

STATE, SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN TURKMENISTAN:
THE POLICIES OF PROPAGANDA UNDER THE RULE OF TURKMENBASHI

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ABSTRACT

STATE, SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN TURKMENISTAN:
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This thesis analyzes the official propaganda campaign carried out under the rule of President Saparmurat (Niyazov) Turkmenbashi in Turkmenistan. Following a brief overview of the historical evolution of the state, society and culture in Turkmenistan to provide a better understanding of the social and historical context in which propaganda was pursued; the main objectives and themes of the propaganda campaign are discussed. Besides other means of propaganda, *Rukhnama*, the spirit-book of Turkmen written by Turkmenbashi, and women are examined in greater detail as case studies of basic means of propaganda. The thesis finally discusses the outcomes of the propaganda campaign together with a glance at the changes and continuities displayed in policies of Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, the successor of Turkmenbashi.

Keywords: Turkmenistan, Turkmenbashi, propaganda.

ÖZ

TÜRKMENİSTAN'DA DEVLET, TOPLUM VE KÜLTÜR: TÜRKMENBAŞI YÖNETİMİNDE PROPAGANDA POLİTİKALARI

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Bu tez, devlet başkanı Saparmurat (Niyazov) Turkmenbashi yönetiminde yürütülen resmi propaganda kampanyasını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Propagandanın uygulamaya konulduğu sosyal ve tarihsel bağlamın daha iyi anlaşılabilmesini sağlamak için Türkmenistan'da devlet, toplum ve kültürün tarihsel evriminin genel hatlarıyla gözden geçirilmesinin ardından; propaganda kampanyasının temel amaçları ve temaları tartışılmıştır. Diğer propaganda araçlarının yanı sıra, Türkmen'in ruh-kitabı olarak tanımlanan *Rukhnama* ve kadın temel propaganda araçlarına ilişkin vaka incelemeleri olarak daha ayrıntılı şekilde ele alınmıştır. Çalışmanın en son bölümünde ise anılan propaganda kampanyasının sonuçları, Türkmenbaşı'nın halefi Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov'un izlediği politikalardaki değişiklikler ve devamlılıklara değinilerek tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türkmenistan, Türkmenbaşı, propaganda.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

After achieving its independence on October 27, 1991, Turkmenistan went through an intensive process of social construction by means of an overwhelming propaganda campaign under the leadership of Saparmurat (Niyazov) Turkmenbashi, the founder and the first president of the independent Turkmen state. Although the organization of the political and economic structures remained almost intact during the transition, independence *per se* was a new phenomenon requiring the Turkmen state to explain itself within a new paradigm and demand loyalty from its citizens accordingly. Under one of the most authoritarian regimes of the contemporary international society, this process was rather based on imposition of the official discourse of the regime through widespread propaganda reinforced by strict public suppression.

The major challenge to consolidation of the independent Turkmen state was a fragmented social structure *vis-à-vis* severe economic hazards stemming from transition to the market economy. Although the rich oil and gas resources of Turkmenistan helped the Turkmen state to subsidize basic needs of the people, low levels of industrialization and chronic efficiency and sustainability problems in the agricultural sector exacerbated the repercussions of economic transition. In order to

ensure a smooth transition and prevent the economic hazards from paving the way for uprisings or conflicts among the interest groups, a sense of unity and solidarity was regarded as necessary to be disseminated together with a belief in the regime as the agent to bring welfare to all citizens. Nevertheless, the society in Turkmenistan was composed of different social groups who used to identify themselves with their ethnic or tribal origins before a unifying national identity during the Soviet rule. The ethnic minorities in Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), mainly the Russians, the Uzbeks and the Kazaks, were defining themselves as distinct socio-cultural groups pursuing their own interests while the Turkmen were equally divided into tribes among themselves. Bringing all fractions of the society under the national identity, ensuring its internalization by all citizens as the primary source of identity, and encouraging them to invest in the collective national interest were concerned as essential for the stability and survival of the new regime. Therefore, consolidation of the national identity became one of the core objectives of the Turkmenbashi regime, and its propaganda campaign.

The authoritarian structure of the state was considered as equally important for maintaining the stability in the country, basically through preserving the *status quo* in politics. The policies of Gorbachev encouraging pluralism within the Soviet Union were regarded as dangerous for the Turkmen society by Niyazov as the Communist Party First Secretary of the Turkmen SSR, and this approach continued to define the characteristics of his regime following independence. Authoritarianism let the ruling elites of the Turkmen SSR suppress the opposition and prevent

decentralization of the management of economic assets, hence enabled them to preserve their power during the transition and to further consolidate their position within the independent Turkmen state. After achieving independence, the authoritarian character of the state was related to the nationalism discourse and displayed as a means to ensure unity and harmony within the society. Any discontent or opposition was regarded as a threat to the regime of Turkmenbashi, whose rule was considered as the guarantee of progress and prosperity of the nation. Accordingly, promotion and legitimization of the authoritarian state structure and rule of Turkmenbashi became the second core objective of the official propaganda campaign.

These two basic objectives of the propaganda campaign of the independent Turkmen state, consolidating the national identity and legitimizing the authoritarian rule under the leadership of Turkmenbashi, were sought through indoctrination of a series of reinforcing themes making up the new ideological paradigm of the regime: Turkmenization, anti-tribalism, revival of the national culture, and the myths of “Golden Century” and “permanent neutrality”. While the first three themes were advanced through comprehensive policies claimed to revive the Turkmen nation and national values, the latter two were projections of a longed prosperity and peace, which were promised and assumed to be realized by the new Turkmen state under the leadership of Turkmenbashi. Turkmenization was a quest for cleansing the foreign elements from the culture and society, whereas anti-tribalism was aimed at diminishing the influence of tribal loyalties to bring all Turkmen together under a

unifying national identity. These two policies were enhanced by the campaign to revive the national culture, which was introduced as the accumulated wisdom of the ancestors to guide the Turkmen state and nation towards material development and spiritual perfection. The course of the revival was also designed to serve justification of the authoritarian characteristics of the Turkmenbashi regime by attributions to Turkmen traditions. The revival of the Turkmen nation by its heroic and wise leader Turkmenbashi was presented to be followed by a new era awaiting the Turkmen, the “Golden Century”, which would bring the longed wealth and emancipation to the people under the guidance of the new Turkmen state. The “permanent neutrality” status of Turkmenistan, recognized by the United Nations (UN) in 1995, was articulated as one of the biggest achievements of the regime in foreign policy for bringing a lasting peace for the Turkmen nation in their Golden Age. An extended interpretation of the neutrality principle was dictating and justifying isolation of the society from the outer world, therefore enhancing the hand of the regime to propagate its own ideological perspective without being challenged by any influence from abroad.

In order to disseminate its propaganda discourse, Turkmenbashi regime utilized an extensive variety of means including public education, censorship on media, massive national ceremonies, banners, statues, monuments and architecture. Among all means employed throughout the propaganda campaign, two elements were remarkable as reflecting the authentic approach of the regime, and therefore going to be elaborated in greater detail: *Rukhnama*, the “spiritual book” of the Turkmen,

and women. Written by the president of the state Saparmurat Turkmenbashi himself, *Rukhnama* was designed to lay down the fundamentals of the indoctrination program of the regime. Turkmenbashi brought together a particular interpretation, or construction, of Turkmen history, traditions and spiritual values in *Rukhnama* to serve as the primary resource underlying all the components of the propaganda campaign. The content of the two-volume book of Turkmenbashi was regarded as sacred and unquestionable as the verses of Qur'an, and imposed as an integral part of the daily lives of the people. Women, on the other hand, were employed as live agents of the symbolic reproduction of the national culture through their dressing; and the image of women as devoted and self-sacrificing mothers was articulated to promote the traditionally paternalistic characteristics of the society, which were expanded into the nature of the relation between the Turkmen state and its citizens.

Although there is a developing literature on particular features of nation-building in Turkmenistan and the authoritarian characteristics and policies of the Turkmenbashi regime, the propaganda mechanisms of the Turkmenbashi regime, which were utilized both for nation-building purposes and legitimization of the authoritarian rule in Turkmenistan, were not sufficiently examined in the literature on Turkmenistan.¹ The basic aim of

¹ For example, see Ochs, Michael, "Turkmenistan: The quest for stability and control" in Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrot (eds.), *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 312-359; Kuru, Ahmet, "Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan", *Central Asian Survey*, 21/1 (2002): pp. 71-89; Akbarzadeh, Shahram, "National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan", *Nationalities*

this study, therefore, is to evaluate objectives, themes and means of propaganda of the independent Turkmen state under the rule of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi within their historical and social context, hence to fill the gap in the field of propaganda analysis in Turkmenistan which presents an interesting and extreme case of propaganda making at the end of 20th and the beginning of 21st centuries.

In this respect, the first chapter presents a brief historical evolution of the Turkmen society and overviews the characteristics of the contemporary society, state, politics and culture. The second chapter elaborates on the objectives of the propaganda of the Turkmenbashi regime and the themes advanced to achieve these objectives, while the third chapter focuses on the means of propaganda employed by the regime. Finally, the last chapter discusses the success of the propaganda of the Turkmenbashi regime in achieving its objectives together with a glance at the changes and continuities displayed in policies of Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, the successor of Turkmenbashi after his death on December 21, 2006.

The major obstacle in conduct of this research has been the severe scarcity of reliable resources about the facts regarding both the past and the present of the country. I have had the opportunity to carry out a field research during my six-

Papers, 27/2 (1999): pp. 271-290; Horak, Slavomir, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime", *Perspectives on European Politics & Society*, 6/2 (2005): pp. 305-319; Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, Barbara, "Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation", *Central Asian Survey*, 25/1 (2006): pp. 129-141; Dadabaev, Timur, "Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan", *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 34/3 (2007): pp. 131-150.

month stay in Ashgabat, from April to November 2006. Nevertheless, the major contribution of my stay remained basically as a personal experience of the extent of the authoritarianism of the regime and its propaganda campaign. The Turkmen government was unwilling to share information with foreigners and international organizations, while public officials were reluctant to give information and the citizens were avoiding clear comments about their lives. Taking photographs on the streets were strictly forbidden. There were practically no publications in the bookstores except textbooks, *Rukhnama*, poetries by Turkmenbashi, and the prestige books of the state depicting the Turkmen national revival and praising the national culture. The television and radio broadcasts were heavily censored and devoted to the programs disseminating the propaganda of the regime. Still, my stay was a valuable experience which enabled me to make observations on the social, economic and political conditions in the country and collect materials regarding propaganda campaign of the regime.

CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF CONTEMPORARY TURKMEN STATE, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

When Turkmenistan achieved its independence on October 27, 1991, the new independent Turkmen state under the leadership of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi did not bring freedom to the country but instead established one of the most isolated and authoritarian regimes of the contemporary world characterized by extremities and contradictions. The state, claiming to be the agent of revival, authenticity and emancipation against the notorious Soviet legacy; was indeed a political and structural continuation of the Turkmen SSR and was most of the time reproductive of Soviet-style socio-political modalities of public control and suppression, particularly regarding its authoritarianism, isolationism and intensive propaganda campaigns. The president of this state, claiming to be the father of the Turkmen; was not only among the most authoritarian leaders of the century but was also ignorant of the real social and economic needs of his people behind populist policies and investments. Despite the huge oil and gas reserves, Turkmen people could hardly make their livelihoods and were suffering from serious scarcities of basic public services. The state was prosperous enough to construct public facilities like an ice-skating palace or a Disneyland, but it had to shut down all hospitals in

rural areas to be able to finance the ones in the capital.² Nevertheless, the future was painted in bright colors - as long as the Turkmen took the spiritual guidance of *Rukhnama*, the semi-religious book written by Turkmenbashi himself.

Beneath the surface, the peculiar regime of Turkmenbashi was a quest for his own self-survival against the challenges of an inherently fragmented social structure. While he was benefiting from many traditional values and customs to justify his rule, the persistence of tribal identities over a unifying national identity was a challenge to legitimacy and continuity of his regime. The fragility of regime was pushing for increased levels of suppression and oppression, which was in turn exacerbating the need for populist policies.

In order to provide a better understanding of the historical and social context for the propaganda policies of Turkmenbashi, this chapter attempts to present an overview of the political history of the Turkmen with a particular focus on the dynamics contributed to formation and reproduction of the prevailing structures, values and identities embedded in contemporary politics. The first part of this chapter dwells on the roots of the Turkmen identity, traditions and culture throughout the premodern times. The second part focuses on the Soviet experience of the Turkmen. In the third part the basic structure of the independent Turkmen state is briefly introduced. The final part of this chapter attempts to shed a light on the socio-economic realities of the country.

² Dadabaev, “Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan”: p. 136.

2.1 The Roots of the Turkmen

Turkmenistan, being the homeland for the Turkmen tribes for centuries, is surrounded by Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in the north, Iran in the south, Afghanistan in the east, and the Caspian Sea in the west. More than 80 percent of Turkmenistan's land is covered by deserts, while only less than four percent is suitable for farming.³ Therefore, for most of their history, the people settled in Turkmenistan lived a nomadic life based on animal husbandry.⁴

Arrival of the Turkmen in the lands known as Turkmenistan today dates back to the 9th century. Coming from Mongolia and southern Siberia, they were a loose confederation of nomadic tribes organized along lines of patriarchic descent and tracing back their ancestry to the mythical Turkish warrior, Oghuz Khan. In the beginning of the 11th century, one of the Turkmen leaders, Seljuk, established a dynasty in Merv. Seljuk's dynasty was soon expanded into an empire through military campaigns to the south and west. However, in the late 12th century, the Seljuk Empire began to fragment. Consequently, the Mongols invaded Turkmenistan in 1221. They destroyed Merv and massacred many of the inhabitants while driving the survivors westwards. Nonetheless, they could not maintain a

³ Habeeb, William Mark, "Chapter 2: The land" in *Turkmenistan*, Philadelphia, Mason Crest, 2005, pp. 17-24.

⁴ Edgar, Adrienne Lynn, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 22-23.

strong political control over Turkmenistan after the death of Genghis Khan in 1227. Eventually, they retreated by the end of the 14th century.⁵

Following the departure of the Mongols, Turkmenistan was a battlefield for continuous conflicts among the Turkmen tribes themselves as well as receiving attacks from Persia, and from khanates of Khiva and Bukhara established in contemporary Uzbekistan.⁶ It was during this period of constant turmoil that the Turkmen formed large tribal and kinship groups which have remained as an important foundation of the contemporary Turkmen society.⁷

In a stateless society, kinship and tribal affiliations were the primary source of political protection. The organization of Turkmen tribes was composed of families, extended families, and larger groupings of related families which made up the tribes together. The social structure was characterized by well-defined hierarchies and centralization of authority around a powerful charismatic leader or chief, who was chosen by consensus according to personal qualities as courage and intelligence. Obedience to the leader was thought to be of utmost importance. Those who explicitly opposed the leader's decisions were often expelled from the tribe as it was considered too dangerous to let the tribe split into fractions. Tribal loyalty was

⁵ See Habeeb, "Chapter 3: The history" in *Turkmenistan*: pp. 25-48.

⁶ *Ibid.* See also Edgar, *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 20.

⁷ Habeeb, "Chapter 3: The history" in *Turkmenistan*: pp. 25-48.

considered to be vital for the survival not only of the tribe, but of its individual members as well.⁸ Descent was also the basis of economic units and the source of economic solidarity as land and water were collectively owned by the kin group. Every married man within the kin group was given an equal share of land and water for the use of his household. Individual ownership and trade of land was unknown.⁹

In absence of a state to regulate the social life, customs and traditions were attributed a vital importance and an absolute respect unparalleled among other Turkic republics of Central Asia.¹⁰ In order to be respected as a “real” Turkmen, one had to live in conformity with the customs and traditions. *Adat*, the all comprehensive customary law, was interpreted and enforced by the elders, known as *yashlys* (old men) or *aksakhals* (white beards), and provided insights to regulate any aspect of life from marriage and family relations to the conduct of war.¹¹ For the Turkmen, *adat* was coming even before Islamic law, *sharia*, as reflected in a Turkmen proverb: “You can leave religion if you like, but you can’t leave your people.”¹²

⁸ Habeeb, “Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion” in *Turkmenistan*: pp. 49-76.

⁹ See Edgar, Adrienne Lynn, “Genealogy, class, and ‘tribal policy’. Soviet Turkmenistan, 1924-1934,” *Slavic Review*, 60/2 (2001): pp. 266-288.

¹⁰ See Benningsen, Alexander and S. Enders Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*, London, C. Hurst and Company, 1985, pp. 94-106.

¹¹ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 26.

¹² *Ibid.*

Indeed, the secondary position of *sharia* for the Turkmen was also a feature of their correlation of religion more with the private sphere rather than the public in those days, which also had its reflections in contemporary Turkmenistan. Although many Turkmen observed the basic Islamic practices such as daily prayers, fasting in Ramadan, and almsgiving; these practices were not held compulsory but rather left to the will of the individuals themselves. Their experience of Islam was not institutionalized in the form of mosques and a professional clergy, neither their belief was strictly based on scholarly religious texts and a dogmatic belief system. As followers of Sufism, they were rather focused on the inner relationship between the individual and the God. The source for guidance to accompany this inner pilgrimage used to be Sufi leaders who were regarded as saints and followed by descent groups until their death.¹³

The significance of Turkmen customs and traditions were not only apparent in regulating the social life, but in also defining the hierarchies within the tribes. The principal source for differentiating the levels of hierarchies was the descent. The “pure-blooded” Turkmen used to be given considerable prestige over *yarimcha*, the mixed-blooded, and *kul*, the descendants of non-Turkmen captives.¹⁴ On the individual level, the basic distinctions were built on age and sex, as younger people and females being underprivileged against males and elders. Turkmen traditions

¹³ See Habeeb, “Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion”: pp. 49-76 and Edgar, “Chapter 1: Sources of identity among the Turkmen.”: p. 26.

¹⁴ Edgar, “Genealogy, class, and ‘tribal policy’”: p. 271.

were particularly disadvantageous for the women through a variety of customs dictating sex discrimination, polygamy, and various traditional marital customs such as early marriage of girls, levirate, or *kalym*, the bride-price paid to the family of the bride.¹⁵

Although all the Turkmen tribes spoke the Turkmen language and shared many common cultural elements, each tribe also had certain characteristics that were unique, such as dialects, styles of clothing or headgear, or certain design patterns for carpets or other decorative objects.¹⁶ Turkmen tribes tended to view these differences as more important than their similarities. Each tribe had a deep pride in its own ancestry and considered its own members to be the only “true Turkmen.”¹⁷ Protecting the purity of the descent was thought to be essential so it was very uncommon to allow Turkmen girls marry outside the tribe.¹⁸

In contrast to the intensive cohesion within the individual tribes, Turkmen tribes were organized as a very loose confederation among themselves. The major Turkmen tribes used to be the Tekke in central Turkmenistan, Ersary in southeastern Turkmenistan, Yomud in the west, Göklen in the southwest, Salyr in

¹⁵ Benningsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*: p. 100.

¹⁶ See Habeeb, “Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion”: pp. 49-76.

¹⁷ Edgar, “Chapter 1: Sources of identity among the Turkmen”. p. 17.

¹⁸ See Habeeb, “Chapter 5: The people” in *Turkmenistan*: pp. 77-96.

the east and Saryk in the south.¹⁹ They were virtually independent entities and never acted together in concert, but they fought against, allied with, and dominated by each other.²⁰ Most of the time conflicts were due to disputes over territory.²¹

In the 19th century, the neighboring states began to establish their control over the Turkmen tribes. When the Russian empire intensified its conquests in Central Asia in the second half of the century, many Turkmen tribes had already become subject to different powers, such as Persia, Khivan and Bukharan khanates.²² After defeating the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva and annexing their territories, the Russian imperial army encountered with the Tekke Turkmen in Goktepe. At the end of a two-year struggle which cost thousands of casualties to the Turkmen, Russians captured Goktepe in 1881. Following the Goktepe defeat, the Turkmen resistance was broken. By 1885, all of the major Turkmen tribes had submitted to the Russian rule and Turkmenistan was annexed to Transcaspia, a subdivision of Russian Turkestan.²³ The borders, however, were not drawn in parallels to the actual

¹⁹ Benningsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*: pp. 98-99.

²⁰ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*; p. 20.

²¹ See *ibid*, p. 24.

²² Bohr, Annette, "Turkmen" in Graham Smith (ed.), *The Nationalities Question in the Soviet Union*, London, Longman, 1990, p. 228.

²³ Habeeb, "Chapter 3: The history": pp. 25-48.

boundaries of where the Turkmen lived, and left large numbers of Turkmen people as minorities living in Persia and Afghanistan.²⁴

Russian imperial rule had important effects on the Turkmen, both in economic and political terms. Although it did not bring tangible benefits to the local people, the construction of the Transcaspian Railroad during this era was an important development in economic terms as it opened the region to the outside world and facilitated trade to a great extent.²⁵ New cities and towns established along its route, and a new merchant class emerged. Cotton cultivation, which would later make Turkmenistan an important supplier of raw materials to the Soviet Union, was also initiated during the Russian rule.²⁶

In political terms, the foremost influence of the Russian rule was the introduction of new conceptions of identity based on ethnicity, language and territory. Influenced by the ideas of ethno-linguistic nationalism which was becoming popular in Europe, Russian authorities began to see language and ethnicity as the main criteria to classify the Central Asian people into administrative and territorial units. Definition of identity apart from genealogy but linked to land and ethnicity was a completely

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 31.

new understanding for the Turkmen, and would constitute the foundations of both Turkmen SSR and independent Turkmenistan.²⁷

However, the period of war and revolutions following the outbreak of World War I was catastrophic. Several years of upheaval, violence and famine swept the country because of distant political events that were incomprehensible to most Turkmen.²⁸ After the February Revolution of 1917, different political forces competed for support in the region, while the Turkmen themselves were divided between Islamic traditionalists and the more progressive nationalist intelligentsia.²⁹ They sided by both White and Red armies against each other. Following the October revolution, Turkmen resistance was part of the general *Basmachi* uprising of Central Asia, which aimed at expelling rural and urban settlers and reviving the traditional way of life ongoing before their arrival.³⁰ Finally, in 1920, the Red Army drove the resistance forces into the Kara-Kum Desert and secured most of the Turkmen territories. *Basmachi* forces, nevertheless, continued to fight in the area of Krasnovdosk and the Kara-Kum Desert until 1936.³¹

²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 31-32.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 34.

²⁹ Coleman, Denise Youngblood (ed.), *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*, Houston, Texas, CountryWatch, Inc., 2010, p. 7.

³⁰ See Olcott, Martha Brill, "The Basmachi or Freeman's Revolt in Turkestan 1918-24", *Soviet Studies*, 33/ 3 (1981): pp. 352-369.

³¹ Bohr, "Turkmen": p. 230.

Once secured their rule, the Soviet leaders believed that creating territorial republics based on nationalities would undermine pan-Islamic and pan-Turkic sentiments, which were thought to contain seeds of a possible total rebellion in Central Asia, while satisfying the nationalist aspirations.³² Accordingly, Central Asian lands were divided along national lines according to Stalin's four criteria of nationhood defined as unity of economy, culture, territory and language. An autonomous Turkmen region was created in 1921, and succeeded by Turkmen SSR in 1924 within the borders which have remained as the country's boundaries today.³³

Receiving its own flag, national emblem, anthem and constitution, Turkmen SSR had all attributes of a nation-state except sovereignty.³⁴ The new Turkmen state was endowed all the basic features such as a national territory, governmental institutions, a standardized national language, and a public education system by the Soviet Union.³⁵ However, the Turkmen population was still divided both genealogically and politically. Despite the dramatic socio-political changes introduced by the rule of imperial Russia, sub-ethnic identities remained more important than a unifying Turkmen national identity. Although most Turkmen had become settled or semi-settled in the period prior to the Bolshevik revolution, their

³² Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 45.

³³ Bohr, "Turkmen": p. 230.

³⁴ See Bushev, Aleksandr, "A kind of prosperity", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 50/1 (1994): pp. 44-47.

³⁵ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 3.

social structure remained heavily influenced by their nomadic culture.³⁶ Therefore, like its numerous other non-Russian minorities, the Soviet government had to foster national consciousness among the Turkmen in parallel to their Sovietization.³⁷

2.2 Turkmenistan through the Soviet Rule

With regards to their approach towards Central Asia, particularly towards Turkmenistan, the basic dilemma for the Soviet government was establishing a new economic regime upon an ideology which was new and alien to the traditional societies on the one hand, while promoting nationalism as an equally new political framework to mold them together on the other hand. The reforms and policies aimed at combined outcomes of these two distinct ends were inherently incoherent and therefore frequently inefficient, if not counterproductive, in their results.

The major reforms carried out by the Soviet government in late 1920s and early 1930s resulted in significant social changes, however, they provoked a remarkable discontent in return. Forceful nationalization of private property and resettlement of the agrarian population into the new collective farms had dramatic results for the

³⁶ Edgar, “Genealogy, class, and ‘tribal policy’”: p. 269.

³⁷ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 2. See Suny, Ronald Grigor, “State building and nation-making: The Soviet experience” in *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford, Stanford Press, 1993, pp. 84-126.

Turkmen as many people lost their lands and were forced to move into cities to work in the state-owned factories leaving their nomadic life behind, while many others had to adapt to a new life in the collective settlements.³⁸ Additionally, transfer of foreign labor force to Turkmenistan from the other republics of the Soviet Union, particularly from Russia, was perceived as a threat to the traditional lifestyle and resulted in unrest among the Turkmen.³⁹ Finally, the Soviet government launched an aggressive anti-religious campaign in 1928 and increased the pressure over Islamic practices.⁴⁰ Reaction against these ambitious Soviet policies paved the way for an open rebellion of the Turkmen, which could not have been suppressed until 1932.⁴¹ Once it was suppressed, thousands of Turkmen were executed by Stalin's orders. Turkmen communist leaders were changed with the ones completely loyal to the Soviet Union, and ethnic Russians were placed in charge of many state institutions.⁴²

³⁸ See Roy, Olivier, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*, New York, London, New York University Press, 2000, pp. 86-89; Habeeb, "Chapter 3: The history": pp. 25-48; Olcott, "The Basmachi or Freeman's revolt in Turkestan 1918-24": p. 361.

³⁹ Habeeb, "Chapter 3: The history": pp. 25-48.

⁴⁰ Bohr, "Turkmen": p. 231.

⁴¹ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 8.

⁴² Habeeb, "Chapter 3: The history": pp. 25-48.

In very basic terms, the rationale behind all these Soviet policies was defined as enhancing the productivity and economic potential of the country.⁴³ Establishing and consolidating political and economic control from the centre was the first step to achieve this objective. Following centralization of economy and politics, installing settlers in the region from other parts of the Soviet Union was assumed to solve the problem of the scarcity of work force in large cultivable areas, to enhance employment opportunities for surplus population in other parts, and to improve the technical skills of native people.⁴⁴ Finally, the last step for the Turkmen to achieve full productivity was giving up their old traditions and adopting a new way of life.⁴⁵ The measures implemented by the Soviet government to this end included both enabling measures (such as education, technical training, encouragement of arts and organized entertainment); and disabling measures (such as the language reform, rewriting the history, and propaganda against Islam and traditions).⁴⁶

The positive measures of the Soviet government were not only intended to provide certain skills but rather aimed at imposing a certain logic of behavior, culture and identity consistent with the needs of the state. Particularly the system of education

⁴³ Wheeler, Geoffrey, "Soviet policy in Central Asia" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)*, 31/ 3 (1955): pp. 317-326.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 323.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 319. Also see Heyneman, Stephen, "From the party/state to multiethnic democracy: education and social cohesion in Europe and Central Asia", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 22/2 (2000): pp. 178-86.

⁴⁶ Wheeler, "Soviet Policy in Central Asia": p. 321.

was carefully designed to indoctrinate communist ideology in every school and every subject, being not limited to history but also social and natural sciences, so as to serve character formation and building social capital. The negative measures, on the other hand, were in the form of more direct attacks on Islamic and traditional culture and practices, together with devaluation of traditional heroes and oral literature.⁴⁷

The language reform was a major component of the latter type of policies.⁴⁸ Throughout the language reform grammars, dictionaries and textbooks were produced for all Turkic languages, including Turkmen, alongside with a literary for each of them. In this respect, the language reform was aimed at serving consolidation of the new national identities through creation of national languages and elimination of sub-national dialects as well as of traditional oral narratives. Nevertheless, introduction of Russian as a *lingua franca*, whose competency was a prerequisite for having access to a wide array of social privileges ranging from having access to higher education and employment to political power, seriously

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ For a detailed comparative analysis of policies, laws and decrees regarding respective languages both by Soviet government and successor independent states see Landau, Jacob and Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, *The Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States: Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001.

undermined development of national languages and subordinated them, particularly after substitution of the Cyrillic for Latin characters in 1940.⁴⁹

The change of the alphabet in 1940 also had another function as preventing the new generations from having access to the writings of previous generations.⁵⁰ The absolute control exercised by censors over any printed production allowed only new publications to be printed but denied transliteration of the existing literature. The outcome was planned to contribute Sovietization by eradicating accessibility of both the religious texts and traditional narratives. Meanwhile, the need for authentic content was addressed by assigning a founding ancestor for each nation, usually being a poet, such as Makhtumkuli for the Turkmen.⁵¹

The writings of Makhtumkuli, who lived in 1770-1840, were in parallel to the nationalist discourse appreciated by the Soviet government. He was recognized as the national hero for his passionate desire for unity among the Turkmen tribes and his envision for a unified Turkmenistan. He had a strong pride in his distinctive Turkmen identity while he was frequently underlining the importance of living an ethical and charitable life for the Turkmen. As the historical hero and contemporary

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-62. See also Clement, Victoria, "Emblems of independence: script choice in post-Soviet Turkmenistan", *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 192/1 (2008): pp. 171-185; Solchanyk, Roman, "Russian language and Soviet politics", *Soviet Studies*, 34/1 (1982): pp. 23-42.

⁵⁰ Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*: p. 77.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

role-model, Makhtumkuli remained very popular as the symbol of Turkmen wisdom and philosophy throughout the Soviet rule. Turkmen music was also closely connected to his poetry, as many songs were based on his well-known poems.⁵²

For the Soviet government, Makhtumkuli and his poems were important mediums to impose “an idealized uniformity onto the real complexity of prenational” Turkmen identities.⁵³ It was a reconstruction of the Turkmen popular culture to serve consolidation of the Turkmen national identity in the way desired by the Soviet government. Alternative identities and accounts that conflict with the national unity, such as the ones based on tribal affiliations or traditional narratives, were suppressed.

Manipulation of the collective memory was also evident in many other incidents, such as rewriting the history. One of the most striking reinterpretations of Turkmen history was regarding the incorporation of Turkmenistan into imperial Russia. Soviet interpretation of the incident was stating that the Turkmen had voluntarily joined with the Russian empire instead of their homeland being conquered against a strong resistance where Russian troops killed about 14,500 native defenders.⁵⁴

⁵² Habeeb, “Chapter 5: The people” in *Turkmenistan*: pp. 77-96.

⁵³ Edgar, *Tribal Nation: the Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*: p. 19.

⁵⁴ Bohr, “Turkmen”: p. 238.

Furthermore, the Communist Party celebrated the 100th anniversary of the “voluntary” annexation of Turkmenistan to Russia in 1981 by raising a monument symbolizing the event. Unsurprisingly, the monument disappeared after Gorbachev introduced *perestroika* as a Union-wide political principle.⁵⁵

In parallel to imposition of an official form of Turkmen national identity and culture from above, native culture and traditions were being constantly devaluated against the Soviet values. Visual propaganda, later in forms of movies and television, was an essential part of the Soviet campaigns in Central Asia, where it had to reach illiterate and poorly literate masses. Movies were constructing “worlds of seemingly factual truth” shadowed by Soviet orientalism; replete with positive heroes, master plots, and the supreme value of “party allegiance” versus the “every-day life”, “darkness” and “diffuse backwardness” of the peoples of the east.⁵⁶ In a similar vein, extending television transmissions into the non-Russian areas of the Soviet Union where local televisions were perceived as ideologically unreliable was a great concern to benefit from broadcasts in propagandizing the party discourse and government decisions.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Bushev, “A kind of prosperity”: p. 45.

⁵⁶ Smith, Michael, “Cinema for the ‘Soviet East’: National fact and revolutionary fiction in early Azerbaijani Film”, *Slavic Review*, 56/4 (1997): pp. 646, 658.

⁵⁷ Downing, John, “The Intersputnik system and Soviet television”, *Soviet Studies*, 37/4 (1985): pp. 468-483.

Traditions were also restrained by laws and regulations, particularly with regard to regulating the family life and emancipation of women. The underlying idea was that modernizing the family would eventually lead to modernization of the society, and primary agents of this transformation were designed to be the women.⁵⁸ During the Soviet period, almost all traditions which were at the disadvantage of the women, including *kalym*, was banned by law and women were given equal rights with men not only in family relations but also in benefiting from public education and participating in the labor force.⁵⁹ A series of policies and programmes were employed to promote gender equality and put emancipation of women into practice against the persistent paternalism embedded in the society.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, success was limited. Most of the time customs were stubborn against the laws, and policies aiming at equal participation were implemented in a merely superficial manner. Employment of women was usually out of the key sectors and higher-skilled positions but rather limited to health care, education and services.

⁵⁸ Lubin, Nancy, "Women in Soviet Central Asia: progress and contradictions", *Soviet Studies*, 33/2 (1981): pp. 182-203; Edgar, "Emancipation of the unveiled: Turkmen women under Soviet rule, 1924-29", *Russian Review*, 62/1 (2003): pp. 132-149.

⁵⁹ Liczek, Irina, "Cultural parameters of gender policy making in contemporary Turkmenistan", *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, & the Middle East*, 25/ 3 (2005): pp. 567-583.

⁶⁰ See Lapidus, Gail Warshofsky, "Political mobilization, participation, and leadership: Women in Soviet politics", *Comparative Politics*, 8/1 (1975): pp. 90-118.

Few Turkmen women held senior positions in the state-run enterprises, and even fewer advanced positions in the Communist Party.⁶¹

Despite the intensity of Soviet efforts, the level of Sovietization in Turkmenistan, as in other Turkic republics in Central Asia, stayed relatively low due to limited contact with Russians and comparatively low levels of urbanization and educational attainment.⁶² Likewise, breakdown in traditional values, beliefs, practices and cultural settings were limited while patriarchal attitudes and behaviors persisted to a greater extent.⁶³

Similarly, tribal loyalties in Turkmenistan preserved their strength and primacy against the development of a cohesive and homogenous Turkmen national identity.⁶⁴ Although tribes were steadily losing their economic autonomy throughout the structural reforms, they remained as a territorial, social and psychological reality.⁶⁵ The underlying reasons were two-fold, stemming from both

⁶¹ Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*: pp. 79-81.

⁶² Jones, Ellen and Fred Grupp, "Modernization and traditionality in a multiethnic society: The Soviet case", *The American Political Science Review*, 79/2 (1985): pp. 474-490 and Silver, Brian, "Bilingualism and maintenance of the mother tongue in Soviet Central Asia", *Slavic Review*, 35/3 (1976): pp. 406-424.

⁶³ Jones and Grupp, "Modernization and traditionality in a multiethnic society: The Soviet case": p. 474.

⁶⁴ Bohr, "Turkmen": p. 229.

⁶⁵ Benningsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*: pp. 95-98.

the internal factors embedded within the tribes, and the external dynamics surrounding them.

The internal factors were basically functions of traditional structures and the historical legacies enabling the tribal identities to persist in their primacy despite the pressures of the external developments. On the one hand, there was the unparalleled loyalty the Turkmen had for their traditional values, which reproduced and promoted particular kinship relations and larger tribal structures. Being crystallized as means of survival under extreme conditions for centuries, traditions and customs were carved in the minds of the Turkmen as integral to their own existence, which was dictated to be depended on the descent group. On the other hand, there was the distinctiveness of each tribe both in cultural and linguistic terms, which was further consolidated by the closed nature of each tribe appreciating purity of the descent and promoting it through endogamy. Furthermore, the pride and uniqueness claim of each individual tribe in their ancestry, coupled with the historical disputes, resentments and hierarchies among Turkmen tribes, made it even more difficult to bring the Turkmen together to melt their differences in one single pot for a unified Turkmen national identity.

Meanwhile, the external dynamics surrounding the Turkmen tribes were equally reproductive of the tribal loyalties. Although the Soviet government sought for elimination of the tribal identities, their policies was rather reproductive of them in return. The *kolkhoz* structure (farmer unions) had been one of the most ambitious

components of these policies. Since the establishment of the Turkmen SSR, collectivization of private property was planned to undermine the economic bases of the tribes and pave the way for a class consciousness, however, *kolkhoz* continued to conform the tribal structures as it was usually dominated by a single descent group and served to reproduction of kinship solidarity. Therefore, land reform and other ambitious programs aimed at transforming Turkmen rural life resulted in further group competition and reinforced the rationale for kin-based solidarity instead of serving to underpin class consciousness.⁶⁶ Furthermore, these kinship groups soon extended their networks to exercise a deep influence on the promotion of political cadres as interest groups, both of the government and of the Communist Party.⁶⁷ Consequently, the Turkmen continued to identify primarily with those who shared their ancestry, instead of identifying with others who shared their economic status.⁶⁸

The Soviet government was also reproducing tribal loyalties through the policy of “tribal parity”, which was thought as an extension of *korenizatsiia* (indigenization) policy. While *korenizatsiia* aimed to serve harmonizing the relations between the Soviet government and the people by the medium of representatives of titular

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 267-268. See also Slezkine, Yuri, “The USSR as a Communal apartment, or how a socialist state promoted ethnic particularism”, *Slavic Review*, 53/2 (1994): pp. 414-452.

⁶⁷ Roy, “Chapter 5: The recomposition of solidarity groups during the Soviet period” in *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*: pp. 85-101; Edgar, “Genealogy, class, and ‘tribal policy’”: pp. 273-86.

⁶⁸ Edgar, “Genealogy, class, and ‘tribal policy’”: pp. 278-9.

nations employed in local governance and bureaucratic posts, the basic assumption underlying the policy of tribal parity was that fair and equal treatment for all descent groups regarding promotion of the indigenous elites would “undercut the basis for ‘tribalism’ and allow the natives to move quickly to the stage of full Soviet nationhood.”⁶⁹ In practice, the given hierarchical relations among groups within each loyalty and historical resentments among the tribes undermined the feasibility of the policy. People were neither cooperative to accept and obey the principle of equity, nor they were satisfied with the degree of equity they received. Accordingly, the principle of equity was turned into a mere rhetoric serving to descent groups to justify their demands *vis-à-vis* the others’. Consequently, the policy of tribal parity implicitly recognized and contributed to reproduction of the very genealogical categories that it was aiming to eliminate.⁷⁰

Finally, the low level of industrialization was a significant structural factor facilitating reproduction of the tribal structures. In the initial years of the Turkmen SSR, a number of industrial enterprises were established throughout the country. However, the economy became increasingly agricultural throughout the 1930s. Despite receiving some factories which were moved to secure zones against the German threat during World War II, the growth of industrial production remained

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 279.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 268.

among the slowest compared to other republics.⁷¹ Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the industrial enterprises established in the 1920s accounted for almost all of light industry of Turkmenistan. Most of the heavy industry in the republic was established in 1970s and onwards for exploitation of oil and gas reserves to provide energy for more industrialized areas of the Soviet Union. Very little of oil and gas revenues were ever returned back as benefits to improve the local economy of Turkmenistan. Marginal levels of economic development and absence of a tangible industrial production led the majority of the population to remain in the least modernized sectors of the economy, namely agriculture and service occupations.⁷² Low levels of urbanization allowed the tribes to preserve and reproduce their traditional structures with fewer challenges in the rural. Furthermore, chronic economic problems made people rely even more on their traditional solidarity groups in absence of effective modern alternatives.

The economic deficiencies also constituted a disabling factor for Turkmen involvement in the reforms of the Gorbachev period, and eventually contributed their unwillingness for independence. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev came to power as the president of the Soviet Union and initiated a series of comprehensive reforms designed to stimulate Soviet economic growth and open Soviet society to new

⁷¹ Habeeb, "Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion": pp. 49-76; Bohr, "Turkmen": p. 232.

⁷² Bohr, "Turkmen": pp. 231-232.

ideas.⁷³ Private enterprise was encouraged to a limited extent, and dissidents of the regime could voice their opinions more freely. The Turkmen utilized *perestroika* to make significant cultural gains, including revision of the official Soviet interpretation of their history.⁷⁴ However, they could hardly benefit from the economic reforms. Although there was a strong desire for devolution of economic power from the centre, such a devolution would put the Turkmen at a relative disadvantage compared to more developed republics of the Soviet Union. Further, the weak industrial base would make it difficult for Turkmen to benefit from the reforms to boost their economic growth. Already suffering from high levels of unemployment and a declining standard of living, the leaders of the republic were concerned that mass of the population was unlikely to show tolerance for economic reform and private enterprise.⁷⁵

Therefore, Turkmen leaders, who were infamous for their conservatism, were “fearful that *glasnost* and *perestroika* would further disrupt the social equilibrium and, hence, their fragile ability to maintain control over the republic.”⁷⁶ Accordingly, they systematically sought to suppress popular initiatives like organization of informal groups and demonstrations in the republic. As Turkmen

⁷³ Habeeb, “Chapter 3: The history”: pp. 25-48.

⁷⁴ Bohr, “Turkmen”: p. 239.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 241.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 242.

Communist Party First Secretary, Saparmurat Niyazov took a clear stand against pluralism from the very beginning, since he was worried that “Turkmenistan was about to fall prey to the ‘copy-cat syndrome’ he said was sweeping the republics.”⁷⁷

Indeed, Niyazov had a hint of truth in his statement. At the end of 70-years Soviet rule, Turkmen state was still suffering from a sense of fragility in absence of a strong national identity cohesive of its people. The Soviet policies had fallen rather short of achieving their objectives in both their economic programs and in their nation-building policies. Nevertheless, the Soviet government had provided the Turkmen the essential foundations and frameworks of both nationhood and statehood. Turkmen SSR was not only a structural example to be mimicked and reformed into a nation-state, but it was also an influential source of political experience for the Turkmen leaders who would establish the strategies and modalities shaping the relations between state and the society in independent Turkmenistan.

2.3 Independence

Like other Central Asian Republics, Turkmenistan wanted greater autonomy, but not independence until the verge of dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁷⁸ Subsequent to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

the popular referendum which resulted in 94 percent of the people being in favor of the independence, Turkmenistan declared its independence on October 27, 1991, and the Soviet Union was formally dissolved on December 31, 1991.⁷⁹

Following the vote for independence, the president of Turkmenistan SSR Saparmurat Niyazov⁸⁰ established a new party called the “Democratic Party of Turkmenistan”, which was composed of former Communist Party officials to a great extent.⁸¹ He declared all opposition parties illegal, and any politicians openly opposed to Niyazov were either silenced or forced to live in exile.⁸² Consequently, the independence acquired in 1991 did not result in a substantial change in the political structure. Niyazov was elected as the first president of independent Turkmenistan in June 1992 and maintained an authoritarian regime based on the

⁷⁸ Menon, Rajan, “In the shadow of the bear: Security in post-Soviet Central Asia”, *International Security*, 20/1 (1995): p. 153.

⁷⁹ Habeeb, “Chapter 3: The history”: pp. 25-48.

⁸⁰ “Turkmenbashi” surname, meaning “the leader of the Turkmen”, was given to Niyazov in October 1993 by *Halk Maslahaty*. Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime”: p. 309.

⁸¹ Niyazov was an engineer serving as the First Secretary of the Ashkhabad City Party Council when he was invited to work at Party headquarters in Moscow. He returned as the First Secretary of the Communist Party and controlled the policy of Turkmenistan during the last five years of the Soviet rule. He was elected as the president of Turkmenistan SSR in 1990, and maintained his post as the president of independent Turkmenistan. See Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: pp. 271-290.

⁸² Habeeb, “Chapter 3: The history”: pp. 25-48. The only opposition party in the republic, *Agzybirlik Khalq Kherketi* (Unity Popular Movement) was a society of native intelligentsia who were mainly concerned with language and environmental/health issues, which had a potential to touch emotions and mobilize people, particularly in urban centers. For more information see Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: pp. 271-272; Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*: p. 135.

rule of a single party, Democratic Party of Turkmenistan.⁸³ The centralized structure of the economy was preserved in a similar vein. Economic reforms were both slow and marginal, so that even the legalization of private property could only be achieved in 1997.⁸⁴ Even today, most of the industrial production is still performed by the state-owned enterprises, particularly in the essential gas, oil and cotton industries.

The constitution adopted in 1992 stated that Turkmenistan was a constitutional republic “based on the principles of the separation of powers – legislative, executive, and judicial – which operate independently, checking and balancing one another.”⁸⁵ It also recognizes and guarantees to protect freedoms of speech, assembly, and religion for the individuals. However, the reality was totally different from the constitutional rhetoric. Although there were legislative and judiciary bodies, the separation of powers was never put into practice but instead these bodies remained shadowed by the decisions of the president. Similarly, the individual rights stated in the constitution were either denied or suppressed.⁸⁶

⁸³ Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: pp. 272-273; Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: pp. 129-141; Ochs, “Turkmenistan: The quest for stability and control”: pp. 312-359.

⁸⁴ Habeeb, “Chapter 3: The history”: pp. 25-48.

⁸⁵ Habeeb, “Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion”: pp. 49-76.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The constitution granted enormous powers to president Niyazov, who was also entitled to serve as chairman of the cabinet of ministers and the two parliamentary bodies of the republic.⁸⁷ In 1994, a referendum was approved canceling the elections planned to be held in 1998 and extending Turkmenbashi's term as president until 2002. In 1999, the parliament voted to make Turkmenbashi president for life. He later stated that he would voluntarily step down in 2010, when he would reach age 70.⁸⁸

The legislative branch of the republic consists of two parliamentary bodies: *Halk Maslahaty* (People's Council) and *Mejlis* (Parliament). *Halk Maslahaty* is the highest representative body of the new Republic of Turkmenistan as the authority to ratify constitutional amendments, treaties and referendums. The president is the chairman of *Halk Maslahaty*, whose members are comprised of the cabinet ministers; regional, district, and city *hakims* (governors and mayors); parliamentary deputies; people's representatives elected by *etraps* (district); the chairmen of the Supreme Court and the Economic Court; and the general prosecutor.⁸⁹ The *Mejlis* is the legislative body with a relatively limited authority and is elected for a five-year

⁸⁷ 1992 Constitution recognized Turkmenbashi as the chairman for life of the People's council, while his supreme leadership of Mejlis was entitled by a law passed in 2003. See Habeeb, "Chapter 4: Politics, the Economy, and Religion": 49-76.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*; Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 305-319.

⁸⁹ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: pp. 8-9. See also Shahram Akbarzadeh, "National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan": p. 276; Šir, Jan, "Halk Maslahaty in the context of the constitutional evolution of post-Soviet Turkmenistan", *Perspectives on European Politics & Society*, 6/2 (2005): pp. 321-330.

term.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, most of the decisions were made by president Turkmenbashi himself while both *Halk Maslahaty* and *Mejlis* merely reflected them.⁹¹ In a similar vein, Turkmenbashi had a great influence over the legal system due to his authority to appoint judges at all levels for five-year terms, which could be renewed indefinitely.⁹² The Minister of Justice, who is supposed to oversee all judges and courts, was also appointed by president Turkmenbashi.⁹³

During his rule, Turkmenbashi did not even pretend to adhere to the liberal principles mentioned in the constitution but instead “crafted a dictatorship based on a ‘cult of the individual.’”⁹⁴ He was demanding complete loyalty from his officials, in other words *nomenklatura*, and from society at large, while encouraging the same attitude to be duplicated at all levels of authority and ensuring this by means of KNB (Committee for National Security, which is inspired by Soviet KGB) to serve “perpetuating the culture of obedience.”⁹⁵ The Ministry of National Security and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, both being responsible for management of internal

⁹⁰ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: pp. 8-9.

⁹¹ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 12; Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime”: pp. 307-308.

⁹² Habeeb, “Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion”: pp. 49-76.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ McFaul, Michael, “The fourth wave of democracy and dictatorship: Noncooperative transitions in the postcommunist world”, *World Politics*, 54/2 (2002): p. 233.

⁹⁵ Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: p. 278. See also Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 11.

threats to regime, were also headed by people appointed by Turkmenbashi to reinforce obedience to his absolutism.⁹⁶

Although the constitution recognizes the right to express personal opinions freely, Turkmenbashi government severely restricted freedom of speech as well as freedom of the press. Political opposition was taken as personal betrayal. Questioning a presidential decision meant dismissal for a public officer, while dissent at all levels of society were punished by imprisonment, house arrest, surveillance, incarceration in psychiatric facilities and torture.⁹⁷ The government also had complete control over radio and television, and was funding almost all print media.⁹⁸ The result was what the regime called “stability”: virtually no rallies, meetings, demonstrations, or protests.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Habeeb, “Chapter 4: Politics, the economy, and religion”: pp. 49-76.

⁹⁷ Brown, Bess, “Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan”, *Helsinki Monitor*, 14/3 (2003): p.208; Ash, Lucy, “Central Asia's new idol”, *New Statesman*, 135/4808 (2006): p. 33. For more stories reflecting oppression and human rights abuses see also Denber, Rachel, “Cruelty behind a joke” in *New Statesman*, 135/4799 (2006): p. 14; Remnick, David, “The land of Turkmenbashi”, *New Yorker*, 82/11 (2006): pp. 34-36; Hilsum, Lindsey, “World view”, *New Statesman*, 134/4721 (2005): p. 23.

⁹⁸ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 11; Uğur, Halil, “Turkmenistan: political, economic, and international developments in the wake of Soviet imperialism”, *Journal of Third World Studies*, 13/1 (1996): p. 17.

⁹⁹ Ochs, “Turkmenistan: The quest for stability and control”: p. 313.

It was practically impossible to figure out whom, other than Turkmenbashi, had a real influence in policymaking or whose interests he had to accommodate.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, it is possible to recognize that he was careful to appease tribal concerns and balance tribal aspirations.¹⁰¹ Although he was from the Tekke tribe, his experience in the state orphanage let him introduce himself as the “son of the Turkmen people”, who stands at an equal distance to any tribe.¹⁰² Furthermore, like Soviet governments previously did, he was trying to maintain equity among tribes in his political decisions, such as appointing *hakims* from respective local tribes rather than appointing outsiders.¹⁰³

Although reproduction of the old Soviet patterns of relations between state and society has been a common characteristic of all post-communist states, Turkmenistan proved to be an extreme example for both the marginality of change and the amplitude of authoritarianism.¹⁰⁴ Neither economic nor political structures were subject to a tangible change throughout the transition, and the authoritarianism of the state was preserved, if not enhanced, despite the set forth rhetoric of

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 331.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, pp. 312-359.

¹⁰² Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan p. 274. See also Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 71-89.

¹⁰³ Roy, *The New Central Asia: Geopolitics and the Birth of Nations*: p. 115.

¹⁰⁴ Benningsen and Wimbush, *Muslims of the Soviet Empire: A Guide*: pp. 168-177.

democracy. A very basic reason underlying such an outcome was the strong tradition of authoritarian rule which the Turkmen respected throughout their history and remained unchallenged without an alternative culture influential upon the elites and the society – let it be previous experiences of democracy or a civic political culture.¹⁰⁵

The prevalence of Soviet modalities were also facilitated by the specific path of transition itself, which was from its very beginnings in Gorbachev period characterized by lack of an effective political opposition, decentralization of power or ongoing economic reforms to undermine the control of Communist Party elites over the evolving course of transition.¹⁰⁶ In the absence of political, structural or economic challenges to his power, Turkmenbashi was able to preserve his assets and ensured his position throughout the transition to block both democratization and economic reformation of the independent Turkmen state.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Parrot, Bruce, “Perspectives on postcommunist democratization” in K. Dawisha and B. Parrot (eds.) *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 1-39.

¹⁰⁶ Fish, Steven, “Postcommunist subversion: social science and democratization in East Europe and Eurasia”, *Slavic Review*, 58/4 (1999): pp. 799-823.

¹⁰⁷ Bunce, Valerie, “The political economy of postsocialism”, *Slavic Review*, 58/4 (1999): pp. 756-793; Walder, Andrew, “Elite opportunity in transitional economies”, *American Sociological Review*, 68/6 (2003): pp. 899-916.

2.4 Turkmenbashi's Turkmenistan

Independent Turkmenistan under the rule of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi was a rigidly closed society whose interaction with the outside world was strictly controlled by any possible means restricting the flow of information and people both inwards and outwards. All institutions and facilities of mass media were financed by the state and their content was shaped in accordance with official discourse and government policies. Internet access was severely limited, and when it was accessible the flow of content was closely monitored by the state. Means of private communication, such as telephone calls and fax transmissions, were also under record. Foreigners, who were hardly admitted visa upon invitation letters from Turkmen citizens or institutions, were regarded as potential agents of both espionage and missionaryism and therefore received a particular KNB attention. In addition to the tight visa regime Turkmen government employed for the foreigners, it was equally difficult for a Turkmen citizen to receive an exit visa, which had to be issued upon a cabinet decision.¹⁰⁸

Reinforced by Soviet-fashioned policies and institutions, the extent of isolationism and government control makes it very difficult to assess the real extent of Turkmenbashi's authoritarianism and its effects upon the country. However, the apparent face of policies carried out by Turkmenbashi and their outcomes were

¹⁰⁸ Brown, "Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan": p. 214.

striking enough to give an idea about arbitrariness of his rule at the expense of social and economic development of his people.

The authoritarian regime of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi was generously financed by the oil and natural gas revenues of the country, which possesses the fourth biggest natural gas reserves in the world after Russia, the United States and Canada.¹⁰⁹ Although exports of oil and gas did not bring back tangible benefits during the Soviet rule, they made Turkmenistan, together with Russia, a net donor of transfers among the union republics and therefore let the successor Turkmen state leave the union as the only ex-Soviet republic that did not have any debt to Russia.¹¹⁰ After the independence, energy sector continued to dominate the overall economic production of independent Turkmenistan, while state preserved the monopoly on both the ownership and revenues of gas and oil resources. Accordingly, Turkmenbashi's regime was able to provide public services including almost-free supply of water and energy without demanding taxes from the citizens, besides engaging in many other populist investments such as reconstructing the capital in marble and gold together with magnificent public facilities including an ice-skating palace, olympic swimming facilities, and a Disneyland. Furthermore, rich oil and gas deposits also favored Turkmenbashi respectful treatment from foreign

¹⁰⁹ Kuru, Ahmet, "The rentier state model and Central Asian studies: The Turkmen case", *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, 7/1 (2008): p. 63.

¹¹⁰ Bushev, "A kind of prosperity": p. 46. See Orłowski, Lucjan, "Indirect transfers in trade among former Soviet Union republics: Sources, patterns and policy responses in the post-Soviet period" in *Europe-Asia Studies*, 45/6 (1993): p. 1005.

governments in spite of the notorious human-rights crimes of his regime, and thus enhanced his hand to advance his authoritarian policies even more.¹¹¹

Despite the wealth acquired through oil and gas revenues, most of the population remained in poverty. Although the official statements recognized only one percent of the population as living in poverty, according to the World Bank 44 percent of the population had to maintain their livelihoods with earnings less than \$2 per day.¹¹² The agricultural sector, which was the major provider of employment opportunities together with the public services sector, remained heavily controlled through a centralized structure which dictated cultivation of cotton and wheat crops to meet particular quotas while providing inputs and subsidies for this end. However, the requirement to sell the harvest in officially set prices left the farmers with annual incomes of around \$100. Overall unemployment was estimated at over 70 percent and aggravated by public-sector layoffs.¹¹³ Even more exacerbating the situation, in 2006, Turkmenbashi considered pension allowances, which were often below \$20 per month, to be excessive and suspended all pension payments until

¹¹¹ For details of Turkmen energy policies see Menon, "In the shadow of the bear: Security in post-Soviet Central Asia": pp.176-80; Mehdiyoun, Kamyar, "Ownership of oil and gas resources in the Caspian Sea", *The American Journal of International Law*, 94/1(2000): pp. 179-189; Andrews-Speed, Philip and Sergei Vinogradov, "China's involvement in Central Asian petroleum: Convergent or divergent interests?", *Asian Survey*, 40/2 (2000): pp. 377-397; Tang, Shiping, "Economic integration in Central Asia: The Russian and Chinese relationship", *Asian Survey*, 40/2 (2000): pp. 360-376; Singh, Anita Inder, "India's relations with Russia and Central Asia", *International Affairs*, 71/1 (1995): pp. 69-81; Warkotsch, Alexander, "International socialization in difficult environments: The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe in Central Asia", *Democratization*, 14/3 (2007): pp. 491-508.

¹¹² Olcott, Martha Brill, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, Washington, D.C., Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005, p.105.

¹¹³ "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*, 379/8479 (2006): pp. 39-40.

they were recalculated according to new rules. According to the ministry for Social Welfare Provision, the new regulations would result in a cut down in pensions of 200,000 people while it would totally deprive 100,000 people of their pension rights by declaring them ineligible.¹¹⁴

Moreover, in Turkmenbashi's Turkmenistan, most of the population did not have access to proper health services while the public education system of the country collapsed. Policies carried out by Turkmenbashi regime regarding these two vital public services were rather destructive of what had been inherited from the Soviet era instead of aiming at their modernization and improvement. Public health policies of Turkmenbashi were mainly focused on restricting both availability and the quality of the overall medical services with an excuse of funding scarcities. In 1997, he ordered the closure of rural hospitals and suggested the rural people to go to the capital city for treatment.¹¹⁵ He argued that this policy would provide them a better care in the capital through redirecting all the funds to the centre to establish strengthened medical facilities. Following his orders, most hospitals outside the capital were closed and few remaining ones were suffering from lack of staff, equipment and medicines. Thousands of rural people lost their lives due to treatable illnesses such as tuberculosis, however, it led to no tangible improvement of health services. In contrast, Turkmenbashi announced further health reforms in 2006,

¹¹⁴ Following the death of Turkmenbashi, the reformation of the pension system was abolished by new president Berdimuhammedov. See Dadabaev, "Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan": pp. 136-137.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

including dismissal of an estimated 15,000 healthcare workers and employing military conscripts in their place.¹¹⁶ Remaining health services were made even more inaccessible by adding new charges.¹¹⁷

Education system of the country was equally malfunctioning. For Turkmenbashi, the primary function of public education was political indoctrination. Intellectual development of individuals was regarded of lesser importance, if not openly declared undesirable for the regime. Accordingly, basic education was reduced to nine years. In the autumns, students were frequently employed in the cotton fields for harvesting.¹¹⁸ Then, a great proportion of schooling time was devoted to getting prepared for ceremonies to celebrate national days and official events, which were abundant. Finally, the remaining lecture hours had to be divided between learning passages from *Rukhnama*, the semi-religious book written by Saparmurat Turkmenbashi himself, and the rest of the curriculum. As a result, the basic education received by the new generation, which constituted almost half of the population, was far below being adequate to enable development of a sufficient level of general knowledge and critical thinking.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Denber, "Cruelty behind a joke": p. 14.

¹¹⁷ "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*: pp. 39-40.

¹¹⁸ "Brain dead", *Economist*, 372/8385 (2004): p. 42.

¹¹⁹ According to *Economist*, over 45% of Turkmen population is stated as under 19 years old. *Ibid.* See also Sabol, Steven, "Turkmenbashi", *Problems of Post-Communism*, 50/5 (2003): pp. 48-57.

The higher education system similarly collapsed. The duration of graduate programs was reduced from four years to two years, and enrollment was cut down to a tenth of the pre-independence figure.¹²⁰ Standards of education were so poor that diplomas were unacceptable abroad. In order to prevent Turkmen students being influenced by foreign ideas, their possibilities to study abroad were remarkably reduced as well, and, upon Turkmenbashi's orders, foreign degrees were not recognized within the borders of Turkmenistan.¹²¹

Meanwhile, the arbitrary and despotic policies of Turkmenbashi were infiltrating almost any dimension of the social life. After he had to quit smoking because of his health problems in 1997, he ordered prohibition of smoking in all public places.¹²² A decree issued in February 2004 banned young men from having long hair or beard. Some other interventions in social life were the ban of opera, ballet and circus which was supposed to be incompatible with Turkmen culture, and listening to the radio while driving.¹²³ Most of the time, these political decisions were simply random without following a certain logical framework or sequence.

¹²⁰ "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*: pp. 39-40.

¹²¹ *Ibid*; Brown, "Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan": pp. 211-212.

¹²² Dadabaev, "Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan": p. 136.

¹²³ *Ibid*. See also Rhodes, Aaron and Paula Tscherne-Lempiäinen, "Human rights and terrorism in the Central Asian OSCE states", *Helsinki Monitor*, 13/1 (2002): pp. 36-51.

Even more concerning was the restrictions upon basic rights and freedoms. Turkmenbashi's regime was declared as "one of the most repressive and abusive governments in the world" in records of many human rights organizations.¹²⁴ The basic rights recognized by the constitution were never put into practice. Ethnic and religious minorities were under a harsher pressure, while each and every Turkmen citizen was closely watched by KNB. Movement of the citizens within the country was strictly limited to further reinforce KNB control over the people. Internal visas were required particularly when traveling to border regions, though movement of the citizens were traced and controlled by country-wide check points located at the exit and entrance points of all towns and cities. Working and living in a city different from the registered residence, which was based on the birthplace and occasionally allowed to be changed, was discouraged and bound to special permission.¹²⁵

Although Turkmenbashi succeeded in maintaining his rule through enhanced means and policies of suppression and oppression, regime's legitimacy remained quite low and was further diminished in respect to serious social and economic problems persisting over years. Like many other rentier systems, Turkmenbashi sought to make up for the deficiencies through enhancing his investments in populist projects

¹²⁴ "Oil of freedom" in *Economist*, 346/ 8063 (1998): p. 32. See also Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003*, New York, HRW, 2003, pp. 371-376; Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

¹²⁵ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006.

and public campaigns.¹²⁶ As elaborated in the following chapters, this basic quest for legitimacy to ensure continuity of the regime remained as the core concern underlying the comprehensive propaganda program of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi and his authoritarian regime.



Figure 2.1 Check point located at the entrance of Ashgabat.

Source: Taken by the author, Ashgabat, 2006.

¹²⁶ Kuru, “The rentier state model and Central Asian studies: The Turkmen case”: p. 54.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPAGANDA DISCOURSE IN TURKMENISTAN

In absence of a tradition of civil society and democratic expression, the relation between the state and the people in Turkmenistan rested mainly on a one-way channel of communication based on propaganda of the state and its policies. It was the discourse of Turkmenbashi and his regime constituting the reference point for formulation and justification of all government policies while the same discourse was calling for and expecting an absolute compliance and ultimate devotion of the citizens in return.

The basic concern underlying the course of propaganda in Turkmenistan was indoctrination of the legitimacy of the regime and the absolute authority of Turkmenbashi. Consolidation of the national identity was accepted as the prerequisite for both the legitimacy and survival of the regime, while it was functionally designed to ensure the rule of Turkmenbashi through dignifying his leader cult by placing it at the core of the nationalism discourse. By granting a paternalistic absolutism to the state and its leader, the regime assumed legitimacy for any political action despite its repercussions on the people.

Within this framework, this chapter presents an overview of the propaganda discourse of Turkmenbashi regime. The first part of this chapter aims to examine the objectives of the propaganda campaign, while the remainder of the chapter focuses on main themes making up the propaganda discourse: Turkmenization, anti-tribalism, revival of the national culture, and the myths of “Golden Century” and “permanent neutrality”.

3.1 Objectives of the Propaganda

In its broadest terms, propaganda can be defined as “the deliberate attempt to persuade people to think and behave in a desired way.”¹²⁷ It is systematic dissemination of ideas designed to influence the public opinion, by not only governments but also non-governmental agents, such as political parties, NGOs, or companies. A propaganda campaign may consist of both direct messages, such as speeches or slogans, and indirect messages attached to symbols and embedded in a practically limitless variety of objects and occasions surrounding people in their daily lives. Means of mass communications, particularly television broadcasts, has been the most common and influential means of propaganda in the age of information, however, propaganda messages are still effectively carried out by more traditional means such as dressing, monuments or architecture.

¹²⁷ Taylor, Philip, *Munitions of Mind: A History of Propaganda*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003, p. 6.

In pluralistic societies, the advance of democracy against authoritarian regimes have broken the monopoly of the official propaganda carried out by governments and challenged them to invest more intellectual and financial resources to cope with alternative ideas and ideologies, however, it does not necessarily mean that propaganda is of lesser importance for authoritarian governments. In contrast, propaganda campaigns of strictly authoritarian regimes, such as the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, have been among the most comprehensive and extensive ones throughout the history. These regimes, being indifferent of demands and opinions of their people, gradually need more repression to contain the opposition groups within the society and eventually larger amounts of indoctrination to legitimize themselves, and more propaganda to install and reproduce the ideology in minds of the people.¹²⁸

Propaganda of an ideological discourse had a particular significance for the new Turkmen state, which had to introduce the *raison d'être* underlying its sovereignty and to bring people together under its hegemony.¹²⁹ Even though independent Turkmen state was a continuation of the Turkmen SSR from several aspects, in terms of sovereignty it was a brand new state to introduce the rationale for its existence and legitimize its rule over its subjects. Like other post-colonial and post-communist states of the 19th and 20th centuries, the ideology of the independent

¹²⁸ Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashy regime”: pp. 305-306.

¹²⁹ For the importance of hegemony for a newly established state see Alonso, Ana María, “The politics of space, time and substance: State formation, nationalism and ethnicity”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994): pp. 380-381.

Turkmen state was based on nationalism, “the pre-eminent rhetoric for attempts to demarcate political communities, claim rights of self-determination and legitimate rule by reference to ‘the people’ of a country.”¹³⁰ As a cultural system of information, national identity was employed to inject “historical meaning and social cohesion” into the community.¹³¹

National identity features the most significant functions underpinning the unity and operational abilities of the state by providing a historic homeland, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, common legal rights and duties, and a common economy.¹³² The lack of an adequately effective national identity “in a political world in which nations are the source of legitimacy for states” leads to deficiency in the functioning of the state and this brings about instability and unrest which can sometimes result in violence.¹³³ On the other hand, a strong and widespread commitment to national identity enables the state to “mobilize masses around issues of ‘national’ defense, ‘national’ honor or pride, and ‘national’ survival, as if the victory or defeat of the state would mean the life or death of the

¹³⁰ Calhoun, Craig, “Nationalism and ethnicity”, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19 (1993): p. 235. See also Chong, Natividad Gutiérrez, “Patriotic thoughts or intuition: roles of women in Mexican nationalisms”, *Nations & Nationalism*, 12/2 (2006): p. 341; Friedland, Roger, “Money, sex, and god: The erotic logic of religious nationalism”, *Sociological Theory*, 20/ 3 (2002): pp. 386-387.

¹³¹ Chong, Natividad Gutiérrez, “Symbolic violence and sexualities in the myth making of Mexican national identity”, *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, 31/3 (2008): pp. 527-528.

¹³² See Smith, Anthony, *National Identity*, Reno, NV, University of Nevada Press, 1991, pp. 1-18.

¹³³ Suny, Ronald Grigor, “Provisional stabilities: The politics of identities in post-Soviet Eurasia”, *International Security*, 24 /3 (2000): p. 116.

cultural community.”¹³⁴ Therefore, a fundamental concern of Turkmen propaganda was consolidation of the national identity whose seeds had been cultivated by the Soviet governments. The massive campaign carried out by Turkmenbashi regime was promoted as the “national revival” of the Turkmen by “returning to their real history and spiritual sources” after decades of Sovietization and Russification.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, it was rather the nation building of the Turkmen through discovery, or invention, of traditions and symbolic production of the Turkmen nation in the same fashion as Soviet nationalities’ policies of 1920s and 1930s.¹³⁶

In this regard, Turkmen nation building reflects characteristics close to Benedict Anderson’s “official nationalism” model.¹³⁷ In contrast to Anthony Smith, who states that nations are rooted in a premodern ethnicity and an enduring ethnic consciousness is maintained through “myths, symbols, memories and values” within a framework of collective loyalties and identities; Anderson claims that a nation has rather been a modern construction which frequently advances pieces of

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: p.73.

¹³⁶ See Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: p. 130.

¹³⁷ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1991, pp. 83-112. See also Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 73-79.

authenticity transformed into standardized national elements.¹³⁸ He puts a particular emphasis on “print capitalism,” which not only contributes to homogenization and connectedness of people by enabling advancement of vernacular languages, but also, in forms of novels and newspapers, by creating a nation image in their minds as a community of similar readers.¹³⁹ Accordingly, Anderson describes a nation as “an imagined political community”, which “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”¹⁴⁰ He contrasts two type of nationalisms, popular linguistic nationalism and official nationalism, the former being based on advancement of vernacular languages and evolved through popular nationalist movements while the latter is imposed upon the people by the state in dynastic and authoritarian regimes. In order to construct and consolidate a national identity, official nationalism disseminates imagination of the nation through particular policies and strategies carried out by the state, including but not limited to rewriting of history, mass media, museums and monuments, public education and administrative regulations.

¹³⁸ See Smith, Anthony, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p. 16.; Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: pp. 1-8.

¹³⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*: p. 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

Official propaganda is extensively and continuously exercised over people to ensure widespread adoption of the national identity.¹⁴¹

Similarly, Turkmenbashi regime employed a rich variety of means and policies to create, enable, enhance and spread imagination of Turkmen national identity. Often replicating the modalities which had been previously advanced by Soviet governments, Turkmen “national revival” promoted its nationalism discourse in parallels to the policies and means described by Anderson. Pieces of traditional elements were picked up carefully and blended with constructions to make up the Turkmen values and promoted through any possible means of propaganda to construct and reproduce the image of “the Turkmen.” History was reinterpreted; language and public education policies were reformulated to contribute consolidation of an authentic and unifying Turkmen identity. All means of mass media were owned by the state and were at the regime’s disposal for dissemination of the image of national identity and the ideology behind the image. Museums and monuments were established to keep the memories of national history and roots of traditions vivid in the eyes of the people, while a series of means ranging from architecture to dressing was designed to embed tradition and ideology into contemporary objects and events. Laws and regulations were in charge to enable and reinforce the supremacy of Turkmen values on the one hand, and to ensure both governmental and individual conformity with these values on the other. Moreover,

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 83-112.

there were also a number of more extreme propaganda choices advanced by Turkmenbashi regime; such as introducing *Rukhnama*, “the holy book of the Turkmen,” or renaming the months and the days of the week to create a Turkmen calendar.

Despite being remarkably extensive and comprehensive itself, consolidation of the national identity was only one component of the propaganda campaign carried out by Turkmenbashi regime. Benefiting from the framework provided by the nationalism discourse, the propaganda campaign sought to justify the authoritarian regime and establish the leader cult of the President. As the “father” of the Turkmen nation, Saparmurat Turkmenbashi was introduced as the ultimate source of wisdom and authority. He was the chosen leader to guide the Turkmen towards glory and prosperity. His decisions were unquestionable and his opinions were unchallengeable. Policies drafted and implemented under his regime could lead to nothing but success and development; if they did not, it could be only because particular individuals were not adequately devoting themselves to their motherland. These individuals, most of the time chosen among the ministers or other high-ranked officials, were immediately dismissed by the father of the nation himself and punished according to the extent of their relative crimes against the home land.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006.

In this respect, Turkmenbashi was at the core of the propaganda campaign of the regime with his personality cult, which was practically synonymous with statehood.¹⁴³ Turkmenbashi presented himself as the country's most prominent national symbol, and many aspects of nation-building were "condensed into the distorted embodiment of the nation in the form of its leader."¹⁴⁴ His title "Turkmenbashi", meaning the chief of all Turkmen, was assumed to symbolize the nation's unity and cohesion. He was considered to be the symbol of the independence of the Turkmen nation, its founding father and guardian towards the "Golden Century".¹⁴⁵

The paternalistic understanding of the state was reinforcing Turkmenbashi's leader cult. The course of nationalism based on "revival" of the traditional values of the Turkmen was promoting a state structure which would display father-like care for its subjects, transform them into a single nation, ensure the nation's unity and security, and bring prosperity and spiritual emancipation to the fellow members of the nation.¹⁴⁶ This gradual transformation of the society would not be possible without the guidance and supervision of the state, but instead chaos and misery

¹⁴³ See Ochs, "Turkmenistan: The quest for stability and control": pp. 328-333.

¹⁴⁴ Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": p. 313.

¹⁴⁵ Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, "Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation": pp. 135-136.

¹⁴⁶ See Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 307-308.

would ruin the country. Therefore, the Turkmen people had to show an unconditional respect, support and love for the state, and at its head, the President.

The central position of Turkmenbashi for Turkmen state was strongly articulated in all official documents and discourses, including the national anthem of Turkmenistan. At the very beginning of the national anthem, the role of Turkmenbashi in relation to the establishment of the independent and neutral Turkmen state was worded as “The great creation of Turkmenbashi / My permanent state, my hearth, my precious”, and repeated several times throughout the reprises of the lyrics.¹⁴⁷ The national day of Turkmen flag was celebrated on his birthday. The sacred oath of Turkmen, which was recited everyday in schools and frequently in public occasions, were expressing loyalty to Turkmenbashi alongside the homeland as “If I act treacherously toward my homeland Turkmenistan, [and] Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi, let my life be reduced to ashes!”¹⁴⁸ The basic slogan of the regime “*Halk – Watan – Turkmenbashi*”, meaning “the People – the Homeland – Turkmenbashi”, was painted abundantly on billboards and buildings all over the country, as well as on the hillsides in the rural, to foster patriotic feelings together with allegiance to Turkmenbashi.¹⁴⁹ The propaganda of his leader cult was also

¹⁴⁷ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. For the full text of the Turkmen national anthem in its version under Turkmenbashi regime see Appendice A.

¹⁴⁸ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. For the full text of the Turkmen national oath “*Kasam*” in its version under Turkmenbashi regime see Appendice B.

¹⁴⁹ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. Also see Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: pp. 278-279.

displayed in various other slogans, such as “*Presidentiň sözi kanundyr!*”, meaning “The word of President is the law!”.¹⁵⁰

Over years his leader cult was even enhanced by attributing quasi-religious characteristics. In years 1996-1999, Turkmen scholars were researching the lineage of Turkmenbashi to prove connections with Prophet Muhammad.¹⁵¹ Once *Rukhnama* was published, its introduction as the spiritual guide for the Turkmen roughly as equivalent to Qur’an eventually declared its author the “national prophet” of the new “religion”. Turkmenbashi was presented to be destined to lead his people towards the longed material and spiritual prosperity not only in *Rukhnama*, but this divine duty assigned to him was also a subject of mystic narratives claimed to be based on his life story.

The higher the level of absolute authoritarianism and arbitrariness of political decisions, the deeper was the need for propaganda to justify them in the eyes of the people. The suppressive character of the regime, taken together with rentier policies, could contain the opposition as long as the overall ideology of the regime was adopted by the majority. As discontent with the governmental policies increased in parallel to economic and social deficiencies, the regime sought for even more powerful ideological tools and more ambitious propaganda shows to appease

¹⁵⁰ Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 74-79.

¹⁵¹ Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: p. 137.

the masses. The result was an ever enhancing ideological discourse established on the basis of nationalism, and a never-ending propaganda show pushing the limits of reason.

3.2 Turkmenization

As an ideology, nationalism was both the basis and the primary focus of the official discourse of Turkmenbashi regime. Put in practice, Turkmen nationalism was a coercive and exclusionary form of ethnic nationalism employed to serve the main objectives of the nation-building policy; namely socio-cultural de-Russification of Turkmenistan, assimilation of ethnic minorities, and the unity of Turkmen tribes under a national identity.¹⁵²

Cleansing Turkmen national culture out of foreign elements was the first and foremost goal of Turkmen nationalism. In basic terms, it was a reaction against Sovietization and Russification and aimed at eradicating the cultural legacy of the Soviet rule while promoting Turkmen values in its place. In broader terms, it also included cultural assimilation, suppression and social discrimination of non-Turkmen ethnic groups making up the population of Turkmenistan, mainly the

¹⁵² See Kuru, “The rentier state model and Central Asian studies: The Turkmen case”: p. 59.

Uzbeks and the Russians, which constituted 9 percent and 7 percent of the population respectively.¹⁵³

Despite being a reaction against Sovietization and Russification itself, “Turkmenization” was indeed replicating a similar approach.¹⁵⁴ In parallel to the policies of the Sovietization and Russification, language and education policies of Turkmenbashi regime became the basic means to promote and impose Turkmen values while weakening non-Turkmen cultural elements. A rich variety of mass media tools were also designed to underpin the Turkmen values and their supremacy through everyday propaganda.

The language policy was one of the most comprehensive means of Turkmenization. After the declaration of independence, Turkmen was recognized as the official language by the new constitution; however, Russian remained as the dominant language both in bureaucracy and daily life. As a reaction to prevailing dominance of Russian, Turkmenbashi and his policies were encouraging its limitation. In 1996, a new Turkmen alphabet in Latin script was adopted to further eliminate traces of Russian influence over the language.¹⁵⁵ In July 2000, Turkmenbashi called all public officials to speak in Turkmen language.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Youngblood Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 63.

¹⁵⁴ See Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime”: pp. 312-313.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

As a part of the language policy, publication of newspapers in Russian was severely limited. The originally trilingual daily paper *Ashgabat* removed its English and Russian sections, and publication of the daily newspaper in Russian was terminated in the city of *Turkmenbashi*, where ethnic Russian concentration was the highest in the country.¹⁵⁷ Consequently, *Neitralny Turkmenistan* (Neutral Turkmenistan) remained as the only newspaper printed in Russian.¹⁵⁸ However, it was equally saturated with the ideology of the regime as its counterparts in Turkmen language. Besides the header of the newspaper itself, a selection of main ideological symbols were placed on the front page, such as the blazon and a photograph of Turkmenbashi, Turkmen flag and the national oath.¹⁵⁹

Television and radio broadcasts in Russian were limited in a similar vein. In June 1999, Russian news broadcast on television was cut down to 30 minutes per day. In October, it was followed by the abolishment of daily 15-minute Russian language news broadcasts on the radio.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Kuru, "Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan": p. 74.

¹⁵⁷ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": p. 317.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Coleman, *Turkmenistan: 2010 Country Review*: p. 13.

The language reform included also replacing Russian names with Turkmen alternatives. In 1992, all Russian geographic names were changed to Turkmen words.¹⁶¹ Administrative terms such as *oblast* (province), *rayon* (district or small city), and *kolkhoz* (farmer union) were also replaced with their Turkmen substitutes *welayat*, *etrap* and *dayhan birleşigi*¹⁶². Ideological concepts such as *garaşsyzlyk* (independence), *bitaraplyk* (neutrality), *agzybirlik* (solidarity), *galkynys* (development) were fitted in expressions derived from Turkmen as well as names of state organs such as “*Halk Maslahaty*” and the “*Mejlis*”.¹⁶³

In 2002, the Turkmenization campaign was extended to renaming months and the days of the week by introduction of the new Turkmen calendar.¹⁶⁴ Particularly the new names adopted for the months were not plain substitutes for their Russian counterparts but were rather designed to present the ideological pillars of the Turkmenbashi regime. The months of May (*Makhtumkuli*), June (*Oguz*), July (*Gorkut*), August (*Alp Arslan*) and November (*Sanjar*) were named after the popular historical heroes of the Turkmen while January (*Turkmenbashi*) and April (*Gurbansoltan*) were named after the contemporary heroes, Turkmenbashi and his mother. Once March (*Nowruz*) was reserved for marking the traditional spring

¹⁶¹ Habeeb, “Chapter 5: The People”: pp. 77-96.

¹⁶² Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 74-75.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁴ The old names of the months and the days of the week were restored in 2008 by Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, successor Turkmen president.

celebrations, the basic elements of the ideology were symbolized in the remaining months of February (*Baydak*; ‘flag’), September (*Rukhnama*), October (*Garaşsyzlyk*; ‘independence’) and December (*Bytaraplyk*; ‘neutrality’).¹⁶⁵ The new names for the days of the week were relatively less ideologized except a particular reference to *Rukhnama* by renaming Saturday as the *Ruhgün*, the “spirit day”.¹⁶⁶ Other days of the week were renamed as *Dynçgün* (Sunday; the ‘rest day’), *Başgün* (Monday; the ‘initial day’), *Ýaşgün* (Tuesday; the ‘young day’), *Hoşgün* (Wednesday; the ‘favorable day’), *Sogapgün* (Thursday; the ‘justice day’) and *Annagün* (Friday; the ‘Anna-day’).

Education was an equally important policy to indoctrinate the ideology of the regime and contribute Turkmenization. Turkmenbashi stressed the significance of patriotic and moral education within the national education system in each available opportunity. The public education policy was formulated accordingly. *Rukhnama* was central to the national education not only in terms of the volume it occupied within the overall curriculum but also as a means to measure eligibility for a variety of social affairs ranging from enrollment in university to taking the drivers license, for which the candidates had to answer questions measuring their proficiency in

¹⁶⁵ February was renamed as *Baydak* as a reference to the Turkmenistan Flag Day, which was celebrated on Turkmenbashi’s birthday, February 19. Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime”: p. 317.

¹⁶⁶ Saturday was chosen by Turkmenbashi as the day the Turkmen shall spend for their spiritual improvement. In order to encourage this attitude to become a habit, the students were supposed spend some time to work for the public good under supervision of their teachers. This symbolic work was usually some cleaning or gardening at the schools. Reading sections from *Rukhnama* on Saturdays was not only encouraged for the students but for all Turkmen.

Rukhnama. Furthermore, a course titled as “The Policy of Turkmenbashi” was included into the curriculum of schools and universities in order to disseminate official ideology based on national revival.¹⁶⁷ Although ethnic minorities could have their own schools notwithstanding ongoing homogenization policies, the national education was strongly emphasizing the significance of Turkmen citizenship to the members of these ethnic groups.¹⁶⁸

Nevertheless, ethnic minorities had few chances for employment once they graduated unless they adopted the Turkmen culture and identified themselves as Turkmen. The conditions were more severe for the ethnic Russian, who were gradually ousted from public service and positions of power. By the end of 1990s, access to government jobs and higher education was practically closed to non-Turkmen. Particularly after the abolition of the dual citizenship treaty between Russia and Turkmenistan in 2003, many ethnic Russians emigrated.¹⁶⁹ Most of the ethnic Uzbek left the country as well, except the communities traditionally living on the Turkmen territories neighboring with Uzbekistan and unwilling to leave.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: p. 78.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁶⁹ “Time to choose”, *Economist*, 368/ 8331 (2003): p. 37.

¹⁷⁰ Brown, “Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan”: p. 213.

The major repercussion of the Turkmenization policies for the country was the loss of qualified staff in all spheres of life. The vacuum was not properly filled by the ethnic Turkmen and paved the way for serious problems and stagnancy in all sectors, including the very vital ones such as health and education.¹⁷¹ Unfortunately, the education system with its serious deficiencies has not been promising for a well-educated new generation to fill this gap neither in foreseeable future.

3.3 Anti-tribalism

The strong tribal loyalties were still a major obstacle to consolidation of a unified Turkmen nation. Recognizing the potential threats of a fragmented social structure, Turkmenbashi sought to unite the tribal identities within a national identity. Therefore, suppression of tribalism became the second major propaganda theme of the Turkmenbashi regime.

The basic stance of the regime against tribalism was denying its existence. According to the official discourse, loyalties defined on the basis of tribes was something of past and nostalgia since the independent Turkmen state was established by Turkmenbashi, the father of the Turkmen, who united the Turkmen

¹⁷¹ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. Also see Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 312-313.

under his leadership.¹⁷² There was no place for advertising tribes or tribal affiliations in media, while the people on the street were reluctant to talk about their tribal origins when being asked.¹⁷³

Although the existence of tribalism in Turkmenistan was officially denied, clan and larger tribal loyalties preserved their strength in both Turkmen SSR and independent Turkmenistan more than any other republic of Central Asia.¹⁷⁴ In rural areas, smaller villages were often made up entirely of members of one clan. Even in urban areas, individuals were respectful of their tribal affiliations and their family lineage.¹⁷⁵

The flag design of independent Turkmenistan, which was composed of the traditional carpet patterns of five major Turkmen tribes, was a clear evidence to present the degree of tribalism by its inability to offer a single, unifying symbol to represent all the Turkmen tribes or a non-tribal Turkmenistan. Furthermore, the design of the flag was also depiction of the hierarchies among the tribes, particularly of the Tekke domination. Although it could be found in homes of many

¹⁷² See Turkmenbashi, Saparmurat, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2005.

¹⁷³ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006.

¹⁷⁴ See Geiss, Paul Georg, "Turkmen tribalism", *Central Asian Survey*, 18/3 (1999): pp.347-357; Akbarzadeh, "National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan": p. 282.

¹⁷⁵ Habeeb, "Chapter 5: The people": pp. 77-96.

non-Tekke Turkmen, the first emblem on the flag, the well-known “*gushly gul*”, was most closely identified with the Tekke tribe.¹⁷⁶



Figure 3.1 Flag of Turkmenistan from 1992 to 1997.

Source: “File: Flag of Turkmenistan (1997-2001).svg”, *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Turkmenistan_%281992-1997%29.svg, accessed on April 10, 2010.

The implicit dominance of Tekke could be observed not only in the flag but also in various facets of the nation building project. Even though Turkmenbashi presented himself above all tribal affiliations, the presidential circle and most of the key posts in the government were held by the people from the Tekke. Consequently, the national discourse was mostly associated with the Tekke tribe. Introduction of the Goktepe battle of the Tekke as a national catastrophe is a remarkable example to

¹⁷⁶ Ochs, “Turkmenistan: The quest for stability and control”: p. 317.

show how national discourse was designed to reproduce the Tekke monopoly of power.¹⁷⁷

Despite the Tekke influence behind the scene, reinterpreting the history was designed to be a major component of the anti-tribalism campaign of the Turkmenbashi regime. The Department of Independence and History was established by Turkmenbashi's orders in the Turkmen Academy of Sciences to explore the "unbiased" history of the Turkmen, that is to say, to construct a new interpretation of the history to discard the Soviet-imposed uncivilized image of the Turkmen prior to the Russian conquest.¹⁷⁸ The second function of the Department was to facilitate overcoming the tribal differences by providing a "national" history to inspire the people to feel themselves proud of a common ancestry and historical legacy. Nevertheless, the publications of the Department were not quite satisfactory for Turkmenbashi and soon the interpretation of Turkmen history as it was published in *Rukhnama* became the only acceptable interpretation.¹⁷⁹ Through tracing back the foundation of Turkmen nation 5,000 years ago, *Rukhnama* was telling a united history of all Turkmen tribes and emphasizing the historical events thought to consolidate the national unity while ignoring the ones which could

¹⁷⁷ See Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 316-317.

¹⁷⁸ Akbarzadeh, "National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan": p. 281.

¹⁷⁹ See Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 310-312.

threaten national solidarity.¹⁸⁰ While the Goktepe Battle was emphasized as an important component of national history, some other historical facts, such as the conflicts between the tribes, were omitted.¹⁸¹ The influence of Makhtumkuli was preserved as an important national hero who was not only the philosophical pioneer of Turkmen unity but was also a Turkmen leader who aimed to solve the problems between the tribes wisely and integrate them.¹⁸²

Another important means of the anti-tribalism campaign was advancement of Turkmen as the vernacular language to provide national homogeneity through extinguishing the diversities between tribal dialects. Policies were formulated to spread usage of Turkmen all over the country, particularly as a written language. Media and the public education were the key instruments for this policy.¹⁸³

Despite the official denial of tribalism and the campaign to eliminate it, tribalism remained as a fact which the regime had to accommodate. In order to avoid a major disappointment among the tribes, Turkmenbashi was trying to preserve his neutral image while maintaining the tribal parity through a balance of clan representation in

¹⁸⁰ See Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: pp. 77-276.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* See also Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 74-79.

¹⁸² Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: p. 75; Habeeb, “Chapter 5: The people”: pp. 77-96.

¹⁸³ Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 74-75.

the government, such as appointing regional administrators from the respective local tribes instead of appointing outsiders.¹⁸⁴ Similarly, the assembly of *Yashlylar Maslahaty*, the supreme consultative council, was convening in a different part of the country each year in order to ensure tribal parity and provide a forum for elders of all tribes.¹⁸⁵ In return, the policies of tribal parity were reproducing the strength of tribal affiliations, as it used to be under the Soviet rule. The prevailing strength of the traditional loyalties to the tribal structures under both the Soviet rule and Turkmenbashi regime shows that unless economic or political conditions give tribal elites substantial incentives to invest in the national identity at the expense of tribal loyalties, the policies of anti-tribalism seem unlikely to succeed at a desired level.¹⁸⁶

3.4 Revival of the National Culture

Accompanying the policies of Turkmenization and anti-tribalism, a search for an ancient “national culture” was launched to fashionably display that Turkmen nation “has existed since time immemorial” and that “its traditions have been passed down

¹⁸⁴ Collins, Kathleen, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 302.

¹⁸⁵ Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: p. 282.

¹⁸⁶ See Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*: p. 343.

intact from heroic founders.”¹⁸⁷ In January 1994, The National Revival Movement was initiated to conduct this research.¹⁸⁸ Two additional state institutions, the National Administration for Study, Protection and Restoration of Historical and Cultural Monuments and the World Turkmen Humanitarian Association supported the Movement to the same end.¹⁸⁹ An overwhelming propaganda campaign for the revival of Turkmen national culture produced, reproduced and advocated the Turkmen’s glorious past and traditions through several means such as media, monuments and museums.¹⁹⁰

Revival of the national culture was not only limited to means designed to provide the people vivid collective memories, but indeed restoring the customs and traditions was an equally significant part of it. Within all Central Asian states, Turkmenistan paid the greatest attention on the revival of “national customs”.¹⁹¹ Traditions were referred as the utmost source to guide any aspect of both public and private life. The regime was seeking to prove its legitimacy by presenting its devoted respect for the customs and traditions as well as ensuring conformity of its

¹⁸⁷ Calhoun, “Nationalism and ethnicity”: p. 222.

¹⁸⁸ Akbarzadeh, “National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan”: pp. 276-277.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006.

¹⁹¹ Smith, Graham, *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 145.

policies with them. In return, the same attitude was expected from the people both in their social and private lives as well as in their relations to the state.

Curiously, the most reliable resource for the national customs and traditions was introduced as *Rukhnama*, “the soul-book of the Turkmen”, similar to its position as the primary source for Turkmen history. *Rukhnama* constituted a comprehensive account of both the material and spiritual values of the Turkmen, including codes of ethic and social conduct advising about almost anything ranging from family relations to duties of individuals and leaders. Above all, the utmost rule was the respect for the elders and their wisdom. Traditions, as the embodiment of the accumulated wisdom of ancestors, were claimed to be the priceless treasure of the Turkmen for a good life and a prosperous society. They were what the Turkmen were deprived of under the oppressive Soviet rule and what would take the independent Turkmenistan to glory.¹⁹²

Accordingly, the state was designed to be in perfect conformity with the traditions. Some political bodies were projected as new forms of traditional political structures, such as *Halk Maslahaty* and *Mejlis*, which were attributed to the traditional boards of elders whose members used to come together to take important key decisions in

¹⁹² See Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: pp. 259-262 and Turkmenbashi, Saparmurat, *Rukhnama: Second Book. The Spiritual Wealth of Turkmen*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2004.

Turkmen tribes and to resolve internal and external conflicts.¹⁹³ Without any exception, all policies of the state were asserted to be compatible with Turkmen traditions.¹⁹⁴ There were also particular policies and legal acts exclusively aimed at the renaissance of customs and traditions, such as the *Kalym* Act, which was obliging foreigners who wanted to get married with a Turkmen bride and requiring them to pay 50,000 US dollars to the state as bride-price.¹⁹⁵

The overwhelming emphasis the Turkmenbashi regime put on the customs and tradition was partly a result of the strong reaction against the legacy of Sovietization. Like many other ideologies of authoritarian and totalitarian systems, Turkmen nationalism chose to demonstrate its exclusivity and underline its uniqueness while rejecting and devaluating the previous ideology, communism.¹⁹⁶ However, putting forward customs and traditions as structures and sources of knowledge alternative to the modernity and reason was an uncommon approach comparable to the stance adopted by Herder's romantic nationalism of Germany *vis-à-vis* the Enlightenment interpreted by Jennifer Fox:

¹⁹³ Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 316-317.

¹⁹⁴ Akbarzadeh, "National identity and political legitimacy in Turkmenistan": p. 275.

¹⁹⁵ Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": pp. 316-317.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 305-306.

Enlightenment philosophy with its emphasis on rational thought, empiricism, antitraditionalism, and universal truths provided the intellectual back-drop for 18th-century Europe. The source and center of Enlightenment thought was an economically and intellectually vigorous, and politically strong France. Herder's Germany, in contrast, was a loose confederation of petty states, each dialectally and culturally distinct from the next, and divided into several sharply defined classes. Herder formulated his ideas in response to this state of affairs in his native Germany, and to what he perceived as the spiritual impoverishment of Enlightenment thought. At the heart of Herder's schema is the concept of Das Volk, meaning "folk" or "nation." The hallmark of each nation is a shared language, history, and environment, all of which contribute to the collective consciousness (Volksgeist) of a people. The members of a healthy nation will feel a genuine reverence for their shared tradition, which in Herder's estimation encompasses the wisdom of the forefathers. Viewed against the foil of Enlightenment thought, which elevated human reason as the agent of progress, Herder's ideas take on a nostalgic cast. His doctrine glorified what he considered to be a more basic form of social organization and salutary way of life that he saw passing with Europe's urbanization and industrialization.¹⁹⁷

Similar to respective position of Germany against the Enlightenment, Turkmenistan, a “loose confederation” of distinct tribes in the shadow of Russian

¹⁹⁷ Fox, Jennifer, “The creator gods: Romantic nationalism and the en-genderment of women in folklore”, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 100/398 (1987): pp. 565-567.

imperialism, found no place for itself within the discourse of modernity, neither in communism nor later in capitalism. Regarded as “uncivilized” and subjected to forced civilization under the communist rule for decades, the Turkmen, once achieved their independence, found themselves lacking both intellectual and material infrastructures to compete in the arena of capitalism to prove how civilized they were indeed. Modernity, which had been destructive against what had been of Turkmen, and which was still alien to what was left of Turkmen, failed to honor Turkmen “national revival.” Therefore, instead of trying to accommodate itself within the modernity discourse, Turkmen nationalism championed tradition as a protest against the modern, and as Herder’s romantic nationalism did, cultivated “the past as a protest against the present”¹⁹⁸ Tradition, narratives and myths alone constituted the ultimate civilization for the Turkmen and blessed independent Turkmenistan.

This particular approach was the characteristic distinguishing Turkmen cultural revival not only in its extent but also in its desired effects as well. The revival of Turkmen national culture could be seen as a project to articulate the common national identity through a sense of shared past experience by dating back the origins of the nation to ancient times and glorifying it by the respect recognized for the traditions evolved together with the nation. In a world of competing claims for political power and identities, primordialism could be thought as a “practical, even

¹⁹⁸ Aris, Reinhold, *History of Political Thought in Germany from 1789-1815*, New York, Russell & Russell, 1965, p. 219.

necessary, solution to the difficulty of establishing exclusive claims.”¹⁹⁹ However, in Turkmenistan, the revival was also appointing the “ancient” customs and traditions as the supreme source of knowledge against any other discourse, or challenges of reason. Taking into account the primary resource of the national customs and traditions was defined as *Rukhnama*, which was written by Turkmenbashi himself, the desired final result of the revival project seems rather building up a completely obedient society which was absolutely loyal to the regime no matter what was brought about by its policies.

3.5 Golden Century

The myth of “Golden Century” was frequently utilized by the Turkmenbashi regime as a means of enhancing compliance and content with the policies of the government. According to the ideological discourse, the Golden Century, which was standing for the promise of advanced material and cultural development of the Turkmen nation, was only achievable through absolute love and devotion the people would display for their homeland throughout the challenging transition period. Introducing a state of emergency for future prosperity, the myth of golden Century was designed to empower the regime by necessitating and justifying an unconditional adherence to rule of state while suppressing the public opinion. It also

¹⁹⁹ Suny, Ronald Grigor, “Constructing primordialism: Old histories for new nations”, *The Journal of Modern History*, 73/4 (2001): pp. 894-896.

served to reinforce the totalitarian rule of Turkmenbashi, who was presented as the source of ultimate wisdom to guide the country in those difficult times.²⁰⁰

The authenticity of the myth of Golden Century was linked to the ancient origins of the Turkmen nation. As described in *Rukhnama*, the foundations of Turkmen national development were established under the rule of legendary national hero Oguz Khan in the first Golden Century. Following the independence, the Turkmen were destined to achieve the longed second Golden Century of Turkmen nation under the rule of “Turkmenbashi the Great” in the forthcoming century.²⁰¹ “XXI Asyr – Türkmeniň Altyn Asyry”, meaning “The 21st Century – the Golden Century of the Turkmen”, was one of the favorite mottos of the Turkmenbashi regime.²⁰²

Despite the promise of a “Golden Century”, severe economic problems and deficiencies in the public services were persisting and the targets set by the economic plans were hardly met. According to Turkmenbashi, it was simply because the people were still lacking the necessary level of devotion to the nation and the homeland. The failures of the social and economic policies of the regime

²⁰⁰ See Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: p. 136.

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 134.

²⁰² *Ibid*.

were ignored. According to Turkmenbashi, the country would “flourish when each person in it, young or old, strongly develops the feeling of patriotism.”²⁰³

Populist policies were employed by the Turkmenbashi regime to reinforce the claim that the state was actually working for the material and spiritual development of its subjects and to remind them the same was expected from them in return. Grandiose construction projects were the major component of the policies exhibiting the material strength of the Turkmen state. The whole city of Ashgabat was reconstructed in gold and marble as to provide the Turkmen the capital they deserved in the Golden Age. In addition to splendid government buildings and palaces presenting the grandeur of the Turkmen state, modern apartments covered by marble sheets were built for the people to replace the old houses inherited from the Soviet era. Numerous parks were constructed to turn the city into a green oasis in the middle of the desert, including the monumental Altyn Asyr Park dedicated to the Golden Age. Ambitious construction projects of the regime were also including an artificial lake, a national park in the middle of the desert from scratch, a Disneyland, an ice-skating palace and an olympic swimming complex.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. See also Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: p. 78.

²⁰⁴ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. Due to the strict ban on taking photographs on the streets, the number and quality of the photographs I could personally take of the architectural constructions of the regime were severely poor. For high quality visual images of the new image of Ashgabat see Khramov, V. M., *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2005, pp. 34-35, 40, 51, 86, 89, 90, 91, 93, 175, 222, 228, 229, 230, 232.

Behind the illusion of the populist shows of the regime, the economic and social problems of Turkmenistan remained unresolved. The policies carried out by Turkmenbashi brought a slight economic development despite the huge oil revenues of the country, and even worsened the situation particularly regarding the health and education services. The regime was most of the time ignorant to the real problems of the people, if it was not deliberately postponing achievement of the prosperity promised by the myth of the Golden Century. In both cases, the prolonged transition enabled the Turkmenbashi regime to continue utilizing this state of emergency as an effective means of self-legitimacy.



Figure 3.2 The new face of Ashgabat. The modern buildings at the back are the new apartments constructed by the state for the citizens.

Source: Taken by the author, Ashgabat, 2006.

3.6 Permanent Neutrality

The permanent neutrality of Turkmenistan, presented as one of the major achievements of Turkmenbashi, was another widespread myth utilized by the Turkmenbashi regime. When the permanent neutrality status of Turkmenistan was approved by the UN on December 12, 1995, Turkmenistan became the second state recognized as “neutral” after Switzerland.²⁰⁵ The president celebrated it as a major achievement of his foreign policy demonstrating the inherently peaceful character of the Turkmen nation in the eyes of the world. However, permanent neutrality was assumed deeper functions regarding both foreign and domestic agenda of the regime.

Once obtained the UN recognition for the permanently neutral status of the country, Niyazov abused the concept of neutrality and turned it into a political tool for making excuses to avoid international commitments he does not want to fulfill.²⁰⁶ In a similar vein, it strengthened Turkmenbashi’s hand in natural gas and oil policies by providing him a greater flexibility to play the potential buyers off each other.²⁰⁷ Soon the permanent neutrality also became a justification for isolation of the

²⁰⁵ Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime”: p. 313.

²⁰⁶ Brown, “Governance in Central Asia: The case of Turkmenistan”: p. 216. For a comprehensive analysis of the permanent neutrality politics of Turkmenbashi regime see Anceschi, Luca, *Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy: Positive(?) Neutrality and the Consolidation of the Turkmen Regime*, Florence, KY, Routledge, 2008.

²⁰⁷ Kuru, “The rentier state model and Central Asian studies: The Turkmen case”: p. 65.

country from the outside world. According to the ideology of the regime, neutrality was not only a political principle that enabled Turkmenbashi to avoid being obliged to other states, but was also a moral guideline for society legitimating isolation of the Turkmen people from international environment and foreign influences.²⁰⁸

The principle of permanent neutrality was further praised and legitimated through historical argumentation. According to *Rukhnama*, permanent neutrality was Oguz Khan's wish and prayer uttered 5,000 years ago to bring eternal peace to Turkmen land.²⁰⁹ Therefore, the neutrality policy employed by the Turkmenbashi regime was considered as continuation of a national tradition. Presented this way, both the political detachment of the country and the seclusion of the society became unquestionable policies as embodiments of the myth of permanent neutrality. Furthermore, the wisdom and dignity of Turkmenbashi were reinforced as the great hero who realized the dream the Turkmen were longing for 5,000 years.

Turkmenbashi exploited this opportunity extensively as a propaganda tool and turned the myth of permanent neutrality into an integral element of the ideological discourse of his regime. The date on which the permanently neutral status of Turkmenistan was recognized through the UN resolution, December 12, was declared as the new national holiday which was in the second rank in importance,

²⁰⁸ Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, "Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation": p. 137.

²⁰⁹ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: p. 236.

after the Independence Day.²¹⁰ The name of the month December was also changed as *Bitaraplyk*, meaning “Neutrality”, as a tribute to permanent neutrality of the country. The flag of Turkmenistan was redesigned to include a wreath as the symbolic representation of permanent neutrality. “*Baki bitarap*” (permanently neutral) was appointed as the second indispensable epithet after “*garaşsyz*” (independent) attributed to the name of the country when it was written in official documents, including the national anthem, which was renamed as “The National Anthem of Independent and Permanently Neutral Turkmenistan”. Documents on the proclamation of neutrality were displayed in the National Museum and referred in almost all publications about Turkmenistan.²¹¹ The accomplishment of acquiring the permanent neutrality status was perpetuated by the monument The Arch of Neutrality and the golden statue of Niyazov on its top, which were located in the centre of Ashgabat by the presidential palace.²¹²

²¹⁰ Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: p. 136.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. For photos of the Arch of Neutrality see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: pp. 66, 82.



Figure 3.3 Flag of Turkmenistan from 1997 to 2001.²¹³

Source: “File: Flag of Turkmenistan (1997-2001).svg”, *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Turkmenistan_%281997-2001%29.svg, accessed on April 10, 2010.

Despite the overwhelming ideological propaganda over the permanently neutral status of the country, few Turkmen had a clear idea about the actual political implications of neutrality. From an optimistic point of view, some have concluded that the neutrality status would prevent military threats to the country and hence Turkmenistan could become the regional power in Central Asia.²¹⁴

²¹³ In 2001, the design of the Turkmen flag was changed again by replacing two of the traditional carpet patterns with new ones, though the wreath symbolizing neutrality of the country remained. For this final version of the Turkmen flag see “File: Flag of Turkmenistan.svg”, *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Flag_of_Turkmenistan.svg, accessed on April 10, 2010.

²¹⁴ Kuru, “Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan”: pp. 74-79.



Figure 3.4 The Arch of Neutrality.

Source: Taken by the author, Ashgabat, 2006.

Indeed, beyond the surface, dissemination of a deeper comprehension of the concepts, context and the rationale making up the rhetorics was not advanced for any of the propaganda themes; neither was it a significant concern for the regime. The desired result was rather a dogmatic adoption of the messages which was designed to serve establishing a unity in the society under a national identity, and ensuring the respect and obedience to the authoritarian rule of Turkmenbashi as the leader of the nation. In a rigidly traditional society, simple attributions to myths and traditions, even of the artificial kinds, were thought to be more influential than presenting a full, rational and coherent ideology. Accordingly, repetition of these

simple messages was considered to be more important than providing a real understanding of the discourse and its components. The result was the extensive propaganda show of the regime, implanting these messages constantly to the people's minds and daily lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE BASIC MEANS OF PROPAGANDA IN TURKMENISTAN

Similar to the discourse of the regime itself, the means utilized by Turkmenbashi regime were most of the time reflecting its peculiar characteristics. Authoritarianism and paternalism were embodied in forms of suppression, censorship and dogmatism. The leader cult of the president was directly or indirectly embedded in every single propaganda action. An intensive traditionalism was displayed constantly to illustrate the revival of the nation. Grand popular investments and shows were abundantly employed to demonstrate the wealth and power of the regime as well as the material and spiritual development it provided to its people. The overall impact of the means employed was further enhanced by isolationism severely limiting the connection of the people with the outer world beyond this overwhelming propaganda campaign.

The extensive propaganda campaign of the regime was saturating all aspects of the daily life with both direct and symbolic reflections. As introduced in the previous chapter, the language policy was designed as a means for both Turkmenization and anti-tribalism. Reinterpretation of the history and revival of a national culture were advanced and disseminated to serve consolidation of the national identity. The education system was based on the discourse of the regime, while competency in

knowledge of *Rukhnama* was imposed as a means to assess eligibility for various purposes, including entitlement of a drivers' license. All means of mass media and publication were financed by the state and intended to serve the discourse of the regime under strict censorship. Slogans and architecture were utilized widespread to reinforce the indoctrination of the discourse and make it an actual and integral part of the daily lives of the people.

Within this framework, media was one of the predominant means of propaganda of Turkmenbashi regime, which occupied a significant volume in ordinary lives of all citizens regardless of their age, ethnicity or social status. In addition to strict censorship filtering anything which could be interpreted as a criticism or deficiency of the regime, information about the foreign affairs were severely limited to avoid a confusion which could lead questioning of the official discourse and most of the time consisted of news about technological developments, natural wonders or social and cultural activities considered appropriate for the Turkmen people. The four television channels of Turkmenistan was defined on a thematic basis as news, culture, youth, and international channel, the latter also broadcasting to neighboring countries. However, the content of the broadcasts of these four different channels were most of the time overlapping and were saturated with the propaganda of the regime in parallels to radio and newspapers. There was practically no television programme beginning without a tribute and prayer for Niyazov. When talking about the President on TV and radio, speakers could not pronounce his name alone, without using some honorific appellations such as “compassionate”, “merciful” or

esteemed". Passages from *Rukhnama* and poems written by Turkmenbashi were a substantial content of the cultural and educational programs. The national news programme was almost completely devoted to the President's declarations or activities. A significant volume of this coverage was committed to show how closely the father of the nation was personally monitoring the development of the nation, both in economic and spiritual terms. Ministers and high-ranked officials who failed to sincerely serve the homeland, that is to say, who were guilty of economic and planning inefficiencies, various types of corruption, or insufficiency of belief in the spiritual values of the Turkmen and the ideological discourse of the regime, were frequently dismissed by Turkmenbashi's orders in harsh trials broadcasted repeatedly in all national television channels. In a similar vein, the first pages of all newspapers were covered with large photos of Turkmenbashi and his devoted actions for the beloved homeland everyday.²¹⁵

In addition to continuous broadcasting from state television and articles in the newspapers, the propaganda discourse of the regime was intensively disseminated through symbols and monuments on the streets, which constituted another predominant propaganda means of Turkmenbashi regime. The leader cult of the president was systematically reproduced through not only renaming numerous

²¹⁵ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. Also see "Inside the mad despot's realm", *Economist*: pp. 39-40; Kuru, "Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan": p. 75; "Built on sand", *Economist*, 336/7924 (1995): p. 36.

streets, schools and factories renamed after him but also a canal and a city.²¹⁶ Banners, portraits and statues of Turkmenbashi were flooding the streets even in remote regions of the country.²¹⁷ Among an estimated number of 2,000 statues of him, the most famous ones were located in Ashgabat.²¹⁸ A particular masterpiece was considered to be the golden statue of Turkmenbashi located on the top of the huge Neutrality Arch which was above the central Neutrality Square. This statue was designed to turn around itself, so as Turkmenbashi's face would always look at sun. Another remarkable statute of him was the one standing before the Monument of Independence and presenting him as the greatest national hero of the Turkmen among reputable figures of Turkmen history.²¹⁹ There were also several statutes of Turkmenbashi's parents, who were presented to the Turkmen nation as role-models.²²⁰ The revival of Turkmen nation was also displayed through numerous

²¹⁶ McElvoy, Anne, "Ashkhabad guy", *New Republic*, 210/13 (1994): pp. 15-16.

²¹⁷ For visual images see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: pp. 89, 90, 91, 93, 156, 229, 232.

²¹⁸ Rasizade, "Turkmenbashi and his Turkmenistan": p. 198.

²¹⁹ For a visual image see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: p. 79.

²²⁰ For visual images see *ibid*, pp. 114, 117-119. Turkmenbashi's father, who had lost his life during World War II, was introduced as the hero for the Turkmen for his devoted patriotism while his mother was the role-model for the Turkmen women as a sacrificing and compassionate mother who had looked after Turkmenbashi and his two brothers until she lost her life in an earthquake in 1948. See Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: pp. 29-42, 309-317. However, Turkmenbashi's spouse and children had never become a part of the propaganda discourse, instead they were regarded as non-existent. They were never visible in the media, neither mentioned in any official ceremony or publication including *Rukhnama*. According to the rumors, his wife Muza Sokolova was living abroad with their son and daughter. While some family disputes might have been the reason behind Turkmenbashi's choice to keep his relations with his wife and children away from the eyes of the public, there is also a possibility that he deliberately put some

memorials, memorial parks and new museums. The National Museum under the Name of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi the Great and the Museum of National Values, which were both located in the interior of the independence monument, were outstanding examples combining recent and ancient Turkmen history.²²¹

Moreover, the contribution of the state to the spiritual emancipation of the Turkmen were illustrated in grand ceremonies held in a significant number of national days, which provided an opportunity for the Turkmen to exhibit their patriotism and thankfulness to the state for reviving the nation and the national values.²²² Thousands of students and citizens were participating in massive celebrations organized countrywide and presenting their happiness in company of poems, songs, dance shows and sketches. The major ceremonies in Ashgabat were broadcasted repeatedly all day in all television channels and at times they could even be replayed all week.²²³

distance with his wife and children and sought to ensure privacy of his family affairs due to a concern that publicity of a marriage with an ethnic Russian wife could seem contradictory to the exclusive characteristics of the Turkmen nationalism promoted by his regime and might be harmful for consolidation of the image of Turkmenbashi as the father of the Turkmen nation.

²²¹ Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: p. 133. For visual images of the National Museum under the Name of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi the Great see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: pp. 133-132

²²² For a list of the national days of Turkmenistan see Appendice C. However, massive public events carried out by Turkmenbashi regime was not limited to celebration of national days, but there were frequently additional thematic organizations on various topics.

²²³ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. For visual images see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: pp. 32, 102, 136, 163.

Besides the major role assigned to media, monuments and public ceremonies; *Rukhnama* and women were the two essential means of propaganda of Turkmenbashi regime, which deserved a particular attention regarding their aimed extent of influence and intensive use throughout the propaganda campaign. Therefore, the remainder of the chapter will focus on *Rukhnama* and women as two major means of propaganda in Turkmenistan.

4.2 *Rukhnama*

Rukhnama was not only a means serving to the dissemination of other ideological components of the Turkmenbashi regime but was also an element of the ideology itself promoted as integral to the rise of the Turkmen state and society. In Turkmenbashi's words, it was the "second landmark book of Turkmens after Qur'an."²²⁴ Excerpts from *Rukhnama* were displayed everywhere through the country as a guide for moral values, also on the walls of the mosques next to the verses from Qur'an, such as the mosque located within the Hero of Turkmenistan Gurbansoltan Eje Memorial Complex located in Kipchak, Asghabat.²²⁵ The historical account of the Turkmen nation presented by *Rukhnama* was accepted as the only true, unbiased version of the Turkmen history. The Turkmen culture

²²⁴ Kuru, "Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan": p. 77.

²²⁵ For visual images of the mosque see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: pp. 106, 108-9.

depicted in *Rukhnama* constituted the basis of the national values while customs and traditions became the supreme source of law in regulating both public and private affairs.

The first volume of *Rukhnama*, which was focused on the honorable history of the Turkmen nation throughout ages and uniqueness of the Turkmen culture, was presented to the *Halk Maslahaty* and approved by the assembly in 2001.²²⁶ In 2004, Turkmenbashi published the second volume of *Rukhnama* in which he elaborated on the guidelines of ethical behavior for the Turkmen. Over the following years the two volumes of *Rukhnama* were translated to several languages including Russian, English, Turkish, Ukrainian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Finnish, Czech, Armenian, Hungarian, Croatian, Italian, Zulu and Indian. While most of these translations were funded by some foreign enterprises to maintain their relations with the Turkmen government; the translations to Russian, English and Turkish were financed by the state soon after the publication of the original texts.²²⁷ The interest of the Turkmenbashi regime in translating *Rukhnama* reveals that the two volumes were also thought as a means to shape the image of the Turkmen nation in the eyes of the foreign audiences.²²⁸ According to Niyazov, *Rukhnama* was not only the book of

²²⁶ Horak, "The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime": p. 313. See also Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, "Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation": pp. 131-132.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 131.

²²⁸ *Ibid*.

the Turkmen but was also a book for other nations to know the Turkmen better and to share the happiness and proud of the Turkmen nation creating their Golden Age.²²⁹

In *Rukhnama*, Turkmenbashi not only reinterpreted the Turkmen history but also manipulated the world history by recasting grand historical empires and milestones of civilizations as a part of the Turkmen history.²³⁰ According to his historical account, Turkmen nation was among the oldest and greatest ancient civilizations in the world alongside with China, Egypt, India and Mesopotamia as well as establishing not only the great empires such as Seljuk and Ottoman but also nearly each empire in Central Asia. It was no a coincidence that Turkmenbashi commanded destruction of 25,000 new history books in September 2000, most probably while he was working on the final drafts of *Rukhnama*, and argued that their writers betrayed the country's history by "ignoring 'the Turkmen origin and character' of Turkmenistan, overstating the role of other nations in its national history and writing that Turkmens originated not in what is modern Turkmenistan but in the Altai mountains."²³¹

²²⁹ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: p. 25.

²³⁰ Rasizade, "Turkmenbashi and his Turkmenistan", *Contemporary Review*, 283/1653 (2003): p. 199.

²³¹ Kuru, "Between the state and cultural zones: nation building in Turkmenistan": p. 77.

Besides being formulated as the primary source for Turkmen history, *Rukhnama* was also a tribute to the Turkmen values and traditions. The material values unique to the Turkmen nation were presented as the horse, the carpet, the musical instrument *dutar*, the jewelry and ornaments, the local species dog *alabay*, the yellowish breed of sheep and the genus of white wheat. The spiritual values of the Turkmen were introduced as an equally great source of proud as the material values, if not greater than the latter. According to Turkmenbashi, the Turkmen nation had succeeded to a high spiritual power by preserving its national characteristics while the historical foundation and experiences of the past were claimed to provide stability and well-being throughout the transition period.²³²

Although the text of *Rukhnama* was divided into chapters on a thematic basis, the flow of the content was not following a system or an order, but was rather randomly interwoven by Turkmenbashi's comments, memories and remarks about different subjects. The first volume of *Rukhnama* was divided into five chapters: Turkmen, the Turkmen's Path, Turkmen Nation, the State of Turkmen and the Spiritual World of the Turkmen. The first chapter traces back the establishment of the Turkmen nation back 5,000 years ago, when it was claimed to be established by the first ancestor of the Turkmen, Oguz Khan, and briefly overviews its historical decline and then revival under the leadership of Turkmenbashi.²³³ Rather than following a

²³² Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: p. 154.

²³³ *Ibid*, pp. 9-76.

chronological order, the narrative is randomly interwoven together with memories of Turkmenbashi, his family, and instances praising the Turkmen people, their culture, traditions and land. It is also in this chapter that Turkmenbashi introduced the fundamental place of *Rukhnama* for the Turkmen:

Rukhnama is the book of unity and togetherness. It is the only source that will connect Turkmen's present and its past. Up until now, there were a number of words, special words, but no whole word. *Rukhnama* should fill this gap. *Rukhnama* should place in the hands of Turkmen their unique and whole history, and spiritual striving.²³⁴

In the second chapter, numerous Turkmen dynasties stemmed from the descent of Oguz Khan throughout the history were examined in detail, the most famous ones being the Huns, Gok Turkmen, Garahanly Turkmen, Gaznaly Turkmen, Seljuk Turkmen, Memluk Turkmen, Ottoman Turkmen, and Safavid Turkmen.²³⁵ Particular attention was paid to the era of Oguz Khan, who led the Turkmen in their first "Golden Age"; and the Seljuk Turkmen whose sultans were introduced as prominent leaders of the Turkmen history. The narrative of the history was frequently mixed with examples and short stories about the spiritual values, traditions and the customs of the Turkmen.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 22-23.

²³⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 77-142.

The third chapter focused on the high qualifications and traditional wisdom of the “Turkmen nation” which entered into a period of decline after the era of Seljuks, and aimed to underline the significance of national unity for the Turkmen.²³⁶ The overall ambiguities and incoherence of the text was reflected in this chapter as well, particularly regarding the definition of the Turkmen nation. Turkmenbashi first claimed that the existence of the Turkmen nation dated back to Oguz Khan, and since then, it could have survived against several invaders including Alexander the Great, Chinghis Khan and Teymir Asgak (Tamurlane) as the Turkmen had “preserved their national self-awareness by means of forming new groups”, which referred to different political organizations including the tribal structures.²³⁷ From this perspective, his definition of the Turkmen nation seems to be based on a shared authentic ethnicity and culture, which could embody itself in different political organizations and even under rule of non-Turkmen political structures. However, on the following pages he offers a new approach, admitting the modernity of the nation and putting forward the nation state as the prerequisite of being a nation:

The idea of tribe is temporary; it constitutes a lower stage in the progress towards national integrity. In the modern era, this causes the integrity of the nation to degenerate.²³⁸

²³⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 143-204.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 147.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 148.

Independence has changed the fate of the Turkmen nation completely and has brought it to the point of perfection because the nation state is the clear evidence that idea of the existence of the nation is not only an imagining or a sweet desire. A nation is constructed only by the existence of a nation state. Thus, being a nation is different from being a people. A people is a community whose future is uncertain because it is deprived of the state which implements the values of the people in real life by means of a political movement. Since the future of that community is uncertain, this means that it is possible for that people either survive or disappear. There is only one way to sustain the existence of a people and that is to become a nation. To become a nation means to have a nation state.²³⁹

Despite the contradictions and ambiguities in Turkmenbashi's arguments about the Turkmen nation, it is possible to interpret that he accepted Turkmen nation as a social entity based on common ethnic and cultural values rooted in an ancient past. Although it succeeded in preserving its cultural values, it was deprived of its political unity throughout the history. The independent Turkmen state revived the political unity of this prevailing nation by bringing the tribes together under the most advanced form of political organization, the nation state, which was the guarantee for the survival of nation and the cultural values constituting the essence of maintaining the national identity. Relying on the tribal structures was misleading

²³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 155-156.

in modern times as they were both inferior to the nation state and harmful for the integrity of the nation.

In this respect, the fourth chapter explores the great contributions of various states established by the Turkmen nation throughout the history, including Parfiya, the Gaznalys, the Seljuks and the Ottoman, to the social, economic and cultural development in Asia and Europe.²⁴⁰ A special section within this chapter was devoted to “Independent and Permanently Neutral Turkmenistan”, appraisal of its independence and neutrality, and its just rule and devotion the well-being and emancipation of its people.²⁴¹ The democratic political structure of the new Turkmen state was also overviewed in this section, together with economic achievements since independence and development targets to be achieved by 2010.

Finally, the spiritual values of the Turkmen were elaborated in the last chapter.²⁴² At the beginning of the chapter, Turkmen spiritual evolution was described in five spiritual ages starting with the first golden age under the spiritual leadership of Oguz Khan. The second spiritual age, which began in AD 650, was characterized by conversion to Islam and Gorkut Ata was the spiritual leader of this era. The period from 5th to 17th century was defined as the third spiritual age, in which the Turkmen

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 205-276.

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, pp. 235-276.

²⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 277-398.

spiritual values were spread over the world by various empire states including the Seljuks and the Ottoman. The spiritual leader of this age was Gorogly. 17th century onwards, idleness and resoluteness infiltrated to the soul of the Turkmen and resulted in an overall decline, with the exception of the era of Makhtumkulu, who was the spiritual leader of the fourth spiritual age of the Turkmen. Within this age the worst period was claimed to be the 20th century due the catastrophe of the two World Wars and subjugation to the Soviet Union, which was described as exploitive of the Turkmen people, suppressive of their traditions, and destructive of their spiritual values. The independent and neutral Turkmen state, under the leadership and guidance of its founder “Turkmenbashi”, was assumed to revive the nation, national culture and national values in the last spiritual age to achieve the longed second “Golden Age” of the Turkmen.

The rest of the chapter was devoted to the principles that the Turkmen should follow to achieve material and spiritual development in this new spiritual age.²⁴³ These spiritual values were a combination of moral values passed from ancestors to new generations and the codes of behavior regulating family relations, social conduct and modalities of good governance. At the core of the scheme of Turkmen spiritual values was the family. The parents were responsible from bringing up individuals with high moral values, while individuals had to show absolute respect and thankfulness to their parents in return. The family also constituted a model for

²⁴³ *Ibid*, pp. 288-398.

the greater society by its clearly defined hierarchical structure and distribution of duties among its members according to their relative hierarchical positions. The state was thought to be the grand family with certain duties and positions attributed to each member in this family to establish and maintain the order. Love and devotion were repeatedly emphasized as the essential values making up a family, as they were the core values underlying the strength of the Turkmen nation.

Within this framework, Turkmenistan was defined in *Rukhnama* as a “democratic, law-based and secular state, in which the rule of the state is implemented in the form of a presidential republic.”²⁴⁴ Democracy or popular sovereignty were not modern or imported phenomenon for the Turkmen as their traditional political organization was proudly claimed to be based on a similar structure for centuries. However, as the state was responsible from the well-being and free development of each individual, the duties of the individuals were to work hard and respect the laws in return. While being a pretty reasonable proposition on the surface, the Turkmen interpretation of this particular claim was the hint revealing the peculiar understanding of democracy of the Turkmenbashi regime. As reflected in many instances throughout the book, the Turkmen state could be democratic only within the limits of its paternalism:

I wish to draw your attention specifically to three sayings by Gorkut ata:

The soltan’s right is the same as Allah’s right.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 249.

The father's right is the same as Allah's right.

The mother's right is the same as Allah's right.

The word *haq*, right, is synonymous with the word justice, *huquk*. They are indeed the same thing.

Thus, the Turkmen grants almost the same rights as Allah's to only three people in society: the ruler, the father and the mother. The ruler's rights imply each and every citizen's responsibilities before the law and the ruler. The rights of the father and mother also imply one's responsibilities to one's parents.

If you are indebted to someone, it means you are to give something to them.²⁴⁵

In this respect, *Rukhnama* was not only presenting a reinterpretation of the history but also of modern concepts such as democracy in the form it would best serve to the regime of Turkmenbashi. Throughout the text, some modern political values with which the society was already familiar, like democracy and nation, were presented as an authentic part of the traditional Turkmen culture and loaded with meanings and characteristics both legitimating and reinforcing the authoritarian structure of the state. Such a reinterpretation was enabling the regime to claim to be fulfilling both modern and traditional aspirations on the one hand, while references

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 301.

to the traditional values were granting an unchallengeable status to the discourse and structure of the regime on the other hand.

Furthermore, the paternalistic character attached to the state was providing the regime and the President the opportunity to benefit from the traditional structure of the society which was praised and aimed to be reproduced throughout the book. The explicit and implicit linkages between the patriarchic family and the state were serving Turkmenbashi regime to reinforce itself through promotion of the traditional hierarchies and responsibilities within the family, and of the society imagined as a greater family. The emphasis on the spiritual values of the Turkmen was not only designed to contribute consolidation of the national identity by a cultural revival, but also to promote devotion, obedience and loyalty to the regime enhancing and justifying its authoritarianism.

Probably based on such an approach, Turkmenbashi published a second volume of *Rukhnama* which was exclusively designed to reinforce the spiritual values of the Turkmen. It was designed as a book of ethics, if not religion, which the readers were ordered to take into their hands after purifying their hearts and body and then read it on a table or something like a prayer rug.²⁴⁶ The semi-religious characteristics of the book were endowing its author a sense of self-prophecy.

²⁴⁶ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Second Book*: p. 31.

The second volume of *Rukhnama* was composed of twenty two chapters. Most of the chapters were revolving around themes related to family life and how the Turkmen should behave in their social lives. Another major theme was patriotism and fraternity. The remaining chapters were advising on more abstract themes ranging from “meaning of life” to “the dignity of being great” and usually advising on moral values that the individuals should have. Throughout the course of the book, the moral principles were usually indoctrinated in company of either short historical narratives or memories of Turkmenbashi himself.

The teachings of *Rukhnama* were integrated into everyday life of the people by all possible means and became the very corner stone of the educational system.²⁴⁷ The instruction of *Rukhnama* was started in kindergartens, where books containing paragraphs from *Rukhnama* were recommended for educational purposes.²⁴⁸ Every Turkmen citizen had to know *Rukhnama* by heart as it was the criteria for eligibility for numerous affairs ranging from admission to university to obtaining the driver’s license. All television and radio channels were broadcasting passages from *Rukhnama* regularly, and quotations of the book could be seen not only in the media but also on the billboards and walls of the buildings throughout the country. One of the most creative means to disseminate the messages of *Rukhnama* was the Rukhnama Park in Ashgabat, hosting a grand monument of the book which was

²⁴⁷ Horak, “The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime”: pp. 313-314.

²⁴⁸ Kiepenheuer-Drechsler, “Trapped in permanent neutrality: looking behind the symbolic production of the Turkmen nation”: p. 131.

opening every evening at 8 o'clock and selected passages were read over loudspeakers to the public.²⁴⁹

On the other hand, Turkmenbashi was taking the necessary measures against the publications which could potentially challenge the discourse of *Rukhnama*. While new publications were under strict government control throughout the country, the Turkmenbashi regime were creating solutions to cope with the potential threat of older publications as well. As a part of these policies, Turkmenbashi closed the libraries in the country in 2005 and ordered destruction of thousands of books.²⁵⁰ According to Turkmenbashi, libraries were pointless because villagers did not have a habit of reading, therefore the central and student libraries were sufficient to meet the demand.²⁵¹

Despite the overwhelming propaganda campaign on *Rukhnama*, it remains a matter of question that to what extent the people internalized its messages. However, once deprived of alternative sources of information to critically evaluate the accuracy and validity of its proposals, the Turkmen had few chances to bring up new ideas to challenge the discourse of the regime, particularly the younger generations.

²⁴⁹ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. For photos of the Rukhnama Park see Khramov, *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*: pp. 74, 80.

²⁵⁰ "IFLA Blasts Turkmenistan Library Closings", *American Libraries*, 36/6 (2005): pp. 24-26.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

4.3 Women

Women were another important means of propaganda advanced by the Turkmenbashi regime. Through dressing their traditional “*göynek*” as official and regular suits, wearing traditional hats or headscarves, keeping their hair long and made according to the custom, and adoring the enormous sacrifices of Gurbansoltan Eje, Turkmenbashi’s mother, the greatest heroine of Turkmen history, Turkmen women became one of the most prominent components of propaganda both as abstracted models and live agents within the society. Through actively reproducing traditional Turkmen values in their outfits and their manners in the family and society; they contributed to both the campaigns for the revival of the national culture, which was assumed to underpin consolidation of the national identity, and promotion of the patriarchic social structures interpreted to claim for obedience and devotion to the state and the President in their extended forms.

Within the course of different models of nationalism and state-building, women have been assigned a significant role as the agents of authenticity and reproduction of the nation. Despite the varieties of emphasis according to the historical context and specific characteristics of different cases, this basic understandings remains common to a great extent. By their outlooks and outfits, women are regarded as symbols of the authenticity and originality differentiating the nation from others. Their primary contribution to the survival and continuity of the nation is considered as enabling the biological reproduction of the nation by nurturing next generations

while preserving the ethnic and cultural authenticity of the nation through restrictions on marriage relations and transmitting the national culture to their children. Motherhood is usually thought to be the primary role of the women within the nation, while they are also supposed to contribute the military and economic struggles besides men when the conditions dictate it as necessary.²⁵²

Such a framework was to a great extent applicable to the case of Turkmen women as they were employed in the propaganda campaign of Turkmenbashi regime. Above all, they were considered as live agents reproducing the authenticity of Turkmen national identity through their dressing, head scarves and particular patterns decorating their outfits and distinguishing the members of the nation from others.

All Turkmen women were supposed to wear “*göynek*”, the long dress originally made from red or green velvet and decorated with traditional collar patterns. In their daily lives, they could enjoy modernized versions of *göynek*, that is to say, models

²⁵² See Alonso, Ana María, “The politics of space, time and substance: State formation, nationalism and ethnicity”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 23 (1994): pp. 379-405; Mukhopadhyay, Carol C. and Patricia J. Higgins, “Anthropological studies of women's status revisited: 1977-1987”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 17 (1988): pp. 461-495; Herr, Ranjoo Seodu, “In defense of nonliberal nationalism”, *Political Theory*, 34/3 (2006): pp. 304-327; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1993, pp.126-133; Simpson, Pat, “Parading myths: imaging new Soviet woman on Fizkulturnik’s Day, July 1944”, *Russian Review*, 63/2 (2004): pp. 187-211; Turkevich, Ludmilla B., “Russian Women”, *Russian Review*, 16/1 (1957): pp. 24-36; Chong, “Patriotic thoughts or intuition: roles of women in Mexican nationalisms”: pp. 339-358; Palley, Marian Lief, “Women's status in South Korea: tradition and change”, *Asian Survey*, 30/12 (1990): pp. 1136-1153; Park, Kyung Ae, “Women and development: the case of South Korea”, *Comparative Politics*, 25/2 (1993): pp. 127-145; Duara, Prasenjit, “The regime of authenticity: timelessness, gender, and national history in modern China”, *History and Theory*, 37/3 (1998): pp. 287-308; Rupp, Leila J, “Mother of the ‘Volk’: the image of women in Nazi ideology”, *Signs*, 3/2 (1997): pp. 362-379; Fox, “The creator gods: Romantic nationalism and the en-genderment of women in folklore”: pp. 563-572.

with modern collar decorations or without decorations, and made from various fabrics in different colors and patterns. However, they had to wear original models of *göynek* when attending public occasions such as school, public service, television broadcasts or official ceremonies. Young girls should have long hair and they had to make their hair in two braids. After getting married, they had to use headscarves which were tied in a way specific to Turkmen.²⁵³



Figure 4.1 Turkmen women with traditional *göynek*.

Source: Taken by the author, Ashgabat, 2006.

²⁵³ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. For images of traditional outfit of Turkmen women see Khramov, V. M. (ed.), *Türkmen zergärçilik sungaty halkymyzyň kalbynyň aýnasydyr*. Ashgabat, TDH, 2003, pp. 20, 30, 76, 82.

Even in urban centers such as Ashgabat, the rules of dressing were respected by the majority of Turkmen women. Including non-Turkmen minorities except the ethnic Russian, most of the women were wearing different styles of *göynek* in their daily lives. However, the ethnic Russian were expected to equally respect rules of Turkmen traditional dressing in public occasions. In order to enroll a Turkmen school or to become a university student, or to attend an official ceremony, they had to wear original models of *göynek*. Although the rule had some practical flexibility



Figure 4.2 A Turkmen bride and groom, accompanied by Turkmen women wearing modernized *göyneys* at their right and left.

Source: Taken by the author, Ashgabat, 2006.

for the ethnic Russian in lower levels of public employment; women occupying higher positions, independent of their ethnic origin, had to be loyal to the traditional style of dressing. By this way, the dressing of women was not only used as a demarcation of authenticity, but also for imposition of the national culture and identity upon non-ethnic Turkmen citizens.²⁵⁴



Figure 4.4. Other versions of modernized *göynek*.

Source: Taken by the author, Ashgabat, 2006.

Secondly, the women were considered as agents to protect the ethnic originality of the nation by the Turkmenbashi regime through the restrictions brought on intermarriages. While marriage of women with foreigners was traditionally disapproved by the Turkmen tradition, Turkmenbashi granted a sense of legal

²⁵⁴ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006.

reinforcement to this tradition by introducing the *Kalym* Act, which required a foreigner who got married with a Turkmen woman to pay a bride-price to the state. Although *Kalym* Act was not a strict measure to prohibit infiltration of foreign ethnic elements into the nation, it was an explicit stance against them by suggesting discriminative measures. By underlining the ethnic borders separating foreigners from nationals, the unique and authentic ethnic characteristics bringing the members of the nation together was implicitly articulated to consolidate the sense of national unity.

Thirdly, the propaganda discourse of the regime was imagining and promoting Turkmen women primarily as mothers responsible from nurturing next generations of the nation and supporting the family by maintaining the household. Such a projection of women was reproductive of their position in the traditional family structure and hierarchies, which constituted the base for the paternalistic structure of Turkmenbashi regime. Therefore, while praising the Turkmen women as devoted and sacrificing mothers, the regime was indeed implicitly reminding all the citizens their respective obligations *vis-à-vis* the state and the President through the agency of women.

Within this framework, Turkmen women as mothers became a remarkable component of the propaganda campaign. The devotion of mothers was often a theme advanced on television and radio broadcasts, particularly around the virtues of the national heroine Gurbansoltan Eje, Turkmenbashi's mother, who was

frequently referred as the role-model for the Turkmen women by her caring and sacrificing character in bringing up her children after the death of his husband during World War II. Month April was renamed after her to keep the image of this eminent model vivid in the eyes of the public, monuments and memorials were constructed in her memory.²⁵⁵

The compassion of Gurbansoltan Eje for her children was also a subject of narratives, most famous one being also theme of the movie “Ene Gudraty” (Motherly Power), which depicted her caring love for her son to be continued even after her death in the great earthquake in Ashgabat. In this mystic story, little Turkmenbashi gets lost while looking for a missing sheep, it gets dark and after a while he loses his consciousness because of the cold. Then the soul of his mother comes to save him by asking help from the nearby neighbors.²⁵⁶

Turkmen women were frequently described as sacrificing and devoted mothers also in *Rukhnama*, while references were often made to their role and duties within the family throughout the course of the book. A section in the first volume of *Rukhnama* was completely devoted to the motherly love, mothers’ love and

²⁵⁵ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006.

²⁵⁶ See Hramow, W. and Orazow, M. (Directors). (2005) *Ene Gudraty* [Film]. Ashgabat: Türkmentelekinofilm.

compassion for their children, and the sacrifices of mother.²⁵⁷ Turkmenbashi also elaborated on his personal love for his mother Gurbansoltan Eje and praised her through several instances spread in various chapters. There was also a separate section about the importance of the role of woman within the family, in which he described the woman as “the Soltan of the home” and claimed that woman “should be given their proper value through affection, love and mutual respect.”²⁵⁸ An interpretation of this section alone would lead to a conclusion that the women were granted an equivalent status with men in the family, if not a higher one. However, such as the entitlement of equal civil rights for men and women, it would be misleading.²⁵⁹ Taken together with other statements of Turkmenbashi in *Rukhnama*, the respect and love women would deserve was depending on her success in fulfilling her traditional duties as the mother, while the best place for Turkmen women was their home despite the equalities in civil rights. According to Turkmenbashi, Prophet Noah had advised that “A rose is beautiful in the garden; a wife, daughter is beautiful in the home”.²⁶⁰ Therefore, in order to be regarded as a Soltan, a woman should not seek participation in the public life unless it was

²⁵⁷ Turkmenbashi, “None would care as much as my mother would” in *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, pp. 309-317.

²⁵⁸ Turkmenbashi, “The woman is the core of the family” in *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, pp. 364.

²⁵⁹ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, pp. 241-252.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 13.

necessary, rather, she should devote herself to her home and well being of the family:

A brave man is not always visible like the sun. If his wife keeps the house clean and tidy and is hospitable to the visitors when he is absent because he is hunting or at war, she will undoubtedly enhance her position in the society. Her own fame will also spread like her husband's. A good man can be recognized by the actions of a good woman. If a woman is not competent in her own home, this problem influences his husband.²⁶¹

The role and position of Turkmen women was more clearly set forth in the second volume of *Rukhnama* through specific examples of customs regulating the relations within the family. A more comprehensive section on women and their role and responsibilities was also placed in this volume under the title "Mother; affection reflected in human beings".²⁶² Turkmenbashi began this chapter by commenting on the virtues and dignity of Turkmen women, which were overviewed as dressing and behaving properly in presence of his husband and other men, cleanliness of hearth, and mercifulness. Then he continued by elaborating on the compassion of a mother for her child, her loyalty to her husband and her home, and her essential role in the spiritual framework of the family and the nation, the latter occupying the largest

²⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 88.

²⁶² Turkmenbashi, "Mother; affection reflected in human beings" in *Rukhnama: Second Book*, pp. 255-268.

volume within the text. At the beginning of his comments regarding the high spiritual and moral values of Turkmen women, he argued that:

The Turkmen woman is more advanced than the man. She can forgive, her brain forgives, but the man cannot forgive his wife. And that proves that they are closer than men to our compassionate God, who forgives our sins..... The woman also covers for her husband's evil deeds. She also hides her husband's ignorant actions and keeps others from seeing them. Sometimes I think to myself: Good God, the Turkmen woman has to bear such loads that even a mountain cannot carry. She accomplishes all of this by wide patience. Thus, aren't we supposed to call women brave and bold!²⁶³

Once defining the advanced divine spiritual values of Turkmen women as obedience and unconditional devotion to her husband within the family, and granting the men the right to make mistakes while implying that if women make mistakes it would not be forgiven by men, Turkmenbashi continued his comments on the relationship between the mother and her children and called the women to provide their children a good moral education.²⁶⁴ Then he returned back to the superior spiritual values of Turkmen women in comparison to men, together with rogue references to Islam, and stated that “Women represents pure Turkmen

²⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 259.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 260-261.

values”.²⁶⁵ When these latter statements are brought together with the former arguments, the result is a definition of pure, utmost moral values of the Turkmen as obedience, devotion and patience which should be transferred to future generations by the mothers.

After a longer section about the traditional jewelry used by Turkmen women, Turkmenbashi concluded his comments on the significant place of women in Turkmen family by defining her as the pillar of the family by reference to the advices of Gorgut Ata:

Man is the guardian; woman is the pillar of a home; if it were not for the pillar, what would be the meaning of the guardian.

Woman lives for his husband, man lives for his land.²⁶⁶

The final conclusion of Turkmenbashi explicitly drew the link between the family and state revealing the ultimate message for the Turkmen: As the women should have obedience, devotion and patience for their family and their husbands, the men should have the same values for their country, which was guarded by the state. These were the pure, highest spiritual values of the Turkmen which should be followed by Turkmen citizens and which should be transferred to next generations.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 263.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 268.

However, Turkmen mothers were not assumed to be responsible for transfer of the authentic culture to younger generations except these particular spiritual values but it was the fathers who would teach Turkmen culture and traditions to their sons. In various models of nationalisms, women have been recognized as the source of tradition and authentic knowledge while men have been promoted as the bearers of modernity and development.²⁶⁷ Therefore, nationalism propaganda has usually linked women to the authentic past of the nation whereas men have been related to the prosperous future.²⁶⁸ In Turkmenistan, on the other hand, the peculiar stance of Turkmen nationalism *vis-à-vis* modernity was reflected in the engenderment of the culture: Traditional culture, which was accepted as the ultimate knowledge of not only past and authenticity but also of future and development, was defined under the realm of men whereas women were assumed as passive agents to show obedience. Similar to German romantic nationalism, even the authentic homeland was referred not as the “motherland” but as the “fatherland”, *atawatan*.²⁶⁹ Traditional culture was described as masculine and women could only contribute to

²⁶⁷ See Chong, “Patriotic thoughts or intuition: roles of women in Mexican nationalisms”: pp. 340-344; Herr, “In defense of nonliberal nationalism”, p. 310; Mukhopadhyay, “Anthropological studies of women’s status revisited: 1977-1987”: pp. 479-80.

²⁶⁸ See McClintock, Anne, “Family feuds: gender, nationalism and the family”, *Feminist Review*, 22 (1993): pp. 61–80.

²⁶⁹ See Fox, “The creator gods: Romantic nationalism and the en-genderment of women in folklore”: p. 568. Although the Turkmen also use “*watan*” alone as a non-gendered conception for the homeland, it has been referred as “*atawatan*” many times in *Rukhnama* and in the national oath *Kasam*. For example, see Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Second Book*: pp. 21-29.

its preservation through its submissive reproduction in their daily lives.²⁷⁰ Despite being symbolic agents of authenticity, Turkmen mothers were not the source of authentic knowledge but instead were subject to the traditional culture shaped, transmitted, inherited, mastered and executed by the male members of the society.

Projected upon the society and the relation between the state and the people, such a characterization of culture within the family was confirmative of the unquestionability of the structure and the policies of the paternalistic state and its leader, Turkmenbashi, who was presented as the supreme master of Turkmen traditions. As women had to follow the course of culture and traditions laid down by their fathers, brothers, husbands and husbands-in law; the people were supposed to respect and obey the rules and decisions of the state and the President, which were claimed to be based on Turkmen culture and traditions.

Accordingly, the messages given about women and their role as mothers in *Rukhnama* and embedded in the overall propaganda campaign of Turkmenbashi regime were following a dual course benefiting from both the abstract image of women depicted in the book and the actual practices of women as live agents. While the former was disseminating a set of general political values derived from the relation between the woman and the family, the latter was imposing the same values to Turkmen women to become practical reproducers of the same structure.

²⁷⁰ Rupp, "Mother of the 'Volk': the image of women in Nazi ideology": pp. 370-372. See also Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*: pp. 279, 287; Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Second Book*: p. 65

The last role of Turkmen women in the propaganda of the Turkmenbashi regime was through their contribution to the economic struggles of the country. Although they were mainly responsible from the household, the economic difficulties of the transition period necessitated women to make further sacrifices by participation in economic production and contributing to the livelihood of the family. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the closure of Soviet factories and resulted in increased unemployment in Turkmenistan like other ex-Soviet republics.²⁷¹ While men often remained unemployed for long periods of time, women tended to seek income through the informal economy, such as being self-employed, home-based workers, street and market vendors, small-scale farmers, and day workers and employees of informal businesses, and assumed a significant role in maintenance of the family income and continuation of economic activity.²⁷² These additional sacrifices of women were praised both in *Rukhnama* and through means of mass media to underline their devotion and diligence, which should be a model for the whole nation to achieve the promises of the Golden Age.²⁷³

Indeed, the social and economic conditions for women in Turkmenistan were actually requiring diligence and sacrifices. Despite the praise Turkmen women

²⁷¹ See Najafizadeh, Mehrangiz, “Women's Empowering Carework in Post-Soviet Azerbaijan”, *Gender and Society*, 17/2 (2003): p. 296.

²⁷² Although more than a decade had passed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union when I visited Turkmenistan in 2006, women were still important earners of the household income through informal economy due to the high rates of unemployment.

²⁷³ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. See also Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama: Second Book*, p. 261.

collected as being devoted mothers, the traditional social structure was severely suppressive regarding their social status and rights. Although the regime was frequently utilizing its apparent respect for women and claimed gender equality regarding civil rights as an evidence to the democratic and just rule in the country, even in urban centers such as Ashgabat women had a subordinate status in social life compared to men while legitimization of their participation in the economic production in terms a requirement of transition were rather paving the way for further exploitation instead of bringing economic freedom.²⁷⁴

According to the statements of Enebay Atayeva, the Minister of Culture and Television-Radio Broadcasting, in “Turkmen Women in the Golden Age” International Conference assembled on April 11-12th, 2006, Turkmen women were granted a better social status in comparison to many other developing countries. Through underlining the women had made up 16 percent of the Mejlis deputies, 12.3 percent of people’s representatives and 42 percent of the members of the public organizations, she claimed that women had been worthily represented in the government, local authorities, and systems of education, culture and health care as well as in banking²⁷⁵. With reference to the Turkmenistan as being a party for both the UN convention on “Elimination of all forms of women’s inequality” and the

²⁷⁴ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. Also see Liczek, “Cultural parameters of gender policy making in contemporary Turkmenistan”: p. 582; Lubin, “Women in Soviet Central Asia: progress and contradictions”: p. 194.

²⁷⁵ Atayeva, Enebay, “Turkmen Women in the Golden Age” in “*Turkmen Women in the Golden Age*”: *International Conference Report Abstracts Collection*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2006, p. 222.

Convention of the International Labor Organization on “Equal payment for both men and women” in addition to numerous international treaties and agreements, Atayeva concluded that the peace-loving policy followed by “Saparmurat Turkmenbashi the Great” had created the most favorable conditions for active participation of women in all spheres of social life.²⁷⁶

Nevertheless, the actual impact of these claims on the lives of Turkmen women was questionable. Even if the accuracy of the statistics presented by Ateyeva was assumed to be correct, it hardly reflects an improved social status for the women. Most of the time laws dictating gender equality were shadowed by discriminative traditions in practice. Although women were frequently employed in public service, most of the time they were occupied in lower posts. When granted administrative positions, they were hardly allowed to take their own decisions but most of the time these decisions were dictated by others behind the scene. Participation in the labor force on an equal basis with men could not provide a real economic justice to women since they were assumed to submit what they earn to their fathers and husbands.²⁷⁷

Having into account the deep loyalty of the Turkmen society to their traditional values, the actual social status of women in Turkmenistan was unlikely to improve

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Observations during my stay in Ashgabat, 2006. Also see Liczek, “Cultural parameters of gender policy making in contemporary Turkmenistan”: pp. 569-572, 582.

in a near future. Even if there had been a slight chance for the emancipation of women, it was blocked by establishing the propaganda discourse of the regime on a basis of paternalism legitimizing women's subordination to men.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

The comprehensive propaganda campaign of Turkmenbashi regime was an apparently ambitious indoctrination project designed to consolidate the national identity and legitimize the authoritarian rule of the state under the leadership of Turkmenbashi, however, it was difficult to assess to what extent the official discourse of the regime was internalized by the public as any kind of opposition or discontent was silenced by the repressive means and policies. Nevertheless, it was possible to derive conclusions on the basis of some indicators visible on the surface.

Lack of uprisings, protests, or massive demonstrations challenging the authoritarian regime of Turkmenbashi could be considered as evidence to the success of the propaganda campaign to achieve the aimed social stability and support for the regime, at least in practical terms, despite a degree of unhappiness with economic conditions and insufficiencies of the policies to overcome persisting problems. This scene was also illustrated by a political opinion survey conducted in Turkmenistan in 2005 for the joint AsiaBarometer project between two Japanese universities, University of Tokyo and University of Chuo.²⁷⁸ According to the findings of the

²⁷⁸ See Dadabaev, "Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan": pp. 131-150.

survey, the participants had lower levels of satisfaction with their economic well-being and the public services provided by the state, however, more than half of them expressed their trust to the central government.²⁷⁹ A remarkable portion of the participants refrained from expressing their opinions not only on their trust to the central government (36.4 percent) but throughout the overall survey, particularly on sensitive political issues regarding their rights and their confidence in various political institutions, and replied that they did not know.²⁸⁰ The intensity of “do not know” answers could be interpreted to reflect both an unvoiced discontent due to a fear of possible repercussions of a negative comment, and a significant level of political indifference embedded in the society.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, the low percentage of voiced discontent with the central government could be thought as an indicator for the success of the propaganda in preventing an actual threat to the stability and continuity of the regime, while “do not know” replies also implied a sense of compliance with the authoritarian and paternalistic discourse promoting obedience. The suppressive measures of the regime *per se* would not be able to prevent open opposition and actual challenges without a sufficient level of recognition of the legitimacy of the Turkmenbashi regime widespread in the society.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 141-143.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 133-134.

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 148.

In a similar vein, it was hard to estimate how much the people really embraced the national identity projected upon themselves, but the practical indicators provided a means to evaluate the success of the propaganda campaign in consolidation of the national identity. Policies aiming at promoting the native language and authentic values were easily welcomed by the Turkmen who used to be culturally subordinated during the Soviet rule, and reinforced the legitimacy of the regime in a society which was outstanding for its loyalty to the customs and traditions. However, it was a matter of question to what extent the cultural revival was contributive to consolidation of the national identity. Exclusion and subordination of non-Turkmen ethnicities and forceful imposition of Turkmen values upon these groups rather paved the way for their alienation, and made it even more difficult to affiliate themselves with a Turkmen national identity. Meanwhile, the particular version of Turkmen history and culture interpreted by Turkmenbashi might not necessarily be adopted as elements of a unifying identity by the Turkmen whose tribal traditions and narratives were different. The persisting need of the regime for policies such as tribal parity was confirming that the Turkmen continued to identify themselves with their tribes as distinct socio-political groups though they were not completely against the idea of a common national identity.

On the other hand, the incoherent stance of Turkmenbashi regime *vis-à-vis* tribalism implied that the campaign to consolidate the national identity might not mean to totally eliminate tribal loyalties to form a homogeneous Turkmen nation, but was rather aimed to turn these loyalties into reinforcing elements of national unity

instead of being potential challenges to the regime. The peculiar design of the Turkmen flag was an evidence displaying that the new Turkmen state officially recognized the existence of the tribes as individual components of the nation although it refrained from admitting it explicitly. Similarly, the policy of tribal parity was also a strong evidence for recognition of tribes as political groups who could seek their own interests. Therefore, if the objective of the propaganda campaign was not complete elimination of the tribal affiliations but their accommodation within the national identity, the policies of Turkmenbashi could be thought to be successful to a great extent. The maintained unity of the nation state without any active opposition on the basis of tribalism against Turkmenbashi regime could be regarded as a sign of success for the propaganda campaign.

The peaceful transfer of presidency to Berdymukhammedov following the death of Turkmenbashi on December 21, 2006 was also supportive of such a conclusion. When Turkmenbashi died, it did not result in a vacuum of authority in the country. There were no demonstrations or uprisings demanding a change in the structure of the regime, neither Berdymukhammedov faced a visible opposition when he came to power. According to the constitution, Ovezgeldy Atayev, Speaker of the Parliament, had to be nominated as the interim leader of the country; however, he was arrested soon after Turkmenbashi's death being accused of driving his would-

be daughter-in-law to suicide.²⁸² Following a constitutional change on December 26, Berdymukhammedov, who used to be one of the few long-lasting ministers of Turkmenbashi, was announced as the acting President in his place.²⁸³ The presidential elections were held on February 11, 2007, and resulted in Berdymukhammedov's absolute victory.²⁸⁴

So far, Berdymukhammedov's regime displays a general continuity of his predecessor's approach to the rule of state and its presentation to the public. Similar to Turkmenbashi, Berdymukhammedov seeks to enhance the legitimacy of his rule by populist policies while preserving and reinforcing the authoritarian structure of regime. However, rather than remaining loyal to the populist understanding of Turkmenbashi, new president's quest for popularity rests on claims to fulfill the deficiencies of the policies carried out by his predecessor. Instead of investing in grand construction projects or majestic public shows, Berdymukhammedov targets the policy areas which used to be problematic during the rule of Turkmenbashi. One of his first political actions was restoring the pension system which had been reformed under the previous regime bringing a dramatic deprivation in many people's rights to claim pensions as well as a significant decline in payments to

²⁸² Kozlova, Marina, "Meet the new boss", *Transitions Online*, (2007, March 19): p. 2; Terzieff, Juliette, "Death of leader brings little early change to Turkmenistan", *World Politics Review*, (1/10/2007): p. 1.

²⁸³ Terzieff, "Death of leader brings little early change to Turkmenistan": p. 1. Berdymukhammedov was appointed as the health minister in 1997, and nominated as deputy prime minister in 2001. See Kozlova, "Meet the new boss": p. 2.

²⁸⁴ Dadabaev, "Trajectories of political development and public choices in Turkmenistan": p. 135.

many others.²⁸⁵ In respect to the education sector, the new president restored back the compulsory basic education to ten years and the length of undergraduate programs to five, while canceling the requirement of two-year work experience to be enrolled in a university.²⁸⁶ He also promised to increase the number of state universities to fourteen and to recover the Academy of Sciences and scientific research institutes, which were closed down under the rule of Turkmenbashi.²⁸⁷ In order to display that he was in favor of a more liberal social life, he removed the check-points all around the country, abolished the bans on opera, ballet and circus, stated that he would support spread of the use of internet, and allowed internet cafes.²⁸⁸ An equivalent display of liberalism was also reflected in the foreign policy. The new president has had personal visits to several countries including China, Russia, the United States and Pakistan to have closer relations with the outside world.²⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the authoritarianism of the regime has remained intact behind the populist and liberal image presented to the domestic and foreign audiences. The

²⁸⁵ Intini, John, "Finally it pays to be old in Turkmenistan", *Maclean's*, 120/12 (2007): p. 21; Kozlova, Marina, "New Turkmen president Berdymukhammedov moves to consolidate power", *World Politics Review*, (6/27/2007): p. 3.

²⁸⁶ "Shadow movement", *Economist*, 390/8612 (2009): 30; Kozlova, "Meet the new boss": p. 2.

²⁸⁷ Kozlova, "Meet the new boss": p. 2.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, "Shadow movement", *Economist*: p. 30.

²⁸⁹ "Shadow movement", *Economist*: p. 30.

political structure has been still shaped on the basis of a culture of obedience and suppression serving to reinforce the rule of the president who has been assumed as the core of the system, while principles of democracy and rule of law have remained as mere rhetoric. As one of his first political actions, Berdymukhammedov has reestablished this order with replacing the central figures of authority within the state by his own supporters. The head of the presidential security service, Akmurad Rejepov, was fired short after Berdymukhammedov came to power.²⁹⁰ The Minister of Internal Affairs, Akmammet Rakhmanov, was dismissed with an accusation of corruption; the Minister of National Security, Geldymurad Ashirmukhammedov, was arrested and his deputy, Agajan Pashshyev, was removed from power.²⁹¹ The strict KNB control over the citizens has been maintained, and Turkmenistan has remained among the countries with worst records of human rights abuses.²⁹² One-party rule reinforced by absolute support of the party to the president has been continued, while the opposition has remained in exile.²⁹³ Neither there was an improvement in the flow of information.²⁹⁴ The spread of internet has remained very limited, and people's access to internet has

²⁹⁰ Kozlova, "New Turkmen president Berdymukhammedov moves to consolidate power": p. 3.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² See Nichol, Jim, "Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055", *Congressional Research Service: Report*, (9/10/2009): pp. 1-9.

²⁹³ "Shadow movement", *Economist*: p. 30.

²⁹⁴ See Mitas, Stefan, "Turkmenistan: Bad times never seemed so good", *Transitions Online*, (2/9/2009): p. 7; Tukhbatullin, Farid and John Feffer, "Turkmenistan: Still Waiting for the Second Step", *Foreign Policy in Focus*, (10/19/2009): p. 1.

been severely restricted and closely monitored.²⁹⁵ The publishing companies have been still owned by the state and their content was supervised to ensure accuracy with the official discourse of the regime. The government control on radio and television has been maintained in a similar vein, and the broadcasts continued to revolve around the achievements of the regime, and the new president, Berdymukhammedov.²⁹⁶

The preservation of the structural framework of Turkmenbashi regime by the new president indicates that the propaganda campaign carried out under the rule of Turkmenbashi was successful enough to consolidate its adoption by the public. The similarities between the propaganda courses of two leaders, such as the intensive search for populism reflected in state policies, strict censorship on media, and manipulated broadcasts, implies that these approaches have been proved as efficient means to bring the desired results. On the other hand, the apparently different characteristics of the populist policies of the new president reveals that Turkmenbashi's grandiose constructions and mass public shows were not sufficiently successful to appease the silent discontent in the public unless their real concerns were addressed.

²⁹⁵ Nichol, "Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055": p. 6; Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055", *Congressional Research Service: Report*, (9/10/2009): pp. 1-9; Tukhbatullin and Feffer, "Turkmenistan: Still Waiting for the Second Step": p. 1.

²⁹⁶ Nichol, "Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055": p. 6; Land, Thomas, "Caspian producers seek independence", *Middle East*, 380 (2007): pp. 40-42.

Another success of the propaganda campaign of Turkmenbashi regime could be thought as achieved in reinforcing authoritarian structure through promotion of the leader cult of the president, as the new president has been replicating the same modality through establishing his own leader cult in his predecessors place. Nevertheless, despite its contributions to consolidate the position of the former president during his rule, the propaganda campaign was not influential enough to maintain credibility of Turkmenbashi's own leader cult after his death, as its unquestionable position could be challenged by Berdymukhammedov to foster his own leader cult. The new president could take several measures to diminish influences of the leader cult of his predecessor without a reaction from the public. He has removed a majority of Turkmenbashi's statues, including the very famous one located at the top of the Arch of Neutrality.²⁹⁷ The national anthem and the national oath have been both revised to remove references to Turkmenbashi.²⁹⁸ The calendar has been reversed to its previous form, so as the months have been no more referring to the former president and his mother, Gurbansoltan Eje.²⁹⁹ In a similar vein, the major creation of Turkmenbashi, *Ruhnama*, has been diminished in its importance. Although it has not been totally abolished, it has been removed

²⁹⁷ Nichol, "Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055": p. 5; "Elsewhere in Turkestan", *Economist*, 392/ 8639 (2009): p. 42.

²⁹⁸ "Shadow movement", *Economist*: p. 30.

²⁹⁹ "Elsewhere in Turkestan", *Economist*: p. 42.

from the curriculums.³⁰⁰ Besides direct references to Turkmenbashi, even the implicit ones which could remind the former president have been sought to be avoided within the discourse of the new president, as indicated by his rephrasing of the myth of Golden Century as “*taze galkynysh*” (new revival).³⁰¹ While depreciating the leader cult of his predecessor, Berdymukhammedov has been simultaneously establishing his own leader cult through extensive use of media. He has also erected a monument to symbolize the new era under his presidency.³⁰²

The prevailing characteristics of the regime under the rule of Berdymukhammedov imply that the political structure of Turkmenistan has been firmly consolidated and is unlikely to display a tangible change in a foreseeable future. While this outcome has been partly a result of the success of the propaganda campaign carried out by Turkmenbashi, it also has its roots in the cultural characteristics of the society. The strong loyalty of the Turkmen to their traditions and the patriarchic tribal structures for centuries made it easy for Turkmenbashi to indoctrinate authoritarianism of the regime to the people. Although both the discourse and the means employed were most of the time extreme or irrational in the eyes of foreigners, they were not quite radical for the Turkmen once they were linked to traditions with which they were familiar.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*; Saunders, Robert, “Turkmenistan: Rage against the Ruhnama”, *Transitions Online*, (3/2/2009): 7; Nichol, “Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055”: p. 5.

³⁰¹ Nichol, “Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055”: p. 5; “Elsewhere in Turkestan”, *Economist*: p. 42.

³⁰² Nichol, “Turkmenistan: Recent developments and U.S. Interests: 97-1055”: p. 5.

Despite its achievements, the propaganda campaign of the Turkmenbashi regime had enormous costs to the public. The policies of Turkmenbashi aimed at legitimizing his rule were most of the time carried out at the expense of the interests of the people. The regime chose to invest in populist policies instead of concrete social and economic policies addressing the real needs of the society. Furthermore, the abundant ideological indoctrination of the regime left the people illiterate of the facts about their country, as well as its relative position *vis-à-vis* the outside world. While the policies of Berdymukhammedov address some basic concerns of the people to enhance his popularity, most of the important problems regarding economic development and improvement of the public services remain unresolved as inherited from the presidency of Turkmenbashi. Berdymukhammedov may formulate policies to overcome these problems in the coming years, or he may choose to ignore the ones which could be shadowed under populist policies. Nevertheless, without a habit and means of critical thinking, the people seems to remain as passive subjects of his policies.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICE A: TURKMEN NATIONAL ANTHEM

GARAŞSYZ, BAKY BITARAP TÜRKMENISTANYŇ DÖWLET SENASY

Türkmenbaşyň guran beýik binasy,
Berkarar döwletim, jigerim-janym.
Başlaryň täji sen, diller senasy,
Dünýä dursun, sen dur, Türkmenistanym!

Janym gurban saňa, erkana ýurdum,
Mert pederleň ruhy bardyr köňülde.
Bitarap, garaşsyz topragyň nurdur,
Baýdagyň belentdir dünýäň öňünde.

Türkmenbaşyň guran beýik binasy,
Berkarar döwletim, jigerim-janym.
Başlaryň täji sen, diller senasy,
Dünýä dursun, sen dur, Türkmenistanym!

Gardaşdyr tireler, amandyr iller,
Owal-ahyr birdir biziň ganymyz.
Harasatlar almaz, syndyrmaz siller,
Nesiller döş gerip gorar şanymyz.

Türkmenbaşyň guran beýik binasy,
Berkarar döwletim, jigerim-janym.
Başlaryň täji sen, diller senasy,
Dünýä dursun, sen dur, Türkmenistanym!

Arkamdyr bu daglar, penamdyr düzler,
Ykbalym, namysym, togabym, Watan!
Saňa şek ýetirse, kör bolsun gözler,
Geçmişim, geljegim, dowamym, Watan!

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM OF INDEPENDENT AND PERMANENTLY
NEUTRAL TURKMENISTAN

The great creation of Turkmenbashi,
My permanent state, my heart and precious,
You are the crown of heads, glory of tongues,
Live as long as the world exists!

I am ready to give my life for you, my independent homeland,
The spirit of brave ancestors is in my hearth.
Your impartial, independent soil is a light,
Your flag is high before the world.

The great creation of Turkmenbashi,
My permanent state, my heart and precious,
You are the crown of heads, glory of tongues,
Live as long as the world exists!

Clans are siblings, people are happy,
Our blood is one forever.
Floods cannot sweep, calamities do not frighten,
Generations survive our fame throughout them.

The great creation of Turkmenbashi,
My permanent state, my heart and precious,
You are the crown of heads, glory of tongues,
Live as long as the world exists!

These mountains are my support, plains are my asylum,
My fate, my honor, my sacred place, my homeland!
Whoever slanders at you let those eyes go blind,
My past, my future and my succession, my homeland!

Source: “*Turkmen Women in the Golden Age*”: *International Conference Report Abstracts Collection*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2006, p.7. The English translation of the text has been prepared on the basis of the version published in Turkmenbashi, Saparmurat, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2005, p.7.

APENDICE B: TURKMEN NATIONAL OATH

KASAM

Eziz Türkmenistan – Ata Watanyň,
Gurban bolsun saňa bu janym – tenim!
Eger – de men saňa sähelçe şek ýetirsem,
Goý, meniň elim gurasyn!
Eger – de men saňa dil ýetirsem,
Goý, meniň dilim gurasyn!
Eger – de men Türkmenistan Watanyňa,
Beýik Saparmyrat Türkmenbaşa dönüklik etsem,
Goý, meniň ömrüm kül bolsun!

OATH

Sacred Turkmenistan, my homeland,
Let my spirit and flesh be a sacrifice for you!
If a cast a spur upon your reputation,
Let my hand be lost!
If I malign you,
Let my tongue be lost!
If I act treacherously toward my homeland Turkmenistan,
Great Saparmurat Turkmenbashi,
Let my life be reduced to ashes!

Source: “*Turkmen Women in the Golden Age*”: *International Conference Report Abstracts Collection*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2006, p.2. The English translation of the text has been prepared on the basis of the version published in Turkmenbashi, Saparmurat, *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*, Ashgabat, TDH, 2005, p.2.

APPENDICE C: NATIONAL DAYS OF TURKMENISTAN

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| January 1 | New Year's Day |
| January 12 | Memorial Day (for the martyrs of the Goktepe fortress) |
| February 19 | State Flag of Turkmenistan Day |
| March 8 | Turkmen Woman's Day (coincides with International Woman's Day) |
| March 20-21 | Nowruz Bayramy (traditional spring holiday) |
| First Sunday in April | "A Drop of Water—A Grain of Gold" Festival |
| Last Sunday in April | Turkmen Racing Horse Festival |
| May 8 | Day of Commemoration of the National Heroes of the 1941-1945 World War |
| May 9 | Victory Day (World War II) |
| May 18-19 | Day of Revival, Unity, and the Poetry of Makhtumkuli |
| Last Sunday in May | Turkmen Carpet Day |
| Third Sunday in July | Galla Bayramy (celebration of the wheat harvest) |
| Second Sunday in August | Turkmen Melon Day |
| Second Saturday in September | Day of the Workers in the Oil, Gas, Power, and Geological Industry |
| Second Sunday in September | Turkmen Bakhshi Day (celebrating the Turkmen folk singers) |
| October 6 | Day of Commemoration and National Mourning (commemorating the victims of the 1948 earthquake that destroyed Ashgabat) |
| October 27-28 | Independence Day |

| | |
|---|--|
| First Saturday in November | Health Day |
| Last Sunday in November | Harvest Festival (celebration of the cotton harvest) |
| First Sunday in December | Good Neighborliness Day |
| December 12 | Day of Neutrality and Student Youth Day |
| The date is ascertained according to the lunar calendar | Oraza Bayramy (Muslim religious holiday) |
| The date is ascertained according to the lunar calendar | Kurban Bayramy (Muslim religious holiday) |

Source: Khramov, V. M., *Turkmenistan: to the Heights of the Golden Age*, Asghabat, TDH, 2005, p.44.