Local Crime Prevention Centres and the (After) Lives of the State in Rural Kyrgyzstan

This chapter introduces the empirical field of community security in Kyrgyzstan and the first case study on Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPCs). In this sense, besides offering a specific analysis of community security practices and their co-production in the triangle between local-level actors, state authorities and international NGOs and donors, the chapter offers a more general view on how the imaginaries of social order discussed in the previous chapter play out in rural and periurban parts of Kyrgyzstan. As I will show, the presence and effects of the state in these parts of the country can be best captured with the metaphor of (after) lives. In her ethnography of borders in the Ferghana Valley, Madeleine Reeves (2014, ch 3) has used the term afterlives to capture the memory and imaginary historical presence of forms of internationalism in formerly industrial towns, where only decaying architecture and ruins bear testimony to the connectedness and privileged status of these places during the Soviet period. My proposal in this chapter is to refer this idea of afterlives not only to such signs of international connection and coexistence of various peoples, but to the state in its entirety. At the same time, to acknowledge that state authorities take an active stance and even intrusive presence in some areas of life in remoter parts of Kyrgyzstan too, the chapter shows how the afterlives of the Soviet forms of social organization and state provision coexist with the new ways in which the Kyrgyzstani state is regulating and ordering life.

Another key interest is to develop an understanding on when, why and how community security ‘is done’. The premise here is that such an understanding needs to be based on a perspective of the livelihoods and struggles for survival that people in Kyrgyzstan became caught up in after the country’s independence and subsequent privatization and liberalization programmes. Building on the discussion of these programmes and their
normalization within the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary, I outline the ‘post-Soviet condition of uncertainty’ (Pelkmans, 2017, p 5) and how it manifests in poverty, precarity and dependence on newly emergent institutions, mechanisms and access regimes including the securing of livelihoods through labour migration to former Soviet states and beyond. These developments are then juxtaposed with the emergence of institutional frameworks and practices in community security, including the detailed analysis of the role of LCPCs in preventing or overcoming conflict, crime and insecurity.

The chapter continues with the discussion of how life in rural Kyrgyzstan has unfolded between the Soviet legacy and ‘new market’ realities, to consider the implications of these dynamics for community security and conflict prevention. The second section presents a mapping of the historical and more recent role of local administrations and social institutions, including courts of elders (aksakals), women’s committees, youth committees, neighbourhood committees and others. I subsequently discuss the role of LCPCs as a coordinating body for the latter and examine their role as a node between, first, executive and law enforcement authorities; second, local populations and actively operating actors/institutions; and third, international NGOs and donors. On this basis, I present an in-depth analysis of peacebuilding and community security practices of LCPCs and analogous bodies in southern Kyrgyzstan. Based on interviews and participatory observation, I scrutinize LCPCs’ often exclusive orientation to the future at the expense of addressing grievances and justice issues, and, furthermore, their performative and selective engagement with communities. In conclusion, I further reflect on the analysis to show how community security and peacebuilding practices invoke the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary while not challenging discourses of executive power and cultural hegemony that are part of the ‘politics of sovereignty’ imaginary, thus leaving the uncomfortable contradictions and contestations underlying Kyrgyzstan’s post-liberal social order intact.

**Life in rural Kyrgyzstan between Soviet legacy and ‘new market realities’**

As I argued in discussing the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary in the previous chapter, research has shown how large parts of Kyrgyzstani and other post-Soviet populations have accepted the necessity and inevitability of a transition from planned to market economy in a way that suggests teleological thinking ingrained through Marxist-Leninist ideology whose telos – the idea of a fully industrially developed Communist society – was replaced with that of capitalist development in a free market. In this light, I use the term ‘new market realities’ in inverted commas to suggest that, even though markets may not have become real or at least did not operate properly, people perceived
their constitution and necessity as real, and therefore were soon confronted with the challenge to find ways to make a living and navigate these realities.

*From economic and institutional collapse to a moral economy of survival*

For the larger part of the population, life in post-independence Kyrgyzstan has been determined by the rapid collapse of the industrial sector and economy as a whole. The ‘shock therapy’ reforms embraced by the first post-independence president, Askar Akaev, had the effect of diminishing the GDP in 1995 to half of the 1990 level within four years and thus back to the republic’s 1970s’ level (Igemberdiev, 2016, p 150). Mass bankruptcies in the industrial sector led to a plunge in GDP to 35 per cent of the 1990 level in 1995. More than privatization, this collapse was effected by the cessation of financial flows from Moscow and the implosion of distribution channels for Kyrgyz-produced goods throughout the former Soviet Union (Gullette, 2010, p 28). Setting up channels and infrastructures for trading and distribution took a considerable time, during which barter trading and the informal and black-market economy, as well as organized crime, were the main channels of economic exchange and accumulation. In consequence, the real wage dropped to a level of around a fifth of the 1989 level and, given hyper-inflation in the early 1990s and a five-fold rise in food prices, made it impossible to live let alone sustain a family if one had employment at all (Igamberdiev, 2016, p 152). Reeves’ perspective from the Ferghana Valley borderlands (2014, ch 3), Mathijs Pelkmans’ research in Jalal-Abad province (2017) and Elmira Satybaldieva’s (2015b) accounts from Osh document the social effects of de-industrialization, de-development and the ‘shutting down’ of entire industrial sectors in the name of the free market. Towns and cities that once enjoyed Moscow provisioning and were seen as bastions of Soviet modernity, welfare and progress, have thus decayed into ruins and ‘ghost towns’.

This de facto economic collapse forced many people to find ways to secure their families’ well-being, and often survival, in the informal economy and through subsistence agriculture (Pelkmans, 2017, ch 1). Most people, especially in rural areas, came to rely on a combination of wage labour and

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1 For illustrations see Razul-zade, Tilav, ‘Журавли улетели, забыв о родных гнездах и городе Шураб, превратившемся в бесхозные руины’ [The cranes flew away, forgetting about their nests back home and about the city of Shurab, which turned into ownerless ruins], 23 June 2010, [https://subscribe.ru/archive/news.world.turkestan/201006/29001625.html](https://subscribe.ru/archive/news.world.turkestan/201006/29001625.html); Sputnik news, ‘Кыргызский город-призрак — кадры из горного Иныльчека’ [The Kyrgyz ghost town – people from the mountainous Inylchek], 25 August 2016, [https://ru.sputnik.kg/photo/20160825/1028764675.html](https://ru.sputnik.kg/photo/20160825/1028764675.html)
subsistence agriculture, which they pursued on land plots allocated in the process of splitting up state or collective farms – through which agricultural production had been organized on an industrial scale (Steimann, 2011, ch 4; Botoeva, 2015, p 534). Similar to the privatization of industrial enterprises, agricultural de-collectivization was an uneven process in which former bosses and managers often acquired the machinery and equipment necessary to cultivate larger plots of land (Steimann, 2011, p 58). As Botoeva notes:

Only a tiny minority of well-off families … were able to produce a surplus and generate cash. Although also a minority in the community, the poorer members could not cultivate most of their land and so rented it out (or lost ownership completely), or did not own much livestock (no livestock or one cow and a few sheep) and had to find other ways to generate income. (Botoeva, 2015, p 535)

These dynamics produced a sizeable population of rural poor who have increasingly moved into the urban centres in the different provinces – mostly to the capital Bishkek and Osh in the south – in the hope of finding jobs in the service and construction sectors (Satybaldieva, 2015a, p 373; 2015b, p 103). This increased the pressures on urban infrastructures and a worsening social climate. The suspension of housing programmes and other state provision gave rise to fierce distribution battles within the labour market and sectors of social housing and land registry, which at times evolved into manifest conflicts.

Besides the de facto collapse of the economy and especially the industrial sector, the more significant failure of the neoliberal ‘transition’ orchestrated by Western donors, international organizations and local collaborators was the redistribution of corporate assets – including key industries, public utility companies and infrastructures – into the hands of politicians or criminal elites with little public scrutiny or accountability. This has arguably created an oligarchical hyper-neoliberalism, in which the elites’ power to dispose of assets and set agendas is in no way equalled by organized labour or the populace at large (Lottholz, 2019b). International financial institutions and regulatory frameworks permitted the largely unchecked accumulation of wealth by elites while the ensuing criminalization and violent practices emerging with the oligarchic elites went largely unchallenged or was even normalized. Large swathes of both Kyrgyzstan and its neighbouring states have become entangled in a post-transitional state where under-development and the exclusion of certain localities and social groups are a fact of life, while key extractive industries and utilities make up a large part of the GDP but are accrued mostly to the wealth of elites. This mechanism was analysed in Heathershaw and Cooley’s collection (2015) which detailed how tax havens and offshore financial centres – spaces and arrangements that came into
being and keep operating thanks to the support and interests of Western countries – help Central Asian elites to siphon off revenues from private side-businesses and illicitly acquired corporate assets.

In effect, it can be argued that the privatization and hyper-neoliberal agenda in the 1990s has created proto or ‘cannibal states’ (Kurtović and Hromadžić, 2017) which, whether due to the incapacity or unwillingness of policy makers, have withdrawn the provision of public goods and in some areas and spaces simply ceased to operate and exist. In this way, rural, minority and other marginal populations have been shut out of the purview of public policy, so that their provisioning and wider development became outsourced to international organizations and NGOs, thus reconstituting the country a ‘global protectorate’ (Pétric, 2005; see Chapter 4). An important role in compensating for the disappearance of state programmes and institutions was played by domestic civil society and community initiatives which have (re-)established a minimal provision of educational and other services such as kindergartens, schooling and professional development (Féaux de la Croix, 2013b; Satybaldieva, 2015a).

This large-scale effort to step in for the receding state is part of a wider shift from once formal and institutionalized mechanisms of provision and distribution to an informal economy and logic of life that encompasses many areas of life in Kyrgyzstan and the post–Socialist world at large. As Morris and Polese argue, informal structures and economic mechanisms can be seen ‘as response to botched political/economic reform’ and a ‘working solution’ in everyday life, which it would make sense to formalize at least in some cases, so as to improve largely dysfunctional social and institutional systems (Morris and Polese, 2015, pp 11, 19). In Kyrgyzstan, there are many negative aspects to this compensatory logic, which manifest in informal payments that figure in many other areas of life from politics and administration to education and health care. For instance, with a university teacher’s average salary of 40 USD not covering average living costs of 100 USD for a family (60 USD in rural areas), it is not surprising that, apart from working in several jobs, a culture of bribery is rife in Kyrgyzstani academia, where students can buy themselves good grades or get away with not attending lectures (Sanghera and Satybaldieva, 2009, p 31). Thus, according to Reeves, the complete disconnect between de facto and reported levels of educational attainment leads to corruption being ‘interpreted not as the deviant action of particular immoral individuals, but the symptom of a much broader, systemic dis-integration’ (Reeves, 2015a, p 22, her emphasis). Even more concerning is Sanghera and Satybaldieva’s finding that medical staff could go as far as withholding medical treatment and care from people who are not able to make extra payments, or that police officers release criminals upon payment of bribes (2009, pp 929, 932). They cite the widespread view that ‘[people] have their own families that they need to feed. That’s why they
take bribes. Maybe, if their salary were bigger, they would be taking fewer bribes’ and they conclude that, ‘public sector workers and professionals justify corruption as necessary for household survival. Their sense of living and being, their modus vivendi, rests upon family commitments, rather than upon a fragile professional ethos’ (Sanghera and Satybaldieva, 2009, p 930). This perspective, which can be glossed as a moral economy approach to corruption (Olivier de Sardan, 1999), resonates with Veena Das’s (2015) argument that rather than morally repulsive, corruption should be seen as bringing about the ‘possibility of life’ for many people in the precarious economy of post–Socialist collapse that is gripping Kyrgyzstan as it is many other post–Soviet countries.

A final aspect of informal compensation for state failure and coping mechanisms is traditional systems for mutual help and collecting money among relatives. These have existed throughout centuries and had, up to the late Soviet period, the primary function of mutual support and solidarity with those experiencing particular hardship, as well as financing children’s life cycle events (Féaux de la Croix and Ismailbekova, 2014, p 7; Botokanova, 2015, p 123). For instance, yrazha (Kg.: literally law, mutual agreement) or yntymak (order, harmony) payments are collected among kin for occasions of weddings or deaths and serve to cover expenses related to the organization of feasts and gatherings (Kapalova, 2015, pp 252–3). With the increasing affluence enjoyed in the late Soviet period, and among wealthier groups for an even longer time, these schemes were of high symbolic significance, reflected in high average-level financial contributions. In the post–Soviet period, the increasing social stratification and earning differentials were mirrored in these schemes (Kapalova, 2015, p 255). Thus, to avoid embarrassment or even exclusion from such schemes, many people have started taking high–interest loans or engaged in petty crimes such as growing and selling hashish to finance their participation (Kapalova, 2015, pp 258–9; Botoeva, 2015: 542). Thus, it has been argued that informal support networks often merely create the ‘illusion of support’ (Kapalova, 2015, p 260) while increasing social pressure on people who lack financial means and social capital. In summary, the collapse of Kyrgyzstan’s industries and economy as a whole, the withdrawal of the state and informal reorganization of many areas of life have effected widespread and entrenched forms of poverty and precarity, which present a potential of insecurity and conflict themselves, but also foreground migration as a prevalent livelihood strategy that is discussed next.

**Translocal livelihoods and their implications for community security**

Alongside its neighbour, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan is the country whose inhabitants are most dependent on labour migration for their survival and livelihood. The early 2000s saw a deepening trend of labour migration to
Russia, Kazakhstan, other CIS countries and beyond, with a sixth – or around one million of the country’s overall population – residing abroad in 2019 (ADB and UNDP, 2020; see Chapter 4). Given this significance, Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich have argued that mobility as the constant state of labour migrants has acquired institutional status and become a vehicle through which people navigate their own life courses, career choices and relations with relatives (2016, p 421). They further argue that conceiving of these livelihoods as translocal rather than inter- or transnational helps to better take into account the often blurred and unclear effects of being in another place: the social pressure and economic hardship in the sending community may be evaded but also reproduced through networks and moral regimes that reach beyond borders (Schröder and Stephan-Emmrich, 2016, p 537; see Thieme, 2008).

Largely irrespective of whether migration has positive effects at home or abroad, it is clear that it creates additional pressure on societal setups, institutions and infrastructures in places of destination. As far as domestic migration is concerned, its effects on urban life and security questions in communities targeted by migration flows are perhaps the most profound. As indicated in the discussion of ethno-nationalist discourse in Chapter 4, migration from rural areas to urban centres was already putting pressure on social systems and institutions in the 1980s, and continued to do so throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The population of the capital, Bishkek, for instance, increased by up to 35 per cent to circa 1.1 million in the year 2001, while its administrative institutions and infrastructure were not enlarged accordingly (Fryer et al 2014, p 177). As well as putting additional strain on urban centres like Bishkek and Osh, an additional issue with in-migration of the rural poor was that many of them did not have a residence permit (propiska) that entitled them to education, health care and social benefits (Hatcher, 2011). Correspondingly, large numbers of people started living in so-called novostroiki or ‘new settlements’ in the outskirts of cities, where they acquired or squatted on land plots and utilities such as water, electricity, sewerage and administrative entitlements were only acquired over the course of years if not decades of political struggle, lobbying and mobilization (Hatcher, 2011; Fryer et al, 2014, pp 185ff; Nasritdinov et al, 2015). Being excluded from legal entitlements and basic services puts pressure on people to resort to livelihood strategies beyond legal boundaries. Especially in more rural settings such as Osh and Jalal-Abad, such poor groups have been shown to be liable to mobilization for political purposes if not conflict and violence (Sanghera, 2010; Radnitz, 2012; Megoran et al, 2014). Although this trajectory is not straightforward, the potential risks emanating from large populations without legal status, care entitlements and opportunities to take part in society are undeniable and pose a problem in and of itself.
This has also been acknowledged and tackled in recent donor interventions (see UNFPA, 2017).

Less visible at first sight, but even more significant are the social and psychological effects of labour migration beyond the national borders. Many labour migrants find themselves in a trajectory of systematic reproduction of their semi- or illegal status, as the Russian authorities have no interest in legalizing large numbers of immigrants (Reeves, 2014, p 130). Given this precarious status and exposure to rights violations by authorities (FIDH, 2016, II.2), most migrants embark on journeys abroad for several years. The xenophobia and racism prevalent in Russia, alongside arbitrariness, abuse and exploitation by employers (Fryer et al, 2014; see Chapter 4), have effectively reconstituted Kyrgyzstanis and people from other Central Asian states as subaltern migrant communities. Apart from the dire psychological effects of this subjugation, migration has put a high burden on families. Researchers agree that it particularly affects children and adolescents who are left with grandparents, or other relatives and even neighbours. Empirical studies (for example, Nasritdinov and Schenkkan, 2012) have shown that these relatives are often not able or ready to impart the attention, devotion and care that could substitute adequate parenting, which has a negative bearing on the emotional well-being and psychological health of migrants’ children. This is most obvious in cases of physical and psychological ill-treatment by surrogate parents (FIDH, 2016, pp 49ff), and in the appalling conditions in which foster children sometimes live.2 Sanghera et al demonstrate the long-term effects of distress caused by separation from parents and its ‘adverse consequences on children’s personal development … and later adult relationships’ (2012, p 393) which can range from insecurity complexes and emotional dependence to depression, anxiety and aggression. Instead of receiving the appropriate emotional protection and economic support, many children and adolescents in Kyrgyzstan lack such basic conditions and are instead exposed to the hardships of supporting or entirely running a household early on in their lives.

As I indicated in discussing the imaginary of Western life, economic precarity and the struggles for a good life make dreams about becoming a successful entrepreneur and making money especially attractive, but also foreground feelings of exclusion, injustice and anger among people who lack the basic conditions to realize such ambitions. Seen from the moral economy perspective outlined above, it becomes obvious how inequality and social stratification in Kyrgyzstan and the additional burden of livelihoods fractured across locations can lure young people toward the

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2 See the documentary by Civic Union ‘For Reforms and Result’, ‘Lost in their childhood’ (Poteriannye v detstve), Youtube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfSWcPXsX2M [25 May 2017].
spectrum of informal, illicit, illegal and outright criminal practices and actions (Sanghera and Satybaaldieva, 2009; Kirmse, 2010, p 394). Given the downsizing, withdrawal and often virtual absence of the state in sectors of health, education and welfare especially in rural and semi-urban areas of Kyrgyzstan, no significant level of compliance toward state laws and decrees or support for government strategies and appeals can be expected. As the analysis in the final section will show, such precarious living conditions and blurred boundaries between legality, licitness and morally acceptable practices appear to give rise to various crimes and conflict behaviour that abound in communities in southern Kyrgyzstan. In the next section, I introduce the structures of local self-governance and civil society that are employed by the Kyrgyzstani state in the effort to maintain order, security and peace against this background.

Local-level governance, social institutions and crime prevention

Local self-governance and social institutions during and after the Soviet Union

In this section, before introducing the legal set-up of LCPCs I first provide an overview of the local self-governance and social institutions which have continued to exist from the Soviet era into the post-independence period. Until 1991, the republic’s Supreme Soviet, at the top of a vertically integrated institutional structure, had formally directed and regulated matters of local life, with local councils on various levels merely implementing policies programmed from the top down (Alymkulov and Kulaev, 2001, p 526). In their overview of changes since independence, Alymkulov and Kulaev argue that ‘there [was] no such understanding of the essence or limits of delegated state powers, leading to the permanent intrusion of the state into local self-government affairs’ (2001, p 564). The legislative patchwork of the 1990s provided ample room for local elites, such as former kolkhoz heads, to secure the best assets before legal regulations and accountability provisions were put in place (Steimann, 2011, p 72; see above, but also Beyer, 2016, p 55).

Throughout the 2000s, local governance structures and competencies have become better differentiated in the 2008 Law ‘On local self-governance and local administration’, with particular attention to democratically elected bodies as a counterpart to governmental sub-divisions. The current set-up of ‘local self-governance’ (Ru.: mestnoe samoupravlenie) features a balance between executive bodies like mayoral administrations (meriia) in cities, and rural administrations (aiyl okmotu) in rural municipalities, on the one hand, and representative bodies such as city and rural councils (gorodskii and aiyhnyi kenesh) on the other hand. Over the years, local administrations were
partly made responsible for maintaining infrastructure and basic operations while administering resources and dispensation of, for example, welfare and pensions. The gradual diminishing of state support and funding levels has put local administrations and councils in a more and more dilemmic situation, especially because local actors have little influence on the budgets they are allotted by the central government (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, p 520). Given the gaping underfunding of city and rural executive committees (aiyl okmotu) they often carry out only the bare minimum of their tasks, thus further driving out-migration and the associated problems discussed above of despair and destitution (Grävingholt et al, 2006; Steimann, 2011, p 62). The situation is further entrenched because province governors and district heads (akims) are appointed rather than elected, which means that ‘state representatives often feel more accountable to their superiors than to the inhabitants of their rayon or oblast’ and which, in turn, feeds into clientelistic and informal dealings replacing democratic and accountable patterns (Steimann, 2011, p 63).

In a similar way to questions of administration, welfare and service provision, a networked and decentralized approach is apparent in the way in which the maintenance of community security and public order are organized. There were already numerous public and semi-public organizations integrated with processes of local self-governance and social ordering at the end of the 1990s (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, pp 534–5) and their number increased further thereafter. The institutions and structures relevant for security provision and other issues of community governance, are listed in Table 5.1.

All the organizations listed in the table were part of communal life in the Soviet Union, with the exception of aksakal courts which ‘escaped’ Soviet attempts to eradicate them and were constituted as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism in 1996 (Beyer, 2016, p 28; see Chapter 4). Most of these bodies experienced a relative decline in importance and activity and have operated in places where they were most demanded by people. For instance, in large cities like Bishkek or Osh, district or mahalla committees or housing associations were sometimes relatively active in representing their inhabitants’ needs, while in some rural areas women’s councils (zhensovet) would try to foster solidarity and mutual help between women.

Overall, this institutional architecture and the ideational regimes it foregrounds were geared toward sustaining social order, harmony and peacefulness, even in the face of increasing strain and tension. This is most obvious in regard to Soviet times, when voluntary squads or neighbourhood committees were tasked with keeping the population under control and, in some cases, to collect intelligence and information that would help authorities to prevent open resistance and subversion (Alymkulov and Kulatov, 2001, p 548). These mechanisms of social ordering and conflict
management were equally useful for the new governing and economic elites of post-independence Kyrgyzstan. For example, the country’s first president, Askar Akaev, first legalized aksamal courts and then promoted their transformation into a country-wide institution because the purpose they fulfilled – the maintenance of peace, harmony, solidarity and mutual help among the dispossessed and precarious population across the country – both served his own purposes and were in perfect sync with the international donors’ agendas on decentralization and devolution of responsibility to the local level and grass roots governance (Beyer, 2016, p 33). On the other hand, the potential biases and omissions of aksamal’s dispute resolution in line with traditional law (adat utuk) alongside faint knowledge of statutory law also became apparent (Beyer, 2016; see Chapter 4). Thus, while they may be effective for maintaining social order, harmony and for building peace and facilitating inter-communal conciliation aksamal and other social institutions in Kyrgyzstan are prone to being only partially effective in their activities by virtue of their semi-public and informal nature. Some of these

Table 5.1: Community-level social institutions and structures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary squads, usually ‘voluntary people’s squads’ (Ru.: Dobrovolnaia Narodnaia Druzhina)</td>
<td>Groups of citizens who complement police and other law enforcement organs in maintaining public order; protecting state-owned corporate property or territorial borders during Soviet times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aksamal (elders’, literally ‘white beard’) courts</td>
<td>Voluntary courts which mediate and arbitrate in minor disputes, usually in the domestic or neighbourhood context; activity inscribed into law in 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s councils (zhenskii sovet or zhensovet)</td>
<td>A structure to gather women and represent their interests both in public life and in the production process, as well as oversee compliance with Soviet legislation on women’s entitlements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbourhood committee (Ru.: kvartalnyi komitet), also mahalla committee in Uzbek-style neighbourhood</td>
<td>Voluntary group of inhabitants of one block or estate who deal with their affairs and coordinate action between domkoms and higher levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House committees (Ru.: domovoi komitet or domkom)</td>
<td>Group of inhabitants of multi-storey houses regulating social affairs and solving problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential associations</td>
<td>Evolved as response to the privatization of multi-storey blocks and the corresponding transfer of responsibility from local administration to proprietors/proprietor associations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: Author
shortcomings were supposed to be mitigated by newly created LCPCs, which I will discuss in turn.

**LCPCs between executive authority and societal concerns**

After the web of Soviet and newly initiated institutions was more or less active in an overall piecemeal approach to social order and community security, the 2005 Law ‘On crime prevention’ (закон ‘О профилактике правонарушений’)\(^3\) regulated community security and crime prevention in an overarching framework and on all administrative levels from central government down to the village unit. Article 12–1 of the law defines the status and competencies of LCPCs as a ‘non-commercial organization founded on the territory of local self-administration for the purpose of the mutual participation of the organs of local self-administration and citizens in the prevention of crime’. Furthermore, LCPCs, would have the right to, among other things:

- constitute themselves as juridical persons;
- design various projects and programmes on questions of crime prevention in order to receive grants and other transfers, including from international organizations and actors;
- [and] be funded out of … the local budget in agreement with the local government; voluntary contributions of juridical or physical persons; [and] grants and other gratuitous and non-refundable support. (See note 3.)

LCPCs are thus not only a platform where citizens and the local self-administration prevent crime in a joint effort, but also serve as vehicles to attract and use international funding. The competencies of LCPCs seem fairly limited, as the decision to inaugurate an LCPC and transfer competencies and budgetary decisions to them rests with local administrations alone (article 12–1). Article 14 details the ample competencies of local administrations apart from this right of initiation, which range from ‘facilitat[ing] the development of LCPCs and coordinat[ing] their activities; consider[ing] the development of crime prevention measures in the socioeconomic development plans; confirm[ing] … other programmes on crime prevention’ and further budget allocation and review activities. Regarding local governments’ tasks to establish LCPCs and facilitate their work, the law has no binding character and, in this sense, establishes a unilateral mechanism: local administrations have rights to the initiation and coordination of LCPCs’ work (alongside some obligations within

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\(^3\) The law was signed by the then newly inaugurated President Kurmanbek Bakiev on 25 June 2005, available in Russian and Kyrgyz language at: [http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1679](http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1679)
the measure of their capacities) while LCPCs or their constituent bodies are largely bound to carry out their tasks but lack scrutiny or feedback competencies vis-à-vis local administrations. Thus, LCPCs’ work is largely dependent on local government as far as the law is concerned. In addition, law enforcement organs are another determining party as, ‘crime prevention activities … are organized and coordinated through consultations of the law enforcement organs … on the provincial, city, district and local government’ (article 7).

Overall, the 2005 Law on Crime Prevention constitutes a clear prioritization of governmental and executive authority in the conceptualization of crime prevention as the prime mechanism for community security. This seems problematic, as public initiative and the role of various representative bodies are subordinate and limited. The latter are merely foreseen in the secondary aspects of design and implementation of crime prevention measures or in the gathering of data and intelligence through which health, education and social welfare institutions are to assist law enforcement and executive organs’ operations (article 11). The idea to combat and prevent crime through data and information gathering, analysis and subsequent devising of measures and policies is convincing with its rational logic of evidence-based policy making. It also has limitations, however, as essentialism and exclusionary methodologies used in the analysis can lead to alienation and other adverse effects in the population, as I discussed in the section on community security in Chapter 4. An essentializing epistemology is especially apparent in the definition of crime prevention in article 1 as:

actions (deitelnost) … directed towards the identification, study, remedy and neutralization of the reasons for any unlawful actions being carried out (sovasheniu protivopravnykh deistviy) and any conditions enabling this; as well as toward ensuring favourable living conditions and the individual upbringing of certain categories of persons, whose behaviour reveals anti-social tendencies (kategorii lic, v deistviakh kotorykh imeetsa antiobshestvennaia napravlennost); the activation of factors that stimulate the law-abiding behaviour of citizens; and the design and implementation of systems of legal, socioeconomic, organizational, educational (vospitatelnykh), special and other measures for the prevention of unlawful actions. (emphasis added)

Although this definition demonstrates some degree of complexity, the emphasized passage indicates an assumption that ‘certain’, in other words identifiable, ‘categories of persons’ will likely require measures for upbringing, education and other matters in order to make them refrain from anti-social or criminal behaviour. This formulation suggests a link between social belonging and anti-social behavioural tendencies and thus seems misconceived, as the statistical likelihood of a person from a
group engaging in deviant behaviour is not the same as ascribing certain behaviours as part of the general characteristics of that group. Basing analysis and measures on group categories might thus create a self-fulfilling prophecy and lead to scapegoating and pathologization of groups on the basis of stereotypes, which is anything but conducive to solving issues of crime and conflict. Therefore, the pathologization and ‘othering’ already identified as an issue in community safety debates in the UK in the 1990s (see Chapter 3) is apparent in the Law on Crime Prevention in the Kyrgyz Republic. The analyses in the next section and also in Chapter 7 will show how analytical thinking and conceptualization of measures by LCPCs and analogous bodies is not infrequently based on categories of people, who are thus unduly homogenized. This, in turn, foregrounds the post-liberal character of community security and social ordering where othering and corresponding forms of undue treatment and exclusion are combined with claims to compliance with human rights and democratic participation.

International security and peacebuilding programming

To provide background for the significance of LCPCs for debates on post-liberal statebuilding, a brief note on the role of international actors in Kyrgyzstan is warranted. Especially after the inter-communal clashes in June 2010, international organizations have set up large-scale peacebuilding community security programmes, making Kyrgyzstan another internationally renowned ‘Peaceland’ (Autesserre, 2014). One of rather few existing overview articles lists more than ten international organizations and bilateral development organizations such as the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) or the US Agency for International Development (USAID) which funded both short-term conflict prevention, mediation and reconciliation projects and long-term ones for community security and community policing, among other things, which have amounted to around 64.7 million euro since 2010 (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021, appendix 1).

Rather than creating new structures, several of these actors have pursued the idea of working with existing structures or at least tapping into the existing social networks and institutions discussed above. Most notable in this respect is the ‘Community Security Initiative’ (CSI) of the OSCE, which supported and helped to restructure policing work in conflict-affected localities with the help of civilian police advisers’ monthly ‘community-police discussion forums … where police, local authorities and civil society representatives talk about their concerns’. As part of its Criminal Justice

Programme, the UNODC has facilitated the creation of community-level crime prevention plans and financed cooperative community security and police reform projects of civil society organizations, which are analysed in Chapter 7.\(^5\) Similar to the OSCE, it has provided infrastructural support by co-funding the refurbishment of local police stations in two districts in the country.

The UK-based international NGO Saferworld, with which I conducted the field research analysed below, has taken a similar approach of working with local partners across communities in southern Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In their ‘community security approach’ the organization aims at ‘supporting communities and security actors jointly to identify and implement locally appropriate ways of responding to causes of insecurity’ (Saferworld, 2015b, p 3). The organization’s aim is thus to foster cooperation between the local population and, on the other hand, local government, law enforcement and security organs (Saferworld, 2015b, p 4). This is a crucial undertaking given the fact that in many communities, people have lost trust in these organs because of their perceived corruption, inability to protect people, and, even worse, individual police and other law enforcement officers’ complicity with and active perpetration of violence, abuse and extortion (Saferworld, 2015b, p 3). In trying to foster cooperative relations between these parties, Saferworld also tries to promote an evidence- and analysis-based approach to local actions, in which a ‘process of identifying → analysing → prioritising conflict and security concerns’ is followed by the ‘planning → implementing → [and] evaluating [of] responses’ (Saferworld, 2015b, pp 5–6). Much emphasis is put on the idea of ‘hear[ing] different perspectives and concerns’ and activating and providing a ‘safe place’ for potentially excluded and vulnerable groups within community populations throughout the process, which also means that law enforcement and local administration members are involved ‘wherever possible’ but not necessarily in every step of the process (Saferworld, 2015b, pp 5, 8, 10). In this sense, Saferworld and its Kyrgyzstani partner, the Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), are trying to nurture potential and build capacity among local civil society and activist elements within communities who are supposed to defend the interests of the population in the cooperative arrangements for community security provision.

Saferworld put a high emphasis on working with already existing structures to enhance their capacity (Saferworld, 2015a), not least because LCPCs specifically often turned out to be ‘dysfunctional, non-funded

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and composed of community representatives without the will or ability to undertake the centres’ work’ (Saferworld, 2015b, p 12). The organization usually approached the members of LCPCs and increased their motivation and skill set by providing training in conflict prevention and community security planning, and by initiating dialogue with other local stakeholders. In cases where LCPCs were non-existent or had ceased to work, the organization gathered interested people and helped them found so-called Community Security Working Groups (CSWGs), which would make plans and implement measures on crime and conflict prevention and aim at creating an LCPC later on (Saferworld, 2015a). At the time of writing, Saferworld and its partner FTI have supported such initiatives in 32 communities nationwide and have founded four new LCPCs (correspondence March 2020). It is important to stress again that LCPCs are effectively, as discussed above, under the oversight of the MIA (via the primacy of law enforcement agencies as well as local executive organs), which retains the right to veto or align to its own principles and agendas the activities carried out by the Saferworld community security programme.

The activities reviewed above only present a small share of the peacebuilding and security programming that has occurred in Kyrgyzstan since 2010. Yet, compared to others, these organizations have been distinguished by their grounded and long-term engagement that promised a more sustainable impact. As several analyses of peacebuilding and conflict-prevention programmes in southern Kyrgyzstan have pointed out, these activities have often been focused on more short-term and measurable/presentable approaches and practices, which were likely to be limited in terms of their structural and substantive effects (for example, Megoran et al, 2014). Thus, many actors have tried to promote harmony (Kg.: yntymak) and tolerance (Ru./Kg.: tolerantnost) between communities and ethnicities by organizing sports or cultural events among young people or mutual visits between different communities (Bichsel, 2005; Beyer and Girke, 2015). As Reeves (2015b) has shown, these rituals are often well known to their participants and take on a performative character that distracts from the persistence of underlying tensions and conflicts in the respective community. The idea of changing the behaviour of local authorities through long-term cooperation, or by building skills and capacities among local administrations and civil society to stand up for people’s interests, bears testimony to an attempt to create more fundamental and long-term change – an argument I will revisit in Chapter 7. The following analysis presents insights from my collaborative research with Saferworld and various partner communities to indicate that this cooperative approach to community security and peacebuilding proved to be advantageous yet still had its challenges and contradictions.
Practices and discourses of community security in southern Kyrgyzstan

In line with the cooperative approach of this research (see Chapter 3), the present analysis is based on research I conducted together with and supported by Saferworld Kyrgyzstan. Having established contact and been invited to use a desk in the organization’s main office in Osh, I accompanied a contracted consultant in visiting a number of LCPCs in southern Kyrgyzstan to undertake interviews and write them up into profiles which, combined with other material, were compiled in a brochure to be presented to national partners, including the MIA. The profiling visits, carried out between 11 and 15 June 2015, were scheduled to last up to two hours and revolve around a standard questionnaire. The schedule was tight, with three LCPC visits per day and considerable geographical distances between the locations. In exchange for helping to conduct the conversations and writing up the LCPC profiles, it was agreed that I could use the material gathered for my PhD research, while mentioning my position as a PhD researcher and Visiting Fellow with the American University in Central Asia (AUCA) was left as optional, depending on the situation. The final purpose of producing a brochure on ‘Success Stories’ of LCPCs (Saferworld, 2016) was somewhat peculiar, especially from a perspective concerned with scholarly positionality and critical analysis. Yet, given the clear separation between my role to support the production of the brochure and my own research project, the ‘success stories’ framing proved to be a rather useful way to understand what was working in the respective communities and what challenges they encountered.

An important impression from the LCPC visits was that, besides the ‘success stories’ we would eventually write, LCPC representatives devoted much time to recounting the multiple expectations and pressures, and often indifference, that they were facing from different local administration bodies and the population. Hence, some were struggling to present or even remember positive results of their work, so it took my colleague and myself repetitive questioning and tedious inquiry into details to gather enough data to construct a success narrative on a given LCPC. This was further complicated by the fact that some LCPC activists did not speak fluent Russian, as Kyrgyz is the language of communication across the country and especially in many rural areas. Although these barriers could be overcome thanks to translating support in some cases, the terms, concepts and overall workflow used in the community security programme were in themselves complex to navigate for some local representatives. The ‘constructed’ nature of the success narratives in the final brochure may thus raise concerns that these exaggerate and euphemize the effects of LCPCs’ work, similar to what Heathershaw (2011) argued on Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) local
development projects in Tajikistan. However, this was less of an issue here because the brochure was less of an M&E document than an additional communication tool in Saferworld’s efforts to strengthen stakeholder awareness of community security in south Kyrgyzstan. To this end, it raised awareness about the obstacles faced by the respective LCPCs and their future plans and development.

In the following part, I discuss the main areas of concern for community security and crime prevention in the surveyed communities, as well as key aspects of their work. In a more in-depth analysis based on follow-up visits, I show how the LCPC in Bazar-Korgon aimed to build peace and mitigate tensions among its multi-ethnic population through the idea of ‘people’s friendship’ to further unpack the implications of LCPCs’ work for post-liberal forms of ordering and its embeddedness in the imaginaries of statebuilding identified in Chapter 4.

**LCPC ‘success stories’: overall results and implications**

To give a brief overview of the overall results of the LCPC profiling, Table 5.2 presents the different issues LCPCs were reportedly working on, with the respective number of times mentioned across the nine LCPCs in the ‘General’ column and the times mentioned as success stories in the ‘Success’ column (interviewees were told to identify one main ‘Success story’ per LCPC). The results from this profiling study present only a small number of communities throughout the vast territory of southern Kyrgyzstan, but comparing them with the results from a report discussed in Chapter 7 (CURR, 2016) and other community security initiatives (OSCE and El-Pikir, 2013) shows that the thrust of the issues presented is of relevance for community security in localities throughout the country. I have structured the issues named into the three clusters of ‘Resources and infrastructure’; ‘Social, communal and institutional’; and ‘Family and individual’ issues.

This compilation demonstrates that LCPCs deal with a wide range of issues, which have varying implications for politics on the national level. Issues in the first cluster of ‘Resources and infrastructure’ appear somewhat more straightforward as they are conceivable through the (neo)liberal modern episteme of science and technology. Thus, a problem can be relatively clearly defined through certain parameters and subsequently be solved through coordination and negotiation, which can require the mobilization of social and political pressure – especially in cases where regional and national authorities are needed to solve issues, such as in border regions – or of social support and contribution to municipal-level projects such as the building of canals, roads and other infrastructure. Issues in this area thus help to showcase communities’ own capacities to address problems and conflicts at least if they are confined to the municipal level. This is reflective of the decentralization
Table 5.2: Issues that LCPCs are working on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>‘Success’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resources and infrastructure</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land disputes</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New arrivals and squatted territories (Ru.: novostroiki)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Border issues (crossings, etc.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water conflicts (inter-communal; drinking and industrial; usage rota violation)</td>
<td>6 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street traffic danger</td>
<td>2 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interethnic tension/conflict</td>
<td>6 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-communal youth conflict</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rackeering (youth, school)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious radicalism (including religious pluralism; one ‘extremism’ only)</td>
<td>7 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust toward law enforcement organs (including corruption in law enforcement, electricity usage, detentions)</td>
<td>4 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of trust toward local government bodies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile delinquency (including hooliganism)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cattle theft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family, individual</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration (including consequence of infantile precarity)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family conflicts (including divorce; domestic conflict/bytovoi konflikt)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early marriage and divorce (including unregistered marriage)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young female precarity (single mothers, impoverished)</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive spending on lifecycle celebrations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/drug abuse</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncategorized</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Specific (sub-)issues are listed in brackets if they have been mentioned but can be reasonably included in a given issue count (for example ‘including religious pluralism’); additions in brackets without ‘including’ provide detail on the respective issue, for instance ‘Family conflicts (domestic conflict)’.
Source: Saferworld (2016); Author
and responsibilization of local self-governance and administrative structures discussed in the first and second sections of this chapter.

Disputes over land and water usage often occur on an inter-communal level and not infrequently across state borders, for instance those of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. As Reeves observes, the creation of newly independent nations has affected the penetration of former areas of free movement across Soviet republican borders with new borders of sovereign states, which are guarded by military posts and barbed wire (Reeves, 2014). During Soviet times, infrastructures had been built with little regard to republican borders but according to economic and technical rationales, so that many water canals and pipes provide Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz villages in their course and there are points where streets from different territories meet or traverse administrative borders. LCPCs thus have to resolve quarrels over water usage rotas and infrastructural adjustment, which quite commonly requires the mobilization of regional and national political actors, as in the case of LCPCs in Batken and Jalal-Abad provinces (Saferworld, 2016, pp 22–4, 28–30). The legal uncertainty and arbitrary behaviour of border guards has given rise to tensions and disputes, with car accidents at crossings resulting in ‘fights and violent incidents’ and disputes over water and border crossings leading to confrontations of large crowds (Reeves, 2014, pp 218ff; Saferworld, 2015b, pp 9–10). In such situations, LCPCs and local government bodies are often confined to a rather helpless role of intermediaries who must quickly react and convey the urgency of concerns to superiors in the national hierarchy; a dependency sadly illustrated in the May 2021 large-scale conflict around the Tajik enclave Vorukh.

In the village of Tash-Bulak, a rural community located on the outskirts of Jalal-Abad at the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, a major road leading through the area proved to be a major security issue. A constant increase in traffic volume and the number of road accidents and casualties required urgent action, especially to protect schoolchildren who crossed the street at dangerous and unmarked spots. While the local administration did not seem to pay much attention, the newly established CSWG tackled the problem by installing speed limit signs, building a pavement in the affected street section, and by organizing school lessons given by traffic police (GAI) staff on traffic rules and safety. These measures yielded immediate results, as no accidents involving pedestrians were reported in the following months. According to the working group members, this initiative can be called a success because people in the community started caring about and supporting this cause when they saw the LCPC members start to tackle the problem on their own, through voluntary initiative (Ru.: na obshestvennykh nachalakh), without

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6 Profiling visit on 13 July 2015, see Saferworld (2016, pp 6–10).
any reward given. The support and mobilization in their own community also helped to lobby the local administration and traffic police departments to help solve the issue.

Among 12 profiling visits in the south of Kyrgyzstan, the Tash-Bulak working group stood out as a positive example, as it demonstrated determination and confidence in light of the successful resolution of this infrastructural issue. On a follow-up visit, I tried to find out more about the motivation and mobilization principles of the group. After repeated questions on the reasons for members investing considerable free time to work for the LCPC and its constituent institutions, the head of the group, who was also deputy head of the rural executive committee, described his own motivation as follows:

‘So what, patriotism might play a role [in motivating us] … but whether there is work or no work, a wage or no wage … this town is ours, these people are ours, all these children are my future, I am not indifferent … I am working here for the state, whether it’s real work or not [mne zdes vot na gosudarstvennuiu rabotu, rabotau ne rabotau]. I am a human. You shall do good things, because something you have to do [dolzhen delat chelovek]. And from us something good shall remain, a good future. And in the future, there should also be good people. Their security matters to me [ix ne bezopasnost bezrazlichno mne ne byvaet] … If I only work for my own interests [radi svoego interesa], what would this be, then I’m an animal, or what? … But we are people and we have a conscience that tells us to do good. That’s my human duty, that’s how I understand it.’

Thus, the head of the working group, and the members who tacitly agreed with him, declared their voluntary work as a matter of fulfilling the duty implied by one’s human nature and conscience. Working to maintain security and basic services for the community was attributed to an underlying, universal essence of human life, by which people who are able to contribute to the collective good are morally obliged to do so and risk being identified as merely self-interested and even ‘animalistic’ if they refuse to contribute. On the other hand, ideas of patriotism or Soviet heritage as a unifying framework were not denied by the group, but seemed to be less significant. The reasons for the group’s motivation could not betray the fact, however, that not all people would be able to engage in and support LCPC activities to the same extent as the group members, some of whom were local administration employees (as in the case of the social worker and the group head) or

Group discussion, Tash-Bulak, 30 October 2015.
were able to devote time to this cause because their family and economic situation allowed them to. The group agreed that there might be limits to the participation of the poor rural population and that more would have to be done to include wider social groups in community-building and rights education to address issues such as lack of registration or early marriages, which were another priority problem.

This leads on to the cluster of family and individual level issues which were of equal relevance as the ‘Resource and infrastructure’ category (with the former mentioned 16 times and the latter 17 times). But other than in the latter category with its straightforwardly identifiable issues and relatively clear division of institutional competencies, LCPCs appeared to be, on average, less equipped to deal with security problems in this area. This is because, on the one hand, upbringing, moral and practical education and family relations are habitually seen as an area curated by social and educational institutions or, given their downsizing and incapacitation, of family and kin networks. On the other hand, LCPCs and their constituents such as aksakal courts, women’s committees or social workers would usually only step in when tensions and conflicts within families erupted into open confrontation or when people affected by domestic violence or other issues would actively approach them. LCPCs were, in fact, struggling to address the social effects of the transformation and increasing strain put on families in light of the translocal livelihoods discussed above. These included, apart from child labour and exploitation by surrogate parents, an increasing number of early marriages, subsequent divorces and the consequential social stigmatization and material destitution of young divorced women and single mothers. With the country-wide rate of underage married girls at 13 per cent in 2015, this was a problem of national dimensions.8

The LCPC in the Mirmakhmudov district of the city of Nookat in western Osh province recognized an increasing number of young women in need of material support.9 Abandoned by their husbands, young mothers lacked both support and the right to claim alimony or child benefits as their marriages had not been registered but conducted through the traditional Islamic nike ceremony. According to an LCPC representative, their social stigma and exclusion made many women ‘suffer from anxiety, depression and, in some cases, made them commit suicide as the last way out of such a situation’. The LCPC tried to address the situation by organizing a seminar with LCPC members, the neighbourhood committee, and

8 Radio Azattyk, ‘В Кыргызстане количество ранних браков не уменьшается [The number of early marriages in Kyrgyzstan is not decreasing]’, 9 December 2015, http://rus.azattyk.org/a/27424930.html
imams on the topic of early marriage and marriage registration, with imams soon afterwards promising to only perform *nike* ceremonies for couples who have obtained official marriage registrations. They further organized information events for the population on the topics of early marriage, divorce and the role of the LCPC and disseminated brochures on the topic under the title ‘What is an official marriage? [Chto takoe ofitsialnyi brak?]’. Additional targeted support and consultation with young couples in cases of quarrels and the allocation of expert staff to the local marriage registration office seemed to have made the overall approach effective: the level of early marriages dropped from 30 in 2015 to only two in 2016 (Mamatjalil uluu, 2017, p 33); imams complied with the code of conduct mentioned above and raised more awareness among the religious population; and the population at large, especially parents, became more aware about the negative effects of early marriages. Yet, while the effect of this initiative seems straightforward, it should not be forgotten that the basic living conditions of people in the town will not have changed. Thus, even if girls are not forced to get married as early as 17, it is, nevertheless, likely that practices like arranged marriages still persist, especially in light of the strong role of religious beliefs throughout Kyrgyzstan, according to which girls should be married or at least have a future husband determined for them at the age of 13 (Mamatjalil uluu, 2017, p 29). Overall, then, it seems that LCPCs can address and change some of the factors that affect community security negatively, specifically in regard to gender-based violence, which has become a more acceptable discussion topic and is frequently tackled through awareness campaigns and specific measures (correspondence, October 2021). On the other hand, given their limited scope, mission statement and resources, a more fundamental transformation of the living conditions and livelihoods that produce precarious living conditions in rural and semi-urban Kyrgyzstan lies beyond the realm of these institutions.

As in the area of ‘Family and individual’ issues, security challenges in the ‘Social, communal and institutional’ category appear complex, contentious and hard to transform. Within this domain, the items of ‘Interethnic conflict/tension’ and ‘Religious radicalism’ are of predominant concern and mentioned more often than all other issues together (13 vs. 11 times, respectively). These issues of public security (obshestvennaia bezopasnost) are at the heart of community security work throughout the country, especially in multi-ethnic and border communities in the South. Consequently, most LCPCs carried out measures to prevent and reduce tensions and confront stereotypes between separate communities, as well as of people joining and supporting radical religious groups. The following part will focus on one LCPC’s efforts to prevent group- and community-based conflict through the idea of ‘peoples’ friendship’.
Building ‘peoples’ friendship’ after identity-based conflict

As I have argued in discussing the ‘politics of sovereignty’ and its discourses of ‘ethno-nationalism’ and multicultural civic nationalism in Chapter 4, contradictions between official policies and institutional arrangements on the one hand and the discourse of ‘people’s friendship’ and ‘Kyrgyzstan is our common home’ on the other appear to be an inherent feature of Soviet and post–Soviet Kyrgyzstan.10 Unsurprisingly, ‘people’s friendship’ (druzhba narodov) has become the core idea behind numerous peacebuilding events and programmes, which try to call people and communities to unity, harmony and peaceful relations in the face of the violence in June 2010 and the continued impunity of perpetrators, persisting tensions and everyday forms of violence and marginalization (Lottholz, 2018a, 2018b). This dilemma of unifying people while their differences have been the basis for violence and (partly still ongoing) discrimination is faced by peacebuilders and administrators in communities across southern Kyrgyzstan.

This situation is well exemplified by the town of Bazar-Korgon west of Jalal-Abad and about 20 kilometres north of the Kyrgyz–Uzbek border, which was gravely affected by the violent clashes in June 2010 (McBrien, 2013). As the two representatives of the local LCPC reported during the profiling interview,11 relations between the population and the police had already been strained in the months and years leading up to the 2010 ‘events’. Unjustified detentions and interrogations, one of which had ended fatally, especially after the June 2010 violence, produced a feeling of grave insecurity and people tried to avoid the police at all costs. During the ‘June events’, the destruction of numerous properties and the killing of 15 people revealed the ‘deep interethnic hostility and the inaction of the law enforcement organs’, but also involved civilian armed violence, killing one Kyrgyz police officer on 13 June. The post-violence period was characterized by continued tensions and irregularities in law enforcement and judicial procedures, as detentions to extort payments abounded. This insecurity meant many people sent their children to relatives or to work in Russia and in some cases entire families left their homes behind.

These issues presented an urgent matter when Saferworld and its partner FTI initiated conversations and the foundation of a CSWG in 2011. The first event organized by the group was a roundtable to start a conversation between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Bazar-Korgon, and it was primarily women who participated and voiced some of the grievances and worries held by people. This helped to further identify issues in a series of meetings with

10 This analysis is partly adapted from Lottholz (2018b).
11 Profiling visit on 13 July 2015; the following analysis is based on the LCPC profile in Saferworld (2016, pp 18–21).
representatives of law enforcement organs, the prosecutor’s office, the local administration and international partners, where a joint approach toward discussing problems and solutions was found and different measures were agreed to improve police performance and inspire trust from the population. These measures included the setting up of a help line *(telefon doveriia)*, compulsory police badges and material improvements of police equipment, the opening of new police posts across town to enable quick reaction to violations, but also accountability mechanisms such as an annual report of the Regional Administration for Internal Affairs *[ROVD]* at ‘town gatherings’ *[selskii skhod]*. These measures, together with a change in police officers’ behaviour, as they would wear uniforms and name badges whenever in service, helped to improve the population’s perception and trust in the institution.

The LCPCs’ attempts to mitigate ethnic tension and encourage a spirit of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence reflect the Soviet idea of ‘people’s friendship’. The events reported by the LCPCs reveal a consistent attempt to promote friendship and peaceful gathering, for instance at a ‘Festival of friendship’ *(Festival druzhby)* with music and dance performances, a sport events series entitled ‘Sport – a messenger of peace’ *(Sport – Poslannik mira)*, dialogue events entitled ‘Park of friendship’ *(Park druzhby)* and ‘Avenue of friendship’ *(Aleia druzhby)* *(Saferworld, 2016*, p 18), and the setting up of a new seating area *(besedka)* in the school courtyard (see *Figure 5.1*). As the two LCPC representatives explained during the profiling interview, the idea was to create open spaces where people would be able to get to know and spend time with each other. Furthermore, an arts competition served to select the best way to illustrate the community’s wishes for peace, which included a map of Kyrgyzstan with spaces for messages from the pupils of the local school to thus gather and make visible young people’s perspectives.12

The different ‘friendship’-themed events and the new *besedka* (seating area) in the local school-yard present viable ways of creating space for interaction and coexistence, which clearly resonate with the ideas of ‘people’s friendship’ and ‘unity in diversity’ discussed above. Having grown up with these maxims, for most adults in Kyrgyzstan it is the most appropriate idea of interethnic relations, which resonates with the multicultural model of Soviet modernity which I grouped under the ‘politics of sovereignty’ imaginary in Chapter 4. Thus, for former Soviet, and now Kyrgyzstani citizens, a multi-ethnic and peaceful Kyrgyzstan should not be disrupted by conflicts and divisions. The painting near the local school further shows how discourses of peace, harmony and unity are reproduced by young people, as the message written by one young person clearly resonates with these discourses: ‘We wish

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12 Interview with LCPC representative during follow-up visit, 30 October 2015.
Kyrgyzstan peace, unity, harmony, welfare, justice and friendship!’ At the same time, the choice of the map of Kyrgyzstan as a basis to accommodate the different wishes and hopes of the local pupils also symbolizes the important role of territory, nation and state for a peaceful future.

When thinking about the effects of these peacebuilding initiatives, the most obvious question concerns the audience of these events and new infrastructures: who attends and makes use of these spaces? It appears likely that they are utilized by those who already have a basic readiness to interact with people beyond their own immediate social circle (and possibly from other ethnicities). However, whether people from economically and culturally marginalized parts of the communities would also seize these opportunities to reach out and build new bridges appears more than doubtful. This was confirmed by one LCPC representative, who pointed to the history of interethnic tensions during Soviet times, with clashes having taken place.

**Figure 5.1:** Peacebuilding based on the ‘peoples’ friendship’ discourse, Bazar–Korgon

Notes: (a) ‘Avenue of friendship’; (b) ‘Friendship square’ with seating area (*besedka*); a sign is indicating the funding by Saferworld, FTI and the US embassy; (c) a map of Kyrgyzstan held by hands in which local pupils wrote messages; (d) the hand on the right reads ‘We wish Kyrgyzstan peace, unity, harmony, welfare, justice and friendship!’ [Kyrgyz: *Kyrgyzstanga kaaloobuuz tynchtik, birimdik, yntymak, beypildik, adiletik, dostuk!*] Source: Author
in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1990s (see Tishkov, 1995) and explained how the policies on urban structuring and education system after the fall of the Soviet Union gave rise to new separations along ethnic lines:

‘The problem is this: In the past, Uzbeks and Kyrgyz were going together to school. Class “a”, that was Kyrgyz, the “b” classes were Uzbeks, and the “v” classes [the third letter of the Cyrillic alphabet] were Russians. Here in our school they learnt three languages, more than 40 years ago and they would always live and work together in a friendly way. Just when the Union broke up, they divided up schools, divided up the territorial administrative units [uchastki], told the Uzbeks to go there and the Kyrgyz to go here, even though they had lived together. So they created Kyrgyz and Uzbek mono-ethnic communities [naselemye punkty].’

This reordering of urban space after Kyrgyzstan’s independence presents a significant ‘re-materialization’ of ethno-territorial thinking, which was closely associated with the materialization and, in 1999, closing of the Uzbek–Kyrgyz border after incursions of Islamist fighters into Uzbekistan (Megoran, 2017, pp 19ff). While such compartmentalization is to the benefit of few, if any, the adverse effects have been most painfully felt during the ‘2010 events’ and their aftermath. The LCPC representative concluded:

‘people wouldn’t be the way they are now if they worked together, went to school together, played together at sports events and if they knew each other. But now they do not want to be involved in such events, they are scared [oni boiatsa]. And the authorities are also afraid and do not let us go to them, we’re not invited into the other school, ‘it’s not necessary’, they say, ‘don’t do it’. But let them mix with each other whether it’s a sports event, a festival or something else! Whether it’s at work or in a holiday camp [v lagere], that’s it, you have to mix them and they will live, they will develop a positive view [u nikh poiavlioutsa khoroshie positivy].’

This makes the challenges of peacebuilding and interethnic reconciliation and trust building abundantly clear: with ethnicized territorial, labour market and welfare policies and provisioning already nurturing tensions during the Soviet period, authorities knew no better than to create mono-lingual schools and mono-ethnic communities (naselemye punkty) to strengthen national languages, cultures and traditions (Brubaker, 2011, pp 1802ff). As new generations grew up in isolation from one another, hardening stereotypes and deepening distrust were compounded by economic competition. The relative wealth of Uzbeks, some of whom sported an affluent lifestyle thanks
to their bazar businesses and networks with nearby Uzbekistan, stood in contrast to the dwindling livelihood opportunities of the poorer part of the Kyrgyz community, who increasingly depended on connections with the local administration or labour migration to the CIS and had accumulated frustration and envy by 2010 (McBrien, 2013, p 261). The idea of building ‘people’s friendship’ between ethnic communities thus confronted historically and institutionally embedded ethnic divisions which were reinforced by ethno-nationalist rhetoric in national-level politics.

Apart from these semantic contradictions, the means of the LCPC were very limited to reach a substantial part of the vast population of 36,000 scattered across various communities around Bazar-Korgon. The average events usually attract between 20 and maximum 200 people, which, in the representative’s words can be regarded a ‘drop in the ocean [kapli v more]’. He also stated that, given that the people who come to community security and peacebuilding events will usually be the ones with a rather wide horizon anyway, events need to also include ‘housewives, those who do not work, idlers (bezdelniki) and, how do you say, all layers of society … you basically should invite them to all events … then it will get better in our community, that’s what I think, that’s how it seems to me’. This suggests that reaching out to the entire community still requires more work and capacity on the part of the LCPC.

A further challenge lies in the persisting grievances and feelings of injustice in light of the still unaddressed misconduct in relation to detentions, trials and money extortion which were tolerated or actively carried out by law enforcement agencies. Addressing and bringing to justice would have seemed a precondition to involve the entire population of the town in a more sustainable building of peace, trust and coexistence. Yet, making progress in this area seems to lie beyond the LCPC’s scope, as it focused on forging a dialogue with law enforcement and security organs in order to secure their cooperation and improve police performance as a first, basic step. In the words of a Saferworld report quoted at the outset of the book: ‘addressing less serious issues together with local authorities and law enforcement agencies gave the community security working groups the skills and confidence to tackle more complex issues later on’ (Saferworld, 2015b, p 11). Meanwhile, investigation of the (post-)June 2010 crimes would have to be initiated at the provincial or national level. Given that authorities have little interest in opening these cases, this precondition for acceptance on part of the wider community is unlikely to be met, which limits the peace and harmony that have been built in this and other communities, and will make them appear superficial and wrong in the eyes of the victims of the 2010 events. Seen from the prism of imaginaries of statebuilding proposed in Chapter 4, the human rights and democratic discourse (see Saferworld, 2016) that situate the LCPC’s work in the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary seem hard to reconcile with the ethno-national thinking and law enforcement and security organs’
prioritization of stability that still took precedence and effectively remained unchallenged in community security affairs.

Conclusion

The analysis of peacebuilding and community security initiatives after the ‘people’s friendship’ discourse, and in the case of early marriages and traffic infrastructure issues has served to illustrate the complexity and situatedness of community-level security and peace in Kyrgyzstan: on the one hand, LCPCs managed to bring together stakeholders and make them take steps toward remedying problems and restoring infrastructures, services and the trust of the population toward state institutions or across ethnic communities. On the other hand, the analysis has shown how the small steps achieved by this work, captured in the ‘success stories’ narrative, need to be seen against the background of wider historical, political and socioeconomic challenges. While only briefly flagged up in the discussion of the LCPCs’ work, these challenges and contradictions have been developed in the other sections of the chapter and are foregrounded in the examination of imaginaries and discourses of social ordering in Chapter 4.

In trying to provide a well-founded contextual picture of community security in Kyrgyzstan, I have started by showing how the economic collapse and the withdrawal and downsizing of state institutions and provisioning have created precarious and deeply uncertain living conditions for most of the country’s population. More particularly, the changes of the 1990s have given rise to a moral economy in which people’s survival has come to be dependent on largely informalized practices and relations and on labour migration and the translocal organization of livelihoods. The significant implications of these trends for community security are the increasing number of ‘social orphans’ and entrenching trends in early marriages and domestic violence mirroring increasing psychological strain experienced by large parts of the population. In a second step, I outlined the context of local administration and its slow restructuring from a sole vertical integration on the executive side toward a balancing with representative bodies such as city and rural councils (gorodskii and aylnyi kenesh). The discussion further surveyed local-level social institutions which have lived on from the Soviet into the post-Soviet period and have been institutionalized and incorporated into local ordering, law enforcement and crime prevention work. Most notably, the newly founded LCPCs present an attempt of Kyrgyz governments in the 2000s to create bodies that coordinate other local structures, including aksakal or women’s courts and neighbourhood committees, to maintain order and prevent crime and conflict, and ideally do so with the help of international project funding while conforming to the priorities and orders of local or higher-level authorities.
Two deep-reaching reflections on the reconfiguration of social ordering, law enforcement and statebuilding emerge from the contextual picture and the more in-depth analysis of LCPCs’ work. The first concerns a shift from a paternalist and almost omnipresent Soviet (as well as early post-Soviet) state to a neoliberal or, as argued by Kurtović and Hromadžić in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian context (2019), ‘cannibal’ state which has withdrawn in most areas of life, leaving people behind to secure livelihoods and organize social order on their own, while retaining capacities to regulate and interfere in some other key areas. This has been most apparent in the decentralization of administrative and law enforcement functions and the corresponding responsibilization at the community level. Thus, what Akaev initiated with his Law ‘On aksakal courts’ in 2002 was continued by his successor Bakiev with the Law ‘On crime prevention’ in 2005 and constituted a process of outsourcing of ordering competencies that would otherwise have remained with the police and judiciary or local administrations, all of which were increasingly incapable of carrying out related tasks.

With the founding of LCPCs as the coordinating body for local institutions and public order bodies, community-level crime prevention and security provision were still retained as a competency of the MIA, but local-level bodies and civil society were recruited to help analyse and tackle security challenges. The result of this decentralization trajectory, which resonates with Western public management and ‘good governance’ ideas and adapts them to the local reality was, similar to an analogous process in the West discussed in Chapter 2, a responsibilization of the communal level for preventing and tackling crime. Meanwhile, the counter-aspect of strengthening accountability of provincial- and national-level authorities and reviewing and possibly changing policies has largely been ignored. Community security programming has, in this sense, been strong on the security side while challenges in the economic, employment, family, health and other sectors that are an important factor in conflict and insecurity have largely remained unaddressed. Such a ‘security-first’ approach points to the instantiation of a neoliberal form of governmentality which renders most attempts of ordering through ‘liberal peace’ ideas to be ineffective and contradictory at best, and as subjugating and violent at worst. This has been most apparent in the approach of ‘addressing less serious issues’ first to develop ‘the skills and confidence to tackle more complex issues later on’ (Saferworld, 2015b, p 11), as it was practised in Bazar-Korgon and effectively accepted that issues with injustice and impunity during and after the 2010 events could not be addressed and brought to justice in the present political order. Here, the post-liberal trajectory on which community-level security and peace evolved was most obvious.

Another observation that further substantiates this argument is the temporary and disembedded nature of LCPCs and analogous local-level
structures. As in-depth analysis has shown, many LCPCs across Kyrgyzstan are largely inactive and incapacitated and thus mostly depend on international support to work effectively (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021). Authorities have mostly focused on controlling and limiting the power of LCPCs, instead of actively facilitating their work or helping to create the legal-normative and institutional frameworks that would help to make community-level security and conflict prevention more sustainable (Lottholz and Sheranova, 2021).

Therefore, it is not unlikely that LCPCs whose support from Saferworld and FTI is discontinued will lose their capacities in a few years, unless new cohorts of voluntary activists are mobilized. The small, but significant ‘success stories’ of LCPCs in Tash-Bulak, Bazar-Korgon and other towns in southern Kyrgyzstan need to be seen in this light, as the motivation and ‘fanaticism’13 are also susceptible to fatigue and exhaustion when issues prove too complex and ‘wicked’ to be solved, or the ignorance and resistance from local and higher-level administration is too stubborn.

The analysed practices and discourses of community security and peacebuilding can be clearly situated within the three imaginaries of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan. The Law ‘On crime prevention’ and institutionalization of LCPCs can be seen as a combination of local governance situated in Western ‘liberal peace’ discourses with traditional discourses on social order and institutions, which has resulted in a set of institutions and practices conforming to the ‘politics of sovereignty’ imaginary. While the content of internationally supported projects and practices has thus largely drawn on Western notions of participatory techniques and local democracy and emphasized their compatibility with Kyrgyzstani local institutions such as LCPCs, askakal courts or neighbourhood and mahalla committees, the overarching priorities and specific measures are always agreed with and thus subsumed under the priorities of the MIA. Thereby, domestic authorities’ sovereignty is maintained vis-à-vis international actors’ criticism or interference and also vis-à-vis local and municipal actors’ challenges and attempts to influence the provincial and national policy making or legislation. Community security and peacebuilding are in this sense allowed to address the symptoms of economic, social and political problems by helping in coping with or adjusting to them. But a feedback loop that would create additional responsibility and accountability from the top levels vis-à-vis communities appears to be generally lacking. The state is thus reconfigured and rebuilt to a post-liberal one, where the classic relationship between state and society, which is supposed to feature collective decision making and vertical

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13 About the new members of the team, the Bazar-Korgon LCPC representative commented: ‘They are as much fanatics as we are, we are cast in the same mould [oni tozhe takie fanaty kak my, s odnogo testa]’, Bazar-Korgon, 30 October 2015.
accountability, is transcended into one where the state is only active in certain aspects and situations while domestic non-state and international actors take over functions and responsibilities that state agencies cannot cover. In Chapter 7, I examine attempts to challenge this post-liberal reconfiguration by creating more accountability of state institutions, specifically the police, vis-à-vis society. The key message take-away from this chapter is a first insight on the co-production of peace, security and order by local-level societal and international actors with state authorities largely controlling the content, shape and symbolic positioning of these efforts, which can thus only evolve on a post-liberal trajectory rather than realizing the ambitions of the ‘liberal peace’.