

Locating Persons: an ethnography of personhood and place in rural Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

This thesis is an anthropological investigation of the interconnections between personhood and place in rural northern Kyrgyzstan. It studies the way people negotiate and experience relations with others and with the places in which they live and work. It is based on 18 months of fieldwork carried out in Kochkor *raion* between June 2006 and August 2008. I look at how the interplay between conceptual forms and everyday practices constitute personhood. I show how both formal ways of reckoning kinship, such as recounting genealogies and tracing back seven generations of male ancestors, and everyday forms of socialising are both integral in what it means to be a person, and are flexible in their designation of persons of the same kind and persons that are different. I go on to show how place holds particular significance for the attribution and negotiation of personhood, but that this meaning is emergent and processual. Providing an historical overview of the linking of persons to places by successive bureaucratic structures, I highlight how understanding places as “cultured” or “pure” have important consequences for how people understand themselves and others as more or less “Kyrgyz”, more or less “modern”. I show how recent reworkings of the meaning of “lineage places” following privatisation and village resettlement have led to changing forms of personhood, shifting from state farm worker to independent farmer. Other kinds of places are also meaningful for personhood. I highlight how the home and the objects it contains are active in the negotiation of a daughter-in-law’s personhood. I examine everyday practices of caring for the home, as well as more unusual practices of building new kinds of homes. These practices are integral to varied personhoods such as being a village daughter-in-law, or seeing oneself as “modern”. These personhoods and relationships with place are subject to ongoing negotiation, and death and grief disrupt these connections. A focus on emotion both within ritual practice and during grief lived everyday enables a better understanding of how personhood emerges from intersubjective processes which involve negotiation, rejection and incorporation of social and political processes. A focus on the co-production of place and personhood allows us to see both as becoming meaningful through these interactions.

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Note on Transliteration

I have followed the standard Library of Congress transliteration system for Russian. As the Kyrgyz language contains phonemes which are absent in Russian, I have used the same system with the addition of the following:

Ө = Ö

Ү = Ü

Ң = Ng

Ж = J

All foreign terms are in Kyrgyz unless otherwise noted.

Where there is a Standard English usage for place names I have followed that, otherwise I have transliterated names according to the system described above.

I have used English plurals (not italicised) as Russian and Kyrgyz plurals are difficult for English readers to discern.

Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Signature

Printed name

Chapter 1 Introduction

On a cold, bright day in early spring I accompanied my host, Nur¹, to the raion (district) centre where she needed to put in order some papers concerning her recently deceased husband. Returning home, Nur and I found ourselves in a shared taxi with a husband and wife unfamiliar to us both. As we passed frozen fields and irrigation canals, the conversation turned, as it often does in these situations, to shared acquaintances. From his passenger seat in the front, the man asked whose daughter Nur was. Keen to draw attention away from the fact that she was outside of her home during the mourning period, Nur chose not to identify herself immediately by the family she had married into, and instead replied “Baike² (brother), my father was Janybek from Chong Tash.” Nur was then asked if her mother wasn’t Bermet apa from Kyzyl Suu. Confirming that she was, and curious as to how our fellow passengers knew her family, she was informed that they themselves were from Kyzyl Suu when they told her “you are our daughter” (sen bizdin kyzsyng). Nur continued the conversation asking about life in Kyzyl Suu, having switched smoothly to using the terms taïke (maternal uncle) and taïeje (maternal aunt), demonstrating a kin relation on her mother’s side, and concerning herself with the unknown lives of those she would later tell me she considered relatives.

Some months later on my way to the capital Bishkek I again found myself in a shared taxi tracing its path along the widening valley, this time with Nurlan baïke, the village head and Alma eje, his wife, who were returning their daughter’s youngest son, Ulanbek, to his parent’s home in the nearby village of Sary Bulak before themselves continuing to Bishkek. The road passed former sovkhos (state farms), their fields parcelled into narrow strips fed by mountain streams or underground water reserves. After the harsh winter, the planting had proceeded apace and now in midsummer the different shades of green picked out the

¹ All personal names and village place names are pseudonyms. I have retained the original place names for better known regional towns and cities.

² I have retained forms of address that I used in the field, hence apa (mother) and eje (older sister) for an older woman; ata (father) and baïke (older brother) for an older man; agai for a male teacher.

various crops families had decided to plant: wheat, barley, alfalfa and potatoes. As we watched people at work in the fields, Nurlan baike explained to his young grandson that this rather than Ak Too was Ulanbek's land, his tuulgan jer (birth place), the land of his uruu (lineage) and, look! There is the parcel belonging to your family – you will have plenty of potatoes this winter! The association of privatised land with uruu was an intricate and delicate affair. Unlike resettled villages such as Chong Tash and Kyzyl Suu, in the large villages lining the valley road inhabitants were often the descendents of a number of different ancestors and so identified with differing uruu. Following privatisation these descent lines have come to be traced on arable land, visible to those who knew the inhabitants and owners.

“We have visitors from England, we must take them to the jailoo (summer pasture)!” and with that it was decided. My host mother, Salkyn apa, had suggested many places my relatives should visit when they came to stay – lake Issyk Kol, the nearby salt mines, and the black mountains – but it was the summer pasture about which she was most enthusiastic. Since the death of her son she had been unable to leave the village and longed for the wide open spaces of the nearby summer pastures. The next morning we were collected by her nephew, Azamat, and crammed into his small car we sped along the potholed road leading to his summer camp. With mounting excitement she began to tell us how much she missed these mountains where as a teenager and young woman she had often come to visit, breath the cool mountain air, enjoy the taza (clean, healthy) food and es aluu (relax). Upon arrival, Azamat's wife greeted us with tea, bread and freshly churned kaimak (cream). Salkyn apa was eager to climb to the top of the nearby hills, so after eating our fill the two of us set off together up the steeply ridged hillside, turning brown in the late summer sun. Struggling to reach the top, we finally emerged at a small plateau and, sitting to catch our breath, we contemplated the valley stretched out before us. Salkyn apa named the surrounding hills and located her village neighbours and kin amongst the boz üis (yurts) vagons (wagons) and tents dotted across the pastures.

These snatched moments of conversations held in shared taxis while moving rapidly from village to village, as well as quiet contemplation and appreciation of populated pastures, all point to the dynamic interaction between the constitution of place and of persons. They intimate how people locate each other through tracing their own and others' connections to places such as privatised fields, resettled villages and summer pastures. At the same time, they are suggestive of how persons are understood to be produced by interactions with place. I was intrigued by Nur's fluent switch from the potentially impersonal *baike* and *eje* (older brother and older sister)³ to *taike* and *taieje* (maternal uncle and maternal aunt)⁴, demonstrating a maternal kinship link established in this case through coming from the same place. What did place have to do with such relations? Nurlan baike's words of instruction to his young grandson about the particular parcels of arable land he was connected to through descent prompted me to consider how relations to place are affected by changing political and temporal situations implicated in the tracing of different forms of ownership. Salkyn apa's embodied experience of the joys of the summer pasture and the act of remembering and representing place insisted that I consider intersubjective aspects of our relationships with places.

In this thesis I wish to investigate the meaning of personhood and place for people such as Nur, Nurlan baike and Salkyn apa by examining the relationship between them. How do Kyrgyz understandings of what it means to be a person relate to the multiple meanings of place? How do relationships with place affect and create Kyrgyz conceptions of the person? A focus on how people talk about place and engage with it, on how place is locally understood as significant in myriad ways of tracing connections with others, brings to the fore theoretical concerns with the constitution of personhood and place. Of course, these relations between personhood and place exist within a larger post-socialist, Kyrgyz context. In order to understand the significance of both it is therefore necessary to relate them to the historical, political and economic changes which have been faced by people in Kyrgyzstan.

³ These terms can also be used for older male and female kin on the father's side, and older men and women in general.

⁴ These terms can also refer to other older male and female relatives on the mother's side.

In addition, much scholarship on Kyrgyzstan is implicitly informed by the theoretical constructs of personhood and place which emphasise a certain fixity in their discussion of both. By taking an approach to the connections between persons and places which sees them as mutually constitutive, I hope to present a more nuanced discussion of both. This first introductory chapter seeks to locate my fieldwork experience and set out the central concerns of this thesis which emerged from it alongside an engagement with the theoretical literature concerning persons and places. I will discuss the framing of Central Asia as a field of research, and then go on to show how a focus on the everyday creation and negotiation of personhood and place enables a more nuanced understanding of Kyrgyzstan to emerge. The chapter which follows will detail my methodological approach and some of the challenges I faced.

LOCATING THE FIELD

The ethnographic work from which my concern with personhood and place developed was carried out between September 2006 and August 2008 in and around the village of Ak Too⁵, situated in Naryn oblast. To reach Ak Too from the capital Bishkek can take between two and six hours, a difference which has little to do with the physical conditions of roads or transport and much to do with the negotiations of social relationships along the way. Most journeys to and from Ak Too are in shared taxis⁶ and are often an opportunity to meet *jerdesh* (people from the same place), to find out about shared contacts, and to catch up on the news of people one may not have seen for some time. In the case of encountering a stranger, questions which allow them to be placed in time and space are asked: “what year were you born in?”, “where are you from?” or, in the case of a woman, “where are you married to?” In a way this allows passengers to determine how they should relate to one another. Should they use the informal or formal personal pronoun (are they older or younger)? Are they from the same place, and potentially, *uruu*? Are they related by marriage (and therefore what form of address should be used)? These kinds of status

⁵ This is a pseudonym for the village, as are other village names, and the names of my interlocutors.

⁶ While people driving long distances in Kyrgyzstan often take paying customers in order to cover the costs of fuel, a large number of men use taxi driving as a way to make much-needed cash income.

relations are also to be seen in how seating arrangements in the car are decided. In addition to placing themselves literally and figuratively in relation to one another, passengers often place themselves in relation to the landscape they are travelling through. Driving east from the capital one traverses the Chui Valley, a large plain of arable land encircled by snow capped mountains as far as the eye can see. The plain is punctuated by villages and small towns which become less frequent and more spaced out as the road continues to Naryn oblast. Such landscapes come alive when fellow passengers discuss relatives who are linked to these places by birth or through marriage, when they speak of their own memories of living, working, studying, or attending feasts in the various towns and villages along the road.

Ak Too village itself has a relatively short history but the area is replete with much longer histories associating persons with places⁷. The origins of Kyrgyz people and their links to the territory of present day Kyrgyzstan are the subject of a great deal of academic and popular debate which seeks to connect the two in a somewhat primordial manner. Nevertheless, it is the case that many residents of Ak Too situate their relationship with the surrounding area in historical perspective. For much of their history the local Kyrgyz population practiced transhumant pastoralism, raising herds of sheep, goats and horses and moving between yurt camps at each change in the seasons. Semi permanent settlements in the surrounding area were limited to *kyshtoo* (winter pastures) and these began to be established more permanently with the arrival of tsarist forces and the agriculture they brought with them in the latter half of the 19th century. Following the implementation of Soviet rule in the area, the current territory of the Kyrgyz state was established in the 1920s. The village of Ak Too was first established during the early days of collectivisation when a group of people moved to the area to settle it as a *kolkhoz*. During the 1930s and 1940s two other *kolkhozs* were established nearby, further incorporating nearby winter pastures⁸, and soon became the *MTS* (machine tractor station) supplying the technical assistance for these *kolkhozs*. Following reorganisation of collective agriculture, Ak Too and the smaller *kolkhozs* were joined together to form a single *sovkhos* and residents of *kolkhozs* considered unproductive were forced to resettle. Ak Too village as the centralised

⁷ In Chapter Two I deal with the history of Ak Too and the surrounding area in much greater detail.

⁸ Whether or not these settlements and movements were enforced is the subject of debate among local residents and will be discussed further in Chapter Two.

administration of the *sovkhos* quickly became the *raion* centre with all the additional income and employment this entailed. The village hosted administration buildings and technical equipment, as well as a hospital, separate maternity hospital, hotel and the only boarding school in the *raion*. However, the position of Ak Too as *raion* centre was relatively short lived. In the late 1950s *raions* were reorganised into larger units and Ak Too lost its status. Nevertheless, it remained the centre of the *sovkhos* and its facilities continued to function. Residents came not only from surrounding villages but also other regions and countries, and included Kazakhs, Russians, Uighurs, Koreans and Tatars, thus establishing the relatively metropolitan nature of this central village which is still clear in the mix of different lineages and nationalities. In Ak Too neighbours are often unrelated to each other. By contrast, in the smaller villages many trace connections with one another according to their *uruu*.

In 1991 Kyrgyzstan became an independent state following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. During the early years of independence Kyrgyzstan was hailed as an “island of democracy” (Anderson, 1999), having implemented legislative and administrative change towards a democratic political system and liberal economic regime, including becoming the first Central Asian country to join the World Trade Organisation. Property reform was undertaken throughout this period resulting in the privatisation of both land and rural farm assets with the consequence that Kyrgyzstan came to be widely regarded as the most open, Western facing of the countries in Central Asia. The government of Askar Akaev emphasised the multi-ethnic composition of the population when trying to invoke a form of civic nationalism. With the fixing of borders, however, that had also taken place, this civic nationalism challenged the rhetoric of the multi-ethnic population as people suddenly found themselves fixed in place, on the wrong side of borders they had previously been able fluidly to move across (Megoran, 2006, Reeves, 2008). The political and economic changes implemented during the first ten years of independence slowed significantly by the end of this period (Collins, 2006) and President Akaev was seen as increasingly autocratic and corrupt. Elections in February and March 2005 were dismissed by opposition parties as fraudulent and demonstrations took place in the southern cities of Jalalabad and Osh where an informal government was established. Demonstrators eventually made their way to Bishkek and President Akaev was ousted from power. There followed a period of relative stability under President Bakiev, a leader of the opposition and a politician from the South.

It was during this period that I carried out the fieldwork for this dissertation, over a year after the political unrest of March 2005. However, in 2010 widespread public protests again led to the end of the president's rule and were followed by violence in Osh and Jalalabad. Bakiev was replaced by a transitional government headed by Rosa Otunbayeva which drafted a new, parliamentary constitution reining in the powers of the president and giving greater voice to the parliament and the Prime Minister. In October 2011 national elections were held and Almazbek Atambayev claimed victory, later appointing Omorbek Babanov as Prime minister. Babanov has since been replaced by Jantoro Satybaldiev in August 2012 following the collapse of the governing coalition and the subsequent formation of a new government, political changes which were widely interpreted in the context of a North-South divide⁹ (Sarygulova and Kolbaev, 2012, Dzyubenko, 2012).

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the five newly independent states in Central Asia, predictions of impending intra- and interstate violence and conflict in the region have abounded (Dawisha and Parrott, 1997, Bertsch, 2000, Cummings, 2003, Rubin and Snyder, 1998, Spruyt, 1998, Tabyshalieva, 2001). Concern with a North-South split in Kyrgyzstan, and the very real consequences of violence in Osh and Jalalabad in 2010 have often been expressed within this framework. An examination of this literature reveals recurring tropes of danger, instability and insecurity which have been identified by a number of authors as powerful elements of an overarching discourse of danger¹⁰ concerned with fixity, a view of conflict as destructive and something to be controlled and suppressed (Reeves, 2005, Bichsel, 2005) relating to a broader understanding of the region as 'traditional' and 'uncivilised'. In addition, this "discourse of danger" intersects with an approach to transition and transformation within post-socialist writing that emphasises the chaotic nature of change (Nazpary, 2001), and the binary opposition between stability and instability, security and danger. The impact of these changes on Ak Too has, of course, been significant. Since the break-up of the USSR, Ak Too *sovkhos* has been disbanded, its resources privatised, and many of its former employees have become land owning independent farmers. Administratively, the villages

⁹ I will return to the significance of the North South divide for understanding Kyrgyzstan below.

¹⁰ See the special issue of *Central Asian Survey*, March 2005.

which formed the *sovkhos* continue to be united by membership of a single *aiyl ökmötü*¹¹ (rural administration) which is responsible for managing municipal property, local services, tax collection and land distribution. The 1990s was a period of great hardship with many families unable to make ends meet, having to sell their livestock and find their way as small landowners.

This brief historical overview points to some of the concerns with place and personhood implicit in academic and popular understandings of Kyrgyzstan. The desire to establish clear borders for the newly founded nation states draws on an understanding of people-place relations similar to that which had underpinned the process of national-territorial delineation in the 1920s when the borders of the Central Asian countries were established¹². It was also this understanding which informed dire predictions that the region would erupt into violence, and continues to be apparent in the focus on a North-South political divide (Bond and Koch, 2010, Marat, 2011, Anderson, 1999, Matveeva, 2010) as destabilising and threatening. At the same time it highlights that these concerns are not just political, economic and historical but are negotiated and reworked by people in their everyday lives. It is this latter aspect of the relations between personhood and place with which I am particularly concerned because in seeking to understand the diverse experiences of personhood and place which were evident during my research, I felt it important to accord agency to these individuals. Through attention to the everyday practices which create persons and places we can achieve a more nuanced understanding of the meaning of both in Central Asia.

THEORETICAL CONCERNS

In this thesis I argue that persons and places are mutually constituted, coming into being through their ongoing interaction. At the same time, I recognise that persons and places

¹¹ *Aiyl ökmötü* replaced the *sel'sovet* (village soviet) following independence and is similar to Russian *selskaia uprava*.

¹² I will return to this process in greater detail in Chapter Four.

exist within particular socio-cultural, historic and economic contexts. On one level this study is about examining how the macro level processes briefly outlined above have alternately impacted on, been reworked and been rejected by people in Ak Too. I do this by examining how social institutions and practices are played out through their notions of personhood and place. On another level, this thesis seeks to engage with theoretical literature on the meaning of personhood and place in order to understand how different interpretations of them can create very different understandings of Kyrgyzstan. The people I was working with were neither herders nor politicians but villagers, many of whom had previously held professional positions in the local administration and *sovkhos* and were struggling to find their way as small scale farmers. This is not to say that they did not think of themselves as rural persons, or that rural places were not of importance to them. Indeed such places were, and continue to be significant for them as much as they are for other people in Kyrgyzstan: celebrated in poetry, songs and art; the national television channel broadcasts regular popular intermissions which celebrate natural places such as lakes, forests and, particularly, *jailoo* (summer pasture) as being especially Kyrgyz. But for the people I discuss in this thesis, the meanings of place extend beyond such valued ‘natural’ places to include abandoned villages, polluted lands, semi-urban environments, domestic spaces and cities; places which are more often seen as the sites of potential conflict and instability. Below I detail my understanding and interpretation of these different relations to place and to what it means to be Kyrgyz in relation to theoretical debates, and seek to locate my thesis in relation to them.

Anthropological approaches to the study of personhood

Personhood is a concept which facilitates cross cultural comparison of the ways that people are created by specific social and cultural contexts. It enables a comparison between what it means to be a human being in a given society, and how relations between humans and non-humans are culturally specific. It has been asserted that by understanding how particular societies conceive of individuals, a relationship can be traced with the overall functioning of society and thus a focus on personhood can be seen as a way to understand the institutions (e.g. kinship) of a given society as a whole. Sociological and cultural

variation in the concept of the person demonstrate recurring principles concerning how personhood is constituted and understood, while at the same time the vast variation in the conceptualisation and experience of personhood highlights that an understanding of persons as autonomous individuals is a uniquely western¹³ cultural concept. The term ‘personhood’ thus gives a seeming coherence to a wide range of theoretical concerns which are grouped together within the diverse anthropological study of personhood.

I use personhood to discuss something which is often glossed as identity, in order to focus more precisely on the processual and relational aspects of the person. I have not found the concept of identity useful in this regard for as Brubaker and Cooper (2000) have argued, identity conflates a wide range of ideas, which can be more acutely analysed by clearly defining terms. For this reason I speak of personhood and intend the term to be understood as those “cultural beliefs about the nature of a people” (Myers, 1986: 105), with the focus on relations that people understand to be constitutive of their being. My own work suggests that exploring social relations with others and with place could be a more useful way to define personhood, and there is work in anthropology which can help in defining this further. I seek to extend my analysis of Kyrgyz personhood also to include relatedness with things beyond the human, incorporating recent work on place and material culture as non-human agents constitutive of personhood. I do not wish to ascribe personhood to places but to understand their role in the creation and constitution of personhood. This necessitates a shift of focus towards relationality and considers agency to be a relational property – it emerges in the context of and from the relationship, rather than the individual. In this section I will trace the development of the concept of personhood from functional approaches that privilege collective attitudes and societal level conceptions of the person, through more recent challenges to such a position drawing on the significance of an experiencing self which may defy societal norms, in order to discuss the possibility of focusing on the person as a way to understand the relationship between experience and social and cultural norms.

¹³ In using the term western, or referring to the west as distinct from other cultural areas, I do not wish to homogenise western experience and cultural diversity. However, as the term is often used as a short cut to aid comparisons with an ‘other’ (be they Soviet, eastern, or indigenous) I use it here to indicate this contrast.

The anthropological focus on personhood can be traced to the seminal work of Mauss. First aired in 1938 in his study, “A Category of the Human Mind” (1985 [1938]), Mauss addressed the issue of whether personhood is culturally conceived in the same way everywhere and always, and whether it is accorded in universally similar ways. Influenced by the work of his uncle and teacher, Emile Durkheim, Mauss sought to understand personhood as the category of thought which reflects the social system of which it is a part and is shared by all members of that particular society. Concerned with law and morality rather than the individual experience of self (1985 [1938]: 3), he distinguishes between the *persona* (or mask, an assumed identity); *personnage* (role) and the *la personne morale* (person). He contrasts the social concept of the person, “la personne morale,” which is a cluster of moral responsibilities and durable rights, with the conception of the self, which he terms the “moi”. The “moi”, a human self-awareness, he considers to be universal and the domain of study of linguists and psychologists. This distinction and the equation of the Western concept of the person with the individual is summed up by La Fontaine as follows: “If the self is an individual's awareness of a unique identity, the ‘person’ is society's confirmation of that identity as a social significance. Person and individual are identified in contrast to the self.” (La Fontaine, 1985: 124). Mauss’s approach has been highly influential in anthropological studies of personhood which have overwhelmingly rejected the significance of the self in favour of investigating the particular ways social rights and responsibilities are ascribed to members of particular societies.

Much anthropological work on personhood builds on Mauss’s position, to argue that the form of society as a whole is reflected in the person and that there is a significant difference between personhood as understood in modern Western societies and other societies (Carrithers, 2000: 356-357). This is clearly reflected in the writings of Clifford Geertz (1974: 31). Coming from a symbolic interactionist position, Geertz considered an understanding of personhood to be accessible through symbolic forms – words, images, institutions, behaviours – in terms of which people represent themselves to themselves and to one another (1974: 41), in this way focusing on what Mauss termed the *persona*. Thus a given culture's understanding of personhood is part of that culture's “total pattern of social life” (1974: 41) and it is only through understanding such systems, he argues, that we can come to understand the “natives' inner lives” (1974: 45). Similarly to Mauss’s rejection of the *moi* as valid subject of anthropological investigation, Geertz rejects the possibility of

such understanding arising from what he terms “empathy”, intersubjective engagement between anthropologist and subject, and locates it squarely in an understanding of 'outward' forms, meanings which are collectively held and therefore constitute a singular system. In his most famous example, that of Bali, he proposes that this system is one of depersonalising personhood. Such an approach emphasises a distinction between the self and the person along the lines of a nature/culture divide, with personhood understood as the social construction imposed upon a pre-social self, which Geertz argues is unknowable.

More recently there has been a shift away from what it means to be a person, in terms of the socially accorded rights and responsibilities this implies, towards a focus on how a person is socially constituted, his or her social relations. Strathern’s idea of the “dividual” person has been extremely influential in this regard. She sees the person as a “composite of relationships, a microcosm homologous to society at large” (1988: 13, 131). As such, the dividual thus objectifies relationships, making them knowable. The dividual is contrasted with the notion of the “individual” in order that the autonomous individual cannot be assumed to be the basis for relatedness and social differentiation. This is not only an understanding of personhood relevant to the Melanesian context, but is also well known in South Asian scholarship (Marriott, 1976, Dumont, 1981). It is about the process of persons being related to one another, rather than about the individual herself. Thus the precise nature of the dividual will differ depending on the aspects of connectedness and sociality which are locally valued. However, it does seem that the dividual has become ubiquitous and is a short hand way for describing a non-western socio-centric other, in contrast to a western ego-centred individual. This distinction between western persons as individuals and ‘other’ persons (including post-socialist, Central Asian and a kind of indigenous ‘global’ person) as socio-centric persons in some ways makes the dividual person a kind of “universal form of pre-modern subjectivity” (Sahlins, 2011a: 13).

An alternative way of thinking about the significance of social relations for the constitution of personhood is a focus on a relational dynamic. Attention to practice and lived experience shows us that personhood is processual and constituted through social relationships, with others and with places (Willerslev, 2007: 21). By taking this relational view we are able to understand the person as emerging from a context of social relations,

rather than pre-existing. The aboriginal Dreamtime is one ontology which seems to incorporate persons and places in such a relational dynamic. A number of anthropologists (Myers, 1986, Glaskin, 2012, Munn, 1996) have shown that aboriginal personhood is relational, and that this relationality incorporates relations with non-human persons, including animals and places. Glaskin argues that this is an ontology of embodied relatedness which understands the “relationship between persons and places... as consubstantial” (2012: 298). A similar argument has been made for indigenous persons in the Russian arctic. Anderson (1998) highlights how shifts between ethnic identities result from a relational view of the person. This argument has also been extended to incorporate relations with non-human persons, namely animals and spirits (Willerslev, 2007, Vitebsky, 2005).

The degree to which personhood is relational may vary cross-culturally but this does not negate the relevance of a relational theory of personhood. However, theories of relational personhood often privilege the social over individual experience, with the result that much work on personhood has an implicit or explicit dichotomy between western individuals and indigenous relational persons. To some extent this continues to have the effect of homogenising the ‘western person’ as a kind of neo-liberal rational individual for whom social relations are less relevant to their personhood. This is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, the notion of the western individual ignores that relationality may also be constitutive of western persons. Secondly, the notion of relationally constituted non-western persons ignores their experience of individuality and autonomy. Thirdly, it raises questions about personhood in contexts which are neither characterised as ‘western’ nor ‘indigenous’, and in particular personhood in socialist and post-socialist societies. By questioning this binary opposition, we should be able to see that autonomy and relatedness exist in different combinations for all persons.

Although the term individual may be restrictive, this view of the person as a “self-fashioning, self-interested bourgeois individual” (Sahlins, 2011b: 234) remains relevant to societies where the individual is considered the actor par excellence. The term individual remains useful as a broad description of a “relative value ascribed,” in many Western societies, to a personhood in which “autonomous agency” is valued (Conklin and Morgan,

1996 : 659). This is not to say that relational persons should be understood as having no autonomy. Indeed, Myers (1986) has shown how relatedness based on sharing incorporates a tension between the two in Pintupi society. The problem is rather, as Spiro notes, that “these bipolar types of self . . . are wildly overdrawn,” and “even if conceived as ideal types,” this contrast is “much too restrictive” (Spiro, 1993: 116, 117) (see also Mosko, 2010).

Whether we are dealing with ‘individuals’ or ‘dividuals’, egocentric or socio-centric concepts of the person, the result of an approach to personhood as a category is that we end up talking only of collectivities (Cohen, 1996) Overall, the grand theorists of personhood demonstrate a more general reluctance within anthropology to engage with the individual selves of those we study. This reluctance may stem from the view of the individual as a purely western construct, a view which Rapport argues results from a conflation of individual with individuality (Rapport, 2003). In addition, in dealing with collectivities, there is little room for the subjectivities involved in the creation and experience of personhood. A number of more recent ethnographies have questioned this conflation through actively engaging with individual experience and intersubjective relations in an attempt to highlight how concepts of the person cannot fully explain the experience of personhood (Jackson and Karp, 1990). Thus, this is a move which takes seriously the anthropological other as individual and extends to them “the personal complexity which we perceive in ourselves” (Cohen, 1996). A move away from the person as category recognises that although individualism may be culturally specific to western societies, individuality is not. As a result of in-depth ethnographic studies which privilege the experiencing self, the aspect of the person which Mauss referred to as the *moi* (awareness of self) have come to the fore, rather than just the *la personne morale* (social rights and responsibilities). As such, analyses such as Geertz's Balinese work, which focuses on the *persona* (mask) which people present to the outside world, have been called into question. Unni Wikan (Wikan, 1990, 1989) eloquently shows that while the Balinese may present a surface of aestheticism they nevertheless have a powerful sense of themselves as experiencing individuals.

These approaches have arisen from a phenomenological turn across the social sciences which have shifted from seeing personhood as a reflection of dominant cultural forms to a focus on the experience of everyday life, where the person has been re-imagined as a site for embodied, experiential interactions with the world (Csordas, 1999:181-182). In order to move away from the possible solipsism of phenomenology, Jackson (1996a) has argued that to understand experience we must focus on intersubjectivity, taking the view that we cannot start from the notion of a pre-existing 'subject' and then try to specify how that subject comes to relate to others. Instead, it is necessary to take interrelationships and specific moments of interaction as the basis of subjectivity, a subjectivity which is relational and always coming into being. Everyday experiences and negotiations of personhood are therefore "multifaceted" and "continually adjusted to and modulated by circumstances." (Jackson, 1996a: 27). As such, place has become an important element for the study of personhood, as it is through interacting with the world that persons come in to being.

Socialist and post-socialist persons

As is clear from the above overview, debates about personhood in anthropology have tended to focus on South East Asia and Africa, with increasing attention being paid to western cultures as a way to debunk the idea of the western person (Conklin and Morgan, 1996 , Spiro, 1993). Perhaps because of an uneasy position within divisions of the world into western and non-western other, personhood has not been such a popular topic in studies of socialist and post-socialist societies. However, many of the anthropological debates outlined above can also be seen in work on socialist and post-socialist societies¹⁴. In the following section, I will outline the various ways socialist and post-socialist personhood has been understood.

¹⁴ The subject of personhood in this literature perhaps seems less common than it is because of a confusion of terms between the self, the individual and the person. A similar confusion of terms is also apparent in much anthropological literature about personhood in other parts of the world (Strathern and Stewart, 1998).

While *Homo Sovieticus* became an ironic way of referring to quiescent Soviet citizens in some circles (Fitzpatrick, 2005), it is neither possible nor desirable to speak of a singular socialist or post-socialist personhood as an archetype. Nevertheless, by incorporating work on the socialist and post-socialist person I am seeking to address how the dramatic changes to social practices and norms have been understood to impact subjectivities and what it means to be a person. Research focusing on Soviet subjectivities has argued that soviet selfhood can only be understood by situating individual self narratives (such as those published in diaries and journals) within “a context of historically specific conventions of how to conceive of oneself and present oneself” (Hellbeck, 2001: 345) and that these conventions involved working on the self, being socially useful and integrated into society, and politically aligned to the communist party. Kotkin’s discussion of what he calls “learning to speak Bolshevik” (1995) highlights how these self-conscious efforts to (re)create oneself as new kinds of soviet persons in particular through work, learning and domestic arrangements were discursively encouraged by the state. The cultivation of the New Soviet Person was linked to the idea of having *kulturnost*’ (“culturedness”), a notion which underpinned “themes of health, self-education, discipline, and conformity to collective norms” (Kelly, 2001: 282). *Kulturnost*’ was to be found in diverse elements of everyday life (*byt*’) which were “status differentiated” (Kelly, 2001: 286) in so far as the working classes were more subject to advice seeking to change their everyday lives and raise their level of *kulturnost*’. This kind of socialist person was particularly linked to the city as place and housing were understood to play an active role in their creation (Crowley and Reid, 2002, Buchli, 1999) .

While the Stalinist period has been seen as productive of new social identities (Halfin and Hellbeck, 1996), personhood in later periods has been characterised as divided. Fitzpatrick argues that identity became linked with “disguise and concealment” (2005: 10) because certain identities were considered unacceptable or even dangerous by the state. The individual discussed by Kharkhordin (1999) is a split subject comprising an interior, hidden self and an official public persona. Thus a distinction is established between the true self, and a dissimulating person. Yurchak (2006) has argued these divided subjects are the result of (western) academia’s reluctance to accord agency to Soviet citizens, and its attempts to understand belief in the Soviet project as the result of domination. In seeking to understand and explain the end of the USSR as both unimagined yet inevitable, Yurchak

argues that seeing personhood as either pro- or anti-Soviet fails to recognise a third option – that of the non-Soviet person, someone who was neither for or against the Soviet state (Yurchak, 2006: 129 - 138). In this he points to a way out of the binary distinction between not only being pro- or anti-Soviet, but also between seeing individuals as divided into interior selves and public persona. It is in the social negotiation of personhood, rather than in its determination through collusion or opposition to state level structures, that what it means to be a person can be best understood.

Oushakine (2004: 396) notes that the similarity between the disruptions and changes of the 1920s and 1930s, and post-Soviet disruptions and changes renders current practices of self fashioning similar to those that went before. During the early post-Soviet period there was an emphasis not only on rebuilding society but also on rebuilding the self, as Ries notes a phrase she often heard was “we must rebuild our very selves” (1997: 197). The post-socialist period can thus be seen as particularly productive of new kinds of personhood, just as Halfin argues that the Stalinist period was for new kinds of Soviet personhood. Zigon argues that “more than any other moment in Russian history, the post-Soviet transformation has been defined by the ever present image, narrative and expectation of ‘how life should be lived’ provided by global media, institutions, discourses and practices.” (Zigon, 2010: 5) and in particular it is the Western other who provides an example of this life already being lived.

The shift from cultivating oneself as a socialist to cultivating oneself as a post-socialist person is argued to be clearly evident in the orientation to a western, capitalist other. Rather than the New Soviet Person which was formulated in counter distinction to the west a more complex relationship with the western other has emerged with an ideal of western persons becoming a model to emulate (Kelly, 2001: 372, 385, Kay, 1997, Wolfe, 2005). At a discursive level this is demonstrated by advice literature emphasizing the cultivation of the individual and interpersonal relationships rather than the collective good (Kelly, 2001: 371), and by business literature which emphasises the autonomous (male) person as a model for successful capitalist business (Yurchak, 2003).

One problem with this focus on macro level discursive practices is that the literature on both the socialist and post-socialist person is characterised by the contrast between a public personhood and private, sociologically unknowable self, reminiscent of the work of Mauss and Geertz. As such, debates about socialist and post-socialist personhood tend to focus on issues of agency. The individual is acted upon and is often only able to react through either collusion or opposition to the state. Society is the focus of attention, rather than the *individual*. Anthropological studies of new forms of personhood in post-socialist societies have attempted to bridge this divide by looking at how people integrate these new discourses into their everyday lives. One facet of the ideal neo-liberal capitalist person emerging from this discourse is their ‘responsibility’ and reflexivity, an ability to internalise a capitalist rationality. Dunn (2005), in her study of standards for food production, focuses on the differences between forms of personhood currently present in Poland. She seeks to demonstrate how western European understandings of individual personhood have been created by forms of governmentality and disciplinary methods of control that implement EU norms, and in turn how these have been internalised by the workers who implement them. She contrasts this type of personhood with “the networked and relational form of personhood created under the property regime of state socialism” (Dunn, 2005: 186) upon which Polish actors who are excluded from the forms of personhood valorised by the EU have to rely instead. Thus, in looking in detail at how individuals integrate new forms of personhood through everyday experience such as work she nevertheless reproduces the opposition between western European and socialist forms of personhood.

Research on post-socialist personhood does not only deal with the self-fashioning of a neo-liberal person through working practices. The interest in economic changes following the end of the socialist system also led to new interest in forms of property and consumption. New ways of owning and knowing property were seen as related to new ways of being a person (Anderson, 1998, Hann, 2003a, Hann, 1998). It is through consumption that personhood is examined as being both formed and expressed, most significantly in relation to the ‘modern’ person and the ‘normal’ person (Fehérváry, 2002, Humphrey, 2002c, Rausing, 2002, Ries, 2009, Rivkin-Fish, 2009). All of this is not to say that this shift towards a new kind of neo-liberal personhood has been seen as unproblematic. Indeed, the condition of what Oushakine (2000: 1010) terms post-Soviet aphasia is an in-between

position which “makes the process of production of the post-Soviet subject very problematic”. Yurchak (2003) argues that the clash between neo-liberal and Soviet personhood has been so great that a process of rapid and extreme adaption has been forced on the post-socialist person. Ethnographies of post-socialism have attempted to provide a nuanced account of agency by highlighting the ways in which people incorporate social institutions into their everyday lives, demonstrating that by taking a close up view of people’s lives the binary distinction between state and society is not quite as clear cut as some approaches may suggest (Humphrey, 1998: 2-11).

Nevertheless, the distinction remains, as the focus continues to be upon how people incorporate coercive institutions into their everyday lives (Yurchak, 2006:). In particular, the basis of comparison is often a difference in economic systems and the kinds of persons these create, which has the effect not only of reproducing a western / non-western person distinction, but also of homogenising differences within economic systems (Thelen, 2011: 53). The underlying assumption that the individualising tendencies of neo-liberalism produce new kinds of persons stems from the view that neo-liberalism is hegemonic and pervasive (Harvey, 2005: 3). Even when neo-liberalism is recognised to vary depending on the context (Brenner et al., 2010, Ong, 2006) or ‘locality’ it is nevertheless often seen to emanate from institution and state level processes with little attention paid to how individuals negotiate these changing social economic configurations. In addition, it is important not to see changes in systems of governance and economics as necessarily leading to or determining changes to what it means to be a person.

A focus on the relational personhood of Russia’s indigenous persons (Anderson, 1998, Vitebsky, 2005, Willerslev, 2007), and in some cases present in ethnographic studies of Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia (Bunn, 2000, Baialieva, 1972) provides an alternative to thinking about post-socialist persons as stuck between socialist and western personhoods. Nevertheless, it in some ways echoes the division between a western, individual and non-western relational person questioned above. In my research in Kyrgyzstan, I did not find evidence for an all-encompassing relational ontology in the sense of extending animate personhood to animals or places. Instead, people are able to incorporate different ways of relating to others and to places which draw on relational ontologies, on Soviet discourses

of working on the self, and on ‘western’ ideals of the individuated person. It seems to me that personhood in Kyrgyzstan forces us to move beyond these dichotomies, much as trying to situate Kyrgyzstan in relation to the past and the rest of the world forces us to reconsider its framing as post-socialist, post-colonial or post cold war¹⁵.

Central Asian persons are subject to a theoretical double bind in being on the one hand considered post-Soviet persons (with the lack of autonomy that entails) and Central Asians (being determined by their kinship relations, and their location). It is difficult to move away from these binaries precisely because individuality has been linked so powerfully with an archetype of western personhood. The result is a gap in the understanding of people’s everyday lives. A focus on individuals and their negotiation and experience of moral and religious personhood is a productive alternative which has recently been used by a number of anthropologists researching Central Asia and Russia (Louw, 2007, Rasanayagam, 2011, Zigon, 2010) to examine how the moral landscape has changed following the end of the Soviet Union. In attending to the ways individuals negotiate these new forms of personhood generalisations about what it means to be a modern person, or a traditional person, can be examined and challenged (McBrien, 2009).

Such an approach also recognises that significant events in lifeworlds are not always related to such transformations (Louw, 2007). Thus, while Kyrgyzstan’s independence and somewhat turbulent subsequent democracy have necessitated the remaking of both Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz persons, it is not only these events and contexts which impact on the development of the person. My own work suggests that it is not just institutional and statist definitions of the post-socialist person that individuals navigate in their everyday lives. This was made particularly clear to me by the circumstances of my research, for while I was initially busy asking questions about how life had changed following independence and the revolution of 2005, my host family were coming to terms with what was for them a much more life changing event, the death of Maksat – son, husband, father and head of household. In seeking to incorporate and do justice to the complex experiences

¹⁵ I shall return to this point below.

of new forms of personhood brought about by this loss I have drawn on the theoretical work outlined above which emphasises the intersubjective nature of personhood.

The meanings of place

Overwhelmingly, when works which deal with post-socialist personhood focus on the development of the person they do so in relation to social institutions and other persons, persons who are limited to human agents. When place does come in to these studies of the person, it is often in terms of the location of the model to emulate or to avoid. Recent writing on place has highlighted how place is in fact active in these processes. In this section I will outline three strands in this work which I find useful in understanding person-place relations in Kyrgyzstan: the social construction of place, the lived experience of place and the materiality of place. I will highlight how each has important points to make with regard to how persons and places interact, and I will seek to show how, by focusing on this interaction, it may be possible to resolve some of the theoretical contradictions in these approaches to place.

The refocusing on place is argued to be particularly relevant because of the way ‘globalisation’ is seen to call in to question locality and belonging, as well as dispossession and displacement (Lovell, 1998). The importance of place in Central Asia has more recently come to the fore in academic research. Liu notes that a spatially informed analysis of post-socialist countries is particularly important because it can highlight the way post-socialist transformations have changed the particular geographic knowledge which was integral to Soviet rule (2005: 424). Reeves argues that the spatial tropes which inform analysis of Central Asia (such as the discourse of danger discussed above) need to be critically reviewed in order that Central Asia does not appear “over-determined by its geographical position” (2011a: 309). In understanding place as an ongoing process, the transformations following the end of the Soviet Union make this a particularly interesting area of research. Recent work on place in Central Asia has highlighted the significance of place for understanding such diverse subjects as migration (Isabaeva, 2011, Reeves,

2011b), orality and material culture (Bunn, 2011), and water (Feaux de la Croix, 2010, Féaux de la Croix, 2011, Bichsel, 2009), repositioning place as central to understanding how people interact with each other, and with national and international structures. The focus in this work has been on how people construct place through their everyday lived experiences, whilst at the same time trying to draw out the political and historical dimensions of place.

These recent works draw widely on anthropological concepts of space and place which have undergone a resurgence beginning in the 1990s and continuing to this day. This renewed attention to place is perhaps a response not only to the political, economic and historical changes which are often grouped together under the term ‘globalisation’, but also to a problem within the discipline of seeing society as spatially localised, and the resulting ontological association of culture/society with area. In addition, this long assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture went hand in hand with anthropology’s principle method of research: fieldwork in a single, stable location¹⁶. More generally, influenced by work in geography, history and philosophy, a revival in the study of landscape (Tilley, 1994, Bender, 1993, Bender and Winer, 2001, Hirsch and O’Hanlon, 1995) and of place (Ferguson and Gupta, 1992, Casey, 1996, Feld and Basso, 1996) as anthropological subjects in and of themselves has formed an important part of what has been called the spatial turn in the social sciences (Warf and Arias, 2009).

This spatial turn repositioned place and nature and sought to understand them not as pre- or a-cultural, questioning the structural configurations of culture and nature as binary opposites. This spatial turn thus rejected Euclidean space, that is to say space as an inanimate backdrop for human action. In seeking to understand the ways that changing social and political configurations have altered the meaning of place, much attention has been given to the way place is socially constructed. A focus on the power dynamics by which places are produced and persons come to be linked with them, or not (Ferguson and Gupta, 1992, Malkki, 1992, Harvey, 1993, Massey, 2005), is a way of recognising that place is not a backdrop for action. In joining together the macro- and micro-politics of

¹⁶ This fieldwork tradition has been critiqued by Marcus (1995), although see Candea (2007) for a considered argument on the value of bounded locations for anthropological fieldwork.

place-making we are able to question uncritical conceptions of place as a surface (Bender, 2001: 7). In this way we can recognise that places are not only the outcome of past processes but are also continually being created, at any given time they are the provisional outcome of what has gone before, they are “stories so far” (Massey, 2005: 89) and as such bring together political and economic processes as well as everyday ways of engaging with and creating place.

However, one consequence of focusing on the multiple ways of reworking the political meanings ascribed to place is that the phenomenological dimensions of place fade into the background. While place as a social construct (Harvey, 1993: 4) recognises the importance of power dynamics in its creation, a focus on the political dimensions of place often sees the lived experience of place-making as relatively insignificant and pays little attention to the way that places are not only created but also creative. Recent work on ‘senses of place’ has highlighted how neither places nor persons pre-exist but come into being through subjective experience (Malpas, 1999: 35). It is a dialectical relation whereby neither persons nor places exist *a priori* but come into being through their interaction (Jackson, 1996a). The focus is thus put on the lived experience of place, and the everyday processes at the level of the subject which constitute place. Regrettably, a drawback of this focus on the phenomenology of place is that place is often presented in a rather depoliticised and ahistorical manner. The question ‘whose sense of place?’ is rarely asked. Issues of power and control over the definition and meaning of place may be lost, as well as the diversity of meaning and practice. Ingold has tried to address this by arguing that relationships to land are themselves historical processes (Ingold, 2000: 139) and that it is the shared relations with place which create persons of a similar kind (Ingold, 2000: 148-149). Similarly, Jackson highlights that it is in working out responses to political and historical processes *in place* that people are seeking to belong in the world, they are engaged in a process of working out a balance between active and passive modes of being (Jackson, 1995b: 123).

Ways of relating to place and to others are also influenced by the localities themselves, their material dimensions. Emphasising the constructed nature of place highlights that the link between place and personhood does not exist outside of a cultural and social context, but in seeing place as solely socially constructed the physicality of place is often

downplayed, and the non-human discounted. With the move away from functionalist explanations and a growing trend within anthropology and the other social sciences towards the focus on practice and agency, ascribing a determinist role to the environment was understandably abandoned. Space and place were no longer seen as either overly determining or the backdrop against which action and everyday life unfolds. Rather, space and place were reconceptualised as active in the configuration and reconfiguration of the social. Nevertheless, the precise role of place in this dynamic differs according to the theoretical approach taken. This has been framed in a number of different ways. Possibilism sought to examine the relationship between humans and the environment by looking at how the environment might restrict rather than determine culture change. Unlike environmental determinism, the emphasis remains on the human capacity to choose from a range of possibilities. Similarly, Gibson's theory of environmental affordances (1977) proposes that an animal's surroundings afford particular behaviours for the animal to enact. More recently, Moran has argued that this interaction is an ongoing process of mutual adaptation (1990). The significance of the material dimension of place has also been important in the work of a number of anthropologists of post-socialist property relations, taking a Marxist influenced approach, such as Hann (2003a). The problem when discussing the material import of place seems to be that it on some level evokes environmental determinism. Nevertheless, the material dimension of place cannot and should not be removed from our theories of place.

It seems, then, that foregrounding social relations allows the materiality of place to remain insignificant, while a phenomenologically informed account of place underemphasises the political and power dimensions of place making. At the same time the materiality of place often fades into the background. While I seek to combine these approaches, theoretical understandings of place as either socially constructed or as relational are in fact starkly opposed. The attribution of agency to place is dismissed as fetishism by both Massey (1994: 121) and Harvey (1996: 320). One way to resolve the problems inherent in substantivist ontologies is to understand persons and places as part of a relational ontology, thus shifting the emphasis away from substance to relation and avoiding any 'fetishising' of place. The nature-culture divide which separates political and historical understanding of place from human-environment interactions has been widely critiqued (Lovell, 1998, Macnaghten and Urry, 1998, Descola and Gísli, 1996). Bruno Latour, in his development

of actor network theory (ANT) (1993) argues that places and persons are co-produced. He seeks to break down the nature- culture divide which he considers forces us to locate agency in the subject (either nature or culture) (Latour, 1993: 80). Latour argues that defining things as either natural or cultural, and thereby locating agency only in the human (places and things cannot act), is what characterises people he calls ‘moderns’. However this does not mean that the divide actually exists for ‘moderns’, and not for ‘non-moderns’, it is rather just the way people talk about what they do. He rejects a substantivist approach, with its emphasis on the subjects being produced, in favour of a relational ontology, thus shifting the emphasis to the relationship itself. Agency is thereby located not in the person or place, but in the relations between the two.

A focus on the intersubjectivity of place and persons enables us to capture the always coming-into-being of both persons and places, whilst at the same time recognising that places do have important material dimensions which they bring to the relation, much as there are also historical and social dimensions which impact the relationship. My understanding of these interactions does not see place as a backdrop to human personhood, but as an active agent in its constitution. Local ways of relating to place play a critical role in the construction of personhood and these ways of relating to place are themselves historically and politically informed. Above I discussed how in trying to understand personhood as intersubjective we are able to look at the dynamics of the experience of being a person, as well as the way that definitions are socially negotiated. These intersubjective experiences take place in a material world; not only are they embodied but also emplaced. In addition, it is not only persons who are created by this intersubjectivity, but also places. There are a number of similarities between theoretical understandings of place and personhood in terms of the varied emphasis placed on relational configurations, most notably in terms of how human-environment interactions are seen as ‘modern’ or not.

The distinction between finding the environment meaningful as a result of direct interaction, and understanding the environment as separate from self has often been associated with the progression from pre-modern to modern, industrial capitalism, the latter leading to alienation not only from other individuals, but also from the environment. In many ways this is similar to the distinction drawn between a western ‘individual’

personhood, and the relational personhood ascribed to non-western 'others'. While a distinction between understandings of the environment can be identified in different societies, much as differences in cultural understandings of the person, this does not necessarily follow a linear, evolutionary progression, nor does it justify opinions pervasive in western discourse that some people are "closer to nature" than others. Both Ingold (2000) and Milton (2002) have highlighted the existence of more complicated relationships between members of Western capitalist societies and their environment, much as the idea of 'western' individuals and indigenous 'dividuals' has been critiqued as overly simplified. While I have stated above that I did not find evidence to suggest an animist ontology in Kyrgyzstan, this does not mean that people accorded place no power. However, in order to understand this without reverting to environmental determinism I seek not to locate agency in one or the other, but to see it as emerging from the relationship between them, a relation to which both bring particular characteristics. By combining an examination of the meaning of place with an analysis of personhood rather than seeing persons and places as givens, I want to examine how they come into existence in relation to each other. This involves extending an analysis of personhood as emerging from relatedness between humans to include relatedness with place.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STUDY OF CENTRAL ASIA

Throughout this thesis I engage with anthropological research into post-socialist societies in a broad sense. I have found this literature uniquely placed to examine and elaborate the complexities of lived experience of transition. Nevertheless, my overarching interest in theoretical approaches to the relations between personhood and place has highlighted a number of drawbacks of anthropological approaches unified by their reference to a geographically and temporally defined area. In their search for a basis for comparison, such frameworks often exclude the particularities of places and persons. Ethnographic studies of post-socialist societies have been concerned to highlight the diversity of paths taken since the collapse of state socialism. As such they have at their base a comparative project. While challenging singular transition trajectories, the anthropology of post-socialism nevertheless takes as its starting point the end of the socialist political system and

‘post-socialism’ now usually refers to whatever emerged after socialism (Hann, 2002). Moreover, while it seeks to destabilise the idea of linear trajectories, it nevertheless continues to group together disparate experiences and realities with reference to the (however heterogeneous) experiences of the past. While it has been argued that resemblance is more important than difference when considering post-socialist societies (Verdery, 1996: 19) this nevertheless has the effect of restricting comparisons to other countries’ cultures. Attempting to see Central Asia as post-colonial can be seen as one way to widen the frame for comparison, but the debates surrounding whether Central Asia be understood as post-colonial (Adams, 2008, Chioni Moore, 2001, Kandiyoti, 2002, Khalid, 2007) and post cold war (Liu, 2011) not only highlight the complicated issues involved in defining the Soviet Union as an empire, but also similarly raise questions concerning the extent to which replacing one post- designation with another would be of use in defining the experiences of living in these places.

A number of authors have warned against essentialising place by associating it with particular cultural characteristics. Appadurai has noted that the “problem of place” is “the problem of the culturally defined locations to which ethnographies refer.”(1989: 16), while Hastrup and Fog Olwig (1997) question the usefulness of location as a means of understanding culture. Similarly, Ferguson and Gupta (1992) highlight how seeing space, place and culture as isomorphic can exclude the experiences of those living in places seen as in-between, such as borderlands; gloss over the diversity of experience of people living in the same place; homogenise the hybrid nature of post-colonial places; and, leave unexamined the interconnectedness between places (Ferguson and Gupta, 1992: 7-8). To a certain extent the framing of societies as post-socialist, post-colonial or post cold war is subject to critiques similar to those levelled at ‘culture area’ approaches. A culture area approach sees certain societies as sharing certain traits and developing in particular linear ways; it explicitly links place and personhood in a way that sees human culture, and by extension human persons, as determined by place. One issue with ‘culture area’ is the way in which it is determined with reference to a particular point in history, with the consequence that this point comes to be seen as the most significant determinant of current cultural and social constructs. Another issue with the definition of culture areas is what the drawing of such boundaries implicitly excludes, geographically and theoretically. Geographically, in the case of Central Asia this is most clearly the case in relation to

studies of China which are very rarely addressed within Central Asian scholarship (for exceptions see Bellér-Hann et al., 2007, Roberts, 2003, Billé, 2012).

This does not mean that a regional analysis is to be entirely rejected, or that the historical experience of Central Asia as a region should be dismissed. While Thelen (2011) has argued that the anthropology of post-socialism leads to theoretical dead ends, it seems that denying the importance of the (post) socialist context would only further limit the possibility of developing theoretical insights which could be applicable to other societies. There are a number of beneficial aspects of looking at Central Asia as post-socialist as long as we are addressing diversity of experience. In this way it is possible to highlight the interconnectedness of places and the hybrid nature of post-socialist places, whilst at the same time according agency to the individual. Doing so would allow for an engagement with concerns at a theoretical level, and also return the emphasis to the diversity of ways that socialism and post-socialism were and are experienced. This past does shape in particular ways the meaning of place and personhood, and the way that recent changes are experienced and negotiated in relation to these. With regard to the anthropology of Central Asia, the region remains relatively under-theorised (Schoeberlein, 2002, Rasanayagam, 2006, Louw, 2007). While this can be somewhat disconcerting when seeking to think theoretically about Central Asia as a region it is also fairly liberating as it allows the ethnographer to draw upon relevant theories from different geographic areas of the world. Rejection of *culture* as the focus of anthropology and a refocus upon the individual and subjectivity provides an interesting way to proceed. My hope is that, rather than leading to abstraction, this may in fact allow for a detailed study to demonstrate the specificity of experience rather than engage in the somewhat tautological arguments which can emerge from seeing particular experiences as overly determined by regional histories.

Place and personhood in Central Asia

While the political situation in Kyrgyzstan is not the focus of my research, it has been central to much academic and journalistic work which draws on and develops implicit

theories of personhood and place. In order to understand how personhood has changed it is necessary to understand the historical, political, social and institutional changes that have taken place, which in turn necessitates attention to Central Asia in its particularity. However, the combination of Kyrgyzstan's recent turbulent history and the tendency to explain regional developments in relation to the past has led to an implicit essentialist approach to place and personhood in much work on Kyrgyzstan. The concern with instability outlined above has been particularly prevalent amongst political science scholars, who in seeking to explain post-Soviet political developments in the region have taken a rather instrumentalist approach. As such, political factionalism in the region is considered a threat to democracy, neo-liberal economics, and stable development. This factionalism is predominantly explained in one of two ways, with powerful groups seen to be constituted on the basis of either 'tribal' or regional affiliations. Kathleen Collins (2006, Collins, 2002) and Edward Schatz (2005, Schatz, 2004) argue that descent is of primary importance in the functioning of politics in Central Asia, and both focus on "clans" as corporate kinship groups which aim to gain or maintain political power. Perhaps because Kyrgyz representations portray genealogical relationships as fixed, both these authors draw on early ethnographic studies of kinship, such as Evans Pritchard's seminal study of the Nuer of Sudan (1940), to discuss clan and lineage kinship systems as the central facet of identity (Schatz, 2004: 26), and use traditional anthropological understandings to problematise discussions of clientilism and corruption (Collins, 2006: 40-41). Schatz explicitly contrasts ethnicity and clan, understanding the latter to be a form of identity without reference to fixed place, thus advancing clan identity as particularly prevalent in nomadic societies following Evans Pritchard (2004:26). This type of approach presents personhood as the inherent property of people, positioned as they are within fixed kinship relations and assuming hierarchical roles. Such a structural functionalist perspective extrapolates from roles and behaviours to describe social structure as a whole¹⁷ and implies that social life has a fixed quality.

Pauline Jones-Luong (2002) and Scott Radnitz (2005) argue alternatively that territorial affiliation is central to understanding political processes in the region. Jones-Luong considers regional identities to displace kinship affiliations, while Radnitz argues for the

¹⁷ See discussion of Mauss's theory of the person above.

importance of localism in the formation of group identities. In addition, a powerful discourse of *tuulgan jer* (literally birth place but more generally used to talk about a place that lineages are linked to) is present in Kyrgyz discussions of belonging, and has been an important element of claiming land following privatisation¹⁸. Luong-Jones and Schatz consider relations to regions or villages as fundamental to the realisation of political power, and political allegiances are often considered to be place-centred in Kyrgyz understandings, such as the view of the country being divided along a North South axis. Politicians often emphasise their rural roots as a means of asserting *taza* (clean, but also pure) Kyrgyzness¹⁹, and this has been correlated with the need to prove proficiency in the Kyrgyz language during recent presidential contests, as well as the supposed North-South political divide in the country in which the so-called northern oblast of Chui, Issyk Kol and Naryn are often presented as somehow more authentically Kyrgyz compared to a more ethnically diverse south, encompassing Jalalabad, Osh and Batken. Thus, much political science work on Kyrgyzstan takes the view that group identities, whether based on kinship (both ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ according to Collins and Schatz²⁰) or place, are the basis for political conflict in Central Asia.

Both descent and territoriality are thus seen as resources through which corporate groups construct and maintain the state. As such, both persons and places are seen to come into being through the work of elites. This is a relatively “clichéd constructivism” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 11) which provides an unsatisfactory approach for understanding the complex ways of relating to places and to each other because it is unable to capture the complex ways that these cultural and political discourses about what it means to be a Kyrgyz person, and the meanings of North and South, are integrated, rejected and reworked by Kyrgyz people themselves. Place and kinship are both politically and culturally salient, and are central to discussions of what it means to be a Kyrgyz person. However, whilst recognising that they are important in this way, I wish in this thesis to elucidate the manner in which relationships between persons and place are both created and creative. An anthropological approach which seeks to attend to practice and lived

¹⁸ See Chapter Two.

¹⁹ Sneath (2010: 256) notes a similar tendency in Mongolian political discourse: “[t]he importance of ‘roots’ in local homelands is a central theme in Mongolian public life... Politicians of all stripes have been keen to present themselves as having rural roots, with a strong sense of tradition.”

²⁰ For more on this problematic reification of kinship ties see Chapter Two.

experience is ideally placed to do this. A number of anthropologists working on Kyrgyzstan have already called into question the propensity of reified identities to, variously, treat the state as a monolith, rather than explore the varied ways in which the state is produced and experienced (Reeves, 2007); advance a general model of interaction rather than address the discursive construction of genealogical relatedness (Gullette, 2006); and, restrict the role of descent and territoriality to political manoeuvring rather than seeking to understand the much broader significance of descent and locality as they interact in people's relationships with their surroundings (Beyer, 2011).

Above I have discussed scholarly work on Central Asia which emphasises a concern with instability and danger, and a failed transition to democracy and liberal economic systems, seeking to understand these through proposing explanations that seem to reify relations with place and with other persons as part of kinship networks. An approach which draws on the theoretical concerns of personhood and place can be a way to address these issues, but it is equally necessary for such an approach to be situated in relation to work which highlights the particularities of Central Asia. I have argued above that it is not possible to speak of a singular post-socialist personhood, nor of a singular post-socialist place. In seeing personhood as relational, and taking into account relations with place in the constitution of personhood, it is necessary to understand the distinctive history of Central Asia which is integral to local understandings of both personhood and place. Thus, in this thesis, descent and locality which are so central to scholarly work on Kyrgyzstan will be examined from another, anthropologically informed, perspective. Like Beyer, I argue that these two ways of identifying cannot be so easily separated²¹. A focus on constitutive practices and processes rather than conceptual debates (such as whether it is locality or clan which animates people's political affiliations) allows us to look at *how* place and personhood, locality and clan come to be salient categories.

²¹ Indeed, it is the articulation of genealogy and location in the making and experience of both place and personhood which I seek to highlight in Chapter Two.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

My argument in this thesis is that the meaning of personhood and place emerge from the interaction between the two, an interaction which is necessarily situated within an historical and political context and yet not wholly defined by either. By exploring these theoretical concerns within the context of Kyrgyzstan, I highlight that personhood and social relations can best be understood by addressing the way informants conceive of themselves as constituted through intersubjective relations with others, and with place. In Chapter Two I demonstrate how relatedness is produced in the Kyrgyz context through analysing kinship discourse and practice. This analysis focuses on the contrast between the use of genealogical charts to trace relatedness, and the practices of everyday sociality and life cycle ceremonies where persons and their inter-relatedness are explicitly created/produced/reproduced with reference to kin and place.

The chapters which follow look at some of the consequences of understanding Kyrgyz persons and places as mutually constituted. Chapter Three focuses on a process which has been taking place since the end of the Soviet Union, namely the re-establishment of villages along lineage lines. The chapter traces the historical development of the links between persons and place in my field site. Drawing on public events and interviews, this chapter analyses the importance of relations with "*tuulgan jer*" (birthplace) in people's conceptions of themselves as certain kinds of persons. In Chapter Four I examine more closely the negotiation of personhood in relation to other kinds of places. In particular, I look in detail at the importance of domestic spaces in the constitution of personhood for daughters-in-law. To this end I focus on the importance of relations with domestic material culture and architecture for personhood, and argue that practices of tending to and building houses are central to differing ideas about appropriate forms of social relations and kinds of persons. In Chapter Five I deal with the question of how death both disrupts and reasserts/maintains personhood through relations with place and with others. I address the issue of "displacement" through looking in detail at the personhood of both the deceased and the bereaved. Through discussions of funeral practices I examine the role of mourning and ritual in confirming the centrality of kin and *tuulgan jer* for persons, living and dead,

and reconstituting their relationships to one another and place. I go on to address the bodily experience of mourning and the manner in which both the emotions of grief and social conventions about how such emotions should be enacted re-position widows, in particular, and impact upon their being-in-the-world. The concluding chapter will draw together the diverse personal, emotional and relational experiences of the people we meet throughout the thesis to draw out how a focus on the meanings of and relationships between personhood and place in everyday life is a productive way to think differently about Kyrgyzstan.

Chapter 2 Methodological Considerations

FIELDWORK BEGINNINGS

On a crisp and sunny morning in late February 2007²², I set off with Aida eje and her three younger brothers to make the three and half hour journey to their natal village of Kara Too, Naryn region²³. We were on our way to attend a feast as part of the 40 day mourning period following the recent death of their younger cousin, Maksat. Shirin apa was already out of the house as she was living temporarily in the village, for the mourning period. During this time she discussed my research with her *abysyn* (co-sisters-in-law) and her *kelin* (daughter-in-law, or, in this case, husband's brother's daughter-in-law) and they had asked that I considered going to live with them. Having loaded up the car with biscuits, bread, sweets and toy dolls for the children, we left Bishkek driving east on the road towards Issyk-Kol, pausing to say a brief prayer and leave money on the roadside to ensure a safe return. Given the sad circumstances it was with some trepidation that I had accepted the invitation from Aida eje to visit the village as a potential field site. However, I felt that in some way my field site and host family were mutually decided upon, somewhat lessening my concerns about imposing on unwilling hosts. In September 2006 I had met Aida eje and her family while studying Kyrgyz language in Bishkek. Their small, three

²² The arrival trope has been famously criticised by Pratt (1986: 31-32) as a literary device employed to assert the authenticity of a given ethnographic account by emphasising the hardships of fieldwork and the indispensability of 'being-there'. Typically, in the ethnography which follows the personal nature of such tropes is soon replaced by an authoritative and unreflexive account. I will not banish my personal reflections from the ethnographic body of this thesis; however, neither will I use auto-ethnography (cf Reed-Danahay, 1997)

²³ I have ensured that all names of people and more distinctive local places have been changed in an attempt to ensure the confidential nature of the sharing of personal experiences which constitutes the majority of my argument. However, I have written about a small number of people in great detail in an attempt to avoid generalisation and the reduction of complex lived experiences to types. Therefore, it may be the case that people are identifiable because of the detailed way in which their lives are examined. Although one of the main arguments of this thesis is based on the specificity of individuals' relations with places, this is an argument which I believe could hold for many locations in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, it has been possible for me to change the names of the villages where I carried out my research, while not disguising the oblast level distinction. This is important because Naryn has certain culturally recognised specificities that people draw upon when describing both themselves and the environment within which they dwell. I have also retained the name of the capital city as it is widely available information.

roomed apartment in a tree lined southern suburb of Bishkek was home to the influential maternal grandmother, Shirin apa, her widowed daughter, Aida eje, Aida eje's twin teenage daughters and 12 year old son, as well as Shirin apa's second son's 12 year old daughter. While I was attending Kyrgyz language classes and living in a different part of the city between September and December 2006 they had welcomed me warmly whenever I visited to 'drink tea' and on my return to Kyrgyzstan in January 2007 they generously gave up one of their rooms for me to stay in while arranging an initial trip to the south of the country in search of a suitable field site. When this trip proved unsuccessful they encouraged me to return to Bishkek and willingly involved me in their day to day lives at this time and throughout my fieldwork when I regularly visited to stay with them in the capital. At this point I was keen to live and carry out my research in a rural location, so as to focus on farming activities and irrigation (my original research topic). To this end they suggested that I go and live in "their" village.

Approaching the village, the atmosphere inside the car became more subdued as we looked out at the sheep, goats, horses, and cows scattered across the frozen fields. Aida eje tied on her headscarf, rarely worn during her daily life as a paediatrician in the capital. Driving on ice-covered streets, we entered the village and arrived outside the house where mourners were gathered. A large number of cars were parked outside the house, many with Bishkek number plates, others with the letters indicating they were registered in Naryn region. Small groups of men, young and old, were stood on the icy road in front of large, light blue gates. Marking the entrance to a court yard and buildings which made up the home we were about to visit, these gates blocked all view of the domestic space which lay beyond. The large double gates which could give access to cars, animals or *boz üi* (yurt, the traditional Kyrgyz felt home, an important part of the rituals of death and mourning) were locked shut and instead the stream of visitors entering and exiting the court yard used the smaller blue gate to the right. A number of the mourners gathered outside respectfully greeted the family members with whom I had arrived, the men shaking hands with each other, whilst casting inquisitive looks my way. We entered the court yard, surrounded on three sides by whitewashed buildings, one half paved with concrete slabs, the other a dirt floor almost entirely covered by the unoccupied *boz üi*.

On the right was a large, one-storey building, with whitewashed walls and light blue window frames. Two concrete steps led up to a light blue door propped open to reveal an entrance area full of broken-backed shoes, rubber overshoes (worn over the traditional *maasy* - leather boots with soft soles worn indoors), and multi coloured, inexpensive plastic sandals imported from China, jumbled on top of each other. People entering the house removed their shoes while being greeted by the household's eldest and only remaining son and the husbands of the household's married daughters. The women of the house were taking a rest from crying the mourning laments in the *boz üi* (yurt) and were seated in a side room, somewhat out of sight. We were ushered inside with more handshaking for the men and cheek-kissing for the women, and shown past a number of rooms laid out for dining in the Kyrgyz style²⁴ to a large dining room filled with a European-style, high dining table which stretched nearly the length of the room. The table was heavily laden with baskets of fruit, including bananas, oranges and persimmons, bread of many different sorts – sweet rolls, traditional flat bread (*nan* in Kyrgyz, *Lepëshka* in Russian), fried pieces of dough known as *borsok* cooked on all special occasions in Kyrgyzstan. There were also bowls of sweets, dried fruits, many different kinds of nuts, and cooked salads. I helped Aida eje to lay out the breads and biscuits and sweets she had brought while the men sat down. Shirin apa came to join us, along with the eldest sister and brother-in-law of my future host mother. Other relatives who had greeted us outside the courtyard were also called in to 'drink tea'²⁵.

As always on these occasions there was some discussion over who should sit where. The seat at the head of the table is usually reserved for the eldest and most respected male guest. However, the arrival of a foreign guest can somewhat upset the order and on this occasion required some polite but insistent refusal from me to take the top seat, as had I done so it could have been considered inappropriate given that I am a young, single woman. Nevertheless, my status as a foreigner was honoured by being given a seat near the top of the table next to Shirin apa, the oldest guest at the table and former *raikom* (Russian

²⁴ *Töshök*, long, thin wool filled mattresses for sitting on, were laid out around the edges of the room with a tablecloth in the middle upon which food would be placed.

²⁵ a deceptive term in English which can refer to not only drinking tea but also eating the abundant foods laid out on a feast table before being invited to a separate room where the main food would be served: *besbarmak* (boiled mutton and noodles, literally five fingers as the noodles are eaten with the hands) or *plov* (rice cooked with carrots, onions and oil).

district committee) education secretary. As people seemed keen to know who this foreigner was that had come to their village I was introduced by Shirin apa who emphasised my role as a PhD student coming to study village life in Kyrgyzstan. After speaking a little about myself in Kyrgyz, reassuring those present that I could at least understand some of the conversations going on around me, Aida eje's youngest brother, Ulukbek baike, who is highly respected for his position as a manager of international development projects, ability to speak fluent English and his educational achievements in St Petersburg, explained further that I was interested in finding out about water management (my initial research aim). These introductions by respected people were key to helping me meet and talk to a wide variety of people during my time in the village. When people sought to place me in a meaningful context for themselves they would often relate me to the members of my "extended family" who held or had held influential positions at the local, regional or national level. A conversation ensued that reassured me it would be possible to carry out research on this topic in this area. A number of the younger relatives who had joined us for tea spoke of the problems they faced with irrigation management and the way neighbouring villages had come to compete for water which had previously been managed under one farm. It was decided that I should be taken to see various 'water sights' around the village in order, I suspect, to enable the really important task of mourning to continue.

It was not until returning from this brief tour that I was introduced to my future host family. A group of women sat on *töshök* (wool stuffed mattresses) in a side room off the corridor in the main house. They were taking a rest from the ritualised crying and singing of the funeral laments and called me in. Nur, newly widowed, sat with her head covered by two patterned green head scarves, one tied in the usual way at the back, the other hanging loosely obscuring the sides of her face. A small woman of thirty, the same age as me, she smiled encouragingly at me with her mouthful of gold teeth. Sitting next to her was her mother and her elder sister who both lived nearby in the same village. Her mother-in-law, Salkyn apa, head of the household and a dominant presence with her striking height of 5'9 and position of school director, sat nearby, Shirin apa at her side. We talked briefly. They asked me how I liked the village and whether I would be happy to come and live with them. Nur asked me in Russian if I was not bored, she was also concerned that I would find the lamenting and crying I had heard distressing. She was solicitous even in these difficult circumstances. I assured them that I was ok and did not need them to worry about looking

after me in addition to all their other concerns on this day. Following the arrival of some new female guests they were soon called to another room to cry and lament, so I took the opportunity to meet Nur's two daughters and we played with the dolls Aida eje had brought for them. The day passed with more talking, drinking of tea and feasting until at four o'clock in the afternoon we began the journey back to the capital on the understanding that I would return with Aida eje on the fortieth day of mourning, the official end of the initial mourning period, to begin my life in the village.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to make the link between theory and practice through explaining how I “did” ethnographic research in Kyrgyzstan. Written retrospectively, methods discussions can sometimes present a linear and unified picture of the progress from initial research question to data ‘gathering’, data analysis and final thesis. Such a presentation would in this case fail to recognize the major changes which have taken place throughout the entire research process and the often unexpected ways in which the use of certain methods produced insights far removed from their initial purpose. Ongoing reflections on field notes and interviews in the light of new experiences also mean that the research is never truly finished. The separation of method, theory and ethnographic data is a somewhat arbitrary one which may distort and essentialise the data produced during fieldwork in “findings” far removed from the actual production of ethnographic insight through both intersubjective communication and the later processes of meaning and sense making through “writing-up”.

The central tenets of this thesis developed as a result of my reflections on the process of doing research through forming relationships with other people which emphasise shared life worlds rather than an insurmountable separation between self and other. The discussion in this chapter will attempt to orient the reader to the research processes which contributed to my thesis while situating these processes within a broader debate on anthropological practice and knowledge. It will detail how the overall qualitative approach

is appropriate because it provides the kind of experiential understanding which this research aims to achieve. It will outline the manner in which ethnographic field research uses a wide variety of methods in order to build a rich picture of lived experience. Discussions of methodology will not be limited to this chapter because they provide an invaluable way of situating the experiences and interpretations of my interlocutors and myself without which it would be impossible to attempt to judge this thesis. It will highlight the reflexive manner in which research was pursued and the attempt I am making to write an ethnography which draws productively on such reflexivity. Nevertheless, this thesis is not about the self of the fieldworker and so the discussion of my own social position will be confined largely to this chapter

REFLEXIVE RESEARCH PRACTICE

The production of ethnographic texts has been problematised by post-modernist questioning of the authority of anthropological knowledge. The ‘writing culture’ school (see Clifford and Marcus, 1986) attempted to deal with this by reintroducing a reflexive nature to the written product of ethnographic fieldwork, both in terms of the field notes and written data produced, and the final ethnography which has traditionally sought to present a coherent story about the research object. Such post-modernist approaches emphasised the necessity of re-introducing the ethnographer into the written text, in order to highlight her role in not only observing but also in some way producing the events she observes. However, taken to their logical conclusion epistemological arguments which emphasise the importance yet impossibility of objective knowledge would lead to the end of anthropology, by “effectively [denying] the possibility of social research” (Davies, 1999: 5).

The reflexive turn requires the researcher to become herself an object of study. This does not necessarily lead to self-absorbed narratives reluctant to theorise the experiences of others. More constructively, it can be seen as a requirement to analyse the researchers’ situatedness and to highlight how personal experiences lead to analytical insights. Such an

approach has the advantage of acknowledging the evolving understanding of the researcher and the development of the research in response to participation in ever-changing social environments. It thus rejects the idea of static societies and of objective knowledge. Knowledge should thus be understood as resulting from the negotiation of joint understandings through intersubjective communication. Nevertheless, using experiences of one's own to understand the other and decrease the distance between researcher and the researched is complicated by the way anthropological knowledge can be said to be generated from the very tension that exists between experiences/interpretations which are the same (or similar) for anthropologist and informant and those which are radically different. The emphasis within fieldwork is on the reduction of distance (and difference) through long term engagement and attempts to become an "insider" or at least a tolerated outsider, conversant with the relevant social norms enabling social interaction of an acceptable kind. As this process progresses, the inherently comparative nature of social research in societies other than one's own becomes less immediate than during the initial stages of fieldwork. It is less felt than analytically reflected upon, a reflection that may in fact be delayed until the process of thinking about one's data as a coherent research project takes place in the radically different location of writing up. Both the tension between self and other (not necessarily dependent on doing fieldwork outside of one's own social environment) and the attempt to overcome this are repeated throughout the research and writing up processes, which generate anthropological knowledge.

My ways of knowing and interpreting my experience in Kyrgyzstan have led me to develop a specific kind of "knowledge" (see Hastrup, 2004) which to a large extent is not understandable as separate from the context of its production. It draws extensively on "imponderable evidence", something which we sense to be the case while our certainty cannot be attributed to data in an objective scientific sense (Csordas, 2004). Such imponderabilia have been central to anthropological enquiry since fieldwork became its main methodological tool. Indeed, it has been described by Malinowski as "a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality" (see Malinowski, 2002 (1922): 18). I am not interested only in what people know and experience, but how they know and experience. By extension, it is necessary here for me to discuss not only what I might think I know about people and places where I did my research, but also my

own embodied experiences which led me to reflect on the “imponderable evidence” of others’ experiences. In addition, it is also important for me to reflect on what I was able to know given the particular circumstances and my social position. Both this commitment to reflexive practice and the theoretical focus of my thesis on personhood thus require me to say something of the personhood which I negotiated during research²⁶.

OBSERVING AND PARTICIPATING

If my aim in this thesis is to focus on lived experience in order to demonstrate the ways in which all people live their lives in particular, if radically different, ways then I must here reflect on my own particular experience of fieldwork which has constituted this thesis. I regard my research as characterised by a holistic approach to experiences in the field. I have sought to include formal and informal conversations, interviews, observations and shared experiences within the approach of participant observation. Jorgensen notes that the aim of participant observation is “...to generate practical and theoretical truths about human life grounded in the realities of daily existence.” (1989: 5). One of the problems in discussing participant observation is precisely that of defining what these realities of daily existence are. By focusing on everyday life and lived experience the distinction between research and living becomes difficult to locate.

Despite the potentially awkward circumstances of my introduction to my host family in Ak Too, there seemed to be a mutual understanding from the very beginning that we could help each other in what was to be a year full of change for all of us. They could help me to understand life in the village and to meet people who could show me how the farming and irrigation system functioned, while I, in some small way, could help them with their grief by providing an often amusing distraction with my stumbling Kyrgyz and funny

²⁶ I will limit myself here to discussion of my social position and personhood whilst “in the field”. Further information about these out with the field can be found in the acknowledgements, in keeping with anthropological tradition (Ben-Ari, 1991).

misunderstandings, as well as the not inconsiderable support my financial contribution would provide to their household. The close relationship I formed with Salkyn apa, Nur and the two children has been the most influential part of this research process, going beyond the insights they provided me with for understanding their way of life to the powerful friendship we formed which I hope will continue for many years. During the 13 months I spent with them we all learned what it meant to live within an all female household in rural Central Asia. We learnt how to negotiate new roles assigned to us as a result of changed circumstances, and we discussed together the possible meanings of all these life changes.

As their roles were being redefined, so were mine. I was initially accepted into the family as a guest and potential friend for Nur. Someone who could, in an unspecified way, assist her in her new role as widow and provide company during the year-long period of mourning she was expected to observe at home, giving up her job as a teacher in the village school and spending almost all her time within the family home, out of sight from unrelated men. As an honoured foreign guest, I was initially instructed on the complexities of Kyrgyz *madaniyat* (Kyrgyz culture or traditions) with actions being pointed out to me as “something all Kyrgyz people do.” I was frustrated by these generalities and it took some time for me to see these interactions as presentations of the way people thought things should be and the way people should behave and interact. I longed to interact on more equal terms, despite the impossibility of this given my practical inabilities and language deficiencies. I was at first not allowed to participate in any of the household tasks. Both Nur and Salkyn apa expressed the view that it would be considered shameful for me to carry out tasks such as cleaning, cooking, fetching water, feeding and watering the animals, as well as attending to the potato field and orchard adjacent to the house. However, my desire to live alongside them and participate in as many aspects of their daily life as possible became more accepted while at the same time it became obvious that there were too many domestic tasks for Nur to complete unaided. Soon after my arrival Salkyn apa had returned to her work as the school director and I was gradually allowed to take on more responsibilities in helping with day to day tasks. While I in no way took on what would be considered the normal domestic duties of any woman in a Kyrgyz household, I did help to care for the children, prepare food for everyday and feast meals and serve tea at the various feasts that the family hosted throughout the year. In this way I learnt about

some of the responsibilities a *kelin*²⁷ (daughter-in-law) takes on after she has married into her husband's family and also about the socially ascribed personhood of young women²⁸.

Engaging in these routine activities of the household, I came to realise that the way I conducted myself within and outside the household held significance for the way not only I but the household were conceived. These experiences were coupled with learning of a different kind, that of practical engagement. It was important that I learned to hold myself appropriately, to sit in approved ways, to speak with deference when required, in short to take on the role appropriate to my personhood. Although, as noted above, this was in some ways a flexible personhood (being both a young woman and a foreign researcher), it did have a profound impact on how I came to understand the personhood of my informants as I learnt that personhood was not only ascribed according to status and age, but also created and negotiated through everyday practice. It was through a multitude of daily interactions that I learned about interactions with neighbours, the management of domestic economy, the importance of the extended family in division of labour, and mourning practices, all of which provide occasion for reflecting on the practice of personhood and the intersubjective creation of persons and places.

During my early time in the field my embodied experience and use of all my senses for comprehending the world was heightened. This process of gaining a "practical mastery" (Bourdieu, 1990), of learning to do things in a practical way, can be seen to precede language (Kohn, 1994: 18). When I first arrived at my long-term field sites much of my verbal communication with my hosts was in Russian, not the language of their everyday interactions. While the process of language learning was something I would explicitly do with my hosts - being given new words every evening to be tested on the next day - the process of learning to do things was much less obvious, and relied on continued reflexive

²⁷ The term *kelin* derives from the root *kel-* meaning to come, and thus can be translated literally as incomer. It also refers to young women in general. I will talk often of daughters-in-law in this thesis, and have decided to use the Kyrgyz term *kelin* for brevity.

²⁸ In fact, as a young, unmarried woman serving tea to guests, it was almost always commented that I would make a good *kelin* and often jokingly suggested to me that I marry a Kyrgyz man or at least beware of being kidnapped, as having a long term partner was deemed insignificant as long as he was not present, and my status as a childless woman in her 30s was to some extent confusing and disapproved of. I was often told that the first thing I should do upon my return to the UK was to get married and have children (this in fact seems to have been a common experience for female fieldworkers. See, for example Werner, 1997).

engagement with everyday practices. The gradual emergence of understanding over time is something I hope to reflect in my written ethnography by tracing the situations and conversations which helped me to comprehend the connections between people and places which this thesis discusses. As Stoller contends “a more sensual gaze will not enable us to see what the other sees, but it will produce texts that correspond more closely to the experience and perception of the ethnographic other” (Stoller, 1989: 68). While I do not think it is possible to see what the other sees, to explain more fully the field in all its sensory richness is surely to the benefit of research. Detailed descriptions which provide context for observation, participation, analysis and interpretation are essential if we are to seek to represent the other in her particularity. More than providing context, however, the incorporation of embodied sense experience into my analysis hopefully enables me honestly to reflect the conditions of the emergence of personhood and place.

Intersubjectivity, friendship and ethical research practice

I often found myself in in-between positions without a clearly defined role, or responding to a variety of roles attributed to me from the outside. Moving between these roles and negotiating my expressions of myself was a complex element of living the research process as an all-encompassing state. What causes us to reflect on ourselves, our social relationships and our places within society? The intellectual contribution of anthropology has often been located in the movement from one (often physical) place to another with the concomitant culture shock felt and described on the crossing of cultural divides, the experiencing of new and different ways of doing and being, providing the necessary experiences for generating data. A common trope in many ethnographies, “[t]he personal shock of the anthropologist’s experience of otherness and displacement of identity is balanced, overcome and transformed into a matter for celebration, by claiming, as its opposite, the essential identity, fixity and impersonal inexperience of his objects of study.” (Rapport, 2000: 73). However, this contrasting of the changing and contingent self of the anthropologist and the unified, coherent nature of the other as representatives of cultures is no longer viable in this post-structuralist age. Reflexivity requires that the changing self of the other is also recognised and respected.

Many of my own experiences of myself during fieldwork were interpreted with relation to the experiences of death, mourning and grief I shared with the people I came to know, experiences which necessarily invoke change and contingency. However, as Kohn (1994: 19) has pointed out, while situations may be comparable the substance of experience is not. While I spent a great deal of time witnessing and discussing extreme grief, I can never experience myself my hosts' lives and their grief. However, this does not mean that others' interiorities are inaccessible to me. Through paying careful attention to the narratives people told about themselves, in conversations, songs and poems as well as the ways they physically experienced their states of mind, I would argue that it is possible to come to know others' selves. It is important not to overstate the possibility for shared experience with which participant observation is often associated (Kohn, 1994: 20). Nevertheless, Suka's words ring true for me when he says that "[c]ompassionate empathy makes the fieldworker and the research participant share a subjective space, implicating them in each other's lives and in the production of ethnographic knowledge." (2007: 24).

In my fieldwork experience the accessibility of others' interiorities was possible through the formation of friendships. I, like Nur in particular, was in a somewhat liminal position coming to terms with a very changed way of life. Following her husband's death, she was keen to explore with me reflections on her surroundings and social relationships. This was not only an attempt on her part to explain her world to me. In some ways we were jointly trying to make sense of our new life worlds through reflecting together on our daily experiences. Cohen (1994) has noted that anthropologists are often unwilling to recognise the interiority of those they study because they are unwilling to recognise the similarities between the anthropological self and the researched other. While I would imagine that most anthropologists do not in practice treat the people they live and work with in the field as persons without selves, as mere externalities, a research methodology which fails to engage with other selves must inevitably lead to a representation of those researched as in some ways persons with an empty centre. The sharing of practical everyday activities and experiences is what leads to the relationships from which understanding about other people and places, as well as selves, can be gleaned. Ridler summarises this when he writes: "What is remarkable, although generally unremarked in the anthropological literature, is

the extent to which relationships founded in recognition of *mutuality* (as opposed to difference) [original emphasis] provide both the conditions under which fieldworkers are able to exist as real social beings, and the source of much of what we consider data.” (1996: 247-8). Such complex relationships blur many boundaries: between informant and researcher, between self and other. “They expose the limitations of ethnographic reductionism.” (Connor, 2008: 187).

Through utilising my host household’s networks, or “relations of obligations” (Humphrey and Sneath, 1999: 141), I learned about connectedness and relatedness through participating in daily life, mourning, feasting and visiting. While my host family played an important role in explaining their way of life to me through their extension of friendship, and despite spending a long period of time in the field, it was never possible for me to observe everything. Therefore, there were a number of other people and families who significantly helped in the development of my understanding of Kyrgyz concepts of personhood and of the relationship between place and personhood. In order to learn about the multiplicity of social interactions and lived experiences, I often relied on what is referred to in the literature as key informants, people who were able and willing to explain their cultural practices to me. This interaction itself was an important way of learning about social interaction in the particular context I was studying.

These people were involved in a creative process with me the ethnographer, interpreting, reinterpreting and incorporating anthropological and local understandings (Davies, 1999: 80). In three cases, these people provided literal interpretations by initially acting as translators for me. Elmira eje and Altynai were English teachers at the school both taking maternity leave to look after their newborn babies, while Saikal was entering university in the capital city. While we were working together briefly carrying out interviews I formed close friendships with them and their families and spent many days and nights in their homes, participating in their day-to-day lives and learning from them. These friendships involved me in the ongoing rural-urban relations which exist between Kara Too and Bishkek, as well as the many events where kin socialise and mark major changes in their lives. It has been claimed that the best informants occupy marginal social positions (Agar, 1980) (as many of my informants did as widows, single women, incomer young brides and

rural unemployed men), and that they are able to interpret and translate their own culture because of a certain reflexive capacity which had grown out of their social position. Nevertheless, such social positions are not fixed but fluctuate over time, thus I do not wish to over emphasise such marginality nor claim that it is this interstitial position which enables social commentary. Indeed, it may well be the case that my key informants were initially keen to share their knowledge with me because they were well integrated into their communities, yet occupied relatively powerless positions, and as a result felt pleased to be asked their opinions. It seems to me that the quality of the relationship established between myself and certain individual informants did not depend on shared outsider or marginal status but was a result of mutual interest and engagement, and that it was as a result of our interactions that some people became key informants rather than due to their specific knowledge.

While relationships can become a form of collaboration they can also entail lasting personal involvement and friendship (Whyte: 1955). In a somewhat instrumental way it has been claimed that close friendships with informants can “enhance and deepen analysis, while helping to protect against the tendency to present others as rule following robots” (Davies, 1999: 80). Nevertheless relationships formed in the field are inevitably ambiguous and, as in other everyday experiences, can often lead to interactions being misinterpreted. It is through the process of long term participant observation and the many methods I used that my interpretations were repeatedly checked and validated. Prolonged involvement increased my ability to reflect on my relationships (Bernard, 1995: 141) and understand peoples’ interpretations in relation to mine and others.

The reflexive character of my fieldwork has meant that ethical challenges, considerations and decisions were involved at all stages of the research process from initial choice of topic through the changing focus and practice of fieldwork and choices made during writing up. Codes for ethical conduct of both the University of Glasgow and the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth have been followed. However, this does not in and of itself guarantee ethical research practice. Understanding the ethical requirements of the research bureaucracy and the practice of ethical research are not one and the same thing (Pels, 1999). Ethical practice in the research for this thesis took

the form of developing ethical and moral social relations with people. Openness and honesty has been at the heart not only of my representation of my research but also in the presentation of myself through the sharing of day to day lives.

The issue of informed consent is rather complex when it relates to research taking place at all times and into almost all aspects of everyday life. Indeed, it is further complicated when one seeks to found relations in friendship. I did not collect written consent for the participant observation I carried out as it was inappropriate for the type of research I was engaged in. While I was always open and honest about my role as a researcher in Kyrgyzstan, the evolving nature of the research focus meant that I may not have accurately informed people about the wide-ranging focus of my research when I was myself unclear about this. In addition, I was not always in control of how and to whom I and my research were introduced and represented by others on my behalf. I was open about note taking when this seemed appropriate and would not interrupt my participation. If my status was unclear I tried to explain why I was participating and sometimes used note taking as a way to signal the form of my participation. My ongoing participation with the lives of people in the village where I carried out my research is a way to continue this ethical and moral practice. My relations with those with whom I formed friendships have been based on each contributing in different ways accepted by the other. They have helped me to gain the knowledge needed to write a PhD thesis while my contributions, although not of the same kind as others could make, were also accepted by them. Our friendships are not reducible to these forms of mutual help, but have grown in addition to them (Carrier, 1999: 21). These relationships have changed significantly following the end of fieldwork, but have continued to be for me the most influential element of my research practice. While I am not able to remain in close contact with all those I considered to be friends, thanks to technologies like Skype and mobile phones I have endeavoured to remain in contact with a number of people, keeping up to date with developments in their lives and continuing to discuss the topics presented in this thesis. Nevertheless, without ongoing day to day engagement these relationships have inevitably shifted, and therefore this thesis presents a discussion of place and personhood as they were discussed and experienced at a particular time and in a specific location.

Interviewing

In the early stages of my research I considered the practical, bodily engagements with the daily lives of my informants which constituted my day to day participant observation to be in some ways non-research. At a time when I was not engaging in a verbal way with the task of coming to know certain things with a view to ultimately producing this thesis, such practical engagement seemed merely to provide context. At this stage I was not particularly open to what Jackson defines as anthropological understanding: “a way of acquiring social and practical skills without any *a priori* assumptions about their significance or function...” (Jackson, 1989: 134). Instead, I focused on the verbal aspects of research and began by interviewing people who, it seemed, could tell me about the processes I had deemed significant: privatisation, farming, irrigation and kin relations. One of the main components of ethnographic fieldwork is interviewing, although this may often not be distinguished from other forms of interaction and dialogue in the field (Atkinson, 2001: 5). Indeed, participant observation necessarily involves talking with the ethnographer’s hosts in the field. Interviewing, then, may take many forms running on a continuum between completely unstructured to structured, and between informal and formal. The 120 interviews which were carried out took in the whole scale. I do not include here the conversations during participant observation and everyday life which, although providing opportunities for informal questioning, were not tape-recorded. I did, however, make extensive notes on these conversations including writing down verbatim things my interlocutors said. Indeed, it was often these more informal conversations which led to the “turning points” in my fieldwork (Geertz, 1973), usually taking place at the time of “revelatory incidents” (Fernandez, 1986) and I was able to gain a clearer understanding of myself, those I was studying and the relationships between us. Despite this I spent a great deal of time interviewing a diverse group of people.

When I first began my fieldwork both I and my hosts assumed that one of the key tasks of my role as a researcher was to ask questions, often of older, respected men. Unfortunately, being a young woman often felt like a hindrance rather than something that could itself provide me with valuable insight. Of course, I was privileged that with many people and in

many situations I was able to switch easily between the role of honorary daughter, *kelin*, and that of foreign researcher. I was therefore able to talk to many people about the economic activities they were involved in and their views of farming and water management. I began this early stage of interviewing by using three different interpreters, Saikal, Altynai and Elmira eje (who I have introduced above) to help me in carrying out exploratory interviews where the interviewees led the discussions to issues which were relevant to them within the broad topics I defined. I did not find these interviews to be an entirely satisfying process and felt frustrated in my ability to connect with interviewees. Young Kyrgyz women in the village where I did my research generally did not participate in conversations about farming or ask questions when in the company of those older or unrelated to them. As I was initially also relying on them as field assistants to introduce me to potential interviewees I at first perceived their status as somewhat of a hindrance to my line of interviewing: Saikal and Altynai had few personal connections in the village not having lived there for long, and Altynai and Elmira eje were primarily perceived as *kelins* despite their professional status as teachers. However, from these early interactions and interviews I was able to learn a great deal about the ways people categorise and attempt to find connections with one another, and it is this which has been more influential on the development of the ideas in this thesis.

As I became more confident in my use of Kyrgyz I decided not to use interpreters. This was not only a result of my improving language ability, but also because I wanted to establish a more immediate connection with my interviewees and somehow felt that the use of interpreters hindered this²⁹. However, because I was still lacking confidence in my language skills I began this next stage of interviewing using a structured approach which relied on a script I developed and piloted with the help of Altynai and Nur. They were able to explain the ways these questions might be interpreted and the kinds of answers they might elicit, thus helping me to write more open-ended questions and learn the local details which were relevant to, for example, income by suggesting I ask about forms of trade I had

²⁹ It is common in anthropological texts for the use of interpreters to be written out, and for the language capability of the researcher not to be discussed. As Borchgrevink (2003) notes, this has the effect of mystifying (and mythifying) anthropological fieldwork, and he argues, is a result of asserting validity based on the 'being there' of the anthropologist. I hope to show in this chapter how the ideas discussed in this thesis emerged over time as a result of sustained interactions with a number of people who assisted me both with my language competence and cultural understandings. Without interpreters, of both kinds, this would not have been possible.

not been aware existed. At this stage I felt I needed to collect some “hard” data, mostly to reassure myself that I was doing research and to enable the aggregation of responses so that I could make statements about the village as a whole. The social context within which views, beliefs, meanings and actions are formed and take place was neither addressed nor articulated in these interviews. These early interviews relied on specific questions which limited the interviewees’ choice of possible answers. These initial questions were a useful tool providing an early course of action and a spur to meeting people and asking further questions. However, perhaps because they did not build on previously formed relationships, the power dynamic felt unequal (Burgess, 1984:101) and it was difficult to establish rapport. Nevertheless, interviews were an important element of my research, providing significant contextual information and, later on, allowing me to clarify what I was learning through participant observation.

While my reliance on three interpreters, key informants and their network of social contacts could be framed as snowball sampling, it could also be said that my access to different settings was controlled by a variety of gatekeepers and go-betweens. It was harder to interview those people who fell outside of the acquaintance of my host families. This meant that, to begin with at least I was directed to interview current and former professionals living and working in the village. As a consequence it was harder for me to interact meaningfully with particularly impoverished families and also the families of current powerful village elites residing outside of the central village. As such, snowballing could be criticised as leading to a skewed sample, resulting in data which is only partially representative and possibly biased. Even so, given the focus in anthropology on systems of relations, random sampling may not be the best way to achieve validity. A benefit of spending a long time in the field was that I could seek out a wide variety of people in order to capture the diversity of my research field, rather than focusing on statistical similarities across a random sample. In an attempt to broaden my focus and ensure I was speaking to a wide variety of people from different ‘social categories’ I made use of village statistics on land and animal holdings (strongly related to perceptions of wealth in the village) to carry out semi-structured interviews with a wide variety of households. These were held in the *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) offices and I selected households to cover a range from no land and animals holdings to households with extensive land and animal holdings. I continued to rely on already established connections, however loose, to provide

introductions to the households I wished to interview. This was because on the few occasions when I had not asked for an introduction and had arranged interviews independently, the interviewees seemed mistrustful of my explanations of my research and were thus unwilling to talk openly with me about their lives.

Given the importance for me of privileging the subaltern voice, structured interviews proved to be both unsatisfying and inappropriate. They did however provide a means to meet a large variety of people and collect some basic data about village living standards and the varying outcomes of privatisation at a family level. Most significantly of all perhaps, they enabled me to develop friendships with key informants outside of the social and kin networks of my host families. With this came the realisation that satisfying research practice is for me intimately related to developing social interaction and social relationships on the level of friendship. This stemmed from my desire to humanise the other. Personal relationships formed the foundation of my understanding and it was impossible to separate my “knowledge” from people and the intersubjective process of meaning making. By situating interviews within a longer period of participant observation, I attempted to examine the social context within which speech took place. Over time as my language abilities improved I was able to carry out unstructured interviews where the interviewees were free to explore their thoughts and memories related to my prompts about their life experiences. Such an approach allowed me to ask questions which addressed particular research issues in appropriate ways, hopefully enabling more in-depth and useful answers.

Despite this, while people talked with me about shared local meanings and interpretations, it was only with closer friends I talked about individual experiences, thoughts and emotions. As I recognise the importance of understanding shared meanings, I was often frustrated in interview situations with the somewhat unreachable selves I was talking to. I wanted to know something both broader and in more depth: the experiences of living in this rural place at this rural time. Over time it became clear that for some this was related to farming, but that for many farming or being “a peasant” did not have a key role in their sense of themselves. More commonly, connection to a place through birth or marriage was the key along with all the place-specific relationships this involved (neighbours,

kin/household, lineage). As a result, both my participant observation and interviews took a new course. The relationship between participation and observation has been described as a ‘dialectical spiral... governed in its motion by the starting point, which is observation.’ (Rabinow, 1977: 80). The quality of observation is significantly improved when the researcher is able to discuss meanings and interpretations with informants; thus there is also a dialectical relationship between observation and interviewing (formal or informal; structured or unstructured) (see Agar, 1980, Davies, 1999). Interviews and participant observation “mutually interact” (Agar, 1980: 109) throughout ethnography. They let the researcher know when and how to ask appropriate and intelligent questions. ‘Rich’, ‘deep’, ‘thick’ information from daily participant observation gave me the understanding to evaluate the information I was presented with in interviews. Interviews themselves also provided a great deal of contextual information in addition to the verbal communication.

An ethnographic record

As I have shown, my time in Kyrgyzstan was spent putting together what Spradley (1980: 63) calls an ‘ethnographic record’ consisting of various data I collected, including field notes, digital recordings of interviews and meetings³⁰, photographs, maps, diagrams and so on. My approach to methods is that they offer a toolkit to be used at different times and in different situations depending on their relevance to the kind of information sought. I carried out structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews; I collected genealogies, songs, poems, sayings; I drew maps and diagrams of places and asked others to do the same; I took photographs and shared and discussed them with others. I attended feasts and celebrations in a number of villages and in the city. I accompanied people I knew to the mountains; the city; Issyk Kol and other towns and villages. I attended the weekly local government meetings, I taught English at the school and took part in teachers’ social activities. I attended training seminars with village deputies and observed the national elections. To some extent I also attempted to combine quantitative and qualitative methods.

³⁰ I discussed the issue of confidentiality with all interviewees, assuring them that all names would be changed and other steps taken to anonymise their data. All interviewees except one agreed to be recorded. I also gained consent from all participants of the meetings which I recorded.

I collected local government statistics about all families residing in the *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administrative area containing seven villages) which included residence patterns, ages, gender, occupation, land holdings etc. These were held in the administration's office and were made available for me to copy. I also collected the records of a rotating savings scheme which had been running for a number of years, this was on the street where I resided and the bookkeeper was a neighbour. However, it has been somewhat difficult to use these data constructively given my emphasis on the particularities of lived experiences, particularities which such data tend to occlude, creating generalisations instead. As Hughes notes, while "at a technical level it may be desirable, even necessary, to combine multiple methods ... at an ontological and epistemological level this can result in marrying incompatible methodological positions." (Hughes quoted in Brewer, 2000: 29). In short, I sought to take part as fully as possible in the everyday life of the village; to forge friendships and converse with people about their lives and mine.

Within the context of writing a thesis the vast variety of lived experience must be discussed in terms of methods. Nevertheless, I have tried here not to provide a formalised picture of my "ethnographic method" as such an attempt is radically limited "... by the flexibility of the investigative process and by the uniqueness of each research situation." (Stewart, 1998: 3). It also to some extent downplays the importance of the ethnographer's "social conscience and social skills" (Jackson, 1996b: 8) in favour of scientific research ethnology. As such, it is important to note that by combining these different methods I was seeking a way of learning the social context through participation in the lives of those for whom such context is often unquestioned. The majority of the methods I used tend to prioritise visual and verbal ways of experiencing the world, in keeping with the long history within social science which privileges the objectifying gaze (Hastrup, 1994: 224). More recently, the objectifying nature of visual perception has been complemented/softened by approaches which favour the use of all our senses in apprehending and understanding the world around us (Stoller, 1989). This is not to say that social researchers were not experiencing their research in these multiple ways before, only that this experience was not generally seen as valid in the production of social scientific knowledge and was therefore left out of analysis and interpretation. Through showing the attention I have paid to reflexive and intersubjective research practice as a way of learning about self and other, I hope I have demonstrated the important role

embodied experience plays in my research practice, as well as in an approach to the writing of ethnography.

ON REPRESENTING THE OTHER, AND THE SELF

Making a claim to be engaged in ethnography and anthropology requires more than the assertion that I carried out long-term field work incorporating participant observation, in-depth interviews and so on. Many other disciplines use these methods to broaden their focus to include the complexities of human experience. Nor does the fact that I did the research elsewhere constitute it as anthropological. The anthropological nature of this research lies not only in the “data collection” methods employed, but also in the underlying approach to understanding the other, in the theoretical framework employed and, most importantly, in the way I have come to understand something of my subject and to represent it as anthropological knowledge. Fundamentally, this depends on the way in which I recorded and wrote-up my “data.” I am not seeking to present a series of ethnographic vignettes or case studies as illustrations of posited social theory, but to provide an interpretive account of the experiences of certain people in a certain place and at a certain time.

The problem of how to overcome the gap between experience and language is something which must be grappled with throughout the research process. During fieldwork it is most clearly illustrated by field notes which can be said to hold a liminal position between the two (Jackson, 1995a). An attentiveness to describing in field notes the senses and the importance of embodied experience enables a richer understanding to develop. However, one is still faced with the problems of translating such experiential understandings into the words of field notes and then of an ethnography which can do justice to all the imponderable evidence with which one is faced. In addition to trying to share and accurately recall the life worlds of my informants during fieldwork, the process of writing, following Abu-Lughod's aims of producing ethnographies of the particular, is also a way to try and overcome what Bourdieu terms “the gulf between two relations to the world, one

theoretical the other practical...” (Bourdieu, 1990: 14). It seems to me that such a gulf comes into being particularly during the process of distancing between fieldwork and writing-up. It is often noted that such a practical and conceptual break with the field is necessary to the process of analysis and anthropologists are encouraged to use the distance between the self and the other to reflect analytically on the data they have collected in much the same way as fieldworkers have been warned about the dangers of “going native”. This process is deemed necessary in order to arrive at general statements which can be made about the people under study. For a long time this process of distancing and its resultant mid-level theorising was seen as relatively value-free. It is important to recognise that such calls for objectivity were rooted in epistemologies founded in natural scientific approaches to the world and that such approaches have been radically critiqued by post-structuralism and post-modernism. As Hammersley and Atkinson point out “[w]e cannot continue to regard the 'writing up' of ethnographic work as innocent. On the contrary, a thorough recognition of the essential reflexivity of ethnographic work attends to the work of reading and writing as well. We must take responsibility for how we choose to represent ourselves and others in the texts we write.” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:258). Furthermore, we must be explicit about the inherently comparative nature of anthropology as what is being compared shifts over time and space.

The possibility of distancing, were it theoretically possible or even desirable, has become increasingly difficult with the global increase in new communication technologies. Although I left “the field” in April 2008 I have remained in close contact with a number of my informants, discussing amongst other things arrangements for large feasts and sharing their concerns about starting a new life, in one case as a market trader in Moscow and in others as pupils at a new school using a strange language. When I am confused about words which I hear again in interviews or my detailed field notes do not fully capture my memories of complex events, I have been able to discuss these with people in Kyrgyzstan, discussions which can lead to new reflections on our time together in Kara Too (on the importance of telephone conversations for continuing both research and relationships after the end of fieldwork see for example Berdahl, 2000, Norman, 2000, Sunderland, 1999, Verdery, 2003) .

Even without these continuing relationships sustained by new technologies, I doubt that fieldwork really ends when leaving the field. The process of re-reading not just notes but also memories of less distinctly recorded experiences in the light of new and accumulating experiences has been referred to by Cohen as “post-fieldwork fieldwork” (1992:345). Hastrup points out that “the past is never past in anthropology” (1992b: 125) and indeed during the process of writing the past seems particularly present to me. It is important, therefore not to present an ethnography which asserts itself as the finished project, as the final analysis, but to recognize that my analysis is to some extent contingent and that for me, as for Ottenberg “the field experience does not stop. Things that I once read in my field notes in one way, I now read in another.” (1990: 146). Rather than seeing this ongoing interpretation and re-interpretation of my fieldwork materials as the imposition of theories on pure fact, I prefer to see the data I collected as inherently ambiguous and my analysis as not founded in the distancing from subjective experience to objective knowledge claims but resulting from a partial disengagement which allows me to see “one part of the world from the vantage point of another” (Jackson, 1996b: 9). One of the main ways that ethnographies can be said to contribute to knowledge is in their representation of the other in ways which are recognisable to readers from both ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the society being described. In other words, it is dependent on the presentation of an honest description of its subject. This requires a recognition that individual lives “cannot be reduced to cultural determinants” (Jackson, 1989: 26). One way in which their very individuality may be attended to and given serious consideration is through analyses of personal explanations of life course and experience, an approach advocated by Jackson (1989, 1996b) and Abu Lughod (1991) in particular. One of the ways I have tried to “write against culture” or indeed research against culture, is through focusing on the everyday experiences, interpretations and representations of people’s lives to which I was allowed access in the rural, urban and in-between settings where I carried out my research. For this reason I have tried in each chapter to open with an ethnographic description of particular instances or experiences which provide a jumping off point for more in-depth discussion, rather than acting as mere illustrations. I hope that in writing of the particularities of experience and of my interpretations I can present an honest picture of the people I came to know. After all “...ambiguity is a fact of ordinary life, ‘theirs’ as much as ‘ours’, and to allow that sharper awareness of the first signifies closer encounter with the second.” (Wallman, 2002: 103).

Chapter 3 Kinship and Personhood in Kyrgyzstan

The arrival of March had seen the coming of spring, the thin winter sun gaining strength and the frozen irrigation canals thawing and spilling their watery contents onto the roads. Outside the home of my hosts, the warm brown mud of the street contrasted sharply with the blue of the gate and the sky, not yet softened by the leaves to come on the large trees. Beyond the gates, the courtyard was full of activity: cooking, greeting, and conversing. All was enveloped in the haunting sounds of the *koshok* (funeral laments³¹) rising and falling in intensity with the entrance and departure of mourners. For the *kyrky*³² it had been decided that a horse as well as sheep would be slaughtered to feed the many mourners³³. The fortieth day following Maksat's death marked the end of an intensive mourning period and the beginning of a year of grieving and readjustment for his family. This would be the last large feast until the family held the *ash* (memorial feast) to commemorate Maksat's death 10 months later, and, as such, it was a significant occasion to which many people were expected to contribute and attend. Through the gates came an almost endless stream of people, paying their condolences at the yurt still resting in the central courtyard where the women of the household and other female kin cried their laments.

Throughout the day people arrived in small groups. Their movement through the courtyard and into the house involved a process of division and coalescence, separating to enter the yurt (women) or greet the eldest son and husbands of the household's daughters (men); becoming arranged into larger groups to be served tea, eat meat, and recite the Koran. These groupings revealed some of the complex social relations at play and the categories often employed to distinguish, discuss and represent people. And yet these categories were not immediately apparent to me, glossed in response to my questioning as *tuugandar* (consanguines); *kudalar* (affines); *koshunalar* (neighbours); *Ak-Tooduktar* (residents of Ak-Too); or work colleagues from the *kollektiv* at the local school where Nur and Salkyn apa taught. Particular kinds of relationships and their qualities were seemingly subsumed

³¹ I will look more closely at the content of these laments and the emotions felt when singing them in Chapter Six.

³² Funeral feast held on the fortieth day after death.

³³ For more information concerning the use of animal sacrifice at funeral feasts see Jacquesson (2007).

within the general notion of being a part of particular categories, categories which also extended to age groups and groups of men and women. Funerals are perhaps the only occasions when such categories are so clearly in evidence and so fully represented³⁴. However, practices revealed some of the qualities of relationships: a number of *tuugandar* were identified as members of the Tokoch *uruu* (lineage), and defined as *jakin* (close) or *alys* (distant). People were invited to eat in a certain order, first were the affines followed by 'distant' Tokoch, then neighbours who were served their meals separately according to their gender. The 'close' Tokoch from the city, then the remaining *üi bölöö* (close family) - brothers and sisters of the deceased and their spouses and children - were served in a more informal manner.

INTRODUCTION

Funerals, while they mark an end to life are an appropriate place to begin this chapter and indeed this thesis as they are key events that bring together many of the elements I will explore in the chapters that follow: the tracing and practice of relatedness, the significance of place, domesticity and aspects of grief and mourning³⁵. My arrival in Ak-Too during the intensive forty day mourning period of my host family meant that my initial introduction to them was not only surrounded by grief and mourning but also that certain relationships were highly visible and present in the day-to-day interactions of mourning. Through the commemoration of death I began to learn the ways that people trace relationships with one another as persons of the same kind and persons that are different.

³⁴ While guests from the *uruu* are also invited to other life-cycle ceremonies, these tend to involve a smaller circle of relatives and thus the extension of the lineage is not so clearly brought into play.

³⁵ While I open this chapter with some observations from a funeral ceremony, my concern here is with the ceremony's role in the expression of kinship ties rather than in the structure of the funeral itself. In Chapter Six I will again return to the subject of death where I will deal more fully with the role of funerary rights and mourning in the formation of different kinds of personhood for the deceased and those left behind, particularly the widow.

In this chapter I will attempt to describe and analyse the interplay between everyday practices and conceptual forms salient for Kyrgyz personhood, focusing predominantly on forms of kinship. While I seek to do this to provide a context for the in depth analysis of the importance of places in the following chapters, I do not claim to provide a definitive picture of the formation and significance of relatedness and personhood in Kyrgyzstan. The significance of relatedness based upon the tracing of genealogical connections has been examined in a number of recent anthropological works on Kyrgyzstan (Beyer, 2011, Gullette, 2006, Ismailbekova, 2011). In this chapter I hope to draw productively on this work to examine how assertions of relatedness through idioms of kinship are produced in different contexts (discussing history; attending lifecycle ceremonies; everyday socialising and interacting) and in what ways these are significant for personhood. As noted in the previous chapter, my analysis is above all grounded in my participation in family life, extending beyond the household to incorporate people living in other villages, towns, cities and countries. The families I lived with were predominantly made up of women and thus their particular position in a kinship system which attends to patrilineal descent as the primary way of tracing relatedness was a central puzzle for me. In this chapter I hope to show that understanding descent-based kinship and domestic family life as opposed is not useful for interpreting social organisation, and an understanding of Kyrgyz society needs to draw upon both as interrelated.

As my fieldwork progressed, I was struck by the importance of day-to-day interactions within families which took place between people not of the same *uruu* who seemed to form closeness and provide support. However, rather than creating a distinction between different modes of interaction, I wish to examine them as processes of tracing relatedness. I take my cue from recent work in anthropology which has called attention to a relational approach (cf. Carsten, 2000b), focusing on people's ability to move between different subjectivities (most notably in the work of Strathern, 1988). Such an approach has been productively applied to the study of Mongolia to highlight how people, and women in particular, can adopt different perspectives and thus different personhoods at different stages in their lives (cf. Delaplace and Empson, 2007, Empson, 2003).

Relatedness is about creating differences and similarities, thus about creating persons of the same type and persons that are different. A focus on relatedness is therefore a focus on these processes as understood and articulated by the particular culture being explored, and returns attention to lived experience rather than seeking to understand social relationships in terms of function. For the Kyrgyz, *uruu* and patrilineal descent are significant ideational factors in the construction of personhood. As such, it is necessary to discuss *uruu* and descent as it is understood and produced in Kyrgyzstan. However, rather than seeing genealogy and descent as the context which structures practice it is perhaps more productive to foreground practice with the effect that ideas concerning genealogy and descent can be seen to emerge from it and to situate this within a broader focus on relatedness and personhood as dynamic processes. In addition, I wish to discuss the role of women in creating personhood and relatedness in order to examine Kyrgyz *uruu* and descent from a perspective which takes women as integral to the construction of the system of descent, rather than peripheral to it.

In this chapter I will discuss different kinds of kinship knowledge current in Kyrgyzstan and how these are differentially employed, what these demonstrate and what they obscure, particularly in relation to day to day interactions and the position of women. The section titled Recounting the *uruu* deals with ways of reckoning genealogical relations, and the following section, “We socialise with our relatives”, looks at how genealogical relations may be practised. I do not wish to establish a distinction between the keepers of formal kinship knowledge and others as enactors of it, but rather to highlight the ways that these particular men and women relate to *uruus* of significance to them and how this impacts upon their personhood. Following this I will examine other ways of negotiating personhood in order to explore personhood as a concept potentially more useful than kinship in explaining day to day interactions. I will again engage with these ideas from a processual point of view so as to demonstrate the ways in which relatedness and personhood are created through everyday forms of sociality as much as ideational factors. First, though, I will outline the salient theoretical approaches to kinship and relatedness

which I will draw on in order to move away from a focus on structure and rules, and give an overview of relevant scholarship on kinship in Central Asia.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KINSHIP IN THE STUDY OF CENTRAL ASIA

The recent reappraisal of kinship as the focus of anthropology has reinvigorated interest in how social beings are formed and indeed what it means to be a social being. Instead of looking for underlying structures which are elaborated through the actions of living people, more recent work has sought to consider the processes themselves as constitutive of relationships. By examining the processes through which significant relationships are created and how these are locally conceptualised, attention has shifted from an interest in social structures and rules determining inheritance and marriage (amongst other things) towards a concern with everyday engagement and experience.

This reappraisal emerged from a move to question the universal applicability of kinship categories and assumptions concerning the biological “facts” of kinship. Since the beginning of the 20th century, anthropologists had argued that they were interested in the social and cultural articulations of kinship rather than biological aspects, which were either unknown or irrelevant. They were concerned with how certain cultures and societies understood kinship, including procreation. This however necessarily reiterated the divide as a taken-for-granted distinction between the natural and social cultural. As Schneider argued in his *Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), anthropological definitions of kinship are based on Euro-American beliefs about “nature” and the biological “facts” of procreation. Such biological “facts”, he contended, were taken to be the “natural” basis for the social elaboration of kinship in anthropological analysis, even when such ideas about biological procreation were not recognised in the societies described, perhaps the most famous example being that of the Trobriand Islanders in the work of Malinowski (1982 [1929]). If ideas about the biological basis for kinship were not shared cross-culturally

then, Schneider maintained, there was no basis for comparison and the domain of kinship should be abandoned. The rejection of a formalist approach allows for focus on social process not as an elaboration of biological ‘fact’ but as implicated in the social construction of these facts. Such an approach allows me to consider formalist kinship categories such as *uruu* as themselves based on cultural constructions of biology which in Kyrgyzstan is seen to be the passing on of “natural” substances such as bone and blood. However, Schneider himself did not escape the understanding of biological facts as pre-social, elaborated through social and cultural processes and did not abandon the distinction between nature and culture he was questioning (Carsten, 2000b).

Building on the cultural turn in kinship studies, which she traces to Schneider, Janet Carsten, from her fieldwork with the Malays of Langkawi Island, developed the idea of “cultures of relatedness”, which emphasise the significance of process in the creation of kinship and personhood:

“I take for granted that the meaning of ‘kinship’ cannot be assumed a priori. I use the term ‘relatedness’ to indicate indigenous ways of acting out and conceptualizing relations between people, as distinct from notions derived from anthropological theory. Ways of living and thinking about relatedness in Langkawi lead me to stress a processual view of personhood and kinship” (Carsten, 1995: 224).

This focus on relatedness should not be seen as existing in either opposition or addition to “biological kinship” but as a complete repositioning and questioning of the view that kinship is a predetermined biological fact which defines relations and position at birth. Rather than, as Schneider does, rejecting the usefulness of the study of kinship altogether, Carsten argues for the importance of attending to how particular people construct ideas of relatedness and the values and meanings attached to them (Carsten, 1995: 225).

The direction which kinship studies in anthropology have taken over the past 20 years provides important intellectual challenges to explanations of kinship still current in some work on Kyrgyzstan. While for anthropologists in the ‘Western’ tradition, “the kinds of

problems changed” (Schneider and Handler, 1995: 193-4) for many other scholars, including those of other disciplines, the significance of kinship for the study of social stability and instability has led to the continued use of structural-functionalist models which emphasise formal sedentary lineage system and its centrality to politico-jural structures in “stateless” societies. This is most clearly the case in works on Central Asia which make use of Evans Prichard’s classic study on the Nuer, informed as it was by the theories of Henry Lewis Morgan (Collins, 2006, Schatz, 2004). Morgan’s theory of society proposed a division between a personal, clan-based society and society founded on property and territory (1964 [1877]: 13-14), a division still applied to analyses of Central Asia today (see, for example Pétric, 2002). This conception of societal forms has been highly influential in both Western and Soviet ethnography, as Kuper notes, “the idea of primitive societies served imperialists and nationalists, anarchists and Marxists” (1988: 239). Evans Prichard and Fortes in their structural functional studies of West and East Africa refined Morgan’s distinction and proposed that these societies be understood as segmentary lineage systems in which nested kinship-based descent groups were understood to form the social structure, able to make and break alliances at moments of political import. The segmentary lineage system as proposed by structural functionalism has been widely rejected in anthropology as unrepresentative of both practices and the categories used by people in societies designated ‘tribal’ (Kuper, 1988: 190-209). In addition, the ideological underpinnings of a division between ‘tribal societies’ and nation states has been shown to be a way of maintaining a distinction between us and them, civilised and barbaric (Colson, 1988 cited in Sneath, 2009b).

Sneath argues that pre-Soviet society in Kyrgyzstan could be better understood as feudal, but that the feudal nature of Kyrgyz society was subsumed within an ethnographic approach informed by Morgan which imposed a segmentary lineage system on nomadic society despite little historical evidence (Sneath, 2009b: 91). He proposes that the translation of local terminology such as *uruu*, *uruk* and *chong uruu* as *rod* and *plem'ia* in Russian, lineage, clan and tribe in English had the effect of reproducing analyses overly influenced by Morgan’s divisions. For Sneath, *uruu* are neither kinship-based nor extended to incorporate all Kyrgyz persons. In his analysis, *uruu* are administrative units of the elite

more akin to aristocratic hereditary rule (2007). Perhaps because of his focus on critiquing western approaches to Central and Inner Asia, Sneath does focus predominantly on the use of ‘tribe’ to describe the political organisation of the region, a tendency which is current in today’s scholarship. He has therefore been criticised for focusing on the political significance, or lack thereof, of kinship in Central and Inner Asia while downplaying the salience of kinship categories in the organisation of everyday life (Abashin, 2009). Sneath argues in response that kinship is of central importance in the daily organisation of life in Central and Inner Asia (and elsewhere) but that this does not indicate “a distinctive type of society that is more fundamentally organised by the principles of kinship than other types, so that we should categorise them as clan or tribal societies” (2009a: 165).

The focus of much of the work on political organisation at state level leaves the analysis of local, lived experience rather undeveloped and fails to extricate the salience of kinship categories for day-to-day relations as anything other than the imposition of social structure. While descent and lineage theory have a long history in anthropology as models for the explanation of social structure, in this thesis I draw on recent theories of relatedness (the processes of creating relations between people) to examine how patrilineal descent and *uruu* are themselves produced both in the elaboration of ties considered to be predetermined by biology, and in the creation of “relatedness” between kin at the household and other levels. This requires me to take an analytic stance which would perhaps be rejected by the Kyrgyz themselves, in so far as descent and *uruu* are expressed by most as ties which are determined at conception and considered to pass on the primary substance³⁶ which creates people of the same kind, and differentiates them from others (cf. Mokeev, 2008). Nevertheless, this analytic stance is justified by the recognition that biological processes do not sit outside of social understandings. By this I mean that, while certain relations may be presented and understood by my informants as determined by biological “facts”, such “facts” can never in any society explain the social elaboration of biological processes. The temptation, then, is to reject any discussion of the division

³⁶ The primary substance is conceptualised as bone, passed on from the father. Blood, passed on from the mother, is also required for the creation of persons, but does not take precedence (cf. Delaplace and Empson, 2007 for an example of similar conceptualisations in Mongolia).

between social and biological on the grounds that such a division is a purely Western cultural construct. However, the construction of such a division plays a powerful role in Kyrgyz concepts of relatedness and of the person and it is necessary to attend to how this is expressed in practice. In many ways, it is the contrast between the categorising of people evident at formal rituals such as funerals and the day-to-day interactions between many of these same people which establishes the central tension I hope to examine in this chapter.

RECOUNTING THE *URUU*

As I became curious about the ways in which people traced and experienced their relationships with one another, I was directed to those deemed to possess formal knowledge of Kyrgyz kinship, mostly older men considered powerful and learned. In this section I will focus on discussions I had with two such men: Bolushbek ata a *sanjyrachy* (someone who collects and recounts genealogical records) and Chyngyz agai, a history teacher. I will examine these conversations as a way to understand the different kinds of knowledge they presented me with, and address some of the major ways that people both trace and recount relatedness.

Sanjyrachy

Bolushbek ata's home takes some finding, tucked away as it is between two streets of the normally grid like village. Shielded by trees and bushes, a path winds its way behind houses belonging to his *tuugandar*, one of whom, Temirlan baike, is taking me to meet his *baike* (uncle). At home with his wife, Tolkun apa, Bolushbek ata welcomes me warmly with an invite to drink tea and we settle down to make some introductions. In tracing his connection to me Bolushbek ata recounts his friendship with Shirin apa (the grandmother

of my host family in Bishkek, and sister in law of my host in Ak-Too) and her deceased husband, with whom he had been close friends and work colleagues:

Bolushbek ata: “We grew up together. He was Azyk, we were *bir uruu ichinde* (inside a single *uruu*).

Rebecca: “Are you also Tokoch?”

Bolushbek ata: “No, no, we are Kara Azyk. Ah, so you know what Tokoch is? You live with Salkyn apa and so you are like a daughter of Tokoch! My wife is also Tokoch... We lived in Kara-Jygach, like the Tokoch, but we built a house and then came here in 1958. So, Kara Azyk... you want to know where we came from? Where our grandfathers came from? Where did we begin?”

He takes out a pile of small notebooks and putting on his glasses begins to list *uruu* “inside” the Azyk *chong uruu*. From these small notebooks vast webs of connections emerged tracing relatives back much further than the seven fathers Kyrgyz people are supposed to know, and extending much wider than the single lines of descent most people are familiar with. Beginning with Dengehiz Khan he recounted connections between the various *uruu* represented in Ak-Too, placing them into sibling and father son relationships as he progressed.

Bolushbek ata, like other *sanjyrachy* can recount immense networks of men related by descent but women are rarely remembered. While we had begun our conversation by finding genealogical connections through women, women involved in the creation of *uruus* (by both giving birth and raising children, as well as facilitating the occasions when genealogies become visible and salient, such as life-cycle ceremonies), this tracing relied on a flexible position of women who could take on their husband’s or fathers *uruu* as necessary. Bolushbek ata named his wife as Tokoch, an *uruu* affiliation passed down from her father, yet in the next breath she is absorbed into the Kara Azyk *uruu*, members of which moved to Ak-Too and built their homes there. Perhaps because of this movement between *uruu* women remain relatively invisible and silent in these official reckonings.

The history teacher

The association people in Ak-Too make between kinship and history was apparent from those I was advised to consult. Chyngyz agai, a native resident of Ak-Too and history teacher at the village school, lived along with his wife and son in a rather rundown former outbuilding of the boarding school. Rushing in from class to eat the lunch his wife, a cook at the school, had prepared, he attempted to answer my questions about the significance and scope of *uruu* relations in Ak-Too. With reference to a small book of *sanjyra*, he recited that the *eng chong uruu* (the biggest *uruu*) of the area was Azyk, and then went on to read out the other *uruu*, *Azyk ichinde* (inside of the Azyk *uruu*), linking them to the surrounding villages. Not for him the hand written notebooks, nor any personal information about the characters which appeared therein. Charged with teaching the importance of knowing one's *jeti ata* (seven fathers) to classes of Ak-Too schoolchildren, Chyngyz agai had also been involved in creating the elaborate hand painted posters which adorned the walls of the school's history corridor. Between a small yurt and a poster listing a 12 year animal calendar, one poster presented the neatly organised *uruu* and *chong uruu* which were said to incorporate all Kyrgyz people into a singular genealogical history. But how did the *jeti ata* fit in to the bigger picture of the *sanjyra* contained within this poster and the book Chyngyz was consulting? In response to my question about his own *jeti ata*, Chyngyz was less sure than when reciting the *sanjyra* of the area and linking them to certain villages. "Sulaiman, Budaichy, Abydesh, Kemir, Bolot. Hmmm, that's five, yes? One, two, three, four, five. Hmmm. The sixth..." He turned once again to his book of *sanjyra* but could not find his sixth and seventh fathers contained within it.

What can the above conversations tell us about the significance of the *jeti ata* and *sanjyra* in practice in Kyrgyzstan? As we saw above, an *uruu* can be understood as a patrilineal descent group which is in theory exogamous. It can be situated in relation to larger and smaller groupings, thus Tokoch and Kara Azyk can both be said to be part of Azyk. Translating the term into Russian or English suggests a history of ethnographic theorising about 'tribal' societies that imposes a divide between societies considered to be more or

less politically advanced, a position recent reappraisals of kinship as relatedness would reject. Nevertheless, *uruu* does remain an important category and should be understood alongside *jeti ata* as significant in the tracing of identity through relatedness. Gulette argues that both *sanjyra* and *jeti ata* are mnemonic devices which aid the recounting of genealogical knowledge (2006: 3), and that they are used to emphasise the importance of such knowledge even if in day to day life most people are unaware of or unable to remember them (2006: 4). The difference between overarching kin identities and personal histories emerged time and again when discussing people's *uruu*. All were sure of the village or place of their *uruu*³⁷ but few could make a confident list of ancestors through which they traced their connection. What then is the significance of these genealogical accounts?

Recent anthropological work on kinship in Kyrgyzstan that have drawn on ideas of relatedness (Gulette, 2006) and patron-client relations (Ismailbekova, 2011) highlight the manner in which local kinship theories are employed in political contexts. The concept of genealogy has been used to express the unity of the Kyrgyz people (Gulette, 2006) through connection with ideas of national and ethnic continuity, and *uruu* relationships still hold political and economic influence which may, however, be more appropriately analysed as patron - client relationships rather than 'natural' kinship (Ismailbekova, 2011). The tracing of relatedness through genealogy does, then, have real effects. Gulette (2006), Ismailbekova (2011) and Sneath (2007) all emphasise the important political work the concept of *uruu* can take on, and at the same time highlight how interpretations which focus on kinship as a structuring principle fail to investigate the way such relations are produced. However, at the same time, for many people genealogy as represented by *sanjyra* and *jeti ata* has little political salience in their lives (Pétric, 2002). This is not to say that the practice of genealogical relatedness is not significant in other fields of life. The significance of *uruu* affiliations in Ak-Too becomes clear when we look at the distribution

³⁷ This is something to which I shall return in detail in the Chapter Four.

of land during the process of privatization in the 1990s³⁸. In addition, as we saw in the opening example, genealogical relatedness in the form of the *uruu* holds particular importance during life cycle ceremonies such as funerals when it is membership in *uruu* groups which determine one's participation and material support for the immediate family of the deceased. The recounting of *sanjyra* and the tracing of the *jeti ata* are significant in classifying who is similar and who is different and as such who should participate in such life cycle ceremonies.

“WE SOCIALISE WITH OUR RELATIVES”

The lineage paradigm in anthropology has tended to emphasise a distinction between social organisation, as organised according to descent based kinship, and family life (cf. Freedman, 1979). Participation in funerals, the recounting of *sanjyra* and *jeti ata*, are practices which demonstrate strong concern with kinship as formal and normative. *Toi* (feast, celebration, life-cycle ceremonies) are central to creating and recreating kin relatedness. However, such formal, normative kinship does not adequately describe the flexible ways in which such norms are created through daily practices. Nor does it describe other ways of positioning oneself in the world. In this section I will look at the way everyday practices can redefine kinship categories.

The village head

³⁸ In Chapter Four I will investigate the significance of kin ties and *uruu* groups in the distribution of land according to *tuulgan jer* (birth place). Rather than seeing *uruu* as the cause of political and economic effects, I will examine the processes through which *uruu* has been and continues to be salient.

Nurlan baike, a man in his 40s who held the unpaid position of *aiyl bashchy* (village head) is a big man who carries his authority purposefully. He had invited me to drink tea with him while he explained the details of his *uruu* connections. On arriving at his home, he showed me around his yard pointing out the mill he had bought to make oil from rape seed to sell at the market and the *moncho* (bathhouse) his sons rented out to bring in some cash. As a member of the Mamai *uruu*, he considers himself to be of the founding and still dominant kin group of Ak-Too. Accompanied by the sounds of his older daughter's children playing, visiting for a few days from a neighbouring village, Nurlan baike gave the names of married couples and their children whom he identified as Mamai, and living on the same or neighbouring streets. As I attempted to order these relations as Bolushbek ata had while recounting his *sanjyra* I became increasingly confused by Nurlan baike's explanation of his *uruu*. There was no tracing of particular *sanjyra* or the *jeti ata* which might link these families, and people no longer residing in Ak-Too were mentioned only in passing. Women were even present – although only those who had married into the *uruu*. Instead of the formal tracing of *uruu* relationships I had come to expect, the emphasis was on shared interactions and mutual help, on co-residence on the same or neighbouring streets, and on family units.

In particular it was when it came to financial ties that the relationships were particularly salient. Nurlan baike told me how together the members of his *uruu* living on the same street had formed a rural credit co-operative, initially borrowing money from a UNDP project³⁹ aimed at providing much needed access to financial inputs for poor farming families in the rural sector. However, this rural credit cooperative was no longer functioning as the members could not agree on suitable joint purchases for the loans. The neighbours and *uruu* members did however continue to participate in *raja*, a form of mutual aid organised along *uruu* lines whereby members contribute a set amount for lifecycle ceremonies, both *jakshylyk* (good, happy) and *jamandyk* (bad, sad) occasions. While *raja* could be given as an example of the functioning of *uruu* as a corporate kin group, in Nurlan Baike's examples, this *raja* was between only those *uruu* members living

³⁹ See Pelkmans (2003) for a detailed discussion of this programme.

in close proximity and socialising on a daily basis. In addition, in the past women of the *uruu* had formed a group to “play” *chërnaia kassa*, a kind of rotating savings scheme, often ‘played’ by older women. Other villagers had formed such groups on the basis of professional ties and shared membership in a *kollektiv*, or between classmates. A number of neighbouring households had got together to participate in *sherine* (a regular feast which participants take turns to host) during the summer, whereby each household took it in turn to slaughter an animal and host a feast where the meat was divided between them. As one of Nurlan Baike’s neighbours, a member of the same *uruu*, later commented to me, “*tuugandar menen katyshabyz*” (“we socialise with our relatives”).

From this discussion with Nurlan baike it emerges that while *uruu* is a salient category people use in the tracing of relatedness, it is perhaps not in the manner proposed by lineage theory which has long been applied to Central and Inner Asia. The *uruu* as Nurlan baike described it did not function as a corporate group despite taking part in life cycle ceremonies. A sense of being related, which comes both from identifying as members of the same *uruu* and in spending time together, is important as a basis for sharing financial hardship and mutual aid. However, this sense of being related was also created by and important for celebrations and socialising more informally. Nevertheless, in Ak-Too, the connections and mutual aid Nurlan baike spoke of were often present between neighbours of different *uruu* and it was residence rather than *uruu* which seemed to be the basis for certain forms of social interaction and assistance. Relatedness is differentiated, and proximity plays a part in this. Unlike other villages in the area, Ak-Too had been settled by people moving to the village when it was established as a *kolkhoz* (collective farm) and later *sovkhoz* (state farm), so it was made up of many different *uruu*. In only some parts of the village were whole streets identified as Mamai, possibly because they were the first *uruu* to have settled and established the *kolkhoz*⁴⁰. Smaller groupings of *uruu* relations were not only identified in terms of residence but also as being closer or more distant, as we saw in the hierarchical serving of food to guests at the funeral, and various forms of feasting and socialising are central to this distinction.

⁴⁰ I will return in Chapter Four to the various stages of settlement and resettlement which villages in the commune have undergone in the last 150 years, and to the linking of *uruu* and place.

Daughter of Ak-Too

Before moving to Ak-Too, I had spent many evenings discussing with Aida eje the various people I might come to know there. Seated in her small Bishkek kitchen sipping tea, we had sat late into the night while she listed the many children and grandchildren of her father's brothers, calling her mother on the phone to check number and names of the children she was less familiar with, those living in Ak-Too or the daughters of her father's brothers who had married away to other parts of the country. A small woman in her forties, always neatly and fashionably dressed, her dyed black hair never showing the white that had arrived with the shock of her husband's death 10 years earlier, Aida eje had welcomed me into her family in Bishkek and suggested to her maternal aunt that I go and live with them in Ak Too. She was always keen for me to understand more about Kyrgyzstan and she happily recited the extensive list of connections, with prompting from me and her daughters. Responding to my questions about relatives traced through her father, it was only to be expected that Aida eje focused on her own *uruu* connections rather than those of her children and deceased husband whom she would normally be expected to participate with more frequently. However, over the 18 months that I spent between Ak-Too and Bishkek it became evident that this family were more intimately involved with the Aida eje's native family than her relatives by marriage. The extent of this group was defined in terms of being *bir atanyn baldary* (the children of one father), in this case the descendants of Aida eje's grandfather, Kylych ata. It was clear that those she knew best were those who lived in Bishkek and who socialised together; sharing feasts and life-cycle ceremonies and participating in *raja* with them.

Women are essential to the maintenance of *uruu* and familial connections⁴¹ but they take on different personhoods at different times. At life cycles ceremonies the *kelins* of the group are separated from the daughters of the *uruu*, the former performing the work necessary to the smooth running of the feast while the latter are guests and thus not expected to cook or work. These host guest relations indicate the high esteem that affinal kin are held in, esteem which characterises the relationship as one of distance and respect. Women born into a family and women who marry into it are thus seen as different kinds of persons (cf. Astuti, 2000). Nevertheless, the more day-to-day interactions of this *bir atanyn baldary* (children of one father) group saw Aida eje and the Tokoch *kelins* socialising together and alternating in hosting informal dinners as a form of *sherine*, demonstrating that they could also be the same kind of person. Personhood is therefore flexible and an individual's position with regard to her extended kin is not fixed and immutable, but worked out in practice and according to physical proximity as well as friendship and affection.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO “LINEAGE SOCIETIES”

Uruu is clearly a salient category in Kyrgyz relatedness. However, it is not the whole story. Rather than rejecting the significance of *uruu*, I have here preferred to examine how it interacts with other forms of relatedness. In this I have taken my cue from works which deal specifically with societies often analysed as patrilineal (Lambert, 2000, Stafford, 2000). These studies address the gaps left by a formalist approach to lineage-based kinship relations, and demonstrate that a focus on everyday interactions can illuminate forms of interaction that are equally important to the creation of relatedness, thus highlighting the role of processes in societies where kinship has often been presented as a *fait accompli*. They are concerned with the processes through which significant relationships are created and how these are locally conceptualised. Stafford's work (2000) on Chinese relatedness

⁴¹ I will return below to a discussion of women's role in the maintenance and re-creation of the *uruu*.

draws attention to how particular definitions of kinship have the effect of presenting lineages as ‘natural’ and immutable, when in fact they are socially malleable, and may be “reinforced and cut... and also extended” (2000: 52) to incorporate or distance people inside and outside of lineage definitions particularly through cycles such as *yang* (between parents and children) and *laiwang* (between friends, neighbours and acquaintances). These cycles require ongoing maintenance and hard work, and despite being fluid are articulated with the ‘rigid’ patrilineal system. Lambert’s focus (2000) demonstrates the existence of a continuum between ‘optative’ and ‘non-optative’ forms, a continuum which is expressed through affection (2000: 88). Consanguineal relationships are considered the ideal by local people, and other relationships often invoke this model (2000). Affinal relations are seen as outside of affective consanguineal relationships, and people therefore attempt to convert the former into the latter.

While these examples are drawn from contexts rarely compared with Kyrgyzstan, they provide interesting ways of thinking about other factors which articulate with lineages. They are thus useful in both theoretical and substantive terms in so far as they enable us to broaden our comparative framework and perhaps make tentative steps towards understanding kinship in Kyrgyzstan as a combination of both formal ideational practices and the everyday interactions of relatedness. By seeking to understand both consanguineal relationships and optative relationships as equally created, we can perhaps better understand how different kinds of relationship articulate with each other.

Nurlan baike’s descriptions of the forms of financial aid and socialising his neighbours, as *uruu* members, engage in, and Aida eje’s interactions with the daughters-in-law of her own *uruu* show how every day practices of relatedness can work to include and exclude people as *uruu* members who would not necessarily be recognised as such in official accounts like *sanjyra* and *jeti ata*. *Uruu* membership can thus be flexibly attributed in order to include and exclude. Rather than understanding persons as being defined at birth by their genealogical inheritance (often expressed as both cultural and biological), the above examples demonstrate that it may be more useful to understand both men and women as

engaging in processes which contribute to their recognition as different kinds of *uruu* members, as different kinds of persons, over time. In the rest of this chapter I will address both these issues in turn by looking at the role of women in the maintenance of the *uruu* and alternative ways of understanding personhood beyond the idioms and practice of kinship.

Perizat's choice

Perizat, a young woman in her 20s, had come to Ak-Too four years earlier upon her marriage to Temirbek. They had met in the city where both had been studying at university. Although not the youngest son of his family, Temirbek lived with his parents and was in charge of their growing farming work, planting, irrigating and harvesting the fields himself as well as hiring out his truck and small tractor to other villagers. Life has not been easy for Perizat. A quiet woman, she had struggled to fit into the boisterous, lively household of her husband. She had a three year old daughter, and worked occasionally at the school where she had also found it hard to make friends. In the summer of 2008 Perizat and her daughter went to visit her parents in Chui oblast. Autumn and the start of the school term came and went, and Perizat did not return. Her husband's family went on repeated visits to her parents' home to try to persuade her to come back to the village whilst attempting to quell the rumours about the reasons for her departure. They brought back her young daughter yet still Perizat did not return. In late November she finally reappeared in the village amidst rumours of an ultimatum, her husband was said to have specified the first day of the *ash* (memorial feast) being held to mark the end of the mourning period for Maksat's death, his father's brother's son, as the final point he would still allow her to return. On the days of the memorial feast for Maksat, Perizat was quietly serving tea alongside her *abysyn* (co-sisters-in-law), deferentially responding to their instructions on when to replenish the bowls of sweets, biscuits, fruit and sugar laid out for the guests, and rushing back and forth with kettles of boiling water to refill the samovar.

Kelin are expected to be the hardest working people in the household, and this is particularly true when it comes to the preparation and serving of feasts. Feasting is of great significance in Kyrgyzstan and indeed in Central Asia more generally (Werner, 1997), where it plays an important role in social and economic ties between kin, neighbours, friends and colleagues. The memorial feast is of particular significance, like other funeral feasts, for the *uruu*. All members of the *uruu* are expected to be present, and *kelin* who lived far from Ak-Too and rarely visited were all in attendance at this *ash*, cooking, cleaning and serving tea. As I mentioned earlier, people are grouped together into different categories of persons at funeral feasts. The *ash* (memorial feast) is no different. This being a particularly large memorial feast, it ran over three days. On the first, affinal relations and local politicians were invited, on the second, members of the Tokoch *uruu*, and on the third came neighbours and work colleagues. Each group would again divide into smaller groups of perhaps ten people who together would move into the main house, be served tea and various breads, sweets and fruits, before removing to another room where they would arrange themselves around a large table cloth placed on the floor in preparation for the serving of meat. Seating was negotiated through a process of discussion about who was most senior with individuals insisting that others take the *tör* (place of honour farthest from the door), but status being recognised and represented in the eventual places people settled into. This main part of the meal consisted of the serving of either horse meat (reserved for groups of higher status) or mutton followed by *besh barmak* (lit. five fingers – a dish of noodles and meat cut in to small pieces by the guests). Meat is served cut into specific pieces, or *Ustukan* and again these are distributed according to gender and status⁴². Feasting itself thus also demonstrates the way that position is defined according to an individual's relationships with others in attendance; where one sits and which *ustukan* one receives depends on the constitution of the group of guests (Bunn, 2008: 11). Recognition as a certain kind of person is thus relational and not fixed.

⁴² See (Bunn, 2008) for a fuller discussion of the way seating and serving proceed at Kyrgyz feasts.

While I cannot know Perizat's feelings about these events, nor the extent to which she really had a choice in her return, the reception and explanation of her return tells us about how the work a woman provides on certain occasions is understood to be significant for both the *uruu* and her position within it. The other *kelin*, while sympathetic towards Perizat's difficult position agreed that it was appropriate for her husband to have taken his daughter back, she was after all Tokoch, they reasoned, and if Perizat had not attended the *ash* (memorial feast) her return would have become almost impossible. Thus, while her presence at the memorial feast can obviously not solve all her marital problems, it signifies an understanding that by taking seriously the work of the *kelin*, Perizat was maintaining her position as a daughter-in-law and keeping open the possibility that she would return to her marital home. Through her demeanour and hard work she could be understood to have been attempting to present herself as an ideal *kelin* and this was recognised by her *abysyn* (co-sisters-in-law) in their unquestioning acceptance of her presence, despite their reflections on the difficulty of her position in her married household.

This glimpse of a significant moment in Perizat's life allow us to see that affinal relations are important in women's position as a reproducers of the *uruu*, but also for their personhood more generally. In Kyrgyzstan marriage continues to be predominantly virilocal, most newly married *kelin* (daughter-in-law, from the Kyrgyz *kel-* to come, literally incomer) are expected to spend some time living with their husband and his parents, and for those who have married the youngest son the expectation is that they will become part of their parents-in-law's house permanently. Domestic work is one way that young women come to situate themselves within patterns of relatedness and integrate themselves into their married household, rising early to milk the cows and spending their days caring for children and other members of the household, cooking, cleaning and preparing tea⁴³. At the same time *kelin* are central to the reproduction and maintenance of the larger *uruu* through bearing children to ensure the continuation of the lineage, and providing the work necessary to host feasts which substantiate larger *uruu* groupings. As such daughters in law demonstrate that persons of a different kind are required for the re-

⁴³ I will return to the significance of domestic places and domestic tasks in creating relatedness and personhood in Chapter Five.

production of persons of the same kind, *uruu* members (cf. Delaplace and Empson, 2007 for a description of this interstitial personhood in Mongolia.). Work and having children and grandchildren can thus be said to be particularly important for women because of their interstitial position and need to integrate themselves into their husband's family, an integration which succeeds with their changing personhood from daughter-in-law, to mother, to mother-in-law.

An examination of the position of women as defined by the patrilineal system, yet negotiated through everyday practices, demonstrates that people can be related but not the same. Relatedness in practice extends outside the *uruu* to incorporate women into lineage society beyond the genealogical tracing of relationships. The practice of relatedness is thus a process of integration during which personhood changes over time.

PERSONHOOD BEYOND KINSHIP

Up until now this chapter has focused on kinship, both in ideational terms and in practice, to investigate how relatedness is constructed and enacted in the making of persons. I would like now to think some more about forms of personhood outside of both lineage paradigms and practices of relatedness which are significant in Kyrgyzstan. I do this in order to disrupt the presentation of Kyrgyzstan as a 'kinship' society, where social organisation and personhood are circumscribed by lineage paradigms.

Upbringing and the moral person

One alternative way of understanding personhood and social hierarchies of relatedness in Kyrgyzstan is to attend to the processes whereby people can become socially recognised moral persons. The concept of *tarbiia* (education, upbringing) is significant to Kyrgyz ideas of the person because it describes a process and implies a relation central to *becoming* a moral person. As Liu describes it, *tarbiia* can be understood as a process “whereby a person's capacity to understand and make judgements is always in formation under the tutelage of his or her superiors.” (2006: 232). This process of becoming a moral person proceeds through intersubjective engagements and involves changes in both personal and social codes. Bunn (2000: 287-292) notes that *tarbiia* has often been translated by the Russian term *vospitanie* and describes the general moral upbringing to which children are subjected. However, it differs in so far as it is a process of learning through watching and listening to one’s elders rather than a didactic moral education, and Bunn describes everyday social situations where conversations are held and stories told which reinforce moral norms of behaviour through indirect comment on the actions of other.

In my experience, these stories focused in particular on transgressions at life stages where people were becoming new kinds of persons and as such served to illustrate how the social transformations could proceed. The narratives told also provide an opportunity for the narrator and audience to develop their position in relation to such transgressions. As Ochs and Capps have highlighted, narratives “do not present objective, comprehensive accounts of events but rather perspectives on events” (2001: 45). Discussion and reflection on others’ practice in this way is thus a significant part of moral reasoning. Zigon has argued that this kind of moral reasoning occurs particularly at moments of “moral breakdown” (2007) such as that following the break-up of the Soviet Union. It also seems that such moments may be experienced at the individual rather than societal level. Narratives about and comments upon people who related to their families in unusual ways, not providing the support or fulfilling the role they were expected to, often included reflections on them being *kishi emes* (not persons). These narratives may not only be part of commenting on the personhood of others but also form a part of creating these personhoods. As we saw above, the return of Perizat to her married home was commented upon and interpreted,

demonstrating how social interactions are sites of learning in response to new situations rather than simply a playing out of social structures. The recounting of such situations serves to reinforce moral norms but at the same time to open up space for an awareness that these moral codes are negotiable. The ideas of *tarbiia* and submission to one's elders are thus not fixed and unchanging but emerge through negotiation and accommodation.

Moral tales often focused on relationships of power, where those in positions of authority were evaluated in terms of their ability to create stable and fair situations, sometimes through downplaying their own status position. According to Liu (2002) and Rasanayagam (2002), these norms of behaviour extend beyond person-to-person relations to incorporate the relations between persons and the state. These conceptions echo Soviet ideologies of state-individual relations and seem to be common across Central Asia. For example, Liu notes that the desire of his Uzbek informants in Osh for a strong Uzbek state drew on a conception of the relations between states and persons which emphasises control and authority, thus "the individual is seen as always being under definite hierarchies of social authority." (2006: 232). In addition, Liu argues that the state is often evaluated by citizens in terms of the personhood of the leader, rather than the functioning of state institutions and the appropriateness of government policies. The individual personhood of the leader is thus invested with significant potency. This location of agency in an individual seems to contradict the emphasis placed by genealogy on inherited position and collective identity, reinforcing a conceptual divide between 'Soviet' and 'Kyrgyz' personhood.

I would now like to take a more in depth look at one man's individual agency as expressed through an account of his involvement in family, work, politics and friendship networks. This account is more detailed than the ethnographic examples already presented in this chapter, and is based on many conversations and shared experiences. I hope this snapshot of Aibek baike's life will serve to illuminate a number of aspects important for personhood beyond kinship relations, and thus not yet touched upon in this chapter.

“A man must make something of his life”

Aibek baike, in his late thirties at the time of my fieldwork, was a cheerful man, often joking and quick to tease. His round body revealed his love of sweets and chocolates, even those destined for his much-loved children. Trained as a vet, Aibek baike had never found employment in his profession, qualifying as he had in the early 1990s when agriculture was in a state of great change and jobs were few and hard to come by. Nevertheless, Aibek baike seemed generally content with his life, able to draw on his education to ensure his flock of sheep and herds of cows prospered and increased, providing a decent income for his mother, wife, son and three daughters, as well as helping his adult sisters in times of need. As the only son and the head of his family since his father's early death while Aibek baike was still at university, he took his responsibilities very seriously, always prompt to host a feast when necessary, meticulous in attending to his in laws, and generous to his nephews and nieces. Nevertheless, Aibek baike felt that there was something he was meant to do with his life. Although unsure what this might be, he wished to do *something* and explained that his father had brought him up to be an active person, and he had been educated to achieve some kind of formal position.

He had recently bought a car in order to earn some extra income as a taxi driver between Ak-Too and Bishkek, and during spring was much in demand for both his veterinary knowledge and his mode of transport. As the brother of my host Nur, he would often offer me a place in his taxi when I needed to travel to Bishkek – he liked to ensure I arrived there safely and it gave him an opportunity to pay his respects to Shirin apa, his *kudagyi* (female affinal relation). One day in late spring as the local elections for village and raion representatives were approaching, I travelled with Aibek baike to Bishkek. Rather than collecting a car full of passengers in the village, as he usually would, Aibek baike decided to drive first to Kochkor. He had business there, he said, which he needed to resolve before going on to Bishkek. I was happy to wait and so we went together. In the nearby town, Aibek baike parked close to the local government office dealing with the registration of births and deaths, and entered the building to join the queue. After some time he emerged

with a spring in his step. Reluctant to tell me at first, he finally revealed that he had been to get a new passport so that he would be able to run in the upcoming elections⁴⁴. He had decided that he should take on a formal, active role in the area and this was how he planned to fulfil the position he felt he had been prepared for. His family however, were not so enthusiastic. On my next visit to their house his wife, Elmira, complained to me that he should not become involved in such things, they only brought complications, and anyway didn't they have enough to worry about with four children and an elderly grandmother to support? Nevertheless, Aibek baike was committed to his course of action and the following month he was successfully elected as a village deputy, unfortunately the lesser of the two positions in his opinion.

In addition to his family, work and political ambitions, Aibek baike was also an active member of a network of classmates. The summer of 2008, like summers before it, brought sunshine, watermelons and parties to celebrate the 20th and 40th anniversaries of school graduations. Aibek baike had left school shortly before the end of the Soviet Union and continued his studies at university in Bishkek, taking a degree in veterinary science. He had returned to Ak-Too upon completion of his university degree because as the only son of his family he was expected to inherit his father's home and care for his parents in old age. While many of his classmates with whom they had studied for 11 years no longer resided in Ak-Too, the women often having moved away for marriage, the men for work, the celebration of his school graduation anniversary was a grand affair and widely attended. While in daily life Aibek baike did not remain in close contact with all his classmates, those who still resided in Ak-Too constituted his primary friendship circle, celebrating birthdays together, sharing feasts and importantly assisting each other with planting and harvesting crops. Predominantly, yet not exclusively, these relationships are maintained between men, and women tend to become part of their husband's circle of classmates. Thus, Aibek baike's wife, although having attended the same school in Ak-Too, did not generally socialise with her classmates, who were two years younger than her

⁴⁴ Documentation is particularly important for officially recognised forms of personhood (Humphrey, 2002c)

husband, but would nevertheless be expected to attend the anniversary of her own graduation in 2010.

Relationships with *klastashs* (Russian *odnoklasniks*; classmates) and, for people who attend university, with *odnogradniks* (Russian groupmates), are considered significant, lasting bonds. Built on childhood friendships mostly confined to the 30 or so others with whom one shares a classroom⁴⁵, the classmates can remain important throughout one's adult life and the anniversary parties are a way to celebrate and demonstrate these ties. The occasion of the anniversary of his school graduation was an opportunity for Aibek baike to celebrate his multiple relationships with classmates, professionals, consanguineal and affinal relations. On the evening of the party Aibek baike put on his best suit and drove his in-laws, mother and wife to the café. Chief organiser of the event, Aibek baike was also in charge of the festivities. A confident MC, he took charge of the room and invited all the *jengeler* (sisters-in-law) and *jezdeler* (brothers-in-law) to join in a game involving passing balloons along a line. Other games were played, each time guests dividing into groups of classmates on the one hand and their 'in-laws' on the other.

It is possible to understand the classmate relationship as similar to siblingship in so far as it is idealised as a lasting relation based on shared experience and bringing with it expectations of assistance and support. Affinal terminologies are not reserved solely for those with whom one can claim a link based on marriage but are used also to refer to the wives and husbands of classmates. However, rather than seeing classmate relationships as a form of fictive kinship, implying as this does that some kin relationships are 'true' in a biological sense, the use of such terminologies serve to highlight how *uruu* and descent are ideational factors which provide a conceptual model for many kinds of relationship. It is the sharing of time, of important life stages, of feasting together and helping one another with work and connections which are the significant elements in the practice of relatedness.

⁴⁵ The Kyrgyz school system predominantly maintains the Soviet practice of pupils remaining with a single group throughout their school career, from age 7 to 18.

This brief look at Aibek baike's life serves to demonstrate that men's personhood is strongly linked to work, when work is a way of contributing to one's family, *uruu* and the state, as well as receiving recognition. Similar to Soviet ideas about work, hard workers are people that are listened to and respected people while those who are said to just gossip and not do well by their families and *uruu* are sometimes described as *kishi emes* (not people). One's social standing is directly impacted upon by professional achievements and the meaningfulness of work. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, meaningful work related to one's training and education has proved increasingly hard to come by. While being successful with animals is highly prized, Aibek baike's desire to take political office as a means to realise the potential he saw within himself, and to define himself as a person beyond the bounds of kinship ties, indicates that people still consider an active role outside of one's kin network to be desirable. Such ambitions are not solely for men. Women's work is not only linked to the home, older women in the village can and do take on important local political roles, for example as village deputies, as well as having established careers as teachers, NGO leaders, bookkeepers. Nevertheless, this is significantly influenced by life stage, as we saw above in the case of daughters-in-law for whom important aspects of personhood are linked to their work inside the home⁴⁶.

The conventions for recounting life histories and significant events which mark the development of personhood are, however, highly gendered. Women's tales seem to emphasise process and the development of the self, while men tend to situate agency in the state or in historical processes (Feaux de la Croix, 2010). However, both men's and women's life histories tend to downplay individual accomplishments and emphasise connections to others thereby placing the emphasis on one's place in a larger collectivity and lessening the import of individual agency (Feaux de la Croix, 2010). In this way the tracing of personhood can be understood as similar to that of the tracing of genealogies.

⁴⁶ I will look at this in more detail in Chapter Five.

From the ways that a number of people we have met in this chapter describe some of these processes it is clear that there are gendered differences. In addition, people can move between different kinds of personhood. Japarov (2005) has identified a number of customary life stages of the Kyrgyz which progress from childhood through youth and adulthood, eventually reaching old age. In addition, life cycle ceremonies mark some of the stages in the acquisition of different kinds of personhood over time. Furthermore, people sometimes refer to a twelve year calendar which marks important points in people's lives, these stages roughly corresponding to the movement between life stages. While for young women getting married and bearing children lead to clear changes in their personhood – indicated by the terms used to refer to them – this is not so clear for men. However, there are norms of behaviour for men which indicate that they have moved from youth to adulthood, including taking on family and work responsibilities, as well as reflecting and making moral judgements about others expressed in the process of *tarbiia*. Family seems most significant for women, professional development for men. Yet personal histories may well take the form of gender-acceptable accounts with other points of significance downplayed. For example, men emphasise travel, education, employment and achievements whereas women focus on family and marriage. Clearly while women cannot be said to occupy a single position, neither can this apply to men. Thus to view either as determined by genealogy or by life stage is to ignore the agency of individuals, the day-to-day negotiations of their relationships with others, as well as other factors of significance such as place, the home and death, all of which will be addressed in the chapters to follow.

CONCLUSION

The process of becoming a person in Kyrgyzstan suggests a combination of genealogical reckoning and processes that establish relationships over time through intersubjective engagement. Genealogies and *uruu* membership do not establish individual personhood in so far as they are not considered to carry with them any particular traits or characteristics.

It is in the day-to-day lived experience that people learn how to behave appropriately, how to negotiate a path between expectations of their role and the particular circumstances in which they find themselves. Attending to the positioning of women in genealogical constructions of relatedness highlights the manner in which both *uruu* and everyday practices are differently implicated yet both significant in the creation of personhood for men and for women. My aim was not to associate men with the formal system of reckoning kinship, nor women with everyday lived experience and the creation of relatedness. Such a distinction would perpetuate a divide between the political, jural and domestic arenas of kinship, and the gendered associations each carry. I argue rather that family and *uruu* are both important for Kyrgyz personhood and social organisation.

In my analysis in this chapter I have tried to tread a path between the relatively more formal ideas about kinship expressed by my informants and the relatively more experiential aspects of relationships which I witnessed and took part in. In doing this I am not trying to suggest that genealogical relatedness is not experienced but rather that it should not be conceptualised as existing prior to the processes which form relatedness. As such I have contrasted ways of recounting formal kinship connections with the ways these are practised, as well as alternative ways that people present and experience themselves as social beings. The genealogical reckonings we have seen in this chapter are tied up with relations to place, their starting point is often located in arrival or departure, and those no longer present in the same location are gradually dropped from the genealogical reckoning. But place is significant for personhood and relatedness for other reasons also. The sharing of daily interactions requires co-locality and is central to the integration of women into an *uruu* as well as its maintenance.

Chapter 4 Connecting Persons and Places

We crowd into the small car in a festive atmosphere despite the early-morning hour and the lack of space. It is mid-August 2008 and we are on our way to the village of Chong Tash for the opening of a new school, the building of which Askat baike, an architect by training, has been overseeing for the last 6 months. He has often stayed overnight in the village and come to socialise with residents a great deal; he was even able to use their machinery to work the fields he leased nearby. After many months of building it is finally time for the village to celebrate the completion of the school just in time for the new school year and Askat baike has invited me to attend. Driving along the main road connecting a number of villages in Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) we swerve and bump trying to avoid the dangers of the disintegrating surface. Covering their mouths and noses with their headscarves to protect themselves from the dust filling the car, Askat baike's classmates, Asel eje and Tolkun eje, discuss their attendance at the celebration we are heading towards. Asel eje laughs that hailing from Jungal (the region the road stretches onward towards) her Sayak *uruu* means she is really returning home and will be welcomed like a daughter.

Chong Tash has grown since the end of the Soviet Union and the privatisation of land holdings and *sovkhos* assets. No longer the site of *sarais* (byres) and a cemetery alone, people have returned here to farm their land and tend their animals. However, it has yet to be officially recognised as a village and does not yet have its own administrative head. This has, until recently, significantly impeded villagers' ability to create local institutions like a school or a medical facility. Nevertheless, with the assistance of funding from ARIS⁴⁷, matched with *ashar* (community labour)⁴⁸, Chong Tash has finally managed to

⁴⁷ Kyrgyzstan national development agency

⁴⁸ The use of the term implies connections with pre-Soviet practices and with recent self-conscious attempts to create feelings of *yntymak* (community unity, good relations), which I will address further in the next chapter. However, it has recently been encouraged by the various forms of support available from national and international agencies which require match funding or contributions of labour for their projects. A political movement called Ashar (Goodwill) was established in 1989 with the aim of supporting the needs of ethnic Kyrgyz and ameliorating the position of the Kyrgyz language. This is distinct from the phenomenon which I discuss here.

build its school. Until the building of this school, families with older children had either decided not to move to the Chong Tash, or to remain only with preschool age children (up to age 7) while older children lived with relatives in other villages nearby or the boarding school in Ak-Too in order to attend lessons. There is relief that the school will finally allow more families to live together and also excitement at the prospect of state employment. Young women with a university education living in the village are keen to put their qualifications to paid use and supplement the incomes their families currently make from farming and herding.



Figure 1 Prestigious guests at a school opening



Figure 2 Inside a yurt set up for a feast celebrating a school opening.

Villagers gather outside the new school where *boz üis* have been erected and a feast is being prepared, tables arranged outside and loudspeakers hooked up to a microphone. At last the officials arrive; a ribbon is stretched across the school door and duly cut. Then the speeches begin. In turn, the visitors praise the relatives (*tuugandar*) of Chong Tash for coming together to build the school, noting how it will enable the children to stay and the community to grow over time. Moving to the *boz üi* (yurt) to enjoy the feast, the celebrations commence. With music blaring from the loudspeakers outside, more speeches are made and toasts given to the success of the school and the future of the village. Eventually, it comes to Askat baike to speak and he proceeds to give a toast which is much appreciated by the other guests. Commending the success of the occasion and the feast prepared, he proclaims “this has become my *tuulgan jer*⁴⁹ (literally birthplace). Coming

⁴⁹ I will discuss this term in detail below.

here every day, drinking tea and eating bread with you, celebrating feasts together and sharing *sherine* (a feast which participants take turns hosting), we have become *bir tuugan* (relatives)".

INTRODUCTION

Origin place, place of return, burial place. *Tuulgan jer* occupies a central position in people's relationship to place in Kyrgyzstan and is meaningful for diverse senses and articulations of personhood. *Tuulgan jer* expresses a connection to place stretching back through time by means of the recounting of emplaced genealogies. More recently it has been a motivating factor in decisions about land privatisation and resettlement following the end of the Soviet Union. The speeches and toasts given at the Chong Tash school opening emphasise the importance of relationships and commitment to place in producing a village community able to create a future for itself. At the same time the speeches allude to the significance of place itself in the dynamics of relatedness. It was through spending time in the village, working and socialising with residents there that Askat baike said they had become related. Talk of *tuulgan jer* and of belonging to a place establishes and expresses connections with people and their *uruu*. Thus, it is a way of asserting relatedness with both place and persons. In this way, a relationship to *tuulgan jer* is both a property of the person transmitted by genealogy, and a form of relatedness that can be acquired through engagements with place.

In this chapter I look more closely at the significance of relationships with place for personhood. I do this because when talking with people in Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) it was of concern to them to provide an account of themselves by establishing their own connections not only with other people but also with places. As such, this chapter builds on the work of the previous chapter, which discussed Kyrgyz relatedness and personhood by examining the importance of genealogical and other

relationships for Kyrgyz conceptions of the person. I do this by discussing what kinds of relatedness are significant for places and what kinds of places are significant for relatedness. While relations with place are multiple, incorporating the different locations people have lived and travelled to (for education, work, trade or leisure amongst other things), most frequently my interlocutors spoke of their *tuulgan jer*. They did this seemingly for four reasons: to explain their *uruu* connections in other terms; to allude to certain personal qualities associated with particular places; to express an emotional connection with aspects of place; and, to explain the location of the land they owned. Therefore, I discuss how place and relatedness are intertwined through an examination of the multiple meanings of *tuulgan jer* using ethnography to highlight the local incorporation and reworking of statist policies towards persons and places.

My aim in this chapter is to investigate how historical and political dynamics have created the places where I carried out my fieldwork, but also to see how these were locally incorporated and reworked, and how these processes have in turn shaped current relations between persons and places in Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration). My outline of these historical processes relies on interpretations of the archival record, which is overwhelmingly a record of those in power. The problem of a focus on history as a process of state making is that it presents change as one of political conquest which happen as crises, rather than day to day experiences which slowly build to change. Thus, the ‘arrival of socialism’ and ‘privatisation’ are both long processes of gradual change yet are often remembered individually and collectively (including by academic discourse) as moments of dramatic and traumatic change. In addition, relying on written sources privileges those in power. Bunn (2011) argues that in Kyrgyzstan orality is a primary means of recounting history because until relatively recently, people were not settled in villages but were moving within their environment, an environment which was not delineated by architectural markers of what had gone before⁵⁰. For her it is in the interconnections between people and places that historical narratives unfold. In order to incorporate the

⁵⁰ While I agree that it is necessary to attend to oral accounts of the past, which I do here when relating processes of collectivisation, sedentarisation and privatisation, the Soviet and recent post Soviet past are very much present and active in physical structures which remain, such as state farm buildings.

experience of Kyrgyz citizens and their alternate ways of experiencing and imagining place, I include the voices of people I interviewed during fieldwork. I do this in the section on collectivisation and resettlement in Ak-Too alongside academic historical perspectives, while in sections focusing on more recent processes of privatisation and resettlement, I draw exclusively on conversations and visits made with people to their *tuulgan jer*. Such an approach, I hope, highlights the power relationships which sometimes fade in to the background in anthropological studies of place.

Places of relatedness

In Kyrgyzstan, the tracing of relatedness is primarily effected through the recounting of genealogies which are emplaced. Abramzon (1971:29) argues that different Kyrgyz tribes were originally founded in specific places, such as the mountain ranges of the Tian Shan, Pamir Alai, Sayan Altai and Kunlun. The present day tracing of genealogies through recounting *sanjyra* often involves accounts of how particular *uruu* and ancestors came to be located in particular places, through migrations politically and economically necessary. These connections between *uruu* and place are expressed most particularly through the idea of *tuulgan jer*.

In practice there are a number of difficulties when trying to translate *tuulgan jer* in English. *Tuulgan*, from *tuu* - to be born, and *jer* – land, could mean literally ‘birth place’. However, this belies the fact that this may be where one’s father, grandfather, or older ancestor was born, but is not necessarily one’s own place of birth. Alternatively, it could be translated as ‘origin place’ but this implies an immutable connection to the land which obscures the historical processes through which places have come to be seen as *tuulgan jer*, processes I will examine in more detail below. In addition, *tuulgan jer* has different implications for men and for women. Men are expected to feel an emotional attachment to their *tuulgan jer*, to live there if possible or return there frequently, and certainly to be buried there. Women,

on the other hand, find that upon marriage their affiliation shifts from the *tuulgan jer* of their father to that of their husband, just as their involvement with the *uruu* changes. More recently, this relationship to *tuulgan jer* has taken on new significance following the breakup of the *sovkhos* when arable land was privatised and parcels were allotted predominantly on the basis of *tuulgan jer*.

Thus, *tuulgan jer* can be flexibly and differentially attributed, has held changing significance over time and exemplifies how kinship and land are intimately connected to Kyrgyz personhood, all of which highlights that its significance must be investigated by attending to the practices, historical and everyday, through which it is invested with meaning. Despite the difficulties in translating *tuulgan jer* it is a useful concept as it acts as a prism through which to investigate Kyrgyz relations with place. It allows us to see how historical and political processes have been integrated into and reworked by local ways of relating to place and of tracing personhood. It demonstrates how genealogy and place can be intertwined in the creation of personhood rather than opposed.

Bunn (2011) highlights that place making in Kyrgyzstan is not a process that can be separated from other processes, such as kinship. The linking of *uruu* and land is not a superficial inscription of kinship categories onto place. However, neither can place and kinship be considered the same thing in Kyrgyzstan. Place does not serve as an organising principle for the Kyrgyz kinship system, unlike for the Pintupi (Myers, 1986) or the Pitjantjatjara (Munn, 1970). While a person may neither have been born in nor live on their *tuulgan jer*, they are still said to be *of* that place. At the same time, being born in a place does not automatically make it one's *tuulgan jer* or make one a member of the *uruu* that lives there. Nor does it serve to connect people in terms of sharing the rights and obligations which come with being of the same *uruu*. Land and residence are nevertheless principles around which people organise and produce relatedness, as we shall see below. In this sense they are both central to the production of persons. By examining connections between person and place that are locally represented as fixed in terms of genealogical

affiliation, I will highlight how they are actually ever changing i.e. processual. In order to do this, it is necessary to look at how they have come to be linked over time.

In Central Asia, an understanding of the history of kinship relations with land is significant for understanding personhood for a number of reasons. Previous accounts (cf Abramzon, 1971) have tended to see Kyrgyz personhood as connected to the land and to the past through ancestral lineages. Boris Petric in his study of Uzbekistan has argued that this relationship with place differs qualitatively between settled peoples and nomadic pastoralists for whom “a particular attachment to ancestry is expressed through genealogical memory...” (Petric, 2002: 86 my translation) and that for these people the land is less delineated according to territory because it is on the depth of genealogical knowledge that solidarity is organised (Petric, 2002:85-86). This argument echoes ideas about the ‘proper’ use of land which underlay attempts to settle nomadic peoples (which I will address further below). At the same time, similar distinctions between the significance of place and kinship underlie analyses of political organisation in Kyrgyzstan, with solidarity on the basis of localism (Radnitz, 2005) or region (Jones-Luong, 2002) standing in opposition to ‘tribal’ affiliation (Collins, 2006, Schatz, 2004) as motivating factors.

These understandings of the linking of persons and place in Central Asia seem to rely on what Ingold has termed the genealogical model. According to this model, the development of personhood is not a process of becoming but of fulfilling a role already determined by descent (Ingold, 2000:135). As a result, the genealogical model accords little significance to place as an active agent in personhood. Indeed, places are often presented as ‘natural’, existing outside socio-cultural contexts, unimportant for personhood and unaffected by human engagement⁵¹. In this way the founding literature on kinship in anthropology allows place to recede into the background (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). However, subsequent reappraisals of these societies (Kuper, 1988) have argued that place is an active agent in the constitution of persons (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995). This chapter seeks to show

⁵¹ This is particularly the case for certain understandings of the *jailoo* (summer pasture) as untouched, pristine nature.

how the posited opposition between personhood founded on the basis of kinship, and personhood founded on the basis of place is called into question by the Kyrgyz example (Beyer, 2011: 456), which demonstrates that place and genealogy are mutually implicated for personhood. The difference here is between genealogy as it is locally understood and practiced, and the ‘genealogical model’ as it has been extrapolated to inform theoretical understandings of social relations in the region.

In addition to focusing on the relationship between kinship and place, it is important to examine the historical context for the cultural construction of place in order to understand the significance of these places today (Hastrup and Fog Olwig, 1997: 9). As De Certeau writes “connecting history to place is the condition of possibility for any social analysis”(Certeau, 1988 [1975]: 69). In Kyrgyzstan relations with the land have been seen as reaching back to a pre-Soviet, pre-Tsarist past, founded in shamanistic and animist belief systems (see, for example, Baialieva, 1972). On the surface the concept of *tuulgan jer* presents a timeless and unchanging relationship between person and place. Yet how and why the concept has been and remains socially salient is closely related to the political and historical context of place. In the places discussed below, there is a complex layering of relationships to place which reflects the political and historical configurations of territorial delineation as well as local ways of engaging with place. Attending to their history also demonstrates that they are not isolated locations but are integrated into a wide and far reaching network of relations. At the same time, in examining the significance of arable land and villages for Kyrgyz personhood I hope to complement research which focuses on the relational import of places in Central Asia such as *jailoos* (summer pastures) and *mazars* (shrines) (Feaux de la Croix, 2010, Bunn, 2011) .

In this chapter I draw on the critiques of the nature/culture divide outlined in the introduction to argue that place is both created by political and historical forces, and is constrained, reworked and resisted by subjective experience, a subjective experience which responds to the agency of human and non human actors alike (Latour, 1993). The term *tuulgan jer*, while it communicates aspects of the person in a number of ways, does so

particularly with reference to an imputed historical connection, an historical connection which has become particularly relevant following the end of the Soviet Union with the use of *tuulgan jer* as the basis for ownership claims in the privatisation of land. By including both an analysis of the historical processes by which persons and places came to be linked in Kyrgyzstan and the ways that people talk about and experience *tuulgan jer* I hope to show how the concept combines contradictory approaches to understandings of place, namely place as socially created and place as relational and agentive. In this chapter I hope to present an account of place making in Ak-Too which gives voice to both.

HISTORICAL PROCESS AND THE LINKING OF PERSONS AND PLACES

The history of Kochkor *raion*, in which Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) lies, echoes the history of Central Asia more generally, which is one of moving peoples, shifting borders and changing administrative designations. New ways of managing people and land created new bureaucratic structures and new forms of personhood, both of which stressed a relationship between place and genealogical kinship. It is therefore crucial to interrogate the processes through which this was effected in order to understand the significance of *tuulgan jer* as it is currently expressed. Rather than seeking to prove or disprove relations to ‘origin places’, in the sections to follow I will elucidate how mobile groups gradually became associated with particular places through outlining some of the major historical changes of the past 1500 years which have impacted these relationships between persons and places.

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries changing social and political configurations meant that populations gradually became more settled and certain groups became linked to particular places. For the purposes of this chapter I will focus on the periods of Russian Tsarist, Soviet and post Soviet rule as it is these political structures which have most clearly impacted on the places and processes I take as my focus. The reason for this is that

whilst in the previous chapter I discussed how persons are both produced through ideological constructions of Kyrgyz kinship as genealogical descent and are created through mundane everyday practices which produce relatedness, the notion of *tuulgan jer* as an expression of *uruu* membership highlights the significant part kinship plays in perceptions of and interactions with place and vice versa. This is a connection that crystallised during the processes of colonisation and sedentarisation of Russian Tsarist and Soviet rule and, more recently, during land privatisation following the end of the Soviet Union (see Beyer, 2011: 456).

The Khanate of Kokand and Tsarist Central Asia

During the second half of the 18th century Northern Kyrgyzstan was ostensibly under the control of the Kokand Khanate which established a number of garrisons in the region. Nevertheless, it was Kyrgyz *manap* (chiefs) which exercised political control over certain groups (*top*) and organised pasture use. These *manap* were not necessarily of the same *uruu* as the members of these groups, it was co-residence and shared relations to the land which constituted these groups, and their genealogical basis was secondary. Pastures were organised according to use rights which were not exclusive although still heritable (Jacquesson, 2010: 50). Winter pastures in particular became increasingly associated with particular camps of *boz üüs*, camps which coalesced around certain *uruu*. Arable land, often located next to spring and autumn pastures, was managed according to exclusive use rights, use rights which often depended on the identity of those who had constructed the irrigation canals which brought water to the fields, and which were passed down from father to son (Jacquesson, 2010: 94). Thus, while the political economic organisation in the region during this period was not determined according to a segmentary *uruu* system, membership in *uruu* did mean that people gradually became associated with particular pastures, and more exclusively with parcels of arable land.

During the second half of the 19th century conflict between powerful Kyrgyz groups led to the seeking of Russian protection and the establishment of a colonial administration in the North (Jacquesson, 2010: 81). Included in the *oblast* of Semireche, the region was initially part of Turkestan between 1867 and 1882, subsequently becoming part of the government of the Steppes between 1882 and 1899, before eventually becoming part of Turkestan once again. These administrative changes were driven by the political concerns of the Tsarist administration rather than economic factors or the constitution of the local population (Pierce, 1960: 48-58). The management of the land at the edge of the empire involved the establishment of new administrative districts. The administration sought to establish territories such as *volost'* (Rus. customary charge) and *aiyl* (camp) and these more often than not took the name of the dominant genealogical groups in the area (Jacquesson, 2010: 86). The gradual conjoining of administrative categories and genealogical groups was an attempt, ironically, to disrupt the power of *manap* and the *rod* they were understood to represent. However, it led to the gradual assimilation of place and *uruu*. Nomadic communities were thus conceptually linked to defined territories, and it was on this basis that settlement was encouraged.

Integration into the Russian Empire meant the creation of knowledge concerning new subjects at the limits of the state. This often took the form of mapping peoples and contrasting their ways of life (sedentary or nomadic) as a way of assessing their level of cultural sophistication. In other parts of the empire native populations had been incorporated into overarching 'systems of social classification' (Khalid, 2007: 126) but in Central Asia the Russian Empire recognised and institutionalised difference (Khalid, 2007: 127). Kyrgyz and Kazakh pastoralists were considered to have no real attachment to place, and the lack of permanent settlements allowed their pastures to be construed as empty space. Based on a conceptual hierarchy which saw sedentary agriculture, with its clear rooting in space, as more advanced than nomadic lifeways, the Tsarist Empire encouraged the settlement of the Kazakh steppe (Campbell, 2011) and Kyrgyz valleys in order to further the economic development of the Kazakh and Kyrgyz peoples (Brower, 2003: 137). However, without the means to enforce settlement of the nomadic population, this settlement was instead promoted amongst Russian colonialists with the view that they

would use the land more effectively and at the same time serve as an example to encourage Kyrgyz settlement. Nevertheless, sedentary agriculture was not widespread and was predominantly practiced by poor families without animals.

In 1916, in a revolt against sedentarisation, and in response to the encroachment of Russian colonisers upon pasture land, the confiscation of animals and the recruitment of men to send to the Russian front of the First World War, many Kyrgyz attacked Russian settlements and the garrisons of Tokmok and Naryn. Following retaliation, large numbers of people fled with their families only to return later and find that all they had had was gone: shelter, animals, community. Known as the *urkun* (exodus) it has been estimated that more than 100,000 died in the uprising against the Tsarist authorities and flight to China, and is still remembered and talked of in this area. Despite this revolt, the Tsarist policies of identifying administrative districts with genealogical groups led to the gradual assimilation of the two, an association which we shall see below continued to be relevant during Soviet times, and still holds importance today.

Integration into the Soviet Union

Despite their failure, Tsarist sedentarisation policies and the appropriation of pasture lands by Russian colonisers significantly altered the Kyrgyz way of life in the 19th century. However, this “sedentary metaphysic” (Malkki, 1992) which underpinned Tsarist attempts at settlement was not unique to the Tsarist empire but could be found throughout Western European imperial rule, and was also central to Soviet ideology which conceptualised peoples on an “evolutionary scale from tribe to nation” (Slezkine, 1994: 450), with settled populations considered to be more economically and culturally advanced. This progression involved moving from ethnic group to nation, and thus with the 1920s came the gradual establishment of republics in Central Asia. In 1921 the area of present-day Kyrgyzstan became part of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist

Republic; in 1924 the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was established; and the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was founded in 1926. Finally, on the 5th of December 1936 the area became a full member of the USSR when it was designated the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. These changing designations over time signalled the changing political status of what would become Kyrgyzstan, changes which mirrored processes taking place throughout the Soviet Union in this early period.

The Soviet government not only undertook the establishment of republics but also engaged in territorial reform within the limits of these newly established republics. In Kazakhstan, *okrugs* were formed on the basis of *volost'*, themselves formed on the basis of winter pastures to the extent that “the definition of *okrug* borders resulted in an organised vision of the territory of the nomads.” (Ohayon, 2008: 176 my translation). Kazakh society was at that time divided into *uruu* groups which were linked to seasonal pastures and as a result these new administrative categories linked back to Tsarist territorial administrative system with kinship organisation (Ohayon, 2008: 176). In Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) it is locally noted that currently villages occupy the same location as historical winter pastures (*kyshtoo*) and winter settlements (*kyshtak*), and the current Kyrgyz word for village (*aiyl*) means also a camp or a group of *boz üis* belonging to close relatives (Iudakhin, 1965). It is thus likely that a similar conjoining of kinship with social organisation and territorial administration also took place in Kyrgyzstan (Ohayon, 2004). Tsarist *volost'* were transformed into *sel'sovets* (village soviets) and reorganised on the basis of shared genealogical membership (Jacquesson, 2010: 121).

Underpinning the establishment of republics and the linking of populations to fixed areas of land in Central Asia were Bolshevik understandings of the nation as historical process. As developed by Stalin, this ideology can be summed up as follows:

“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up and vested in a common culture.” (Stalin, 1973: 60).

The Stalinist approach to the “national question” rested on a number of fundamental ideas about the person and the connection between the person, environment and state, ideas which were articulated through the concept of *ethnos*. It is important to note that *ethnos* in this formulation was a cultural not a biological category, and thus the emphasis was placed on cultural community and *byt’* (Rus. way of life). Economic differentiation was central to the Soviet ascription of separate ethnic group identities in Central Asia and echoing Tsarist classifications mainly focused on differences between sedentary and pastoral ways of life. In addition, those designated as pastoral (Kazaks and Kyrgyz) were internally differentiated on the basis of where they carried out their economic activities: the steppe for the Kazaks and the mountains for the Kyrgyz⁵².

The Soviet Union’s proclaimed attempt to forge nations from tribes (Hirsch, 2005:117) relied on an ethnographic project which shifted its focus from the fixing of people in place in order to manage the exigencies of empire, to an ideological project which saw this coupling of persons and locations as the first step in the replacement of ethnic identity with workers’ consciousness. To this end, early Soviet policies attempted to both institutionalise and territorialise ethnicity through processes of resettlement at the national level (see Kassymbekova (2011) for a detailed example of how this proceeded in Tajikistan). Resettlement, while not uncommon in the administration of other empires, was used in the Soviet Union as a means to effect social transformation (Schoeberlein, 2000) through the creation of new relationships to place, and thus new kinds of persons: Soviet citizens. Through practices which institutionalised nationality on the sub-state level (Brubaker, 1996: 27) people were encouraged to identify with both a national identity as well as state (Soviet) identity. Both of these were linked to place through territory, yet the former was understood to emerge from a particular nexus of *ethnos*, language and territory while the latter was to transcend locality. The Soviet approach to the connection between people and place thus ultimately aimed to move beyond the ethnic and the national through the eventual emergence of Soviet man and woman.

⁵² This economic basis for ethnic differentiation is still argued in some contexts to hold the most influence in people’s connection to place (cf. Pétric, 2002).

Despite apparent continuities, the Soviet Union's approach to Central Asian populations therefore marked a considerable ideological shift from the Tsarist imperial rule of the region. Normative language used within the Soviet Union built upon Tsarist approaches to the designation of groups, yet emphasised the institutionalisation and territorialisation of ethnicity (Reeves, 2008:23). Although Soviet nationalities policies may thus seem to institutionalise difference, Khalid argues that this was initially a means to consolidate power, and that the vision of a classless society in which every citizen participated equally, the ideological endpoint of Soviet rule, was seen to be open to all citizens (Khalid, 2007: 128). As he puts it, "the Soviet project aimed at the *conquest* of difference" (Khalid, 2007: 130) even if this were to be achieved by initially codifying this difference along ethno political and national lines. Thus whilst the codification of difference through ethnographic classification bore similarities to Tsarist Imperial rule, and Western European colonial policy (Hirsch, 2000), the ultimate aim of such institutionalisation of identity was significantly different. Soviet ideology, informed by Marxist theories of the evolution, considered that nationalist identities would eventually wither away to be replaced by class consciousness. It was with the help of the Soviet state that the linear progression through developmental stages could be jumped over (Slezkine, 1994), with the effect that the connection between people and place would be disrupted.

Collectivisation

How was this disruption effected? Throughout the Soviet Union and much of Eastern Europe the advent of socialism brought with it the extension of an industrial labour model to rural areas through the implementation of collectivisation (Hann, 2003a: 9). Collectivisation was carried out not only amongst farming communities but also amongst hunter gatherer, fishing and herding communities. However, its form differed in accordance not only with state policy but also local interpretation. The collectivisation

programme of the Soviet administration in Kyrgyzstan began in 1929 (Naryn in 1931 (Ohayon, 2008)) and was both more widespread and sustained in its effect than previous sedentarisation policies. Almost all rural residents were integrated into *kolkhozs* over the next seven years (Karypkulov and Il'iasov, 1986: 385-412). Initially, collectivisation involved the establishment of *kolkhoz*, particularly in northern regions of Kyrgyzstan, deemed suitable for arable production such as Chui *oblast*. In other parts of the country, such as Kochkor *raion* in Naryn *oblast*, collectivisation went hand in hand with sedentarisation, and indeed 4119 households were sedentarised by 1931 in Kochkor *raion* (Il'iasov, 1972: 184, 187). *Kolkhozs* were formed on the basis of settlements on winter pastures which, as we have seen, can be traced to the Tsarist sedentarisation programmes. In this way the process of sedentarisation and of collectivisation proceeded along *uruu* lines insofar as *uruu* had been connected to place during the establishment of *volost'* and *aiyl* (village).

However, collectivisation and sedentarisation policies ostensibly sought to disrupt kinship groups. Throughout Kyrgyzstan, collectivisation was accompanied by the repression of elites which, unlike in Russia, did not focus on kulaks but on *bai* (rich) and *manap* (ruler) persons who were considered such if they owned more than 400 animals (if nomadic) or 300 (if seminomadic), if they had occupied the position of customary *volost'* under Tsarist rule or if they had been decorated for fighting with Tsarist forces against the Soviets (Ohayon, 2008: 170). People who held these offices were targeted in particular as they were understood to be the head of *uruu* groups, although as we saw above this was probably not the case (Jacquesson, 2010). Consequently, collectivisation in Central Asia was accompanied by mass movements of people, both planned by the state and those fleeing integration into the Soviet Union. In Kazakhstan this policy is said to have led to the great famine of 1931 – 33 in which up to 38% of the population died (Pianciola, 2004: 137). In Kyrgyzstan, collectivisation led to similar levels of decimation of both the animal and human population, as well as the displacement of people due to renewed migrations to China.

Although collectivisation varied significantly in the details of its implementation, across the region it shared the same ideological impetus. A central tenet of this was that state ownership was superior to all other forms of property (Hann, 2003a); another was that the material conditions of life should be the same for all (Humphrey, 1998: 17). Thus, across the Soviet Union people lived in villages laid out in a similar way, in similar houses, and consumed similar goods, all of which afforded a certain uniformity in material life (Humphrey, 1998: 17). Collectivisation thus radically altered the context of everyday life, and brought people much more into the Soviet state's sphere of influence. While this was perceived by many as a considerable intrusion into their lives (King, 2003: 394), at the same time it brought unprecedented rural development in terms of education, healthcare and employment (Hann, 2003a). Thus, while for some authors it seems that the arrival of Soviet power in Central Asia was experienced as an assault on 'traditional' ways of life (Roy, 2000), this was not necessarily so. In order to understand how this process was locally lived, in the following section I draw on the memories recounted to me by local residents.

THE LOCAL IMPACT OF SOVIET SPATIAL POLICIES

Whilst tsarist and Soviet administrations had begun the process of fixing previously mobile communities by making villages of winter pastures and mapping the limits of *oblasts* onto the previously existing territories of nomadic migration (Ohayon, 2008: 176 in relation to Kazakhstan, Ohayon, 2004), the process of collectivisation introduced Soviet ideals more directly to the making of place. Soviet progress and modernity were most frequently associated with the city; attempts to create new kinds of persons through the creation of new places focused predominantly on urban areas. As Alexander and Buchli note "[i]n the Soviet Union, cities were the cradle of progress, the place of modernity and, after the 1930s quite distinct from a rural way of life" (Alexander and Buchli, 2007: 2). In cities a different kind of person was to be created; a modern, progressive *Homo Sovieticus*. However, such ideological understandings of the significance of place for the creation of

new kinds of persons was also apparent in the restructuring of rural places through the ‘industrialisation’ of the countryside (Kaneff, 2004: 41-2) and the building of new villages. Coupling together both economic and political aims, collectivisation was a way to force nomadic peoples to take up a way of life considered to be more advanced both economically and culturally. Collectivisation and resettlement sought to transform Kyrgyz mobile pastoralists into agricultural workers employed by the state as part of an industrial model of agriculture.

Collectivisation was not only a spatial reconfiguration; it also sought the reconfiguration of persons through changing the relationship between the state and rural populations. Thus, new forms of personhood emerged, such as hard working *kolkhozniks* and *sovkhozniks*, active members of the Communist party, ‘hero mothers’, and citizens of the Soviet Union⁵³. Place was not merely a backdrop for the forging of new kinds of persons, it was considered in Soviet ideology to play an active role (Crowley and Reid, 2002). Early Bolshevik reformers saw space as a means through which to redefine *byt’* (Rus. way of life) and the everyday and the significance of place for the creation of new kinds of persons was thus apparent in the forced relocation of people and the building of new villages.

The changing shape of Kyzyl Suu

As I intimated above, ideological understandings of the power of place meant that during the time of the Soviet Union restructuring place was seen as a means to alter consciousness and redefine the basis of social interaction. In order to do this, local villages underwent a number of changes, from initial settlement as *kolkhozs* on historic winter pastures, to largely depopulated outposts of a centralised *sovkhoz*. The life stories of Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa provide a highly personal glimpse of the social and economic changes that

⁵³ I offer these as examples of aspects of personhood which were valued during Soviet times, not as an exhaustive list.

took place in the village of Kyzyl Suu during the periods of sedentarisation, collectivisation and reorganisation, and their accounts highlight the mixed feelings towards Soviet spatial reconfigurations which continue to this day.

Amankeldi ata explained to me how Kyzyl Suu first came to be established. The first settling of the village took place in the 1920s with the establishment of the *kolkhoz* before Amankeldi ata was born:

“They came from there... the people who had become powerful (*chong* literally, big) and they built houses. We hadn't even seen things like that; we lived in the mountains with *boz üis*. And then they built houses – the houses still stand here. It was the place where our fathers had lived. We lived correctly (*tuura*) in this place. We lived in a nice (*tatuu* literally, sweet) place, it was pleasant (*tatynakai*).”

In speaking as though he himself experienced these changes Amankeldi ata clearly identifies himself with his ancestors who moved to the village from the mountains. This may be because in identifying Kyzyl Suu as his *tuulgan jer* he is tracing a connection to them through place. However, it may also be because for many people early collectivisation did not vastly alter their way of life. The establishment of early *kolkhoz* work brigades were organised according to kin groups, and herding remained the main occupation (Jacquesson, 2010: 136-138). This changed when in the mid 1950s there was a widespread amalgamation of *kolkhozs* into large *sovkhos* as part of Krushchev's agricultural reforms. In Kochkor *raion* the numerous small *kolkhozs* established on winter pastures were gradually reorganised into nine *sovkhos* and two *kolkhozs*. In the 1950s, Kyzyl Suu *kolkhoz* was amalgamated into the Ak-Too *sovkhos* and the village changed from a vibrant place to one of relative desertion. For Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa, the implementation of Soviet spatial policies were traumatic. Mairam apa describe the events thus:

“We were all relatives. We were all split up. All the people left. We stayed. Four houses here, us and our neighbours, we stayed [the neighbours later also left]. We have twelve children, they were all young. Where could we take them to? We didn't

have the means, how would we build a house (in another village)? A tractor came (to move us), the *militiia* also came, everyone came. They destroyed our garden. But we stayed.”

Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa describe themselves as having lived in Kyzyl Suu all their lives, an unusual position given the recent history of the village. Despite resisting attempts by the Soviet state at spatial integration through relocation, they were nevertheless intimately tied to the state. In place of the initial *kolkhoz* village, a number of large *sarai* (byres) were established where the *sovkhos* employed shepherds to tend the livestock over winter before they were moved to the summer pastures. The family that remained managed to live “somehow” (*eptep septep*), Mairam apa said, with a small pension her mother received, the money they received for the children and some wages for raising animals belonging to individuals. Clearly, not everyone was equally integrated into the new bureaucratic structures, nor became new kinds of person. It seems that staying was not just about an emotional connection to their *tuulgan jer*, but also about Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa’s ability to move and be integrated into the *sovkhos*, an ability based on economic means as well as willingness to become a ‘worker’.

More recently this resistance to Soviet reworkings of place has been re-evaluated. Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa, are now described by others as *taza* Kyzyl Suuduktar – “pure”, “clean” people from Kyzyl Suu - because of their continuing commitment to and emplacement in Kyzyl Suu which was seen to have somehow kept them separate from Soviet influence, with its ambiguous connotations. This separation of Kyrgyz from Soviet is something which occurs on a daily basis with practices being identified as either Kyrgyz or Russian (implying Soviet) most frequently along a spatial continuum from rural to urban. Ways of relating to place therefore seem to be situated in a hierarchy from more authentic to less authentic, with Soviet and neoliberal influences seen as a disrupting and negative influence, while commitment to one’s *tuulgan jer* is seen as a clear expression of Kyrgyzzness.

The creation of a new village

Unlike earlier *kolkhoz* established on historic winter pastures organised around kinship ties, a number of new *sovkhos* were created on previously unsettled land and brought together different kinship groups. Ak-Too village was established in a place which purportedly had no history of connection between *uruu* and location. As I have outlined above, the process of collectivisation and sedentarisation contributed to the association of certain kinship groups with particular places. In the area of current day Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) the population at the time of collectivisation was predominantly identified as Azyk; and it is recalled locally that *uruu* within the Azyk genealogy became linked to certain villages. In particular, Kyzyl Suu was settled by Bychman *uruu* while another nearby village was made up of members of the Kara Azyk *uruu*. Whilst *uruu* are recounted with an emphasis on historic migrations, there is an implied break between movements which took place before living memory, movements which came to rest on land now considered *tuulgan jer*, and movement from these places in more recent times – to larger villages, cities, other countries – which in the main have not disrupted the narrative of *tuulgan jer*. The central village of Ak-Too was not an historic winter pasture but because of population pressure was created as a new village, with its new population made up not only of Azyk *uruu*, but also of groups coming from elsewhere.

As a former head of the *sovkhos*, and current village Deputy, Tynchtykbek baike had been important in the running of the village. Well respected and influential, he was still invested in representing the village as a certain kind of place and was keen to recount the history of the village to me. Resident on a street predominantly inhabited by members of the Mamai *uruu*, Tynchtykbek baike described the origins of the village to me thus:

“Kochkor *sovkhos* was established in 1927 and at that time Ak-Too used to be a *kolkhoz*, not a village. In 1930-1931 people moved to other places to build houses and settle down to form one separate *kolkhoz*. My grandfather moved here first and then gathered all his relatives to form one *kolkhoz*.”

Although Ak-Too was founded as a *kolkhoz* in the 1920s, it is to the arrival of people who built houses and settled down in the 1930s that Tynchtykbek baike traced its establishment as a village. The kind of place that Ak-Too was changed over time. In the 1950s it became the central village of a large *sovkhov*, incorporating eight smaller villages and their arable and pasture lands. The process of consolidating smaller villages and *kolkhozs* into larger *sovkhovs* had winners and losers, as we saw in the case of Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa above. Ak-Too gained status as the machine tractor station for the whole farm. Briefly *raion* centre, Ak-Too welcomed incomers not only from the smaller liquidated villages but also from cities and other areas as workers in the new administrative buildings necessary to serve the community. The changing relationship between persons and place thus also resulted from the reorganisation of labour. As people became more settled in villages, fewer and fewer were engaged in herding, instead taking on paid work as state employees. For those who did continue to herd, engagement with pasture lands was altered by the industrialisation of herding.

Thus an attempt to break certain kinds of relations with place through resettlement was accompanied by the state's self-conscious efforts to create urban-rural places in the form of 'villages of the city type'. These "[n]ew ways of organising the home, the workplace or the street would, it was claimed, produce new social relations that would, in turn, produce a new consciousness." (Crowley and Reid, 2002: 14). To some extent this is apparent in the ways that people began to identify themselves as Ak-Tooduk – someone from Ak-Too. Boasting a hospital and separate maternity hospital, the only boarding school in the *raion*, a hotel for visiting dignitaries, a number of small shops and a club, Ak-Too was remembered as a multicultural, 'civilised' place by many inhabitants. With running water to on-street standpipes, electricity and domestic telephones, Ak-Too offered a different way of life for Soviet *sovkhov* workers and conferred upon them different rights to *kolkhoz* workers. Throughout the Soviet Union, collective and state farm workers were the target of a civilizing mission which sought to make them active agents in "raising the cultural standard and obtaining the facilities that go with it" (Polyansky 1969 quoted in Rausing, 2004).

When in late 1950s the *raion* was consolidated into a larger administrative area, Kochkor *raion*, Ak-Too retained many of the benefits it had accrued as an administrative centre, such as the large bathhouse, reliable electricity supply and networks of influence with other bureaucratic locations. However, people recounted that the incomer populations from locations outside the territory of the *sovkhos* began to dwindle, moving away to follow professional opportunities elsewhere. The multicultural make up of the village changed and became once again predominantly Kyrgyz with only a few Kazakh and Tatar families remaining. However, this growing ethnic homogeneity belied a complex mix of families from different villages, and thus the many different lineages present in the village. The workers of the *sovkhos* continued to be specialized and professionalised in their daily work producing meat and dairy products, and the school and hospitals remained important places of work.

The settlement of Ak-Too village initially proceeded along *uruu* lines, with particular areas being settled by individual *uruu*, a pattern of settlement which is not peculiar to Ak-Too (see Yoshida (2005) and Jacquesson (2010) for how this proceeded in other parts of Kochkor *raion* and Beyer (2011) for an example of a similar process in Talas *oblast*). Over time the growing number of inhabitants led to changes in the structure of the village. The grid layout expanded to incorporate new households and the straightforward association of lineage and other family relations with particular places was somewhat disrupted. Nevertheless, although more streets were built and resident patterns became more mixed following the amalgamation of *kolkhozs* in the area into the single Ak-Too *sovkhos* the early settling of the village is still reflected in the large number of streets solely inhabited by members of this *uruu* or even *bir atanyn baldary* (the children of one father) groups. The assertion of the Mamai *uruu*'s settlement of Ak-Too is an interesting example of claims to topographical primacy, making claims to Ak-Too not only as place of residence but also as *tuulgan jer* at the same time as recognising that the Mamai *uruu* come from 'elsewhere' and are not part of the Azyk group predominantly associated with Kochkor. At the same time, residents of Ak-Too were and are able to draw on alternative forms of

personhood related to place. The settlement of Ak-Too demonstrates that the meaning of places were not solely determined from outside by political processes but emerged from the everyday incorporation of state policy with practice, something that continues to this day.

POST SOVIET RECONFIGURATIONS

Throughout the post socialist world privatisation has had economic and social repercussions equally as significant and far reaching as collectivisation; persons and places have been and continue to be redefined. Just as the redefinition of the relationship with land marked by the implementation of *kolkhozs* and *sovkhozs* led to changing forms of personhood, so the shift from state to private land ownership has been accompanied by changing forms of personhood, and changing relations to the land. As previous political and historical reconfigurations were integrated and reworked by local ways of being and doing, so privatisation has not been solely a top down process.

The anthropological study of economic life experienced a revival following the end of the Soviet Union and the collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe which threw into question the social context of economic behaviour. Prior to this a divide existed between the anthropological study of economic behaviour in 'traditional' societies which saw the economy as intertwined with other areas of social and cultural life (Helgason and Palsson, 1997: 451), and research carried out by economists which focused on western societies and considered the economic sphere, and 'the market', to exist independently of social relations (Carrier, 1997). Renewed anthropological interest in post socialist societies' attempts to initiate economic reform through privatisation and the institution of other neo liberal economic policies thus refocused the study of the market as enmeshed with social life (see, for example, Humphrey, 2002c, Humphrey, 1998, Hann, 1998, Hann, 2003a, Lampland, 1995, Dunn, 2004, Verdery, 2003, Humphrey and Mandel, 2002, Hann, 2003b).

Academic interest in the economic and social outcomes of privatisation, and the insecurity this has led to, is widespread (see Hann, 2003a for this approach across the post-socialist space). As a consequence of post socialist ethnographies' focus on privatisation as a change in social relations they overwhelmingly see property as a 'bundle of rights' or social entitlements (Hann, 1998: 7). In Kyrgyzstan, research on privatisation overwhelmingly focuses on documenting the process and analysing the role of kinship as a social network facilitating access to property (Pétric et al., 2004, Jacquesson, 2010, Yoshida, 2005). More recently Beyer (2011) has highlighted how land privatisation has been the latest stage in an ongoing process of integrating colonial redefinitions of place and property. In seeing property as a set of social relations, land and place are seen as inanimate material objects. Accordingly, little attention has been paid to the object of ownership itself (for exceptions see Alexander, 2004, Humphrey and Verdery, 2004), in particular to the properties of place as an agent.

This is particularly salient when it comes to considerations of land, and the way its redefinition may impact upon person-place relations. Land has often been considered a special kind of property. It is a fictitious commodity according to Polanyi's categorisation (1944), that is to say it is not produced for exchange but ascribed an 'artificial' exchange value. When considering the thing-ness of land it becomes clear that it has a unique material property being neither moveable nor easily delineated. Land is thus unlike other forms of property – it has been neither created by humans, nor can it be physically moved and only in rare cases can it cease to exist⁵⁴. Nevertheless, land is now something which can be owned in Kyrgyzstan. People assert ownership not through physical possession, but through, in this case legal title. At the same time, land as a place of belonging remains significant for personhood. In the rest of this chapter I hope to address how local conceptions of place integrate these recent changes in ownership, whilst recognising that the agency of land may not only complicate notions of property but also contribute to understandings of place as productive of personhood.

⁵⁴ I am thinking here for example of land forms which are lost to the sea.

Privatisation of land in Ak-Too aiyl ökmötü

The process of the privatisation of state assets began in Kyrgyzstan in 1991⁵⁵. In many areas, private land ownership is the culmination of a gradual process of reforms to state agriculture which began at this time. One of the first steps in the process of land privatisation was that contained in the constitution of 1993 which introduced the principle that all land belonged to the Kyrgyz, thus clearly reiterating a link between ethnicity and place. This was later amended to ‘Kyrgyzstani citizens’, establishing a link between civic nationalism and place (Giovarelli 2001, 90). The state could grant rights of possession to individuals in the form of 49 year leases and it was on this basis that land shares began to be distributed. In 1995, these rights were extended to 99 year leases and were fully transferable (Kaser, 1997: 25). Following a referendum in 1998 full private land ownership was allowed, but a five-year moratorium on transactions in privately owned land was simultaneously imposed (Lerman et al, 2004). Since that time however, these land shares have become ownership documents with the lifting of the moratorium in 2001 and individuals can now own, inherit, lease, buy and sell land rights, although this is still restricted by residence requirements. The distinction here between the ownership of land rights and the ownership of the land itself is subtle yet important, and may well reflect the complexities of owning something which is at once an economic asset and a source of group identity. While theoretically all land in Kyrgyzstan can now be privately owned, the state has retained control of pasture and other non-arable land, while cropland and most of the non-land assets of the former state and *kolkhozs* have been privatised and distributed to

⁵⁵ Privatisation of state farm machinery assets also proceeded along kinship lines, being divided up among the different *uruu*. Animals, by contrast were distributed according to membership in the *Sovkhoz* and according to household size. Privatisation in Ak-Too, as in other parts of Kyrgyzstan (Beyer, 2011, Feaux de la Croix, 2010), is an ongoing process. The sale of state farm buildings was still taking place in 2008, and ownership and use rights in pasture lands continue to shift and change.

rural residents. *Tuulgan jer* could supposedly be traced to any of them, yet it is overwhelmingly to the small parcels of arable land that people refer when discussing it.

In 1991 Ak-Too *sovkhos* began instituting reforms, allowing individuals to apply to look after sheep belonging to the *sovkhos* on the understanding that they could keep any lambs produced. These individuals were able to use arable land belonging to the state to produce fodder for their animals, as well as inputs supplied by the farm. Unsurprisingly, this generous provision for semi-private farming was taken up by the elites of the *sovkhos* who had the facilities to keep herds at home. As was recounted to me frequently, the success of these private enterprises angered villagers who had not been able to take part. Calls for a more equitable access to farm assets were made, although most people did not envisage wholesale privatisation. However, following the February 1994 national decree which reaffirmed the right to land for all people living and working on the territory of *sovkhos* and *kolkhozs* (Bloch et al., 1996), the total landholding of Ak-Too *sovkhos*, minus 25% of the most productive land set aside for a National Land Fund, was reallocated on the basis of individual rights. All people born before 1993 and living in the village at the time of privatisation were deemed eligible for a share of 0.4 ha of land from the total landholdings and in accordance with the initial legal framework of land privatisation they established peasant farming enterprises.

Throughout the post-socialist world the “temporal context of property” (Alexander, 2004:252) played an influential role in whether land privatisation took on the form of restitution (see Verdery, 1994; 1998; 1999; 2003 for examples of how this proceeded in Romania) or the allocation of shares not linked to any physical product. In common with the other Central Asian states, but unlike many other socialist countries, Kyrgyzstan had no prior history of private ownership to which it could appeal for the division of state property to its citizens. In various locations throughout the country (see, for example Beyer, 2011, Jacquesson, 2010, Yoshida, 2005), kinship played a significant role in how privatisation proceeded and Ak-Too *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) was no exception. The majority of villagers decided to establish these enterprises on the basis of their *uruu* and claimed

arable land located in and around the village to which they traced this *uruu*, whether or not this was the village where they lived or had been born. While there does not seem to have been an official requirement that land be privatised according to kinship ties, these studies all highlight how people were encouraged to claim land on their *tuulgan jer*.

Nevertheless, this is not a monolithic discourse, as for a variety of reasons some people did not claim land on their *tuulgan jer*. Some people chose to claim land close to the village in which they lived, or to later ‘exchange’ their land for land located nearby, making it easier for them to farm. Those who held positions of some power in the *sovkhos* administration at the time of its dissolution, or were related by marriage to somebody who did, were often able to claim land adjacent to the comparatively densely populated central village, making it easy for them to farm their land. More recently still, certain individuals in positions of power have been able to make use of the National Land Fund⁵⁶. Most residents not tracing a connection to *tuulgan jer* on the territory of the *sovkhos* had initially moved to the area to take up administrative posts and so were generally in a good position to claim land, however a few residents were neither able to claim *uruu* affiliation to land on the territory of the *sovkhos* nor held influential positions within the administration. These were often people who had come to the area in the 1950s when the village was the *raion* capital and had remained following the village’s reclassification as administrative centre of the *sovkhos*. With neither high professional standing nor kinship contacts, these individuals and families were often allocated the most distant and least accessible pieces of land.

Although clearly, then, not all land claims were made on the basis of *uruu*, it does seem that the linking of *tuulgan jer* and property rights was a ‘moment’ when kinship became particularly salient for asserting not only belonging but also ownership. Privatisation simultaneously created a link with *tuulgan jer* which was more fixed to particular places, while at the same time making this land ‘detachable’ through its potential sale as an asset.

⁵⁶ This was initially established to include 50% of arable land allocated for the establishment of peasant farming enterprises. In Ak Too it includes much of the better land which is situated far from village settlements.

With the advent of privatisation, connections with *tuulgan jer* were reasserted in new and novel ways as new person - place relations based on ownership were instituted and combined with reworkings of places as kinship places. However, the linking of *uruu* with place seems to have subsequently expanded to incorporate a sense of belonging to an area rather than membership in a kin structure based on ownership of particular parcels of land.

The resettling of Kyzyl Suu

Following the privatisation of land and farm assets considerable changes in rural residence patterns have taken place. Flanked to the south by high mountains favoured for their lush pastures and abundance of grazing, the small village of Kyzyl Suu has consequently undergone something of a revival. Streets sparsely 'cut' in a grid from former winter pastures, the homes of returnees range from single roomed buildings to more substantial houses. The population of the village fluctuates significantly from season to season. In winter only those who have made the village their primary home remain. In the spring there is an influx of people who own arable land and have built a small house there who come for the lambing season. Kyzyl Suu provides wide open spaces for sheep to roam and bigger plots for animal pens where the lambing process can be more easily overseen. In the summer many families take animals up to the pasture. In families which are large enough some members remain to oversee the planting, irrigating and harvesting of crops. Autumn, like elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan, is a time of abundance: animals have been fattened and crops harvested. The markets in nearby towns provide a place to sell animals and grain and *toi* (life cycle ceremonies) are held making good use of the scarcest of resources, money. Relatives arrive to celebrate weddings and there is much movement between villages to attend the various feasts hosted by patrilineal and affinal kin. Potatoes, meat and flour are sent to sustain relatives in the city, and animals are slaughtered and shared out. This is not an isolated village but one integrated into broad networks of exchange which spread far and wide, no matter the challenges of impassable roads and the lack of transport.

It is spring when I first visit and outside the home of Timurbek ata young men preparing for the spring sowing operate a small machine to thresh the barley remaining from the autumn harvest. Inside the house, the largest in the village, Timurbek ata tells me his reasons for returning to Kyzyl Suu. Drinking *airan* (drinking yoghurt) and jiggling one of his many grandchildren on his knee, he says:

“We were told that every Kyrgyz person should return to their *tuulgan jer* to live—that is why I came back 12 years ago and built this house. After democracy, we came to our own land, our *tuulgan jer*. I was born here, I grew up here – that is why I returned... It is good here because it is close to the mountains, to the summer pasture⁵⁷, so it is good.”

While people make reference to official discourses at the time of privatisation which encouraged them to return to their *tuulgan jer*, it is more often the case that when discussing privatisation and land allocations, people assert an emotional tie to their *tuulgan jer* as the basis for their land claim. Such emotional ties are often based on an idea of shared circumstances and an emphasis on sameness. Timurbek ata was keen to emphasise that he did not consider residents of Kyzyl Suu to be any different from each other or from residents of more established villages, yet he nevertheless considered the place he inhabited to be a place apart.

Timurbek ata’s family have a relatively large landholding (4 hectares) and are able to sell livestock at the market in the capital because their adult sons live and work in Bishkek. Despite asserting that people from one village to the next are all the same, the differences are apparent in landholdings and the access to labour both within and between villages. Differences which enabled or prevented people from moving back to Kyzyl Suu (or indeed from building a new life under collectivisation), differences which might be related to Soviet era class positions that enabled disparate gains in landholdings and animals from

⁵⁷ While *jailoo* may now be represented as belonging to particular villages they do not come under the term *tuulgan jer*. However, although *uruu* affiliation does not determine access to pasture it may facilitate it (Feaux de la Croix, 2010)

privatisation are generally subsumed within the sameness implied in all being from the same place.

For a number of years people owned and worked the land they had received from the *sovkhos* as groups, most often organised according to *uruu* membership but sometimes also as neighbours or work colleagues. However, this is no longer the case and land allotted to groups has been split up into smaller parcels attributed to individual households. The ideal of working together as members of the same *uruu* is widely repeated in both the smaller and larger villages as the initial motivation for farming newly privatised land together immediately following the breakup of the *sovkhos*. Equally widely repeated are the reasons why such a state of affairs could not continue: namely, that people did not come out to work and were unreliable. However, this changing process of ownership was also the result of a changing legal environment.

Thus, while everyone was entitled to 0.4 ha of land there was great variation as to location, accessibility, proximity to roads and markets and, perhaps most importantly, water sources. Encouraging people to claim land deemed their *tuulgan jer* may have been one way to ensure that relatively poor and inaccessible land was distributed. By first allocating land on the basis of large, shared landholdings, the internal differentiation of the land was avoided by the state and left to kin groups to decide upon the particular allocation of plots to individuals and families. For many it was only when shared landholdings were divided by household that the physical plot of land came to be considered theirs and theirs alone.

Some people from Kyzyl Suu who have not returned do talk about these social and economic divisions. The economic benefits of living and working in Kyzyl Suu did not go unnoticed by Erkinbek baike and his wife, Zina eje. In the central village, people from Kyzyl Suu were said to be *bai* or *malduu* (rich or having many animals) and a certain amount of resentment existed because of the additional payments added to wages, pensions and other state benefits which residents of Kyzyl Suu receive because of their high

mountain location. In addition, being present in the village year round gave one better access to scarce irrigation water, and in the past had enabled residents to gain use rights of the more productive parcels of land. Sitting in his kitchen in Ak-Too, drinking tea and eating bread made from imported Kazakh flour, Erkinbek baike complained out loud

“Our land is no good. Our land is far from the water so our crops cannot drink enough of it. Those people who live in the village (Kyzyl Suu) have land at the mouth of the water, their land is good.”

Although *tuulgan jer* suggests that all land to which one traces a kin connection is equal this is not the case in practice. While *uruu* affiliation was the basis for access to land, differentiation in distribution still exists both in terms of quantity and quality of land. It is the quality and location about which people complain. Some *tuulgan jer* is clearly better than others, in terms of the economic benefit one can gain from it. Nevertheless, people are rarely willing to sell or exchange their land, and those that do so are seen as simultaneously clever and entrepreneurial, and as somehow relating improperly to their *tuulgan jer*. It is not just a case of incomplete land reform or confusion around the legality of selling or leasing land (cf. Bloch and Rasmussen, 1998). This unwillingness also goes beyond land not being moveable or easily delineated and draws in ideas of place as part of kinship and belonging, that is place as an aspect of personhood. Therefore, the reason that many people do not engage in buying and selling land may be because it is not a property like other kinds of property.

Rather than seeing the relationship with privatised land in economic terms as irrational, and wishing to foster a more competitive land market it is perhaps more useful to understand the many dimensions of the relationship between people and their *tuulgan jer*. During the period of state agriculture whole villages had been identified with certain *uruu* but this was not the case for parcels of arable land that were identified more often by proximity to geographical or built features of the environment such as mountains, rivers, mines and irrigation pump stations. Following the subdivision of arable land which had been allocated to particular *uruu*, particular parcels of land became the focus of relations

with *tuulgan jer*. Understandings of relations with *tuulgan jer* therefore shifted to incorporate ideas of private ownership. The two examples presented here demonstrate the ways that relationships with *tuulgan jer* were influenced not only by historical kinship ties to place but also by social differentials following privatisation which impacted on access to resources and the ability to make a living from the land. More recently still, *tuulgan jer* has come to express not only a connection through ownership but also a connection to place in a broader sense, incorporating other people who trace an *uruu* connection there, as well as aspects of the land itself.

Sociality and the nature of relations with *tuulgan jer*

I first visited Kyzyl Suu with Makhabat eje and her husband Kanybek baike, a relative of my hosts in Ak-Too, who considered it his *tuulgan jer*. For most of the year they lived in the nearby village of Dostuk to which people from Kyzyl Suu were relocated during the Soviet period. However, in early March they were overseeing the lambing period and they offered to show me something of their life there. As well as being a time of hard work their stay in the village involved intensive socialising with their neighbours, all members of Kanybek baike's *uruu*. Makhabat eje, invited me to accompany her as she spent mornings visiting and drinking tea with her neighbours. Sat around low tables sipping tea sweetened with homemade jam, they discuss recent events and the lives of village residents and relatives. They mull over the fate of the many young men who have gone to the capital city or to Russia in order to earn some money working on construction sites. They share information about life-cycle ceremonies, many of which Makhabat eje had attended when they took place in the autumn and early winter.

The events which they discussed connected them as kin but did not necessitate close, daily interaction. *Toi* (life cycle ceremonies) are occasions when the *uruu* may take on a

ceremonial significance⁵⁸ but, as I argued in Chapter Three and as is clear from Makhabat eje's daily socialising, they are not the only way of creating and maintaining relationships. Everyday visiting and tea drinking are significant practices which enable women to create relatedness outside of a ceremonial context, a context which most commonly affirms the role of the *uruu*. This is particularly significant because legally and genealogically, women do not have the same relationship as men with *tuulgan jer*. The practice of virilocal marriage means that women often leave their birthplace to live with their husband and husband's family. Just as a woman moves between her father's *uruu* and that of her affinal relations, so she shifts between her father's *tuulgan jer* and her husband's. This is exemplified in the way land ownership is apportioned and managed. While women were entitled to the same landholdings as men at the point of privatisation, this land was claimed on the *tuulgan jer* of their husband (or father, if unmarried). When a daughter subsequently marries, this land is rarely apportioned to her to farm but remains the de facto property of her father and brothers, on the assumption she will rely on her husband's land. However, while women may move between places, they do not move between *uruus*, remaining always a member of their father's *uruu* and performing the work necessary to reproduce their husband's *uruu* through raising children and serving guests. They also, therefore maintain a connection to *tuulgan jer* as lineage place. A woman will not automatically gain a legal share of her husband's land and if she is later widowed her husband's family may try to reclaim the land apportioned to him.

Such an understanding of land rights emphasises patrilineal descent. Just as *uruu* is understood to pass from father to son, so is *tuulgan jer*. However, the significance of *tuulgan jer* lies not in its unchanging association with *uruu* but in the fact that it is flexibly attributed. This is not in any way to lessen the importance of *tuulgan jer* as an aspect of personhood but to recognise that just as practice is fundamental to an understanding of Kyrgyz genealogical personhood, so an understanding of the relationships with place in their day to day and historical unfolding is also necessary to an understanding of Kyrgyz personhood.

⁵⁸ I discuss this at greater length in Chapter Three Kinship and Personhood in Kyrgyzstan, and in Chapter Six Death, Mourning and Grief.

Imperatives to remain in contact with *tuulgan jer* have been interpreted as advice to keep in contact with one's *uruu* (Feaux de la Croix, 2010). Practising relatedness through visiting and feasting with *uruu* members allows Makhabat eje to create a relation with her husband's *tuulgan jer*. She said she particularly enjoys this day to day socialising with her neighbours, and she and her husband tried to come as often as possible to visit with them, even when they were not needed here to tend to their animals. She considered the close relations of the village population to be a fundamental aspect of the village itself, apparent in the material structures as well as the social relations. It is not only visiting with fellow residents and *uruu* members, but also creating the material structures of the village which create relatedness, as in the case of constructing the new school in Chong Tash which we saw at the beginning of the chapter.

When we had drunk our fill of tea and tasted the dark bread and *sary mai* (literally yellow fat, a kind of clarified butter made from cow's milk) of each household, Makhabat eje walked with me to see the partially frozen river from which people and animals take their drinking water. She pointed out the no longer functioning water clarification plant which villagers were hoping to reinstate, the small polyclinic which had been constructed with funds from ARIS and community labour, and the new village school. When considering the recent developments in the village she emphasised the particular way villagers in Kyzyl Suu would come together as a community in order to improve their surroundings and their livelihoods, a way of interacting she characterised as fostering *yntymak* (community, good relations). Although research has found that larger village populations are more likely to initiate *ashar* (community labour) projects (Dewald et al, 2004: 1935), here it was seen to be something particularly related to small, close knit communities, a way to engage neighbours and relatives in the active building of both community and village. Like the building of the new school in Chong Tash, the act of engaging in such a project is a way of creating relatedness with both fellow residents and the land itself. At the same time, villages resettled on *tuulgan jer* are known for their ability to inspire such engagement, and it is possible to see this as a property of the place itself.

Daily socialising in place with other villagers, more formal feasting and toasting, and coming together to build services for fellow villagers are all seen as a way of fostering *yntymak*. Although it seems that *yntymak* is a special kind of sociality afforded by *tuulgan jer*, this is a kind of sociality that is also attributed more generally to rural places as opposed to Bishkek and other major cities. Not restricted to Kyrgyzstan only either, it is a kind of nostalgia one can find all over the world for rural, non-urban places which supposedly have a slower pace of life. The particularity of *tuulgan jer* however, lies in the linking of *yntymak* with kinship places, thus connecting place, community and relatedness. While in other contexts ideas of *yntymak* may incorporate people beyond one's *uruu* and include former classmates and work colleagues, in villages such as Kyzyl Suu where residents are all associated with the same *uruu*, kinship, place and community can rarely be separated.

Changing livelihoods and the transformation of persons and places

Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has to a large extent reoriented toward the production of grain and away from the previously dominant pastoral sector. While the latter remains extremely important in terms of the national consciousness, agriculture has become much more important in the income generating strategies of rural people, whether or not they continue to practice transhumance. Although reform apparently led to increased productivity and increases in household incomes (Swinnen et al., 2009: 29) real GDP dropped and in the late 1990s and early 2000s the majority (65.6%) of the rural population was living in poverty (Falkingham, 2003). Following the breakup of Ak-Too *sovkhos* the vast majority of villagers have become dependent for their income on household level arable farming and animal breeding, and increasing economic and social stratification is emerging.

The majority of people rely exclusively on their own family landholdings and it is difficult to see how such small plots of land can be economically viable. Not only their small size but also the lack of affordable inputs such as seeds and fertilisers, as well as technical and labour shortages, and the unreliability of irrigation, mean that harvests from farmed land are small and frequently fail altogether. Predominantly, the crops grown on the arable land in this area were used to feed domestic herds of sheep, goats, cows and horses during the long, harsh winter. As people try to increase their herd sizes they therefore require increased access to fodder. The majority of my informants prefer to grow and harvest their own hay, alfalfa and barley rather than dealing with fluctuating prices on the open market. During the period of my fieldwork increasing food prices meant that many people were also trying to find ways to increase their access to land in order to grow wheat either for personal consumption or for sale. Difficult access to markets makes the sale of any surplus left over after consumption needs hard to achieve, in particular for the smaller villages which do not have their own markets nor decent roads or transport links to markets in nearby towns. A number of residents who have returned to their *tuulgan jer* live in *sarais* (byres) built by wealthier relatives who have chosen not to return. They look after animals and farm their own and their relatives landholdings. For this work they receive payment in kind: housing, animal products which they can sell, flour and clothes, as well as some money. These are often young families with children of preschool age, families who were not able to farm their own small land holdings because of the distance from the central village. Their own animal herds are often small and they are unable to support themselves without providing work for these relatives.

These new forms of employment demonstrate that the process of privatisation has reconfigured status and identity as well as the relationship between persons and place, and persons and the state (Alexander, 2004: 254). The unfixing of property rights in the *sovkhos* apparatus involved not only its physical assets but also the less tangible rights to a job and future support. Persons have been transformed from Soviet workers produced by

the industrial model of agriculture of which they had been a part, to *dyikan*⁵⁹ (farmers) who own and work their own small parcels of land. *Dyikan* is the term employed in the village census to record the main form of employment. However, as there is no tradition of the peasantry in Kyrgyzstan, it is not unusual that one rarely hears someone describe themselves as *dyikan* outside of an official context⁶⁰. In addition, it differs significantly from other forms of employment such as being a worker in a *sovkhos* with the rights and responsibilities it carried, or now as teaching or professional jobs at the *aiyl ökmötü* (rural administration) which bring with them an income and status. Indeed, most of those registered as *dyikan* consider themselves unemployed or without a job (*bosh* free, unoccupied). This may be because people are unable to rely exclusively on farming to sustain themselves and their families, while at the same time growing grains or farming potatoes are seen more as a necessary means for family survival than a choice of employment. It may also be because such work does not carry with it the cultural value accorded to herding or wage employment, even though to be successful at it requires considerable skill which is recognised. There are some similarities however, as both the neo-liberal individual and the collectivist *sovkhosnik* emphasise hard work and responsibility (Feaux de la Croix, 2010: 216).

Not only have people lost their status as *sovkhosniks*, they have also experienced a change in the kind of place they live in. For Tynchtykbek baike, Ak-Too is now his *tuulgan jer*, the place where members of his *uruu* claimed arable land at the time of privatisation, and where they will be buried. For others who trace their *tuulgan jer* elsewhere, Ak-Too continues to offer alternatives forms of personhood related to its history as a semi urban place, albeit personhoods which are increasingly challenged by circumstances. As McBrien (2009) points out, the Soviet modernization project in Kyrgyzstan objectified ideas of tradition and the modern, however unintentionally. Kyrgyzness became linked with ideas of tradition and a kind of reified “national” culture, as was common throughout the Soviet

⁵⁹ The term was employed during the period of collectivisation to categorise not only farmers but also herders (Ohayon, 2008: 20), and although it is not a direct translation of *krest'ianin* it did denominate a similar class position. While *krest'ianin* is usually translated as peasant this has significant ideological connotations and therefore *dyikan* may be better translated as farmer.

⁶⁰ This is similar to the situation in Russia where people are similarly unwilling to describe themselves as farmer (*fermer*) (Humphrey, 2002b)

Union (Adams, 2010), while *kul'tura* was seen as something that could be constructed (Grant, 1995), both could be indexed to place. In Central Asia the socialist association of cities with modernity and modern, 'cultured' (*kul'turnii*) citizens remains a powerful influence and the city continues to be seen as a place of 'culturedness' (*kul'turnost'*), and of opportunity (Alexander and Buchli, 2007). In contrast, village life is often associated with a lack of 'culture' (*kul'turnost'*), and by extension residents are seen as 'uncultured' (*bez kul'turnii*) and less modern. Facilities such as standpipes and telephones marked Ak Too as a *kul'turnii* (cultured) and modern place, with the implications of civilisation this brought (Anderson, 2000).

Following independence, many of the facilities which made Ak-Too a modern and cultured place have ceased to exist as telephone cables were plundered for scrap metal, and the power and treatment chemicals were no longer available to keep the water supply running. In addition, regular power cuts and rises in the cost of both electricity and coal mean that villagers are increasingly reliant upon other sources of fuel, such as animal dung. Such changes are experienced as counter to an idea of progress which had seen rural Kyrgyz redefined from nomadic, to settled farmers and then to workers integrated into an industrial model of agriculture. The process of de-linking from the Soviet Union has been experienced as a loss of modernity by many, and bares comparison with the experience of becoming disconnected which Ferguson describes in his study of the Zambian Copperbelt (1999: 238), where people acutely feel they are living through a loss of modernity, and nostalgia for a modern past (1999: 14). As we saw above, villages and their residents are often described as somehow more Kyrgyz than people living in cities, or even larger villages like Ak Too. The experiences of people living in Ak Too complicates these rural/urban, traditional/modern divides because as a 'village of the town type' it straddled these divides. People are now no longer sure whether they live in *kul'turnii* or *taza Kyrgyz* places, or which of these is more valued.

Attending to individual relations to *tuulgan jer* illustrates how these contexts have been integrated into the meaning of place through everyday practices. The positive value of hard

work, which echoes socialist ideology, continues to play a role in asserting a connection to one's *tuulgan jer*. This land seems to hold a value which is generated as an attribute of individuals, families and *uruu* engaging with it in certain culturally appropriate ways. These forms of engagement are changing with the new social and economic context of the post socialist world. Despite this, the development of rural land markets is seen to be of vital importance to improving rural livelihoods by enabling the rental and sale of arable land, which it is presumed will increase agricultural productivity (Swinnen and Vranken, 2005). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, an uncertain and evolving legal framework is blamed for the underdeveloped land market. Little attention is given to why people may not wish to sell their land, and yet the economic significance of land cannot, in my view, be separated from its social and cultural significance.

To interpret these changes as a failure of market reform, or as a return to pre-Soviet ways of living would be to oversimplify the complexity of the new articulations of person-place relations. Resettled villages are experienced as a continuation of past forms of engagement which emphasised movement between multiple locations of significance, such as winter and summer pastures, liquidated and newly built villages. These movements have, following the end of the Soviet union, taken on new forms with large-scale migrations away from rural areas to seek work in cities or in other countries because villages where farming small parcels of land is the only option are often unable to offer sufficient income to support the population. For this reason I do not take the resettling of *tuulgan jer* as a form of idealised return but rather understand it within the context of post Soviet household survival strategies (for studies which focus more particularly on household survival strategies in Central Asia see Kandiyoti, 1999).

CONCLUSION

Interactions with and appreciation of *tuulgan jer* suggest it is not seen as a ‘timeless’ kinship place. It is very much a place created by historical processes as well as by the relatedness of those who are connected to it. Places are created through the lived experience of broad historical processes, the local integrations and reworkings of these, that can be seen in the ways people discuss and relate to these places. I have argued that persons interact with an environment at once social, physical and historical, and this is integral to the creation of personhood and relatedness. Seeing place not as the stage upon which historical change occurs but as an active agent in this change, I have examined not only state processes of defining persons and places but also local ways of engaging with place, of ‘doing place’ (Reeves, 2011a: 308) and how these are intertwined with kinship and personhood. I have shown how historical and geographical shifts over the last century are significant in the linking of genealogical relatedness with place and in the redefinition of personhood in the region. I have teased out how historical and contemporary processes, such as sedentarisation, collectivisation, and most recently privatisation, have both formed and been formed by local conceptions of the relations between persons and places.

This chapter’s brief examination of the historical processes through which *uruu* and place have come to be closely interrelated highlights the importance of bureaucratic policies in the definition of people and places. Tsarist and later Soviet modernisation programmes were an attempt to create new kinds of person, through spatial and social reconfiguration. Through initially transforming winter pastures into permanent settlements and then amalgamating and reconfiguring settlements into larger villages, integrating rural populations into Union wide political and economic networks, the Soviet State may have hoped to destroy *uruu* affiliations and create new forms of connection with place, and new kinds of people. However, *uruu* and *tuulgan jer* continue to be important for local concepts of personhood. This is not to argue that they have remained fixed and unchanged because of a failure of the Soviet project, nor that the meanings of place and personhood have remained static and unaltered as a result. As the last chapter showed, *uruu*, like other forms of relatedness, is continually being created anew through everyday practices. In much the same way, the meaning of place is constantly coming into being as the culmination of actions so far (Massey, 2005: 130). Soviet attempts at spatial reordering and post-Soviet

discourses of *tuulgan jer* and private property have been incorporated and reworked by local people through practices of relating to the land and to one another. Thus, the current association of *uruu* with land is not a case of ‘survivals’ of a pre-Soviet era, and consequently of a relationship relatively undeconstructed by the Soviet project (Roy, 2000); the ‘revival’ of *tuulgan jer* is not just about a reconstruction of the past, but is also a reconstruction of the future (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992), a future radically different from that offered by the Soviet Union.

As we see when looking at the recent process of privatisation, *tuulgan jer* has become a fixed point, an origin place. At the same time it is locally recognised that people moved to these places from elsewhere, and indeed in the case of Ak-Too village we see that *tuulgan jer* can result from recently established connections with place. These contradictory ways of thinking about *tuulgan jer* reflect a tension between an ideal of the Kyrgyz as pastoral nomads, and most rural people’s experience of living in settled villages, a tension which continues today. It also reflects a tension between what Ingold (2000: 134) terms “genealogical thinking” and the “genealogical model”, that is to say between understanding ancestry and descent “within the context of a relational approach” (2000: 133) or as itself the context for action.

If, as Massey (1994) argues, space is a social process, then just as the recounting of genealogies creates persons as the continuation and outcome of those that went before, so the telling of the history of locations establishes them as *uruu* places, as *tuulgan jer*. Taking this perspective, places, whilst the products of political and historical shifts, are also a way of remembering such changes and form a link between the past and the present and the creation of certain kinds of personhood linked to kinship. I agree with Beyer when she argues that through altering the ‘imperial landscape’ (2011: 460) people in Kyrgyzstan were able to incorporate new spatial forms into their everyday practices. Place was thus not determined by state policy but emerged from the dynamic of living new forms of settlement, a dynamic which in these places continues to this day and is closely intertwined with relatedness and personhood. In addition, the way that my interlocutors talk about

tuulgan jer demonstrates that it is a place which has effects on them, a place with agency. Therefore, to see *tuulgan jer* as either the sum of social relations, or as the material object of property rights is to miss out an important dimension. All of this points to the need to understand place as both historically and politically authored, and as itself active in the construction of persons. Thus, taken together this chapter and the next seek to bring together approaches to place which are seemingly opposed. I do this in an attempt to recognise that place is a many layered thing. It is important to bring together approaches that emphasise the phenomenological and political nature of place in order to ensure that place is neither depoliticised nor seen to exist outside of everyday experiences.

Chapter 5 Making domesticity and relatedness

Altynai sweeps the *shyrdak* (mosaique wool felt carpet) which formed part of her elder sister-in-law's dowry, and tells me that although they are beautiful her husband, Esen, does not like them. He thinks, as does she, that it would be better if they were hung on the wall. Repeatedly passing her straw broom over the colourful felt, she tries to gather together all the crumbs and dust which have collected in between the finely pieced-together pattern. She complains that *shyrdaks* are just not practical because they absorb all the daily dirt and dust. Dipping her broom in water she deftly sprinkles droplets across the carpet surface and begins to sweep again and starts to talk of the new house they are building. Although she has neither visited the land which her husband has bought on the other side of the village nor seen any plans for the design of the house, she has definite ideas of how it should look on the inside. In particular, she tells me she wants to have a Kyrgyz room. This would be a room full of traditional Kyrgyz handicrafts such as the *shyrdaks* she is busy cleaning. She says that she would keep this room untouched, "just look at it and then close it up so that it wouldn't get dirty."⁶¹

INTRODUCTION

In Kyrgyzstan, tending to objects and caring for houses creates new persons and forms of relatedness initiated by marriage. For *kelin* (daughters-in-law), houses in many ways represent the agency of others due to a preference for virilocal residence which means that young women often move, on marriage, to their husbands' parents' house. As such, their home environment is somewhat determined by others, but as I will show important processes of personhood construction are engaged in by women as they interact with the environment they enter on marriage. In contexts where *kelins* occupy an interstitial position in their married household as neither affine nor consanguine, it is these mundane

⁶¹ Some of the work in this chapter also appears in Reynolds (2012 (forthcoming)).

practices which integrate them into their new home, and it is in imagining changes to these houses and practices that they imagine different personhoods and ways of being related. In this chapter the everyday processes and actions adopted by *kelins* living in their husband's family house, in relation to these houses and the objects in them, are shown to be critical in the negotiation of new and changing personhoods. In the first part of the chapter, I focus on the process of becoming a *kelin* through engagements with domestic objects and places, while in the second part I focus on the imagining of alternate ways of being a *kelin* through the different practices (potentially) afforded by new domestic places and objects. First, though, I wish to explain my reasons for focusing on the house as a means for understanding Kyrgyz personhood, and in particular that of *kelins*.

The house is a key place for Kyrgyz personhood, most particularly that of the *kelin*. It is also central to understanding everyday Kyrgyz kinship and relatedness as it is here that the lineage comes into being through mundane daily practices such as cooking, cleaning, caring and serving. I argue below that the house and its contents provide both the material setting for these practices as well as being active agents in their performance. It is in the day-to-day engagement that practice and imagination collide and become integral to the constitution of personhood. In addition, the house itself is shaped by the lives of those living within it. In this way, I understand houses and personhood in Kyrgyzstan to be mutually implicated in processes of becoming (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 37).

The meaning of the house

Throughout Kyrgyzstan one is met with representations of the *boz üü*, the traditional round felt yurt. In the city, bus stops emulate their form, on the side of major roads concrete yurts are nestled between those of the transportable felt kind, serving as shops and cafes to feed travellers. In the summer, yurts can be seen amongst the more solid trailers and more easily transported tents, housing those people who continue to spend part of the year with

their animals in the *jailoo* (summer pasture). Tourist camps of clusters of the “traditional” yurts spring up in popular summer pastures such as Song Kol, responding to the desire to sleep in the shelter of their heavy felt forms, a desire shared by local and international tourists alike. In villages and cities yurts are to be seen outside the homes of the recently deceased⁶² as well as providing temporary shelter while houses are being built or renovated.

Bunn notes that the *boz üi* “is both a ‘core symbol’ and a matrix for the organization of Kyrgyz life” (Bunn, 2000: 394), while according to Jacquesson (Jacquesson, 2010: 83), the *boz üi* is a “synonym for the family” (my translation). Yet, despite their almost iconic status in Kyrgyz society⁶³, yurts do not provide the majority of housing in Kyrgyzstan. Unlike Mongolia, where the yurt continues to be an important element of modern, vernacular architecture (Evans and Humphrey, 2002), in Kyrgyzstan outside cities and towns with their multi-storey blocks of flats and newly built brick houses, single storey mud brick houses known as *tam üi* (lit. walled house, also called *jer tam*) predominate, set back from the street and often surrounded by a high wall and large metal gates. Behind these gates a cluster of buildings can be found, usually arranged around a courtyard which opens at the rear to a large garden plot – in Ak-Too almost always planted with potatoes. The vast majority of villagers in Ak-Too live in such mud brick houses built and owned by their families. These buildings create the fixed villages which resulted from the sedentarisation and collectivisation I detailed in earlier chapters. Unlike the *boz üi* that move with people between villages and pastures, these structures are fixed in place and it is people who circulate between them, most importantly *kelin*.

Although Caroline Humphrey declared in the late 1980s that there had been “no place like home in anthropology” (Humphrey, 1988: 16) there has since been a significant renewal of interest in architecture within the discipline. Much recent work has focused upon the

⁶² I will talk more about the importance of yurts and rituals of death in the next chapter.

⁶³ The *tunduk*, the wheel like wooden object which forms the centre of the yurt’s roof also forms the centre of the national flag and is held aloft by the statue representing freedom in Ala Too square, central Bishkek.

built environment to investigate the role that it plays in the constitution of culture and society (cf Amerlinck, 2001, Blier, 1994, Lawrence and Low, 1990, Moore, 1986, Bourdieu, 1990 [1970], Humphrey, 1988). In particular, this recent work has focused on the house as a locus for the interaction of architectural, social and symbolic aspects of culture and demonstrated that it is as important and valid a subject for anthropological investigation as more traditional topics such as kinship and exchange.

Despite this, concern with the material structure of the house seems to have been discussed rather separately from concern with the house as a social structure, the latter influenced Lévi-Strauss's work on House societies (*sociétés à maison*) (Lévi-Strauss, 1982, Lévi-Strauss, 1987). Lévi-Strauss argues that House societies, such as the Kwakiutl in British Columbia, occupy a position between the elementary and complex kinship systems he earlier identified, between kin and class based social orders (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 10), and endure through succession, ownership of property and the passing on of the house name. While Lévi-Strauss's work may seem far removed from socialist and post socialist societies, Pine (1996) has demonstrated how houses in the Gorale region of Poland share similar properties with Lévi-Straussian house societies, in so far as they are able to integrate people through both matrilineal and patrilineal kinship, as well as other forms of integration based on adoption or labour. Pine (1996) argues that houses in this region have endured in opposition to the state as an alternative form of social support and belonging. In addition, there may be something specific about the process of sedentarisation that took place in Central and Inner Asia which has created a new kind of house society (Empson, 2011: 273).

However, in Kyrgyzstan, the house has not replaced patrilineal descent as a site of identification and belonging and so I do not think we can talk of house societies in this context. The *iii bülö*, drawing on the root word for house, can be translated as family and is usually made up of a married couple and their children, but may also incorporate adult children's spouses and children. Typically an adult son remains in his parents' household with his wife and children until his younger brother marries, at which point the elder will

be given his share of the household wealth to assist him in establishing a separate household, while the younger remains and inherits his parents' home upon their death. When there are more than two sons, it is usual that the older sons will all have left the household upon the marriage of the youngest son. While these relations are clearly based in a single structure initially, they nevertheless perpetuate rather than oppose Kyrgyz understandings of a lineage based society. Nevertheless, the house as physical structure and as the locus of creating kin based relatedness is important in Kyrgyzstan.

In addition to the physical structure of the house, the objects contained within it are also significant and have been shown to be active in the process of self constitution through their arrangement, display, maintenance and giving away (Cieraad, 1999, Clarke, 2001, Marcoux, 2001, Noble, 2004). At the same time, the distancing of oneself from present surroundings by a refusal to engage in creating domesticity through acts of decoration can occur amongst those for whom the domestic space is not and cannot be their own (Burikova, 2006, Parrott, 2005). However, engagement with or rejection of consumption practices as the self-conscious expression of self are not the only ways in which persons and objects constitute one another. Rather than ownership and choice of objects or display strategies, practices of viewing and tending to objects in the house may situate and maintain persons within webs of relationships connected to the house (Empson, 2006b, Empson, 2006a).

The Soviet and post-Soviet significance of domestic material culture are also important for an understanding of how the house and its contents are implicated in the creation and negotiation of personhood in Kyrgyzstan. In a socialist context, material culture studies have often focused on how domestic places were a site for self expression through decoration and display despite an overarching conformity of domestic space and domestic material culture due in large part to an economy of shortage (Fehérváry, 2002, Humphrey, 2002c, Rausing, 2004, Verdery, 1996). The early Soviet state had an ideological concern with determining the everyday through architecture (Groys, 2003). However, Soviet planners were not able to control what Buchli (1999) has termed the 'superfluity of

meaning'. Attempts to redefine acceptable subjectivities through defining the meaning of everyday objects and practices (Buchli, 1999), were similarly unable to limit the imaginative engagement of residents (Humphrey, 2005). Below, I will show that such imaginative engagement can involve the imagining of alternatives, of future use and future lives based on everyday engagement with domestic objects and places that may not always be considered theirs. As I shall argue below, such imaginings are neither determined by the objects themselves, nor by the architecture which houses them; indeed, houses as physical structure, domestic objects and cultural conceptions have been shown to both make possible and restrict the ideas and actions which emerge within them (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 2). As Humphrey notes, "the built construction seems capable... of acting as if like a prism: gathering meanings and scattering them again, yet not randomly. As a prism has a given number of faces, the light it scatters has direction." (Humphrey, 2005: 55).

Despite avowed attempts to combine study of the house as architectural form with the house as social group, the two are not often given equal weight in analysis. In addition, domestic material culture often recedes into the background when analysing social relationships which take place in the house. In this chapter I attempt to combine analysis of the structure and contents of the house, with the social relationships which take place within it. I do this by focusing on two particular *kelins* in the hope that the specificity of their interactions with domestic spaces and objects demonstrates how such interactions can constitute personhood and relatedness more generally.

Why look at houses to understand Kyrgyz personhood?

Much of my time in Kyrgyzstan was spent in domestic places (houses, courtyards, gardens, apartment blocks) and it was in these locations that I learnt about sociality and relatedness. I here wish to examine the active part that such domestic places play in these processes

rather than seeing them as mere backdrops against which these processes take place. While normally addressed separately, in this chapter I seek to understand how the structure of the house and its contents, and the social group that lives within it, constitute each other through people's daily practices. Thus, I am interested in the intersubjective experience which takes place between individuals, and between individuals and things.

My focus takes its cue from the concerns of the people whose houses I shared, with whom I discussed domestic building projects, and with whom I engaged in daily interactions with their domestic spaces. My reasons for looking at built structure, contents and social group together stem from local conceptualisations which unite them. As I noted above, the term *üi* can refer to a number of different types of houses, homes or dwellings. Significantly, it is also the root for a number of other words associated with both relatedness and physical domestic structure. For instance, the term *üi bülö* can be translated as family, while the word *üilönüü* means to marry, for a man⁶⁴. This suggests the many links between the meanings attributed to the built structure with understandings of the social group that lives within it.

As outlined above, my analysis draws on recent literature which has placed the house and its contents centre stage in an attempt to understand the connections between the material world and the person. My argument relates to an increasing recognition of the house as a site for the interanimation of persons and things. Rather than being a mere reflection of taste, the house is considered to itself have agency and participate in the construction of the self (Birdwell-Pheasant and Lawrence-Zuñiga, 1998, Miller, 2001a). Houses are active in how those that live in them express their agency (Miller, 2001b) and as such are sites where gender, social relationships and kinship are negotiated and contested (Cieraad, 2002, Pink, 2004). Indeed, "kinship is made in houses" (Carsten, 2004: 34) and through the material objects they contain (Makovicky, 2007: 288).

⁶⁴ Interestingly, for a woman 'to marry' is expressed by *turmushka chyguu* which means literally to go to work, to go to life.

The personhood of *kelins*

Throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus, *kelins* hold a certain position within the household where gender and age play an important role for status. As noted above, as incomers they are neither fully of or outside the household in which they reside and their status is often dependent upon their ability to bear male children, but also on their skills in carrying out household tasks (Hortacsu and Bastug, 2000), such as cleaning, washing, cooking and serving relatives and guests. As young women they are strictly regulated by the expectations of the family into which they have married⁶⁵. This personhood is nevertheless temporary⁶⁶ as they will eventually move from being a *kelin* to a part of the married couple heading the household, usually either through establishing a separate household with their husband (more usual for women married to older sons) or, through the practice of ultimo geniture, inheriting their parents-in-law's house upon the latter's death (as is usual for those married to the youngest son).

I am not suggesting here that *kelins*, in particular, and women in general are *defined* by the domestic. Rather than reifying the subject and the social relations implicated in her definition, I instead want to discuss the processes of objectification through which both the subject (the *kelin*) and object (domestic material culture) are involved in a process of mutual constitution. My aim is to show how precisely a *kelin*'s personhood, which is gender, age and hierarchically specific is nevertheless created through her individual engagements with domestic objects and buildings.

⁶⁵ This may vary depending on location. For instance, in the southern Issyk Kol area of Kyrgyzstan, *kelin* are expected to bow to members of their new extended family, while in Kochkor this is not the case.

⁶⁶ See Empson (2011: 177) for a discussion of the changing personhood of daughters-in-law in Mongolia.

I hope therefore that a focus on the domestic everyday, both real and imagined, as evidenced in this chapter, can enable a nuanced analysis of women's personhood, and incorporate the varied ways *kelins* view their position. In addition, by looking more closely at the particular ways that every day and imaginary engagements with houses and their contents play a role in the negotiation of a *kelin's* position, I argue that a focus on the house and domestic practices in Kyrgyzstan can modify essentialised, androcentric understandings of connection to place which are suggested by the notion of *tuulgan jer*. This is not to argue that an understanding of women's connections to place can only be achieved through a focus on the domestic, but that a focus on these processes can tell us how certain individuals in Kyrgyzstan are able to negotiate their connections to place and people through practice, everyday and imaginary.

I take this position because despite the overarching rules or norms of behaviour, it is evident from my research that a *kelin's* position whilst she is living in the house of her husband's parents is negotiated with her affinal relatives over time and most particularly through daily practices and reflections on engagements with domestic places and objects, past, present and future. To be a good *kelin*, a proper person, one must interact with people and with things 'correctly', and while these ways may vary from household to household, the process of learning to do them in the accepted way is the process of becoming a *kelin*. Like the middle class Bengali women of Donner's research (2008), Kyrgyz *kelins* negotiate their personhood within the extended family house where they construct relatedness based on patrilineal kinship rather than in opposition to it. It is in the integration of outsiders, in the form of *kelin*, into the family that most clearly demonstrates how the house itself and its contents are active agents in the production of relatedness. In the examples below I show how two *kelins*, in their interactions with material objects and houses, try to tread a path between being acted upon and acting, between embodying the ideal of a *kelin* and fulfilling their own desires. As Miller (2001b) argues, material objects and houses are found to be not so much instrumental to these negotiations, but to function as active agents. Material culture, then, in this study of village life in Kyrgyzstan is shown to be highly significant; not merely reflecting social realities nor determining them but acting as an agent in their creation.

In order to show exactly how this occurs, the following section reports on two different ways in which material culture and the domestic are implicated in changing kin relationships. The first example shows how engagements with objects in their married house, such as the domestic work of cleaning and cooking, tending and display of significant family objects, and the uses of domestic space contribute to changes in kin relations and creates the specific negotiated personhood for the young women. The second focuses on how *kelins* imagine that the changing of their domestic worlds through new physical structures and material culture, by planning, constructing and envisioning new houses, will effect significant change in their relationships with kin and place.

SITES OF INTEGRATION AND BECOMING

In rural Kyrgyzstan the house is a key space for the continuity of the family and wider kin group and has becoming increasingly important due to a renewed centrality in the economic and social activities of the household. With the end of the Soviet Union came a collapse of paid work opportunities outside the house. As a result, the vast majority of women and men in Ak-Too find themselves dependent on the domestic economy which predominantly revolves around raising animals and growing grain. While some of this work is carried out at local and regional markets, in the fields, the *jailoo* (summer pasture) or travelling to other villages, towns and the capital, for many households a large proportion of daily negotiations over the input of agricultural labour and the sale of produce or animals takes place from within the house. This economic activity extends beyond the house; the seasonal needs of agricultural work mean that the household often needs to rely on the input of family members who are no longer living in the village. Rather than being a one way exchange, however, this arrangement is often an important source of income for family members who have moved away but have not been able to successfully find their way in the city.

Central to economic livelihoods in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan, the house is also central to the creation, negotiation and realisation of personhood. The house occupies an important position in the familial and social life of its residents, permanent or temporary. There is often a fluidity of residence and the accompanying flexible use of space enables large numbers of family members to stay at the house for sometimes months at a time. The house's outward form thus represents the family that lives within and beyond it, and can be understood as an 'extension of the person... it serves as much to reveal as it does to hide and protect' (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 2). Nevertheless, young women are perhaps least represented by the outward forms of these houses, as their personhood is more tied up with the 'proper' use of domestic space and objects. The following examples show how two young women and the domestic places and objects they interact with are involved in ongoing processes of becoming and negotiating their personhoods as *kelins*.

Becoming a village *kelin*

The daily work of maintaining a house through cooking and cleaning often formed a central part of women's narratives in Ak-Too about finding a place in their husbands' houses. While it is important for all *kelin* to contribute such work to their husband's lineage, it seems to be particularly the case for those women who married the youngest son and subsequently went to live with his parents in their family house. If the house is a space for socialisation, then house work is the form of socialisation par excellence for *kelins*. At the beginning of this chapter we observed Altynai sweeping *shyrdaks* and reflecting on the practices of maintaining certain kinds of domestic spaces. I would like in this section to return to Altynai and the larger household of which she is a part in order to examine the ways domestic work practices both create persons and domestic places themselves.

Altynai is a young teacher who had been living in Ak-Too for three years when I met her. During my time in the village, Altynai gave birth to her second son and took maternity leave from her teaching job at the local school to spend more time at home. We spent a great deal of time together, preparing food and looking after her children. She would talk to me about her life in the village and how she came to be there. The following account I have put together from these many long conversations which were often accompanied by copious bowls of milky tea and raucous, playful children. Altynai grew up in Naryn city, living in a small apartment with her parents, two brothers and three sisters. She often reminisced about her younger days with me, recounting the way all the girls would work together to prepare meals and clean the house, how these daily chores of keeping the family clean and fed were easier there with so many hands to help and the convenience of indoor plumbing and heating. As a student at the university and then a new teacher, Altynai saw her future in the city, using the English she had learned and practised with foreign visitors and maybe one day going to see the places they described for herself. She dreamed of moving to Bishkek and vowed she would never marry a village boy, certainly not the youngest son with his commitment to living with his parents in the family house. And yet, through her own choice she met and married Esen, a man seven years her senior to whom she was introduced by a colleague, and now finds herself in Ak-Too, as the *kelin* of a youngest son, facing alone the work of keeping this new family, caring for her parents-in-law, her two young sons, her husband and her nephew, as well as the many sons and daughters of the household who come for shorter or longer stays. Their domestic space is flexible, with the five large rooms of the house serving as space for storage, sleeping, eating, cooking, socialising and hosting almost interchangeably. In addition, the residency pattern is fluid and fluctuates depending on the time of year and the needs and personal circumstances of the grown-up children of the house.

Altynai's and Esen's household is the only one of the wider family remaining in Ak-Too, as all the older siblings have moved to cities or nearby towns. As such, it is the strongest link for these siblings to their childhood village, where the men in particular still maintain close social contact with their *klastashs* (classmates) through participating in *sherine* (sharing the meat of slaughtered animals between a group of, most usually, friends and

their families on a rotational basis). The house offers a place to *es aluu* (take a rest) for the elder brothers and sisters equally. The members of the household all consider its farming activities to be essential to its economic position, both in terms of the amount of work required and in terms of the manner in which it enables them to help family members. Even so, the main sources of cash income are Altynai's wages as a teacher and Esen's parents' pensions. While the members of Altynai's household spend considerable time at home, the significance of the house and the practices of interacting with domestic spaces and objects differ between them.

This domestic space, important for members of the family in different ways, was first built by Esen's parents and has been extended and reconfigured over the years. One room forms the main centre of social activity as well as sleep. In this room is a small coal and dung burning stove which provides only a limited amount of heat for the large room and is where meals are cooked and tea prepared. On opposite walls two clocks tick the passing of time; two calendars advertising competing political parties and two windows open on to the enclosed front yard and the rear potato field. A low table takes the centre of the room and around it guests arrange themselves whenever they come to visit, conversing over milky tea, *airan* (drinking yoghurt) and dark, chewy bread at any and all times of day. A small dresser houses the dishes, pots and bread when they are not in use. One of only two rooms which are heated, this room was built on to the main house by Esen's parents many years ago and is also where his mother and father sleep along with the son of their youngest daughter. A television stands in the corner hooked up to the large satellite dish out in the yard which takes up the space designed to shelter their old car, which now stands squarely in front of the gates. To the side of this small yard is the extensive area housing the household's animals – cow sheds, a chicken coop, two stables for the horses are all accessed from a separate gate – keeping the main entrance to the house free from animal muck. The rest of the house is little used. One other room is heated and is where Esen, Altynai and their two small sons sleep. Their new computer, a gift from Esen's eldest brother, sits on a desk, while carpets hang on the wall and an electric radiator (built by Esen) sits alongside a tiled stove in the corner of the room. The other rooms in the house

mostly serve as stores for potatoes and grain, while one large room is carpeted and contains large sideboards received as dowry gifts for elder *kelins*.

Altynai was accompanied by very few material objects on her move to her parents-in-law's house. She is still awaiting a visit from her parents and family to her marital house which will be the occasion for the presentation of her dowry. The absence of a dowry does not bother Altynai, rather she is concerned more with the day-to-day tasks of keeping her new marital house clean. For Altynai, like many other *kelin*, integration into her husband's family is achieved primarily through the daily tending of the objects of others which come to represent the house as the centre of their family. Indeed, when talking of the dowry she might receive in future she said that a washing machine had been highest on her list until she found, with some relief, that her parents-in-law already had one. Before Altynai's arrival her mother-in-law and her husband had carried out all the domestic tasks. The wives of the older sons of the household had spent little time in the house before moving to the city to establish their own households, and older daughters had similarly moved away with their husbands, themselves *kelin* in different families. Following Altynai's arrival, Esen had returned his focus more to caring for the domestic animals and tending to the fields; his mother, Jangyl apa, was "having a rest" in Altynai's words, with a busy schedule of visiting her children in nearby towns and cities and involving herself in the establishment of a village NGO. Altynai thus became responsible for the day-to-day cooking and cleaning, washing the clothes of all family members and caring for three small children.

Altynai's life in the village has not been easy. In such a dusty location, the battle to keep the house clean is ongoing. For Altynai the work of cleaning has import beyond living a clean and respectable life far from the drudgery of village existence (as she sometimes expressed it). Her ongoing battle with dust is also the site of battles with her mother-in-law and *jenges* (sisters-in-law). As such, domestic work provides an arena for the negotiation of the domestic and its relation to personhood. Since moving to the village, Altynai has become solely responsible for tasks that, at her parents' house were shared

collectively with her mother and sisters. In addition to getting used to this new-found individual responsibility, Altynai has had to learn how to complete these tasks in the way of her new household. To some extent, this has been a question of learning to use new kinds of tools, such as replacing an electric vacuum cleaner with a straw broom. At the same time it has involved learning new techniques, with instruction coming from her elder sisters- and mother-in-law. As a new member of the household, Altynai has found this process somewhat isolating, requiring her to “start again” and “do things completely differently”. She has found the criticism of her city ways sometimes difficult to bear and on occasions returned to her parents’ house in protest at what she feels are unfairly harsh judgements of her abilities as a *kelin*.

It is not unusual for *kelins* to view the occasion of returning to their parents’ house as a way to express the uncertainty they sometimes felt about their position in their new household, in contrast to their significantly different position as a married daughter in their own house. However, for Altynai, while this return to her parents enabled her to openly signal her unhappiness, it was other activities which seemed more effective in allowing Altynai to define herself and her surroundings. One means of doing this took place outside the home in the form of her work as a teacher. Despite not particularly enjoying this work (it being a profession she considered of low status in comparison with her earlier dreams of working as a translator) the income she received did permit her to feel she was contributing something other than domestic labour to the household. More significantly in terms of how Altynai was able to develop herself as a *kelin*, were domestic practices. Cooking “international” foods or foods ‘from the city’, using the computer, socialising with other teachers in her house and spending time with me were all important ways for her to assert her control over her domestic tasks in terms of when these should be carried out, and also assert her position in ordering the domestic space through inhabiting it for different activities.

Practices of care and display

Nur was born and grew up in the village. Despite this, she never envisaged herself as a “village *kelin*”, preferring to dream of a future in the city or even in Germany to practice the language she studied at university. However, when her childhood classmate asked her to marry him she accepted, upon the condition she would not have to spend her summers looking after their animals in the high pasture – work she considered much too hard! Nur became a widow at 31 when Maksat, her husband of ten years, died. As the youngest son he had lived with his mother, Salkyn apa, and inherited the house his parents had built. Following Maksat’s death, Nur continued to live with her mother-in-law and two small daughters in their village house, whilst they all awaited the completion of a house in the city which her husband had decided was essential for their children’s future.

When I knew her, Nur was unable to work in her job as a teacher during the one year mourning period and was spending almost all her time at home, hosting frequent memorial feasts. Living in their house for much of this time, Nur often shared her daily routine with me, and recounted stories and memories connected with the house and its objects. Nur often talked about her arrival at her husband’s house. She recalled the initial period of living with their husband’s family as a process of socialisation, a time when she was trying hard to become the right sort of *kelin* and to learn both new ways of doing things and new ways of using the house and its contents. Simple things such as when one should use the outside kitchen and when the inside, where the new family socialised and at what time and where people went to sleep and got up were all somewhat disorienting experiences for her with which she needed to become familiar in order to fulfil the appropriate duties of a *kelin*, duties which differ from household to household depending on the residents and also the opinions of older members. Like many other young women, Nur even now often felt more at ease in her parents’ house, where she felt able to express herself and relax. However, through the gradual accumulation of objects and relationships, and through the frequent acts of tending to them she was able to assert her position as a family member in her husband’s house. In the following detailed description of an interaction between us, I

show the ways in which Nur experienced her connections with these objects, and with other people through them, as well as the way these experiences formed an integral part of her conception of herself.

Nur and I leave the outdoor kitchen crossing the courtyard to take the dishes and glasses back to their proper places in the main house. In the room they call the 'Kyrgyz room' – decorated with the best *shyrdaks* and used for hosting guests - we place our metal bowls full of dishes on the floor. Nur directs me to place the dark blue glasses decorated with pretty white flowers alongside a jug of the same appearance onto a shelf in the highly polished sideboard which occupies one wall of the room. She recounts to me the occasion when these were presented to her, telling me that this set was a gift from her husband's brother's wives, and husband's cousins' wives when she had completed her university degree shortly after marrying.

In the middle of the sideboard, perched on top of cupboards housing plates and kitchen implements, there are two souvenir yurts made from felt complete with small woven doors and piles of *töshöks* (wool stuffed mattresses for sleeping and sitting on) lined up against the wall inside. Above these in pride of place hangs a picture of the village painted from a vantage point on the small hill to the south of the house. In muted tones it shows a spring scene of the grid like layout of streets lined with poplar trees and the black mountains stretching out to the north. Nur recounts how her late husband bought the picture from a local artist after admiring a similar painting in the house of an acquaintance. A jumble of dolls and children's toys sit level with this picture on the cabinet to its right. The girls' best toys are kept here and rarely played with; these are dolls their aunt brought for them on the 40th day after their father's death and are always carefully stored in the pink boxes with which they arrived. This sideboard takes up a whole wall both displaying and hiding many objects belonging to the household. It formed part of Salkyn apa's *sep* (dowry) and has take pride of place in this room since the house was built.

The sideboard, alternatively called a buffet or commode, is found throughout the post-socialist space. Despite symbolising a bourgeois way of life (Praz, 1982) it remained a common feature in homes ranging from panel apartments to kolkhoz houses. Its significance has been interpreted as displaying a kind of still life, reflecting “time as habit, repetition and long duration” (Boym, 1994: 154) and as such a kind of personal museum, or commemoration. For Nur, while the cabinet displays a number of objects which do commemorate her relationships with the family, the sideboard’s meaning and that of the objects it houses seems to inhere in practical engagement with the objects, and more importantly, it is through these engagements that she can become significant for this personal museum, housing as it does many objects not belonging to her. The display was thus “constitutive of home” (Makovicky, 2007: 292) not only through the objects it contained, but also the work its use and maintenance required.

This sideboard projects an image of the family (*üi bölöö*) as a whole, united together in the accumulation of objects belonging to the different members and representing their relations with others not present. Like the objects Noble discusses in his research on the relation between prized possessions and identities and relationships in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, objects “capture the interweaving of subjectivities because they exceed their materiality and their location in time and place; and they exceed their materiality because they objectify the relations of familial and interpersonal life.” (Noble, 2004: 245). Our relationships with objects are essential elements of our relationships with ourselves and with other people (Miller, 2001b). However, when these objects are not purchased but gifted or inherited they cannot form an uncomplicated act of self-expression. Nevertheless, objects allow people to “accumulate being” through their ongoing maintenance, rather than just in the act of initial consumption (Noble, 2004: 236). In tending to the objects in this sideboard, using and cleaning them, Nur actively creates her place in the family.

The objects which fill the rooms in Nur and Salkyn apa’s house populate their house. Like the blue glasses we replaced in the sideboard, and the sideboard itself, these objects often speak of relationships between women of the *uruu* as it is women who mostly give and

receive such things; it is women who are accompanied by these gifts when they move between households. When the table is set it is not just laden with food and drink but with a cut glass sugar bowl and cake stand gifted by sisters-in-law, colleagues and friends. It is in selecting which objects to use, feeling their weight and the smooth, cold texture of metal and glass, that memories are evoked and spoken of: Nur talks of the occasion she and her husband bought fruit bowls in preparation for a feast, and brings out the bottle of special Chinese vodka replete with herbs and preserved snake which they hoped would bring him some relief from his illness, despite uncertainty about its provenance. It is in clearing away, cleaning and carefully replacing such objects in their rightful places that the people from whom they came are remembered: Nur recounts the tension she felt on her wedding day when her family were late in delivering her dowry gifts because her father's brother (standing in for her deceased father) was reluctant to take on the role as head of the family. For Nur, tending to these objects is thus a way of affirming her attachment to them and to the people who gave them to her, and of asserting her position as a *kelin*. The use of these objects thus plays a part in other relationships such as those between a *kelin* and her father or eldest brother, or between a *kelin* and her husband.

The meanings of these objects for Nur were not only to do with the relationships of which they formed a part; their very materiality was also significant. The *kachestvo* (quality) she associated with the dark blue glass and with the sideboard were all appreciated as evidence of being valued herself. Like other objects in the house, Nur connects the blue glasses I placed in the sideboard with herself and her relationship not only to the giver but also to her mother-in-law. Salkyn apa has often extolled the virtues of her own sideboard, as well as Nur's sideboard in the dining room, comparing their quality as solid, beautiful objects of Russian origin with the Chinese sideboard of her oldest *kelin*, Saltanat, which she has relegated to the everyday living quarters in the small three roomed house which the family normally occupies, where its disobedient doors are fastened shut with bent nails. By contrast, some of the hand-stitched wool stuffed mattresses of Nur's dowry were judged so good by Salkyn apa that they formed part of her own daughters' dowries, something Nur

considers a positive reflection on her own mother's skilled sewing, and by extension herself⁶⁷.

Many of the women I spoke with about domestic work described the initial period of living with their husband's family as an embodied process of socialisation, a time when they were trying hard to become the right sort of *kelin* and to learn new ways of doing things and new ways of using the domestic space. Altynai's and Nur's experiences demonstrate that these processes of becoming a *kelin* are also closely tied up with material objects, daily engagements with which mediate their integration into their married household and their negotiation of their personhood. Meaning also inheres in these material objects themselves. The ranking of objects in terms of quality according to provenance can be traced to Soviet times. Humphrey has argued that at this time "western goods were not merely representative but constitutive of social identity" (Humphrey, 2002c: 54). The value of western goods was seen to inhere in their ability to symbolize the international connections of their owners (Berdahl, 1999: 124). Fehérváry notes, however, that a perception of western goods as of higher quality was also at play, as well as the way they "seemed to encompass an entire way of life and valuation of human dignity" (2002: 386) which was not available in socialist countries but considered to be normal in the West. While in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union could be seen as somehow alien and Soviet goods recast as not normal (Rausing, 1997, Rausing, 2004, Fehérváry, 2002), in Russia no such conceptual distancing was possible (Humphrey, 2002c). In Central Asia, Soviet (and now Russian) goods as well as Kyrgyz crafts retain their patina of *kachestvo* and are compared favourably with certain imported goods identified as Chinese. These objects of quality reflect positively not only on their owners, but also upon those who tend to and use them. For Nur, the foreignness of the goods gifted to or associated with her, and the quality of the crafts which accompanied her upon her wedding, gives her room to feel herself to be more than a "village *kelin*". Tending to domestic objects and the house are therefore a way for Nur to locate herself both within the family, but also make connections to the wider world.

⁶⁷ Unlike the skill-based assessments discussed by Portisch (2010), this appreciation was not an assessment based on intimate knowledge of the skill itself as Salkyn apa herself was not a craftswoman, focusing more on her public role as head teacher and village deputy, and unfamiliar with how to make a felt carpet or sew a mattress.

As *kelins*, both Nur and Altynai are responsible for the cooking in their respective households, and both take the time to not only prepare food which is pleasing to their families-in-law but also to make meals which point to their knowledge of non-Kyrgyz foods and connection with non-Kyrgyz, or non-rural places. For the negotiation of personhood, foodstuffs seem to be particularly important in the reworking of conceptual hierarchies of place through consumption, perhaps because they are literally consumed (Humphrey, 2002c). Melissa Caldwell has talked about a Russian shift towards “nationalist food practices” that involve favouring foodstuffs produced in Russia and seen as *nash* (ours), a shift which she interprets as refashioning “practices more typically associated with market capitalism to preserve values that are more recognizably ‘socialist’ – notably ethics of sociality and collective responsibility.” (2002: 297). She suggests that by consuming goods they consider *nash* they are asserting themselves as part of a Russian collectivity rather than aligning themselves with a “capitalist individualism and autonomy” (2002: 297). Cheap plastic shoes, imitation yurts, polluted foodstuffs, inferior quality wardrobes – all were coming into villagers’ daily lives and complicating their relations with material objects and their place of origin.

Unlike the conceptual divisions behind goods considered *nash* by post-Soviet Russian consumers which increasingly exclude goods from former Soviet countries (Caldwell, 2002, Humphrey, 2002c) not all foreign goods are considered bad or anti-Kyrgyz. Indeed, ex-Soviet imported furniture and foodstuffs such as Kazakh white flour and Russian and Ukrainian sweets are more highly valued than their locally produced equivalents and their provenance can tell us something about hierarchies of place which have emerged following the end of the Soviet Union. Such goods are seen to be more refined, bringing with them aspects of *kul'tura* contrasted with goods produced in Kyrgyzstan. However, such *kul'turnii* goods are not always contrasted positively with Kyrgyz goods, and this contrast is also problematised by goods emanating from new markets, such as China. As we saw above, vodka had been brought from China in the hope it would help Maksat recover. Other Chinese goods such as winter coats, clothing and material are also highly valued by

shoppers in Bishkek markets. However, rumours in the village in 2006 which recounted that horses bought cheaply in a Chinese livestock market died on arrival in the nearby *jailoo* (summer pasture), indicate a profound ambivalence towards Chinese goods, perhaps related to an idea that quality imported goods should not be cheap, but equally that uncertainty about their provenance suggested to people that such goods might be polluted and unsafe.

As we saw in Chapter Four, the linking of rural places with ideas of *tazalyk* (cleanliness) and of being *paidaluu* (healthy)⁶⁸ form part of descriptions of people from Kyzyl Suu as *taza* Kyrgyz (“clean” or authentic Kyrgyz), people such as Amankeldi ata and Mairam apa. Similarly, goods such as *kymys* (fermented mare’s milk), certain *chöp* (herbs) and meat and dairy products are considered *taza* in both senses of the words precisely because they rely on people living and working in the *jailoo* (summer pasture). It is not only the people who become both “clean” and “authentically Kyrgyz”, but also the goods and food stuffs which depend on the *jailoo* or rural villages for their production. This contrast between *taza* Kyrgyz and *kul’turnii* foreign goods mirrors rural/urban, traditional/modern, Kyrgyz/Soviet (and by extension, now European post-Soviet countries) contrasts which recall the differences between resettled villages and the standpipes, bathhouse and large shops which used to index the “modern” status of Ak Too. Nevertheless, this contrast has come under some strain as people feel their access to *kul’turnii* goods has diminished, and the cleanliness of Kyrgyz goods questioned. For instance, in the summer of 2006 rumours abounded of a group of Kyrgyz travellers who, after stopping on the road through the *jailoo* linking Kochkor and Jungal *raions* to sample some fermented mare’s milk had experienced serious food poisoning. Equally, rumours were circulating of a chemical dump in Kyzyl Suu leaking into the ground and poisoning the potato crop. In their relations with both kinds of goods Nur and Altynai are negotiating attributes of both “Kyrgyzzness” and “culturedness”, the role of “good”, “village” *kelin* and their view of themselves as modern women linked to the city and beyond, a negotiation fraught with complexities.

⁶⁸ There is some similarity here between these rural places seen to be “clean” and “pure” and the *dachas* Humphrey discusses as sites for the production of “clean” foods in Russia (2002c: 56).

BUILDING AND IMAGINING

In rural Kyrgyzstan the legislation governing the building of private houses during the Socialist period fixed the maximum size of both the plot and the house, and most people lived in four-roomed houses. Today the majority of villagers in Ak-Too continue to live in such houses, with a yard and outbuildings to serve as a summer kitchen and keep animals, and sometimes a bathhouse, all backed by a small plot to grow potatoes and occasionally an orchard. During Soviet times the restricted availability of consumer goods led to what Caroline Humphrey has termed an “involuntary homogeneity” (2002c: 52), material items and in particular domestic furniture were replicated throughout the Soviet Union (Rausing, 2004: 41). Kyrgyz rural houses reflect this involuntary homogeneity of Soviet era material culture in both their decorative style and their contents. Both inside and outside these houses a remarkable continuity of decoration still exists – floors are painted with a ubiquitous light brown gloss, while walls are white washed and window and door frames painted light blue, to match the exterior. However, new ways of earning and storing wealth mean that people are engaged in schemes of house building both in the village and in the capital city. These undertakings self-consciously attempt to project an image of the family as they wish to be seen. Nevertheless, sideboards and *shyrdaks* reappear throughout these buildings, real and imagined, demonstrating their significance in the delicate balancing of sameness and difference. In this section, I look at how decisions about new houses and their contents reflect negotiations over what is considered necessary to live a ‘proper’ life, and provide a site for the imagining of new and changing ways of interacting with domestic structures and objects and the personhoods these may afford.

A city house in the village

The following example shows how day to day engagement and imagination collide and become integral to personhood by drawing on the manner in which a *kelin* and her husband envisage a change in their material culture by critical responses to their current house and plans for future change. It is shown how, in doing so, they imagine new selves and new kin relations as well as a simple change in belongings.

As I noted earlier, Altynai and her husband, Esen, currently live together with Esen's parents and his sister's son. The young couple is in the process of building an entirely new house in the village. Drinking tea together one early afternoon Esen and Altynai discussed with me their plans for a new house on the other side of the village. Gesturing towards the windows, Esen asked out loud "why do we all live in houses like this, with basic windows and doors? Double glazed windows cost \$100, this room would need two and a door, \$300, that's three fat sheep but people don't do it!" Altynai commented that people just don't know how to use their money. Turning to me, Esen exclaimed that there are people "sitting on 100 sheep but they live in basic houses". For her part, Altynai describes the building as a place which she can escape to as a family with Esen and the children, away from some of the responsibilities of being a *kelin*. As I noted in the opening example, she has neither visited the land which her husband has bought in the village nor seen any plans for the design of the house. Nevertheless, she is clear about how the house should look on the inside. She imagines a 'Kyrgyz room' which would contain traditional Kyrgyz handicrafts, a room she would be able to keep untouched, clean. As such her imagining of this room brings together aspects of herself as a 'good' village *kelin*, respectful of traditional ways and objects as well as capable of maintaining a respectable, clean house with her desire for greater control over her time and domestic work. The desire for certain kinds of places is therefore linked to their ability to enable certain kinds of personhoods.

Esen describes to me the *evrostandart* (European standard) house his brother is building in Bishkek. Although he says he cannot manage something like this city house he is nevertheless determined to build a house with "all conveniences". Taking inspiration from a resident of a neighbouring village who had installed an indoor water pump and was

developing a way to collect methane gas from animal dung, they talked often of the ways they might build such a modern house. They are determined to build a “completely standard” house, as Esen says “a house with everything - hot water, cold water, central heating and a shower.” He and Altynai express frustration with their current house: too large to heat yet too small to accommodate all their frequent guests, and without room for all their animals in the yard. Esen explains that life is difficult in the “Kyrgyz way” that everything takes longer in this old house. “Life is difficult for Altynai and me. If we have a completely standard house we will be freer. I will have more time to work with the animals, fattening them for market, and to work in the fields.”

Esen’s description of these things as *evrostandart* and of his future house as being ‘completely standard’ suggest that double glazed windows and doors, indoor plumbing and a gas supply, are ‘standard’, normal elements of a ‘standard’, normal house, a comfort that everyone should aspire to. Sigrid Rausing (1997; 2004) has shown how in Estonia in the 1990s, ‘normal’ was associated with the unfamiliar and somewhat unobtainable, while ‘not-normal’ was related to the recognizable and common-place. Similarly, Krisztina Fehérváry (2002) has highlighted how in Hungary certain domestic places and material goods were considered normal on the basis that they were expected to become so in the future, despite being rather exceptional at the time. Equally, in rural Kyrgyzstan the features which Esen and Altynai consider standard are far from the norm for the vast majority of rural Kyrgyz.

A focus on “European standard” for house building does not point to an uncritical appreciation of western consumer goods. Building houses which are *shaarlyk* (of the city) or “European standard” may rather simultaneously be about recreating a different kind of lost modernity which people felt was lived during Soviet times, and thus regaining the way things “should be” (Bridger and Pine, 1998). Fitted kitchens which nevertheless do not function as kitchens (and in fact never did), being as they are bereft of cookers or sinks or any kind of plumbing, can be found throughout this village where there has never been a domestic water supply and electricity has become increasingly unreliable. People express

the reasons for maintaining or reproducing this kind of domestic environment as related to the fact that they had “got used to” a certain kind of domestic ideal when Ak Too still had many of the attributes of a *kul'turnii* location. The way modernity is now experienced by Altynai and Esen in their desire for a standard house echoes both the Soviet modernisation project which intimated that culture was akin to civilisation (Anderson, 2000) and something which could be constructed as well as potentially destroyed (Grant, 1995: 60), as well as the wishes for the ‘normal’ yet extraordinary lives of Fehérváry (2002) and Rausing’s (2002) informants.



Figure 3 A 'city' house in a village.

For Esen and Altynai, village houses are seen as somehow lacking, they do not have all the modern conveniences which are associated with an unobtainable normality in other places (Fehérváry, 2002, Rausing, 2004). In discussing the ‘proper’ use of money they are asserting that not only city dwelling business people can have this kind of domestic environment, but also that rural farmers can, indeed should, live in similar houses if they ‘work hard enough’. It hints at the different ways of storing wealth (in animals, in houses,

in banks) which are competing for legitimacy in Kyrgyzstan but it is also a comment about the kind of persons who are deserving of this kind of housing and the domestic practices which are envisaged to go with it. Moreover, both Altynai's and Esen's ways of envisioning and creating certain kinds of houses are intimately connected with their sense of themselves as certain kinds of person, ones who can act in the world using both skill and ingenuity to improve the material conditions of family life. However, this aim to build a city standard house in the village and the difference it could make to their daily practices challenges the way that Altynai and Esen envisage actually living in the house. Of the two buildings they plan to build, it will be in the smaller three roomed building that all seven members of the household, including Esen's parents and nephew, are expected to live. Altynai's domestic tasks will continue to be essential for the everyday life of the extended family. There is dissonance and contradiction between the house building project and the actual relationships which it sustains and which will in turn be sustained by them. Their days will continue to be taken up with their current work of raising animals and caring for children and grandparents; their new house will continue to be subject to shortages of electricity and heating.

New house, new future

The foundations have been laid and the walls built. It is late summer and so what better time for a feast even if the roof has yet to be raised? Together with Maksat's siblings, cousins and in-laws I have been invited to attend a feast at the new house that Salkyn apa's one remaining son is building for his brother's family in the capital city, Bishkek. We pull up to a small space crowded with cars. A blue and white striped tarpaulin has been stretched between a metal wagon, which provides temporary housing for the construction workers, and the beginnings of the perimeter wall. Laughter comes to us around the side of this temporary structure and then someone appears with a large watermelon to add to the already sizeable pile in the shade. We are ushered onwards to a low table piled high with fruit, sweets, bread and *borsok* (deep fried dough), the smoke from the samovar in our

eyes. Before we can sit more people arrive and others stand. Together we walk up a loose wooden board to enter the incomplete structure of the house. Springing in to this as yet unfinished building I find it hard to imagine it as a home, but then Talant baike appears to show us what is what: here is the bathroom, it will have a toilet and a shower; this is the sitting room, here they will watch television; over there are the three bedrooms, and in there is the kitchen; maybe we will build a staircase and a second floor. It is just like Dinara's house, I am told, and they took the plans from her new place. Called back to tea and to the here and now of the *raja* (a group contribution of money), I try hard to remember the dimensions and the rooms so that I can tell Nur when I get home. She has not seen it yet.

The next time I return to the house is with Nur herself, this time arriving by *marshrutka* (minibus taxi) we walk from the main road dividing the new suburb from the Soviet apartment blocks which shares its name. This house is in a "central location," as I was often informed by other people discussing the city with me. We're quickly lost in a maze of paved roads weaving between shiny metal gates in red, green and blue through which glimpses of small yards can be seen, while the upper stories of large "elite" houses rise up beyond painted in candy-coloured pinks and yellows. The white and blue houses of the village seem far away, as do the migrant settlements of adobe houses which have sprung up around Bishkek. The house rises up on poured concrete foundations and uneven steps which separate it defiantly from the small dirt yard around it. *Evrostandart* windows have been placed into apertures on all four external walls, their protective coating still flapping in the wind. Above the steps the entrance stands open, expectantly waiting a shiny new brown door with three locks which will secure this new house. The yard is littered with off cuts of wooden planks which Talant baike went to great efforts to procure. He insists they can be put to good use to make the inside of the house more commodious, so while awaiting the new door Nur and I begin to sort them, choosing the pieces she thinks will make the best skirting boards to add texture to the as yet bare plaster internal walls. Awkwardly yet carefully we begin to move the planks through an open window to keep them safe and dry in the interior of the house.

As we work Nur points out the different rooms of the house to me. She talks about the main room with a fireplace of the kind she had seen in American films, “that is where we will drink tea and watch television”. The third small room will be the Kyrgyz room, she says. It will house the *töshök* and provide comfortable surroundings for guests at future feasts they may hold. Through in the kitchen space she asks my advice about where they might position a staircase to the (as yet unbuilt) second floor. “Asel and Salkyn apa will sleep there,” she says pointing to one of three rooms which lead off the main living and cooking area. “Kanykei and I will sleep in the next room,” she points to the only room which currently has a ceiling. It also contains a bed, a heater made from concrete and metal filament; a small TV and some bags containing clothes. This room is currently home to two people from Ak-Too who have been taken on as non paying tenants. Their need for cheap housing in the city following migration to work in one of the many small workshops producing clothes for markets in Moscow and beyond, neatly dovetails with Talant baike's need for a kind of informal guard to make sure the house is not taken apart just as soon as it has been put up. The contrast between these most basic of living arrangements, no toilets, no running water, with Nur's description of her city home-to-be strikes me forcefully. Yet this is not the only contrast. The somewhat fixed use of space envisaged by Nur for her family in the city house is vastly different to the flexible spaces they inhabit in the village. The flexible use of household space often reflects the changing composition of the household. In their village house the *chong tam* (large building) was of higher status. This is where more important guests were entertained, where the “better” furniture and bedding was kept. When large feasts were held guests were accommodated in the six rooms of this building for days on end and when relatives came to visit their beds were made up in the various rooms. It is this part of the house which was to remain the particular space of the family when they relocated to the city, with the smaller building to be rented to a friend who would also have access to the stables, the yard, the orchard, the summer kitchen and the bath house.

This flexibility of space is experienced bodily. The frequent rearrangement of furniture in the smaller building meant there was an ongoing reconfiguration of the way we moved

about the space, sat to eat, converse or watch television, and prepared food. These changes in bodily engagement with the house also followed seasonal changes, with the use of the outside kitchen in warmer summer weather changing both our daily practices of consuming food and of hosting guests. In addition, as a household in mourning, the use of the semi-public space of the apple orchard and garden was circumscribed. Salkyn apa recounted to me how when her son was alive they had spent long evenings taking their meals under the branches of apple trees. This space, on to which the window from my bedroom opened, had seemed to me a highly private space only open to the family or their guests, yet for Salkyn apa it was now clearly a public space, where their daily practices of eating and drinking tea could be observed by neighbours, and thus the behaviour of family members in the orchard must conform to publicly acceptable standards of mourning⁶⁹.

Nur's plans extend outside, too. While little interested in farming or gardening at her village house, here she envisages a different kind of space: one filled with flowers, a pleasant place to sit and imagine they are not in the city. However, her focus on finding a practical way to support herself and her children somewhat intrudes upon these ideas of creating a garden retreat. She will, she says, build a summer kitchen alongside the main building which will contain three rooms and which she hopes to let out to paying tenants. Salkyn apa has somewhat different plans for this new house. In addition to more flexible sleeping arrangements and no talk of the second floor, Salkyn apa insists to me on other occasions that they will build a second kitchen in the yard "with a *kazan* (traditional Kyrgyz cooking pot) to cook *borsok* (deep fried dough served at feasts) and make *besh barmak* (boiled meat and noodles)." After all, she remarks, "we are Kyrgyz." Despite her plans for how the space should be she does not envisage it as her new home. The village house will be returned to and lived in by Salkyn apa, maybe only in summers or maybe, as she hopes, permanently, accompanied by one of her grandchildren. As the locus of the family, the objects of affinal and lineage relations will most likely remain in the village house. While Nur talks of taking certain objects to the city these are mainly objects which fit with her idea of a modern city house such as the unpatterned blue teapot received as a

⁶⁹ These practices will be examined in more detail in the next chapter.

gift from my family when they came to visit, as well as the necessary handicrafts to furnish the Kyrgyz room desired by Salkyn apa. The majority of objects which have accumulated around the family will, however, remain in the village. Perhaps, like those objects stored in other city dwellers' village homes, such as Shirin apa's house, they will be visited annually, taken out into the sunlight to ensure their long life and resistance to moths. A repository for the furnishing of future family homes, a felt carpet here and a sheepskin rug there that can be taken to ensure new buildings are brought within the realm of family places.

These contrasting ideas about the use of space and objects reflect different ideas about respectability. For Salkyn apa, it is clear that a certain work ethic is required for respectability while for Nur the focus is on recreational space which reflects a different kind of emerging middle class respectability modelled on images from foreign films and television, nevertheless tempered by awareness of a need for income to make this a possibility – an income which would be earned in a way that, however, undermines the ideal. In this we can see that continuities with rural homes are combined with an emerging middle class domestic form, both of which challenge socialist middle class housing (panel built apartment blocks). For example, outdoor space which represents clean air and a rural way of life is incorporated into ideas about the need for recreational space; indoor space is flexible just as the village house currently is, but achieves this with reference to a different model – the kitchen diner – which combines living and dining space in much the same way as living in a small three roomed building. These continuities are present not just in the form, but also the process. For example, the design and building of the house requires individual input and ingenuity in the obtaining of materials and services, through the negotiation of social networks and bureaucracy, but also draws on 'modern' design and materials⁷⁰. In addition, descriptions of the house as "elite", "two story", "in a central location" all point to the assertion of new kinds of personhood that draw on ideas of the urban and *kul'turnost'*, assertions made even more significant because of the death of Maksat and uncertainty the family face. At the same time, Salkyn apa's descriptions of

⁷⁰ see Fehérváry (2011) for a fascinating discussion of these continuities as they are found in the building projects of an emerging Hungarian middle class.

how the house will remain “Kyrgyz” through the use of space, the material objects present and the sociality envisioned indicate that these negotiations are complex and will be worked out through everyday interactions with the house and one another rather than being determined by it. The family’s status as rural migrants does not stop them from claiming a place in the *ku’lturnii* capital city, while at the same time they assert their Kyrgyzness, something which complicates divisions in the city between “old” residents and new arrivals seemingly defined by their Kyrgyzness (Flynn and Kosmarskaya, 2012, Schroeder, 2010).

Homebuilding and the making of persons

If the house can be seen to both produce and embody sociality (Humphrey, 2002c: 45), then imagined houses can be spaces where new and different socialities can be conceived. In imagining different selves and different places people imagine different ways of being-in-the-world. However, “only because they already dwell therein can they think the thoughts they do.” (Ingold, 2000: 186). Understanding these places as created through dwelling leads us to understand that buildings “whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational context of their practical engagement with their surroundings.” (Ingold, 2000: 185). Like the “technologies of the imagination” referred to by Sneath et al. (2009) and the prisms noted by Humphrey (2005), houses afford but do not determine imaginative outcomes. The imagining of new selves and new relations draws on familiar ways of being which are gendered, age-bound and related to particular conceptions of time and place, yet they are not defined by these. The imaginary places of new houses also seem to afford novel ways to reconfigure these in multiple possible selves and relations. Thus Altynai can imagine her position as the youngest and only resident *kelin* in her married household, with all the domestic work that entails, to be qualitatively changed by a house with modern conveniences while at the same time affirming herself as a good *kelin*, appreciative of traditional Kyrgyz objects and taking care of her parents-in-law.

The process of building is a group endeavour and the socialising of the new house is achieved in part through kinship-based feasts. While the city house facilitates both Nur's and Salkyn apa's narratives of the self, in a certain way it also affirms the centrality of family and of oneself as a person defined through kinship position. The newly imagined space of the city house is an intensely social space. As we have seen, the family feast and *raja* brought the house under construction firmly within a familial context. Both Nur's and Salkyn apa's envisioning of their family's future, not matter how divergent, demonstrate that these imagined spaces are in fact populated before they are built, and as such have already become homes.

CONCLUSION

In the examples above I have shown how the building of houses and interaction with the objects they contain are central sites for *kelins'* negotiation of personhood and their creation of relatedness with affinal kin. For *kelins* the house emerges as an important site for their integration into the family, and also for their negotiation of their personhood. I have dealt with two kinds of domestic interactions. Firstly, I have looked at already existing houses where the integration of *kelins* are mediated through both domestic work and engagements with domestic space and objects. Secondly, I have examined how imaginative perceptions afforded by the building of new houses are bound up with projects for creating new kinds of people and relationships. The past in the present seems to be a constitutive part of relationships with domestic objects. At the same time, the future in the present forms part of everyday imaginings of these objects in new settings, and indeed imaginings of these new settings themselves.

Unlike the activities of cleaning and tending that, as we saw above, are often the work of a *kelin* on her own, house building is a distinctly collaborative project - if not in physical engagement then certainly in imaginative construction. Discussions about windows, doors, fireplaces and 'Kyrgyz rooms' can be understood as a concern with what is appropriate in these new buildings, about making judgments about the 'right' way of living and the kind of persons that might be imagined to live in these buildings, surrounded by these objects. The gendered nature of house building is tied not to the earning of money but the control of such money and decisions about design, for which men take the majority of decisions, whereas for women it seems it is the practices they are already engaged in, such as cleaning, cooking, serving and caring, which are re-envisioned as proceeding differently.

While it may seem that the new houses discussed above differ radically from the current homes of their future occupiers, houses which in some cases could be interpreted as "ready-made environment fashioned by a previous generation and lived in long before it becomes an object of thought..." (Carsten and Hugh-Jones, 1995: 64), these current houses were built and rebuilt as consciously different to state-provided village houses not more than 40 years ago. They, too, were and continue to be an expression of self and family life. They also, of course, exist in the imagination as well as in daily practice, the two combined and intertwined in the embodied act of perception. Fundamentally, both houses old and new, and domestic objects are important elements in *kelins'* making, remaking and affirming relationships, and thus themselves, through the intertwining of daily practices and imaginative reflections on future practices in new homes.

The ethnography presented here demonstrates the extent to which *kelins* are individually able to negotiate their personhood through their interactions with domestic material culture and imaginings of new living spaces. Significantly, these negotiations are not dependent upon ownership or consumption, nor are they over-determined by kinship relations or gender ideologies which position *kelins* as relatively powerless. In this way, the house provides a site for *kelins* to assert their personhood and create relatedness within the context of an androcentric discourse on the relationship between kinship and place. My

discussion of the import of houses and domestic material culture brings into focus the significance of objects which often recede into the background for these individual responses.

Chapter 6 Death, Mourning and Grief

The day of the memorial feast for Maksat has finally come, not quite a full year after his death. This feast will mark the end of mourning: his widow Nur will return to work and the family will soon begin their move to Bishkek. We have been preparing for today for weeks: erecting a *boz üü* (yurt) in the yard; bringing a horse from the house where it has been fattened; receiving provisions from the capital to feed the many expected guests; and, perhaps most importantly, ordering and installing the gravestone with a picture of Maksat etched on its smooth surface. The evening before the feast, relatives begin to arrive and the *kelins* and older women sit up late chopping onions and carrots for *plov*, making dough for *borsok* (deep fried dough) and discussing the fine details of how the feast day should proceed. As the sun comes up on the morning of the feast we all rise early from our beds to begin the frenetic work of preparing for the guests. Nur seems a little lost while all around are busy. *Kelins* are ferrying neatly cut dough to the outdoor kitchen to be fried in the large cast iron pans. Behind the kitchen a fire is being prepared on which to cook the vast amounts of *plov* which will be consumed. Smoke rising from stoves and samovars, we all suddenly pause and turning to face Mecca raise our hands and say *omin* as the horse is slaughtered.

With this brief change of pace, activity moves from preparation to event. Nur, Salkyn apa, Maksat's married sisters, women of the Tokoch *uruu*, all enter the yurt and begin to receive guests who arrive slowly at first and then, as we approach midday, in ever-increasing numbers. Women enter the yurt to share their condolences and men recite the Koran. When all those expected have arrived we prepare to go to the cemetery. I join the women with their heads bare in tying on a *jooluk* (headscarf) and we begin to leave the yard. The sound of the mourners in the yurt who have begun to cry the funeral laments builds to a high pitch and as they climb on to a truck for the short journey to the cemetery their weeping and distressed cries are overwhelming. In silence, I drive with other mourners to the cemetery just outside the village. Some *kelin* and maternal relatives have gone ahead to prepare the tea and food which will be consumed at the graveside.

Upon arrival at the cemetery, Nur, Salkyn apa and the Tokoch women descend from the truck and move steadily to the graveside where they crouch down, tears running down their faces. Salkyn apa wailing loudly clasps her granddaughter Asel to her, who looks frightened and overwhelmed. Kanykei, the youngest granddaughter, holds back and begins to sob for her father. She is quickly gathered up and held by her uncle. Nur's wet cheeks are turned away from the scene and she makes no sound. The men and other women mourners stand surrounding but slightly apart from these women, who have now moved off to the side of the grave. The crying continues quietly while the Koran is recited by the village *moldo* (mullah) directly in front of the grave. He, together with male family and village elders, then moves to the edge of the cemetery where a table cloth has been lain on the floor covered in the usual feast fare of breads, fruit, *borsok* (deep fried dough), sugar and jam. The steaming samovars are put into action by waiting *kelins* and the men drink tea and again recite the Koran at the edge of the cemetery. Salkyn apa and Shirin apa again begin to lament with powerful force bringing us to tears. We women go then to drink tea and the emotion of the lamenting combined with the everyday event of drinking tea affects me powerfully; Nur keeps her eyes lowered and does not speak. Finally, the Koran is once again recited and the remaining male mourners drink tea.

We return slowly and quietly to the house and the day continues: the *kelins* and I serve tea to the guests; people gossip about Gulzat's return⁷¹; gifts of clothes and material are exchanged; *plov* and horse meat are consumed and guests return to their homes, *keshik* (small plastic bags of food to take away)⁷² clasped in their hands. The powerful emotions expressed at the graveside subside and the end of the mourning period is successfully marked.

⁷¹ See Chapter Three

⁷² These small bags are always taken away from feasts and funerals to share with family, friends and neighbours who did not attend. In the case of food from funerals, the tasting of the food will occasion a reciting of the Koran for the deceased.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my time in Kyrgyzstan, death was a frequent visitor to the people I knew. People's spouses, siblings, parents and children, taken by long-term illness, shockingly sudden accidents or the quiet passing of old age. None of these deaths were banal or every day, all were felt powerfully as an incomparable loss and mourned with great sadness. And yet when it came time to try and understand the experience of losing a loved one in Kyrgyz society, it was the rituals my informants encouraged me to learn about, and indeed it was the rituals people talked about and ethnographers wrote about. Intense emotion was almost nowhere to be seen in such accounts, and yet such intense feeling was all around. As I have already noted at the beginning of this thesis, my stay in Ak Too was hosted and facilitated by a family who were in mourning. While this was in some ways a challenging situation to find myself in, largely due to my understanding of death and grief as highly private events, the circumstances in some ways enabled us to form closer relationships with each other than may have otherwise been possible. One reason for this was that I was myself grieving the loss of my uncle who had died the previous August, an experience which formed the basis of many conversations between myself and Nur and enabled us to see similarities in each other which may otherwise have been elusive. Over time we were able to share highly emotional events and through mutual empathy build an emotional understanding which underpins all the evidence presented in this thesis, but most particularly the ideas discussed in this chapter.

The opening to this chapter briefly highlights the different reactions to death and grief and the manner in which these may be experienced and expressed during a highly ritualised commemoration of death. The differing visible reactions of Nur and Salkyn apa, and of Asel and Kanykei to the death of Maksat demonstrate that there is no one single way to grieve, but that this may depend on the individual's personality as well as their social positions. At the same time, it is clear that adults are expected to grieve in a certain socially acceptable way and that such visible mourning is an active way of honouring both the deceased and the surviving family. Such an interpretation presents me with a

conundrum: how can we talk about the emotions of grief at the same time as trying to understand ritually enacted occasions? One way that I seek to do this in this chapter is by focusing on the central concerns of the thesis overall, that is to say the relationship between personhood and place, and how this is impacted on and reworked by death and grief.

In this chapter I thus seek to disrupt the relationship between people and place presented in earlier chapters by examining what happens when such a relation is dislocated by death. As I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this thesis, connection with place is a central component of what it means to be a Kyrgyz person and constitutive of social relationships with others. With death and grief come new ways of experiencing place which both destabilise and reaffirm personhood. My aim is to provide a detailed description of the way this is enacted through every day and ritual practices over time, paying particular attention to the experience of grief and the role of emotion in the shifts which take place. I do this in order to highlight once again the emotional significance of place for personhood, but this time through demonstrating how death can be instrumental in the disassembling of connections with place for the living. My ethnographic material highlights that different ways of grieving can exist within a highly ritualised context, and are also neither contained nor completed by them. Moreover, these are ways of grieving which highlight the processes that influence change in the personhood of both the deceased and the bereaved. In discussing these processes I thus address not only the ritual and everyday processes but also the way in which highly personal responses to grief interact with them. This chapter focuses then on the particular dislocation between personhood and place that occurs when death is experienced, a dislocation which is created by and in response to institutionalised and everyday interactions. The chapter engages particularly with the work of Rosaldo (1989) to refocus the study of death on emotion and intersubjectivity rather than culture and social structure. I take the position that experience of death and bereavement cannot be analysed as discrete phenomena, but should be understood as an integral part of social life (Rosaldo, 1989). As such, death and bereavement challenge anthropological holism (Connor, 1995: 537) and necessitate an approach that allows for the inchoate (Herzfeld, 1996: 150) in both ritual and everyday contexts, an approach which has been enabled by a rise in interpretive approaches (Lutz and White, 1986: 45).

There is an ongoing debate about the role of the personal and the ritual in anthropological analyses of grief and death. Addressing the major debates on the subject and exploring both the ritual and the personal in the context of Kyrgyzstan here enables me to understand the experience and interconnections between the ritual and the personal in everyday interactions. The analysis undertaken below does not resolve this debate – it actually highlights further complexities. By viewing interactions through the lens of place, as in other parts of this dissertation, the dislocation and resolution of dislocation that comes through bereavement is shown to be the result of interaction between local, personal and cultural dimensions. This analysis of death and grief in Ak Too shows the multifaceted changes that faced the family I lived with but also underlines the need to understand the complexity of grief and death in its fuller complexities elsewhere.

The structure of the chapter is in four parts. I begin with an overview of the anthropological literature on death, mourning and grief which will examine the different theoretical approaches, comparing broadly the emphasis on ritual action and emotional response in order to highlight how the two aspects of death and bereavement are rarely analysed together. I then give an overview of Kyrgyz funerary and mourning practices drawing on secondary literature in order to provide relevant details of funerary rituals and mourning practice. I go on to present ethnographic reflections on emotions in funerals in order to nuance the preceding systematic explanation of Kyrgyz funerals. Finally, I look more closely at mourning and grief outside of ritual contexts to provide an alternative interpretation enabling a better understanding of the “being out of place” of grief.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF DEATH

Death is both universal and inevitable, yet it is not a simple category but has varied and complex elaborations. This fluidity across time and cultures has led to an ongoing interest

within anthropology as to how death is conceptualised. Many societies make a distinction between social and biological death, the former being the point at which people act towards a person as if they were dead regardless of whether they are biologically alive or dead. The distinction between social and biological death has become an increasingly researched topic particularly in western industrialised countries where increased life span and illnesses such as dementia have meant that people often experience an exclusion from social life and decisions concerning their own lives. Social death has also been used to refer to certain forms of exclusion from social life, and the denial of personhood. However, more commonly social death refers to the social recognition of biological death and as such takes place sometime after biological death and is often marked by funeral rituals. The significance of this distinction is that it demonstrates how death is as socially constructed as it is biologically inevitable⁷³.

Importantly, this contrast is between death as something which can be clearly pinpointed in time and death as a process. As Ingold notes, 'death punctuates, but does not terminate life' (Ingold, 2000: 143). Social death is both the disassembling of the social person (Kaufman and Morgan, 2005: 318) and their transformation into something else, such as an ancestor (Kaufman and Morgan, 2005: 319), both of which are often most visibly effected through ritual processes. The focus on death as process is thus on the transformation of the deceased into another kind of being, often through a series of rituals over time. Consequently, much anthropological work on death has concerned itself with the study of ritual burial and mourning practices. Two important works which have addressed the ritual marking of death are those by Huntington and Metcalf (Huntington and Metcalf, 1991), and Bloch and Parry (1982), both of which draw extensively on the work of Hertz as the basis for their theoretical arguments. Hertz (1960) was a student of Durkheim and his perspective to some extent mirrors that found in Durkheim's work on suicide in so far as it argues that the social element of what appears to be a highly individual and private act must be studied if we are to understand its import. Thus, Hertz proposed that the conception of and emotions surrounding death, as well as the ritual processes which mark

⁷³ This is not to say that biological death is a clear state either – the biological definitions of death have changed significantly over time due to medical advances.

it, should be understood as sociological facts. In this way Hertz understands the function of ritual to be the reestablishment of the social order through the separation of the deceased individual from the social collectivity. Huntingdon and Metcalf and Bloch and Parry interpret Hertz's work quite differently. Bloch and Parry argue that Hertz's work demonstrates how "rituals organise and orchestrate private emotions" (1982: 3) with "socially constructed emotions and beliefs..." in fact *producing* death (Bloch and Parry, 1982: 3). By contrast, Huntingdon and Metcalf argue that "the relationship between ritual and emotion is not causally determinative in either direction, but rather cybernetic." (Huntingdon and Metcalf, 1991: 4).

Despite the differences in their interpretation of Hertz, the work of Huntingdon and Metcalf and Bloch and Parry can be understood as similar in so far as they both focus on the contained nature of ritual processes and do not address emotional responses to death outside of this context. An alternative approach to the study of death has most famously been proposed by Renato Rosaldo who, in *Grief and a Headhunter's Rage* (1989), notes that bereavement is noticeably absent from studies of death and mourning, which focus more upon detached observation of ritual spectacle and the presentation of formulaic ways of dealing with death, an approach which significantly limits the anthropologist's ability fully to comprehend the intensity of emotions felt. Rosaldo criticises both Huntingdon and Metcalf and Bloch and Parry for reducing death to ritual activity, "defined by its formality and routine" (1989: 12) and ignoring bereavement which is not routine. In his earlier work on Ilongot funerals and headhunting rituals (1980), Rosaldo had himself sought to understand Ilongot ways of relating to death by analysing them in terms of cultural symbols and meanings, interpreting them within a theory of exchange, an approach he comes to criticise for equating "analytical 'depth' with cultural 'elaboration'" (1989: 12). Only after suffering his own loss, that of his wife, the anthropologist Michelle Rosaldo, during a fieldwork accident, did Renato Rosaldo understand the literal ways in which his headhunter informants experience the rage of grief which could only be vented by "the act of severing and tossing away the victim's head..." (1989: 1). This understanding, he argues, arose directly from his "repositioning" as subject following his own experience of "serious loss" (1989: 8). Rather than focusing on the "thickening of meaning" which symbolic analyses favour, Rosaldo argues that it is the emotional "force" of grief which

needs to be understood if we are to know anything of the experience of the other, and to acknowledge the indeterminate outcomes and experiences of death rites and bereavement.

Emotional responses to death

Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Dylan Thomas (1953)

Poetry and literature have in general dealt more successfully with the strong emotions aroused by death, able perhaps to more easily examine the interior life of characters and express empathy with the grief they are suffering. Anthropology, on the other hand, has tended to focus on ritual funeral and mourning activities and assume that such practices both enable and complete the emotional work necessary in coming to terms with the loss of a loved one through deconstructing death (Seale, 1998). Within this context, emotional displays of grief are often presented as the enactment of a ritual script - a position which seems to belittle, if not deny, the intensity of feelings of grief. As Rosaldo notes (1988), grief itself in such analyses seems to fall by the wayside, considered almost irrelevant to the role of mourning and funerary ritual in marking the social death of the deceased through effecting a successful transformation and thereby maintaining and renewing the social order. However, "the emotional tug of death derives less from the brute generalized abstract fact than from a particular intimate relation's permanent rupture" (Rosaldo, 1988: 425-426).

Thus, understanding grief requires us to go beyond ritual analyses and contemplate the "interior" life of the other. Such a step involves something of a conceptual leap concerning which many anthropologists have been (and continue to be) hesitant, in so far as they

debate whether and in what way the emotional life of the other is knowable. For Rosaldo, this understanding relies on the anthropologist as positioned subject and requires him or her to draw on analogous personal experience as a basis for understanding. By contrast, Lutz notes that the anthropologist's position as outsider makes it difficult for shared emotional understanding to come about (1988: 217), and that what is needed, yet often elusive, "is a shared social position and hence, a shared moral and emotional point of view" (1988: 217). Taking this sociocentric position, Lutz argues that understanding of emotions needs to be denaturalised so that the imposition of Western concepts onto those we study can be revealed (1988: 225), and the problem of 'projection' which Gertz (1974) warns against, avoided.

Within a cultural theory of emotions the focus is placed on the experiencing self who is culturally constituted (Rosaldo, 1984). Culture is seen to control not only the expression of emotions, but also the experience of emotions. For example, Gertz's work on Bali (1973) famously argues that the controlled expression of emotion by the Balinese is not in fact the covering up of emotions strongly felt, but that such emotions are not strongly felt at all. Indeed he argues that the only emotion felt by the Balinese is shame, which he calls stage fright. Similarly, Briggs's work on the Utku argues that anger is simply not present in this Inuit community (Briggs, 1970). Social organisation, and culture, is thus seen to deeply affect how emotion is experienced (Lindholm, 2001: 283) and this can be understood in contrast to the psychobiological position which argues that emotions are universally felt, despite variations in their expression. Lindholm criticises the work of Briggs, Lutz, and Michelle Rosaldo for their focus on the social constitution of emotion which he argues denies any autonomy, intensity or force to emotion (2001: 287). This critique is somewhat similar to that of Renato Rosaldo who, as we have seen, argues that in attempting to understand death it is essential to recognize and attend to the overwhelming force of grief.

The necessity of Renato Rosaldo's positioned subject for achieving an emotional understanding of the other nevertheless underestimates the two-way nature of intersubjective understanding. For such an understanding to occur perhaps requires that those involved, both ethnographer and informant, are prepared to reveal something of

themselves. While Rosaldo argues that it is important for the ethnographer to have analogous experience to be able to interpret the emotional responses of the other, this may be understood to ignore the importance for the other which the ethnographer's own experience holds in building mutual understanding and empathy. Nevertheless, an empathic understanding does not just emerge out of the extension of one's own experience onto the other which would amount to little more than the projection Geertz (1974) so clearly warns about. It requires effort to access the other's position and concerns through close interaction over time, shared experience and openness on both sides (Hollan, 2008). In attempting to engage with the emotional states of my informants it is thus necessary to both understand the social context of the particular ways their emotions were expressed and felt, and to attempt to engage empathically with their situation by drawing upon my own lived experience and the intersubjective experience shared with my informants.

A holistic approach to the study of death

The contrast between the work of Huntingdon and Metcalf and Bloch and Parry, and Rosaldo can broadly be summarised as the contrast between the use of death and mourning rituals as a prism through which to understand other "social dramas", and the "universal humanism" of Rosaldo (Seremetakis, 1991: 14). These are quite different approaches, but they represent the dichotomy within anthropological studies of death which results in the view that emotion is seen to exist and be experienced largely outside of the ritual context. Consequently, both approaches lead us greatly (Geertz, 1974) to ignore the extent to which emotion may be variously felt and experienced *during* ritual activity (Connor, 1995). Attempts to overcome this have focused on the argument that people can and do feel 'real' emotions during ritual. Clark-Decés (2005) in her study of Tamil professional mourners emphasises the genuineness of their emotions despite both their role and the context. Here, the emphasis is placed on the authenticity of emotion, emotion which is not 'fabricated' within the ritual context (Clark-Decés, 2005: 24). This focus on authenticity implies that emotions can be felt during ritual occasions *despite* the context, suggesting that for the most part ritual is understood to reassure the living and take the place of uncontrollable

emotions of bereavement by structuring their expression and removing any spontaneity. Mimica (1996: 227-228) argues that the western understanding of the ‘genuineness’ of emotion as related to spontaneity is problematic, and is based on moral judgements about the proper way of being an emotional person that consider emotion and premeditation to be mutually exclusive. Such an approach allows that emotion may be felt within a context that requires its expression, and that this lack of spontaneity does not diminish its force.

I argue here that it is important to attempt an analysis that accords force to emotions experienced both within ritual and during the everyday process of grieving a loved one over time. This is because combining an overview of ritual practices with individual experience using detailed description can serve as a means to resist “conceptual models and systematic explanation which, when pushed too far, can disqualify and efface the very life one wants to understand.” (Jackson, 1996a: 2). For this reason, I will draw on both descriptions of Kyrgyz mortuary ritual and the individual experiences of my informants to highlight how cultural categories are challenged, negotiated and created through intersubjective experience. By combining the two, not seeing one as context and the other as explanatory example, it is possible to understand death, grief and mourning as all part of the larger process of bereavement (Rosaldo, 1988: 433), a process that it is important to understand in order to comprehend how people respond to the disruption of their own and their loved one’s personhood. At the same time, this chapter presents a discussion of how grief expands beyond the boundaries of funeral and mourning practices to tell us something about how death cannot be fully integrated into and explained through such cultural processes. Such an approach requires us to engage profoundly with the emotional responses of the other both during ritual and beyond.

KYRGYZ FUNERAL RITUALS

Kyrgyz funerals have been analysed as the pre-eminent rite in Kyrgyzstan, an occasion when both beliefs about death and the afterlife and social relations among the living are

enacted. Academic analyses of Kyrgyz funerals have focused upon normative practices and state attempts to control ritual rather than paying attention to diversity of practice (cf Jacquesson, 2008)⁷⁴, or analysed rites in terms of theories of gender, power and social control (Inogamova, 2008). As such, they echo the anthropological concerns evidenced in Huntington and Metcalf (Huntington and Metcalf, 1991), and Bloch and Parry (Bloch and Parry, 1982) in their focus on ritual as a way to understand social structure rather than individual responses to death and the accompanying challenges to and reworkings and re-articulations of these structures. In this way they reflect the traditional western anthropological concerns with death, in so far as they focus upon the way ritual enables social cohesion to be re-established.

Studies of Kyrgyz funeral rituals are also influenced by Soviet anthropological concerns with defining and recording “authentic” cultural practices. Thus the classification of practices as either Islamic or traditional informs analyses of funerals from diverse periods (cf Baialieva, 1972, Köchümkulova, 2007). Classification in this way stemmed from the Soviet Union’s focus on religion as anti-communist, as well as attempts to destroy elites (Jacquesson, no date). Funerals were seen as particular occasions when both were at play, with their religious content and their focus on asserting the role of the *uruu*, and thus were the particular focus of political attacks. Despite this, funerals remained significant events in Kyrgyzstan, even for party elites. Photographs which I was shown when helping Shirin apa clean her village house showed in faded black and white the funeral of her husband. A member of the local party elite, he had died suddenly in the 1960s while he was away studying in Moscow. Following the repatriation of his body a large funeral was organised in his home village of Ak Too. Members of the local and national communist party attended, following in cars the large truck where he lay, underneath a portrait. Hundreds of villagers walked alongside to the cemetery where his nephew Maksat now rests.

⁷⁴ In this chapter I have chosen to focus on the emotions felt by the bereaved and how these relate to and rework ritual and everyday mourning, which are largely left out of structural analyses. However, another element which is missed by generalised descriptions is often the wider political and cultural context in its particular impact upon ritual occasions, although see Jacquesson (2008) for a discussion of this context for the Kyrgyz case.

For these varied reasons, analyses of Kyrgyz funerals, as we shall see below, often focus on the religious and lineage structure of Kyrgyz funerals and are divided analytically into four phases (Jacquesson, 2008: 282): the wake, the burial, the mourning period, and the memorial feast, with the mourning period and the memorial feast (*Ash*) being separated by up to five years. Through these ritual occasions a number of things are said to happen: the differentiation and distancing of the deceased as they are transformed into an *arbak* (spirit or ancestor); the differentiation of the living according to their position in relation to the deceased, and to other mourners; assertion of the *uruu* through the organisation and payment of *raja* (a group contribution of money) to fund the funeral; confirmation of relation to kinship places through burial in one's *tuulgan jer*. In this section I will present an outline of these different stages of funeral, mourning and memorial practices drawn from Soviet and post-Soviet ethnographic analyses, as well as my own field research. However, such a focus does little to convey the feelings of bereavement. Nevertheless, I do this in order to provide a background to the later discussion which will draw out the ways in which a change in relation to place through separation between the living and the dead is effected by both ritual and everyday practices, and how these are individually and differentially experienced. The following section, where I give details of Kyrgyz mortuary practices, attempts to understand the role of these rituals in relation to connections between personhood and place. However, it leaves a significant dimension unexplored, namely, the way that funerals are individual lived experienced. Therefore, after presenting a detailed description of the rituals which take place following death, I will discuss Nur's feelings about the funeral of her husband Maksat. I will then address the experience of grieving of the family and in particular Nur's feelings about her changed status from wife to widow.

Preparing for death and honouring the deceased

First it is important to highlight how the dying prepare for death. Close relatives (although this mostly excludes young children) assemble at the deathbed to ask the dying person to express their particular wishes, as well as their gratitude to their relatives (Inogamova,

2008: 3). This is the point when the dying person may give instructions for their funeral, or for the care of their family following their death. A mullah is invited to carry out *dem salu* which involves reading the thirty six sura of the Koran, dropping water into the mouth of the dying and for him or her to pronounce “*kelme*” three times (Inogamova, 2008: 3). Following death the body is washed for a first time (Inogamova, 2008: 3, Jacquesson, 2008: 283) and is then wrapped in a white shroud with face covered.

In preparation for the burial which usually occurs on the third day following death, close relatives, *uruu* members, affinal relations, friends, colleagues and neighbours will be informed in person, by telephone or by note. Close relatives are expected to travel immediately to the place where the wake will be held. The body of the deceased may be transported to its *tuulgan jer* if it is at some distance from where death occurred. Not all people return to their *tuulgan jer* to be buried, a decision which may be taken by the dying person or their relatives. Reasons given for not being buried in the *tuulgan jer* were that it was too far, no close family members lived there and/or it would be too difficult to visit regularly to tend the grave and pray for the deceased. Wherever it is decided to bury the deceased, a mortuary yurt will be erected outside the home where the funeral rites will be held. This is most often the home of a close patrilineal relative, if not that of the deceased themselves. The yurt which is erected should belong to a member of the *uruu*, although in some places the local mosque may own a yurt which can be rented specifically for this purpose. It is not only in rural areas that funeral yurts are erected; they can also be seen outside houses in the *microraions* of the capital city. To those unable to erect a mortuary yurt, a room in a house or apartment may be set aside for this purpose. The deceased will be lain out in either the yurt or the room behind a curtain. Kochkunov (2008) specifies that if the deceased is a man his body will be lain on the *er jak* (male side) of the yurt, while a woman will be lain out on the *epin jak* (female side) with their head to the exit.

Once the burial place has been decided, the yurt erected and the deceased laid out, the body will be watched over by close female kin. In the past an effigy of the deceased was often constructed and dressed in the deceased’s clothes (Jacquesson, no date, Abramzon, 1971). This effigy remained in the funeral yurt for the forty days of mourning, and represented the

presence of the deceased at the home throughout this time. In addition, food was prepared and left in a dish for the deceased (Baialieva, 1972), demonstrating that the deceased was not believed to leave the home for the forty day period and indeed needed to be placated and comforted throughout this difficult transition to the realm of the *arbaks* (spirits or ancestors). An important element of comforting the deceased is the expression of loss and sadness, as well as praising their good character. Historically, women closely related to the deceased expressed their grief by scratching their faces and tearing their clothes (Jacquesson, 2008: 283). However, this practice seems less prevalent now. Men upon approaching the wake will wail about their loss, but will not enter the funerary yurt. Women, however, enter the yurt to weep and lament *koshok* (funerary laments from the verb *kosh-* to put together, to improvise (Köchümkulova, 2007: 224)) with the female relatives seated there. The practice of weeping and lamenting continues in both rural and urban areas.

These *koshok* may draw on the long tradition of Kyrgyz oral poetry (Köchümkulova, 2007: 225) but each one is different and should reflect both the deceased's life and character, as well as their relationship to the lamenter. As such they are an expression of the intersubjective nature of grief. *Koshok* often reference the natural elements which are considered symbolic of a nomadic Kyrgyz way of life (Köchümkulova, 2007: 242) and elements which are celebrated in poetic evocations of one's relationship with the land and especially one's *tuulgan jer*⁷⁵ resurface here. *Koshok* were traditionally sung every day until the memorial feast. However, it is now more usual for them to cease following the end of the forty day mourning period, occasionally being sung when a mourner visits who was unable to attend the wake or the funeral, and again being repeated at the memorial feast which marks the end of mourning. For some, laments should not be sung by old women as it may be considered unseemly for them to lament the loss of one they have spent much time with (Köchümkulova, 2007). However, this seems to vary depending on the individuals involved and it may be the case that older women lead the lamenting when they are more experienced and more able to do so than the younger women present.

⁷⁵ See Chapter Two

During the wake mourners come to the house to pay their respects but also to contribute to the funeral costs. The expenditure necessary to host a funeral which could be considered respectable can be very high. Animals must be slaughtered, provisions for the tea tables must be bought, and gifts must be given to mourners and money to the mullah and local mosque. Such costs are rarely borne by the immediate family of the deceased alone. Contributions in the form of *raja* are made by members of the deceased's *uruu*. The exact amount of this contribution will usually be set by an elder of the *uruu*, either male or female, and may be decided upon by dividing the total estimated cost equally between the contributing households, or may reflect the means of each. The *uruu raja* can be understood to bring together people of differing status and location, stretching as they often do between village and city, and is a practice through which people affirm their relatedness with one another, as well as with the deceased. In addition, neighbours, colleagues, friends will make a contribution which may range from an animal to be slaughtered to a small amount of money (often established in a similar way to a *raja*) or clothes or material. It is not acceptable to attend a funeral without making some kind of contribution. These contributions lessen after the fortieth day until the *Ash* (memorial feast) which can be held between six months and five years after the burial.

The practices detailed above provide an opportunity for relationships to be affirmed, reinforcing not only the personhood of the deceased but also of the living. In particular, practices which are identified as Kyrgyz and as Muslim are both significant for affirming the personhood of the deceased. Their *uruu* affiliation is affirmed by the lying in state in a yurt belonging to a fellow *uruu* member, as well as the selection of *tuulgan jer* as burial place. The status of the deceased as a 'good' Muslim is confirmed by the involvement of a mullah and the frequent reciting of the Koran. Other aspects of personhood such as gender are also recognised in the positioning of the deceased in the yurt, as well as the roles of the living in carrying out certain aspects of the funeral, such as the crying of *koshok*. These aspects of personhood and relationships are significant in other aspects of funeral practices, which I will now go on to detail.

Burial rites

On the third day, the day of burial, a number of rites are performed. The first of these is the ritual washing of the corpse (*söök juu* to wash the bones) which is performed by an uneven number of people (often three) of the same sex as the deceased. These people often represent certain groups of relatives of the deceased, including *kuda söök* (affinal) and *matrikin*. These individuals are given gifts for their service which correspond to the tasks they carry out or position they occupied in relation to the body. For instance, the person who holds the deceased's head received a hat (man) or headscarf (woman), the person who washes the body receives clothes, and the person who stands at the deceased's feet receives shoes. These items often belong to the deceased, but in some places new clothes are given (Inogamova, 2008: 16). Following this washing, the corpse is wrapped in a white shroud provided by patrilineal kin, then lain on a bier covered in carpet or felt. The mullah performs the rite of redemption of sins (*doorun tushuru*) where siblings of the deceased ask the mullah to absolve his or her sins for each 12 year period of their life.

The body is then taken out of the yurt by the *sööktun esi* (owners of the body⁷⁶) - close, patrilineal kin such as father, brother or son - for the *janaza* rite. They offer to repay the debts of the deceased, by asking three times those men assembled if the deceased owed any of them and then repeating three times that they will pay. The mullah asks the assembled men three times what kind of person the deceased was and they respond three times saying "he was a good man, let him be in heaven" (Jacquesson, 2008: 284). Following this, the mullah leads the *janaza* prayers (prayers of the dead) with the assembled men arranged into an uneven number of rows (the women do not participate). Next, the body of the deceased is taken on foot or in a lorry to the cemetery, accompanied only by men. The women come out of the mortuary yurt and weep loudly as the body is taken away, protesting the impending burial (Jacquesson, 2008).

⁷⁶ This implies a lineage affiliation. It is the 'bone' which is the shared substance of lineage members, making them kin, thus the deceased belongs to the lineage.

At the cemetery, the corpse is lain in a grave previously prepared by young patrikin. The grave has a chamber large enough to sit up in, in which the body is placed and there is a hole next to this chamber which will be filled with earth. The body is placed in the chamber by the father, brother or son (Inogamova, 2008) and matrilineal uncle (Jacquesson, 2008) of the deceased, and is lain with head to the north and feet to the South, and face uncovered (Inogamova, 2008) turned towards the West and Mecca. The attendant men will take handfuls of earth and give these to the *sööktun esi* (owners of the body) who places it in the chamber next to the corpse on the east side, so as not to cross over the body. The chamber is then closed and the hole filled with earth. A mound of earth is built on the top and the grave remains otherwise unmarked until a stone or structure is placed over it on the occasion of the memorial feast. The mullah then recites from the Koran and the men return to the wake. On approaching they will wail, and the women will begin to lament. The mullah and close male relatives enter the mortuary yurt and recite the Koran for the women.

Following this, the attendants at the funeral are invited to eat “*kara ash*”. An animal is slaughtered, which can be a sheep, a cow or a horse, with the latter being the most prestigious. It is then boiled and either noodles or *plov* (rice cooked with mutton, onion and carrot) is prepared. The attendants are served according to genealogical rank and separated by gender. As mentioned in the earlier discussion of the funeral feast in Chapter Three, meat is distributed according to kinship ties and social status. Thus, *kuda söök* (affinal kin) are served first, followed by distant *uruu* members, *bir atany baldary* (the children of one father), friends, colleagues and neighbours. The meat is separated into *Ustukan* (shares) by the host and distributed according to the strict significance of the pieces and the status of the guests⁷⁷ (Jacquesson, 2007). After the meat is distributed a dish of noodles or *plov* is placed in the centre and the guests shred some of the meat into small pieces to mix in. This is then apportioned to all, although some is always left in the dish for the hosts. After the meal the Koran is recited and the guests leave, the women taking with them the meat they

⁷⁷ See Bunn (2008) for a detailed description of how meat is apportioned at feasts, and its larger social significance.

were given, noodles or *plov*, bread, *borsok* (fried bread made on special occasions, the smell of which is said to let the *arbaks* (ancestors) know they are being remembered), sweets and fruit in a small plastic bag. This food will be shared at their home with relatives, friends and neighbours who did not attend the funeral and the Koran will be recited for the deceased. In this way, both the pieces of meat and the mourners are “hierarchised” and the distribution of food “actualises” kinship and social ties (Jacquesson, 2007:397) which extend beyond those who attend the funeral. As well as this funeral feast on the third day a feast will also be held on the seventh (*jetiligi*) and fortieth days (*kyrky*) (now often organised on a Friday).

Mourning continues until the fortieth day after death. Following burial the mortuary yurt may be taken down. However, bricks are placed where the deceased lay and must not be walked over by people or animals. The mourning women spend their time seated in another yurt inside the courtyard or room inside the house. They continue to cry the *koshok* whenever new mourners arrive, but men no longer wail when approaching the house. Between the third and seventh day men must go to pray at sunrise next to the grave of the deceased as the women cry the *koshok* loudly at the house. This is said to reassure the deceased and ease his or her journey to the next life. After the seventh day women are allowed to visit the cemetery. In the past they would often take food and leave it at the cemetery as a way to placate the deceased (Jacquesson, 2008). The fortieth day signals the end of the intensive mourning period with a large feast and may be marked by an additional feast offered by affinal kin.

The extended mourning period

Life begins to resume its everyday rhythms. Relatives who have been residing with the family return to their own houses. The sounds of mourning laments and weeping for the most part cease; people return to work and the household becomes quieter and less bustling with guests or the presence of *kelins* and *abysyns* (co-sisters-in-law) to help serve and

cook. Nevertheless the household must remain a relatively public place with someone always at home and food always available to accommodate any visitors coming to pay their respects who were not able to attend during the first forty days. Smaller feasts may also regularly be offered on Fridays to neighbours who come to recite the Koran for the deceased although animals will not be slaughtered for each of these.

If the deceased was a married woman then her widower will return to their everyday tasks. However, if the deceased was a married man then his widow must continue to observe certain restrictions on movement and social interaction usually lasting for up to a year. Although the widow may cast off her mourning headscarf, she should remain well covered wearing loose clothes which cover her arms and skirts which descend well below the knee. She should neither greet nor serve guests, at least initially, and should not leave the house frequently, particularly not on foot. Of course, the possibility for a widow to remain relatively sequestered from public life depends a great deal on personal circumstances⁷⁸. She may or may not return to work. If the family is able to support the widow then she is encouraged to remain at home in mourning for up to a year, the end of which period is often marked by the *Ash* (memorial feast)⁷⁹.

⁷⁸ Some widows may find themselves no longer supported by their husband's family and may have to leave their home if it was shared with their husband's relatives. In such situations women often return to their own parents and hope to remarry. Some women enter into a levirate marriage with their husband's brother and thus continue to be supported by his family. Jacquesson (2008) notes that such marriages were common in the past. From my fieldwork it seems that they do still occur, although less frequently and not generally approved of.

⁷⁹ The memorial feast or *ash* is the final stage of the funeral rites and mourning period. Memorial feasts are also held for the deceased every year to mark the occasion of their death. Not as large nor as expensive as the *Ash* which marks the end to mourning, memorial feasts are nevertheless important to the maintenance of connections between the living and the dead, as well as between the living themselves. As I have mentioned above, this may take place between six months and five years after the funeral; it may often be arranged in autumn to coincide with a relative abundance of products required such as fruits, fattened animals and *kymys* (fermented mare's milk). The *ash* can take two forms, the *mai ash* (fat *ash*) which is a feast, or the *chong ash* (large *ash*), a feast and equestrian games, the latter being organised for influential older men only. See Jacquesson (2008) for a detailed discussion of the *chong ash*.

EMOTION IN RITUAL AND BEYOND

Social death, and the rites which mark the transition from *uruu* member to *arbak* (ancestor) focus on re-establishing a relation between person and place for the deceased through both ensuring their transition into the realm of the ancestors and allowing the bereaved to assert a commitment to place through the selection of burial and memorial place. At the same time, the management of social interaction with the bereaved through withdrawal from social life emphasises the disrupted relation with place and the destabilising potential of death for the rest of the community, as well as the bereaved person's subsequent slow reintegration into public life. The above description of funerals in generalised terms highlights the simultaneous dislocation and reestablishment of a relationship with place, through choice of burial site but also through affirmation of the centrality of the home and the network of relations tied to it. It also highlights how funeral rites are occasions for *uruu* membership to be clarified and the relations between *uruu* members, both living and dead, strengthened. In this way it conforms with Huntington and Metcalf (1991) and Bloch and Parry's (1982) emphasis on funerals as social dramas which are significant because of what they can tell us about social collectivities, rather than the individual.

Echoing traditional anthropological analyses of mortuary rituals, it does seem to be the case that Kyrgyz people consider such mourning practices to, in themselves, re-establish the social order by completing the transformation of the dead and beginning the eventual reintegration of the bereaved. As Miller and Parrot note, such a functionalist perspective, rather than being a theoretical position may in fact be "an observable perspective and response to loss" (Miller and Parrott, 2009: 503) within a given society. Nevertheless, generalised descriptions of Kyrgyz funerals cannot help but gloss over the very important particularities and the lived experience of death and bereavement. In presenting below Nur's considered responses to the funeral of her husband I highlight how funerals, rather than being about the generalities of cultural practice are in fact specific lived experiences.

Feeling lost: a widow's response to the rituals of death

This chapter opened with a brief description of the mourning feast for Maksat and the experience of this ritual occasion for the family I lived with, as well as my own. While only a sketch of a complex event it should be clear that those participating experienced the occasion differently for a variety of reasons. Rather than seeking to understand their reactions solely in relation to their social position, I wish here to attend to individual emotion so as to recognise the inchoate and unpredictable nature of reactions to loss and great sadness. I will do this by presenting an overview of conversations between Nur and myself when she reflected on the funeral rites she had participated in and discussed the feelings she had about certain of those events detailed above. As I noted earlier, Nur's emotional openness was in part built on our similar experiences of grief. Over time and through discussions of different practices and reactions we came to share a vocabulary that enabled her to explore her emotions concerning the loss of her husband and her change of status, reflections I will return to in the following section. Here, however, I hope to show how her understanding of Kyrgyz funerary practices allows us to better comprehend the emotional content of ritual.

Nur had long known the extent of her husband's illness which had been diagnosed as cancer after many tests in Bishkek. Together with the other members of his family it had been decided to keep from him his diagnosis. A *köz achyk* (open eyes, a seer) was consulted, who predicted that he would recover and the family continued to live in Ak Too until he became much sicker the previous autumn. At this point they had decided to move him to his older brother's home in the capital to seek treatment. Many remedies were sought ranging from chemotherapy and radiotherapy to special vodka and tablets bought from China. Nur travelled between Ak Too and Bishkek, continuing to work at the school as much as possible, and feeling out of place wherever she was. She recounted to me that on one of her stays in the village during this time she had dreamt she was at home with Maksat when three old women, one of whom she recognized as a deceased relative of Maksat, came to the house. They entered the court yard without knocking and were

approaching the door to the small house when Nur saw them through the window. She rushed outside to see what they wanted and they told her they had come for her husband. She explained to them that he was not ready to go yet and managed to persuade them to leave. Upon awakening she said she felt very calm but knew that she should not be in the house in the village anymore because Maksat was close to death. It was then that she decided to move to be with Maksat in the city while he was sick.

Nur remembers this as a time of increasing desperation and great sadness. Anger with the *köz achyk* for her inaccurate prediction of Maksat's recovery led her to reject the woman's other advice for protecting her children from jealousy. She felt increasingly out of place living in her brother-in-law's crowded flat and any control over her husband's care she felt must be relinquished to older female relatives. This feeling of her own insignificance came to a head when her husband's death was imminent. For Nur, the religious rites detailed above did not feature strongly in her accounts of Maksat's last few hours. Rather, it was the gathering of the family to ask Maksat his last wishes which caused her particular pain. On a number of occasions she went over the sequence of events with me seemingly trying to suppress her anger at what had happened. Each close relative had gone in to see Maksat on his own for him to say his last words to them. One female relative immediately upon leaving his room proclaimed that he had confided his last wishes to her and asked her to ensure the well-being of his daughters. While Nur expressed understanding that he would be concerned about Kanykei and Asel she often told me that she was sure he would not have asked this particular woman to take on this role as long as she or Salkyn apa were able to take care of the children themselves. The sadness of the event and the possibility for the resolution of Maksat's wishes was also experienced by Nur as one of rivalry and competition over the memory of her husband's last wishes, a rivalry which she felt powerless to confront.

After a visit to her younger sister in law, Begai, in the summer following Maksat's death, Nur again discussed with me a specific element of the funeral -- namely the washing and preparation of the body for burial. The reasons for our conversations about this were twofold. Nur knew that I was interested in funeral procedures but, perhaps more

importantly, the consequences of these rites had recently made a strong impression upon her. On going to visit Begai and her husband, Tilek, she had been greeted by her brother-in-law dressed in Maksat's shoes, his "best shoes" as she described them, which they had bought on a shopping trip together. She described being shocked at their sight and not understanding how they came to be on Tilek's feet. Slowly, she came to realise that Tilek must have been responsible for holding her husband's feet while his body had been washed. At the time she had not been aware of who was carrying out these tasks, she said, and although she knew some of Maksat's clothes had been given away to those who had carried out these tasks it had not felt real for her until she saw her husband's shoes on her brother-in-law's feet, at which point she again felt great confusion and dislocation. While in the past she had been involved with Maksat in choosing his clothes, following his death she was no longer a part of decision making about them, something which intimated her new relationship with Salkyn apa, no longer mediated by her husband, and suggested her new position within the household and society more generally. Thus while the selection of individuals to carry out these tasks can be interpreted as a way to reaffirm kin, affinal and other friendship ties it is important not to lose sight of the emotional import of not only performing such intimate tasks for a deceased loved one but also the ongoing significance elements of the rite, such as gifts in recognition of the task carried out, may hold for close relations of the deceased.

Perhaps the hardest element of the funerary rites for Nur was the lamenting for her husband's death, lamenting which continued after the forty days mourning period whenever mourners arrived who had not been able to attend, and which again took place at the memorial feast. Our conversations about this began one day shortly after the fortieth day when a number of distant female relatives came to see the family as they had been unable to attend during the wake. Upon arrival Nur became agitated as Salkyn apa was not at home to greet and lament with the women. Nur herself went with them into the large house where they sat in the Kyrgyz room to weep and lament Maksat's death. After some time, and as instructed by Nur, I took them water to wash their faces, and a kettle with boiling water for Nur to serve them tea. Upon their departure she expressed relief that they had gone and began to describe to me how she had behaved. She was thankful that the women themselves had words to lament with and explained that she was able to keep her

head lowered in a respectful position so that they could not see her eyes. She wished she was still wearing the mourning headscarf because she had wanted to cover her eyes as she found it impossible to cry on demand in front of them, and explained how ill at ease and out of place she felt having to cry and make a noise in public. She had felt the same way during the funeral and exclaimed “how is it possible for a young woman to know what to say, how to lament?” Her position as a *kelin* was not only premised on being a married woman and daughter-in-law but also on being a young woman, with certain expectations about her role in public as someone in the background serving and tending to others. At that time she had initially refused to lament, saying that she did not have the words and did not feel able to express herself in such a way. Eventually, with the insistence of her older female relatives she wept the laments using words given to her by Shirin apa but even so she said she wanted only to cry alone, and in private.

Unlike Köchümkulova (Köchümkulova, 2007), for whom lamenting the loss of her uncle and grandfather was a way to express her grief and to connect with understanding of Kyrgyz traditional culture, for Nur lamenting was a painful experience which she felt did not reflect or allow her to express her true emotions. Nur’s reflections on lamenting could be taken as confirmation that emotions during funerals are merely ritual displays required of the occasion yet devoid of meaning. However, it does not seem here to be a question of whether emotions within a ritual context are fabricated or not (cf. Clark-Decés, 2005) as indeed emotions which are not spontaneous can nevertheless be powerfully felt (Mimica, 1996). Rather, the emotions which Nur did feel in relation to lamenting, that of anxiety at the necessary performance and wishing to fulfil her duties, alongside her wish to cry alone, are perhaps the result of her personal and individual response to the social drama unfolding around her and her changing position in relation to her wider family.

The consulting of *köz achyk* and the interpretation of dreams, as well as initially refusing to participate in the crying of funeral laments and feeling uncomfortable when confronted with her husband’s personal possessions given away as part of a funeral rite: all seem here to be ways that Nur sought to understand and in some way avert or control the death of her husband. Dreams are often considered to be of particular significance in Kyrgyzstan, their

meanings are discussed and interpreted as a way to make sense of the uncertainties of everyday life. As Louw notes, in Kyrgyzstan “dream omens embody peoples’ fears about, and hopes for, how their lives may develop” (2010: 277). In addition, dreams of situations out of one’s control, which can be said to be the case of dreams relating to the death of a loved one, are perhaps one way people can reflect on what they are or are not able to control (Louw, 2010), that an individual is able to affirm their relevance to the situation and attempt to make a new and difficult situation a known situation (Mimica, 1996: 214). Similarly, consulting a *köz achyk* is an attempt to foresee and avert an unwanted future. This powerlessness could be interpreted as the result of the weakening of her position within the family as the youngest and thus most junior *kelin*. In addition, such feelings of powerlessness when faced with death may be universally understood to underlie funerary ritual and mourning processes in so far as these rites reclaim and socialise death, thus re-establishing social control and cohesion. Nevertheless, this approach is rather unsatisfactory when it comes to understanding Nur’s feelings about the loss of her husband and her dissatisfaction with some of the ritual practices which followed the death of her husband. Feelings of powerlessness and of being out of place are perhaps the only way Nur could respond to the illness and death of her husband and the ritual requirements which followed. The emotional force of grief could not be expressed as rage (Rosaldo, 1989) or in drinking and angry outburst (Delaplace, 2009). Rather, Nur had to find her own more or less socially acceptable ways of coping with her grief, albeit ways which did not necessarily accord with social expectation.

While the previous structured overview of funerary and mourning rituals allowed us to see the various ways separation between the living and the dead, as well as strengthening of *uruu*, affinal and other social ties are effected, it does little to explore the experience of participating in such occasions for the bereaved. This discussion of Nur’s reflections upon elements of her husband’s funeral highlight how, contrary to Bloch and Parry’s argument, the funeral rites did not create a singular emotional response. Neither, contrary to Metcalf and Huntington, can we argue that funerary ritual in Kyrgyzstan should be understood as a prism through which to understand Kyrgyz society. As I have shown, within the ritual context there are ways that the bereaved should behave and individuals try to maintain and fulfil these expectations. Nevertheless, people recognize how individuals feel and cope

with differing situations and they react generally with compassion. Therefore, the fulfilment of the particular roles required of different people is flexibly adapted so as to recognize their individual reaction to death. At the same time, certain behaviours are challenged or regarded negatively. This may not be in the form of harsh criticism but rather through gentle reminders of what is appropriate. It is the indeterminate nature of such processes which pushes us to address individual responses to such rites in order to understand the myriad ways they are experienced by those involved. The funeral did promote intense emotions for Nur which cannot be understood as merely the fulfilment of a necessary social drama. However, it did not complete nor contain the disengagement from Maksat which his death ritually required, grieving for his death was an ongoing process made up of a myriad of tiny adjustments. In the next section, I will look more closely at how these adjustments were experienced.

THE PLACE OF THE LIVING

Out with the ritual context, there are still clear social expectations for how one should grieve. Following the end of the forty day mourning period in Kyrgyzstan it is considered no longer acceptable to cry for the deceased and the lamenting (mostly) ceases. Different reasons given for this were that it is wrong to cry because the grave may become flooded and the deceased lie uncomfortably in water, or that the deceased would not be able to go to the realm of the *arbaks* (spirits or ancestors), feeling too tied to those vocally and visibly mourning their loss. Concern is voiced for those unable to come to terms with their loss in quite the way suggested by such comments: I was often asked if Salkyn apa was well and whether she was still crying; people showed their interest in Nur by asking whether she was still “sitting at home”. Both these kinds of enquiry demonstrate awareness that grief and mourning overspill the bounds of ritual commemoration, but nevertheless people remain uncomfortable with visible displays of grief outside of these bounds. Perhaps for this reason, bereavement is felt and expressed in less visible ways.

Delaplace (2009), drawing on Rosaldo's approach, has discussed how funerary rites in Mongolia establish a silence around the deceased, and that grief when displayed as anger outside of a ritual context is largely responded to with silence. He argues that such a response comes from the expectation that funerary rites complete the mourning process and encourage silence about the deceased. However, when grief is experienced so forcefully that it cannot be contained and individuals speak of the deceased in unexpected ways it is no longer possible to seek a cultural explanation but becomes necessary to consider how strong emotions may not be understood by giving "meaningful" explanations to social actions." (Delaplace, 2009: 516). In this way, for mourners faced with uncontrollable rage in Mongolia silence "becomes the last and only recourse available to deal with the expression of raging grief..." (Delaplace, 2009: 516). In the rest of the chapter I hope to show how dislocation from place is a key element in individual emotional responses to death. The feelings of no longer being at home, of being out of place that I shall explore below appear less forceful than the rage discussed by Rosaldo, or the anger and breaking of silence described by Delaplace. This dislocation was all pervasive and encompassed many different and sometimes contradictory emotions, not all of which can be explained by the social personhood of the bereaved.

Navigating through grief

Maksat's *kyrky* which marked the culmination of the intensive ritual mourning period, was held on a Friday. Saturday saw the departure of *uruu* members and by Sunday evening close family had returned to their homes in the city. Apart from my new and somewhat distracting presence, the family were alone for the first time following his death, and the necessary return to the rhythms of everyday life was imminent: tending to the animals, preparing for spring sowing, Salkyn apa's return to work as the village school head teacher and Asel's return to school would all begin the next day. Apart from a visit to the cemetery, this was the first time anyone in the household would be publicly present in the village. In the evening, Salkyn apa's sister-in-law, Jyldyz apa, arrived with her son in his noisy Lada to discuss how this return to public life should be managed. Temirbek and

Jyldyz apa insisted that they must drive Salkyn apa to the village school the next morning to avoid the twenty minute walk through the centre of the village and maintain her visible withdrawal from social life. Talk of this resumption of her working life was accompanied by Jyldyz apa's comments upon the sad situation of the family and resulted in Salkyn apa becoming extremely distressed, weeping at the loss of her son. She was hushed and encouraged not to cry any more, as "the time for that had passed". Salkyn apa was not keen to return to her job as head teacher but knew that she must do so before arranging to take retirement at the end of the year. With her daughter-in-law unable to work due to the restrictions placed on widows in mourning, Salkyn apa's income was vital for the family's continued well-being. The next morning, the car arrived as planned and whisked Salkyn apa to her office and her granddaughter, Asel, to her classroom. In the evening it returned them equally swiftly to the home. After this first day however this journey was to be made on foot. Emphasising that she must maintain propriety by avoiding public places, Salkyn apa's and Asel's journey to and from the school took circuitous routes skirting round gardens and navigating backstreets, pathways which allowed them to avoid much of the social interaction required on village streets through limiting the number of people they would meet.

Restrictions on movement following the death of a loved one usually only apply to the widow. However, Salkyn apa's restriction of her own movements hint at the emotional support such withdrawal from social life might offer. Salkyn apa found such circumnavigating comforting, enabling her to avoid being an object of curiosity and sympathy or both. Salkyn apa's deliberate avoidance of central village places also allowed her to reject the idea that she should continue with her life as before following the forty days mourning period by enabling her to avoid invitations to social events and quietly prolonging her mourning period. Nur at times expressed the feeling of reassurance that a slow adjustment to new circumstances was appropriate, and was encouraged by the withdrawal from public life and restriction on social interaction and movement which had been deemed necessary by the older women of the family. However, her new restriction to the house was clearly far more extensive than that stemming from Salkyn apa's reluctance to encounter people on the streets.

The opposition between the ways Salkyn apa and Nur experienced the death of Maksat was contradictorily reflected in their relationship to place. While Salkyn apa initially felt out of place in the village, this soon lessened and she continued her usual manner of moving through the streets as a public individual. Nur's relation to place following the death of her husband can be described as profoundly ambivalent, partly because her view of village life changed from one of relative freedom to one of much greater restriction. Nevertheless, the feeling of being out of place did not leave Nur and once her confinement to the house was no longer socially expected she found the requirement to re-enter village society difficult and being present in public village places particularly distressing. Her dislocation extended beyond the place she had been born and lived for most of her life, feeling also uncomfortable and out of place on visits to local towns and the capital city.

Structurally of course we can say that Nur is very much out of place. As a widow her position as a *kelin* is destabilised, no longer has a secure reason to be in the household of her husband's family (something of which she was very much aware when she commented on the generosity and goodness of her elder brother-in-law in keeping her in the family home). We have seen in the previous chapter how Nur envisaged an eventual life for her family in a newly-built house in Bishkek which was tied up with hopes for the future rarely connected to everyday experiences. The need for her to earn money to support her family in this desired lifestyle reinforced her dislocation as she sought to emigrate in search of work. Many places were discussed, distant contacts sought and visa applications made⁸⁰. Throughout all of this Nur was negotiating her position within her husband's family, as a dutiful *kelin* she was able to emphasise the self-sacrificing nature of emigration and her commitment to her mother-in-law's needs. At the same time, however, she was able to imagine for herself a new kind of life in the places she might eventually go to, saying that anywhere was better than Ak Too. Eventually, she was able to move to Moscow with a sister-in-law to work in a market, leaving behind her children and her life in the village and half-built house in the city. Only upon leaving did she find that her connection with place

⁸⁰ This highlights the fact that decisions of whether or not to migrate are not taken by the individual but as a whole family, and indeed that the opinion of the migrating person is often not the most important (Reeves, 2012: 109).

remained strong, and in Moscow despite enjoying her new found freedom and relative economic power she longs for the familiarity of her Kyrgyz home.

Changing engagements with the domestic

Prior to Maksat's death, Nur had been a teacher at the village school, working Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. until mid-afternoon. Although Salkyn apa was a strict mother-in-law and expected Nur to be at home when not working, Nur did spend some time away from her married home visiting her family and socialising with other teachers and her and Maksat's classmates. She was able to run errands in the village, drink tea with neighbours and discuss village events with acquaintances on the street. With Maksat she had regularly visited the capital and the nearby town of Kochkor. In the summer they had often had a holiday on the shores of Issyk Kol. She was like many other relatively well-off villagers, moving freely between rural and urban places, at home in both. After her husband's death, Nur said she no longer felt at home, felt out of place in all those locations she had previously been comfortable. It was expected that she remain confined almost entirely to the house for a year following her husband's death, or at least until the *Ash* feast was held to mark the end of the mourning period. Nur, like Salkyn apa was relieved not to be under the public gaze. At the same time, as the mourning period progressed she found such restrictions increasingly difficult to bear. Other than on the rare occasion the family was invited to feast and a car provided or she was required to see to a bureaucratic matter which could not be resolved by others, Nur was not to leave the house.

Nur's interaction with the world changed emotionally, spatially, and bodily. As a widow during the first forty days of mourning she wore two head scarves rather than her usual one, the additional headscarf hanging down by the side of her face and often excluding it from view. She wore longer skirts and tops which covered her arms fully. While the clothes a widow wears are traditionally referred to as *kara kiit* (black clothes), Nur consulted with Shirin apa who encouraged her to dress modestly but not to spend money

on black clothes, merely to wear dark colours of an unremarkable kind. During the forty days, Nur had not remarked on the differences such clothes made to her movements, but when she returned to the work necessary to run the household (milking, cleaning, cooking, looking after animals, sorting grain) as well as new tasks she took on now her husband was no longer with her, she began to notice how they changed her movements and way of accomplishing such tasks. Unable to wear trousers, she noted it was not so easy to climb the ladder to the loft to refill the central heating tank; as the days became warmer, her longsleeved jumpers were increasingly uncomfortable in the midday sun. She longed to dress smartly once again and, as the memorial feast grew closer, talked in detail with her brother and mother about the clothes that they would present her with.

Although the forty day period is the most intensive time when ritual activities occur, such as the crying of laments, offering of prayers for the deceased and the hosting of feasts for relatives and neighbours, mourning does not cease when that time comes to an end. The first two months following this time Salkyn apa and Nur tried to host a feast for their neighbours every Friday in order that the Koran might be recited for Maksat. These feasts were much less formal than those of the *uchu*, *jetiligi* and *kyrky* and bore little resemblance to the *Ash* feast which would mark the official end of mourning, in both size and the roles of both hosts and guests. At these Friday feasts an animal was rarely slaughtered; rather pieces of meat stored with relatives and in-laws who had freezers were cooked and *plov* was made. While meat was still distributed according to age seniority, smaller pieces were given out. *Borsok* was fried, so that the *arbaks* (spirits or ancestors) would smell the scent, and the table was laden with sweets, biscuits, fruit and bread which had not been finished by the fortieth day. These feasts were held in the three-roomed house rather than the larger building which had been used to host the other feasts. Most importantly, Nur's world changed to one behind the scenes - neither greeted in the funeral yurts nor relaxing with family in the house. Now she was busy preparing the feast but upon the arrival of guests retreated to the outdoor kitchen so as not to be seen by them. After helping at a number of these feasts, I began to discuss with Nur her feelings about them. She expressed that this was a change she found particularly difficult to negotiate. As a daughter-in-law, Nur had been expected, and expected herself, to prepare and serve both her family and the guests. Remaining out of the sight of guests meant they also remained out of her sight. She was

unable to check that tea was being refilled regularly, that they were allocated the right piece of meat; she was unable to urge them to eat more, drink more, take more away with them. She felt uncomfortable unable to do this, asking many questions of me and the others serving to ascertain whether all was going as it should. She felt uneasy seated in the outside kitchen, not in her “right place” ensuring the guests were well looked after.

Nur’s relative seclusion from friends, neighbours and public village places was juxtaposed somewhat with the required openness of the home to those who wished to pay their respects. During this time the gate to the yard remained open and the table in the main building was set for drinking tea. As we saw above, if anyone had been unable to attend the funeral they were expected to come and recite the Koran when they visited the village⁸¹. Thus, while the home on some levels can be seen as a private place, a place where the widow is expected to remain away from social interaction with all the close relatives, the home also remained a relatively public place throughout the mourning period -- necessarily open and accommodating to those who come to recite the Koran and pay their respects to the deceased. This changing nature of domestic place makes the interstitial position of the widow particularly hard to navigate. However, it affects all members of the family as, even when guests are not present, the place of the home remains relatively open to public scrutiny. For instance, it was no longer acceptable to eat outside in the overlooked orchard during the hot summer which had been normal family practice before. When I returned the following year, these restrictions on the use of the outdoor place became increasingly clear to me in retrospect as they had been removed.

Material disengagements

⁸¹ Initially, for a few weeks following the *kyrky*, women who visited also cried funeral laments.

The divestment of material objects belonging to the deceased forms a part of the ritual commemoration of death in diverse locations (Kuechler, 1988, Williams, 2003), and often forms part of other forms of separation from the deceased through no longer speaking of them, naming them, or engaging in their preferred activities (Williams, 2003, Taylor, 1993). Similarly, for the family I lived with it was not only the use of place which changed in relation to the home, but also their interaction with the objects it housed. Following Maksat's death a portrait of him was hung in the dining room, high on the wall opposite the portrait of his father who had died some years before. All households have such pictures, ancestors who look down on those drinking tea and remind us of how they once populated the house. These portraits in the house complement the grave stones and mausoleums erected in cemeteries. Such forms of memorialisation create sites for remembrance (Watkins, 2004) and interaction with the deceased. Both of these objects changed Nur's relation with the places in which they were situated. The cemetery where Maksat was buried and the dining room in the house became places where she felt Maksat remained, but also places of which she was occasionally afraid. When she talked about where Maksat now was she often indicated the cemetery, saying he was watching her from there, or when in the dining room, noting that he could see her actions from high on the wall. She found his gaze comforting, yet also felt it to be something which she could draw on to help her make decisions about her life, particularly in relation to her mother-in-law.

While some objects formed part of the memorialisation and remembrance of Maksat, the separation and divestment of objects associated with him was more common. Apart from his portrait in the dining room, there were very few visible reminders of Maksat, something which Nur recognised was to help her mother-in-law in her grief. Salkyn apa's disengagement from the materiality of her deceased son was powerfully asserted through her refusal to look at photographs of him, to see his clothes or belongings visibly displayed in the house. They were thus given away, or contained in the cupboards lining the walls of the large house. Nur, by contrast, attempted to maintain a connection with Maksat through using objects which they had bought together (the fruit bowl, vodka and kitchen implements mentioned in the previous chapter), wearing his clothes and watch, and keeping other items which retained his smell. Indeed, it may be that giving away or storing out of sight objects related to Maksat enabled those objects that she could use to take on

more agency in his wife's social relationship with him. Her engagement with these objects was occasion for narrating memories in conversation with me, but they were also important in maintaining an embodied connection with her husband. The particular power of these objects could be understood to relate to them as "personal property" (Humphrey, 2002a, Miller, 1987), a category of property which highlights the connections between objects and persons not as legal rights but as a relationship formed through use and close interaction. Thus, these objects become a part of the social person. Upon death, then, it is appropriate for these objects to be given away as a way to honour social relationships (such as during the funeral), or no longer used as a way to allow other objects to memorialise the deceased. These objects of personal property were however also important for Nur in her new relationship with her husband, seeming to allow her to relate to him as both an *arbak* (ancestor) and a dearly loved husband.

Miller and Parrott in their ethnography of loss and material culture in South London argue that "we cannot control the way a person is taken away from us in death, but we can control the way we separate from the material objects that were associated with the dead." (Miller and Parrott, 2009: 509). However, in this case it seems that Nur had to negotiate her relationships with these material objects as part of her relationship not only with her deceased husband, but also with her mother-in-law who had strongly contrasting views on what should be done with them. Indeed, as we have seen, when she was confronted by other people wearing his clothes, such as the shoes which had been given to Maksat's younger sister's husband in recognition of the role he played in preparing the corpse, she felt shocked and her concerted efforts to maintain a control over connections through objects was destabilised through seeing them appear in a context with which she was both unfamiliar and for which she was unprepared. Unlike the objects in her home which remind her of Maksat and which she uses and cares for to in some way maintain a connection with him⁸², seeing her husband's shoes in an unexpected context reconnected her with him by bringing back strong and forceful memories which momentarily made her face how they had come to be there.

⁸² See Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter I have attempted to show how through attending to emotional experience both within the context of funerary and mourning rites, as well as the everyday adjustments of bereavement, it is possible to gain a greater understanding of the emotional import and dislocation of death. Combining general description of Kyrgyz death rites with the experiences of a Kyrgyz family who had lost their male head of household, a treasured son, husband and father, my discussion has highlighted the need to engage emotionally with the other in order to move beyond understanding funerals as total social facts or prisms through which to interpret Kyrgyz society. In particular, my focus on Nur's emotional response to the death of her husband elucidates some of the many ways she negotiated her individual feelings in relation to the social context, a context which required of her certain ways of being.

The detailed analysis of Kyrgyz funeral rituals presented in the first part of the chapter allows us to see how these rituals demonstrate and affirm social relationships between the living, and between the living and the dead. Participation in these rituals through attendance and contribution to *raja* enables these relationships to be created and recreated over time. Rituals also highlight salient forms of personhood and how these are in flux, for example from a living person to an *arbak* (ancestor), from a wife to a widow. In addition, they demonstrate how place is an important element in genealogically bounded social relationships and forms of personhood through the emphasis they place on *tuulgan jer* as burial site. From all of this it becomes clear that Kyrgyz funerals can in some ways be understood to complete the social death of the deceased and affirm the continuity of the social group.

Nevertheless, structural analyses of ritual show us very little about how rituals are experienced and negotiated in their particularity. Thus it is important to address the

emotional responses to ritual of those involved. My focus on Nur's experience of her husband's funeral gives an important counter point to a generalised description of ritual and its social purpose. It also provides a critique of anthropological approaches to death and mourning which tend to see emotion as either produced by ritual, thus not authentic, or as existing outside of a ritual context and largely unavailable to social research and analyses. While rituals are often understood as a way for the living to reassert control of a destabilising social event, this control is clearly not equally felt by all. Nur's feelings of powerlessness and her attempts to regain some control over her own lived experience are evidenced by her account of events leading up to her husband's death and the funeral rituals which followed. Interpreting dreams, initially refusing to cry the funeral laments (and only agreeing when she was given the words to say), can be seen as socially acceptable ways for Nur to refuse the social completion of Maksat's death, ways which emerge from her emotional responses to his loss.

The remainder of the chapter attempts to highlight how the emotions of the other can be meaningfully attended to and brought into social analysis as a way to show how the individual negotiates, responds to and influences social structures and expectations outside of a ritual context. Relations with place are profoundly affected by death, for both the living and the deceased, and these changes are expressed through everyday lived experiences such as navigating public village places, private domestic ones, and the material culture of home. However, I hope my detailed descriptions of Nur's, and Salkyn apa's, daily negotiations of their lives following Maksat's death also show that experience can never be fully understood in terms of its social import, and that space must be given to the inchoate without always attempting to describe it as meaningful social action. Thus the dislocation and being out of place which seem to characterise both Salkyn apa and Nur's feelings of bereavement, while they can be understood and interpreted in relation to their age and gender subjectivities, also highlight how death is a lived experience and as such open to the myriad ways which individuals negotiate their personhood creatively.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

I opened this thesis with three examples of how people negotiate the relationship between personhood and place in rural Kyrgyzstan. Nur's conversation with strangers in a shared taxi, who became relatives when a connection to the village of Kyzyl Suu was established, highlighted the way that place can be a means of establishing kin relatedness. Nurlan baike's description of his grandson's relation to recently privatised arable land indicated the way that change (in this case historical and political) impacts on the meanings of land and relations with it. Salkyn apa's delight at spending time in the mountains enlivened place with the relations and memories she saw in it. In this concluding chapter I wish to draw out these overarching themes of kinship, political and economic configurations of land and phenomenological relations with place in order to discuss them in relation to wider anthropological and area studies questions, suggesting where appropriate possible directions for future research. I will begin by highlighting the meaning of personhood which has emerged from my focus on everyday experiences in rural Kyrgyzstan. I will go on to address the meaning of the particular places I have focused on (arable land, villages and houses), and the import of combining a phenomenological approach with a recognition of the importance of context. Finally, I will discuss the implications of the approach I have taken, understanding place and personhood as intimately linked, for understanding Kyrgyzstan.

KINSHIP AND PERSONHOOD

Previous accounts of Kyrgyz personhood have focused on structural relationships, described in terms of clans and tribes, presenting persons as generated from and fixed by kinship relations, rather than contingent, emergent and dynamic. The importance of everyday practices in creating these relationships has rarely been addressed, as studies have privileged formal rules of reckoning kinship. Anthropologists working on kinship in Kyrgyzstan have more recently situated their analyses in relation to the processes of

tracing and enacting kin connections, dealing with the political (Gullette, 2006, Gullette, 2010) and economic implications of kinship (Ismailbekova, 2011). In this thesis I have attempted to deal with some of these concerns but by focusing on person-place and person-object relations. As such I have drawn on recent work on kinship that emphasises the processes and everyday practices of making relatedness (Carsten, 2000a). In this thesis I have argued that persons are relational and emerge from relations both with other persons and with places. In Chapter Three I have shown how persons come into being through processes which draw on social ideas of genealogy and participation. In Chapters Four and Five I have shown how these ideas about relatedness and the person also involve places and material objects which both enable and limit possibilities for personhood and relatedness. In Chapter Six, I note that these ways of relating to place and objects are not fixed, as is shown by the reworking of such relations upon the death of a loved one.

Aspects of both personhood and place allow people to trace relationships with others as persons of the same kind and persons that are different. The importance of relations with other persons for Kyrgyz personhood is most clearly demonstrated in tracing and practising kin relatedness. In Chapter Three I suggested that Kyrgyz kinship has both formal and experiential aspects by showing how kin relatedness is on the one hand traced through genealogical reckoning, and on the other created and enacted through every day and ritual interactions. These two aspects are seemingly opposed, in so far as genealogical reckoning asserts that aspects of personhood, if not personhood itself, are inherited fully formed from an ancestral line, while a processual view understands the person to come into being through practical engagement with others and with the world (Ingold, 2000: 135). I have argued that the adoption of the genealogical model in interpretations of Kyrgyz personhood has had the effect of a static understanding of kinship taken up in policy and academic literature, specifically with relation to the import of *uruu* for political and economic relations. However, by looking closely at everyday practices, both of narrating genealogies and of interacting with persons of the same and different *uruu*, I have shown that these both complicate and reinforce such ideological reckonings of kin relatedness. In addition, genealogies do not themselves exist outside of or prior to processes of tracing and becoming related. I have suggested, therefore, that tracing of personhood according to

genealogy, particularly patrilineal descent, can perhaps best be understood as a social practice.

Connections with ancestors and with other living persons is often written and recounted in terms of lines of descent by reckoning of the *jeti ata* (seven fathers) and *sanjyra* (genealogies) both of which overwhelmingly record men only. However, attending to practices such as feasting and hosting sheds light on the position of women within the lineage and indicates that through their contribution to socialising and lifecycle ceremonies they are central to the recreation of genealogical relatedness. I have described how women occupy an interstitial position between their affinal and consanguineal kin, between their own and their husbands' *uruu* and *tuulgan jer*. I have interpreted this inbetween-ness as important for the reproduction of persons, indicating that persons of a different kind are needed to create persons of the same kind. Indeed, it is through a *kelin*'s autonomy in terms of her separation from kin and from place that she is able to generate relatedness through every day practices which suggests that such inbetween-ness is not necessarily destabilising for personhood. However, by contrast, it could be argued that widowhood is a particularly insecure form of personhood precisely because of this inbetween-ness. No longer physically able to reproduce her husband's lineage, a widow's difference is not generative of new persons. Nevertheless, Nur's experience following her husband's death demonstrates that she finds alternative ways to assert herself through observing mourning practices and seeking financially to support her mother-in-law and daughters by moving to work in Moscow. Similarly, Perizat's negotiation of her position in her married home involves a negotiation through leaving with her child and then returning to serve at Maksat's funeral. This suggests that a focus on the particularity of experience can illumine how personhood is always a result of social negotiation.

These different but complementary ways of tracing kinship and relatedness indicate that personhood is differently produced in different contexts. Discussing genealogical history, attending lifecycle ceremonies, everyday socialising and interacting all contribute to the creation of kin persons. Other contexts are important for other kinds of personhood. In this

thesis I have particularly focused on kinship and relations with place for creating personhood, but I have also touched upon the importance of non-kin based relationships and Soviet ideas of work and upbringing which stress other socio-centric ways of being a “good” person. Through successfully interacting with others and the performance of certain roles one can become an appropriate kind of person, man or woman. In failing to interact in the expected way one may be designated *kishi emes* (a non-person). Nevertheless, the meaning of personhood is always negotiated in its particularity. Throughout the thesis I have dealt with an implicit tension between autonomy and relatedness, in the contrast between individual experience and group belonging, being out of place and being of a place. This is clear when we look at how Aibek baibe is trying to “make something of his life” while fulfilling his role as head of household, and how Altynai is trying to become a village *kelin* while aspiring to city living. Indeed, this relational flexibility is at the heart of what it means to be a person. Alternative forms of belonging, such as classmate and groupmate relationships, might differently affect how people negotiate their autonomy with regard to diverse and possibly competing demands and future work could look at this in greater depth.

Viewing personhood in this way, as emerging from intersubjective *processes*, and incorporating varied contexts for these processes, challenges widely held views of Kyrgyz persons as determined by their *uruu* relationships or regional affiliation or gender. The social mechanics of the redistribution of goods and labour which takes place within a framework of kin relatedness are interpreted in policy discourse as negatively impacting on rural development and the political climate in Kyrgyzstan. Such interpretations rest on a certain idea of Kyrgyz personhood as resulting from intensive kinship relations which deny autonomy to the individual. I have highlighted that a tension exists between these two ways of being, negotiated in everyday practices such as hiding the last slice of watermelon when there is a knock at the gate, and that we need to pay attention to the precise ways in which individuals negotiate these different modes in order to better understand the importance of kinship relatedness in Kyrgyzstan. Interpreting Kyrgyz personhood in this way also casts doubt on the oft-drawn dichotomies between indigenous relational selves, socio-centric Soviet and post-Soviet persons and an autonomous western individual. I

showed that Kyrgyz concepts and experiences of personhood make use of varied and various ways of understanding self and relations with the “other”, ways which incorporate personhoods often typified as stemming from “western”, “Soviet” and relational ontologies. In understanding personhood as relational we are able to question these divisions, and better describe Kyrgyz experiences of personhood. Locating agency not in an individual (person, place or thing) but in the intersubjective space allows us to see that all persons and places are in fact relational; they cannot come into being alone. In addition, it highlights the need for greater analytic diversity for understanding not only Kyrgyz persons but also the post-socialist “other” (Thelen, 2011).

PLACE

An analysis of personhood as relational is enriched by an incorporation of relations with places and with objects. In this thesis I have shown that place is not only constructed by human actors, but also itself plays a role in the construction of human personhood. The ethnography presented in the preceding chapters suggests that places and objects matter for personhood because they enable certain kinds of relations, while limiting others. In some cases this is a matter of geographical location, where relatedness is differentiated according to spatial proximity. As Askat baike’s speech at the Chong Tash school opening indicated, spending time in the same place allows one to become related, or at least to talk of interconnections in kin terms. Being far apart, by contrast, may lead to genealogical connections being disregarded, as indicated by Nurlan baike’s exclusion of non-resident kin from his description of his *uruu*, or created in different configurations, demonstrated in the case of Aida eje’s socialising with her own *uruu* rather than her deceased husband’s. But places also matter due to the ways in which their materiality can offer possibilities for different experiences of personhood.

If people belong to each other, linked through genealogies and lifecycle ceremonies as well as more everyday practices, they also belong to place, *tuulgan jer*, villages and houses. The particular designation of places as “kinship” or “lineage” places indicates that certain people belong to such places. At the same time these places belong to people. The history of settlement and resettlement of villages calls attention to the way that the meaning of *tuulgan jer* itself can shift to include new understandings of belonging. In Chapter Four I have suggested that places in Kyrgyzstan are multiply imagined and agentive. Successive political processes have sought to define them while at the same time people have incorporated and reworked these meanings of place, particularly clearly in the case of *tuulgan jer*, following privatisation and resettlement. For Tynchtykbek baike and his fellow *uruu* members, Ak-Too village became their *tuulgan jer* after settlement during Soviet times. Following the end of the Soviet Union and subsequent land privatisation, the resettling of Kyzyl Suu further highlights how the meanings of *tuulgan jer* shift to incorporate political, economic and historic changes. Expressing a commitment to *tuulgan jer* through returning to villages destroyed during the reorganisation of the 1950s, allows persons to combine post-socialist personhoods such as *dyikhan* (farmer) with an assertion of themselves as Kyrgyz lineage persons.

Nevertheless, social differentials also impact on this relation with *tuulgan jer* as some people are unwilling or unable to relocate. In addition, not all *tuulgan jer* are made equal as complaints about lower quality arable land and access to irrigation indicate. Understanding these varied ways that land is valued and is experienced as meaningful for personhood is an important element often left out of discussions of rural development and land reform in Kyrgyzstan. In seeking to locate *tuulgan jer* in a broader historical and economic context, I have suggested that relations with such places create persons, and therefore new kinds of relations with place (i.e. becoming a private landowner, becoming a citizen of an independent Kyrgyzstan rather than a Soviet person) impact on ideas and experiences of personhood. At the same time I have proposed that redefining the meaning of a place through economic or political change is neither simple nor straightforward. Places also emerge from relations with persons, created through every day practices and interactions, through which meanings are reworked and incorporated, or rejected. Further attention to

practical engagements with place might elucidate how ideas of skill and expertise inform notions of the ‘right’ kind of relationship with place, and examine how this informs new kinds of personhood linked to changing types of work, such as what it means to be a farmer or a herder in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

I have explored in detail how such everyday practices create persons through engagement with domestic places. Looking at the ways objects are displayed and cared for has illuminated how such engagements enable an expression of self which stresses both individuality and relatedness, in the sense that negotiations over how homes are lived are part of the differential power dynamics at play in integrating persons into new families. These places and objects make possible certain ways of relating to others and to place, bringing their own materiality to bear. They also make possible certain ways of relating to the past and the future and disabing others. Emerging practices of consumption are constitutive of new kinds of social relations and persons. In Chapter Five I proposed that in seeking to understand the building of new houses which will be “*evrostandart*” we can discern new ideas about new ways of being “modern”. Indeed this contrasts clearly with the “modernity” of Ak Too, perceived to be in the past as it has become disconnected from the Soviet networks which linked it to the wider world, and the infrastructure associated with progress such as piped water and healthcare facilities has crumbled. Building a “European standard” or elite house, choosing a “central” location rather than a migrant settlement, these decisions are not just influenced by financial means (although wealth clearly plays a part), but also by the kind of person one envisages being, and the world in which one seeks belonging. Similarly, returning to one’s *tuulgan jer* to settle, or to be buried, are ways of asserting and creating personhood which link one to a past at once Soviet and pre-Soviet. Remembering and indexing the past through relations with places such as resettled villages and objects deemed “quality” or “ours” links people to others across newly formed national borders, and asserts belonging in the world. With the increasing importance of China and Chinese goods for the Kyrgyz economy, it could be productive to look in more detail at how new consumption and trading practices are integrated into ideas of personhood for those engaged in cross border trade.

In dealing with place I have combined two aspects of place that are rarely considered together: land and domestic spaces, the “natural” and the built environment. Looking at places such as resettled villages, former *sovkhos* headquarters, family homes and new city houses has allowed me to investigate the importance of different kinds of place for personhood. Unlike *jailoos* (summer pastures) or lakes such as Song Kol and Issyk Kol, these are not the kinds of places typically valued for their beauty or health-giving properties. Equally, they are not the kinds of places which are seen as “cultured” or modern. The changes in what it means to be *Ak-Tooduk* epitomise the transformations that place and personhood in Kyrgyzstan have undergone following the end of the Soviet Union. These places are not just a representation of personhood, they are integral to it. I have therefore suggested that the relation between places and persons is one of co-construction, and co-negotiation. In this way arable land, villages and rural houses complicate divisions such as rural/urban and degrees of “Kyrgyzness” and allow us to investigate the way different aspects of personhood may be simultaneously indexed to such places. It would be interesting to investigate further how both personhood and place are reworked in contexts such as the migrant settlements which have developed around Bishkek, in particular how migrants to these places experience their homes in relation to notions of rural and urban, modern and Kyrgyz.

While considered together the places I have discussed in this thesis have enabled me to see how place in general is important for Kyrgyz personhood, it has thus also been productive to investigate how they are different from one another (houses are different to *tuulgan jer* for instance). While both have to do with processes which create belonging and relatedness, their different properties engender different kinds of practices and relations. I suggest that it is important to bring together place in its most inclusive sense. By looking at a diversity of places it emerges that there is not just one kind of relation with place, and thus the materiality of place itself can be seen to play a role. It is in the relationship that persons and places come into being but also bring their own specific properties. In this thesis I have attempted to address what seems to be a division in the literature on place which argues it is either socially constructed, or accords it agency (Massey, 2005, Harvey,

1993, Descola and Gíslí, 1996, Feld and Basso, 1996). From the evidence presented above I suggest that this distinction is not so clear cut after all, and that seeing the agency in the relationship between persons and places allows us to move away from these divisions to focus on the processes by which place may come to be seen as constructed or agentive.

CONCLUSION

Ending this thesis with a chapter on death, and taking into account the wider context of political and economic hardship in Kyrgyzstan, could leave a negative impression. I want also to recall the joy and laughter which made up much of my fieldwork. Despite their grief, the family I lived with were warm and welcoming and our time together was full of laughter. My lasting memories are of infectious giggling while listening to stories and drinking tea late into the night; of waking early to bright blue skies and the sound of animals going out to graze; of jumping over irrigation channels which burst their banks and spilled onto dusty (soon muddy) streets; of trying and failing with Nur to irrigate the family potato garden, getting stuck in the mud but feeling we were learning important new skills together. I do not want to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Kyrgyzstan, and these everyday and for the most part happy experiences are probably common for most fieldworkers yet are written out in making fieldwork experience (life?) into an academic document. Yet, the conclusions I have been able to draw about the significance of place for personhood are equally influenced by these contexts. This is important because it highlights the need to incorporate the everyday in our attempts to understand others; it is after all the everyday which creates them just as much as the shifts of global economic fortunes and political systems.

At the same time a focus on the everyday should not occlude change, something which writing in the ethnographic present has a tendency to obscure (Fabian, 1983, Birth, 2008). Since I carried out my fieldwork Kyrgyzstan has experienced yet more political and

economic turmoil. Nur has moved to Moscow, leaving behind her daughters and mother-in-law who are themselves living a new life in Bishkek: new lives, new places, and new ways of negotiating personhood. The meaning of place can be affected by political and economic changes, and these can be reworked, negotiated, accepted or rejected. At the same time, other kinds of change can influence the meaning of place for personhood: moving upon marriage into a new home; experiencing grief as a destabilising feeling of being out of place. Change at both the societal level and the level of the individual have implications for the relations between persons and places in Kyrgyzstan. In taking an approach which positions these intersubjective relations centre stage I have attempted to bring together these different levels of change in order to highlight that it is in the everyday negotiations of personhood and place that change, of all kinds, is negotiated.

Glossary

<i>Abysyn</i>	Collective term for brothers' wives; co-sisters-in-law
<i>Agai</i>	Honorific term for male teacher
<i>Airan</i>	Drinking yoghurt
<i>Aiyl</i>	Village, also camp, group of yurts
<i>Aiyl bashchy</i>	Village head
<i>Aiyl ökmötü</i>	Rural administration
<i>Alys</i>	Far, distant
<i>Apa</i>	Mother, honorific term for older woman
<i>Arbak</i>	Spirit or ancestor
<i>Ash</i>	Memorial feast
<i>Ashar</i>	Community labour
<i>Ata</i>	Father, honorific term for older man
<i>Bai</i>	Rich; synonym of manap and bii
<i>Baike</i>	Older brother, also used as form of address for an older man
<i>Besh barmak</i>	lit. Five fingers. Traditional food served during feasts consisting of boiled meat and noodles
<i>Bez kul'turnii</i>	Russian. Uncultured
<i>Bir atanyñ baldary</i>	The children of one father
<i>Bir tuugan</i>	Relatives
<i>Bir uruu ichinde</i>	Inside one uruu
<i>Borsok</i>	Deep fried dough
<i>Bosh</i>	Free, unoccupied, unemployed
<i>Boz üi</i>	Yurt
<i>Byt'</i>	Russian. Way of life
<i>Chërnaia kassa</i>	Rotating savings scheme
<i>Chong</i>	Big; powerful
<i>Chong ash</i>	Main/big feast
<i>Chong tam</i>	Main / big house
<i>Chong uruu</i>	Tribe
<i>Dem salu</i>	Islamic last rite
<i>Doorun tushuru</i>	Islamic rite of the redemption of sins
<i>Dyikan</i>	Farmer

<i>Eje</i>	Sister, also used as a form of address for an older woman
<i>Epin jak</i>	Female / right side of the yurt
<i>Eptep septep</i>	Somehow
<i>Er jak</i>	Male / left side of the yurt
<i>Es aluu</i>	To take a rest, relax
<i>Evrostandart'</i>	European standard
<i>Jailoo</i>	Summer pasture. Also used to designate pastures used at other times of year
<i>Jakshylyk</i>	Good/happy
<i>Jakyn</i>	Close
<i>Jamandyk</i>	Bad/sad
<i>Janaza</i>	Funerary rite
<i>Jenge</i>	Older sister-in-law
<i>Jengeler</i>	Older sisters-in-law
<i>Jer tam</i>	Walled house
<i>Jetiligi</i>	Feast held on the seventh day of funeral
<i>Jezdeler</i>	Older brothers in law
<i>Jooluk</i>	Headscarf
<i>Kachestvo</i>	Russian. quality
<i>Kara ash</i>	Funeral meal eaten on the day of burial
<i>Kara kiit</i>	Black clothes, mourning clothes
<i>Kazan</i>	Large metal cooking pot, similar in shape to a round bottomed wok
<i>Kel-</i>	To come
<i>Kelin</i>	Daughter in law, can also be used to refer to young married women in general
<i>Keshik</i>	Bag of food to take away given at a feast
<i>Klastash</i>	Classmate
<i>Klastashtar</i>	Classmates
<i>Kolkhoz</i>	Russian. Collective farm
<i>Kolkhoznik</i>	Russian. Collective farm member
<i>Kollektiv</i>	Russian. Group of work colleagues
<i>Koshok</i>	Funeral laments
<i>Koshunalar</i>	Neighbours
<i>Köz achyk</i>	“Open eyes”, seer
<i>Kuda söök</i>	Affinal kin

<i>Kudalar</i>	In-laws
<i>Kudagyi</i>	Female affinal relation
<i>Kul'tura</i>	Russian. Culture
<i>Kul'turnii</i>	Russian. Cultured
<i>Kul'turnost'</i>	Russian. Culturedness
<i>Kymys</i>	Fermented mare's milk
<i>Kyrky</i>	Feast held on fortieth day of funeral
<i>Kyshtak</i>	Winter settlement
<i>Kyshtoo</i>	Winter pasture
<i>Lepëshka</i>	Russian. Flat, round bread
<i>Maasy</i>	Leather boots with soft soles worn indoors
<i>Madaniiat</i>	Kyrgyz culture
<i>Mai ash</i>	Large feast
<i>Malduu</i>	Having many animals; rich
<i>Manap</i>	Chief, synonym of bii and bai
<i>Marshrutka</i>	Russian. minibus taxi
<i>Mazar</i>	Shrine
<i>Microraion</i>	Russian. Administrative subdivision of an urban area
<i>Militsiia</i>	Police
<i>Moldo</i>	Mullah
<i>Moncho</i>	Bathhouse
<i>Nan</i>	Bread
<i>Odnogrupnik</i>	University class mate
<i>Odnoklasnik</i>	Classmate
<i>Okrug</i>	District
<i>Omin</i>	Amen
<i>Paidaluu</i>	Healthy
<i>Plemi`ia</i>	Russian. Tribe
<i>Plov</i>	Dish of meat, rice and carrots
<i>Raion</i>	Russian. Region
<i>Raja</i>	Collective contribution of money, normally for life-cycle ceremonies
<i>Rod</i>	Russian. Clan
<i>Sanjyra</i>	Genealogy
<i>Sanjyrachy</i>	Reciter of genealogy

<i>Sarai</i>	Animal byre
<i>Sary mai</i>	Clarified butter
<i>Sel'sovet</i>	Russian. village soviet
<i>Sep</i>	Dowry
<i>Shaarlyk</i>	Of the city
<i>Sherine</i>	Regular feast which participants take turns to host
<i>Shyrdak</i>	Mozaique wool felt carpet
<i>Söök juu</i>	To wash the bones, ritual washing of a corpse
<i>Sööktun esi</i>	Owners of the body, lineage members
<i>Sovkhoz</i>	Russian. State farm
<i>Sovkhoznik</i>	Russian. State farm worker
<i>Taieje</i>	Maternal aunt
<i>Taike</i>	Maternal uncle
<i>Tam üi</i>	Walled house
<i>Tarbiia</i>	Education, upbringing
<i>Tatuu</i>	Nice; sweet
<i>Tatynakai</i>	Pleasant
<i>Taza</i>	Clean; pure
<i>Tazalyk</i>	Cleanness, also implies purity
<i>Toi</i>	Feast; party; life cycle ceremony
<i>Top</i>	Group ruled over, led by a manap
<i>Tör</i>	Place of honour farthest from the door
<i>Töshök</i>	Wool stuffed mattress
<i>Turmushka chyguu</i>	To marry (woman), to go to work, to go to life
<i>Tuugandar</i>	Relatives
<i>Tuugandar menen katyshabyz</i>	We socialise with our relatives
<i>Tuulgan jer</i>	Birth place, lineage land
<i>Tuura</i>	Right, correct
<i>Uchu</i>	Feast held on the third day of a funeral
<i>Üi</i>	House
<i>Üi bülö</i>	Family
<i>Üilönüü</i>	To marry (man)
<i>Urkun</i>	Exodus
<i>Uruk</i>	Clan

<i>Uruu</i>	Lineage
<i>Ustukan</i>	Shares of meat given to guests at feasts
<i>Volost'</i>	Russian. Customary charge
<i>Vospitanie</i>	Russian upbringing
<i>Yntymak</i>	Community, unity, good relations

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