The government presentation of the state attempts to form a close relationship with ‘the people’ through a national genealogy, intended to represent the will of the people. This ‘imaginative engagement of subjects with the state’ is what David Sneath (2003: 46) calls ‘technologies of imagination’. Such images are produced through a number of different activities and events, including parades, meetings, speeches and national celebrations. Expanding personal notions of genealogy is one such imaginative technology. Many people, who have an interest in their ancestry, have found a resonance with Akaev’s vision and their own understandings of their ancestry. The formal recognition of genealogy, moreover, has encouraged some to incorporate this vision within their own lives as well as a framework with which to judge other people’s actions.

The celebration of ‘2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood’ in 2003 was another example of the interaction between the people and the state, developed through a series of imaginative practices. The government presented the notion of ‘statehood’ as the continuity of the state, which was a condition of the persistent struggle by historical figures to maintain unity among the Kyrgyz people and attain independence, and encompassed in a set of moral values presented as core to their ethnonational identity. The condition of the state, in this representation, was thus contingent on the moral actions of their people directed towards unity and harmony. The state became another rhetorical device through which the ‘Kyrgyz’ are governed, and was to be internalized in order for the people to govern themselves.

Genealogy, as a methodological tool, serves to examine the particular discursive formation of the state and how it was employed. Returning to Owen’s (1994) definition, it provides a critique of what has been created and how this strengthens the concept of autonomy. This methodology reveals the creation of the ‘state’ and the ways in which this has served to create a concept of the ‘Kyrgyz person’ as separate ethnic and state identity. Akaev’s ideology of the state, however, was not ultimately successful. As Slavoj Žižek (1994) has argued, ideology is not totalizing, it leaves gaps. When the official discourse is contrasted with the events
that were on-going in the country, gaps appear in the seams of this discourse. The celebration of the state failed to unify the people and bring political stability. Here, genealogy provides a critique on this particular representation.

THE CONCEPT OF THE STATE

The phenomenon called ‘the state’, Timothy Mitchell (1999: 77) argues, ‘arises from techniques that enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract, nonmaterial form’. The state appears as an entity separate from society. The divide is created by the perception of an external force, which has over-arching powers to control and direct the lives of the citizens. The ideological construction and reproduction of the state (Abrams 1988 [1977]), however, reveals that this abstract image conceals the subtle internalization of its disciplining practices. As in the case of banal nationalism (Billig 1995), these practices form a part of people’s everyday lives, advanced largely through discourse, and are often unnoticed. Thus, the public perception of the state as an external actor imposing its demands on our lives hides the ways ideologies create new roles and adapt to new circumstances, which silently become a part of lives, shaping our actions and concepts.

This view of the state is similar to Homi Bhabha’s (1990) description of the discursive construction of the nation as a continuously recreated phenomenon of the present, not an historical object. Its formation is the result of a tense division between representations of an a priori historical existence, or what he terms a ‘pedagogical object’, contrasted with a narrative ‘performance’ elaborated through the rejuvenation of concepts and ideas in the present and reflected onto a discursive field outlining the ‘nation’. The pedagogic aspect is concerned with the self-generation of the concept of the nation as a reality; however, the performativity of this creation continually disrupts the formation of this image. ‘The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation’s self-generation by casting a shadow between the people as ‘image’ and its signification as a differentiating sign of Self, distinct from Other or the Outside’ (Bhabha 1990: 299). People, thus, are the ‘cutting edge’ between these two forms of representation. This distinction keeps the nation in the present, constantly opposed to different and changing ‘objects’ articulated as external to its own representation. This marks the internal constitution of the nation as a ‘liminal’ space of discursive formation – not a totalizing representation, but one where the boundaries are fluid and continually shifting.

Joel Migdal’s (2001) ‘state-in-society’ approach complements Bhabha’s ideas. His concern is to focus on the way in which tactics of physical and discursive power are used to make people engage with politics and each other in certain ways, and the conditions under which this changes over time. The state, as much as the nation, is a contradictory concept. It is an image, which is represented as a ‘bounded and unified organization’,