

**Undocumented Citizens:  
Legacies Of The Propiska System In A Post-Soviet City**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
A. Internal Migration And “Undocumented” Citizens.....	1
B. Residence Registration: Notification or Petition?.....	3
C. Political and Economic Reasons Behind the Residence Registration .....	8
D. Research Questions .....	10
E. Overview of the Chapters .....	20
II. RESEARCH SETTINGS AND APPROACHES.....	23
A. Residence Registration System Under Different Political Regimes .....	23
1. Propiska in the Soviet Union and in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.....	23
2. Anmeldung in Austria and Germany .....	27
3. Hukou System in China .....	30
4. Ikametgah in Turkey .....	35
B. Kyrgyzstan: Deviant Case .....	39
C. Research Design .....	45
1. Archival, legal, and statistical data .....	45
2. Interviews: settings and participants .....	46
III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK .....	51
A. Introduction .....	51
B. Historical Institutionalism Approach .....	51
C. Rethinking the Meaning of Corruption .....	59
D. Rethinking State-Society Relations .....	63
IV. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROPISKA SYSTEM .....	72
A. Introduction .....	72
B. The Origins of the Propiska System .....	76
C. Soviet “Internal Passport”.....	80
D. Social Consequences of Propiska .....	84
E. Collectivization, Passportization, and Sedentarization of Nomads in Central Asia .....	86
F. Propiska after Communism in Kyrgyzstan .....	89
V. UNDOCUMENTED CITIZENS: NEW SOURCES OF INEQUALITY .....	101
A. Introduction .....	101

B. The Nexus Between Propiska, Property, and Social Rights .....	103
C. Fuzziness of Propiska Regulations .....	107
D. Popular Resistance to Propiska Reform .....	110
E. Illustrations of Exclusion: Voting Rights and Access to Welfare .....	112
VI. PROPISKA AS A CATALYST FOR INFORMAL WELFARE .....	<b>121</b>
A. Introduction .....	121
B. Informality and Welfare in Post-Communist Context .....	122
C. Case Studies of Informality in Public Sphere: Education and Healthcare .....	129
D. Unequal Distribution of Informal Welfare .....	134
VII. CONCLUSION .....	<b>139</b>
A. The Lasting Effects of Soviet Legacies .....	139
B. Understanding State-Society Relations Through the Prism of Propiska System .....	142
C. Propiska in Global Perspective .....	144

## LIST OF TABLES

1. Types of residence registration .....	4
2. Political and economic incentives for design and enforcement of residence registration systems .....	10

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KGS	Kyrgyz som
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi,
NGO	Non-government organization
NKVD	Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennih Del (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs)
RP	Refah Partisi
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
USD	United States dollar

## SUMMARY

Being “undocumented” is most often referred to immigrants who reside in a host country without authorization but little is known about contexts in which citizens become undocumented, too. In many cities of the developing world, particularly in communist and post-communist states, rural-to-urban migrants constitute a sizable group. They face challenges to their citizenship rights as economic and social underclass due to long-standing residence registration policies, such as *propiska*, which is the main topic of this dissertation. *Propiska*, a system of permanent residence registration, is perhaps the most enduring communist policy that has survived through democratization and liberalization processes in the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union. Previously used as a Stalinist tool of population control and repression, *propiska* now functions as a mechanism for political and economic exclusion of rural migrants in urban centers. Although the policy has been incrementally reformed to allow free movement, but to this day rural migrants who lack local registration have not gained access to the same social and political rights as their urban counterparts. Despite being full citizens, unregistered rural-to-urban migrants are excluded from participation in local elections, as well face barriers to welfare due to lack of *propiska*. However, they are able to obtain social services through informal everyday interactions with street-level bureaucrats at state institutions, such as offices of public agencies, public schools, and health clinics. These interactions often involve informal arrangements that may take forms of exchange of favors, gifts, and bribes. As a result, we observe a peculiar form of urban governance, where the state restricts formal distribution of welfare yet simultaneously tolerates the informal and at times extralegal arrangements between the people and the street-level bureaucrats. In order

to illustrate why and how registration policies are resilient this research is based on a case study of *propiska* system in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Using historical-intuitionism approach and qualitative methods, this dissertation seeks to illustrate the paradox of “undocumented citizens”. It attempts to explain the process of adaptation of one policy in three completely different political and economic regimes, where timing and sequence of certain events determine who is affected by the policy and how. This dissertation also demonstrates how old inequalities produced by the old system and the new inequalities produced by the new system are layered on top of each other; thereby thickening the lines between deserving and undeserving, members and strangers, visible and invisible.

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. Internal Migration and “Undocumented” Citizens

Migration is one of the central topics in current political science discourse with emphasis placed on the rights of immigrants from the Global South in host cities in Europe and North America. Citizenship debates tend to focus on national and local migration policies that facilitate or restrict immigration process, grant or curb the rights of immigrants and refugees, and persecute or tolerate undocumented workers. Undoubtedly, these are some of the most pressing concerns of our time. However, this almost exclusive focus on international migration masks deeper questions about state’s power and limits it imposes on its own citizens within its borders. Indeed, most population movement happens *within* developing countries, from rural areas to urban rather than between developing and industrialized states (Klugman 2009). It is predicted that most of world’s population growth in the next several decades will happen in low- and middle-income cities of the Global South (UN 2013). While the word “undocumented” is always associated with non-citizens residing in a host country without authorization, internal migrants who for different reasons do not or cannot register with the local government also become “undocumented” and marginalized within their country. In many cities of the developing world rural-to-urban migrants face challenges to their citizenship rights as economic and social underclass due to residence registration policies, such as *propiska*, which is the main topic of this dissertation.

Internal migration refers to population movement within the borders of one state. It outnumbers international migration by a large margin: United Nations report conservatively estimates there are 740 million internal migrants globally (UN 2013), while

the number of international migrants in the world is just under 260 million (UNDP 2009). While internal migration can be categorized as rural-to-urban, rural-to-rural, urban-to-rural, or urban-to-urban, in the context of developing countries the general trend of population movement is from villages to cities. This trend can be explained by “push” and “pull” factors, where the former means decline in opportunities in agriculture and the latter means economic opportunities in urban industrial and service sectors (UN 2017). As a result, cities of the Global South experience large scale rural-to-urban migration flows and rapid urbanization that some states attempt to control through registration mechanisms. Internal migrants who fail to follow the registration procedures become “undocumented citizens”.

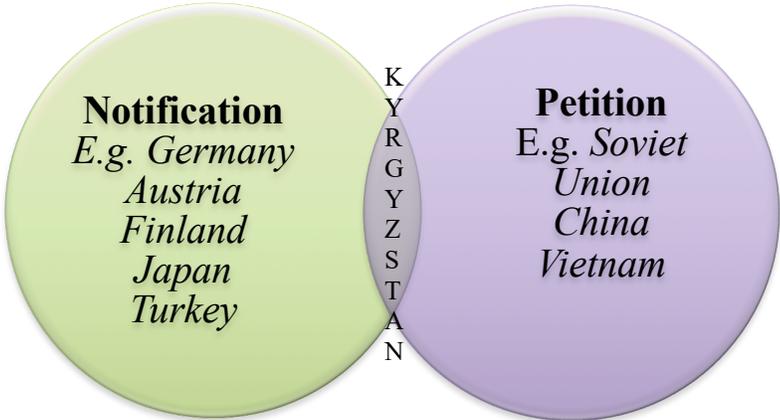
The paradox of “undocumented citizens” refers to a state-citizen relation where due to lack of official documentation that legitimizes one’s claim to citizenship in a given city, the state directly or indirectly prevents some of its own citizens from exercising certain rights (e.g. voting rights) and accessing social welfare. In other words, *de jure* citizens of the nation who lack certain papers, stamps, licenses, or cards can have their political and social rights curtailed by the state. Undocumented citizenship can occur in different contexts and for different reasons. Examples of “undocumented citizens” include individuals who despite their birth in a certain country to citizen parents may have hard time proving it to the authorities because they do not possess birth certificates. This is often the case in a number of developing countries, such as Pakistan and Indonesia (Deshingkar 2005). Another example of “undocumented citizens” is poor families without ration cards in India. The state and local governments issue ration cards to poor households that are eligible for subsidized grain. However, ration cards are also

commonly used as identification documents (Abbas 2016). Finally, the case of “undocumented citizens” that this dissertation will explore is rural-to-urban migrants without residence registration in host cities. Residence registration is a document, a card, or a stamp that allows an internal migrant to change their permanent place of residence. The range of countries where registration of residence is compulsory is very diverse; it includes Russia, China, Austria, Germany, Norway, Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Turkey just to name a few. In these countries local residence registration is a pre-requisite for municipal voting rights, employment, public services, and social welfare. Moreover, failure to register with the authorities within a certain time frame following relocation is almost always penalized by administrative fines or sometimes even criminal charges. As the following examples show, individuals whose citizenship is a birthright can become “undocumented” for different reasons, which depend on state’s specific policies.

## **B. Residence Registration: Notification or Petition?**

Various forms of residence registration system exist virtually in every country be it democratic as Austria or Germany, authoritarian as Russia or China, or somewhere in-between as Kyrgyzstan or Turkey. However, the extent to which a mandatory registration system restricts citizenship rights (e.g. voting rights, access to welfare benefits) of internal migrants ranges widely among these countries. For instance, in Turkey rural migrants may face barriers to education, but are mobilized to vote in local elections; while in Kyrgyzstan unregistered migrant do not have voting rights. Moreover, the height of barriers to obtaining the local residence registration also varies. For example, “points system” in Chinese megacities permits only educated, professional, and wealthy individuals to obtain local registration, while municipalities in Turkey and Japan often carry out the process

online and only require an identification document and a proof of address (e.g. a utility bill). Therefore, residence registrations can be divided into three broad categories (Figure 1): 1) registration as notification, meaning individuals must simply notify the state about change of their permanent residence; 2) registration as petition, meaning individuals must seek state’s permission to change their permanent residence; and 3) “grey area”, meaning the laws protect freedom of movement and choice of residence; however, due to specific local registration provisions, certain groups of internal migrants are unable to register and thereby are excluded from citizenship rights for political participation and social welfare.



**Figure 1: Types of residence registration**

Examples of registration as notification include many states across the globe, including Germany, Japan, and Turkey. Turkish citizens can notify the state of permanent address change (*ikametgah*) via online system that keeps population records (Turkiye 2019). Some Japanese municipalities make the process even simpler by allowing citizens to register at special kiosks (*jidokofuki*) installed in convenience stores, bust terminals, and subway stations (Lg-Waps 2019). These kiosks are equipped with a printer, so one can

obtain a residence registration document (*jūminhyō*) right then and there. In contrast, socialist countries have historically been notorious for restricting internal migration and requiring citizens to obtain official approvals in order to move, especially from villages to cities. At present, residence registration (*hukou*) is still an important mechanism of population control in China, although management of *hukou* is no longer entirely in the hands of the central government. Instead, decisions about petition process, specific requirements, and final choices of who gets to become a city resident, are delegated to the municipalities. For instance, Chinese megacities like Beijing and Shanghai make it extremely difficult to obtain local *hukou*; they use “points system” to officially accept only the most educated, professional, talented, and wealthy citizens.

Between states with notification-type and petition-type registration systems, there is “grey area”, which refers to states that have no formal barriers to internal migration and residence in cities; but municipal governments set specific registration conditions that many rural migrants cannot meet. The case of “grey area” is residence registration system in Kyrgyzstan that was inherited from the Soviet Union, of which Kyrgyzstan used to be part of until 1991. Soviet *propiska*, i.e. residence registration, was a stamp showing permanent address in the internal passport. Migration and change of *propiska* was allowed only for employment in a state enterprise or through marriage. The state prohibited unauthorized internal migration and maintained strict population control. However, since the fall of communism and subsequent liberalization and democratization, *propiska* was formally abolished in all post-Soviet countries. In order to comply with international laws and norms, the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan recognizes and protects freedom of movement as a basic human right. Indeed, the national law regarding internal migration that governs

population registration sets forth simple registration process, similar to Austria or Germany, which only requires identification document, proof of residence, and an application form (Minjust 2019). The law also clearly states that registration is of notifying character and lack of registration does not preclude one from access to basic rights and services.

Nevertheless, local ordinances in Bishkek, the capital city, impose additional registration provisions. In order to become a registered resident of the city, local registration authorities require new arrivals to present proof of immovable property ownership or a written consent of the landlord allowing a tenant register at the property. The former option is inaccessible for most rural migrants because they cannot afford to purchase apartments or condominiums, the cost of which in Bishkek is upwards of USD500 per square meter.<sup>1</sup> The latter option is very tricky: in order for a tenant to register at a rental unit, the landlord has to accompany the tenant and appear in person at the state registration service bureau. In addition to writing a letter of consent to tenant's registration, the landlord must produce original copies of property ownership documents. If the landlord cannot appear in person, notarized letter of consent is acceptable, but the tenant must still bring the original copies of property documents.<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly, landlords are very unlikely to go through such a burdensome and time-consuming process, especially considering that allowing the tenant register at their property will cause a surge in utility bills and property taxes. For instance, water bill is based on the number of people registered at the dwelling. Moreover, landlords are often concerned that registered tenants

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a review of listings in newspapers, websites, and data from construction companies

<sup>2</sup> Instructions provided by the State Registration Service

<https://grs.gov.kg/ru/subord/dnags/registration/786-rieghistratsiia-ghrazhdan-po-miestu-prozhivaniia/>

might claim property rights or inheritance rights in the future. Therefore, unless they are close family, landlords generally do not support tenants' residence registration applications. Furthermore, since many rural-to-urban migrants do not have financial means to purchase property or rent apartments in the city, they tend to settle in squatter neighborhoods on the outskirts of Bishkek. Without official property ownership documents, namely "red book" (*krasnaya knizhka*) that certifies land rights and "technical passport" (*tehpassport*) that certifies ownership of a dwelling structure, persons who reside in the squatter settlements cannot obtain local registration. As a result, currently there are estimated 600,00 unregistered internal migrants in Bishkek.

Since the residence registration system in Bishkek is so similar to its Soviet predecessor in its exclusionary and discriminatory nature, people continue to refer to it by the old name "*propiska*". Thus, hereafter throughout the manuscript the term "*propiska*" will refer to both Soviet and post-Soviet residence registration system. In contemporary Kyrgyzstan the ways in which *propiska* system is framed and enforced varies significantly between national and local levels. Although freedom of movement, freedom to choose a place of residence, and equal citizenship rights are constitutionally protected, Bishkek's registration system privileges the wealthy and the "old-timer" urbanites while marginalizing tenants and squatters. Therefore, from above *propiska* seems to be a form of notification record that is common in democratic states, but in effect it is a restrictive institution of social stratification and control. This duality puts Kyrgyzstan's *propiska* system in the "grey zone", which makes the problem elusive to international observers and researchers.

### C. Political and Economic Reasons Behind Residence Registration

The rationale behind decisions about the design of the residence registration system depends on state's specific needs to consolidate political, economic, and fiscal control. In other words, states have different incentives as to whether make a particular group of citizens "official" or "undocumented". For instance, in Austria and Turkey obtaining local residence registration is relatively easy. In Austria that is because the federal government allocates city budget based on the number of registered residents, so it is in municipality's interest to make sure all of its inhabitants are properly registered. In Turkey, the outcomes of local and even national elections depend on the votes of rural migrants, who comprise a significant part of the urban population, so it is in politicians' interests to make sure they get voter registration, which is tied to the residence registration.

On the flip side, Chinese *hukou* system is very restrictive, which makes it nearly impossible for a rural migrant to obtain urban *hukou* in cities like Beijing or Shanghai. Nevertheless, millions of unregistered migrants in these cities provide disposable labor for construction, manufacturing, and service industries. Despite assurances about eventual repeal of the *hukou* system that has been discussed for many years, the institution persists because there are no political or economic incentives for reform. China's one-party system precludes genuinely competitive elections; so, although patronage and personalist networks are not uncommon (GRS 2019), particularly in local politics (Campbell and Hieyeon 2014), politicians do not need migrants' votes to gain power. Current *hukou* status quo allows Chinese megacities to profit from abundance of cheap labor provided by non-*hukou* workers without paying for housing and social services that registered citizens

are entitled to. Budgetary considerations play a key role in cities' *hukou* decisions. Local governments' share of tax revenue is capped at 45% even though they account for 85% of state expenditures. China's fiscal structure forces local government to fund their social and infrastructure spending through various types of off-budget financing strategies (Wooyea and Baum 2014). In other words, cities struggle to fund public services for their current *hukou* population, so recognizing and granting local registration to millions of "undocumented citizens" and becoming financially responsible for their welfare is unacceptable for municipal governments. Therefore, there are neither political nor economic incentives to remove restrictions of the *hukou* system; on the contrary, maintaining status quo is in state's interest.

Among the states that require residence registration Kyrgyzstan emerges as a curious case. In Kyrgyzstan urban residence registration is difficult to obtain due to its explicit link to property ownership. As a result, more than a third of capital city's population is unregistered.<sup>3</sup> Majority of unregistered rural migrants reside in squatter settlements at the edges of the capital city, Bishkek. Yet the central government determines city's budget based on the number of registered inhabitants (similar to Austria), so maintaining barriers to residence registration seems financially counterintuitive. Moreover, similar to Turkey and many other countries of the Global South, Kyrgyzstan's politics is entrenched in clientelism and patronage, yet hundreds of thousands votes from squatter settlements are "wasted" since these citizens are not allowed to participate in elections, which seems politically irrational. Thus, endurance of

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<sup>3</sup> According to the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, in 2019, registered population of Bishkek is 1,027,245. There are estimated 600,000 unregistered internal migrants.

the Soviet-era institution is puzzling sine it does not make much political or economic sense in a context of capitalist economy and electorally competitive political environment (Table 1).

	Political Incentives		Economic Incentives	
	Competitive elections	Non-democratic regimes	City budget depends on population size	City budget does NOT depend on population size
Lenient registration system	Istanbul, Turkey		Vienna, Austria	
Restrictive Registration System	<b>Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</b>	Beijing, China	<b>Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan</b>	Beijing, China

Table 1: Political and economic incentives for design and enforcement of residence registration systems.

#### D. Research Questions

Why does *propiska* system persist? This is the primary question that this dissertation attempts to address. This question assumes that *propiska* system should not exist, at least not in its current form, so this assumption needs theoretical justification. Literature on political patronage would suggest that support from squatter settlements is crucial for winning elections in developing countries, such as Uruguay (Carnegie Endowment 2015), Ghana (Paller 2014), India (Auerbach 2016), and Turkey (Özler 2000). Parties and politicians seek support from the urban poor, who comprise a sizable part of the electorate. Thus, from a rational choice perspective, parties are incentivized to encourage participation by removing legal barriers to voting rights and simplifying procedures (Downs 1957). For instance, in anticipation of competitive elections following

democratization, Bolivia, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Chile carried out political and land reforms extending suffrage to the poor and illiterate populations (Lapp 2004). Following this logic, as a part of transition from socialism to democracy Kyrgyzstan, too, should remove residence registration restrictions and allow squatters and other *propiska*-less internal migrants to vote in municipal elections, as well as simplify the process of voter registration in national elections, which is also linked to *propiska*.

Furthermore, voting rights are the core principle of democratic conception of citizenship (Walzer 1970). In fact, the very definition of a citizen always includes reference to participation in collective self-governance through elections (Bauböck 2005). Current academic discourse about citizenship tends to focus on the rights of international migrants, while voting rights of citizens are often taken for granted. For instance, scholars are discussing the global trend of expanding territorial and membership boundaries of democratic citizenship that enfranchises previously excluded populations, such as citizens who reside abroad or resident non-citizens (Bauböck 2005). Examples of expanding boundaries of citizenship include American cities, such as San Francisco, CA, Chicago, IL, College Park, MD that allow non-citizens, even undocumented immigrants, to participate in school board elections (Haltiwanger 2017). In contrast, Kyrgyzstan government excludes a large group of its own citizens, namely *propiska*-less internal migrants, from voting in local elections. Despite decades of democratization efforts, for which Kyrgyzstan was labeled “an island of democracy” (Anderson 2013), there are hundreds of thousands of people whose basic citizenship right, a right to political participation, is limited by the *propiska* system. Hence, from a normative perspective,

denying residence registration and thereby voting rights to *de jure* citizens contradicts fundamental norms of democratic citizenship.

In addition to political considerations, theories of fiscal decentralization also suggest that Kyrgyzstan's *propiska* system is economically unreasonable. Fiscal decentralization refers to delegation of authority and responsibility for municipal and social services from the central government to the local governments (Bird and Vaillancourt 2008). Decentralization theories generally predict positive social and economic outcomes of delegating tasks of public service delivery to local governments (Oates 1972). The argument is that regional and municipal governments are more responsive and better aware of the local needs and preferences than the central government; therefore, they can more efficiently allocate welfare resources (Oates 1972). Moreover, transferring decision-making authority to the local level is believed to improve democratic governance by encouraging political participation (Taranchieva 2007). Since local residents are directly impacted by the municipal decisions, they are more likely to turnout to vote in local elections. Kyrgyzstan was a pioneer of decentralization reforms in the post-Soviet space and began implementing them as early as 1993, just two years after the collapse of the USSR. Nevertheless, decentralization reforms made Bishkek administration neither efficient nor sympathetic to population needs since more than a third of them are unregistered migrants.

Bishkek municipal government is in charge of managing infrastructure, public services, and social welfare, including public education and healthcare. City's budget for social expenditures is allocated by the central government based on a formula that takes into account the size of its population, which is indicated by the number of officially

registered residents.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, economically rational decision would be to register as many residents as possible to obtain a larger piece of the budgetary pie. However, enforcement of *propiska* requirements does exactly the opposite. In spite of a myriad of challenges that the city faces due to inadequate funding, such as dilapidated and overcrowded classrooms and health clinics, it continues to deny registration to property-less rural migrants.

In sum, institutional design of *propiska* system is not consistent with rational considerations of local budgets and party politics. It also contradicts the principal norms of democratic citizenship. So why does the state preserve *propiska*? In part, *propiska*'s institutional survival is explained by theories of path dependence and critical junctures (Chapter 4). Another major argument of this dissertation is that *propiska* system illustrates how the state and the society adapt to the challenges of transition from socialism to neoliberalism. The state, at least on paper, preserves Soviet-style institutions of social control and a comprehensive welfare system, which were the main sources of Soviet state legitimacy and power. "Old-timer" urbanites, the former Soviet "intelligentsia" elites, who lost their privileged social status to new business elites, support *propiska* system not only because of the rights and entitlements that come with local *propiska* but also because of symbolic cultural and moral superiority associated with it. Unregistered migrants cope with limitation imposed by the *propiska* system through informal mechanisms of negotiation with street-level bureaucrats. In turn, public white-collar workers, whose salary is the lowest in the country, benefit from the "supplemental income" generated from informal payments. Finally, bringing it back to the state, informal payments de facto

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<sup>4</sup> From an interview with a local government official

“subsidize” state services and welfare but the ultimate decision of who gets what and at what cost is in the domain of the state.

A set of specific sub-questions can be further derived from this line of reasoning. First, why does the state maintain Soviet-style welfare system? Soviet cradle-to-grave social welfare was the fundamental characteristic of the communist regime. Indeed, in 1990, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union, spending on social security alone was 29% of Kyrgyz SSR’s<sup>5</sup> GDP since more than half of the population received some kind of social allowance. Unsurprisingly, the high level of social spending relative of GDP had to be supplemented by transfers from Moscow (Falkingham et al. 1997). Although all-encompassing welfare system is no longer economically feasible for Kyrgyzstan, social expenditures, such as pensions, social security, education, and healthcare continue to make up the largest share of the state budget; only now there is no subsidy to rely on (OECD 2018). Following its separation from the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan faced rapid economic decline and high inflation, forcing the government to cut spending. Instead of rolling back some social programs, the state decreased funding across-board, which meant reduction in pensions, child benefits, other cash assistance, as well as healthcare and education.<sup>6</sup> Kyrgyzstan’s decision to maintain entitlements established by the Soviet state despite enormous cost is surprising and unique in post-Soviet space. In fact, Kyrgyzstan spends more (as percentage of GDP) on social welfare than Russia, Uzbekistan, Georgia, or Tajikistan (OECD 2018).

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<sup>5</sup> Soviet Socialist Republic

<sup>6</sup> the actual payment amounts of pensions, disability benefits, cash assistance to needy families is very low and keeps most vulnerable groups in extreme poverty. For instance, in 2018, government aid for children in low-income families was KGS875 (approx. USD 12) per child per month.

How and why does Kyrgyz state manage this large and expensive welfare system? Certainly, *propiska* plays an important role in welfare distribution because citizens are entitled to social benefits and services only at their registered place of residence. Unregistered migrants are disqualified from applying for social assistance and face barriers in access to healthcare and education. Thus, on one hand, *propiska* allows controlling social spending; and on the other hand, it justifies exclusion from the welfare system. Having a convincing rationalization for exclusion of migrants is important because comprehensive welfare is a key source of state legitimacy, which is a notion inherited from the Soviet Union.

Considering the extent of political and economic marginalization that *propiska*-less rural migrants face, related question is then: how do unregistered migrants cope with the *propiska* system? How do they circumvent it? What do informal exchanges between citizens and public workers mean for the boundaries between the state and the society? Are these informal practices a way for rural migrants to claim their citizenship rights or is it a way for the state to maintain status quo? Do these informal arrangements help migrants overcome barriers to social welfare or do they perpetuate existing patterns of inequality?

These questions point to informal practices through which rural migrants gain access to social services, such as education and healthcare. Informality is usually defined as “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 6). Thus, informality is often viewed as something that exists outside of state realm; however recent studies show that, in fact, it is produced by state policies (Roy and AlSaiyad 2012).

Whether it is the case of informal markets and labor (Agarwala 2013), slum housing (AlSaiyad 1993), or social networks (Park and Yadong 2001), informal institutions form not in absence of state regulations, but rather in response to them. In the case of Bishkek, rigid property-ownership requirements bar many unregistered migrants from obtaining local *propiska* and thereby limit their access to public services and social welfare. Nevertheless, *propiska*-less migrants are able to negotiate informally with street-level bureaucrats, who have the ultimate power to grant or deny service. These informal arrangements involve exchange of favors, gifts, and bribes that are all very common in post-Soviet space and elsewhere in the developing world.

Although informality has generally been understood as a form of resistance and subversion mechanism employed by subaltern populations (Bayat 2013), *propiska* evasion tactics demonstrates the opposite. Informal payments for state services do not necessarily undermine state institutions; to the contrary, these street-level petty corruption practices reinforce them by compelling citizens to bear the cost of underfunded welfare system. Specifically, informal payments, in cash or in kind, from citizens to low-level state officials, such as medical staff in state hospitals and clinics, public school administrators, police officers, and bureaucrats subsidize their low wages and dilapidated facilities.

The problem of low wages provides one explanation to the next question discussed in the dissertation: why do street-level bureaucrats allow unregistered migrants circumvent the system? Indeed, according to the data from National Statistical Committee, an average monthly salary of medical professionals, teachers, and administrators is approximately KGS 11000 (USD160); though many public workers interviewed for this research earned significantly lower salaries. Still, this does not fully clarify how and why street-level

bureaucrats dare to engage in informal and even extra-legal behavior. Principal-agent theory is often used for the analysis of the relationship between different levels of government. The premise of the theory is that the “agent” makes decisions and takes actions on behalf of the “principal”. However, both actors pursue their own interests, which may contradict each other (Jensen and Meckling 1976). For instance, from a principal-agent perspective, elected political institution is the “principal” and bureaucracy that implements policies at the ground level is the “agent”, where the former is concerned about re-election but the latter is not. Nevertheless, bureaucracies have substantial autonomy and minimal parliamentary oversight in administrative decision-making that ultimately affects policy outcomes (Wilson 1980). By the same token, street-level bureaucrats are agents of bureaucratic institutions; and their decisions are most consequential for ordinary citizens, who are the ultimate “principal” in a democratic hierarchy.

Principal-agent theory would predict that illegitimate behavior of street-level bureaucrats who solicit or accept informal payments undermines state’s authority. In particular, *propiska* system attempts to limit access to welfare to only locally registered individuals, so by allowing unregistered migrants to use social services in exchange for an informal fee nullifies residence registration policy. However, it does not necessarily mean that state’s capacity for social control is eroded as a result of state workers’ disobedience of the law. Instead, informality in everyday street-level state action is tolerated because it allows the state to use its power ambiguously, meaning using its discretion in exercising firm control and enforcing the rule of law or turning a blind eye. In other words, informality in state governance reflects the logic of flexible authority, which responds to

political contestations between different groups and interests. When it comes to the question of *propiska*, the two main groups whose interests seem to be at odds with each other are Bishkek’s “old-timers” and rural migrants, who constitute majority of the urban poor. Both these groups engage in informal arrangements with street-level bureaucrats, but established middle-class urbanites use their social connections and gift-giving practices to access highest-quality public services, such as reputable surgeons or high-ranking public schools; whereas low-income *propiska-less* migrants use informal channels to access basic state services that they are otherwise excluded from.

Given that both registered and unregistered urban populations utilize informal mechanisms to navigate the welfare system, why is there so much resistance to *propiska* reforms? Why do attempts at passing new legislation that would simplify the registration process fail? Several proposals of *propiska* reform have been put forward at the national and the local levels of legislature in the past few years; however, none of them succeeded. Each time reform proposals are met with bitter criticism from “old-timer” city dwellers, on one hand, and demands to abolish residence registration altogether from civil rights NGOs, on the other. Why do “old-timers” viciously resist *propiska* reforms? This question can be analyzed through the prism of identity theories, particularly norms of indigeneity – “the idea that groups native to a territory hold special rights and entitlements” (Paller 2019, 5). Indigenous claims to the city often overlap with ethnic identities, but in Kyrgyzstan, Soviet programs of “russification” and “civilization” of peripheral capitals shaped the very identity of Bishkek’s “old-timers”: ethnic Kyrgyz but Russian-speaking intelligentsia, mostly from northern regions of Kyrgyzstan (Flynn and Kosmarskaya 2012). Today tensions between migrants and “old-timers” play out in key policy areas,

such as land rights and social welfare that are both linked to *propiska*. Since *propiska* is one thing that protects privileged status of “old-timer” urbanites and confirms their exclusive rights to the city, every attempt to make local policies more inclusive is highly contested.

Research questions presented above are not answered in the dissertation in a particular order because they are deeply intertwined with one another. Instead, this study synthesizes multiple themes and theories to unpack the paradox of “undocumented citizens” and the puzzle of a resilient institution that perpetuates it. This research offers an important contribution to political science literature by providing a lens to understanding microfoundations of post-socialist state building and citizenship. The case study of “*propiska*” reveals a peculiar form of urban governance, where the state restricts distribution of welfare but at the same time tolerates the informal and at times extralegal arrangements between citizens and the street-level bureaucrats. State theorists would argue that this is a symptom of a weak state and emphasize the lack of capacity to enforce its own policies (Fukuyama 2004); while subaltern theorists would accentuate the active role of the people who use informal channels to resist oppression and sabotage the state (Scott 1985). Modernization theorists would predict that informality and corruption are signs of backwardness, which will be eradicated as the country progresses from traditional to a modern society (Huntington 1971); whereas critical theorists would point at neoliberal reforms creating new conditions for re-production of informality and corruption (Szeftel 1998). This dissertation stands at the center of social science discussions about state and society and offers an insight into the intertwined nature of informal welfare and social control in the post-socialist context. Endorsing Timothy Mitchell’s and Joe Migdal’s

critiques of statist approaches and their emphasis on the “practices” (Migdal 2001, 18) and “effects” (Mitchell 1991, 94) of the state, this study analyzes state-society relations through the prism of the paradox of “undocumented citizens”. Specific formal rules and informal practices that surround the *propiska* system illustrate how routine actions of state agents and ordinary citizens blur the lines between the public and the private, the state and the society. After all, shared meanings of state and citizenship are constructed through everyday interactions at public schools, health clinics, and crowded offices of municipal bureaucracies.

### **E. Overview of the Chapters**

The dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 introduces four examples of residence registration systems: *propiska* in Kyrgyzstan, *Hauptwohnsitz* in Austria, *hukou* in China, and *ikametgah* in Turkey, as well as comparatively examines their requirements and purposes. Kyrgyzstan’s *propiska* system is identified as a deviant case, on which this study will focus on thereafter. Justification of case selection is followed by explanation of political and socio-economic context of Kyrgyzstan. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to the discussion of research design and methodology.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to literature review and theoretical framework of the dissertation. Historical institutionalism is the primary approach to the study of durability of the *propiska* system. Since the tensions between *propiska* as an institution of social control and informal mechanism through which “undocumented citizens” circumvent it represent micro-practices in post-socialist state-society relations; therefore, this chapter

will also focus on situating the dissertation in broader literature on state, informality, and citizenship.

Chapter 4 explores the origins of differentiated and localized citizenship by analyzing the history of the *propiska* system in imperial Russia, the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Bishkek. It also takes on historical exploration of the nexus between *propiska*, property and citizenship rights in post-Soviet Bishkek by examining the role of *propiska* in privatization of urban housing, migration flows, illegal land-grabbing, and the effect that all these factors had on exercise of citizenship rights.

Chapter 5 explores the connection between asymmetric social rights and urban citizenship. Registration is often required for constitutionally protected social rights to education and healthcare. Although at the national level state discourse and laws promote non-discrimination and equal access to social rights, at the street-level of bureaucracy social welfare is distributed unevenly, particularly among established city residents and rural migrants. The capacity of urban public education and healthcare systems has been shrinking since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the demand for it has been growing due to rapidly increasing population. The way local authorities and street-level administrators tackle this problem is by prioritizing those who are registered in the city. Using *propiska* as the basis of eligibility for basic education and healthcare, the state grants asymmetric social rights. The current form of *propiska* system justifies unequal distribution of welfare resources; it also serves as a tool of categorization between those who belong to the city and those who do not.

Chapter 6 delves into the ways in which migrants circumvent *propiska* requirements. Specifically, it explores how unregistered rural-to-urban migrants negotiate

with the state through everyday interactions at the street-level bureaucracies: in public schools, health clinics, and crowded municipal offices. These interactions often entail informal arrangements, which involve exchange of favors, gifts, and bribes. As a result, we observe a peculiar form of urban governance, where the state restricts distribution of welfare but at the same time tolerates the informal and at times extralegal arrangements between the people and the street-level bureaucrats.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter, which ties together the previous chapters and relates them to the bigger picture of post-communist transition. In this chapter I bring household registration *hukou* in China into the discussion and put *propiska* system in comparative perspective. Chinese *hukou* system restricts the rights of peasants to permanently relocate to cities and access social welfare (Solinger 1999). Here I demonstrate that socialist states have created a legal but illegitimate urban citizenship regime premised on urban-rural hierarchy the legacies and consequences of which are vividly present in contemporary urban life in cities as drastically different as Beijing and Bishkek. The chapter wraps up the dissertation by final remarks on post-communist democratization and citizenship; it demonstrates that post-socialist cities provide an important venue for investigating micro-foundations of larger political and social phenomena.

## II. RESEACH SETTINGS AND APPROACHES

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research approach and methodology adopted in the dissertation. First, I provide thorough justification of case selection by presenting *propiska* in a comparative perspective against corresponding registration policies in Austria, China, and Turkey. Subsequently, Kyrgyzstan is identified as a deviant case that fits neither political nor economic reasoning behind other residence registration systems. Second part of the chapter explains the political, social, and economic context of Kyrgyzstan defining the backdrop of the case study. Lastly, I discuss research tools employed in this study, including archival work, review of relevant legislation, survey of statistical data, as well as interviews and participant observations.

### A. Residence Registration Systems Under Different Political Regimes

#### 1. Propiska in the Soviet Union and in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

Communist states have been notorious for implementing a variety of policies aimed at all-encompassing social control. One of the most important control mechanisms was the *propiska* system. *Propiska* was a stamp indicating permanent address in the Soviet “internal passport” through which the government controlled population movement. Relocation and change of *propiska*, i.e. residence registration, was allowed only in certain scenarios, such as getting accepted into a university, being offered state employment, or marrying a person who has *propiska* in the city.<sup>7</sup> However, travelling without an internal passport or being physically present at a place outside of one’s registered permanent residence without authorization was a crime punishable by fines and incarceration (Pipko

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<sup>7</sup> Akin to visa and “green card” eligibility criteria for foreigners who seek to enter and reside the United States

1985). Enforcement of the *propiska* system allowed the state to maintain a continuous population tally that was necessary for statistical estimations and planning of socialist economy, including production and distribution of consumer goods, housing, and welfare expenditures.

Furthermore, *propiska* system played an important role in Stalin's ambitious collectivization and industrialization plan: it served as a mechanism of regulation and stratification of labor. Urban residents each received a labor book (*trudovaya knizhka*) and internal passport with *propiska* stamped into it. These two documents tied an individual to a state enterprise that was responsible for provision of employment, housing, rations of food and basic commodities, and social welfare. In other words, local *propiska* was essential for survival in the city (Garcelon 2001). At the same time, the government purposefully did not issue internal passports to peasants in effect confining them to the boundaries of the farming collective (*kolkhoz*). As a result, peasants could not travel outside the *kolkhoz* without written permission from the local authorities and could not escape brutal conditions of forced collectivization by migrating to cities (Garcelon 2001). This rural-urban stratification persisted until 1979 when peasants were granted a right to internal passport, but in many regions, it was not put to practice until *perestroika* reforms (Liubarskii 1994). Hence, *propiska* was a part of a complex record-keeping system that allowed the Soviet state to strictly discipline labor in line with the requirements of five-year plans and economic objectives of the time. It was also a tool of social control and gatekeeping access to major urban centers officially designated as "closed cities", where quality of life and opportunities for social mobility significantly exceeded those of rural areas (Smith 1989).

Yet another imperative key function of the *propiska* system was state surveillance. Between 1932 -1946 internal passports and *propiska* were administered by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) (Terrill 1989), an infamous Soviet law enforcement institution responsible for political repressions, executions, and management of Gulag.<sup>8</sup> *Propiska* stamps granting legal permission to reside in a specific locality were issued at local police headquarters, so that the authorities were always informed about one's whereabouts. NKVD's database of addresses and photographs, using which the police could identify and locate virtually any citizen, was one of the most powerful tools in that allowed Stalin to carry out the Great Purge.<sup>9</sup> After NKVD was dissolved in 1946, *propiska*-based persecutions continued as long as unauthorized presence at non-*propiska* area stayed criminalized. For example, just within one year in 1952, over 25,000 citizens were identified as trespassing restricted localities and deported back to their registered residence; criminal charges were brought against over 12,825 people and 849,886 faced administrative penalties for violation of *propiska* regulations (Garcelon 2001). Therefore, *propiska* was the paramount mechanism of social control that not only served economic and political objectives, but also characterized citizenship in the Soviet state, which was localized, differentiated, and under constant surveillance.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, newly independent countries that were once parts of the union went through profound political, economic, and social changes. Centrally planned economy was discredited and abandoned; presidency and parliaments were formed through popular elections. New leaders welcomed market

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<sup>8</sup> A system of forced labor camps

<sup>9</sup> 1936-1938: political campaign of repression, imprisonment, and execution of the Communist Party officials, bureaucrats, military leaders, and common citizens who were suspected of dissent or perceived as a threat to the regime

reforms and international organizations flocked to the region to help implement them. Economic liberalization, democratization, and protection of human rights were the main goals of post-communist transition for over two decades. Liberal reforms, however, were not accompanied by substantial restructuring of the welfare system or renouncement of Soviet-era registration policies. In 2019 residence registration system remarkably persists in many post-Soviet countries, including Russia, Belarus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. Although *propiska* was formally abolished at the national level in all these states; however, its vestiges remain firmly grounded in local regulations and social policies. In fact, post-Soviet residence registration systems are so akin to *propiska* that both citizens and bureaucrats still refer to it by that name. Thus, while restrictions on freedoms of movement have been lifted, residence registration requirements continue to cause hardship for rural-to-urban migrants and limit their political and social rights. In Kyrgyzstan specifically, eligibility for voting in municipal elections, as well as access to public healthcare, education, and social security system are determined by possession of local registration.

However, registration in a city, such as Bishkek, the capital and the largest urban center of Kyrgyzstan, is difficult to obtain because it depends on property ownership, which is unattainable for most peasants. An individual can receive local registration only if they can prove ownership of real estate property within the municipal boundaries, or if they obtain a written permission from the homeowner that allows registration against their address. Yet homeowners, be they relatives, friends, or landlords of the petitioner, are reluctant to grant such permissions because of long-term implications, such as increase in taxes, utility payments, and potential claims to inheritance by the persons registered at the

property.<sup>10</sup> Complicating matters further, due to lack of financial means most low-income rural migrants reside in illegal squatter settlements on the outskirts of Bishkek, which is not uncommon for a city in the Global South. Residence in illicit housing cannot be registered; therefore, rural migrants who inhabit them become undocumented citizens.

## 2. *Anmeldung in Austria and Germany*

It may sound surprising, but a number of democratic countries in Europe have some type of residence registration requirements. These policies usually only require an individual to report their new address to the responsible state agency. For instance, in Finland, Population Register Center *Väestörekisterikeskus* collects demographic data, including address changes. According to Finnish legislation, one must notify the Local Register Office when they move permanently or stay temporarily (over 3 months) at a new address within one week of the move. The notification process can be completed online or at a local post office and only requires an identify card.<sup>11</sup> Sweden and Norway also utilize similar compulsory residence registration systems *Folkbokföringsregister* and *Folkeregisteret* respectively, which serve purposes of taxation, identification, and population statistics.<sup>12</sup>

However, in some other European countries, particularly Germany and Austria the residence registration systems are strict and complex. In Austria, for citizens and noncitizens alike, residence registration *Anmeldung* is required within three days of moving in order to change principal residence *Hauptwohnsitz* or establish secondary

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<sup>10</sup> From an interview with a state notary public

<sup>11</sup> Registration instructions at <https://vrk.fi/en/notification-of-move>

<sup>12</sup> Registration instructions at <https://www.skatteetaten.no/en/person/national-registry/moving/>  
Also: <https://www.skatteverket.se/privat/folkbokforing/attvarafolkbokford/folkbokforingsdatabasen.4.3810a01c150939e893f16fe2.html>

residence. When a new principal residence *Hauptwohnsitz* is registered, the responsible local authorities must also conduct de-registration (*Abmeldung*) from the former residence concurrent with registration of the new residence.<sup>13</sup> The registration can be carried out in person or via mail by filling out a residence registration form and providing identification documents (or certified copies if applying by mail). Notably, the residence registration form requires a signature of the accommodation provider, i.e. a) house or condominium owner for themselves, cohabitant, or their tenant; or b) the main tenant for their cohabitant or subtenant; or c) subtenant for their cohabitant. Each person must fill out and submit their own residence registration form. Failure to follow the registration procedures is considered an administrative offence punishable by a fine of up to 720 Euros and up to 2180 Euro for a repeat offense.<sup>14</sup>

The notion of residence registration *Anmeldung* in Austria (also Germany) and the process of residence registration bear a lot of similarities with the *propiska* system. First, similar to *propiska* system in Kyrgyzstan, *Anmeldung* plays an important role in taxation and budgeting that goes on between federal and local governments. Specifically, the number of officially registered persons with local *Hauptwohnsitz* determines the budget that municipality receives from the federal government. Secondly, registration application form requires a signature of the accommodation provider. Change of *propiska* also necessitates consent of the accommodation provider, but unlike Austrian laws, Kyrgyzstan's legislation limits the definition of accommodation provider only to an owner

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<sup>13</sup> Registration instructions found at <https://www.help.gv.at/Portal.Node/hlpd/public/content/118/Seite.11802001.html>

<sup>14</sup> Section 22.8 of the Meldegesetz: 8.gegen § 16a Abs. 5a verstößt, begeht eine Verwaltungsübertretung und ist mit Geldstrafe bis zu 726 Euro, im Wiederholungsfall mit Geldstrafe bis zu 2 180 Euro, zu bestrafen.

of a house, apartment, or condominium. Therefore, *propiska* compared to *Anmeldung* is a more discriminatory institution that is skewed in favor of property owners. Thirdly, similar to *propiska*, *Anmeldung* determines access to voting rights and social services that are administered by the municipal government, such as issuance of ID and passports, and certain welfare benefits.<sup>15</sup>

The rationale behind the limitations on political and social rights based on possession of *Anmeldung* in Austria has to do with the federal state structure, in which income tax revenue is split between the federal government, state governments, and municipalities, where the taxpayer has their *Hauptwohnsitz*. In other words, fiscal distribution that funds municipal public goods and services justifies exclusion of citizens who do not pay into the city's revenue. The federalist fiscal reasoning behind *Hauptwohnsitz* cannot be applied to the case of *propiska* system in Kyrgyzstan since Kyrgyzstan is a unitary state with a different taxation structure. Specifically, income tax is based on the location of the employer, not the individual, so there is no link between income tax and *propiska*. Redistribution of fiscal revenue from the central government to the municipal governments, however, depends on the size of registered population in that city or village. Therefore, in both Austria and Kyrgyzstan, a large number of unregistered migrants can cause significant economic problems for the underfunded municipalities. In other words, despite the discrepancies between the number of people that are officially registered and the number of actual residents, city's budget is designed to provide only for

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<sup>15</sup> E.g. Lower Austria Youth Welfare Act specifies that: Youth welfare is available to all persons who make their stay in Lower Austria; Austrian citizens, citizens from states of the European Union or of the European Union Economic area and stateless is anyway youth welfare too if they have their main residence (*Hauptwohnsitz*) in Lower Austria,

those with local registration. This is a predicament that cities like Graz, Austria and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan face due to hundreds of thousands unregistered inhabitants; however, in the case of the former these are mostly university students, while in the case of the latter they are rural migrants.

The example of *Anmeldung* in Austria and Germany shows that residence registration systems are not inherently undemocratic and their exercise is not limited to authoritarian states. They are often used elsewhere in Europe for population census, taxation, and state budgeting purposes. However, the devil is in the details. The institutional context and specific features of registration policies make them undemocratic and discriminatory, as is the case with *propiska* system in Kyrgyzstan and *hukou* household registration in China.

### 3. Hukou System in China

The case of Chinese *hukou* system is perhaps the most well-known example of compulsory residence registration. *Hukou* system was introduced in mid-1950s as two-tiered system that not only links an individual to the place of their permanent residence, but also divides citizens into two groups: those with agricultural (rural) *hukou* and non-agricultural (urban) *hukou*. *Hukou* status is hereditary, which means that it is passed down from mothers to their children (Tiejun and Selden 1994). Holders of urban *hukou* have been historically privileged in their access to better healthcare, education, access to jobs and other social benefits. For instance, state enterprises or work units (*danwei*) that employed urban workers provided almost all urban housing, as well as social welfare. Besides, basic food items such as grain and meat could be bought only in state-markets using rationing cards, which were only available for holders of urban *hukou*. Furthermore,

while non-agricultural or urban *hukou* was issued to households, in the rural areas only one *hukou* booklet was issued for an entire cooperative during the collectivization period (1950s -1906s) (Mackenzie 2002). Thus, similar to their Soviet counterparts, Chinese peasants were tied to a farming unit and could not leave the cooperative without special permission; and if found in cities, they faced criminal charges for unauthorized migration.

When economic reforms were introduced in China, they were predicted to dismantle many Maoist institutions of state planning and social control. Indeed, since 1979 a number of transformational reforms put China on a new path of economic and social development, as well as lead to the establishment of a new political ideology of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”<sup>16</sup>. In market-oriented economic environment it was argued that *hukou* system would only cripple productivity by constraining free movement of labor, so the demise of *hukou* system seemed inevitable (Tisdell 1995). However, forty years later *hukou* system still remains albeit in a somewhat different form. The distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural *hukou* types no longer exists, but household registration system binding a citizen to a specific permanent residence is alive and well. Holders of local *hukou* have easier access to skilled jobs, education, social welfare, and other opportunities in their city; whereas unregistered migrants are marginalized in these aspects. Currently over 280 million internal migrants reside and work in cities outside of their *hukou*. They are referred to as “floating population” (*liudongrenkou*), who due to lack of the household registration are in essence undocumented citizens within their own nation.

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<sup>16</sup> Incorporation of elements of market economy while preserving the rule of the Communist Party and its commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology and the road to communism.

Through the years the *hukou* system was subject to various reforms, most importantly decentralization reforms in mid-1990s (Ling 2013). Decentralization of *hukou* administration allowed local governments to experiment with *hukou* policies deciding who gets *hukou* when and how. For instance, in 1990s Shanghai offered a special “blue” *hukou*, a temporary residence permit, to migrants who invest more than USD200,000 or purchase residential property larger than 100 square meters. The holders of “blue” *hukou* were entitled to similar benefits as the holders of traditional “red” *hukou*, such as access to education for children and business licenses for entrepreneurs. Most importantly, eventually “blue” *hukou* could be transferred to the formal *hukou* after three to five years (Shanghai Municipal Government 1993). “Blue” *hukou* policies that targeted wealthy and educated professionals: businessmen, investors, and state employees, were enacted in a number of other cities across China, including Guangzhou (Guangzhou Municipal Government 1999) and Shenzhen (Young 2013, 131). Estimated 3 million *hukou* were “sold” in Chinese cities nationwide in the first few years of the decentralization reform, which provided over 5 billion US dollars in revenue for local governments (Solinger 1999). Currently the practice of issuance of “blue” *hukou* is outlawed. However, the rent-seeking practice of granting local *hukou* to investors and buyers of residential property is still common in many cities.

In an effort to expand *hukou* reforms, in late 1990-s and early 2000-s Chinese authorities adopted a set of policies aimed at simplifying the process of obtaining *hukou*. Specifically, the state reduced the requirements for local *hukou* to “stable source of income” and “stable place of residence” (State Council Notice 2001). However, municipalities often interpreted “stable income” as employment in a state enterprise or

running business with stable profits; they also equated “stable place of residence” to homeownership. As a result, low-income laborers who comprise the absolute majority of rural migrants were left out of the scope of the new *hukou* policies (Wang 2005). Most recently, city governments of largest and most developed cities like Beijing (in 2018) and Shanghai (in 2013) launched a points-based *hukou* application system. An applicant must be below retirement age, have a temporary residence permit, have no criminal record, and have made social insurance payment for at least seven consecutive years (Wen 2018). After this eligibility threshold is met, an applicant earns points for education level, entrepreneurial activity, achievements in innovation, and professional awards. Considering the strict criteria, unsurprisingly only 124,000 out of estimated 8 million non-*hukou* residents of Beijing applied for household registration in the first round of selection process in 2018; among them only 6,019 were actually granted Beijing *hukou* (Mei 2019).

Analysis of Chinese *hukou* system reveals a number of striking similarities with Soviet-era and modern-day *propiska* system in Kyrgyzstan. Denial of household registration booklets and internal passports to peasants resulted in their exclusion from basic citizenship rights and confined them to collective farms. Meanwhile, prioritization of urban industrial infrastructure and accompanying tasks of housing and welfare provision for urban residents created a pro-urban bias. Holders of urban *hukou* or *propiska* not only enjoyed more freedoms, but also had access to better social services, such as education, healthcare, and career opportunities in state enterprises and government bureaucracy. In essence, *hukou* and *propiska* established social hierarchy in seemingly classless societies, where privileged urban residents had significantly more freedoms, rights, and resources than their rural compatriots.

The registration-based social hierarchy was not eliminated with the demise of command economy in China and the collapse of the Soviet Union. On the contrary, if anything market reforms exacerbated existing inequalities. Allowing local *hukou* be “purchased” through investments in residential property or local business, Chinese authorities indicated that wealthy individuals are worthy and welcome, but the poor are not. Similarly, by tying *propiska* to homeownership, Kyrgyzstan defined who belongs in the city and who does not. Nevertheless, the mixture of open market and socialist mechanisms of population control was part of the reason for China’s rapid economic advancement: unregistered migrants provided cheap low-skilled labor for key industries in coastal cities and special economic zones. These non-*hukou* workers did not have full rights to urban social services and welfare. Municipalities benefited from growing industrial base, but were not burdened with responsibility for social welfare of migrant families who made the growth possible. In Kyrgyzstan, *propiska* system also adapted to a neoliberal city and shielded the local government from responsibility for welfare of rural migrants. However, unlike their Chinese counterparts, rural migrants in Bishkek are not systematically recruited into large-scale manufacturing; instead they usually work in the informal sector, such as bazaar trade, street vending, housekeeping, and other type of irregular labor. Hence, in both cases, *hukou* and *propiska* marginalize poor and low-skilled unregistered internal migrants, in effect making them second-class citizens; while at the same time using the residence permits to incentivize investments, particularly in the housing market.

#### 4. *Ikametgah* in Turkey

The example of residence registration in Turkey, *ikametgah*, demonstrates how and why the policy is carried out in a state that is neither democratic like Germany or Austria, not fully authoritarian like China. Moreover, when it comes to Turkish cities, questions about residence registration are closely intertwined with politics, elections, and problems of informal housing. Residence registration, is required for voter registration, which also the case in Europe and in Kyrgyzstan. However, unlike Vienna or Berlin, Istanbul, Ankara, and other major cities in Turkey have millions of people living in squatter neighborhoods *gecekondu*.<sup>17</sup> Since 1950-s the number of rural-to-urban migrants settling in *gecekondus* rapidly increased so that by 1994 it reached the point where voters from *gecekondu* could decide the outcomes of local elections (Yalcintan and Erbas 2003). Thus, protecting voting rights of *gecekondu* dwellers, who tend to support pro-Islamic politics, has been an understandable tactic on the part of conservative populist parties: Welfare Party (RP) in 1990-s and Justice and Development Party (AKP) since 2002. The electoral incentives that motivate expansion of voting rights (as well as social welfare) of urban squatters in Turkey stands in sharp contrast to Kyrgyzstan, where unregistered migrants are excluded from participation in local elections.

In order to detangle the relationship between *ikametgah*, informal housing, and elections, it is important to understand the process of residence registration and the context of Turkish urbanization and political environment. Residence registration, *ikametgah*, is a document that is required for voter registration, as well as access to municipal services,

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<sup>17</sup> Recent government efforts aimed at urban transformation and “beautification” included replacing *gecekondu* with social housing projects, namely formal apartment buildings. So the number and the geographic scope of old-style *gecekondu* are consistently decreasing.

public education, and healthcare (Resmigazaete 2006). Before 2007, the application for change of principal residence (*yerleşim yeri*) and issuance of *ikametgah* had to be done either in person or via postal service; now Turkish citizens can obtain *ikametgah* online if they have a digital signature. The process is rather simple and straightforward and requires only an identification document (notarized copy if applying by mail) and a proof of residence, such as a rental agreement or a utility bill. In fact, what makes *ikametgah* interesting is the relative ease with which *gecekondu* inhabitants can obtain it (Senturk 2013); and the reason behind that is the link between residence registration and voter registration.

Votes from *gecekondu* have been crucial for winning local and even national elections since the 1960-s (Karpas 1976), i.e. during the industrialization period, when large waves of rural-to-urban migration began. Contrary to strict labor management policies that were in place in Soviet Union and China during the same time period, Turkish state encouraged rural-to-urban migration because it needed supply of labor for its industrialization efforts. However, municipalities were incapable of keeping up with migration pace and could not provide enough affordable housing. As peasants continuously flocked to urban areas looking for work, they faced lack of affordable housing. As a result, cities like Istanbul and Ankara went through the process of so-called ‘*gecekonduzation*’, in which migrant workers almost overnight built illegal settlements on public and private lands (Kocak 2014). As inflow of rural migrants rapidly increased, so did the pressure from native urbanites to eradicate unsightly *gecekondu*. However, it was not in any party or politicians’ electoral interest to do so because of the large number of potential votes to be gained from *gecekondu*.

After decades of uncontrolled population growth and consequent urban sprawl, by the year 2000, 65% of all housing in Istanbul was labeled as informal construction and squatters constituted 75% of Istanbul's total population (Yalcintan and Erbas 2003). This striking population growth and expansion of *gecekondu* is an outcome of populist policies of both central and local governments that sporadically legalized informal settlements or supplied utility services in pre-election season. Voting patterns of *gecekondu* residents reveal that over the years urban squatters' party preferences were not based on ideology, but rather on material interest (Özler 2000). For instance, in 1973 elections center-left Republic People's Party (CHP) won the elections in large part thanks to *gecekondu* voters who supported CHP in response to the promise to legalize their land rights by the end of the same year (Karpaz 1976). However, CHP lost its popularity due to prolonged civil unrest and subsequent coup d'état in 1980; and in 1995 elections *gecekondu* voters backed right-wing Welfare Party (RP). RP candidates also won mayoral races in Istanbul and Ankara (Bugra 1998).

Since then Turkish electorate has generally taken turn to the right, with conservative pro-Islamic populist parties, such as Nationalist Action Party (MHP) (Tepe 2000) and Virtue Party (FP) (Yeşilada 2002) advancing in both local and national politics. In November 2002, Law and Justice Party (AKP) won general elections in a landslide and got 65% seats in the Parliament. In 2004 local elections, AKP candidates won in Istanbul and Ankara. Ever since then AKP has been the ruling party in Turkey. Success of pro-Islamic populist parties, including AKP, can in large part be attributed to winning over *gecekondu* voters. Welfare Party, Virtue Party and their successor Law and Justice Party all used grassroots organization network, especially in *gecekondu* neighborhoods and

gathered support by providing municipal services, basic commodities, food, and assistance in finding jobs (Delibas 2014). In most recent 2019 local elections, however, center-left Republic People's Party (CHP) candidates won in many large cities, including Istanbul and Ankara. In addition to economic crisis that Turkey now faces (Goodman 2019), local political experts attribute this dramatic political change to AKP losing touch with its supporters among the urban poor. Meanwhile, the new mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem Imamoğlu, during the election campaign often recalled his Black Sea childhood, a heritage he shares with millions of rural migrants who kept arriving to the city since 1960s and settled in *gecekondu*. By emphasizing his roots and affirming his commitment to alleviating poverty and bringing about justice through redistribution of city's resources, he was able to connect to the religious working class. Imamoğlu's "radical love" strategy, which means embracing not alienating AKP's main supporters – the urban poor, led CHP to victory in Istanbul for the first time since 1994.

In the countries of the Global South it is not uncommon for political parties to "extend sophisticated organizing machinery" (Paller 2019, 3) into informal settlements to secure votes and maintain a system of political patronage. Turkish politics is just one example of how decisive are the votes of rural migrants and the lengths to which parties go to obtain it. Unsurprisingly, *ikametgah* and voter registration had been issued to the residents of *gecekondu* even when they lacked official property ownership documents through the office of *muhtar*, an elected neighborhood leader. Following this electoral logic, Kyrgyzstan's case is quite unusual: squatters cannot obtain local *propiska* and as a result are not allowed to vote in local elections, as well as face barriers to voting in national elections. Although Kyrgyzstan's political elites are known to capitalize on

relations of political patronage and clientelism (Ismailbekova 2017), unregistered migrants remain as a largely untapped voter base. The sheer number of *propiska*-less citizens in Bishkek that amounts to nearly 10% of country's total population<sup>18</sup> calls for their citizenship rights to be taken seriously. If for no other moral reason, simplifying the registration system and protecting voting rights of rural migrants could benefit politicians at the ballot box, but every attempt at reforming *propiska* is shut down at local and national levels.

### **B. Kyrgyzstan: The Deviant Case**

Based on the comparative analysis of several registration systems in different parts of world, it is apparent that Kyrgyzstan's *propiska* system is unusual. One on hand, it does not fit simple economic logic: making barrier to registration low and allowing migrants become full urban citizens would allow Bishkek to obtain a bigger piece of the state budget; however, the city continues to impose property ownership pre-requisites. On the other hand, neither does it fit the political logic: unregistered migrants, particularly those in squatter settlements *novostroikas*, represent (almost) untapped electoral base for political parties, so allowing them to obtain *propiska* and, thereby, voting rights is in parties' political interest. Especially considering clientelistic nature of linkages between parties and citizens in Kyrgyzstan, one would expect to observe establishment of patronage networks in squatter neighborhoods, which is an almost universal practice of parties elsewhere in the developing world (Stokes 2007). Since institutional survival of

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<sup>18</sup> In Bishkek there are 600,000 unregistered persons, whereas the total population of the country just over 6 million

*propiska* in Kyrgyzstan contradicts theoretical and observational predictions, it represents a deviant case, meaning an outlier among similar cases (Seawright and Gerring 2008).

Among states of the former Soviet periphery in Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is also somewhat of a deviant case. While leaders in neighboring Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan consolidated authoritarian power, Kyrgyz first president Askar Akaev launched broad reforms for democratization and liberalization. To that end, Western observers named Kyrgyzstan “an island of democracy” in a sea of dictatorships surrounding it. Perhaps one of the reasons behind Kyrgyzstan’s early democratization is that unlike presidents of aforementioned Central Asian states who all served as First Secretaries of the Communist Party in their republics before the dissolution of the USSR, Akaev was a political outsider. In fact, Akaev is a renounced physicist and computer scientist, who up until late 1980-s had nothing to do with politics.<sup>19</sup> His liberal pro-reform political ideology became clear after his visits to Moscow as part of Kyrgyz delegation in 1987. So when on the eve of the communist collapse, riots and ethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan discredited existing leadership, Akaev emerged as progressive candidate who could lead the newly independent country into a democratic future. Indeed, in the initial years of his presidency Akaev facilitated formation of a multiparty system. He also encouraged development of independent media and civil society organizations, so that by year 2000, the number of nonprofit organizations reached 3000 (Marat 2005).

A more pragmatic observer of Kyrgyzstan politics would shift the emphasis from Akaev’s liberal ideology to the country’s economic needs and argue that democratization

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<sup>19</sup> Examples of Akaev’s research: Akaev, A. A., and S. A. Maiorov. "Coherent Optical Computers." *Mashinostroenie, Leningrad* Part II (1977): 310-320.; also Akaev, Askar A., and Sergei A. Maiorov. "Optical methods of data processing." *Moscow Izdatel Vysshaia Shkola* (1988).

reforms were important because they were profitable (Anderson 2013). While many post-Soviet countries including Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan capitalized on their wealth of natural resources, especially oil and gas, Kyrgyzstan being a resource-poor, mountainous, and landlocked territory faced rapid economic decline after withdrawal of Moscow-sponsored subsidies. Foreign aid and investment became the main contributors to the local economy, so political and economic reforms were necessary to maintain Western support. In addition to institutionalization of democratic principles, a host of liberalization reforms were also quickly implemented. For instance, privatization of state enterprises and public housing started as early as 1992. The same year Kyrgyzstan became a member of the World Bank and the following year it became the first country in the region to adopt its own currency “som”. In 1998 Kyrgyzstan joined World Trade Organizations, 14 years ahead of Russia.

However, Kyrgyzstan’s democratic liberal miracle was short-lived. By early 2000s it was clear that Akaev’s regime had become increasingly authoritarian and neopatrimonial (Laruelle 2012). He staffed the Cabinet with his loyal supporters (northerners like himself), jailed critics of his regime, and secured a third term in office by pressuring the constitutional court. Although throughout his presidency Akaev tried to avoid regional and ethnic conflicts by promoting “Kyrgyzstan is our common home” slogan, his actual policies and actions exhibited preferential treatment of northerners, i.e. ethnic Kyrgyz from northern provinces (*oblast*). For example, investments were disproportionately channeled to the northern *oblast* and northerners were appointed to govern southern *oblast* and cities, which caused growing tensions between North and South.

These tensions between North and South coupled with growing dissatisfaction with Akaev's regime culminated in the Tulip Revolution in 2005. There is a breadth of literature that looks into the causes and consequences of the Tulip Revolution,<sup>20</sup> but suffice it to say that Akaev's early democratization reforms that allowed free speech, protests, media, and civil society created an opening for opposition to take advantage of public outcry over "rigged" elections in 2005. Tulip Revolution ousted Akaev, who fled to Moscow; and Kurmanbek Bakiev, a southerner, became the new President. However, his tenure was very brief. Accused of corruption and nepotism, the extent of which even surpassed Akaev, Bakiev was forced out of office by the Second Kyrgyz Revolution in April 2010. Bakiev fled to his hometown in the southern province of Jalal-Abad, where people still supported him, but eventually fled to Minsk, Belarus. A few days after the revolution, ethnic conflict broke out between the Uzbeks and the Kyrgyz in southern cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad. Interim government failed to adequately respond to the riots, so the conflict escalated and took lives of hundreds of people, mostly Uzbek, and displaced 400,000 people (The Guardian 2010).

In the aftermath of the revolution and ethnic violence, the new interim government set forth a set of political reforms aimed at more inclusive and equitable governance. Most importantly, new Constitution passed by referendum in 2010 reduced the power of the president and strengthened the parliament. Interim President Rosa Otunbaeva stepped down in December 2011 and was replaced by newly elected Almazbek Atambaev. This

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<sup>20</sup> Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution is one of the so-called Color Revolutions that took place in post-communist space. For further reading: Cummings, Sally, ed. *Domestic and International Perspectives on Kyrgyzstan's 'Tulip Revolution': Motives, Mobilization and Meanings*. Routledge, 2013. Also, Beissinger, Mark R. "Structure and example in modular political phenomena: The diffusion of bulldozer/rose/orange/tulip revolutions." *Perspectives on politics* 5, no. 2 (2007): 259-276.

marked the first peaceful transition of power by means of competitive elections not only in Kyrgyzstan, but in all post-Soviet Central Asia. In 2016, amendments to the Constitution further reduced the power of the President and enhanced authority of the Prime Minister and the leaders of the parliamentary factions. Under such constitutional arrangements, parties began to play an increasingly important role; however, party system is still weak and fragmented (Doolotkeldieva 2017). Parties do not have a clear ideological or policy platforms; rather they gather around a charismatic leader, usually a successful entrepreneur, and mobilize voters through regional patronage networks of influential party members (Imanalieva 2015).

Currently there are six parties in Jogorku Kenesh, the unicameral Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, namely, Social Democratic Party, Respublika-Ata Jurt, Kyrgyzstan, Onuguu-Progress, Bir Bol, Ata-Meken. The current president Sooronbai Jeenbekov, backed by Atambaev, won presidential elections in October 2017. However, within a few months of assuming office, Jeenbekov removed and jailed the Prime Minister Sapar Isakov and mayor of Bishkek Kubanychbek Kulmatov, as well as dismissed and persecutes a number of other senior politicians close to Atambaev. Most recently, in June 2019, the parliament voted to strip Atambaev of presidential immunity. Then on August 8, 2019 Kyrgyzstan's national anti-terrorist unit raided Atambaev's private residence, but was met with resistance from his supporter. Next day, on August 9 security forces arrested the ex-president on corruption charges. Recent developments in Kyrgyzstan's politics indicate rapid consolidation of authoritarian power in the hands of President Jeenbekov, who has already hinted at reversing changes in the Constitution and return to a presidential system.

Considering the dynamics of politics in Kyrgyzstan, it becomes apparent that it represents a typical case of competitive authoritarianism and shares common characteristics, such as clientelism, nepotism, regionalism, tribalism, corruption, and political opportunism with many countries in the Global South (Levitsky and Way 2002). However, when it comes to residence registration and informal practices that surround it, where states typically expand suffrage and use forbearance as redistribution to win votes (Holland 2017), Kyrgyzstan does the opposite by restricting voting rights and disenfranchising a significant part of the urban population. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan is also a deviant case in the context of post-communist Central Asia because of its imperfect but democratic institutions and competitive elections. Yet *propiska* system in Kyrgyzstan is just the same as in strictly authoritarian Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

This dissertation is primarily about Kyrgyzstan's *propiska* system, but in order to put it in comparative perspective, I will also discuss Chinese *hukou* as a shadow case in the concluding chapter. Using Mill's most different systems design I demonstrate that while persistence of *propiska* and *hukou* are similar institutions with similar outcomes, China and Kyrgyzstan vary in all other key aspects, such as political regime, levels of urbanization and economic development, as well as state capacity. Therefore neither of those conditions can explain why restrictive registration systems persist and outlive socialist regimes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Considering China is no longer fully socialist, but rather "socialist with Chinese characteristics" meaning economically capitalist but under the rule of the Chinese Communist Party

## C. Research Design

This dissertation is based on fieldwork conducted in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan between August 2015 and August 2017. During that time, I conducted archival research at the national library, reviewed bills and laws related to residence registration, as well as reviewed statistical data from the national statistical bureau and databases of international organizations. I also conducted interviews with internal migrants, “old-timer” city residents, street-level bureaucrats, public workers in healthcare and education, elected officials of the municipal government, and local experts.

### *1. Archival, Legal, and Statistical Data*

Historical analysis of the *propiska* system is the key to understanding its institutional survival and adaptation to different types of political and economic systems: feudalism, socialism, and liberalism. Therefore, using historical-institutionalism approach, I trace the development of the *propiska* system from an institution of serfdom in imperial Russia to a tool of social control in the Soviet Union, and finally to a mechanism of social stratification and exclusion in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. In order to construct the historical timeline and to analyze *propiska*'s path and critical junctures, I surveyed relevant historical literature in both English and Russian languages, as well as reviewed archives of newspapers and journals at the National Library in Bishkek.

In addition, I examined proposed, repealed, and current laws, regulations, and policies regarding registration systems in Kyrgyzstan. I systematically recorded the extent to which they excluded unregistered rural migrants from key aspects of social, political, and economic life in the city: receiving identification documents, voting, education, healthcare, welfare benefits, access to criminal justice, employment, and banking. I

utilized the commercial database TOKTOM and publicly available database of the Ministry of Justice to trace the adoption and amendments of relevant provisions in The Civil Code, The Code of Civil Procedure, The Laws Concerning Internal Migration, The Code of Criminal Procedure and other relevant laws since the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Lastly, I used Census data as well as other social and economic indicators, such as labor statistics, social expenditures, health, and education data provided by the National Statistics Committee of Kyrgyzstan.

## *2. Interviews: Settings and Participants*

This dissertation, to a large extent is based on qualitative data collected through semi-structured and unstructured interviews, as well as observations of four informal settlements “novostroikas” in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan: Dordoi, Ak-Jar, Kalys-Ordo, and Altyn-Kazyk. Dordoi is an informal settlement at the northern edge of the city next to the largest bazaar in Central Asia of the same name. Everyone who lives in the settlement is an internal migrant. The inhabitants of Dordoi work as loaders, cashiers, drivers, and unskilled laborers. Dordoi is one of the oldest informal settlements; it was established in 2002. At the time, most people did not construct actual houses, but lived in traditional nomad yurts. After the Tulip Revolution in 2005, the agricultural land where Dordoi now stands was completely taken over by “land-grabbers”. People living in Dordoi have petitioned the government multiple times asking to legalize their homes, so that they could obtain *propiska* and gain access to political and social rights. Many of those who reside in Dordoi today were cheated into buying their illegal properties. The government promised to legalize the slum and grant property rights, but because some of the houses were built

on top of a gas pipeline, they remain illegal. As a result, while most dwellings became recognized by the state, some remain in legal limbo. Nevertheless, in recent years some improvements in infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and water, as well as social services were achieved. For example, in 2015 the first and only public school opened its doors to local children. Although the maximum capacity of the school is 960 students, the actual number of children of school age in Dordoi is well over 1500.

Ak-Jar was also established in 2002 and grew rapidly after the Tulip Revolution. Currently there are over 2300 houses, which are homes to over 15000 people. However, most of these houses are illegal because they were built either on top of a gas pipeline or under high-voltage electric cables. Local regulations prohibit construction in these areas due to safety issues. Similar to Dordoi, slum dwellers in Ak-Jar are rural migrants, most of who work in the informal sector as bazaars sellers, taxi drivers, or day laborers. Unlike Dordoi, there is no public school in Ak-Jar, so school-age children either have to commute to nearby Kelechek or Ak-Bata (legalized *novostroikas*) or other schools in the city. The problem is that there are only two bus lines that connect Ak-Jar to other parts of the city, so it takes up to 2 hours for some students to get to school. Due to lack of education opportunities, children in 43 families in Ak Jar do not attend school according to the UNCEF report.

In Kalys –Ordo “land-grabbing” started in 2003. Currently the settlement consists of 3000 houses and 18000 residents. There is only one asphalted road; others are dirt roads that are difficult to use during winter months. Most houses are made of dirt; few are made of brick. Apart from single-family homes, there are also many so-called “dormitories” – houses with about 20 small rooms, which are rented out to poor migrants and their

families for approximately USD30 per month. Most residents work in local bazaars; some women work in clothing factories, but many are unemployed. One thing that draws attention in Kalys-Ordo is a relatively large number of people with disabilities. According to one of the residents, that is because it was easier to purchase and formalize property rights for people who receive public benefits, including disability. However, infrastructure in Kalys-Ordo is very poor: provision of electricity and water is not regular and the settlement is too close to the landfill. Although the quality of life in Kalys-Ordo is significantly worse than in some provincial towns, people choose to stay there because of its proximity to the city that offers better quality healthcare than in other parts of the country. However, Kalys-Ordo's proximity to the landfill makes it a dangerous place to live: smog from burning trash covers the settlement. Nevertheless, majority of properties in Kalys-Ordo are formalized. There are two public schools and a healthcare center that serves local population, as well as residents of nearby *novostroikas*.

Altyn-Kazyk is also located right next to a landfill, just a few meters away from piles of waste. There are approximately 500 houses and more than 3000 people in the settlement. Since local regulations prohibit construction within 1000 meters of the landfill, the residents of Altyn-Kazyk cannot formalize their houses. The first thing that one notices when arriving in the settlement is the horrendous smell and shriek of crows and vultures hovering around the landfill. However, the landfill is not just a curse of the slum – for most residents it is the only source of income. The dangerous job of picking metal and plastic from trash can bring up to USD10 per day. For this reason, the settlement's name, which translates to “Golden Pole” is fitting since landfill is a “goldmine” for many in the local community. Since the slum has no access to water, electricity or gas, the

dwellers of Altyn-Kazyk take the matters in their own hands: they bring water from the nearby Kalys-Ordo and they gather money to purchase an electric grid that can be hooked to the city supplier. The residents of Altyn Kazyk are charged more per kilowatt than city dwellers, but there is just enough electricity for light bulbs and a TV. In the winter months when I was conducting the interviews, the temperature inside the houses was almost as low as it was outside even though people constantly burned coal to warm up. In case of illness, there is no medical facility and even no pharmacy in the community to turn to. There are no public schools and childcare facilities either. Altyn-Kazyk is one of the poorest informal settlements with least infrastructure and social services available to the residents.

The migrants that I interviewed in each of these *novostroikas* had different personal profiles. Few were owners of the dwelling, but most of them were renters who could not afford to purchase their own home or rent a better place in the city. Some respondents had higher education and worked in local schools and medical clinics, but most were either unemployed (or employed irregularly) or worked in low-skilled jobs even though they possessed a high school or even a university diploma. Women in particular tend to be unemployed and do not receive any welfare benefits for themselves or their children. Some respondent were students, others retired elderly and people with disabilities. But what they all had in common is various problems that they had to face because they lacked local Bishkek *propiska*. In total I interviewed 78 rural migrants and their stories laid the foundation for this dissertation.

In order to understand how *propiska* affects the attitudes of the ‘native’ city residents towards the unregistered rural migrants, I conducted 25 in-depth unstructured

interviews with the “old-timers” to examine their perception and image of the unregistered rural migrants. I also asked the respondents to imagine the consequences of local registration reforms, how do they think it would affect them, and whether or not they support such reforms.

State’s practices and perspectives were captured through interviews with street-level bureaucrats and municipal government officials. The goal of these interviews was to investigate their viewpoint on why local registration is necessary and useful and how it helps or hinders the provision of social services, as well as implementation of social and economic policies. Street-level bureaucrats, such as public education and healthcare administrators, clerks, and police officers described how the *propiska* system affects the way their institutions operate and offered their perspective on why it is a necessary (or not) administrative tool. Municipal officials discussed the current state of internal migration and whether there any are other alternatives to the *propiska* system. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded via pen and paper as well as electronic recording devices when permitted by the respondent.

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### A. Introduction

The main question addressed in this dissertation is why do certain institutions, such as *propiska*, that seem counterintuitive and anachronistic prevail? Since the question itself references historical roots of the policy, the most fitting approach to answering it is historical institutionalism, which focuses on ideas of path dependence and critical junctures. Historical institutionalism offers a broad framework to investigate both policy endurance and change. Historical account of *propiska* system presented in Chapter 4 demonstrates its “stickiness” and self-reinforcing patterns following critical junctures, namely episodes of dramatic political and economic changes. Although analysis of historical process provides valuable insights, but there is much more to be said about the *propiska* system. Particularly, the tensions between *propiska* as an institution of social control and informal mechanism through which “undocumented citizens” circumvent it represent micro-practices in post-socialist state-society relations. Therefore, this chapter will also focus on situating the dissertation in broader literature on state, informality, and citizenship.

#### B. Historical Institutionalism Approach

The most essential topics in comparative politics, such as democratization, authoritarianism, state-building, and revolutions just to name a few, take a long time to develop. Institutions, such as parties, labor unions, constitutions, tax systems, or residence registration systems that are parts of these larger processes may persist unaltered for a long period of time under certain conditions and gradually or abruptly change in other circumstances. Historical institutionalism provides a set of analytical tools to study

institutional origins, persistence, change, and legacies. Perhaps most importantly historical-institutional approach allows to disentangle multiple causal interactions between institutions and contexts in which they are embedded. One of the prominent scholars of historical institutionalism, Kathleen Thelen, argued that “the key to understanding institutional evolution and change lies in specifying more precisely the reproduction and feedback mechanisms on which particular institutions rest” and that “greater insight into the different types of reproduction mechanisms behind different institutional arrangements holds the key to understanding what particular kinds of external events and processes are likely to produce political openings that drive institutional evolution and change” (Thelen 1999, 388). Scholars of historical institutionalism suggest that social science research ought to shift from “snapshots” to a “moving picture” of social mechanisms that can be historically traced in order to facilitate the finding of patterns of phenomena over time (Pierson 2011).

Historical-institutional approach to study politics is often juxtaposed to rational choice approach. Rational choice theory assumes that individuals are rational beings and suggests that they rely on calculations of costs and benefits in order to achieve their specific objectives. Rational choice institutionalism is a political science approach that is based on a premise of self-interested actors who have particular policy preferences. In rationalist models, these preferences are based on exogenous structure-generated equilibrium that constrains options that a rational actor can choose from (Shepsle 2006). For example, Olson’s logic of collective action posits that large groups of individuals, like workers or consumers, will not organize around common interest because the cost of individual contribution (time, effort, money) towards the shared goal is personally costly

but inconsequential for the ultimate outcome (Olson, 1965). Historical institutionalists, however, emphasize institutional origins of political preferences, not individual-level cost-benefit analysis. Thus, the main disagreement between the traditions of historical-institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism is about the origins of policy preferences; or in words of Thelen and Steinmo “perhaps *the* core difference between rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism lies in the question of preference formation” (Steinmo et al. 1992). The critical distinctive characteristic of historical-institutional (as opposed to rational choice) approach that is relevant to this dissertation is the emphasis on how institutions created in the past affect contemporary politics in ways that counter actors’ preferences and interests. Current residence registration in Kyrgyzstan succeeded Soviet *propiska* system retaining a lot of the same features, particularly in terms of how difficult it is to obtain in a major city and how important it is for distribution of social welfare. However, as discussed in previous chapters, administration of *propiska* does not fit rational logic of local political actors: for municipality, rational choice would be to ease registration eligibility requirements and encourage all residents to register so that it can get more budgetary transfers from the central government; for clientelistic political parties and political entrepreneurs simplification of voter registration, which is tied to residence registration, would expand their constituency and create new opportunities for patronage. Therefore, in this case, focusing on institutional foundations of preferences and balancing macro-level and micro-level analysis is the most appropriate way of explaining *propiska*’s resilience.

The principal example of why the analysis of historical processes is crucial for understanding political outcomes is the argument about path dependence, which refers to

self-reinforcing patterns of positive feedback process within a political system (Steinmo et al. 1992). In other words, if a policy or an institution goes down a certain path, changing its course becomes increasingly difficult as time passes and alternative options become fewer and less appealing. Therefore, when a path is established, self-reinforcing mechanisms make changing or reversing its direction almost impossible. Once structural and institutional patterns of political phenomena are formed, social norms help to create “self-reinforcing dynamics”, such as increasing returns, network effects, and lock-in (Pierson 2000). Hence, theory of path dependence can help to explain the “stickiness” of political institutions, such as *propiska* system that has persisted through centuries from feudal Russia, into the Soviet Union, and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

In the analysis of path-dependent institutions, “critical juncture” is a key concept that refers to a short period of time, a formative moment that triggers a path-dependent process (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). During a critical juncture different options are possible and the direction of the future paths is not pre-determined, which means that the course of institutional development selected at that point is only one of several paths that were available (Mahoney 2000). In other words, choices and decisions that political actors make during critical junctures are less restricted and more important for institutional development than the decisions they make later down the “path” (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007). Once a single option is selected, this initial choice establishes a long-term institutional legacy. The causal logic of path dependence and critical junctures was adopted by a number of political scientists who explored both institutional durability and change. These include some of the most fundamental issues in comparative politics like democratic transitions (Diamond 1999), endurance and collapse of authoritarian regimes

(Mahoney 2001), as well as origins and consequences of social movements (Tarrow 2011).

For instance, Ruth Collier and David Collier's comparative-historical analysis of eight Latin American countries reveals various state responses to labor movements during critical junctures that ultimately determined the course of either democratic or authoritarian paths Latin American countries followed during 1960-s and 1970-s (Collier and Collier 1991). Another example from post-communist studies is Anna Gryzmal-Busse's book *Redeeming the Communist Past*, which demonstrates how after the collapse of widely despised communism regimes in Eastern and Central Europe, regenerated communist successor parties remarkably survived, adapted, and succeeded within the new democratic system (Grzymala-Busse 2002). Valerie Bunce, also, made an immense contribution to historical-institutional study of communist and post-communist politics; in her book *Subversive Institutions: The Design and the Destruction of Socialism and the State* she explained long-term underlying factors and immediate triggers that caused the collapse of Marxist-Leninist regimes and why it led to disintegration of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia (Bunce 1999); and in *Defeating Authoritarian Leaders*, Bunce and Wolchik showed how timing and sequence of post-communist social movements determined the strength of their democratic outcomes (Bunce and Wolchik 2011).

While critical junctures explain the origins of institutions and path dependence theory gives a reason for institutional continuity, other theories of historical institutionalism offer an account of change. Punctuated equilibrium theory suggests that long periods of institutional stability are sometimes "punctuated" by exogenous change

that causes overwhelming and radical policy transformation (Baumgartner and Jones 1992). However not all institutional changes are so profound; indeed, many are gradual in nature. Mahoney and Thelen distinguished four types of gradual institutional change: displacement (elimination of old rule or policy and establishment of a new one), layering (new policy enacted alongside an existing one), drift (change in existing policy due to exogenous factors), and conversion (shift in policy goals and its administration) (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). In the case study presented in this dissertation, the collapse of the Soviet Union prompted fundamental changes in political regime and economic policies in Kyrgyzstan but it did not lead to radical reforms in either residence registration or welfare system. Instead, in these two aspects, institutional change was slow and not as significant as in other policy areas.

Hence, in the tradition of historical institutionalism, this study uses narratives to identify mechanisms that explain durability and gradual change of *propiska* residence registration system and how its use as an instrument of exclusion from welfare perpetuates inequality and petty corruption in healthcare, education, and street-level bureaucracies. Critical junctures, such as establishment of internal passports during initial collectivization and industrialization era, explain the origins of *propiska* and its contribution to social stratification between rural and urban citizens. In post-Soviet period, *propiska* policy was re-invented to fit the demands of democratic norms, that is to grant freedom of movement, but at the same time to exclude unregistered rural migrants from welfare and politics, which reflects processes of simultaneous drift and conversion. Essentially, *propiska* system adapted to the new political and economic environment and remained deeply embedded in many administrative processes – from issuance of a birth certificate to the

issuance of a death certificate nearly all interactions with the state involve furnishing proof of local residence registration.

Informal arrangements that are used to circumvent the rules of residence registration also have their roots in the Soviet experience. Facing scarcity in basic commodities and onerous “red tape”, Soviet citizens often resorted to informal arrangements and exchanges. For example, Ledeneva’s book *Russia’s Economy of Favors* provides a historical-institutional analysis of “*blat*” – meaning exchange of favors within informal networks to gain access to rationed goods (Ledeneva 1998). The use of informal social networks of friends, family, colleagues, schoolmates, neighbors, and fellow-villages continue to play prominent role in politics, business, and everyday life not only in Russia, but all post-Soviet states. In addition to *blat*, forging personal relations with public workers responsible for distribution of goods and services was important because it would allow asking them for special favors. Thus, the informal practices of showing gratitude for public service, which included both monetary and non-monetary exchanges, became customary. Even though shortages and rationing no longer exist in post-Soviet countries, informal payments, particularly to low-level bureaucrats, police, healthcare workers, and educators remain commonplace (Polese, 2016).

Analysis of informal institutions is rare in historical-institutional tradition even though in post-communist and post-colonial states key political events and processes stem from informal rather than formal institutions. For example, Grzymala-Busse argued that in transitional settings, informal institutions could replace, undermine, and reinforce formal institutions regardless of state capacity (Grzymala-Busse). For Hemke and Levitsky (2004) these informal institutions represent alternative unwritten “rules of the game”,

which they categorize into complementary (facilitate pursuit of individual goals within the formal institutional framework), accommodating (alter the effect of formal rules without violating them), substitutive (achieve what formal institutions are designed to do but cannot), and competing (violate formal rules). However, not all informal institutions fit into this typology. Particularly, informal practices that emerge as coping mechanisms in response to overly restrictive or oppressive formal institutions, such *propiska*, are better described as “adaptive informal institutions” (Tsai 2007). For instance, using the example of Chinese private sector development in 1970-s, Tsai (2006) argues that when formal institutional environment is too restrictive, individual actors respond with informal coping strategies, which overtime become institutionalized. Similarly, informal practices of circumventing *propiska* are adaptive informal institutions that originated in Soviet “blat” but took a life of their own in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan.

Therefore, both communist legacy institution – *propiska* system and the informal mechanisms of circumventing it are partially rooted in the historical context of the Soviet regime, but they also gradually transformed and adapted, each in their own way, to the new political and economic reality. Durability and most importantly, adaptability, of these formal and informal institutions notwithstanding disintegration of the state itself goes to show that institutions have long-term legacies that far outlive leaders, policies, and even the state. These legacies shape patterns of individual and organizational behavior and, thus, continue influencing political development for generations to come (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017).

While historical-institutionalism offers a broad framework for analysis of institutional durability and change, theories of corruption provide explanations to

questions that are also central to this dissertation, such as: is there a difference between informality and corruption when it comes to circumventing *propiska* by negotiating with bureaucrats? What do these informal exchanges between citizens and public workers mean for the boundaries of state and society? Are these informal practices a way for rural migrants to claim their citizenship rights or is it a way for the state to maintain status quo? Do these informal arrangements help migrants overcome barriers to social welfare or do they perpetuate existing patterns of inequality?

### **C. Rethinking the Meaning of Corruption**

In political science the meaning of corruption is largely taken for granted. Contemporary narratives about corruption originate in reference to Weberian model of Western rational bureaucracy, where public and private domains are strictly delineated. Corruption occurs when these lines are crossed and bureaucrats use public office for private gain (World bank 1997). The ills of corruption have been mostly associated with post-colonial (Nye 1967) and later post-communist countries (Karklins 2016). Economists argued that corruption impedes growth (Mauro 1995) and allows shadow economies to flourish (Friedman et al. 2000); while scholars of political development warned that corruption hinders success of democratic reforms (Shleifer 1997). As a result, eradication of corruption in the Global South has been at the top of the agenda for international development organizations, such as World Bank, UNDP, and USAID. However, current mainstream discourses about corruption among political scientists and development experts often stem from flawed assumptions about conceptual uniformity of corruption, the source of incentives to partake in it, and its universally adverse effect on state capacity to govern.

First, conceptual definition of corruption has rarely been questioned. Traditional definition of corruption rests on a clear distinction between public and private but the boundaries of these domains are fluid and vary in different contexts (Scott 1969). Specifically, informal institutions such as systems of social and economic exchange, norms of reciprocity, and social networks are all fundamentals of corruption, yet not equivalent to it. In fact, whether one act is considered corrupt or not has to do with power dynamics more than anything else. Specifically, Doshi and Ranganathan (2019, 438) suggest that “symbolic, material, and territorial forms of power – forged through race, class, gender, and other hierarchical relations of difference – are especially influential in determining which actions, places, and bodies are deemed corrupt and which publics are imagined to be harmed by corruption at different historical junctures”. Similarly, Harrison argues that “the differences between different practices which are all lumped together as ‘corruption’ lie in the different conceptions of what kind of moral boundary line has been crossed in particular instances” (Harrison 2007, 675).

Therefore, informal practices that emerge among the urban poor due to economic precarity may be demonized and considered corrupt in one place or at one period of time, but celebrated in the next. Likewise, extracting and dispossessing actions of politicians might be seen as normal (e.g. as part of privatization reforms or market mechanisms) in one instance, and as deviant and corrupt in the other. For example, during Cold War, corruption in the Soviet Union could be interpreted as a method of resistance an oppressive regime. However, after the fall of communism, corruption was deemed one of the most critical problems in Russia, Caucasus, and Central Asia (Stefes 2006). Although the most offensive acts of corruption were related to privatization of lucrative industries

by regime “insiders”, anti-corruption campaign spearheaded by international development organizations in post-Soviet countries focused on combating petty street-level corruption by punishing doctors, customs officers, or traffic policemen (Wedel 2012).

Meanwhile, in India, informal arrangements between street-level bureaucrats and the urban poor are framed as “ordinary spaces for negotiation” where slum-dwellers, hawkers, and street-vendors can exercise their agency (Anjaria 2011). Thus, not only does conceptualization of corruption depend on particular context or historical timeframe, but also on the perception of agency (Anjaria 2011). In other words, the key question to consider is who preys on whom: are the urban poor victims of extortion? Or do they purposefully seek out informal negotiations with the state? Evidence from Bishkek demonstrates that the answer is not always straightforward. Therefore, the term “corruption” that rightfully bears a strong negative connotation is a complex and fluid concept, but in current academic and development policy discourse it has come to encompass a wide range of informal activities. However, the diversity in meanings linked to different types of informal exchanges, as well as how they become politicized, remains largely overlooked.

Secondly, from the perspective of rational models, bureaucratic corruption is usually explained by principal-agent theory, where a principal (e.g. head of tax revenue service) employs an agent (tax clerk), who interacts with a client (taxpayer) on behalf of the principal (Klitgaard 1988). Problems arise when agents ignore the interests of the principal and engage in rent-seeking (Rose-Ackerman and Palifka 1999). Rational choice theory’s take on the logic of bureaucratic corruption does not take into account the role of political and economic institutions in perpetuating informal activities at street-level

bureaucracies; instead leaving moral accountability with individual bureaucrats. For example, in African context, liberalization reforms introduced by international development agencies, such as deregulation, decentralization, and privatization formed new conditions for proliferation of corruption (Szeftel 1988). Meanwhile, in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, legacies of the communist system, such as collegiality among state workers and aversion of whistleblowers, make post-communist countries more prone to corruption (Karklins 2016).

Thirdly, corruption is presumed a dysfunctional aspect of state governance and a symptom of a weak state. In other words, states that are plagued with corruption (be it top-level political elites or street-level bureaucrats involved in the deviant practices) are deemed to lack capacity to enforce laws and curb corrupt behaviors of politicians and bureaucrats. The idea that corruption can actually reinforce state power is controversial. Nevertheless, Darden (2008) finds that under certain conditions graft, which is generally subsumed in the concept of “corruption”, becomes an informal state institution that sustains the integrity of the state by providing an alternative to inadequate formal mechanisms of securing compliance (Darden 2008). Darden further argues that informal or illegal practices, such as graft, provide a basis for ensuring loyalty and obedience within a political hierarchy. In these situations, leaders use graft either to “reward” their subordinates with additional compensation or “punish” them by exposing and seizing their illicit property gained through corruption (Darden 2008).

At the street-level, informal exchanges including petty bribery (the hallmark of corruption in development circles) also have ambiguous meaning for the state. For instance, Gupta (1995, 376) posits that “instead of treating corruption as a dysfunctional

aspect of state organizations, I see it as a mechanism through which “the state” itself is discursively constructed”. Exploring everyday practices of low-level state officials and their interactions with citizens in India, Gupta (1995) demonstrates how informal practices, including bribery, blur the boundary between public and private. Specifically, office space located in bureaucrat’s private residence is both private and public; the aide taking on bureaucrat’s personal or household tasks in addition to their official duties is engaged in both public and private work, and of course, informal payments that accompany formal fees also bring the public into the realm of the private and vice versa (Gupta 1995).

In order to tease out the question of whether petty corruption (or other types of informal state institutions for that matter) undermines the state or constitutes it, it is important to critically examine the notion of the state and its relation to the society. From the perspective of statist theories, any kind of informal interaction between the state and the citizen is a dysfunction; however, from the perspective of subaltern theories, petty corruption and informal practices make state accessible to otherwise excluded populations. Both theoretical viewpoints make flawed assumptions about the state: either exaggerating its autonomy or underplaying its intent. The discussion presented in the dissertation stands in the center of the scholarly debate about state-society relations and offers a different account of how the image and meaning of state is shaped by adaptive post-communist formal and informal institutions.

#### **D. Rethinking State-Society Relations**

The conventional definition of state comes from Max Weber’s seminal lecture in 1918, where he argues that the state is a “human community that (successfully) claims the

monopoly of the legitimate use of violence within a given territory”. This conceptualization of state assumes that it is an autonomous, monolithic, and goal-oriented organization with clear boundaries. Another major assumption is that the state is the only entity, which should and does create rules and uses violence to make people obey them. Thus, Weber’s is a definition of an ideal type state, which is used to compare existing states against. Theorization of state in terms of formal legalism dominated political science of the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Political life was equated with the state, which was conceptualized as law-making institution that stood in a superior hierarchical position vis-a-vis the society and other parts of the polity.

However, after emergence of behaviorism in 1950-s, the focus shifted from formal rules and legal institutions to societal forces. The shift of attention from state to society can also be partially attributed to political mobilization of masses, interest groups, and mass media that came to the forefront of political thought (Almond 1988). Due to the necessity of finding a way to incorporate economics, civil society organizations, churches, schools, and other forms of collective action, the concept of “state” was abandoned and replaced by “political system”. Political systems approach denied state autonomy; and instead assigned greater role to the society in influencing political outcomes. Specifically, American pluralist literature focused on how pressure groups influence policy. For instance, Latham (1952) went as far as characterizing governmental institutions, such as the House and the Senate with their own identities and interests. Thus, pluralist models generally rejected the idea of state autonomy and its distinctiveness from other groups within the society. The boundaries between the state and the society became increasingly blurry and the relationship between them – obscure.

As a response to the shortcomings of the political systems approach, a number of scholars started once again questioning state-society relations. Statist literature emerged out of these considerations and tried to grasp the meaning of state and critically evaluate Weber's basic definition of it. John Nettl is one of the pioneering statist to direct scholarly attention back to the concept of state. He argued that state is an ideological and cultural construct that exists among people who recognize it; and it is deeply connected with historical experience, as well as cultural and intellectual traditions of a specific country (Nettl, 1968). In other words, state was understood as a conceptual variable that corresponds to empirical phenomena (such as formal legal structures) but also is "incorporated in the thinking and actions of individual citizen" (Nettle 1968, 577). However, as statist literature developed, it became increasingly preoccupied with the question of state autonomy. In fact, statist political scientists suggest that state is much more autonomous than pluralist literature leads us to believe and that the causal arrow runs from the state to the society, contrary to previous pluralist assumptions.

For instance, Nordlinger (1982) criticized societal reductionism and instead emphasized state autonomy in decision-making. In essence, the argument was that even in democratic politics, politicians can determine public policy without considerations of rewards and punishments from particular societal groups. In fact, under certain conditions, they are able to implement policies that contradict societal inclinations. Therefore, the bottom line for statist scholars is that "state is an actor in its own right: it cannot be understood as a reflection of societal characteristics or preferences" (Nordlinger, 1982, 225). Furthermore, Skocpol (1985, 21) in "*Bring the State Back*" argues that "[states] matter because their organizational configurations, along with their overall patterns of

activity, affect political culture, encourage some kinds of group formation and collective political actions (but not others), and make possible the raising of certain political issues (but not others)". To that end, modern state is presumed to dominate various social groups and shape their behavior.

The assumption of state autonomy has certainly remained influential in social science discourse, but it was also challenged by subaltern theories, as well as alternative conceptions of state-society relations. Subaltern theorists contest the idea that people, particularly those oppressed or marginalized by power hierarchies, are simply subjects of state control and merely obey the rules. Instead, subaltern literature focuses on the ways people interact with state through different formal, and especially, informal mechanisms, so that the state is perceived less as disciplinary power and more as a locus of negotiation (Anjaria 2011). In his influential book *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of resistance*, James Scott (1985, 16) illustrates that subtle forms of everyday resistance, such as "foot dragging, dissimulation, desertion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage" avoid direct confrontation with the powerful authorities. Nevertheless, "individual acts of foot dragging and evasion, reinforced by a venerable popular culture of resistance and multiplied many thousand-fold, may, in the end, make an utter shambles of the policies dreamed up by their would-be superiors in the capital" (Scott 1985, 17). Similarly, Asef Bayat's *Life as politics* discusses the idea of "quiet encroachment of the ordinary", which refers to silent but sustained effort of the urban poor to improve their livelihoods through informal and often-illegal tactics of redistribution, such as squatting and hooking up to municipal electric power or water supplies (Bayat 2013).

Subaltern literature demonstrates that individuals and social groups are not passive subjects of the state; they exercise agency on their own behalf through informal means. By the same token, interactions between low-levels of state bureaucrats and the urban poor also involve informal exchanges and petty corruption discussed earlier in the chapter. Indeed, informal practices, such as bribing local law enforcement to use public space for squatting, hawking, or street-vending or bribing medical staff at a state clinic to get care one is ineligible for, blur the contours of state boundaries and obscure the line between public and private. Subaltern theorists may argue that these are “ordinary spaces for negotiation” with the state where claims to substantive citizenship can be made but this understanding of the relationship avoids the conversation about power hierarchy in these interactions. State officials have the ultimate power to grant or deny requests, so they also have the power to set or change the rules of informal exchanges. Moreover, privileged and marginalized populations both use informal networks, exchanges, or payments to access public resources or services (e.g. land, housing, healthcare, education, various certificates or permits). For those with better social connections and more funds for graft, state is clearly more accessible than it is for the urban poor, which makes these informal practices not so much tools of resistance to state abuse, but tools of exploitation itself. As Haller and Shore (2005, 17) argued: “We should not lose sight of the fact that transactions of bribery and corruption always take place in power relationships that invariably stratify, marginalize and exclude”.

Perhaps the most important shortcoming of both subaltern and statist theories about state-society relations is that they assume that the rule of law is the main objective of the state and the main source of its power. From the initial Weberian conceptualization

of state to contemporary theories of state-society relations, it presumes that states create laws and rules in order to compel people to adhere to them. However, in reality states often adopt laws that are impossible to follow, so what if some laws were intended to induce non-compliance? For instance, in Turkish mining sector, for the sake of public safety, each time specialized explosives are used local police officer has to be on site and file paperwork. However, quarries are numerous and they are located far from each other, so there are simply not enough *jandarma* officers available to be present at all times. Instead of waiting for days or weeks until *jandarma* officer becomes available, mining companies enter informal agreements with them so they can file the paperwork after the fact in exchange for unofficial monetary or non-monetary compensation. In Kyrgyzstan, since *propiska* is linked to homeownership, it effectively bars low-income internal migrants from obtaining local registration and thereby excludes them from urban social services. However, these social services or goods, such healthcare or identification documents are essential in every individual's daily life, so migrants try to find informal ways of circumventing *propiska* requirements.

Laws and rules that are designed to be hard (or nearly impossible) to comply with, are nevertheless mechanisms of social control. On one hand, they perpetuate informality and corruption, but on the other they can be enforced selectively in a punitive manner. Therefore, the boundaries between legal and illegal, formal and informal, public and private are not as strict as statist theories presume; yet informality is not necessarily a weapon of the weak, as subaltern theories contend; instead it might even be the weapon of the state. Taking this as the point of departure, this dissertation seeks to understand the connections between rigid state policy, bureaucratic corruption, and the meaning of

citizenship that is being forged through street-level interactions between the state and the citizen. In doing so, the most useful theoretical perspective is state-in-society lens offered by Joe Migdal and Timothy Mitchell.

State-in-society theory rejects the assumption that state is a coherent, monolithic, and autonomous entity. Indeed, Migdal in his definition of state departs from Weber's: "state is a field of power marked by the use and threat of violence and shaped by (1) the image of a coherent, controlling organization in a territory, which is a representation of the people bounded by that territory, and (2) the actual practices of its multiple parts" (Migdal 1988, 18). In Migdal's view states are shaped by two elements, namely images and practices, which either complement or contradict each other. The image of the state is its "avatar" in an international arena, i.e. its outward characteristics of autonomy, territorial integrity, and social boundary that separates it from non-state actors. Practices of the state, on the other hand, are the various everyday actions that occur in different state agencies. These practices can reinforce the image of the state or weaken the territorial or social boundaries associated with it. Specifically, practices can blur the divide between public and private, as is the case with bureaucratic corruption. Therefore, state is a complex non-monolithic entity, whose image and practices may not coincide. This duality is the paradox of the state, which needs to be accepted and acknowledged. It doesn't make state weak or strong, but it means that "like any other group or organization, the state is constructed and reconstructed, invented and reinvented, through its interaction as a whole and of its parts with others" (Migdal 1988, 23).

Similarly, Mitchell (1991) questions the distinction between conceptual and empirical realm of the state. He argues that state is represented and reproduced in visible

every day forms, such as legal language, military or police uniforms, architecture of public buildings, and so forth. Therefore, cultural forms of the state are in themselves empirical phenomena as solid as, for example, legal structure of a party system. The state appears to stand apart from society; its intentions and ideas stand apart from the external world to which they refer. However, rather than searching for definition that will fix the boundary, Mitchell recommends examining the detailed “political processes through which the uncertain yet powerful distinction between state and society is produced” (Mitchell, 1991, 78). This distinction should be drawn internally between institutional mechanisms through which political and social order is maintained. Consequently, the “elusiveness of the state-society boundary needs to be taken seriously, not as problem of conceptual precision but as a clue to the nature of the phenomenon” (Mitchell, 1991, 78). Specifically, Mitchell states that “disciplinary power operates not from the outside but from within, not at the level of the entire society but at the level of detail, and not by constraining individuals and their actions but by producing them” (Mitchell 1991, 91-92). Thus, Mitchell shows that state and society are mutually constructed and that existing institutions contain hidden imbalances of power because creation of disciplines directly or indirectly allows the state to act in the interest of the existing power relations.

Every single day people re-create and reinforce the boundaries of the state, and thereby recreate the state. Processes of spatial organization (such as street names, addresses, and local registrations), population accounts (such as birth certificates, ID cards, and driver’s licenses), and informal activities (such as patronage networks and street-level corruption) – are all arrangements that draw the boundaries between public and private. Migdal would refer to them as “practices” and Mitchell would call them

“functions”, but these local-level arrangements are key to understanding and analyzing state power. *Propiska* system is an example of how disciplinary power of the state is not just about constraining citizens even though it might seem that way at first glance. Instead, the rigidity of *propiska* compels property-less rural migrants to find informal ways of circumventing the registration requirements and gaining access to social services through alternative channels. In other words, with regards to *propiska*, rigorous enforcement is not state’s intention; on the contrary, ambiguity in its administration and tolerance of street-level petty corruption are practices of state power in their own right.

## IV. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF *PROPISKA* SYSTEM

### A. Introduction

Local registration system has proven to be a remarkably widespread and resilient institution. Imperial powers used various forms of registration to control their colonies and populations, including Spain and Ottoman Empire. Registration regimes that limit individuals' right to movement within a country were used to perpetuate inequalities in South Africa under apartheid and continue to restrict access to certain provinces in Malaysia. Although various types of registration that bind a citizen to a specific place or limit their ability to migrate within their own country are fairly common, Russian internal passport. The goal of this chapter is to explain the resilience of *propiska* system by sorting through its complex history. I will demonstrate how the institution of *propiska* was adapted to different regimes: feudal, socialist, and semi-democratic and how it was interpreted by accompanying state ideologies. Therefore, using historical-institutionalist approach I attempt to reveal the causes of *propiska's* persistence in various economic, political, and social contexts.

### B. The Origins of *Propiska* System

In 1649 Code of Laws or *Sobornoe Ulozhenie* established under Tsar Aleksei is believed to be the most important written monument to survive from Russia before 19<sup>th</sup> century (Hellie 1988). It represents an important point in Russian history as the first comprehensive legal code of Imperial Russia. It addresses a wide scope of issues from capital crimes to liquor licensing, but most notably it consolidates serfdom and prohibits peasants from leaving the estate of their landlord (Tikhomirov and Epifanov 1961).

Peter the Great ruled Russia from 1682 until his death in 1725 and became commemorated in history books as a liberal reformer, who replaced medieval social and political systems with modern “enlightened” institutions. However, when it comes to migration control, his decrees further restricted population movement. In 1714 urban households were required to report any arrivals or departures to the District Supervisor; in 1716 police posts started mandatory travel documents checks; and a decree issued in 1719 standardized travel documents and required everyone to obtain a pass from their superior to move from one village to another (Mervyn 1993).

Each subject of the Russian Empire had to be permanently registered at a certain location and needed special permission to leave. The permanent place of residence was defined as a place where one worked, owned property, or was registered in the books, but not by choice (Mervyn 1993). As a result, serfs and peasants, who comprised more than eighty percent of the population, were denied the right to move or travel without permission of the landlord. Institutions of movement control are closely intertwined with the process of social ordering in Russia’s system of “estates” (*sosloviye*) that developed in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century dividing the society into four main categories or estates: nobility, clergy, urban residents, and peasantry (Mironov and Ahearn 2008). Thus, *sosloviye* refers to a social group whose place in a social hierarchy, as well as rights and privileges are based on occupation. Every member of each *sosloviye* was obliged to register with an appropriate local institution and was assigned a permanent place of residence. Peasants were to remain in their estate for a lifetime unless they were somehow able to acquire education or state service.

Historians argue that Russian estate system developed differently from similar structures in Europe because first, it appeared much later (exactly when Western social hierarchies started to dissolve) and second, it was purposefully established by the state, as opposed to medieval legacy in the West (Kliuchevskii 1937). Specifically, the Digest of Laws in 1832 delineated various status laws and created poll tax registry, which further widened the chasm between privileged and unprivileged Russians (Charques 1959). Inclusion in the poll tax registry was an indicator of stigma and low social status, as well as severe restrictions on geographic mobility. Peasants, servants, and persons with criminal records were all included in the poll tax registry and were unable to move within the country (Freeze 1986).

Population movement was assumed to be for the purposes of work or trade but not for personal reasons. As such, rights to travel were stratified along social and ethnic lines, which resulted in one of the greatest inequalities. Nobles, priests, and state officials were granted internal passports that allowed them to travel and establish residence in any region of the empire, while peasants had to obtain written permission from the landowners. These authorizations were valid for a short time-period and short distances. Longer journeys required permission from town councils or other proper government office. All urban households were required to notify authorities of out-of-town visitors to the local police or else pay hefty fines. Saint Petersburg and Moscow had their own additional policies, such as employment requirements that made obtaining residence in those cities more difficult (Mervyn 1993).

The Jewish were excluded from interior provinces of Russia and forced to relocate to western borderlands in 1791. In 1835 western territories of imperial Russia that include

today's Belarus, parts of Ukraine, Moldova, Lithuania, and eastern Poland comprised The Pale of Settlement – a geographic region, where Jews were allowed to reside and beyond which they were forbidden to seek temporary or permanent residence (Avrutin 2010). Other ethnic minorities, such as Cossacks, Roma, Caucasians, and Turkic peoples were also limited in their freedom of movement.

Inability to present documents verifying legal temporary presence or permanent residence, as well as harboring undocumented individuals was considered a criminal offence punishable by fines and imprisonment. These harsh rules demonstrate Russian Empire's tremendous effort to not only rule its territories but also manage the population, particularly its social and geographic mobility. Perhaps the most important and lasting effect of tsarist era mobility restrictions was social stratification between those who are contained in one geographic area (the poor, the landless, and the ethnic minorities) and those who are free to travel and move (the nobles and the religious elites). The system of geographical stratification and social (estate) classes was closely intertwined. These categorizations divided people and granted them unequal rights up until the Communist Revolution. Every member of each estate was registered with the local authorities at their place of residence and how easy or difficult it might be to travel or move permanently from one place to another was determined largely by belonging to a privileged or an unprivileged estate. The unequal and stratified system of population control created a large divide between peasants and the ruling classes, limited basic freedoms, and created impossible economic burdens that determined the fate of tsarist Russia. The collapse of Russian tsarist regime was a critical juncture, at which the institutions of geographical and social stratification could have ended because they were inconsistent with the Marxist-

Leninist ideology and the communist aspiration for a free egalitarian society. However, internal passport and residence registration cards were re-invented to serve different needs of the Soviet regime.

### **C. Soviet “Internal Passport” : Communist Registration Policies**

In 1917 October Revolution put an end to the tsarist regime and brought Bolsheviks into power. Bolsheviks openly criticized imperial policies of peasant and worker oppression; however soon after establishment of the new regime, communists, too, installed their own instruments of coercion and control. The military required an organized system of recruitment; economic crisis required a system of food rationing; policing and persecution of the enemies of communism required issuance of some form of personal identification. Therefore, while Bolsheviks promised abolition of all forms of tsarist oppression (The Declaration of the Rights of Working and Exploited People 1918), the very existence of the socialist state necessitated strict regulation of residence, labor, and population movement.

Residence registration cards were (re)introduced as early as 1918. The initial purpose of the residence registration cards was to keep the members of the former bourgeoisie class in check, i.e. ensure that they participate in the military service and engage in productive and “socially useful” labor. Workers were compelled to have a record of their employment status on the residence registration card (Light 2016). However, people with undesirable backgrounds, specifically those considered upper class, had hard time finding employment at state-approved organizations and as a result were further marginalized and persecuted.

Just a few months after the initial launch of residence registration cards, labor

books (*rabochaya knijka*) quickly replaced them as the main form of government issued identification document. Labor books contained two main pieces of personal information: employment status (that included work hours, salary, maternity or sick leaves, vacation times and was subject to regular updates and certifications by the local administration) and address of the permanent place of residence. *Propiska* as it is known now, was first introduced as a line item in a labor book in 1919 (Light 2016). Remarkably, labor books and *propiska* both survived the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of communism and are still widespread in post-Soviet countries, including Kyrgyzstan. Labor book entries are used for employment record keeping and serve as the basis for retirement benefits. *Propiska* is included in the government-issued identification card.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the labor book, each household was issued a “housing book” (*domovaya knijka*) that contained a list of persons who were registered at the dwelling, as well as all visitors who ever stayed there. The hosts had to register the visitors at the local law enforcement stations within 48 hours of their arrival (Rakhmonova-Schwarz 2010). Just like the labor book, “housing book” has also survived through the years and generations. Although nowadays it no longer requires immediate registration of visitors, it is still a mandatory document for every homeowner in post-Soviet countries, including Russia. Housing book includes a list of property owners who may or may not have *propiska* at the address of the property<sup>23</sup> as well as individuals who are registered at the property, i.e. whose permanent or temporary *propiska* is at the address, but who do not

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<sup>22</sup> In 2019 the line item containing address of permanent residence was removed from national identification cards; however, this information is now contained in a microchip, so when ID card is scanned address of permanent residence can be verified.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, in cases when one person owns multiple apartments or other types of housing

actually own the property.<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, early Bolshevik policies borrowed their substance from tsarist institutions of control and oppression and adapted it to the context of post-revolution Russia. The labor book and the housing book both normalized and reinforced *propiska* and the limits it put on people's freedom of movement. Thus, Bolshevik policies laid the cornerstone for control mechanisms that were used and adapted for multitude of purposes: from building Stalinism to managing post-socialist transition.

Joseph Stalin rose to power and became the leader of the Soviet Union after Lenin's death in 1924 and remained the General Secretary of the Communist Party until his death in 1953. One of the main objectives of the party in 1920-s and 1930-s was a transition from a rural to an industrialized economy. Thus, when Stalin came to power, industrialization was the main priority. In his view the means to achieve that objective was through expropriation of *kulaks*, wealthy peasants. Stalin argued that *kulaks* exploited poor peasants and urban workers by holding on to grains until prices rise and selling them for a large profit margin, so the immediate just thing to do would be to extract crops from *kulaks* by force and redistribute them to the cities. From 1928 to 1936 the Soviet state carried out farm collectivization, where all peasants were forced to give up their individual farms and join large co-operative farms *kolkhoz*. The state extracted agricultural products from the collective farms and used it to acquire capital for industrial investment (McAuley 1992). By mid-1930s industrialization was achieved, but at the cost of famine and persecutions that resulted in death of millions of peasants (Graziosi 2009). From this point

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<sup>24</sup> For instance, children or other family members who with permission of the owner are permanently registered at the property or renters who can get temporary *propiska* at the property with owners' consent.

on, the Soviet Union developed a three-sector economy with heavy industry and defense as first priority sector, light industry as second, and agriculture as the lowest priority sector (McAuley 1992).

In the environment of forced expropriation, farm collectivization, famine, and persecution, Soviet passport system was established to control migration and prevent peasants from fleeing. Internal passports became the main identification document; they contained personal and family information, as well as *propiska*, a residence permit stating the permanent address of the passport-holder. It once again became illegal to travel without the internal passport and to reside at an address different from the *propiska*. The officially declared purpose of passportization was to monitor population demographics to plan economic production and to control the movement of criminals and *kulaks* (Buckley 1995).

Workers in the cities and state farms were issued internal passports. When they traveled outside of their permanent place of residence or changed their place of residence, they had to register with the authorities within 24 hours of arrival. Local administrators either approved or denied registration; therefore, internal migration was locally controlled with central cities imposing most stringent restrictions. Undocumented presence in cities, harboring and employing undocumented internal migrants was deemed criminal offense punishable with fines, up to two years of imprisonment, or up to one month of forced labor for the first offense and up to two years of forced labor for repeated offenses (Mervyn 1993). While urban workers and state farm workers faced migration constraints majority of peasants were altogether excluded from the passport system (Mervyn 1993). They were not issued passports until mid 1970-s, which meant that until then they had no

right to travel outside the farm or legally change their place of residence. In this way the state prevented migration into the central cities, whereas criminal laws penalizing migration without proper documents and registration mainly targeted passport-less peasants.

The official purpose of the internal passport and the *propiska* system was to monitor and estimate population statistics in order to come up with projections for distribution of social welfare, housing, employment, and production of consumer goods. However, it was not the sole purpose of the policy; it also limited access to central cities, where compared to the countryside, people enjoyed higher quality public goods and services, such as better education, healthcare, housing, more access to consumer goods, and social entertainment. Moreover, urbanites had more opportunities for upward social mobility. Since market barriers to entrance to the city did not exist, the state “scientifically” created them (Buckley 1995). In “restricted” cities the population increased only by 4-5 percent between 1956 and the high of *perestroika* in 1989 when migration restrictions were repealed (Buckley 1995).

The registration records also played a role in surveillance, persecutions, and Stalin’s reign of terror. Since application for the internal passport required two copies of photographs (one for the passport and one for the police archive), applications processing resulted in a photo registry of almost every adult in the country. These photographs were undoubtedly available to Soviet security forces and made it possible for them to carry out purges and executions of the “enemies of the state”(Mervyn 1993).

#### **D. Social Consequences of Propiska**

Albeit *propiska* and internal passport system were institutions of strict population

control, they were not entirely effective in discouraging rural-to-urban migration (Lewis and Roland 1979). Soviet citizens found formal, informal, and, sometimes, illegal ways of circumventing the rules. In other words, migration restrictions set in motion adaptation mechanisms. For instance, fictitious marriages for the sake of *propiska* became commonplace. Well-connected individuals could obtain *propiska* in a sought-after city by exchanging favors with high-ranking city or party officials, a situation colloquially known as “*blat*”. In the Soviet context, *blat* refers to a usually non-monetary informal practice of accessing scarce recourse by mobilizing personal contacts and “pulling strings” (Ledeneva 1998). In the economy of shortages, *blat* was commonly used to procure food, consumer goods and public services and circumvent formal procedures. *Propiska*, was one of those formal procedures people sought to bypass, and one of the goods they sought to obtain. In fact, many contemporary informal practices became ingrained during the Soviet era as a result of Soviet style urban governance, where majority citizens at one point or another had to resort to informality to access basic goods and services.

During de-Stalinization period in 1950-s, Moscow’s industrial firms were allowed to hire a certain limited number (quota) of out-of-town workers on the condition that they will build housing for these workers. While the construction was in progress, workers settled in crowded factory dormitories waiting in queue for new housing, which was their only chance at getting permanent *propiska* in Moscow. The wait period was at least five years, but usually more than that. In the meantime, out-of-town workers endured abuse and discrimination in the workplace, because they essentially had no rights and would lose their only chance for Moscow *propiska* if they get fired. “*Limitchiki*”, a derogatory term, referring to these out-of-town factory workers became a part of obscenity vocabulary used

by Muscovites to demean each other though no one could tell a difference between who is “*limitchik*” and who is a Muscovite just by looking at them.

One of the classics of Soviet film: “*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*” (1980) that won the Academy Award in foreign language film category in 1981, demonstrates the complex and multifaceted issue of the *propiska* system by telling a story of three young women: Katya, Lyuda, and Tosya who came to Moscow to work in a factory and become roommates in the factory dormitory. Katya wants to study at a university and build a successful career, but she has to work at the factory until she obtains Moscow *propiska*. Tosya has lost all hope in getting housing and *propiska* through employment, so she marries an electrician from the construction site where she works. Lyuda does not want to settle for anything less than a handsome, rich, and famous Muscovite man; and she soon finds him – a rising star of Soviet hockey team. Lyuba convinces Katya to impersonate a professor’s daughter and introduces her to Rudolph, a camera operator. Katya falls in love with Rudolph and becomes pregnant, but after finding out that Katya is “*limtchitsa*”; Rudolph leaves her. The film then continues to follow the lives of three women and how they continue their pursuit of success and happiness in Moscow. This film goes to show how *propiska* system affects almost every aspect of daily lives of common Soviet citizens: their work, friendships, relationships, families, and even popular culture.

Hence, it can be concluded that *propiska* system had three critical social consequences. First, it instituted differentiated citizenship, where peasants, who were not even issued identification documents until 1974 and migrants whose undocumented presence in cities was criminalized became de facto second-class citizens. *Propiska* symbolized access to full citizenship rights that were unevenly distributed between

industrialized ‘restricted’ cities and the countryside. Moreover, public goods and services were reserved for properly registered individuals, whereas those without *propiska* were formally excluded from the distributional networks. In essence, *propiska-less* citizens were treated by the state as illegal aliens who have no rights and can be jailed or sent off to labor camps at any time. Fear of persecution compelled them to stay hidden, isolated, and marginalized.

Second, *propiska* and related policies constructed a negative image of migrants, particularly newcomers to big cities. Social prejudice associated with lack of *propiska* and with “*limitchiki*” is still evident in post-Soviet cities, including Moscow and Bishkek. “*Limitchik*” is used in Russia to describe someone who is stupid, dirty, violent, and has no manners. Many young people who use this derogatory term today do not even know where it actually comes from and mistakenly think it refers to someone with “limited intellectual capacity”.<sup>25</sup> In Kyrgyzstan, another defamatory term “*myrk*” is used to refer to rural migrants. Stereotypes associated with “*myrk*” are similar to those of “*limitchik*”, which essentially refers to the same category of people: peasants who move to big cities.

Third, proliferation of informality is a result of overall Soviet-style governance system, which imposed impossible restrictions on individuals, and *propiska* was just one of those institutions. It created impossible conditions, where masses of people had to resort to informal practices, such as *blat* and fictitious marriages in order to obtain the Holy Grail of social and citizenship rights.

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<sup>25</sup> From discussion in online forum

## **E. Collectivization, Passportization, And Sedentarization Of Nomads in Central Asia**

In nomadic regions of Central Asia, *propiska* and passportization had particular causes and consequences in addition to those in Soviet Russia. First, it aided in collectivization process and forced nomads into sedentary lifestyle, which was the first step towards “modernization of culturally backward people” (Edgar 2004). As a result, majority rural population of Central Asia were registered with local authorities but not issued internal passports and thus could not migrate away from the collective farms. At the same time, through a special labor recruitment policy “*orgnabori*” Russia sent thousands of ethnic Slavic workers down to Central Asia for construction of railways, roads, and urban infrastructure, as well as mining, engineering, and other types of skilled and semi-skilled labor creating a divide between rural “backward” indigenous populations and “developers” - migrants from Russia and the European parts of the Soviet Union.

Following Bolshevik Revolution, Turkestan Krai of Imperial Russia became the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Between 1920 and 1924 the territory undergone a number of structural changes: names, borders, identities, and ethnic delineations of Central Asia were constructed and re-constructed during the course of Soviet “scientific” nationalities project. According to Soviet view of ethnicity, clans and tribes are lingering remnants of the feudal period and clustering them into “nationalities” can facilitate the process of building of new ethnic and national identities (Hirsch 2005). These clusters were usually based on common language, although all Turkic languages are mutually intelligible. Borders separating different nationalities were drawn without much geographic, economic, or ethnic rationality (Oliver 2007).

In August 1920 Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic was established on the territory of contemporary Kazakhstan. In June 1925 it was re-named to Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Despite its name, it included no part of the Kirghiz SSR and modern-day Kyrgyzstan. Instead, today's Kyrgyzstan was a nameless part of Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic up until 1924, when it got separated and named Kara-Kyrgyz autonomous region of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic. In May 1925 it was re-named again to Kyrgyz Autonomous *oblast*. In 1926 it was reorganized into Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and, finally, in December 1936 its status was elevated to Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, a formal constituent of the Soviet Union. Similar processes took place in other parts of Central Asia, where modern day Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan were incorporated, then separated, then restructured multiple times before settling into SSR status. Gradually, the aim of creating nationalities out of small tribes and clans of nomads was achieved to certain extent as people's identities became grounded in relation to their titular republics. However, these blotchy transformations also had other far-reaching consequences, including complex ethnic relations between majority and minority populations in newly established territorial units in Central Asia.

Ever since Bolsheviks came to power, one of their main goals for Central Asia has been settlement of nomads. In 1920-s the state carried out a set of campaigns that encouraged nomad's settlement and cultivation of agriculture, such re-distribution of land in 1927 and livestock confiscation in 1928 (Olcott 1981). These campaigns, however, were largely unsuccessful; less than 4% of livestock was transferred and only a couple hundred hectares of land were nationalized (Olcott 1978). Collectivization was a second

attempt at forcing “sedentarization” of Central Asian nomads and establishing farmlands for cultivation of grain and cotton. The sedentarization project was closely intertwined with the project of incorporation of nomads into the collective farm system, the ultimate purpose of which was to increase grain production to finance industrialization. The “under-utilized” lands and labor resources of Central Asia provided a promising opportunity for achieving those aims. The project had disastrous consequences, particularly in Kazakhstan, where due to decline of livestock by as much as 90%, crop failures, requisition of grain, and epidemics – all byproducts of sedentarization of nomadic herdsman, millions of Kazakhs (Pianciola 2004) and Kyrgyz (Ercilasun 2009) died of starvation. The total population of indigenous people significantly declined, while the number of people living in the cities nearly tripled between 1929 and 1934, mostly due to migration from European parts of the Soviet Union, mainly Russia and Ukraine. Although the Soviet state did encourage hiring of native workers in urban industrial projects, the quotas were never filled (Liber 1991). Instead, European labor migrants were recruited to work in mining industry, construction, and industrial enterprises in Central Asian cities (Shigabdinov and Nikitenko 2000).

By 1950-s capital cities and large urban centers in five Soviet republics in Central Asia became restricted migration zones (similar to Moscow). Majority population in these cities were ethnic Slavs, mostly Russian. According to 1970 census, only 12.3% of population in Frunze (now Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan) were ethnic Kyrgyz, while more than 80% were Slavs (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010). All people living beyond the urban regime zones, i.e., those in collective farms were deprived of passports and were required to be registered with the rural district authorities (Rahmonova-Schwarz 2010). Deprived of

internal passports, Central Asian native populations remained relatively immobile, while millions of Russians were sent to settle in Central Asia at the time of Stalin's collectivization and industrialization efforts (Lubin 2016).

During de-Stalinization period, state prioritized native populations in education, employment, and political promotions in local party ranks and ruling committees. In other words, under the Soviet "affirmative action" policy, the local government promoted opportunities for titular nations (Martin 2001), which alienated European professionals. At the same time, these policies allowed for formation of indigenous intelligentsia: Russian-speaking, university educated professional urban elites. Kyrgyz urbanites climbed the ranks of local bureaucracy and held positions within various state enterprises and public institutions of education, science, and art. Meanwhile rural Kyrgyz continued to face barriers to geographical and social mobility. Although collective farm workers were issued internal passports in late 1970-s, migrating to cities was allowed only for university education or state employment, which means that majority of peasant were still bound to collective farms.

Sedentarization, collectivization, and urbanization processes in Central Asia were deeply intertwined. While traditional ways of life of Central Asian nomads were dismantled and they were forced into collective farms, Russian peasants and workers were compelled to emigrate to Central Asia to build up agriculture, industry, and cities. In spite of Soviet "affirmative action" policies, the power dynamics were skewed in favor of mostly urban ethnic Russians rather than mostly rural and immobile native populations. Thus, there was an overlap between urban and ethnic privilege in cities, where Russian-speaking urban residents had access to political, economic, and welfare resources, while

up until 1970-s passport-less native populations were marginalized in all these aspects. Institutionalization of second-class citizenship through *propiska* policy and passportization, had an ethnic flavor in Central Asia that cannot be separated from its experience with other Soviet policies that forced sedentarization and forever transformed economy and society of the region.

Soviet Union has been a large-scale social experiment in a variety of different ways: from operation of planned economy to building of national identity. Although it is commonly assumed that Soviet societies were classless by definition, state-engineered social stratification of urban workers versus peasants was also a part of the socialist experiment. The social and economic inequalities between urban and rural populations and asymmetric citizenship rights that each group possessed have had lasting effects on the social and political dynamics in modern post-Soviet states. In Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan, specifically, state-engineered urban-rural divide was further complicated by Soviet nationalities and affirmative action policies that promoted and privileged ethnic Kyrgyz but Russian-speaking urban intelligentsia that settled in the capital city of Bishkek. Therefore, using internal passport and *propiska* system as tools of social stratification, Soviet state not only divided people into urban and rural classes, but forged their identities and defined the parameters of their relations with the state and with each other.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a critical juncture in political development of European and Central Asian states: some took the path towards consolidated democracies, others went down authoritarian path, and many establishes so-called “hybrid regimes” (Diamond 2002). *Propiska* system was formally abolished in all post-Soviet states; yet in

most of them, including Kyrgyzstan, new registration systems were instituted to replace it. Since restriction of internal migration no longer made sense under conditions of free market, the purposes of re-invented *propiska* are different from those in the Soviet era. In other words, just as it was once molded from feudal institution into a Soviet one, *propiska* yet again was adapted to state's contemporary needs. Every time *propiska* is re-defined and re-instituted it leaves profound and enduring legacy on the way people interact with the state and with each other.

#### **F. *Propiska* After Communism In Kyrgyzstan**

After collapse of the Soviet Union, internal passports and *propiska* regime has been formally abolished in all newly independent states. Nevertheless, registration systems in their various forms have been preserved. While it does not restrict movement within a country as it used to during the Soviet era, local registration is still an eligibility requirement for many welfare benefits, such as public education, healthcare, pensions, and disability benefits. The metamorphosis of *propiska* system illustrates how the state and the society adapt to the challenges of transition from socialism to neoliberalism. The state, at least on paper, preserves the Soviet-style institutions of social control and the comprehensive welfare system, which were the main sources of Soviet state legitimacy and power. "Old-timer" urbanites, the former Soviet "intelligentsia" elites, who lost their upper social status to new business elites, support *propiska* system because of the rights and entitlements that come with local *propiska*, as well as because of symbolic cultural and moral superiority associated with it. Unregistered migrants cope with limitation imposed by the *propiska* system through informal mechanisms of negotiation with street-level bureaucrats. In turn, public white-collar workers, whose salary is the lowest in the

country, benefit from the “supplemental income” generated from informal payments. Finally, bringing it back to the state, informal payments de facto “subsidize” state services and welfare but the ultimate decision of who gets what and at what cost is in the domain of the state.

As a result of liberal reforms that allowed free movement coupled with continuity of the registration system, Kyrgyzstan has experienced large waves of rural-to-urban migration with majority of recent low-income rural migrants remaining unregistered. Although, in order to obtain permanent registration in the city, a migrant no longer needs permission from the authorities, they must either prove real estate ownership, or obtain a documented approval from a property owner allowing a migrant to register at the owner’s address. In Bishkek, however, even friends and relatives, not to mention regular landlords, are reluctant to allow a newcomer to register at their property. For one, the cost of property taxes and some utilities, such as water and heat, are proportional to the number of people registered in the dwelling. But perhaps even more importantly, persons permanently registered at the dwelling may legally claim property rights and inheritance rights in certain cases.<sup>26</sup>

*Propiska* system is deeply intertwined with property rights. Firstly, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, *propiska* played a critical role in housing privatization and transformation of property rights in post-Soviet Bishkek. It served as basis for real estate ownership transfer from the state to the tenants. In other words, sitting tenants of public housing units who possessed *propiska* at the address could purchase their unit at highly subsidized prices. As a result, almost overnight individuals with urban *propiska* officially

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<sup>26</sup> from an interview with state notary public in Bishkek

became homeowners. These first-time homeowners had a significant economic advantage in a nascent housing market in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan since they could potentially generate income by renting out their dwelling or selling it and re-investing the profits. Thus, the socialist aspect of *propiska* blended with neoliberal market logic and produced a new source of urban inequality and marginalization (Hatcher 2015). Specifically, urban populations without Bishkek *propiska*, such as renters and squatters were excluded from distribution of property rights and, thus, void of the source of capital that those with local *propiska* obtained via housing privatization.

At the same time, rural areas faced rapid decline as collective farms were re-structured and broken up into small family farms. All transfers other than inheritance, such as buying, selling, or mortgaging of the land plots were initially prohibited by law in 1991, but repealed three years later (The Order of Land Share and Land Tenure Rights 1994). The process of privatization and distribution of land previously collectively owned was highly unequal. The pre-existing power disparities between rural elites (managers of collective farms) and regular peasants were further exacerbated when the former obtained larger and better land plots along with the remaining Soviet-era equipment and technology, while the latter were assigned small and hardly accessible lands plots. While post-communist land reforms may have allowed peasants to feed themselves through subsistence farming, but due to lack of necessary inputs that used to be provided by the Soviet state, such as equipment, technology, and fertilizers, the productivity of these farms continuously fell all throughout 1990-s and 2000-s (Mogilevsky 2013). Consequently, rural poverty and unemployment coupled with liberalization reforms stimulated continuous rural-to-urban migration.

The first wave of mass migration from rural areas to Bishkek started in 1980s, several years before the collapse of the Soviet Union. It mostly consisted of students and professionals who wanted to remain in the city, but could not access public housing. Since access to Bishkek's public housing was based on possession of local *propiska* and thousands of urban residents have already been in queue for new housing for years, migrants were excluded from housing distribution. Instead, they occupied uninhabited lots on the southern edges of the city. These young and educated professionals, who had lived in the city for years without being able to get permanent *propiska* and housing, organized a popular movement that demanded legalization of informal settlements and access to urban resources. Ultimately, they achieved these goals and the squatter communities in the southern parts of the city were formally incorporated.

Thereafter, as the number of internal migrants from other parts of the country continued to grow in Bishkek, the population of ethnic Russians rapidly decreased as they left the country for the historic homeland - Russia. By 1989 the percentage of ethnic Kyrgyz rose to approximately 23% (compared to only 12.3% in 1970) and the percentage of ethnic Slavs fell to 55% (compared to 80% in 1970). As a result of demographic changes, the "original urbanites" felt that the rural migrants are threatening their social status, culture, and norms. The "original urbanites" included both ethnic Slavs, as well as "Europeanized" Russian-speaking Kyrgyz who obtained higher education in Bishkek and climbed the ranks of local bureaucracy (Flynn and Kosmarskaya 2012). For these Kyrgyz elites "urban-ness" was the source of their identity and status that distinguished them from the "backward" rural Kyrgyz.

In essence, these urban Kyrgyz were “first-comers” and the indigenous inhabitants of the city who belonged to the city by virtue of having state-granted employment and housing. The links between land and property rights, social identity, and group membership (in a city, a community, a tribe, or a nation-state) has been widely discussed in political science literature, particularly with reference to African context (Lentz 2013). For instance, Lund (2011) argues that autochthony, i.e. first arrival is commonly viewed as a requisite for inclusion or exclusion; similarly, Paller (2019) demonstrates how norms of indigeneity are the basis for claim-making on the local state. In the context of Kyrgyzstan, Soviet-era urban intelligentsia were the first arrivals to Bishkek; their rights and privileges were guaranteed by local *propiska* and their social identities forged by urban-ness. They were also mostly northerners since Bishkek is located in the northern Chui *oblast* (region), so that the regional, tribal, and autochthonal identities became intertwined and embedded in the notion of who belongs to the city.

In 1990-s, after Kyrgyzstan became an independent state and the remaining barriers to mobility were lifted, many more peasants left behind declining rural areas and arrived to the city. The second wave of rural-to-urban migration was comprised of Kyrgyz-speaking young unemployed farmers hailing mostly from Northern regions of the country. Since the first president Askar Akaev was himself a member of a Northern tribe, Northerners were believed to enjoy certain advantages and privileges in state employment and other benefits. Despite tension between the “original urbanites” trying to protect the status quo (i.e. Russians and “Europeanized” Kyrgyz) and “migrants” nationalist claims to the city, the assimilation process was more or less smooth. Informal settlements established by the second wave were also gradually legalized and incorporated.

While Northerners migrated to Bishkek, the capital city located in the North of the country, peasants in the South moved and settled in Osh, the second largest urban center. That was the pattern until 2005, when Tulip Revolution ousted Askar Akaev and a new president Kurmanbek Bakiev, a southerner, was elected. As political power shifted from Northern to Southern elites, so did state employment opportunities and business preferences. As a result, the third wave of rural-to-urban migration originated in the South, where economic conditions were significantly worse than in the North. As migrants before them, they, too, built informal settlements on the only space available to them – the undesirable land plots mostly in the northern parts of the city, such as those dangerously close to landfills, railway tracks, or the airport. These squatter settlements *novostroiki* have been often stigmatized and vilified by the media and the “original urban” residents. Since the majority of the “urban” Kyrgyz intelligentsia is Russian-speaking, many with their own origins in earlier migration waves from the Northern tribes, the stereotypes associated with “new” migrants (aggressiveness, inappropriate behavior, bad manners, etc.) primarily target migrants from the South.

Unlike informal settlements of 1980-s and 1990-s, recent *novostroiki* are legalized slowly. All eligible informal housing units built before 1999 were granted official status across-the-board; however, for post-2005 *novostroikas* the process of formalization has been complex and inconsistent. That is partly due to safety laws that prevent building on hazardous or otherwise dangerous sites and partly due to widespread unpopularity of such initiatives. Multiple attempts at blanket legalization of post-2005 squatter settlements were presented to the Parliament. For instance, one bill proposed legalization of persons, i.e. issuing *propiska* to slum residents without legalizing their dwellings; another proposed

granting them property rights and issuing “red books”<sup>27</sup> for the housing structure, but keep the land on which the structure stands in public domain.

However, none of those initiatives materialized. Instead, deputies<sup>28</sup> take action on case-by-case basis in response to pickets and demonstrations, particularly ahead of elections. For instance, in 2016 residents of one of Bishkek’s *novostroikas* organized a demonstration in front of the White House (Azattyk 2016). Using their own funds, the community was able to purchase an electric generator and applied for grid connection permit, but the electric company Severelektro did not respond to the request one way or the other. Leader of Ata-Meken Party, Tekebaev criticized the situation and promised to resolve the issue. Indeed, shortly thereafter Severelektro issued the permit, even though doing so was illegal and the company could potentially be prosecuted for violating the law. Thus, for politicians delaying legalization of *novostroikas* presents an opportunity for “kind gestures” that win votes. In other words, the state’s indecision, i.e. neither legalization nor tearing down of squatter settlements is intentional, because politicians use forbearance to win votes (Holland 2017).

Currently there are over 6,000 illegal housing units in various *novostroikas*. Due to the illegal status of these units, the inhabitants who own or rent them cannot apply for local registration, and as a result do not have access to the same social benefits and opportunities as those who are properly registered in the city. Thus, current registration system is not a barrier to mobility per se, but rather a tool of citizen stratification into those who belong to the city and those who do not. Since registration depends on property

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<sup>27</sup> Document that proves formal ownership of property

<sup>28</sup> Elected members of Parliament

ownership, political and social rights associated with it are explicitly linked to property rights. The continuity of *propiska* system, specifically the barriers it imposed on rural-to-urban migration under the Soviet regime and its role in public housing privatization thereafter, ensured that low-income rural migrants turned squatters are excluded from property ownership and, therefore, the rights to the city.

Since unregistered migrants are ineligible for healthcare in urban *poliklinikas* and their children cannot access urban schools, residents of some *novostroikas* were able to pressure the government for local clinics and schools, but they are often overcrowded and understaffed because they serve not only the local community but also neighboring *novostorikas* that do not have such facilities. Thus, *novostorikas* and their residents are not absorbed into the city like previously legalized informal settlements of 1990-s; rather they remain isolated and marginalized politically because they are not eligible to vote in local elections<sup>29</sup>, socially because they cannot access urban social services, and economically because they do not qualify for loans, mortgage, and state employment.

Another layer of complexity that adds to the social, political, and economic inequality is the distinction between property owners and renters. While post-Soviet privatization schemes allowed sitting tenants to purchase their units at highly subsidies prices, “land-grabbers” *samozakhvatchiki*, particularly those of the earlier waves of migration, legalized their squatter settlements and got the “red books” confirming property rights. However, the vast majority of internal migrants residing in Bishkek today belong to neither of those groups; instead they rent. Since rental units in apartment buildings are very expensive, most migrants find accommodations in *novostroikas* both legal and illegal

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<sup>29</sup> Only those with local registration can vote in local elections.

ones. Migrants usually enter informal rental agreements with the property owners because most landlords are reluctant to put a contract down on paper and generally refuse to allow renters to register against their address and obtain local *propiska*. Landlords' concerns are that they will have to pay additional taxes and utility fees and won't be able to easily evict the tenants. Perhaps most importantly, they fear that the tenants might claim property rights, although currently there is no legal basis for that.

The combination of Soviet policies in Central Asia, post-communist reforms, and persistence of *propiska* system had multi-layered complex social consequences for urban fabric of contemporary Bishkek. By prioritizing cities over countryside, the Soviet state in effect instituted asymmetric citizenship regime: urbanites were full citizens with a passport to validate their rights. In a socialist context that meant access to welfare, the standard of which was higher in cities. Peasants, however, did not have passports and the privileges associated with having one. In Central Asia urban-rural stratification was further deepened by ethnic, regional, and tribal factors. Specifically, during the Soviet era, Bishkek residents, i.e. the "original" urbanites were mostly Slavs with a small minority of "Europeanized" Russian-speaking Kyrgyz. City itself was a major part of their identity that distinguished them from the "backward" rural populations. Collapse of the Soviet Union, en masse emigration of ethnic Russians, and arrival of rural migrants to Bishkek led to exacerbation of pre-existing social cleavages, so that urban-rural, Russian-Kyrgyz, Northern-Southern divisions accumulated and overlapped. Post-communist transition to market economy, particularly housing privatization efforts and gradual legalization of squatter settlements, created new social cleavages between property owners and renters. All the while *propiska* system was used to justify marginalization and exclusion of

“undesirable” populations, the scope and definition of which varied through time. In a post-socialist context, lack of *propiska* is not a barrier for migration, but its link to property ownership makes it a tool of ‘differentiated citizenship’ drawing lines between formal and informal, legal and illegal, visible and invisible.

Social stratification based on the place of residence dates back several centuries and is not unique to Russia and the Soviet Union. What is remarkable about *propiska* policy is that it persisted for that long and was adapted to entirely conflicting ideologies: feudalism, socialism, and neoliberalism. Under each of these political-economic systems, permanent residence registration played a different role. In Tsarist Russia *propiska* was used to control the movement of serfs and ensure their return to the landlords. In the Soviet Union internal passport (with *propiska* as a part of it) was a multipurpose tool: it aided planning distribution of welfare and consumer goods; it allowed the state to take on an ambitious industrialization project at the expense of immobile and starving peasants in collective farms; finally, it was a valuable means of population control and identification of “enemies” in Stalin’s era of terror and purges.

Today due to widespread decentralization reforms, local state has more authority in decision-making but also more responsibility in maintaining urban infrastructure and welfare. Thus, while at the national level, the state promotes equality and installs constitutional protections to all segments of the population, at the local level asymmetric citizenship becomes more and more deeply institutionalized. Enforcement of the local registration regime allows the local state to distribute scarce welfare to individuals with highest political capital, that is those who vote in local elections and those capable of organizing collective action. As a result of post-communist privatization schemes and

political gains associated with selective legalization of squatter housing, some Bishkek residents, namely those who were already registered in the city during the Soviet era and migrants who demanded rights through urban protests became property owners and thus have permanent *propiska* in the city that grants them access to various aspects of citizenship rights.

Meanwhile more recent rural migrants face prejudice due to their regional origins, since most “latecomers” to the city come from south Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, they also face obstacles to political and social rights: as tenants without rental contract they lack formal basis for *propiska*, so even if the *novostroika* or their specific unit become legalized, it does not mean that the tenant will benefit from it. As long as the landlord withholds written permission, which is usually the case, the tenant has no right to register at the property.

Debates about legalization of squatter settlements in Bishkek are widespread among politicians, the media, and regular citizens. Migrants who built homes on public land, certainly, look forward to getting “red books”. Community activism, protests, and demonstrations in front of government buildings are not uncommon. In time for elections, party leaders and deputies in the Parliament address demands of slum activists by aiding infrastructure projects, initialing or speeding up legalization process. However, the poorest and most marginalized communities remain unheard and invisible. Tenants of slum housing do not apply for local *propiska* because they lack necessary documents (i.e. formal rental contract); therefore, in the eyes of the local state they do not exist. They rarely participate in community organizing because the informal rental arrangement is temporary and housing situation is precarious. However, although unregistered migrants

may be invisible to the state, it does not mean that they are completely disconnected from it. Just as Soviet people found ways of circumventing state control and use informal channels to access public goods, in post-Soviet Bishkek unregistered migrants turn to informal networks for welfare and social services.

## V. UNDOCUMENTED CITIZENS: NEW SOURCES OF INEQUALITY

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### A. Introduction

Internal migrants can under certain conditions face both formal and informal barriers to obtaining social services like education, healthcare, and government assistance that are more common for transnational migrants rather than mobile citizens. *Propiska* or post-*propiska* migrant registration regimes in post-Soviet countries—such as those in Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan—restrict access to identification documents (passport, driver’s license, etc.), employment, pensions, banking, and voting for internal and international migrants alike (Baliyar and Satybaldieva 2012). As a result of state policies that require citizens to provide documentation that proves their legal right to be there, internal migrants find themselves with diminished citizenship rights in their own country. This is the paradox of undocumented citizens that will be discussed in this chapter.

Currently an estimated 600,000 internal migrants reside in Bishkek, the capital city, who together comprise almost 30 percent of the city’s population. These individuals, however, typically lack *propiska*,<sup>30</sup> or local registration. In order to obtain an urban *propiska*, an internal migrant need to prove that they own real estate or has a formal rental agreement in the city - something that is beyond the financial means of many migrants. Instead, they tend to build homes on land obtained illegally, such that their property rights are not recognized by the state. As a result, many unregistered rural migrants in Bishkek

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<sup>30</sup> In the Soviet Union (and briefly in the Russian Federation and other Warsaw Pact countries): a permit entitling a person to reside (and therefore work) in a particular city or town. (Oxford English Dictionary)

have limited access to social and political rights. Moreover, registration requirements have been integrated into other laws and policies concerning issuance of identification documents, property inheritance, criminal justice, welfare, marriage, and elections, thereby socially and politically disenfranchising these migrants. In essence, the lives of unregistered internal migrants are not dissimilar to those of undocumented international immigrants. The crucial distinction, however, is that rural migrants are *de jure* citizens of the state.

The core argument of this chapter is that the paradox of undocumented citizens is in part due to the legacy of Soviet social engineering via *propiska* system and in part due to intentional preservation of certain features of *propiska* within the current residence registration system. Decades of *propiska* enforcement under the Soviet regime led to normalization of the notion that social rights are based on official place of residence, so in the eyes of local-level public administrators, exclusion of unregistered rural migrants from their services is justifiable. At the same time, the inconsistencies between constitutional laws and municipal ordinances cause a fuzzy regulatory framework governing residence registration, which allows a lot of leeway in local public administration's decision-making, particularly in terms of exclusionary and discriminatory practices. Nevertheless, attempts at *propiska* reform are met with resistance from "old-timer" urbanites, new elites, and homeowners. As a result, old Soviet-produced inequalities between urban and rural, russified and "backward" Kyrgyz became exacerbated by new inequalities between registered and unregistered, northerners and southerners, residents of formal housing and slum dwellers, homeowners and tenants. In other words, the socialist aspect of *propiska* adapted to the new realities of liberal economy and produced new sources of urban inequality and marginalization.

## **B. The nexus between *propiska*, property, and social rights**

*Propiska* system is deeply intertwined with property rights. Firstly, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, *propiska* played a critical role in housing privatization and transformation of property rights in post-Soviet Bishkek because it served as basis for real estate ownership transfer from the state to the tenants (Hatcher 2016). In other words, those who had urban *propiska* could buy their apartments from the state at highly subsidized prices. This practice made urban populations privileged by the Soviet regime (as discussed in the previous chapter) happy homeowners. At the same time, collapse of collective farms lead to enrichment of local elites, particularly managers of *kolkhozes*, who took advantage of their positions to secure lands and farm equipment, but majority of farmers could not farm upkeep without state subsidies (Howell 1998). As a result, farmers had to sell their lands back to the state or *kolkhoz* managers and look for employment in cities.

Although *propiska* has been officially abolished, a simplified form of registration system has been preserved; it determines eligibility for welfare, such as public education, healthcare, and disability benefits. In order to obtain permanent registration in the city, a migrant no longer needs permission from the authorities. Instead, she must either prove real estate ownership, or obtain a documented approval of a property owner allowing her to register at the owner's address. The former option is only available for high-income migrants. The latter option is complicated. Friends and relatives, to whom a migrant is most likely to turn to for this favor, are reluctant to allow a newcomer to register at their property. For one, the property taxes and the cost of some utilities is proportional to the number of people registered in the dwelling, which means that as the number of people registered grows, so do the taxes and utility payments. But perhaps even more importantly, persons

permanently registered at the dwelling may claim property rights and inheritance rights in certain cases.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, whereas migrants may find places to stay or rent, it does not necessary mean that they can obtain the registration. Lastly, migrants residing in illegal *novostroki*s cannot apply for local registration because of the illegal status of their properties or rental units and thus do not have access to the same social benefits and opportunities as those who are properly registered in the city.

As a result of post-communist liberal reforms, economic decline in rural areas, labor demands of the city, and the continuity of the registration system, Bishkek has experienced large waves of rural-to-urban migration with majority of recent low-income rural migrants remaining unregistered and residing in informal settlements. These migrants have limited access to social welfare, cannot vote in local elections, cannot apply for a bank loan, and cannot start a formal business. Hence, in a post-socialist context, the current registration system is not a barrier for migration, but its link to property rights makes it a tool of asymmetric citizenship drawing lines between formal and informal, deserving and undeserving, visible and invisible. Specifically, “old-timer” urban residents benefited from privatization programs: by virtue of being registered residents of Soviet public housing they were able to purchase their dwellings at a nominal price. The privilege of homeownership allowed “old-timer” urbanites to have economic security and an upper hand in urban real estate in the precarious environment of market transition. For peasants, privatization reforms meant de-collectivization; however, the value of the land plots most of them received was much lower than the market price of urban real estate.

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<sup>31</sup> from an interview with state notary in Bishkek

Peasants in southern regions of the country (Osh, Batken, and Jalal-Abad) were particularly disadvantaged because arable land there is scarce but the size of population is high. Moreover, due to the fact that political leadership was in hands of predominantly northern elites since independence in 1991 until the Tulip Revolution in 2005, economic opportunities for southerners in the capital city (located in the North) were low. Therefore, during the first fourteen years of Kyrgyzstan's nationhood, migration from the southern regions was sparse, which means that rural migrants from the South were late-comers to the city. As a result, as these latest migrants settled in *novostroikas* around the city, they faced formal exclusions due to lack of local *propiska* and prejudice from the established urbanites. In addition, by 2005 the desirable lands for squatter housing have already been occupied, so late-comers settled in zones not suitable for inhabitation, such as near landfills, the airport, or the coal-burning power plant. In some cases, tenancy in these zones led to tragic consequences. For instance, in 2017, an international cargo plane crashed into a squatter settlement right outside the airport and killed 35 people. Building in such close proximity to the airport is dangerous and illegal, as is building on top of gas pipelines and next to landfills, which means legalization is impossible for these types of informal housing. Since the ability to prove property ownership with proper documentation is a pre-requisite for local registration, the poorest and most disadvantaged individuals are undocumented and invisible to the state.

At local bureaucracies, such as offices of state registration service, the police, public health clinics, and schools, administrators view *propiska* as a necessary instrument of public order, record-keeping, and distribution of state resources. Institutionalization and normalization of *propiska* system throughout decades of Soviet rule, as well as persistence

of the policy following the collapse of communism, solidified the notion of essentiality of residence registration. Indeed, casual conversations with Bishkek residents of all walks of life reveal that ordinary people often perceive registration barrier and requirements as normal and necessary. Not surprisingly street-level bureaucrats generally find current registration system and registration-based exclusion of unregistered urban population from their services mandated and justifiable.

For instance, police officers argue that strict registration system means that citizens are less likely supply the state with a bogus address. Since individuals are usually registered at properties they own or their families own, investigators can relatively easily locate them. Similarly, clerks at the state registration service also consider *propiska* necessary for accurate record-keeping, especially in terms of voter registration. The main concern about relaxation of registration process, from their perspective, was that if citizens can easily register and re-register at different places of residence it may lead to chaos and voter fraud (i.e. the same person voting in multiple places). For school administrators, the main problem is over-enrollment; so, although teachers and principals are sympathetic to children of unregistered migrants, they emphasize school's obligation to provide education to registered residents first and then decide about *propiska*-less children on case-by-case basis. Street-level bureaucrats rationalize existing registration system in part due to institutional inertia and normalization of exclusionary practices associated with *propiska*. Public administrators often complain about chaotic migration and the strain it puts on urban infrastructure and welfare, but at the same time acknowledge that access to public goods and services is frequently a function of informal personal connections rather than official paperwork (discussed in Chapter 6).

Hence, in the context of post-communist Bishkek, old Soviet state-engineered social categorization of urban versus rural, “civilized” (russified) versus “backward” have lasting legacies on contemporary dynamics of social relations. Normalization of exclusion based on possession of certain stamps or papers also has lasting legacies on bureaucratic procedures and on the subjective perspectives of public administrators. At the same time, the merge between socialist aspect of *propiska*, namely its role in determining eligibility for welfare, and the market reasoning linking *propiska* to property ownership produced new forms of social inequality. Excising social cleavages, such as regional divisions between northerners and southerners were further exacerbated by patterns of migration to Bishkek (i.e. “first-arrivals” versus “late-comers”), slum legalization trends, and *propiska*-based access to social welfare. By the same token, due to the rules of residence registration system in contemporary Kyrgyzstan, property ownership became a defining attribute of belonging to the city and the basis for claiming social and political rights. This also means that the poor, the squatters, and the renters emerge as “undocumented citizens” who are ineligible to vote and to access urban social services.

### **C. Fuzziness of *Propiska* Regulations**

Taking into account the social consequences of post-Soviet *propiska* system and widespread democratization and liberalization efforts in Kyrgyzstan, how does *propiska* fit into regulatory framework of Central Asia’s “island of democracy”? Fuzziness of laws surrounding *propiska* offer an explanation to this question. According to the Law of Kyrgyz Republic “On internal migration”, registration at the place of residence is used only for notification purposes. The law distinguishes between the place of permanent residence (*место жительства*) and the place of temporary residence (*место пребывания*).

According to statute No. 3, the purpose of the law is to protect constitutional rights of Kyrgyz citizens: “their freedom of movement, freedom of choice of the place of residence, personal freedom and safety, as well as protection against discrimination and prevention of chaotic migration process within the Kyrgyz Republic”. The purposes outlined in the text of law contradict each other. Specifically, prevention of chaotic migration hints at the need for migration control, which means freedom movement and freedom of choice of the place of residence should be limited to an extent that makes migration “non-chaotic”.

Furthermore, residence registration procedure is carried out by the state bureaucracies and local governments in ways that repudiate the national laws; they are often based on regulations of the lower legal force as well as subjective attitudes of street-level officials who are responsible for the registration. For example, the law states that internal migrants who plan to stay in the city for more than 45 days must apply to the authorities for a new registration no later than 5 working days after arriving. According to national laws, in order to apply for a permanent or temporary registration, an individual need only fill out an application form and provide an identification document. However, a Bishkek city ordinance states that authorities are allowed to require additional documents. In practice, the lack of a public checklist of “other” documents creates basis for unjust misuse of authority at the local level.

Therefore, the fuzziness of laws governing *propiska* serves two purposes: on one hand, constitutional and national laws create a façade of official protection of citizens’ rights and freedoms; and on the other hand, it also gives significant amount of discretion to local level officials. Fulfillment of the former objective was particularly important in the years following independence, when Kyrgyzstan was heavily reliant on international aid. For

Kyrgyzstan, separation from the Soviet Union meant the end of subsidies and transfers from the Union's budget, so securing international aid was paramount for country's economic survival. As a result, Kyrgyzstan became "globalized protectorate" of international development organizations (Pétrie 2005). In exchange for financial aid, Kyrgyzstan embarked on an ambitious journey of democratization and liberalization, part of which were constitutional reforms that would protect right and freedoms of the citizens. However, these reforms were not backed by genuine motives for social and political change.

Indeed, at the local level, municipal governments adopted ordinances that were obscure enough to be open to interpretation; meanwhile, public administrators established procedures that effectively excluded poor, property-less, and unregistered rural migrants from urban social services. For instance, in Bishkek, the residence registration authorities require proof of de-registration from the previous residence, as well as proof of ownership of immovable property in the city. The process outlined on the official website of the state registration service requires applicants for Bishkek *propiska* to bring original copies of *techpassport* (property registration booklet that confirms legal ownership). In addition, if the applicant is not a legal owner of the dwelling, they must either obtain a notarized letter of consent from the legal owner or bring them to the office to appear in person. As expected, most landlords will not put in the time and effort to jump through hoops for their tenant. Besides, having multiple individuals registered at the property increases property taxes and utility bills, so landlords are reluctant to help tenants with *propiska*. As a result of the ambiguity in the regulatory framework of residence registration system, municipal government and local public administration have a lot of discretion in the ways they

interpret the laws and implement migration and welfare policies. The actual practices end up being discriminatory towards low-income rural migrants.

#### **D. Popular Resistance to *Propiska* Reforms**

Recognizing the problems with disenfranchisement of a large part of urban population from social rights and political participation, as well as recognizing political (patronage) opportunities that may arise if residence registration requirements are lifted, city level and national level elected officials proposed *propiska* reforms on multiple occasions. For example, in 2014 former mayor of Bishkek, Kubanychbek Kulmatov, suggested all squatters be granted property rights of their dwelling units, so that they can obtain local *propiska*, but the land on which the dwelling stands remain public.<sup>32</sup> The rationale for this approach was that squatters would be granted full citizenship rights; and at the same time, the municipality would have the power to use or sell public land for residential or corporate development if and when there was such demand. However, this idea gained neither political nor popular support.

In June of 2019, member of the Parliament, Iskhak Pirmatov, proposed a bill that would simplify the registration procedure by allowing tenants to register online by uploading a copy of their ID card and the ID card of the property owner. Pirmatov argued that that current fuzzy laws and high barriers to obtaining local registration create serious problems for ordinary citizens, as well as cause budgetary irregularities: namely towns and villages that people emigrate from receive disproportionately large budget transfers, while cities that host internal migrants do not receive enough. The bill was considered

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<sup>32</sup> From an interview with a consultant close to Mr. Kulmatov. At the time of research Mr. Kulmatov was detained on (questionable) corruption charges.

controversial; it attracted a lot of media attention and sparked debates about *propiska* reform. However, civil society activist and “established” city residents spoke out against it. The former thought that the reform was not progressive enough, while the latter argued that the simplicity of online registration infringed on their control over who is registered at their rental property. Ultimately, the bill was another failed attempt at reforming registration system.

Resistance to *propiska* reform reveals the dynamics of power in Bishkek’s politics, where individuals of middle and high socio-economic status, i.e. homeowners from “the old-timers” urban intelligentsia, as well as “new” elites oppose expansion of rights of squatter, renters, and “late-comer” migrants. This resistance to institutional change can be viewed through the prism of politics of belonging that explains the tensions between the “autochthones” and the “migrants”(Dunn 2009). For instance, Lentz (2003) finds that in Ghana younger generations of internal migrants in Ghana claim that they, too, are “sons of the soil”. Although, the context of the relationship between land and belonging is different in Ghana and Kyrgyzstan, but the argument can still be made about the native-stranger relationships. The ranks of “autochthones” grow as more people begin to identify as native to the city and distinguish themselves from “strangers”, i.e. new migrants. In Bishkek, due to the peculiarities of the *propiska* system, property ownership is the key to claiming belonging to the city.

The relationship between established urbanites and rural migrants is perfectly exemplified by an anecdote I heard in the streets of Bishkek: “Our city is like a crowded bus. When a new passenger wants to squeeze in, the people on the bus yell at him: you won’t fit! Take the next one! But he is stubborn and pushed through the door. At the next stop a

few more people try to get in, he angrily screams at them: can't you see there is no space here for you!" The notion of who belongs and who does not is fluid; those who arrived to Bishkek and established themselves over time, now identify as "natives". Together with "old-timers" they oppose *propiska* reforms and voice concerns about spread of slums, traffic congestion, loss of "cultural" values, and growing crime rates. Opinions and attitudes of homeowners and established city residents is important for local policy makers, because they have voting rights, while "undocumented citizens" do not.

#### **E. Illustrations of Exclusion: Voting Rights and Access to Welfare**

Of the 78 migrants I interviewed in Bishkek, one in three said that they did not participate in the 2015 parliamentary elections because they did not have Bishkek registration. Some of them were not aware of the special procedure for voting in a place different from their place of permanent residence. Other respondents were turned away from the polling station because they could not find their names on voter rolls and were directed by the precinct administration to vote in their place of permanent residence.

Another third of the migrants interviewed did not vote for reasons other than lack of Bishkek registration, such as illness or business. However, half of those who cited other reasons for not voting exhibited feelings of low political efficacy, saying things like "my vote does not change anything" or "voting does not make sense, it is a waste of time." Only 23 internal migrants in my sample exercised their right to vote: among them, 8 voted in their hometowns or villages where they have *propiska*, meaning that only 15 voted in Bishkek. All 15 had received higher education and were employed, which means that they had greater access to information.

Analysis of post-election data collected in collaboration with a local nonprofit organization shows that in the 2017 presidential elections a large number of people did not vote due to registration problems (Platforma 2017). A random sample of 1020 registered voters nationwide was asked about their turnout and reasons for participating or not participating in the elections. According the State Registration Service, 56.3 percent of all registered voters participated in these elections. Survey respondents, however, reported a 76.5 percent turnout rate, which can be explained by social desirability bias. Even considering that turnout was over-reported, 12.6 percent of those who said they did not vote cited their lack of *propiska* and lack of knowledge of how to register to vote without it as their main reason for not participating in the elections.

The Kyrgyz Republic has signed on to international treaties that proclaim non-discrimination in citizens' right to education, and its national laws and education policies reflect that commitment. For example, the law "On Education" states that "citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic have the right to education regardless of their gender, nationality, language, social and economic status, occupation, religious and political beliefs, place of residence, and other status" (Azimov and Azimov, 2009, 20).

Theoretically, all individuals residing in the country should be allowed to attend elementary and secondary educational institutions (Standard Statute on General Educational Institutions 2015). In 2004, the "Access to Education" program, which was approved by the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, introduced new mechanisms for protecting all children's rights to education, emphasizing "unhindered access to public schools for all children (regardless of location and living conditions) as one of its most important tasks" (Azimov and Azimov, 2009, 21).

However, the implementation of laws forbidding discrimination against migrant children is not being realized in practice. The 90 public schools that comprise the elementary and secondary educational system in Bishkek receive almost one-third of the city budget. Even so, these schools cannot meet the needs of Bishkek's growing population: city schools are overcrowded and forced to work in shifts, overstressing administrative and teaching capacity. To control enrollment, principals often refuse admission to migrant children, technically a violation of the law.

Of the 78 internal migrants in Bishkek whom I interviewed, 28 had school-age children. Twelve of them reported being asked for *propiska* when applying to public schools in the city, and 9 out of 12 paid bribes or informally negotiated school placement through relatives in government positions. One female respondent relentlessly pressured the Ministry of Education to facilitate the admission process because education is a right, while another mother sought help from a children's rights NGO:

*“When I tried to put my son in kindergarten, the administration rejected us because we did not have a Bishkek propiska. When it was time for him to go to elementary school, again we were rejected. For a year and a half, I was battling with the school. I asked for help from an international organization called Child Protection Center, and with their pressure the school finally accepted us. But now my boy is 9 years old and just starting first grade... He should have the same right to education as other children, but it took us almost two years.”*

—B., female, 29, registered in Osh; has lived in Bishkek for 5 years

“...I feel that people without *propiska* are treated unfairly. I have been denied jobs because of it. It was difficult to put my children in school because of it. At school, my daughter’s classmates asked her whether she was from Bishkek and where she was from before befriending her. Even my youngest daughter was asked about it in kindergarten.”

—S., 42, female, registered in Kayindi; has lived in Bishkek for 14 years

Although parents would prefer to send their children to city schools, which they believe provide better-quality education, most children of low-income internal migrants attend schools in *novostroikas*, where they are not asked for *propiska*.

In terms of healthcare, the law states that all citizens have the right to health, social justice, equality, access to medical assistance, and social protection in the event of loss of health (On Health Care in the Kyrgyz Republic 2019). Furthermore, “all citizens have the right to healthcare regardless of...their place of residence, by granting equal opportunities to exercise the right to medical assistance” (On Health Care in the Kyrgyz Republic 2019). In practice, however, rural migrants experience discrimination in public healthcare. In some instances, doctors or administrators require higher payments from migrants or refuse treatment due to lack of proper documents. In these situations, migrants either resort to bribery or turn to private hospitals, which are more expensive. Of the 78 interviewees, 62 had received medical treatment in the public healthcare system. Of those 62, 55 percent were able to get free care at public hospitals with a referral from a clinic in their *novostroika*; 21 percent reported always seeking healthcare in private hospitals due to the better attitude of medical staff and better overall conditions; 12 percent reported paying higher fees due to lack of registration; and 11 percent reported initially being denied care at public hospitals

or clinics due to their lack of *propiska*, but eventually negotiating for care through bribes or social connections.

*“When my children are sick, I take them to private hospitals. My youngest daughter has a weak immune system and she is often sick. In private hospitals they treat us well and provide good service, but we have to pay a lot of money. If we had a Bishkek propiska, we could get the same service for free at public hospitals, but the level of bureaucracy is very high there...”*

—S., 42, female, registered in Kayindi; has lived in Bishkek for 14 years

In Kyrgyzstan, retirees can receive their pensions either through direct deposit to their bank account or in cash at the post office in the place of their permanent registration (On State Social Insurance 2018). Indeed many retired internal migrants collect social benefits through banks, which gives them the flexibility to withdraw money from any location. Among my interviewees, 20 are receiving or used to receive social benefits, and half of them collect it through banks.

However, this convenience is only available to retired people. For people with disabilities, it is much more difficult to obtain the social insurance payments to which they are entitled, since benefits must be paid in the beneficiary’s place of registered permanent residence (On the Principles of Social Services to the Population of the Kyrgyz Republic 2017). Additionally, applications for disability benefits, aid for needy families with dependent children, and aid for children with disabilities, HIV and AIDS are only accepted at the location of *propiska* registration (On State Benefits in the Kyrgyz Republic 2016).

Although these payments can be collected in cash or via direct deposit, applications for bank services must filled out at the place where an individual has *propiska* (On the Procedure for Payment of Public Benefits for State Social Insurance 2018). Moreover, the expert commissions that determine eligibility for disability benefits conduct medical assessments only in the place of permanent residence, i.e. *propiska* registration. Here again, different laws and local regulations contradict each other and allow bureaucratic administrations to make case-by-case decisions based on informal arrangements.

During the interviews, it became apparent that many people who are eligible for social benefits are either not aware of new procedures and the availability of bank deposit options or the benefits are inaccessible to them without going back to their place of registration.

*... I have four children and I used to receive help from the government when I lived in Kayindi. But when we moved to Bishkek, we stopped receiving benefits.*

—S., 42, female, registered in Kayindi; has lived in Bishkek for 14 years

*...I am unemployed and I have two little children. I tried to apply for unemployment benefits in Bishkek, but I was told to either show my propiska or apply in Issyk-Kul. When I called the Issyk-Kul office they explained the complicated procedure to me. In the end, I gave up on [applying for unemployment benefits]. Now I just sit at home with my children.*

—A., 43, female, registered in Issyk-Kul oblast; has lived in Bishkek for 15 years

*My uncle got sick. He had a problem with his kidneys. His son was a donor and he gave one kidney to his father. After the surgery, both of them were declared persons with disabilities. However, they could not get any welfare payments until one of our relatives who works in the government helped them. My uncle and his son do not have Bishkek propiska but they didn't have any problems because one of the akims<sup>33</sup> handled the issue personally. If we didn't have any relatives in the government and the akim hadn't helped them, they would still be facing these problems.*

—T., 26, female, registered in Naryn region; has lived in Bishkek for 3 months

In essence, the problems that internal migrants face due to lack of local registration are not dissimilar to those of undocumented international immigrants. Social categorization based on possession of certain documents leads to de facto different levels of inclusion among individuals who are supposed to be equal members of a political space. For example, the most basic legal right and duty of a citizen—the right to vote—is hindered by local registration requirements. Many internal migrants are not aware of additional steps they should take to be able to vote in the city, because they often simply assume that it is not even possible in the first place. As a result, rural migrants in the city become disenfranchised from national and local politics.

Furthermore, possession of documents becomes closely intertwined with how ordinary people understand the very definition of citizenship. For example, when I asked my interviewees to explain in their own words what the term “citizen” means, many

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<sup>33</sup> An *akim* is a local government leader.

indicated that a citizen was someone who had a passport or other documentary proof of citizenship. Nearly a quarter described a citizen as someone who possesses identification documents. This understanding of citizenship stands in sharp contrast to liberal notion of citizenship as a set of norms, values, rights, and responsibilities. Therefore, even in light of democratic reforms, the legacy of Soviet and post-Soviet bureaucratic institutions dictates who gets what, and these practices are justified by the already constructed meaning of citizenship and rights attached to it. The notion of justified exclusion is normalized to the point that few people question the legitimacy of *propiska* as an institution. The implication of such an understanding of citizenship at the most basic level is that it delineates between two groups, those who have the proper documents and those who do not, and thus justifies discrimination and prejudice against rural migrants without registration. Discrimination and prejudice on the part of the street-level bureaucrats who interpret complex national and local regulations leads to migrants' exclusion from social citizenship.

Although the law guarantees freedom of movement and equal access to public goods and some progressive measures, such as using banks to facilitate access to welfare transfers, have been implemented in recent years, many migrants are not aware of such changes and many remain unable to access the social benefits to which they are entitled. In part, this is due to the street-level bureaucrats' high degree of discretion in determining eligibility for public services. Exclusion from public services and social benefits labels citizens as "deserving" or "undeserving." Those who have proper registration are seen as "deserving" because they pay local taxes and contribute formally to the local budget, while those without it live in illegal settlements and take advantage of the city by consuming urban public goods.

This kind of discourse is not uncommon on the streets of Bishkek, both among older and younger generations.<sup>34</sup>

Certainly, possession or lack of *propiska* is not the only variable contributing to unequal access to social rights and public benefits. Socio-economic status, level of education, age, gender, and ethnicity also contribute to these outcomes. However, as discussed in this chapter, the *propiska* system exacerbates the divisions between “natives” and “strangers”, northerners and southerners, residents and squatters, homeowners and renters. Even if the *propiska* is reformed or substituted with a different policy, the damage has already been done. In other words, the institution of *propiska* has created delineation between ‘insiders’ who belong to the city and are entitled to public welfare and ‘outsiders’ who do not.

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<sup>34</sup> From my discussions with local people in the streets and university students.

## VI. PROPISKA AS CATALYST FOR INFORMAL WELFARE

### A. Introduction

This chapter explores how unregistered rural-to-urban migrants, disenfranchised from political and social rights as discussed in previous chapters, negotiate access to social welfare through everyday interactions with the state at the street-level: in public schools, health clinics, and crowded offices of municipal bureaucracies. These interactions often entail informal arrangements, which involve exchange of favors, gifts, and bribes. As a result, we observe a peculiar form of urban governance, where the state restricts distribution of welfare but at the same time tolerates the informal and at times extralegal arrangements between the people and the street-level bureaucrats. This chapter demonstrates that informal welfare practices are not necessarily “weapons of the weak” as is commonly discussed in the literature, but rather “weapons of the state” emphasizing intentionality in allowing and perpetuating informal activities in street-level interaction between the state and the citizens.

Informality, as a coping mechanism for the poor and the marginalized to contest social injustice and economic inequality has been well documented in subaltern literature (Scott, 1985). However, this chapter will demonstrate that informality is not necessarily the weapon of the weak, it may as well be a weapon of the state. In other words, under certain circumstance the state may intentionally ignore or even encourage informal practices. For instance, it has been argued that politicians may tolerate informal activities, such as slum dwelling, hawking, or street-vending if it is in their electoral interests (Holland 2017). This chapter presents a different perspective on how and why the state may condone informal activities, including petty corruption in the offices of street-level

bureaucracies. Specifically, here I argue that the *propiska* is not being enforced systematically nor was it designed to be. Instead, street-level public administrators who routinely interact with citizens often work out informal arrangements, make exceptions, and allow people to circumvent *propiska* requirements. Surely, these interactions generally involve exchange of favors and informal payments or, in other words, petty corruption, for which post-Soviet countries are rather notorious.

The second major point developed in the chapter is that in post-Soviet urban context characterized by the *propiska* system coupled with the retrenchment of welfare state, informality is also a source of inequality: the wealthy use it to cut through bureaucratic red tape, access priority medical care and access elite public schools, while unregistered migrants use informal practices to access basic public goods and services. Then, of course, there are also those who do not have the means to afford informal payments or who lack kinship networks, and thus find themselves outside of both formal and informal state structures.

## **B. Informality and Welfare in Post-Communist Context**

Rapidly growing cities of the Global South have attracted a lot of scholarly attention in the recent years. Cultural and ethnic diversity as well as complex social and political networks characterize these cities, where widespread informality is a particular feature that distinguishes urban life in developing countries from the industrialized ones (Post 2018). However, with the exception of China, studies of urban politics and urban informality in communist and post-communist cities are rare, even though they are spread out across most of Eurasian continent and contain hundreds of millions of diverse populations. One common problem in post-communist and particularly post-Soviet space

that has been widely discussed in both academic and international development circles is corruption – a term that is not well defined, fuzzy, and prone to conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970). Thus, it is important to distinguish corruption from informality and understand where to draw the line when it comes to provision of social welfare and services.

In post-communist and particularly post-Soviet space, the issue of corruption, i.e. gifts, bribes, and exchange of favors between citizens and staff of public institutions, has been widely discussed in both academic and international development circles (Ledeneva 2018). All former Soviet republics, including Russia rank at the bottom of Transparency International's list. Informal channels and mechanisms that citizens use to access medical care, housing, education, or various licensing documents in post-Soviet cities have been commonly called out as corruption by international organizations and policy experts.<sup>35</sup> In post-Soviet cities restrictions on access to welfare imposed by *propiska* requirements, as well as retreat of welfare state (i.e. dilapidated public schools and hospitals and unlivable wages of public workers) necessitate informal exchanges between citizens and the street-level bureaucrats. What explains persistence of these informal exchanges in post-Soviet cities? And why does the state tolerate these practices?

In order to analyze these questions, it is helpful to understand the origins of petty corruption in the welfare system. Contrary to what one might expect from the Soviet Union as a tightly controlled totalitarian regime, informality has always been part of social and economic relations even under Stalin's rule (Ledeneva 2009). Contemporary informal

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<sup>35</sup> Post-Soviet states rank as some of the most corrupt countries in world by Transparency International. E.g. Kyrgyzstan is 132/180, while Russia is 138/180.

practices originate in the Soviet notion of “*blat*”, which means using informal networks and connections to well-positions party members, bureaucrats, or other influential individuals in order to obtain particular consumer goods or social services (Ledeneva 1996). For example, a Kyrgyz railway worker, could exchange a train ticket for a new winter coat and a university professor would help a former classmate’s daughter get into a prestigious college in exchange for being moved up the line for new public housing. Thus, *blat* is both a means for survival in an economic system characterized by chronic shortages and an institution of privileged access for well-connected elites.

Furthermore, Soviet welfare system, which was believed to be the most comprehensive and egalitarian, was in fact neither universal nor entirely free. Both education and healthcare provision were based on place of permanent residence regulated by the *propiska* regime. Urban schools and hospitals in the capital cities were on average better equipped and provided better quality services. In addition, several exclusive urban “elite” education and healthcare institutions were only accessible to high-ranking party members and government officials. *Blat* was, of course, used to gain access to these “elite” institutions. After the collapse of the USSR, transition towards democracy and market economy were expected to bring about modernization and eradication of informality. However, as we now know, the effect was just the opposite.

Almost three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, informal practices define everyday life in post-Soviet cities. Discussions of informality in political science tend to emphasize clientelism as a distributive mechanism employed in strategic electoral calculations (Stokes 2013). In other words, durability of patronage networks has often been attributed to adaptation of clientelism to formal democratic institutions, especially in

post-colonial contexts, such as Ghana (Paller 2014) or India (Sadanandan 2012). The path-dependent continuity of cultural norms and traditional societal structures, such as tribes and clans, determine the nature of political contestations and state-society relations (Collins 2002). Similarly, scholars of Central Asian politics often argued that exchanges within and between informal networks of families, clans, and tribes are what drives relations of power and draws the contours of state-society relations. Indeed, the importance of informal networks and relations of patronage are easily visible in the streets of Bishkek. For instance, in a conversation about informality and corruption, a local politician explained that they have a sense of responsibility to give back to their community (i.e. extended family, home village) in different ways, such as paying for house renovations, buying household or farming equipment, or spending on cultural celebrations. Interestingly, that both elected and non-elected (i.e. appointed) politicians, as well as businessmen express the same sentiment. Those who do not face electoral risks, strictly speaking, do not need to build patron-client relations for electoral gains; however, informal bonds are deeply embedded in political as well as social norms of Kyrgyz society.

Another way that scholars consider informality is as a mechanism for the marginalized people and communities to cope with economic inequality and social injustice (Scott 1985). Informality has been defined as something that exists outside of state control and without state sanction or legal status and as such it has often been exemplified by illicit economic activities such as hawking, slum dwelling, or petty corruption (Christopher 1998). State tolerance of these types of informal activities has generally been attributed to weak capacity of the state (Becker 1968) or the principal-

agent problem (North 1990). The weak state rationale is based on the assumption that the state simply does not have the ability to properly enforce laws; while the principal-agent explanation is based on the assumption that upper-level officials fail to control the actions of lower-level bureaucrats and street-level public administrators. However, state's active role in creating regulatory conditions that compel ordinary citizens into informal arrangements are largely overlooked. If the point of departure is the acknowledgement of state's intention in perpetuating informal activities, then informality can no longer be viewed as tool of resistance against an oppressive state, but rather as a tool of the state that allows state functions to move freely between public and private realms.

Informal exchanges of cash or gifts between ordinary citizens and street-level public administrators in contemporary Bishkek are in part rooted in Soviet tradition of *blat*. At the same time, traditional informal networks based on membership in extended families, clans, and hometowns are crucial for the logistics of practicing *blat*. That is because the practice of giving bribes is a performative act; there are certain norms to be followed, rituals to be performed, and relations to be arranged (Gupta 1995). Informal exchange of favors and petty corruption are widespread in many countries and cities of the Global South. These are usually viewed as deficiencies of the state that lacks capacity to curb illicit activities. However, the case of Bishkek demonstrates that the state maintains a rigid registration policy that it does not intend to systematically enforce and deliberately tolerates informal arrangements because they grease the wheel of the large but inadequately funded welfare system. In essence, in the post-Soviet context, two key variables: endurance of rigid but ambiguously regulated *propiska* and retrenching welfare state stimulate people's engagement in informal exchanges with street-level bureaucrats.

This phenomenon is neither a symptom of weak state (as statist literature would dictate) nor a symptom of bottom-up resistance to oppression (as subaltern literature would argue), but rather it is state's approach to organizing state functions, in particular welfare, in a way that draws a fluid line between public and private, formal and informal. Hence, this design allows the state to maintain *de jure* control of the welfare system but *de facto* privatize some of its functions that citizens pay for informally.

Indeed, in post-Soviet cities one of the main causes of proliferation of informal payments and petty corruption is retrenchment and plight of the welfare state. Just as *blat* was used to access scarce consumer goods under the conditions of planned economy; it is now a response to welfare "shortages". Facing a multitude of economic and political dilemmas, political elites in post-Soviet countries neither preserved nor restructured the welfare state that they inherited (Cook 2013). This means that benefit programs were not eliminated because having experienced Soviet "cradle-to-grave" universal welfare, people expected continuation of living standards they had been accustomed to. Phasing out benefit programs would be "third rail politics" and not fare well with the population already under pressure from market reforms and subsequent economic recession.

Although benefit programs were not officially scaled back, welfare expenditures were dramatically reduced. Market transition and economic depression of 1990-s made provision of Soviet-inherited broad basic social services unaffordable and unsustainable (Cook 2013). Pensions, unemployment insurance, spending on education and healthcare among other things dropped significantly. Nowadays, in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in Central Asia, average pensions cannot support minimal standard of living and can barely cover the cost of essential utility bills. Public schools and medical centers are

overcrowded and dilapidated; they lack appropriate technology and often rely on international donors. Salaries of public workers were slashed so that today doctors, nurses, teachers, policemen, and other public workers are among the lowest earning employment category on par with retail and restaurant service staff.<sup>36</sup> Gifts, be they monetary or otherwise (Morris and Polese 2016), that public workers receive from their “clients” serve as their supplemental income. Thus, welfare state functions nominally, while in reality it does not live up to citizens’ expectations and they try to achieve desired outcomes through informal practices.

For rural-to-urban migrants in particular, informal mechanisms are often the only channels for access to public goods and social welfare. Although registered urban residents and even the wealthy also participate in informal exchanges to secure better standards of medical care or to get rid of a speeding ticket, for them participation is a choice to “upgrade” and they are expected to give more (more money, more expensive gifts, or mobilize high-level political and social connections) (Morris and Polese 2016), but for unregistered rural migrants resorting to informal exchanges is not a matter of choice but necessity. In essence informal arrangements between citizens and public service providers at the street-level constitutes de facto privatization of welfare state by means of large-scale informalization of relations between the low-paid “*budgetnik*” or public worker and the citizen, who would otherwise be altogether excluded from the service (Polese 2006). Thus, for both participants of the exchange it is a win-win solution to each their predicaments and circumstances, which explains why informality is tolerated from below.

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<sup>36</sup> Bases on employment data from National Statistical Committee

However, informality is tolerated and sustained from above as much as it is from below. The state broadly defined including the local government, the police, street-level bureaucrats, and planners use informality purposefully. In fact, in the urban context, state may have legal authority to take down informal housing and eradicate corruption, but doing so may not be in its interest because it will undermine state legitimacy in other aspects (i.e. inability to provide public housing, and other types of welfare). Informality is precisely in the center of this tension between state authority and state interest (Davis 2017). Therefore, the line between formal and informal becomes blurry, especially when it becomes apparent that informality might determine not only the nature of state-society relations but also the nature of the state itself. Hence, informal exchanges between the citizens and the state at the street-level represent a particular feature that characterizes post-socialist welfare state. On one hand it shows that state-led welfare provision is inadequate and thus contested from the bottom-up, but on the other hand allows the state to maintain its authority and legitimacy by preserving Soviet institutions that nominally guarantee social welfare and simultaneously put limits on its provision through *propiska*. Hence, informality and regulation are complementary: where welfare is inaccessible it spreads through informal mechanisms thereby shaping dynamics of interpersonal relations in the society and state-society relations.

### **C. Case Studies of Informality in Public Sphere: Education and Healthcare**

Public education system in Kyrgyzstan, similar to other post-socialist states, is widespread but desperately underfunded. From pre-school to university, public education institutions struggle with lack of resources as basic as books, stationary, classroom equipment, as well as over-enrollment. Classrooms that are designed for maximum 30

students sometimes reach double the size. Teachers' wages depending on years of experience vary between approximately 9200 and 15600 KGS equivalent to 130-230 USD per month pre-tax.<sup>37</sup> State universities face similar challenges of underfunding and low wages.

In these circumstances corruption in post-socialist education system, particularly in institutions of higher education, has been well documented (Osipian 2009). Grades can often be negotiated with instructors through "brokers", i.e. fellow students who have established credible relations with the instructor. There are even some cases where degrees and diplomas can be obtained from university administrators through informal channels and bribes (Akipress 2016). However, informal exchanges are commonplace in primary education system as well, both in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere in post-socialist space (Kovács 2015). In 2013 Transparency International reported that informal payments to public schools in Bishkek amounted to 7820 KGS (~110USD) per student per year. In many cases these informal payments take form of "donations" that upper class urban residents contribute in exchange for admissions to prestigious public schools<sup>38</sup>.

For unregistered rural migrants, however, it is not a question of prestige, but that of access. Although some informal settlements have their own schools, they tend to be understaffed and are extremely overcrowded. When parents try to seek admission to public pre-school or secondary school, they face institutional barriers imposed by the *propiska* system. However, from the perspective of school administration some children have to be denied admission because of over-crowdedness:

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<sup>37</sup> According to the information provided by the Ministry of Education of the Kyrgyz Republic income tax is 10% and social security is 17,25%.

<sup>38</sup> A small number of prestigious urban public schools are more desirable than private ones.

*“Many children apply for our school, but it is already overcrowded and we don’t have enough teachers. They [teachers] have to work double shifts. We try to explain this situation to the parents. It’s not that we discriminate based on propiska but because there is simply no space.”*

—Administrator in public school #67

School administrators often attribute the growing number of school children in need of education to internal migration and almost unanimously agree that *propiska* system is necessary to control the number of admitted students and to avoid “total chaos”<sup>39</sup>. The way that schools balance the constitutional rights of children to education and the limits on how many students they can actually fit in their classrooms is by admitting students with local *propiska* first and if any available spots are left they can admit unregistered students on first-come first-served basis. Parents without local *propiska* find alternative ways to secure their children’s’ education by mobilizing kinship networks, or informal networks of friends, neighbors, and co-workers, who might be able to persuade or pressure school administrators.

Although all public-school administrators complained about shortage of teachers and over-crowdedness, they did not seem concerned about inadequate state funding. In fact, one informant revealed that their school is in good shape mainly because of parents’ contributions and “donations” for maintenance and renovations. Therefore, informal practices that may take form of gifts, “donations”, or exchange of favors within kinship

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<sup>39</sup> From interview with deputy director of school-gymnasium #29

networks exemplify how both parents and administrators adapt to constantly overcrowded and underfunded public schools. While *propiska* system allows schools to legally discriminate against migrant children, a parallel informal structure allows room for negotiation and contestation.

Similar to education system, the healthcare system in post-Soviet countries is also deeply affected by informal patient payments, either gifts such as liquor and sweet treats or “under-the-table” cash payments (Gaal and Belli et al 2006). Since these informal transactions occur between the patient and the doctor or a nurse and comprise unofficial payment for publicly funded healthcare service, these informal transactions once again exemplify how in the context of post-communism, informality lies between public and private, the state and the market. The process of informalization and de facto marketization of healthcare is a response to low wages of medical personnel, as well as lack of medical technology and supplies. The average salary of a medical doctor ranges from 6500 to 19000 KGS per month (pretax, approx. 93 – 272 USD) depending on their specialty and years of experience.<sup>40</sup> Thus for many healthcare professionals informal payments both monetary and non-monetary constitute a significant contribution to their income. For obvious reasons, there is few reliable statistics about the extent of informal exchanges in the medical sphere, but some studies suggest it constitutes at least 30% of national healthcare spending (Ensor and Savelyeva 1998).

Informal payments may be monetary, in which case a patient slips cash into a doctor’s or nurse’s white coat. In this situation it is customary for the doctor to refuse the payment saying it is not necessary, while not taking the money out of the pocket. Informal

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<sup>40</sup> Information provided by the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic

payments can also be offered in non-monetary form; small gifts such as liquor, wine, or sweet treats are also very common. In some cases, a patient might use his own job “perks” to exchange with the healthcare provider. These informal activities are socially accepted as demonstrations of gratitude and reciprocity. In the environment of weak institutions of governance, people tend to rely on interpersonal bonds and informal relations (Polese 2014).

While unregistered rural migrants are not exceptional in that they use informal channels to navigate the healthcare system, those without urban *propiska* are in particularly precarious position since they do not formally qualify for certain medical services. Local *poliklinika*, which provide primary care, are the first healthcare option that people turn to for basic needs, such as vaccinations, pediatric care and so forth, serve only people with local *propiska* in their specific city district. In other words, people are assigned certain *poliklinikas* based on their *propiska* and place of residence. National hospitals admit all citizens regardless of their regional origins or registration status, but often require *napravlenie*, i.e. referral from a *poliklinika*. However, as a number of informants from Bishkek’s *poliklinikas* revealed, unregistered migrants can receive medical care if they negotiate with a physician personally. In one of the maternity hospitals there is an entire informal procedure that governs the process of prenatal care for unregistered migrant women.

“... women without Bishkek *propiska* should write a letter of request to the head physician asking permission to give birth in this maternity hospital. In this letter they need to explain why they chose this hospital specifically. In addition they put 1000 soms in the envelope.”

— Maternity Hospital Administrator

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Thus, persistence of informal transactions in the healthcare sector in post-Soviet context can be explained by three factors: 1) low wages and lack of appropriate state funding; 2) social acceptance and normalization of informality (Sharipova 2015), and 3) formal institutions that limit access to healthcare, i.e. *propiska*. While privileged urban populations, the wealthy and well-connected elites use informal channels to cut through bureaucratic hurdles and get the best quality medical care (Sharipova 2015), rural migrants without *propiska* are formally excluded and have little choice but to meet their medical needs through informal payments.

#### **D. Unequal distribution of Informal Welfare**

Post-Soviet regimes have been cautious about cutting welfare programs and significantly restructuring Soviet-style welfare system. However due to economic decline and poor economic conditions, particularly in Central Asia, financing of these welfare programs has been problematic. Moreover, tax base remains weak due to proliferation of informal economic activities, i.e. “shadow economy” that do not contribute to tax revenues and social security. At the same time private companies have their own informal channels to negotiate tax breaks and “behind-the-door” deals. The wealthiest entrepreneurs often hold key government positions in national and local political bodies.

Thus, due to poor governance, weak tax enforcement, and economic informality, the state generates low tax revenues and is unable to provide adequate financing for its extensive welfare programs. As a result, education and healthcare expenditures have been disproportionately low relative to population needs. A creative solution to this predicament is shifting the burden of welfare financing from the state to the citizen (Rasanayagam 2011). Informal payments, be they “donations” for school renovation or cash slipped into a nurse’s pocket, in effect subsidize these institutions and represent de facto marketization of social welfare. However, the “shadow process of redistribution” (Cook 2013) where street-level bureaucrats and the citizens find mutually acceptable ways to fill in the gaps left by the state does not necessarily undermine its authority and legitimacy since welfare formally remains a state domain. The state tolerates and even encourages informality because it satisfies state interests; specifically, maintenance of social welfare system that would otherwise be on the brink of collapse. In other words, the state does not need to introduce unpopular market mechanisms into the welfare system because market principles are already at work in unofficial ways.

Informality is often seen as the “weapon of the weak” through which the poor and marginalized cope with inequality and injustice (Scott 1985). However, in the post-Soviet space informal payments and transactions are used across the board by the marginalized and the wealthy alike. While the unregistered migrants resort to informal payments to access basic services, the wealthy use their economic and political power to cut corners and obtain best quality public service. For instance, in a conversation with a renowned doctor in one of Bishkek’s state hospitals, I wondered why she continues working in a low-paying position at a poorly equipped facility instead of moving into a private facility

or opening her own practice. Her answer was surprising, but not inconsistent with the picture of informal welfare. At the public hospital, she already has a lot of patients and in addition to official fees they always show gratitude by giving “something extra” directly to her.

Another doctor, an obstetrician working in a state maternity hospital, shared a similar sentiment, but he was very open about having unofficial rates for his services. The most common procedure that he performs almost daily is C-section, for which his rate is 500USD. Therefore, the informal costs of services of top medical specialists at public hospitals are not affordable for the majority of ordinary Bishkek residents and rural migrants. Access to “good” doctors and specialized care is reserved for those who can pay for it. Thus, in essence, the public healthcare system is being informally privatized and as a result, inequalities between “haves” and “have-nots” discussed in the previous chapter are further intensified and exacerbated.

Similarly, in the public education system every child is entitled to education at a school in their *propiska* district, which means that unregistered children are not automatically eligible for public education. However, a child may be admitted into a public school of their choice (outside of the district) in the *propiska* city, if they score above a certain threshold on their first-grade entrance exam, which normally includes reading comprehension, basic writing and arithmetic skills. As a result of policies that link *propiska* and student’s pre-existing academic skills to the choice of public schools they can attend, children from well-off families have a lot more opportunities than children of migrants. Studies in educational achievement consistently show that parents’ income and socio-economic status has implications on their children’s’ educational outcomes

(Reardon 2013). Therefore, when local policies actively promote clustering of wealthy and high-achieving students in certain schools, gaps in achievement outcomes are even more stark. The “elite” public schools that are usually located in the central part of the city, often referred to as the “golden square”, so students who belong to their districts are likely to be of higher socio-economic status. Out-of-district students have to complete in entrance exams, so only the brightest can start their education there. *Blat* connections to local school administrators or teachers are an important factor in parents’ ability to place their child in an “elite” public school.

For instance, Bishkek gymnasium #6 is the most prestigious public school in the city. It is located on a picturesque tree-lined boulevard in the most affluent neighborhood of the city. Naturally, the school is very selective and imposes high admissions barriers. I spoke to one family who attempted to place their daughter in this school even though they lived many miles away from it. Although the prospective first-grader passed the exams with flying colors, the school administrator expressed worry about her personal traits and her ability to “fit in”. At the same time, the school official also hinted at the need to purchase new equipment for the computer lab, which a group of parents proposed to finance. These comments did not sit well with the girl’s parent and they applied to another public school, instead. This account exemplifies how both formal and informal institutions prioritize already privileged individuals and marginalize the underserved populations. It is not surprising that because of informal “donations” that parents contribute for school renovations and purchases, “elite” schools are better equipped even though they receive the same amount of state funding as “regular” overcrowded and dilapidated schools in the city.

Therefore, in post-Soviet context informality has dual implications: it leads to *de facto* privatization of social services and as a result further exacerbates inequality.

Ultimately, the most vulnerable population, those who do not possess enough money for informal payments or lack kinship ties to mobilize social capital, have hard time accessing basic services making it a question of basic human and citizenship rights.

## VII. CONCLUSION

### A. The lasting effects of Soviet legacies

The goal of this dissertation was to explain the causes, consequences, and legacies of the Soviet leftover institution *propiska*. The analysis of historical development of residency restrictions from tsarist Russia to post-communist Kyrgyzstan revealed that at each critical juncture, be it demise of the feudal regime and the victory of socialist revolution or the fall of communism and the inception of a new independent democratic state, *propiska* was adapted and re-invented by each subsequent totalitarian, authoritarian, and semi-democratic regimes. Moreover, during each historical period it serves specific state purposes: for tsar's feudal elites *propiska* was a way to control the serfs; for Stalin it was a way to force and confine peasants into collective farms; and in Kyrgyzstan *propiska* is a way of excluding low-income rural migrants from city's social welfare.

The rationale behind the exclusion of migrants from social welfare is also rooted in the legacies of Soviet welfare system that Kyrgyzstan inherited. The universal "cradle-to-grave" welfare was the most prominent feature of the Soviet state. In fact, it was the main promise of the October revolution and the Party's legitimacy depended on its ability to guarantee provision of social welfare to all Soviet citizens. In other words, comprehensive welfare system was one of the main sources of Soviet state legitimacy and this had important implications on state-society relation in the post-communist period. However, despite being universal, Soviet welfare was not equal, which means that certain groups of people enjoyed more privileges than others. For instance, party elites and top-level bureaucrats received medical care in "special" hospitals and recuperated at exclusive

resorts. Military and security forces also had their own medical centers and places of vacation and leisure.

Meanwhile ordinary citizens were stratified into urban and rural categories by the *propiska* system and the quality of welfare they received largely depended on their place of residence. Surely, major national medical facilities, research centers, top universities, and bureaucratic headquarters were all located in capital cities. The quality of urban social services has always been and continues to be superior to those in rural areas. However, *propiska* system effectively blocked access to “closed cities”, which included all capitals of member-republics and a number of other large cities, such as Saint Petersburg and Novosibirsk. Therefore, distribution of welfare under the Soviet regime was localized and unequal. This institutional design of welfare distribution coupled with state-engineered social stratification based on urban versus rural residency, left lasting legacies on post-socialist state-society relations. In particular, the practice of linking welfare benefits to the place of permanent residence was carried over to post-socialist Kyrgyzstan albeit with some modifications.

Along with formal institutions, such as residence registration, informal institutions, such as *blat*, were also carried over from the Soviet era. Under conditions of chronic shortages of consumer goods, Soviet citizens found ways to access what they needed by using social connections to individuals who had power over distribution of that particular product or service. Correspondingly, contemporary exclusion of rural migrants from urban welfare benefits creates necessity for using *blat*, bribes, and other forms of informal payments as an alternative way to access the welfare system.

Therefore, historical-institutional analysis shows adaptability of socialist formal and informal institutions to new forms of economic relations and state governance. Specifically, the word *propiska* was officially removed from the legal language because it did not fit the Kyrgyzstan's democratization agenda of the time. Although it was renamed simply "permanent residence", in substance, however, it was still a *propiska* system. For instance, it played a key role in determining eligibility for privatization of urban public housing: those with *propiska* at the dwelling purchased it at a nominal cost. Further, it also determined eligibility for public education, healthcare, official employment, and participation in local elections. Perhaps, the only aspect in which contemporary *propiska* significantly differs from the Soviet one is its leniency towards rural-to-urban migration. In other words, *propiska* no longer serves the purpose of migration control, but it maintains social stratification across rural/urban and "native"/migrant lines.

Furthermore, "native" urban intelligentsia comprised of Russian-speaking Kyrgyz elites have always been unwelcoming to rural migrants. Nevertheless, following the initial privatization of public housing in 1991-1993 by the "natives", multiple waves of rural-to-urban migrants arrived to Bishkek. Migrants from the earlier waves came from northern regions of the country, as did the political elites of the time. These migrants were mostly young, educated, and energetic professional who claimed their rights to the city and successfully demanded legalization of first squatter settlements in Bishkek. As full legal members of the Bishkek community, "early-comers" joined the rank of "natives". However, the recent arrivals, mostly from the southern regions, often face multiple formal and informal barriers to claiming social rights. Thus, the understanding of who belongs to the city and who does not depends not only on ascribed characteristics, such as ethnicity

or language, but also on the timing and sequence of their arrival to the city. In other words, the divisions between the “natives” and “migrants” are not fixed, but rather depend on when and how various migrant groups settled in the city, what were the political circumstances, and what kind of opportunities were available to them at the time.

## **B. Understanding state-society relations through the prism of *propiska* system**

Another major argument developed in this dissertation deals with the ways in which the *propiska* system and informal mechanisms of circumventing it affect state-society relations. Challenging statist literature, I argued that inconsistent enforcement of laws and tolerance of informality should not immediately be equated to state weakness. In fact, even the distinction between strong and weak states rests on questionable assumptions about the definition and boundaries of the state. Furthermore, the discussion of *propiska* and informal welfare also challenges statist assumptions about clear and strict lines dividing the realms of state and society, public and private, formal and informal.

Particularly, ambiguity and fuzziness of regulatory framework governing *propiska* system allows the local state a lot of leeway in interpretation of the laws and establishment of *propiska*-related administrative procedures. As a result, at the national level, *propiska* seems to be no more than a mechanism of notification of address change similar to the residence registration process in democratic countries like Austria, Germany, Norway, or Japan. However, a closer look reveals that local registering authorities require proof of property ownership in order to obtain *propiska* at the said property. As a result, hundreds of thousands of squatters, tenants, and renters who factually reside in Bishkek remain unregistered and thus invisible to the state.

Ambiguity of national laws, rigidity of the *propiska* system, and its unsystematic enforcement at street-level bureaucracies seems chaotic, but there is a rationale for it. Constitutional laws vaguely protecting freedom of movement and non-discrimination (of migrants) are meant to satisfy the demands of international organizations that oversee and fund Kyrgyzstan's democratization efforts. Rigid barriers to obtaining *propiska*, namely property ownership requirement, satisfies the "old-timers" and the homeowners' symbolic and material interests. Finally, lack of systematic enforcement of *propiska* at local bureaucracies, signals that state's intention is not to cut unregistered migrants from welfare entirely but rather steer them towards informal paths to social services.

Indeed, exchanges of gifts and bribes at local bureaucracies are not uncommon and go way back to the days of Stalin. However, in the context of marketization, state's tolerance of informal payments for social welfare means that *de jure* welfare system is under control of the state but *de facto* some of its functions become informally privatized since they are unofficially paid for by the "clients". In essence, by ignoring informal welfare, the state deliberately shifts the lines between public and private realms and moves state function between formal and informal. Fuzziness of regulatory framework and ambiguous enforcement of formal policy, however, leaves much maneuvering room for the state to tolerate or crack down on these informal practices.

All in all, this dissertation is about the process of adaptation of one policy in three completely different political and economic regimes, where timing and sequence of certain events determine who is affected by the policy and how; it is also about the old inequalities produces by old system and the new inequalities produced by new system being layered on top of each other and thickening the lines between deserving and

undeserving, members and strangers, visible and invisible. Therefore, the arguments developed in this dissertation could also be applied to other post-communist countries that enforce (or not) residence registration systems.

### **C. *Propiska* in the Global Perspective**

Survival of the *propiska* system is not unique to Kyrgyzstan. Russia's registration regime that formally replaced the Soviet internal passport still bears a lot of similarities to the Soviet *propiska* policy. The law "On the Right of Russian Citizens to Liberty of Movement and Choice of Temporary or Permanent Residence within the Russian Federation" emphasizes the fact that the new system simply requires a notification to the local authorities rather than an official permit. However, similarly to Bishkek, in order to get a residence registration to begin with, the petitioner needs to provide proof of property ownership or a formal lease agreement accompanied by a letter of permission from the landlord (Bovt, 2013). Persons without local residence registration can be denied employment, as well as denied permission to open a bank account, to obtain a driver's license or gain access to public healthcare and education. Since governance and management of registration has been decentralized and is now in the hands of the local governments, large cities like Moscow and Saint Petersburg, as well as cities close to Russia's southern borders have additional requirements that make migration and settlement in these cities more difficult for both internal and international migrants (Light 2016). In other words, it is not a simple notification mechanism the as the official narrative would suggest, but rather local governments use registration restrictions in order to keep "undesirable" populations, particularly labor migrants from Caucasus and Central Asia out of the formal realm and force them to seek employment and social services

through informal channels. Employment in the city without having local *propiska* is illegal; thus, labor migrants can be detained, fined, and deported at any time. Therefore, *propiska* is one of many tools in Russia's migration management toolkit, by which the state is able to achieve a delicate balance between satisfying the need to for cheap urban labor and the anti-immigrant public opinion (Schenk 2018).

Uzbekistan is the only post-Soviet country that not only preserved some adaptation of the *propiska* system, but also the Soviet-style internal passport. In Uzbekistan, failure to produce *propiska* to the local law enforcement authorities might lead to fines or even weeks of jail time (Hojaqizi 2008). Obtaining *propiska* in the capital city of Tashkent is very difficult, but there are three ways in which a migrant can do it. First option is to find a sponsor (often a family member) in order to claim residence and get registered in Tashkent. Another option is to obtain local *propiska* through employment in national or local government or a state enterprise. Currently, less than a hundred organizations are authorized to sponsor *propiska* for their employees. Another way of obtaining Tashkent *propiska* is marriage. Although the new president Mirziyoyev who came to power in 2016 promised to launch reforms to the *propiska* system that would finally allow Uzbek citizens to move freely within the country, the only recent change that materialized was granting Tashkent registration to buyers of housing units in newly constructed apartment buildings that cost no less than 35,000 USD. Considering that Uzbekistan GDP per capita is less than 2,000 USD, the cost of new housing is unattainable for the vast majority of rural migrants. Since Uzbekistan has been slow to implement market reforms, liberalization but preservation of *propiska* system signals its usefulness in stimulating Tashkent's housing market. Unlike other regions in the country, the capital offers reliable utility services,

better education, infrastructure, and job opportunities, which naturally attracts migrants. However, similar to Kyrgyzstan, in the case of Uzbekistan *propiska* in the capital city is a privilege that favors individuals of certain regional or tribal origins (Turaeva 2015) and economic status that satisfies the neoliberal logic.

Outside of the Soviet Union, various similar residence registration regimes were in place in other communist countries. These institutions were necessary for the socialist economic planning collectivization, industrialization, and distribution of welfare resources. In some cases, such as Korea and China, indigenous traditional family or household registries were adapted to the socialist agenda. In other cases, like in Vietnam, residence registration was modeled after Soviet *propiska* or Chinese *hukou*. Currently Vietnam's *hokhau* system restricts employment in public sector and access to social services to over 5 million people who lack permanent *hokhau* in their factual place of residence.

In Korea, *hoju* family registration system was instituted during Koryo dynasty (918-1392) and continued through Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910) as an institution of traditional family values (Deuchler 1992). In South Korea *hoju* was deemed unconstitutional and was officially abolished in 2005 (Nam 2010). In communist North Korea *hoju* morphed into an institution of migration control as it took on characteristics akin to *propiska* (Ma and Zeng 2015). Unlike *propiska*, however, it also diminishes rights of women by requiring that the head of household is male. The man's permission and signature is necessary for all kinds of paperwork that the members of the family will need in their lifetime.

The roots of China's *hukou* go back to population registration system *xiangsui* and *baojia*, which emerged early in Chinese history. The initial prototypes of modern *hukou* were established during Xia Dynasty (21-16 century BC) and Shang Dynasty (16-11 century BC) for the purposes of taxation and control (Wang 2005). During Zhou Dynasty (11-8 century BC) *xiangsui* system stratified geographic areas into hierarchically arranged zones from "royal" center to "barbarian" rural areas (Wang 2005). In the years that followed this categorization was accompanied by population registration and restrictions on internal migration. *Baojia* system was introduced during Qin Dynasty (475-221 BC); it instituted collective responsibility of a group of families, i.e. *bao* that was responsible for taxes. Moreover, crimes, including illegal migration, committed by one member would cause punishment for the entire collective. Chinese versions of "internal passports" were introduced within the next century and those lacking permission to travel were severely persecuted (Wang 2005). Therefore, internal migration and travel was restricted by cultural and institutional norms in the early period in Chinese history.

More detailed records and household registration booklets that were enforced and archived by local and central governments developed throughout centuries. In 1911 *Huji* Law became the first legal document to formally regulate *huji* system in China. It solidified the centralized control of population movement, as well as control of agricultural production and taxation. The registration procedures and rules laid out by the law were utilized by all regimes that ruled China in 20<sup>th</sup> century: the Republican Government, the Japanese occupation forces, and the communists (Cheng and Selden 1994).

The *hukou* system as we know it today was established in 1958. It divided urban and rural populations, restricted migration, and linked provision of social services and welfare benefits to the *hukou* status (agricultural, i.e. rural or non-agricultural, i.e. urban) and *hukou* location (place of registered permanent residence). Similar to the Soviet Union, *hukou* played crucial role in the socialist planned economy, collectivization, and industrialization. However, in the post-reform era, *hukou* continues to serve political and economic interests of the state. Recent reforms that decentralized management of *hukou* system resulted in significant variation in *hukou* conversion procedures. Local governments of small cities and towns allowed rural migrants to obtain *hukou*, but those were not the places that many people migrated towards to begin with (Chen and Fan 2016). Instead, *hukou* transfers in those cities served one main purpose – raising city revenues by setting urban real estate ownership as a pre-requisite for *hukou* applications and expropriating rural land in exchange for the city *hukou* (Zhan and Andreas 2015). Prosperous megacities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou where majority of undocumented “floating population” work and reside, established a points system that makes only a tiny fraction of migrants – the educated and the wealthy – eligible for local *hukou*.

Communist regimes across the world used some type of residence registration systems that restricted internal migration in order to keep population records, which were necessary for economic planning, distribution of welfare, and social control. In Soviet satellite states registration institutions were modeled after *propiska* and in East Asia after *hukou*. Although *propiska* and *hukou*, historically developed independently of each other; they are deeply intertwined with old feudal cultural and political institutions of Russia and

China. Both of these institutions survived through centuries and to this day continue to serve interests of states as different as Kyrgyzstan and China.

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December 13, 2019

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Sincerely,

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