



THE ARRIVAL OF THE KYRGYZ PEOPLE IN TURKEY AND THEIR LIFE IN ULUPAMIR

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Abstract

This work deals with the arrival of the Kyrgyz people in Turkey and their efforts to preserve their way of life in the Turkish environment. It describes the departure of the Kyrgyz people from Kyrgyzstan under the leader of Rahman Kul Khan as they escaped from the threat of Communism. They Kyrgyzians traveled from Kyrgyzstan, through China, Afghanistan, Pakistan to Turkish Anatolia where they settled in the village of Ulupamir in 1982. Their journey and the difficulties they had faced were described in the work. In Turkey's Anatolia, they found a new home where they seek to observe the original religious customs, the family routine of the society in everyday life and family rituals, the preservation of Kyrgyz customs and traditions such as craftsmanship and the influence of pastoral tradition on everyday life. Kyrgyz minority

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, Sheep, Ulupamir, Tradition.

1. Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is a mountainous country where most of the territory is located at an altitude about 1000 m. Climate conditions affect people's lives, but also their traditions. Kyrgyz tradition is closely related to the life of semi-nomadic society. Tradition has laid the foundation of almost all traditions, including cuisine, home, family ties, legends, games, and so on.

Nomads were forced to become accustomed to changing political conditions after the 1917 Revolution and subsequent collectivisation. During the collectivization, the nomadic population was violently settled. At that time, a group of Kyrgyz led by Rahman Kul refused to live under Soviet domination, and therefore fled to China and then to Afghanistan. In Pamir, they lived outside the interest of China and the Soviets. They cared for the cattle and protected it, while the animals were also dependent on them.

There was a Marxist coup in 1978 in Afghanistan. The Kyrgyz people did not want to live encircled by Communism, so they were forced to leave to Pakistan. However, they did not do well, even some of them died due to local climatic conditions, they were not accustomed to, and therefore decided to find a new home. In 1982, a new home was found in a mountain area near Erciş near Lake Van in Turkish Anatolia.

This work outlines the arrival of Kyrgyz people in Turkey and show their lives in the Kyrgyz village of Ulupamir.

2. Methodology

The aim of this paper is to describe the way for the Kyrgyz people to Turkey and their integration into the Turkish society and to outline the problems they face. Its answers should include some sub-questions about the influence of Islam on the life of the people and family ceremonies, the influence of the pastoral traditional life in the studied area, the importance of the craft production on the life in Ulupamir.

The paper is based on the results of the mid-term field research and the materials collected during the visit to Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. Emphasis is placed on qualitative methods, in-depth interviews with respondents or more age categories. Qualitative data is supplemented and augmented by secondary data from literature, websites and statistical data.

Medium-term research was conducted in the form of participating surveys and semi-structured interviews in English, Russian, and Turkish. Research in Kyrgyzstan took place in Osh in the Talipov family in July and August 2012, while part of the research took place in the capital of Bishkek. The whole family speaks Russian, but they talk Kyrgyz among themselves. There was obvious shyness and initial mistrust in conversations. They described themselves as a hard-working family who deserved everything. They regarded Europeans as easy earners with a small number of hours at work and big profits. Contact with us was very limited, as the father and mother did not want to talk to the girls. On the other hand, the family was very kind and very helpful. Using snowball technique¹, we met their friends Asan Zhunusbek, Liliya Shopokova and other local people who tried to show us the traditions and culture of Kyrgyzstan.

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¹ Snowball technique is getting contacts using existing contacts.



Terrain research in Turkey took place in July and August 2013. Before I arrived in the village of Ulupamir, I had got contact with Hamza Kutlu, whose ancestor was known as Rahmun Kul Khan. Getting contact before departure was an important step, as the village maintains little contact with the world. All social sites about the village are managed by people from larger cities like Istanbul. Semi-structured interviews took place in Turkish language because the villagers could speak Turkish or Kyrgyz, some even Farsi language. During the summer, Hamza Kultu spends time in Ulupamir to help his family with the economy, but he works at a printing company in Istanbul over the winter. Besides Hamza Kutlu, I also came into contact with his family, distant relatives and acquaintances. His father is a member of *aksakal*, or of the elderly, which resolves disputes at the level of the local community. The mayor of the village arranged for us the contact the Kyrgyz and Turkish teachers in the local school. While staying in Ulupamir, we met with local people of all ages who introduced us to Kyrgyz culture in the Turkish environment.

3. Kyrgyz in Turkey

Turkey is a country of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. In the census, Turkish citizens must not report to ethnicity, language and religion, and it is therefore difficult to determine the exact number of members or minorities. The total population of the Republic of Turkey in July 2017 is 80,845,215 people. According to the result of 2016, it is estimated that Turks are 70 - 75 percent, Kurdish are 19 percent, other minorities are 7 - 12 percent (Cia.gov, 2018). The Kyrgyz occupy a tiny fraction within all ethnic groups, but their culture and traditions have an unmistakable place in the Turkish Republic.

3.1. The arrival of the Kyrgyz people in Turkey

The path of the Kyrgyz people to Turkey was not easy, as they traveled through several countries before eventually settling in Turkish Anatolia. In the 1920s, the Kyrgyzs moved to China, which they left in the 1930s and relocated to Afghanistan. In 1978, they moved to Pakistan and then to Turkey in 1982 (Kokaisl, 2008:130).

The civil revolution in 1917 triggered the start of the civil war in Russia, followed by the creation of the Union of Socialist Republics (USSR) and the expansion of Communism. Soviet history characterizes the civil war in Central Asia as a counter-revolution in the territory of today's Kyrgyzstan in terms of class struggle, as only exploiters oppose the Soviet government. The Soviet government was created in January and February 1918, which followed the creation of the Soviets in April of the same year in Naryn and in May and June in Karakol. In the middle of 1918, almost the entire territory of today's Kyrgyzstan was annexed to the Soviet government (Kokaisl, Usmanov, 2012: 85-98).

The Soviets sought to conquer territory and join Central Asian nations to the empire and create Soviet citizens between 1918 and 1930. Violent methods were used very often to achieve their goals. At the same time, the struggle of the Kyrgyz people started against the Soviets, who destroyed their way of life. They used to kill their animals, kill their imams. Religion was forbidden, they did not respect their culture, and people were dying. At that time, the drink ayran was able to save several Kyrgyz lives. Soviet soldiers came to the Kyrgyz people and gave them a choice of poison or weapons. The choice of weapons symbolized the connection to the Soviet Union and their thoughts. The Kyrgyzians found that poisoning and fast-paced ayran would cause vomiting and thus life-saving (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

According to the talks with Kyrgyzs, they do not have problems with Russians and are not afraid of them. On the other hand, they admit that the Soviets brought the modernization to Kyrgyzstan such as sewerage, education, etc. Turkish Kyrgyz people also mention Russian in unfair terms. They blame them for the suffering and the war they caused them. Some Ulupamiran Kyrgyzians speak in the context of the Soviets with words like hatred and resistance. Not only the Soviets were attacking Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan, but they were picking up animals and killing their people, despite the fact that the Kyrgyz did not hurt them anyway. Even Hamza Kutlu does not like Soviet Russians, just because of communism, but as he notes, he does not currently have a problem with the Russians and he likes Russian girls.

In 1926, Haji Rahman Kul was investigated by the Soviet government for allegedly charging weapons of arms purchase from the British government and organizing people against the Soviet Union. Despite lack of evidence, he was imprisoned without proper charge and kept in solitary confinement for six months. However, Haji Rahman Kul escaped the enlightened soldiers and returned home to the village. This act was further reinforced by the survival of his attempt to poison him. Thanks to these activities, he differed from other Kyrgyz, which made him a future leader. At the age of 35, Haji Rahman Kul was elected Khan and became a threat to the Soviet Union. Before the Kyrgyzians left for China, they had no news and almost did not know about it. All they knew was *Kara Çin* Or Black China. They remained there for two years. They traded with the Uygur and their sheep became very important part of their life. According to the Kyrgyz



people, the reversal in China came two years after Mao Zedong's came into power. They joined the area to China together with Lia Sao Phi (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

The Kyrgyzians were surrounded by the Communist regime again, and therefore the only solution seemed to go to the Afghan Pamir, which was not at the core of both the Soviets and the Chinese. Ulupamir Kyrgyz described the route from China to Afghanistan, marking the cities he passed. All the time he believed Afghanistan was close but he was twelve days on the way and starving.

In 1985, the British and the Russians decided to create the Vachian Corridor, also called the Pamiric Interface. This action created the border between Bukhara Emirate and Afghanistan on the Amudarji-Pjangji River. The Ucyan corridor, the so-called Afghanistan, was also to serve as a buffer zone between British India and Russian Turkmenistan. However, these borders were not strictly guarded or enforced, and therefore the Kyrgyz wandered freely throughout the area. Imperial powers allowed them to live their way of life (Kokaisl, Pargač, 2007: 12-15).

According to the witnesses, the Kyrgyz people lived in the mountains at an altitude of about 4,000 m. The summer lasted only two months, the rest of the year was cold and frosty. In the winter, the wind bite into their skin, so they covered the entire body except their eyes. It was very difficult to go out for milk from cows or water. When water was poured into the village, the water was frozen before they got home. As a result of climatic conditions, agriculture was not possible. Kyrgyzians had to learn how to handle food and raw materials, as the first bigger city was two weeks away. Only half of children survived because of the severe conditions. There was no doctor in the village, so people helped each other. In the case of toothache, the only possible solution was to tear them out. One Ulupamirian Kyrgyz is proud that thirty-one teeth were thrown and one tooth left. In particular, women in a different condition tolerated their pregnancy because they were working in the normal way as if they were not expected. They were resting only two or three days before giving birth, then the men held their work and took care of the household. The frequent phenomenon was the death of women due to excessive blood loss.

The government of the memory of the Kyrgyz people was introduced as a chanate in Pamir. Pamirish Kyrgyzians were exempt from paying taxes and were also freed from military service. Haji Rahman Kul Khan solved the everyday problems of the Kyrgyz people and others who lived in the neighborhood. He was awarded the title Pasiban-i-Pamir, the Lord and the Protector of Pamir, as well as the state medal (Kayipov, 2010: 193).

The Pamir Kyrgyz felt comfortable in the 1930s and 1940s, because they were not in interests of the Soviets and Chinese in Pamir. Their home laid high in the mountains where there was no easy access. In Pamir, they lived in a nomadic way of life where sheep, goats and yaks grazed. Jurts were built in the midst of the inhospitable peaks of the Vakhan Corridor, a 10 m wide and 50 m long southeast strip bordering on Pakistan. The Kyrgyz people were isolated for four months a year but self-sufficient. They managed to survive little, especially milk and meat, and they grew strong of them (Stockbower, 1981).

In the words of the Pamir Kyrgyz, a secret journey was going on from China to Pamir to sell iron products, textile products, forks, knives and other kitchen utensils, etc. Young buyers arrived on the horses and donkeys from Pakistan, Afghanistan and China, especially the Uighurs. Kyrgyzians hosted buyers in their own homes, and they became friends over time. If the buyers returned again, the Kyrgyz people were killing a sheep for them, but they did not want to pay for it because it was kindness, not trade. There was no language barrier between them, they could understand each other because they belonged to one Turkic nation.

The beauty of Pamir was also associated with the opium trade that came to the Kyrgyz people in the 1970s. Most opium vendors came from Afghanistan and Uzbekistan. Radio, sunglasses and other luxury goods were sold with opium at that time. Haji Rahman Kul did not support the opium trade, he was fundamentally opposed. He even wrote to the Afghan government to stop the opium trade. On the other hand, there were people among the Kyrgyz who were addicted to the opium, even selling it. The daughter of one of the opiate traders refused to communicate unlawful information about his father, who was an important member of the Kyrgyz community, but at the same time he sold and took opium in the 1970s. The reason was the defamation of the father's name and the adherence to the saying that the dead were speaking only in good terms (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

The government system in Pamir was based on three main areas: the national tradition, Sharia and Afghan law. Dauod, the president of Afghanistan, was deposed in 1978 and the Communist government of the province came to power in Kabul. This system was stable and was not shelved until 1979, when socialism came to power fully (Kayipov, 2010: 194). The economic success of the memory of the Kyrgyz people always led to the interest of the neighboring Communist countries, and Haji Rahman Kul Khan knew



what would follow with his nation and the country. The country was surrounded by the Communist regime, so Haji Rahman Kul spoke to his children and his wife firstly. Later, he coalesced with older *aksakal*, or *white beards*. He told them about the fate of the Kyrgyz people and proposed to leave for Pakistan. His great wish was to stay together and follow him on his way to his new home because he could not imagine their separation (FemaBilisim, 2011).

After the Marxist coup in Afghanistan in 1978, the Kyrgyz refugees fled the Pamir. The Kyrgyz refused to accept the President Khalgi in the background of communism. In 1979, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and sought to establish the Soviet government. Haji Rahman Kul did not wish to live in the Communist country and his family and his followers decided to move to Pakistan. The inquisitive leader led the tribe through snowy peaks to Pakistan. Women and children were riding horse while men walked on foot. They crossed through the passes of Munara and Mulkali, crossed the river, where several animals were lost, and eventually arrived in Imrit in Pakistan. They settled in four camps, they came in a small number to the Yain and Chatorkhan valleys, and around a thousand were divided between Hunza and Gilgit (Stockbower, 1981).

Ulupamir Kyrgyzians lived in the refugee camp near Gilgit River Pakistan represented something completely different from the ethnological point of view, but also from the climate. Even the 40 families, headed by Abdirashit, returned back to Pamir's random platform. The Kyrgyzians suffered from a depressing feeling, since their lives were so closely related to farm animals. They were dependent on their animals, now their lifestyle had to change because their animals perished or did not survive in these conditions. According to the Kyrgyz people in Afghanistan, Afghanistan left about 1300 Kyrgyz and went on a journey with 30,000 sheep, 80,000 yaks, 3,000-4,000 horses and 50-60 camels. The trip was very difficult because women did not have shoes and everything seemed different and strange. The road survived around a thousand Kyrgyzians and 30,000 animals. There was no space for the shepherds' goat and dsheep herds, because people cultivated crops at the foot of the mountains. Men and shepherds without herds wandered aimlessly in the camp. They were proud of their independence, but they needed money. They looked for work as wage-workers in a nearby town. They were unqualified. However, willing to work for less money than local people, who were every hostile to them. Women embroidered and sold caps and blankets at the bazaar. The weaving fabrics ended because they did not have sheep from which they could make large sheep wool blankets (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

They spent four years during which they failed to adapt to the local climate in Pakistan. They were accustomed to cold and harsh mountain conditions from Afghanistan instead of the mountain Pakistani climate, where temperatures ranged between 35 and 40 degrees Celsius, as well as about 50 degrees Celsius. The temperatures ranged below 20 degrees Celsius in Pamir. Humans suffered from high temperatures, they slept very hard at night and slept poorly and could not eat properly. During the first four months, 272 people died, mostly young men (Kayipov, 2010: 195). Animals also died together with people. Kyrgyzians suffered from hunger, and they killed their sheep or sold them under price. In the opinion of the Ulupamiran Kyrgyz, if they lived in those conditions for another five or ten years, they would not survive and die.

Men and women received support for forty cents a day and a person from the Pakistani government. The Kyrgyzians also received the wheat, sugar and salt allocations every month and some dried milk from foreign nations. Another problem was the unavailability of other cities because road were often closed as a result of the floods that have plagued the area (Stockbower, 1981).

The Kyrgyz people were dependent on material and financial support, largely due to the initiative of Haji Rahman Kul Khan, Pakistani government, foreign associations and cultural centers. The Kyrgyzians, accustomed to growing and raising cattle, were forced to do other work. Some of them started to open stores and some became successful traders. At the bazaars, local people still perceived them as immigrants and stared at them through their fingers because they were different in particular on a linguistic basis. The Kyrgyzians spoke only the dialect of Turkish and Persian, while the people of Gilgit spoke only the *shini*, a common dialect. Another difference was about their clothes. The Pakistanis wore a national *shalwar* shirt dress, unlike the Kyrgyz men wore straight pants and shirts. The women wore long scarves covering their long braids. It was their headband that distinguished them from Pakistani women wearing a mask over her face (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006). Despite the tribulations, the Kyrgyz people preserved their generous and charismatic spirit of mountain people. The Kyrgyz people always offered their guests tea and pieces of biscuits and sweets. They sat and drank tea in the evenings. The men listened to the *sitar*, a simple three-stringed instrument, and usually began to dance solo with gentle hand movements.



People still looked up at Haji Rahman Kul Khan who decided to take the first step to save their people and spirit and decided to move to a country with mountains and cold weather. Haji Rahman Kul sent letters asking for a new home to America, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, France and other countries. People heard about Alaska that the weather was cold and there were animal pastures. They hoped it would be possible to live in Alaska as well as in Pamir or Kyrgyzstan. At the request, Haji Rahman Kul Khan was told by the US Embassy in Islamabad that such a mass action would require an act of Congress. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska was afraid that the Kyrgyz authorities could create their own governmental structure (Stockbower, 1981).

In the opinion of the Ulupamirish Kyrgyz people, a new home offers from the United States of America (Alaska) and the Republic of Turkey came at the same day after four years in Pakistani exile. The Ulupamiran recalled how the Americans came in their suits. But eventually they decided on Turkey. Turkey's choice may appear to be clear because Islam is the dominant religion in both countries. At the same time, both peoples belong to the Turks, thus seeing a certain bond between themselves. Climatic conditions and nature also corresponded the most with their demands. Turkey tried to restore the idea of pan-Turkish and the connection with their far-off ethno-linguistic brothers. To date, some of the Kyrgyzians have an idea of what would happen if they chose America. If they could keep some Kyrgyz tradition and habits in the non-Muslim environment.

In 1982, the first 760 Pamirish Kyrgyz, including 330 men and 430 women, joined the Turkish Airlines from Islamabad to Adana (Kayipov, 2010: 194-195). Van Kyrgyz recalls how they entered a salon in Islamabad accompanied by a man. They had been waiting for a long time in a small room in a large number of people. They were tired and they had no place to sit. The man asked for the chair and also added proudly that he had received it.

They spent the first evening in Turkey in the town of Adana in the south of the Anatolian peninsula. Upon arrival, they were surprised by Turkey because they imagined a completely different country. Everything was different from what they knew. Street, buildings, and people seemed different. Every Turkish they met was interested in them and wanted to talk to them briefly. The Mayor of Adana spoke to local people at a public speech to help the incoming Kyrgyz people. He asked them if they could let them sleep at their houses at the beginning. The first days did not have a secured stay, and therefore they were reliant on the local people who helped them because it is a Turkish nature. There were ideas and fears of a new beginning with the Kyrgyz people themselves, and often older men could not fall asleep (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

The total number of incoming Kyrgyzians was 1,150 and were deployed between Van and Malatya. The Kyrgyz moved to the government-built houses in the Altindere district of the Erciş district (Mehmetçik TV, 2015). The Kyrgyz people had to pay for the loans, they eventually acquired houses cheaper than under normal conditions due to the financial crisis and inflation. The Kyrgyz people themselves think the price was ridiculous. Upon the request of the Kyrgyz people, they changed the village from Altindere to Ulupamir, which means a great Pamir. Ulupamir is also a plateau in Afghanistan (van Herpen, 2012)

The Kyrgyz people moved from one place to another from China via Pamir to Pakistan. These places were only a temporary shelter for them. The last Khan of Haji Rahman Kul sought a permanent home for his people, which he eventually found in Turkish Anatolia. They celebrated the birthday of Haji Rahman Kul in Kyrgyzstan in 2013, which was also visited by Hamza Kutlu.

3.2. Brief characteristics of Turkey

The Kyrgyzs chose a new home to have a similar climate and mountainous terrain to keep their traditions and culture alive. Turkey's natural conditions are influenced both by the size of the region, but also by the position of the republic. The Republic of Turkey covers an area of 783,562 sq km, the 37th largest state in the world (Cia.gov, 2018). Generally speaking, Turkey is hot in summer and cold in winter. Most of Turkey are plateaus and terrains existing from mountainous areas. The southern and western coastal region have a Mediterranean climate, and the number of factors affecting the climate is becoming more complex in the east and north. These factors include a slightly varied topography such as the Black Sea coast in the north and the Russian plains, which behave as a nearby source of very cold air in winter. The east of Turkey is very hot in the summer (Climatechange.com, 2018).

The population of Turkey is 80,810,525 (Turkstat.gov.tr, 2018). Jews, Lazis, Kurds, Arabs, Zazos, Greeks, Alevites, Assyrians, Albanian, and Cherkas represent only a handful of minorities in Turkey. The Kurds are the largest minority. The number of Kyrgyz is estimated at around 4,000 – 5,000 inhabitants. Sunni Muslims predominate in the country, the Christians and Jews are irrelevant (Minority Rights Group, 2018).



The Kyrgyzians have a tiny fraction among the others, but they bring unmistakable charm to the Turkish side.

Turkey sought to create a political movement that would unify the Turkic peoples of Central Asia into one political entity, pan-Turkism. In the 1990s, Turkey strengthened the idea of pan-Turkism after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, thi area is closely linked to Russia and has not been able to penetrate more into the Central Asian region. At the same time, they wanted to be close to these republics and therefore supported their mutual economic and energy relations, educational and cultural activities. Other countries also supported them such as Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran set up mosques in Kyrgyzstan together with the Islamic Center of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan founded in 1991. More than 2,000 mosques have been constructed in the south of Kyrgyzstan since the mid 1990s (Kokail, Pargač, 2006: 192-193).

The Kyrgyz people talked about the Turks as big brothers. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan represents their native country for the Turks. The Republic of Turkey supported the arrival of the Kyrgyz people on the small Asian peninsula. The Kyrgyzians have not uccumbed to adaptation and have retained their traditions and custom that they are caring for and trying to preserve for the next generation.

3.3. Description of the investigated area Ulupamir

Kyrgyzians in Turkey live mainly in large cities like Istanbul, Ankara, Malatya and Eskişehir. The only Kyrgyz village is Ulupamir in Turkey. The total number of Kyrgyz people in Turkey is different. Some people estimate about 5,000, others are more modest and speak about 2,000. However, the most fruequent estimates are around 3,500 Kyrgyzians.

The studied area Ulupamir is located in the east of Turkey in the provice of Van and belongs to the area of Erciş. Ulupamir is 132 km away and Erciş 32 km away. Erciş is the most populated area of the provice of Van, which is often affected by earthquakes (T.C. Erciş Belediye Başkanlığı, 2018). The last earthquake which destroyed the mosque in the village was on October 23, 2011, even four Kyrgyz died (Tarihistan.com, 2001).

There is a continental climate which is characterized by large differences between daily and nigh air temperatures. Winters are cold to harsh. The number of precipitation depends on the distance from the sea. The natural conditions in Anatolia are reflected in agriculture and cattle farming as they do not provide the right soil and climate for yak, milk and honey. Local people often live on farming. Bred animals include horses and predominantly sheep (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

In the 2017, the population of Ulupamir was 1,586 people, representing 821 mean and 765 women (Nufusune.com, 2018) There are about 415 houses in the village. According to the Turkish Statistical Office, the highest population was achieved in 2008 with a total population of 1,829, representing 934 men and 895 women living in the village. The population has been declining over the years. The men predominate over women who care for the household and children, cook and devote themselves to traditional things.

Figure 1. Population in the village of Ulupamir between 2013 - 2017

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Ulupamir	1,767	1,627	1,534	1,528	1,586

Resource: (Nufusune.com, 2018)

Figure 2. Population in the village of Ulupamir between 2007 - 2012

Year	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Ulupamir	1,720	1,707	1,713	1,722	1,829	1,642
Men	877	873	864	870	934	827
Women	843	834	849	852	895	815

Resource: Turkstat.gov.tr. (2018).

The village has separated from the surrounding world and has little contact with the other villages. The Kurdish villages surround Ulupamir, but the first contact was not welcoming with the Kurds. There has been stepping up the armed struggle in the east and southeast of Turkey between the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the early 1990s. Ulupamir was influenced by this hostility, as the PKK had also come across several villages. The Kyrgyzians created *koruculuk*, the guards, with the help of the PKK presence (Milliyet Haber - Türkiye'nin haber sitesi, 2013). The equestrian watch system was launched in 1985 and the spirit of the Kyrgyz warrior began to appear. There are three village patrols in the village where there is total number of 186 *kurucu*, with 80 guards in the cavalry unit. They also included 19 horses on duty. The Kyrgyz people are loyal to the government because they have given them a new home. This service also has its victims, such as Abdulselam Yar, who was killed when he was 32 years in guarding



and protecting the village (Aytmatov, 2012). Local Kyrgyz men want to protect their village from the dangers of terrorism. It is very important for them, because they regard it as their tradition. Turkey welcomed them with open arms and helped them to start living, and therefore all the young men who can fight become *korucu*. Local *korucu* has been working for over 27 years, now he is 43 years old. He does not know any other job. On the other hand, he mentions that the government's salary is not enough, and he would like to change this fact. He wishes to put an end to these terrorist activities so that there is peace. The original Pamiri Kyrgyz Jumoboy Kutlu says that Kurds see Kyrgyz as Turks as part of the Turkish army. Even the young Kyrgyz people like Ertan Alper feel that they are not very happy and therefore their relationships are poor with the surrounding villages. On the other hand, the wise *aksakal* disproves these doubts and mentions that they have a very close relationship because they are also Muslims and all Muslims are brothers. Then he remarks that they have married a Kyrgyz girl to a neighboring Kurdish village.

Aksakal is the designation for the redeemer of each genus. *Aksakal* courts, the courts of elders, are institutions at the local level responsible for settling disputes at the local community level (Eurosaia foundation, 2012). We can find *aksakal* in Ulupamir in the number exceeding 10 elders, some of the Kyrgyz people mention 15 - 20 elders. The number of *aksakal* is dependent on the population of the village. Generally, *aksakal* should be smart people over the age of 40, but they do not really matter at all. The father of Hamza Kutla and some of his uncles are in the *aksakal* council. Father of Hamza Kutla, 75 years old, is a popular and humorous person, so Kyrgyz people like him. *Aksakal* council within the framework of the laws try to solve disputes in the village if someone is in trouble. But there are not many problems, the only problem they have is the problem with electricity. There is also *aksakal* court in Istanbul which consists of 4 - 5 people. In Ulupamir, Turkish laws are adopted, and their own laws apply only to the village of Ulupamir. In the opinion of villagers, *aksakal* make the right decisions.

3.3.1. Religion

Turkey and Kyrgyzstan belong to the supporters of the Hanafian law school, mazhab of Hanifa, which has the most supporters in the Muslim world, especially in Central Asia, South Asia, the Caucasus, Turkey and the Balkans. Abu-l-Jusr al-Pazdavi, Abu-l-Mu'ina an-Nasafi and Abu-l-Jusr an-Nasafi were most deserving of the systemization of the Hanafi school in the Ferghan basin (Exnerová, 2008: 21).

The studied area of Ulupamir is located in the east of Turkey, which is considered to be a traditionally religious area, which also contributes to a stronger religious belief. In Ulupamir, all residents claim to believe in Islam, which is reflected in the dominant position of Islam in Turkey. Kyrgyz live around ethnic Turks and Kurds. In Turkey, nomadic tradition continues to play a more important role than Islam. The old memory of the Kyrgyz people recalls how they prayed five times a day at the Gilgit refugee camp. They built a mosque with stones from the mountains and the flowing river in the open air. Children met to read the Qur'an under the strict mulla with long white beard every day (Stockbower, 1981). According to the local Kyrgyz people in Ulupamir, they pray five times a day as administrative Muslims, but there are some exceptions, especially among young men.

One of the most important places for believers is the mosque. The mosque is a social and religious center. Islam does not require them to be necessarily present in mosques for praying. Muslim can pray at any point facing the city of Mecca. On the other hand, Friday is the most important day for Muslims because it is considered a common weekly prayer in the mosque. It is not necessary to come to a mosque for men, but it is strictly recommended to visit the mosque at the time of the Friday *namaz* (Exnerová, 2008).

A mosque stood in Ulupamir until 2011, when it was destroyed by an earthquake. Even four Kyrgyz people died in this earthquake (Mynet Haber, 2011). If they did not have a mosque in the village, they could go to Friday's prayer for Erciş, or they could meet for a common prayer in the mayor's house or they built tent in summer and autumn. The new mosque was built in 2014 with the help of selected funds (FemaBilisim, 2011; Van depremi insani yardım operasyonu, 2011).

The most important Muslim holidays include *Kurban Bayramı* and *Ramadan Bayramı*. Ramadan Bayramı is a celebration that marks the end of Ramadan, while Kurban Bayramı takes place on the tenth day of the Islamic month of dhul Hiyah, which reminds Abraham's willingness to obey to sacrifice his son (Lunde, 2004: 20).

The whole village adheres to Muslim holidays in the opinions of local people in Ulupamir. Hamza Kutla fasts and does not drink and eat during the day every day for 30 days in the month of Ramadan. It is allowed to eat during the night. However, fasting is not simple for him, but rather difficult, but spiritual brings invaluable value. It is the bearer of peace and well-being within man, so it must bring the well-being of all Muslim societies. At the same time, it has also beneficial health effects for the human body.



Kyrgyz families meet to celebrate holidays in a family circle. Women prepare traditional food, sing and rejoice. In the morning, a man visits a mosque in Ulupamir where he prays together with other men. After prayer, preparations for the process of sacrifice are culminating. According to the information of the old Kyrgyz people from Ulupamir, about 40 - 100 sheep are sacrificed during *Kurban Bayramı*. Earlier in Pamir, the number of sheep was about 150 - 160 sheep. Part of the meat is distributed to poor neighbors to celebrate this important holiday. In addition to *Kurban Bayramı*, sheep are sacrificed at the birth of a baby. After the birth of a male offspring, a second sheep is killed in honor in 40 days.

3.3.2. Family ceremonies

The Kyrgyz society emphasizes the importance of family and family ties which give the individual an important status. There is both an important ancestral and customary right for Kyrgyz identity. It is very important to belong to a particular clan, as members of a clan try to support each other. Kyrgyzians are proud of their history, and therefore have their own relatively strong awareness of gender affiliation. According to the tradition of *jets ata*, every family member should be able to list seven male members of the previous generation of the family (Kokaisl, Kohoutková, Kodar, Dordzhieva, 2011: 157-158). The term *jets ata* is known to all the Kyrgyz people I met. Nearly every Kyrgyz alleged that he knew all seven ancestors, but not all of them could list them. The young Kyrgyz Ulukmyrza remembered his father Tynycha, the fiancé of Talipa and the preator of Toigonbai, and he did not remember the other members. Just like his friend Asan, who was not able to name all of them. Hamza Kutlu understands that he knows all seven ancestors and remembers them without difficulty and also provides part of his pedigree. His seven ancestors include Rahmankul, Abdülvahit, Ovalbek, Hudayar, Kasimbek, Atabek and Sultankul.

Family ties are very strong. They all reported their genus and background when mentioning the family, especially Hamza Kutlu, who is proud of his origins associated with Rahman Kul Khan. There are strong family ties with Turkish Kyrgyz, especially during big family celebrations and religious holidays.

The most important family ceremony with the Kyrgyz people in Kyrgyzstan and Ulupamir is the wedding. Weddings take place in Ulupamir, especially from May to October. They have been facing the problem of closing endogamous marriages within one venue upon arriving in Turkey. Other Kyrgyz tribes lived in Pamir, so the girls could marry in neighboring Kyrgyz villages. Elderly Kyrgyzians continue to wish to marry within their own family or emigrants from Kyrgyzstan. Nowadays, the Kyrgyz women are also married to the Turks because it should not be defended in their love. This is probably the reason why Kyrgyz songs are played at weddings, but they dance Turkish dances.

The wedding takes three days. The first day begins with the preparation, so guests come and bring cutlery, plates and sweets. The sheep is selected to be sacrificed next day. All guests are gathered the next day, men and women are separated. Women bake bread and prepare *borsok*, food from dough fried in oil, and they cook mutton which is cooked in water in a large pot. Gifts for bride and groom are deposited near the pots, mostly gold and money. The next day, there is a common prayer for the bride and groom to be happy and to live in abundance. Early in the morning of the third day, everyone gathers in the groom's house and then they go to the bride's house together. They drink a cup of tea and this is the beginning of the wedding ceremony. When the sheep are slaughtered, its bones are left for later. They try to keep the custom of helping the bride and groom fifteen days after marriage.

Kyrgyz rites are closely linked to their traditional view of the world, the family system and oral tradition. Even though, the Kyrgyzians gave up nomadic life about a hundred years ago, yurt remains a key indicator of their cultural identity and is used for special occasions such as weddings, child birth, including funerals. Every important rituals and customs take place inside and outside the yurt (Kokaisl, Kohoutková, Kodar, Dordzhieva, 2011: 160-162).

Every Kyrgyz knows a yurt and considers it as a part of national culture. Yurt merges with nature and its color is rich and joyful. Yurt consists of a wooden structure that is covered with different types of felts like *jabuu*, *tuunduk*, *uzuktor*. Life inside the yurt is centered around the *komoto*, a place for fire. Yurt has been changed, too. The right side of the yurt was considered to be a female part where kitchen utensils, needle, yarns, embroidery, knitting and female brides are located. The male part is on the left of the yurt. The left-hand part is filled with whips, hunting knives, hunting and riding things, cattle, hunting and craft (Kyrgyzstan, 2007).

They call yurt as a white house in Ulupamir. Van Kyrgyzians recall how they put the yurt on the plains of Pamir and looked at the mountains that surrounded them. They played komuz and sang songs, and their cattle ran down in the background. At present, there are only two yurts in Ulupamir that serve the whole venue for the most important festivities and events.



Sheep plays a significant role for Kyrgyz people in Turkey. The most common use of sheep is the production of yoghurt. They do not use it for meat consumption as it is highly valued. However, sheep may be sold and money can be used for other purposes. Sheep meat is very popular among Kyrgyzstan. There are 37 ways to use sheep, for example ayran, yogurt, *kurut*, *süzme*, *ecgey*, *pıstak*, *kaymak*, *şirne*, *kategan çayı*, *çeneş*, *karın*, *miske*, *sarma*, *naktanma*, *meat*, *çeneş*, *deri*, *giysiler*, *bed*, *money*, *tumak*, *tahta boş*, *keçe*, *çadır*, *kop*, *kurşun* and *kakma*. They try to process the whole sheep, her skin as well. The skin creates a pocket or bag, *çeneş*. The pocket keeps the same temperature, so it is most often used in the winter when it is necessary for a beverage to last for as long as possible. Yoghurt is most often stored in the pocket (37 Uses For A Dead Sheep, 2006).

The popular beverage of the Kyrgyz people in Ulupamir is ayran, a mixture of yoghurt, water and salt. Ayran can also be found in Afghanistan, Lebanon, the Balkans and the Caucasus. Göktürk diluted the bitter yoghurt with water in an effort to improve its taste thousands of years ago. Today we can find ayran almost anywhere even in fast food, restaurants and supermarkets (Artık, Poyrazgölu, Konar, 2008: 63; Gina, 2013).

3.3.3. National games

Horses have been in the heart of nomadic life. The horse is a friend, a worker, and a source of food. Horse games are an example of traditional Central Asian culture. One of the most popular games is kökbörü, also known as *Kuk Pari*, *Kok-Bor*, *Kök Berü*, *Ulak Tyrttysh* and *Ulak Tartysh*. They talk about buzkashi in Afghanistan, Tajikistan and among Persian-speaking nations. Turkey call this game *cirit* (Valiyev, 2011).

The principle of the game is the rider or whole team gets the dead body of the goat through the target line first, so-called *patta*. The number of players is around 40-50, but often more than 100 riders. Reaching a patch is not easy because all players try to snatch a goat from their opponent's hands. Only the strongest players who have good riding skills can participate in the game. Riders are called *chavandoz* (Williams, 2015: 39-40).

The National Team of Kyrgyzstan performs the World Championships in this sport regularly. In addition to Kyrgyzstan, other *kökbörü* teams are Russia, India, Germany, Japan and Turkey (Centralasiacultures.com, 2018) The *cirit* national team, which is composed of Kyrgyz people, is relatively successful. At the time of the research, mayor of Ulupamir went to the *cirit* championship in Kazakhstan. In the opinion of Hamza Kutla, local competitions are also held in Kyrgyzstan, but they are played for celebrations and important occasions. He played this game before, but he says he is lazy and gives priority to watch and cheer younger men. People can watch *cirit* in Ulupamir, too.

3.3.4. Craft production in Ulupamir

The Ulupamirans mention the long tradition of carpets from Kyrgyzstan, which they would like to continue in Turkey. The carpet building was built in 1992, when the government seized the opportunity to improve the working conditions and living conditions of local Kyrgyz people. The change was applied mainly to women who can work in the village and do not move away from men and children. Young girls work mostly in the building, for example the 22-year-old Altyna. The 18-year-old girl described carpet manufacturing as a very simple matter because she learned everything in fourteen days. Carpet production takes an average of five months. They are inspired by nature and animals. They sing Kyrgyz songs during the process. The most famous Ulupamir carpets include *Çeşmibolbol*, which everyone wants to have at home. The women feel sorrow after completing the carpet, but also joy because the carpet will serve someone and make other people happy.

As women themselves mentioned, they meet with friends. It is better than sitting alone with their children at home. Although the village is small, they are very happy to have this job, as poverty is the biggest problem for Ulupamir people. Aie has been working there for four years, and she loves her job very much, but she mentions that there is a high probability of its closure due to a long-term crisis. Aie does not want to stay at home and she wants to work there.

The Kyrgyz people in Ulupamir follow the traditions of the memory of the Kyrgyz people. They learned how to make boots from Pamir. Almost every family is engaged in craftsmanship, which is handed over carefully from one generation to the next generation. Masters, artists, and craftsmen make wood and metal with spoons, plates, spades, etc. Women produce woven mats, riding bags, handbags, riding apparel and so on.

Traditional clothes are made and sewn by themselves because they are very talented. They can produce windscreens, coats, tapes, caps, gloves, etc. Clothes should be able to protect them from cold weather. This clothing is being sent for sale to Istanbul and other parts where Kyrgyz people live in Turkey.



The Kyrgyz people in Ulupamir are proud of their own product such as homemade cheese and bread. The cheese is made from milk of cows, sheep and goats. Cheese is sold on the market in the nearest town of Erciş.

We find famous artists among the Ulupamirans. Abumalik Kutlu and Muhammed Akbar Kutlu, the sons of Haji Rahman Kul Khan, are devoted to painting and sculpture. Their works are exhibited in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Germany, Belgium and other countries (Kayipov, 2010).

4. Conclusion

The Kyrgyz tradition is closely related to the life of semi-nomadic society. Tradition has laid the foundation for almost all traditions and affects most aspects of the life of the Kyrgyz people, ranging from craftsmanship, kitchen to family ceremonies. Tradition of nomadic life occupies a more important role in the lives of the Kyrgyz people than Islam. The mosque is a sacred site for Muslims, but it was destroyed in Ulupamir during the earthquake in 2011. One of the most important Muslim holidays is *Kurban Bayramı*. During the *Kurban Bayramı* in Ulupamir hundreds of sheep are sacrificed

Sheep together with horses are among the most valuable animals. The most sophisticated and strongest riders can attend *kökbörü*, which is played at special occasions and celebrations. Young people from the Kyrgyz cities are not interested in *buskhashi*, but still honors the tradition and importance of the game for national sentiment. The village of Ulupamir lives *kökbörü*, even in the Turkish national team are all Kyrgyz players.

Sheep are also part of family ceremonies like the birth of a child, but the wedding still occupies a significant place. The Kyrgyzians have been struggling since their arrival in Turkey with the issue of endogamous marriage, and are currently marrying with the Turks, Kurds. At weddings, they sing Kyrgyz songs and dance Turkish dances. Abductions of the bride are a deeply rooted tradition. In Ulupamir, they consider it the only possible way to marry a loved one if the family does not want it. After the nikah ceremony, newlyweds leave the village, unlike the company in Kyrgyzstan, who tolerates the couple and allows them to stay.

Families meet for major events, as well as family picnics, where the most famous Kyrgyz dishes are served as *beşparmak* or *mantı*. The national drink for Kyrgyzstan is *kumys*, but they do not produce it in Ulupamir and prefer ayran or tea. The Kyrgyz people in Ulupamir are trying to produce and become self-sufficient in their own products such as bread, yogurt, ayran, mutton and more. Yurts serve for important ceremonies most often associated with family ceremonies In Ulupamir, you can find only two yurts. Yurts are decorated with colored carpets made of felt material. The long tradition of carpets was taken over by girls from the Van region. In Ulupamir, they founded a house where the carpets are woven. The weaving is accompanied by the sounds of the *komuz* and the Kyrgyz songs. In addition to carpets they produce shoes, pads, plates, caps, but also homemade cheese and bread. The Ulupamirans are self-employed in craftsmanship, even expanding into other cities like Istanbul. Almost every Kyrgyz craft has a beginning in the nomadic style of life, the art of which could be passed on in material terms but also in a variety of traditions. Generations of Kyrgyz have made carpets, playing musical instruments, singing folk songs, telling stories until today.

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