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Decolonization in Kyrgyzstan from an (Inter-)Generational Perspective

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Decolonization in Kyrgyzstan from an (Inter-)Generational Perspective. Political Socialization of Youth in Bishkek

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Abstract:

In Kyrgyzstan, political attitudes toward Russia reveal a notable generational divide. While the older generation generally holds a favorable view of the Russian regime, Kyrgyzstani youth adopt a more pragmatic, if not critical, stance. This divide has been further amplified by recent societal movements toward decolonization, which resonate strongly with younger generations and deepen generational differences. These tensions are complicated by Kyrgyz cultural norms, which discourage youth from contradicting their elders, who are expected to provide moral guidance. Given these cultural expectations, it is likely that young Kyrgyzstanis with anti-Russian views experienced conflict with older generations, challenging the traditional norms of filial piety.

This thesis draws on ten biographical-narrative interviews to explore the political socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth, identifying key biographical events that fostered the development of decolonial consciousness. It also examines how intergenerational relationships influenced the formation of their political attitudes. The findings suggest that decolonization profoundly shaped the life trajectories of young Kyrgyzstanis, leading them to reject colonial narratives of Russian cultural superiority and embrace their Kyrgyz heritage. Despite the cultural expectation for parents to provide moral guidance, many elders refrained from imparting their pro-Russian views, allowing alternative socializing influences—such as schools, universities, peers, media, and political events—to play a more prominent role in the youth's political development. Although decolonization has been a source of intergenerational conflict, the thesis also reveals opportunities for dialogue and the potential to strengthen intergenerational cohesion.

Keywords:
Kyrgyzstan, decolonization, political socialization, youth, intergeneration conflict

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Cover picture: Child playing in in the backyard of the National Museum of History, Lenin statue in the background. May 2024, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan © Philipp Zimmermann

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1. Introduction

In July 2023, I embarked on an exchange semester at the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. I planned to immerse myself in the Kyrgyzstani[1] society to obtain an understanding of its dynamics and discover a pressing social issue, which I could examine within my master thesis. Experiencing everyday life in Bishkek and beyond, I aimed at closely observing my surroundings to find inspiration for my research project. Two personal experiences left a lasting impression on me and aided the maturation of an idea, which would eventually become the topic of my master thesis.

The first experience occurred in Bishkek's Victory Park, as I sat down next to the "Monument to Military Bravery" to rest from a walk in the southern part of the city. An elderly Kyrgyz man approached me as my foreign appearance elicited his curiosity. Soon, an amicable conversation about my origins and life in Bishkek evolved into a discussion about "the situation in Ukraine". The man expressed his condemnation of "Ukrainian fascists", highlighting the necessity of a Russian military intervention. Being well aware of the Kremlin's narratives justifying the Russian invasion of Ukraine, I tried my best to refute his arguments. However, neither my long-standing ties to Ukraine, nor my recent visit to the country in February 2022 convinced him of the accuracy of my reasoning and the credibility of my knowledge. Although he never visited Ukraine, he dismissed my knowledge with a patronizing comment: "I am an expert, I studied political economy in Moscow in the 70's". As my resistance to his position apparently angered the man, we quickly ended our conversation and said goodbye.

During my stay in Kyrgyzstan, similar disputes with elderly people occurred repeatedly, until I became frustrated and began to avoid discussing politics with elderly people. I began to accept that pro-Russian attitudes are prevalent among most elderly people in Kyrgyzstan and that I have no power to change this. The pro-Russian sentiments of the elderly often stem from their nostalgic memories of the Soviet Union, as illustrated by a statement made by Sadyr Japarov, President of the Kyrgyz Republic, on February 24, 2022, the day that Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine:

[1] Throughout the thesis I consistently distinguish between the terms "Kyrgyz" and "Kyrgyzstani". "Kyrgyz" refers to an ethnic community and "Kyrgyzstani" refers to the citizens of the country, including a variety of ethnic groups.

> "We were with Russia for 200 years and we are ready to be together with Russia for another 300 years." (Sadyr Japarov, 2022, as cited in Roziev, 2022)

Despite Japarov's early support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan soon retreated towards an official position of neutrality (Masalieva, 2022). However, Japarov's initial statement demonstrates how the memory of shared history continues to inform political relations between Bishkek and Moscow. Despite the state's rhetoric of neutrality, people rallied in front of the Russian Embassy in Bishkek to express their disavowal for the Russian aggression against Ukraine (Kopytin, 2022), until the Kyrgyz government banned the protests (Putz, 2022). While the public support for the Putin regime in Kyrgyzstan remains high compared to other post-Soviet states, the Russian president's approval rating dropped from 76% in 2021 to 63% in 2022 (Ritter & Crabtree, 2023). Russia's war on Ukraine has thus provoked mixed responses, but has generally led to a slight decline in the image of Putin's regime in Kyrgyzstan.

Disagreements over the interpretation of the events divided entire families, as disputes over conflicting narratives unfolded in the quotidian sphere (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 6). Soon after arriving in Kyrgyzstan, I realized that age is an important predictor of how people position themselves to the war: while I felt increasingly distant from older elderly people, knowing about their pro-Russian sentiments, I noticed passionate support for Ukraine among Kyrgyzstani youth. When I started to research the topic more thoroughly, I obtained empirical validation of my anecdotal evidence of the correlation between and attitudes toward the war in Ukraine. A survey by Central Asia Barometer (2022b) confirmed that youth rather condemn the war, while elderly tend to support it.

Generational differences in political attitudes may be explained by Karl Mannheim's theory of generational consciousness. He argues that each age cohort encounters a unique set of historical conditions, which provides them with a generation-specific understanding of social problems. While coming of age, each generation experiences particular social, cultural, and political changes which leaves an imprint on them, resulting in a distinct generational consciousness (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 3). Engvall (2023, p. 8) argues that the specific experiences of the elderly, who grew up in Soviet Kyrgyzstan and youth that was born in independent Kyrgyzstan also led to such generation-specific understandings of politics, particularly in the way that these age groups look at Russia. He argues that the younger generation views the country primarily in terms of employment and material opportunities,

while older people who have a strong sense of Soviet nostalgia feel an emotional attachment to contemporary Russia, which makes them more susceptible to Russian propaganda. Meanwhile, the post-Soviet generation has been shaped by political developments since their country's independence and is therefore less inclined to accept Russia's colonial approach of dealing with Kyrgyzstan (Engvall, 2023). Elderly see the future of their country within the Russian sphere of influence, while Kyrgyzstani youth is becoming increasingly vocal, demanding emancipation from Russian dependence and full restoration of the countries' sovereignty (Lottholz, 2022, p. 82ff.; Nogoibaeva, 2023).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has revealed a generational divide between youth and elderly in Kyrgyzstan. However, the roots of this age-related disagreement extent beyond the recent military events in Ukraine. They are rooted in fundamentally different understandings of their country's past and divergent visions for its future. While the elderly are upholding their positive assessments of Russian politics and maintain nostalgic emotions towards the Soviet past, a growing number of youth in Central Asia demands decolonization, especially since Russia launched its war against Ukraine (Bekbassova, 2023).

The term decolonization is defined as the undoing of race relations imposed by colonial powers, which portray indigenous peoples as "primitive" and "backward", in contrast to "modern" and "progressive" colonizers, who claim to have introduced civilizational advancement to their respective colonies (Nayar, 2015, p. 31). Decolonization involves emancipation from economic, cultural, and political dependence of the former colonial power, but also more profound processes of reconnecting with precolonial traditions and cultural practices (Nayar, 2015, p. 45f.).

In the context of Kyrgyzstan, decolonization entails a variety of processes related to history, politics, and self-identification. Young people are questioning the continued Russian influence in Kyrgyzstan and the persistent cultural, economic, and political domination of their country (Engvall, 2023, p. 8). Furthermore, decolonial actors aim to dismantle racial hierarchies and take pride in being Kyrgyz (Nogoibaeva, 2023, p. 7f.). This manifests itself in an increased interest to learn the Kyrgyz language and study Kyrgyz culture and traditions. In addition, growing public interest in Stalinist repressions and famine reflects a critical re-examination of Kyrgyz history. This includes challenging colonial narratives, which claim that Russian and Soviet rule brought civilizational progress to "backward" Central Asians, and highlighting

colonial violence and atrocities committed by imperial forces (Doolotkeldieva, 2023). Given the inclination of elderly to continue admiring Russia, compared to the growing criticism among young people, it appears that the recent trend of decolonization has resonated primarily among Kyrgyzstani youth, further entrenching the generational divide between young and old.

While the first described personal experience that inspired this thesis was about the generational differences outlined above, the second event involved my witnessing of intergenerational relationships between young and elderly people. During my stay in Kyrgyzstan, I was able to join a group trip to the Sary Chelek Biosphere Reserve in the southern part of the country, that coincided with my birthday. After a full day of hiking around pristine mountain lakes, the group prepared a birthday party for me, which was scheduled to start at midnight. I remember with great joy, how these young people, whom I had just met that day, sang me a birthday song and spontaneously decorated a watermelon with candles for me to blow out.

However, the evening took a surprising turn, when the only older man in the group decided to take over and curate the rest of the evening. The festive atmosphere quickly vanished as the rest of the evening was dominated by his vulgar jokes and coercive drinking games. Noticing that everyone else was uncomfortable with the man's behavior, I asked why we were not stopping him from ruining our party. "He is an old man and in Kyrgyzstan, we have to respect the elderly. We can't do anything about it", one of the girls replied. I was surprised by her response, because in my understanding, respectful behavior is a mutual obligation, not a one-sided liability. I felt frustrated because the man seemed to be abusing cultural notions of the authority of elders to impose his unpleasant behavior on the group. This became even more apparent the next day, when he continued to drink in the morning and harassed our female tour guide on the way back to Bishkek. Again, no one dared to confront him, and everyone silently tolerated his misbehavior.

Frustrated by my companions' inability to confront the elderly participant's abusive behavior, I began to explore the academic literature on age relations among Kyrgyz people. I learned about pronounced age hierarchies and cultural taboos about speaking out against the elderly. In Kyrgyzstan, there is a strong moral obligation to follow the guidance of the elderly, especially elderly men, and to refrain from challenging their positions (Beyer, 2016, p. 82). In Kyrgyz

families, fathers are considered to be the sole leaders and children must obey by all means (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005, p. 152). At the same time, Kyrgyzstani society is characterized by gerontocratic authoritarian leadership. The country's youth are excluded from political power and prevented from participating in decision-making processes (Ismailbekova, 2020; Schwartz, 2014, p. 197), based on the claim that they lack experience and knowledge (Coppenrath, 2020).

These observations of generational differences and age discrimination form the starting point of my master thesis. The thesis scrutinizes biographies of political socialization of a specific segment of the younger generation, which has negative attitudes towards Russia, supports Ukraine, and is in the process of regaining confidence in its Kyrgyz ethnicity, culture, and language. Having grown up in a society that has embraced Russia's strategic engagement in the region (Engvall, 2023; Lewis, 2015; Sharshenova, 2021) and having been raised by a generation that was heavily exposed to Russification during Soviet rule, while maintaining largely positive and nostalgic memories of the Soviet Union (Dadabaev, 2010, 2021; Esipova & Ray, 2013), it is expected, that these individuals engaged in conflictual intergenerational encounters throughout their formative years. In violation of cultural notions of the authority of elders, many young Kyrgyzstani people emancipated themselves from their parents' pro-Russian outlook on society, in order to develop their own understanding of history and politics, which bears potential for intergenerational tensions.

The thesis uncovers the formative experiences which led these young people to question hegemonic interpretations of history and dominant political attitudes, and reveals which events were decisive for the development of their decolonial consciousness. Furthermore, the thesis aims to shed light on the negotiation of intergenerational conflict over the prospect of decolonization and Russia's role in Kyrgyzstan's future on the familial and societal level – as perceived through the eyes of the young interviewees.

Four questions guided the research for this thesis:

1. How did Kyrgyzstan's younger generation begin to challenge the popular narratives of their elders, which portray Soviet rule as a blessing for Kyrgyzstan and advocate for continued close political ties with Russia?
2. How did young Kyrgyzstanis shed feelings of inferiority about their language and traditions and began to take pride in their Kyrgyz origins?

3. What were the formative experiences and turning points in their biographies that contributed to the establishment of anti-Russian attitudes and the emergence of a decolonial mindset?
4. How are disagreements about decolonization, the war in Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan's relationship with Russia discussed within the family?

This thesis applies sociological theories of generations, postcolonial theories, and the concept of political socialization. Political socialization research examines how youth acquire their political orientations during their upbringing and how political attitudes and orientations are transmitted from one generation to the next (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 1). Initially, studies of political socialization were preoccupied with parent-child relations. More recent research incorporates the analysis of the impact of media, peers, school, and political events on the emergence of political orientations during adolescence (Habashi, 2017, p. 19). Political socialization research suggests that early life experiences are particularly impactful for the adoption of political attitudes and orientations, because children have not yet formed political opinions and are most receptive to political stimuli (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 3).

The thesis aims to uncover the generational experiences of Kyrgyzstani youth, which shaped their outlook on Kyrgyz history, language, and culture, as well as contemporary Russian politics. It attempts to disentangle the impact of various socializing agents which have influenced the development of their political consciousness. To answer these questions, the thesis draws on empirical material collected in Bishkek in April and May 2024. The data consists of ten biographical-narrative interviews with young people from Kyrgyzstan, aged 18-29.

The following chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the research, drawing on theories of generational sociology, political socialization, and postcolonial thought. It develops a theoretical framework which incorporates perspectives on social change and continuity suggested by generational sociology to analyze processes of decolonization. The third chapter provides a comprehensive review of the literature, providing an overview of intergenerational family dynamics in Kyrgyzstan and the political socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth. This chapter also features an analysis of empirical data provided by the Central Asia Barometer (CAB). The data offers a nuanced understanding of the differences in political attitudes toward Russia across generations. The fourth chapter outlines the research design, including a description of the interview process, the sampling strategies employed, and the methods of data analysis.

Chapter five then presents the results of the research and provides the answers to the research questions formulated above. The thesis ends with a conclusion, which summarizes the main findings.

2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the thesis, including the sociology of generations and postcolonial theory. Section 2.1 outlines macro-societal approaches to the concept of generations, emphasizing how age cohorts develop a distinct generational consciousness and specific approach to politics. Section 2.2 focuses on the micro-perspective, discussing the intergenerational transmission of political values and the political socialization of youth. In section 2.3, I will briefly define key concepts of postcolonial studies and position Kyrgyzstan within the postcolonial debate. Finally, I will discuss how decolonization processes can be analyzed from the perspective of generational sociology by merging sociological theories of generations with postcolonial studies. The final section of this chapter will outline a theoretical construct that integrates both approaches and develop a theoretical perspective which guides this research.

2.1 Sociology of Generations

Generations are an important social category and element of social stratification, much like class and gender (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 99). The concept of generations is commonly employed in media and public discourse to narrate social and political change (Connolly, 2019, p. 154). Since Karl Mannheim wrote his foundational essay on "The Problem of Generations" in 1927, sociology has reclaimed the topic from the disciplines of biology and psychology (Burnett, 2016, p. 27). Following the mitigation of the 20th century class conflict, combined with the increasing uncertainty about future living conditions, generational belonging became a central catalyst for social tensions (Kohli, 2007, p. 1902). Furthermore, the generational perspective provides a productive lens for analyzing social change and continuity (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 103).

The concept of generation can be approached in two different ways: the first considers generations within their micro-setting of the family as lineage relationships. This perspective focuses on the political socialization of youth, which includes the transmission of political attitudes from parents to children and the general impact of formative experiences during childhood and adolescence on the development of political orientations (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 35f.; Stoker, 2014, p. 378). The dynamics of political socialization in the micro-context and intergenerational transmission in the family environment will be further elaborated in

section 2.2. The second approach to generations focuses on the macro-societal perspective and groups people who were born at the same period of time into a cohort. While these cohorts move through different life stages from childhood to adulthood, they experience a particular historical period and generation-defining events at the same age. Generation-defining experiences may include traumatic events, a set of cultural and political mentors, demographic shifts that affect the distribution of resources, and a sacred place that sustains a longing for utopia (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 96), as well as wars or the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Although the intervals at which cohorts are grouped into a generation are arbitrary, they are recognized as a political generation, because it is assumed that these cohorts develop a shared generational consciousness (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 35f.; Stoker, 2014, p. 378f.).

Generational experiences are conditioned by strategic opportunities and difficulties attached to each generational cohort. Each generation encounters a specific set of life chances for acquiring material and cultural resources (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 93ff.). By sharing these experiences and a specific location in society, members of a generation develop a common generational consciousness. This includes a shared habitus, a common culture, and a collective memory (Connolly, 2019, p. 156; Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 93). Generations are composed of individuals, which have been emotionally and cognitively formed by a particular spatiotemporal context (Schwartz, 2014, p. 191). Nevertheless, historical stimuli can have different impacts on generations and can favor diverse political orientations within an age cohort (Burnett, 2016, p. 35). Increasingly fragmented lifestyles and flexible labor markets create more divergent generational experiences, which contribute to more fluid generational identities (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 98).

Generational differences

Since each generation encounters a unique set of historical conditions, each generation experiences different processes of acquiring a generation-specific understanding of social problems. Social, cultural, and (geo-)political changes and transformative events provide each cohort with a distinct generational consciousness (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 3). Critical events can cause generation-defining memories, which can result in generational differences, considering patterns of political views and attitudes (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 8). While disruptive political events at a specific time affect every member of society, the age of an

individual at the time of these events determines the extent to which this experience is internalized and influences the formation of political attitudes. Younger generations, who are in the process of developing a generational consciousness are more likely to be influenced by such formative events (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 12). The resulting generational rifts can have political, cultural, and economic dimensions (Kohli, 2007, p. 1900).

In the case of Kyrgyzstan, it is also instructive to consider changing historical conditions and disruptive events as the cause of different political attitudes between generations. Older generations experienced social stability and a certain degree of economic prosperity during the late phase of the Soviet Union, while its dissolution led to the loss of socio-economic status, downward mobility, and impoverishment, all of which are considered drastic experiences for this generation (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 72; Schwartz, 2014, p. 188). In light of these experiences, the elderly tend to view the Soviet period with a sense of nostalgia, which also contributes to a strong emotional attachment to present-day Russia (Dadabaev, 2010, p. 26; Engvall, 2023, p. 8).

Younger people who grew up in post-independence Kyrgyzstan have a more pragmatic stance on Russia, seeing it mostly as a source of remittances and labor opportunities, and are generally less inclined to accept Russian domination of Kyrgyz politics and economy (Engvall, 2023, p. 10). Finally, the generational framework also suggests that Russia's war on Ukraine has had a more profound impact on the political attitudes of the younger generation, leaving an important imprint on their generational consciousness. To extent to which the war in Ukraine may have exacerbated generational divisions in Kyrgyzstan is discussed more detailed in chapter 3.

Empirical measures of generational differences are inconclusive because it is difficult to identify the underlying causes of attitudinal variations across different age cohorts. While the generational framework suggests that different socialization experiences during specific historical periods are responsible for different political orientations, it is also possible that life-cycle effects are at play (Stoker, 2014, p. 384). Depending on their age, individuals occupy a specific position in society, which may translate into age-specific political attitudes. Reaching adulthood is associated with increased political mobilization, as adults turn into stakeholders, such as property owners or employees. Upon retirement, old people often disengage from social life and suffer from health constraints, which results in marginalization within the

political system (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 8f.). These age-specific and generational experiences may overlap, making it difficult to disentangle life-cycle and generational effects when measuring differences in political attitudes across age groups (Stoker, 2014, p. 384).

Intergenerational relations: conflict and solidarity

Intergenerational relations are organized around normative expectations and social obligations (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 94). The intergenerational contract envisions the involvement of families and public education in the socialization of successive generations, and the younger generation receiving financial and emotional support from adults. In return, the elderly receive family care and benefit from state welfare programs (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 38). Furthermore, certain age ranges can symbolize certain cultural norms and values. For example, traditional societies consider the importance of the elderly in transmitting collective memories and expressing cultural values in order to maintain and perpetuate cultural traditions (Eisenstadt & Turner, 2015, p. 867). This is also true in Kyrgyzstan, where the elderly enjoy public authority and are expected to provide guidance to younger cohorts (Beyer, 2016, p. 82).

Intergenerational relationships can be characterized by simultaneous dynamics of conflict and solidarity, resulting in a constant state of intergenerational ambivalence (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 43). When individuals of different generational affiliation have incompatible views on values, behaviors, and identities, intergenerational conflict can arise (Urick, 2007). These conflicts can be analyzed at the micro-level of family relationships, as well as in the macro-societal context (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010). While diverging generation-specific perceptions of political issues can lead to intergenerational conflict in society and family settings, family ties and social bonds also have the capacity to diminish generational distinctiveness and reduce intergenerational tensions (Stoker, 2014, p. 383). Intergenerational relations are thus shaped by interacting dynamics at the micro- and macro-levels.

Theories on intergenerational dynamics propose six dimensions of intergenerational solidarity at the family-level. Family solidarity consists of emotional cohesion (affectual solidarity), social contact (associational solidarity), geographic distance (structural solidarity), supportive behaviors (functional solidarity), filial obligations (normative solidarity), and attitudinal agreement (consensual solidarity) (Katz & Lowenstein, 2022, p. 33). Empirical studies on how

these six dimensions of intergenerational family solidarity correlate with each other suggest that family members who share political attitudes also feel more emotionally attached to each other. They also suggest that feelings of obligation lead to higher rates of association and exchange, but not emotional attachment (Katz & Lowenstein, 2022, p. 35).

This categorization is also instructive for the analysis of family relations in this research project: the cultural context of Kyrgyzstan suggests a strong sense of normative solidarity, reflected in obligations of filial piety (Harring et al., 2021, p. 69). At the same time, the research question focuses on family contexts of political disagreement and low consensual solidarity. This research will illuminate how tensions between these dimensions of intergenerational solidarity are experienced and shaped by the interviewees.

While the family solidarity framework emphasizes shared values among family members and highlights normative obligations to help, it neglects the possibility of disagreement and conflict shaped by differences in life stage, cohort socialization, and gender roles. Family solidarity can suppress desires for individuality (Katz & Lowenstein, 2022, p. 36), and irreconcilable tensions between autonomy and dependence give rise to intergenerational ambivalence (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 43). Studies also reveal that intergenerational family relations vary widely across national contexts. Non-industrial societies tend to have higher levels of intergenerational solidarity, reinforced by cultural beliefs and negative social sanctions (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 45). This observation also applies to Kyrgyzstan, where the family is the single most important social institution and the cornerstone of society (Harring et al., 2021, p. 27ff.).

At the macro-societal level, intergenerational conflict arises when emerging generations come into contact with established political, economic, and social institutions and identify shortcomings and hypocrisies of adult society (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 36). Generational consciousness arises from the shared struggle of an age cohort that encounters existing social structures that prevent them from pursuing their goals (Burnett, 2016, p. 36; Connolly, 2019, p. 159). Recognizing the societal dimension of their struggle, youth develop collective responses to social problems and, in the process, create a generational identity (Burnett, 2016, p. 38).

Macro-level intergenerational conflict refers to the generational acquisition of cultural capital and material resources (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 93). Intergenerational conflicts negotiate

the opening, widening, closing, and narrowing of channels of generational life opportunities. Older cohorts deliberately narrow the access to career paths and upward mobility for younger generations. Events such as economic crises, or wars also contribute to changing opportunity structures and thus foster intergenerational tensions (Connolly, 2019, p. 157). When power relations between age cohorts shift, intergenerational conflict can arise. Youth will respond to tightening channels of opportunity with resistance (Connolly, 2019, p. 158), while anti-youth sentiment may grow as the aging population observes younger cohorts taking over their power (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 95).

The strategic access to resources and opportunities during a specifical historical period determines the identity of a generation. There are "active generations" that have encountered a range opportunities to exert political influence, and "passive generations" that are deprived of opportunities to unfold cultural meaning (Eisenstadt & Turner, 2015, p. 867). Within this distinction, Kyrgyzstani youth can be characterized as a "passive generation", given the gap between their personal aspirations and existing opportunities (Harring et al., 2021, p. 5), as well as ageism and gerontocratic leadership, which deprive the younger generation of possibilities to exercise political influence (Ismailbekova, 2020; Schwartz, 2014, p. 197).

Intergenerational conflict at the societal level can include struggles over labor markets, wages, and capital investment, but also over cultural icons, and national identity (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 95). In particular, the perception of an alleged inequitable distribution of public resources that favors the elderly is the subject of intergenerational disputes. Younger age cohorts are concerned that they will not receive the same level of benefits as today's elderly when they retire. The increase in public resources devoted to the well-being of the elderly, compared to the reduced investment in children is considered as unjust (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 35f.). Furthermore, succeeding generations may view the achievements of previous generations as irrelevant and unimportant, which older people may perceive as a lack of social recognition by the younger generation (Eyerman & Turner, 1998, p. 95).

Social change and continuity

Sociological theories of generations offer particular ways of conceptualizing social change and continuity. Generations are a fundamental unit of social reproduction and youth are a social force for continuity and for change (Burnett, 2016, p. 35). In the sequence of generations,

families and societies create stability and change as they renegotiate a balance between continuity and innovation (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 37; Kohli, 2007, p. 1900). Processes of socializing new citizens into the traditions of a political system ensure the reproduction of existing political structures (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 1).

In terms of social stability, the micro-setting of the family is decisive, because the extent to which political values and orientations are transmitted from parents to children has a major impact on either social continuity or change. If parents successfully transmit their political attitudes to their children, the political stability of a system is ensured. Once political power is transferred to the younger generation, political change or stability depends on the transmission rates of political orientations during the formative years of the upcoming generation (Stoker, 2014, p. 380).

Focusing on the macro-societal perspective, generations are also a factor of social change. New generations come into being by setting themselves apart from existing older ones and generational replacement enables the occurrence of societal renewal (Kohli, 2007, p. 1900f.). Demographic changes lead to the gradual substitution of elderly, and generational replacement affects the composition of social and political representation (Stoker, 2014, p. 381). These processes also occurred in Kyrgyzstan recently, as the parliamentary elections in November 2021 led to a complete generational replacement and a decrease in the average age of deputies. The majority of them are now born in the 1970's and represent the last generation that spent most of its formative years in the Soviet Union (Engvall, 2021).

Mannheim's concept of generational consciousness is particularly instructive to link generational change to societal change. Generational consciousness outlines the importance of changing socio-political circumstances during the formative period of emergent generations, which translates into the creation of new political understandings and perspectives on societal problems (Stoker, 2014, p. 382). Due to rapidly changing historical conditions, each generation is socialized in a particular way and develops its generational consciousness in a conflictual encounter with existing societal structures (Eisenstadt & Turner, 2015, p. 868). Encountering traditional structures, while carrying new perspectives, youth may perceive the established norms and institutions as inefficient and outdated. By organizing in social movements or participating in revolutions, youth can be an engine for social transformation and change (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 37).

In summary, change and continuity across generations are determined by cohort effects, lineage effects, and period effects. Cohort effects encompass the influence of socio-political events that occur to a particular group of individuals born at a specific point in time on the political attitudes of the following generation. This concept aligns with the theoretical framework proposed by Mannheim, which postulates that the experiences and circumstances of a generation influence its political attitudes and behavior. Lineage effects consider the transmission of political attitudes within the family context. Period effects describe the impact of socio-political events that affect all groups in society, regardless of their generational affiliation (Bengtson & Oyama, 2010, p. 38f.). While lineage effects tend to ensure social continuity and stability, cohort and period effects work towards social change and transformation.

2.2 Political Socialization Theory

While the previous section focused on macro-societal approaches to generations, this section will highlight the micro-setting by elaborating how political attitudes and orientations are transmitted from one generation to the other and how youth form their political ideals throughout their upbringing. Political socialization is the process "by which persons learn to adopt the norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors accepted and practiced by the ongoing political system" (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 1) and "by which people acquire relatively enduring orientations towards politics in general and toward their own political system" (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 1). Political socialization is concerned with how each new generation is introduced into the existing political system and familiarized with existing structures of societal organization. This includes the acquisition of political knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and orientations (German, 2014, p. 17). This process is mediated by various socialization agents, such as parents, peers, media, and school (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 1).

Concepts of political socialization are rooted in social learning theory, which argues that children learn about politics by observing, remembering, and imitating their social environment (Mayer et al., 2023, p. 1). Parents are usually the primary socializers and children therefore seek to replicate parental attitudes. Successful learning and the assumption of political citizenship depends on the consistent cue giving and reinforcement on behalf of the

parents (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 783), and the child's accurate observation and perception of their parents' attitudes (Mayer et al., 2023, p. 1). Observation and emulation thus are the underlying principles of the acquisition of political values, orientations, and habits, according to social learning theory.

The study of political socialization is based on the premise that early life experiences of children and adolescents are particularly influential for the assumption of political attitudes, identities, and orientations (Stoker, 2014, p. 378). During the so-called "impressionable years", adolescents are considered to be particularly receptive to political stimuli. Since young people have not yet adopted political opinions and behavior yet, they can be influenced more easily by external factors (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 3). For example, socio-political events that occur during youth are more likely to be remembered for a life time and have an enduring impact on the political orientations of an individual (Stoker, 2014, p. 378). While empirical research suggests different age spans for the highest susceptibility to formative influences, such as from 15-25 or 18-30 years old (Stoker, 2014, p. 389), there is a general consensus that early life experiences lay the foundation for political attitudes and values that persist over a long period of time (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 3).

Parents as agents of socialization

The parent-child relationship has traditionally been conceptualized as the primary arena of political socialization and the site of intergenerational transmission of economic, social, and cultural capital (Katz & Lowenstein, 2022, p. 30). The standard transmission model describes parent-child similarity as an outcome of social influence and learning processes operating in the family home (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 783). Empirical studies across multiple generations confirm that parents are highly successful in transmitting their political values. Transmission rates are highest for political issues with a strong moral component, while more abstract values have lower transmission rates (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 787).

The application of social learning theory suggests that observational learning of political attitudes requires frequent discussion of politics in the family environment and consistent demonstration of political attitudes by the parents over a longer period of time. Empirical studies demonstrate that highly politicized families that regularly discuss politics are the most successful at transmitting political orientations to their children (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 789).

Considering the transmission of party identification, voting behavior, and political trust, politically engaged parents were particularly effective (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 788). Furthermore, Mayer et al. (2023) demonstrate that in addition to the frequency of political debates in the family setting, the quality of parent-child communication also impacts parent-child similarity. Parents, who regularly listen to their children's political views and engage in political debates show even greater convergence in parent-child political orientation (Mayer et al., 2023, p. 15).

These empirical observations have interesting implications for the case of Kyrgyzstan. Young people in Kyrgyzstan report that they rarely discuss politics with their family members (Harring et al., 2021, p. 66). Following the findings of Jennings et al. (2009), the rare occurrence of political debate in Kyrgyzstani families suggests a low level of political transmission from parents to children, exposing them to alternative influences outside of the family environment. Moreover, there are pronounced intergenerational hierarchies and obligations of filial piety in Kyrgyzstan, implying that political socialization follows a top-down emulation process entirely led by adults (Beyer, 2016, p. 82; Gattiker, 2018). However, a lack of parental listening can also constrain the successful transmission of political orientation, as shown by Mayer et al. (2023).

Since its emergence in the 1950's, political socialization research has traditionally focused on parent-child transmission. However, these studies have been criticized for affirming parent-child similarity as the result of transmission processes. The intergenerational convergence of political orientations may also be rooted in shared socio-economic circumstances and common local political contexts (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 783; Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 5). Moreover, the similarity of political orientations may also result from child-initiated debates and parents adopting some of the viewpoints introduced by their children (Mayer et al., 2023, p. 3). Apart of that, the durability of parental influence is questionable. While parental influence prevails during childhood, adolescents may begin to question their parents' views and are likely to revise their political orientation in early adulthood (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 6; Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 1).

However, the most prominent critique of the adult-centered approach is its apparent neglect of alternative socializing agents, such as schools, peers, and media. Critiques argue that different socializing agents complement each other and that young people navigate a complex environment of institutions throughout their formative years (Habashi, 2017, p. 19).

Furthermore, the adult-centered approach conceptualizes political socialization as a hierarchical top-down process that renders youth as passive recipients of political stimuli (Gordon & Taft, 2011, p. 1499; Habashi, 2017, p. 18). Contemporary perspectives instead consider youth as agents of their own political socialization (Moeller & Vreese, 2013, p. 310) and recognize the capacity of youth to provoke social change (Habashi, 2017, p. 20). For example, Gordon and Taft (2011) demonstrate how youth activist groups denounce adult-led institutions of political socialization for their hierarchical approach and engage in their own projects to socialize their peers into politics.

Alternative socialization agents

Peer socialization is an important alternative socialization agent. Peer groups attract individuals by satisfying their need for social validation and their desire to anchor their social reality. The political attitudes of group members are controlled by mechanisms of granting or withholding a status or goods. As long as a peer group remains attractive to an individual, the individual will conform to the political values of the group in order to seek approval (Campbell, 1980, p. 325). Peer groups can impact trajectories of political socialization if certain political attitudes are important to group identity and have a behavioral manifestation (Campbell, 1980, p. 326). A study by Campbell (1980) demonstrates that peer groups with high levels of political engagement also have high levels of political homogeneity among their members, and that the more visible a particular attitude is, the more similar the members are with respect to that particular attitude (Campbell, 1980, p. 342).

The problem with studying the impact of peer groups on political socialization, however, is that the convergence of political attitudes among friends cannot be attributed solely to socialization processes and the mutual influencing of each other. Instead, young people consciously choose their friends according to political similarities that they consider important. Schmid (2006) disentangles the effects of selection and socialization on political similarities in peer groups by analyzing longitudinal data. The study shows that considerable political similarities exist already at the beginning of friendships, but that peers also become more politically similar over time (Schmid, 2006, p. 149). The study confirms that both selection and socialization are responsible for convergent political attitudes in friendships and that peer groups have the capacity to influence the political socialization of an individual (Schmid, 2006, p. 150). Discussions about socio-political issues and the establishment of social norms among

peer groups can have a decisive impact on the trajectory of political socialization (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 7).

The media is considered another major agent of political socialization. It is a particularly interesting socializing agent, because adolescents have greater autonomy in selecting their media consumption, compared to their very limited freedom in choosing their family, education, or peers (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 1). Media begins to shape children's perceptions of political actors at an early age and its importance even increases during adolescence. Throughout their socialization process, young people may adapt interpretations of politics conveyed by the mass media and acquire political knowledge that enables them to actively participate in political processes (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 2). However, individuals are most likely to choose media that confirm their pre-existing political attitudes. Therefore, media tends to validate trajectories of political socialization instead of introducing new orientations and challenging attitudes (Moeller & Vreese, 2013, p. 312). This tendency is reinforced by the algorithmic logic of social media, which provides information based on previous online behavior (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 3).

Transformations in the media landscape have profound implications for the political socialization of youth. Traditional media, such as television used to inform large segments of the population. The emergence of online media has fragmented the media landscape and diversified the modes of information transmission (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 3). The recent emergence of more personalized media consumption may lead to less uniform socialization outcomes (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 5). Online media have not only lowered the threshold of access to information, they have also reduced the temporal distance between an event and the media coverage, allowing individuals to react more quickly and engage in debates with other individuals. Social media formats allow for the (co-)creation of political information, instead of traditional top-down communication and thus provide an opportunity for political self-expression (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, 3f.). Empirical studies suggest that the new media environment has a stronger impact on political socialization than traditional formats and that social media networks have greater potential for political mobilization (Ohme & Vreese, 2020, p. 5).

School is an understudied agent of socialization. The overwhelming majority of studies on political socialization in school are concerned with the possibilities of civic education to

familiarize adolescents with the principles of liberal democracy (Koskimaa & Rapeli, 2015; Myoung & Liou, 2022; Schwarzenthal et al., 2022). Schools are seen as an important sphere to promote democratic values, to provide students with political literacy, and to stimulate interest in political participation with the goal of ensuring the future functioning of democracy. While these studies have strong normative assumptions that resonate with specific policy goals, they do not provide a detailed account of the actual socialization dynamics that occur in the interplay of school curricula, teachers, and students.

Goldenson (1978) stands out for using an experimental research design to measure the effect of curriculum on students' political attitudes. Two groups of students attended different types of social classes: while the first group received a specially designed class that emphasized civil liberties, the second class avoided discussing civil liberties. After two months, about 20% of the first group expressed increased levels of support for civil liberties, while the second group showed stagnating concerns about the attitudes in question (Goldenson, 1978, p. 53).

In addition, the study highlighted the importance of teachers in mediating the content of the curriculum to the students. The credibility that students attributed to their teacher was a decisive factor in determining the degree of attitude change among the students. Students who had a favorable view of their teacher and considered the teacher as an expert in their field demonstrated political attitude changes toward the values promoted by the curriculum. Students who gave their teacher low credibility ratings showed opposite tendencies in their attitude towards civil liberties (Goldenson, 1978, p. 62). The study confirmed that both the content of the curriculum and the students' perceptions of their teachers condition the outcomes of political socialization in schools.

Political events have so far often been overlooked as socializing agents. The experience of transformative events can lead to generation-defining memories that influence political views and behavior (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 8). For example, Booysen and Fleetwood (1994) analyze the impact of political events in South Africa on attitudes toward racial inequality, while Anderson and Zyhowski (2017) demonstrate the impact of a U.S. election campaign on the political socialization of school students. Important political events in the life trajectories of Kyrgyzstani youth could be the protest movements of 2005, 2010, and 2020, which violently overthrew the governments in place (Terzyan, 2021), or Russia's war on Ukraine, which changed public perceptions of Russia in Kyrgyzstan (Ritter & Crabtree, 2023).

Depending on the national and cultural context, some socializing agents may be more impactful than others due to differences in parenting styles, media landscapes, educational systems, or youth cultures (German, 2014, p. 26). While parents are most important during childhood, their influence gradually declines in favor of alternative socializing agents. Moreover, changing socio-political environments and disruptive political events, such as economic crises and wars contribute to the emergence of generational differences that undermine parent-child transmission (Neundorf & Smets, 2015, p. 3). Nevertheless, studies show that similarities in political attitudes are generally higher with parents than with peers (Schmid, 2008, p. 577). While political socialization scholarship initially overestimated the influence of parents, the general observation that parents are the primary socializing agent with a significant impact on the political orientation of their children remains valid.

Tensions between adult-centered conceptions of political socialization and new perspectives that emphasize youth agency while shifting the focus to schools, peer groups, and the media are of particular interest in the case of Kyrgyzstan. Pronounced social hierarchies between the elderly and youth, combined with social expectations of strict adherence to the opinions of the elderly suggest an important role for adults in the socialization process. However, socialization outcomes such as negative attitudes toward Russia and support for decolonization suggest that parent-child transmission was not successful, but was undermined by alternative socialization agents and the changing political environment in post-independence Kyrgyzstan. The study of Kyrgyzstan can provide an insightful contribution to the debate on the interplay of different socialization agents and offer further understanding of the impact of major political changes on the emergence of generational differences.

2.3 Decolonization from a Generational Perspective

This section introduces the topic of postcolonialism. After providing definitions of basic concepts, I will situate Kyrgyzstan within the postcolonial debate. I will conclude by explaining how decolonization processes can be analyzed from the perspective of generational sociology.

Definitions: Colonialism, Postcolonialism, Decolonization, Colonial Mentality

Colonialism is a violent process of conquest and subjugation of indigenous populations, followed by the establishment of administrative governance, legal systems, and military dominance (Nayar, 2015, p. 30). It is founded on the racial hierarchization of "progressive" and "modern" Europeans opposed to "backward", "primitive", and "non-modern" natives. Colonialism involves the extraction of raw materials and the acquisition of labor for the economic benefit of the colonial center, but also includes the conscription of indigenous soldiers to serve the colonial administration. The forceful imposition of the colonizers' religion, education system, and language leads to the erasure of native histories, traditions, and value systems (Nayar, 2015, p. 31). Initially, colonialism was mostly associated with the Western European empires of the 19th century, but influential scholars advanced the application of the term and its theoretical approaches to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Hofmeister, 2016; Spivak et al., 2006; Tlostanova, 2012).

The term postcolonialism first referred to the historical and material changes in a country 'after colonialism', but later evolved into a theoretical approach that analyzes modes of European domination based on historical legacies of colonialism and contemporary forms of subjugation (neocolonialism). Postcolonialism also considers the study of the psychological and cultural impact of colonial rule on the minds and the agency of colonized subjects (Nayar, 2015, p. 122). Based on the idea that colonial ideas persist and reproduce in the realms of law, religion, and literature, the term decolonization describes the escape from colonial modes of thought, and the conscious undoing of legacies of European concepts from intellectual and philosophical traditions. Decolonization thus refers not only to the loosening of colonial ties and control, coupled with the achievement of cultural, economic, and political independence, but also to a more profound process of reconnecting with precolonial traditions and cultural practices (Nayar, 2015, p. 45f.).

Colonial mentality describes the self-perception of formerly colonized subjects as ethnically and culturally inferior (Fanon, 1963, p. 210, 1967, p. 82f.). This mentality derives from the enduring legacies of colonial discourses that perpetuate binary distinctions of non-European backwardness and European civilizational superiority, resulting in a form of internalized racism (David & Okazaki, 2006, p. 241f.; Decena, 2014, p. 9f.; Fanon, 1967, p. 148). Through processes of decolonization of the mind, formerly colonized subjects can shed their colonial mentality

and regain their cultural and ethnic self-esteem (Fanon, 1963, p. 210). This involves a critical re-examination of histories of oppression and a rejection of colonial representations of the self (Nayar, 2015, p. 5f.). Colonial mentality is associated with mental illness and symptoms of depression (Decena, 2014, p. 10f.).

Positioning Kyrgyzstan in the debate

There is a consensus among historians and international scholars that the rule of the Russian Empire in Central Asia was essentially a colonial rule (Hofmeister, 2016; Morrison, 2021). Especially in Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Empire is strongly associated with the brutal suppression of the Central Asian Revolt in 1916, which resulted in the ethnic cleansing of the Issyk Kol region and the flight of 130.000 Kyrgyz people to China (Chokobaeva, 2019; Duishembieva, 2019; Morrison, 2019). The event, known in Kyrgyzstan as “Urkun” (Kyrgyz for “exodus”) has become increasingly important for the collective memory of the Kyrgyz people over the past decade (Bridges, 2023; Fedtke & Fukalov, 2023; Putz, 2016).

When it comes to the interpretation of the Soviet period, the debate is much more controversial and contested. Discourses that portray Soviet rule in Central Asia as a modernizing, nation-building, and state-consolidating force co-exist with interpretations of the Soviet project as a form of colonial subjugation of the region (Kassymbekova & Chokobaeva, 2021, p. 484; Loring, 2014, p. 80ff.). Judgments about the colonial character of the Soviet Union ultimately depend on the emphasis placed on specific periods and certain policies, which highlight either the oppressive and exploitative dimension or the contributions to health care, education, emancipation of women, and raising living standards, but also on the positionality of the researcher.

In this thesis, I adopt the interpretation of Soviet colonialism. I substantiate this claim by pointing to the continued racialization of nomadic communities as backward and culturally inferior, combined with the discursive orientalization of the Muslim Other throughout the tsarist and Soviet periods (Kassymbekova & Chokobaeva, 2021, p. 494). These discourses materialized in the forced settlement of Kyrgyz nomads, who were forced to transition from nomadic pastoralism and animal husbandry to peasant agriculture (Boyanin, 2011; Loring, 2008). Land appropriation began with the settlement of Slavic colonists during the tsarist period, who were considered as a “civilizing” force for the development of the indigenous

population (Hofmeister, 2016). The process of land dispossession continued throughout the early Soviet period, when the policy of forced collectivization further deprived Kyrgyz nomads of their primary means of livelihood. This eventually led to the complete eradication of their nomadic identity (Loring, 2008).

Inspired by Western discourses that legitimized colonialism as a "civilizing mission", Soviet rule in Central Asia was mostly a continuation of tsarist practices (Nogoibaeva, 2023, p. 2). Soviet colonial rule in Central Asia entailed the economic exploitation of the region's resources for the betterment of the living conditions in the metropole. The procurement of raw materials such as cotton and livestock served the industrialization of the colonial center (Loring, 2014, p. 80). Colonial policies included the cultivation of the Russian language at the expense of native languages, combined with the suppression of Islamic religious practices (Ahmad et al., 2017). In addition, the Soviets established a system of political domination that subordinated indigenous Central Asians to European and Russophone Bolsheviks (Loring, 2014, p. 80f.). Finally, the Soviet Union suppressed indigenous resistance movements and exterminated the entire Kyrgyz national intelligentsia between 1934 and 1938 (Fedtke & Fukalov, 2023; Loring, 2008; Sarsenbayev, 2020).

The enduring legacy of Russian and Soviet colonialism in Kyrgyzstan's postcolonial era can be observed in the Russian penetration of Kyrgyzstan's politics, media landscape, economy, and security sector (Engvall, 2023). The Russian politics of domination involve coercive strategies, but also relies on shared norms and value systems (Lewis, 2015), which Russia mobilizes as levers to manipulate public opinion in Kyrgyzstan (Engvall, 2023). On the other hand, colonial legacies persist in the continued use of the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan (Agadjanian & Nedoluzhko, 2022). Colonial mentalities are evident, as proficiency in the Russian language and knowledge of Russian literature are considered markers of cultural capital (Marat, 2008, p. 49). At the same time, internalized perceptions of cultural inferiority surface when Kyrgyz rural migrants moving to Bishkek are ridiculed for their accent in Russian language (Doolotkeldieva, 2023; Krugliy, 2023).

Generation as concept to analyze the persistence of colonial legacies and processes of decolonization

To date, academic research has barely uncovered the potential of sociological theories of generations for the study of decolonization processes. Some empirical studies (Carvalho, 2016;

La Rosa, 2022, p. 145; Lai, 2005; Matheson et al., 2022; Sevillano et al., 2023, p. 308) and conceptual papers (Allen & Jobson, 2016; Oppong, 2022) have acknowledged the generational dimension of decolonization, but to my knowledge, no study has systematically applied sociological theories of generations. I argue that the generational perspective on social stability and change is particularly productive for the study of persistent institutions of colonialism and processes of decolonization. In this section, I will merge postcolonial theory with sociological theories of generations to formulate a theoretical perspective that guides my research.

At the macro-level, Mannheim's concept of generational consciousness is instructive for linking social change to generational effects (Stoker, 2014, p. 382). It implies that age cohorts born and raised in the postcolonial period have a different perspective on the former colonial power than older age cohorts who experienced their formative events during the colonial period. These divergent socializing experiences in different historical periods provide emerging generations with a different perspective on established structures and the impetus to advocate for social change (Eisenstadt & Turner, 2015, p. 868), including decolonization. For example, Allen and Jobson (2016, p. 130) argue that the decolonization of anthropology should not be understood as a school, movement, or approach, but rather as a generational phenomenon of scholars belonging to a particular age cohort that went through specific formative experiences and left their mark on anthropology in the 1980's and 1990's. Their argument for attributing paradigmatic shifts toward decolonization within anthropology to generational effects may also be valid on a broader societal level.

Since postcolonialism suggests the persistence of social institutions and discourses inherited from the colonial period and the continued dominance of former colonial centers (Nayar, 2015, p. 122), it is questionable to what extent the generational consciousness of postcolonial generations has fully renounced colonial modes of thought. For example, in his study of Hong Kong, Lai (2005) finds that postcolonial generations continue to assign the highest social status and symbol value to the former colonial language, while the transition to the native language is a slow process.

At the micro-level, the dynamics of political socialization are decisive to determine the social process of decolonization through generational replacement. If the political socialization of a generation occurred in a colonial system, it is expected that the generation was exposed to

colonial narratives and representations throughout its formative years. Agents of socialization, such as schools and the media, but also peers and parents may have actively participated in the dissemination of colonial images and contributed to the internalization of a colonial mentality. This assertion is supported by Oppong (2022, p. 184), who argues that colonialism has detrimental effects on the socialization of children and adolescents. Low self-esteem and negative self-perception may be the result of socialization under the conditions of colonialism (Oppong, 2022, p. 186).

Political socialization in the post-colonial era takes place in the context of independence, when the political and economic control of the former colonial power is waning (Nayar, 2015, p. 45f.), while the emerging politics of nation-building might condemn the atrocities of the colonial rulers and revalue pre-colonial culture and traditions (Fanon, 1963, p. 209f.). Schools and the media could disseminate nationalist discourses and national historiographies that familiarize young people with their pre-colonial history and give them a sense of pride in their ethnic identity and an awareness of their origins (Kuzio, 2002, p. 249). Generations that emerge after the withdrawal of the former colonizer from their territory experience their impressionable years when the former colonizer faces a crisis of legitimacy to maintain political domination and loses hegemony over societal institutions. These changing socio-political circumstances can provide youth with a distinct anti-colonial generational consciousness and might disrupt the intergenerational reproduction of colonial institutions.

However, there is also an intergenerational factor of colonial mentality, as parents can potentially transmit their attitudes of racial inferiority and admiration of the colonial culture to their children. Due to the logic of intergenerational transmission of political orientations and values during socialization processes, attitudes of colonial subjugation can persist in the postcolonial era (Oppong, 2022, p. 186). These effects have been observed in empirical studies of second-generation Filipino Americans by La Rosa (2022, p. 147), Ferrera (2011), and Decena (2014, p. 61), who measured some degree of persistence of colonial mentalities in postcolonial generations. However, these studies remain vague about the extent to which parent-child similarities are the result of transmission dynamics.

In summary, the persistence of colonial institutions, versus processes of decolonization in the postcolonial era can be analyzed through a generational lens at the micro- and the macro-level. At the macro-level it is decisive, to what extent changing historical conditions allow for

the emergence of a generational consciousness in favor of decolonization, or whether colonial institutions continue to dominate the generational experience of postcolonial cohorts. At the micro-level, family transmission and other agents of socialization determine the degree to which an individual adopts anti-colonial positions or internalizes a colonial mindset. The successful transmission of political values and orientations from parents socialized under colonial rule can lead to the reproduction of colonial mentalities. Alternative socializing agents that disseminate decolonial perspectives can undermine the parent-child transmission and inspire youth to question colonial narratives voiced by their parents.

3. Context

This chapter introduces the case of Kyrgyzstan and provides extensive contextual information on (inter-)generational dynamics in the country. It includes a review of existing academic literature and a quantitative analysis of survey data collected by the Central Asia Barometer (CAB). Following the distinction between macro- und micro-sociological approaches to generations introduced in chapter 2, this chapter is also divided into two sections: The first section discusses the generational experiences that were crucial in shaping the generational consciousness of the Soviet and post-Soviet generation and presents empirical evidence from the CAB survey to analyze generational differences between youth and elderly in Kyrgyzstan. I conclude the section by debating intergenerational dynamics at the societal level and in the family setting, introducing relevant literature. The second section discusses the political socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth and reviews relevant publications.

3.1 Generational Differences and Intergenerational Dynamics in Kyrgyzstan

According to Mannheim's concept of generations, the attitudinal differences between different age cohorts emerge from their unique socialization experiences in a specific historical context. Each generation develops its own generational consciousness, as a result of its shared experiences of specific historic events and societal developments at a particular time in its life (Stoker, 2014, p. 382). These theoretical considerations also resonate with Engvall (2023, p. 8), who argues that older people who were socialized in the Soviet Union feel a strong sense of Soviet nostalgia and emotional attachment to contemporary Russia. On the other hand, the younger generation born in post-independence Kyrgyzstan, is less inclined to accept Russian domination in local politics and has a more pragmatic stance towards Russia, seeing it mainly in terms of employment and material opportunities (Engvall, 2023, p. 10). The following section briefly outlines the historical experiences that distinguish the Soviet- from the post-Soviet generations, in order to provide some insight into how these historical periods may have informed their attitudes toward Russia and the extent to which they brought into being a generational consciousness inclined toward decolonial thought.

Experiences of the Soviet generations

Most older citizens in Kyrgyzstan refer to the Soviet Union in a nostalgic rhetoric. While historians evaluate the Brezhnev era as a period of stagnation, many Central Asians refer to it as a "golden era". Drastic improvements in living standards, combined with satisfactory employment opportunities and salaries compensated for the lack of political freedom (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 74). Meanwhile, the ideological frames promoted in the educational system persuaded Soviet citizens of the positive effects of the Soviet rule (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 72). The social contract in the Soviet era obliged people to subordinate themselves to political authorities and abstain from political activity in exchange for a certain amount of material prosperity and certainty for the future. During "developed socialism" in the Khrushchev and Brezhnev era, people were willing to sacrifice political freedom in exchange for social stability (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 74).

In addition, Kyrgyzstani people benefited from opportunities to travel throughout the Soviet Union and to study in Moscow or Leningrad. The experience of multiculturalism and encounter of ethnic diversity is remembered very positively by Kyrgyzstani elders. Economic stability and material wealth ensured peaceful interethnic contact, in contrast to the violent ethnic clashes that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to a loss of cosmopolitanism, and the educational migration of students was gradually replaced by exploitative labor migration to Russia (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 77).

The drastic experiences of poverty, loss of social status, and political instability following the collapse of the Soviet Union contributed to the glorification of Soviet rule. Authoritarian rule was praised for ensuring order, and strong state institutions were acclaimed for promoting discipline, in contrast to the post-Soviet experience of corruption and political turmoil (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 75). Furthermore, while political freedoms stagnated in the post-Soviet period, the government was no longer accountable for providing for the needs of its citizens, resulting in a significant downgrade from the Soviet social contract (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 74). Soviet nostalgia therefore commonly evaluates the Soviet Union in reference to the political present as "better than now", rather than "generally good" (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 72).

The attitudes of the elderly in Kyrgyzstan towards Russia are shaped by these memories of the Soviet Union. Selective memories of the elderly mute experiences of famine, forced labor, repressions, agricultural failures, and unavailability of consumer goods while emphasizing

social security, universal health care, and quality education (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 72). Furthermore, there is a common perception, that the enormous death toll, loss of property and livelihoods during the collectivization campaigns were the source of relative prosperity and rising living standards in the post-Stalin era (Lottholz, 2022, p. 88), and that people did not experience such hardships because of Soviet policies, but survived them thanks to Soviet intervention (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 71).

Evaluating the Soviet experience against the background of impoverishment, unemployment, and loss of socio-economic status in the 1990's contributed to nostalgic sentiments and grief over the break-up of the Union (Dadabaev, 2021, p. 71f.). In 2013, 61% of the population of Kyrgyzstan believed that the dissolution of the Soviet Union was more harmful than beneficial for the development of the country (Esipova & Ray, 2013). Sentimental feelings about the Soviet Union continue to influence how the elderly view contemporary Russia, as the elderly continue to look up to Russia and are grateful for its historical involvement in Central Asia (Engvall, 2023, p. 8). This is also manifested in the preference of the elderly to consume Russian media, because they feel more familiar with it (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 6). Trust and emotional attachment make the elderly more susceptible to Russian propaganda (Engvall, 2023, p. 8). The collective memories and generational experiences of the elderly thus demonstrate a sense of immunity to decolonial critique, as they deny the atrocities committed by the Soviet Union and generally omit all negative aspects of its authoritarian rule.

Experiences of the post-Soviet generations

Kyrgyzstani youth were socialized after their country gained independence from the Soviet Union. During its 33 years of independent statehood, the Kyrgyzstani people witnessed drastic political changes and socio-economic instability. Kyrgyzstan's first president, Askar Akayev, ruled the country for 14 years. He promoted an image of Kyrgyzstan as an "island of democracy" to attract funding from international donors. The early 1990's gave confidence to believe in reforms and the democratic development of the country (Marat, 2008, p. 44). A certain degree of freedom of speech and the media, an active civil society and political opposition provided an optimistic outlook for the future (Terzyan, 2021, p. 3). However, in the late 1990's and early 2000's, Akayev's popularity declined and he began to suppress the political opposition and introduced constitutional changes to increase his power. After the "Tulip Revolution" of 2005, his successor Kurmanbek Bakiyev completely abandoned all

democratic ambitions (Marat, 2008, p. 44). In the last 20 years, Kyrgyzstan has experienced three violent “revolutions” that have not led to any significant political or economic reforms, but have turned the country into an “island of instability” (Terzyan, 2021, p. 2) .

Former President Akayev promoted a civic national identity to prevent the emigration of ethnic Slavic and German citizens in the 1990’s. Therefore, he praised Russia’s historical contribution to the development of Kyrgyzstan and welcomed Russian cultural influence in Kyrgyzstan. He gave Russian language the status of the second national language and renamed the Kyrgyz-Slavic University after former Russian President Boris Yeltsin (Marat, 2008, p. 33). The desire to promote a civic identity also led to a reluctance to remove Soviet symbols from public spaces (Laruelle, 2012, p. 40).

However, many ethnic Kyrgyz citizens rejected his concepts of civic nationhood and he was criticized for denying the nation’s past (Marat, 2008, p. 34). The rural-urban migration of ethnic Kyrgyz and the departure of Slavic and European ethnic minorities changed the country’s demographic outlook and put pressure on the government to give ethnic Kyrgyz more political and cultural representation to ensure social peace (Laruelle, 2012, p. 41). Interethnic tensions culminated in violent clashes between Kyrgyz and the Uzbek minority in Osh in 2010, which gave further rise to ethno-nationalist sentiments and Kyrgyz patriotism (Laruelle, 2012, p. 46). Akayev’s early attempts to promote a civic identity failed, and the perception of the Kyrgyz people as a “titular nation” with superior rights in their “own” state, as opposed to ethnic minority “guests”, became dominant (Laruelle, 2012, p. 43).

During the first two decades of independence, Kyrgyzstan embraced all kinds of geopolitical initiatives, despite their incompatible goals, with Russia and the United States becoming the country’s main partners (Terzyan, 2021, p. 7). Kyrgyzstan relied heavily on loans from international financial institutions, and international donors encouraged political and institutional reforms (Lottholz, 2022, p. 76). When the government announced the prospect of joining the World Bank’s Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in 2007, there was a public controversy about the country’s dependence on international actors. The HIPC initiative was associated with Western hegemony, and the government was accused of succumbing to Western usurpation and American politics (Marat, 2008, p. 49f.). After the violent conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010, the country became a primary target for

Western peace interventions, which furthered debates about the legitimacy of the presence of foreign organizations (Lottholz, 2022, p. 80).

Within the society of Kyrgyzstan, the economic, social, and political sovereignty is perceived as incomplete. Foreign-funded NGO's and the presence of American and Russian military bases are perceived as threat (Laruelle, 2012, p. 39). However, the rejection of foreign intervention is primarily aimed at Western actors, and not at Russia (Lottholz, 2022, p. 70). The negative perception of the involvement of Western organizations was promoted by Russian mass media, which conveyed negative views about the U.S.-led wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, while promoting Putin as a strong-minded leader offering protection from harmful Western intervention (Marat, 2008, p. 50). Following the strong anti-Western sentiment, Kyrgyzstan terminated its moderately pro-Western foreign policy in favor of joining the EEU and CSTO, which granted Russia military, economic, and political hegemony in Kyrgyzstan (Lewis, 2015, p. 58).

Anti-Western sentiment in Kyrgyzstan follows the Soviet discourse that depicts the West as morally weak and lacking in solidarity. Disillusionment with market reforms and the Western neoliberal model fuels anti-Western rhetoric. Older people often accuse young people of lacking morality and respect, while being overly obsessed with Western consumer culture. The Western human rights agenda is delegitimized for being funded by external donors and denounced as "foreign agents", while the LGBTQI community is seen as a perversion of Western origin that undermines local values and identities (Lottholz, 2022, p. 86f.). At the same time, there is an enduring loyalty to Russia, as Kyrgyzstan, unlike Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, has not critically reassessed Russian influence and historical ties. The ability to master the Russian language and knowledge of Russian literature are still important markers of cultural capital (Marat, 2008, p. 49).

Nevertheless, there is also an emergent anti-colonial discourse that not only accuses the West for undermining the sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan, but also rejects Russian interference. The anti-colonial paradigm highlights the colonial and exploitative dynamics of Kyrgyz-Russian relations during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Anti-colonial critics denounce the racist undertones and assumptions of white European supremacy of the civilizational discourse of the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation towards Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan's accession to the EEU is considered as a continuation of the exploitation of resources and raw materials from

Kyrgyzstan, combined with the slave-like treatment of Kyrgyz migrant workers and the xenophobia of Russian society (Lottholz, 2022, p. 84). Emerging nationalist movements promote pride in being Kyrgyz, mastering the Kyrgyz language, and knowing the country's history (Laruelle, 2012, p. 43). Anti-colonial rhetoric is linked to Kyrgyz ethno-nationalism and manifests itself in the rediscovery of pre-colonial traditions, such as the Manas epic, and the glorification of anti-colonial resistance fighters, such as Kurmanjan Datka, Ishak Razzakov, or Yusup Abdrakhmanov (Lottholz, 2022, p. 92).

Since Russia launched its full-scale war against Ukraine, some parts of the Kyrgyzstani society became increasingly interested in studying their own history through the lens of colonialism, focusing on the ethnic cleansing during the Central Asian Revolt of 1916 and the Stalinist terror of the 1930's. This perspective links historical experiences of colonial trauma between Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan to create a sense of solidarity (Krugliy, 2023). In addition, there is a growing interest among the Russian-speaking Kyrgyz population in improving their skills to master the Kyrgyz language grew. State policies also started promoting the use of the Kyrgyz language, when a new law was passed in July 2023, requiring civil servants to be able to speak Kyrgyz. The law was condemned by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, who claimed that the law was "undemocratic" and "discriminatory" (Najibullah, 2023).

The political developments and societal discourses outlined above form the background of the political socialization of the Kyrgyzstani youth. The generational consciousness of young Kyrgyzstani people has emerged from these shared experiences and common events of growing up in independent Kyrgyzstan. These societal developments are highly ambivalent in their implications to the extent that they may have contained or furthered the spread of decolonial thought in the country. On the one hand, Russia has successfully implemented its neocolonial approach to reassert its hegemony in the country, relying on persistent pro-Russian attitudes (Lewis, 2015). On the other hand, there is an emerging anti-colonial discourse that denounces Russian influence (Kravtsova, 2022; Lottholz, 2022, p. 84). However, the debates about the lack of sovereignty of Kyrgyzstan and the centrality of ethnic Kyrgyz people within the nation seem to stem less from decolonial reasoning, but more from ethno-nationalist sentiments. The thesis will provide insights into how young people relate to these discourses and how their biographies have been informed by these overarching developments in post-independence Kyrgyzstan.

Differences in political attitudes: empirical evidence

Drawing on empirical research conducted by the Central Asia Barometer (CAB), this section provides a more precise image of the proclaimed generational differences in order to assess the extent to which generational cleavages exist. Quantitative survey data acquired from the CAB survey wave 10 (n=1506) (Central Asia Barometer, 2021) and survey wave 11 (n=1510) (Central Asia Barometer, 2022a) include a variety of questions on political opinions related to Russia. Additionally, I obtained data from a survey on public opinion on Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, conducted by CAB in March 2022 (n=1006) (Central Asia Barometer, 2022b). While the survey wave 10 was conducted in October 2021, data collection for survey wave 11 took place in June 2022. Based on longitudinal data, the comparison of the two datasets allows to estimate the immediate impact of Russia's full-scale invasion on the public opinion of different age cohorts. This makes it possible to test the adequacy of political socialization theory, which suggests that the war had the most profound impact on the youngest generation, who are currently experiencing their impressionable years and can be most easily influenced by formative events.

The raw data included an age marker for each respondent, which allowed to group the respondents into age cohorts. As the sample reflects the demographic composition of Kyrgyzstan, the older age cohorts of 50-59 and 60+ have particularly small numbers (e.g. n=111 for the 60+ age group in survey wave 10), making them more susceptible to standard errors. Nevertheless, the following data analysis provides a general understanding of generational differences. A table showing the exact number of respondents for each figure is included in Appendix A.

Figure 1: How is your opinion on Russia?

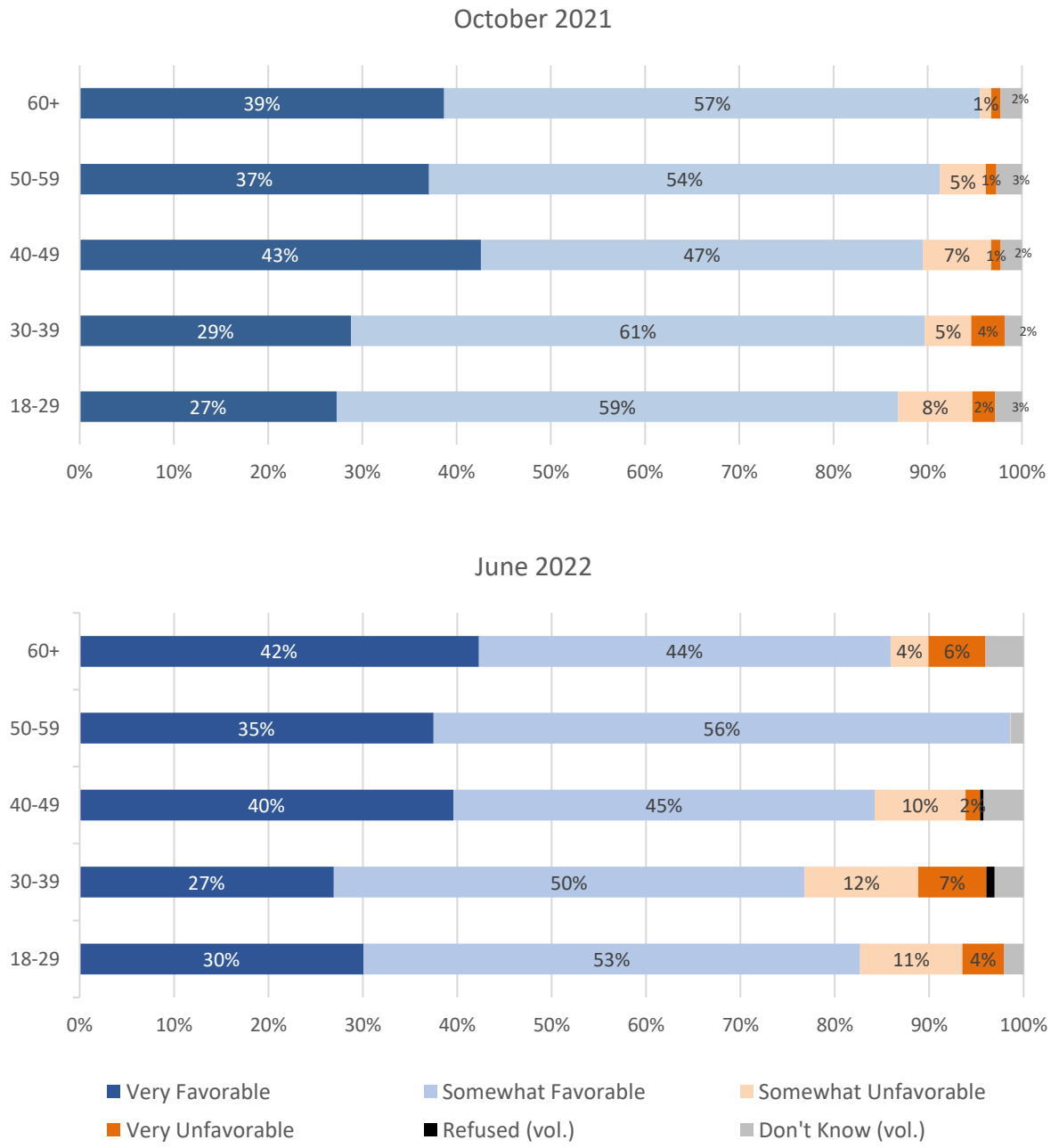
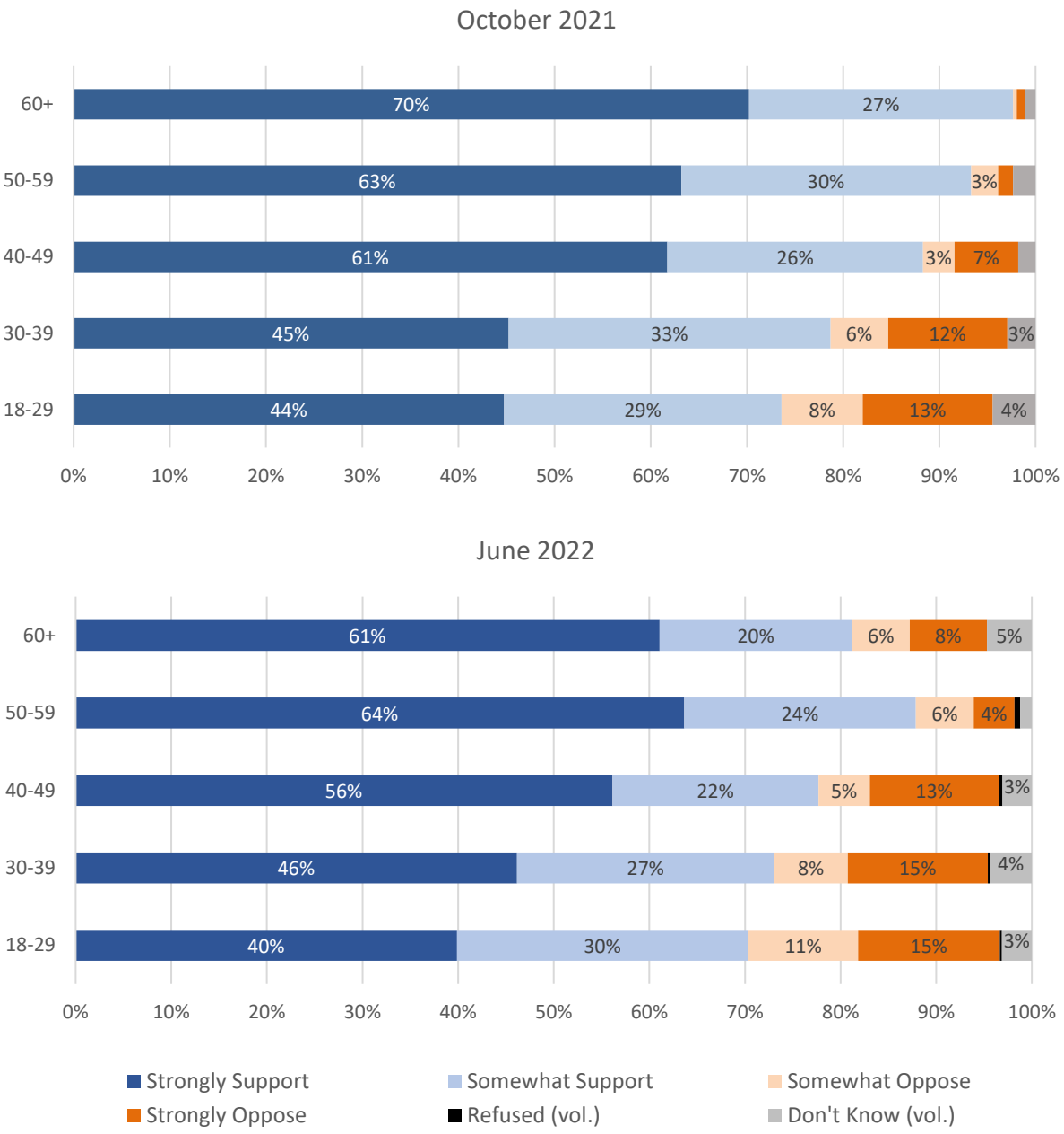


Figure 1 shows that the general opinion about Russia is rather positive among all age groups. The dataset suggests that the anti-Russian youth examined for this thesis are a minority group within their age cohort of 18–29-year-olds and that this generation cannot be described as genuinely "anti-Russian". However, the survey wave of October 2021 also shows clear age distinctions: while older generations describe their image of Russia as "very favorable", younger generations prefer the "favorable" category, reflecting what Engvall (2023, p. 8) describes as an emotional attachment of the elderly to Russia compared to a more pragmatic

attitude of the younger generation. At the same time, survey wave 10 shows that anti-Russian sentiment is more widespread among the younger generation, with 10% of Kyrgyzstani youth having an unfavorable view of Russia, compared to only 2% of the generation 60+. Taking into account the impact of the war, the June 2022 survey shows ambivalent results. Anti-Russian sentiment has increased by 5% among 18-29-year-olds, but the largest increase is observed among 30-39-year-olds, where the percentage has doubled from 9% to 19%. According to the data, Kyrgyzstani youth was no longer the most anti-Russian generation in the country after the full-scale war. This observation contradicts the expectation of political socialization theory, which suggests that youth, experiencing their impressionable years, are most affected by political events. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, this could be explained by the prolonged dependence of young adults on family ties (Harring et al., 2021, p. 34) and the continued reliance on older people for moral guidance (Beyer, 2016, p. 82). The increase in anti-Russian sentiment in the 60+ age cohort and the drop of anti-Russian attitudes among 50-59-year-olds may be a standard error due to the small sample size in the respective age groups.

Generational differences can be more or less pronounced depending on the precise question asked to the respondents. When asked about their support for the presence of Russian military bases in Kyrgyzstan, generational differences were very visible in the October 2021 survey, as older people were in favor of Russian military facilities, while 21% of Kyrgyzstani youth rejected it. However, the survey showed increasing dissatisfaction with the Russian military presence among all generations, again rendering political socialization theory inadequate to explain the effect of war on public opinion.

Figure 2: Please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the presence of Russian military bases in our country



When asked about their preferred country for security or economic ties (figure 3), the generational differences become even more apparent. While Russia is generally embraced more strongly in terms of security than in terms of economy, the gap between youth and elderly in favor of Russia is about 20% in each area. This generational gap is present in the data before the full-scale invasion and in the survey wave conducted after the war began. On the other hand, when the respondents were asked about their concerns about Russian influence in Kyrgyzstan (figure 4), the pre-full-scale invasion data showed no generational pattern, while the generational differences increased in the aftermath of the war. The younger generations, especially the youth, became more skeptical about Russian influence, while the attitudes of the older generations remained rather unchanged. Therefore, on this particular issue, political socialization theory might provide an explanation for the generation-specific attitude changes.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents that selected Russia as preferred country for economic/ security ties (June 2022)

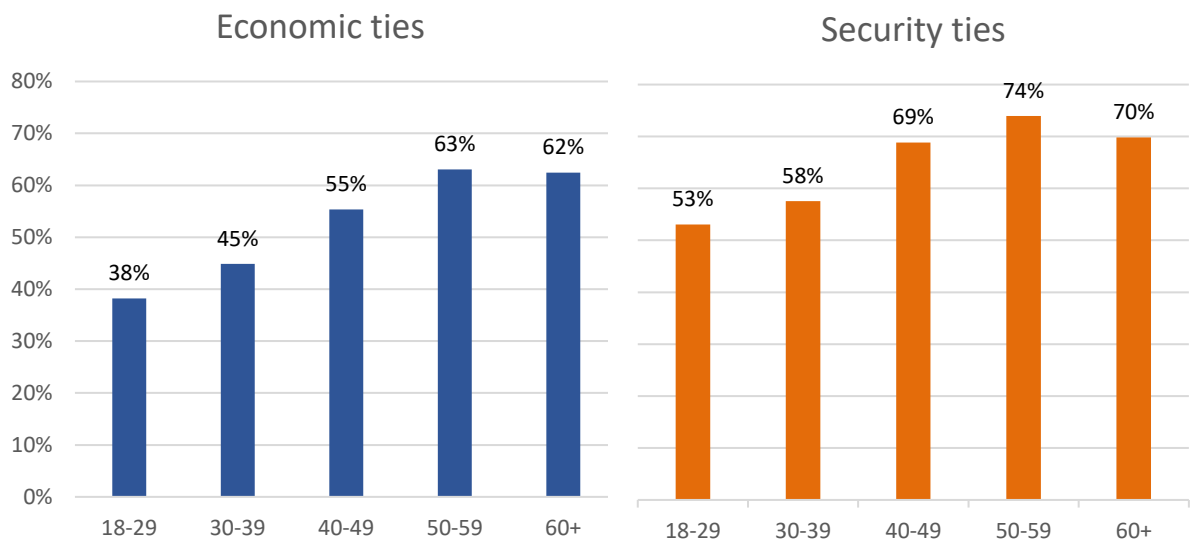
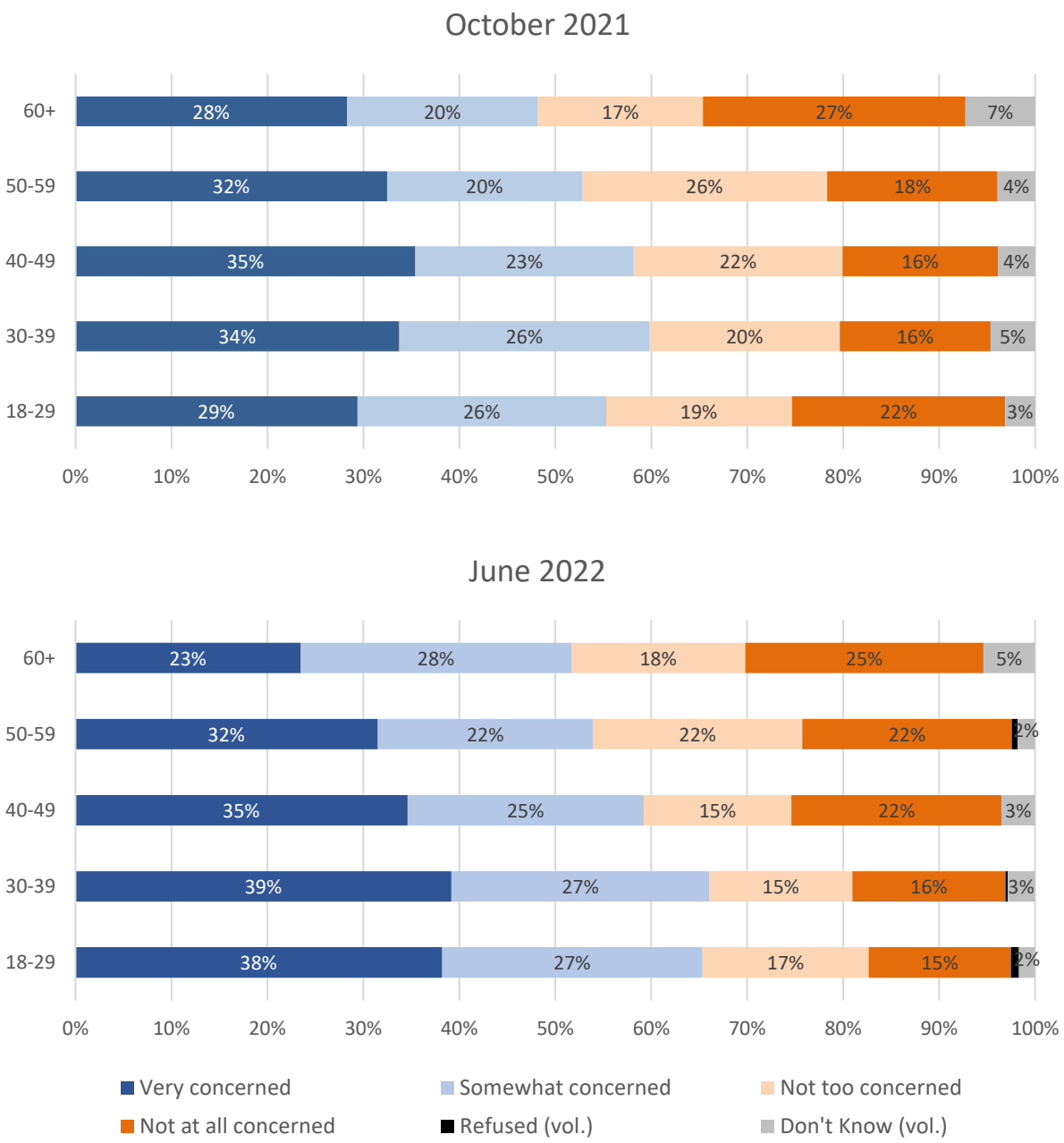
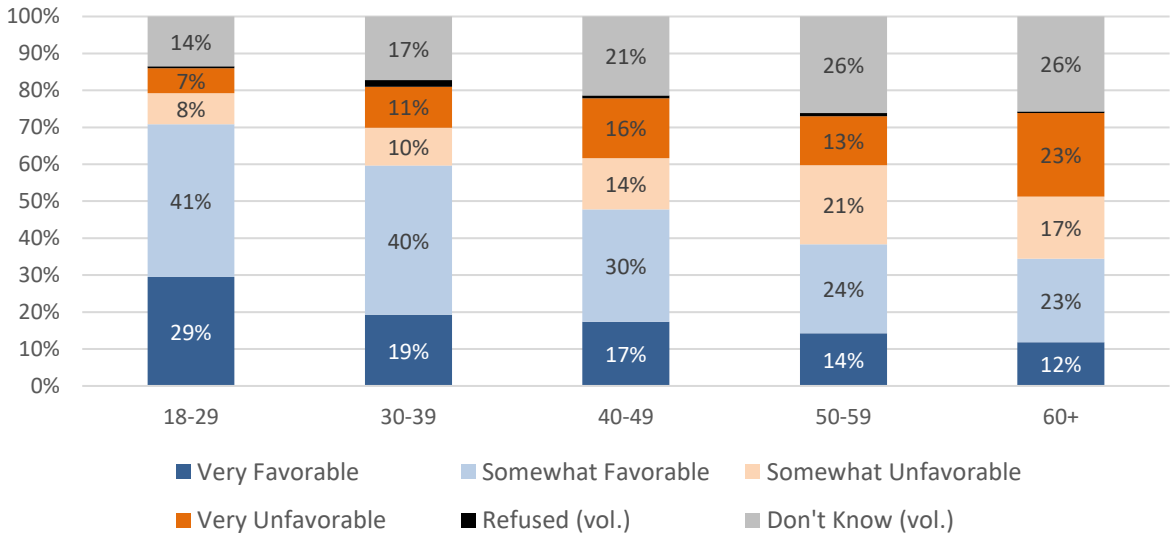


Figure 4: How concerned, if at all, are you about the amount of influence Russia has in our country?



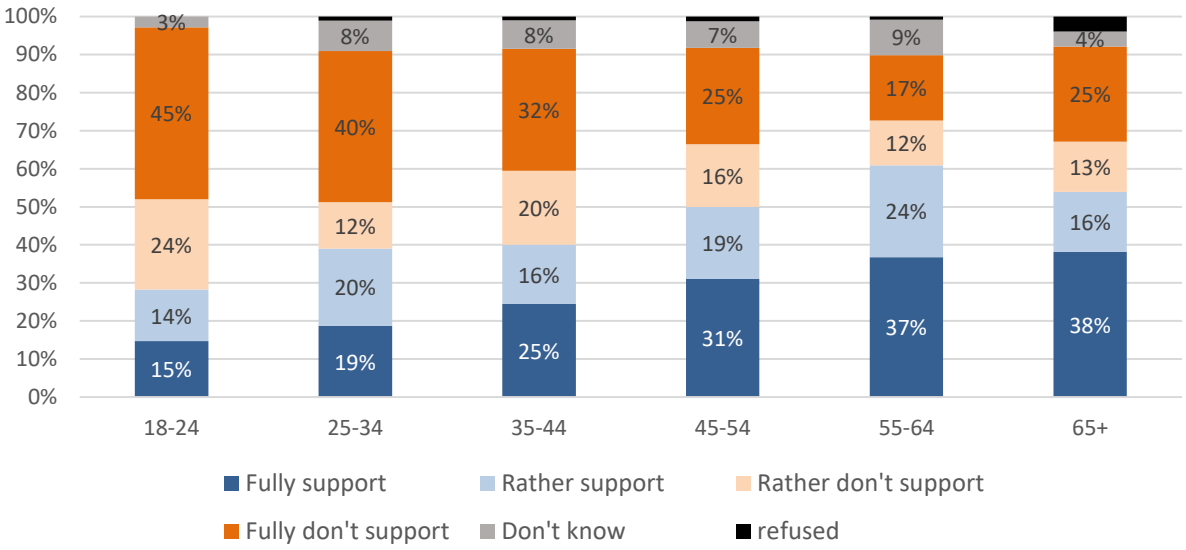
Moreover, as shown in figure 5, political attitudes towards the United States of America express a strong generational component. Since anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric in Kyrgyzstan is spread mainly by Russian media (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 4), the question can to some extent give an idea of the degree of exposure to Russian state narratives about Western influence. Among young people, only 15% have anti-American attitudes, while among the generation 60+, 40% express resentment against the USA. Since anti-colonial discourse in Kyrgyzstan does not necessarily target Russian influence, but can also criticize Western hegemony (Lottholz, 2022, p. 86f.), the generation-specific perception of the USA also demonstrates that youth and elderly may have different understandings of decolonization and concerns about who they want to emancipate themselves from.

Figure 5: How is your opinion on the United States of America? (October 2021)



The most pronounced generational difference became apparent when respondents were asked to express their opinion on “Russia’s military operation in Ukraine” [full-scale invasion of Ukraine] (figure 6). Young people expressed the strongest opposition (69%), while the majority of the 55-64 and 65+ age-cohorts supported Russia’s war on Ukraine, with approval rates ranging from 54-61%.

Figure 6: In light of recent events in Ukraine, please tell me whether you support, rather support, rather do not support, or do not support at all Russia's conduct of military operations on the territory of Ukraine (March 2022)



On the one hand, the war itself divided the generations in Kyrgyzstan: among the youth there is a high level of dissent to Russia's war on Ukraine, while the elderly tend to support Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On the other hand, the war has had little generation-specific impact on how Kyrgyzstani citizens view Russia in general. Most questions about Russia showed a decline in Russia's image among all generations. It was only when respondents were asked about their concerns about the extent of Russia's influence in Kyrgyzstan that young people became particularly critical.

In summary, the quantitative data provide an ambivalent picture of generational attitudes toward Russia. It is important to acknowledge that the majority of Kyrgyzstani citizens maintain positive attitudes toward Russia. While critical opinions about Russia are most prevalent among the 18-29 and 30-39 age-cohorts, there is still a significant number of positive perceptions among younger generations. Most interestingly, the generational differences vary depending on the exact question respondents were asked, with young people expressing more critical attitudes on some questions than on others. It is possible that younger people are influenced by societal norms and parental expectations when answering more abstract questions about their general attitudes toward Russia, while they are more independent when commenting on Russia's military base or their preferences for economic and security ties.

Overall, the quantitative data provide evidence of generational differences, but they should not be overestimated. It is more adequate to speak of generational differences than of generational cleavages, and it is important to recognize that Kyrgyzstani youth cannot be described as truly "anti-Russian", but rather as the most critical of all generations.

However, it is important to acknowledge that youth in Bishkek have slightly different political attitudes and values. Being more liberal compared to rural Kyrgyzstan, youth are also more critical of Russia than respondents from other parts of the country. Looking only at respondents in Bishkek, the percentage of 18-29 year olds with a somewhat or very unfavorable opinion of Russia rises to 25% (Central Asia Barometer, 2022a). Since there are only 444 respondents from the city of Bishkek, these figures cannot claim to be representative, but they do suggest a certain tendency that young people with decolonial mindset may be concentrated in the capital.

Intergenerational dynamics in Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyz family relations are characterized by a strict social hierarchy based on age and gender differences. For centuries, patriarchal culture has dominated family life, rendering husbands as the unquestionable authority over children and wives (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005, p. 152). Within the society of Kyrgyzstan, there is a strong moral obligation to obey elders and to refrain from challenging their authority. At the same time, the elderly are expected to provide moral guidance to the youth and transfer their knowledge to the younger generation (Beyer, 2016, p. 82).

Nevertheless, intergenerational family dynamics underwent profound changes compared to the pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-Soviet periods. Following the integration of women into the labor market, the Soviet system required parents to cede responsibility for education and moral guidance to preschools, schools, and extracurricular activities (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005, p. 152). State institutions thereby undermined the importance of the family, which is traditionally conceived as the cornerstone of Kyrgyz society (Harring et al., 2021, p. 33ff.), while limiting the ability of the elderly to transmit their historical memories and moral values to their offspring.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, families regained their competence to educate their children and teach morals and ethics (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005, p. 156). The post-Soviet

transformation brought along ambivalent developments: The diffusion of Western forms of parenting and family concepts promoted ideas of egalitarianism and less hierarchical family organization. At the same time the revival of traditional cultural patterns and increased religiosity gave rise to more patriarchal family dynamics (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005, p. 168). A study by Bühler-Niederberger and Schwittek (2014, p. 509) demonstrates that children in Kyrgyzstan express a high knowledge of social hierarchy and a strong internalization of their inferior position within the family at an early age. Children experience compliance with family expectations and knowledge of duties and obligations as a positive source of self-validation. Being "functional" and bringing added value to the family is already a major concern at the age of five to six (Bühler-Niederberger & Schwittek, 2014, p. 510f.).

At the same time, as a consequence of poverty, the society of Kyrgyzstan is experiencing mass migration to urban areas and abroad. Economic hardship and weak welfare state policies gave rise to the practice of informal kinship caregiving, in which primary caregivers, such as mothers and fathers, migrate temporarily to secure economic livelihoods, while grandparents or other close relatives engage in childrearing (Muhametjanova & Adanır, 2023). Family separation not only complicates social bonding between children and parents (Sanghera et al., 2012, p. 385ff.), but may also undermine the intergenerational transmission of political orientations examined in this thesis. Given the high prevalence of migration and kinship care, the disruption of parent-child relationships could potentially have societal implications.

Pronounced social hierarchies between elders and youth exist not only at the family level, but also in the context of society. So-called aksakal courts illustrate the importance of senior citizens in providing guidance on moral issues and resolving legal disputes. The term aksakal literally means "white beards" and describes a local authority entrusted with resolving legal matters because of their age, experience, and position in the community. During the Soviet period, aksakals were informal community gatherings, but in 1995, as the former Soviet legal system was perceived increasingly outdated, aksakals were institutionalized by law. Minor conflicts are investigated by aksakals at the local level before the police and the professional judiciary take over responsibility. Before having access to legal proceedings with state officials, citizens are required to interact with local aksakals. Aksakals resolve community conflicts based on moral norms that reflect Kyrgyz customs and traditions. As a result, aksakals are

accused of reproducing a conservative, repressive social order, that privileges communal cohesion over individual freedoms. (Beyer, 2016; Lottholz, 2022, p. 97).

In the political sphere, the dominance of older decision-makers is a source of conflict. Youth activists accuse their leaders of gerontocracy (Schwartz, 2014, p. 197) and blame them for the failure to build a functioning state (Ismailbekova, 2020). In particular, Ismailbekova (2020) argues that the 2020 protests were a movement of young people who envisioned a progressive future for their country. However, in the midst of the unrest, older elites, such as the current president, Sadyr Japarov, seized power and deprived young people of the opportunity to reform Kyrgyzstani society. As a result, young people expressed their frustration with the events, claiming that the older generation had ruined the country for the past 30 years and robbed the young protesters of their victory. This interpretation also resonates with Amangeldi Jumbaev, a Kyrgyz youth activist, who described his experience of the 2020 protest in an online discussion:

> "[O]n 6th of October, we had confrontation with the people of Sadyr Japarov. They were for the prime minister and we were yelling 'lustratsia' or 'jashtar', which means 'youth'. For me, lustration in the broadest term means that new people need to come to the politics. By new, I mean not just young, but people who had not been before in the politics […]. Unfortunately, we have seen in the political arena of Kyrgyzstan ageism, when older people have this stereotype, 'we have more experience, the younger has to work more'. When we were at the 6th of October at the house of the government, we had a confrontation with the people of Sadyr Japarov, when they were yelling 'Sadyr', we were yelling 'lustratsia', and I had a feeling, they didn't understand what is lustratsia." (Jumbaev 2020, as cited in Coppenrath, 2020)

Nevertheless, the events of 2020 led to a complete generational replacement of the Kyrgyz parliament, but not in favor of the youngest age cohort. While the previous parliament consisted of representatives of the old Soviet-era generation, born between World War II and 1965, the November 2021 elections brought to power a new generation born between 1965 and the early 1980's. The new parliament is made up of politicians who went through the Soviet schooling system but gained their first professional experience after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Engvall, 2021).

This generational replacement has neither fulfilled hopes for democratization, nor advanced liberal-progressive politics. While the Bishkek-based, NGO-led liberal civil society failed to gain a foothold in the parliament, the deputies represent a patriotic, nationalist, and traditional

orientation that resonates with the values of rural Kyrgyz citizens. The new parliament embodies the slow disappearance of the Soviet legacy but refutes the idea that generational replacement would translate into an embrace of Western liberalism. Instead, the new parliament demonstrates a return to Kyrgyz traditions (Engvall, 2021).

Informed by traditional values and nationalist sentiments, the generational consciousness expressed by the parliamentarians may primarily reject Western liberal influence but appear more accommodating to Russian authority. If these parliamentarians have any inclination toward decolonial thought, their understanding of decolonization will be more rooted in conservative or religious ideologies that denounce Western criticism of their illiberal policies for its alleged colonial undertones, and discredit gender equality and LGBTQI rights as Western colonial concepts (Zhang, 2023, p. 2).

3.2 Political Socialization of Youth in Kyrgyzstan

Based on the theoretical considerations in section 2.2, this section discusses the political socialization of youth in Kyrgyzstan. The section begins with the traditional socializing agents of parents and then continues with alternative socializing agents, such as the media, school, and political events. It includes a broad selection of contemporary studies and academic publications that shed light on the process by which young people in Kyrgyzstan acquire their political orientations throughout their upbringing.

Parents as socializing agents

A study conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) provides important insights into how political attitudes are transmitted within the family in Kyrgyzstan. The study found that 44% of young people never discuss politics with their families, and only about 10% do so frequently (Harring et al., 2021, p. 66). Since empirical studies suggest that the transmission of political orientations is successful only when parents consistently communicate their political views over a longer period of time (Jennings et al., 2009) and engage in political debates with their children (Mayer et al., 2023), the infrequent discussion of politics in Kyrgyz families may hinder the transmission of political identities. The study also shows that urban youth are even less

likely to discuss politics with their families, suggesting that the generational divide may be even more pronounced in cities (Harring et al., 2021, p. 66).

The lack of intergenerational family communication about politics is contrasted by a relatively high number of young people that report completely overlapping political views with their parents. While 29% state that their political attitudes converge with their parents', only 16% say that their views significantly differ from their parents' attitudes. In urban contexts, however, 20% of respondents report significant differences from the political attitudes of their parents, while only 18% claim to completely overlap with their parents (Harring et al., 2021, p. 69). This observation again suggests certain differences between urban and rural intergenerational dynamics.

Read against the backdrop of political socialization theory, the study raises the question of how young people can be certain to share their political views with their parents, if politics is not discussed among family members. The FES youth study contradicts empirical studies that prove that successful parent-child transmission of political orientations is highly dependent on the frequency, consistency, and quality of political discussions within the family (Jennings et al., 2009; Mayer et al., 2023). Qualitative interviews conducted as part of this thesis will shed light on this contradictory observation and provide a more nuanced understanding of the underlying dynamics.

Based on the strong intergenerational convergence, the study emphasizes that cultural values of filial piety and respect for elders are important to Kyrgyz society. The study finds that young Kyrgyz people do not criticize the views of their families and do not feel the need to question or dissociate themselves from them. The authors note that youth in Kyrgyzstan is not a transitional phase of separation and gaining independence from the family, but a phase of stabilizing the quality and intensity of relationships within the family (Harring et al., 2021, p. 34). According to the authors, social norms and values are transmitted and internalized across all life contexts on the basis of historically developed and socially entrenched intergenerational contact (Harring et al., 2021, p. 35). The study portrays Kyrgyz youth as extremely conservative, which is also reflected in their enormous rejection of homosexuality (80%) (Harring et al., 2021, p. 30) and alcohol consumption (78%) (Harring et al., 2021, p. 27).

The FES study also challenges the diagnosis of a generational divide in Kyrgyzstan, as postulated by Ismailbekova (2020), Engvall (2023), and Lottholz (2022, p. 82), as it describes

youth identity development in harmony with family expectations (Harring et al., 2021, p. 34). Kirmse (2010, p. 399) reconciles these contradictory observations by suggesting that Kyrgyz youth are navigating a difficult process of fulfilling the social expectations of their relatives while engaging with global cultures and developing their own personal views and interests. One explanation for the contradiction of the study with scholarly observations of generational divides is that the FES study slightly overrepresents rural population. Also, it appears that the urban respondents were recruited largely from the more traditional, southern city of Osh, rather than from Bishkek. Thus, the sample may have slightly skewed the results and present Kyrgyz youth a bit too conservative. However, the FES study also demonstrates that cases of youth that are in outright contradiction with the political views of their parents are not the norm.

Existing literature on parent-child transmission in Kyrgyzstan suggests that the socializing agent of parents hinders the emergence of a decolonial mindset among youth. This research aims to give a more precise understanding how the parental generations' nostalgia for the Soviet Union and emotional attachment to contemporary Russia are perceived by the young interviewees and to what extent it informed their own political socialization. Since older people tend to look up to Russia and perceive its culture as a more "developed", the research also addresses the issue of intergenerational transmission of a colonial mindset, providing insights into the extent to which children adopt parental values that suggest Russia's cultural superiority.

Alternative socialization agents

Media consumption, peer group discussions, political events, and school education can also have a significant impact on the socialization outcomes of Kyrgyzstani youth. Regarding the perception of history and the formation of attitudes about Russia, school history classes can play an important role in the extent to which young people view Russia's historical role in the region with admiration or rejection. Umetbaeva (2015) and Bagdasarova and Marchenko (2017) studied history textbooks of Kyrgyzstan and analyzed what interpretations of history they convey. Umetbaeva (2015, p. 292) concludes that history textbooks combine contradictory discourses that portray the Soviet Union as colonial and oppressive ruler, but also describe the USSR as a nation- and state-building modernizer. By selectively combining these discourses, the overall narrative becomes ambivalent, nuanced, and contradictory.

Furthermore, she highlights the agency of history teachers in accepting, challenging, rejecting, and criticizing the discourses promoted by the history textbooks. Personal biographies and interpretations shape how teachers appropriate the historical narratives conveyed by the history textbooks (Umetbaeva, 2015, p. 300). Most of the teachers associate the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the loss of their social status and prestige as teachers, combined with a downward social mobility and sense of humiliation (Umetbaeva, 2015, p. 302). These biographical experiences lead the teachers to downplay the colonial narrative of the history books in their teaching, while placing more emphasis on the modernizing role of the Soviet Union (Umetbaeva, 2015, p. 305).

The study demonstrates how the school class as a socializing agent also has a strong intergenerational component that partly resembles parent-child transmission dynamics. The role of history classes in the political socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth may be ambivalent: in contrast to the Soviet education system, students in post-independence Kyrgyzstan are familiarized with interpretations of the Soviet Union as a colonial oppressor, but teachers who are rooted in the Soviet era through their own socialization experiences, have a powerful position in mediating the state-sponsored historical discourse. The impact of the school on the development of anti-Russian sentiment and decolonial thinking can therefore be both, hindering and facilitating. Qualitative interviews conducted for this thesis will provide further details on how young people perceive the positionality of their history teachers and how they judge the historical accuracy of their teaching.

In terms of media consumption among Kyrgyzstani youth, there is a clear preference for online media: 82% of citizens aged 18-29 years use the internet as their primary source of information, in contrast to older citizens who have a greater affinity for Russian state TV (Central Asia Barometer, 2022b) and are particularly receptive to Russian state propaganda (Engvall, 2023, p. 8). However, since Russian disinformation is disseminated through all channels, including online media, social media, and messenger apps such as Telegram, internet use does not necessarily reduce exposure to Russian narratives (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 3). As Kyrgyzstan's society's perception of global politics are mediated through Russian media, there is a convergence of political views in Kyrgyzstan and Russia (Marat, 2008, p. 50). Additionally, Kyrgyz youth follow highly influential bloggers, who are increasingly replacing journalists as commentators on political events (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 7).

In general, Russian media have a very good reputation in Kyrgyzstan. Russian newspapers, online media, and TV stations are considered trustworthy and reliable, in contrast to local Kyrgyz media, which is commonly accused of corruption and serving the political interests of local elites (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 7). While Kyrgyz media is perceived as inferior to Russian media, Western media is denounced for spreading immoral Western values that are alien to the Kyrgyz culture and inappropriate for Kyrgyz society (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 6). The Kyrgyz media landscape is generally dominated by Russian outlets, and many Kyrgyz citizens access information about international politics through Russian sources.

However, there are generational differences, as the affinity of the elderly to Russian media is conditioned by habits and feelings of familiarity and attachment derived from their Soviet experience (Gabdulhakov, 2023, p. 6). Moreover, media consumption of the younger generation may be more diverse and may have different effects on political socialization. Thus, the literature has ambivalent implications about the potential impact of media on the political socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth. While greater exposure to independent and critical media among youth may promote decolonial discourse, the hegemony of Russian media may also reinforce colonial patterns of political perception.

In recent months, however, Kyrgyzstan has experienced a massive crackdown on independent media, including the banning of the online news agency Kloop (Spaeth, 2023) and the prosecution of journalists from 24.kg (Amnesty International, 2024). In April 2024, the government also banned TikTok, citing its adversarial impact on children's health (Imanaliyeva, 2024). The initiative to block Kyrgyz youth from accessing TikTok may also demonstrate the government's fear of social media as tool to mobilize youth for political action and contribute to undesired socialization outcomes of critical-minded citizens.

Lastly, there are a number of political events that may have played an important role in the political socialization of youth in Kyrgyzstan. During their upbringing, Kyrgyz youth experienced three violent protest movements that overthrew the government, in 2005, 2010, and 2020. Although Kyrgyz youth not only witnessed the events of 2020, but in some cases participated directly in them, young people are generally indifferent to politics (Harring et al., 2021, 65f.). Political instability, inter-ethnic violence, and corruption did not have a mobilizing effect but rather disillusioned Kyrgyz youth into an apathetic stance toward politics and a search for personal fulfillment in their immediate social environment of friends and family. Gaps between

personal aspirations and actual opportunities resulted in a passive attitude towards society and politics (Harring et al., 2021, p. 5f.).

Russia's war against Ukraine is certainly an important political event for the political socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth. Young people expressed their opinions about the war and Russia on the internet, for example, when Russian migrants fleeing military conscription arrived in Bishkek, humorous videos appeared on TikTok. One video, which went viral, depicted Russian migrants looking for an apartment in Bishkek, who repeatedly encountered rejections based on racist comments, which Central Asian labor migrants usually encounter in Russia (Krugliy, 2023). The inversion of racial stereotypes was an ironic commentary on racial hierarchies and can be interpreted as an expression of growing decolonial consciousness among Kyrgyz youth.

4. Research design

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the research design to explain how the empirical data of this thesis was collected and analyzed. First, I will introduce the method of data collection and discuss my sampling strategy. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the data analysis procedures.

4.1 Data collection

Interviewing technique

The empirical data collection of this research applies the method of qualitative biographical-narrative interviewing, developed by Schütze in 1977. Narrative interviews consist of a retrospective reconstruction of experiences, which enables the interviewer to immerse himself in the perspective of interviewees and to understand their interpretation of past events (Küsters, 2009, p. 20f.). Biographical research relies heavily on the narrative technique, as biographies are produced through narrative storytelling (Küsters, 2009, p. 30). The method is particularly productive for research projects that combine life histories and socio-historical contexts, because the personal stories express a larger societal context and the "narratives produced by individuals are constitutive of specific socio-historical phenomena in which biographies are grounded" (Bauer & Jovchelovitch, 2010, p. 67).

The methodological approach of this thesis aligns with this perspective, as the biographies of the respondents reflect larger social transformations occurring in post-independence Kyrgyzstan, by providing insights into how macro-societal developments of decolonialization inform individual life trajectories and impact the respondent's subsequent establishment of a decolonial consciousness. Although processes of nation-building cannot be studied directly from the perspective of the individual, these macro-societal dynamics are present in the lived experiences and narrations of the interviewees.

The narrative interview method draws on common everyday practices of storytelling. Advocates of this technique argue that the unprepared and spontaneous recounting of personal experiences produces particularly authentic reconstructions of social realities (Küsters, 2009, p. 17). Narrative interviews place great emphasis on the question that initiates

the conversation (so-called “elicitation”), which is intended to generate a detailed story that leads from past events to the present, including precise elaborations of the sequence of events and a plausible transition from one incident to another (Küsters, 2009, p. 44). The question must be of personal and social significance in order to provoke a lasting, independent passage of storytelling (Bauer & Jovchelovitch, 2010, p. 63). The interviewer must not interfere during the narration.

Once the interviewee has finished telling the story, the interviewer asks immanent questions that address parts of the narration that remained vague or unclear (Küsters, 2009, p. 61). Immanent questions seek to fill in gaps and clarify inconsistencies in the initial story and are formulated by adopting the terminologies and concepts used by the interviewee. In the second phase of exmanent questioning, the researcher asks questions that reflect his or her own interest in the research. The difficulty in this phase is to transform exmanent questions into immanent questions by translating one’s own terminologies and concepts into the language used by the interviewee in order to avoid the imposition of the researcher’s own assumptions (Bauer & Jovchelovitch, 2010, p. 62f.).

It is important to keep in mind that the actual biography of an individual is mediated through their storytelling and that experiences are represented through the narratives of the interviewees. Therefore, narrations and actual experiences are not identical (Küsters, 2009, p. 33). For example, narrative-biographical interviews cannot accurately determine the effect of schooling on an individual’s attitude toward Soviet rule in Kyrgyzstan. Rather, the interview method assesses the importance that individuals ascribe to their schooling in shaping their views of Kyrgyz-Soviet history.

In addition, the narrative reconstruction of past experiences involves evaluations from the perspective of the present, rather than recounting events as they were perceived in the lived moment. While the new perspective on the past may distort the precise narration of past events, the distance in time also gives meaning to memories that were previously considered unimportant (Küsters, 2009, p. 34). This consideration is particularly important in the context of this research, because many biographical experiences, such as racial discrimination were seen as unproblematic and “normal” when they occurred, but after the respondent developed a decolonial mindset, these experiences took on new meaning.

The interviews were conducted primarily in English because of my limited knowledge of Kyrgyz and Russian. However, the interviewees were also allowed to speak in Russian, if they had difficulty expressing themselves in English. A few respondents occasionally switched to Russian. Due to language constraints, proficiency in English language turned into a selection criterion for respondents.

After carefully evaluating the requirements for the elicitation technique, I asked the interviewees the following question: “Tell me about your life, starting from your childhood, continuing with your teenage period until the present. And tell me please, how did you become the person, that you are today?”. Instead of asking a more specific question focused on the topic of the thesis, I asked this broad question to gain a general understanding of the interviewee’s life trajectory, which later provided rich background information for interpreting their biography. The question’s emphasis on the formation of the present-day personality usually directed the interviewees to focus on their socialization process and to elaborate on the impact of different socializing agents, similar to the approach of political socialization research. The question usually provoked detailed narrations about the role of parents, school, university education, peers, media, and political events in the formation of the respondent’s personality.

Once the interviewees had completed their initial storytelling, I asked a series of immanent questions to clarify inconsistencies and to elicit more information relevant to the research. Often these questions would involve further elaboration on the interviewee’s relationship with their parents, but would also move the interview further toward the topic of decolonization. For example, some interviewees mentioned a deep interest in Kyrgyz history during their high school years, or patriotic feelings while participating in the 2020 protest. The mention of these issues in their initial life story provided entry points for immanent questions. When the respondents were asked to elaborate further on these experiences, they usually brought up the topic of decolonization themselves, which paved the way for translating exmanent questions into immanent questions and delving deeper into the topic throughout the interview.

After the first question elicited a broad perspective on the interviewee’s life trajectory, a second question attempted to trigger a second narration: “Looking back on your life, from your childhood until the present, how did you feel about being Kyrgyz?”. This question was

particularly effective because it usually provoked detailed biographical narrations of personal decolonial transformations. The advantage of the question was that it did not suggest that Kyrgyzness was in any way connected to Russia, yet respondents would most often narrate their feelings about being Kyrgyz in relation to Russian historical and cultural influence. The question allowed me to minimize my influence on the informant's viewpoint, but enabled them to express their own perspective.

Furthermore, with this question I refrained from using academic terminologies, such as colonialism and decolonization, in order to avoid imposing my own approach of applying postcolonial theory to the Kyrgyz context. Interestingly, the interviewees themselves often used terms like colonialism or decolonization when answering the question. I used these terms only when the interviewees themselves brought them up, otherwise I chose to ask further questions using the language and descriptions that the interviewees themselves used to describe their feelings of Kyrgyz identity. In doing so, I avoided imposing my own concepts and expressions during the interview.

The first general question about the interviewee's life story provided rich background material for interpreting individual biographies. However, respondents often engaged in lengthy narrations at the expense of the second question. Interviewees who were less fluent in English expressed a degree of exhaustion after recounting their general life story and gave rather brief answers to the second question. As a result, I tried to strike a balance between these questions by asking less immanent questions about the life story if I expected that it would limit the respondent's energy and time resources to answer the second question in detail.

Initially, an interview guideline consisting of many small-scale questions was designed to help memorizing all the essential aspects of the research topic. Throughout the research process, however, the guideline became increasingly redundant as it imposed a very rigid structure on the interview and disrupted the flow of the narration. Instead, the interview allowed for more agency on the part of the interviewee to determine the direction of the conversation. I did, however, keep a set of exmanent questions in mind that were covered to some extent in each interview. These included questions aimed at eliciting biographical narrations about personal experiences that had a formative impact on the development of attitudes towards being Kyrgyz, their historical consciousness about the Russian Empire and Soviet rule in Kyrgyzstan, and their judgments about contemporary Russian politics. The narrations about how the

respondents felt about being Kyrgyz at different stages of their lives usually provided concepts and expressions to translate these exmanent questions into immanent ones. Furthermore, I always asked about the discussion of these issues in the family setting, with an emphasis on the parent-child dynamics during these debates.

The interviews were conducted in April and May 2024 and lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours. Most interviews were recorded in cafés, but some were recorded in the homes of interview partners. Prior to the interview, I obtained written consent to record the interview. The consent form included a broad explanation of the research topic and further information about the storage and protection of their data. While the consent form gave a general idea of the research, it was intentionally vague to ensure non-interference and openness of the interview. The consent form clarified that the thesis would consider the political socialization of youth in Bishkek and examine individual biographies, but did not include terms such as decolonization. A copy of the consent form can be found in Appendix B.

While I tried to maintain methodological coherence, I also made compromises when the interview situation required it. For example, during the first interview, a friend of the respondent was present and spontaneously joined the conversation. The interview therefore developed more into a peer group discussion between two friends. The conversation did not contain the initial life story narration, but other insightful stories that were useful for the research. Therefore, the interview was included in the empirical material of the thesis, although it deviated from the narrative-biographical interview method.

Case selection

Three interviewees were recruited through my personal contacts, while another seven interview partners were recruited through social media and snowballing. I shared a story on Instagram that was reposted by my contacts, reaching people I did not know. In most cases, interviewees volunteered to help recruiting additional interviewees from their circle of friends.

During the recruitment process, I remained vague about the research topic to avoid distorting the spontaneous and unprepared storytelling of the interview. Therefore, the Instagram story described the research interest as “how you formed your views on politics and society”. In addition, I asked interviewees that assisted in establishing further contacts to refrain from giving their friends precise information about the topic and procedure of the interview.

However, this seemed to be more difficult when I conducted interviews with respondents from my personal social environment, as some of them were already familiar with my interests and ideas. It was obvious that at least one interview partner responded to the elicitation technique with a very narrow answer, as he was aware of my scope of interest. However, additional invitations to recount his life story in a broader way succeeded in provoking the desired independent narration.

Initially, the idea was to focus on cases that reported family conflicts over the issue of the war in Ukraine and Russian politics in general. However, inquiring about the nature of political debates within a family prior to the interview would have certainly have revealed part of my agenda and thus distorted the authenticity of the spontaneous narration. In the end, I decided to apply only three criteria to select eligible interview partners: they had to be between 18 and 30 years old, live in Bishkek, and be born and raised in the Kyrgyz Republic. Despite the fact that parental attitudes were not a criterion for participation in the research, the overwhelming majority of interviewees reported conflictual political debates with their parents. While ten respondents expressed strong anti-Russian sentiments, seven interviewees described at least one of their parents as “pro-Russian” or “Putinist”. The number of interviewees describing the discrepancy in political attitudes toward Russia between parents and children provides further evidence that intergenerational political dissent in the family environment became a common social reality after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The choice to study youth living in Bishkek is based on the assumption that critical-minded, liberal people are most likely to reside in the capital and that biographies involving a decolonial transformation are most common among Bishkek youth. However, the focus on Bishkek also revealed urban-rural cleavages surrounding processes of decolonization, as the place of socialization determines the primary exposure to either Russian or Kyrgyz language, which in turn influences a wide range of biographical experiences related to personal feelings of Kyrgyzness. The sample offers some insight into these divergent experiences, as nine interviewees spent most of their childhoods in the Russified environment of the capital and learned Russian as their first language. However, two respondents were raised in the countryside and moved to Bishkek only after graduating from high school. These two interviewees learned Kyrgyz as their primary language.

Since the requirements for participation in the research did not include any reference to ethnicity, Kyrgyzstani people of Uzbek and Kazakh origin are also represented in the sample. However, there are no Slavic or other European ethnicities among the cases studied. Thus, the research cannot provide a comprehensive answer to the question of how ethnicity interacts with perceptions of decolonization, but the interviews demonstrate that ethnic identification certainly plays a crucial role in the way Kyrgyzstani people relate to the issue.

Finally, it is important to remember that the sample represents the most liberal and more privileged part of Kyrgyzstani youth. This is reflected in the high level of education of the respondents and their experiences of studying abroad. This is a result of the recruitment process that took place in my social environment. Furthermore, participation in the interview required a good command of the English language, which further limited the diversity of the sample. On the other hand, the sample is diverse in terms of age range (18-29 years old), educational paths, and professional carriers. A detailed overview of social and demographic information, including personal and parental political attitudes can be found in a template in the Appendix B.

Data collection ended after the tenth interview. At this point, I had identified recurring themes and topics throughout the interviews, which allowed for the extraction of common experiences and interpretations. Nevertheless, additional interviews would have been necessary to achieve theoretical saturation and to be more confident in the findings presented in this thesis. However, given the limited time and scope of this master's thesis, I decided to proceed with data analysis after more than a month of interviewing.

4.2 Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were converted into written text using an AI-powered transcription software, called converter.app. However, the transcripts required extensive proofreading. In the process, I translated segments of the interviews conducted in Russian into English. The following rules were established prior to the transcription:

- Marking of speaker changes
- Creation of consecutively numbered paragraphs

- Notation of emotions, interruptions of the conversations, and changes in the surroundings in square brackets, e.g. [laughs], [interruption of the interview to buy cigarettes at a nearby store].
- Grammatical errors were not corrected during the transcription, but the flow of the speech was enhanced by omitting fillers.

The empirical material was processed through qualitative content analysis, following the methodological steps elaborated by Kuckartz (2018). Data analysis was supported by MAXQDA coding software. Qualitative content analysis suggests reducing the complexity of the interviews by subsuming recurring themes within categories (Kuckartz, 2018, p. 32). Therefore, the analysis requires the creation of a system of categories that capture the relevant content of the interviews and reflect the research question (Kuckartz, 2018, p. 63). Categories can be created deductively (suggested by the theoretical framework or literature review) or inductively (created from the empirical material) (Kuckartz, 2018, p. 64).

This research employs a mixed strategy, combining inductive and deductive approaches to category creation. Some categories were deducted from theoretical readings, such as important socializing agents suggested by political socialization scholarship. Categories like “parents”, “school” or “media” were applied in a deductively because they were extracted from theory prior to the research. Most categories, however, were carved out from the empirical material, such as recurring generational experiences that were discussed repeatedly among respondents. Categories like “shame of speaking/ being Kyrgyz” or “hybridity and unbelonging” were generated from engagement with the empirical material. Each category was given a definition to guide the coding process and to distinguish the categories from each other.

First, I read the whole empirical material and wrote thematic summaries of each case. Afterwards, the first cycle of coding was carried out, in which segments of the text were assigned to the system of categories. While deductive categories were created prior to coding, inductive categories partly emerged during the coding process. After the first round of coding was completed, I examined the passages subsumed under a particular category and developed further subcategories reflecting the differences and commonalities of the empirical cases. The Appendix C features a visual overview of the category system, demonstrating the

hierarchization of the categories. The visualization also provides information about the amount of text segments included in each (sub-)category.

As suggested by Kuckartz (2018, p. 111), a thematic coordinate grid was used for the detailed evaluation of the results in MAXQDA. Within the grid, the cases are arranged in columns, while the (sub-)categories form the rows of the grid. The text segments within each box were abstracted and condensed into case-related and cross-case summaries, which were filled into the boxes of the grid. This tabular summary was used for the cross-case analysis of thematic characteristics and for in-depth analysis of individual cases.

5. Results

In this chapter, I will present the findings of my empirical research. The first section takes a macro-perspective, discussing the broader social transformations towards decolonization that defined the respondents' generational experiences and contributed to the establishment of a distinct decolonial generational consciousness among Kyrgyzstani youth. Section 5.2 examines the interplay of socialization agents throughout the process of acquiring political attitudes. The section discusses the extent to which different agents helped or hindered the establishment of a decolonial consciousness. Section 5.3 sheds light on how macro-societal trends of decolonization were experienced by individuals. The section outlines recurring themes and personal experiences of decolonization, discussing how the issue of decolonization entered the lives of Kyrgyzstani youth and how it changed their way of relating to Russia and their Kyrgyz roots. Chapter 5.4 analyzes the intergenerational debate over decolonization by scrutinizing family conflicts over issues such as Russian politics, Soviet history, and Kyrgyz culture.

5.1 Generational experiences of growing up in post-independent Kyrgyzstan

This subchapter examines the generational experiences of Kyrgyzstani youth from a macro-societal perspective, shedding light on the societal conditions they encountered during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. The section outlines the common social experiences that were reflected in the individual biographies of the respondents and contributed to their life stories of how they related to being Kyrgyz at different stages of their lives. I outline four common generational experiences which repeatedly came up during the interviews: the shame and inferiority associated with being Kyrgyz during childhood and teenage years, urban-rural cleavages, hybridity and struggles of belonging, and the recent revival of Kyrgyz culture and language. Throughout my analysis, I will link these macro-societal phenomena to individual biographical experiences to demonstrate how broader societal transformations relate to individual biographies of decolonization.

"I was ashamed to speak Kyrgyz": childhood and teenage years in post-Soviet Bishkek

Kyrgyzstani youth born in the 1990's and early 2000's grew up in an environment that was still heavily influenced by the Soviet legacy. Soviet influence persisted in street names, statues, family names, "Victory Day" parades, history textbooks, and the popularity of Russian culture and TV programs. In addition, the Russian language was dominant in all aspects of life in Bishkek, Altynay explains:

> "I was born and raised in Bishkek. Most of my friends, like we were speaking Russian. And it also, I think made me feel like I was, I belong to this place if like, I must speak Russian." (Altynay, Pos. 8)

In the Russified environment of Bishkek, children barely learned the Kyrgyz language, and the Kyrgyz language was usually associated with low education, poor manners, and rural origins. Being ashamed for speaking Kyrgyz was a common childhood experience that almost all interviewees included in their narrations. It also guided parental decisions to enlist their children for Russian-speaking kindergartens and schools, since Russian language was associated with higher educational standards and was supposed to provide their children with additional life opportunities. For example, Temirkul explained that there was a Kyrgyz-speaking school in his neighborhood, but all the children went to the neighboring district to attend the Russian school, based on their parents' perception that knowledge of the Kyrgyz language was less desirable than fluency in Russian.

In order to demonstrate their social status as educated, middle-class urbanites and to dissociate themselves from the negative traits attributed to being Kygyz, post-Soviet youth learned to conceal their Kyrgyz identity and present themselves as Russified Kyrgyz:

> "Growing up speaking Kyrgyz, it was kind of shameful and we would hide the fact that, some people would hide the fact that they speak Kyrgyz, they would say 'oh I don't know Kyrgyz, I only speak Russian', something like that, and often I would say that to myself, I don't know Kyrgyz, I only speak Russian." (Aiperi, Pos. 78)

Interestingly, in some cases, the denial of Kyrgyz roots occurred already at a very early age. For example, Altynay told everyone in her kindergarten that she was Russian despite her Kyrgyz ethnicity, while Temirkul's brother refused to eat meat at the age of six, explaining that he was Russian, and that Russians did not eat meat. These early, childish ways of dissociating oneself

from being Kyrgyz show how pervasive ideas of Kyrgyz inferiority were in society, as they penetrated the minds of children at a very early age.

Feelings of inferiority were perpetuated by experiences of racism, as Kyrgyz people faced discrimination by ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan. For example, Nurbek and Begayim describe how they were called “Kirgiziata” in their childhood. The expression derives from the colonial term “Kirgizia”[2], which Russians applied to Kyrgyz people, since Russian phonetics do not allow the “ы“-sound after the letter “K” and “G”. Furthermore, the “-ta” ending conveys a demeaning connotation, turning the expression into a racial slur. The effects of racial discrimination are also prevalent in Yntymak’s experiences, who struggled to accept his Kyrgyz origins, as Russians mocked him for his Kyrgyz name:

> “My name is not usual for Russians, even in the kindergarten, they always call me Mak, just Mak. But they couldn't pronounce my full name, Yntymak [ынтымак][3], and when they tried to pronounce it, it sounded so ugly. Like, I don't know, I didn't like my name because of Russians, because they kind of made fun of my name. So, I wanted to change it, because of Russians, so they could pronounce my name correctly […]. Because when you're like, live in a situation like this, you just start to think that the problem is you.” (Yntymak, Pos. 225)

As Yntymak was thinking about pleasing Russians by changing his name, his story also demonstrates how his self-esteem considering his Kyrgyz roots suffered from degrading comments about his name. He did not recognize racial discrimination as root cause for his mistreatment but perceived his Kyrgyzness as problem. Colonial race relations that position Russian people as superior to Kyrgyz people were wide-spread and adopted by Kyrgyz people themselves, as Temirkul noticed, when he experienced racial discrimination by other Kyrgyz people, for having a darker skin color as them:

> “My mom has dark skin of color. That's why, me too, and in school, my classmates tried to bully me, calling me ‘black’, you know, like slurs. And they weren't white either, it was strange, like why you call me black, when you are too, not black, but you're not much whiter than me? My mom even told me like in her class years, in 1965, I guess,

[2] In Russian language the “ы“-sound can not follow after the letters of “K” or “G”, which makes it difficult for Russian native speakers to pronounce “Кыргызстан“ [Kyrgyzstan]. “Kirgizia” was a Soviet-era designation which aligns with the phonetic system of Russian language. Nowadays, the name is perceived as colonial toponym and its continued use is seen as denial of Kyrgyzstan’s independence. Kyrgyz people increasingly accuse Russians to refuse the correct pronunciation not because they are unable to do so, but because of prevailing colonial attitudes.

[3] In Russian language, there are no words beginning with the letter “ы“, which supposedly creates difficulties for Russians to pronounce the name.

> her classmates bullied her too. They called her a lot of slurs. I guess it's a fun experience because… it's really a fun experience because it's strange how Kyrgyz, we're using racism to everyone." (Temirkul, Pos. 14)

Temirkul explains that his darker skin color is connected to his rural origins, since his mother migrated from the countryside to Bishkek. His rural origin and darker skin color make him appear racially "more Kyrgyz", compared to his Kyrgyz classmates, which regard themselves as racially superior for fitting better into the image of the Russified urban Kyrgyz, because of their lighter skin color. Temirkul experiences a complex racial hierarchization, where Kyrgyz people rank differently, depending on how strongly their physical appearance and habitus is associated with Kyrgyzness or Russianness. His experiences demonstrate how Kyrgyz people internalized these racial hierarchies and reproduced these racial differentiations by discriminating against others.

A similar dynamic can be observed in the case of Nurbek. Growing up in rural Kyrgyzstan he is surrounded by a Kyrgyz-speaking environment, from which he tries to set himself apart by studying Russian language:

> "I used to be ashamed, that I didn't know really good Russian. But then, there were moments when I visited children's library a lot. And again, Russian ladies worked there. When I could have a talk with them, and when they would say, oh, he reads a lot. And then... Like, this boy, like he's smart, etc. I would feel validated by them. And more like… I think I also perceived them as smarter. And these Russian ladies validated my skills in Russian. And other things, I would feel like... Like a more... Like a more advanced Kyrgyz, like... who knows Russian well, etc. Because compared to that, my peers who only spoke Kyrgyz, who used to study in Kyrgyz classes, we kind of perceived them […] differently." (Nurbek, Pos. 20)

His narration expresses a sense of internalized inferiority related to his Kyrgyz origins, which he tries to discard by emulating Russian people. He tries to shed "backward" features of Kyrgyzness, by immersing himself into Russian culture and literature. Although he cannot become Russian himself, the compliments of the Russian librarians provide him with a sense of recognition by an authority, to which he subordinates.

The respondents demonstrate how colonial race relations continue to operate in the first two decades of post-independent Kyrgyzstan. When transitioning from childhood to their teenage years, the significance of Russian language might even increase, because the importance of the domestic family environment, where Kyrgyz occasionally was spoken diminishes, while

social recognition of peers becomes more relevant. In the 2000's and early 2010's, Kyrgyzstani youth culture was strongly inspired by Russian trends and less concerned about local culture, as Nurbek describes his cultural orientation during his teenage years:

> "All the TV that I watched was like Russian popular channels that had this really goofy TV series about teenagers, etc., about young people. And then Russian pop music, of course, the Russian show business, which I knew a lot about. So, it was cooler than Kyrgyz. Kyrgyz show business didn't attract me because it was more like the thing that your parents love, or your aunts, etc." (Nurbek, Pos. 2)

According to Nurbek's perspective, it appears that Kyrgyz pop culture is something outdated, associated with the elderly. Youth, however tried to set themselves apart from older generations by embracing Russian culture. Interestingly, most of the interviewees use the word "cool" to describe the status of Russian language, compared to Kyrgyz being "uncool". It demonstrates how the level of social prestige attributed to the languages was translated into the symbolic system of teenagers, where peer recognition and the following of social trends are of great importance. Altynay also shared this common teenager perspective, that Kyrgyzstan is not a "cool" country, as she avoided telling foreigners about her country of origin. She feared that being from a "third world country", people would believe that she is less smart and knowledgeable. Therefore, she preferred stating that she is "from a country next to Russia", as being associated with a large country like Russia appeared more meaningful and "cool".

About "Myrk" and "Balkonchik": Urban-rural cleavages in postcolonial Kyrgyzstan

Soviet rule left a strong urban-rural divide in Kyrgyzstan, since Bishkek was heavily Russified, while in the countryside Kyrgyz language and traditions prevailed. This divide is also present among the narratives of the respondents, since the place where they grew up determined their primary language, which subsequently also impacted how they relate to Kyrgyzness and Russianness throughout their life. The majority of interviewees grew up in the Russian-speaking environment of Bishkek, which created a feeling of disconnection from their Kyrgyz roots. On the other hand, Kyrgyz-speaking people from the countryside struggle to become fluent in Russian to access socio-economic opportunities in the capital.

For Bishkek-born people, travelling to the countryside to visit relatives is an important way of learning about Kyrgyz traditions and practicing Kyrgyz language. Many urban respondents

spent their vacations at their grandparent's village and recall how these experiences had a decisive impact to develop a positive attitude towards being Kyrgyz and becoming acquainted with their origins. For example, in her childhood, Altynay was sent by her parents to her grandmother in Naryn every summer to improve her knowledge in Kyrgyz language. While she did not know about her parent's intentions, her visits to the countryside enabled her to enhance her language skills. In a similar way, Begayim remembers the positive impact of countryside visits to become more conscious about her Kyrgyz roots:

> "But every year for summer holidays, I went to Issyk Kul, to my grandparents and spent the whole summer there. […] sometimes, someone passed away and we had this funeral process going on and I saw it, sometimes babies were born and I saw this process. I saw some weddings. And my granddad, he gathered his colleagues from all around Kyrgyzstan […] and he was hosting them in Kyrgyz traditional way. We had these yurts built, this killing of poor sheep and horses, but I saw everything, how it's preparing and how it's cooking. So, I think I started to feel that I'm more Kyrgyz during these summer holidays, when I saw all of this. Because at this moment, I was the closest to all of our traditions. And language, because in city, in Bishkek, you just don't have an environment to speak Kyrgyz language, but there when you go to visit some of your relatives, they don't speak Russian. You're just forced to speak Kyrgyz and improve it." (Begayim, Pos. 20)

However, going to the countryside, Russified Kyrgyz people can also encounter resentment by the rural population, who blame urbanites for being unaware of their language and traditions. Gulnara describes how engaging with rural Kyrgyzstan had the opposite effect on her attitude towards being Kyrgyz. As her relatives mocked her for her poor Kyrgyz skills, she adopted a more reserved attitude towards Kyrgyz culture:

> "When I was a child, we went a lot to Talas. It's my dad's countryside. And my grandma, she was not bullying me, but she was making fun of my accent and my other cousins from this side of my family, they were just making fun of me speaking Kyrgyz. And it really traumatized me a bit, because I was close. I mean, it closed my connection to any Kyrgyz language narrative in my life. That's why I didn't even try to speak Kyrgyz." (Gulnara, Pos. 28)

While the interviewees occasionally expressed their positive feelings about visiting the countryside, rural Kyrgyzstan had primarily a negative connotation throughout the childhood and teenage years of the respondents. Since Kyrgyzness is associated with the regions of Kyrgyzstan, while Russianness is a feature of the capital, the hierarchization of Kyrgyz and Russian languages also impacted the way how the Russified urban population perceived the

countryside. Shame about Kyrgyz language is closely connected to demeaning stereotypes, which depict rural population as backward, uncivilized, and uneducated, as Altynay explains:

> "Speaking Kyrgyz was considered like… you came from the villages and no one in urban setting speaks Kyrgyz and so it wasn't like explicitly said that like, oh speaking Kyrgyz is bad but it was more like I think subconsciously in everyone, that if you don't want to be presented as less educated […]. So, it's like this kind of link that goes and like if you want to be presented like you are like smart and like you are open minded and stuff, you have to be from the urban area and in urban area they speak Russian. And I think… I felt that in society even though it wasn't explicitly said to me, but I felt that […]. Because I think, I would be like when I was like a child or teenager, I'm embarrassed if my parents spoke to me in Kyrgyz." (Altynay, Pos. 72)

Postcolonial urban-rural cleavages and reciprocal resentment also materialized in vernacular expressions, such as "Myrk" [Мырк] and "Balkonchik" [Балкончик]. Myrk is a racial slur, which describes uneducated, ill-mannered, Kyrgyz-speaking people from the countryside. The term "Balkonchik" describes Russian-speaking inhabitants of Bishkek, which are accused of being unaware of their cultural traditions and language. "Balkonchik" refers to the sedentary way of living in Soviet apartment blocks, featuring balconies, opposed to rural modes of dwelling.

"I'm embracing my culture and identity" - The Kyrgyz revival

While Russian remains the dominant language in the public space of Bishkek, Kyrgyz culture experienced a revival throughout the last five years and young people gradually started to appreciate Kyrgyz language. The comeback of Kyrgyzness is a broad societal trend which resonates with different segments of society but is particularly driven by young people. Aiperi explains how she experiences the current trend of decolonization among her group of friends:

> "Now, me and my friends, we're telling that it's important to speak Kyrgyz [...]. It's important that we have for example in coffee shops and have menus written in Kyrgyz […]. So, it's kind of revival of bringing back the importance of our own language, that… that we do not lose our own identity in this, by speaking Russian. Also, we're trying to kind of… right now among the young people it's really kind of popular to wear Kyrgyz national dresses or clothes that have Kyrgyz national patterns […]. It's the act of embracing your cultural identity, also. Because… it's kind of, we are bringing back that something, the culture that was suppressed during Soviet regime. Also, if you know, some people are changing, young people are changing their Russian surnames to Kyrgyz surnames […]. So "-ova" is a Russian ending and now people are taking away this Russian ending, just leaving their Kyrgyz names […]. It's… I was thinking about that too, if I should change my last name to Kyrgyz last name and not make it Russian. […].

> Also, we, me and my friends are talking about the important Kyrgyz figures. Talking about the people that were repressed. These people, the Kyrgyz intellectuals, they brought something to our culture, so it's important that we do not forget them. What else? Of course, talking about more that we as an independent country, we should be fully independent and not depend on our neighboring country, like Russia, that has still a big influence on our politics" (Aiperi, Pos. 49)

The decolonial discourse that became increasingly influential among Kyrgyzstani youth thus involves the revaluation of Kyrgyz language, arts, clothes, and music, the removal of colonial legacies, as embodied by the Slavic endings of family names, the critical reassessment of Soviet history, and the questioning of political influence of present-day Russia in Kyrgyzstan. Before, Kyrgyz youth was primarily inspired by Russian pop culture and music, the Kyrgyz revival also increased the popularity of Kyrgyz language among celebrities and music, which started to speak or sing in Kyrgyz language more frequently. Public debates about history became particularly concerned with the repressions against the national intelligentsia during Stalinism, but also the suppressed Central Asian revolt of 1916, and the subsequent exodus of Kyrgyz people to China. The respondents were particularly emotional about their rejection of the Soviet denomination of "Kirgizia" and their insistence of calling their country "Kyrgyzstan". The debate about the designation of their country became somehow symbolic for the struggle to restore independence and defy all kinds of persisting colonial claims and projections enduring from the Soviet period.

While the comeback of Kyrgyz culture is articulated in local youth culture, it is simultaneously promoted by the state. The Kyrgyz revival is not only a grassroots movement, but also enacted from above, as recent legal changes require that civil servants know Kyrgyz language, parliamentary sessions take place in Kyrgyz language and legal documents are published in Kyrgyz language. Nevertheless, Aiperi's statement also demonstrates the importance of her peer group to exchange opinions and discuss this new societal trend and thereby diffuse decolonial sentiments. Several interview partners refer to the recent revival of Kyrgyz culture as a generational phenomenon and consolidate their generational consciousness around shared ideas of decolonization, which are popular within their age-cohort. For example, Batyr explains that "our generation, as I think, started to recognize who them are, actually, and they started to interesting in their own language and culture." (Batyr, Pos. 254), while Aiperi elaborates that "my generation, we were born after the collapse of Soviet Union and then we are kind of on the path of discovering ourselves and our identity." (Aiperi, Pos. 47).

"I was always feeling like an alien": hybrid identities and unbelonging in postcolonial Bishkek

While all the interviewees underwent biographical transformations that reflected broader societal developments of decolonization and expressed their support for the undoing of colonial legacies, there are also moments of ambivalence and feelings of discomfort in the way they relate to their Kyrgyz identity. The ambivalence arises from the combination of Kyrgyz and Russian culture, as the Bishkek-born youth is ethnically Kyrgyz, speaks Russian, and was exposed to a great variety of cultural influences, which created a multicultural environment. The identity of Russified Kyrgyz youth can be explained by Homi Bhabha's concept of hybridity, articulated in his book on "The Location of Culture" (1994). Bhabha describes how mixed identities that are "neither the one nor the other" (1994, p. 25) emerge from the master-subject relationship during colonial rule and open a third space of transcultural negotiation. The notion of hybridity is best described by Altynay:

> "I think being Kyrgyz is like really kind of interesting experience because as they say, we speak like Russian, we look Asian. At the same time, we are super influenced by Western world. So, a lot of things are encapsulated, I think in even average Kyrgyz person. And I find it quite fascinating at this point." (Altynay, Pos. 8)

Having a hybrid identity in contemporary Kyrgyzstan involves a variety of emotions. Some respondents embrace their identity as Russian-speaking Kyrgyz and despite their conviction for decolonization, they do not seek to discard the impact of Russian language and culture on the formation of their personality. For example, Gulnara highlights how she perceived her knowledge of Russian language as an asset to access culture and education:

> "I see a lot of pros, for me, as being a Russian actually, speaking person. Because if I only spoke Kyrgyz, to me, it would be a shutdown shelf between me and my culture, actually. Like cartoons that I watched, music that I listened, books that I read. A lot of things that I know, that made me, I learned it in Russian. […]. Okay, they try to put down Kyrgyz […] and that's why I don't know what to feel. I just know that it actually made me good to be a Russian-speaking person." (Gulnara, Pos. 38)

Gulnara's statement conveys a degree of ambivalence as she expresses her disavowal for Russian colonialism, but simultaneously accepts the impact of Russian culture in the region,

as she positively evaluates her knowledge of Russian language. This ambiguity of denouncing Russia for colonialism, while embracing Russian culture is evident among many respondents, as Temirkul describes how his admiration of Russian pop music remained unchanged, despite his disavowal of colonial attitudes expressed by Russian migrants in Kyrgyzstan. In a similar way, Batyr explains how he considers Russian influence and the Soviet legacy in Kyrgyzstan as deeply problematic, but always supports Russian athletes in international sport events and even feels a degree of patriotic compassion. Although Yntymak feels a lot of resentment towards Russia, he describes his emotional attachment towards the country. For example, he feels represented by the appearance of Russian culture in US-American movies, hinting at how for many Kyrgyz people, Russia might still occupy a mediating position between Kyrgyzstan and the world:

> "If I see some something Russian in, for example, American movies, I always feel so like, I don't know, but I feel so proud because there's some Russian… because something that I know […]. [Continues in Russian] It would be better of course, if they would show Kyrgyzstan there, but [continues in English] they don't show Kyrgyzstan so that's why we just, we have what we have maybe." (Yntymak, Pos. 121)

Despite vocal convictions to decolonization, many respondents do not transition to Kyrgyz language, citing their difficulties to learn the language or personal attachment to Russian language. Also, some of the interviewees acknowledge Kyrgyzstan's limited geopolitical agency to emancipate from Russia and highlight the necessity to maintain positive relations, due to economic dependencies. It appears that Kyrgyzstani youth incorporate elements of decolonization and colonial legacies into their everyday practices and world views, negotiating a third space of postcoloniality.

While Kyrgyzstani youth partly embrace their postcolonial hybridity, it can also be a source of identity crisis and feelings of unbelonging. For example, Temirkul describes how the simultaneous influence of Russian and Kyrgyz culture created a feeling of not fulfilling societal expectations:

> "You know, it's like, I was always feeling like I was an alien, because I didn't speak Kyrgyz. It's just what I felt all the time, because I felt like I'm not Kyrgyz enough, I'm not Russian enough, I'm just in between." (Temirkul, Pos. 14)

Temirkul explains a struggle to identify with preconceived paradigms of being Kyrgyz or being Russian and fearing disapproval for his in-betweenness. This also resonates with Kanykey, who described a strong feeling of alienation, separateness, and unbelonging as a Russian-speaking Kyrgyz:

> "When I was a child, I was in this Russian bubble, so people used to divide like if you were grown up in the center of Bishkek and you speak in Russian, then you're Kirgiz [Киргиз] and if you're speaking Kyrgyz and maybe you're from some village, then you are Kyrgyz [Кыргыз][4]. […]. I guess that's why I felt outside of this feeling that I'm Kyrgyz, because I'm Kyrgyz, but I'm speaking Russian. […]. I never felt that I'm Kyrgyz, because it's like you know, there is some group of people who is Kyrgyz, but you're not part of them. […] you're just watching them from the window, you know, it's like you're standing in the house and you're watching people from the window, but you never interact with them." (Kanykey)

Kanykey's experience of distinguishing between traditional "Kyrgyz" and Russified "Kirgiz" people demonstrates how the merge of Russian and Kyrgyz culture during the process of colonization manifested in vernacular practices reflecting the hybridity of Russian-speaking Kyrgyz people. Kyrgyz people with greater exposure to Russian influences are separated from Kyrgyz people that preserved their language and culture from external forces. The continued differentiation of "Kyrgyz" and "Kirgiz" people shows how colonialism created a societal divide which persists throughout the era of independence.

The uneasiness of being a Russian-speaking Kyrgyz is also an experience of Cholpon, as she denies her Kyrgyz origins in front of taxi drivers, because she wants to avoid judgmental comments. The fear of social disavowal became particularly urgent, since social trends towards decolonization shifted the blame from the Kyrgyz-speaking population on the Russian-speaking Kyrgyz population, as Aiperi explained:

> "Back then [in my childhood] I didn't speak and I was… some people would shame you for speaking Kyrgyz and now people shame you for not speaking Kyrgyz, so that was… that's the change that we had in society, because now especially elderly people, they

[4] The major difference in the pronunciation is the "ы" opposed to the "И"-sound, but also the "К" and "Г" in "Kyrgyz" sound rougher, because they are generated from the throat.

> say ‘oh you should speak Kyrgyz’, if you're not speaking Kyrgyz, you should be ashamed of yourself, because you don't know your history or culture.” (Aiperi, Pos. 55)

Aiperi’s observation shows that despite the recent rehabilitation of Kyrgyz language, cultural techniques of shaming persist as a method of the community to enforce social expectations on other members of society. Therefore, decolonization is not only experienced as empowering process, but also as coercive social dynamic. This creates uncomfortable situations for some of the Russian-speaking Kyrgyz people, such as Kanykey and Gulnara, who would like to improve their fluency in Kyrgyz, but receive negative reactions by Kyrgyz-speaking people, such as starring, mocking, and shaming. While speaking Kyrgyz language became more important, several interviewees complain that society does not provide a supportive environment for Kyrgyz people to learn their language. In certain social settings, the social trend of moving towards decolonization created a climate of intolerance for hybridity, which discomforts people who struggle to fit in the ethno-nationalist paradigm.

In the multi-ethnic environment of Kyrgyzstan, the linkage of ethno-nationalism with decolonization constrains the degree to which non-Kyrgyz citizens of the country can identify with decolonization. For example, Malika, who is of Kazakh-Uzbek origin feels alienated by their peer’s intentions to coerce her into speaking Kyrgyz. As she grew up in a Kazakh-Uzbek family environment, she never identified with Kyrgyzness and feels no desire to learn the language. But also, Kanykey, who is ethnically Kyrgyz, feels a degree of exclusion by the growing importance of Kyrgyz culture, due to her physical appearance:

> “I also think that I have these problems with identity, because also I don't look Kyrgyz, but I'm Kyrgyz at the passport and my parents are Kyrgyz, all my relatives are Kyrgyz, except this Tatar and Uzbek bloods. So, for me it's really hard because when I see people on the streets, I don't find similarities with me, so I felt more... more close to Uzbek people in Tashkent, because when I see their faces, I feel like I look like them and they consider me as a local and this is why I felt like home when I'm in Tashkent.” (Kanykey, Pos. 30).

In summary, Kyrgyzstani youth grew up with a variety of generation-defining experiences, which left an imprint on their outlook on Russia and their Kyrgyz identity. Throughout their childhood and teenage years, the Soviet legacy persisted as Russian language continued to be the more prestigious than Kyrgyz language. Fluency in Russian continued to operate as

important marker for the educated urban middle class to display their social capital and distinguish themselves from rural Kyrgyz-speaking people. However, the recent five years witnessed a revival of Kyrgyz language and a gradual disappearance of stereotypes, which associated Kyrgyz language with backwardness and rural origins. Kyrgyzstani youth does not only embrace this current trend of decolonization, but young people are also an important advocate to popularize Kyrgyz culture and language. However, the process of decolonization also created a lot of ambiguous feelings and identity struggles, since the growing patriotic sentiments in society are conflicting with the hybrid identities of the Russian-speaking population of Bishkek.

5.2 The impact of socialization agents on the establishment of a decolonial consciousness

Drawing on the theoretical elaborations of chapter 2.2 and the literature review of chapter 3.2, this chapter provides a more detailed analysis of the process by which young people in Kyrgyzstan acquired their political attitudes towards Russia and being Kyrgyz. The chapter disentangles the interplay of socialization agents shaping the political socialization of young Kyrgyzstanis. The analysis considers socialization agents suggested by political socialization literature, but also additional actors that turned out to be relevant for the interviewees. The chapter scrutinizes how these agents were either hindering or furthering the establishment of a decolonial consciousness throughout the socialization process.

The literature review in chapter 3 demonstrates a generational gap between children's and parental attitudes towards Russia and a different outlook on history and postcolonial dependencies. The literature suggests that parents are less inclined to decolonization, given their nostalgia for Soviet Union and admiration of present-day Russia. Contrasted with the negative attitudes of youth towards Russia and their support for decolonization, the research was initially pre-occupied with the question to what degree parents transmitted their "colonial attitudes" to their children and to what extent alternative socializing agents undermined this transmission process, exposing them to decolonial narratives. However, this perspective is not completely accurate, as it underestimates the complexity of the political attitudes of the parental generation, which sometimes has a more ambivalent relationship with decolonization.

Parents

Many interview partners were not able to consistently describe the evolution of the political attitudes of their parents, because throughout their childhood, political debates only occurred occasionally at their family home. The absence of political discussions during the respondent's upbringing hints that the transmission rates of political values in Kyrgyzstani families might be low, since the emulation of attitudes requires consistent cue-giving (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 783). While social norms oblige parents in Kyrgyzstan to provide moral guidance for their offspring and transfer their knowledge to the younger generation (Beyer, 2016, p. 82), the parents of the respondents barely included their attitudes towards Russia into socially entrenched modes of parent-child transmission.

Parental political attitudes became more visible to the interviewees after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which sparked heated debates among many families and exposed generational divides considering their perspective on Russia. Out of eleven interviewees, seven reported that at least one of their parents had pro-Russian attitudes at some point in their lives, while another respondent described the strong anti-Western sentiments of his mother. Encountering attitudinal differences towards politics and dealing with generational gaps related to Russia and Soviet history thus are a common experience for Kyrgyzstani youth.

In most cases, the transmission process of political attitudes occurred not through parent-initiated conversations, where elderly sought to pass their pro-Russian sentiments to their children. Instead, children conceived parental attitudes through their parent's choices in media consumption. Most respondents describe that during their childhood, their parents watched Russian state TV at their family homes, exposing their children to Russian propaganda. Most parents occasionally commented some of the narratives presented in the TV, but did not promote a culture of political debate. Parents did not provide consistent cue-giving and reinforcement, required for successful transmission (Jennings et al., 2009, p. 783). Parent-child transmission therefore occurred mostly in an indirect way, mediated by media consumption in the family home.

Among the respondents, only Altynay, Cholpon, and Malika admitted that their parents were successful in transmitting their pro-Russian views to them. However, Malika also highlights that the transmission of her father's political views was not based on consensual solidarity, but

rather on her awareness of filial obligations (normative solidarity) (Katz & Lowenstein, 2022, p. 33):

> "Yeah, he's like now, you know, when you are a child in a really traditional family, you have to obey. Like, I really see that, okay, what my father is doing, but you couldn't say something against him. Because it will be, it means that you are not respecting him. So, I remember during my childhood, my bachelor year, I just, when he's telling something, I was okay, yeah, father, you're right." (Malika, Pos. 64)

Societal norms of "respecting the elderly" and internalized age hierarchies thus facilitated inter-generational transmission of pro-Russian attitudes in the case of Malika. However, Malika's embrace of pro-Russian attitudes changed as soon as she moved to study abroad, where she was exposed to alternative socializing agents and started questioning the age-hierarchies promoted by Kyrgyzstani society. The case of Malika implies that the transmission of political values based on normative solidarity has a low chance to persist throughout adulthood. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, that would mean that parents transmit their pro-Russian attitudes to their children based on cultural norms of filial piety, but that the adoption of parental values is short-lived, since they were never fully convinced of their parent's political orientations, but only adopted them because they felt obliged to do so. Unfortunately, the interviews do not provide enough evidence to draw broader conclusions, since most respondents did not include cultural notions of parental authority into their narrations.

On the other side, Temirkul and Begayim explained that their parent's preferences for Russian state TV did not impact their political attitudes in favor of Russia, as they questioned the legitimacy of foreign media in their country. As a 15-year-old boy, Temirkul was wondering, why his family watched Putin's New Year speech instead of their own president's. He noticed that "something is not right" about that and replaced Russian state TV with online sources. Begayim even recounted an early childhood memory, when she inquired her parents about the Russian TV shows and established a critical attitude to Russian state media:

> "When I was a child, I remember, I was like about three or four years old. And all of our TV channels were Russian. And that's why seeing all this content on TV, I saw that we are part of Russia. And I remember this conversation with my mother […]. I was asking like what is Russia? What is Moscow? Is it different? And she was explaining me that Moscow is a capital of Russia. I said do we live far away from Moscow? Are we Russia? She said no, we are not Russia, we are Kyrgyzstan. And it was mind-blowing, why we

> are watching this content then if we are not Russia? Why we are watching this news?" (Begayim, Pos. 42)

Considering Soviet Union, parental attitudes reverberate well with the findings of Dadabaev (2021). The respondents explained how their parents expressed almost exclusively positive feelings about Soviet Union, remembering their youth with nostalgia. Their parents tend to romanticize Soviet Union for their experiences of economic stability, education, and social security. Positive memories of the Soviet period also explain their emotional attachment with present-day Russia, in the case of Aiperi's, Temirkul's, and Cholpon's parents. At the same time, Cholpon's mother, Altynay's parents, Aiperi's parents, and Gulnara's father downplayed the existence of repressions during Stalinism and do not consider the cruelties committed by the Russian Empire in 1916.

However, the mothers of Begayim, Kanykey, and Nurbek told their children how their ancestors fled from persecution to China during "Urkun", but in Nurbek's case it did not contribute to the establishment of a critical consciousness about Russian colonial violence, because his mother did not provide him with necessary context information. Kanykey explains that she felt sorry for the losses of her ancestors, but did not develop a compassionate feeling about it, as she was to young and unaware to fully grasp the meaning of the events. Begayim's mother did not actively seek to transmit the knowledge about the 1916 ethnic cleansing to her daughter, but only told her how it affected her ancestors, when Begayim learned about the topic herself and inquired her mother about their family history. In general, the parental generation did rather not transmit interpretations of history which could denounce Russian and Soviet rule as colonialism.

While I assumed that the elderly's admiration of Russia goes along with regarding Kyrgyz culture as inferior, the reality proved more complex. Many interviewees explain how their parents are pro-Russian and have nostalgic feelings about Soviet Union, but still take pride in being Kyrgyz. Although many parents embraced the process of Russification, partially deny Soviet repressions against the Kyrgyz national intelligentsia, they still take pride in their Kyrgyz roots, showing how colonial rule had an ambivalent impact on the parental generation. It seems that many parents reconciled their Soviet nostalgia and pro-Russian attitudes with their Kyrgyz patriotism by not only being proud about being a Soviet citizen, but by taking pride in Kyrgyzstan being part of the Soviet Union.

However, patriotism among Kyrgyz parents is a gendered phenomenon: while the mothers of Altynay, Yntymak, Kanykey, Yntymak, Cholpon, and Gulnara did not express any pride about being Kyrgyz during the childhood and teenage years of their children, the fathers of Altynay, Gulnara, Cholpon, Aiperi, and Nurbek took a pivotal role in teaching their children about Kyrgyz traditions and customs. Only Malika's father did not take much effort to transmit knowledge about traditions to his daughter, while the mothers of Aiperi and Nurbek, where the only females engaged in teaching their children about Kyrgyz culture. Usually, when respondents talked about the parental impact on their feelings about being Kyrgyz, their narrations focused on their fathers.

Aiperi explains about her father's patriotic sentiments, how he transmitted general knowledge about Kyrgyz culture to her, and provided her with a sense of emotional attachment to Kyrgyz traditions:

> "My father is a big, like a huge fan of Manas and he named our younger sister after the wife of Manas, Kanykei. […]. [A]nd we have these paintings of Manas all over the house. It was important to him to know this and that we read Manas too. Because Manas is a huge part of Kyrgyz culture. […]. But also, you know the snow leopard is also the… kind of the symbol animal of Kyrgyz people. Also fan of that, my father. We would have like these sketches of snow leopard all over the house, we have paintings of snow leopard and he would say it's important, he's our like ritual, spiritual animal for Kyrgyz people. […]. He would buy a lot of Kyrgyz instruments. For some reason also important to have a Kyrgyz instrument. None of us played that, Komuz, but we have it. Also with like wool carpets, like these attributes of Kyrgyz culture, it was important for us to have it at home. […]. I think it did impact me and I didn't complain about this, I actually liked that we had this stuff […] it's kind of… it's something to be proud of, you know. […]. Yeah, I think it did impact me, because now I think yeah, it's important that we remember these things. That we fight for the preservation of snow leopards and protections of them. That we remember Manas, the book of Manas." (Aiperi, Pos. 70-72)

Nurbek describes a similar process of knowledge transfer, where his father taught him about slaughtering sheep and hosting guests in a traditional way, while his mother familiarized him with Kyrgyz poetry and literature. His parents provided him with a sense of belonging and connection with the family roots. Gulnara also enjoyed her father's enthusiasm about recounting their families' history, but she did not perceive it in terms of belonging to a broader Kyrgyz community and therefore, it did not provide her with patriotic sentiments.

However, other respondents describe a strong resentment against their father's attempts to instill patriotic values into them. For example, Altynay had little understanding for her father's obsession with Kyrgyz culture and their families' origins. Due to his insistence to talk about

Kyrgyz traditions she felt like her father enforced their Kyrgyz identity onto her and therefore rejected his efforts to transmit his patriotic sentiments:

> "I found it annoying that he [my father] would always talk about like history and family history and I thought that he's kind of delusional, because he always like 'oh our family is so great and blah blah' and I'm like 'no family can be like super great, they all have flaws, they all have like some weaknesses, why are you not talking about it? We didn't have it all. I'm like you are delulu. And I cannot handle it'. And that's like because I thought that he was super biased, I didn't like that, so I kind of had resentment to our family history, because I'm like I cannot trust you [laughs]." (Altynay, Pos. 63)

Cholpon also explained that her father was very proud about his Kazakh roots, but during her childhood and teenage years she never cared about it. Although Batyr's father succeeded in transferring knowledge about Kyrgyz language and culture to his son, he did not convey his patriotic sentiments to his son. Batyr describes a problematic relationship with his father, which he feared for his patriarchal and aggressive behavior. The emotional distance undermined a more profound transmission process, but nevertheless provided him with a general sense of Kyrgyzness, which he revived after he established a decolonial consciousness. Altynay also explains that despite her resentment of her father's patriotism, "some seeds were always in my [her] mind" (Altynay, Pos. 13), which she reinvigorated at a later point in her life.

While most of the respondents mentioned their father's insistence to preserve Kyrgyz traditions and transmit knowledge about customs and rituals to their children, mothers often were less engaged in Kyrgyz culture. For example, Cholpon's and Yntymak's mother discouraged them from learning Kyrgyz language. Yntymak recounts how his mother reacted when he discovered his interest in Kyrgyz language:

> "[S]he always says good about the Soviet Union and once she said that 'why you learning Kyrgyz language? Why you don't learning some English or other languages because Kyrgyz language is like'... she said really bad words about Kyrgyz language. She said that not even the dogs interested into Kyrgyz language." (Yntymak, Pos. 104)

Cholpon and Altynay describe their mothers as people that were strongly impacted by the Soviet period and identified more strongly with Soviet Union than with their Kyrgyz ethnicity. Yntymak goes further by denouncing his mother as "Mankurt"[5], a derogatory term for Kyrgyz

[5] In his famous novel "The Day That Lasts More Than a Hundred Years", Aitmatov creates the figure of Mankurt, which is captivated and tortured. Being wrapped in camel skin and exposed to strong sunlight, his brain sustains irreversible damage. He subsequently forgets about his ethnic origins and does not recognize his

people that do not recognize their obligations to preserve their culture and language. Growing up in a polarized environment of a patriotic father and a mother that rejects all Kyrgyz traditions, Altynay positions herself somewhere in between and says that her parents enabled her to think about Kyrgyzness in a more nuanced way, as she perceives positive and negative aspects. Regarding her mother, she explains her dismissal of Kyrgyz culture with her negative experiences with Kyrgyz traditions:

> "My mother was bride kidnapped by my father. […]. So, I think it also was like one of the cornerstones of her resentment of all the traditions and all the stuff because she… for that time, I think wasn't that happy with her life. I mean she put all her like, I think love, affection, like passion and energy into her work and her kids. But she also faced all the negative aspects of our traditions, that's why she was not loving it. She was like resenting it." (Altynay, Pos. 13)

One possible explanation of the gender-divide among the parental generation is the patriarchal dimension of Kyrgyz traditions. Some mothers might have been less involved in transmitting Kyrgyz culture to their children, because they perceived it as repressive, compared to the Soviet influence, which provided them with a degree of emancipation. Fathers, who are granted unquestioned authority within their family according to Kyrgyz traditions (Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005, p. 152), can be considered as profiteers of Kyrgyz culture and might be therefore be more engaged in transmitting these values to their children.

Although Kyrgyz culture traditionally considers elderly as authorities that provide moral guidance (Beyer, 2016, p. 82; Harring et al., 2021, p. 33ff.), politics were actually rarely discussed in the family home during the childhood of the respondents. This observation aligns with the study of Harring et al. (2021, p. 66), which claims that only 10% of Kyrgyzstani families engage in lively political debates in the domestic sphere. Lack of consistent cue-giving and reinforcement can explain that the inter-generational transmission of political values among the respondents is low: parents rarely succeeded transmitting their pro-Russian views and their admiration of Soviet Union to their offspring. While three respondents described how they adopted their parental attitudes during their childhood and teenage period, their pro-Russian orientations did not endure their adulthood.

mother any more. He kills her when she tries to rescue him. Mankurt later became a powerful anti-colonial metaphor to criticize the impact of Soviet rule on indigenous people of Central Asia.

Parents were more successful in transferring knowledge about Kyrgyz culture and patriotic feelings to their children. However, many children resented their father's national pride and attribute more meaning to other biographical experiences and socializing agents in furthering their sense of being Kyrgyz. In summary, parental impact on the political socialization of their offspring seems smaller than proclaimed by Harring et al. (2021).

While the literature review suggested that age hierarchies in Kyrgyzstan pressure children to adopt political attitudes conveyed by their parents, this was only the case with Malika, who explains that she grew up in a very conservative family. Temirkul and Aiperi also described the prevalence of age hierarchies within their family, however they did not subscribe to parental authority, to the disappointment of their fathers. The low prevalence of age hierarchies in the context of parent-child transmission might be explained by the fact that the sample represents a rather liberal segments of Kyrgyzstani society, where cultural norms of filial piety are less pronounced. To fully understand the extent to which ageism and gerontocratic culture informs political socialization in Kyrgyzstan, it is necessary to study socialization processes within more conservative families and rural regions of the country.

Grandparents

While political socialization research does not pay great attention to grandparents as socialization agents, the respondents often included their grandfathers and grandmothers in their narrations. Grandparents are especially relevant in Kyrgyzstan due to the high value attributed to family relations, prolonged family dependency, and socially entrenched intergenerational contact (Harring et al., 2021, p. 34f.), which can increase the intensity of grandchild-grandparent relations.

Malika and Altynay mentioned how their grandmothers consistently communicated their political views to them and eventually took an important part in the intergenerational transmission of pro-Russian orientations:

> "I think for the longest time, I had positive feelings towards Russia. Because my parents were positive towards Russia, my grandma, she was a fan of Russia. Like she really like, she loved Soviet Union, she loved Putin, she loved everything about Russia and should always say how good they are. So, I think, because like I spent so many years like all summer with her, it kind of affected me. So, I had like really that positive image of Russia, it's like, it's that country that like we're together with, like it helps us a lot. Like

> that was the narrative I was receiving. So, like it helps us a lot, it cares of us and in general, it's like, I thought like… Russia is good." (Altynay, Pos. 65)

In a similar way, Malika describes how her grandmother used to amplify anti-Western narratives conveyed by Russian state TV by expressing her disavowal for the USA and the West. She thereby provided reinforcement for the worldviews articulated by the media, which eventually had an important impact on persuading Malika to adopt the pro-Russian positions presented to her. Cholpon's grandmother also had an impact on her political orientations, because she annually took her to the "Victory Day" commemorations of WWII, exposing her to historical narratives and memory culture promoted by Soviet Union and present-day Russia.

On the other side, grandparents also provided their grandchildren with critical historical knowledge and skills in Kyrgyz language. Many grandparents are more strongly associated with the countryside and some of them still reside in rural Kyrgyzstan. Often the parental generation was the first to move to Bishkek and therefore experienced a greater degree of Russification and Soviet influence. For example, Kanykey explained that her grandmother is primarily Kyrgyz-speaking, while her mother is primarily Russian-speaking, because the Soviet rule led to a gradual Russification. According to her perception, Kyrgyz language and culture gradually vanished with generational replacement, because the Soviet system discouraged the intergenerational transmission of Kyrgyz language. In a similar way, religious practices vanished from one generation to another. Generational differences manifested in her grandmother's desire to enroll Kanykey in a Kyrgyz-speaking kindergarten, opposing her mother's decision that attending a Russian-speaking kindergarten would provide her with further life opportunities.

Based on differences between these Soviet generations, grandparents sometimes had a slightly different impact on socialization processes, compared to parents. For example, the grandparents of Altynay, Kanykay, and Begayim were an important socializing agent to transmit skills in Kyrgyz language, since their parental generation was less fluent in Kyrgyz. Their fluency in Kyrgyz was either based on their desire to preserve traditions or their residency in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, grandparents were more likely to practice Kyrgyz traditions compared to the parental generation and for Begayim, their grandparents also took an important role in familiarizing her with Kyrgyz culture.

Some respondents explain divergent levels of history knowledge between parents and grandparents. According to Cholpon, Altynay, and Temirkul, the Soviet schooling system neglected Kyrgyz history and did not provide their parents with basic knowledge about Stalinist repressions or the 1916 ethnic cleansing. In contrast, the grandparents of Cholpon, Kanykey, and Begayim were more concerned about preserving family memories. Since they were born closer to the events of 1916 and witnessed Stalinism, they were able to explain to their grandchildren how these events impacted their family history. For example, Begayim told how her grandmother taught her about their families' fate during the 1916 revolt, which arose strong anti-Russian emotions in her:

> "So, I talked to my grandmother and she told that her, my grandfather's parents and grandparents used to be very rich and wealthy people. They had […] a lot of animals, they had a lot of yurts, a lot of people, they were like khans with their little, little tribe and when it all started, they were forced to give a big part of his things. And escaped to China. And she told me that my grandfather's mother used to hide their gold in yurt. Yurt is like, they have this kan [Kyrgyz expression for a part of the yurt] and she sewed the gold into these things. So no one could find it. He saved some part of his property and when they escaped to China, those who survived, they lived well there. And when they could go back home, they lost some people for sure, because this road is dangerous. They came back, but USSR's people took away everything. So, I was just asking my grandmother and she was just telling these stories." (Begayim, Pos. 28)

However, the respondents were not always interested in the transmission of critical history knowledge of their grandparents. When Kanykey was approached by her grandmother to help her writing down their family history, she did not find joy in learning about her roots and perceived it as an obligation. Family experiences of persecution and displacement did neither arise any emotions in her, nor did it contribute to a critical consciousness of Kyrgyz history:

> "[T]here is this tradition that you have to know your seven great-grandfathers[6] and my grandmother, she wanted to make a book about our relatives and ancestors and she made a book about father's side and grandmother's side. So I was helping her with typing this book, when I was like 17 years old. But I was so tired from this, because it took so much time, […] mostly I did this for her. […]. She was very proud that we made

[6] Knowledge about ancestors is an integral part of Kyrgyz culture. According to Kyrgyz traditions, everyone should be aware of their family genealogy and be able to trace back their patrilineal origins (father's names) for seven generations. The practice of recounting those father's names is called Sanzhyra [Санжыра] in Kyrgyz. Originally, the practice was designed to prevent marriage of closely related individuals to ensure genetic variability within a tribe. Since the importance of tribes as a unity of social organization declined, recounting the Sanzhyra has more of a symbolic meaning, as the knowledge of origins creates a sense of belonging and ethnic consciousness.

> this book and she made this presentation of this book, it was on Kyrgyz language. […]. And yeah, it has stories about our ancestors, how they were moved from, they were forced to move from Kyrgyzstan to China and there was some repressions and yeah. […]. I was 17 years old. I'm a young wild girl and I don't realize why I should do this and my grandmother, she was insisting, […] please help me write this book, it's very important and she was keeping on saying that and I was like okay, I'll make this but it was like you know? It was like a duty on me and I didn't like to do this. […]. I really didn't understand why should I do this. I was really unconscious in that moment. Like right now I realize that it was good." (Kanykey, Pos. 19-27)

The role of grandparents in forging a decolonial mindset is ambivalent. Their knowledge of history can contribute to a critical historical consciousness and their skills in Kyrgyz language can help their grandchildren to establish a connection with their Kyrgyz roots. At the same time, grandparents can act as source of pro-Russian sentiments, conveying pro-Russian narratives to their grandchildren. However, the interviewees often ascribe a different meaning to their grandparents and their impact on their political socialization, compared to their parents. These differences are explained by the stronger Russification of parents compared to grandparents.

School

According to political socialization theory, schools are an important agent for socializing students into the political traditions of their society. The interplay of school curricula and teachers mediating the content can have a persuasive impact on the attitudes of students (Goldenson, 1978). The narrations of the respondents considered mostly Kyrgyz language and history classes as formative experiences to impact their feelings of being Kyrgyz and shaping their attitude towards Russia. Apart from the curriculum, the respondents highlighted their experiences with their teachers, who occupied a central role in their memories.

The narrations of some respondents suggested that colonial race relations persisted in the educational system after the independence of Kyrgyzstan and exposed them to structural inequality throughout their educational journey. Russian teachers were considered as particularly good teachers, because of their fluency in Russian language and affiliation with Russian culture. At the same time, some teachers internalized and reproduced these racial hierarchies, as they perceived Kyrgyz students as less educated than Russian students. Aiperi describes her experiences of discrimination by a Russian teacher:

> "[In] my high school, all my teachers were Russian […] and the majority of students were also Russian, and the Kyrgyz students were minority. And we would often face kind of discrimination by our Russian teachers and I remember in my school, it was sitting me, a Kyrgyz girl, and then next to me was a Russian girl. And my teacher, she's a Russian. She pointed at me and said 'you look like you're not very smart. But this person looks like she's very smart'. And I was like… And I felt so offended why would she say that, but then when you grow up, you realize she was probably chauvinistic so and this kind of, small like microaggressions towards students of Kyrgyz background, I then, I recall that this would often happen in my school." (Aiperi, Pos. 25)

Begayim recounted similar experiences, as she explains that some Russian teachers in her school were known for imposing an unequal grading system that privileged Russian over Kyrgyz students. Furthermore, Kyrgyz students encountered demeaning designations like "Kirgiziata" by their Russian teachers. The narrations of Begayim and Aiperi provide evidence that racial inequalities inherited from the Soviet period persisted after the dissolution of Soviet Union and deprived Kyrgyz students of educational opportunities.

Such experiences of racism can contribute to a feeling of inferiority, but also strengthen someone's decolonial consciousness, as they become aware of racial inequalities. However, the narrations of Begayim and Aiperi suggest that they only denounced their experiences as racist when they revisited their high school memories as adult. After they established a decolonial consciousness their schooling experiences reassured them in their anti-colonial convictions, but during their school years, they were not perceiving their feelings of injustice through that lens.

Kyrgyz language classes had quite divergent impacts on the respondents' feelings of Kyrgyzness. For example, Begayim and Kanykey remembered how the classes did not enable them to improve their ability to speak Kyrgyz language but focused on grammar and overly complicated literature. Kanykey describes that society coerced her to speak Kyrgyz, compared to an educational environment which did not support her to fulfill these societal expectations. Kyrgyz classes were boring and difficult for her and Begayim and ultimately discouraged them to study their language.

Altynay and Nurbek had a different experience, as they remember their classes positively. Although Altynay did not speak Kyrgyz very well during her school years, her teacher appreciated her efforts with good grades and commented her mistakes with laughing, which provided her with joy and encouragement to pursue her interest in the language. Nurbek, who

learned Kyrgyz as primary language, explains how Kyrgyz lessons had an important impact on his patriotic sentiments:

> [T]he second half of my secondary school, I engaged a lot in theater stuff with my Kyrgyz language teacher. She used to do a lot of, like poetry contests and theater contests in Kyrgyz, featuring Manas, episodes from Manas, or like poetry of Kyrgyz writers. And I participated a lot in that. And I think that arose more patriotic senses in me. Because I would be like, I don't know. I just loved exploring this Kyrgyz literature more. […]. And that was one of the important episodes for me to learn more about my culture and poetry and etc. (Nurbek, Pos. 20)

While Kyrgyz language lessons had a divergent impact of containing or furthering the students' connection to their Kyrgyz identity, history lessons were similarly ambivalent in shaping the respondents outlook on Kyrgyz history. Interviewees commonly described school history books as dry and boring collection of dates and facts which were difficult to understand. They pointed out that their schoolbooks were either from Soviet period or imported from Russia and therefore promoting colonial narratives about Kyrgyz history. Yntymak explains how history books in school portrayed Russia as a friendly nation to Kyrgyzstan, because it brought progress and civilization to Kyrgyz people:

> "In our books, books says that with the Russia… we are the nomads. So that's why we never had big cities. We never had big cities and so that's why a lot of people think that with the Russia, we started to build some buildings, cities. We moved from the yurts to apartments. So that's why we have toilets in our home. […]. We always talk about Russia, like Russia is our friend. With the Russia, we have education because of Russia. We have cities, buildings because of Russia. We live in apartments because of Russia." (Yntymak, Pos. 189)

Other respondents also remembered that their history books depicted Russia in a favorable manner. Aiperi and Begayim recall that neither the "Urkun" nor the 1936 mass executions of the Kyrgyz national movement were mentioned in their books. Malika says that colonialization was described in a positive sense in her history books and equated with development and progress. Although in Begayim's history lessons, the term of colonialism was applied, the actual meaning behind it remained unclear and vague. Furthermore, her classes featured popular Russian narratives, since WWII was referred to as "Great Patriotic War" (1941-45), and omitted the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939. Additionally, Temirkul and Aiperi pointed out that the history of Russia was a separate topic in the curriculum, to which they dedicated more time than to studying Kyrgyz history.

While Umetbaeva (2015) argues that history textbooks combine contradictory discourses that portray the Soviet Union as colonial and oppressive ruler, but also describe the USSR as a nation- and state-building modernizing force, the respondents perceived their history books differently, denouncing them for their colonial narratives that portray Russia and Soviet Union in a positive light and exclude critical aspects of history. Only Nurbek describes the presence of both discourses, as his history classes involved narratives of "People's Friendship", but also discussed repressions against the Kyrgyz national movement. However, in the end, colonization was presented as inevitable, historical fact and critical debates about historical injustices did not occur in his classes.

At the same time, some of the interviewees attributed great importance to their teachers, highlighting their agency in familiarizing their students with Kyrgyz history and mediating the historical narratives promoted by the official curriculum. Altynay remembers her history teacher with excitement:

> "I think mostly because of her [my teacher's] passion, I became really interested in history because at first, I was only interested in world history. I found like our, like greatest history to be so boring. I was like they have wars, they have battles, like they have all this cool stuff. And what? We are just like nomads, going from one place to another […]. So, you see it's just meh, [...] and it didn't really, it wasn't really important, […] but because my teacher… I really liked her and she, I think implanted this kind of like curiosity in history in me. […]. I believe, that some teachers who also have like those fond feelings for Soviet Union, they wouldn't say like really harsh words about the time. But that teacher in high school… what I like, she was really like getting into that. She was like, I think saying it as it is. She was like, so yeah, they came here, they butchered everyone, they forced everyone to move and stuff, so it's actually, I don't remember like in details all of the lessons, but that particular like lesson that day, where we learned about like actual invasion of Russian Empire in Kyrgyzstan, like in… and how they forced everyone to move in 1916 and there was a famine like and stuff. That really like touched me. That I still like clearly remember the class and then everything that we discussed that day." (Altynay, Pos. 54-56)

Altynay's experience demonstrates the enormous impact of her teacher on her knowledge of history and her critical perspective on the colonization of Kyrgyzstan. Her teacher sparked her interest in Kyrgyz history and inspired her to overcome colonial assumptions inhibited in discourses of sedentarism, which attribute civilizational achievements and imperial greatness exclusively to settled societies. Altynay's teacher not only successfully transmitted her passion about Kyrgyz history to her student, but also her interpretations of history, highlighting the

colonial violence and historical injustices brought to the region by the Russian Empire and Soviet Union. While Altynay describes her school textbooks as incomprehensible, it is her teacher's excitement and storytelling which manipulates the official narrative towards a decolonial history class.

Malika, Aiperi, and Yntymak also remembered their teachers' agency in appropriating the official curriculum by expressing their own emotions and attitudes about Kyrgyz history. While Yntymak's teacher felt very negatively about Soviet Union and consistently expressed her disavowal for Russian rule in the region, Malika's and Aiperi's teachers alternated the narrative towards a version of history more favorable to Russia. For example, Malika explained how her teacher downplayed the repression during Stalinism:

> "[A]nd even the teacher, that, it wasn't good. Even you know, when they're telling about repression during the Stalin period, she did it like 'lalala'. Okay, it was repression. These people were killed. […]. [T]his repression, it wasn't nice. I mean, if you were telling about repression, during the Soviet time, you couldn't, you know, provide information in that way. Like, it's a really big and hard topic. […]. But the way she was telling it was, you know, 'oh, the repression, oh, okay, several people were killed, but that's okay, we are leaving'." (Malika, Pos. 26)

Although nowadays Malika criticizes the interpretation of Soviet history conveyed by her teacher, she enjoyed attending history classes when she was a student. She praised her teacher for her interesting storytelling and investment in preparing engaging sessions for the students. Back then, her teacher persuaded her to adopt a perspective on history that is favorable towards Russia.

The narrations of Altynay, Yntymak, Aiperi, and Malika resonate well with the findings of Umetbaeva (2015), which highlights the importance of the teachers to selectively emphasize colonial or modernizing aspects of the Soviet Union to harmonize it with their personal opinions and experiences related to Soviet rule. Since the respondents perceived their history textbooks as boring and incomprehensible, their teachers were particularly powerful to convey their own interpretations of history, as demonstrated by the cases of Altynay and Malika.

The interviews demonstrate varying degrees of influence of school on the socialization of Kyrgyzstani youth, regarding their historical consciousness and feelings about their Kyrgyz origins. Gulnara, Yntymak, Temirkul, Batyr, and Kanykey do not assign their school experiences

an important role, as they were either disinterested in school history classes or obtained their historical knowledge from alternative sources. On the other side, Altynay, Cholpon, Nurbek, Malika, Aiperi, and Begayim describe their school experiences as formative events, which influenced their outlook on Russia and their feelings about being Kyrgyz.

The findings also reverberate with Goldenson (1978, p. 62), who observes that students who perceive their teachers as credible experts on their topic are most likely to adopt the perspectives promoted by their classes. Apart from that, Malika and Aiperi highlighted how cultural notions of authority and ageism were guiding the process of knowledge transmission in Kyrgyzstani schools, since it was deemed undesirable to question the teacher, despite contradictions in their narrations. Critical thinking was not encouraged, according to Aiperi:

> "[A]s a child or as a high schooler, you just kind of, as a sponge you just absorb this information, but you don't reflect on this. But as an adult I think, I started my reflections of during high school we studied this history of Russian books, why do we study it? Because at that time I didn't question it, like I didn't… I didn't tell my teacher why do we have to study it, because as a student you have no right to ask questions, especially if you go to public Kyrgyz schools. The system is that you don't ask questions to your teachers, you just obey them" (Aiperi, Pos. 25)

Throughout the interviews, school appeared as an ambivalent socializing agent, which can promote colonial narratives, but also decolonial thought. Kyrgyz language lessons can discourage students from learning their language, but also provide them with knowledge about Kyrgyz poetry and literature. While Nurbek and Altynay describe how Kyrgyz courses encouraged them to learn their language or provided them with patriotic feelings, Kanykey and Begayim expressed their frustration about it. History classes can diffuse colonial narratives that unequivocally praise Soviet Union for their contributions to the development of Kyrgyzstan, but also draw attention to historical injustices and colonial violence. While Altynay's teacher conveyed anti-Russian sentiments, Malika left high school with the belief that colonization was for the benefit of her country. The impact of high school on the socialization outcomes of their graduates are divergent, since the uniform curriculum is appropriated and transformed by the teachers, according to align it with their own perspectives and experiences.

University

While political socialization research rarely considers higher education as a socialization agent, the respondents frequently mentioned the impact of university studies on their political attitudes. Bishkek hosts three international universities directly linked to foreign states: the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University named after Boris Yeltsin (KRSU), the American University of Central Asia (AUCA), and the Kyrgyz-Turkish "Manas" University. Among others, Russia, Turkey, and the USA mobilize education as a soft power to leverage their geopolitical interests in Kyrgyzstan and socialize their students into their own academic culture (Muratalieva, 2015; Murzaeva, 2014; Posner, 2021).

Within the sample, there are three students that studied in AUCA and four that visited KRSU. Unfortunately, none of the respondents went to Manas University. Gulnara and Temirkul graduated from KRSU, while Nurbek and Kanykey dropped out from their studies at the Russian-financed University. Studying at KRSU was considered comparatively easy and Temirkul and Nurbek explained about wide-spread corruption which obliged all students to pay bribes in the end of the semester to pass their exams. Kanykey complained about the lack of respect by the lecturers towards the students. In summary, Temirkul, Nurbek, and Kanykey experienced KRSU as an outdated university, reflecting the academic culture and institutional organization of the Soviet period.

In contrast to the overall negative evaluation of KRSU, Gulnara was satisfied with her experiences as she appreciated her professors and expressed satisfaction with the skills she obtained during her studies. She explained that her professors did not try to force pro-Russian attitudes on their students, however, there were academic staff from other departments which disseminated Russian propaganda in their lectures. Nevertheless, after Russia launched its full-scale war on Ukraine, more than 20 professors were dismissed, because they expressed their support for Ukraine (Aizhigitov, 2023). The majority of Gulnara's lecturers also lost their jobs when the leadership attempted to ensure compliance by replacing deviant academic personnel. Despite Russia's effort to appropriate education as a soft power, it failed to diffuse pro-Russian sentiments among the respondents. On the contrary, their negative experiences at KRSU rather diminished their cultural and emotional attachment to Russia.

AUCA received a much more positive assessment by the respondents, who appreciated the academic opportunities provided by the American University. For Malika, AUCA was crucially

to obtain skills in critical thinking. During her school career, she was forced to adopt the opinions conveyed by her teachers, while AUCA taught her to conduct research independently and question hegemonic narratives. Malika did not experience her decolonial moment in AUCA, but the academic skills transmitted to her enabled her to question narratives conveyed by her high school teachers that depicted Russian and Soviet rule as a blessing for Kyrgyzstan. Studying in AUCA created the preconditions to think about Russia in a more critical way at a later point in her life and to denounce Russian and Soviet rule in the region as colonial subjugation.

For Nurbek, AUCA was an important socializing agent to strengthen his political awareness and understanding of injustices. He noticed academic debates about decolonization taking place in AUCA, but for him it was rather the environment of the university, which inspired him to independently research topics like the "Urkun" in books, publications, and online media. Aiperi also experienced decisive personal transformations in AUCA, because her courses familiarized her with the problematic legacy of Soviet Union, which provided her with a more critical historical consciousness and awareness of colonial dimensions of Soviet rule:

> "[M]y first thoughts about […] Kyrgyzstan's past in Soviet Union came […] during my bachelor's study. Because we would study, we had a course called, I think Central Asian politics and then we would discuss some topics of like… we had, as I remember we were talking about how the natural resources in Central Asia, it was divided by Soviet government, not by the local people so and because of that we have many conflicts over natural resources with our neighboring countries, like Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan over water resources for example. And also, how the land dispute with Tajikistan, also happened because the Soviet government decided to draw the borders this way and not considering the opinions of local people. So, in my studies in bachelor's, we started discussing more about this, how the Soviet legacy created more problems in post-Soviet countries in Central Asia. And that time I started questioning like the… the orders of Soviet regime and how it affected our countries, so I think my reflections came in much later [during my university studies], I didn't think about the colonization things in high school. (Aiperi, Pos. 25)

Malika, Aiperi, and Nurbek thus ascribe a tremendous impact of the university on their political socialization, rendering AUCA as extremely effective agent in promoting decolonization. AUCA provided them with critical knowledge to reassess their attitudes to Russia, but also gave them a more profound understanding of colonial rule in Central Asia. Furthermore, during their studies, they were socialized into Western academic traditions of critical thought which

enabled them to independently continue their research about politics and history of Central Asia and come to their own conclusions. In that regard, AUCA was able to undermine other socializing agents, like school or parents, which promoted colonial interpretations of history or pro-Russian sentiments. On the other hand, KRSU failed to fulfill its geopolitical objectives of socializing their students into the Russian sphere of influence. The prevalence of corruption, unengaging classes, restrictions in freedom of speech, and hierarchic teacher-student relations rather deterred Nurbek, Kanykey, and Temirkul from closer engagement with Russian institutions.

Peers

According to Campbell (1980, p. 325), peer groups exercise pressure on their group members to align with the political values by withholding or granting social recognition. Through this process, peers may influence political attitudes and either promote or contain decolonization. As elaborated in chapter 5.1, in the 2000's and 2010's, youth culture in Bishkek was heavily oriented towards Russia and teenagers embraced Russian pop-culture. Peer groups exerted pressure to grant Russian culture a superior status by devaluing Kyrgyz culture and language, which was deemed "uncool", as experienced by Aiperi:

> "It's just small remarks from my classmates, when I would like… over the phone I would say something Kyrgyz to my family members. And they would say [with teasing voice] 'you, you're speaking Kyrgyz!' Because in… living in Bishkek meant that you're speaking Russian means you are from middle class, you are educated and educated men are speaking Russian." (Aiperi, Pos. 76)

Aiperi describes how the negative sanctioning of her peers forced her to comply with the social expectations of speaking in Russian. The example demonstrates how peer groups ensure alignment with peer culture by disapproving Aiperi for her usage of Kyrgyz language. It seems that during this period youth culture internalized colonial power relations and reproduced them through mechanisms of peer group pressure.

Furthermore, Altynay, Gulnara, and Kanykey explained how their circle of friends consisted mostly of Russian-speaking people which further distanced them from their Kyrgyz roots, because they were exclusively exposed to Russian language and sharing interests in Russian pop-culture. Therefore, during the teenage years of the respondents, peers would rather

hinder processes of decolonization, while assuring the prestigious status of Russian culture within spaces of youth culture.

Following the recent rehabilitation of Kyrgyz culture and popularization of Kyrgyz language, youth cultures embraced these developments and began to actively disseminate decolonial ideas. Gulnara describes how one of her friends had an enormous impact familiarizing her with Kyrgyz culture, arts, and history, while and changing her perspective on her Kyrgyz origins:

> "And then I met Aigul. Aigul is my best friend. And she actually was the one who impacted me a lot about Kyrgyz culture. She taught me and Nazira and Kunduz. They taught me about the love to art. To our country. I don't know how to explain this love. When I learned about the history that we've been through, about this colonization, about murders, and harsh times for people. […] From my friends, I started to learn a lot of things about Urkun, about genocides, about the whole shitty things that happened to us during the Soviet Union power." (Gulnara, Pos. 28-32)

Similar impacts of peers were described by Yntymak, Cholpon, Malika, and Altynay. For Yntymak it was important to receive compliments from his friends for his endeavors to produce voiceovers in Kyrgyz language, which encouraged him to continue learning Kyrgyz. Cholpon described the profound impact of her ex-boyfriend to teach her about Kyrgyz history, music, and language. In the case of Malika, it was her sister that persuaded her to reassess her positive attitudes towards Putin and convinced her to assume an anti-Russian stance. Altynay explained the importance of her peers to provide a comfortable and encouraging environment to speak Kyrgyz language:

> "I think my current biggest friend group, there are some like friends, who I know actively speak Kyrgyz in their own families, so from time to time they can also drop phrases and I think it also made me more comfortable. It's also like you know, adding Kyrgyz language to my speech and I think having friends who just also casually drop or insert Kyrgyz words or phrases is like an encouraging environment to also practice Kyrgyz." (Altynay, Pos. 42)

Peer groups thus had an important impact by amplifying social trends: while they promoted colonial hierarchies during 2000's and 2010's, they actively engaged in the popularization of decolonial discourses in recent years. For example, Aiperi explains how speaking Kyrgyz, discussing colonial violence in Kyrgyz history, wearing Kyrgyz traditional clothes, and going to cafés with menus written in Kyrgyz language became important social activities among her group of friends.

However, attitudinal similarities considering decolonization among friend groups in Kyrgyzstan are not necessarily the result of a socialization process, throughout which peers influence each other to assume the same political orientations, since dynamics of selection and socialization operate simultaneously among friend groups (Schmid, 2006). While Gulnara, Yntymak, Cholpon, and Malika attribute a certain meaning to their peers within their process of establishing a decolonial consciousness, Altynay also highlights the effect of selection instead of socialization. She explains that her friend group agrees on condemning the Russian war on Ukraine, however she believes that the attitudinal homogeneity among her friends is a result of selection, because she would not engage in friendships with people that support the Russian regime.

Nevertheless, peer groups are important to allow youth to anchor their social reality Campbell (1980, p. 325), which can also be seen in the case of Kyrgyzstani youth culture. Peer groups provide a discursive space to elaborate the meaning of decolonization for the development of a shared group identity which embraces Kyrgyz culture. In joint group activities peers can manifest their decolonial convictions, for example by visiting history lectures together (Cholpon), going to Kyrgyz-themed cafes (Aiperi), or on touristic trips to the countryside (Gulnara).

Events

The narrations of the respondents included a variety of political events which contributed to the establishment of their decolonial awareness. The three “revolutions” of 2005, 2010, and 2020, however, were negligible for most of the respondents, considering their attitude towards Russia and their feelings about being Kyrgyz. Begayim explained how witnessing the 2010 events in her childhood implanted a sense of compassion for the political future of their country in her. When she participated in the protests of 2020 herself, she felt an uplifting unity among the protesters, which strengthened her patriotic feelings for Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, Batyr describes a feeling of disappointment when he followed the 2020 events on the TV and through social media. Given the power grab of Sadyr Japarov, he perceived the protests as failed attempt to achieve a better future for the country, resulting in a sense of alienation from the sphere of politics. The protest movements therefore had a varying impact on the political consciousness of the respondents and given its domestic character, they did not occupy a central role within their biographical journey towards decolonial consciousness.

Nurbek and Aiperi pointed out how the political events that occurred in Ukraine in 2014 impacted their political attitudes towards Russia, as they grew increasingly skeptical about Russian political involvement in the former Soviet countries. Aiperi recalls a sense of anger when she was watching TV with her parents as they learned about the Russian annexation of Crimea. Unlike her parents, she felt that the violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine was an act of injustice. Nurbek described how his university education familiarized him with the events in the Donbas, which worsened his opinion about Russia.

For Yntymak, Begayim, and Temirkul, the Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflict was a decisive event considering their decolonial consciousness. When violent clashes along the border flared up in spring 2021 and escalated again throughout 2022, they developed a feeling of patriotic compassion for the protection of their countries' territory. Begayim described the impact of an intense encounter with Kyrgyzstani military personnel, which was about to leave Bishkek on their way to the conflict zone:

> "[O]ne evening, near the Southern Park, I saw a big military car, with soldiers inside. And I understood that they are heading to Batken. And they were singing some patriotic songs. And they saw me. I stopped just to look at them. And I thought what if some of them will never come back. What if some of them will die there? And I had a panic attack at that moment, and I started crying. And they saw me crying. And they were like, hey, don't cry. They are calming me. Like everything will be okay. Don't worry. We will be back. Everything is going to be okay. I think it is a big event for me and my patriotism." (Begayim, Pos. 77)

Yntymak and Temirkul also explained how their anti-Russian sentiments increased during the conflict because they perceived Russia as an ally of Tajikistan and argued that Putin might have authorized the attack on Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, Yntymak noticed how the popularity of Kyrgyz language increased during the conflict as people used their language to express their commitment to protect their country from foreign aggressors.

The most prominent event in the narrations, however, was the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which was mentioned by every single respondent. Kanykey describes how the war changed her attitude towards Russia, but also her perspective on Kyrgyz history, in particular considering Urkun:

> "I remember that they were forced, like generation of my grandmother parents, they were forced to move in a sudden way to China. And yeah, I think every, this reflection get more conscious only after the invasion of Russia to Ukraine. We started talking

> about and it got informed everywhere, like in social media and television about in podcasts, so I was, I heard about that before, but I wasn't reflecting on my attitude towards Russia. So yeah, it's only because of the war, people started like awakening and talking about that. Before it was like a blurry, you know, like I didn't have a strong opinion about it. I was really indifferent." (Kanykey, Pos. 77)

Kanykey's experience demonstrates a societal shift after the war, as historical injustices and atrocities committed by Russian and Sovie rule, such as the Urkun became a topic of public interest. The violent invasion of Ukraine added emotional meaning to the 1916 events and society became more conscious about the occurrence of colonial violence throughout the history of Kyrgyzstan. This also reflected in the declining popularity of the Russian regime in Kyrgyzstan (Ritter & Crabtree, 2023) and among many respondents, who reevaluated their image of Russia. Since Begayim, Temirkul, Aiperi, and Nurbek already maintained anti-Russian positions prior to the war, the Russian invasion of Ukraine reinforced their critical stance towards the Russian regime. Malika, Batyr, Kanykey, and Cholpon, however, attribute more importance to the war, as it had a decisive impact on changing their attitude from positive or indifferent to negative. While public debates about decolonization were already prevalent before the war, the popularity of the topic increased tremendously when social media and online platforms started to discuss historical events in a critical light. At the same time, many people also switched from Russian to Kyrgyz language to dissociate themselves from Russia. While Yntymak and Begayim were encouraged by the war to speak Kyrgyz language more frequently, Altynay describes a more comprehensive strategy of omitting the Russian imprint from her identity:

> "I think this war encouraged… me and actually a lot of my friends to start speaking Kyrgyz more often. […]. I think mostly, now whenever I talk about our country, I totally skip the part where we were part of Soviet Union. I skip part that we are kind of close to Russia and we speak Russian. And even when I apply somewhere, my first, I would always write Russian as my first language. But now I write Kyrgyz is my first language, even though I don't speak freely [laughs]." (Altynay, Pos. 28)

However, not only the war itself triggered far-reaching social transformations in Kyrgyzstan. It was the migration of Russians to Central Asia that made the impact of war tangible to the inhabitants of Bishkek, as the influx of newcomers disrupted their daily routines. So-called "relocants" [релоканты] settled in Bishkek to either escape political persecution or evade conscription into the Russian military (Savitahunov, 2022). The sudden immigration of several thousands of people put severe pressure on the housing market and the rents increased two-

or threefold (CABAR, 2022; Kudryavtseva, 2022). There are reports that some property owners seized the opportunity to increase the rent by evicting their local tenants and replace them with wealthier Russian immigrants (Kaktus Media, 2022).

However, Russian immigrants were not only associated with rising prices for rents, services, and consumer goods, but also intense interpersonal encounters, which downgraded the public image of Russians. Begayim, Aiperi, Temirkul, Malika, Kanykey, and Nurbek reported negative personal experiences with Russian immigrants and criticized them for their colonial attitudes and behaviors towards Central Asians. Some respondents claimed that Russian migrants were not appreciating that Kyrgyzstan provided them with an opportunity to relocate, but complained about lower living standards, poor infrastructure, and cultural differences, compared to their experiences in Moscow or Saint Petersburg. The behavior of Russian "relocants" was perceived as disrespectful (Begayim) and respondents had the feeling that Russians were "looking down to them" (Nurbek), perceiving them as "barbarians" (Malika).

Aiperi worked in a ceramic workshop prior to the influx of Russian migrants, however her ethnically Russian boss terminated her contract to replace her with a Russian "relocant", as she claimed that "Russian knowledge" would advance the technical expertise in the atelier. While the incident highlights the persistence of colonial attitudes, which render Russian mastery as superior, Aiperi criticized her replacement as unsustainable, since the Russian employee left Kyrgyzstan a few months later. Frustrated about her experience, she describes another encounter with Russian immigrants which hardened her attitude towards Russian "relocants":

> "There was a festival last year and I participated with my ceramic shop, I was participating and I was selling my stuff and next to me were people from Russia. […]. [T]hey would sell postcards of like places in Kyrgyzstan. Postcards of Issyk Kol, like some of these cultural places, like Burana or other natural places […] and I asked them 'oh did you take these pictures yourselves?' and they said 'no', 'I said where did you get them?'. They said oh we just took it from the internet'. So it kind of becomes illegal selling; you know; unauthorized selling of these pictures and I asked them 'did you travel yourself to these places?' and they said 'no, we've never been there'. And I asked so you're selling not your pictures of places that you… you're not, you don't even know been there you know. And they said yes and for them it was totally okay and I felt like again, are they exploiting my culture for profit, because they were people that flew from Russia, they're selling pictures of Kyrgyzstan that they've never been to. […]. And I asked them 'I don't think this is right thing to do, why are you selling this?'

> Economically it's illegal, first of all. Secondly of all, why are they exploiting these cultural places, these sacred places of Kyrgyz people for their own benefits? And it's the first thing that I argued with them about and then I started talking about the Kyrgyzstan history and I said, you know, Kyrgyzstan was colonized by Russia and they said 'no no no no we ne… Russia never colonized anyone. France and England are colonizers, but we never colonized anyone' and I told them 'have you even read the history of Kyrgyzstan and why we were even inside Soviet Union?' And they said no, we never read it and I said 'why are you claiming that you never colonized anyone?'. They start saying […] Central Asia joined Russia themselves voluntarily, by invitation. So it was very bad encounter I had with people they came from Russia." (Aiperi, Pos. 88)

Aiperi criticizes Russian "relocants" not only for denying Russian and Soviet colonialism, but also decries their lack of sensitivity by commodifying cultural symbols of Kyrgyz people. Her narration demonstrates how interactions with Russians relocating to Kyrgyzstan can significantly worsen the perception of Russian people as they resemble exploitative colonial dynamics and reproduce colonial race relations. Russian migrants were commonly accused of lacking awareness about their countries' troublesome historical involvement in the region and their behavior was perceived as embodiment of Russian colonialism.

Noticing colonial attitudes in personal encounters contributed to strong anti-Russian sentiments among the respondents and increased their awareness about how colonial legacies continue to inform the perspective of Russian people towards their former colony. The interviewees were quick to point out colonial dynamics in their personal experiences, as they witnessed the reinvigoration of colonial themes of Central Asian backwardness and Russian cultural superiority. Temirkul and Kanykey described personal encounters, where Russians acclaimed themselves for bringing cultural development and social advancement to an underdeveloped region. For example, Kanykey criticized how Russian immigrants came to Bishkek believing that they were the first people to introduce techno parties to the Kyrgyzstani audience, while disregarding the existing local underground music scene:

> "I don't like relocants, who came to us and say something like, oh you know in Moscow, the clubs are more… and they start to compare clubs here and in Moscow and we're like can you not compare this, because it's really like out of the case, it's like different contexts, like Russia is a big empire and don't compare Moscow to Bishkek, like it can't be compared. And when they say like oh, I had a better experience in, in Russia and you're like this is so disrespectful towards us and I hated Plur[7] also, because they were like we're gonna be a new cultural center in Central Asia. And I was like do you mind

[7] Techno club in Bishkek, founded by Russian "relocants" in 2023.

> that there were cultural centers before you, and like you're not the only center and for me was like really stupid and when they came here to show us what real rave looks like, I don't like when, like white people came here and they gonna show you with that arrogance, with this ego like, I will show you how to make proper raves, proper parties. And like, they want to make something like Mutabor[8] here and I was like I don't need a fucking Mutabor, I don't need your fucking Moscow parties, you know." (Kanykey, Pos. 45)

Temirkul recalled a similar situation, where a Russian "relocant" explained how he will introduce yachting to Issyk Kol, claiming that Kyrgyz people have to be taught how to sail properly, reflecting colonial themes of bringing civilizational progress to a remote periphery. He continued to explain that Kyrgyz elderly are not familiar with smartphones and other modern technologies. The incident shocked Temirkul, as he felt that his interlocutor had some misleading racial stereotypes in his mind, as he seemed to perceive Kyrgyz people as "undeveloped" and "backward".

In summary, political events proved to be very impactful on the establishment of a decolonial consciousness among Kyrgyzstani youth. The 2014 events in Ukraine and the Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflict had a minor impact in promoting decolonization in Kyrgyzstan, because some parts of society became more critical of the Russian regime and started to feel more positive about their Kyrgyz identity. However, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine had a very profound and far-reaching impact in undermining the public image of Russia among Kyrgyzstani youth and creating a desire to dissociate themselves from their former colonial master by speaking Kyrgyz language more frequently. Despite the enormous impact of the full-scale war in Ukraine, it is important to acknowledge that decolonial processes were already underway for a couple of years in 2022. The Russian invasion of Ukraine should not be mistaken for the event that initiated decolonial debates in Central Asia, but rather be considered as an incident which provided an enormous boost for the topic, as it popularized critical historical discussions and promoted the usage of Kyrgyz language.

Media

Interviewees frequently referred to the media when narrating their decolonial life trajectory. Social media accounts and online media played an important role in disseminating critical knowledge and promoting decolonial discourse. However, media also had the capacity to

[8] Well-known techno club in Moscow

prevent Kyrgyzstani youth from developing a decolonial consciousness, especially during their childhood and youth, when they experienced greater exposure to Russian state TV and Russian pop culture.

Altynay attributes an important role to pop-cultural cinema, which diminished her interest in the history of Kyrgyzstan. During her childhood, she watched many historical movies that dealt with sedentarist societies and associated them with imperial power and civilizational greatness through the reenactment of heroic battles. However, there were no powerful representations of nomadic societies on the screen and Altynay concluded that Kyrgyz history was boring and negligible because her ancestors were absent from contemporary cinematic culture. Cholpon also mentioned the impact of Soviet movies during her childhood, which depicted the Soviet Union in a positive light and influenced her to make a positive judgement of Soviet rule.

Furthermore, Russian state TV was present in many households throughout the childhood of many respondents and familiarized them with political narratives of the Russian regime:

> "[D]uring my childhood, like my mom, my parents, my, even my grandma, because I was always with my grandma, we were always looking for these Russian channels, this Russian propaganda where they showed that okay, America is not okay, this West, West countries is not, they are not okay. With this all, their politics. And like, and Russia, they are doing all, they do this, that, my grandma, she was like, I think best for thinking that Russia is really nice country. And maybe we have to move there. But I think it's just this impact of this Russian propaganda in TV channels." (Malika, Pos. 48)

While the impact of media that neglected Kyrgyz culture and promoted Russian narratives was particularly present in the childhood of the respondents, the interviewees ascribed a different role to the media as they grew older and decolonial developments gained ground in Kyrgyzstan. Nurbek recounts that the emergence of his decolonial awareness was closely linked to transformations in the social media landscape that occurred during his teenage years. The transition from social media platforms associated with Russia to US-American or Chinese providers granted him with insights into global pop-culture. Changes in his media consumption set him further apart of Russia, as he was socialized into a sphere of an online culture, where the US, Europe, and Korea occupied a hegemonic position, instead of Russia:

> I remember that most of the pop media that I followed was also Russian. […]. [T]here was a switch when we transitioned from, I think from Odnoklasniki. […]. [A]n old social media which is more Russian, like a Russian social media. And then switched to, transitioned to Instagram. And then I think Instagram was more English speaking at

> first. And I could get more exposure to English-speaking celebrities there too. And then Odnoklasniki started having, and still has, an image more like a backwards social media, which is a Russian speaking. And really old, for people 50 plus. […]. And then it was also Vkontakte, Facebook, but then it all went to Instagram. And of course, another pivotal moment was, it's already not teenage years, but the pandemic. When I'm seeing another transition from Instagram to TikTok here. And then I think it was also really influential for me. Because then it's, I think thanks to TikTok I really got immersed into the American and, somewhat European probably, pop, too. Of also, of course, Korean was there. (Nurbek, Pos. 2-4)

Almost all respondents attributed a certain meaning to social media, influencers, podcasts, online newsrooms and journals regarding the emergence of their decolonial consciousness. Since Temirkul obtained internet access at the age of eleven, online sources have had an important impact on his socialization process. Reading Wikipedia articles and watching videos on YouTube, he developed an understanding of politics and began to despise authoritarian leadership, including adopting of a negative attitude toward Putin. Batyr credits TikTok with playing a key role in his decolonial awakening. He recounts that trending videos about Kyrgyz nomadism sparked his fascination with his Kyrgyz roots. He soon developed an obsession with Kyrgyz culture and got tattoos with Tengri patterns. Furthermore, he decided to produce his own content on TikTok, to overcome the lack of online resources in the Kyrgyz language.

However, most respondents described how the prevalence of online content promoting decolonial thought increased drastically after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. While decolonization became a popular topic in general, social media amplified these trends by disseminating critical information and popularizing the decolonial debate. Important topics of informational posts were the mass executions of 1936 and the forced expulsion of 1916. Some respondents reported how the algorithmic logic of their social media exposed them to critical posts and reinforced their anti-Russian sentiments.

Some actors were repeatedly mentioned by the respondents. These include journalistic online media that provide critical coverage of events in the region and beyond, such as Kloop, CABAR (an initiative by the Institute for War and Peace Repoting), and Azattyk (the local branch of RFE RL). In addition, interviewees highlighted the impact of political activists and organizations, such as Begayim Nazirbek, a decolonial feminist activist, Bashtan Bashta, a civic initiative for political education that runs a podcast series called “O’dekolon”, and Esimde (Kyrgyz for “remember”), a local organization that engages in critical research on 20th century Kyrgyz

history. These actors can be considered the most active agents promoting decolonization in Kyrgyzstani online spaces.

Thus, the media can be seen as an impactful socializing agent to promote decolonization among Kyrgyzstani youth. Online news agencies, social media channels, and activist-influencers were frequently mentioned as important actors in disseminating decolonial knowledge that resonated well with the respondents and provided them with an input to further reflect on the postcolonial reality. In particular, after Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, social media activity increased and the topic of decolonization began to trend on social networks.

In summary, the narrations of the respondents included a great variety of socializing agents that influenced their process of acquiring political attitudes towards Russia and their Kyrgyz roots. While political socialization theory and thematic readings on intergenerational relations in Kyrgyzstan suggest a major role for parents in transmitting their political orientations to their offspring, the respondents described their parent's role as rather marginal. Despite the cultural obligation to provide moral guidance and knowledge to their children, Kyrgyzstani parents do not necessarily perceive the transmission of political attitudes as part of this duty, as they were rather unengaged to pass on their pro-Russian sentiments to their children. Instead, the childhood of the respondents was characterized by an absence of political debate in the family home.

The lack of political discussion in the domestic sphere and the little effort of parents to instill their pro-Russian orientation and positive evaluations of Soviet history in their children, increased the importance of alternative socializing agents and maintained their receptiveness to alternative narratives about present-day Russia and Kyrgyz history. School education was a rather ambivalent socializing agent, sometimes promoting and sometimes containing the formation of a decolonial consciousness. While some students discovered their interest in Kyrgyz language and history, others were bored and annoyed by their classes. Some history classes promoted colonial historical narratives, while other lessons conveyed decolonial perspectives on Kyrgyz history. In both cases, respondents highlighted the agency of their teachers, who appropriated the official curriculum and altered the narrative to align it with their own emotions and experiences of life in the late Soviet Union.

The emergence of critical attitudes towards Russia and the regaining of self-esteem about being Kyrgyz is mostly related to socialization experiences at the university, media consumption, peer group influence, and political events. AUCA was highly effective in familiarizing its students with decolonial thought and enabling them to develop a more critical understanding of the political and historical involvement of Russia in the region. Peers were an important actor in introducing decolonial ideas to their friends, and peer groups are central to further elaborating the meaning of decolonization and developing a shared group identity around the issue.

The events of 2014 in Ukraine and the Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflict in 2021-22 had a minor impact on Kyrgyzstani youth, as some felt increasingly negative about Russian foreign policy and began to feel patriotic about their Kyrgyz origins. However, the most decisive shift was the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which drastically downgraded the public image of Russia among Kyrgyzstani youth. Young people desired to dissociate themselves from Russia by speaking the Kyrgyz language more frequently and critically reviewing Kyrgyz history from a decolonial perspective. The present-day military aggression in Ukraine is seen as a continuation of Russia's historical imperial ambitions in Central Asia. Furthermore, the arrival of Russian migrants in Bishkek substantially changed perceptions of Russia, as locals witnessed colonial patterns of behavior among the newcomers.

Finally, the media has also played an important role in disseminating and popularizing decolonial thought. Particularly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, social media accounts and influencer-activists became increasingly vocal in denouncing Russia's harmful influence in Central Asia. Social media accounts spread awareness about colonial violence and atrocities committed by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in Kyrgyzstan, familiarizing Kyrgyzstani audiences with decolonial approaches to history. In conclusion, despite culturally entrenched modes of parent-child transmission and the general importance of parents for political socialization, alternative socializing agents were the most influential in providing Kyrgyzstani youth with a decolonial consciousness.

5.3 “I had the urge to stand by our flag and sing the anthem”: Decolonial life trajectories and biographical turning points

Chapter 5.1 extracted recurring themes from the interviews to draw a larger picture of macro-societal developments in post-independence Kyrgyzstan, while chapter 5.2 analyzed the impact of socialization agents on the formation of political attitudes towards Russia and being Kyrgyz. This section will look more specifically at personal biographical turning points to scrutinize how exactly social trends towards decolonization entered the life trajectories of Kyrgyzstani youth. The chapter will outline commonalities of biographical turning points to illustrate how decolonization processes resonated within individual life stories.

For some interviewees, decolonization became an important issue when they witnessed broader societal transformations, such as the growing importance of the Kyrgyz language or critical debates about reevaluating history. They were less conscious of their moment of exposure to decolonization, as their feelings about being Kyrgyz changed gradually rather than out of sudden. However, some interviewees shared very specific personal decolonial experiences after which they questioned dominant societal narratives and which they considered as “biographical turning points”. In this section, I will outline some of these turning points that were described by several respondents.

Moving abroad was a recurring theme among the respondents, as living in a different country had far-reaching implications on the development of a decolonial consciousness. For Aiperi, Altynay, and Cholpon, it changed their feelings regarding their Kyrgyz origins, while Malika changed her political attitudes towards Russia, as she was exposed to different narratives and sources of information. Aiperi describes how she first began to identify as Kyrgyz when she left for South Korea to pursue her studies:

> “I think the first, the first memories of me being consciously Kyrgyz person, I think when I went abroad and then I had to like not many people know where Kyrgyzstan is and I probably was the first Kyrgyz person they know. And I had to present… a kind of an ambassador of Kyrgyz people now for these random people on the street and I would tell them hey, we have these kind of traditions, we… we have this kind of, I would tell them about yurts and then I would tell them about our cuisine and I would say we speak Russian, but that's because we were part of Soviet Union and it stayed still Russian language, but we have our own language, we have this kind of customs, these

> traditions and these cultural things. I think the first time when I realized hey, I am a Kyrgyz person when I went abroad." (Aiperi, Pos. 51)

When asked by foreigners about their origins, Altynay and Aiperi had to think more consciously about how they want to represent Kyrgyzstan and question themselves about the essence of Kyrgyz culture. Being addressed as a Kyrgyz and speaking on behalf of their country provided them with a degree of identification with their Kyrgyz roots, while the curiosity of foreigners to learn about Kyrgyzstan increased their self-esteem about their ethnicity. For Cholpon it was more a longing to return to her homeland that strengthened her identification with her Kyrgyz origins. Since she moved to Switzerland as a teenager, it was her mother's decision that she spent her school years in Zurich, and since she missed certain aspects of Kyrgyz culture, she started to value and appreciate her Kyrgyz roots.

Another important decolonial impulse is related to *online culture*. For Yntymak, Batyr, Temirkul, and Nurbek, their social media activities and online media consumption were decisive in changing the way they view the world and their Kyrgyz identity. For example, Yntymak's decolonial journey is intertwined with his hobby of producing voiceovers for US-American cartoons:

> "[T]he reason why I started to think about it [decolonization], that was, like, you know, I was trying to making this [dubbings for US-American cartoons] in Russian, but then I realized that there is so much people who want to do dubbing in Russian, so I thought maybe... Competition, yeah? Yeah, that would be a really hard competition, because […] there will be a lot of people like me, so... Because the Russian dubbing industry so developed, and there's a lot of people from the Baltic states, from Belarus, Ukraine, from the Caucasus, from all countries of Central Asia, who wants to do dubbing in Russian language, so I thought that would be really hard to me […]. And I just realized that if I can't do this in Russian, I should do this in Kyrgyz language, so... But for... I just tried to make some... Like, you know, I made a few dubbings in Kyrgyz language, and then I sent these dubbings to my friends, and they sent me a lot of compliments about it. They gave me their support, and then I just, you know, I had my inspiration to continue this, and I just... I... I started to think that if I want to make this in Kyrgyz language, I should learn Kyrgyz." (Yntymak, Pos. 242)

When Yntymak realized that he could occupy a niche by creating Kyrgyz online content, he became interested in the Kyrgyz language and improved his language skills. Batyr, who became friends with Yntymak over their shared hobby of producing such voiceovers in Kyrgyz, was more inspired by TikTok. When he saw trending videos about Kyrgyz nomadism, his patriotic

feelings grew, and he began to notice the lack of online content in the Kyrgyz language. Therefore, he started to produce memes and videos in Kyrgyz, but also began dubbing cartoons in Kyrgyz language. For Nurbek and Temirkul, their access to critical information and exposure to Western culture on social media was important in influencing their cultural orientation, but also to provide them with skeptical attitude towards Russian politics.

Furthermore, for Gulnara, Begayim, Cholpon, and Kanykey, *touristic activities*, such as hiking, and city tours were important experiences to develop a decolonial consciousness. Gulnara explains how she was impressed by the beauty of nature and how her travels contributed to a patriotic feeling towards her country:

> "And from 2022, I took a trip, a solo trip to Sary Chelek. With my friend, we went to Song Kol, all of these beautiful, beautiful places in our country. And I was bamboozled. I don't know. I was so shocked that we live in this country. And actually, we didn't know that we have so much beauty, so much power and so much land that is not explored. […] But I felt so much love for the people who fought for this to be our lands. To be named Kyrgyzstan, not like other nations named labels." (Gulnara, Pos. 28)

This experience is shared by Begayim, who explained that she developed a feeling of belonging, during her hikes in the Kyrgyz mountains. Cholpon strengthened her sense of belonging by participating in historical city tours in Bishkek. During the tours, she became more aware of the historical circumstances that gave rise to the architecture around her. She learned about the meaning of certain statues and monuments, and developed a more profound understanding of the layers of history represented in the city. For Kanykey, traveling to cities like Tashkent and Almaty was an important experience. During her journeys, she explored linguistic and cultural similarities and became more aware of the shared Turkic roots with Uzbek and Kazakh people, which connected Central Asians before Russian rule came to the region. Learning more about the shared Turkic heritage became a way to develop cultural connections beyond the common experience of Russian colonization.

Another important experience for the respondents was getting acquainted with Kyrgyz history. *History education* not only provided many of them with a better understanding of the effects of colonization on their ancestors, but also helped to restore their self-esteem in being Kyrgyz, as they began to understand the meaning of certain rituals and traditions and began valuing them. Cholpon and Begayim both mentioned the profound impact of a public lecture series offered by Kyrgyz historian Melis Murataliev:

> "[T]here were some lessons of, we have a Kyrgyz historian, he did some like lessons, once per week about specific subjects, aspects of Kyrgyz history, culture, language, etc. […]. It was so interesting, he did so well. […] after we went out of the lesson which lasted around two or three hours, I was like, I have the urge to like stand by our flag and sing the anthem. They were like yeah, you're like, we could feel like the importance, I think, of the, of the nation. Of the… yeah, heritage we have, kind of." (Cholpon, Pos. 22)

Gaining historical knowledge about Kyrgyz resistance to Russian colonization, Urkun, or Stalinist repression contributed to the establishment of a decolonial consciousness, as emotional meaning was attached to the term "colonization". After gaining some initial knowledge about these historical events, the interviewees often sought out conversations with their parents or grandparents to obtain further information about how these major historical events affected their own family history. During these conversations, they often learned that their family had to flee to China during the 1916 events and how they were dispossessed by the Bolsheviks. In the process of inquiring about their family history, many respondents became aware of the meaning of colonialism to their own ancestors and how it changed the course of history to the present day.

Temirkul and Kanykey's decolonial narrations referred to encounters with *spirituality*, which left an imprint on their life trajectory. Interest in Tengrism and other shamanic practices had the potential to provide respondents with a sense of Kyrgyzness. Temirkul in particular assigned a major role in changing his life towards embracing his Kyrgyz roots to spirituality. He recounts a life changing experience with his aunt, who visited him to treat his headache in a shamanic session. As she was able to precisely explain to him how he sustained injuries during a gang fight with the other teenagers of the neighborhood, he was impressed and started embracing the spiritual traditions of his family.

Kanykey and Batyr also explained their fascination with Tengrism and ancient Kyrgyz spirituality, which strengthened their Kyrgyz identity. For example, Kanykey remembered a shamanic session, during which she lost her consciousness and started singing in Kyrgyz in a state of trance, although she usually barely mastered the language. Although Kanykey was scared about the experience, it still improved her feelings of being connected to her Kyrgyz origins. The rediscovery of ancient religious practices and fascination about spirituality of Kyrgyz nomads increased the interest of some respondents to learn about their family roots and embrace Kyrgyz culture and traditions.

While not far-reaching enough to describe it as turning point, respondents also frequently mentioned how they found inspiration in *Kazakhstan*. Yntymak, Begayim, Cholpon, and Temirkul observed how Kazakhstan is taking a pivotal position in Central Asia to advance decolonization. While Yntymak praised the Kazakhstani government for its language policies, aiming to promote Kazakh language, Temirkul and Begayim acknowledged how Kazakh pop-musicians were very influential in popularizing Kazakh language and upgrading its image towards a contemporary, modern language. Cholpon, who lived half of her life in Switzerland explained how the Kazakh diaspora inspired her to inquire about her family roots, because they were much more concerned about preserving their culture, compared to the Kyrgyz diaspora groups.

The establishment of a decolonial consciousness usually entailed the recovery of self-esteem about being Kyrgyz, reconsidering Kyrgyz history in terms of colonialism, and taking a critical stance towards contemporary Russia. Within most biographies, these processes are interwoven, as interviewees gradually evolve towards these outcomes. In some cases, attitude changes occur simultaneously, but many respondents describe it also as asynchronous process. Shedding feelings of shame related to Kyrgyzness often started within the last five years, coinciding with general trends in society. Some interviewees already deployed critical attitudes towards Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, however the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 had the strongest impact. At this point, the Kyrgyz cultural revival was already going on for a few years, but increasingly anti-Russian sentiments among youth further contributed to the desire to distance oneself from the Russian regime and develop a distinct national identity, for example by speaking Kyrgyz language more frequently.

However, there are also biographies which entail only one part of the attitude changes conceived as decolonization within this thesis: Malika's decolonial position only considers emancipating from Russian political and cultural influences, while she does not develop patriotic sentiments towards Kyrgyzstan. Cholpon, on the other hand, develops a sense of Kyrgyz pride, but does not consider herself as anti-Russian and believes in the necessity to uphold positive relations with the Russian regime.

5.4 Intergenerational negotiations of decolonization in the family context

While political debates were largely absent from the family home throughout the childhood and youth of most respondents, parents and children became increasingly engaged in political disputes throughout the last years. Russia's war on Ukraine in particular provoked heated debates, when generational differences considering the assessment of Soviet history and Russian politics became apparent. In reference to the literature review, which suggest that Kyrgyzstani society and families exhibit strong age hierarchies and patriarchal culture (Beyer, 2016; Ismailbekova, 2020; Wejnert & Djumabaeva, 2005), I will first outline the perception of age relations by the respondents and discuss their family environment, within which political debates occur. I will continue to analyze the anatomy of intergenerational debates related to the issue of decolonization, with a focus on disputes on Soviet history, present-day Russian politics, and Kyrgyzness. The analysis will highlight the question, whether decolonization separates generations from each other or contributes to intergenerational cohesion.

"You are younger than us, so you have to keep silent": Ageism in Kyrgyzstan

Pronounced social hierarchies between youth and elderly were not only discussed in the literature on intergenerational relations in Kyrgyzstan, but also mentioned by some of the interviewees in their narrations. Aiperi, Malika, and Temirkul described encountering ageism either in within their family or society in general. For example, Malika experienced ageism at her workplace, which she perceives as a cultural phenomenon of the post-Soviet countries. Against the backdrop of her exposure to flat hierarchies in the European professional world, she expresses frustration about being mistreated at her current workplace:

> "I was really happy because it's an international organization, and it's a German organization. But when I started working there, I understood that anyway, it doesn't matter, […] if there are […] locals, you will feel this post-Soviet, you know, attitude towards, like, 'you are younger than us. So, you have to please do that, do this, like, you know, okay, keep silence'. […]. Like, it's not okay, like, when you're a supervisor, telling you that, 'oh, you have to sometimes turn on your brain'. And I said, no, please don't talk with me like that way." (Malika, Pos. 6)

Some respondents also complained about ageism in the educational system of Kyrgyzstan, since they were discouraged from challenging opinions articulated by their teachers and obliged to adopt their attitudes if they desired good grading. Aiperi and Malika felt that their

teachers' lessons were inconsistent and conveyed inaccurate information, however age-hierarchies within the educational system prevented them from arguing against their teachers. Similar experiences of age hierarchies were also discussed by Temirkul, who drew parallels between his father's obsession to rule over others and general tendencies of unequal power distribution within Kyrgyzstani society:

> "I think the problem with my father, he had a huge ego. […]. I think this thing happens not only in my family. It happens to a lot of people. When someone can't, you know it's like when… It's like the president of Kyrgyzstan. They don't want to give their power to other people. So, they're trying to sit on their place for as much as possible. They're trying every option they can do, so other people can't take what's theirs. I guess, it happens in the White House. It happens in every unit, in every house. (Temirkul, Pos. 8)

Temirkul's observations of hierarchies and power structures reverberate with the analysis of Wejnert and Djumabaeva (2005, p. 152) which highlights the patriarchal, ageist hierarchies of traditional Kyrgyz families, rendering fathers as unquestionable figures of authority within the family. The respondents' narrations of family relationships will be analyzed below.

"I cried and shouted at him that it's not the way to raise your children": Family relationships and parenting styles

Patriarchal family relationships and authoritarian parenting styles also informed the socialization processes of the respondents. For example, Nurbek and Malika were pressured to behave according to social conventions to avoid attracting the attention of the village community. Being the topic of village gossip was considered shameful for the family and the threat of collective punishment coerced them into withholding individual self-expression in favor of communal rules and obligations. At the same time, Aiperi and Malika explained being taught to "respect the elderly", subordinating themselves to their parents, especially to their fathers. Malika in particular felt obliged to adopt political attitudes conveyed by her father, rendering it as disrespectful to argue against the head of the family. Furthermore, the respondents were pressured by parental expectations to marry (Kanykey, Gulnara) or to pursue a specific professional career (Gulnara, Temirkul) to satisfy their parents.

The presence of authoritarian father figures was particularly problematic for the male respondents, which were bound to their male parent as primary socializing agent, but did not receive caring attention and emotional warmth of their fathers. Batyr explained how he grew

distant to his father as he feared his sudden outburst of anger, while Temirkul despises his father for his egocentric, self-obsessed behavior. Nurbek also expressed his disappointment about his father's rude and aggressive behavior:

> "One of the episodes, where like, I was helping to do, I still hung out with him and helped to do things at home and etc. With the animals, with the cattle that we had, with his cars sometimes even though I didn't really love it. […]. So, one of the times, I think we were repairing at the rooftop something. When I didn't do the thing right, he yelled at me, swore at me. I cried and shouted at him that it's not the way that parents should raise their children or approach their children. I think I had some idea, I don't know, from where, from books or TV, of how parents should talk to their children. And there were moments when I thought my dad shouldn't be talking that way to me. He perceived it as a more like Western model or something that I saw somewhere, that the parents should be respectful to his child [laughs]." (Nurbek, Pos. 15)

Just as Nurbek, Gulnara also referenced Western parenting styles which she saw in US-American cartoons as desirable form of upbringing, contrasted to the lack of attention and solicitude which characterized her childhood. In general, many respondents described an unfavorable family environment, citing periods of intense conflict with their parents. For example, Nurbek describes a feeling of emotional separation, as he felt unable to share his feelings and opinions with his parents, considering their conservative values. Temirkul felt alienated by his father's stubbornness, as he was unable to hand over responsibilities his son, but preferred to concentrate all power in his hand. Begayim experienced the most conflictual upbringing, as she went through a series of intense fights, culminating in the termination of contact with her parents, as they forced her to move out of their family home and find a new place to live. Kanykey recalled painful memories of abandonment and betrayal, while Gulnara, Nurbek, and Temirkul missed emotional warmth and care during their childhood.

While Gulnara, Temirkul, Nurbek, Malika, Batyr, and Aiperi described a family environment which reflected traditional Kyrgyz values of parenting, Altnynay, Cholpon, Kanykey, and Yntymak grew up in an environment, which did not feature strong age hierarchies and an unquestioned male authority as the head of the family. For example, Kanykey was born as an extramarital child and grew up without a father figure, while Altynay's and Cholpon's parents got divorced during their upbringing. Yntymak also grew up without his father. The absence of a father often granted children with a higher degree of freedom to maintain their own opinions and attitudes. Furthermore, many respondents defied their parents' expectation by

independently choosing their professional career and by renouncing the traditional path of early marriage and childrearing.

Patriarchal family relationships and ageism inform the intergenerational debate about decolonization in Kyrgyzstani society. However, many interviewees did not succumb to societal norms which require them to refrain from challenging parental authority. Furthermore, not all respondents encountered the same patronizing culture of political debate at their family homes but grew up in less conventional family settings that deviate from the conservative ideals envisioned by cultural norms in Kyrgyzstan. The following section investigates how these debates are enacted within the family environment and how intergenerational dynamics shape the discussion of decolonization.

"They're all dreaming about Soviet Union": Debating Kyrgyz history

The parents of the respondents maintain exclusively positive attitudes about Soviet Union, acclaiming Soviet rule for social stability, economical wealth, quality healthcare, and high educational standards. Only Nurbek's parents acknowledged improving living conditions in the post-Soviet period. In their narrations, the respondents often reduce their parents' admiration of Soviet Union to nostalgic feelings related to their childhood and youth memories and thereby refute any argument that living conditions during USSR were superior to living standards in present-day Kyrgyzstan. For Nurbek, Yntymak, and Batyr, their parents' positive perspective on Soviet rule is just a matter of romanticization of their youthful years, while they disregard the social and economic benefits offered by Soviet Union.

Russian and Soviet rule in Kyrgyzstan is frequently debated in the families of Altynay, Gulnara, Cholpon, Begayim, Aiperi, and Kanykey. Altynay outlines the generational conflict line, along which most debates on Kyrgyz history evolve:

> "[S]o whenever, my all my patriotism works, I always end up with like Soviet Union was bad, like everything was but they are like no! It wasn't that bad! I'm like they kill all these people in 1916 [sic!][9], they're like yeah, it was bad, but we survived! And they gave us education! I'm like no!" (Altynay, Pos. 34)

[9] The 1916 atrocities were not committed by the Soviets, but by Armed Forces of the Russian Empire. That Altynay does not distinguish between both powers, seems emblematic for the unnuanced understanding of history of today's youth in Kyrgyzstan

The intergenerational cleavages about the past emerge from a selective mobilization of history to sustain a specific interpretation of Soviet and Russian rule. Elderly rely exclusively on their personal memories in late Soviet Union. They focus on economic wealth, social security, and political stability. Youth base their judgement entirely on the events of 1916 and 1936, highlighting the atrocities committed by Russians and Soviets in the region. This line of conflict was present in the narratives of Altynay, Yntymak, Gulnara, Begayim, and Aiperi. Both conflict parties promote a very narrow understanding of history, resulting in irreconcilable interpretations of history.

In most cases, intergenerational debates fail to generate more nuanced interpretations of history and fall short of facilitating intergenerational understanding, since parents and children both insist on their perspective. The post-Soviet generation ignores their parents' experiences of social benefits during late Soviet Union, belittling them as irrational childhood nostalgia. At the same time, their parents deny or downplay the occurrence of repressions and colonial violence in Kyrgyzstan. For example, Begayim's father, whose ancestors escaped the Kazakh famine and fled to China during Urkun defies all efforts by his daughter to convince him about the adversarial impact of Russian and Soviet rule on his families' biographies. In a similar way, Cholpon describes her mother's reluctance to acknowledge the existence of repressions during Soviet rule:

> "[W]hen I was telling her like there were repressions, she was like yeah, but that's it. So they happened. And I was like uh, I remember as I was reading Solzhenitsyn, she was like why do you read this shit? It's nonsense." (Cholpon, Pos. 33)

While a general intergenerational cleavage permeates history debates in Kyrgyzstani families, there are also incidents of productive discussions that can reduce gaps between parents and children. For example, Cholpon actively sought to learn about the perspectives of other family members to inform her own judgement of Soviet Union. Family memories became an important source for her to establish a nuanced understanding of history and obtain empathy for the generational experiences of her mother and her grandparents. Gulnara explains that she occasionally recommends critical history books published in independent Kyrgyzstan to her father, who obtained his history education exclusively from Soviet books. While her father reads the books suggested by his daughter, Gulnara did not notice any attitude changes considering his overall positive evaluations of Soviet rule in Central Asia. Only Kanykey

describes how intergenerational rifts in her family decreased recently, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine:

> "I'm saying to them that they should stop romanticizing Soviet Union, because it was like an empire […]. My mom is, yeah, I told them that they're like people from matrix. [….]. That they're all sleeping in the capsules and they're all dreaming about Soviet Union, but it's like, it's an artificial idea and it's not, it's not good, like I don't know how to explain this, but yeah, they're like sleeping, you know. And I'm trying to say wake up! This is not the best, like I mean stop romanticizing for the Soviet Union, like I think right now [since Russia launched its full-scale war on Ukraine] they're seeing that this is a consequence of the colonial things. It happened to us that we don't speak Kyrgyz anymore, and yeah, I don't know, maybe my mom stopped romanticizing, because I haven't heard about that." (Kanykey, Pos. 67)

Kanykey's experience that the war increased family cohesion considering perspectives on history stands out, as youth and elderly have different ways of mobilizing history to either support or reject the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Kyrgyzstani youth underpin their rejection of the war with their condemnation of Soviet Union, which they perceive as a colonial empire. For them, the present-day war on Ukraine is a continuation of Russian imperial ambitions, as they link the Russian colonization of Central Asia with ongoing military aggressions in Ukraine. Elderly commonly base their supportive attitude towards Russia's war on their emotional attachment with Soviet Union and their positive evaluation of Russian rule in Central Asia, as experienced by Begayim and Aiperi:

> "Russian politics, as I said, for some reason, they [my parents] have to support Russia. No explanation there from my parents, they just say we were once part of Soviet Union, we have to support them. I said well, Ukraine was also part of Soviet Union, why are you not supporting them? So it's just, I think it's feeling of closeness to Russia, because we speak Russian language. Like the feeling of being familiar with them." (Aiperi, Pos. 70)

In summary, Kyrgyz history remains a highly divisive topic for Kyrgyzstani families and irreconcilable interpretations of Soviet and Russian rule in the region continue to provoke intergenerational conflict. Considering the recent trend of reevaluating history, decolonial thought separates children from their parents, because youth fully embrace an essentialist narrative, which omits all contradictions to the decolonial framework, negating all economic, social, and cultural achievements, which occurred during the Soviet period. In the same manner, elderly deny all colonial aspects of Soviet rule, including the repressions against the

Kyrgyz national movement and the ethnic cleansing of the Issyk Kol region by the forces of the Russian Empire.

"My parents are Vatniki": Debating Russian politics

Generational differences considering political attitudes towards Russia built up throughout the last decade, however the Russian invasion of Ukraine exposed divergent political orientations between family members and triggered heated political debates, as experienced by Aiperi:

> "My earliest memories was when the Crimea was annexed. […]. And I just remember being angry because we were watching news and I was telling my parents this is not the right thing, we shouldn't allow for one person to take over land. […]. Just watching news over dinner and arguing about small things, but the biggest one was the recent war, I think. I would just, yeah, we would argue a lot and we have a group chat with family members, also it goes there the arguments in the group chat. And I think you can ask every Kyrgyz person and ask their parents; I think it's the same situation in every household because everyone's watching the same TV channels." (Aiperi, Pos. 74)

Intergenerational conflicts surrounding the war in Ukraine occurred commonly among the interviewees. Apart of Cholpon, all other respondents voiced their support for Ukraine and expressed their criticism towards the Putin regime. Their parents, however, often chose to support Russia. Gulnara's father, Begayim's father, Aiperi's parents, Temirkul's father, Malika's father, Kanykey's father, and Batyr's father argued that the Russian invasion of Ukraine was justified. Furthermore, Yntymak's mother, Begayim's father, and Malika's father exhibited their anti-Western sentiments, showing their disavowal for the United States of America. As explained by Aiperi, family arguments about the war in Ukraine are a common generational experience and Kyrgyzstani youth often struggle with the pro-Russian sentiments of their parents. Begayim recounted a fight with her father, which exposed their irreconcilable worldviews and severely damaged their relationship:

> "My parents are, we call them 'Vatniki'[10]. They love Vladimir Putin. They are pro-Russians. I had a big fight with my father, because of our holiday. We have a bank holiday on 23rd of February, the Day of Fatherland Defenders. It is a super pro-Soviet holiday. And I told him it's nonsense to celebrate it now, because war is going on, because of everything and Russia, Russia colonized us, your mother suffered from that[11]. And he just never understood and he said that he was raised in Soviet Union and he is proud of that, that they had an ideology and now there is no any ideology in our

[10] Derogatory term for supporters of Russian propaganda in post-Soviet countries
[11] His ancestors escaped from the Kazakh famine to Kyrgyzstan during 1930's

> community. And we are all following this United States propaganda. And we don't understand anything. So, we had a big fight and I stopped talking to him for three months." (Begayim, Pos. 40)

Parent-child arguments involve a couple of themes, such as their divergent interpretations of history, but also the controversial perception of Western powers. Being exposed to Russian propaganda media, many parents absorbed common anti-Western narratives and internalized a sense of hatred against the United States of America, to the estrangement of their children, as experienced by Yntymak:

> "We had earthquake in January, but then there were guests in our home, and we just sit on the table and talking with family, and they say, really stupid, really funny thing: They blamed earthquake, they blamed America. They say that America bombed something underground, and that's why we had earthquake. That's really funny, I guess. They believe that America bad so badly that they're believed in this stupid ideas. I don't know how they can even think about it, that sounds, that even sounds so stupid." (Yntymak, Pos. 136)

The experiences of Yntymak and other respondents resonate well with the findings of the CAB survey, presented in chapter 3.1, which demonstrate generational divides, considering the perception of the USA. Anti-Western sentiments thus separate parents and children from each other.

The interviewees report different ways of coping with family disputes and intergenerational differences considering political orientations. Yntymak, Begayim, and Aiperi recall heated debates with their family, but they failed to convince their parents that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is unjustified and fell short of disproving Russian propaganda narratives, given their parents insistence on their point of view. Yntymak did not manage to convince his mother that she fell prey to anti-Western conspiracy tales, while Begayim was unsuccessful to persuade her father to reevaluate his pro-Russian attitudes, despite the enormous suffering that Russian and Soviet colonialism inflicted on his ancestors. In a similar way, Aiperi had to acknowledge that Russian propaganda was too powerful that she could rescue her parents from the political narratives disseminated by Russian state TV.

Given their inability to influence their parents' attitudes, Gulnara and Batyr developed a degree of acceptance of their father's pro-war stance. Gulnara blames her father's support of the invasion of Ukraine on his childhood experiences and thereby attempts to excuse his endorsement of an act of military aggression, which she considers immoral:

> “[M]y dad, he is actually a pro-Russian. He supports Putin. And he thinks that Kyrgyzstan someday will be a part of Russia. I know it is… I feel so much shame about that, but I cannot change him, because when I started to learn that my dad actually is a pro-Russian, I was crying. I was so devastated about that fact. But then I started to realize it is actually his youth. It is his childhood. And he remembers the best things from the Soviet Union. And I cannot change his memories. I cannot change the narrative that's going on in his head. So right now, I'm more... I'm accepting him in his own way, that he is like that and it's not going to change, but we had a lot of fights about that topic.” (Gulnara, Pos. 48)

Temirkul, Malika, and Batyr refrained from arguing against their pro-Russian fathers, as they felt that they would not be able to change their attitudes. Since they perceived their fathers as authoritarian figure, they shied away from challenging the leader of the family. When Malika overcame her fear and argued against her father, she noticed that she is navigating thin terrain, risking to anger the head of the family:

> “[W]hen I have this disagreement, I feel that he's starting like, like, he's starting angry for me. And I feel this moment, when I just should keep silence. Or he will just be, or he will shout or something like that. […]. I'm just like, okay, okay, you're all right. But sometimes, we, anyway, we have this conversation about this. […]. You are watching this pro-Russian news, you have to watch other news too, cause some, so he sometimes became angry when I'm starting, like, talking something against his view, that he is not right, in my opinion. […]. It's only happening, I think, in a really traditional family.” (Malika, Pos. 64)

Traditional concepts of Kyrgyz family relations are at play, when internalized age hierarchies urge children to abstain from disagreeing with their fathers. Furthermore, anger expressed by Malika’s father hints that a cultural norm was violated when Malika contradicted his opinion, as he felt threatened in his sole claim to rule over the family.

However, there were also incidents of intergenerational reconciliation within parent-child debates on Russia and the war. In particular, Temirkul, Kanykey, and Altynay recounted becoming closer with their mothers since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Altynay explained that her mother began to embrace her Kyrgyz roots and started speaking Kyrgyz language since the beginning of the war, reflecting similar personal transformations as her daughter. They established consensus on their support for Ukraine and her mother encouraged Altynay to attend pro-Ukrainian protests in Bishkek. In that regard, decolonization did not separate Altynay from her mother, but increased the quality of their relationship:

> "[S]urprisingly after the war started, she [my mother] became so patriotic. I mean it's a good thing, it's a good thing but you know sometimes… Whenever, I go, will go to those protests like against the Russia war or like for other purposes she would say why are you going there, like no no no, it's dangerous, you shouldn't go there. After the war started she was like yeah, if you want to go, yeah it's a good cause, you should totally join them and so she became more understanding of my ideals and principles." (Altynay, Pos. 28)

Temirkul and Kanykey also reported that their relationship with their mothers withstood the challenge imposed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Engaging in political discussions with his mother, Temirkul persuaded his mother to give up her pro-Russian stance and take a critical position towards Russia, as he shared with her some critical online content. Already prior to the war, his mother became a supporter of Russian oppositional leader Alexei Navalny and the war did not disrupt their general agreement on shared political values. When Kanykey discovered that her mother and her grandmother were supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and adopted Russian propaganda narratives, she explained Russian disinformation to them and helped them to diversify their media consumption to reduce their exposure to Russian state TV. Furthermore, she began discussing the topic of decolonization with her mother, leading to an amicable culture of political debate:

> "[W]hen the war happened, I asked my grandmother and mother about what they feel about the war and they were, at the beginning, they were kind of supporting Russia and I was like why are you supporting them? And my mom, she was really like, oh they have so much like terrorists in Ukraine and blah blah blah and when I started talking with her about that, like how the real situation is, she was like yeah, she changed her mind and my grandmother she also changed her mind. And they started more to support Ukraine and also, I showed my grandmother different channels, because she was watching only Kyrgyz and Russian channels." (Kanykey, Pos. 63)

The cases of Kanykey and Temirkul demonstrate that intergenerational dialogue also has the capacity to further intergenerational cohesion and contribute to consensual solidarity within the family. Children can influence their parents by providing them with independent news sources and persuade them to renounce their pro-Russian attitudes and condemn the Russian military aggression. The cases also show that political socialization is not necessarily an adult-centric, top-down process, but that influence on political orientations can be exercised in both ways.

However, the ability to renounce pro-Russian attitudes seems to be a matter of gender, since only mothers were willing to listen to their children and be considerate of the political attitudes of their offspring. Fathers, in contrast were often the most ardent supporters of Putin and the Russian regime. Gender related differences in parental attitudes were present in the case of Altynay, Gulnara, Begayim, Temirkul, Malika, and Kanykey. Of those respondents that grew up with both parents and included parental attitudes towards Russia in their narrations, only Aiperi and Cholpon did not differentiate between the political attitudes of their parents. In all other cases, the female parent would be more willing to make concessions in favor of their children and admit that their children were partly right in their political viewpoints.

It is possible, that the gender differences are a result of traditional Kyrgyz family values, which position fathers as the head of the family. Given that cultural norms entitle them to act as moral leaders guiding their family, father's might struggle to accept when their offspring undermines their authority by challenging their opinion. Since Kyrgyz traditions assign a less powerful role to mothers within the family setting, they might be more prone to consider their children's political opinions, because listening to their children does not contradict their social role within the traditional family context.

In summary, decolonial thought threatens intergenerational cohesion, because the elderly tend to admire Russia and adopt narratives conveyed by Russian state media, while Kyrgyzstani youth embrace decolonial ideas which argue for emancipation from the Russian regime and solidarity with Ukraine. However, the interviews also hinted that intergenerational reconciliation is possible, since mothers are sometimes prone to concede their pro-Russian attitudes and consider their children's point of view. Meaningful political debate can emerge between mothers and children and help to achieve consensual solidarity. Fathers, in contrast appear resistant to intergenerational dialogue and insist on their support for the Putin regime.

"I started to value things he invested in me": The Kyrgyz revival as intergenerational reconciliation

Considering the recent trend of taking pride in being Kyrgyz and rediscovering Kyrgyz roots, the respondents' narrations demonstrated divergent family dynamics. In some cases, the interviewees perceived themselves as main advocate of decolonization, introducing the topic to their family members. As discussed in chapter 5.2, many mothers resented Kyrgyz traditions

during the childhood and teenage years of the respondents. However, the interviewees hinted at their mothers following common societal trends of embracing Kyrgyz culture and became more accepting of their Kyrgyz roots. Nevertheless, in some families, negative attitudes towards Kyrgyz culture and language prevailed among the parental generation, rendering children as main promoters of decolonization within their family.

For example, Yntymak and Cholpon were the first in their family to become interested in learning Kyrgyz language, despite their mothers' denigrating comments. In a similar way, Aiperi notices that her parents "still may not getting this cultural revival thing" (Aiperi, Pos. 63), as she frequently corrects her mother who sticks to the Soviet term of "Kirgizia". Furthermore, Yntymak recounted that his aunt was afraid to visit the city center of Bishkek, citing concerns about her inability to converse in Russian language. He tried to convince his aunt to emancipate from her colonial mindset, since she lacked the self-esteem to visit the capital city, given her rural origins and lack of fluency in Russian language:

> "I have an auntie. […]. She's old. But I really want to spend time with her and once I ask her why she… she lives in Mayovka. […] That's kind of a district of Bishkek. But it's located outside of the city. And I asked her why she don't come to the city. Why she never walk around the city. And I asked her and she said that 'I don't know Russian. And if I speak like…' [interrupts to ask Batyr for translation of a word from Kyrgyz to English]. She was afraid to come to Bishkek because she don't know Russian. Because, you know, and I said that it is Kyrgyzstan. You need to ask other people to talk with her in Kyrgyz. Because it's Kyrgyzstan, it's Bishkek. […]. They're like, don't do anything., like to solve this problem. They just, will just live our lives." (Yntymak, Pos. 156)

On the other hand, as explained in chapter 5.2, many fathers maintain patriotic sentiments and feel proud about being Kyrgyz. In their childhood and teenage years, many respondents were annoyed by their fathers' obsession with Kyrgyz culture and their insistence to transmit knowledge about traditions and skills in Kyrgyz language to their offspring. However, the establishment of a decolonial consciousness resulted in a degree of intergenerational reconciliation and improvement of father-child relationships, because common values of appreciating their shared Kyrgyz roots created a sense of unity.

Cholpon, Altynay, and Batyr reported that they developed a more profound emotional connection with their fathers, after they established a decolonial mindset and discovered their interest in their Kyrgyz roots. For example, Batyr, who had a problematic relationship with his father since his childhood, explained how he carefully started to reengage with his father after

he became obsessed about Kyrgyz culture due to a TikTok trend. When he noticed that his knowledge of Kyrgyz culture and traditions was mostly transmitted by his father, he started to appreciate the impact of his father on his process of socialization:

> "Even though I was afraid of my father, and despite that we were distant, he participated in my upbringing. And his attempts to educate me have been preserved in my memory. I didn't take them seriously, I didn't think about them that deeply. But now that I grew older, and I saw these trend on TikTok, I began to remember these words of him, that's what he said, that's how he did it. And I started to value things that he invested in me. I started to adapt some of his habits and thinking for myself." (Batyr, Pos. 331)

Furthermore, the way towards decolonization is inextricably linked to the discovery of pre-colonial traditions and knowledge of origins. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, decolonization requires engagement with family history and ancestral origins, since traditions oblige Kyrgyz people to be aware about their seven forefathers. To obtain knowledge about family history in order to develop a sense of belonging, Kyrgyzstani youth have to engage in meaningful conversations with the elderly. This was particularly relevant for Cholpon, who explained how the relationship with her father improved, when she expressed her interest in her Kazakh origins and inquired her father about her family history:

> "[S]o my dad, he was super excited about it, because no one, he has five daughters and no one is interested into the Kazakh side. He was always very proud of it […] and we never actually matter, it never actually mattered for us. And so when I started asking him he was very happy about it, because I was the only one who finally started acknowledging the Kazakh roots and, um, I think yeah after that our relationship got a bit better, so we got something to talk about and we still are, so I still am like the one who is interested in this." (Cholpon, Pos. 31)

The interviews demonstrate that there is a degree of intergenerational consensus about the importance to rehabilitate Kyrgyz language and appreciation of Kyrgyz traditions, but generational differences prevail considering the interpretation of Kyrgyz culture and what aspects of it should be emphasized during decolonization. A conversation between Batyr and his father demonstrates the divergent meaning that members of different generational cohorts might attach to Kyrgyzness:

> "But he [my father] judged me if I did some unusual stuff, like, you know, re-color [dye] my hair, like my tattoos[12], even if they're Kyrgyz. But it's still tattoos, Kyrgyz don't do

[12] Batyr's tattoos feature religious patterns related to Tengrism

> tattoos. He judged me why you look like Russians, you know. You want to be Russian? […]. I said, no, I'm not Russian. As you know, ancient Kyrgyz was blond, was with... with green eyes or blue eyes. They was just like me. I'm a true Kyrgyz. I'm not Russian. And he just laughed. […] In the end, different ways to be Kyrgyz." (Batyr, Pos. 296)

Since the sample consists exclusively of liberal-minded youth, it highlights particular elements of Kyrgyz culture, which resonate with their mindset. For example, youth frequently reference Tengrism and nomadism as the essence of Kyrgyz culture, because it aligns with their pursue of individual liberties and freedom. Tengrism is a shamanic religion, associated with living in harmony with nature, while nomadism conveys a spirit of mobility and freedom. During the interviews, Temirkul, Batyr, and Kanykey expressed their interest in Tengrism as alternative path of post-colonial spiritual recovery, while Batyr and Altynay confessed their fascination about nomadism.

For other segments of society, the return to Kyrgyz traditions may rather mean to embrace conservative, patriarchal values and adopt Islamic beliefs. The conversation between Batyr and his father demonstrate, that Kyrgyzness can also be mobilized to reject cultural innovation, such as tattoos and unconventional hairstyles, but to promote communal cohesion and uniformity at the expense of personal individuality. This understanding of decolonization does not resonate with liberal-minded youth. For example, Aiperi, Nurbek, Temirkul, and Batyr express their disavowal about the Islamic revival and patriarchy in Kyrgyzstan. Aiperi considers Islamic religion as another colonial vector that threatens to undermine the cultural identity of the Kyrgyz people. She draws parallels to Russian colonialism and argues that Islam is not indigenous to Kyrgyzstan and that nomadic tribes were forcefully converted to Islam centuries ago.

In summary, decolonization has divergent implications for societal cohesion and intergenerational family solidarity. On the one hand, decolonization poses a risk for intergenerational unity, because youth and elderly have different understandings of history and distinct attitudes towards Russia. Their political visions for the future of their country and their wishes for cultural, economic, and geopolitical alliances are irreconcilable. At the same time, decolonization also has the potential to facilitate intergenerational dialogue and to create emotional bonds beyond generational cleavages. The desire of youth to discover their Kyrgyz origins requires investigation of their ancestral origins, which draws them to engage with elders. Parents and other elderly family members can provide knowledge about family

history and traditions while transmitting skills in Kyrgyz language. Furthermore, there is a broad societal interest in the preservation of Kyrgyz culture and popularization of Kyrgyz language, which has the potential to bridge generational divides and further intergenerational unity.

6. Conclusion

Born in the late 90's and early 2000's while maturing in the 2010's, Kyrgyzstani youth experienced fundamental societal transformations of decolonization during their impressionable years, which is reflected in their distinct generational consciousness. Their generational conscious is formed by shared experiences of regaining self-esteem about their Kyrgyz roots and acts of shedding feelings of inferiority related to their ancestral origins.

Growing up in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstani youth internalized a strong feeling of shame and deficiency about Kyrgyz culture and language, which urged them to hide all Kyrgyz aspects of their identity, while striving to become Russian by embracing Russian culture and by speaking Russian language. In recent years, however, Kyrgyzstani youth witnessed a revival of Kyrgyz culture as a social trend towards decolonization gained ground in Bishkek. Young people began to embrace their Kyrgyz identity, to question Russian dominance in the region, and to critically reassess the historical impact of Russian and Soviet rule on the development of Central Asia. Interpretations of history, which render Russian and Soviet interference in the region as colonial domination gained popularity, while youth began improving their skills in Kyrgyz language and appreciating Kyrgyz traditions.

At the same time, a great share of Bishkek's youth is experiencing identity struggles imposed by the decolonial turn. Although young Russian-speaking Kyrgyz support decolonization, they also report a degree of alienation as they grapple to fit into the emerging ethno-nationalist paradigm promoted by dominant understandings of decolonization. On the one hand, many Russian-speaking Kyrgyz find it difficult to learn the Kyrgyz language; on the other hand, they are reluctant to discharge the enormous impact of Russian culture on their socialization. Russian colonization has created hybrid identities among the inhabitants of Bishkek that blend Russian, Kyrgyz, and other cultural influences. Kyrgyzstani youth often find themselves in a third space of interculturality, being neither Kyrgyz nor Russian enough to fit into preconceived societal notions of identification.

In general, the issue of decolonization is of enormous importance for Kyrgyzstani youth, as the recent societal transformations have left an imprint on the biographies of each young person. Their life trajectories underwent dramatic transformations over the past decade, from subscribing to colonial ideas that render Russian culture as superior to denouncing Russian

hegemony in the region, shedding feelings of inferiority, reclaiming self-esteem, and demanding independence and sovereignty.

Despite cultural norms that position elders as unquestionable authority and oblige parents to transmit their knowledge and provide moral guidance, parents mostly refrained from imposing their pro-Russian attitudes and nostalgic sentiments about the Soviet Union on their children during their childhood and teenage years. Political debates were absent from most family homes and political values were transmitted passively through parental media consumption, since most parents watched Russian state TV, exposing their children to Kremlin narratives about politics and society. While Russian state TV became a mediating agent for transmitting parental political orientations to their children, parents did not reinforce the worldviews conveyed by Russian state TV by further discussing them in the family home. As a result, children often lacked the necessary reinforcement to adopt political values and rarely imitated their parents' attitudes.

Although Kyrgyzstani youth often face age-related discrimination and pronounced age hierarchies, many are emancipating themselves from societal expectations to subscribe to parental authority. While society expects youth to emulate parental understandings of society, young people often have the self-esteem to emancipate themselves from parental worldviews and develop their own perspectives on society. If the intergenerational transmission of pro-Russian attitudes is based on normative expectations rather than consensual solidarity, the probability that these political values will persist into adulthood is low, as Kyrgyzstani youth are exposed to a variety of alternative socializing agents that promote political ideas that are critical of Russia.

Since many parents lack the commitment to transmit their political attitudes to their children, the importance of alternative socializing agents to influence the process of acquiring political orientations increases. For example, educational institutions, such as school and university have been decisive in promoting or containing decolonial discourse. School is a highly ambivalent socializing agent, which can promote colonial narratives of history, but also provide students with a critical historical consciousness. Teachers assume a powerful role in mediating the official curriculum, promoting their own interpretations of history by manipulating the narrative to align it with their own experiences of living in the late Soviet Union. Some denounce Russian and Soviet rule for their atrocities and colonial violence, while others

express their admiration for Russian cultural influence and nostalgia for the Soviet Union. Kyrgyz language and literature classes can inspire patriotic feelings in some students, while discouraging others from further studying their language.

Higher education institutions are similarly important, as the diversity of Bishkek's university landscape demonstrates the geopolitical agendas of multiple actors. While the American University of Central Asia is highly effective in promoting decolonial thought and anti-Russian attitudes through its critical teaching, the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University fails to bring students closer to the Russian cultural sphere because students are deterred by its academic culture, which is characterized by corruption, restrictions on freedom of speech, and strong hierarchies between faculty and students.

The media is highly influential in disseminating decolonial narratives and providing critical knowledge about Kyrgyz history, including colonial violence and atrocities committed by imperial powers. Peers are important for debating the issue of decolonization to further elaborate its meaning and to develop a common group identity around shared decolonial activities. Political events, such as the Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflict and the Russian annexation of Crimea were crucial in promoting decolonial thinking and patriotic sentiments among Kyrgyzstani youth. However, the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine had the most profound impact, giving a tremendous boost to decolonization, as Kyrgyzstani youth sought to dissociate themselves from Russia by speaking Kyrgyz more frequently and began to perceive parallels with Ukrainian experiences of colonization, while announcing a common struggle to break free from Russian imperial ambitions. Finally, the war-induced arrival of Russian migrants in Kyrgyzstan significantly downgraded the public image of Russia because Kyrgyzstani youth noticed colonial attitudes among the newcomers and became increasingly aware of how Russians continue to perceive Central Asia as culturally inferior and ascribe to themselves a civilizing role.

Macro-societal trends of decolonization entered the lives of Kyrgyzstani youth in different ways, profoundly changing their way of relating to their Kyrgyz roots, as well as their political attitudes towards Russia and their understandings of Kyrgyz history. While some people gradually incorporated decolonial ideas into their identities as they witnessed broader societal changes, others experienced far-reaching decolonial turning points, citing personal biographical events. For example, moving abroad often increased the decolonial

consciousness of Kyrgyzstani youth, as they had to present themselves as a person from Kyrgyzstan and consciously think about the essence of Kyrgyz culture and its impact on them. Becoming an ambassador of Kyrgyzstan when meeting curious people often started a process of self-reflection and furthered identification with Kyrgyz culture.

In addition, tourist activities such as nature visits, hiking, or city tours fostered the decolonial consciousness of many young Kyrgyzstani people. Learning about the history of their lands, witnessing the beauty of Kyrgyz nature, and developing an emotional connection increased their sense of belonging. Furthermore, online culture often had a decisive impact on the decolonial convictions of Kyrgyzstani youth. The transition from Russian-dominated social media such as Odnoklasniki or Vkontakte to Western platforms like Facebook or Instagram increased exposure to international pop culture. At the same time, Kyrgyz nomadism became a trending topic on TikTok. More recently, Kyrgyzstani youth started producing social media content in the Kyrgyz language in an effort to popularize their language. Social media thus became an important vehicle for spreading Western pop-culture among Kyrgyzstani youth, but also a tool to empower them to produce content in the Kyrgyz language.

Another important event was the acquisition of historical knowledge through education. By leaning about Kyrgyz history, young people develop a critical understanding of the impact and legacy of colonial rule on Kyrgyzstan. While some young people seek historical knowledge by discussing family history, others choose to attend public lectures. In both cases, awareness of colonial violence and atrocities contributes to anti-Russian sentiments and recognition of the struggle to preserve Kyrgyz culture and traditions. Lastly, encounters with spirituality also provide some young people with entry points for decolonial self-reflection and show new ways of connecting with Kyrgyz roots. In particular, the indigenous shamanic practices of Tengrism fascinate young people because they promote an alternative belief system that advocates living in harmony with nature.

While I initially assumed that decolonization bears the potential for intergenerational conflict, it has ambivalent implications on intergenerational relations. Looking at the intergenerational debates on Kyrgyz history, youth and elderly maintain irreconcilable understandings of history. While the elderly have nostalgic feelings for the Soviet Union, which create an enduring emotional attachment to Russia, the youth reject any positive evaluation of Soviet and Russian rule, emphasizing colonial oppression and atrocities committed by the imperial center. Both

generations mobilize history in a very selective way to justify their interpretation of events. Older people focus on economic and social stability in the late Soviet Union, while denying the existence of repression. Youth base their negative judgment of Soviet and Russian rule on Stalinism and the brutal crackdown of the Central Asian Revolt of 1916, omitting any positive contributions of Soviet rule, such as quality education, women's emancipation, and increasing living standards from their narrative. Intergenerational dialogue could potentially contribute to a more nuanced comprehension among youth and elderly. But while heated debates take place, they do not produce intergenerational understanding.

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, political disputes about the Russian regime have become a common occurrence. Confrontation with pro-Russian parents is a common experience among Kyrgyzstani youth. While fathers are the most passionate in supporting the Russian regime and justifying the invasion of Ukraine, mothers tend to be more open to alternative perceptions and expressed their interest in hearing their children's perspective on the events. Thus, fathers generally continued to admire Russia despite the war, while mothers sometimes changed their attitudes and became increasingly critical of Putin and the Russian leadership. Ageism is particularly present in intergenerational debates with fathers, as male parents are less inclined to listen to their children for fear of losing their authority if they do not defend and uphold their opinions. Mothers appear more accommodating to their children's perspectives and attitudes, and are willing to change their opinions and learn about the decolonial ideas of their offspring.

Given the recent revival of Kyrgyz culture, the parental generation is not opposed to the popularization of the Kyrgyz language and the growing interest in Kyrgyz traditions. Fathers, in particular, are often passionate about Kyrgyz culture and committed to preserving Kyrgyz traditions. They are engaged in transmitting skills in Kyrgyz language and knowledge of customs and rituals to their children. Many young people resented their father's insistence on instilling patriotic sentiments in them during their childhood and generally felt indifferent to their Kyrgyz heritage. However, as Kyrgyzstani youth experienced their decolonial moment and the Kyrgyz language began to gain popularity, they revisited their childhood memories and started to appreciate their fathers' efforts to familiarize them with Kyrgyz culture. Many young people report that they began talking more frequently with their fathers about their family

history and ancestral roots, after they became aware of decolonization. In many cases, these conversations improved the quality of the father-child relationship.

While decolonization can create intergenerational conflict, it can also facilitate intergenerational dialogue and increase intergenerational solidarity. Issues such as Soviet history, Putin, or the war in Ukraine are highly divisive and threaten social cohesion. At the same time, decolonization has created a societal consensus on the importance of preserving Kyrgyz traditions and popularizing the Kyrgyz language, which has the potential to reconcile young and old. Most importantly, decolonization involves a critical engagement with the past and family history. Elders are an important source of knowledge for youth to understand about their ancestral origins. Therefore, decolonization inextricably links the different generations in Kyrgyzstan.

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Appendix A: Central Asia Barometer Survey Wave 10/11

Figure 1: How is your opinion on Russia?

	Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of…Russia (October 2021, Survey Wave 10)															
	Very Favorable		Favorable		Unfavorable		Very Unfavorable		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count
Age Group 18-29	27%	120	59%	300	8%	34	2%	12	0%	1	3%	12	100%	479
30-39	29%	124	61%	290	5%	34	4%	20	0%	0	2%	8	100%	476
40-49	43%	103	47%	130	7%	19	1%	6	0%	0	2%	7	100%	265
50-59	37%	74	54%	80	5%	12	1%	3	0%	0	3%	6	100%	175
60+	39%	39	57%	65	1%	3	1%	2	0%	0	2%	2	100%	111
Total	31%	460	57%	865	7%	102	3%	43	0%	1	2%	35	100%	1506

	Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of…Russia (June 2022, Survey Wave 11)													
	Very Favorable		Favorable		Unfavorable		Very Unfavorable		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count
Age Group 18-29	30%	144	53%	252	11%	52	4%	21	0%	0	2%	10	32%	479
30-39	27%	123	50%	228	12%	55	7%	33	1%	4	3%	14	30%	457
40-49	40%	103	45%	116	10%	25	2%	4	0%	1	4%	11	17%	260
50-59	35%	57	56%	93	0%	9	0%	4	0%	0	1%	2	11%	165
60+	42%	63	44%	65	4%	6	6%	9	0%	0	4%	6	10%	149
Total	32%	490	50%	754	10%	147	5%	71	0%	5	3%	43	100%	1510

Figure 2: Please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the presence of Russian military bases in our country

		E19b [KAZ KGZ] Please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the presence of…Russian military bases in our country													
		Strongly Support		Support		Oppose		Strongly Oppose		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count
Age Group	18-29	44%	203	29%	149	8%	43	13%	69	1%	2	4%	13	100%	479
	30-39	45%	221	33%	160	6%	30	12%	51	0%	2	3%	12	100%	476
	40-49	61%	158	26%	70	3%	11	7%	21	1%	2	2%	3	100%	265
	50-59	63%	115	30%	45	3%	4	2%	4	0%	0	2%	7	100%	175
	60+	70%	77	27%	29	0%	1	1%	2	0%	0	1%	2	100%	111
	Total	54%	774	29%	453	5%	89	9%	147	0%	6	3%	37	100%	1506

		Please tell me if you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose the presence of…Russian military bases in our country (June 2022, Survey Wave 11)													
		Strongly Support		Support		Oppose		Strongly Oppose		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count
Age Group	18-29	40%	191	30%	146	11%	55	15%	71	0%	1	3%	15	31,72%	479
	30-39	46%	211	27%	123	8%	35	15%	67	0%	1	4%	20	30,26%	457
	40-49	56%	146	22%	56	5%	14	13%	35	0%	1	3%	8	17,22%	260
	50-59	64%	105	24%	40	6%	10	4%	7	1%	1	1%	2	10,93%	165
	60+	61%	91	20%	30	6%	9	8%	12	0%	0	5%	7	9,87%	149
	Total	49%	744	26%	395	8%	123	13%	192	0%	4	3%	52	100%	1510

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents that selected Russia as preferred country for economic/ security ties (June 2022)

	Respondents that selected Russia as prefered country for economic ties (June 2022, Survey Wave 11)			
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Total
Age Group	18-29	38%	183	479
	30-39	45%	205	457
	40-49	55%	144	260
	50-59	63%	104	165
	60+	62%	93	149
Total		48%	729	1510

	Respondents that selected Russia as prefered country for security ties (June 2022, Survey Wave 11)			
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Total
Age Group	18-29	53%	254	479
	30-39	58%	263	457
	40-49	69%	179	260
	50-59	74%	122	165
	60+	70%	104	149
Total		61%	922	1510

Figure 4: How concerned, if at all, are you about the amount of influence Russia has in our country?

		How concerned, if at all, are you about…the amount of influence Russia has in our country? (October 2021, Survey Wave 10)													
		Very concerned		concerned		concerned		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count
AgeGrp Age - Grouped	18-29	29%	156	26%	131	19%	93	22%	88	0%	0	3%	11	100%	479
	30-39	34%	167	26%	125	20%	95	16%	70	0%	1	5%	18	100%	476
	40-49	35%	89	23%	64	22%	63	16%	39	0%	0	4%	10	100%	265
	50-59	32%	56	20%	41	26%	40	18%	34	0%	0	4%	4	100%	175
	60+	28%	28	20%	25	17%	21	27%	30	0%	0	7%	7	100%	111
	Total	32%	496	24%	386	20%	312	20%	261	0%	1	4%	50	100%	1506

		How concerned, if at all, are you about…the amount of influence Russia has in our country? (June 2022, Survey Wave 11)													
		Very concerned		concerned		concerned		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count
Age Group	18-29	38%	183	27%	130	17%	83	15%	71	1%	4	2%	8	32%	479
	30-39	39%	179	27%	123	15%	68	16%	73	0%	1	3%	13	30%	457
	40-49	35%	90	25%	64	15%	40	22%	57	0%	0	3%	9	17%	260
	50-59	32%	52	22%	37	22%	36	22%	36	1%	1	2%	3	11%	165
	60+	23%	35	28%	42	18%	27	25%	37	0%	0	5%	8	10%	149
	Total	36%	539	26%	396	17%	254	18%	274	0%	6	3%	41	100%	1510

Figure 5: How is your opinion on the United States of America?

		Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of...United States (October 2021, Survey Wave 10)													
		Very Favorable		Favorable		Unfavorable		Very Unfavorable		Refused (vol.)		Don't Know (vol.)		Total	
		Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count	Row N %	ted Count
Age Group	18-29	29%	149	41%	210	8%	44	7%	26	0%	2	14%	48	100%	479
	30-39	19%	94	40%	199	10%	53	11%	44	2%	5	17%	81	100%	476
	40-49	17%	38	30%	88	14%	46	16%	40	1%	2	21%	51	100%	265
	50-59	14%	26	24%	47	21%	34	13%	27	1%	1	26%	40	100%	175
	60+	12%	15	23%	30	17%	14	23%	21	0%	1	26%	30	100%	111
	Total	20%	322	34%	574	13%	191	13%	158	1%	11	19%	250	100%	1506

Figure 6: In light of recent events in Ukraine, please tell me whether you support, rather support, rather do not support, or do not support at all Russia's conduct of military operations on the territory of Ukraine

		In light of recent events in Ukraine, please tell me whether you support, rather support, rather do not support, or do not support at all Russia's conduct of military operations on the territory of Ukraine (March 2022)													
		Fully support		Rather support		support		Don't know		Refused		Total			
		Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count	Row N %	Unweighted Count		
Age Group	18-24	15%	26	14%	24	24%	42	45%	80	3%	5	0%	0	100%	177
	25-34	19%	52	20%	56	12%	34	40%	110	8%	22	1%	3	100%	277
	35-44	25%	49	16%	31	20%	39	32%	64	8%	15	1%	2	100%	200
	45-54	31%	49	19%	30	16%	26	25%	40	7%	11	1%	2	100%	158
	55-64	37%	47	24%	31	12%	15	17%	22	9%	12	1%	1	100%	128
	65+	38%	29	16%	12	13%	10	25%	19	4%	3	4%	3	100%	76
	Total	25%	252	18%	184	16%	166	33%	335	7%	68	1%	11	100%	1016

Appendix B: Empirical data collection

Figure 7: Consent form

Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Political Socialization of Youth in Bishkek
Principal investigator: Philipp Zimmermann

PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT CAREFULLY. YOUR SIGNATURE IS REQUIRED FOR PARTICIPATION. YOU MUST BE AT LEAST 18 YEARS OF AGE TO GIVE YOUR CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH. IF YOU DESIRE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM, YOU MAY REQUEST ONE.

Please be informed that the participation in the research is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time, without prejudice, should you object to the nature of the research. You are entitled to ask questions and to receive an explanation after your participation.

Description of the Study:
The study takes place in the framework of the Master thesis of the principal investigator. The study scrutinizes biographies of political socialization of youth in Bishkek to provide a new angle on the research of social transformations in Kyrgyzstan from a generational perspective.

Purpose of the study:
The study aims at identifying critical turning points in the biographies of young people when developing their political consciousness. Furthermore, the research seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of the interplay of different socializing agents.

Possible Risks:
There will be no risks.

Possible Benefits:
There will be no personal benefits for you. However, your information will help the researcher to acquire an academic degree and provide crucial insights for social sciences. Upon request, the researcher will share the results of his thesis with you.

Compensation for your time:
There won't be any compensation for your time.

Confidentiality:
The audio recording of the interview will be stored on the personal and password protected computer of the researcher. The audio file will be converted into a written transcript. During this process, your identity will be hidden: your name will be removed and replaced by a pseudonym. Furthermore, all specific information that could potentially provide information about your personal identity will be deleted.

Opportunities to Question:
Any technical questions about this research may be directed to the principal investigator

Principal investigator: Philipp Zimmermann
Contacts: E-Mail: Philipp.zimmermann@posteo.de Instagram: @philipp_in_space

Any questions or concerns regarding the ethics of the study can be voiced to AUCA Institutional Review Board (IRB) at irb@auca.kg.

Opportunities to withdraw at will:
If you decide now or at any point to withdraw this consent or stop participating, you are free to do so at no penalty to yourself. In this case you will not receive compensation fee for your time.

Opportunities to be Informed of Results:
If you wish to receive the results of the research project let the researcher know. Upon request, the thesis will be shared with you, approximately in July or August 2024.

Date:

Signature of Participant _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent _____

Figure 8: Social and demographic data of the interviewees

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Duration of recording	Age	Place of Birth	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Higher Education	High School Education	Primary School	Parental Attitudes	Own attitudes
Batyr	27.04.2024	Living room at his home	2:20h	22	Village in Talas Oblast	male	Kyrgyz	2D Animator	Engineering at Talas State University	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Father supports Putin, Kyrgyz patriot. Mother is absent from his narratives	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot
Yntymak	27.04.2024	Living room of Batyr	2:20h	18	Bishkek	male	Kyrgyz	?	none yet, in transition to university	7-8th grade: Kyrgyz-Turkish high school (Lyceum); 9-10th grade: public school in Russia; 11th grade: Kyrgyz-Azerbaijani school	public school in Russia	mother says "war is bad", but strong anti-Western sentiment, until recently negative feelings about being Kyrgyz. Grew up without father	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot
Aiperi	03.05.2024	Cafe	2:02h	28	Tokmok	female	Kyrgyz	Artist, self-employed	BA in Politics in AUCA, MA in Politics & Development in South Korea	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Parents support Putin, father is Kyrgyz patriot	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot
Altynay	04.05.2024	Cafe	2:12h	27	Bishkek	female	Kyrgyz	Marketing Manager	BA in Business Administration	Kyrgyz-Turkish high school (Lyceum)	Public school, instruction in Russian language	parents object Russia's war on Ukraine, father is a Kyrgyz patriot, mother rejected Kyrgyz traditions and language until Russia's war on Ukraine. Then she became more patriotic. However the whole family talked positively about Russia during her childhood	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Duration of recording	Age	Place of Birth	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Higher Education	High School Education	Primary School	Parental Attitudes	Own attitudes
Malika	06.05.2024	Cafe	1:26h	29	Bishkek	female	Kazakh-Uzbek	Project Manager at international organization	MA Political Sciences, University of Cologne; BA at AUCA	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Parents support Putin, no patriotic feelings about Kyrgyzstan	against Putin, no patriotic feelings about Kyrgyzstan
Begayim	11.05.2024	Cafe	01:41h	24	Karakol	female	Kazakh-Kyrgyz	Marketing Specialist	BA in Chinese Studies at Bishkek Humanities University (dropped out)	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Parents support Putin, but mother became more critical after the war	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot
Temirkul	15.05.2024	Cafe	01:52h	26	Bishkek	male	Kyrgyz	unemployed	BA in Journalism in the Kyrgyz-Russian-Slavic University named after Yeltsin	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Father supports Putin, mother stopped supporting Putin after critical conversations with her son and became even more resentful to Russia after the invasion of Ukraine.	against Putin, positive feelings about being Kyrgyz, but also alienation and disbelonging
Cholpon	18.05.2024	Kitchen of flat	2:19h	28	Bishkek	female	Kazakh, Kyrgyz & Uzbek	self-employed German language tutor	BA in Social Sciences and Slavic Studies at Zurich University	High school in Switzerland	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Father: patriotic feelings about Kazakh roots, Mother: no patriotic feelings; both with anti-Ukrainian sentiments, possibly pro-Russian	positive feelings about being Kyrgyz; strong changes in views about Russia, recently critical towards Ukraine

Pseudonym	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Duration of recording	Age	Place of Birth	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Higher Education	High School Education	Primary School	Parental Attitudes	Own attitudes
Kanykey	22.05.2024	Cafe	1:47h	28	Bishkek	female	Kyrgyz-Uzbek	DJ, Artist, Filmmaker	BA in Psychology at Kyrgyz-Slavic University named after Yeltsin (dropped out)	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Grew up mostly without father, mother and grandmother supported Russia at the beginning of the war, but changed their opinion. Discussions with daughter contributed to opinion change. Father supports Putin	against Putin, positive feelings about Kyrgyz culture, but also sense of alienation and disbelonging
Nurbek	21.05.2024	AUCA	1:54h	22	Village in Issyk Kol Oblast	male	Kyrgyz	Consulant at international organization	BA in AUCA	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Parents are indifferent about politics	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot
Gulnara	26.05.2024	Cafe	1:03h	27	Bishkek	female	Kyrgyz	?	BA in Journalism in the Kyrgyz-Russian-Slavic University named after Yeltsin	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Public school, instruction in Russian language	Father supports Putin and is Kyrgyz patriot; mother without strong political inclinations	against Putin, Kyrgyz patriot

Appendix C: Data Analysis with MAXQDA

Figure 9: Code Map main category ‘generational experiences’

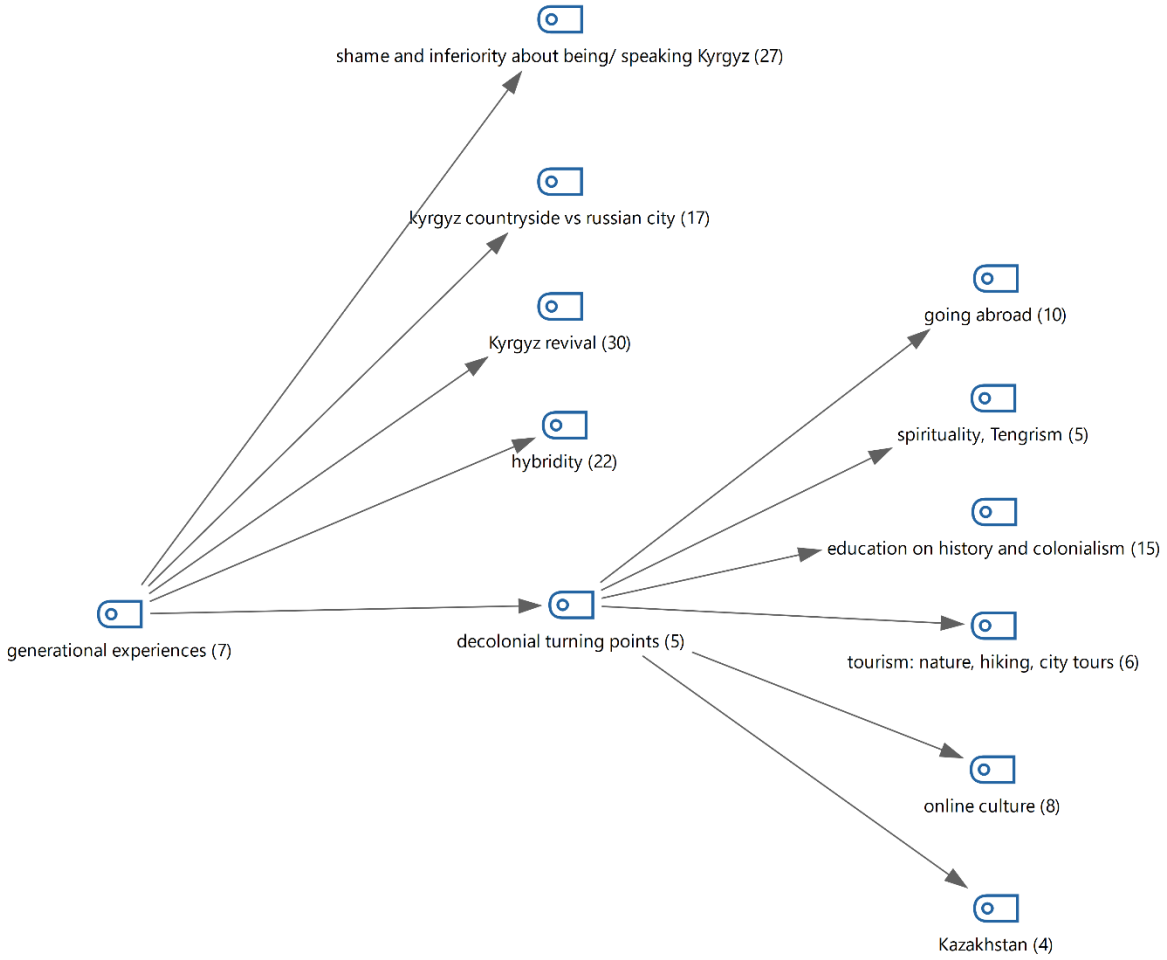

Figure 10: Code map main category ‘intergenerational negotiations and family dynamics’

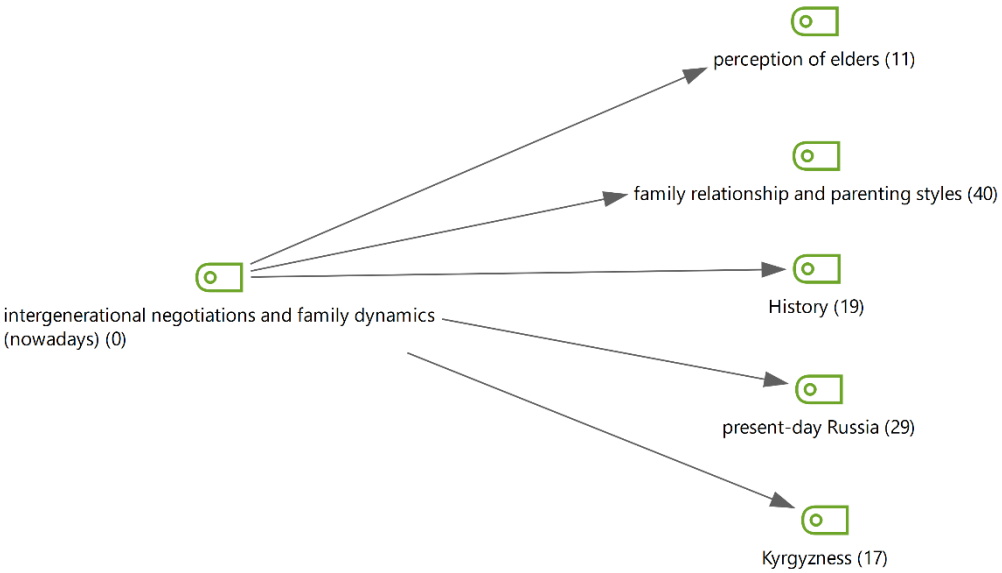
perception of elders (11)
family relationship and parenting styles (40)
History (19)
intergenerational negotiations and family dynamics (nowadays) (0)
present-day Russia (29)
Kyrgyzness (17)

Figure 11: Code map main category ‘socializing agents’