

The imagination of a dictator

A descriptive idea analysis of the political work Rukhnama

Abstract

This thesis studies three ideas represented in the political work *Rukhnama* written by Türkmenbaşy, the former totalitarian dictator of Turkmenistan. Using the theories of Anderson in *Imagined communities*, with the method of descriptive idea analysis, it comes to the conclusion that the work represents a heavily authoritarian ideology with its basis in a family structure. The family structure is patriarchal with the clear purpose of Türkmenbaşy being at the top. Aside from strengthening Türkmenbaşys own political ambition with this compulsory book, it also serves as creating a new nationalism for Turkmenistan, moulded after the family structure. By analysing the work, including its strictly political messages, as well as the personal stories, poems and fictional histories, the underlying core of the book has been analysed. The ambition of the thesis is to uncover the messages of nationalism in order to enable further studies both on the *Rukhnama* and other similar books written by dictators.

Keywords: Turkmenistan, *Rukhnama*, descriptive idea analyses, imagined communities, dictatorship

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1 Introduction

The state of Turkmenistan rarely concerns the common westerner. It is a state in the middle of Central Asia without a coastline, large population or seemingly impressive history. It may seem like the only thing worth noticing about the country is its reserves of natural gas and oil. However, this small nation does have a compelling recent history with Saparmurat Niyazov, the former President for life who forced the country to dictatorship policies and practices which have been labeled “totalitarian”.¹ This thesis will investigate the chaotic work called Rukhnama, “The Book of the Soul”, written by the president.



1.1 Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze the work Rukhnama by Saparmurat Niyazov, called Türkmenbaşy. There are many reasons to make an in-depth analysis on this material. Firstly, there have been very little research done on this subject by the Swedish and English research community. Secondly, this is a part of a unique type of literature. Dictators with totalitarian ambitions who write their own books which are meant to express their political foundations for themselves and their countries are not many, but they are important. Rukhnama could be compared to Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, Gaddafi’s *The Green Book* and *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*. These are books which today have a limited influence in today’s Western societies but have been historically important here and continues to be important in other parts of the world. Perhaps there are some things that overlap in these works. Thirdly, Turkmenistan is a country located in Central Asia. This is an overlooked region, composed of five

¹ Templeton, Tom, “The Man Who Would Be King”, *The Guardian*, 2004-10-10, (<https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2004/oct/10/features.magazine37>, Read 2018-04-04)

different countries and a population of 70 million. This thesis aims to shed light over this region and give new perspectives on Turkmenistan and other totalitarian states.

The research question for this thesis seeks to establish a clear view on the three main types of ideas represented in Rukhnama, in regards no nationalism The question:

How are the ideas on nation, state, and hierarchy presented in the Rukhnama?

1.2 On Rukhnama

The book, called Rukhnama (The spelling differs, for this thesis the in the researched materials are used, unless referring to other researchers work), was published in two stages. The first in 2001 and the second in 2004. It was, as claimed, written by the president Türkmenbaşy. Its purpose is to create a sense of nationalism in the Turkmen people, who regained independence during the fall of the Soviet Union. Rukhnama is often compared to other books written by dictators, and thereby one might get the impression that it is equal to Mein Kampf, The Green Book or Quotations, in the sense that a somewhat clearcut ideology can instantly be extracted from this book which is aligned with the ruler's actual politics. I want to make clear that this is not the case with Rukhnama. It is an odd and messy book which is hard to follow. It varies between stories of Türkmenbaşy, his parents, histories of the Turkmen people, various agreements with other nations, geography, territory, philosophical expositions on the Turkmen character, religion, various poems and advice of all sorts. All of this without any sensible structure.

If this is the case, why should it be studied? Because it is important. It might be considered a low-quality book but it is still extremely important in Turkmenistan, and even more so in the past. It is important to study this type of literature in totalitarian societies. The importance of the text is what is relevant, not the quality of the text. In his

own words: “*Rukhnama* should be a source of power and striving to reach the targets of Turkmen’s Golden Age”.²

Just how important was this particular book? It was for many years compulsory reading in schools and universities. Without knowledge of the books teaching you are not able to get a job in the state sector, get a degree at the universities or get a driving license. The national TV-stations broadcasted readings from the book every evening. Public criticism of the book (and Türkmenbaşy himself) would result in fines, jail or torture. Without this book, we cannot fully understand the dictatorship in Turkmenistan.

It was also intended for international use: “The foreigners who read *Rukhnama* will know us better, became[sic!] our friends faster, and the far and the foreign becomes closer to us on our path to being accepted in the world.”³

² Turkmenbashy, Saparmyrat, *Rukhnama: reflections on the spiritual values of the Turkmen*, Ashgabat, Ashgabat city, 2005, 22.

³ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 25

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Previous research

As stated before, the research done on Rukhnama is all other than extensive, at least when considering the English and Swedish research. For this thesis, it means that it will need to focus on creating entirely new material, hopefully for others to use in the future. The scarcely available literature will be used wherever it is possible. Among the existing text on the subject is a chapter from the anthology *Tyrants Writing Poetry*. Riccardo Nicolosi has in his chapter come to the conclusion that Rukhnama “played a central role in the construction of cultural identity of post-Soviet Turkmenistan by providing argumentative strategies for modeling a national history that would legitimize Türkmenbaşı’s power.”⁴ Others have examined Rukhnama in regards to education⁵ and the general ideology of the state.⁶ One author has also tried to analyze the different translations of the text to see how the text developed through time, coming to the conclusion that it indeed changed as the nation building was in process.⁷ But it is uncertain which version came first and in which language it was first written in.⁸

In an earlier article, Horak stated that “The peculiarity of local ideology mixes elements of modern Middle Eastern dictatorships, communist regimes and pseudo-

⁴ Nicolosi, Riccardo, “Saparmyrat Niyazov’s *Ruhnama*: The invention of Turkmenistan” in *Tyrants Writing Poetry* (Editors: Koschorke, Albrecht and Kaminskij, Konstantin) [Elektronisk resurs], Central European University press, 2017, 249

⁵ Cevdet Kırıkçı & Abdullah, İbrahimoglu & Zafer and San, Selda, “The Ruhnama in Citizenship Education in Turkmenistan”, in *Journal of Education and Practice*, Vol.8, No.21, 2017

⁶ Polese, Abel & Horák, Slavomir, “A tale of two presidents: personality cult and symbolic nation-building in Turkmenistan”, *Nationalities Papers*, 2015, 43:3

⁷ Shapira, Dan D. Y, “İrân-o Tūran: On Iranian (and Quasi - Iranian) in the Ruhnama”, in *Iran and the Caucasus*, 14 (2010)

archaic Oriental despotism.”⁹, when using both the Rukhnama and the practical politics of Turkmenistan.

2.2 Theory

Nationalism can be defined in many ways, as there are multiple variations of the term. Gellner has said that “Nationalism is first and foremost a political principle where the political and national unit should be conformed”¹⁰, which is the main definition used in this thesis.

In order to analyze this work from a perspective on nationalism we will first have to determine what it is. The influential political scientist and historian Benedict Anderson have written the book *Imagined communities* where he suggests that nations are communities which socially constructed and not a natural form of organization. The basic assumption regarding nations and nationalism of this thesis will be that of Anderson’s. He states that a nation is imagined since the members of any nation will never meet or come in contact with most of their countrymen but will still imagine that they are part of the same nation.¹¹ If nations are imagined, then what purpose does Anderson’s suggestions have in this essay? In short, Türkmenbaşy is the one who in this work who is doing the imagination. Türkmenbaşy is trying to reinvent Turkmen nationalism in regard to his own personal rule. He is doing this in multiple ways. It’s former status, and in many ways it’s current, role in Turkmen society reasonably makes it one of the most important tools of power and ideology in Turkmenistan. Anderson considers “print capitalism” as a corner stone while talking about the origins of

⁸ Shapira, Dan D. Y, “Īrān-o Tūran: On Iranian (and Quasi - Iranian) in the Rukhnama”, in *Iran and the Caucasus*, 14 (2010), 269

⁹ Horak, Slavomir, ” The ideology of the Turkmenbashi regime” in *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 2005, 6:2, 306

¹⁰ Gellner, Ernest, *Stat, nation, nationalism*, Nya Doxa, Nora, 1997, 11. Personal translation

¹¹ Anderson, Benedict R. O’G., *Den föreställda gemenskapen: reflexioner kring nationalismens ursprung och spridning*, Daidalos, Göteborg, 1996, 21

nationalism and the creation of modern European national states.¹² Even if this argument mainly concerns the very origins of nationalism in 16th century Europe, I will argue that this story of origination is applicable on the form of nationalism which Türkmenbaşy is trying to invent. The printing press enabled languages to conform, stabilize and settle to one area, when the administration became centered to one language and on territory, thus destroying the old traditions of religion and dynasty.¹³ Since culture and texts are central in Anderson's theory, a compulsory cultural, political and philosophical book like Rukhnama suits this theory well. Another strength of using this theoretical perspective is that it enables a discussion on other works where the same theory is applied. In most cases this does not mean that nationalism by default is false or lack genuineness,¹⁴ but in this particular case it could be argued that at the book is trying to create a true and genuine nationalism but might not have been able to accomplish this.

From this, we can according to Anderson assume two things about the nation that are very interesting for this thesis. The first is the sovereignty of the state. This is a stark contrast to the old divine order and the dynastic kingdoms. A sovereign state is a free state, which is an idea that dates back to the Enlightenment. The second is that the nation is a community. This community serves as a bridge over inequality and exploitation, making it a deep foundation in the very lives of the nations people. A foundation so deep, that its members are willing to sacrifice their life for it.¹⁵

2.3 Method and disposition

Considering the format of the material, a book, a content analysis would be the best option for this thesis. Content analysis could be described as a wide range of methods, and for this thesis the descriptive idea analysis has been chosen in order to answer the

¹² Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 47

¹³ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 50, 53

¹⁴ Özkırımlı, Umut, *Theories of nationalism: a critical introduction*, 2. ed., extended and updated, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, 105-108

¹⁵ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 22

research question.¹⁶ This method is used to study political ideas and messages delivered mainly by text.¹⁷ Since there is no established way of doing an idea analysis the author has the ability to construct their own method suited to their research.¹⁸ Therefore the constructed method will be characterized by the research question.¹⁹ Since the point of this thesis is to examine nationalism in Rukhnama a descriptive idea analysis would be the preferable branch of content analysis. It is a good match since there is very little research done on the material and many new things will be uncovered while studying this text. It is also good for unearthing political ideas, especially when the forms of text are varied in the book.

The descriptive idea analysis has from time to time been criticized for just explaining *what* the text is saying, and not *why* it is being said. It could be argued that the descriptive idea analysis is just a stepping stone to the question of *why*. Still, the descriptive research says something of our reality,²⁰ or in this case the reality of the citizens of Turkmenistan. Geertz coined the term “thick description”, a term for a hermeneutic analysis that can be used in social sciences. The goal of the “thick description” is to give detailed and specific descriptions of reality.²¹ The book will be read through the lens of “Imagined communities” with the purpose to discover the themes used in this message to the Turkmen people.

The analysis have been operationalized with three main themes, which also gives the analysis a structure. The book have been divides through the main themes that is relevant for the research question. The themes are: the state, the nation, and hierarchy. The observant reader will notice when reading that the three parts are inseparable. This is due to the chaotic structure of Rukhnama. As an example, the very names of the chapters in the book does not correlate with its actual contents. The chapter called “The State of Turkmen” covers little of discussions on the Turkmen state, which can be found all over the book. It is impossible to distinguish them completely, but the effort has been made in order to make it as clear as possible.

¹⁶ Bergström, Göran & Boréus, Kristina (red.), *Textens mening och makt: metodbok i samhällsvetenskaplig text- och diskursanalys*, 3., [utök.] uppl., Studentlitteratur, Lund, 2012, 24

¹⁷ Beckman, Ludvig, *Grundbok i idéanalys: det kritiska studiet av politiska texter och idéer*, Santéus, Stockholm, 2005, 11

¹⁸ Bergström och Boréus, *Textens mening och makt*, 173

¹⁹ Beckman, *Grundbok i idéanalys*, 11

²⁰ Beckman, *Grundbok i idéanalys*, 48

²¹ Geertz, Clifford, *The interpretation of cultures: selected essays*, Basic Books, New York, 1973, 23

3 Analysis

3.1 On the state

Even if the notion of the state and nation as a family is mostly not spelled out directly, at one point he states that “The state is like a grand family”.²² In the discussions on the state itself he rarely points out this. It is mostly visible when he speaks of the nation as a family, and the nation being impossible without the state.

The specific sets of instructions for the Turkmen state and economy should not be interpreted from a strictly western point. It is to be interpreted to be an attempt to becoming a part of the international unity, not the western international unity. Thus, while having most of the basic rights in the constitution and Rukhnama, there are some exceptions to the western mould. The state itself is being said that it is a state among other state, and he seeks validation from the international community through this text while emphasizing on the democratic values which are represented in the constitution of Turkmenistan. In the declaration of the Turkmen state in the Rukhnama however, a couple of things stand out. Whenever a law in the present-day Turkmenistan not was not applicable in a specific case the constitution of USSR came into power!²³

Also, it is determined that the state is responsible for the structure of the banks, making it a more internal economy, even if he claims that the economy of Turkmenistan is a free market economy.²⁴ This could be a reaction from Türkmenbaşy, with the purpose of closing the internal economy from international competition, since they were a part of the USSR.

²² Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 248

²³ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 47-50

²⁴ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 49-50

The state being an important part of the building of the new nation, it is important for Turkmenbashi to make the state unique, at least in name. “Our state structure is harmonious with our national characteristics, the traditions of the Turkmen people, and the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” of the United Nations.”²⁵ Exactly how the national characteristics and traditions are in harmony with this new state. It is mostly determined by the mantra that is repeated endlessly by Turkmenbashi throughout the book. These characteristics are “National Independence, Permanent Neutrality and the *Rukhnama* of Turkmen”²⁶. National independence and Permanent neutrality is the values which are sharable with the rest of the world, while the *Rukhnama* is specific to the Turkmen nation. The two dogmas of National independence and Permanently neutrality is being very heavily emphasized in the book. Independence and independent is mentioned 121 times in the book, and neutral and neutrality 34 times. Often it is very surfaceable mentions, but they serve an important purpose in constructing the nationalism, since they hammer in the message of the sovereign state.²⁷

In this case the *Rukhnama* is to be considered both the book and the general “Spirit of the Turkmen” which is more loosely defined. In some ways the *Rukhnama* are portrayed to also be the inspiration for the internationally common values. Türkmenbaşy describes Oguz Khan’s perspective on neutrality.²⁸ In general, he claims that the new state is based on the old societies:” Today we have founded a state based on golden principles originated from Turkmen society’s political, economic, and cultural structure”.²⁹

One passage can be seen as key to how Türkmenbaşy views of the nation and its relation to the state. “Our body broke in to pieces, as if our head was somewhere and our legs and arms were somewhere else. So, the tree of life did not flourish, the state building could not stand on a firm basis and good fortune did not smile on my nation.”³⁰ This passage show the perceived nature of the state, which is deeply connected to the nation.

²⁵ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 154

²⁶ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 235

²⁷ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 22

²⁸ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 236

²⁹ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 243

³⁰ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 246

The main need for this organic family is the basics of human life: water, food and security. Here, Turkmenbashi is the patriarchal father, caring for the family's need. In his vision he does not think very highly of economy and resources as independent values. They are merely ways of empowering the Turkmen people. He states that: "The day Turkmenistan became independent humans became the most important asset of the state."³¹ This quote can be misleading. Drawn from the context, it seems like humans are the workforce of the state and can be deployed. But, at least according to Turkmenbashi in *Rukhnama*, this is meant to be interpreted in a different way. That the humans are the main concern for the state, and not economy and natural resources.

In conclusion: Turkmenbashi sees the state as the body of the nation, without it can not function. It's main purpose is to guide the nation, while still being one of the cores of the nation. I would like to propose that this organic view should be expanded to an organic family structured like a patriarchy, where the state is the father.

3.2 On the nation

The third chapter is dedicated to the Turkmen nation, although it is a recurring theme throughout the entire book. Turkmenbashi traces the origins of the nation back 5000 years to Oguz Khan, a mythological ancestor to some Turkic peoples.³² Noah the prophet is often mentioned besides Oguz Khan, and Türkmenbaşy claims that the territory of the Turkmen was given to one of Noah's son, Yafes, by the prophet. Thus, the origins of the nation have two sides to it, ethnicity and religion. The religion is however most used to explain why the nation exists in the first place, while ethnicity is used to legitimize the creation of the nation and the state.

While creating, imagining, the nationalism Turkmenbashi makes uses of both internationally accepted parts of nationalism, and parts which are specifically Turkmen

³¹ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, 270

³² Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, 9

according to him. It can be hard to find a consistent message of what actually makes up the nation in Türkmenbaşı's imagination. In the beginning he states: "The real unity of Turkmen is blood and language unity"³³. By doing that, he is using the genealogical definition where the ethnicity is the most important part. This type of nationalism is of the same branch as the German nationalism.³⁴ Quickly the importance of the blood fades. Instead language becomes the main component of Türkmenbaşı's nationalism. However, it is nowhere stated that anyone can become Turkmen by just adopting the language of the Turkmen people. The cultural aspect of nationalism is the most heavily discussed in Rukhnama, exemplified by this quote "The nation is the unity of language, religion, customs and traditions, ideals and state."³⁵ These values are what's needed of a state. Apart from the state, which will be discussed in a chapter of its own, these are soft values. Values which is present in the everyday life. Polese and Horak said the following:

"Turkmen national identity that becomes, by force of this, de-ethnicized" and "construct an official nation-building narrative so concentrated on the figure of the president as to minimize the ethnic features of nation-building measures that scholars have noticed in a wide range of cases in the post-socialist region."³⁶

Polese and Horak said this in regard to nation-building in Turkmenistan, and not directly related to the Rukhnama, but the point still stands. It is clear that it is aimed towards the Turkmen public, which in Türkmenbaşı's mind not nationally "aware". He makes use of stories of old (and mythical) rulers to enforce the idea of a reborn state to do this, which will be discussed more in detail below. The ethnicity is mostly visible on the surface, as he rarely digs in discussions in blood aa race. The stories, aside from the political messages, all tell of the soft values, which are to be recognized by the reading public. Examples of material objects are used to symbolize the nation: "the horse, the carpet, our musical instruments(dutar), jewellery and ornaments, local/native breed/species dog(alabay), the yellowish breed of sheep and the genus of white wheat",

³³ Turkmenbasha, *Rukhnama*, 23

³⁴ Klimeš, Jiří, *Antisemitism and Nationalism in German Protestantism of the 20th century*, 9

³⁵ Turkmenbasha, *Rukhnama*, 248

³⁶ Polese, Abel & Horák, Slavomir, "A tale of two presidents: personality cult and symbolic nation-building in Turkmenistan", *Nationalities Papers*, 2015, 43:3, 457

which all point towards perfection and uniqueness”.³⁷ It can be said that it is a form of primitive nationalism. But it is not the same as saying that the nation is within these types of material objects but aims to create an understanding of the nationalism when he states that “A nation is shaped materially according to these spiritual foundations”.³⁸

The many references to old, both real and mythological, empires serve multiple purposes. By telling these stories while repeating that the Turkmen are the successors he is putting the current Turkmen nation in this story, creating an image of an old empire. More importantly, the stories are centered around the old leaders like Oguz Khan. Therefore, it is clear for the readers that Turkmenbashi himself is a leader in the same sense that the old leaders were. Strong, authoritarian and ambitious.

While the old ways and days certainly is used to create the nationalism, it should not necessarily mean that it in all ways is a reactionary, or even conservative, nationalism. He does not seem to want to preserve the old societal structures. “The idea of a tribe is temporary; it constitutes a lower stage in the progress towards national integrity”³⁹. The tribal structure remains an important part as a cultural tradition but is part of the history. In this revival of the Turkmen nation the tribes have no place in the structure of the state.

One of the core principles of the *Rukhnama* is the “born again nation”⁴⁰. A new nation based on the old ones. The rejection of the tribal society is part of this. Moving beyond the tribal society and politics, Turkmenbashi presents two ways. The formal one adheres more to the state’s functions, which are discussed in chapter 3.1. Regarding the more abstract nation building, it is clear that Turkmenbashi himself is the replacement for the tribal system. Exactly how this is portrayed will be broken down and discussed in chapter 3.3. Essential to us here is his role for the nation in itself. He uses the old Khans as models for his own rule of the nation. What we as readers are supposed to understand is that Turkmenbashi rules in the same, successful, way. He is supposed to be perceived as strong, punishing but peaceful, authoritarian and clever ruler. Besides this claim of being the father of the nation, he gives the audience a softer side to his fathership as well. He often explains how rough his childhood was, losing his father

³⁷ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, 66

³⁸ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, 157

³⁹ Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, 148

⁴⁰ See Turkmenbashi, *Rukhnama*, 172

and mother. In their absence, he turned to his nation for parenting. The lost child found his identity with his motherland, a message that fits very well with the complete narrative in the book, where the nation and state is structured as a family.⁴¹ It fits well with his narrative of the Turkmen nation as a whole, since they gone through hardships like the Soviet rule, and multiple conquering's of people like Genghis Khan and Alexander the great.⁴² He came out stronger from the bad things that had happened to him, just like his nation did. Besides guiding the nation in all its difficulties, he says the following: "Turkmens! The mud thrown at you is also thrown at me; and my cleanness, my brightness is also yours."⁴³ In this, he is not only representing himself as *being the nation* (considering his tragic childhood), but he is the nation's people's saviour. Meaning that they might suffer, both individually and collectively as a nation. But with his leadership, he will absorb the pain and make the nation stronger. Nicolosi said of the Rukhnama, that it:

"played a central role in the construction of cultural identity of post-Soviet Turkmenistan by providing argumentative strategies for modeling a national history that would legitimize Turkmenbashi's' power."⁴⁴

Compared to the result of this chapter, it seems to be true. The national identity constructed by Turkmenbasy in Rukhnama are meant to legitimize his power, while also outlining the structure of his new state nation, which will be discussed in a chapter 3.3.

3.3 On hierarchy

The message on the ideal of hierarchical structures of the Turkmen nation is one of the more coherent messages throughout the book. The overall message is that of the nation

⁴¹ Turkmenbasy, *Rukhnama*, 150

⁴² Turkmenbasy, *Rukhnama*, 148

⁴³ Turkmenbasy, *Rukhnama*, 146

⁴⁴ Nicolosi, Riccardo, "Saparmyrat Niyazov's *Rukhnama*: The invention of Turkmenistan" in *Tyrants Writing Poetry* (Editors: Koschorke, Albrecht and Kaminskij, Konstantin), Central European University press, 2017, 249

as a family, a conservative reaction not entirely unlike the development in Hungary in the interwar period. How this is portrayed will be shown below.

The starting point in understanding how Turkmenbashi wants to structure the hierarchy comes from the very origins of the book. According to Turkmenbashi, he wrote the Rukhnama with the inspiration from God (in the translated version both “God” and “Allah” are used interchangeably). By doing this, he is trying to establish the right of his power using a sort of “mandate of God”. The wording here is important, since he so often refers to the Turkmen people as his.⁴⁵ Additionally, this attempt to restructure the hierarchy is made in order to strengthen his own power, but also to bridge and destroy the old tribal society which characterizes Turkmenistan.⁴⁶

Türkmenbaşys claim to power, according to himself, is not due to his strength, political prowess or cleverness, but due to fate.⁴⁷ This puts him in the role of being the father of the nation, and the Turkmen people his children. His responsibilities is the same as a family father, with Turkmenbashi pointing to the following traits that should guide the father when educating his children: “he should approach his children with love and should choose for them and offer them modesty, happiness, and compassion; he should treat them equally and justly.”, while “a Turkmen child should have a sense of humor, and be generous and loyal to his/her parents and the country.”⁴⁸ This points towards a patriarchal view of the nation and the Turkmen. Further studies with in comparative analysis could make connections between the Turkmen family hierarchy and similar structures, such as discussed in Germany.⁴⁹ This is enforced by the tales of Oguz Khan which are numerous in the book.⁵⁰ If you follow his wisdoms, you are set out to be a successful Turkmen ruler.⁵¹ These are arguments based on the traditions and stories from Turkmen societies, but there is a religious side to it as well.

This thesis has mostly been based on interpretation of the masses of text that is the Rukhnama. Some parts do not need the same type of interpretation, since it is clear what it means. For example, this sentence, apparently coming straight from an old leader:

⁴⁵ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 9, 19, 70, 101, 237

⁴⁶ Roy, Olivier, *Det nya Centralasien*, 1. uppl., Alhambra, Furulund, 2002, 113-116

⁴⁷ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 19

⁴⁸ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 18

⁴⁹ For further discussion on this subject, see Daub, Adrian, *The State as a Family: The Fate of Familial Sovereignty in German Romanticism*

⁵⁰ Example: Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 86-87,

⁵¹ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 87

“The Soltam’s right is the same as Allah’s right.”⁵² (The Soltam, an old term for the leader in the historic Turkmen society, has the same right as the almighty God. A divine rule, with unquestioned authority.

Since Turkmenbashi is the father of the nation, naturally there are children present, the people of Turkmenistan. He says that he himself, made Turkmenistan his parents when he became an orphan.⁵³ The Rukhnama is said by the author to not only be a political book, but a guide in everyday life, not all things might seem like political advice. But since the complete book is a political tool, compulsory reading for all state workers, students and so on, there are strong reasons to interpret the “everyday advice” as political advice too. Since it has already been concluded that the structure of the nation and state are likened to the patriarchal family, it is necessary to include all forms of texts. Most importantly, children are to obedient and loyal: “The first responsibility of the child is the fulfilment of the duties that are incumbent upon him regarding his parents”⁵⁴. This adds another dimension to the hierarchical system. Not only are the children, or the people, supposed to be loyal to the parents or president, but has certain duties connected to them from their parents. Thereby, you are supposed to stay in your place, and not necessarily advance in life freely, but instead the individual is locked in the cultural, economic and societal place. This is stated on another place in the Rukhnama, where Oguz Khan says that some people are suited for certain duties, saying: “Big tasks for big people, small tasks for small”.⁵⁵

Within the society the Rukhnama suggests that authority always should be trusted. It is more apparent in some cases than others. The Rukhnama states that people with education are to be trusted above ordinary people.⁵⁶ The positions seems to be a bit extreme, that if a group of three men with education agrees on a topic, it is always true, and the ordinary man should agree. This is too a very authoritarian structure of society. It is important to remember that the Rukhnama is compulsory reading in all levels of education. The messages of Rukhnama thereby becomes projected down to the people, through the educated people of Turkmenistan.

⁵² Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 301

⁵³ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 151

⁵⁴ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 320

⁵⁵ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 99

⁵⁶ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 88

The Rukhnama, however, emphasises age more than education. Continuously throughout the book it is said that elders, especially fathers. Like previously mentioned, this message is told through the tales of Oguz Khan. To enforce this the family's status above everyone else, he is quoted as saying: "If there are no elders, there are learned people"⁵⁷

Submission from the individual appears to be a cornerstone of the Türkmenbaşy nationalism: "An individual whose way of living is contrary to the national understanding is afraid of punishment, and hence tries to conceal himself and his true character, and assumes the semblance of another, better character."⁵⁸ In other words, if you live a life which differs from the Rukhnama, it is wrong. Submission also includes that you obey. Failure to obey will be punished: "“May those who would betray the motherland (atavan) never be allowed to take a place among us!”⁵⁹

Submission is not just a tool of power of obedience, it also serves a purpose of bringing people together. By being part of the nation and the state, it is also supposed to be an honour to serve it. One of the highest honour is dying for your own country. As Türkmenbaşy puts it: "[...] even if we die, we desire to die as Turkmens."⁶⁰ The death of the individual becomes a symbol for the collective, which is very important for the sense of belonging to a nation.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 98

⁵⁸ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 198

⁵⁹ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 184

⁶⁰ Turkmenbashy, *Rukhnama*, 146

⁶¹ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 22-23

4 Results

In the beginning of this thesis the question posed was: *How are the the ideas on nation, state, and hierarchy presented in the Rukhnama?*

One of the goals was to examine the ideas on nation, state and hierarchy in the Rukhnama and stake out a new field of studies regarding Turkmenistan, enabling future researchers to further deepen the knowledge of Turkmenistan and totalitarian states. The study finds that a couple of new perspectives are very much worth the effort of intense studies.

Horak stated that “The peculiarity of local ideology mixes elements of modern Middle Eastern dictatorships, communist regimes and pseudo-archaic Oriental despotism.”⁶² This interpretation is supported by this thesis, to the extent of what the Rukhnama itself brings to the discussion of ideology.

Using the Rukhnama as a form of political message, seen in the light of “Imagined communities”, three main components was found. As seen in the analysis, these were the nation, the state, and hierarchy. These are not entirely separate creatures, but all the components blend in different ways. The results should be interpreted as what Türkmenbaşy wishes to the nation and its nationalism to be, not how it functions or how well it is perceived. Which is why the question of “imagined communities” is of such relevance.

The main finding is that of the imagined structure of the nation and state, which is that the structure is hierarchical. The ideal hierarchy that is presented, and analysed through the method of descriptive idea analysis, is the hierarchy of the patriarchal family. In this family, Türkmenbaşy himself is the father with the right to rule the state. The ordinary people of Turkmenistan being the children of the family, and the elite educated in the Rukhnama being the foster parents when Türkmenbaşy is not present.

⁶² Horak, Slavomir, ” The ideology of the Turkmenbashy regime” in *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 2005, 6:2, 306

They are also expected to die for their nation, thus empowering the sense of nationalism⁶³, while at the same time making it a heavily authoritarian work.

The way this form of nationalism is conveyed is through historical and mythical stories, meant to convince the public of Türkmenbaşys claims of power. Those claims being that of the patriarchal father. The appeal for the public comes partly through these stories and the sayings from Türkmenbaşy, but is also related to simple everyday objects, recognizable by common people. It is not, however, just a tool of power. It is a way of creating the nationalism for a nation that has recently been reborn after the fall of the Soviet Union. The nationalism that is created is moulded after the authors own wishes, which unsurprisingly favoured his ambition for power. According to Rukhnama, the state should be entirely independent and neutral. This includes the state having the power to govern the banks. The importance of independence and neutrality are frequently mentioned in the book, making it one of the indicators for the quest for sovereignty, an important part of “Imagined communities”⁶⁴ The need for differentiating Turkmenistan from other nations proves this as well.

The matter of perspectives is interesting here, as the Rukhnama is meant for giving the people a sense of nationalism. Anderson states that many new nation states often see a surge of enthusiastic participation of the public in this creation of nationalism,⁶⁵ although he is mostly concerned with countries colonized by the West, and not the Soviet successor states. The Rukhnama was written a decade after the independence, where this initial rush had already been running for a couple of years when it was published. It is more likely that Türkmenbaşy reinvented and moulded this new nationalism, without much consideration taken to the “peoples” nationalism.

⁶³ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 22-23

⁶⁴ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 22

⁶⁵ Anderson, *Den föreställda gemenskapen*, 113

4.1 Further research

One of the purposes of this thesis was to do the ground work for further research. It has been shown that Rukhnama is a very good source for this. The themes of nation, state and hierarchy could become complete studies separately, with good chances of deepening our understanding of these aspects in both the fields of Turkmenistanian studies and studies of totalitarianism. Since essential interpretations and valuable results now have been made and presented, the possibilities for research in this relatively new area are very fruitful. Comparative studies, where a comparison with different nations in different stages of developing nationalism, could prove to uncover more of conservative and totalitarian systems. A study where it is compared to works by other dictators could prove to be useful.

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