically, her concerns regarding the opinions and gossip of extended family members. Her refusal to condone the marriage and to meet her granddaughter were grounded in an adherence to her understanding of traditions, and her attempt to save face and avoid a connection to anything which might be understood as shameful.

Invocations of *uiat* are thus practices of ordering, built upon an understanding of peace as stability through the adherence to customs and tradition, enforced through the gaze of others; most notably those of higher social status. This links back to the notion of *tynchtyk*: the condition of 'quietness' embodied in this term as an understanding of peace epitomises this adherence to tradition. This condition is manifest when adherence is practiced and is broken through transgression. In order to maintain this condition, *uiat* is invoked as a negative reinforcement, deployed to denote such transgressions and enforce the invoker's perception of traditional understandings and practices. In this context, marriage, the traditions and customs which underpin it, and the ever-present threat of *uiat*, can be understood as such a practice of ordering, and as an example of ensuring peace as stability.

In Kyrgyzstan, marriage secures community unity, positive inter-familial relations, and helps to guarantee the continuation of the customs and traditions which underpin this stability into the next generation. It prevents conflicts between family groups, maintains traditional structures of authority, and serves as a platform for the community to exert practices of ordering and maintaining stability, ensuring peace as a manifestation of *tynchtyk*.

Although these traditions were limited during the Soviet period, they nevertheless persisted, and are still widely practiced. The following account draws from my own experiences attending wedding celebrations and many conversations held on this subject throughout my time in the country. The traditional marriage process for Kyrgyz people consists of a complex series of celebrations, gift-giving, dowries, and reverse dowries,⁸¹⁹ with many stages which must proceed in a particular order. These are driven in no small part by maintaining *namys* (*namus*: honour) and, inversely, avoiding *uiat*. However, much like the traditions and customs which underly the invocation of *uiat*, these traditions open to negotiation by the families of the bride and groom. There is a common understanding of the need for such traditional practices, but their precise incarnation is agreed upon through discussion prior to their commencement. Nonetheless, this negotiation must result in a series of practices which avoid any implications of *uiat* through adhering to what is understood as tradition. For example, if *калың* (*kalyng*, a form of reverse-dowry) is paid, then a *септ* (*sept*, a form of dowry) must also be paid, and vice versa.

A prime example of a marriage practice which ensures *tynchtyk* through *namus* and *uiat* is that of giving *бата* (*bata*). This is a blessing given to the couple. Before the wedding, *bata* is often given by grandparents and, afterwards, by the couple's respective parents. During the wedding celebrations, it is given by almost all of the guests, with special emphasis placed on the *bata* given by the elderly or those with higher social status. *Bata* is not only a public process of well-wishing, but also of giving permission. By giving *bata*, the extended family and community of the couple in question give their assent for the marriage. In this context, *bata* takes the form of speeches in which traditionally phrased blessings are given, such as "be wealthy", "be happy", and "be healthy". The giving of permission and demonstration of acceptance through ritualised, formal speeches shows a link between *tynchtyk*, tradition

⁸¹⁹ A dowry is often understood in Europe as the money, property, or objects of value a woman brings to her husband or his family through marriage. The use of the term 'reverse dowry' here is intended to convey the fact that this is contribution in this manner but made by the husband to the family of the bride.

(*salt*), and the notions of *uiat* and *namus*. In this example, peaceful order, or *tynchtyk*, is maintained through adherence to tradition, avoiding *uiat* and acting in accordance with *namus*. Permission and acceptance should be secured from relatives and the wider community in order to avoid accusations of *uiat* in the process of getting married. The giving of *bata* represents this, demonstrating that the marriage is proceeding in the proper way through the giving of traditional blessings. In this way, peaceful order is upheld through acting in accordance with tradition. *Tynchtyk*, understood as a form of peaceful order built upon the 'quietness' of adhering to tradition and the status-quo, is maintained in this example through the adherence to traditional marriage practices, bolstering community cohesion and avoiding *uiat*. *Uiat* is, therefore, the negative reinforcing principle, ensuring the adherence to tradition through the threat of shame.

The above examples demonstrate the invocation of, or fear of *uiat*, as a means of stabilising and maintaining the status quo in relation to traditional understandings and practices; as a concept which engenders a form of peaceful order. They also clearly demonstrate the hierarchies involved: the first example demonstrates that of age, of the authority of a father over children; the second relates to gender and the risk of *uiat* in doing things which do not conform to others perceptions of your gender roles and appearance; the final example of marriage links *uiat* to the idea of Kyrgyz traditions and customs, showing how shame is fundamentally and negatively connected to upholding and demonstrating traditional understandings and practices, despite the fact that many of these understandings and practices are fluid and dependent upon context. The concept of *uiat* serves to demonstrate a significant aspect of what is presented here as the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect of the triangulation and paves the way for the consideration of an additional and interconnected concept, that of *ynytmak*, which provides another illustrative and expansive example of this aspect in Kyrgyzstan. The following section will elaborate upon this concept, giving examples of its use in the everyday, social, and political contexts, linking it together with *uiat* as a fundamental part of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace.

Ynytymak: The Key to Happiness

Although there is notably more scholarly attention paid to the concept of *ynytmak* than *uiat*, the concepts are equally pervasive in Kyrgyzstan. However, as a negative force, *uiat* is more

commonly invoked in private, or in conversational, personal settings: although public iterations occur, they are often extreme cases or related to localised practices of discipline. However, *yntymak* is a much more public process, and can even be found even incorporated into the names of parks, political parties, and even the names of individuals. For example, in 2021 “Yntymak Park” was opened in Bishkek: rather interestingly, it is situated on *Mir* Avenue (*peace* in Russian).



Figure 6: (Taken from https://24.kg/english/205543_New_Yntymak_park_opened_in_Bishkek_/).

This photo of *yntymak* park shows the use of a *tyndyk*, the traditional wooden construction used for the centrepiece of a *boz ui* (боз-үй), or yurt. This further highlights the connection of *yntymak* to understandings and practices of tradition, memorialising this connection through the name of the park and the construction of this platform.

It is the subject of television adverts, proverbs, and can be read on billboards and signs across the country, promoting the concept as a vision for peaceful order in stark contrast to the use of *uiat*, which is never found in such contexts. It is thus understood as a positive force, and the invocation of *yntymak* is understood as inherently positive. The currency of *yntymak* is evident throughout the literature and my own observations. However, a striking example of this can be seen in a common story, repeated to me many times during my time in Kyrgyzstan, and two corresponding Kyrgyz television adverts. The story concerns an old man and his nine sons, all of whom were lazy, competitive, and did not listen. One day the old man brought them a bunch of sticks tied tightly together and challenged his sons to snap the bunch in half in a competition as to who was the strongest. Each tried, and each failed: together, the sticks were much too strong to break. The old man then untied the sticks, giving one to each son and telling them to break it. Each did so with ease. He explained to them that people are like these sticks: together, united, they are strong, but when they are

alone, they are weak and easily broken. The moral of the story in Kyrgyz is often given as ырыс алды, ынтымак, (*yrys aldy, yntymak*), which translates roughly as ‘the key to prosperity is *yntymak*’ or, as it is translated by Megoran, “prosperity follows concordance”.⁸²⁰ This message was reflected in a series of adverts on Kyrgyz television, financed by the Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan and directed by Aktan Arym Kubat, a well-known Kyrgyz Director. I was made aware of these adverts early on during my time in Kyrgyzstan, almost as soon as I expressed an interest in *yntymak*. The first shows two boys carrying buckets of water. The water is heavy, and they take turn carrying the buckets, counting out ten steps each before changing over. However, they begin to argue and fight over who’s turn it is, switching to carrying one bucket each. However, without the balance of two buckets, each boy begins to spill water, gives up, and returns to fighting. An old man, wearing a *kalpak*,⁸²¹ sees them from a nearby field, showing them that if they hold one bucket each, but hold hands together, they can carry the water easily, sharing the load without spillage or conflict [see figure 7].



Figure 7: yntymak advert one - a screenshot taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5_Qcdile3I, (the full video can be watched here).

⁸²⁰ Megoran, Nick, *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan – Kyrgyzstan Border*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): p. 87.

⁸²¹ This is the traditional hat for Kyrgyz men. It is relatively tall, made of felt, and coloured depending upon the status of the wearer. The most auspicious, reserved for elderly men, is predominantly white, often with black ornamentation using traditional Kyrgyz symbolic ornaments.

The later version of this advert uses the same actors, but when they are much older. They are loading churns of water into the boot of a Moskvich, a popular car in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Central Asia. However, the car, unsurprisingly, will not start, and they take turns trying to bump-start it, unsuccessfully. However, they have learnt the lesson given by the old man when they were boys, and instead push the car together from behind each of the front doors. These both end with the phrase *yrys aldy, yntymak*, and demonstrate and promote the notion of *yntymak* through analogy. There are other adverts, all of which demonstrate this through different examples.



Figure 8: yntymak advert two - a screenshot taken from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5_Qcdile3I. The full video can be watched here.

The academic literature reflects these understandings of *yntymak*, considering the concept in its various incarnations in the political, social, and cultural spheres. *Yntymak*, however, does not have an effective direct translation like *uiat* and, despite various efforts to provide one, is better understood through its use and in relation to the practices it prescribes. Nevertheless, such direct translations have been attempted: Kuehnast and Dudwick characterise it as “mutual aid”;⁸²² Mostowlansky translates it as “harmony”;⁸²³ Beyer and Girke explain it as “harmony” or “harmony ideology”;⁸²⁴ and Megoran presents it as “cooperation, harmony, and concordance”.⁸²⁵ The most considered and comprehensive

⁸²² Kuehnast, Kathleen and Dudwick, Nora, ‘Better a Hundred Friends than a Hundred Roubles? Social Networks in Transition – The Kyrgyz Republic’, *World Bank Working Paper*, No. 39, (2004).

⁸²³ Mostowlansky, Till, ‘The State Starts from the Family: Peace and Harmony in Tajikistan’s Eastern Pamirs’, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 32, Iss. 04, (2013): p. 462-474.

⁸²⁴ Beyer, Judith and Girke, Felix, ‘Practicing Harmony Ideology: Ethnographic Reflections on Community and Coercion’, *Common Knowledge*, Vol. 21, Iss. 03, (2015): p. 196-235.

⁸²⁵ Megoran, Nick, *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan – Kyrgyzstan Border*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): p. 86.

presentation of *yntymak* is set forth in the work of Madeleine Reeves, who details the concept through her extensive ethnographic experiences. Reeves contrasts *yntymak* with passive toleration: “it demands the active production of social relations with those recognized to be different; it is the opposite of forbearance”.⁸²⁶ The concept is manifest in active practice and makes positive demands of people, appealing to *namys* (honour) and *uiat* (shame) as its negative undergirding, reinforcing principles.⁸²⁷ It relies on structures of authority for its application, and “is typically policed in rural villages by older men, who are deemed critical to its maintenance”.⁸²⁸ In opposition to the idea of the liberal subject, recognising the rights of others to freedom and security, *yntymak* is premised upon the enactment of social obligations marked by gender, generation, and other such hierarchies.⁸²⁹ Following such obligations and abiding by the prescriptions built upon these hierarchies is to live *yntymaktuu*, a phrase which Reeves translates loosely as “harmoniously”, highlighting its compulsive, social character and reliance upon mutual relations of dependence.⁸³⁰ This is portrayed in Megoran’s book through his use and exploration of the idea of “concordance”, demonstrating the compulsive and authoritarian nature through the idea of uniting disparate groups or entities under central leadership, as was the case historically for the disparate Kyrgyz “tribal confederations” and their unity under the leadership of Manas.⁸³¹

The examples of *yntymak* in the literature range from small monetary exchanges and cost-sharing in relation to localised celebrations, such as a wedding or funeral,⁸³² to everyday negotiations regarding the collectivisation of the utilities and costs incurred by residents of Bishkek’s informal settlements,⁸³³ the realities of life on the Kyrgyzstan – Uzbekistan border,

⁸²⁶ Reeves, Madeleine, ‘Politics, Cosmopolitics and Preventative Development at the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Border,’ in Schiller, Nina G. and Irving, Andrew, *Whose Cosmopolitanism? Critical Perspectives, Relationalities and Discontents*, (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015): p. 207.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Ibid.

⁸³⁰ Ibid.

⁸³¹ Megoran, Nick, *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan – Kyrgyzstan Border*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): p. 87.

⁸³² Kuehnast, Kathleen and Dudwick, Nora, ‘Better a Hundred Friends than a Hundred Roubles? Social Networks in Transition – The Kyrgyz Republic’, *World Bank Working Paper*, No. 39, (2004).

⁸³³ For more of this argument, and more information on the nature of the informal settlements in Bishkek, see: Cramer, Bert, ‘Kyrgyzstan’s Informal Settlements: *Yntymak* and the Emergence of Politics in Place, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2018): p. 119-136, along with Isabaeva, Eliza, ‘From Denizens to Citizens in Bishkek: Informal Squatter-settlements in Urban Kyrgyzstan’, *The Journal of Social Policy Studies*, Vol. 12, Iss. 02, (2014): p. 249-260, and Sanghera, Baliyar and Satybaldieva, Elmira, ‘Ethics of Property, Illegal Settlements and the Right to Subsistence’, *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 32, Iss. 01/02, (2011): p. 96-114.

and the ideology of nation-building presented by the Kyrgyz state.⁸³⁴ The concept is shown to be employed in diverse settings across society, including in the speeches of political leaders, local village courts, conflict situations on the street, and in private conversations.⁸³⁵ My experiences in living in Kyrgyzstan testify not only to the frequency of use of this concept, but its permeation throughout the various layers of the country's culture, society, and politics. During my first few months in Kyrgyzstan, I lived with a Kyrgyz family of 7 in one of the informal settlements to the southeast of Bishkek. Although many of the houses were quite expensive and well-built for the area, with many residents owning nice cars and 4x4s, the water supply and electricity supply would suddenly cut off with no notice and notable regularity. Life in the informal settlements, as Cramer notes, is notably removed from the material and authoritative provisions of the central state.⁸³⁶ Whilst participating in part of the peacebuilding project in the southern Region of Osh, and spending the day with a participant, this separation was brought into stark relief. The participant was a leading figure in the local project coordination, and was particularly active in their community, running a local charity for the disabled, elderly, and vulnerable. When I asked them about the influence of the project, they instead began to discuss all the local issues beyond the scope of the project which it was not addressing. The project, as later sections will address, concerned electoral participation: it was, therefore, supporting the centralised state as the vehicle for peacebuilding. However, the problems outlined in the course of these conversations highlighted the separation of the state from many aspects of everyday life. He noted the large levels of voter apathy; the result of corruption and a lack of trust in individuals and the system, alongside suggesting that people's main concerns were money, work, and everyday struggles, rather than politics and governance. The charity they had set up was intended to fill the material gap left by an absent, financially unstable, and often corrupt state, and was part of his belief that *yntymak* was a necessary ideational basis for filling this separation.

⁸³⁴ Megoran, Nick, *Nationalism in Central Asia: A Biography of the Uzbekistan – Kyrgyzstan Border*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017).

⁸³⁵ Beyer, Judith, *The Force of Custom: Law and the Ordering of Everyday Life in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2016): p. 205-206.

⁸³⁶ Cramer, Bert, 'Kyrgyzstan's Informal Settlements: *Yntymak* and the Emergence of Politics in Place, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2018): p. 129.

Instead, people rely upon *yntymak* to provide a community spirit and shared labour in the face of uncertainty.⁸³⁷ During my time in the informal settlement, this took the form of a community road-building initiative as, despite the relative quality of the housing, there were no tarmac roads. Where the concrete river channels diverted the mountain rivers around the settlement, parts of the road had begun to collapse, meaning that residents were forced to drive the long way round across dirt roads until they were able to re-join the main, paved road. Money was collected from each house for building a new road, showing how the community took it upon themselves to provide for their basic needs. This was explained to me using the notion of *yntymak*, which was used to refer to the kinds of community relations, solidarity, and undergirding cultural impetus for the material aid provided. I was told that, although conditions were more difficult in the settlement in many respects, at least people had retained *yntymak*, and could work together for the benefit of all. The majority of residents had come from villages in the north of the country, rather than having been born in Bishkek, and this was a source of pride when they compared themselves to the urban population, who my host described as no longer living by traditional (салттуу - saltuu) values. *Yntymak* was often presented in this manner as a cultural tradition: as an historical custom and traditional value which was essential to being Kyrgyz or even Central Asian.

As I became more interested in this concept and began to see its key connection to understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, I arranged a focus group with Kyrgyz academics, the majority working in universities in Bishkek, but some abroad. I used this platform to discuss the idea of *yntymak* and its relationship to peace (tynchtyk). I framed the discussion in terms of my understanding of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect of my triangulation, suggesting that my interests concerned understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The central theme of this discussion was the idea of stability, which was presented as the cornerstone of these understandings and practices. They identified some additional aspects of *yntymak* which help to clarify the concept and further illuminate the foundations of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace.

Although *yntymak* is built upon the idea of unity and solidarity, this is often a unity *against* something, a coming together of people in light of a particular issue. The Manas epos is again an excellent reference point for this idea: not only is the concept often considered in

⁸³⁷ Cramer, Bert, 'Kyrgyzstan's Informal Settlements: *Yntymak* and the Emergence of Politics in Place, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2018): p. 130.

tandem with the story of Manas, but his unification of the forty tribes against a common enemy was often given as an example. During the focus groups, *yntymak* was presented as a way of removing any space for debate regarding contentious issues, maintaining a conservative status quo. Rather than solving conflict, it aims to prevent its very emergence. It was discussed as the opposite of anarchy, enacted through local power structures and built upon the legitimising invocation of tradition. As such, they argued that it resonated well with existing kinship group structures and practices, bringing groups together to face a challenge. *Yntymak*, they argued, exists in the shadow of perceived danger. Nevertheless, these focus groups identified the central idea of *yntymak* as peaceful coexistence, reinforcing my observations and those presented in the literature. They suggested that it allowed for solving a particular issue whilst taking into account diverse perspectives, stemming from the nomadic tradition of collective decision making and negotiation. In this regard, one group gave the example of the negotiation of pasture use and the movement of livestock. They saw it as an organic concept in mono-ethnic Kyrgyz communities, where it melded into a repertoire of traditional and customary practices for everyday life, but of particular importance in multi-ethnic communities as a result of the differing nature of conflict. They too drew attention to its contextualised and contingent character, framing it as an authoritatively driven process of negotiation according to the perception and invocation of tradition. In this manner, it was described as a “non-egocentric perception of reality” in which the individual is subsumed by traditional authority and community interrelationships. For there to be *yntymak*, “people must go beyond themselves”. This again reinforces my experiences in the field and those presented in the literature.

The idea of stability is essential in cognising the underlying character of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. While I was staying in a predominantly Uzbek village in Jalal-Abad, I stopped to talk to a group of workmen building a new mosque for the village. The conversation moved onto the violence in Osh in 2010, and the story they told serves to illustrate the importance of stability rather aptly. During the violence, people began to flee the city, especially Uzbek residents, and seek refuge in the nearby villages, with many even attempting to cross the border in Uzbekistan. According to the workmen, large groups of Uzbeks arrived at the village and began asking around for food. The local traders offered to sell them bread and, instead of charging the usual twenty or so *som*⁸³⁸, they asked for two

⁸³⁸ The currency of Kyrgyzstan.

thousand. The new arrivals were outraged, asking how bread could ever be that expensive. The traders replied that it wasn't the bread that was expensive, but they were charging an additional cost because they had interrupted their peace, bringing uncertainty and possibly violence to their quiet village. The traders explained that the price would go back down if the groups asked politely, did not disturb the community, and helped out. An agreement was reached, and the groups did not disrupt the life of the village, buying supplies for a normal price and moving on. This story demonstrates the importance of stability and order: despite the two groups belonging to the same nation, state, and ethnicity, the principle of maintaining stability triumphed over the other allegiances which one might expect to come into play in such an interaction. Help was given only if it conformed to this principle, and it was the primary subject of their negotiation. This is representative of the importance given to stability and order across most parts of life in Kyrgyzstan.

Before continuing, the use of observations and experiences with ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan to illustrate characteristics of what is termed the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect requires a little explanation. To begin with, the inclusions of *tradition* in the title of this aspect is not without purpose: it demonstrates the importance of references to tradition in invocations of this aspect, alongside references to ethno-cultural history relating directly to the Kyrgyz ethnicity. This foregrounds the inclusion of other groups who reside in the same spaces and contexts. In addition to this, there are manifold commonalities between several ideas and cultural understandings across the region understood as Central Asia, despite the manifold and sometimes profound differences which accompany them. Furthermore, those with whom I spoke were born in Kyrgyzstan, growing up in a country which placed great emphasis on tradition and the invocations of tradition mentioned here. This is evident in the names of villages, parks, and festivals, as discussed earlier. Despite the proclamations of an increasing prevalent Kyrgyz nationalism, some cultural artifacts, such as those discussed in the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, are considered to belong to *Kyrgyzstan* rather than only the *Kyrgyz*. In the course of several walks through the southern city of Osh, I saw a few Uzbek men wearing the *kalpak*; a high hat, often white or black and white. This is considered a traditional Kyrgyz hat for men, worn mostly by the older generation but yet with colour variation to demonstrate social and marriage status. They walked around the city, in which the national flag of Kyrgyzstan was a prominent feature, hung from lampposts, displayed on shop signs, or draped from poles. When I asked by host and his family why they wore the

kalpak, rather than the traditional Uzbek *doppa*, they replied together that they considered it to be the national hat of Kyrgyzstan, rather than belonging solely to the Kyrgyz. This was a sentiment I had heard before: during a role-playing game in one of the peacebuilding workshops I attended, which will be discussed later on, a young man made his own Kalpak, pretending to be the village elder talking to young voters. He made the same observation of the hat as a national symbol of the whole country.⁸³⁹ This demonstrates the incorporation of these people into what they considered a national culture, and thus their knowledge and use of such phrases and cultural artifacts discussed in this section. Several more examples will refer to ethnic Uzbeks with whom I lived, spoke, and otherwise interacted with, and it is in light of these connections and the nature of the traditions discussed here that these should be considered.

A few additional examples are useful here in order to empirically illuminate these insights. These demonstrate *yntymak* in its incarnation as unity *against* something; the role of authority, community, and the acceptance of traditional practices in the everyday; and the importance ascribed to the concept in its absence. Together, these examples show the incarnation and invocation of *yntymak* as a collective response to a common issue through the promotion and maintenance of stability and order. Only two months after I had arrived in Bishkek, the government of Kyrgyzstan's fifth president, Sooronbai Jeenbekov, was ousted as the result of popular protest, which included clashes with riot police, the deployment of the army, and the arson of the right wing of the 'White House', Kyrgyzstan's presidential building. On my way to work in the morning, crowds of a few hundred were playing music, waving Kyrgyz flags, and speaking using megaphones in the main square, protesting the election result in which the ruling president's party had won by a significant majority amid near ubiquitous claims of election fraud, vote buying, and general irregularity. By the time it began to get dark, this number was closer to eight thousand. As I stood towards the back of the crowd, drawing a rather uncomfortable amount of attention, I saw military trucks beginning to position themselves at major intersections and the riot police putting on their gear as protestors began to test the strength of the gates of the White House. During the

⁸³⁹ However, it has been suggested to me that this could have been the result of a pressure to integrate faced by Uzbek communities in the south of the country in the wake of the outbreak of intercommunal violence in 2010. However, this was not the reason given to me during the course of my fieldwork and, if this is the case, it does not affect the argument made here concerning the influence of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices upon the Uzbek community. My thanks to Nick Megoran and Ainoura Sagynbaeva for the suggestion and very interesting discussion on this point.

course of the evening, pitched battles with police, acts of property destruction, and damage to government buildings created an environment of significant insecurity for local residents. However, following the spirit of *yntymak*, local residents, mostly young but both male and female, took it upon themselves to distribute food and water to those who were afraid or unable to leave their homes, and guarded local businesses round-the-clock in shifts to prevent any looting reminiscent of the 2010 revolution. This grew organically from the ground up, eventually resulting in local ‘brigades’ being organised, who were identified by coloured cloths attached to their arms or heads, and local leaders emerging, including the brother of a colleague of mine. This spontaneous movement reflected the core ideas behind the concept of *yntymak* - to ensure stability and order in the face of a common threat – and was described as such by those I spoke to, who employed this term with pride. The term was used frequently when I discussed these brigades with the sister of one of its leaders, who had immense pride in the activities of her younger brother. She explained that it was an excellent example of *yntymak* in practice, and that such solidarity and collective response to a common threat was “very Kyrgyz”. She was worried for her brother but proud that he embodied such practices and concerns. This statement was echoed in a conversation with an older woman and local business owner, who was keen to show me how fast the mess from the uprising was cleared up. She praised the work of these brigades in preventing the spread of property damage, but also highlighted the work of local women. With little organisation at all, she explained, groups of women had gathered in the streets in the early morning following these events, clearing up the stones, dirt, and other detritus left by the protestors. She said that it made her proud to be Kyrgyz, and that it stemmed from a practical expression of *yntymak*, something she portrayed as essentially and uniquely Kyrgyz. These examples aptly demonstrate the incarnation of *yntymak* as a collective response to a common issue through the promotion and maintenance of stability and order. The lack of such stability and order, and the lack of *yntymak*, was brought into focus upon the outbreak of violence along the Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan border. Beginning in April 2021, a dispute that allegedly concerned the placement of a camera for monitoring a water supply facility near the village of Kok-Tash in Batken, Kyrgyzstan, erupted into cross border violence. This led to around forty-six deaths and more than one hundred buildings vandalised or destroyed.⁸⁴⁰ During one of my visits to Orto Sai bazaar in Bishkek I got talking to one of the traders whom

⁸⁴⁰ N/A, ‘Kyrgyzstan – Tajikistan: Images of Destruction After Border Clashes’, (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-56963998?piano-modal>), [Accessed 05/12/2023].

I knew from many previous visits. He was originally from Batken, having moved to Bishkek to enable his children to attend university. He expressed great sorry over the situation, saying how the Kyrgyz and Tajiks had lived in togetherness, in togetherness, in *yntymak*, without modern borders for large swathes of history. He explained that the problem was the lack of *yntymak* in the modern era, and he expressed his desire for a return to such historical relations through the strengthening of *yntymak*.

After a year of living in Kyrgyzstan, and long after these events, I began working with the NGO. After completing each of the local stages of the peacebuilding project, I always sought to live in the community for a while with participants and their families, attempting to get more of a feel for the participants lives outside of the project and the contexts in which the project was trying to operate. On one particular occasion, I was invited to stay with a participant on their family farm, where I stayed in a small guesthouse adjoining the main building and the central yard. The family were ethnic Uzbeks living in a predominantly Uzbek community,⁸⁴¹ where houses are most commonly built around a central courtyard, with few outward-facing windows, and in which fruit trees, vines, and other plants produce food and shade. However, the farm was considerably bigger, stretching across the fields and over the river, hidden by rows of ever-present poplars. After a few days staying with the family, the weather began to turn. One of their larger fields was entirely carrots, all of which needed to be collected and driven to the bazaar before they ruined once the temperature dropped. The family, however, was not that big and, despite all coming together for the occasion, their eldest son explained to me that the whole village would help. We began as a team of four, using pitchforks to dig the carrots out of the ground one or two at a time. However, after a few hours the wives of many village residents turned up, sat down, and began to clean and pack the carrots into plastic sacks. This was followed by another farmer on a tractor, dragging blades through the earth to replace our rather measly pitchforks and bring

⁸⁴¹ Several parts of this section, especially those which relate to the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, use examples from my time staying in predominantly ethnic Uzbek areas and my experiences with these communities. There appears, therefore, to be a contradiction between my use of the term 'Kyrgyz/Traditional' and the use of these examples. However, I would like to make it clear at this point that what I am outlining is a consideration of understandings and practices of peace *in Kyrgyzstan*, rather than those that ostensibly belong to a particular ethnic group. I am only able to speak Kyrgyz: I cannot speak Russian well and I cannot speak Uzbek at all. Therefore, all conversations were conducted in Kyrgyz, allowing me to include these interactions in my discussion of Kyrgyz language terms. Furthermore, the notions which these terms represent are widespread across the country and are not limited in their understanding or use to a specific ethnic group. The use of the term 'Kyrgyz/Traditional' is intended to refer to the way in which these ideas are framed: as being either directly related to the history and culture of the Kyrgyz or through reference to a fluid understanding of tradition.

the carrots to the surface. Overall, around twenty people arrived, some taking carrots in exchange for their help, others bringing food, supplies, and tools to assist. This was, as my host explained on many occasions, *yntymak* in action. It was naturalised in the community to the point of banality: each person I spoke to saw it as a duty, rather than any kind of unique or special assistance. This speaks to the idea of a “non-egocentric perception of reality”, and the everyday and established character and nature of *yntymak* as an understanding and practice. The whole process was watched over by the father of my host, to whom the farm ultimately belonged. Although he didn’t work physically, he constantly disappeared to organise this or that, ensuring that other residents brought the necessary assistance. He divided labour, ensured that we worked, and brought people together, demonstrating the fundamental position of customary structures of authority in the practice of *yntymak*.

This section has sought to explore Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace through the concepts and practices associated with the Kyrgyz language terms *yntymak*, *tynchtyk*, *uiat*, *namys*, and *salt*. It has sought to explore and exemplify such ideas and actions as expressions of an understanding of stability as peaceful order, highlighting the importance of stability and order in ideas of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The following section introduces and explores the influence of Islam in relation to these understandings and practices of peace, further developing the triangulation proposed and exploring the convergence, divergence, and amalgamation upon which it is built. Such relations are evident even upon the surface. During my time at the farm, my host rather interestingly used two terms to refer to the help they received: *yntymak* and ашар (*ashar*). The word *ashar* does not originate from the Kyrgyz language: it is an Arabic word which entered the lexicon through the spread of Islam in the region. The south of Kyrgyzstan is notably more religious, and the Uzbek communities there tend to be more overt and stringent practitioners than the Kyrgyz of the north. This convergence highlights one aspect of the influence of Islam in Kyrgyzstan, one which will be discussed in the following section in depth and in relation to understandings and practices of peace. Language is a good place to start to outline not only the influence of Islam on everyday life in Kyrgyzstan, but to demonstrate how ideas converge. This influence is evident in one of the common Kyrgyz greetings, (саламатсызбы – *salamatsyzby* in the formal register, and салам – *salam* in the informal register), both of which take their root from the Arabic word for peace and a part of common Islamic greetings. Despite the relative immateriality of this example, it demonstrates the way in which ideas converge and, in this

case, can come to be recognised independently of this convergence, forming something new and widely accepted whilst retaining aspects of its original component parts. The following section explored these relations between understandings and practices of peace in depth, examining the influence of Islam through the framework of the triangulation and its three conditioning aspects of convergence, divergence, and amalgamation.

5.1.2 - The Influence of Islam: Convergence, Divergence, and Amalgamation

Kyrgyzstan is a majority Muslim country, around 90% according to the US Department of State.⁸⁴² Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan is officially a secular state, albeit in a more liberal fashion than the secularism maintained in practice by the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan, like the other republics of Central Asia, established the freedom of religious belief, bringing Islamic understandings and practices back into the public sphere,⁸⁴³ after their noticeable absence under communism. Nevertheless, Islam has not played a significant role in the country's politics, instead becoming an important source for national identity construction,⁸⁴⁴ with the freedom of religion sometimes framed as a popular aspect of the post-Soviet period.⁸⁴⁵ Despite the restrictions and de-facto harassment which occasionally mar post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan's attitudes towards religion, it was often presented to me as in terms of freedom and openness in practice, notably in comparison to the surrounding countries. The influence of Islam in Kyrgyzstan is evident in many aspects of life, from the everyday to the level of government, and connects to the legacies of the Soviet Union and Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices in myriad ways. This relation is one of convergence, in which understandings and practices have common characteristics which allow for integration; divergence, in which they do not; and amalgamation, where these have merged or become indistinguishable in their nature or usage. This section will begin by framing the influence of Islam as it is understood in the literature before elaborating and evidencing this relationship, exploring this influence in relation to understandings and practices of peace in order to establish this aspect of the triangulation.

⁸⁴² N/A, (<https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-report-on-international-religious-freedom/kyrgyzstan/>), [accessed 12/09/2022].

⁸⁴³ Toktogulova, Mukaram, 'Islam in the Context of Nation-Building in Kyrgyzstan: Reproduced Practices and Contested Discourses', *The Muslim World*, Vol. 110, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 51.

⁸⁴⁴ Ibid: p. 53.

⁸⁴⁵ McBrien, Julie, *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularities and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): p. 6.

Toktogulova refers to the rise of Islam after the collapse of the Soviet union as a “‘reislamisation’ process”, highlighting the historical influence of Islam in Kyrgyzstan yet drawing attention to the rise of religious practice as a post-Soviet occurrence: one which occurred in the context of the nation-building efforts proceeding this collapse.⁸⁴⁶ Islam was considered by officials as an important aspect of building a new nation, and was promoted as a key component of national culture, demonstrated at a basic level by the advancement of celebrations and rituals such as Orozo Ait (Eid ul-Fitr) and Kurman Ait (Eid ul-Adha) as national holidays.⁸⁴⁷ The influence of Islam can thus be seen as one of convergence with the attitudes and activities developed in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

A further convergence, between the influence of Islam and the legacy of the Soviet Union, is discussed by McBrien. She uses the example of a statue of Lenin, still standing, as most are in Kyrgyzstan, and its position next the mosque in the southern town of Bazaar-Korgon as an illustration of the focus of her book: namely, how a complex and sometime contradictory, yet nevertheless intertwined landscape of religion and politics came to be, how it is interpreted, and what this says about secularism in the country.⁸⁴⁸ The meeting of Islam and the legacy of the Soviet Union is unavoidable in a country experiencing a resurgence of religious belief and practice in the face of an ever-present Soviet history, despite the opposition of the latter to the former during the Soviet Union itself. The modern landscape of Kyrgyzstan identified by McBrien presents a complex picture of convergence and amalgamation in which the influence of Islam becomes part of everyday experience and the post-Soviet political landscape.

This complexity in the influence of Islam, its relationship to the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, and its divergence across individuals and contexts was exemplified throughout my time in the field. In the course of one discussion, in a café in downtown Bishkek, the two women I was talking with exemplified this multiplicity. Although both identified a connection to Islam, certainly in the terms of national belonging promoted by the state, they followed starkly different understandings and practices in relation to it. The two women worked together at an Islamic T.V station in Bishkek, yet one had introduced me to the other, suggesting that if I

⁸⁴⁶ Toktogulova, Mukaram, ‘Islam in the Context of Nation-Building in Kyrgyzstan: Reproduced Practices and Contested Discourses’, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 110, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 51.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁸ McBrien, Julie, *From Belonging to Belief: Modern Secularisms and the Construction of Religion in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017): p. 5-6.

wanted to learn more about Islam in Kyrgyzstan, she would be a knowledgeable and well-read person to talk to. My friend, who had made the introduction, wore jeans, a t-shirt, and makeup, in obvious contrast to her colleague's headscarf and long, modest dress. While she explained in great detail the long history of Islam in Kyrgyzstan, its links to their great heroes and the relationship of the religion to Kyrgyz traditional ideas and activities, my friend admitted that, although she considered herself to be "culturally Muslim", by virtue of being Kyrgyz, she did not know much about religious issues. She explained that she followed common rituals and practices but remained uncovered and did not practice *namaz*, the prayers performed by Muslims. Although 90% of the population might consider themselves Muslim, according to her estimates, she believed that less than half are "serious" practitioners. The idea of a Muslim identity, and Islam being a cultural aspect of belonging rather than the adherence to such practices, was also brought up by others during conversation. In one such conversation, I spoke to a man who had recently returned from studying in the United States, who explained to me that before he had left, he would have told me without hesitation that he was a Muslim. However, after spending time abroad, he had come to the realisation that this was cultural rather than religious in nature: he had not been recognised as a Muslim by other Muslims in the US and had opposed the spread of mosques and 'traditional' Islamic practices in Kyrgyzstan, saying that there were more mosques than schools. He had always avoided prayer but participated in the established Islamic holidays and life-cycle celebrations, understanding them as a part of his culture and identity rather than as only religious practices. This diversity amongst the ways in which Islam has influenced Kyrgyzstan was further exemplified by my time spent with a recent graduate in theology from The Islamic University of Medina, Saudi Arabia. We met again in a café, cafés being almost an institution in the country, and talked about his attitudes and experiences. He was noticeably uncomfortable with the café I chose: one in central Bishkek with a more Western-style look, menu, and clothing for women. Our waitress was wearing jeans and a t-shirt, chatting with me as we ordered and being friendly. He refused to order, despite me already drinking a coffee. As soon as I finished, he insisted that we move to a café the other side of the city. The café itself was built in an Uzbek Islamic style, with colourful patterned tiles and small minarets adorning the entrance. Inside, after washing our feet, we were escorted through the quiet of the restaurant floor to our table by a woman wearing a hijab and long dress, who barely spoke and avoided eye contact. As soon as we arrived, he was suddenly confident and full of questions, despite having barely spoken

himself in the previous café. During our time together, he expressed strong support for the spread of Saudi interpretations of Sunni Islam in Kyrgyzstan. He saw corporal punishment in this fashion as a solution to conflict in the country, spoke at length about spreading the clean and righteous life of Islam, and made stops at two different mosques for *namaz* during our time together. He dominated the conversation, using this as a platform for converting me and explaining, in great detail, the sins he believed I was committing. His views covered almost every aspect of everyday life and government and followed a noticeably devout understanding of Islam, one which was a great contrast to the majority I came into contact with. Some go to mosque, yet occasionally drink vodka; some are the devout missionaries of the 'right' and 'orthodox' Islam; and others uphold beliefs and practices which, despite having their roots in Islam, are understood as traditionally Kyrgyz. Others reject Islam outright, harking back to the shamanistic religion which existed in the region before Islam, choosing to worship *Tengri* rather than ostensibly diverge from their culture and heritage through ostensibly foreign ideas and rituals. Although there are public representatives of this belief, I was unable to meet them despite my efforts to make contact, and thus I had almost no engagement with Tengrism and the activists who espouse it.

However, although these discussions highlight the existence *of* the influence of Islam on post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, and the broad characterisations of this influence, there is little in the literature which relates to understandings and practices of peace in this regard. The following sections will therefore address the influence of Islam in terms of understandings and practices of peace predominantly through my own observations. It is worth noting that, where generalisations or broad statements concerning these are discussed, rather than in-depth narratives more traditional ethnographic accounts, these are nonetheless the result of the manifold conversations, observations, and experiences developed from my time in the country. The specific experiences and observations to evidence these claims have been chosen because of their exemplary nature and are intended to be indicative of a wider prevalence of such situations, ideas, or actions in Kyrgyzstan, attested to by my time in the field.

To begin with, although the literature suggests a convergence of the legacy of the Soviet Union and the influence of Islam, I did not observe this in relation to understandings and practices of peace. The stringent secularism, and often rather repressive atheism in practice, of the Soviet Union has prevented the convergence of ideas from Kyrgyzstan's Soviet legacy

and those which emerged in the resurgence of Islam regarding peace and peacebuilding, according to my experiences. Although the meeting of this legacy and the resurgence of Islam has had manifold effects upon Kyrgyzstan, as McBrien discusses, these convergences appeared to have little to do with perceptions of peaceful order. The Soviet Union was rarely mentioned in those conversations I had with the more religious: when it was, it was to highlight the persecution faced by their relatives and the freedom of religion which resulted from its collapse. Islam was often presented to me as a return to the 'old ways', and the understandings of peace I encountered when talking to those who identified as practising Muslims were almost exclusively presented in Islamic terms, with extensive reference to Kyrgyz/Traditional concepts. Any convergence of understandings and practices of peace thus occurred mainly between what I identify as the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect and the influence of Islam. This section reflects this experience, focusing more on the relations between these two aspects whilst highlighting the divergence of understandings and practices of peace influenced by Islam from those stemming from the legacies of the Soviet Union.

An example of the convergence of understandings and practices of peace stemming from the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect and the influence of Islam is evident in the terms *yntymak* and *ashar* mentioned previously. *Yntymak* has been discussed in depth, and its connection to and manifestation within the Kyrgyz/Traditional outlined. *Ashar*, on the other hand, is a notion connected to Islam and Kyrgyzstan's Islamic history and is also a widespread and long-used term in the country. Although the word itself has Turkic origins, it stems from an Islamic influenced basic tax measure enacted in the Ottoman empire, meaning "one in ten".⁸⁴⁹ Despite these roots in Ottoman Islamic law, the term is now often employed to denote the collective and mutual assistance, and provision of goods and services, given to those who cannot afford them.⁸⁵⁰ It is thus often represented as material assistance. However, this mutual assistance is commonly underpinned by the invocation of *yntymak*: *ashar* describes the giving and nature of such assistance, but *yntymak* is often presented as its ideational or cultural basis. The example of my experiences on the family farm attest to this: the use of these two terms demonstrates the convergence of these ideas in this manner, and the convergence of Islamic-influenced understandings and practices of peace and those presented as Kyrgyz/Traditional. Cramer, in his article on the informal

⁸⁴⁹ Sheranova, Arzuu, 'Ashar (Kyrgyzstan)', [https://www.informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Ashar_\(Kyrgyzstan\)](https://www.informality.com/wiki/index.php?title=Ashar_(Kyrgyzstan)), [accessed 11/01/2023].

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid.

settlements, outlines a similar link. He discusses the “anti-imperialist and ethno-nationalist home builder movement” by the name of *Ashar*, who were active in the 1980s in organising protests and land seizures by landless ethnic Kyrgyz in Bishkek, and frames *yntymak* as an assertion made “in the material and authoritative void left by an incapable state” and one which “is used to build communities both materially and experientially”.⁸⁵¹ The relation between the two is presented as an ideational underpinning for a concrete process of material assistance, with *yntymak* forming the underpinning of *ashar* in this capacity. In this case, this organisation provides material goods through mutual assistance, (land), and yet Cramer’s paper seems to suggest *yntymak* as the ideational base for the politics behind such a process. He writes that the residents of these informal settlements, some created through *ashar* the organisation, and thus the process understood as *ashar*, recognise that the state fails to work meaningfully for them, and that they must “reject, reshape, or otherwise reproduce” the authority of the state for themselves.⁸⁵² *Yntymak*, as a force for stability, order, and peaceful relations based upon an authoritative appeal to tradition (*salt*), can therefore be seen as the principle which unites and converges with the material assistance referred to as *ashar* in order to develop a united community in the face of this uncertainty. It is thus “used to build communities both materially and experientially”.⁸⁵³ Such stability and order through mutual assistance and cooperation creates tight-knit communities through invoking tradition, representing understandings and practices of peace in this manner through the development and maintenance of processes intended to ensure a form of stability and (peaceful) order. My time at the farm attests to this distinction between *yntymak* and *ashar*, with the former being used to refer to community relations themselves, and the latter explicitly to the assistance provided. We began the day with pitchforks, levering the carrots out of the ground a few small bunches at a time, and with the assistance of my host’s immediate family alone. However, while we were digging, the eldest man of the household, and father of my host, walked back to the village and began to talk to the other farmers and their families, asking for help. Before long, a tractor and small plough was brought to the field by their neighbour, speeding up the process. The wives of friends and neighbours came to clean, stack, and pack the carrots into sacks before we loaded them into a tractor trailer, and other men appeared with forks to help us dig the remaining, stubborn

⁸⁵¹ Cramer, Bert, ‘Kyrgyzstan’s Informal Settlements: *Yntymak* and the Emergence of Politics in Place, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2018): p. 128-129.

⁸⁵² Ibid: p. 129.

⁸⁵³ Ibid.

carrots of the now much loosened ground. This kind of material mutual assistance was referred to as *ashar*: when my host showed me his home, he proudly explained that his friends, family, and neighbours had all come together to build it, enthusiastically citing *ashar* in reference to this as material assistance. Discussions of the more abstract community relations which were involved in establishing, organising, and maintaining the underpinning community relations in this example, as well as in the example given concerning the rather expensive bread, were instead presented as being predicated upon the term *yntymak*.

In this example, the two understandings and practices have converged in a singular process, despite often being used to refer to particular aspects of it. However, there is also a divergence between the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect and influence of Islam. One example of such a divergence which became evident through my discussions and experiences in the field concerned conflict resolution mechanisms. The *аксакал* (*aksakal*), or whitebeard, is a village elder who, usually as part of a group of elders, serves as the arbitrator of localised disputes. Beyer has an excellent article on this subject, in which she highlights the nature of the decisions made by these elders as being conducted “according to customary law”:

⁸⁵⁴through the invocation of *salt*, (tradition). Following independence, these elders were given legal recognition by the first president, Akaev, with the law enacted stating that the *aksakals* should make decisions in such disputes “according to the customs and traditions of the Kyrgyz”.⁸⁵⁵ This kind of dispute mediation is, therefore, a noteworthy manifestation of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect. The *Aksakals* can issue punishment in three ways:

(1) issue a warning, (2) require a public apology to the victim(s), (3) administer a public reprimand, (4) require the guilty party to compensate for material damages, (5) fine the guilty party an amount not to exceed the equivalent of three months’ salary at minimum wage, or (6) sentence the guilty party to community service. If the court cannot get the parties to reconcile in a property- or family-related case, it makes a unilateral decision on the question under consideration. If necessary, *aksakal* courts are empowered to hand matters over to the regional courts.⁸⁵⁶

⁸⁵⁴ Beyer, Judith, ‘Customizations of Law: Courts of Elders (*Aksakal* Courts) in Rural and Urban Kyrgyzstan’, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, Vol. 38, Iss. 01, (2015): p. 54.

⁸⁵⁵ Law on the *Aksakal* Courts, art.2, in Beyer, Judith, ‘Customizations of Law: Courts of Elders (*Aksakal* Courts) in Rural and Urban Kyrgyzstan’, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, Vol. 38, Iss. 01, (2015): p. 53.

⁸⁵⁶ Beyer, Judith, ‘Customizations of Law: Courts of Elders (*Aksakal* Courts) in Rural and Urban Kyrgyzstan’, *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, Vol. 38, Iss. 01, (2015): p. 56.

Although I did not witness or attend such *Aksakal* court sessions, they were nonetheless much discussed by the people I spent time with, and great respect was given to them.⁸⁵⁷ However, following on from the resurgence of Islam highlighted by the literature, the role of Imams and the mosque has come to diverge with that customarily reserved for the *aksakal*. As such, there has been a divergence of dispute resolution mechanisms between those I characterise as Kyrgyz/Traditional, and those following the influence of Islam. The experiences of one of my informants attested to this: during time spent conducting research in one of the northern regions of Kyrgyzstan, they had spoken to many young people about how they chose to resolve their disputes. They often explained that they would always talk to the imam first, who they saw as the central figure in this capacity. They saw religion and religious authority as the best and even only arbiter of such issues. They raised the issue that elders occasionally drank vodka at celebrations, and thus themselves diverged from the Islamic conception of a 'clean' life. My informant explained that this stood in stark contrast to the attitudes of the older generation, who were much more likely to engage in traditional dispute resolution through elder family members or *aksakals*. Older people, who had grown up in the Soviet Union, did not approach Islam as piously as the younger generations, often only attending Friday prayer and invoking religion at certain life-cycle celebrations, rather than praying five times a day and endeavouring to live a 'clean', Islamic lifestyle in its entirety. This demonstrates not only a divergence between dispute resolution mechanisms presented as Kyrgyz/Traditional or the result of the influence of Islam, but that such a divergence can be understood through a generational divide. In this example, these practices did not occur side-by-side and had not amalgamated, but instead were understood as being essentially divergent from one another.

Nevertheless, there are further examples of a divergence between Kyrgyz/Traditional modes of Kyrgyz/Traditional dispute resolution and those stemming from the influence of Islam. I observed a marked example of this in the situation of a young woman I had come to know, and the difficulties she was facing with her husband. To ensure a level of anonymity in this discussion, I will only refer to these difficulties as relating to her family situation and the prospects with her husband. One Kyrgyz/Traditional institution of dispute resolution which is

⁸⁵⁷ It is this reason that a discussion of the *Aksakal* courts does not feature in more detail in the discussion of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, along with the fact that the preceding discussion of *salt*, *uiat*, and *yntymak* is an attempt to outline the fundamental principles through and with which Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices of peace are manifest, instead of their concrete institutional in, for example, such a court.

often presented as the first port of call for such disputes is that of their elderly relatives, or the *өкүл ата* (*ökul ata*) and *өкүл эне* (*ökul ene*). These latter positions were explained to me through the notion of a ‘representative father’ and ‘representative mother’. A newlywed couple can each have such formally nominated figures from the outset of their marriage, who provide independent advice to the bride and groom and help to resolve issues in their relationship. In more serious cases, or where elderly relatives of representative parents are not trusted or are unavailable, these disputes can be brought before the *aksakal*, who can act in a more official, state-sanctioned capacity in the role of a magistrate, and thus make legally binding decisions. The woman I spoke to was having such difficulties and was considering divorce. However, in this instance, and as a result of the religious conviction of the woman and her husband, they planned to go first to their Imam, and they considered this the best and step, and the wisest and most authoritative figure. This was explained to me as a kind of marriage counselling, where the Imam would give advice and try to resolve any disputes to avoid a break-up of the marriage. Ultimately, the dispute did not go this far, but it nonetheless serves as a good example of the influence of Islam in terms of understandings and practices of peace. In this context, the Imam took the role of a dispute mediator, diverging from the customary role of representative parents and thus from a form of established dispute resolution which represents the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect. Through this example, we can see an example of the change in preference from customary dispute resolution to Islamic dispute resolution mechanisms; from community-based traditional structures of authority, such as relatives, *aksakals*, or representative parents, to the authority of God through the mosque, representing a wider phenomenon of divergence from the understandings and practices of peace which are presented as being uniquely Kyrgyz, or through reference to tradition outside of the inclusion of Islam. Although many Kyrgyz consider themselves to be “culturally Muslim”, a common phrase I encountered in conversation, they nonetheless often draw a distinction between Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices, such as *yntymak*, *uiat*, and those undertaken in reference to *salt*, and those which belong more to Islam. An extreme example of this division and distinction is evident in the comments made by former president Almazbek Atambayev during his time in office. He referred to “Arabization” or “Pakistanization” as negative descriptors of the influence of Islam in the country, even suggesting such influences should

be seen as “mankurtization” as they ignored or displaced traditional cultural values,⁸⁵⁸ demonstrating his belief that the influence of Islam was fundamentally a divergence from genuine, Kyrgyz ways and attitudes of living. Those who consider themselves to be more serious or committed practitioners of Islam, or even those who have a more distinctly religious identity in the country, however, often expressed to me that Islam was the religion of all the Central Asian peoples, and that it was the religion “of their ancestors”, or the idea that “all Kyrgyz are born Muslim”. Divergence between the aspects identified in the triangulation is thus not only a one-way street, but a complex process contingent upon situation and context, time and place.

Although the comments made by Atambayev are divisive, and part of the narrative of Kyrgyz ethno-nationalism that has become an ever-larger part of Kyrgyzstan’s political environment in the years following independence, the kind of figure he sought to characterise can nonetheless be found, albeit in small numbers. The graduate of Medina University is a stark example of this, advocating for capital punishment and strict sharia law as the basis for a new peaceful order in Kyrgyzstan. He presented himself as a scholar, explaining to me the manifold ways in which the adherence towards a stricter, more Saudi-influenced interpretation of Islam would bring peace through stability. He explained this through the notion of enforcing a “righteous”, Islamic life through capital punishment, suggesting that the deterrence that would result from such penalties would reinforce Islamic values and practices and, combined with increased state authoritarianism, would ensure a model of stability and order built upon a particular understanding of Islamic values and Sharia law.

The divergence of his understandings and practices of peace from those presented to me as Kyrgyz/Traditional is highlighted by the attitude of Atambayev, with his disdain for ‘Arabisation’ and the loss of Kyrgyz culture. This man was exemplary of the subject of these fears, believing them an authoritarian interpretation of Islam, built into governmental structures and practiced through the legal system, was the only path to peace. This represents a notable divergence from the *aksakal* courts and the fluid and contingent practices which emerge from and through the reference to *salt*. To begin with, it lacks the fundamentally fluid and contingent nature of these idea in their manifestation, instead resting upon an appeal to a distinct interpretation of the concrete laws of God. Furthermore,

⁸⁵⁸ Toktogulova, Mukaram, ‘Islam in the Context of Nation-Building in Kyrgyzstan: Reproduced Practices and Contested Discourses’, *The Muslim World*, Vol. 110, Iss. 01, (2020): p. 53.

the punishments and the manner in which decisions regarding these punishments are made is quite different, resting upon religious institutions rather than elders, and upon an interpretation of the Quran rather than upon an interpretation of 'tradition' and the contextual particularities of the situation and nature of the problem itself. Despite both being interpretations, the appeal to divine authority is a notable divergence from the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect, which is instead grounded in reference to *salt*. Traditionally, the local *aksakal* is responsible for resolving disputes, with the process having been legalised and revitalised shortly after independence. This emphasises the principle of self-governance by each community, manifesting that fluidity of tradition an interpretation which previous sections have outlined. They represent the nomadic history of the Kyrgyz people, and rest upon the customary respect for the elder generations which permeates all aspects of life in the country. However, instead of resting upon fluid, localised interpretation and an appeal to tradition, the judgement of the Imam, who would represent the power of such understandings and practices of peace following the influence of Islam, rests on the considerably more rigid Islamic law, with digressions and their consequences established and concrete. Thus, although the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect and the influence of Islam both emphasise stability and order as the path to peaceful order, they diverge in fundamental ways. This section has highlighted this divergence through the changing nature and foundation of dispute resolution mechanisms in the community and in the home, and the divergent basis and reinforcing principles of stability and order, contrasting the notions of *uiat* and *yntymak* with those that stem from Islamic principles and values.

5.1.3 - The Legacies of the Soviet Union

The final aspect of the triangulation is that of the continuing influence of the Soviet Union in relation to understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. This is best understood in terms of a 'legacy': despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the understandings and practices promoted through propaganda, education, and cultural 'sovietisation' are nevertheless retained in greater or lesser degrees. The manifestation of these legacies is subject to the same fluid process of convergence, divergence, and amalgamation outlined through the concept of triangulation. However, as the practice of religion was subject to extensive restriction under an unofficial policy of atheism during the Soviet era, the relation

of this aspect to that of the influence of Islam is only one of divergence. However, the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect can often be seen enmeshed with the legacies of the Soviet Union. The following sections introduce and exemplify this legacy, giving examples of its prominence, content, and prevalence in everyday life and highlighting the importance of this aspect. This is followed by a discussion of the ‘friendship of the peoples’ as the central concept behind Soviet understandings and practices of peace in Central Asia, and a discussion of some of the ways in which these understandings and practices relate to those of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect.

The continuing legacy of the Soviet Union in Kyrgyzstan becomes immediately clear after a short walk through the streets of Bishkek. Parks and war memorials dedicated to the heroes of the Second World War can be found across the city, a Soviet MiG sits on a plinth outside the Soviet-built National Guard building and Ministry of Defence, and a towering monument to the friendship of the peoples sits a stone’s throw from the White House. Although these symbols have declined in their importance, along with the decline of the Union itself, they nonetheless continue to be maintained. Nothing symbolises this better than the statue of Lenin, which used to occupy the prime position in the centre of the main square. As highlighted in chapters one and two, this monument has been subject to significant change since independence: first stood Lenin, his finger outstretched towards the motherland; this was replaced upon independence with *erkindik*, a Kyrgyz statue of liberty; however, Manas now occupies this space, resplendent upon his horse and atop the largest plinth of all. Nowadays, Lenin has been moved to a modest position in a park, between The Museum of National History and the Kyrgyz parliament building. In a way, this symbolises the position of the Soviet legacy: no longer front stage, yet still very much a part of Kyrgyzstan’s life and politics. For example, the very nature of memorials and sculpture across Kyrgyzstan was affected by the Soviet Union. Traditionally, and in part the result of the influence of Islam, Kyrgyz memorials are almost exclusively for individuals after death, predominantly with an ornate grave marker called a *kymboz*. However, the memorialisation of great moments and people from Soviet history gave rise to a mirrored practice in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. Now, the great events of Kyrgyz history are immortalised in

Soviet-esque memorials of their own, occupying prominent places across the country. A memorial commemorating the Central Asian Revolt of 1916 and 'Great Urkun'⁸⁵⁹ was erected at the entrance to Boom Gorge on the edges of Chui and Issyk-Kul regions, and very much represents the continuation of the Soviet style.



Figure 9: the first photo demonstrates the kymboz. The second shows the monument to the Great Urkun in Boom Gorge, on the boundary between Chui and Issyk-Kul regions, (both taken by the author).



This continuing legacy is exemplified even in the names of Kyrgyz citizens, some of which reveal the continuing legacy of Soviet conceptions of peace. A rather stark example can be

⁸⁵⁹ Fleeing the increasing colonisation of the Russian Empire, and the threat of conscription during the first world war, around 10,000 Kyrgyz attempted to flee towards China across the Tien Shan mountains. Thousands of people and animals did not survive the journey, and the event is one of the greatest tragedies of Kyrgyz history.

seen in the name Мелис (*Melis*) which is an acronym for Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin. Soviet propaganda concerning peace, and in opposition to war, was one of the more powerful psychological instruments employed since the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917.⁸⁶⁰ This was amplified by returning soldiers from the Second World War, who not only sought peace themselves, but saw the Soviet Union as having brought peace to Europe. One young woman told me of her grandfather's role in the battle for Berlin, and his strong desire for peace after experiencing the horrors of the war. This attitude, bolstered by state propaganda, is reflected in the use of the Russian word мир ('peace', although it can also be used as 'world') in Kyrgyz names. The word has been incorporated into the Kyrgyz style of naming: for example, Мирбек (*Mirbek*), Элмир (*Elmir*), or Мирзат (*Mirzat*) for men, and Элмира (*Elmira*) or Миргүл (*Mirgul*) for women. *Mirbek* uses the Russian word for peace alongside the common Kyrgyz appellation *bek*, often used in male names, roughly translating as 'Khan' or 'strong'. *Elmir* can thus be literally understood as 'people peace', *Mirzat* as 'peace substance', and *Mirgul* as 'peace flower'. The use of nouns, adjectives, and concepts appellatively is common practice in Kyrgyzstan, yet the inclusion of the Russian *mir* represents the addition of a Soviet understanding of peace into Kyrgyz society and is thus symbolic of the enmeshing of such understandings into everyday life in Kyrgyzstan.

These understandings are presented in people's everyday lives most commonly through nostalgia, something which became evident to me in conversations with those who had lived through substantial parts of the Soviet period. This was brought further into focus through an afternoon spent with Эсимде (*Esimde*), an organisation dedicated to promoting a shift in the understanding of Kyrgyz history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries through constructing an oral history archive built upon the memories and accounts of individuals and a platform for their discussion, including events which were subject to extensive Soviet repression. During the afternoon, the organisation's staff presented to me their perspectives on nostalgia and the Soviet Union, suggesting that it consisted of: economic nostalgia, and looking back at the economic stability and state paternalism of the Soviet period; the influence of modern Russia in cultivating a positive perception of the Soviet Union through television, radio, and Russian language news outlets; and the resulting romanticisation of this period, built upon the nostalgia of the elderly, the continuing presence of Soviet

⁸⁶⁰ Barghoorn, Frederick Charles, *Soviet Foreign Propaganda*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964): p. 80.

iconography and architecture, and the educational program in schools. They expanded upon this framework, suggesting that the legacy of the Soviet Union could be understood through four main features: internationalism, paternalism, ideology, and infrastructure. My own observations confirmed this, highlighting the same facets which *Esimde* had seen throughout their collection of oral accounts of Soviet and post-Soviet history.

People often reminisced to me about how life used to be in the 'Kirgiz' Soviet Socialist Republic, lamenting about the myriad ways in which they saw the quality of life as having declined since independence. A prominent local business owner, a woman in her late sixties, told me many stories about her childhood, explaining how from the age of seven or eight she used to walk alone around her local neighbourhood, sleeping at neighbour's houses when she felt tired, being fed and looked after by everyone, with neither her nor her parents ever having concerns for her whereabouts or safety. Her memories were filled with nostalgia: she explained that it was a time where communities were close-knit, everybody helped everybody and knew each other's names, and things were stable. She smiled as she told me about her childhood: despite her success in post-independence capitalism, she nonetheless held a deep nostalgia for life under the Soviet Union. This was echoed by many members of a women's business association I spent time working alongside: the members often referred to themselves as being from Frunze, rather than Bishkek, demonstrating their Soviet identity and connection with the old times through using the Soviet name for the city.⁸⁶¹

This nostalgia was common amongst the older generations. A former teacher of micro-biology at the Kyrgyz State Medical Academy in Bishkek, born in 1940, talked to me in great detail about growing up in the Soviet Union and how her life had changed. She talked quite directly about the idea of stability in relation to living and working under Soviet rule, describing the collapse of the USSR as a moment which revealed the difficulties and dangers of instability, contrasting this with the consistent stability of the Soviet system. There were, nevertheless, bad things about this time: she emphasised the benefits of the relative growth of freedom since independence, saying new ideas had been given space to emerge, people could travel and be educated abroad, and you could buy anything you could afford. However, despite the limitations and hardships of the Soviet period, she thought many

⁸⁶¹ Mikhail Frunze was a Bolshevik leader around the time of the Russian revolution in 1917, born in what is now Kyrgyzstan. The capital city was named after him from 1926 until independence in 1991.

things had, in fact, become worse. During the USSR, “we were poor but provided for”, with the state providing housing, education, food, and work and thus creating a form of stability in people’s everyday lives. People today have to create stability for themselves through working, saving, and trying their best, and many simply do not have the resources and opportunities to do so. She talked about this idea of stability in relation to politics too. During the Soviet period, the communist party ruled without opposition and, although people often did not know who their local and national leaders were, this did not matter. Things remained the same. She explained the idea of stability as continuity and certainty in this capacity, framing Soviet politics as stable in terms of the absence of dissent or competition. She gave corruption as an example, contrasting the kind of open, widespread, and unashamed corruption of post-independence Kyrgyzstan with the situation under the USSR, using her time spent working in medical institutions as an example. Under Soviet control, this was provided by the state, without the influence of private companies and private interests. Now, however, marketisation had created the conditions for widespread corruption: doctor’s salaries are low, medicine is less accessible, and corruption had emerged in the form of securing quicker treatment, beds, and better care. The cost of medicines and bribes has meant that the poorest in society have become detached from good medical care for financial reasons.⁸⁶² Life, she explained, became increasingly difficult if you were poor. People became detached not only from aspects of life they could no longer afford, but from each other: she talked about collectivisation to illustrate this. Collectivised labour prevented many of these problems, creating a form of stability through the guaranteed provision of essential goods, work, and working conditions, ensuring a basic quality of life which today is more dependent upon class, wealth, and social status. Necessities were cheap, services were provided for, and meat and milk were free, without the ever-increasing prices and competition which she saw as characterising contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

This idea of a ‘decline’ from Soviet state paternalism, viewed through the lens of nostalgia, is something also discussed in the literature. In her book on police reform in post-Soviet countries, Marat highlights the continuation of Soviet-era structures and systems of policing, referring to their “identical structures, chains of command, institutional cultures, and,

⁸⁶² Although polyclinics are common and free, hospital care is more open to corruption. It is paid for by taxes but, in practice, it is much better to ‘know someone’ and to engage in informal practices, often involving money, to secure quick, quality, and specialist treatment.

importantly, relationships with the political elite”.⁸⁶³ However, although such structures and systems “have resisted change despite transformations in the overall political context”,⁸⁶⁴ they nonetheless demonstrate the perception of ‘decline’ into ‘instability’ presented to me through observations and discussions in the field. In spite of this continuation, policing in the post-Soviet space has changed following independence, developing:

New ways of operating, including predatory tactics against citizens, rampant corruption, politicization, and symbolic relationships with organized criminal groups... instances of bribery, extortion, racketeering, and the use of physical violence have increased over the past two decades.⁸⁶⁵

This demonstrates the contrast between state institutions during and after the Soviet period. The legacy of the USSR continues in contemporary Kyrgyzstan through the maintenance of the external semblance of these institutions, but they are no longer what they once were. Independence was followed by a loss of state paternalism and the development of corruption, nepotism, and other influences, perceived as a decline in comparison with the authoritarian and ostensibly ‘stable’ rule of the Soviet authorities. Marat’s focus on policing exemplifies this through providing an empirical illustration of the reasons for a perceived decline in stability through the changing nature of policing and the emergence of corruption and other aspects of depreciation within their practices.

However, the legacy of the Soviet Union remains strong in many aspects of life in Kyrgyzstan, with the force of nostalgia combining with a perceived decline in living standards and stability ensuring its continuation. Iǵmen presents the legacy of the Soviet Union in a relation of convergence and amalgamation with Kyrgyz/Traditional aspects of everyday life. He gives the examples of elderly people who celebrate the October Revolution as well as Nowruz⁸⁶⁶, and families who display images of Lenin next to their *Shyrdak* (the traditional felt carpet), arguing that such people do not separate their ‘Kyrgyzness’ from the narrative of the Bolshevik revolution.⁸⁶⁷ Although the book is from 2012, using examples from even earlier, it nonetheless helps to highlight the convergence of these two aspects of the triangulation

⁸⁶³ Marat, Erica, *The Politics of Police Reform: Society Against the State in Post-Soviet Countries*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018): p. 5.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁶ Nowruz is the Persian New Year that coincides with the spring equinox.

⁸⁶⁷ Iǵmen, Ali, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2012): p. 142.

presented here. He explicitly states that “Soviet modernity and Kyrgyz tradition did not collide but converged, resulting in something that was new”.⁸⁶⁸ He argues that the late Soviet era’s Kyrgyz elite “accepted the Soviet call to showcase their ethnicity within the framework of socialism”,⁸⁶⁹ indicating a further amalgamation of Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices and those of the Soviet Union. Whilst having lunch with some of the staff at a medical university in Bishkek, one of the older women was talking about her daughter, who was born several years after independence. She described the generational gap between them, and her disappointment that her daughter did not understand Soviet culture and was not a “Soviet person”. She not only saw herself in this way but seemed to equate this Soviet identity with what it meant to be a Kyrgyzstani citizen. The other women around the table, most of whom were of a similar age, all nodded their heads in agreement, some having had similar experiences themselves. To them, this was not an enduring legacy of a country which no longer existed, or of a system which had long ago collapsed: it was an integral part of their identity, history, and culture, defining in part how they understood themselves and how they perceived the country. The legacy of the Soviet Union was enmeshed with being Kyrgyz and with life in Kyrgyzstan. These encounters, observations, and discussions within the literature highlight the importance of the legacies of the Soviet Union, their reinforcement through nostalgia, and the ways in which they are represented commonly in everyday life. The following section examines the understandings and practices of peace which emerge from this legacy, beginning with an exposition of the ‘friendship of the peoples’ as the core Soviet attempt at engendering peaceful order across Central Asia and beyond.

Internationalism and the Friendship of the Peoples

The core of Soviet presentations of peaceful order, and its enduring legacy in relation to understandings and practices of peace, can be understood thorough the promotion of a ‘friendship of the peoples’ in the former USSR. Changes made in the Soviet nationalities policy after 1932 necessitated a new unifying principle for the multi-ethnic Soviet state and, in 1935, Stalin introduced the notion of a ‘friendship of the peoples’ as a means of

⁸⁶⁸ Iğmen, Ali, *Speaking Soviet with an Accent: Culture and Power in Kyrgyzstan*, (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 2012): p. 141.

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid: p. 146.

articulating this principle.⁸⁷⁰ By 1938, it was the officially sanctioned metaphor of the imagined Soviet multinational community.⁸⁷¹ Instead of the encouragement of hatred towards class enemies, promoted in previous policies and propaganda aimed at internal unification, the 'Friendship of the Peoples' emphasised the USSR's diverse nationalities' love for one another and, of course, for Comrade Stalin.⁸⁷² It promoted intimate and personal emotions, conveying an affective tie between the different Soviet nationalities.⁸⁷³ In her discussion of intermarriage in the Soviet Union, Edgar notes that the term 'race' was rarely used in the later years of the Soviet Union, and that ideas concerning innate characteristics based upon ancestry coexisted with a firm belief in the 'Friendship of the Peoples' and the accompanying Soviet internationalism. She writes: "in the words of my interview subjects, 'we didn't think about nationality then', 'we were all internationalists'".⁸⁷⁴

A woman I worked for during my time as an English teacher talked with me about her time as a student in the Soviet Union, exemplifying Soviet internationalism and the friendship of the peoples. At that time, she explained, everyone was a citizen of the USSR, despite their ethnic identity or geographical location. She was born in the Kirgiz SSR but went to university in the Ukrainian SSR. She was proud of being Kyrgyz and brought with her traditional Kyrgyz clothing to wear in the streets to show her pride in her nationality and ethnicity. However, she did so within the framework of being a *Soviet* citizen, attending university together with students from many different Soviet republics as part of the increasingly educated Soviet youth. Her experiences in Ukraine were of multinational and multi-ethnic education under Soviet direction. People came from across the Soviet Union and were free to express some of the culture and history of the groups to whom they belonged as she did. However, education was undertaken at a Soviet state institution, providing teaching in-line with Soviet ideals and politics and through the principle that all were, first and foremost, a Soviet citizen: national or ethnic belonging was a secondary form of identity. She expressed a nostalgic understanding of Soviet internationalism, highlighting the reasons why such internationalism is understood as a lost aspect of a former peaceful order.

⁸⁷⁰ Martin, Terry, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, (London: Cornell University Press, 2001): p. 432.

⁸⁷¹ Ibid.

⁸⁷² Ibid: p. 441.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Edgar, Adrienne, *Intermarriage and the Friendship of the Peoples: Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia*, (London: Cornell University Press, 2022): p. 213.

The ideas behind the friendship of the peoples emphasises the foundational principle of solidarity which undergirds Soviet understandings and practices of peace. This principle rests upon the notion of being, first and foremost, a citizen of the Soviet Union; of being a Soviet person. The legacy of this approach to solidarity as peace is evident in contemporary Kyrgyzstan, where it enmeshes and interrelates with the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect. Whereas the friendship of the peoples demonstrates such solidarity as an understanding and practice of peace in relation to the inter-communal relations, the idea of одноклассники (*odnoklassniki*) in Russian, of being classmates, further illustrates such a principle of solidarity. The bulk of my observations here come from a conversation with Ismailbekova and some of the ideas from her upcoming work and are reinforced with my own observations. During her time conducting research in a rural village on Islamic forms of charity, the building of mosques, and labour migration, Ismailbekova observed a group of classmates who, upon an anniversary of their graduation, had come together to build a house for a young man with six children, and another group from a different graduation year, who collectively built a house for their disabled classmate.⁸⁷⁵ She explained to me that this kind of association between classmates, and the reason for such close bonds, stemmed from the Soviet conception of classmates (*odnoklassniki*). In Kyrgyzstan, there is still a taboo on classmates marrying one another: they are considered siblings, and there is a longstanding legacy of the Soviet Union which emphasises the need for peer solidarity between classmates. In Soviet understandings, she explained, the division between public and private life was not as stark as it often is in Europe. Instead, people's public and private lives should support one another. Although being classmates, or even colleagues, is often considered a public relationship, in Kyrgyzstan the private lives of such people are often discussed and known about in such public settings, and support is expected and provided from peers. She understood this as a legacy of Soviet understandings of solidarity, an extension of the principles of the friendship of the peoples. This was reinforced by my observations working alongside a women's entrepreneur forum in Bishkek: many of the women were classmates and had established relations with others of the same age or in the same field through such relationships. Networks of support and solidarity thus emerged

⁸⁷⁵ Ismailbekova A (2023) Doing Good Aid: Islamic Charity, Empty Mosques, and Imams (*unpublished manuscript*, referenced by permission of the author).

from such relations. This combined with the fact that most of the women referred to themselves as coming from Frunze, rather than Bishkek.

However, such a relationship can also be seen as part of and also an amalgamation between the legacies of the Soviet Union and the understandings and practices of peace of the Kyrgyz/Traditional aspect. The example Ismailbekova writes about highlights some of these ideas: the classmates had grouped together to provide material assistance, in the form of building houses, which shows the amalgamation of practices associated with *ashar* with the forms and principles of solidarity through classmate relations as a legacy of the Soviet Union. Her examples also show how this interrelates with the notion of community relations, expressed and exemplified through *yntymak*, as such material assistance was intended to benefit those who belonged to the same village as the classmates, and helped the community by providing assistance to a disabled man and his family who had previously required the support of the whole village. They thus contributed to maintaining the status-quo of stability through community and mutual assistance embodied by this concept, as demonstrated through the previous discussion of the television adverts illustrating this notion. The man even planned to celebrate his new house through the slaughter of a sheep, an accompanying meal with the community, and receiving the blessing of community elders, showing how a Soviet manifestation of solidarity has become enmeshed in Kyrgyz/Traditional understandings and practices. These continue understandings and practices of peace by resting upon the promotion and maintenance of the kinds of stability and order discussed in the Kyrgyz/Traditional section, but with the influence of Soviet legacies of solidarity.

5.1.4 - Conclusions: The Wider Context

The aspects of the triangulation previously presented and the manifold examples and explorations which accompany it provide the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The concept of triangulation itself, and the ideas of convergence, divergence, and amalgamation which accompany it, are intended to convey the fluidity, contingency, and context-dependency of these understandings and practices of peace. Together, they provide a general characterisation and context which forms the backdrop for

part two, which considers the specific context of the NGO and the peacebuilding project within which I conducted my research.

Chapter six presents and explores the detachment between the project and the wider context in which it operated through a procedural narrative, examining the epistemic environments of the project which ensured the exclusion of this wider context through the exclusion of participants and their communities. Despite claiming to provide locally adapted responses to conflict, encourage the participation and agency of marginalised groups, community leadership and development, and capture local views, the project did no such thing, creating and maintaining an epistemic environment which precluded the inclusion of such situated knowledge and context-dependent perspectives. Within this part, chapters five and six thus work together in exploring this detachment, setting the stage for optionality as a critical device against such detachment, and as a reconstructive norm which provides the potential conditions of the possibility for peace, building upon this critique.

Therefore, this disconnect is important not only as a means of highlighting the self-contradictory nature of the project and its failure to address its own commitments to situated knowledge and its characterisation of 'the local'. The central argument of this thesis stems from optionality as a critical device and reconstructive norm, and it is in relation to this concept and these manifestations of it that this disconnect is considered and from which it gains particular importance. As the normative conditions for the possibility of peace, optionality prescribes the "interrogation and interlocution of different ontologies and epistemologies in local peacebuilding contexts",⁸⁷⁶ recognising and facilitating the perspectivist, plural, and contingent character of knowledge and creating a space for a dialogue for peace built upon such preconditions. As such, optionality requires a recognition of the importance of situated understandings and practices of peace, and their facilitation in an approach towards peace. This normative theoretical framework informs this thesis throughout and, with regard to the chapters concerning the wider and specific contexts, serves as a critical device, providing the critical framework through which the disconnect between the NGO and project and the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan is framed and understood as something which cannot produce a

⁸⁷⁶ Behr, Hartmut, 'Peace in Difference – Peace Through Dialogue about and across Difference(s): A Phenomenological Approach to Rethinking Peace' in Albergh, Jeremiah; Hinton, Alexander Laban and Shani, Giorgio (eds.), *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 185.

sustainable, normative of theoretically informed approach towards peace. Instead, there is the imposition of a blanket template for peace, disconnected from the context and epistemic environment of peace in which it is enacted. Kyrgyzstan is not a blank slate, without manifold and historically established understandings and practices of peace, many of which are established, both in the minds of people and in their everyday actions and invocations: as chapter five demonstrated, there exists a variety of enmeshed, complex, and actively practiced understandings of peace. Therefore, chapter six intends to explain the nature and manifestation of this disconnect and the understandings and practices of peace which underpin it. This takes place through a discussion of the specific context and epistemic environment of the NGO and peacebuilding project. Once this disconnect has been established, the notion of optionality as a critical device and reconstructive norm will be introduced, culminating in the notion of 'peace-as-optionality'.

Chapter Six: The Specific Context: The NGO, the Peacebuilding Project and its Epistemic Environment.

Following on from the part one's elaboration of the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, part two presents the specific context of an NGO and peacebuilding project in the form of an empirical narrative. This narrative stems from experiences and observations gathered in the six months I worked with a particular peacebuilding NGO in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, and concerns their main project in the country at that time. As well as working in the office, participating in the project activities, and assisting in writing the final report, (referred to in the methodological discussions), I spent time staying with participants in their houses and local communities, (including volunteering in a local school and helping out with harvest). The observations drawn upon in part two therefore stem from formal interactions with NGO staff and the procedures of the project itself, formal and informal conversations with people across all levels of the project and the communities in which it was enacted, and observations of behaviours and interactions across the board. The terms used to describe the different actors involved are as follows:

<i>The Organisation:</i>	This refers to the U.S based international body to which the branch in Kyrgyzstan belongs.
<i>The NGO:</i>	This denotes the branch in Kyrgyzstan itself.
<i>The Project:</i>	This refers to the particular peacebuilding project with which I was involved and upon which this research is predominantly based.
<i>Participants:</i>	Those who were invited to complete the project with the NGO.
<i>Attendees:</i>	Those who attended project events, such as the campaigns, but were not participants.
<i>The Partner Organisations:</i>	Smaller organisations with whom the NGO worked with in conducting the project, most of whom were based in the regions and even cities in which the project events occurred. These were all local youth advocacy groups,

	working in their respective communities with under 30s in various capacities to better their education, opportunities, and provide a platform for them in their local communities.
<i>The Project Experts:</i>	These were the experts chosen by the NGO to run the training workshops, write the policy briefs, and otherwise assist in the procedure and content of the project as a whole. There were three main experts working consistently with the project, and these included a journalist and T.V station employee teaching media literacy, who had worked with other international organisation in the past, and two academics from Bishkek universities.
<i>The Donor:</i>	This is the largest international organisation involved who provided the funding for the project and thus who approved the initial project proposal.

Figure 10: table of terminology.

I attended each and every one of the training workshops, campaigns, and round tables referred to in this section in person, unless stated otherwise. My observations therefore come from my involvement in them, both on behalf of the NGO and as an observer. For the most part, I was treated as an independent observer, as the participants and organisations were told about my position as a researcher prior to my involvement. However, on some occasions I was asked to complete specific tasks on behalf of the NGO, one of which included gathering “success stories” for evidencing the project achievements in the final report. Those I spoke with in conducting these tasks were always made aware of this, and the changes in behaviour and my observations which accompanied this change in position are discussed in this section.

The principal analytical format of the empirical narrative developed in part two is a *procedural elaboration* of the NGO with whom I worked, and the project undertaken⁸⁷⁷, culminating in an epistemologically focused discussion of the understandings and practices of peace they embody. This proceeds by outlining the activities of the project *as they were intended and portrayed by the NGO*, followed by the manner *in which they actually occurred in practice*, building upon my observations and constructing a narrative which reveals the disconnect between the specific context of the NGO and the project and the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, alongside the self-limiting, instrumental, and ultimately imposed epistemic environment of the project itself. The discussion will therefore focus on the hierarchical epistemic character of these procedures, the ways in which they undermine the NGO's presentation of the project, and the ways in which they are detached from the wider context in which they operate. This detachment not only occurs through the exclusion of the understandings and practices of peace elaborated in chapter five, but through undermining their fluidity, contingency, and context-dependency through the imposition of a blanket template for peace. This stands in stark contrast to the temporally and contextually conditioned nature of such understandings and practices of peace, outlined in part one through the concept of triangulation and the accompanying notions of convergence, divergence, and amalgamation.

Chapter six begins by discussing what is meant by an epistemic environment, the relationship between such an environment and a procedural narrative, and the association between procedure and content in terms of the project under study. This is followed by a brief overview of the NGO before moving on to the specifics of the project and the examination of each activity in turn. However, it should be noted that the NGO's name, alongside specific or easily identifiable aspects of the project and the names of people and places, have been removed or obscured. This is to avoid any negative impact upon the NGO, their potential to secure future funding, or individual staff members, project participants, or members of particular communities, who spoke to me in confidence and discussed topics which they often overtly stated they would not have been comfortable raising with representatives of the organisation. Although this thesis takes a critical stance in relation to the NGO and project, it nonetheless recognises that, to a limited extent, any attempt at

⁸⁷⁷ As I worked in a single project during my time with the NGO, it will hereon be referred to simply as 'the project'.

building peace is better than no attempt at all, and therefore does not wish to undermine the aspects of the project which participants found beneficial. Despite the criticisms made, I spoke to many participants who were hoping to get education or find work abroad, and to whom the project was an important stepping-stone, or others to whom the project provided opportunity for employment, material support, or otherwise helped their lives in one way or the other, whether this was related to peace and peacebuilding or not. I also owe my personal gratitude to the NGO for enabling and facilitating my research, without whom such research would not have been possible, and therefore do not wish to cause unnecessary disruption to them or their activities. I accept that someone with a detailed knowledge of the NGO scene in Kyrgyzstan would most likely be able to deduce the NGO with whom I worked from my discussions; however, such people are few and far between, and I understand my observations as not constituting a particular risk to the NGO in this regard, and to be important enough to warrant in-depth discussion. By obscuring the project and NGO to all possible extents, I hope to avoid any adverse effects whilst making more general arguments about the limitations and negative aspects of peacebuilding and a normative argument for its reconstruction.

6.1 - Epistemic Environments

In part two, the term 'epistemic environments' refers to the conditions of and for knowledge within a particular context. It denotes both the assemblage of knowledge practices which condition a space and the conditions for knowing which emerge from them, creating an environment in which only certain knowledge and ways of knowing are legitimated and facilitated. The epistemic environment is the result of the project's procedure and its content, which form an assemblage of knowledge practices which create the conditions for knowledge within a particular space or context. In terms of the project, this term is intended to capture the conditions of and for knowledge within the spaces created through the project activities. Together, these conditions produce an 'epistemic environment', shaped by the procedure and nature of knowledge provision, which sets the parameters for licit knowledge. The epistemic environment thus orders and structures knowledge within a particular context. In the project, this environment is shown to be hierarchical and authoritative, resting upon the principles of education, comprehension, and dissemination.

In this manner, a blanket template for peace is provided and established: one which is disconnected from the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The application of this template, reinforced by the conditions of knowledge which delimit this epistemic environment, precludes the consideration of alternatives, effectively causing an effacement of what the project understands as ‘the local’ despite its commitments to enable situated knowledges. Ultimately, the epistemic environment of the project, which emerges from the project procedures and their content, determines the conditions of the possibility for peace. The epistemic environment shapes the possibility for dialogue, the inclusion or exclusion of situated knowledge and the consideration of the particularity or uniqueness of contexts, and shapes the ‘top-down’, ‘bottom-up’, or otherwise plural and multilateral nature of any peacebuilding effort. It determines whether such an effort is built upon an imposition of knowledge or an open approach *towards* the possibility of peace. In short, it determines the fundamental characteristics of any peacebuilding approach, thus determining the conditions of the possibility for peace. Viewed through the lens of optionality, the discussion within part two makes the case that the project represents very poor conditions in this regard. After highlighting the disconnect between the wider and specific contexts presented in this thesis, and examining the limitations imposed by the procedure, content, and resultant epistemic environment of the project, optionality is applied as a critical device and reconstructive norm which foregrounds these poor conditions and provides an alternative vision for the conditions of the possibility of peace.

6.2 - A Procedural Approach

A procedural approach in the context of this thesis denotes a particular focus upon the structuring of activities, delimitation of roles, and, most notably, the general sequencing of events. The reasoning behind this approach stems from both my observations in the field and from optionality as the overarching theoretical framework. With regard to the field, my central observation of the project as a whole was that it took the form of *instruction* rather than *exchange*, despite often being presented in the opposite terms by the NGO. In practice, this meant that my interactions with participants, the precise nature of which will be outlined on a case-by-case basis within this section, and their contributions within the

project, were limited by the hierarchical and pedagogic nature of the project activities themselves, and the ways in which these conditioned my relations to participants, my position as 'attached' to the NGO, and the epistemic environment in which observations and conversations occurred. Since the project was about educating participants through the provision of pre-determined understandings and practices of peace, as the following section will evidence, it was characterised by the *provision of knowledge*, a process better suited to procedural examination as it rested upon, and was characterised by, the adherence to a particular process and program. This procedure provides a significant insight into the epistemic nature of the project and shows us its inherent contradictions, something reinforced through comparing the processes described and presented by the NGO with those which actually occurred. It also facilitates the exposition of the NGO's understandings of peacebuilding, as the procedure is the means by which such understandings are established and promoted. Furthermore, outlining the procedure of the project and characterising it in this manner allows this thesis to clearly outline not only the ways in which such practices diverged from the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, but also the processes behind this divergence and the specific aspects of this procedure which resulted in it.

A procedural narrative is also an effective way of determining the nature of the project's epistemic environment. The ordering of knowledge, and thus the determination of what knowledge is enabled or considered legitimate in a particular context, is conditioned by the procedures which establish, develop, and impose this knowledge. The procedures of the project thus establish the parameters of knowledge within it, defining what forms of knowledge are imparted or accepted through controlling the sequence of events and thus the manner and nature of how knowledge is ordered. The project demonstrated a hierarchical and authoritative approach through providing a blanket template for peace, the technical knowledge required to understand it, and the practical skills required to disseminate it in their communities and online. The procedural narrative provided in this section thus highlights the ways in which the epistemic environment of the project was established through the procedural manner in which knowledge was ordered and provides insight into how knowledge is conditioned by the nature and sequence of events. However, a procedural narrative cannot fully explain an epistemic environment, as other factors are involved in conditioning knowledge in a particular context, from the status, character, and

actions of individuals involved, to the location, layout, and character of the spaces involved. Nevertheless, a procedural narrative provides not only an overview of the processes and activities which condition knowledge within a particular context, but also shows the influence of structure and sequence in this regard. The procedural narrative presented in here is bolstered by an examination of the content of the various activities undertaken during the project, providing a more detailed picture of its epistemic environment through detailing the nature of the knowledge provided. This examination divulges the blanket template for peace which undergirds the project and demonstrates the hierarchical and authoritative nature of this knowledge and manner of its provision.

Ideally, the procedure and content of the project should reinforce one another, with the procedure establishing a sequence of events which ensures that the content is delivered effectively, structuring the provision of this content in a way that maximises its absorption by participants and ensuring a conducive epistemic environment. Despite many changes in procedure, resulting from disorganisation and unforeseen disruptions, this does occur to some extent within the project. The content of the project, when considered in its entirety, represents a blanket template for peace. The procedure of the project creates an epistemic environment which promotes this template in an authoritative and hierarchical manner, precluding alternative perspectives and effacing 'the local'. The changes which were made to the procedure throughout its enactment only added to this epistemic environment, as later sections demonstrate.

A procedural examination of the project is also necessitated by the conceptual character of optionality as the theoretical framework undergirding the research. Optionality is fundamentally concerned with the *epistemological environment* of peace and peacebuilding in both its manifestations as a critical device and reconstructive norm. As a theoretical framework, it engenders a focus upon the nature and articulation of knowledge concerning understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding, building upon conceptions of perspectivity, plurality, natality, and the contextual nature of knowledge ('*Standortgebundenheit*' according to Mannheim) to develop the conditions of a space for epistemically unobstructed, open dialogue for peace. This centres upon such an articulation of knowledge as means of negotiating difference, outlining the epistemic conditions of the possibility for peace through an 'optional' epistemic environment. Research which aligns with optionality requires, therefore, a parallel concern with the epistemic environment in

which peacebuilding occurs, as the concept establishes a yardstick through which such environments within existing models for peace and peacebuilding are accessed through its operationalisation as a critical device, and the normative basis for a subsequent rebuilding through its elaboration of conditions of the possibility of peace as a reconstructive norm.

In order to employ optionality in this manner, the focus of the empirical narrative is procedural, outlining the epistemic environment created and cultivated throughout the course of the project in this manner. Such a narrative serves to capture and characterise this environment through the examination of procedures and project activities and their epistemological implications, exploring the manner in which knowledge is produced, articulated, and disseminated. This elaborates the project's inherent epistemic hierarchies, their manifestation in the notions of education, comprehension, and dissemination, and, ultimately, the manner in which the project undermines its own presented aims of remaining connected to, and incorporating, 'local'⁸⁷⁸ perspectives and situated knowledges, representing it's disconnect from the wider context of understandings and practices of peace as they are manifest in Kyrgyzstan. In this regard, the project represents the antithesis of an approach towards peace informed by optionality.

6.3 - The Organisation and the NGO: The Nature of the Project in their Own Words

To begin with, some contextual information regarding the NGO is required. This information has been collated from the documentation given to participants and the donor by the NGO, their reports, and the description made of themselves on their website. These included leaflets given out during the project, the project description initially sent to the donor prior to the project's commencement, the report which I helped to write, and both their main website and the section of this site which discussed their operations in Kyrgyzstan. All of this information was available in English as the Organisation is based in the U.S. However, long direct quotations and other identifying features have been removed, and this information

⁸⁷⁸ The use of the term 'local' in single speech marks is intended to reflect the NGO's usage of the word, as the word itself is neither clear-cut in its meaning nor particularly useful. Everyone is 'local' to somewhere, and we are all situated in our own localities. In addition, the term denotes a binary distinction between the 'local' and the 'international' which is neither clear-cut in its manifestation in practice, nor useful in examining actual understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding in specific post-conflict environments.

had been paraphrased and amalgamated to preserve all possible anonymity. The organisation as a whole is based in the United States but employs a mostly local staff in its NGO branches across the world, all operating their own distinct projects guided by the central, founding principles of the organisation. This particular branch is a large NGO for Kyrgyzstan and, like most of the branches of this organisation, is staffed mostly by those born in the country of operation. The ostensible focus of the organisation is upon the everyday actions and interactions of conflict parties, and they present themselves as having developed a unique approach to enable joint problem-solving through co-operation in a space of mutual regard and understanding. They thus present themselves, quite explicitly, as an organisation with a positive approach towards cultural and social difference, attempting to facilitate and negotiate difference as a positive and progressive force for societies and communities who have experienced conflict through emphasising cross-party commonalities. Their explanation of their own approach places a strong emphasis upon collaboration, built upon establishing and maintaining this mutual space of shared understanding as the basis for collaborative solutions to conflict. In this manner, they see peace and peacebuilding as a process rather than definite end, although this process is conditioned by their overall approach and its undergirding rationale. In order to develop and facilitate such a process, the organisation maintains a continuous presence in the areas in which they operate and engage across multiple levels of society from the grassroots to the elite, presenting their approach bridging the gap between these spheres in the peacebuilding process. As a result, they see themselves as an organisation that is enmeshed in 'local' contexts and cultures, and thus one able to effectively and appropriately interact with situated understandings and practices of peace.

The NGO's documents concerning the project reflect these commitments, most notably in the project description and final report, documents which were primarily produced for the benefit of the donor. These documents talk about locally adapted responses to conflict, the participation and agency of marginalised groups, community leadership and development, and capturing local views, amongst others. They highlight the project's aim to strengthen "cohesion" in local communities, learning from local perspectives, and maintaining a connection to the 'local' level despite attempting to bridge the gap between 'local' and 'national' peacebuilding efforts. The NGO thus presents itself in the broad terms of the post-liberal peace scholarship, painting itself with the brush of the local turn. These aspects of the

NGO are further reflected in the procedures of the project itself yet are ultimately contradicted and undermined in its enactment. Despite its presentation as an organisation which enables situated knowledges and a plurality of situated perspectives in the process of peacebuilding, the very foundation of the project as a pre-determined democracy-building, civil-identity forming, campaign for clean elections ensured that this was only ever a façade. The procedures and activities undertaken reveal its basis in education, comprehension, and dissemination, implanting preconceptions of peace without the input of outside perspectives, resting instead upon a series of epistemic, procedural, and organisational hierarchies.

The Project

The project itself was unique to Kyrgyzstan, following on from the organisation's stated commitment to 'local' solutions built upon each branch's connection to the locale in which they operate. The project lasted for less than a year and worked in tandem with existing regional organisations as implementation partners. These organisations were often smaller NGOs who worked in specific communities or regions on issues such as interethnic harmony and youth engagement and advocacy. In official terms, the focus of the project was on developing and promoting civil engagement with democratic processes in Kyrgyzstan and was manifest in practice as a series of workshops and campaigns focused on promoting a specific conception of civic identity, the fundamentals of democracy and democratic political systems, and the roles, uses, and potentials of social media as a form of project advocacy. This was intended to facilitate a discussion on both the 'local' and national levels concerning ostensibly progressive forms of citizenship, democratic engagement, and liberal values regarding identity and democracy. The project was framed against the backdrop of Kyrgyzstan's history of civil and political unrest, citing the experiences of past elections, protests, and revolutions as indicative of a country divided along lines of regionalism, kinship identity, and the rural/urban. It was explicitly intended as a means of developing a peaceful order in the face of these problems. Liberal democratic understandings and practices, relating to both elections and civil society, were presented as a recipe for peaceful order, and the NGO representatives referred to the project as a *peacebuilding* project. The development of a new *identity* was essential to this recipe as an attempt by the project to replace the supposedly problematic and divisive identities which have existed historically in

Kyrgyzstan. The proposal for the project references the unrest in October 2020, the fact that the population faced three elections in 2021 as a result, (parliamentary, local council, and a constitutional referendum), and their view that this represents a crossroads for the country: how the population engages with the election campaigns, candidates, and their political agenda will have “direct consequences” for “peace, security, and stability” in the near future.⁸⁷⁹ The project was thus framed as one of peacebuilding, providing the people of Kyrgyzstan with the tools required to establish and maintain peaceful order.

In employing this understanding of peace, the organisation posited itself as a mediator between the ‘local’ and national levels of the project, constructing and curating dialogue between participants, national level organisations, and the state. With regard to the participants, the project was built upon the development and inculcation of a new social and political *identity*, one which incorporated liberal democratic values in participant’s everyday lives and political processes. The establishment of such a dialogue, civic identity, and networks of influence were intended to continue after the completion of the project. Overall, the project was framed as a means of enabling participants, and those included through outreach campaigns, to help shape the *peaceful* and *stable* future of Kyrgyzstan, as the quotes in the previous paragraph demonstrate. All participants had already worked alongside the NGO in their previous flagship project and were chosen on, ensuring continuity in their approach and beneficiaries in order to maximise the measurable success of their training program and the ability of participants to disseminate their newfound ideas and skills amongst their local communities.

In a nod of the hat to the organisation’s commitment to working across multiple levels of society, the project explicitly aimed to amplify and strengthen social and political action at the ‘local’ level over decisions taken at the national level. Within the limitations of the project, ideas and perspectives were presented as moving from the ‘local’ level of to the national level of state policy as part of a process which supports and extends ‘local’ conflict mitigation efforts. The project literature and final report frequently refer to the grassroots, local, and community-centric aspects of the project, positioning the project as creating a bridge between these and the national level of state policy. It was intended as an “inclusive

⁸⁷⁹ Although these are direct quotations taken from the official reports and documents of the NGO, no referential details will be provided. I have these references but chose not to provide them in order to preserve all possible anonymity.

approach”, engaging with actors across these levels to equip participants with knowledge and enable the consideration of ‘local’ perspectives at the state level. At its core, the project was presented as a capacity-building exercise aimed at strengthening relevant knowledge and skills, outreach and campaigning, constructive dialogue, and policy advocacy. The project thus limited the scope of interactions and interrelations to those relevant to its aims and concerns and to its promotion of a particular civic identity, electoral processes and participation, and civic engagement through the procedure followed and the actors involved. These ultimately and rather completely undermined the aims of the project, creating an epistemic environment which prevented any meaningful engagement with situated knowledges, contexts, or individual perspectives, thus establishing a disconnect with the wider context in which it operated. The project was also framed by the NGO as a process of women’s empowerment, which was built into the project merely through the fact that slightly over half of the participants were female. This was highlighted throughout the literature they handed out and in their correspondence with the donor, which I had access to during my time in the office. Once I joined the project I requested all of the associated documentation from the NGO, who provided the initial proposals, the correspondence with the donor, and the various plans and additional documents developed throughout the various stages of the project and their enactment. Before undertaking a more detailed analysis of this epistemic environment the concept of civic identity espoused by the project requires elaboration, as it is a central subject throughout its enactment.

Kyrgyz Jarany

The particular notion of civic identity promoted at the core of the project is, therefore, of great significance to the project and to this narrative. The following explanation of this notion is predominantly drawn from the official document produced by the government, of which I was given a paper copy in Kyrgyz language and have paraphrased here, alongside the referenced UNDP document. This explanation thus draws from both the Kyrgyz state’s Kyrgyz language description and the English language description developed in tandem by the UNDP. These documents worked together, without deviation. The state document was written earlier, in 2020, and outlined the notion in its initial stage. The UNDP document refers to meetings and discussions concerning the concept after its implementation in 2022, using translated sections of the state document without references. The concept of *Kyrgyz*

Jarany, (Кыргыз Жараны) or ‘Kyrgyz Citizen’, was developed by The Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth for the Kyrgyz Republic with the support of the United Nations (UN) project ‘Inclusive Governance and Common Civic Identity for Sustainable Peace and Development’, funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund.⁸⁸⁰ The initiative was led by a national government committee and implemented by local government agencies, with the results accessed by the office of the president. It consists of five key aims: the formation of a conscious understanding of the civic identity; strengthening the unity of the people of Kyrgyzstan, increasing tolerance and maintaining respect for diversity; the development and promotion of the state language, preservation and development of multilingualism; creation of equal conditions in access to management and decision-making processes; and increasing confidence in political institutions and public authorities.⁸⁸¹ *Kyrgyz Jarany* is presented by the UN as a blanket solution to peace, as is evident in the wider initiative’s name, which suggests the components of “Inclusive Governance and Common Civic identity” to be the fundamental basis for “Sustainable Peace and Development”. The project rests upon this idea of a fixed trajectory to peace and, in this respect, is a clear application of the fundamentals of the liberal peace. Although the project employed the notion of *Kyrgyz Jarany*, the NGO had chosen to adopt this vision of civic identity rather than having been instructed to do so by a state body or official. The head of the NGO explained to me that this had been the result of a discussion they had with the person who would later become the lead expert of the project.

At its core, *Kyrgyz Jarany* is intended as a unifying liberal democratic civic identity which promotes understanding and tolerance with regard to cultural, ethnic, and religious differences in Kyrgyzstan.⁸⁸² *Kyrgyz Jarany* holds the participation in economic, social, and political life as a prerequisite to unity through equal rights, with particular emphasis on electoral processes. It attempts to form a national identity which, while recognising and facilitating the differences inherent to diverse groups in society, can unify them under the notion of common citizenship and the rule of law. It employs ideas of diversity, tolerance, partnership, and collaboration regarding different ethnic, cultural, and religious groups in

⁸⁸⁰ N/A, ‘The Concept of Kyrgyz Jarany (Kyrgyz Citizen) was Discussed with Journalists of Osh Regions’, <https://www.undp.org/kyrgyzstan/press-releases/concept-kyrgyz-jarany-kyrgyz-citizen-was-discussed-journalists-osh-regions>, [accessed 31/10/2022].

⁸⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸⁸² The following is taken from the official documentation, which was provided during the course of the project, this documentation comes from the Kyrgyz government and is in either Kyrgyz or Russian language. Translations are the author’s own.

society, suggesting that unity and peaceful order can emerge once the concept has become the mainstay of families, society, and the Kyrgyz nation. These commitments are highlighted in the concept's promotion of Kyrgyz language as the official language whilst including the caveat that Russian, Uzbek, and other secondary or minority languages should be accepted and facilitated. The initiative focused on educating the population in its own terms, beginning by building trust in state institutions.

The concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*, along with the aims and general program of the project outlined above, reveal much about the understandings of peace which undergird the practice of the project. These understandings constitute a blanket template for peace which the activities undertaken in the course of the project apply. This template is representative of the liberal peace, building upon the prescriptions for peace espoused by this approach, and resulting in activities which represent these prescriptions in practice. In its common understanding as a theoretical consolidation, the liberal peace aims to replicate liberal institutions, norms, and political, social, and economic models across the globe. In practice, the liberal peace rests upon democratisation, the rule of law, human rights, and establishing and promoting capitalist market economies. The project, and the notion of *Kyrgyz Jarany* promoted by it, demonstrate its commitment to establishing liberal institutions, norms, and both political and social models in Kyrgyzstan. *Kyrgyz Jarany* promotes a notion of civic identity which aligns with the liberal peace, promoting liberal norms, a liberal social model, and liberal civil rights through its emphasis on tolerance and an integrated society. It is a conception of civic identity which fits with the liberal peace model. The project, at its foundation, also aligns with the liberal peace. It is fundamentally aimed at democratisation and democracy promotion, emphasising electoral rights and obligations as political rights, and suggesting that the enactment of these rights serves as a basis for peaceful order. It promotes ideas concerning the rule of law through emphasising clean and fair elections, along with conscientious voting behaviour. Together, these aspects of the project mirror the liberal peace in their attempt to promote liberal democratic values, politics, and social models as a blanket template for peace. The project thus implies that, once *Kyrgyz Jarany* has been established and further democratisation has occurred, Kyrgyzstan will be on the path to peace, as it explicitly demonstrates this liberal peace approach in its enactment. During the project, peace was constantly referred to in relation to the notions of democratisation, and during the training workshops and national round tables I observed many explicit references to the assumed connection between the two.

This blanket template for peace demonstrates the detachment of the project from the wider context in two ways. Primarily, this detachment is evident in the fact that the understandings and practices of peace, discussed through the general aspects of the Kyrgyz/Traditional, the influence of Islam, and the legacies of the Soviet Union, are not incorporated into the blanket template applied by the project. The project itself, as discussions concerning the projects epistemic environment made later in this section demonstrate, does not have the procedures in place, nor establishes spaces conducive to the incorporation of the situated perspectives in which these understandings and practices exist, a problem compounded by the epistemic environment of the project. Secondly, this blanket template is, as its name suggests, the imposition of a pre-determined and unchanging understanding and practice of peace and peacebuilding. It was not developed in tandem with participants and their communities, resting principally upon the advice of experts. It therefore consists of understandings and practices which undermine and oppose the fluid, contingent, and context-dependent nature of those discussed chapter five. Whereas those understandings and practices exist in an open and fluid relationship with one another, converging, diverging, and amalgamating in a manner dependent upon time, place, circumstance, and context, this blanket template for peace presents *the* path to peace, without room for such change and contingency. The rest of this section demonstrates this detachment through examining the epistemic environment of the project through an analysis of both the project's procedure and the content of the activities and events undertaken as part of it. These observations are elaborated throughout part two and are thus explored in greater depth as each emerges in the course of the argument.

6.4 - The Processes of the NGO: The Project's Structure in Their Own Words

The following section presents the structure, procedures, and activities of the project *as they were presented by the NGO in their initial proposal, schedule, and oral explanations*. These are drawn from the official documents of the NGO, including their initial proposal for the donor and material provided in order to promote the project. This is supported by conversations held and descriptions given to me by NGO staff, including the director during our first meeting to discuss my involvement in the project, and the project experts. As this

section demonstrates, the procedures of the project changed over time, and this was evident in the changes in these descriptions and in the literature produced by the project. As time went on, staff began to reformulate the project, rubbing off titles from whiteboards, making amended schedules, and discussing the changes with each other, the donor, and those involved in the round tables. The documentation they produced also demonstrated this change: the final report presented a different procedure to the proposal. The initial outline of the project presented to me in conversation with the local NGO head when I began to work alongside them was not the same as the final procedure undertaken in the course of the project.

This will be used to show the deviations ultimately made from this initial proposal and their influence upon the project's epistemic environment, culminating in demonstrating this environment as facilitating a disconnect from the wider context through its near total exclusion from the ideas and activities of the project. The changes made further compounded the authoritative model of knowledge provision which characterised the earlier stages of the project, leading to a widening disconnect with participants and their local communities and undermining the project's self-presentation. The subsequent section will explore this in depth, although this section, in outlining the project according to the NGO, begins to allude to the contradictions, juxtapositions, and departures which led to this situation, setting the stage.

The basic procedural framework for the project which was *intended* by the NGO began by developing and academically equipping the 'local' through training workshops, giving them specialist knowledge and campaigning skills. The second part of the project was intended to capture local perspectives and address local concerns: this would be achieved through local round tables, in which 'local' concerns could be identified and discussed, and ultimately formulated into policy briefs by local partner organisations. This should have been followed by additional 'local' consultation before these ideas were presented as policy prescriptions for the state. The third part of the project was concerned with this national level, developing the local policy briefs into national policy documents which would be discussed at national round table events and, hopefully, adopted as state-wide concerns. In this way, the NGO intended to bridge the gap they identified between their idea of the 'local'; and the 'national'.

I was able to attend almost all of the events during the phase of the project I was involved in. However, I was unable to attend the first round of training workshops and therefore conducted interviews with NGO staff, the leaders of partner organisations involved in the project, and had many conversations with the participants who had attended them in order to be able to include them in these discussions. I was also unable to attend the local round table in Batken, Kyrgyzstan's most south-westerly region, as it was held at the same time as the events I did attend. I instead pursued the same approach of interviewing and conversing with those involved during other stages of the project. Nevertheless, I attended the second round of training workshops and all of the round tables in the regions in question, including the national round tables and project closing meeting in the capital. The following paragraphs illustrate this basic framework and the sequence of the project as it was presented by the NGO:

1. Training Workshops:

These took the form of two rounds of expert-led workshops in each of Kyrgyzstan's seven regions, providing training on the central ideas and activities of the project to participants. They focused on the fundamentals of liberal democracy, promoting a new civic identity, and clean electoral participation, including campaign planning and online advocacy to spread the message. The NGO also suggested that the experts who led these workshops were responsible for collecting 'local' concerns and perspectives from participants in relation to 'local' conflict mitigation efforts, canvassing them for such perspectives.

2. Online and Offline Campaigns.

After the completion of the workshops, participants were supposed to use their newfound skills to run a series of offline and online campaigns promoting the project and its aims. Offline campaigns took the form of additional training workshops, quizzes, games, and other forms of entertainment which highlighted and furthered the intentions of the project. The

online campaigns consisted of memes⁸⁸³, social media posts, and videos with the same purpose.

3. *Local Round Tables:*

According to the project description, the local round tables were intended to facilitate the majority of the project's engagement with the 'local', creating a space for the discussion of regional issues and those of specific communities, thus allowing for the input of 'locals' and 'local' authority figures alongside project participants. They consisted of discussion groups for participants, the project's regional partner organisations, local government representatives, police representatives, and other authority figures such as teachers. Although these were presented as part of the incorporation of 'local' perspectives and conflict mitigation efforts, the changes to procedure meant that, in practice, these events occurred *after* the writing of the policy briefs in a manner detached from the regions and community they were concerned with. Although diverse perspectives and issues not covered by the project were raised on many occasions during their enactment, this new procedure ensured that they had no mechanism for inclusion in the project: they were not even recorded by the NGO.

4. *Local Policy Briefs:*

These took the form of expert-written documents of around one to five pages, each concerned with a different issue. Each of the seven regions had its own 'local' policy brief, and these were supposed to be the culmination of the 'local' insights collected by NGO staff and experts throughout the training workshops and campaigns, including through WhatsApp and social media, and developed following the discussions held at the local round tables. The themes were supposed to emerge from these discussions, and the briefs themselves were intended as the vehicle for 'local' perspectives for the national stage.

⁸⁸³ "Memes" are understood here as "an image, a video, a piece of text, etc. that is passed very quickly from one internet user to another, often with slight changes that make it humorous", (N/A, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/meme?q=meme>, [accessed 28/04/2023]).

5. National Policy Briefs.

The national policy briefs were intended to follow on from the collection and codification of 'local' perspectives ostensibly embodied by the preceding stages of the project, notably in their culmination in the local policy briefs, developing those insights into expert-written policy prescriptions for this national stage. The stated aim was, therefore, to turn the series of local concerns ostensibly collected into a series of issues which could be presented and discussed at the national level. However, the procedural changes which occurred meant, in practice, that these documents were written around the same time as the local policy briefs, often by the same people from the capital, and thus did not include any perspectives expressed at the local round tables, and mostly had nothing to do with the local policy briefs in terms of their themes.

6. National Round Table Events.

The stated purpose of the national round tables was, therefore, to bring these issues from the 'local' to the national level, through the policy briefs, for discussion with representatives of national level organisations. These events were therefore attended by representatives of the organisation; government officials, including representatives of The Office of the President and The Ministry of Culture, Information, Sport, and Youth; the project experts; representatives of other national NGOs; and a few representatives of religious organisations. In practice, however, the topics which were discussed had become so far removed from those of the project that these became an expert-led seminar series, concerning the issues important to the experts rather than the project participants. The discussions at this stage bore no resemblance to the discussions held at the local round tables, and the topics were completely detached from this context.

7. The Close-out Event.

The close-out event was intended to follow on from the round tables, manifest as a scaled down version which focused more upon the organisation, the project, and the potential for future activities. It was attended by all of the project experts, two representatives from central government, and the leader of the NGO and the current project coordinator. They

examined the policy briefs, with more emphasis on the national, presented success stories from participants, and gave expert recommendations relating to potential future projects. It was held at the NGOs office and was intended for the benefit of the NGO alone. It served as the conclusory meeting of the project.

This sequence of project activities represents the procedure of the project as it was presented by the NGO. As this outline has suggested, however, this procedure shifted over the course of the project, and a more in-depth discussion of these issues is therefore required for this empirical narrative in order to better characterise the project's epistemic environment. Before this discussion, this procedure requires some characterisation to foreground this discussion of the epistemic environment with the pedagogical atmosphere in which it emerged. The following section presents the ideas of *education*, *comprehension*, and *dissemination* as the fundamental characteristics of the project, both as envisioned by the NGO and in practice. Despite the changes made to the basic procedure in practice, these are nonetheless useful ideas to characterise the atmosphere of the project and are themes which characterise it throughout its enactment. The initial project description submitted to the donor argued that, in order to fulfil the project aims, participants "need knowledge" on subjects such as "the election cycle, system of checks and balances, civic identity and duty", and required the skills to develop "awareness raising campaigns" in order to engage "their fellow countrymen to take an active part in political processes". As such, the procedure of education, comprehension, and dissemination was central in conveying the understandings and practices of peace held and promoted by the project and is a significant aspect in understanding the disconnect between the specific context of the project and the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan.

6.5 - Education, Comprehension, and Dissemination

These three themes served as the basis for the sequence of knowledge provision embodied by the project, representing its hierarchical, predetermined, and thus exclusive nature. As such, these themes provide the undergirding for the disconnect between the wider and the specific context of the NGO and project, characterising an epistemic environment which prescribes particular, predetermined understandings and practices of peace and ensures that situated knowledge and existing practices for peace are excluded. The proceeding

section will present these themes through an in-depth consideration of the project activities, providing an empirical narrative which exemplifies these themes and provides illustrations of their manifestations through my own observations. Although this section refers to those aspects of the project which remained unchanged, proceeding as they were initially presented by the NGO, these themes should be understood as characterising the epistemic environment of the project throughout its enactment.

Education: The Training Workshops

The project began with two rounds of three-day long workshops, led by up to three external experts who each had their own field of expertise, including jurisprudence and state law, journalism, and media campaigning, which provided training to participants on the central ideas and aims of the project. Although I was unable to attend the first round, instead characterising them through discussions with participants, interviews with the experts and NGO staff, and through the documentation which the NGO had produced about them. I attended all of the second round in person and was at times just an observer of proceedings, but often participated myself, joining the participants' in completing tasks, eating lunch together with them, and joining-in with leisure events in the evenings. I have also used the summaries, schedules, and official documents, including leaflets, produced for and directly after these events to help characterise them.

According to my observations and the ways in which the projects were described, both in text and by those involved, both the first and second round of training workshops took the form of expert-led seminars which were intended to educate participants and provide them with the knowledge the project understood as conducive to peaceful order. The NGO was not directly involved in the workshops: control was given to the experts, who prepared the topics, presentations, and activities undertaken. Participants sat around long tables, as if at a conference, quietly listening to the presentations with little interaction with the expert leading it. Questions were asked by participants, more so in some regions than others, but were for the most part clarificatory, and the questions directed at the participants far outweighed those they asked. The training followed a series of themes, providing detailed distinctions and categorisations with regard to civic identity, democratic participation and voting behaviour, alongside an emphasis on informed electoral decision-making.

The training workshops that I attended had the distinct feel of a classroom, with the participants sat around a long table and the experts, NGO representatives, and those from the partner organisations sat at the front. Next to them would be a whiteboard and projection screen which the experts would use to show slideshows, draw diagrams, and otherwise use to explain the ideas and understandings which the training sought to convey. Participants behaved as if they were at school, making notes on what was presented as important information and acting in a highly respectful way towards the experts and representatives. The experts visibly took the role of teachers, standing at the front and delivering a series of authoritative and hierarchically reinforced seminars, where participant interaction was limited to answering questions, completing tasks, and ultimately being assessed.

The first round of these workshops focused on the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany* and civic identity more generally, a focus which formed the core of the project's understanding of peaceful order and against which the experts juxtaposed ostensibly divisive forms of identity, such as those based upon kinship, ethnicity, or religion. Here we can see a telling example of the beginning of a disconnect with the wider context: the project began with a dismissal of the complexities of the context in which it operated, setting the stage for a blanket template for peace which was developed without concern for context. This was exemplified by the binary of "constructive" and "destructive" civic identity taught to participants. This binary was built upon the division between "progressive" or "active" citizens, who participate in local and national politics and align with the principle of *Kyrgyz Jarany*, and the civic identities considered problematic, such as "nihilism", "passivism", "marginalism", and "radical conformism". The former two embodied apathy towards politics and social issues, while the latter two referred to those who always seek to differ from social norms just for the sake of it, and thus don't make informed decisions (marginalism – the expert even suggested those with such an identity were not shown affection as children), and those who do not have their own position, but seek desperately to conform. Although the expert gave those joining the Islamic State movement from Kyrgyzstan as an example, examples were also given which framed the kinship associations and kinship-based identity, along with regional, ethnic, and linguistic-based identities as destructive, positioning the project as a means of instigating a new form of civic identity to replace the 'problematic' identities which already exists, making reference to many of those which characterise

aspects of the wider context. For example, the experts often referenced the prominence given to kinship relations and ostensible clan identities, alongside the tendency for communities to consider their issues to be separate from the state, and thus to not participate in elections, as major issues to peaceful order. In addition to this, it was not so much what was directly discussed that reveals this disconnect, but what was left out. There was no discussion of existing understandings and practices of peace, both as identified in chapter five or any alternatives which could have been identified. The explicit attempt was to instil *new* knowledge and to create *better* practices. This is reflected in the nature of the epistemic environment as *education, comprehension, and dissemination*, in the way the training workshops resembled classrooms, and in the context which they provided to participants. This demonstrates an intentional detachment from this context through the blanket application of *Kyrgyz Jarany* as a template for peace, rather than an engagement with the manifold potential and already practiced understandings and practices of peace which are manifest in the wider context.

This was followed by lectures, with accompanying slides, concerning the psychological influences on choice in electoral participation, the problems of “absenteeism”, and how to vote “conscientiously”.⁸⁸⁴ This focus on democracy and democratic elections was bolstered by explanations concerning the Kyrgyz electoral and presidential system and the basic structure, function, and role of parliament, including the recent referendum on moving to a presidential system. The leading expert then discussed electoral systems, in Kyrgyzstan, Britain, the U.S and other countries, alongside the meaning and legal structure of a referendum and the importance of stability in politics.

The second topic addressed during these workshops concerned producing media and project advocacy. The training consisted of two components: the provision of technical skills; and an understanding of the roles and potentials of media and social media. Participants were taught how to produce videos, to write and present for electoral campaigns, and, predominantly, how to produce social media content, which was evident in the content of the slides and presentations given by the experts, and in the tasks given to participants as part of ensuring comprehension, which will be discussed in the next section. They were shown how to use a smartphone app for video editing, how to produce infographics, and how to conduct project advocacy through campaigns and events. These practical aspects of

⁸⁸⁴ In Kyrgyz this is аң-сезимдүү (*ang-sezimduu*).

the training were accompanied by presentations on the uses of social media in public relations, electoral campaigns, and how to plan and execute advocacy campaigns online and offline. The presentations at this stage focused on event planning, giving participants training on how to develop ideas for events, plan them, and promote them using social media. The training workshops, therefore, are a clear illustration of education as a key characterisation and function of the project. The expert-led presentations had the sole purpose of applying and promoting a predetermined series of concepts and skills which were singularly intended to join together with the notion of *Kyrgyz Jarany* to inculcate the understandings and practices of (liberal) peace which the project embodies. The training concerning civic identity is an example of *education* as a defining aim of the project and characteristic of its epistemic environment as, through these workshops, participants were provided with knowledge concerning the 'correct' kind of civic identity to engender peace and were educated as to what the project experts saw as "destructive" identities which hindered the application of this template. Education was also provided concerning the technical skills and knowledge requirements in order to spread their newfound knowledge. This provision of knowledge required the participants comprehension in order to ensure that they could function as vehicles for the core messages of the project in their local communities and beyond.

Comprehension: Testing, Tasks, and Measurable 'Success'

Whilst participating in the project, I observed two key means through which the participants' comprehension was measured and assessed. These were the use of tasks during the training sessions, and a multiple-choice written test before and after each series of training workshops. The tasks employed during the workshops had two main characteristics: they assessed and ensured comprehension in the form of participant's *understanding* of the theories, concepts, and processes presented in the workshops, and also tested their *practical skills*, including event planning, public speaking, and video editing.

In terms of ensuring comprehension regarding the theories, concepts, and processes presented to them, participants were asked to complete different tasks. These included creating and presenting posters as a group which explained types of electoral participation and non-participation, the main characteristics and identities concerning electoral

participation and civic identity, alongside explaining the differences between constructive and destructive citizenship and clean and corrupt elections. Participants were also asked to conduct a role-play exercise, in which the participants were divided into four groups representing parliament, the media, the courts, and the president. They were then tasked with how to develop and publicise a new law about providing meals to school students and write an act of parliament to present in the form of a speech, demonstrating their knowledge of the process for establishing laws and the roles of parliament. During one of the training workshops, the experts quizzed the participants on the information they had just learnt, and prizes of headphones and pen drives were handed out for correct answers, rewarding and testing the participants' comprehension.

In terms of the practical skills provided, participants were given an imaginary candidate and asked to make a campaign speech for them: their good and bad points were displayed for all to see, but participants had to present them in the best possible light and withstand questioning from the others, ensuring that they had understood the instruction given on advocacy and informed voting decisions. This was intended to ensure that they had understood how to defend a position and the basics of giving a speech, alongside how to ask critical questions of political figures. However, the bulk of testing for comprehension of practical skills concerned media production and the development of offline campaigns. Participants had to plan, act in, and film videos, create infographics, and develop memes. They were tasked with planning and filming a video promoting clean elections and electoral participation, with experts checking their plans and playing their videos to the whole group for discussion. The videos included apathetic voters being convinced to vote by village elders, a lack of participation leading to violence and civil unrest, and guides concerning how to cast a vote and the nature of the political system. In this way, these tasks ensured comprehension through getting participants to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that they had been taught, taking comments and criticism from the experts and other participants. The main purpose of ensuring comprehension in terms of these understandings and practical skills was to ensure the participant's knowledge and ability to act as advocates for the project and its core messages: in other words, to *disseminate* the understandings and practices of peace held and developed by the project.

In addition to this, the training workshops were accompanied by a pre-training and post-training test. This was a multiple-choice examination of the difference in comprehension

before and after the provision of knowledge. Therefore, the pre- and post-training tests were the same, and contained questions like: “name the general structures of a progressive civic identity”; “what is an active-social citizen?”; and “voting with an understanding of being conscientious – this is...?”. The test was two and a half pages of such questions and served as the basis for the quantifiable success of the project in the final report and in presentations to government and other national NGO representatives. The concepts, ideas, and knowledge of practical skills which were assessed in the test represented the core provisions of the project, and the results of the test were assessed against predetermined comprehension targets: for example, a minimum of twenty-one participants should achieve a score of eighty-three percent or above. However, only ten managed to do so. Nevertheless, there was a marked improvement in scores, enabling the NGO to demonstrate comprehension in empirical terms to the donor and, ostensibly, the ability of participants to advocate and campaign for the aims of the project beyond the duration of the project itself. However, the NGO did not only use the results of the pre- and post-training tests to show comprehension. The final report of the project uses the number of events held to demonstrate comprehension through the assumption that lots of training hours means lots of knowledge provided and understood. This is accompanied by attendance records for participants and their achievements following the project, such as starting a youth organisation, going to study in Europe, volunteering in existing community organisations, and becoming university president, all of which ostensibly evidence comprehension through linking these successes to the attainment of the knowledge provided by the project. The final report also makes many statements which simply state that comprehension has been achieved, discussing their alleged new “leadership”, “fact-checking”, and “collaboration” skills, as well as the tasks they had completed under expert supervision and the successes of the campaigns which participants had supposedly run themselves. These measures, as later sections will show, were not so evident in practice.

The stated aim of the project, as it was initially presented to the donor, was to enable participants to become “agents of peace” at the ‘local’, regional, and national levels. This meant that, following their education and ensured comprehension, participants were expected to disseminate the core ideas of the project establish them in their communities and the country at large.

Dissemination: The Online and Offline Campaigns

The main avenue for this dissemination took the form of the online and offline campaigns which participants were instructed to complete. I observed and participated in the sessions of the training workshops where participants learnt the required skills and began developing this content, and I was also able to see them in their completed form when they were posted on social media. My participation was mixed. For the most part, I worked alongside participants in completing the tasks they were given, sitting and learning alongside them: however, occasionally I chose to observe how participants interacted with the experts and the project without getting directly involved. I was never in the position of a teacher or expert during the project, although I was sometimes asked to gather information for the NGO. These instances are discussed separately in this section. After the completion of the training workshops, the participants, divided by location, were tasked with producing videos, infographics, and memes and publishing them on project social media pages. Each group also had to plan and run an 'offline campaign', to disseminate and promote the message of the project, taking different forms in different locales.

The videos created by participants focused on promoting informed electoral participation and the principles outlined in *Kyrgyz Jarany*. They often had similar themes and were uploaded to social media and shown at project events: the best, according to the NGO, were shown to national NGOs and government officials. The following descriptions demonstrate their common themes.

In one of the participant's videos, two friends are seen meeting and begin to talk about the upcoming election. One leans in and asks his friend if he is going to vote for his relative,⁸⁸⁵ who is running for parliament. He asks if his friend will gather votes for him from others in the village, offering money in return. The video cuts to real footage of protest and unrest in Bishkek, with various news reporters, overlayed above the noise, talking about the spread of violence and disorder at the time, intended to show the thought process of the man who had been offered the money. When it cuts back to the scene, the friend refuses, saying that elections should be "clean" and that he "cannot be bought". The video ends with a slogan across the screen: "don't sell your vote, choose the future".

⁸⁸⁵ In Kyrgyz, the term they use is a little ambiguous and could refer either to a relative or close friend.

Another video opens to the scene of a man lying on a sofa in his apartment, drifting off. As he falls asleep, his phone flashes with an incoming message: are you coming to vote in the election tomorrow? He replies no, and soon falls fast asleep. In his dream, he wakes up on the sofa to flashing lights and the noises of fighting and protest echoing across his apartment. He is alone. Suddenly, he reappears in a field, tied-up together with a group of prisoners guarded by an armed guard. He asks a woman in front of him what happened: “don’t you remember?”, she asks, “after the election, our motherland was sold”. The guard hears them talking and hits the man in the face with the butt of his rifle. He wakes up again on the sofa to the sound of his wife shouting: “they have changed the law; the kidnap of sixteen-year-olds has been legalised and our daughter has been taken!”, referring to the illegal yet sometimes still undertaken practice of bride kidnap. He collapses, only to wake up for real, again on the sofa, covered in sweat, to the message he received at the start. He replies again, saying that he will vote tomorrow. This was chosen by the NGO as the best video and shown not only to all other groups of participants, but to state and national NGO representatives.

These two videos demonstrate some of the common themes across the videos produced by participants as a whole: the buying of votes and the revolutions and unrest which occurred in Bishkek. They all emphasize electoral participation and informed decision making as solutions to these problems, interlinking the idea of a corrupt electoral process and mass non-participation with civil unrest and a lack of governmental or institutional stability. This represents the understandings and practices of peace espoused by the project; namely, that informed, conscientious voting behaviour alongside mass electoral participation are key to establishing and maintaining peaceful order. I again observed here a disconnect between these understandings and practices in the specific context of the project with those outlined as characterising the wider context. This disconnect emerged in my observations through the fact that the ideas and actions of the project do not engage at all with the understandings and practices of the wider context as I have identified them. Instead, they identify what the project perceives as the central problem, weak and uninformed electoral participation, and provide a blanket template to resolve this issue and engender peaceful order in a manner which does not engage with the context and situated knowledges evident in the people and places in which the project is enacted. The complexities of the wider context are not only lost, but effectively paved over in the establishment and administration

of this blanket approach in the form of a rigid, predetermined procedural training regimen. The fact that education and dissemination are significant characteristics of the project's epistemic environment suggests that not only are the participants unaware of this recipe for peace, but so are the wider population. Through dissemination, the idea of having to educate participants become the idea of having to educate the nation.

Other videos displayed the basic ideas of *Kyrgyz Jarany*. For example, one shows scenes of people helping the elderly, teaching young children, and generally displaying good behaviour and personal qualities in their local communities. It shows the young and old, women and men, and those of different ethnicities in harmony and mutual assistance, ending with the slogan, "our unity, our strength, is in our diversity. We are all Kyrgyz citizens". Another video follows the story of a woman and her involvement with one of the local organisations with whom the project is partnered. She narrates the video, explaining her dream of going to university to study. However, her parents wanted her to get married, and found a suitable match who wanted to be her husband. She was upset at the time and had no idea what she could do. One of her friends explained to her about a local organisation she was part of and how they could help her. After she joined, they held a meeting with the mothers of local women and stressed the importance of education and choice in life for women, sitting together and talking. In the end, her parents agreed that she could go to university and supported her in her ambitions. She was grateful to them for allowing her to go and worked hard to prove herself to them. The video ends with the idea that now, she is truly a 'Kyrgyz citizen', directly referencing the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*.

In addition to these videos, informative text-based media was produced in the course of the project which explained the fundamentals of informed, conscientious voting, the problem of vote-buying and corruption, and the basics of participation in a liberal democratic system, further stressing the importance of individual votes. To reinforce this knowledge, a series of memes was produced around these themes. One showed a man standing atop a pile of books, with text which translates as "knowledge makes the world known". Underneath, a picture showed one of the books falling, with text saying, "if you can handle the knowledge". Here, the impact of the provision of knowledge upon participant's understandings is starkly evident. The meme suggests the importance of 'correct' knowledge, and places the kind of hierarchical, authoritative emphasis on possessing that knowledge conveyed by the project,

something which will be explored in depth in a later section on the role of experts. Another took the form of a short cartoon showing stick figures in a job interview. The interviewer asks the other figure to introduce themselves: he immediately says, “I want to contribute to Kyrgyzstan’s development”. The interviewer stands up, shakes his hand, and says “We’ve accepted you for this job”. Yet another shows a crowd being led in a chant. The chant goes as follows: “*Who are we?*”, “Kyrgyz citizens!”. “*What do we want?*”. “For every citizen to know their own rights and responsibilities!”. “*When do we want it?*”. “All the time!”.

Although sometimes a little confusing, the memes promote some of the core aspects of the project as a whole: that is, the importance of gaining correct knowledge, behaving responsibly, the problems of corruption, and the basic ideas behind *Kyrgyz Jarany*. The online campaigns, of which making memes was a part, were reinforced by a series of offline campaigns, which took the form of additional workshops and events organised by participants and supervised by the partner organisations of each region. The following paragraph will describe two of these events in order to provide a picture of what occurred.

The offline campaigns had two major aspects: they were not only educational workshops for members of the wider community, who could not attend the project itself, but were also a means of spreading the message of the project through entertainment. These were often combined: for example, one event included dancing and music designed to explain the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*, in which members of different ethnic communities wore traditional dress, danced traditional dances, and emphasised their ability to represent their differences whilst being united as citizens of Kyrgyzstan. The offline campaigns were ostensibly developed and led by the project participants but, especially in the south of the country, were in fact often orchestrated by the project’s partner organisations. They were attended by members of the local community, alongside the relatives, colleagues, and classmates of participants. The campaign events often began with an introduction from representatives of these organisations, who elaborated upon the importance of the project, its major components, and outlined the educational content of the training workshops. In many of the events, this was followed by poster or PowerPoint presentations from participants, who discussed informed decision-making in elections, electoral systems, and *Kyrgyz Jarany*, disseminating their newfound knowledge in their communities. The attendees of these events were asked questions about what constituted manipulation in

elections, the reasons for giving your vote, or the aspects of good citizenship. Tasks were also given to attendees, such as drawing pictures to represent their feelings concerning parliament and their understanding of elections, or what clean elections might look like, or working in groups to outline 'active' and 'passive' civic engagement, and 'nihilist' and 'conformist' civic behaviour. In this manner, the offline campaigns often mirrored the emphasis placed on education *and* comprehension demonstrated in the project itself. One of the NGO staff explained to me that the partner organisations, most notably in the south, had little creativity, and had attempted to merely recreate the project training sessions for a wider audience, rather than develop their own unique or more engaging campaigns.

However, although this appeared in many ways to be an accurate assessment of the role of the partner organisations, this did not account for the influence of the epistemic environment of the project upon those involved in it, and the ways in which this conditioned the offline campaigns into reflecting the emphases on the provision of knowledge and its comprehension which characterised the project. The education, comprehension, and dissemination model and procedure demonstrates that the understandings and practices introduced by the project are, to some extent, novel and detached from the wider context of familiar, everyday, or established understandings and practices already existent in Kyrgyzstan. This is not to say that elections, voting, or informed decision-making are new ideas in the country, but instead to suggest that the way in which these were understood and presented by the project, and the particular emphasis placed upon their peacebuilding capacity, were new ideas which diverged from the triangulation presented. The conversation I have with participants and the attendees of the offline campaigns reflected this. At one of the campaigns, I worked with a group of attendees who had been tasked with making a poster to summarise the presentations they had just seen on passive, active, constructive, and destructive forms of civic identity and behaviour. They spent the first five minutes desperately googling the terms which had been used, trying to get to grips with the ideas through a quick scan of Wikipedia, despite the ideas having just been explained to them. They told me that it was the first time they had heard many of these words, never mind the first time they had encountered the ideas themselves. Both the representatives of the NGO and the project experts had, on several previous occasions, had conversations with me about the difficulty of these ideas for participants and the problems they were having ensuring comprehension, suggesting that future projects should not be so technical or so

complex in terms of the knowledge they attempted to impart. As a result, many of the attendees at the offline campaigns began to lose interest as time went on, talking and playing on their phones to pass the time. At one point, representatives of one of the partner organisations intervened, telling the attendees “You are receiving important information, and you should concentrate!” As a result of these difficulties, and of the novel and introductory nature of the knowledge provided, the procedure of the project was built upon the ideas of education, comprehension, and dissemination, ensuring that new knowledge was provided, understood, and was thus able to be spread. The offline campaigns mirrored this structure in many ways for much the same reasons: the attendees were encountering new knowledge and, in order for them to further spread the message in their communities, they needed to comprehend it. Creativity, context specificity, and otherwise alternative means of conducting these campaigns was therefore side-lined in favour of the procedural model for the whole project as a result of the influence of its epistemic environment, characterised through education, comprehension, and dissemination.

Despite such mirroring practices, some of the offline campaign events attempted to incorporate excitement and entertainment, albeit always alongside some features taken from the training workshops. Activities in these events included a forum theatre with the theme of “clean elections, clean future”, a scene of which showed a fight between people trying to put up or take down a campaign poster and their eventual agreement to respect each other’s opinions. Other examples included a large model of a tree covered in paper apples, each with a question on them which each attendee must answer, and interpretive dancing, where signs which reinforced the messages of the project were attached to each of the dancers. Other offline campaigns incorporated dancing as well as music in an attempt to explain the basic ideas behind *Kyrgyz Jarany*.

These examples demonstrate the nature of dissemination within the project, showing how the messages and goals of the project were spread in participants’ communities and on the national stage through social media and community events. Together, these examples can be seen in light of the trajectory in the project’s epistemic environment from education to comprehension and finally to dissemination, ensuring the continuation the understandings and practices of peaceful order presented through the provision of predetermined knowledge, testing its effective understanding, and finally having participants relay that

knowledge and campaign for it. These three themes can thus be seen to embody the fundamental procedural approach of the project: something which, in turn, reveals the epistemic environment engendered by the project as one stemming from a hierarchical and authoritative provision of knowledge, testing that the knowledge provided has been fully understood, and then building participant's capacity to spread this knowledge and further develop an environment for this purpose.

Concluding Remarks

Education, comprehension, and dissemination thus characterise the provision of knowledge throughout the duration of the project and represent the underlying features of the project's epistemic environment. The procedural narrative which was employed to demonstrate these characteristics also reveals much concerning the understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding which the project embodies. The aspect of education provides the *conceptual* knowledge required for understanding the ideas discussed and promoted by the project, such as models of social behaviour, the fundamentals of Kyrgyz democracy and democratic participation, and *Kyrgyz Jarany*. Alongside this, participants were provided with *technical* knowledge, which was intended to equip them with the practical skills necessary to promote the ideas which they had learnt and become active advocates for the goals of the project. The conceptual knowledge was presented as the path to peace: *Kyrgyz Jarany*, liberal democracy, and informed participation in clean elections are introduced to participants as the fundamentals of peace and stability in a clear application of the basic principles associated with the liberal peace. The provision of technical knowledge was intended to ensure that these ideas were circulated in, and adopted by, participants' own communities, and the aspect of measuring comprehension was intended to ensure that this knowledge was 'correct', ready for presentation to these communities.

Whereas education provides the knowledge for participants to become vehicles for the provision of the project's understandings and practices of peace, measuring comprehension guarantees it, enabling the 'successes' of the project to be empirically verified.

Dissemination, then, represents the ultimate realisation of participants as the vehicle for spreading this knowledge, ensuring its continuation and, ultimately, the successful spread and inculcation of the project's aims in communities. Together, these three aspects

characterise the procedure of imposing the blanket template for peace embodied by the project, the intentions of its content, and the core features of its epistemic environment as the authoritative and hierarchical imposition of knowledge. This characterisation demonstrates the twofold detachment of the project from the wider context outlined in chapter five. Firstly, it contains nothing which relates to the understandings and practices outlined in the triangulation, and contains no procedures or processes designed to incorporate them, or provide a platform for diverse, situated perspectives to shape the project. Secondly, as a rigid framework for the application of the blanket template for peace embodied by the project, it stands in opposition to the fluidity, contingency, and context-dependency of these understandings and practices of peace, imposing a pre-determined, singular vision and path to peace which does not allow for such conditions.

The influence and, as a result, the success of this procedure and epistemic environment was readily apparent during a series of interviews I conducted with participants on behalf of the NGO. Usually, my conversations with participants were informal, often conducted over lunch, during breaks, or after the training sessions had finished and I returned with them to stay in their community. In addition to this, as part of their attempts to write a final report and present the project in a positive light at the national level, I was tasked with gathering “success stories” by the NGO. They asked me to talk to participants during the training sessions, asking them what they thought of the project, what they had learned, and what the benefits of the project were for them and their communities. Instead of having informal conversations with participants, in which I assured them that anything said would be anonymised and never conveyed to the official bodies involved in the project, I instead had to conduct a series of official interviews where participants were explicitly made aware that their answers would be passed on to, and used by, the NGO and donor organisation. This caused a dramatic shift in both my relation to participants and the statements which they made regarding the project. As a later section will show, participants often presented a disconnect between the project and the wider context identified in this thesis. However, during these interviews they demonstrated a pronounced ability to mirror the language, framing, and aims of the project, demonstrating the influence of the project’s authoritative and hierarchical epistemic environment of education, comprehension, and dissemination. Their relationship with me changed for these interviews: instead of open, friendly, and distinctly informal conversation, participants provided short, shy, and quietly considered

responses, occasionally checking with me that what they were saying was appropriate. Their responses were carefully measured to mirror the project and present it as an influential success; exactly as the NGO had hoped. Below are a few examples from these interviews (with added emphasis)⁸⁸⁶:

I joined this project to *learn new things and move past the old things I had learnt before*. In the future, *I will use what I have learnt* in this project to *choose the best candidates* based upon their qualities.

In the future, when our election happens, *I will be able to better analyse it*. Now *we have become more informed*, we can *help others to vote conscientiously* and to make their own *informed decisions*.

I have *learnt much I didn't know before about the elections*. When I first participated in an election, I knew little and just voted. Now *my intellectual ability has been increased* and I have *acquired new skills*. I can now *spread these skills in my school and my community*.

These examples demonstrate the way in which the procedure and epistemic environment of the project conditioned participants responses. The difference between these responses and those I received during informal conversations, or when staying with participants in their communities, highlights the limits of this environment within the procedure and space of the project, along with drawing attention to the disconnect between the project and its wider context. A later section will explore this in detail.

The triangulation developed in part one outlines a general characterisation of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, presenting the wider context in which the NGO and project operate. However, as this section has sought to evidence, the project is notably disconnected from this context. This disconnect can be understood in two main ways. The most apparent of these is the fact that the aims, content, and enactment of the project does not engage with any of the aspects included in the triangulation, the understandings and practise they entail, or any of the complexities of this wider context. It does not reference these ideas, built upon them, or include them in planning and enacting

⁸⁸⁶ The sections in italics are intended to highlight the parts of participant's responses which best demonstrate the influence of the project's epistemic environment, which most closely mirror the aspects of education, comprehension, and dissemination.

the project. Instead, it is built upon the application of a blanket template for peace, which develops the notion that informed, electoral participation and a new form of civic identity is *the* path to peace. The disconnect is evidenced, first and foremost, by the lack of any commonalities or relations between the two contexts discussed in this thesis. This sits at odds with the enmeshed complexity of the wider context, along with appearing completely detached from the understandings and practices of peace which characterise them. In short, the specific context neither explicitly nor implicitly engages with these understandings or practices, in direct contrast to its claims to be 'locally-adapted' and context-sensitive.

Moreover, the procedure of the project demonstrates the existence of an epistemic environment which precludes any engagement with the wider context identified in part one. This is the result of the application of a rigid program of knowledge provision, testing, and training to enable the spread of this knowledge, (education, comprehension, and dissemination). These themes demonstrate this epistemic environment: *education* implies that the knowledge provided is not established with regard to the people and places involved in the project; *comprehension* reinforces this, suggesting that it is novel enough to require testing to ensure that those who have been trained have understood it correctly; *dissemination* again shows us that this knowledge, and the understandings and practices of peace which it entails, are new to the context of operation, as they must be widely disseminated across both specific communities and the population at large, as the offline and online campaigns demonstrate respectively. This environment is built upon this blanket template for peace, and the procedure of its enactment precludes the inclusion of diverse perspectives, situated knowledges, or a meaningful engagement with the wider context through excluding this procedurally. There is no space given to incorporating such understandings and practices of peace, something which was only reinforced by the role of experts and changes made to the project throughout its enactment, as later sections will explore. The epistemic environment of the project, and the procedure which reinforces it, are intended to apply and engender this blanket template for peace amongst participants, built upon emphasising free and informed electoral participation and the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*, and enable them to spread it amongst their own communities and on the national stage through (social)media. The disconnect is thus further evidenced by the nature of this epistemic environment, which precludes the inclusion of situated, diverse, or otherwise

alternative perspectives in an authoritative and hierarchical fashion represented in and enforced through its procedure.

This disconnect was also made evident by the participants themselves during the training workshops. This was manifest as a lack of engagement, difficulties in comprehension, and statements and behaviours which stood at odds with the principles and notions of *Kyrgyz Jarany* and the ostensibly progressive civic identity and political engagement promoted by the project. Not only did participants often lose interest or disengage themselves from the project, preferring to play games, use their phones, or simply talk and play music rather than engage with the content of the project, but they also displayed a notable difficulty in understanding particular aspects of it. Despite the fact that the participants had already participated in a similar project with the NGO, and despite the training they received in the course of this project, they often had difficulties understanding the concepts and even structures identified and promoted by the project. During a lunch break, I slipped out with one of the participants who had often sat next to me to talk, and we had a chance to talk openly about the project, out of earshot of the experts and NGO representatives. They explained to me that they had never heard of most of the ideas expounded in the project as part of inculcating *Kyrgyz Jarany* and had known little about the political systems upon which it was built prior to the training workshops. They did, however, stress that they now knew “how I should vote and participate”, “how I should engage with elections”, and “the information I need to be a good citizen”. This example is representative of several conversations with participants, and the lack of comprehension was also something highlighted by the project experts, who admitted to me that the training workshops were too complicated, employed ideas too difficult for participants, and assumed a preliminary knowledge base which often was not complete in practice. This shows the disconnect between the project and its participants by emphasising the fact that the project was built upon the inculcation of knowledge rather than building upon existing understandings and practices of peace. It was very much a *specific context* of ideas and activities, disconnected from those which were familiar to participants and to the *wider context* identified in this thesis, intended as a general characterisation of the understandings and practices of peace which existed outside of the NGO and their project.

In short, these three themes demonstrate the epistemic environment of the project, characterising it as one of imposition, relying upon the top-down provision of knowledge in

an authoritative manner, detached from the wider context in which it is established. This serves to undermine the project's self-presentation, standing in stark contrast to the focus on the 'local' and grassroots expressed in the descriptions of the project. The understandings and practices of peace promoted by the project have been standardised and pre-determined, imposed upon the wider context and specificities of such consideration in Kyrgyzstan. As such, it represents a totalising understanding of peace: one which exists as a template for blanket application in post-conflict settings, (Kyrgyzstan being perceived by the donor as one such setting). The application of this blanket template for peace is enabled by the procedure and content of the project, which together efface the notion of 'the local' within the project through preventing alternative perspectives, excluding situated knowledge, and creating a space in which only the aims and themes of the project are enabled. This stands in contrast, and even opposition, to the fluidity, contingency, and context-dependency of the understandings and practices of peace which characterise the wider context. For example, although the notion of *Kyrgyz Jarany* is a concept developed in partnership with Kyrgyzstan's government, it is nevertheless a concept developed in tandem with the UN, who had a significant role in determining its content and nature and is presented by them as a blanket solution to peace, as is evident in the wider initiative's name, which suggests the components of "Inclusive Governance and Common Civic identity" to be the fundamental basis for "Sustainable Peace and Development". The project rests upon this idea of a fixed trajectory to peace and, in this respect, is a clear application of the fundamentals of the liberal peace. This epistemic environment is further illuminated by the changes made to the planned project procedure and the roles of those enacting it, presented at the start of this section. The epistemic environment is further reinforced by this, as these changes exacerbated the level of disconnect from the regional, communal, and individual contexts in which the project operated and with whom it worked. Therefore, the following section elaborates these issues through a thematically structured narrative built upon my own observations and work within the project and NGO.

6.6 - Changing Procedure: A Broadening Disconnect with the Wider Context and the Reinforcement of the Epistemic Environment

The Role of Experts:

This section begins with a narrative concerning the role of the project experts, demonstrating the juxtaposition between their presentation as assistants in gathering, formulating, and presenting 'local' perspectives and conflict mitigation efforts with their actual position in practice. Instead of working as facilitators in this regard, the project experts, most notably the lead expert, controlled and mediated each aspect of the project from its ostensible basis in the 'local' to its presentation at the national level. This section presents a narrative which follows the lead expert in their role, considering their relation to the intended procedure of the project and examining the ways in which this role became detached from that imaginary. The aim of this section is to demonstrate the role of experts from throughout the project, from inception to enactment, in order to show the disconnect between the specific context of the project and the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, along with the ways in which the project experts contributed to the limiting epistemic environment previously discussed. The role of experts changed throughout the course of the project, and the following discussion will also demonstrate how these changes led to a widening of this disconnect and to the reinforcement of the epistemic environment which the previous section introduced, further limiting the intention and ability of the project to engage with situated knowledges and live up to its claims with regard to 'the local'.

The project incorporated three main experts during the training sessions, each bringing a different aspect of expertise and occupying a slightly different role within the project. These included jurisprudence and state law, journalism, and media campaigning, and training sessions which concerned these aspects were led by the corresponding expert. They also occupied the role of external consultant for the NGO, helping to determine the content of the training and the activities undertaken to reinforce it. In addition to these main experts, additional experts were brought in to assist in producing the policy briefs. One of the experts was very much in charge, directing the other experts and commanding a higher level of respect and influence. They had known the head of the NGO for many years, and their partnership was already established in previous incarnation of the project and in other work

concerning the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*. This lead expert was more than just an external consultant: they were integral to the formation of the project itself. When I spoke to the head of the NGO, they explained that the very idea for the project emerged from a conversation between the two of them. Much of the concepts, training frameworks, and aims of the project were the result of their influence, and they retained a great deal of control throughout the project. They were involved in each stage of the project's procedure and in each level of its enactment. Outside of the (social) media training, the lead expert determined much of the training workshops' content and wrote some of the policy briefs themselves at both the local and national level. Certain aspects of the project became, in some respects, a platform for the presentation and propagation of their own ideas and hopes for Kyrgyzstan. The other experts also exerted some influence upon the project, albeit to a lesser degree limited by the roles they were given. The experts occupied three main positions in the project which enabled this influence. Firstly, they ran the training workshops, under the control of the lead expert, placing them in a position *between* the participants and the NGO. Although NGO representatives attended most of the project events, the experts were responsible for running the training workshops and therefore, for gathering and enabling 'local' perspectives and conflict mitigation efforts. The NGO were quite explicit with me in their explanation of this role. In addition to occupying a position between the participants and the NGO, the experts stood between the 'local' and national levels of the project through their control of the policy briefs and their content. Additionally, the lead expert ran the national level round tables, deciding upon the themes to be discussed and dominating the discussion, occupying centre stage in discussions and often controlling the nature of those discussions. The role and position of the experts was therefore spread across the 'local', organisational, and national levels of the project, creating an environment in which their influence determined not only much of the content and the nature of the training provided, but also the transmission of knowledge between these different levels of the project. As such, the experts had a notable influence upon the epistemic environment of the project, reinforcing its authoritative, hierarchical nature and diminishing the ability and intention of the project and its procedure to enable situated perspectives and context-dependent understandings and practices of peace.

The experts determined the content of the training workshops, wrote all of the policy briefs, and presented both the briefs and the project as a whole at the national level. Although the

NGO and the NGO staff had initially formulated the project for presentation to the donor, securing their support and funding, even this stage was significantly influenced by the role of the lead expert. They were, therefore: in control at the level of participant engagement and the ostensible gathering of 'local' perspectives; in control of (mis)representing participants in the form of the local policy briefs; and (mis)representing these in the form of national policy briefs and at the national round tables. Although one of the round table topics was developed by one of the NGO's project coordinators, this was done with the advice and final say of the head of the NGO, who had built the project alongside the lead expert and relied a great deal on their advice in making such decisions. There are two central reasons for this level of expert control and the resultant procedural disconnect of the project from the wider context. The first is due to the sheer level of involvement the lead expert was given in the formulation and enaction of the project, allowing them to take control and both establish and frame the content and enaction of the project in-line with their own wishes; the second is the result of the NGOs lack of coordination: the project lacked a consistent and competent project coordinator from its early stages and, as a result, the role of experts expanded to fill the gap. I observed both of these problematic aspects of the project through my direct involvement in the training workshops, round tables, and project meetings held at the office of the NGO, of which I attended all. The dominance of the lead expert was evident in their behaviour, commanding respect and centre-stage throughout the project and in each aspect of their involvement. A good example of this is the honorific title of 'teacher' or 'master' (арай – *arai*) used by the NGO and by the participants in conversation with them, alongside the way in which they commandeered the national round tables, something which later sections will explore in depth. The disorganisation of the NGO was demonstrated first and foremost by their lack of planning; I was asked to fill in for staff at multiple project sites and conduct jobs which the NGO had forgotten or been unable to give to existing staff. Several events were not attended by NGO reps, and I was therefore tasked with collecting attendance information, interviewing participants about the benefits of the project, and writing accounts of events and procedures at the round tables, making up for their lack of staff. Once I was given the wrong location for a project event, and instead of turning up at the local government building I was sent to a local school, who were very hospitable but rather confused. The NGO head then turned up over an hour late, did not seem to know what the event was about, took a few photos and then left without me, forgetting that there

was no public transport from this village, which itself was an hour and a half from where I was staying by car. Again, further evidence of this will be provided in later sections.

This latter reason was notably apparent in my own experiences working with the project. The supervision and coordination of the project had been split between three people prior to my involvement, one of whom had left the NGO, and I was soon asked to take on a few of these roles on their behalf., including writing the final report. Whilst writing the report, one of the project supervisors tasked me with identifying the project's achievements. When I asked what kind of achievements, they understood the project to have attained, they replied "I don't have any information on achievements. Do you see (any) achievements?". This statement became representative of the detachment of the NGO representatives from the project, and the lack of the direction and coordination regarding the planned procedure and intended project aims. To some extent, I was seen as a kind of expert myself, having worked with other projects and having qualifications and a current thesis topic which broadly related to the themes of the project. This mirrored the kind of deference given to the experts by the NGO staff, who openly admitted that they did not know all that much about the project, its intended procedure, or its aims. In addition to this deference to the experts, the representatives of the NGO who attended the various project events, who were, for the most part, much younger than the lead expert, invariably used the word *арай* (*arai*). This is best understood as a respectful form of the word *teacher*, close to the English term *master*. This was used in place of another respectful term of address in Kyrgyz, such as *байке* (*baike* - brother), connoting a higher level of respect and a student-teacher relationship, and epitomises the position of the lead expert in the project hierarchy, even in relation to the NGO staff. One of the lead experts had a job outside of the project as a lecturer at a university in the capital, and this position and its status was continued in the role in the project. This was highlighted by the fact that the representatives of both the NGO and the partner organisations often asked the lead expert for confirmation when they made a point, either during formal discussions related to the procedure or enactment of the project, or when questions or points were raised during the training sessions. They often gave input on the content being provided by the expert, but always did so through the expert as gatekeeper of this content. At one stage, the NGO representative and that of the partner organisation began to discuss some of the points made in the project, giving differing opinions to the group at large. Unfortunately, these discussions began in Kyrgyz, but rapidly transitioned to

Russian, so I was only able to tell that they stemmed from questions asked by these representatives concerning information provided by the expert and were conflicting opinions, and not the precise content of the questions or debates themselves. Nevertheless, after making points which ran slightly contrary to the content of the training session, they asked the lead expert to approve of each of the statements as they made them, ensuring that, even though they were participating in a form of debate, it was a debate conditioned by the authoritative and hierarchical epistemic environment engendered through the role and position of the expert leading the session. Further illustrations of the elevated position of the lead expert could be seen in the relationship between them and the project participants. All of the participants were considerably younger than the lead expert, and he fluctuated between referring to them as “children” and “colleagues”.⁸⁸⁷ They always addressed him respectfully, and not once did they contradict the content of the lectures, nor offer an opposing or even slightly tangential perspective. They were passive learners, participating in the epistemic environment of education and comprehension, enabling informed dissemination. However, this is a large part to do with the enactment and manifestation of cultural norms and longstanding hierarchies of respect in Kyrgyzstan, rather than directly the result of the hierarchies imposed by the project. Nevertheless, these structures only aided the project in its application of a blanket template for peace and reinforcing epistemic environment and was employed in this regard by both the NGO and lead expert in practice.

The project experts were thus not acting as mediators between the ‘local’ level, as the project identified it, and the national: instead, they controlled the content of the project and the manner in which it was presented to participants and participated in the hierarchical and authoritative provision of knowledge. Although tasks were given to participants with the intention of collecting ‘local’ perspectives and conflict mitigation efforts, according to both project documentation and oral accounts given by the NGO staff and project co-ordinators, these were subsumed by the procedural characteristics of the project (education, comprehension, and dissemination), and the epistemic environment created as a result. For example, during the first round of training workshops, participants were asked to make posters explaining local issues and provide a brief plan of what could be done to mitigate them. Although I was unable to attend these in person due to the complications imposed by

⁸⁸⁷ In Kyrgyz this is балдар (*baldar* – children) and кесиптештер (*kesipteshter* – colleagues).

COVID 19 upon my fieldwork, I interviewed four of the NGO staff on this workshop, two of whom had planned and attended it. I also spoke to four of the participants involved, who explained what they had said and the overall nature of the workshops. One of the more active and prominent participants, identified by the NGO staff as such and with whom I spoke explained that, in his town, litter was the biggest problem: he proposed a community litter-picking drive and the formation of a community group to manage it. While his idea was lauded, it was completely ignored. The project had already been planned and the procedure established, meaning that, from the very outset, alternative voices were automatically excluded. Although this is a relatively small instance of this disconnect between the project and the wider context of its operation, it is symbolic of a more general and deeper disconnect. This was the only example of a 'local' opinion or perspective given in the course of the project which the NGO representatives and project experts could recount to me. This example is not intended to demonstrate an understanding of peace that was ignored, but instead to show the lack of space provided for any alternative voices, divergent perspectives, or ideas which went beyond the pre-determined and static scope of the project. The fact that this was the only example of any attempt to discuss 'local' problems or divergent perspectives which these leading figures in the project could remember suggests that this was an aspect of the project that, despite being central to its formulation and enactment on paper, was not a concern in practice. The provision of such a space, but the lack of concern regarding it and, ultimately, the lack of its realisation as a space for situated, contextualised perspectives, is also evident in the following example.

The other concrete opportunity for participants to provide unstructured input in this regard came during the local round tables, of which I attended all events across four regions. During one of the round table events, participants were divided into groups to make the same kinds of posters. The groups were arbitrarily divided up by the lead expert, meaning that they were not representative of the regions that participants were from. The round table event included participants from different cities, towns, and villages, and this division confused the project's notion of the 'local' by ignoring the geographical divisions of participants and the specificities of the contexts from which they had come. This event was accompanied by local government representatives from the region, who also joined in and thus reduced the ability of participants to formulate and present the issues important to them. The authority of these figures compounded with that of the experts and created an environment in which

participants had to defer to them. All of the posters were presented, including ideas such as promoting friendship and improving education, they were taken by a representative of the partner organisation without any discussion. The NGO representatives did nothing and made no move to record or otherwise incorporate these ideas in their project or mission. The groups were given fifteen minutes to collect these ideas and were only given this time after the rest of their role in the project was over. Furthermore, due to the changes in procedure which the next section outlines, the local policy briefs had already been written, and were even handed out at the local round tables I attended, meaning that any perspectives provided by participants *could not be included in the project* or transferred to the national level as policy prescriptions. The fact that they had been written in advance was evident not only from their early use in the project's procedure but was also explained to me by the NGO staff as they struggled to change the events and activities of the project to match this change in procedure. In addition to the limitations which this example identifies, the local round tables were procedurally limited by their position *after* the local policy briefs, meaning that any input from 'local' perspectives could not be incorporated into them, and thus would not be transferred to the national level through the national policy briefs. The local round tables were themselves quite disorganised and uncoordinated events: the one used as an example occurred at the end of the project, even after the national round tables had begun, and certainly after any ideas or perspectives could have been incorporated into the project. Such disruptions to the planned procedure of the project thus served to compound the inability of the project to engage with local perspectives, and thus the hierarchical, instrumental, and imposed nature of its epistemic environment.

The next section, therefore, deals with this *procedure* and the problems which emerged as a result, thus further outlining and exploring the epistemic environment of the project and how changes to the project's procedure shaped it. The section begins by examining this procedure, highlighting the epistemic environment this creates and the way in which it deviates from the intentions concerning the 'local' which the project identified at its inception, further demonstrating a disconnect between the project and any considerations concerning the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in which it operates.

The Epistemic Environment and Project Procedure: The Policy Briefs and Round Tables

The project procedure, outlined at the beginning of this section, placed each project event in a particular sequence in order to provide a basis for the project to realise the aims which it proposed: i.e., the incorporation of 'local' knowledge and perspectives, and giving them a platform at the level of national policy. This was as follows:

1. *Training Workshops.*
2. *Online and Offline Campaigns.*
3. *Local Round Tables.*
4. *Local Policy Briefs.*
5. *National Policy Briefs.*
6. *National Round Tables.*
7. *Close-out Event.*

As outlined in relation to the training workshops and campaigns, this procedure led to the general model of this epistemic environment becoming one of education, comprehension, and dissemination, creating conditions in which these aims were not and could not be realised. This epistemic environment was further reinforced by the changes made to the order of the round tables and policy briefs in the procedure of the project. The intention of the local round tables and policy briefs was to enable, include, and formulate 'local' perspectives for presentation to at the national level in order to influence policy development. This was explicit both in the project's official documentation and in how it was presented to me directly by staff and experts. Although such perspectives were ostensibly collected during the training workshops and campaigns, something which the previous examples suggest was not the case, the planned procedure placed the bulk of this process within the local round tables and subsequent development of policy briefs, the former being the space for dialogue concerning 'local' issues, and the latter for the formulation of these insights into documents which could be used to present them to central government. The local round tables should thus have enabled the collection of 'local' perspectives, and the local policy briefs and were presented as the extension and documentation of this process; the bridge between the 'local' and national levels of the project. As the introduction of this section identified, the project displayed an overt concern with incorporating the 'local' and building up from the 'grassroots' level, framing itself as "inclusive", "locally adapted", and

built upon “community dialogue”.⁸⁸⁸ The initial proposal argued that policy agenda is “formed and discussed mainly among elites in the capital city”, with no or limited consultation with the public, “especially at the grassroots level”. It justified the project by suggesting that there was, therefore, an urgent need “to take major political discussions to a local level and bring back the key messages to the national level” in order to change policy. To this end, the local round tables should have come *prior to* the policy briefs. The reason for this relates to the epistemic environment initially proposed by the project: participants were supposed to have the opportunity to highlight, discuss, and present ‘local’ issues, perspectives concerning them, and existing conflict mitigation efforts, allowing them to be considered and incorporated into the subsequent policy briefs and brought to the attention of local and national state bodies for policy creation. Although the inclusion of these perspectives was still limited by the overall aims and focus of the project, (by the emphasis upon fair and informed electoral participation), and would have been filtered through them, it was nonetheless an attempt to situate the project in the context it operated and include the perspectives of those with whom it should have worked *alongside*.

In spite of this, the policy briefs were developed *before* the round tables, and were even handed out or read to participants and attendees at these events.⁸⁸⁹ Here we can see the effects of procedure and its relation to content upon the epistemic environment of the project. The fact that the policy briefs came before, rather than after the local round tables has two main effects in this regard. Firstly, this change in procedure ensured that ‘local’ input was precluded, establishing a procedural effacement of situated knowledges. In addition to this, having the policy briefs first means that the content of the local round tables, instead of emerging from the context in which they were enacted, instead emerged from the policy briefs content itself. Here, we can see how the procedure of the project affects its ability to incorporate situated knowledges and diverse perspectives, and how this limitation is amplified by the relationship between procedure and content: the changes made to the procedure affected the content of the activities within that procedure. Together, the limitations imposed by procedure and content, and their interrelation, affected the epistemic environment of the project, further reinforcing its hierarchical,

⁸⁸⁸ These quotes are taken from the initial project description given to the donor and the final report.

⁸⁸⁹ The use of the term ‘participants’ here refers to the participants of the project itself: to those who received training, conducted campaigns, etc. The term ‘attendees’ refers to those who came only to that even in particular: in this case, the representatives of the police, teachers, and local political figures who attended the round tables.

authoritative, and exclusive nature with regard to situated knowledges and alternative perspectives. In changing the procedure, the project bolstered the effects of its epistemic environment of education, comprehension, and dissemination by ensuring that knowledge could only be applied 'top-down' to participants, rather than being developed in tandem *with* them. Furthermore, the resultant influence of the content of the policy briefs limited the knowledge considered legitimate, or even facilitated during the project. By conditioning the local round tables in terms of their content, the discussion held at these events were limited to a singular, pre-determined theme, rather than being open spaces for pluralistic dialogue and deliberation, as the project suggested they should be.

This problematic epistemic environment which emerged from this change to procedure was expressed by the NGO representative who joined me while I attended many of the round table events. They highlighted that the development of the local policy briefs prior to the round tables effectively meant that 'local' perspectives no longer have a platform within the procedure of the project and are replaced by the views of the respective document's authors. This is most evident in the fact that participants' and attendees' contributions at the round tables were effectively structured and limited by the chosen theme of their local policy briefs, which was done by experts, with limited input from the NGO representatives. Any perspectives which diverged from this theme were not recorded or addressed, and thus not included in the national policy briefs. NGO representatives did not attend all of the round tables, instead simply asking me or partner organisation representatives to attend on their behalf, which included monitoring how many had attended, who they were, and how many were women. As such, we were not required to give in-depth feedback concerning the ideas and recommendations put forward, or even record them at all. According to the procedure of the project, they did not need to attend or record these perspectives, as 'local' perspectives had already, professedly, been gathered and developed into the local policy briefs. In fact, the local policy briefs were not even mentioned in the initial project description submitted to the donor: they appeared as a bolt-on to further present the image of 'local' consultation and engagement, despite the lack of any mechanism to incorporate such insights being manifest in the project in practice.

The original intention outlined at the start of the project, both in the proposal and through oral accounts provided to me when I first began working alongside the NGO, was that the local partner organisations nominated a representative from within their organisation to

write these reports, compiling the discussions from each regional round table and creating a document which could be used to develop the national policy briefs. However, I was told that the local partner organisations lacked the capacity to do this and, as a result, the plan had been changed. After clearing these changes with the donor, the NGO replaced these representatives with experts. For the most part, the project experts were used and, in order to cover all the regions without overloading these experts, additional experts were employed for this task alone. These were mostly academic staff who had ostensible expertise in a field considered relevant to the project by the NGO. However, I had no direct contact with the additional experts employed, as they were employed at short notice to fill a gap which was not supposed to be there. The NGO intended to use experts from the regions, in an attempt to bolster their ability to represent the 'local'. However, this was not always possible, and instead the majority of the experts employed were either already part of the project or were nevertheless based in Bishkek, with some already working with the central government. This added another dimension to the authoritative nature of the project: not only did experts replace any vague semblance of 'local' representation, but these additional changes meant that these perspectives were now being interpreted, formulated, and written by those disconnected from the areas and people about which and whom they wrote.

This had a two-fold effect in stifling the 'local' as outlined by the project and ensured that the policy briefs at both the local and national level were completely detached from the wider regional and community contexts in which the project operated, and from the people who participated within it. The position of the local policy briefs *before* the local round tables had several effects upon the nature and epistemic environment of the project which undermined the commitments made by the project to the 'local' and incorporating situated knowledge and perspectives. First of all, the topics of the local policy briefs were chosen by the project experts, with some occasional but limited influence from the NGO. These topics were chosen based on the predetermined content and aims of the project or concerned subjects which the experts themselves knew about or wished to promote, rather than through consultation with participants or their communities as the initial procedure suggested. This had the effect of ensuring that the local round tables were structured according to these policy briefs, making the themes of the policy briefs the core of their discussion. As such, the 'local' discussions held at these events were centred upon, and limited by, these themes, ultimately coming under the control of the experts: a notable

trope of the project and its epistemic environment. The local round tables were thus effectively curated by the project experts and NGO, ensuring the continuation of a hierarchical, instrumental, and imposed epistemic environment built upon a pre-determined and blanketly applied understanding and practice of peace and peacebuilding. Although the discussions held during the local round tables often deviated from this, with diverse perspectives voiced on topics well beyond the scope of the project, such ideas and conversations were not considered or recorded officially: the position of the local round tables in the project procedure made sure that these voices were *excluded* from the local policy briefs and shut out from the national policy briefs, national round tables, and from potential policy influence. The mechanism intended by the project to include 'local' perspectives was replaced by their procedural exclusion, despite the project ostensibly resting upon ideas of 'local' engagement and advocacy. Furthermore, the content of the local policy briefs became that of the local round tables, structuring, ordering, and ultimately limiting the discussion. Therefore, building upon a hierarchical epistemic environment of education, comprehension, and dissemination, a procedure of exclusion was established through the role of experts and the changes made to the sequence of project activities, along with the effects of imposed content.

These limitations, and the nature of the epistemic environment, created by the project's procedure, which ensured them, were brought into focus by my observations and conversations during the local round tables themselves. Two of these events will be used as representative examples: although they were diverse in nature, these examples capture the variations I observed by representing their extreme ends and, although I was unable attend each and every one, interviews with staff and participants confirmed that the few I missed fitted into this characterisation. The local round tables demonstrate the limitations of the project's self-professed 'local' engagement in practice, juxtaposing the NGO's aims with the limitations imposed by the project's procedure. They also demonstrate the fact that spaces for dialogue and the discussion of situated perspectives did exist and were perceived as such by participants and even enabled by the *positive* influence of one of the partner organisations, but were either restricted by procedure or by the local partner organisations who, in many cases, mirrored the training workshops and obstructed the development of any such spaces. The positive contributions of the local partner organisations, in relation to the project's aim of inclusivity, and the round tables they held were stifled by both the

project procedure and the expanded role of experts. In addition to this, the *negative* influence of some of the partner organisations, and their contribution to the authoritative, hierarchical, and thus limiting epistemic environment of the project was effectively encouraged by this procedure and by the NGO. This is important in light of the changes made to the project procedure: this difference in the round tables, resulting from the influence of the partner organisations, shows the importance of inclusivity to participants, the potentials of the project which were negatively affected, and the influence of the partner organisations themselves, who often merely mirrored the epistemic environment of the project.

All local round tables began by explaining the project, its central aims, and the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*, alongside recounting the activities undertaken, giving PowerPoint presentations, and showing some of the campaign videos made by participants. Although the project participants were present, for the most part, there were other attendees, such as local government figures, teachers, and even a police officer, were not familiar with the project. Each local round table was built upon the theme of that region's local policy brief, which was outlined at the start of each event and often handed out as a document. Each included a zoom presentation from one of the project experts, who did not attend these events in person, but was facilitated in practice by each region's local partner organisation. However, there were significant differences between them: some mirrored the project, ensuring education, comprehension, and dissemination in an authoritative and hierarchical manner: others were more open, discussing issues beyond the scope of the local policy briefs, engaging with participants, members of their communities, and with divergent perspectives. Nevertheless, despite the differences in epistemic environment embodied in these examples, the local round tables were nonetheless fundamentally limited by the project's procedure, undermining the commitments made to the 'local' and incorporating the perspectives and existing conflict mitigation efforts of the communities involved. In this manner, despite the efforts of some of the partner organisations and the wishes of participants, participants and the discussions held were excluded from the intended development of policy at the national level and replaced by the authoritative voice of the experts in the form of the local policy briefs.

One of the early local round tables, occurred in the north of Kyrgyzstan, with the theme (and corresponding local policy brief) of how to promote active and informed youth engagement,

both electorally and in their communities. The local partner organisation representative addressed questions on this theme to all participants and attendees, including “who are the youth?”, “what are the youth problems?”, “what are the types of youth?”, and “what are the recommendations of the experts and local policy brief?”. The expert who had written the policy brief presented on these themes, providing a link to an academic document they had written on the subject. In this capacity, this event fitted into the wider epistemic environment of the project, characterised by the provision of education through hierarchies of knowledge. It also exemplified the kind of ‘local’ engagement that the project had envisaged and embodied a more open model for a round table. Participants and attendees raised many issues beyond the scope of the project, including economic issues in their communities; the poor relationship between people and the state; the absence of identification documents and resulting inability of citizens to participate in official processes; the hierarchies and customs in Kyrgyz culture which prevented young people and women from certain activities; and the lack of public transport. They wanted more youth centres and teachers, and thought that better relations between, and resources for teachers, schools, and parents would be the best place to start in order to address the themes given to them. After the event had finished, I spent the afternoon with the project participants. They were happy, animated, and keen to talk about their experiences of the round table. They felt that, although there had been much disagreement within the discussions, they had been given a chance to express themselves and, furthermore, felt listened to, despite the higher social and political status of many of the attendees. The disagreement was a sign of participants feeling able to state their opinions, and of attendees listening to them and responding. One woman explained to me that she now had a sense of her own potential as a result of this interaction: she no longer thought that she would simply be ignored and had been positively surprised that her opinions had been taken seriously. The others agreed, saying that this was their favourite part of the round table and project; having a platform and being included. As a result, participants were engaged, open, and keen to discuss issues above and beyond the scope of the project with people such as the police representative, with whom they would not usually have had such discussions with. This was in large the result of the local partner organisation’s representative, who facilitated the event and promoted an open and communicative space for participants and attendees. They ensured everyone had an equal say and promised that the door of their local office was always open for chats, suggestions, and assistance. These attempts at inclusivity and its clear importance

to participants, along with a demonstration of the potential of the round tables to be a platform for the very perspectives which the project ostensibly attempted to capture and facilitate, are clear in this example.

This also demonstrates the limitations imposed upon these events by the project procedure and the changes made to it, excluding any perspectives which fell outside of this order and reordering. In this example, the local partner organisation, participants, and attendees demonstrated a desire for open discussion, a desire to introduce issues in their communities which went beyond the scope of the project, and the possibilities for dialogue between those who would not usually have engaged with each other. However, the procedure of the project ensured that this was limited to this event, and any perspectives expressed, or opportunities arisen would be excluded from the proceeding stages of the project. The policy briefs had already been written and, despite discussion ideas and issues well beyond its scope, this document was the only part of this local round table to be transferred to the national level through its ostensible incorporation into the national policy briefs, although, as later sections argue, even this transfer did not occur in practice. This event was still represented only by the project experts, as participants were excluded from national level events while the experts allegedly presented their perspective for policy consideration. Here we can see the stark limitations of procedure, both in constraining the content of the local round tables and in ensuring that they occupied a position in the sequence of the project where they would be unable to influence its later stages, or serve as a basis for gathering, formatting, and presenting the perspectives and established conflict resolution practices of participants and their communities.

This round table, and those it represents, stands in stark contrast to those undertaken in the south of the country with a different local partner organisation. The importance of being included to participants demonstrated in the previous example, and the potential of these events to realise the project's aims in this regard, is contrasted here by the mere mirroring of the project's authoritative, instrumental, and imposing epistemic environment undertaken by these events. This demonstrates the influence of procedure and the project's epistemic environment upon certain partner organisations, and the influence which these organisations had when led by the limitations of the project. In this round table, the two partner organisation representatives had a much tighter, more controlled and authoritative approach to the event, focusing only on the project, its aims and messages. Participants,

who had come from different regions in the south, were given pre-determined questions to answer by these representatives in front of the other participants and attendees, rather than there being a space created for open dialogue. This effectively controlled the subjects available for discussion, and even the time allocated for each topic. These questions included “what kind of assistance can be given to create an active youth?”, “how can we encourage patriotism and prevent people leaving for America or Russia?” and, rather ironically, “how can we bring together the different perspectives from the different regions?”. All of these were again derived from the policy brief which had been written prior to the round table. There were only a few attendees, all from local government, and instead of participating in discussion they were given time to give speeches to the participants. These speeches argued for *Kyrgyz Jarany*, suggesting that it was a great concept, as it had been approved by the president himself, and that it embodied the kind of patriotic feelings which Kyrgyzstan desperately needed. One stressed that the youth should not accept “American culture” and should aim to stay in Kyrgyzstan and contribute to the country, rather than seeking a life abroad. This stood in opposition to the views of many of the attendees, who constantly asked me how they could leave to study and work abroad. All of these questions were either whispered to me over lunch or during breaks and leisure activities when the experts, NGO staff, and partner organisations were out of earshot, or explained to me outside of the project, when I was staying in different communities with participants. I made sure to be in these spaces for the purpose of allowing participants to speak more freely, and to see me as more than another member of staff at the NGO. Staying with participants in their houses and local communities was of great help in this regard. For example, during organised leisure activities, such as a walk up Sulaiman Too, the sacred mountain of Osh, I walked in groups with participants while the NGO representatives walked separately with the project experts. I also lived with many of the participants in their own communities after the project had ended, creating ample space for such interactions. After these speeches, the whole local policy brief for the region in which the round table was being held was read aloud by one of the partner organisations representatives. This was a two-and-a-half-page document, written in Russian. Participants yawned, played on their phones, and otherwise lost all concentration while this was going on: almost all of them were first language Kyrgyz or Uzbek speakers, and many could not speak Russian well: some could not speak it at all. The NGO representative in attendance was quick to point this out to me, although did nothing about it. At this point, one of the local government representatives

took his coat, donned his hat, and walked out without a word to anyone except the other government representative.

This was followed by a video call with the lead expert of the project while participants sat in silence, until the internet failed, and the call came to an abrupt end. They attempted to play one of the campaign videos, but this too did not work. Instead, the partner organisation representatives nominated a leader from each group of participants, organised by the villages, town, or cities they belonged to, to speak. However, this was completely directed: they were again given questions to answer and asked to explain the policy brief which had just been read out to them. They were asked to be quick and to the point, although only two managed to speak before the video erupted into life and cut them off mid-sentence, quickly followed by the video call suddenly beginning to work again. This interruption by the video and lead expert ended this portion of the round table and, instead of participants speaking, the round table went back to the expert outlining the content of the training workshops and the aims of the project. After the expert finished what could only be described as a lecture, participants were arbitrarily divided into four groups. Some remained with members of their community, whilst most were mixed randomly. They were given ten minutes to prepare posters explaining their recommendations for addressing the problems highlighted by the campaign video, which they had not quite seen all of, and the issues raised by the lead expert in the video call. They were also encouraged to address 'local' issues in these posters with the notion of *Kyrgyz Jarany* in mind, which seemed to run contrary to their organisation into groups not related to their communities. The attendant government representatives actually joined in with one of these groups, all of whom were older men whose status meant that anything they said was immediately written down. Each poster was no more than seven bullet points, and all were presented in five minutes or less. The ideas they contained were very general: to promote friendship; to have more training from the NGO; to have more projects.⁸⁹⁰ They were not given chance to discuss these ideas with the other participants and attendees, and the 'recommendations' they were supposed to contain did not reference any specific issues, raising the questions – what were they recommendations for, and what issues did they come from? They were vague 'solutions' to unspoken problems, lacking any context beyond what had been discussed in the project. One group, however, consisted mostly of those from a singular village, and did address their village specifically, talking about

⁸⁹⁰ I attended all of these sessions and translated the posters myself.

the festival held there to promote interethnic harmony (called *yntymak festival*) as a successful initiative for peace. Despite this, once the presentations had finished the posters were taken by the partner organisation without the NGO being given a copy or even a chance to look at them after they had been taken down. As I participated in the final report, I can state confidently that these were never sent to the NGO.

These examples of the local round tables demonstrate two conflicting presentations of the event, the former facilitating open dialogue and the discussion of diverse perspectives and community issues whilst the latter mirrored and even extended the authoritative, hierarchical epistemic environment of the project. We can see in both the influence of the procedure of the project and its epistemic environment in limiting the scope, content, and effect of the local round tables. In the former, despite such relative openness and dialogue, was limited by its position in the project procedure, following the creation of the policy briefs, and was still controlled by the project experts in terms of its framing and influence upon the nation level of the project. The later, in mirroring the project, demonstrated the pervasiveness of its epistemic environment through the subsumption of participants perspectives below the aims and actions of this environment, and by the pre-determined nature of the project. It also demonstrates the influence of these things upon the partner organisations, who had also attended the training sessions.

Such procedural exclusion was not limited to the effects of these changes made to the sequence of project activities, or to the local round tables alone. An additional aspect of the project procedure which ensured its disconnect with the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan can be seen in the disengagement between the local round tables and the national round tables, both in terms of their position in the project procedure, content, and regarding participant's and attendees attitudes towards them.

The National Round Tables

The initial aim of the project procedure was to develop a bridge between the 'local' and the national: between situated perspectives from diverse contexts and the level of state policy formation. However, in the same manner as the arguments made in preceding sections, the procedural position and content of the national round tables prevented this from occurring in practice. The following section evidences this through a procedural analysis of changes

made to the sequence of events in the project, exploring how these changes excluded the possibility of such a bridge and further contributed to the limiting hierarchical and authoritative epistemic environment of the project. The content of the national round tables will also be explored in this capacity, looking at how this content was constrained by the policy briefs, their content, and their position in the procedure.

There are three ways in which the national round tables demonstrate a detachment from the project as a whole, a disconnect in relation to the wider context, and reinforce the hierarchical and authoritative epistemic environment of the project. These are the result of their position in the project's *procedure*, the *content* of these events, and the exclusive *epistemic environment* which emerges as a result, ensuring the ostracism of situated knowledges and context-specific perspectives in contrary to the project's stated aims.

The position of the national round tables in the project procedure is the first indicator of their detachment from the project as a whole, its wider context, and of how they contribute towards the epistemic environment outlined in this section. The national round tables should have been the final stage of the project, presenting the amalgamated perspectives of local communities to a government audience after they had been gathered through the local round tables and formulated as policy briefs. However, due to disorganisation in the NGO and the procedural changes made as a result, some of the local round tables came *after* their national counterparts, ensuring that any perspectives expressed and gathered would never see the light of day, and certainly would never have been part of the ostensible policy prescription stage in which the national round tables should have been the focus. The procedure of the project ensured that any 'bridge' was rendered impossible, and that each stage of the project excluded, or remained substantially detached from the pre-and proceeding stage. Although this was not the case for all of the national round tables, this disruption nevertheless meant that any genuine or consistent transfer of knowledge from the 'local' to the national levels of the project was rendered unworkable overall.

In addition to this, the participants themselves were excluded from direct or meaningful participation in the national round tables through the project's procedure. During the round tables I attended, participants were able to listen in via video link, but were not permitted to speak, and were not displayed on video. This meant that, although they were able to hear the proceedings, they could not contribute. Their contributions were limited in the procedure of these events to a single video, shown at all the national round tables, which

had been chosen by the NGO from the videos which had been made as part of the online campaign. According to the NGO, this was the “best” one, and the one which best encapsulated the aims and ideas of the project, and was the video used previously in this section concerning the man who dreams of a dystopian Kyrgyzstan after falling asleep, moments after receiving a text asking about his participation in the upcoming election. The NGO thus acted as a gatekeeper, curating their presentation of participants in order to best appeal to the attendees of the national round tables whilst preventing any direct contact between the two groups. This was brought into further relief by the differences between the policy brief themes which determined the themes of the local and national round tables.

The themes of the national round tables were, for the most part, unrelated to those of the local round tables. The discussions held at each stage of the project therefore had little in common with one another, ensuring that instead of presenting ‘local’ ideas for policy consideration, the project often became a series of seminars, led by experts, in which their own ideas were presented. Examples of the themes for the local round tables I attended were: the role of youth in solving youth problems through the local authority administration”; “activating youth to participate in decision-making processes and community life”; “the role of youth in urban and rural electoral participation”; and “analysing the role of youth organisations in promoting the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*”.

These themes were developed through the formation of the policy briefs, which were written prior to the local round tables. For the most part, they followed the general themes of the project, discussing the relationship between participants and their local authorities and the role each must play in securing the aims of the project, how participants can vote conscientiously, participate electorally and in their communities, and how participants can do so whilst embodying the concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany*. As one of the themes shows, questions concerning the rural and urban divide in participation were also raised at these events, despite not being an issue in the training seminars. This represents a small addition made by the experts and shows a minor way in which they curated the local round tables through their control of the policy briefs, and the position of the policy briefs prior to the local round tables. As the previous section highlighted, the allocation of such themes is itself a barrier to open dialogue and the expression of diverse issues and perspectives, as it limits the scope of discussions to a singular, pre-determined theme, decided by the project experts

with input from the NGO. These themes did not arise organically from open discussion, nor did they stem from any input on behalf of the participants.

Despite such limitations some of the local round tables held honest, open, and productive discussions, displaying the capacity of those involved to highlight their issues and those of their community, and to discuss such issues with diverse local, state, and non-state actors to explore possible solutions together. As such, there would have been much from these local round tables which could have fed into the discussions at the national level, had this been made procedurally possible. Instead, the national round tables fielded almost completely different themes, again chosen by experts, and again without the input of participants, their communities, and even the NGO to a significant degree.

The themes of the two national round tables which I attended were: “the influence of religious factors on electoral processes in Kyrgyzstan: the difficulties of making conscientious decisions” and “the interaction of family and society in the process of youth upbringing in Kyrgyzstan”.

The procedure of the national round tables thus ensured their detachment from the project as a whole, and from the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. The former is evidenced predominantly by the difference in themes between the local and national round tables, showing the blatant nature of this detachment. This was reinforced by the exclusion of participants, their perspectives, and those of their communities through curating their involvement, including choosing which of their contributions to highlight, even though all of their contributions had already been limited by the epistemic environment of the project through the notions of education, comprehension, and dissemination. Participants could listen to what the experts and attendees had to say, but they could not be involved in the discussions themselves. The procedure of the project thus contributed to the hierarchical and authoritative epistemic environment of the project by maintaining a hierarchy of knowledge and administering it in an authoritative fashion. The national round tables were expert-led, curated by the NGO, and exclusive in term of who could attend and whose ideas were presented.

This epistemic environment is further reinforced by the content of the national round tables, as demonstrated by their overarching themes. The first of these demonstrates the departure from the main themes of the project, and from what was discussed at the local round tables

by participants. Again, these themes emerged from the policy briefs written for, and presented at the national level. The first example was written by the lead expert, who taught jurisprudence and had been an advisor to the Kyrgyz government in matters of religion, secularism, and the state. This seemed to have been developed and presented by them in order to give their ideas a further platform at the national level, despite their obvious disconnect from the project as a whole. As later sections will explore, they dominated the round table, leading the discussions and determining the content of them. Despite seeming to connect to the project, the second example only serves to highlight the lack of inclusion of 'local' ideas or situated perspectives by asking a question at the nation level which should have been a starting point for the project itself. Instead of this question being posed to participants and their communities, establishing the issues of conscientious voting at the level in which they occurred, the question was instead discussed at the national level with government officials, other NGO representatives, and members of a religious organisation. The question was thus answered in a hierarchical and authoritative manner, rather than being considered at the level where the issues themselves existed and were better understood. This shows the increasing disconnect between the project and the wider context in which it operates: it reinforces the idea of a procedural disconnect in this capacity, in which the sequence of events, including when questions are addressed, ensures such a disconnect. The third example again demonstrates a significant detachment from the project at large, raising the issues of family, society, and their effect on youth upbringing in Kyrgyzstan. This was not discussed at any point in the project and was raised neither by the NGO or by participants prior to this point. This theme again stems from the influence of experts, who wrote the policy brief which identified this issue and therefore raised it at the national round tables, which were built upon these policy briefs.

The content of the national round tables thus demonstrates a clear disconnect between the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan, and a detachment from the content of the rest of the project itself. It rests upon a procedure which excludes the voices of participants, and reinforces that exclusion through introducing themes which have nothing to do with the earlier stages of the project, which the participants were actually involved in. Furthermore, in addressing topics unrelated to issues raised by participants, and of the experts choosing, the national round tables discussed themes which had little to do with the understandings and practices of the wider context to which the

triangulation referred. It existed more as an exercise for the experts to present their ideas, and for central government, leading NGOs, and religious groups to discuss issues which they saw as important, rather than building upon the issues raised during the project. In this manner, the national round tables contributed to the epistemic environment of the project through maintaining the hierarchical and authoritative conditioning of knowledge in the same manner as the training workshops and campaigns.

Rather than operating through education, comprehension, and dissemination, the national round tables instead existed as a space separate in many respects to the rest of the project, ensuring that any policy prescriptions made were the result of discussion procedurally and in terms of their content, detached from the rest of the project and the wider context. It was again a space of exclusion, ensuring that participants and their local communities could not steer discussions, nor contribute directly, and undermining the stated aims of the project as enabling the 'local' and including diverse, situated perspectives. The epistemic environment of the project was thus maintained, and even reinforced, through the limitations identified in the national round tables. The following section explores this epistemic environment through an empirical narrative taken from two of the national round tables.

The national round tables all took place in Bishkek, in conference rooms in fancy hotels, and were attended by government officials, other NGO representatives, and the occasional member of a religious institution. Everyone wore formal clothes, sitting under screens around large tables with notepads, branded pens, and bottles of water. The first event began with an introduction from the minister for culture, information, sports, and youth, who took it upon himself to begin proceedings. Only after his speech did the NGO staff get a chance to introduce the ideas, activities, and aims of the project, which they followed by playing the campaign video which they had judged to be the best. As soon as this had finished, the lead expert took centre stage, marking a significant shift in proceedings. He began very much in line with the project, standing at the head of the table and talking about the two main issues in Kyrgyz democracy as he saw them: the law, and conscientious voting. After a couple of minutes in which he linked the idea of a functioning democracy with peaceful order, he stated that the most dangerous threat, in this regard, was mixing religion and democracy.

Here we begin to see how the position of the experts in the national round tables epitomises the hierarchical, authoritative epistemic environment of the project. Not only had the

experts written the policy briefs, and thus set the agenda for these round tables, but they also occupied centre stage at the events themselves, allowing them to direct discussion and use the events as a platform for their own ideas. The idea of religion did not form any part of the official project procedure and content and was only raised by this expert during the training workshops, when he encouraged critical thinking when considering candidates whose electability was presented on the basis of their religion. It was not raised by participants at any stage. The lead expert nevertheless wrote his policy brief on this subject, using only his own ideas without input from the NGO, participants, or their communities. This represents a significant detachment of the national round tables from the rest of the project. Furthermore, the importance of the influence of Islam, to which the triangulation attested, shows its importance in the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan. When understood in light of the blanket template for peace which the project presented, as a process of democratisation, civic identity development, and voting behaviour education, Islam was presented during this round table as antithetical to peaceful order: as anti-democratic and thus as an obstacle in the path to peace they prescribed. This shows the detachment of the national round tables from the wider context of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan as I understand them. Its introduction by the lead expert, at this final stage of the project and in a manner disconnected from the project and the wider context, further illustrates their role in the epistemic environment of the project, furthering the authoritative and hierarchical approach conditioning of knowledge across the spaces and levels of the project.

The lead expert continued to present his own ideas on this subject, including themes such as terrorism, extremism, the obstacle that religion represents to conscientious voting, and the spread of what he considered to Arab or Pakistani clothing amongst Muslims in Kyrgyzstan. He claimed that religious people only voted on religious lines and were easily manipulated into choosing only equally religious candidates. He argued for better social infrastructure and education to solve this problem, promoting the idea of a secular state. Despite their initial nod of the hat to the context of the project, the lead expert dominated this national round table, setting the agenda, controlling proceedings, and answering the questions given by attendees. This culminated in the NGO representative who gave the closing remarks merely echoing what they had said, despite their introduction having only referred to the ideas, activities, and aims of the project.

The second national round table I attended mirrored this in many ways, although the theme which the experts had decided to present, and address was different. Although the start of the event concerned youth and citizenship, and again began with introductions by the NGO about the project, the predominant theme was external migration and the difficulties faced by families. After showing the video, and following the same initial procedure of the project, another expert spoke about the issue of divorce, the effects on children, and the issues faced by Kyrgyz families, ending with a bullet-point presentation on their recommendations. The lead expert then again took centre stage, expanding on these issues, and introducing the issues of bride kidnap and migration, again finishing with their own recommendations. In this manner, they mirrored the policy briefs for this event, providing a discussion centred upon their own ideas, and finishing with their own recommendations. The issues they raised were again notably disconnected from those of the project and, although serious and important issues in Kyrgyzstan, had little to do with understandings and practices of peace as they were presented to me in the wider context. The authoritative and hierarchical epistemic environment was mirrored in this round table, being expert-led and, in terms of content and procedure, being expert dominated. The lead expert even ran significantly over their allotted time to talk without interruption, and talked passionately about their credentials and credibility, justifying their ideas, claims, and recommendation through their history of working with many NGOs and government bodies since independence. In this manner, they rather explicitly attempted to create a hierarchical and authoritative epistemic environment for their own ideas, justifying their detachment and disconnect from the project and wider context through their authority. They reified the position of experts in such projects, arguing that experts should give recommendations to donors, NGOs, and the state. The questions asked of the experts by attendees supported their position in this regard, as they concerned only the policy documents or what the experts had said in their presentations, rather than addressing the project activities and ideas.

The attendees had the same observations as me at the end of the national round tables. They too could see this dominance and were critical of the epistemic environment adapted and exploited by the experts. During conversations with them after these events they raised the issue that participants from the project and their communities had no voice in these events, suggesting that the experts had just provided their own opinions on issues which they themselves had selected. Some pointed this out in the policy briefs, suggesting that

they were not really analytical: they included little data and no empirical observations, showing that they were mostly opinions mixed with personal recommendations. During lunch, the attendees went even further, explaining that they thought the national round tables seemed overly disconnected from the project, and they could not see what exactly they had to do with it. For example, a young woman had often raised the issues of migration to Russia for work and the lack of employment in her local area as the most significant issues, yet these were beyond the limitations of the project and thus excluded from its later stages. As some of the local round tables came after the national events, I showed participants the themes and asked them what they thought: they made the same observations and were surprised that the policy briefs and national round tables did not connect to what they had learned, or to what they had said in the earlier stages of the project. A group of young men and women with whom I spoke directly after the project said that they did not recognise some of the themes as belonging to the same project. This highlights the rather stark disconnect between the national round tables and the wider context.

The procedure and content of the national round tables can thus be seen to have been detached from the wider project and disconnected from the wider context, supported by an epistemic environment, inculcated by the project experts, which allowed them to field their own ideas, present their own recommendations, and do so authoritatively and in a position above that of the NGO in terms of their control and influence. The partial valorisation of the local displayed by the NGO in their documentation was thus undermined by its effacement in practice.

Taken as a whole, the preceding discussion of the specific context demonstrates the disconnect between the wider and specific contexts of understandings and practices of peace examined in this thesis. The fieldwork undertaken in this regard and the resultant text above thus represent the application of optionality as a critical device, conducted in tandem with optionality as methodology. The application of optionality as a critical device in the previous chapter, in tandem with its position as the guiding basis of this thesis' methodology, demonstrates the central proposition of this thesis; that optionality is a necessary reconstructive norm. The disconnect between the wider and specific context, and the authoritative imposition of externally developed knowledge that this entails, stands in direct contrast to optionality proposed as the conditions of the possibility for peace. as such,

this thesis proposes optionality as a potential means of overcoming this disconnect, rethinking peace in a manner that takes situated knowledges and understandings and practices of peace seriously, aiming to incorporate them into the peacebuilding process. However, this thesis does not attempt to provide a roadmap for its operationalisation in this regard: this would need to be the subject of another work of significant length. Therefore, the following section offers a summary of the arguments and research undertaken, concluding this thesis by readdressing the normative and theoretical aims of optionality as the conditions of the possibility for peace, providing a discussion of the ways in which this should be pursued in later works.

A SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

This thesis has endeavoured to present and expound an approach to rethinking peace and peacebuilding beyond the predominant liberal and post-liberal approaches through the development and operationalisation of optionality. This is intended to contribute towards the burgeoning attempts to rethink peace beyond their limitations across the academic literature both theoretically, in the development of a new theoretical framework and methodology, and empirically, in terms of its operationalisation in relation to the context of Kyrgyzstan.

The thesis began with an exploration of the literature concerning considerations of peace and conflict, considering both the presiding academic approaches and their application to Kyrgyzstan. This explained the limitations of the primary approaches, situating the thesis alongside academic efforts to rethink peace and peacebuilding practice. In order to achieve this, this thesis elucidated the concept of optionality through the works of Mannheim, Morgenthau, and Arendt; operationalised this concept in the form of a methodological approach towards the field; and explored the ways in which this approach compliments and further develops ethnographic methods. In these capacities, optionality was then effectuated through eighteen months of fieldwork, developing a general characterisation of understandings and practices of peace in Kyrgyzstan through a form of triangulation, alongside an in-depth ethnographic study of a project undertaken by an international

peacebuilding NGO. This was expressed through two chapters: the former explored this general characterisation as the “wider context”; the latter examined the “specific context” of the NGO and project. This was undertaken as a means of not only investigating the divergent understandings and practices of peace contained within each context, but also to scrutinise the relationship between them.

This relationship was explored through the epistemic environment and procedures in the enaction of the NGO’s project. The examination of the epistemic environment within this specific context looked at the conditions for knowledge it established, and how only particular knowledge was legitimised, facilitated, and developed. This was manifest as a hierarchical, authoritative imposition enabled through education and comprehension testing, and spread through prescribed means and modes of dissemination. The procedures and sequences of events manifest in the enaction of the project were demonstrated to have enabled and developed this problematic epistemic environment, reinforcing the imposition of understandings and practices of peace which characterised the project. This insured that the project was built upon instruction rather than exchange, excluding the situated knowledges that characterised the wider context. The procedures examined included the planned events of the project, the role of experts and staff, their relationship to participants, and the changes made to the procedure over time. The epistemic environment and procedures were thus shown to be mutually reinforcing and co-constitutive.

Optionality was employed in this manner, and in the course of this research as a critical device. However, as the conditions of the possibility for peace, optionality is also proposed in this thesis as a reconstructive norm to enable the rethinking of peace. Optionality is intended to be a potential conceptual means of opening-up and unobstructing approaches to peace, (re)connecting practices of peace to the plurality of understandings and practices used to express and enact it. Such plurality is a result of the distinctness and diversity of individuals, groups, and arises from distinct and particular geographical and epistemic contexts. The use of optionality in this thesis aims to facilitate and enable these understandings and practices of peace by proposing an *approach towards* this plurality and contextuality, enabling and facilitating the understandings and practices of peace of those involved in moving beyond conflict in the locales and contexts in which they live. Optionality is thus a guiding reconstructive norm, aiming to bridge the gap between the specific contexts of peacebuilding practices and the understandings and practices of peace which already

exist in the wider contexts in which they operate. This highlights the tension between optionality and the field observations presented in the empirical chapters: optionality stands in direct opposition to the disconnect and imposition identified between the wider and specific contexts in this thesis and is intended more generally as a possible approach that could diminish this division. This constitutes a rethinking of peace by moving beyond the arrogant impositions of the liberal peace, and the problems identified within post-liberal approaches, despite the fact that optionality in some ways supports some of the foundational ideas of the post-liberal. By way of a conclusion, this thesis proposes optionality as a reconstructive norm: optionality should be understood as an approach towards the field that proposes the conditions of the possibility for peace as a means of diminishing the imposition, epistemic hierarchy, and essentialisation of peace that this thesis has explored through its empirical research. The following section concludes this thesis by exploring the theoretical and normative aims of optionality in terms of dialogue, explaining the key ideas in optionality as a reconstructive norm. The section ends by paving the way for future research in how this could manifest in empirical terms.

The term ‘dialogue’ is somewhat of a buzzword in peacebuilding, often in the form of the assumption that dialogue provides “a path to peace, overcoming silence and repression”.⁸⁹¹ However, despite accusations of the fetishisation or meaninglessness of various considerations of dialogue in peacebuilding it is nonetheless of essential value, especially in optionality as a reconstructive norm. Whether individuals, groups, or conflict parties act in a manner conducive to peace is determined by their relation to their fellow humans: peace always articulates a relation to an “other”.⁸⁹² Issues of peace are therefore fundamentally concerned with questions of difference and how it can be negotiated.⁸⁹³ Such negotiation must occur through some form of dialogue.

There are two fundamental approaches which can characterise such dialogue. Although these are opposite ends of a spectrum, these categorisations allow us to broadly consider

⁸⁹¹ Laban Hinton, Alexander, ‘Rethinking Peace: Dialogue Fetish’, in Albergh, Jeremiah; Hinton, Alexander Laban and Shani, Giorgio (eds.), *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 169.

⁸⁹² Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace in Difference – Peace Through Dialogue about and across Difference(s): A Phenomenological Approach to Rethinking Peace’ in Albergh, Jeremiah; Hinton, Alexander Laban and Shani, Giorgio (eds.), *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 173.

⁸⁹³ Ibid.

understandings and practices of peace and peacebuilding as embodying, to a greater or lesser degree, the fundamental principles of each categorisation. These are, briefly:

- essentialist approaches, built upon hegemony, hierarchy, assimilation, and exclusion; principles themselves developed from the subjugation of difference to epistemological (or ontological) principles of the self.⁸⁹⁴
- Non-essentialist approaches, built upon the cultivation and positive embrace of difference,⁸⁹⁵ living *towards* difference.⁸⁹⁶

The liberal peace fits clearly into the former. Post-liberal approaches position themselves towards the latter yet, as chapter two of this thesis explored, often incorporate essentialist approaches in spite of the language used and aims professed. The peacebuilding project explored in this thesis is a clear example of this. Optionality, however, is firmly situated in the latter approach, and is presented here as a reconstructive norm which, building upon the research conducted through its position as a critical device, establishes a new framework for a rethinking peace. To do this, optionality attempts to provide a potential framework for the negotiation of difference in non-essentialist terms, with empathy and in recognition of the particularity of contexts. In practical terms, “a non-essentialist way of dealing with difference surmounts in the maxim of political dialogue, a dialogue that is empathetic to differences and steadily moves to and provokes the edges of its own rationality”.⁸⁹⁷ The operationalisation of optionality would provide the conditions for such a dialogue as the conditions of the possibility for peace.

The core of the practical operationalisation of optionality, therefore, centres upon the “interrogation and interlocution of different ontologies and epistemologies in local peacebuilding contexts”.⁸⁹⁸ As a reconstructive norm, optionality is a conceptual framework that aims to facilitate and bolster the community ownership of peace through the

⁸⁹⁴ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015): p. 41.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid: p. 104.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid: 140.

⁸⁹⁷ Behr, Hartmut, *Politics of Difference: Epistemologies of Peace*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015): p. 140.

⁸⁹⁸ Behr, Hartmut, ‘Peace in Difference – Peace Through Dialogue about and across Difference(s): A Phenomenological Approach to Rethinking Peace’ in Alberg, Jeremiah; Hinton, Alexander Laban and Shani, Giorgio (eds.), *Rethinking Peace: Discourse, Memory, Translation and Dialogue*, (London: Roman and Littlefield, 2019): p. 185.

interchange of 'unobstructed' dialogue, about and across difference, in a manner profoundly sensitive to the particularities of distinct/unique epistemic contexts.

Operationalising Optionality as a Reconstructive Norm: Outlines

However, this still leaves the question of what the operationalisation of optionality would look like in practice, as this thesis has been primarily concerned with optionality as a deconstructive, critical device. A detailed discussion of this would be too much for this thesis, and therefore the following section will briefly address this question and pave the way for future research on this question. Having emphasised the importance of dialogue, three other defining aspects of optionality as a reconstructive norm could be proposed, although these are only suggestions. They are empathy; emphasising the particularity of contexts; and de-essentialising difference. These aspects could serve as guides for the activities that might occur in the operationalisation of optionality, enabling this process to address the concepts key concern with facilitating a non-essentialist approach to peace.

To begin with, empathy must be distinguished from sympathy. Sympathy entails feelings of pity for the other, enacted from a position above and beyond their problems. At its core, it is to feel a kind of sorrow for their misfortunes. Empathy, on the other hand, implies a process of engaging *with* the other, moving towards a compassionate understanding built upon shared humanity and a deeper relation to the other, their problems, and ultimately their lifeworld. Empathy could therefore be a key aspect of negotiating difference. A potential pathway towards engendering an empathetic dialogue for peace in line with optionality might be found in creating, sharing, and performing music. In the literature concerning music and empathy, it is not uncommon to find claims and presentations of music as a 'universal language'; as a path to overcoming difference and promoting wellbeing.⁸⁹⁹ It is an approach already linked to peacebuilding: examples include include the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, founded by Edward Said and Daniel Barenboim to bring together Israeli and Palestinian musicians, and the UNICEF's appointment of classical musicians as goodwill ambassadors to areas of deprivation, disaster, and conflict.⁹⁰⁰

⁸⁹⁹ Clarke, Eric et al, 'Music, Empathy, and Cultural Understanding', *Physics of Life Reviews*, Vol. 15, (2015): p. 62.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Music can create an emotional response in listeners which engenders empathy. This can occur in several ways, from “pre-conscious motor resonance with musical features that resemble the vocal and motor expression of emotion” to emotional contagion and empathising with “the imaged emotional experiences of the performer or composer”.⁹⁰¹ Music thus creates an empathetic process through which a mentalisation and imaginative perspective-taking occurs in relation to the performer or composer,⁹⁰² allowing the listener to perceive alternative or even conflicting worldviews and perspectives, imagine them almost as a narrative, and therefore approach an understanding of them. This can also be achieved through singing or playing the songs of, or together with, the performer or composer. Performing another’s music evokes the same kind of empathy but could also provide a further connection with the performer or composer through not only listening to their music, but actively participating in it. The same can be said of playing together with another group or individual, joining this process of empathy-making with one of togetherness in the shared endeavour and emotion of playing or creating music *in togetherness*. Therefore, when employed to engender empathy in a process for peace, music does not have to be simply created by one and listened to by another: it can be a process of togetherness – playing together, singing together, composing together, or even simply listening together. In this manner, music and musicking could be part of the operationalisation of optionality, creating a non-essentialised space for dialogue through musicality that promotes empathy and, as a result, togetherness.

Although empathy is proposed here as an essential starting point for this operationalisation, two further ideas could bolster and develop empathy within this process. These are emphasising the particularity of contexts and moving towards the de-essentialisation of difference, and are understood here as co-constitutive. Emphasising the particularity of contexts allows for the representation and subsequent understanding of the temporal, contingent, and context-dependent narrative, or ‘self’, presented by the groups and individuals involved, and this acts as a starting point for the de-essentialisation of difference. One potential avenue for pursuing these aspects in the operationalisation of optionality could be through storytelling and the use of narratives.

⁹⁰¹ Clarke, Eric et al, ‘Music, Empathy, and Cultural Understanding’, *Physics of Life Reviews*, Vol. 15, (2015): p. 69.

⁹⁰² Ibid.

The roots of conflict are often to be found embedded in stories; stories that construct enemies, fuel discord, and justify violence and entrench division.⁹⁰³ However, storytelling and the presentation of narratives can also be a path towards peace. Each group or perspective within a (post) conflict context adopt a narrative which justifies their own claims. Although material, political, or economic issues often form the heart of conflicts, they are made salient through such narratives.⁹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, storytelling is an effective way to communicate ambiguous meaning⁹⁰⁵, allowing for the presentation and discussion of diverse and divergent perspectives and narratives without the implication or necessity of a singular, fixed 'truth'. When participating in storytelling, people expect to have to work to grasp meanings, accepting that they must engage with the narrative and that interpretations may be incorrect or partial.⁹⁰⁶ In addition, stories call for more stories: people often respond to stories by telling one of their own, which can corroborate or contradict the initial narrative,⁹⁰⁷ making storytelling an excellent means of engendering an alternative form of dialogue in post-conflict contexts.

Building upon the empathy engendered through music and musicking, telling stories and sharing narratives provides another possible step in developing a dialogue in-line with peace-as-optionality. Together, these approaches could provide a practical route for emphasising the particularity of contexts, allowing for a dialogue about and across differences and thus engaging in a process of de-essentialising difference. Through this process, groups and individuals can not only represent themselves on their own terms, but also build upon empathetic feelings to negotiate differences in a manner conducive to peace. Storytelling and the performance of such narratives foster empathetic awareness, providing a platform for the interrogation and interlocution of different ontologies and epistemologies in concrete conflict contexts. In doing so, they demonstrate the particularity of such contexts and, in tandem, begin the process of de-essentialising difference.

Although there are many potential roots to operationalise optionality and begin its application as a reconstructive norm for rethinking peace, these short examples have

⁹⁰³ Fairey, Tiffany, 'Peace is Possible: The Role of Strategic Narratives in Peacebuilding', *Media, War and Conflict*, (2023): p. 5.

⁹⁰⁴ Ron, Yiftach and Maoz, Ifat, 'Dangerous Stories: Encountering Narratives of the Other in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, Vol. 19, Iss. 03, (2013): p. 281-294.

⁹⁰⁵ Polletta, Francesca et al., 'The Sociology of Storytelling', *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 37, Iss. 01, (2011): p. 122.

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid.

hopefully provided further insight into the nature of optionality, its potential for use within a process for peace, and has outlined a series of avenues for further research and the development of optionality.

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