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# Kinship, State, and "Tribalism": The Genealogical Construction of the Kyrgyz Republic

**David Gullette**

Robinson College

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Social Anthropology
University of Cambridge

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# Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text.

This dissertation does not exceed the word limit approved by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology.

# Abstract

This thesis explores the conceptions of genealogy, kinship, and "tribalism" in relation to the construction of national identity in Kyrgyzstan. It begins by examining the political collapse of 24 March 2005, when mass, anti-government demonstrations took place in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. In what became known as the "Tulip Revolution", the protestors succeeded in ousting Askar Akaev as President of the Kyrgyz Republic. One of the protestors' grievances against the Akaev regime was "tribalism", a form of corruption expressed through the particularisms of kinship and regional ties. Accusations of "tribalism" were criticism of political factionalism, but paradoxically, the notions of "clans" and "tribes" were presented as important markers of Kyrgyz identity by locals and government sponsored nation-building projects. In this thesis, I examine these representations of kinship together with the complex and intertwined narratives of genealogical relatedness and political campaigns.

The prominence of "tribal" relations in Central Asian governments has become the focal point of many studies since the collapse of the Soviet Union. A study of "tribalism" in Kyrgyzstan, however, reveals that while it has become a narrative of corruption, it is distinct from the construction of the categories of "tribe" and "clan" as forms of relatedness. I argue that a radical reconsideration of these kinship relations needs to take place in the social sciences. I present an alternative way of creating kinship relations through genealogy. In what I term the "genealogical imagination", I suggest that relatedness is constructed through the dialectic between memory and representations of history.

Through ethnographies which describe the erection of monuments to real, mythical and appropriated ancestors of the Kyrgyz people, I examine the government's use of genealogy to construct the official history. This history is underpinned by theories of ethnogenesis, the study of the establishment of continuous social groups and group identity through a history of development. In the official narrative, ancestors are represented as crucial figures who contributed to the development of the Kyrgyz nation, and whose actions serve as lessons for people today. The ancestors are recognised as creating and maintaining an identity, for the Kyrgyz nation, and also for the state, which was elaborately marked in 2003 celebrations in honour of "2,200 years of Kyrgyz statehood".

This representation of the state is a recurring theme in national celebrations, but the festivities in 2003 came at a politically tense moment. I employ another conception of genealogy, as a method to investigate the discursive space through which such a notion of the state is created. The narratives construct an idea of the state as a central part of their identities, while simultaneously defining the state as the sum of the people. This image places an emphasis on the notion of unity. However, the use of genealogy to examine the construction of an identity can also act to critique that identity. I argue that this official discursive construction attempts to displace strong political challenges and social unrest. The application of the discourse did not foster the unity that was intended. Instead, it highlighted contradictions between the official representation of the state and everday experiences – contradictions which formed the backdrop of the "Tulip Revolution".

"Kyrgyz" is not an ethnonym; "Kyrgyz" is an idea.

– Muratbek Imanaliev (2002: 137)

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# Note on Transliteration and Names

I have transliterated Russian terms according to the British Museum transliteration guidelines. I have also transliterated Kyrgyz terms according to the same guidelines, but I have modified it to include the three extra letters of the Kyrgyz alphabet. I have transliterated these letters accordingly:

| | |
|---|---|
| Ң | NG |
| Ө | Ö |
| Ү | Ü |

Also, in Kyrgyz, the /Ж/ is a much harder sound than in Russian. I have transliterated this as /J/.

Many people's names and place names have been changed to protect their identity.

In places where I provide a person's name, I have reproduced them with the surname last. Since independence, there is a growing tendency to drop the Russified suffixes and adopt Kyrgyz ones. In such cases people are called by their first name and patronymic name, not their surname. For men, the Kyrgyz word indicating the patronym is "uulu". For example, Tursunbai Bakir uulu, the republic's ombudsman, would be: Tursunbai, the son of Bakir. *Uul* in Kyrgyz translates as "son", and the suffix –u is the third person singular possessive form, which conforms to the rules of vowel harmony. For women, the word indicating the patronym is "kyzy". For example, Janyl Abdyldabek kyzy would be: Janyl, the daughter of Abdyldabek. *Kyz* in Kyrgyz translates as "daughter", and the suffix –y is the third person singular possessive form, which conforms to the rules of vowel harmony.

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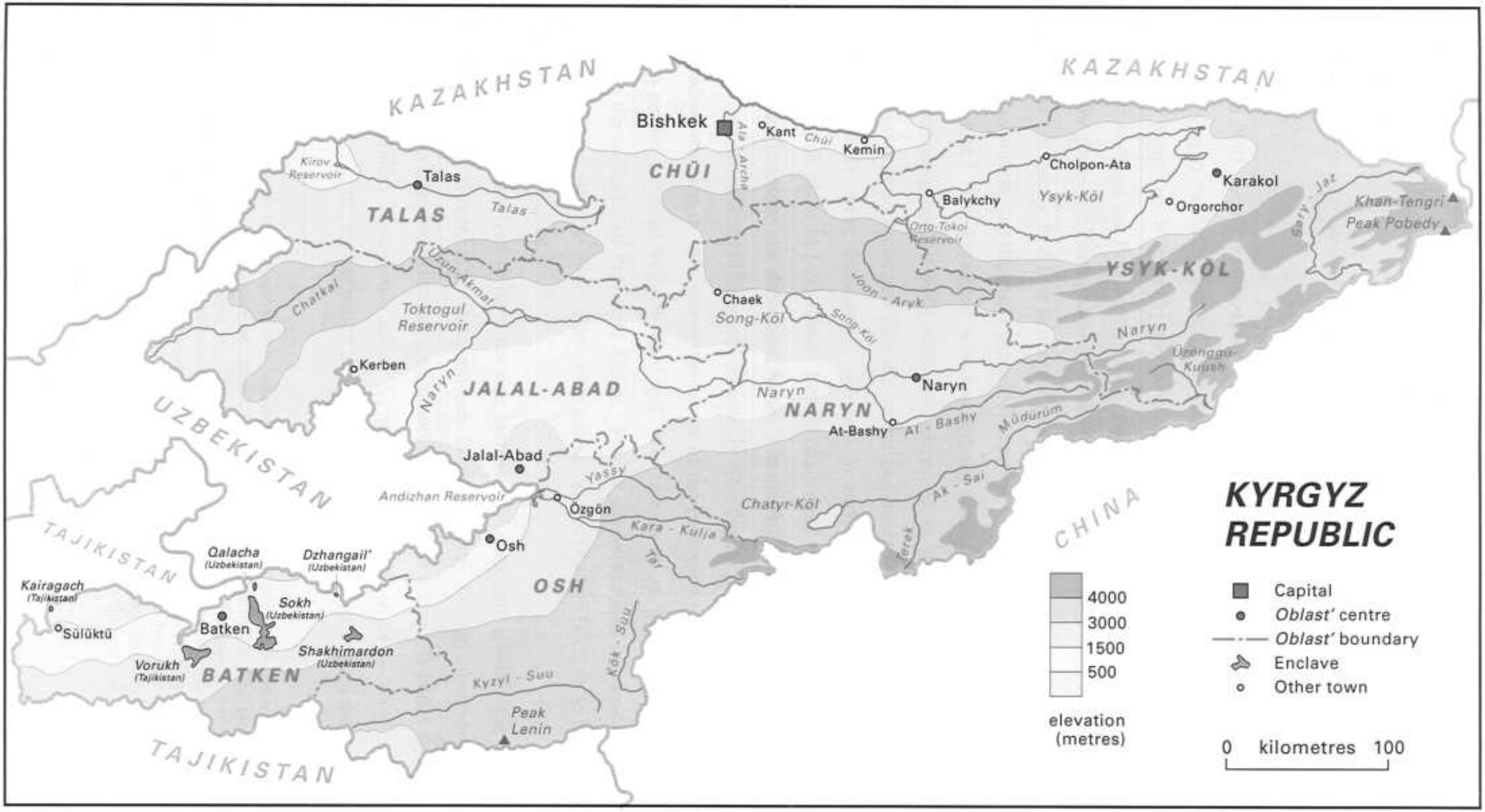
KAZAKHSTAN
KAZAKHSTAN
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Kant
Kemin
Chüi
Ala-Archa
CHÜI
Kirov Reservoir
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Talas
Cholpon-Ata
Karakol
Balykchy
Ysyk-Köl
Orgorchor
Orto-Tokoi Reservoir
Saryy Jaz
Khan-Tengri
Peak Pobedy
YSYK-KÖL
Uzun-Akmat
Chatkal
Toktogul Reservoir
Chaek
Song-Köl
Song-Köl
Joon-Aryk
Naryn
Uzengü-Kuush
Kerben
Naryn
JALAL-ABAD
Naryn
NARYN
Naryn
At-Bashy
At-Bashy
Müdürüm
UZBEKISTAN
Jalal-Abad
Yassy
Andizhan Reservoir
Özgön
Chatyr-Köl
Ak-Sai
Kara-Kulja
Terek
CHINA
TAJIKISTAN
Osh
Qalacha (Uzbekistan)
Dzhangail' (Uzbekistan)
Tar
OSH
Kairagach (Tajikistan)
Sokh (Uzbekistan)
Batken
Sülüktü
Shakhimardon (Uzbekistan)
Vorukh (Tajikistan)
BATKEN
Kyzyl-Suu
Kök-Suu
Peak Lenin
TAJIKISTAN
4000
3000
1500
500
elevation (metres)
KYRGYZ REPUBLIC
Capital
Oblast' centre
Oblast' boundary
Enclave
Other town
0 kilometres 100

# Introduction

On 24 March 2005, nearly ten thousand people demonstrated in Ala-Too Square, in the centre of the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. They demanded the resignation of President Askar Akaev. After a number of speeches and skirmishes with pro-government supporters, the demonstrators stormed the President's office, the White House, near the square. A half hour before the protestors managed to overcome the police and ransack the building, the President and his family fled in a helicopter and were later granted asylum in Moscow. The "Tulip Revolution", as the event came to be known, was the end of Akaev's fourteen years as president.[2] The President, who had initially made strong reforms, was ousted because of increasing despair with what was perceived as corrupt and abusive power.

The demonstrators claimed that the recent parliamentary elections (27 February and 13 March 2005) were fraudulent. Already in early March the first large-scale demonstration took place in Jalal-Abad. Locals challenged the results of the first round of parliamentary elections and demanded Akaev's immediate resignation. They occupied the regional-administration building and eventually won the support of the police. Later, the local administration in Osh was in the hands of the protestors. Members of various opposition parties travelled to Jalal-Abad and Osh, and set up an informal government challenging the authority of President Akaev. Similar demonstrations happened around the country. Eventually, the opposition groups came up from Osh to Bishkek to bring the demonstrations to the capital.

Akaev was perceived to have become increasingly autocratic towards the end of his presidency. However, after independence in 1991, many foreign observers were hopeful that Kyrgyzstan would make a successful transition to a more Western style of democracy. President Akaev once called Kyrgyzstan an "island of democracy" amidst the other republics in the region which had not made such significant administrative and

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[2] The "revolution", although it is debatable as to whether this can be considered a revolution or not, has been also called various other names, such as: "pink", "silk", "lemon", and "daffodil". The profusion of names is rumoured to be linked to the lack of unifying symbols. Tulips were the chosen symbol of one opposition group, but the army had reported been asked to remove all the tulips from the city centre before 24 March. People then chose other symbols to carry on the demonstration, therefore, many people found daffodils nearby. Pink was the colour used by former Foreign Minister and Ambassador to the United States and Canada and to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland Roza Otunbaeva during her demonstrations in the run-up to the parliamentary elections and afterwards. As for both silk and lemon, I have been unable to verify the origin of these names.

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legislative attempts to adopt a democratic political system and a market-orientated economy. However, these advances were said to stagnate towards the end of the first decade of independence (Collins 2006). Akaev strengthened his political control by changing the constitution and tightening his political circle to friends and relatives. This was often described as *traibalizm* (Russian: "tribalism") – a form of corruption expressed through the particularisms of kinship and regional ties.

*Traibalizm* was one of the most persistent accusations made by the opposition against Akaev and other members of government (Osmanalieva 1999; Osorov 2002). For many, the situation became acute during the parliamentary elections of 2005 when two of Aksar Akaev's children won seats. Many were concerned that he was preparing to hand over the presidency to one of his family members. Furthermore, during his time in office, Akaev had amassed a great personal fortune and his family was involved in many lucrative business deals (Kimmage 2005). This private wealth was in stark contrast with the steadily declining social and economic situation in the republic.

### *The genealogy of the Kyrgyz Republic*

Although accusations of *traibalizm* were contentious political issues, paradoxically, people presented the notions of "clans" and "tribes" as important markers of Kyrgyz identity. *Traibalizm* represented the use of strategic ties to gain political and economic power. However, "tribes" and "clans", I argue, were perceived as important categories of genealogical relatedness. Moreover, this concept was promoted by a number of local and national celebrations commemorated the actions of shared ancestors, making it a highly relevant category to life in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

This thesis examines these varying notions of "tribal" relations in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. There are a number of fundamental questions associated with this concept. What do Kyrgyz people mean when they use the terms we translate as "clans" and "tribes"? How have these terms been changed by communism? What are the implications of our usage of these terms? Also, what is the place of these concepts in the modern state?

I argue that a distinction needs to be made between the concept of *traibalizm* and the kinship categories of "clan" and "tribe". *Traibalizm* is a description of particular kinds of corrupt relations that in this case contributed to the increasing autocratic power of the President. The groups accused of *traibalizm* are networks of elites who have

created or manipulated shared connections for personal gain. "Tribes" and "clans", on the other hand, are categories of relatedness elaborated through narratives of shared genealogical descent.

The English categories of "tribe" and "clan" are expressed through a number of Russian and Kyrgyz terms. Instead of portraying a social reality, these terms are often used interchangeably to describe genealogically imagined communities; however, at certain times these terms refer to fluid groups which are contextually derived, particularly during life-cycle ceremonies. These do not represent corporate groups, but groups which form to fulfil obligations to family members (both close and distant) at various times.

In this thesis, I predominantly use the Russian terms, *plemya* ("tribe") and *rod* ("clan"), as many of my interviews were conducted in Russian and are the terms that my informants used. Moreover, a majority of academic and media publications were in Russian. These sources continued to use the Russian terms instead of using the Kyrgyz terms, *uruu* ("tribe") and *uruk* ("clan") with explanations. The formal definitions used by *sanjyrachi* (Kyrgyz: specialists on genealogical descent and the history of particular *plemya* and *rod*), used the Kyrgyz terms, but their use reflected strong similarities with the Russian terms (Jetimishbaev & Masyrakunov 1994; Törökan uulu 1995a). Ultimately, there is very little or no distinction between the contemporary use of the Russian and Kyrgyz terms. Russian travellers' accounts and early ethnographies of the region constitute many of the documents which describe *uruu* and *uruk*. These accounts were followed by Soviet evolutionist approaches to kinship studies, which have contributed to the current meanings of these the terms.

In everyday situations, the people I spoke with often used the terms either in Russian or Kyrgyz interchangeably. In some cases, people said that there was no real distinction between the two categories; they were each describing similar kinship relations. For example, some people would describe the "Mongoldor" as a *rod*, while others referred to it as a *plemya*. The use of either *plemya* or *rod* was associated with kinship relations, but these were not simply a description of a biological group, but ones formed through social interaction and shared memories of ancestors. Therefore, in this thesis I have argued that the usage of these terms, either in Russian or Kyrgyz, reflect genealogically derived relations, and do not refer to actual groups. The genealogies are aided by two mnemonic devices, *jeti ata* (Kyrgyz: a person's seven patrilineal ancestors, literally "seven fathers"), and *sanjyra* (Kyrgyz: genealogical information combined with an account of the past). These two concepts were used to chart the descendents of *plemya*

and *rod*, and the Kyrgyz equivalents, but also to emphasise the importance of genealogical knowledge.

These notions of kinship were not an important feature to people's everyday lives. Many people had little interest in these kinship categories. However, these forms of identity were emphasised in certain contexts. For example, as I will describe in Chapter 2 and 3, Nurlan Motuev, an opposition figure, developed the notion of a political party based on *plemya* associations. While this ultimately failed, it represented an attempt to manipulate this identity for political purposes. This is a theme that I will return to later in the thesis when I examine the government's construction of a national history and concept of the state. Furthermore, as I mentioned above, life-cycle rituals, such as weddings and funerals, also gathered people together who were considered to be from the same *rod*. One man, Amanbai Saraev (see Chapter 3), described gathering with his *rod* for a funeral. He described that he was asked to go by his father and that he did not know the deceased or many of the people there. In this respect, he felt very little connection with them, but because out of obligation to his father and the deceased he attended the ceremony. Although formally it may have been his *rod*, his connection to them was established through obligations and connections to their ancestors.

The various meanings of "clan" and "tribe" have made it very difficult to employ them as analytical categories, and thus require that we rethink some of the classical concepts of kinship studies. Therefore, I propose that genealogy is the central concept in explaining the creation of relatedness through the narration of shared descent in descriptions of *plemya* and *rod*, or their Kyrgyz equivalents. This engages with other similar works that have advocated for such critical analysis of the subject (Schneider 2004). The legacy of kinship studies in anthropology has created a complex terminology based on theories, many of which are marked by evolutionist perspectives. Mary Patterson has stated that anthropological depictions of kinship are inherently problematic. In the age of post-colonialism, she noted that: "[…] prominent practitioners [of kinship studies] suddenly came to the realisation that more than any other categories employed in anthropology, kinship was mired in an epistemic, ethnocentric murk from which there was no possibility of extricating it" (Patterson 2005: 12). At least from the 1970s, if not before, kinship studies began to be more rigorously critiqued, to the point where its death as an anthropological concept was officially pronounced (Schneider 2004). The Eurocentric forms of kinship reckoning at the heart of the study were systematically undone to reveal that other societies did not privilege notions of biological accounts of

kinship. New approaches to kinship studies now explore the construction of relatedness between people as a constituent of kinship relations (Carsten 2000a).

By advocating relatedness, I move away from the use of older kinship models. For example, many of the representations of "clan" and "tribe" that are discussed in a number of sources on Central Asia depict segmented societies where the groups act as corporate units. I argue that this is a development of kinship models underpinned by evolutionist logic. Instead, it is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that "clans" and "tribes" are not groups in the sense of cohesive bodies of people, but categories of relatedness determined through narratives of genealogy.

I have posited various notions of genealogy at the centre of this thesis to describe forms of kinship and the ways in which realatedness created through genealogy has been used as one of the main features of the Kyrgyz government's construction of a national identity. Firstly, earlier anthropological accounts of genealogy focused on the biological relations between people as part of structurally distinct *plemya* or *rod*. However, I argue that in contemporary Kyrgyz society, *plemya* and *rod* represent an imagined community of people who construct relatedness not only through charted biological links, but also through memories attached to shared ancestors and their relation to history, the importance of these links being stressed in certain contexts. This is a method of determining relatedness which I describe as the genealogical imagination.

Secondly, I have employed genealogy as an analytical methodology. The government's use of genealogy marks a transition from constructing notions of kinship to ideology. However, we can employ genealogy to investigate the various practices and images that are being propagated in official accounts of the nation and state. I describe some of the ideological underpinnings which are illustrated by the form of national celebrations. Although the history of these ideas are explored in a vague chronological order, this is not to suggest that this is a natural progression, but elements that have been used and manipulated for the purposes of creating a "Kyrgyz" national identity. The depiction of this ideological backdrop serves to demonstrate the way in which the knowledge of a person's relations constitutes a practice through which they are governed, or as Nikolas Rose (1996b) has described it, a "genealogy of subjectification". I extend this analytical scope in which I describe as the genealogy of the state. Here, I examine the distinction between the myth of the state, as founded by the ancestors, and the state in its administrative form. This is analysed through the Kyrgyz government's the year-long commemoration of "2,200 Years of Kyrgyz Statehood" in 2003. Through this

methodology of the genealogy of the state, I comment on the temporal and political significance of this celebration. I suggest that while the discursive construction of this celebration supports Akaev's ideology of nation-building, it was a response to strong opposition from political parties and individuals after the killing of six demonstrators in March 2002. Genealogy is not just an examination of the practices and tactics that have shaped contemporary views, but also a critique which operates to explore the significance these "tribe", nation, and state identities have in the present.

***Contemporary literature about Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia***

As I have stated, this work provides a unique approach to examining the notion of "tribes" and "clans" in Kyrgyzstan and throughout Central Asia, which differs from other contemporary work focusing on these concepts. There is a growing body of literature which analyses political factionalism as either constituted by regional or "tribal" associations. This division has formed a debate between many scholars, especially in political science (Collins 2002, 2006; Jones Luong 2002; Schatz 2004, 2005). Although these models are popular, they are also being critiqued within political science. Some authors argue that localism is a more nuanced view of political organisation (Radnitz 2005). However, let me briefly describe this debate as it influences many works on Central Asia.

Pauline Jones Luong (2002), considers factionalism within Central Asian governments to be the result of regional associations. She argues that any pre-revolutionary kinship ties were transformed into regional associations by various Soviet policies which supplanted the role of "tribal" elites, and disrupted the old social order. Today, she contends that in Kyrgyzstan, there is a struggle between northern and southern elites. This, she notes, is reflected in the organisation of the electoral system.

Kathleen Collins (2002; 2006) and Edward Schatz (2004; 2005) both argue that Central Asian politics are divided between "clan" factions. They claim that corporate kinship groups are operating to preserve (or gain) control of political power. Both authors discuss the maintenance of political power through the establishment of balancing mechanisms, such as informal pacts. When the pacts break down the position of the dominant "clans" is challenged.

These approaches outline important political and economic trends in the post-socialist period; however, they are based on constructing models around corporate groups.

I argue that there are no such organised groups, but instead, these categories represent strategic attempts by individuals who employ various identities to expand their political and economic networks. Furthermore, these approaches are grounded in models of segmentary lineage system (Evans-Pritchard 1940), especially in the models of "clan" factionalism in government. In anthropology, this model of kinship organisation has been largely abandoned as it does not adequately examine the history and events that have shaped social interaction. I advance that by focusing on relatedness constructed through the discursive construction of genealogies provides a more nuanced approach.

***Thesis outline***

In this thesis I propose an account of people's lives which traces the shifts in their narratives between these different views of "tribal" identity. I explore these different positions and the effect they have on people's experiences of the post-Soviet era. I begin by focusing on *traibalizm*. This particular form of corruption was one of the main allegations made against the government, forming a backdrop to the "Tulip Revolution". In Chapter 1, I explore the discursive construction of these allegations in the context of post-Soviet notions of "dispossession" (Nazpary 2002). The internal dynamics of *traibalizm*, however, has become the source of a debate in political science. I examine this debate in greater detail. However, I stress the strategic use of relationships for the control of resources and political power as opposed to advancing a general model of such interaction.

Although *traibalizm* is represented as a form of corruption, the notion of "clans" and "tribes" are important markers of Kyrgyz identity. I explore this concept in Chapters 2 and 3 by discussing a newspaper campaign by Nurlan Motuev, an opposition leader, about his *plemya* (Russian: "tribe"), the Sayak. In Chapter 2 I examine Motuev's description of his *plemya* and the significance he attributes to this category for contemporary Kyrgyz identity. Motuev's description touches on two basic issues. Firstly, what is meant by the use of the term *plemya*? What implications, therefore, does this have for Western descriptions of this notion? Secondly, how have *plemya* been described in Tsarist and Soviet ethnographic accounts?

In Chapter 3 I explore this idea further. I argue that we should begin from the position that *plemya* do not represent corporate groups, but are forms of relatedness created through the discursive constructions of genealogical ties. I propose a method of

analysis which I term genealogical imagination – relatedness created through the dialectic between memories and representations of history. A number of ethnographic descriptions are provided, including examples of genealogical museums which are ways of creating an awareness of this form of relatedness.

The construction of categories of relatedness, I argue, has been adapted by Akaev and reproduced in his descriptions of the nation-building campaigns. In Chapter 4 I look at the official celebration of one ancestor of the "Kyrgyz" people. At the unveiling of a new statue to this figure, President Akaev discussed the importance of this ancestor's role in the construction of a Kyrgyz nation, but also as a *plemya* leader. In the official rhetoric these characteristics are presented as important elements of Kyrgyz ethnic identity. Therefore, I begin by analysing ethnic studies in the Soviet era. In particular, I focus on ethnogenesis – the study of the origins and development of an ethnic group – which was one of the most influential theoretical approaches to analysing ethnicity. Akaev uses the work of Lev Gumilev, a popular theorist of ethnogenesis, to support his visions of ethnic development in Kyrgyzstan. This ethno-nationalist vision constructs an identity of the Kyrgyz people, which places genealogy as a fundamental aspect to their identity.

Chapter 5 examines the conception of genealogy as an identity, but also as a form of governmentality. The historical figures are presented in way that not only contributes to the construction of a national identity, but also complements their views about their ancestors. In an example of this, I discuss the national celebration of the epic poem *Manas*. Akaev argued that the values derived from the epic demonstrated the "passion" of the ancestors to create an independent nation and state. This is a concept which he builds out of Gumilev's work. Personal depictions of ancestors which appeared in newspapers also described their ancestors in a similar way. The desire to demonstrate the contribution that ancestors made not only shaped the way in which people discussed themselves as continuing the work these figures had started, but also was an attempt to influence the actions of others. This was a view of those that took an interest in their ancestors. Many people had little knowledge of their predecessors. Nonetheless, this basic knowledge was sufficient for creating an ideological view of the nation which all could engage irrespective of their level of interest.

This representation of *plemya* and nation as constructed out of a notion of genealogical relatedness also underpins the concept of the state. In Chapter 6, I examine this notion by discussing the national celebration of "The Year of Kyrgyz Statehood". The state in this context was presented as made up of the people, and conversely, the state

was positioned as an important constituent to people's identities. Here, I employ another approach using genealogy, which uses it as a methodological tool. I argue that through this method we are able to identify some of the practices which contribute to the construction of our identities, but also we are able to perform a critique of this identity. I argue that although the emphasis on unity through the state was the implicit message of earlier national celebrations, it is the timing of this festivity that highlights its attempt to overcome political and social tensions in the country. The death of six protestors in 2002 sparked a series of demonstrations, presenting a strong challenge to Akaev's presidency. The celebration of statehood, I suggest, was an attempt to displace these views by underlining the importance of genealogical relatedness to the maintenance of the state. But, while the celebration did encourage people to explore their ancestry and its importance for the ethno-national celebration, it did not stop people from challenging Akaev.

This work concentrates on various scales of representation of relatedness constructed through genealogies (e.g. personal and national). There are many issues which are touched upon in the thesis, but fall outside the scope of this thesis. In the next two sections, I briefly address the most important of these topics: gender and religion.

### *Gendered aspects of post-Soviet life in Kyrgyzstan*

Historically women in Central Asia have been seen as subject to highly patriarchal and male dominated public discourses. During socialism, policies aimed at improving the position of women in society (Akiner 1997) have, in some situations, resulted in further strengthening of "patriarchal traditions" in certain areas. One such example was the attempt to ban the *paranja* (Uzbek: veil) by Soviet administrators in Uzbekistan in 1927. Douglas Northrop (2003) has demonstrated that women were often subject to heavy social pressure to continue wearing the veil, and in many cases there were attempts by locals, to elevate the wearing of the veil as a "traditional" Uzbek social custom to reinforce this practice. In fact, there was resistance to Soviet attempts to ban the veiling of women by both sexes. The actions of the Soviets were described in Uzbek as a "*hujum*", or an attack on the old ways of life. Those areas where Soviet polices helped women to advance in society were quickly undermined in the post-Soviet era. While some women have continued to be powerful public leaders and occupy political office, they frequently do so with little support. For example, Mary Buckley has argued that in

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many circumstances: "women are surrounded by a male backlash against Soviet propaganda about the heroic 'emancipated woman' of the communist past" (Buckley 1997: 7).

In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, marriage also represents another conflict between reified "traditions" and conceptions of modernity. Recently, international media attention has been focused on accounts of bride kidnapping (Kyrgyz: *ala kachuu*).[3] Sarah Amsler and Russell Kleinbach define this practice as: "[...] the act of abducting a woman to marry her and includes a variety of actions, ranging from consensual marriage to kidnapping and rape" (Amsler & Kleinbach 1999: 185). Research into marriages in Kyrgyzstan (Bauer *et al.* 1997; Handrahan 2004; Kleinbach 2003) has suggested that up to a third of all marriages are a result of kidnappings, both consensual and forced. Although it was officially outlawed during the Soviet era, there are accounts that it still took place. Even since independence, the Kyrgyz government has maintained that the practice is illegal as it violates human rights, there seems to be a greater frequency than during the Soviet era. Few police investigations are launched and those that are begun apparently do not take their inquiries very far.[4] The reasons given for kidnapping often involve issues of poverty. Men do not want to pay a *kalym* (Kyrgyz: bride price) and are reluctant to spend money courting a woman. Additionally, as can be seen in Petr Lom's film, *Kyrgyzstan – The Kidnapped Bride* (2004), the men's mothers sometimes harass them into stealing a bride. The mother depicted in the film was particularly happy that her son would kidnap a woman; she said she would now have someone to help her around the house.

In these depictions few men have been interviewed or were reluctant to give interviews. In many cases, men have been cast as violating human rights. However, comparable research from Kazakhstan suggests some important insights. Joma Nazapry notes that for some men in Kazakhstan the construction of their ethno-national identity they have imagined a direct claim over land and people. Nazpary discusses the sexual

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[3] See Gul'chekhra Karimova and Azamat Kasybekov (2003), Kleinbach *et al.* (2005), Sue Lloyd-Roberts (1999), Alex Rodriguez (2005), and Craig Smith (2005) for recent descriptions of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan. Cynthia Werner (1998) has also examined cases of bride kidnapping in southern Kazakhstan.

[4] Petr Lom's film, *Kyrgyzstan – The Kidnapped Bride* (2004), made for Frontline/World and filmed mainly in northern Kyrgyzstan, is about young women being kidnapped for marriage. Lom recounts one story of a young lady that was kidnapped. Because of the shame she felt from being kidnapped and possibly being raped, she hanged herself. The parents of the deceased girl went to the police, but explained in the film that nothing had been done. To see clips from the film, see: http://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/stories/kyrgyzstan/thestory.html (accessed 1 June 2006).

harassment of women as part of this imagined claim. He notes that: "[…] harassment is particularly imposed on non-Kazakh women, because, according to women, hooligans claim that the Kazakhs' primordial rights on the territory of Kazakhstan entitle Kazakh men to an undisputed right over the bodies of women who live in Kazakhstan. And they frequently resort to violence to enforce such claims" (Nazpary 2002: 48). Gendered aspects of nationalist ideology are an extensive theme that I am unable to address in this thesis.

Another aspect of literature on gender is the exploration of how women negotiate the difficulties of life in the post-socialist era in patriarchal societies. In her thesis on gender relations in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, Kathleen Kuehnast uses a Kyrgyz proverb used by her informants to examine such negotiations. The proverb, "Let the stone lie where it has fallen" (Kyrgyz: "*Tash tüshkön jerinde oor*"), does not refer to women accepting their situations, instead, in Kuehnast's view, it is concept which "[…] introduces a strategy for how a person should address change practically, that is, not through the act of passive resistance but through an active stance of accommodating and collaborating in the process of change" (Kuehnast 1997: 36).

In a later article Kuehnast (1998) develops this view through her examination of a young Kyrgyz woman and the everyday choices she made, i.e. what to wear, pursuing education, marriage, and work. While these were also contingent on a number of other factors, i.e. money, family pressure, etc., the woman Kuehnast describes was in a position to make more choices than generations before her. Furthermore, by living in a city, the number and kinds of choices she was able to make were greater than in the village. Nevertheless, in Kuehnast's conversations with her, the choices the woman made appeared to be contradictory. Kuehnast argues, however, the multiple gender ideologies enforced through religion, nationalism, globalisation, the former socialist past, etc.; were explored and reformulated simultaneously at a time when the introduction of new economic and political models often caused women to make strategic choices.[5] These represent calculated attempts to adapt to the new ideologies in the post-Soviet era.

One aspect of gender relations that forms an important topic of this thesis, this is how have women reacted to the patrilineal and patriarchal forms of the official genealogy which supports the construction of the Kyrgyz nation? Sylvia Yanagisako and Jane

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[5] See also Kathleen Kuehnast and Carol Nechemias (2004) for more on the influences that shape the category of "woman" in post-Soviet states.

Collier (2004) argue that Western descriptions of kinship are primarily based on sexual reproduction and therefore shape our conceptions of gender. For example, the relation between gender and kinship in many ways reflect particular culturally and historically located views of women as reproducing the nation. During the Soviet era women were recognised as "heroine mothers" (Russian: *mat' geroina*) for giving birth to a large number of children. This recognition continues today in Kyrgyzstan.[6] The reification of women as reproducing society is based on Morganian concept in which kinship and gender are biologically determined. The reaction against this view by Yanagisako and Collier emphasises ethnocentric concepts in our understanding of kinship and force us to re-examine our notions of the role of gender in genealogy.

In the official ancestral genealogy constructed by former President Akaev, however, gender is not imagined in such a way. The genealogy represents a patriarchal vision of society, with very few women receiving any acknowledgement. However, a particular construction of Kyrgyz womanhood has been elevated in Akaev's nationalist ideology. The one more widely recognised woman in Kyrgyz history is Kurmanjan *datka*. Kurmanjan *datka* is regarded as a strong leader in southern Kyrgyzstan. Akaev praised her as an "[...] extremely smart, imperious, and vigorous woman who was put forth into the leading role by virtue of her strong personality and her stately qualities" (Akaev 2003c: 106). Kurmanjan *datka*, in Akaev's view, represented a powerful, determined figure, which he positioned as a role model for Kyrgyz women. Pictures depict her in the traditional white turban of a married women (Kyrgyz: *elechek*), an archetype of a mature and respected woman.

In a book where Akaev describes the developments in Kyrgyzstan in the ten years since independence and the goals that need to be pursued in the future, Akaev discussed his vision for the role of women in the country. He states: "I dream of that time when women, besides magnanimous words about their role [in society], will receive the opportunity to take by right what belongs to them – a high place in our society" (Akaev 2002b: 502). Women have taken high positions in government, as is evident in the competition for certain government positions, and occupy respected places in universities and in other institutions, although they are in a minority. Nevertheless, how does the

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[6] During the Soviet period, a *mat' geroina* was a woman who gave birth to ten or more children. While women are still recognised as *mat' geroina*, today the number has been reduced to five children.

image of Kurmanjan *datka* correspond with the official genealogy which is dominated by male figures?

Kuehnast's example of women strategically employing shifting values should not be limited to the post-Soviet era. For example, the figure of Kurmanjan *datka* is represented as a leader who exercised great diplomacy in her negotiations between the Kokand Khanate, the Russian Empire, northern Kyrgyz elite, and her own people in Alai. Kurmanjan *datka* is integral to the official historical depiction of Kyrgyzstan in the late nineteenth century. Despite this, her image is enmeshed in an otherwise male-dominated past. She is but one of only a few women nationally recognised.

The absence of women is also noticeable in genealogies. Nevertheless, knowledge of genealogies and contributions to that knowledge is not an exclusively male domain. While many women are not interested in it (and many men are equally indifferent) there are some who are deeply engaged in the discussion of genealogies. Janyl Abdyldabek kyzy, a government worker in Bishkek, published an article about her ancestors in a national newspaper (see Chapter 5). President Akaev acknowledged her contribution to the genealogical knowledge of her ancestors. Although men usually lead public discussions on genealogies, women add to these representations. While there have been no explicitly feminist reinterpretations of the official genealogy in Kyrgyzstan, the few – but significant – contributions by women demonstrate that this part of kinship studies is also a place of negotiation.

### *Religion and ethnicity*

Another enormously important aspect of Kyrgyz life that I do not attempt to address in depth in this thesis is religion. Many contemporary descriptions of Central Asia focus on the possibilities of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (Lubin & Rubin 1999).[7] While Hizb ut-Tahrir (Arabic: Party of Liberation) actively promotes the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in the region, the republics have formed secular governments. In many cases the influence of Islamic practices on everyday life are overstated. Among the mobile pastoral peoples, Islam was a relatively late development which was quickly prohibited by the Soviet regime. In Kyrgyzstan, many people perform Muslim rituals, but

[7] See Nick Megoran (2000) for a critique of the view advanced by Nancy Lubin and Barrett Rubin.

do not consider themselves to be believers. This is slowly changing, but Islam does not determine many of the social practices found in the region.

However, Islam is regarded as a part of ethnic identity. I explore this as a complementary notion to the official account of Kyrgyz ancestors. Akaev has cast the actions of these figures as "moral", which conform to the secular views of good citizenship. Nevertheless, these morals also support Islamic codes of conduct. In the following paragraphs, I briefly outline how these views have come to coexist.

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many people throughout the Fergana Valley converted to Islam. However, it was not until the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that Sufi missionaries were able to convert many of the mobile pastoral people in the mountainous areas of contemporary Kyrgyzstan (Haghayeghi 1995: 76-77). Although many nomads in northern Kyrgyzstan had converted to Islam by the early twentieth century, the faith was not as established as it was in southern Kyrgyzstan, where many mosques and *medressas* (Kyrgyz: Islamic schools) had opened.

During the Soviet era, Islam was considered a threat to the goals of the socialist regime. Firstly, Islam was ideologically opposed to the secularism of communism. Secondly, mobilising people in the name of Islam was a threat to Soviet legitimacy in the region (Shahrani 1993: 130). For example, the Soviets considered the *basmachi* guerrilla movement to be a Muslim fighting force. However, it was the destruction of Kokand in 1918 by Russian troops which sparked resistance to the colonisation of the region. The *basmachi* movement was not fundamentally a Muslim group; it can be seen to primarily a reaction to Russian colonial encroachment and the establishment of Soviet rule. They were opposed to colonisation by Russians and against *Jadids* (Arabic: Muslim reformers[8]) (Broxup 1983).[9] These concerns and others caused the Soviets to target religious institutions in the region. The Soviet administration executed religious leaders, prohibited religious texts, and closed down mosques and *medressas*.

However, Islamic values were not entirely incompatible with the goals of communism. Ludmila Polonskaya and Alexei Malashenko note that Islam shared similarities with the ideology of communism. For example, they stress the "[...] priority of collectivist values over individual ones and the evaluation of the social and purely

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[8] "*Jadidism* was a program of modernization that encompassed several points: reform of the traditional Muslim educational system; emancipation of women; creation of a common Turkic literary language; and fortifying the relationship among Russia's Muslims" (Sabol 1995: 239, n. 18).

[9] See also Olivier Roy (2000) and Peter Hopkirk (1984) who gives a vivid account of this period in Central Asian history.

human significance of the individual being based on his service to the community" (Polonskaya & Malashenko 1994: 103). The similarities between some values of Islam and communism allowed for the continuation of Islamic interpretation of social actions.

Such complementary views changed the perception of Islam from a belief system into a characteristic of ethnicity within a communist system. As Mathijs Pelkmans (2005) has argued, during the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, being a Muslim is often associated with national identities in Central Asia. M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani noted that during the late Soviet era: "For Turkistanis, the refocusing of their traditional Islamic identities through their Soviet assigned, but locally interpreted, modern national identities, is perfectly congruous with the historical pluralism of Islamic *umma*" (Shahrani 1985: 35).[10]

While Islam remains a part of people's ethnic identity, this is now changing. Particularly in northern Kyrgyzstan, people are adopting Islam as a belief system, observing the rituals of worship and the other five pillars (Arabic: *Arkan-al-Islam*). Today, Kyrgyz are predominantly Sunni Muslims, many of whom follow the Hanafi school of thought. Islam, however, has not had much influence on forms of relatedness in contemporary Kyrgyzstan. While Islamic practices do influence marriage proscriptions, general conceptions of kinship and religion are distinct categories of identity. In my discussions with people about their ancestors and notions of kinship, the subject of religion was rarely mentioned. However, as I have stated, ancestors are described as "moral" people, i.e. abiding by Islamic moral values, but which are also the basis for the secular views of citizenship.

### *Methodological approach*

This thesis is based on fieldwork conducted in northern Kyrgyzstan from 2002 to 2003. However, my investigation into some of the central questions of this thesis began during a previous trip in 2000 to 2001. During the first trip, I went to Kyrgyzstan to develop research questions for my doctoral studies. I was based at the Kyrgyz State National University[11] where I studied Russian and Kyrgyz languages, and was a part-time English teacher. During that time, I was struck by the stark contrast between depictions of

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[10] The *umma* is an Arabic term designating the community of all Muslims. See also Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay (1985) on this subject.

[11] In 2003 the university was renamed the Jusup Balasagyn Kyrgyz National University.

Kyrgyzstan as divided between "tribes" (Dzhunushaliev & Ploskikh 2000) and everyday life where such corporate groups did not influence people's actions. While not all authors argued that "tribal" society re-emerged after socialism as a "traditional" mode of political and social organisation, many commentators were equally unclear as to the relevance of "tribes" in everyday life. "Tribes" and "clans" were largely absent from discussions I had with people. Although there was a consensus in the literature about the interaction between these groups, my encounters indicated that there was no such clearly formed view (cf. Rosen 1984: 1).

When I returned to Kyrgyzstan in 2002 for my fieldwork, I documented how the notions of "tribes" and "clans" were conceived as forms of relatedness and how they influenced the construction of identity. I chose in the city of Naryn, as I was told by friends and colleagues that this was where "real" Kyrgyz live. The harsh mountain environment had discouraged many Russians and other ethnicities from settling there during the Soviet era. As a result, my friends told me, people were able to maintain many customs that were no longer to be found in other parts of the country.

In Naryn, I involved myself with many aspects of life in the town. Through a number of contacts, I was able to live with a local family. I was able to witness the different constrains of life in post-socialism, but as it was a single parent family, certain issues were particularly apparent. Furthermore, I became a part-time English teacher at Naryn State University. I was able to meet with university administrators and students. This allowed me to conduct participant-observation, to continually engage with people over a long period of time shaping my understanding of my central research questions.

I chose Bishkek as a second base. The designation of 2003 as "2,200 Years of Kyrgyz Statehood" demanded that I examine events in both cities. There were a number of festivals and meetings that took place in the capital, which were important ethnographic experiences. I was able to access the National Library of the Kyrgyz Republic and the rare books department of the National Academy of Sciences. I was able to study archive documents, Tsarist and Soviet ethnographic accounts on the region, and to find new publications. I met with a number of scholars from different universities and research institutes in Bishkek. They provided me with an invaluable source of discussion and material. Furthermore, I conducted interviews with a number of politicians and journalists, who were key figures in local and national movements. This was particularly important in explaining accusations of corruption.

I also travelled to villages in Naryn and Ysyk-Köl *oblasts'* (Russian: regions). Through friends and acquaintances, I was able to live with families and discuss my research interests with them. Over cups of tea and numerous meals we discussed many issues related to my subject. I conducted both questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires provided me with a format on which to base discussions while exploring issues that arose in during those meetings. These additional trips to villages supported concepts that I developed during my fieldwork and provided me with important illustrative examples.

During many of my journeys to villages I was accompanied by an assistant, Bakyt. A colleague introduced me to Bakyt and I was in close contact with him throughout my fieldwork. Occasionally, he accompanied me to meetings and was a very helpful in debating the events that took place. Bakyt also introduced me to families and was helped when there were language difficulties.

During my fieldwork, newspapers were an important source of information. In contrast to many other parts of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has a relatively liberal media. Internet websites are increasingly popular, but during my time there, newspapers remained the most popular form of media. Despite the state media sources, many newspapers are owned by opposition politicians or carried their articles, which challenged the government's position. The Russian language daily, *Moya stolitsa novosti* (*My Capital News*, which was later renamed *MSN*) regularly printed articles by the imprisoned ex-Vice President Feliks Kulov. The weekly Russian language paper, *ResPublica*, also carried articles by the outspoken opposition figure, Nurlan Motuev. *Agym* (*Trend*), a bi-weekly Kyrgyz language publication, expressed the views of its editor-in-chief and former presidential candidate, Melis Eshimkanov. A majority of the opposition newspapers were printed by the government printing company, Uchkun. Nevertheless, only occasionally were issues blocked or altered.[12]

There are also a number of government and pro-government publications. *Slovo Kyrgyzstan* (*The Word of Kyrgyzstan*), a Russian language newspaper, publishes three times a week and carries speeches by the president and new laws. Many of Akaev's

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[12] There were more serious allegations of government interference. Alexander Kim, editor-in-chief of *Moya stolitsa novosti* accused the government of opening a number of libel cases against the newspaper with the intent to close it. Kim also said that his journalists were intimidated and his car set on fire, which he attributed to intimidation by the government (Karakulova 2003). The newspaper was closed on 13 June 2003 because it was found guilty of defamation and could not pay the damages. It later reopened on 27 June 2003 as *MSN* (Redaktsiya gazety *MSN* 2003).

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speeches were published in this newspaper and provided detailed coverage of many of the national celebrations. *Vechernii Bishkek* (*Evening Bishkek*), a pro-government Russian language newspaper, was the most popular daily newspaper in the country. It often carried stories against the opposition and provided complementary articles to the national celebrations. These are just a few of the more regular publications. In total, I counted over forty newspapers published in Bishkek.[13]

I was also able to conduct interviews after my fieldwork had ended. Upon my return to England, I met with Kyrgyz students and migrant workers. I organised interviews and was able to arrange many follow-up meetings. This provided me with new insights and allowed me to learn the latest news from those who just arrived.

### *A historical outline of the Kyrgyz Republic*

Numerous studies detail the history of Kyrgyzstan,[14] but I here will only highlight a few of the more relevant historical moments for the purposes of this thesis.

In the official history, the Kyrgyz are one of the oldest ethnic groups in the region. A statement made by the Chinese chronicler, Sima Qian, has been used to support the government's claims that the Kyrgyz had a state in 201 B.C. Apart from this reference, little is known of the extent or influence of this polity. The next time the "Kyrgyz" are said to have succeeded in establishing political and military independence was in the ninth century A.D. when they established a khanate on the Yenisei River in southern Siberia (Butanaev & Khudyakov 2000). The end of the Kyrgyz Khanate came with the rise of Chinggis Khan in the thirteenth century. The military power of the Mongols was too great for the Kyrgyz who were incorporated into Mongolian rule. Displaced from their territory in Siberia, the Kyrgyz slowly migrated south, towards what today is Kyrgyzstan.

In the 1700s, many Kyrgyz came under the control of the Kokand Khanate. The borders of the Khanate stretched northwards to southern Kazakhstan, but the ruling

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[13] These were just the papers which dealt with politics, and do not include *oblast'* newspapers, international editions, or special interest papers. According to my research, I found at total of 118 newspapers and 15 journals available in Kyrgyzstan.

[14] For more detailed discussion of Kyrgyz history, see Rafis Abazov (2004); A. Asankanov (ed.) (1996); A. Asankanov and O. Osmonov (2002); Dzh. Baktygulov and Zh. Mombekova (2001); V. Butanaev and Yu. Khudyakov (2000); T. Chorotegin and K. Moldokasymov (2000); V. Mokrynin and V. Ploskikh (1995); T. Omurbekov and A. Dzhorobekova (1998); and Svat Soucek (2000).

dynasty only had weak control of this region. Both settled Kyrgyz in the south and nomadic Kyrgyz in the north struggled against the Khanate. There were a number of petitions for Russian support against the Khanate. In 1876 the Kokand Khanate was abolished and the Russians assumed control of the region.

In October 1917 the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, and soon thereafter new administrators were sent to Central Asia. As part of the policy of national delimitation in 1924, the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous *Oblast'* was formed. On 1 February 1926 the Soviet granted the status of Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Finally, on 5 December 1936, this was changed to the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic, a full member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

The Soviets implemented a modernization campaign. Beginning in 1928 the nomads were forced to settle and join *kolkhoz* (Russian: *kollektivnoe khozyaistvo*, collective farm), the first of a number of five-year plans, to produce agricultural products on a large scale. The administration also implemented education and language reforms. These reforms had another effect – the slow Russification of certain aspects of Kyrgyz life. For example, the first language, particularly in urban centres, was Russian.

On 31 August 1991, Kyrgyzstan formally ceded from the USSR. There were a number of difficulties associated with their sudden independence. One of the most contentious issues has been continual debates over the nature of the constitution. The first constitution was introduced in May 1993. There have been a number of changes made to the constitution, but the latest in 2003, were accused of increasing the power of the President and limiting the effectiveness of political parties.

The Kyrgyz state has also struggled in formally establishing its borders with its neighbours. In 1996, after a series of meetings and agreements, Kyrgyzstan agreed to cede parts of its territory with China. These territories had been unresolved since the Tsarist era. These led to a number of demonstrations (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, the borders that the Soviet administrators devised in 1924 were internal borders. Once these became international borders, all countries in Central Asia held negotiations to determine their exact borders.[15]

However, Kyrgyzstan set the trend by pushing through some reforms. In May 1993, Kyrgyzstan was the first country in Central Asia to introduce its own currency, the som. In April 1996, Kyrgyzstan with four other members (China, Kazakhstan, Russia,

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[15] See Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003; 2004).

and Tajikistan), founded the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The member states agreed on border delimitation, military cooperation, international trade, and methods of tackling drug trafficking. Later, in 1998, Kyrgyzstan joined the World Trade Organization to develop international trade.[16]

The first President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, was elected by Parliament in 1990, which was still part of the USSR. The introduction of the constitution in 1993 granted citizens the right to vote. In 1995, Akaev won the popular vote to remain as president. However, the constitution stipulated that a person should only be president for two five-year terms. The presidential election in 2000 was highly contentious because Akaev ran again. He stated that in 1990 he had been elected by parliament and not by the people. Akaev won the election, but many opposition candidates complained that he had prohibited certain people from running and did not allow candidates sufficient opportunities to advertise their political views.

For example, former Vice President Feliks Kulov was imprisoned on charges he claimed were fabricated. A former Akaev supporter turned leader of the opposition party Ar-Namys (Dignity). One time Vice President, Governor of Chüi *oblast'*, Chairman for the National Security Committee and Mayor of Bishkek, Kulov had developed strong views against President Akaev and his policies, which he claims led to his imprisonment.[17] He was arrested in early 2000 on charges of embezzlement dating back to when he was Governor of Chüi *oblast'* (1993-1997). He was jailed before the presidential elections which he had announced he would participate. He was acquitted of these charges, not long before the election took place. However, because he refused to sit a state language exam to assess his proficiency in Kyrgyz, the country's first official language, he was barred from running. After the election he was tried again on the same charges and sentenced for seven years. For many, this marked a turning point in Akaev's style of government and a vocal opposition challenged the President.

The successful ousting of Akaev in the "Tulip Revolution" did not bring about the changes hoped for by so many. The term "revolution" increasingly appears to have little

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[16] However, because Kyrgyzstan was the first country in the region to join, and none of its neighbours were members, the republic was not able to take advantage of the economic agreements. This caused a tariff war between the republic and Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, which was not resolved until 2000.

[17] It is interesting to note that Kulov was written out of Bishkek history in Zh. Malabaev's (2001) book on the capital. Kulov was mayor of Bishkek from 1998 to 1999. Ryspek Baltabaev (2003) published an article in *Moya Stolitsa Novosti* describing this omission and the importance that Kulov has had to Bishkek during his time as mayor. However, such as large error must also bring into question the political intentions of Malabaev and those of the publishing company in his description of the history of Bishkek.

connotation with any real change in the improvement to the conduct of the government. In fact, many are concerned that the situation is deteriorating. Numerous friends and colleagues have expressed frustration and dismay with the government, which is now led by Kurmanbek Bakiev. The assassination of businessmen and parliamentary deputies has fuelled fears that the new government is incapable of controlling the escalating violence in the country, unable to implement laws, and at worse, being involved in "mafia" business.

During this period of the weakened legislative body, one of the main characters of this thesis, Nurlan Motuev, took advantage of this situation and became leader of the political activist group, the People's Patriotic Movement "Joomart". On 6 June 2005, Motuev, with the help of supporters, seized the Bashsary coal mine, the largest mine in the Karakeche basin in the Jumgal region of Naryn *oblast'* (International Crisis Group 2005). After independence, the ownership of the mine was taken over by a local businessman, parliamentary deputy and Akaev ally, Kamchybek Joldoshbaev. Motuev considered this "illegal" and in the absence of a strong regulatory force, he was able to take control and distribute free coal to some and sell the remainder. It is even suggested that he now controls all five mines in the region.

Motuev is regarded by many in the government and local residents as operating outside of the rule of law and creating the greater problems for people at this time. He has threatened to resist any attempt to take back the mine with physical force if necessary (Mizante 2006). The Kyrgyz government has stated that it will address Motuev's actions and find appropriate ways to resolve the situation. On 23 May 2006 government forces arrested Nurlan Motuev, who had become known in the media as the "Coal King". He was brought to Bishkek and placed in jail and officially charged with unlawful seizure of property and tax evasion. A later appeal for his release on 8 June was rejected.

Motuev's actions demonstrate the difficulty the current government is experiencing in enforcing the laws to control the more opportunistic members of the political elite. The future is uncertain, but many people have said that the situation in the country is becoming worse. Unlike its neighbours, Kyrgyzstan lacks natural resources, which makes the economic situation even more difficult to improve. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is challenging the ideology of a unified nation and state. The new President, Kurmanbek Bakiev, will develop his own political rhetoric for the nation and state. However, thus far he has not proposed an alternative to Akaev's vision.

## *CHAPTER 1*

# *Korruptsiya, Traibalizm* and the "Tulip Revolution"

The competition between political elites is a major source of instability in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Their struggle for resources and political power has increased accusations of *traibalizm* (Russian: "tribalism"), framing much of the political discourse since the mid 1990s and is a central feature of the "Tulip Revolution". *Traibalizm* is a specific form of *korruptsiya* (Russian: corruption), which is used to describe the changing perceptions of "corrupt" practices since the collapse of the Soviet Union, emphasising the actions of the political elite who create factions by manipulating relationships and identities. During my fieldwork, I witnessed the intensification of these allegations. The actions taken against government officials accused of such relationships eventually culminated in the "Tulip Revolution". In this chapter, I focus on these allegations of *traibalizm* and the meanings invested in the concept.[18]

Although *traibalizm* is translated into English as "tribalism", in this thesis I attribute these terms with distinct meanings. Claims of *traibalizm* are accusations against the organisation of factions and the manipulation of identities. "Tribalism", however, refers to the perception of the division of political and economic power between cohesive corporate "clans" in Central Asian governments. Debates about the internal mechanisms of "tribalism" are a feature of many recent works in political science. However, I propose *triabalizm* as a way of addressing the numerous, and often overlapping, idioms people employ to describe the formation of factions in the post-Soviet era.

The discourse of *traibalizm* formed a backdrop to the anti-government demonstrations that led up to the "Revolution". Therefore, I begin by examining instances of political and social unrest since March 2002, when the death of six protestors in southern Kyrgyz served as a catalyst for further demonstrations which called for President Akaev's resignation. Amongst the many criticisms of the President, he was

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[18] The intentional use of the Russian terms highlights the nuances of the local discourse. In Kyrgyz *traibalizm* is translated as *uruuchuluk*, but the Russian term is more frequently used. *Traibalizm* is derived from Latin (*tribus*), but its form suggests it is a loan word from English, and this form allows for it to be easily mapped onto a general lexicon of corruption.

often accused of *traibalizm*. This was highlighted during the 2005 parliamentary elections, when Akaev gave his full support to two of his children who ran for office.

I compare these examples with recent political science studies on Central Asia, which argue that factionalism in government is a representation of either regional associations or "tribal" alliances. This debate highlights different social and political organisations which developed during the Soviet era and how they are addressing the new political challenges. Each of these views expands our understanding of the nature of politics in the region. However, I argue that they reify notions of relatedness into formal, corporate groups. This is a misleading description which portrays Kyrgyz society as battling against "traditional" models of social organisation in the modern era.

In contrast to these views I suggest that these terms expressed through accusations of *traibalizm* denote idioms of particularlism – various overlapping conceptions of favouritism which are perceived as "corrupt" practices. The multiple meanings understood through the use of *traibalizm* articulate strategic attempts by elites to gather support by emphasising "tribal" and regional identities. Let us begin by examining the situation in Kyrgyzstan in 2002. Claims of "tribal" and regional factionalism are a central theme of these demonstrations. The criticism and challenges against President Akaev eventually leading to his ousting.

### *Territorial and political integrity*

The events of 17 March 2002, which subsequently became known as the "Aksy tragedy" (Russian: "*Aksy tragedii*"), marked a period of social unrest and increased criticism of President Akaev.[19] For the opposition, this moment signified the beginning of a series of developments which eventually led to the "Tulip Revolution". On 17 March, a group of protesters marched towards Kerben, the Aksy regional capital, Jalal-Abad *oblast'* (Russian: region), demonstrating against the imprisonment of local parliamentary deputy and leader of the Asaba (Flag) Party, Azimbek Beknazarov. However, there are conflicting accounts as to what happened during the protest. Government officials

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[19] This is known as a "tragedy" mainly because local human rights advocates saw this not only in terms of a tragic loss of life for the residents in Aksy region or Kyrgyz citizens, but as they, and other opposition parties claimed at the time President Akaev and his supporters seemed to have disregarded the democratic and human rights of the citizens. It has also become recognised as the beginning of the most turbulent period of Kyrgyz history since independence. See Akaev (2003c: 213-222) for his discussion of the tragedy, the land transfer deals made with China, and a thinly veiled criticism of Beknazarov.

maintain that demonstrators began throwing objects at the army who were there to maintain order. *ResPublica* reported that a group of villagers from Kyzyl-Tuu were marching towards Kerben, when they were stopped by the special police force (OMON),[20] between the villages of Boz-Piek and Uspenskoe. When the villagers refused to turn back, OMON officers fired on them, killing six men. The deaths resulted in a night of violence in the region and further demonstrations. The following night, President Akaev, who had been in Moscow, appeared on television. He blamed opposition groups for attempting to destabilize the political authority of the government and appealed for calm.[21] After further demonstrations, Beknazarov was released from prison on 19 March.

In the following months, President Akaev attempted to take charge of the situation and sought reconciliation with the opposition parties. He also initiated an investigation into the killings. Several high-ranking government officials were eventually found accountable for not preventing this event. On 22 May 2002 Kurmanbek Bakiev, the Prime Minister at that time, stepped down from office after a special commission found that he and several other government officials had not acted to stop the deaths of the demonstrators.[22] Bakiev cleared himself of any guilt, but stated that he felt that he could no longer hold office after being part of a system that failed to stop the deaths. A native of the Jalal-Abad region, Bakiev felt sympathetic to the families and their complaints. Once he left office, he urged those that he thought to be guilty to step down (Blua 2002).

During the summer of 2002 demonstrations continued throughout the country.[23] In November 2002 a march from Osh to Bishkek had been organised by Beknazarov and the victims' families. On 18 November, just after I had arrived to begin my fieldwork, many police buses were parked in Ala-Too Square in case those who had marched up from Osh began to demonstrate. People were tense during this time. However, all the

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[20] OMON is a Russian acronym for "*otryad militsii osobogo naznacheniya*".

[21] See L. Garayushchenko (2002) for a detailed account of the Aksy events and other analytical articles. See also *ResPublica's*, an oppositional newspaper, website for another chronicle of events: http://www.respublica.elcat.kg/gazeta/tragedy/2.htm (accessed 28 June 2006).

[22] Bakiev was later elected President after the "Tulip Revolution". He won an electoral vote on 10 July 2005 and was later inaugurated into office on 14 August 2005.

[23] Turat Akimov (2003) reported that on the 4 September 2002 Aksy residents started a protest march to Bishkek, planning to meet in the capital on 17 September. However, already by 12 September they had been rounded up and put on buses to take them home. The demonstrators had named their march "The Great Campaign" which is a cycle of the *Manas* epic. "The Great Campaign" was the account of Manas's proclamation of a raid on China. The Kyrgyz warriors destroyed the Great Wall and Manas placed himself on the Celestial Throne in Beijing. The protestors were using the epic, which President Akaev had based much of his ideology for Kyrgyz society, against the government. The choice of this part of the epic was also a clear indication of the anger some people felt about transferring Kyrgyz land to China. See also Maman Karabaev (2003) for more commentary a year after the tragedy.

protestors that had participated in the march were detained in a suburb of Bishkek, Voenno-Antonovka, and later sent back to Osh on buses.

At this time, I attended a pro-government "meeting" which took place outside the Jogorku Kengesh (Parliament). A crowd of around a hundred people marched towards Parliament. They stopped outside and made impassioned speeches against the opposition. Shouting through a megaphone, local residents expressed their anger with opposition leaders, who they considered were only after political power and causing unnecessary disturbances throughout the country. People held placards with slogans such as: "We condemn the actions of the opposition" (Russian: "*My osuzhdaem deistviya oppositzionov*"); "Masaliev and Beknazarov – resign!" (Russian: "*V otstavku Masalievya, Beknazarova!*"); and "Askar Akaevich, we demand [that you] dissolve the Legislative Assembly" (Russian: "*Askar Akaevich, my trebuem raspustit' Zakonodatel'noe sobranie!*").



**Figure 1.1** – 18 November 2002 – A pro-government meeting in Old Square, Bishkek. The banners read (l-r): "We condemn the actions of the opposition", and "Give us a quiet life and work". (Photo: Author)



**Figure 1.2** – 18 November 2002 – pro-government meeting in Old Square, Bishkek. Nearest banner reads: "Remove Masaliev and Beknazarov!" (Photo: Author)

On 28 December 2002, seven police officers and local government officials were convicted for their involvement in the Aksy tragedy. Four of those men were sentenced to prison; the others were acquitted due to lack of evidence. The opposition voiced heavy criticism for the way in which the investigation had been carried out and that those who had been imprisoned had received lenient sentences (Albion 2003). The victims' families and supporters continued to challenge the verdicts.

The reasons for Beknazarov's arrest were also contested. Beknazarov was detained on 5 January 2002 on charges of abuse of his position in 1995 when he worked as a representative of the public prosecutors office in Toktogul region, Jalal-Abad *oblast'*. It was alleged that Beknazarov delayed the investigation of a murder case. He was accused of impeding the trial.

Following his release from prison on 19 March 2002, Beknazarov maintained that he was arrested because he had questioned land transfer deals with China. There were at least four places along the Chinese-Kyrgyz border that were disputed. Historically, these areas have been contested since the time of the Tsarist expansion into Central Asia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, published a book in 2003 to answer questions relating to the border issue between Kyrgyzstan and China.[24]

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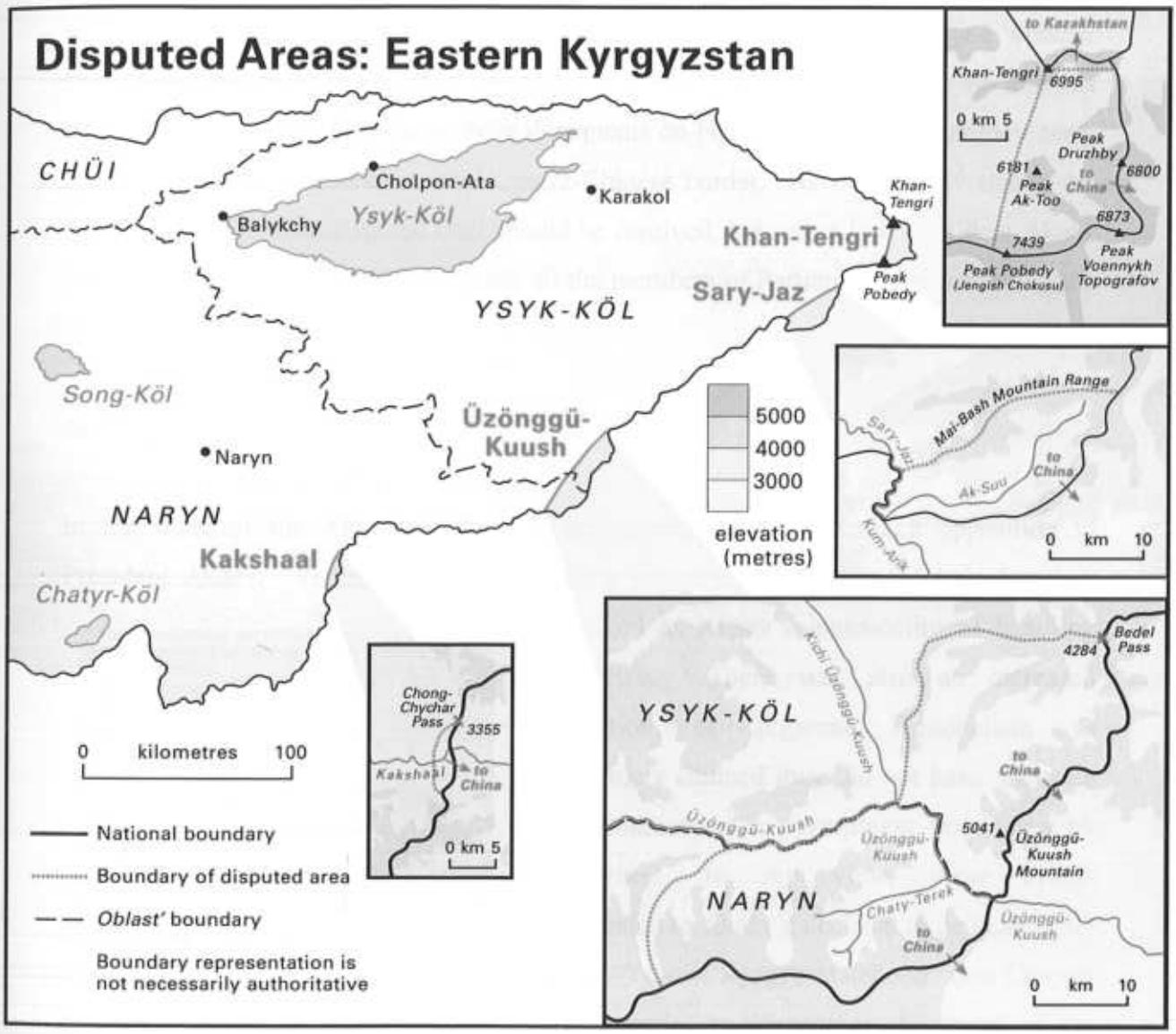
[24] Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2003).

The book presents a collection of articles by academics and politicians written in Kyrgyz and Russian about the border, its history, and more general border issues. There are also copies of agreements made between the Russian Empire, Soviet Union and the Kyrgyz Republic about the border with China, beginning with the "Peking Additional Treaty" of 2 November 1860. The documents that are reproduced are not complete and do not describe much of the physical landscape of the disputed territories or their general significance.[25] The authors stressed, however, that the areas do not hold any natural resources that can be exploited, which was a concern of the opposition.

I met Beknazarov a couple of times to discuss his views on the land transfers. On a cold September day, he showed me a map with the disputed regions highlighted on his office wall in parliament. He reproduced these for me on my own map of Kyrgyzstan, which I have included below (see Figure 1.3, overleaf).

[25] This is in stark contrast with a volume produced by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation about the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border (2004). Here detailed maps are provided showing the lines of delimitation from different agreements. The maps clearly indicate boundaries from 1930, 1961 and 2001. Land transfers between the countries are clearly demarcated as well.


Disputed Areas: Eastern Kyrgyzstan
CHÜI
Cholpon-Ata
Karakol
Balykchy
Ysyk-Köl
Khan-Tengri
Khan-Tengri
Peak Pobedy
Sary-Jaz
YSYK-KÖL
Song-Köl
Üzönggü-Kuush
Naryn
NARYN
Kakshaal
Chatyr-Köl
5000
4000
3000
elevation (metres)
0 kilometres 100
National boundary
Boundary of disputed area
Oblast' boundary
Boundary representation is not necessarily authoritative
Chong-Chychar Pass
3355
Kakshaal
to China
0 km 5
to Kazakhstan
Khan-Tengri
6995
0 km 5
Peak Druzhby
6181
Peak Ak-Too
to China
6800
6873
7439
Peak Pobedy (Jengish Chokusu)
Peak Voennykh Topografov
Mai-Bash Mountain Range
Sary-Jaz
Ak-Suu
to China
Kum-Arik
0 km 10
YSYK-KÖL
Kichi Üzönggü-Kuush
Bedel Pass
4284
to China
Üzönggü-Kuush
Üzönggü-Kuush
5041
Üzönggü-Kuush Mountain
NARYN
Chaty-Terek
to China
Üzönggü-Kuush
0 km 10

The latest publicised border issue was related to Üzönggü-Kuush, the largest area of disputed land (approximately 87,200 hectares), taking its name from the river running through the disputed territory (Beknazarov 2001; *ResPublica* 2001). However, there were another three areas Beknazarov and his colleagues discovered that had also been transferred to China. Beknazarov explained to me he had initially been investigating the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in the Aksy region, where a small peninsula extends into Aksy. He wanted to know what agreements had been made over this border region and whether there were any previous Kyrgyz claims to the area. It was only when he and his colleagues began searching the archive documents on border delimitation that they came across documents pertaining to the Kyrgyz-Chinese border. As Beknazarov stated, the issue was not whether disputed land should be resolved, but rather how President Akaev conducted the affair without addressing all the members of Parliament and informing the general public.

***Strategies for national unity***

In the wake of the Aksy tragedy, the demonstrators formed staunch opposition to President Akaev. Victims' families and their supporters were angered by what they perceived as Akaev's incapability of handling the crisis. There was also an increased perception of regional factionalism as southerners claimed they did not have adequate representation in a government dominated by northerners. In my view, these events contributed to Akaev's decision to dedicate 2003 as the "Year of Kyrgyz Statehood" (see Chapter 6). Akaev stated that this celebration was intended to "strengthen the unity" of the country (*Kabar* 2002).



**Figure 1.4** – Askar Akaev (Photo: RFE/RL)

Akaev employed a number of strategies to accomplish this. One strategy was to hold a national referendum on 2 February 2003.[26] The proposed changes to the

[26] A forty member Constitutional Committee was created by a special decree signed by President Akaev on 26 August 2002. The task of the committee was to look at ways the president's powers could be redistributed to the Parliament and local authorities. This action was regarded as a direct result of calls for

constitution were aimed at reforming the government. The referendum required a vote on two issues. The first issue asked voters to decide on a package of constitutional reforms, and not individual changes. These reforms were aimed at redistributing presidential powers, granting regional officials more authority. Following the Aksy tragedy, many saw this as a necessary concession by the President. However, a recommendation on restructuring parliament overshadowed the distribution of presidential powers and other proposed constitutional reforms. The Constitutional Committee suggested that Parliament should be reduced in size from a bicameral to a unicameral parliament. The bicameral parliament – consisting of two houses: the Myizam Chygaruu Jyiyny (Kyrgyz: Legislative Assembly) and the El Okuldor Jyiyny (Kyrgyz: Assembly of People's Representatives) with 105 seats – was introduced in 1994. This replaced the Soviet-style unicameral (or one house) parliament of 350 seats. The newly proposed unicameral parliament would reduce the number of seats further to just 75. There were mixed reactions by many Kyrgyz that I spoke with about this. Many people thought that reducing the number of seats would limit the number of deputies, giving inadequate representation. They claimed the politicians had stood for election just to gain greater access to resources and to make privileged business ventures. However, a colleague of mine, Raushan, an education coordinator in her mid thirties, complained that the reducing parliament would lead to under-representation in certain areas. The second issue was a vote to decide whether President Akaev should complete his term in office, ending in December 2005. Both ballots were passed with clear majorities, which indicated that Akaev had retained a vote of confidence from the electorate.

In the run up to the referendum, many opposition parties felt that the proposed changes were being rushed through without a sufficient period of consultation. They regarded the new constitutional measures as only increasing the likelihood of *korruptsiya*, including *traibalizm*. During this time a fierce media battle broke out between the major newspapers. Front pages were devoted to slandering other newspapers and their respective supporters. *Vechernii Bishkek* even printed mock ballot sheets on their front page and telling their readers to vote in favour of the proposed changes to the constitution and to support President Akaev. This dispute represented more than an attempt to debate

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Akaev to resign following the Aksy tragedy (Carlson 2003). The recommendations by the Committee were voted on in a referendum on 2 February 2003.

the proposals further. It demonstrated a move by opposition figures to retain their seats in the new parliament.

Opposition figures also made accusations about the current trend of politics. *Moya Stolitsa Novosti* published an article, signed by nineteen opposition parliamentary deputies, "human rights defenders" (Russian: *pravozashchitniki*), leaders of non-governmental organisations, etc., who demanded that the referendum be delayed and further consultation be carried out on the constitutional reforms. They listed a number of grievances about the proposed changes and demands. In one of their complaints, the opposition figures stated that the changes would:

> [... exclude] the opportunity for political parties under party lists to be elected in Parliament, about which a basic arrangement was reached in the course of the Constitutional meeting. It, in turn, means denying the democratic multi-party political system in the republic and the development of such negative phenomena as *traibalizm*, regionalism, and the division by kinship and national attributes (Masaliev *et al.* 2003: 1).

The opposition leaders objected to the reintroduction of a proportional majority representation system originally withdrawn during the initial review of constitutional reforms. Zaynidin Kurmanov, a leading figure of the Moya Strana (My Country) Party, noted:

> According to [Article 54 Chapter 2] of the Constitution, political parties can nominate their representatives at parliamentary elections, which means that, according to the parliament's earlier decision registered in the election law, the party representatives and independent candidates compete on equal conditions. The majority system has been restored—this will preserve the current archaic political system dominated by regional groups and clans, rather than political parties. If the present election system survives no efficient deputy groups will be possible (Kurmanov 2004:13).[27]

He claimed the elections have been "[...] strictly personified, while the voters tend to support the well-known people rather than party programs" (Kurmanov 2004: 11, see also Collins 2006: 184-186). Furthermore, Kurmanov argued, many parties only reflect the interests of the leader. This created another fear among opposition parties opposed to the

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[27] While the election of individual independent candidates to parliament having the same proportional representation as political parties is an important point of debate for the future of the parliamentary system, this article also acts as a party political broadcast by Kurmanov for his party, Moya Strana.

proportional-majority system; they were concerned that individual candidates could easily invite their friends and relatives to work in government, which reinforced the allegations already levelled at government officials. These concerns were underscored during the parliamentary election, which was decided over two rounds, on 27 February and 13 March 2005. The debate over the eligibility of certain candidates and the election campaigns of two of President Akaev's children caused concerns over *traibalizm* to remain a central concern among many opposition leaders. The failure to hold transparent elections resulted in mass demonstrations organised by opposition politicians, which eventually succeeded in ousting Akaev.

### *"Tulip Revolution"*

There is not sufficient space to go into a detailed account of the events leading up to the parliamentary elections.[28] However, the power struggles between government officials and different opposition figures and groups fighting for political office in the new parliament generated fresh accusations of favouritism, including *traibalizm*. Both opposition and pro-Akaev figures were implicated in these charges. The new unicameral parliament, brought into effect by the referendum in February 2003, heightened the contest for political power.

The two rounds of elections sparked widespread dissatisfaction among many who claimed that the elections were unfair and that the rules had been ignored. Many interpreted the successful victories of Bermet Akaeva and Aidar Akaev, two of Askar Akaev's children, as a move by the President to establish a core network of supporters. As early as 3 March 2005, protestors had gathered in Jalal-Abad challenging the results of the first round of voting. By 4 March, the protestors had taken over the regional-administration headquarters (Radnitz 2006). After the second round of voting on 13 March 2005, there were more demonstrations across the country. On 19 March, a *kurultai* (Kyrgyz: congress) was called by opposition leaders in Osh. Here they announced a rival government, creating a congress of "national unity", which was attended by Kurmanbek Bakiev, the former Prime Minister; Roza Otunbaeva, a former

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[28] For a concise timeline of events leading up to the elections and including the "revolution", see: www.iwpr.net/index.php?apc_state=heno---special_index.html&s=o&o=centasia_kyrgyzrev_00html (accessed 28 June 2006), compiled by the Institute for War and Peace Reporting. See also http://www.rferl.org/specials//kyrgyzelections/ (accessed 28 June 2006) for several galleries devoted to the revolution by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

ambassador and Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Adakhan Madumarov, a Member of Parliament (Abdyrazakov 2005). By 20 March, demonstrators occupied other provincial administration buildings in Osh, Talas and Naryn *oblasts*. These demonstrations continued, and on 23 March it was reported that there was a large convoy of buses from the south heading towards Bishkek for further protests.



**Figure 1.5** – 24 March 2005 – Demonstrators in Ala-Too Square. Banner reads: "Akaev resign!" (Photo: IWPR)

During this time, Jenishbek Nazaraliev, an influential medical practitioner and director of a drug treatment and rehabilitation centre in Bishkek, joined the campaign calling for Akaev's resignation. From his office in the capital, he published articles, distributed pamphlets and recorded an announcement for radio. He encouraged people to protest and blamed Akaev for trying to "fool" (Russian: *durachit'*) the Kyrgyz people. He argued that people could no longer tolerate such treatment and urged them to demonstrate (Nazaraliev 2005). By 24 March 2005, an estimated seven thousand people had massed outside Nazarliev's office. An eye-witness stated that the main opposition leaders gathered outside Nazarliev's clinic adding their support to the demonstration, but appealing to the people not to get drunk and cause disruption. The leaders asked the Minister of Internal Affairs, Keneshbek Dyushebaev, to order the troops not to fire on the demonstrators, which he promised he would do. The slogans and speeches delivered in the morning's rally challenged the results of the parliamentary elections and demanded President Akaev's resignation.

Later in the day, several thousand protestors gathered in Ala-Too Square, in the centre of Bishkek, next to the White House (the President's office). Kurmanbek Bakiev was one of the leaders of the protest. He demanded that President Akaev speak to the people. In the afternoon, pro-Akaev and opposition factions began fighting in and around Ala-Too Square.[29] Eventually, the fighting quietened and the demonstrators moved towards the White House. The police, who had been ordered to not fire on the protestors, were incapable of effectively dispersing the crowd. Attempts to charge the demonstrators with horses failed. The police were overrun and demonstrators stormed the White House.

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[29] This is an interesting and possibly dangerous development. Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström (2005) have argued that drug barons use youth groups, who are usually trained in martial arts, to offer physical support in their activities. They also suggest that in the aftermath of the "Tulip Revolution", the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (a coalition of nine different opposition parties organised on 22 September 2004 including the Party of Communists, the Communist Party, the Republican Party, Asaba, the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, Kairan El, New Kyrgyzstan, Erkin Kyrgyzstan, and Erkindik – with Kurbambek Bakiev as Chairman) used youth groups to help establish order.



**Figure 1.6** – 24 March 2005 – Protestors storming the White House in Bishkek (Photo: Dmitry Shevkun)

As the protests continued some politicians left their posts. The Prime Minister, Nikolai Tanaev, resigned. Finally, as the White House was attacked, President Akaev and his family escaped by helicopter and eventually made their way to Moscow. That evening, Feliks Kulov, leader of Ar-Namys (Dignity) Party, was freed from prison by his supporters and joined the people in the city. The same night, the opposition leaders gathered and nominated Kurmanbek Bakiev as interim president.

The following day, Bakiev appointed Roza Otunbaeva to her old position as Minister of Foreign Affairs. He also appointed Feliks Kulov as Minister for Security, whose first task was to stop the looters who took advantage of the absence of organised security forces. He resigned after establishing order in the capital. Bakiev dismissed many officials in Akaev's cabinet. Some ministers had already left their posts during the demonstrations. Those who resigned or were dismissed from their positions became outspoken critics of the "revolution" and of the members of the interim (former opposition) government leaders. In the months that followed, many ministers tried to keep their positions in government as leaders debated whether the recently elected Parliament was the legal government body or whether there should be new elections.



**Figure 1.7** – Feliks Kulov (Photo: IWPR)

One of the first actions that the interim government took was to begin an investigation into the businesses owned and influenced by the Akaev family.[30] The interim government enlisted the help of foreign firms to track the financial resources and business ventures of the Akaev family. One of the most complex business deals discovered was that of the mobile phone company, BiTel, partly owned by Aidar Akaev (Kimmage 2005). Another issue was the exclusive contract Aidar had made to supply American military aircraft with fuel at Manas Airport. Frustrated with Aidar Akaev's economic monopoly, a Kyrgyz businessman, Timurbek, angrily told me: "Aidar had raped [Russian: *iznasiloval*] the businessmen in Bishkek and in other areas".

During the summer, and since the election of Kurmanbek Bakiev as President on 10 July 2005, there has been no decision as to what should be done once the investigation has finished. There are calls for the Akaev family to be stripped of their financial resources and to have the money reinvested in the national budget. The investigation has also targeted those closely associated with Akaev and even his international business partners. These were only some of the charges that he faced. The new administration was concerned to discredit Akaev and to reclaim for the state some of the money which they claim he stole. In the period following the "Tulip Revolution" the interim government vilified the public image of the Akaev family. However, the claims of *korruptsiya* directed against Akaev were not confined to the appropriation of economic wealth. A central criticism of the Akaev family was *traibalizm*. This was evident in the election of Bermet Akaeva to parliament and the scandals that emerged during the course of the 2005 parliamentary elections.

### *The Akaev legacy*

The events that led to the victory of Bermet Akaeva contributed to the dominant impression that the President sought to secure his political legacy through his family. This contributed to the impression of blatant nepotism described as *traibalizm*. In the pre-election campaign, Askar Akaev gave his full support to his children, Aidar Akaev and Bermet Akaeva, and two sisters-in-law who had been nominated to stand for

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[30] A report had already been published by the newspaper *MSN* (former *Moya Stolitsa Novosti*). On 8 February 2005, Rina Prizhivoit (2005) listed the businesses owned by the Akaev family. This caused Akaev to threaten legal action, but it was never brought to court.

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parliamentary seats.[31] Bermet ran as a member of the Alga, Kyrgyzstan! (Forward, Kyrgyzstan!) Party.[32] Her constituency, No. 1 – University, became one of the most controversial seats in Kyrgyzstan. She was registered as a candidate only after another well-known politician, Roza Otunbaeva, had her registration revoked.

Since independence, Otunbaeva was briefly Minister of Foreign Affairs before becoming the first Kyrgyz ambassador to the United States and Canada (1992-1994). After this post, she returned to Kyrgyzstan and was again appointed as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1994-1997). She later served as ambassador to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland (1997-2002). However, she stated that she had become disheartened by President Akaev's politics and resigned from her post. In May 2002 she became the assistant to the United Nations Secretary-General's special representative for the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. Later, in December 2004, she, together with several colleagues, founded the Ata-Jurt (Fatherland) Party. On 6 January 2005 Otunbaeva received her official registration certificate to run for a seat in parliament in No. 1 – University constituency. Several hours later, however, the electoral committee revoked her registration as they stated she had not lived continuously in the Kyrgyz Republic for five years before running for public office, a stipulation outlined in the constitution concerning elections.[33] On 20 January, Bermet Akaeva received her electoral registration in the same constituency.



**Figure 1.8** – Roza Otunbaeva (Photo: IWPR)

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[31] Aidar Akaev was officially registered by the Central Elections Committee (CEC) as a candidate on 18 January 2005 in the No. 57 – Kemin constituency. Bermet Akaeva was officially registered by the CEC as a candidate on 20 January 2005 in the No.1 – University constituency.

[32] This party was founded by Bolot Begaliev on 7 September 2003, and is a merger of the Manas El, New time, New Movement, Party of Cooperators, and (later) Birimdik. Although Akaeva was a leading figure, neither Askar Akaev nor Aidar Akaev belonged to this or any other party.

[33] See http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/law/codecs/?all=1 (accessed 29 June 2006) for all the laws pertaining to elections in the Kyrgyz Republic. The law pertaining to minimum residence period is Chapter 12, Article 69, Paragraph 1. President Akaev signed this and other amendments to the electoral code into effect on 24 January 2004.

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With her supporters, Otunbaeva demonstrated in the centre of Bishkek. The opposition condemned what they saw as a deliberate attempt by the government to exclude those people, like Otunbaeva, that could present a challenge to Akaev. Nevertheless, she was kept from registering for the election. On 12 January the Supreme Court rejected Otunabeva's appeal to run for election, and on 24 February, Otunbaeva appeared in the Birinchi Mai Court in Bishkek charged with disturbance of public order as a result of her demonstrations. The constituency was subject to further scandal as students reported that they had been told by university administrators that they had to vote in the election, and for specific candidates, or risk being expelled.



**Figure 1.9** – Roza Otunbaeva demonstrating in Bishkek (Photo: IWPR)

Despite the protests and accusations, on 27 February, the first round of parliamentary elections went ahead. Bermet Akaeva faced strong opposition. Among her competitors was Emil Aliev, Deputy Chairman of the Ar-Namys Party – Feliks Kulov's party. Akaeva did not receive more than fifty percent of the vote, but had secured a majority. Therefore, she had to compete in a second round of voting the following month, which she won. [34]

Otunbaeva's case is an extreme example of the kind of political struggle that was present throughout Kyrgyzstan at this time. Other opposition elites mobilised mass public demonstrations, joining forces to demand that Akaev resign from office. However, there was no common political platform uniting these opposition leaders and groups. This has led to a continued struggle for power since Akaev's departure.

### *The new President of the Kyrgyz Republic*

Following their sudden departure from Kyrgyzstan, Aidar Akaev's and Bermet Akaeva's parliamentary seats came under investigation from local courts. On 30 May 2005 the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the Pervomai District Court of Bishkek to invalidate the election results for the No.1 – University constituency, and Bermet was stripped of her parliamentary mandate. In a statement to the readers of *Vechernii Bishkek*,

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[34] Aidar Akaev had received a sufficient majority of the vote during the first election round to win the parliamentary seat for his constituency.

Akaeva stated that elections results were overturned due to pressure from current political forces, which did not follow the rule of law (Akaeva 2005).[35]

In the wake of the revolution, supporters of different politicians resorted to physical violence in order to vent their grievances. For example, supporters of the businessman Urmatbek Baryktabasov stormed a government building in Bishkek on 17 June 2005 in protest against his exclusion from the upcoming presidential elections. He was excluded because he was a citizen of Kazakhstan, and therefore not eligible to run in the elections. The uprising was eventually controlled, but proved a serious challenge to the legitimacy and authority of the interim government. There were also a number of political assassinations during this time, which many speculated were between members of the elite attempting to gain power in the post-Akaev era.[36]

These events underscore the inability by those opposition parties to consolidate and formulate effective policies. The motivation for their alliance was to remove Akaev from office. Once this goal had been accomplished, the parties again divided. As Kurmanov (2004) stated, politics are largely based on popularity contests between different candidates and not on parties with organised manifests for their accession into office. This situation has continued following the "Tulip Revolution", and has been characterised as opportunism by elites to destabilise the current government for their own political gain.

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[35] Bolotbek Maripov, a former journalist with *Obshchestvennyi reiting*, has been elected to Akaeva's post. Aidar has kept his seat in parliament. Otunbaeva was not successful in her attempt to win a parliamentary seat following the "Tulip Revolution".

[36] Those that have been killed since the "Tulip Revolution" include: Usen Kudaibergenov (10 April 2005) – a supporter of Feliks Kulov who helped to organise militias following the looting after the revolution. Jyrgalbek Surabaldiev (10 June 2005) – a Member of Parliament and businessman. He was an ally of Akaev and had been linked with organising gangs to fight the anti-government demonstrators on 24 March 2005. Bayaman Erkinbaev (21 September 2005) – Member of Parliament and businessman. He also controlled the Kara-Suu market in southern Kyrgyzstan. The details of his death seem to be related to a drugs deal. He had survived a previous assassination attempt on 28 April 2005. Tynchbek Akmatbaev (20 October 2005) – Member of Parliament and chairman of parliamentary committee on security and policing. He was killed during a meeting with prison rioters at Moldavanovka Prison, outside of Bishkek. There is speculation that his murder was ordered by Aziz Batukaev, a prison inmate, whose brother-in-law, Khavaji Zaurbekov, was killed by Akmatbaev's brother, Rysbek Akmatbaev. Rysbek Akmatbaev won his brother's parliamentary seat in Balaykchy on 9 April 2006 and has been acquitted of the three murder charges against him. Raatbek Sanatbaev (8 January 2006) – an athlete (Greco-Roman wrestler) and was in contention for the presidency of Kyrgyzstan's National Olympic Committee, a prestigious post previously held by Erkinbaev and Aidar Akaev. Also, Edil Baisalov survived an assassination attempt on 12 April 2006. He is the leader of the non-governmental organisation "Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society". Baisalov has been a strong critic of Rysbek Akmatbaev and organised a demonstration of 2,000 people on 8 April 2006 against his candidacy for the parliamentary seat in Balaykchy. Later, Rysbek Akmatbaev was shot dead (10 May 2006) outside a mosque in Kök-Jar, a suburb to the south of Bishkek.

While these disputes continued, the interim President, Kurmanbek Bakiev, attempted to foster unity among the Kyrgyz citizens. Addressing a group of Aksy residents on 3 May 2005 he thanked them for their continued determination to receive justice which had acted as an important factor in the "Tulip Revolution" (*AKI Press* 2005). On Sunday, 10 July 2005, Bakiev was elected to be the second President of the Kyrgyz Republic.[37] Later, on Sunday, 14 August 2005, he was inaugurated into office. In his inauguration speech, Bakiev noted that favouritism had played a role in government structures. He stated: "When I was prime minister I sometimes had to work with unprofessional ministers who were appointed because they were someone's relative or friend, [... that] seriously damages the economy and it's a brake on development (MacWilliam 2005). His speech was intended to make a break with the kinds of *korruptsiya* associated with Akaev in order to support a new government.



**Figure 1.10** – Kurmanbek Bakiev (Photo: RFE/RL)

Analysts and local citizens have attributed these disputes to political rivals competing for control of resources. The dramatic outcome of the "Tulip Revolution", and the series of political events leading up to it, has strengthened these views. Some analysts have interpreted this as a struggle between regional groups or as "clan" politics. This has formed a debate in political science. Scholars are divided on whether the political elite represent regions or if they are acting on behalf of "clan" interests. These models have influenced the way political organisation in Central Asia is described. In the following sections I examine these approaches and local interpretations of the political divisions.

### *"Tribalism" and regionalism*

Political science accounts of the transitions from communism to democracy in Central Asia have noted a general trend towards factions of elites attempting to gain power in the post-socialist era. Attempts to describe these factions have led to two main views. Authors such as Pauline Jones Luong (2002), describe regional associations. A

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[37] On the President's official webpage, http://www.presidkent.kg (accessed 29 June 2006), there was a documentary film directed by Z. Eraliev entitled *Eldik revolyutsiya* (Kyrgyz: *The People's Revolution*, 2005). It outlines the origins of the "revolution" from the "Aksy tragedy" to the culmination of regime change at the "Tulip Revolution". It also highlights the challenges the new government has faced. (This movie is no longer accessible – 9 June 2006.)

description of regionalism refers to the establishment of relations between people based on their shared, locally-specific or broader, territorial backgrounds, shaped by the internal administrative division of a place or region. Analyses which advocate regionalism as a model of political engagement stress these local connections and the attempt to secure greater political control in order to obtain resources for their region.

Other authors, such as Kathleen Collins (2002; 2006) and Edward Schatz (2004; 2005), argue that "clans" negotiate pacts which establish the distribution of political and economic power. I refer to these depictions generally as "tribalism", implying a notion of "clans" acting as corporate kinship groups. This differs from my discussion of *traibalizm* which examines the discursive construction of notions of factionalism in Kyrgyzstan. Although there are other descriptions of politics in Central Asia, these are the most influential views.[38] Below, I outline these approaches, beginning with regionalism.

Jones Luong (2002) argues that elites in post-Soviet governments have established relations through shared regional bases. She contends that kinship connections were transformed into regional ties. The term "tribalism", she suggests, is a misnomer, as people usually refer to regional ties when employing this term (Jones Luong 2002: 179, n. 53). The transformation of what she calls "tribal" to regional identities occurred through the combination of three different processes: the Soviet administrative-territorial structure, economic specialization, and the creation and expansion of a national cadre. In the first of these categories, Jones Luong notes that the Soviet administrative-territorial structure imposed in the region "fostered regional rather than national cleavages due to its coincidence with very weak (or nonexistent) national identities and very strong (preexisting) local identities" (Jones Luong 2002: 64). Jones Luong argues that despite the revisions to the administrative segmentation of Central Asia in the 1920s and 1930s to reflect "tribal" areas, the new divisions imposed by the Soviet authorities instead split "tribes", but left "clans" intact in the same region, both of which she describes as

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[38] Other accounts of political organisation attempt to move away from this debate. For example, Scott Radnitz (2005) examines the events and demonstrations from the time leading up to the Aksy tragedy and shortly thereafter. He provides a very interesting discussion that does not confine these demonstrations to representations of regionalism or "tribalism". Radnitz argues that the Committee to Defend Beknazarov, created by activists in Bishkek on 15 January 2002, resembled a vertical network of relationships mobilising people at different levels of state administration and local self-government who were sympathetic to the anti-government movement. This was facilitated by a horizontal level of networks where people contacted friends, colleagues and acquaintances to join in support of this movement.

mobilised groups.[39] This division therefore contributed to the rise in regional identities as opposed to "tribal" identities. Administrative divisions further fostered a separate sense of north and south in Kyrgyzstan, reinforced by historical differences. Furthermore, Jones Luong notes that people from titular ethnic groups nominated to the Communist Party in their own republics, precipitated the "redefinition and extension of existing clan- and tribal-based patronage networks to the regional level" (Jones Luong 2002: 67).

Secondly, the economic specialization the Soviet administration organised each of the republics to produce specific goods for the rest of the USSR. Jones Luong describes two effects of this: on the one hand regional (ethnic) leaders had to take responsibility for the economic performance of their respective republics; on the other hand the Soviet republics became dependent on each other as a means of supporting national incomes and for the commerce of manufactured goods. Nevertheless, she notes the economic structures of the republics "reinforced regionalism rather than nationalism or tribal affiliations" (Jones Luong 2002: 68). She argues that the ethnic division of labour helped to create and strengthen "patron-client ties between the regional leaders, who were often representatives of the titular nationality, and the rural population, which served as the social and economic base for maintaining and expanding patronage networks. It also contributed to the growing displacement of tribal chiefs' traditional authority" (Jones Luong 2002: 68).

Finally, the formation of a national cadre further strengthened regional identities in Central Asia. The Soviet policy of *korenizatsiya* (Russian: the indigenization of Soviet power through mass recruitment of non-Russians into the Party) cultivated strong regional groups.[40] There was a tendency for the first secretaries and other national-level leaders to rotate, allowing leaders from other regions to participate. This was not official policy, but the Soviets approached this as an "unspoken, yet widely accepted, 'rule' that some percentage of republic-level positions had to be dispersed among representatives from the various regions comprising the republic, albeit not necessarily evenly" (Jones Luong 2002: 70).[41] Jones Luong argues that this form of power sharing remains in place today, and that in Kyrgyzstan, the biggest regional division is between north and south,

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[39] Jones Luong describes a "tribe" as "an ethnically homogeneous sociopolitical unit based on kinship, often composed of several clans. It is thus distinct from clan in that it is much larger and often serves an explicitly political purpose" (Jones Luong 2002: 54, n. 7). The structural quality she attributes to a "tribe" is characteristic of structural-functionalist approaches (see Chapter 2).

[40] See Bernard Olivier (1990) for a discussion on *korenizatsiya*.

[41] See Steven Burg (1986) for a model of political stability connected to the mobility of (national) elites.

with divisions between the northern regions as well. The structure of the electoral system, in Jones Luong's view, both in the Soviet era and since independence, reflects this division. She argues that this situation has created a transitional bargaining model for political and economic power, and is based on regional affiliation.

In opposition to Jones Luong, Kathleen Collins (2002; 2006) contends that "clans" are central to politics in Central Asia. Although "clans" are informal political organisations, in Collins's view, they have a significant impact on regime type in transitional periods. In particular the struggle for political power between "clans" and the negotiation of pacts as part of this process determine regime consolidation and durability. She defines a "clan" as:

> a type of social actor, with powerful rational and normative elements that reinforce each other. Although as organizations they predate the modern state, their normative content, informal structure, and rational elements enable them to adapt in many circumstances to the advance of the state. They have persisted despite the breakdown of their larger tribal organizations, and they have used clientalism and patronage as strategies for advancement and survival (Collins 2006: 43).

In Collins's account, "clans" incorporate both real and fictive kinship. Furthermore, regional identities, are not separate to "clans", they are centred on "clan" networks or large families. However, she bases her account of "clans" on outmoded anthropological accounts and does not explore various conceptualisations of political and social life.[42]

Collins bases her account of kinship mainly on the work of Evans-Pritchard (1940) and complements this by arguing that kinship structures have a number of internal mechanisms to maintain the presence of "clans", especially as "modern organizations" (Collins 2006: 43). She stresses the primacy of kinship and the strength of its bonds. Also, she discusses the rational actions of "clans" as corporate groups in an economy of shortage. Finally, she illustrates the importance of the role of elites and the influence they exert of their kinsmen.

Additionally, Collins remarks on the particular historical features which allowed "clans" to persist during the Tsarist and Soviet eras: "[…] three critical conditions present in the Central Asian cases enable and foster clan persistence: (1) late state formation, due in large part to colonialism; (2) late formation of a national (i.e., nation-state) identity;

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[42] Gabriele Rasuly-Paleczek (2005: 8-9) makes a similar point about the use of anthropology by social sciences.

and (3) the absence of a market economy (and in its place, the existence of an economy of shortage" (Collins 2006: 44). These external conditions allowed some "clans" to adapt and persist until today.

Collins illustrates these points by focusing on the developments during the Tsarist and Soviet periods. She argues that the Russian expansion into Central Asia did not disrupt clan formation as the local population was governed indirectly, using existing social organisations to facilitate Tsarist rule. Once the Soviets had taken power, efforts were made to overcome these social organisations. During the early Soviet period, however, Collins notes that attempts to develop socialism from scratch were unsuccessful, and native elites were retained as local authorities. Two other factors contributed to the persistence of "clans" during this period: the introduction of the *kolkhoz* system which kept local clan groups together, and the policy of *korenizatsiya*, which turned local elites into Party members. This allowed "clan" elites to maintain their influence in their respective groups. During the later Soviet period, Collins argues that "clans" strengthened their control in local governments. During the Brezhnev era, many elites from one "clan" were permitted to remain in power for long periods. However, this changed with the introduction of *perestroika* under Gorbachev. "Clans" began to create pacts and grapple for greater political power.

The pacts that the "clans" made in the period before the collapse of the Soviet Union, or the lack of them, is the focus of Collins's broader argument of regime consolidation and durability. She argues that Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan represent examples where the newly nominated presidents in 1991 had to consolidate their power by demonstrating their willingness to organise informal pacts. Collins discusses the Kyrgyz situation in particular, and provides examples of how former President Akaev invited family members into government. These relations were built through trust and allowed Akaev room to manoeuvre in the political sphere, which she argues "[…] contributed to the more open and democratic nature of the Kyrgyz nation" (Collins 2002: 145). However, where there was no such agreement, e.g. Tajikistan, the new regime quickly fell apart.

In Collins's view, several elements are necessary for the arrangement of pacts. A historical balance of power was required between "clans"; the pressure of an external threat (in this case from Gorbachev); and also a legitimate broker to assist the agreement between the "clans". The result, Collins notes, "[…] established a regime in which the central element, the division of resources, was agreed upon and managed by clan elites"

(Collins 2006: 132). Collins argues that in Kyrgyzstan there is sufficient evidence to state that "clan"-based systems corrupt state institutions. Furthermore, this contributes to the collapse of "clan" pacts. These and other factors brought down the Akaev regime.

Edward Schatz provides a supportive account of Collins's view in his study of the prominence of "clans" in Central Asian politics. Schatz stresses that in Kazakhstan a "clan" is underpinned by common kinship, which is based on a segmentary lineage system. He views genealogical descent as paramount to both "clan" and ethnic identity, but is careful to assert that "clans" have been associated with political blocs which monopolise state power and economic resources and do not rely on kinship ties. However, most importantly for Schatz is the possibility for "clan" ties to be concealed. He notes: "Specifically, subethnicity was not rooted in visible markers (as ethnic divisions tend to be) but rather in an exchange of genealogical information that defines identity and difference. Clan background could thus be concealed from the agents of Soviet surveillance who prosecuted network behaviour as illegal" (Schatz 2004: 17).

Schatz develops some of these ideas further in an article where he suggests a general model for examining the persistence of "clans" in politics. He employs a centre-periphery distinction whereby "clan clientelism" indicates that "[...] clans behave as unitary actors with narrowly defined self-interest" (Schatz 2005: 249). Drawing on his fieldwork from Kazakhstan, Schatz argues that this is evinced by the increase of middle and high level government posts preferentially given to people from the elder and middle *zhuz* (Kazakh: horde).[43] He points to "clan balancing" where a number of mechanisms, internal and external, operate in order to prohibit "clans", again as active groups, from seeking self-interested goals. Furthermore, Schatz proposes a framework which he describes as "discursive battles", where kinship is not visible, and "the contours of clanship are contested" (Schatz 2005: 249). This model attempts to describe the continual allegations of the involvement of "clans" in politics central to the "[...] politicized imagination of clanship" (Schatz 2005: 244).

While Schatz accepts the notion of "clan" as a corporate group, he touches on two areas that require further reflection. Firstly, he underlines the importance of genealogical information as contributing to the construction of "clan" and ethnic identity.[44] Genealogy,

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[43] Schatz refers to *zhuz* as an "umbrella clan", does not conform to classic anthropological notions of a "clan". Instead, I argue it refers to politically unified nomadic groups.

[44] See also Adrienne Edgar's (2004) work on genealogy in Turkmenistan.

I argue, is the basis from which we can discard the confusing concepts of "clan" and "tribe" in our discussion of contemporary Kyrgyz society (see Chapter 3). Secondly, the "concealability" of "clan" ties suggests that it is a category that can be strategically deployed to create ties, but also one that in other contexts is not stressed and is not a primary principle of organisation.

What these authors have demonstrated is that both regionalism and "clan" ties are ways of creating connections. This may be used for the construction of identity, to create a base for political support, or to obtain scarce resources. However, they have instead concentrated on corporate groups which conform to the "rules of the game" of political science models. These views are better represented by the Russian term *klan*, which in English translates as "clan", but refers more to a political bloc, and is not dependent on the members' relation to one another. However, instead of beginning with a set of "rules" to dictate the behaviour of elites and determine the possible outcome of their actions, I argue it is necessary to begin by examining the narratives of *traibalizm* and the specific contexts in which they are embedded.

In contrast to these views, I employ *traibalizm* as an indication of idioms of particularlism which forms part of the broader discourse of *korruptsiya*. *Traibalizm* does not suggest a primordial social formation, but instead, is a collection of idioms which depict how different factions and networks have emerged in government since independence. While I focus on the perception of variously defined factions at the government level, it is not limited to government posts; people can also be accused of *traibalizm* in other places of work. Nevertheless, it is predominantly used as a critique of the allocation of government positions to friends and family of current government workers and ministers. I argue *traibalizm* has at least three meanings associated with it. Firstly, it is used to refer to *nepotizm* (Russian: nepotism). Such claims were clearly stated in 2005, when Aidar and Bermet Akaev both stood for parliamentary election, with the father's full support. Secondly, *traibalizm* refers to people who may have received government posts through kinship ties. This form of favouritism does not suggest that the lines of descent can be traced clearly and should not be interpreted as representing a "clan" group, although the relation between the two could be argued as coming from one *rod* (Russian: "clan"). Thirdly, it can refer to people from a certain area, who may or may not also share common descent. Here, the emphasis focuses more on regional connections, but also implies a possibility of kinship ties. Indeed, the Soviet concentration on nations and regions did have a significant framing effect on people's

identity. However, I do not argue, as Jones Luong does, that "clan" identities have been transformed into regional identities. Accusations of *traibalizm* combine "clan" and regional identities into one concept. However, narratives of "clans" are often a separate category which is regarded as important in the construction of relatedness. Regionalism (Russian: *regionalizm*, *mestnichestvo*, Kyrgyz: *jerdeshtilik*), in the strict sense, refers to an association primarily by region. *Regionalizm* is sometimes used together with *traibalizm* to indicate this different set of relations. It cannot be assumed, however, that the two categories are mutually exclusive. Moreover, *traibalizm* does not imply kinship ties, nor do I suggest that this term defines a majority of people living in one area as belonging to one "tribe" or "clan". I use the term *traibalizm* to illustrate people's use of the term which touches upon one or more of these meanings, suggesting Kyrgyz conceptualise these relations in strategic ways.

### *The multiple meanings of* traibalizm

Despite the approaches of these authors, there are a number of views which combine both regional and "tribal" connections (Khamidov 2002a, 2002b; Khanin 2000; Kushlubayev 1995; Temirkulov 2004). The political factions represent "clans" which are predominantly divided between northern and southern Kyrgyzstan. "Clans" are typically referred to as a form of "informal, neo-traditional structures of power" (Khanin 2000: 126). Analysts argue that "clans" find support among other "clans" from their region, and they develop into broader, territorial organisations, which resemble patron-client networks. However, these approaches assume, like the other political science views, that these are corporate groupings, and do not explore the discursive construction of these categories. Although these meanings are combined in many narratives, I argue that they are descriptions of the strategic manipulation of multiple identities in order to mobilise support for political factions.

For example, everyday jokes often combine regional and "tribal" associations in order to express criticisms of these factions. These jokes play on presumptions that certain people enjoy a strong status in society because they are related to influential people from their "tribe", or that they have established a strategic connection by coming from the same region. Predominantly, the jokes play more on the notion of regionalism, but are nevertheless structured with a double meaning, simultaneously referring to "tribal" and regional connections. The underlying assumption is that irrespective of

whether an individual is powerful or not, it is through their connections – whatever kind they may be – that they will seek support to increase their opportunities. In other words, while these narratives often combine notions of regional and kinship connections, they are demonstrations of idioms of particularlism, expressing strategic forms of association. The description of a cartoon series will help to demonstrate this further.

Beginning on 30 March 2004, the popular opposition newspaper, *ResPublica*, published a series of anti-Akaev political cartoons.[45] The series was entitled: "Nikakai – Ruler of the Armchair" (Russian: "Nikakai – Vlastelin kresla"). Akaev, who was referred to as "Nikakai", was the main character of most of the cartoons. In the first cartoon in the series, Akaev was suffering from a nightmare. He dreamt that people were trying to take his armchair (i.e. presidency) away from him. Upon waking, Akaev strapped himself in the armchair so that no one else could sit in it.

In the cartoon that follows (Figure 1.8), the crux of the joke falls on knowledge of Akaev's and his wife's home regions. Akaev is from the Kemin region, Chüi *oblast'*, and is a descendant of the Sarybagysh *plemya* (Kyrgyz: "tribe"), a genealogical connection which is dominant in the area. His wife, Mairam Akaeva, is from Talas *oblast'*. She is descended from the Koshchu *plemya*, of which a majority of people from the *oblast'* claim descendency. While the discussion involves particular regions, there is the assumption of "tribal" links as well. In this cartoon, the main character, Nikasym, is Toichubek Kasymov – chief of Akaev's presidential administration for the final years of office, and former governor of Ysyk-Köl *oblast'* (1996-2000) and Chüi *oblast'* (2000-2004).

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[45] Prior to this, *ResPublica* began counting down the number of days remaining in the presidential term of Akaev during the summer of 2003. The remaining number of days appeared in the top right-hand corner of the front page of each new edition. The campaign started on 24 June 2003, marking 859 days left of Akaev's term in office.




**Figure 1.11** – *ResPublica*, Issue 15, Published 28 April 2004, http://gazeta.respublica.kg/?archive/2004/0428_15/index.html (accessed 28 June 2006). Author's translation, original in Russian.

There many other jokes similar to this. One simply stated: "Communism has gone – Keminism has come" (Khazanov 1995: 148). Similarly, "We used to build communism, now we build keminism" (Alimov 1994). Yet another joke that I heard

during my fieldwork spoke about the future president of the Kyrgyz Republic. Three men, one from Osh, another from Naryn, and the third from Talas; argued about which region the next president should come from. The man from Osh said that he should come from Osh to represent the interests of the south. The man from Naryn said that he should come from Naryn to represent a different region in the north. The man from Talas was quiet. The men from Osh and Naryn looked at him and asked: "Don't you want the next president to come from Talas?," rather surprised at his silence. To which the man replied: "No, we just hope that the next president marries another girl from Talas".

The jokes touch on the underlying struggle between elites, and their relation to the Akaev family. These jokes indicate not only a situation where local leaders help their home regions, but moreover how elites mobilise their supporters by politicising their locally-specific and kinship connections which contribute to factionalism. Claims of *traibalizm* refer to these attempts to divide people. I argue that these are not "tribes" or regional associations, but identities formed through strategic discourses as part of the technologies of the self and the influence this has on other who share similar views (see Chapter 5). This view was underlined in an interview with a newspaper editor in Bishkek.

In a discussion with Oleg Ryabov, deputy editor-in-chief of *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, a government newspaper, I asked him about his views of *traibalizm*. He argued that there was no such thing in the government. *Traibalizm*, in his view, was when officials bring in their own people to work in government posts, but said that those currently serving in government were not "regionally" connected to President Akaev.[46] Ryabov stated that the term *traibalizm* can only really be applied as a description of factionalism. He explained that if bringing in your own people was a form of *traibalizm*, then this could also include the Presidential administration of George W. Bush. *Traibalizm*, therefore, is a derogatory accusation of political division, and not a literal term as the political science models employ it.

Ryabov's remarks highlight the incongruity between representations of a "traditional" organisation of society and modern politics. This has been highlighted by J. McIver Weatherford (1981), in his parody of the United States Congress. In his book, *Tribes on the Hill*, Weatherford begins by making a comparison between the Conoy Indians that used to inhabit the area that has now become Washington D.C. and the

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[46] Ryabov did not clarify whether the people in government were related to President Akaev through their genealogies; he only discussed relatedness by region.

politicians that have come to occupy Capitol Hill. He discusses several traits that the politicians exhibit and the similarities they bear to other social and political practices of non-industrialised societies from around the world.

Weatherford begins by examining new Congress men and women. He parallels his account of the newly elected officials with the coming-of-age ceremony for boys among the Shavante Indians of Brazil. For example, in the halls of Congress, new officials have to endure hazing from elder officials. Then as the young officials establish themselves, they organise a group, or in Weatherford's term a "clan", to help them organise and execute their duties. The assistants of a Congress official are usually people who have been recommended by other officials and have had previous experience working in government. These people facilitate the official's duties and enable them to further establish themselves amongst their peers. However, as Weatherford notes, family members have often acted as assistants, paid and unpaid. He remarks: "The close kin ties in Congress resemble what the British anthropologist F. G. Bailey in describing politics in India calls 'personal bureaucracies'. Groups of personal retainers coalesce around individual politicians within a bureaucratic setting, the underlying principle of organisation being the relationship of patron to client" (Weatherford 1981: 51). Family members have played an important role in Congress, and continue to do so throughout the different levels and institutions of government.

Weatherford's ironic view of the organisation of Congress demonstrates why a description such as *traibalizm* is effective as a derogatory description of factionalism, but does not refer to a government divided between actual "tribes" or regional associations. Claims of a north-south divide in Kyrgyzstan are partly a reflection of the struggle between southern political elites for greater political representation and economic investment in the area. These claims of dominance by one regional group have now changed with the inauguration of Kurmanbek Bakiev, a southerner, as President. Friends and colleagues have told me that many southerners are filling government posts. However, I argue that people are criticising the mobilisation of politicised identities, which exploit "tribal" and regional associations. These narratives are not attempts to describe the internal dynamics of "clan" or regional associations in government, but are instead, accusations of corruption.

### *Narratives of* korruptsiya

Many friends and colleagues described corruption as a particularly difficult challenge for Kyrgyzstan today. "*Korruptsiya* takes first place in Kyrgyzstan", said Ainura. As a single mother, Ainura was all too aware of the economic difficulties in the country. However, her experiences of *korruptsiya* were not limited to everyday life. In our discussions, she told me that she had previously worked in a government ministry and had seen how people were given high positions by their friends and family. According to Ainura, the officials would spend the ministry's money for personal items or to educate family members. With money, she noted, you could do anything, giving several examples. She used to work in a travel agency. The owner succeeded in opening the business without going through the formal procedures. The police demanded the closure of the company, but the owner bartered with the officers and paid a bribe to keep the business open. Another example was that men could pay the army, usually about US$500, to be excused from the mandatory military service.

The collapse of the former centralised economy has made people acutely aware of the difficulties of implementing new economic standards and the opportunism that people take during this period. Some analysts have noted, among former Soviet countries, that corruption results partly from the disjuncture between democratic governance and a Western market-led economy. John Girling, for example, states:

> [...] corruption stems from the incompatibility, in important respects, of economic and political systems: this is most evident in the case of the mutually exclusive claims of capitalism and democracy. (The collusion of economic and political elites, with its potential for corruption, is an attempt to overcome the 'misfit'.) Corruption, when it erupts in 'scandal', is more than a matter of individual 'fault' (a criminal problem): it is a social fault (Girling 1997: 30).

Girling defines "corruption" as: "[...] the abuse of public position of trust for private gain" (Girling 1997: vii). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, this definition portrays the struggle between the elites who are negotiating new economic and political models. Also, it is important to stress the perceptions of those that stand outside relationships or interactions where others have access to goods and resources and articulate their positions as being "dispossessed" (Nazpary 2002) in various ways. I am also conscious of the different

notions that "public" and "private" can convey in various contexts across various societies (Sneath 2002).

Since independence many members of the Kyrgyz elite have become political leaders (as in other former Soviet countries), and also may have gained control of extensive economic wealth. As Girling has argued, the accumulation of wealth has been facilitated by the change to "democratic" forms of governance. Ultimately, this has marginalised ordinary citizens without the same access networks or influence. The disparity between ordinary citizens and those with significant political and economic influence has fuelled accusations of corruption. Many complained that despite laws which are meant to limit corruption, regulations are not enforced. Furthermore, weak (or non-existent) regulatory groups are unable to prevent widespread corruption.

A model highlighting the disjuncture between the political and economic models of a nation-state may provide an insight into the occurrence of "corruption", but the characteristics of a range of practices considered to be "corrupt" have a more complex history. Caroline Humphrey and David Senath, focusing on examples from their respective research in Russia and Mongolia, have argued that: "the characteristics of corruption [...] can be understood as a consequence of the particular nature of the Pre-Soviet and particularly the Soviet political economy [...] in relation to the current economic collapse" (Humphrey & Sneath 2004: 85). The particular forms of corruption and the ways in which they are conceived are changing in relation to the difficulties of economic restructuring that many post-socialist countries are experiencing.[47] In many of these countries where shortages of resources were often a problem, people sought to circumvent the official procedures or to establish connections in order to obtain access to necessary goods and services. This has influenced the understanding and practice of "corruption" in the independent era. Jakob Rigi has highlighted this in his research in Kazakhstan:

> While corruption in the Soviet era was embedded in the contradictions of an over-centralized bureaucracy and economy the post-Soviet corruption, occurring on much larger scale, is a characteristic of the interface between a new form of post-Soviet polity, which I have called [...] 'the chaotic

[47] Furthermore, David Sneath (2006) has challenged the view of what can be imagined as "corruption". He argues that instead of viewing certain practices as exchanges which imply a form of corruption, we need a more nuanced view whereby we can see these practices as transactions which enact different relationships. These relationships and the nature of transactions change over time and this must be reflected in our analyses.

> mode of domination' [...], and the emerging mechanisms of the market (Rigi 2004: 101).

Following these views, I employ the Russian term "*korruptsiya*" to describe the particular form of corruption which has developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, and articulates forms of factionalism which have developed in relation to perceived political dominance and the control of resources. My use of this term highlights the feelings of dispossession amongst those who accuse others of the misappropriation of resources. For example, the first act of the new Bakiev government was to criticise the Akaev family for their economic wealth and to find ways of recovering it. Secondly, it also refers to a conceptual overlap between Soviet and post-Soviet experiences of bureaucracy and new economic challenges. These changes also alter the perception of what is "corrupt" and how people negotiate them.

The current debate in political science presents "tribalism" as factions of cohesive social formations, internally supporting their members in oppositions to similar groups. This is a form of corruption in regard to the ideals of democratic governance. However, I argue that the claims of factions in government by Kyrgyz people portray the various ways in which elites manipulate identities in order to gain power and resources. They are not descriptions of factions; they are accusations of the disproportionate access to political and economic power.

The factions that the political scientists describe are not evident in everyday life in Kyrgyzstan. Instead, individuals and families are part of various kinds of relations and networks. These are changeable, fluid, and by no means homogeneous. Family connections are frequently of prime importance, but kinship connections beyond the immediate family are also significant. Many of the most important "blat"-style relations are between people who have no sort of kinship relations at all. For example, Nazira, a mother of two and a close friend, recounted a story to me. One day, after New Year, she came home to Naryn. She arrived just as a man from the electricity company was about to cut off the electricity supply to her flat. Nazira stopped him and spoke with the woman, Jyldyz, also from the electricity company who was supervising the disconnection. A bill had arrived while Nazira was away in her parent's village, but the company had decided to disconnect the electricity without sending any further warnings. Nazira had no money at that moment, so she quickly collected money from friends and neighbours, enough to pay for the minimum cost, and promised to pay the rest later. A couple of weeks later,

Nazira ran into Jyldyz at the town market and thanked her again for not cutting off the electricity and waiting for her to find some money. Nazira invited Jyldyz to her home for dinner as a way to thank her. Jyldyz came to the flat for dinner and then she came regularly afterwards. Nazira cooked dinner and Jyldyz was invited to take hot baths, as she did not have any hot water at home. Jyldyz and Nazira also came to an arrangement over the electricity. The result was that Nazira would pay less than the full amount and Jyldyz would make it seem as thought the full amount had been paid.

Jyldyz continued to come to the house at various times, even when she was not coming for dinner. She had an altercation at work which left her shaken and upset. She had come to Nazira to discuss her problem and anxieties that, as she put it, she "could no longer trust anyone". Nazira tried to comfort her, and Jyldyz was grateful for her help. The relationship developed over time, and took on new aspects each time.

This, and many other examples like it, stresses the kinds of networks people create to negotiate the difficulties of living in the post-Soviet era. Nazira and Jyldyz never talked about their relationship in terms of *traibalizm*, and neither did they see it as a form of *korruptsiya*. For Nazira, the relationship, which developed into a friendship, was essential for her as she was often without money and her salary from work was months in arrears. This relationship is more indicative of *blat* – "informal contact and networks to obtain goods and services or to influence decision-making" (Ledeneva 1996/1997: 43).[48] This was an important feature of Soviet life and continues to be useful in the post-Soviet experience. These kinds of relationships do not suggest corporate groups, but an adaptable approach to negotiating the difficulties of life in a period of increasing bribery and economic shortages.

### *Idioms of particularism*

Narratives of *traibalizm* are an expression of various forms of factionalism. Though the term is used to convey a number of idioms of particularism, I argue that these do not describe formal, corporate groups, but are criticisms of the ways in which people manipulate relationships to gain political and economic power. These are not descriptions of kinship relations, but allegations made against elites and how they create support groups.

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[48] See also Ledeneva (1998).

Western descriptions of "tribalism", such as that of Collins (2006), posit it as a limiting social practice from a previous era. Such claims indicate a tendency to view the involvement of supposed "kinship" relations at a national level to be signs of a not-completely-modern state.[49] As I will describe in the following chapter, Tsarist and Soviet colonisers employed an evolutionary model of society, in which tribal societies were placed on the lower end of the developmental scale. In regard to such issues, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000), in his study on political modernity, has addressed similar concerns. This historical consciousness of the European colonisers has in certain situations tended towards viewing non-European peoples as "not yet" ready to fully master self-government. Chakrabarty challenges John Stuart Mill's approach of examining the prerequisites for self-rule, in which Mill argues that history must show the development of a people in order to attain their independence.[50] Chakrabarty comments further, noting: "acquiring a historical consciousness, acquiring the public spirit that Mill thought absolutely necessary for the art of self-government, was also to learn this art of waiting [to become developed]. The waiting was the realization of the 'not yet' of historicism" (Chakrabarty 2000: 8). This colonial view of the need to civilise people is particularly evident in the early attempts by Soviet ethnographers to determine the ethnic identities of the people under their control, and also by later ethnogenetic theorists.[51]

The hegemony of Western perceptions of historical consciousness and the development of government, as Chakrabarty describes, overlooks a very important issue: the distinct imaginations of how government processes and the state can be constituted. As I will argue in the rest of the thesis, notions of genealogical relatedness form a central role in the everyday and official constructions of Kyrgyz identity and the state. Accusations of *traibalizm* are a form of criticism about the manipulation of relations for political gain, but they are not descriptions of kinship. The following chapter begins to examine the issue of kinship by challenging nineteenth century notions of "clans" and "tribes" and how they are imagined as important markers of identity in contemporary

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[49] However, as A. Robertson (2006) argues, we should not judge the developing world before we address the kinds of corruption that exist in the West and how this effects those countries.

[50] Charles Taylor (1993) has also challenged this view and argues instead a developed historical consciousness, that it is the desire to manage their own affairs that people form a group of those who share a set of views which focus around an identity of indispensable characteristics (which are protected by a series of rights which necessitate the respect of others), and contributes to the formation of a notion of a "full human subject" and use this as the basis to seek self-rule.

[51] Similar remarks on modernity are made by Bruce Grant (1995) about the Nivkh on Sakhalin Island and by Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003) on his research among the Evenki in Siberia.

Kyrgyz society. This will also address how they have become a discursive reality of social life, although in everyday experiences, these categories hold no real significance.

## *CHAPTER 2*

# "Sayaks of All Countries in the World – Unite!": The Changing and Problematic Categorisations of "Clan" and "Tribe"

In April and May 2003 several articles by Nurlan Motuev, an opposition politician, appeared in the newspaper *ResPublica*.[52] These articles, written in Russian, were a reaction to a book that had been edited by Mairam Akaeva, President Askar Akaev's wife. The book, *Poslovitsy i pogovorki* (Russian: *Proverbs and Sayings*), stated that the meaning of the name "Sayak", a Kyrgyz *plemya* (Russian: "tribe"), translates as "tramp" or "vagabond" (Russian: *brodyaga*).[53] Motuev, who claimed to be the "leader" (Russian: *lider*) of the Sayak, explained that the preferred translation of the name is "lone traveller" (Russian: *odinokii putnik*).[54] However, this issue stretched far beyond the choice of translation in the book. This was the start of Motuev's political campaign.

In the first of a series of articles, Motuev berated the editors of the book, and drew question marks over their own *plemya* backgrounds. He noted that Chingiz Aitmatov, a famous Kyrgyz author, was from the Kitai *plemya*, which Motuev suggested was the remnants of the Chinese army defeated by the Arabs in the seventh century A.D. These people had been absorbed by what he considered to be the core *plemya* which make up the Kyrgyz.[55] Motuev thereby questioned whether Aitmatov has greater authority than him to speak about the origins of Kyrgyz *plemya* as he descends from a group which is not originally Kyrgyz. In comparison, Motuev described his *plemya* as "pure" (Russian: *chistyi*). Thus, he made the claim that the Sayak are one of the true Kyrgyz *plemya*, and not a foreign group that had been absorbed and assimilated.

Furthermore, Motuev reproduced part of a telephone conversation he had with Sveta Karamoldobaeva, an editor with the publishing house Sham that produced the book.

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[52] For the full set of articles see Nurlan Motuev (2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2003d; 2003e).

[53] It should be noted that most Kyrgyz know the Sayak colloquially as the "Kyrgyz Jews".

[54] Motuev's articles were published in Russian, and the term he uses for his "tribe" is "*plemya*". I will use the Russian term as it is the primary term that he and other authors employ. I will discuss this in contrast to the Kyrgyz terms that could have been used below. Furthermore, it should be noted that in order to avoid confusion, I will use "*plemya*" the singular form, instead of the plural form "*plemeni*".

[55] It should be noted that the word for "China" in both Russian and Kyrgyz is "Kitai".

During the conversation, one *aksakal*, Berdibek Sydygaliev,[56] said to Karamoldobaeva: "On behalf of six thousand aksakals from the Jumgal region we demand the removal of this blasphemy from the book. Otherwise people will revolt, and we, the aksakals, shall not restrain them. Why do you offend only the Sayaks, when similar things can be said of other Kyrgyz plemya?" (Motuev 2003a: 5).[57] Part of Karamoldobaeva's response was also printed, in which she stated that they would remove that particular phrase and apologised. A hint of desperation was also included in her reply, pleading for the people not to rise up against them in such a manner. Motuev took this to be a victory for *plemya*, and also as the basis of a "Sayak" political movement.

Motuev's attempt to generate political support through this *plemya* (which eventually failed) touches on two fundamental issues, which are the focus of this chapter. Firstly, what do the Kyrgyz mean when they use the terms *plemya* (Russian: "tribe") and *rod* (Russian: "clan")? I explore the ways these terms have been defined and what underlying theoretical implications are contained within the meanings. In general academic discourses, *plemya* and *rod* are represented as corporate groups, indicating an early stage in evolutionist conceptions of social development. These views contribute to the numerous doxic, epistemological assumptions in kinship studies, borne out of nineteenth century theories of evolution. In this regard, I explore a number of models, or themes, related to kinship studies among nomadic peoples.[58] I argue that through the analysis of these models, *plemya* and *rod* do not represent corporate groups, nor do they explain the how people understand them in their everyday lives. The use of these terms today indicates something different, that they are categories of genealogical relatedness. I explore this issue thoroughly in Chapter 3, where I also discuss more recent anthropological approaches to kinship studies with respect to David Schneider's (2004) critique of kinship studies.

Secondly, I analyse the historical representations of the notion of *plemya* and *rod*, which Motuev employs in his articles. I provide examples from Tsarist and Soviet

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[56] The Kyrgyz term *aksakal* refers to an elder, but it literally translates as "white beard". *Aksakals* are respected members of Kyrgyz society, but are usually recognised as such by leading a distinguished life. Sydygaliev is particularly respected as he fought in the Second World War and has received many awards and medals.

[57] Jumgal is a region in the Naryn *oblast'*, where many Sayaks descendents live.

[58] See Maurice Godelier (1977) who provides an in-depth analysis of the nature of the theoretical problem of "tribal" societies in anthropology. Also, nearly thirty years later, David Sneath (Forthcoming) returns to this discussion and its implications in Inner Asia. Clearly, this remains a continual source of debate in anthropology.

ethnographers, and Soviet archive documents, related to the discussion of *plemya* and *rod*. These representations construct a discursive reality whereby these kinship "groups" are attributed with corporateness, and represent divisions within Kyrgyz society. They became the official representation of social life in the region. The construction of such representations is comparable to Alexei Yurchak's (2006) description of the "authoritative discourse". Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the term, Yurchak argues that the ideological discourse created an authoritative description of social life, yet this was reinterpreted within the language and formalities employed within the discourse. Similarly, I propose that the Soviet documents of Kyrgyz "tribal" society, created an authoritative description of social life. This created the effect of a discursive reality, and in this case presents *plemya* and *rod* as corporate groups within Kyrgyz society.

However, Yurchak notes that people employ the same language of the ideological discourse to express different meanings. I argue that in Kyrgyzstan, the language people use to talk about *plemya* and *rod* has been conditioned by the official ideological discourse during the Soviet era. I suggest that the conception of these categories refers to discursive construction of relatedness through genealogies (see Chapter 3). Let us begin, however, by focusing on the ways *plemya* and *rod* are defined in Kyrgyzstan, which simultaneously highlights the influence of Soviet discourse.

### *The place of* plemya *in representations of Kyrgyz society*

The introduction of reforms during the Gorbachev era also saw a greater openness in public discussions of notions related to *plemya* and *rod* in Kyrgyzstan. Although, *traibalizm*, as a form of *korruptsiya*, was still targeted by the administration, people began to explore their genealogical histories more freely. In 1990, new materials were published on *sanjyra* (Kyrgyz: genealogical information combined with an account of the past), which were cast as historical studies of particular *plemya* (Jetimishbaev & Masyrakunov 1994). Motuev's articles are a part of this growing discourse. Here, however, I want to focus on the meanings implicit in the terms.

In everyday discussions in Kyrgyzstan, the terms are translated using the English words "clan" and "tribe" are not always distinct and their meanings are used interchangelably. Most commonly, the English terms "clan" and "tribe" are associated with the Russian terms "*rod*" and "*plemya*", respectively. However, the terms are attributed with a number of different connotations when translated from Russian into

ethnographers, and Soviet archive documents, related to the discussion of *plemya* and *rod*. These representations construct a discursive reality whereby these kinship "groups" are attributed with corporateness, and represent divisions within Kyrgyz society. They became the official representation of social life in the region. The construction of such representations is comparable to Alexei Yurchak's (2006) description of the "authoritative discourse". Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the term, Yurchak argues that the ideological discourse created an authoritative description of social life, yet this was reinterpreted within the language and formalities employed within the discourse. Similarly, I propose that the Soviet documents of Kyrgyz "tribal" society, created an authoritative description of social life. This created the effect of a discursive reality, and in this case presents *plemya* and *rod* as corporate groups within Kyrgyz society.

However, Yurchak notes that people employ the same language of the ideological discourse to express different meanings. I argue that in Kyrgyzstan, the language people use to talk about *plemya* and *rod* has been conditioned by the official ideological discourse during the Soviet era. I suggest that the conception of these categories refers to discursive construction of relatedness through genealogies (see Chapter 3). Let us begin, however, by focusing on the ways *plemya* and *rod* are defined in Kyrgyzstan, which simultaneously highlights the influence of Soviet discourse.

### *The place of* plemya *in representations of Kyrgyz society*

The introduction of reforms during the Gorbachev era also saw a greater openness in public discussions of notions related to *plemya* and *rod* in Kyrgyzstan. Although, *traibalizm*, as a form of *korruptsiya*, was still targeted by the administration, people began to explore their genealogical histories more freely. In 1990, new materials were published on *sanjyra* (Kyrgyz: genealogical information combined with an account of the past), which were cast as historical studies of particular *plemya* (Jetimishbaev & Masyrakunov 1994). Motuev's articles are a part of this growing discourse. Here, however, I want to focus on the meanings implicit in the terms.

In everyday discussions in Kyrgyzstan, the terms are translated using the English words "clan" and "tribe" are not always distinct and their meanings are used interchangelably. Most commonly, the English terms "clan" and "tribe" are associated with the Russian terms "*rod*" and "*plemya*", respectively. However, the terms are attributed with a number of different connotations when translated from Russian into

English. For example, *rod* is used to describe a "clan", but also "family", "sort", and "gender" (i.e. sex). Similarly, the Russian terms have not been easily translated into Kyrgyz. Russian literature has linked *plemya* with the Kyrgyz term "*uruu*", and *rod* with the Kyrgyz term "*uruk*".[59] Descriptions of Kyrgyz *plemya/uruu*, as briefly described in the previous chapter, note that *plemya* are divided into three administrative-military parts before the Soviet revolution: *ong kanat* (Kyrgyz: right wing) and a *sol kanat* (Kyrgyz: left wing), and also *ichkilik* (Kyrgyz: centre) (Abramzon 1971: 26; Asanov 2002a, 2002b; Bartol'd 1996; Kushlubayev 1995; Valikhanov 1985, see also Appendix for a chart of the *plemya*). The *ong kanat* is mainly located in northern Kyrgyzstan, whereas the *sol kanat* and a majority of the *ichkilik* are predominately located in southern Kyrgyzstan.[60] These are not "tribal" confederations, but instead indicate a more ancient administrative and military division of Kyrgyz people, which is found throughout Central and Inner Asia.

However, there is further confusion between the descriptions of the terms. For example, the Russian scholar K. K. Yudakhin wrote in his *Kyrgyz – Russian Dictionary*, that both *uruk* and *uruu* translate into Russian as *rod* and *plemya*, respectively (Yudakhin 1999: 807 & 808). However, in the *Russian – Kyrgyz Dictionary*, he notes that both *rod* and *plemya* in Russian translate into Kyrgyz as *uruu* (Yudakhin 2000: 739 & 559). Moreover, he describes *uruk* as a generation (Russian: *pokolenie*), which designates a person's relatives. Yet, there is another term for generation (Kyrgyz: *muundar*), which indicates a broad age group (Yudakhin 2000: 593).[61] Another Soviet scholar, E. V. Sevortyan, wrote that there was a Turkic word, *uru*, which he recognised as both *uru* [*sic*] and *uruk* in Kyrgyz. He noted several meanings for this term in Russian: "clan" (*rod*);

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[59] Many *sanjyrachi* (Attokurov 1995; Jetimishbaev & Masyrakunov 1994; Jusupov *et al.* 1994; Törökan uulu 1995a, 1995b; Umar uulu 1991) have formalised a more or less fixed usage of the Kyrgyz terms which correspond to their Russian translations.

[60] Rysbyubyu Beibutova (1988) notes that wings were originally organised facing north, so the left wing would have been to the west and the right wing to the east. (This is different from many other societies in Inner Asia where they were orientated towards the south.) The designation of "*ichkilik*" appears to be a later division. This may be because in many documents those *plemya* that are part of the *ichkilik* were incorporated by the "Kyrgyz" later. However, it is also possible that the Kyrgyz wings were reorganised in accordance with the Mongol legal and administrative code, known as the Yasa (also Yasaq or Jasaq), when the Mongols invaded Siberia and Central Asia in the thirteenth century. Andrea Schmitz (1990) examines the question of the "left – right" organisation as one of a number of dichotomies among the Kyrgyz. However, she argues against structuralist notions of dualistic organisation and suggests that while these dichotomies may exist, the theories which have attempted to explain them have not examined them in great historical depth and do not look for the origins of these divisions. These divisions must be examined in connection with wider social, political and economic issues in society.

[61] Strangely, *muundar* is not found in Yudakhin's Kyrgyz-Russian dictionary.

"seed" (*semya*)[62]; "generation" (*pokolenie*); "child" (*ditya*); "younger" (*mladshii*); and "wedding" (*svad'ba*) (Sevortyan 1974: 604-606), but does not include *plemya* in this definition. To add to this confusion, there is another Russian term for "clan", which is *klan*, but this is used most prominently in descriptions of political factions, which is used irrespective of the personal relations of the members (see Chapter 1).

I pressed people to give me more Kyrgyz terms that they might use to describe their *uruu* or *uruk*. Some said that sometimes they refer to their *uruk* as *ichinen uruu* (Kyrgyz: "a *plemya* within a *plemya*"). I have even heard *uruk* being described as *kichine uruu* (Kyrgyz: a "little *plemya*"). If people wish to describe immediate family members, e.g. mother, father, sisters, brothers and father's parents; then they use the term *tuulgan uruk* (Kyrgyz: "birth *rod*" or "own *rod*"). A family is usually called *üi-bülö* in Kyrgyz. However, there is a formal Kyrgyz administrative term used for family, *tütün*, which is more closely associated with household of a married couple. For example, in the village of Kyzmatchy where I conducted research in 2003 the population was described as five hundred *tütün*. As Mirlan Jumabekov, a young teacher from the village, described the term to me, "a *tütün* is a married man and woman, not dependent on the number of children they have or may have". The application of these various terms caused frustration throughout my fieldwork. In many discussions, my interviewees reversed the meaning of *uruu* and *uruk*.

Ch. R. Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen, a Kyrgyz social scientist, has presented a historical reconstruction of Kyrgyz nomadic society which examines descriptions of *uruus* and *uruks* in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many of these descriptions, however, reflect Soviet views of nomadic society. Moreover, these views of kinship (Kyrgyz: *tuugandyk*, Russian: *rodstvo*) relations, share strong similarities with segmentary lineage theory. For example, she describes *uruk* as: "A concept [which] characterizes a rather small ethnic association in the hierarchy of all formations, and consists of a group of relatives having a general ancestor 5-7 generations back. They are also united by a principle of joint settlement in one village and of general agrarian-management" (Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen 1999: 130). This is slightly different from the usual description given by Western anthropologists. Commonly in anthropology "clans" are described as a group of people who descended from a distant (real or mythical)

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[62] The Russian words "seed" (*semya*) should not be confused with "family" (*sem'ya*), which has a soft sign (Russian: *myagkii znak*) after the "m".

ancestor, whether they can trace the genealogy or not (Holy 1996: 75; Keesing 1975: 31; Seymour-Smith 1986: 38).

In Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen's definition, an *uruk* would be closer to a lineage. All people within those five to seven generations, she notes, can claim a kinship connection. This resembles a more exclusive lineage known as *jeti ata*, or the seven patrilineal ancestors to which people are said to derive their kinship connections. Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen notes that there is a smaller kinship group known as *bir atanyn baldary* (Kyrgyz: children of one father), which only includes three to five previous generations.[63]

As for *uruu*, Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen describes this as a group "[...] which can unite a few *uruk*, or can include only one, but are significant by the number of *uruk*. Here, the group of people incorporated among them have related [familial] ties, reaching up to the seven generation in the general genealogy. An *uruu* can have native as well as foreign elements. They take subordinate *uruk* under their protection" (Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen 1999: 130). Furthermore, she notes that *uruus* in the past had their own territory for their cattle breeding subsistence economy.

These depictions of *uruu* and *uruk*, however, are based on Tsarist and Soviet definitions of *plemya* and *rod*. This representation suggests that they were corporate groups led by elders. It is possible that whatever meaning *uruu* and *uruk* had in the nineteenth century was replaced by the official definitions used by the Soviets. These representations have continued to frame people's descriptions of their *plemya* and *rod* today. However, people are not organised into such formal groups, nor are villages made up of relatives. These concepts as they are described above do not correspond with the way these categories are understood today. I argue we need to analyse the way the meanings of these terms are constructed in everyday situations, and not view them as indicators of actual groups.

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[63] See also Anatoly Khazanov (1983, especially p. 129). Khazanov translates *bir atanyn baldary* as "sons of one father". Although the Kyrgyz are a patrilineal society, another translation of the phrase is "children of one father". I prefer to use the broader definition as it not only an important form of identity to men, but also it can be used and is used by women, and can be referred to as a point of pride see Janyl Abdyldabek kyzy (2003). However, I did not come across this term while working in Kyrgyzstan. Although Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen and Khazanov both mention the term, it may be used only in certain contexts and places.

***Motuev's discourse of kinship***

Returning to Motuev, his use of the term demonstrates that he viewed *plemya* as an actual corporate group of which he was the leading representative. I arranged a meeting with Motuev to speak with him more about his views. On a hot day in May 2003, we met at a café in Bishkek. Sitting outside in the shade of the trees in the city centre, we discussed his recent publications and the debate that it had sparked. He told me that in 1993 at a special gathering of *aksakals* he had been elected leader of the "Sayak". He stated that the Sayak *aksakals*, particularly in Naryn *oblast'*, felt marginalised by the concentration of governmental power that the "Sarybagysh" had amassed during the Soviet era which had continued into independence. An example of this was the career of Turdakun Usubaliev, a prominent politician from the Kochkor region, Naryn *oblast'*, who is also from the Sarybagysh *plemya*. During the Soviet era, Usubaliev served as First Secretary of the Kyrgyz SSR from 1961 to 1985. Also, from independence in 1991 until the "Tulip Revolution", he served as parliamentary deputy. The Sayak *aksakals*, according to Motuev, felt that while Usubaliev was First Secretary, many Sarybagysh benefited from this. Many also stated that when Kyrgyzstan became independent, he had great influence over the nomination of the presidential candidate, namely Askar Akaev. Motuev's intention at the time I spoke with him was to unify his *plemya* publicly and to strive for political recognition. The ultimate goal was to nominate a Sayak to run in the parliamentary elections in February 2005. His slogan was: "Sayaks of all countries in the world – unite!", which he modelled after Marx and Engel's maxim for the proletariat.[64]

In order to achieve this, Motuev had to underline his politicised interpretation of *plemya* and *rod*. In his second article, Motuev stressed the centrality of people's knowledge of their *plemya* history, in particular their *jeti ata* (Kyrgyz: patrilineal ancestors traced back seven generations, literally meaning "seven fathers"). Motuev expressed this through a common Kyrgyz phrase: "Those who do not know their ancestors up to the seventh generation are slaves!" (Motuev 2003b: 2).[65] The memory of the ancestors contributed to the formation of a distinct (ethnic) identity and was one way to distinguish a person as Kyrgyz in the pre-Tsarist era. It was argued that if a man or woman could not recount their seven patrilineal ancestors they were considered to be a

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[64] In Russian: "*Sayaki vsekh stran mira – soedinyaites'!*" This was the slogan he used during our interview.
[65] Motuev wrote this in Russian: "*Kto ne znaet svoikh predkov do sed'mogo kolena, tot rab!*"

*kul* (Kyrgyz: slave) or *joo* (Kyrgyz: enemy). Essentially, they were not "Kyrgyz".[66] Although this historical notion of *jeti ata* has remained, it does not determine Kyrgyz identity today.

While it is popularly held that everyone knows their *jeti ata*, in reality it is quite different. Many people I spoke to about this admitted that they did not know all of their *jeti ata*. Often I was told that it was written down and could be referred to if necessary. Asek Kyyazov, a middle-aged Bishkek resident, showed me his own written records of his genealogy. He had traced them all the way back to Mohammed and to Adam. His teenage son, however, did not know much of the details of the genealogical history, but Asek assured me that he would know them later. The fact that families may have genealogical records written down, or know someone who can recount their family's ancestry is sufficient for many. I argue that *plemya* contributes to the notion of Kyrgyz identity, by underlining the way in which genealogy contributes to concepts of imagined communities including the Kyrgyz nation. Genealogy has also become one of the central themes of the government sponsored nation building celebrations (see Chapter 4 and 5). Asek's records did not map a corporate network. When people need assistance, they usually rely on family and friends, but this is not conceptualised as a *plemya*. Often people create *blat* networks (see Chapter 1).

The way in which Motuev employed these categorisations suggests that there are real groups known as the "Sayak", "Sarybagysh", etc. In doing so, he discursively created a reality whereby these "groups" form a part of daily life in Kyrgyzstan. Thereby he could establish boundaries and rights for these "groups". In this way Motuev created a political platform through this categorical construction of the "Sayak". Claims of this sort have had the effect of contributing to the appearance of a resurgence of *plemya* in the post-Soviet era. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this theme has become the subject of a popular debate in political science about post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, these views only maintain a series of underlying evolutionist theories connected with the notion of "tribes" and "clans". The implication of this not only distorts our understanding of contemporary meanings of *plemya* and *rod*, but also

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[66] Furthermore, Motuev recounted the historical importance of *plemya* and *rod* throughout Central Asia, Siberia and the Middle East. He also added an element of religiosity by stating that generally *plemya* was important to Muslims as well, noting the *plemya* origins of Mohammed. (However, he may have weakened his argument by his next two examples of strong *plemya* leaders: Saddam Hussein, the former President of Iraq, and Dzhokhar Dudaev, the late Chechen President and rebel.) By doing so, he attempted to create a well-rounded image of himself as an observant Muslim.

contributes to the construction of the discursive reality where these categories are regarded as actual social forces.

### *Evolutionist underpinnings of kinship studies*

Motuev's depiction of Kyrgyz society divided into *plemya* creates an impression of an ancient form of social organisation. This social formation has been the subject of much theoretical examination. In particular, it was shaped by theories of social evolutionism originating in the nineteenth century. Here, I am referring to the work of Lewis Henry Morgan (1998 [1877]), a lawyer who made numerous visits to the Iroquois in America in the mid-1800s. Although Morgan is credited with creating terminology for kinship[67], his work was concerned with the evolutionary development of people from "savagery" to civilisation, especially through a number of developmental markers: subsistence, government, language, family, religion, house life and architecture, and property. Indeed, the opening lines of his book, *Ancient Society*, illustrate this clearly: "The latest investigation respecting the early condition of the human race, are tending to the conclusion that mankind commenced their career at the bottom of the scale and worked their way up from savagery to civilization through the slow accumulation of experimental knowledge" (Morgan 1998 [1877]: 3).[68]

Today, anthropology has long abandoned Morgan's evolutionist vision of human development. The reflexive trend in the discipline in the 1980s addressed the way in which anthropologists conduct their fieldwork and write about their areas (Clifford & Marcus 1986). Also at this time, following the work of David Schneider (Schneider 2004) and others, kinship theory was revised. However, not all elements of the evolutionist logic have been purged from the discipline, especially in regards to kinship theories. There remain traces of this view in contemporary accounts of (previously) nomadic societies.

This has led to a confusing situation whereby anthropology has distanced itself from representing societies as "tribal", but other disciplines advocate this concept as a

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[67] Morgan had two forms of kinship terminology: classificatory and descriptive. The "[...] classificatory system designates a kinsman in terms of the relation between the category to which he belongs and Ego, the descriptive system designates him by tracing the linear connection between the two and describing its path" (Makarius 1977: 710).

[68] These views were part of a broader set of ethnological discourses of that time. See John Haller (1971), Meyer Fortes (1969), Elisabeth Tooker (1992), and Thomas R. Trautmann (1987).

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useful method for examining current political trends in newly independent countries. Political science is one such discipline. For example, Kathleen Collins has advanced the notion of "clan politics" in Central Asia to understand regime transition following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As I explained in Chapter 1, part of her argument focuses on examining the conditions necessary for "clans" – as corporate, rational groups – to persist from the pre-Tsarist era (Collins 2006: 44-51).

I argue that the discussion of "clans" as actual groups succeeds only in regenerating the evolutionist views. Instead, we need to be more critical of these terms. I now examine some general models which perpetuate the image of real groups in nomadic societies.

***Kinship models and their legacies***

In the following sections, I examine some models of kinship, which employ notions of evolutionism. Furthermore, these models focus specifically on some ways both Western and Soviet scholars describe kinship among nomadic peoples, although I am primarily concerned with the Kyrgyz. Firstly, I analyse feudalism. This was the subject of a long-running debate within Soviet ethnology. The main concern was to determine the level of social development in connection with the evolutionary principles of Marxism. However, what relevance do these ideas have today?

Secondly, I examine the concept of egalitarianism. Although much of Soviet research concentrated on exposing "class structures" among nomadic peoples, paradoxically, they included depictions of egalitarianism.[69] Some Soviet accounts depicted nomadic peoples as exhibiting forms of "primitive communism". This formed an image of a society that was by all means not modern and needed to be dragged through the levels of social development, but at the same time, had social mechanisms that would make them receptive to the implementation of socialist ideology, or had socialist characteristics already. Similar notions of egalitarianism are also found in Western anthropology. The presumed social structure of the nomads was regarded as an important method for the maintenance of social equality. Nevertheless, as I argue in the discussion of feudalism, stratified relations are evident in the social relationships of nomads.

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[69] As Yuri Slezkine has noted: "[…] the ethnographers' usefulness to the building of socialism consisted in their ability to uncover class structures, while their task as scholars was to study societies that by definition had no classes" (Slezkine 1991: 479).

Finally, I examine accounts in Western anthropology of the social structure of nomads which maintained egalitarianism. The segmentary lineage model provided a diagram for the division of nomadic society into lineages, which coalesced through genealogies to form "clans" and "tribes". Political power was balanced among these different segments and therefore maintained egalitarianism. This model has shaped many interpretations of the social structure of (formerly) nomadic peoples since the 1940s. As I argued in the previous chapter, these views are outdated and do not address local conceptualisations of kinship.

***Model 1: Nomads as a "feudal" society***

A debate which shaped representations of pastoral nomads, particularly among Soviet scholars, was the notion of "feudalism". The discussion of feudalism was based on a model of European forms of class society associated with small-scale agriculture, and were derived from Marx's (1938) concepts. In this view, the main means of production was land, and was characterised by conditional holding of the sovereign's land by lords who exploited the labour of serfs or vassals. According to Marxist theory, this represented an evolutionary stage, placing it before the development of a bourgeois society and capitalist economy. However, ethnographic research on nomads in Central Asia and Mongolia presented a challenge to this Marxist framework. The characteristic feudal relations were not clearly discernable among nomads. As Ernest Gellner notes:

> One of the paradoxes, form a Marxist viewpoint, of Russian ethnography of nomadic people under Tzarist rule, was that it was possible to find some who were still semi-patriarchal and not *yet* properly feudal, and others who had entered market relations and were semi-capitalist and no *longer* properly feudal, but there was a marked shortage of nomads who were properly feudal, neither too early nor too late (Gellner 1988: 97, original emphasis).

Some Soviet revisions of the Tsarist era ethnography attempted to locate distinct class divisions. However, the debate that followed divided the Soviet social sciences. For example, K. Nurbekov (1999) – a Kyrgyz scholar during the Soviet era – described

*manaps* (Kyrgyz: *plemya* leaders) [70] and *biis* (Kyrgyz: judges or judiciaries who settled disputes by customary law among *plemya*)[71] as representing a fully class-based society:

> Kyrgyz society in the period before the October [revolution] was feudal. The Kyrgyz were still outwardly connected by forms of kinship within the boundaries of the nomadic aiyl [Kyrgyz: a small herding group, encampment, or village] communities. But according to their economic relations they represented a society, which had developed a form of class relations (Nurbekov 1999: 33).

Other academics did not see the situation as so clearly defined. S. Abramzon, the eminent Russian scholar who conducted research on the Kyrgyz, also argued that land was of primary importance to the nomads. Nevertheless, he did not state that the Kyrgyz had developed to a fully feudal society. He argued that the Kyrgyz still had marks of patriarchal relations combined with feudal divisions, marks of an earlier evolutionary stage:

> The various relations between members of Kyrgyz society to the means of production, which was land, especially pasture; was the basis of class division. Of key importance in the conditions of the cattle breeding economy was feudal property of the land, which was the basis of Kyrgyz patriarchal-feudal relations. Although the possession of pastures had an outwardly communal character, in fact, all pastures were divided between prominent biis and manaps who appropriated the right to dispose of their and others' lands as feudal owners. Thus, this created a monopoly of the possession of land by the feudal elite of Kyrgyz society. [...] Clan and tribal property on pastures existed only nominally, acting as a legal fiction, which was in fact a feudal form of landed property (Abramzon 1971: 157).

Other evidence presented in support of "feudalism" among nomads highlighted the presence of forms of taxation which exploited people's labour and was used to

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[70] The term "*manap*" has been commented on by the famous Soviet ethnographer, V. V. Bartol'd. Bartol'd, acknowledging the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff, who had made similar notations in the 1860s, states: "[...] one bii of the Sarybagysh tribe bore the name Manap; he became the head of his tribe, and later, after his death, all biis called themselves manaps" (Bartol'd 1996: 240). See below for another explanation by Valikhanov. Bartol'd which provides a general history of several important *manaps* in Kyrgyz history (see Bartol'd 1996: 239-252).

[71] Another Kyrgyz term for a judge is *kazy*. *Kazy*, according to Yudakhin (1999: 317), seems to have been more focused on settling disputes by forming their judgments on the *Shariat*. However, this term is used more predominantly in southern Kyrgyzstan. In 1995, President Akaev "reinstated" a local court system, known as *aksakal* courts (Kyrgyz: *aksakaldar sotu*). He argued that these were "traditional" systems of justice. See Judith Beyer (2005) for more on *aksakal* courts.

maintain control of the land and herds. A. Khasanov, a Kyrgyz social scientist during the Soviet era, noted:

> During the colonial period of Kyrgyzstan, manaps preserved feudal practices over the working mass, such as saan, küch (or atmai) [Kyrgyz: working cattle, seized from those indebted to the *manap*] and chairikerstvo [Kyrgyz: a *chairiker* was a sharecropper]. Kyrgyz manaps, served by volost'[72] managers and encampment foremen, raised a number of local taxes: soyush, jigit kyzmaty [Kyrgyz: young men in the service of a *manap*], chygym, etc. (Khasanov 1968: 11).[73]

These taxes were part of a number of taxes paid to the *manap*. There were more levies and fines paid even for wide range of events (see Table 2.1) serving a many purposes:

**Table 2.1** – List of taxes paid to *manap*

| ***Tax***[74] | ***Description*** |
|---|---|
| *aiyp tartuu* | a fine for the infringement of a common law (*nark*) |
| *baila* or *shyralga* | the right of the *manap* to take from a hunter half their game |
| *biilik* | a levy for the "judicial duty" of an investigation |
| *chygym* | a levy covering the expenses of the *manap* for hosting guests |
| *jurtchuluk* and *sel'vik* | a levy for the victim of a natural disaster, a large part of which is given by the *manap* |
| *koshumcha* | an offering to the *manap* for different reasons |
| *otmai* | a tax for the use of pasture |
| *saan* | a poor person taking care of a herd for the current year, but for a limited time |
| *salyk* | systematic tax of the population for the *manap* |
| *soyush* | a levy for the *manap*'s table |
| *tuyakat* | a tax for driving a herd through the land of the *manap* |

There were other taxes imposed by the rulers of the Kokand Khanate on the nomadic herders:

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[72] A *volost'* was the smallest administrative division in Tsarist Russia. It was replaced in the reforms of the 1920s by *raion* (Russian: region).

[73] See below of a more detailed list of taxes paid to *manaps*.

[74] This is a translation of a table in Russian at the Kochkor Regional History Museum, which I visited on 10 September 2003. See also Abramzon (1971: 162) and Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen (1999: 71). In Abramzon's description of the taxes, he describes *salyk* as quitrent (Russian: *obrok*), a rent usually paid in horses and sheep.

> The Kokand Khanate actually imposed various taxes on all Kyrgyz land; and a special tax for cattle was collected – zyaket. Much of the land was rented to nomadic communities. Besides, separate Kyrgyz clans [Russian: *rod*] and large family groups procured areas by means of purchasing state land [Russian: *gosudarstvennaya zemlya*] which then was distributed between all members according to the amount they had paid with the right to resell. Basically this concerned irrigated areas, [but] as a rule, pastures remained for general use (Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen 1999: 71).

The Kokand Khanate's territorial control spread to northern Kyrgyzstan, but was less influential than in southern Kyrgyzstan, where it is thought such taxes would have been forcefully imposed on the settled peoples in the Fergana Valley. Nomads were forced to adapt to limited pasture use for herding their animals and increased contact with sedentary communities due to land allocation for Russian settlers moving to Central Asia in the nineteenth century.[75]

The control of land was also described by the Russian explorer, Petr Semenov (1827-1914), during his travels in Central Asia.[76] He recorded a particular encounter with the *manap* Borombai (or Burambai)[77] of the Bugu *plemya*. When he arrived at the *manap's aiyl* (Kyrgyz: encampment)[78] he found Borombai to be in exceptional spirits:

> Burambai's joy at the arrival of Russian assistance was explained by his absolutely critical situation, as the whole of the eastern half of the basin of Lake Issyk-kul', which was in his domain, was virtually already lost to him. He had evacuated it along both the northern and southern shores of the lake (along the Kungei and Terskei) since his defeat in the autumn of 1854 and moved to winter quarters by the Santash Pass, leaving behind only a few *auly* in the valleys of the rivers Tiup and Dzhargalan, the eastern tributaries of the lake. It was to these *auly* that the Sarybagish tirelessly directed their *baranty* [Russian: raids], and during one such raid, while Burambai was in Terskei with his forces, they managed to outflank him from Kungei and from there to reach his *auly* at the river Tiup, and to smash them completely, taking prisoner part of his family, namely one of his wives and the wives of his three sons. That happened at the end of 1856, after which Burambai led a nomadic existence beyond the Santash, and the Sarybagysh already considered the whole basin of Issyk-kul' to have been conquered by them [...] (Semenov 1998: 144).

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[75] An example of this is Gulnar Kendirbai's (2002) account of the allocation of land used by nomadic herders to the Cossacks and Russian settlers arriving in northern Kazakhstan.

[76] From 1906 Semenov became known as Petr Semenov-Tyan'-Shan'skii.

[77] There are a number of different spellings for Borombai's name, but I have chosen this spelling as it is consistent with a number of contemporary spellings of his name.

[78] In modern Kyrgyz usage, *aiyl* also means "village".

Semenov's account demonstrates the importance for control of land between the *plemya*. Raids and skirmishes among elites and their followers were common in northern Kyrgyzstan. Greater pasture land enabled *manaps* to collect more taxes and to spread out the herds. Furthermore, as we can see in the case of Borombai, the arrival of Tsarist forces helped and obstructed this competition over land between *manaps* and elites.

Some Soviet scholars argued that not only was control of land important, but livestock were also an essential means of production. B. Vladimirtsov (2002), a Soviet social scientist, has been credited with advancing the notion of "nomadic feudalism". From his research of Mongolian nomads, he argued that there were three stages of feudalism. The earliest stage, from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, was marked by a reliance on livestock but also increasing competition over land use. The success of the nomadic subsistence economy depended on maintaining livestock and controlling a certain area of land, a *nutag* (Mongolian: a place of residence or an area of migration).[79] However, the idea of "nomadic feudalism" was heavily criticised, predominantly by scholars who argued that livestock was the main means of production, not land.

The maintenance of livestock was a crucial part of nomadic existence, and for many scholars was the determining factor in the development of feudal-like relations among nomads. The precarious mountain and steppe environment often meant that a herder might have many animals one year, but due to blizzards or drought conditions, that herder might loose most of the livestock, which would substantially decrease their wealth. However, as M. Nazif Mohib Shahrani (1979) describes, wealthy herders usually distributed their herd among other families. In which case, if there were poor conditions, then some of the herd may survive if it is herded in a different area. Furthermore, if any of the herd was lost in the poor conditions while being herded by other families, they may have been required to compensate the wealthy herder.

In his study of a number of Kyrgyz families who lived in the high Pamir Mountains in the Wakhan Corridor of northern Afghanistan in the 1970s, Shahrani focused on the adaptation of the group's social, political and economic structure to the closed Chinese and Soviet borders that surrounded them. He demonstrated that wealthy herders dominate production through livestock. He noted that the 135 families depended on Haji Rahman Qul (the khan as Shahrani describes him[80]), or from other wealthy

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[79] For a description on the various meanings of *nutag* (or *nutug*) see Bat-Ochir Bold (2001: 41-43).
[80] "Khan" is Turko-Mongolic word meaning "leader" or "ruler".

herders, for support. Shahrani stated that there were two forms of animal distribution: *saghun* and *amanat*. Under the *saghun* system: "[...] poor families who do not own animals and do not have the labor force to herd livestock year round are provided by the rich *oey* units with ten to thirty ewes and does, with lambs and kids, shortly after the lambing season, or one or two yak cows with their calves" (Shahrani 1979: 179).[81] This system operated mainly for the poor families to obtain milk and wool over spring and summer but would have to be retuned by autumn. In the *amanat* system poor *oeys* were given large amounts of livestock by richer *oeys* for a long period:

> The herders exercise all rights over the products (milk, wool, and fuel) that can be earned from the herd while they are in charge of raising them. But the rich Kirghiz retains the right of ownership (i.e. disposal) over the herd. Reciprocally, the herders must give an annual accounting to the owner and must show an increase in the size of the herd to ensure the continuation of the arrangement (Shahrani 1979: 179).

Shahrani argued that these systems of animal distribution represented an "[...] increasingly more centralized, mildly authoritarian and 'feudal' structure in which the khan figures prominently (Shahrani 1979: 184).[82] Although this particular organisation among these families seem to have developed only after their arrival in the Wakhan Corridor, I would argue that it did not develop in a vacuum of historical socio-political knowledge about similar practices that were used among other Kyrgyz groups.[83] Therefore, this also suggests that these asymmetrical relations were similar to those in the period before the Tsarist colonisation of Central Asia.

However, there were a number of Soviet scholars who attempted to address what they felt were mistakes in earlier theories of feudalism among nomads, including Vladimirtsov's discussion of "nomadic feudalism". One such scholar, S. E. Tolybekov (1959; 1971), argued that nomadic groups, chiefly because of their continual mobility, were not able to develop any further, and therefore, did not attain a feudal society. As

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[81] An *oey*, as Shahrani describes it, is a "house (yurt), family, household" (Shahrani 1979: 236).

[82] While the Kyrgyz avoided being trapped within the territories of the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, the economic and political difficulties that they faced contributed to the increasingly visible nature of these feudal-like practices. Nevertheless, they share a high level of similarity with those practices that had been noted in Kyrgyzstan, particularly during the nineteenth century. For further discussion of pastoral nomadism, see David Sneath (2000). See also Tatjana Emeljanenko (1994) on Kyrgyz *bais* (Kyrgyz: rich herd owners) and herding practices.

[83] Although Shahrani does not indicate that the same terms are used among the Pamir Kyrgyz, the forms of leasing and levies that are imposed are similar to the earlier forms noted above.

Gellner has summarised this view: "[Nomadic society] constitutes a sociological cul-de-sac, or to use the expressive Russian word, a *tupik*" (Gellner 1988: 106). By stating that nomadic societies could not develop further and that land was not a primary means of production, Tolybekov (1971) provided the first strong criticism against Vladimirtsov's work.

Another scholar to continue Tolybekov's anti-feudal argument was G. E. Markov (1976).[84] Markov took Tolybekov's ideas further: "Where Tolybekov asserts with firmness, and perhaps a touch of bitterness, that nomads *could not* develop further than they did, Markov contents himself with asserting that they *did not*" (Gellner 1988: 111, original emphasis). Under certain conditions, elements of feudalism could appear, but not through nomadic development. Instead, according to Markov, it was as a consequence of colonising forces, i.e. the Russians, which imposed administrative measures on the local population.

Bat-Ochir Bold, a Mongolian social scientist in Iceland, argues that we should not apply the term "feudalism" to Mongolian (and other) nomads. He states: "The concept of feudalism was formulated on the basis of an assumed universality of the special economic, political and social system that was created by the resolution of the contradictions in early social conditions of Byzantine and some European people" (Bold 2001: 24). Nevertheless, in the Mongol examples that Bold presents, and in the Kyrgyz examples provided above, the titles given to elites, e.g. *manap* and *bii*, indicate that there was a level of social stratification. Therefore, I follow David Sneath's description of "feudal" as being a "[...] convenient shorthand term to describe the stratified social order" (Sneath 2000: 25). This discussion should not be limited to a debate over the means of production, but needs to explore the various relations developed to maintain this stratification and control over resources.[85] Furthermore, the Marxist scheme of evolutionary development and its use in Soviet social sciences not only limits our understanding of pre-Tsarist nomadic life, but also perpetuates viewing nomads as a primitive and undeveloped people.

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[84] Following Tolybekov and Markov, Anatoly Khazanov (1983) has argued against feudalism.

[85] This is the focus of Bat-Ochir Bold's (2001) work. Bold's view is developed from Fred Scholz's (1995) discussion of land use. However, there is a misunderstanding in Bold's use of Scholz's work. Scholz (1995: 26) argues that private ownership "[...] does not belong to the nature of nomadic culture", postulating an original state of nomadic society. Nevertheless, he argues that in cases where there *is* private ownership, this restricts the access to pasture. This is quite different from Bold's argument where he argues against private ownership of land and pastures.

***Model 2: Nomads as egalitarian***

Although there is strong evidence to suggest that there were forms of stratification, both Soviet and Western accounts of nomads also contained elements of egalitarianism. In Soviet studies, despite accounts identifying class elements in society, there was also another trend which simultaneously examined nomadic groups as having socialist characteristics. Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov (2003) notes that this view developed from Russian intellectuals who presented an idealised notion of "socialist" peasant communities in the late nineteenth century. Although Marxists criticised this, it still remained a part of ethnological representations. By retaining this feature of nomadic societies, it reconciled the aims of the Soviet political practices with the notion that the end of capitalism would be followed by a return to communism. Therefore, the "organic purity" of peasant communities as natural models of socialist existence was reified in this context.

The primitive communism present in Soviet ethnological studies, shared similarities to the way in which Western anthropology described social divisions among nomads. One assumption was that egalitarianism was maintained by having a segmented society. It was claimed that without sedentarization, other forms of political and economic development leading to asymmetrical relations were difficult to achieve. Nomadic society was conceived as naturally divided by kinship. In anthropology, the characteristics of segmentary pastoral nomadic groups have been described as: "the weak, elusive, ephemeral nature of political centralization, the wide diffusion of power and political participation, the precarious and relatively mild degree of social differentiation, the prominence of collectives practising mutual aid and self-defence" (Gellner 1988: 107). The model of segmentary lineage system was persuasively put forward as a social type in *African Political Systems* by Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940), which linked egalitarianism with stateless societies. Deviations from this model, as Talal Asad (1979) points out, are usually conceived of as isolated examples.

This ideal type of pastoral nomadism, however, needs to be addressed by examining the "total system". Asad argues that anthropologists have failed "[...] to realize that the equality of segments specified by such a system represents a formal equivalence at the *ideological* level, that it does not define the *productive capacity or political power* (material resources, manpower, etc.) of opposed groups" (Asad 1979:

421-422, original emphasis). Indeed, in later anthropological studies the issue of land ownership and trade between pastoral nomadic and sedentary groups has become of greater research interest (Khoury & Kostiner 1990). Nevertheless, Asad remarks:

> It is not merely that nomads 'interact' at different social levels with sedentaries, but that the social conditions of their existence are reproduced by the total system, a system which is historically formed and reformed by complex combinations of the forces and relations of production. And since the conditions, and the system which reproduces them, vary radically according to time and place, there cannot be an essential 'pastoral nomadic society' (Asad 1979: 422).

According to Asad, the relationships that exist between nomads and with sedentary communities exclude the possibility of egalitarianism. Moreover, the negation of such characteristics ascribed to the concept of pastoral nomadism undercut the justification of such a model.

***Model 3: The segmentary lineage system of pastoral nomads***

As I noted above, another assumption connected with the notion of pastoral nomadism is the model of a segementary lineage system.[86] The anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1940) developed this structural formation of society in his study of the Nuer. He constructed a dual model (Figure 2.1) of social segmentation and the divisions of these groups throughout different territories.[87] In a simplified version of this model (Figure 2.2), A represents an apical ancestor from which a "clan" claims descent. B and C are maximal lineages which descend from A; and in turn, D and E descend from B; and F and G descend from C.

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[86] Although he includes the possibility for stratification, Anatoly Khazanov (1983) also employs the segmentary lineage system as the most logical model of social organisation for nomadic groups to have in order to maintain an existence in the harsh Eurasian steppe environment.

[87] This structure has also been referred to as a "conical clan". In other geographical locations the conical clan has been regarded as "[…] a model often applied to chiefdoms or tribes dominated by a 'royal' family" (see Lindner 1982: 692). Similar structural hierarchical divisions to that outlined in segmentary lineage theory also apply here. Nevertheless, the real concern in examining a "tribal" society in such a way, is that such a description may neglect other relationships that may cross-cut these supposed hierarchies.

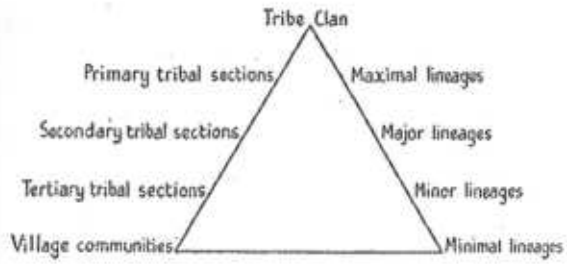


**Figure 2.1** – E. E. Evans-Pritchard's (1940: 248) model of segmentary lineage system

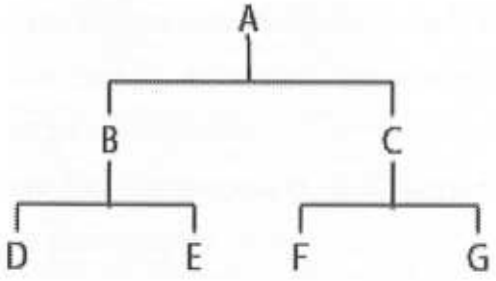


**Figure 2.2** – Simple diagram of a segmenatary lineage model

According to Evans-Prichard's theory, if two segments opposed each other, for a specific reason, then their agnates will join them in their defence. For example, if D and F should quarrel, then D and E will join together, which represents B, and F and G will join, which represents C. This was a compelling model that was used to describe a number of societies (see Fox 1971; Geiss 2003; Holy 1996; Keesing 1975).

In earlier works, Evans-Pritchard had argued that this model reflected evolutionary transitions from a society based on "clan" divisions to territorial organisation (see Kuper 2004). However, in Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, this model became a functionalist description of core values of Nuer society. "Clans" were abandoned and replaced by "lineages". Adam Kuper has noted: "The lineage system was an ideological construct, a way of thinking and talking about the actual camps and villages and their relationships with each other. It was assumed to be primary, since values were primary; but it need not match any particular concrete praxis" (Kuper 1988: 198). In retrospect, the distorting effect of this model on ethnographic representations was quite apparent. The approach was developed out of the theoretical influences of the time, but a historically-informed perspective, as Asad argued, is essential in understanding the formations of society.[88]

The models examined here illustrate some basic concepts which underpin representations of kinship among nomadic groups. They are all founded upon evolutionist views of social development. However, the models also demonstrate how the discussions about nomads were constrained. These models created a discursive reality in which *plemya* and *rod* were active groups led by elites. I argue that these models of "kinship society" do not accurately depict the actual social relations of everyday life

[88] There have been attempts to salvage some elements of segmentation. Paul Dresch (1986), for example, has argued that segmentation helps to understand the possibility of certain events and the forms of action. Nevertheless, I contend that it still operates within structural-functionalist logic. He attempts to provide a mechanism for equality predetermined by a very rigid division of "tribal" societies.

among the nomads. Much of the literature on the Kyrgyz only discusses the role of elites. However, the characterisation of the Kyrgyz as "tribal" determined the possibilities for describing their historical and contemporary social organisation.

In the sections that follow, I examine this representation of Kyrgyz nomadic society. Firstly, I begin by presenting several ethnographic accounts of the Tsarist era. These discuss the social structure of the Kyrgyz during the pre-Tsarist and Tsarist periods. Secondly, I provide a number of Soviet ethnographic accounts which built on the earlier descriptions and attempted to revise them. Finally, I examine the Communist Party's discussion of "tribal" elders and the ways in which they targeted them as class enemies to liberate the poorer classes.

The accounts below depict elites as representatives of "tribal" society. They are described in two ways. Firstly, they are characterised as leaders of *plemya* who maintain "traditional" ways of life, and are therefore able to discuss these customs with the greatest authority. Secondly, their control over the people is described as "despotic" and they are vilified as class enemies. This second view, developed more in Soviet literature, creates the negative image of imperious elites, who with their fellow *plemya* members, struggle against Soviet power. This contributes to the image today of *traibalizm* and the divisive effects it has in politics. Both of these views form a general picture of the Kyrgyz as a "tribal" society with powerful leaders.

This history of representation presents the construction of a discursive reality of *plemya* and *rod* in Kyrgyzstan. The language used characterises these categories in a way that makes them seem as though they are corporate groups with a particular social structure and actively engaged in politics. These views have shaped the way many analysts describe *plemya* and *rod*. As I argued in Chapter 1, political scientists have constructed models of factions based on "clan" membership. These models are based on accumulated representations which perpetuate the view of corporate groups.

However, I stress that *plemya* and *rod* are a discursive reality, as opposed to actual corporate groups. The political science models do not investigate the construction of these views and their significance in everyday life. The contrast between such models and lived experienced was made clear in many conversations with people. For example, one night, Cholpon, the sister of the mother of my host family, and I sat up late talking. She had come to Naryn to look for work to support her two children and to be near her family. I asked her if she could ask members of her *plemya* for assistance. "No," she said, and then explained that there was no such system of support based on her *plemya*.

Cholpon, as with many people I spoke to, did not speak of their *plemya* as a group that could provide financial or any other kind of support. Cholpon mainly relied on the help her family could give her. This was similar for many of my friends and colleagues. Her family would bring milk from the village for her and her sister to sell in the town. They would also send money to buy medicine and for them to use as well. Cholpon and her sister heavily relied on the help from their parents. This, as for many people I met, was the principle means of support. Nevertheless, let us now turn to the construction of the discursive reality by the Tsarist and Soviet ethnographic representations.

***Tsarist era research on local elites***

During the Tsarist era, travellers and ethnographic accounts often recall meeting with Kyrgyz elites (*manaps* and *biis*). They provide interesting depictions of early nineteenth century Kyrgyz nomads. One such account is from the Kazakh ethnographer, Chokan Valikhanov (1835-1865). He presented a strong class-like description of Kyrgyz society. Valikhanov notes that Kyrgyz social organisation was similar to "castes", with *manaps* controlling a majority of political, economic and social power. In his description of the "*dikokamennye kirgiz*" (Russian: "wild mountain Kyrgyz")[89], he notes:

> People [Russian: *narod*], as on estates, are divided in two castes: possessors (manaps) and simple people (kara-bukhary). Manaps, as direct descendants of the most ancient ancestor of a horde, originally had patriarchal right as father of the family, but gradually over the course of time this power increased and has turned into, in the end, despotic relations of the possessor and slaves (Valikhanov 1985: 38).

Valikhanov notes, however, that *manap* is a specific term, and Borombai (the same person that Petr Semenov refers to) told Valikhanov that they do not use the term *manap*:

> The first manap (by the explanation of locals: a strong, unapproachable despot) occurred not long ago among the Sarybagysh for the first time. The Sarybagysh bii, by the name of Manap, was the first tyrant. Biis from other clans [Russian: *rod*] enjoyed manapstvo [Russian: the social position and privileges associated with being a *manap*] and now manap is the nominal name of the clan leader of each generation of a horde [Russian: *orda*]. For all that, among the Bugu clan [Russian: *rod*] the people have a

[89] Tolstov *et al.* (1963) have also reference the Kyrgyz as occasionally being referred to as "*zakammnykh kirgiz*" (Russian: "mountain Kyrgyz").

> bigger importance. And Buranbai told me himself, that they do not have manaps in a strict sense (Valikhanov 1985: 38).[90]

Bormbai's claim "the people" (Russian: *narod*) are more important, indicating some form of egalitarianism, and that there are no such *manaps*. Nevertheless, this is the view of a leader of the *plemya*. The experiences of the people may have portrayed a very different picture. Borombai tells Valikhanov (1985) that there are no *manaps* in a "strict sense", suggesting that there may be comparable forms of rule over a number of households.[91]

Valikhanov's account includes a description about *söök* (Kyrgyz: literally "bones", but similar to lineages). Although the origins of the term are difficult to trace, similar metaphors are known to have been used by the Mongols (*yas*) in the twelfth century. For example, white bone in Mongolia became associated with those that could claim direct descendent from Chinggis Khan, while commoners were from the black bone. Black was a term commonly used throughout Inner Asia to describe commoners or "simple" people, described by Valikhanov as "kara-bukhary".[92] Although *kara* is not used to describe people and not necessarily a reference to bones among Kyrgyz.

Among Kazakhs, these terms are more prevalent. For example, Nurlan Amrekulov (2000: 102-103) notes that the white bone (Kazakh: *ak suyek*) were descendents of Chinggis Khan, and the black bone (Kazakh: *kara suyek*) described the commoners.[93] Shirin Akiner (1995: 15-16) argues instead that the white bone represented one set of elites (those claiming to be descendents of Chinggis Khan). These khans were elected from the white bone elite and "possessed" groups of "clans" or "tribes", and competed with each other for political power within the Kazakh Khanate (from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries). She notes that their main role was to balance conflicting "tribal" interests. Another set of elites were known as black bone (*batyrs* and *biis*). Akiner argues that they belonged to the "clan-tribal" structure. They had legal and military jurisdiction over a number of "clans". Their positions were often

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[90] This view has been supported by other authors. A. Dzhymagulov, quoting Radloff in 1863, notes that "Manaps [...] have almost despotic power over their people" (Dzhumagulov 1990: 4).

[91] Semenov (1998), who met Borombai on a number of occasions, often refers to him as a *manap*.

[92] Denis Sinor (Sinor 1990: 310) has suggested that the term, *qara budun*, or "*hoi polloi*", has existed since the sixth century and was used during the Türk Kaghanate. The meaning seems to have been largely retained in Kyrgyz usage.

[93] Amrekulov actually describes four different levels. In between the white and black bones were a group of religious elites who claimed to be descendents of the Prophet Mohammed. They were known as the *asyl suyek* (Kazakh: rare [precious, noble] bone). And the lowest level consisted of slaves. Akiner notes, however, the religious elites were members of the white bone.

hereditary but their effectiveness, she notes, was based on charisma. Furthermore, they were independent of the elites of the white bone. Among the Kyrgyz, the stratification of elites was elaborated more through the classifications of *manaps* and *biis* than through bones.

*Manaps* and *biis* were the focus of a number of other documents as well. Valikhanov's account highlights more harshly the position of *manaps* among nomads. This may have been because he was native to the region and knew how strong the control of the elites was over the people. Other accounts presented the elites in more familiar terms to European readers, and did not discuss the non-elites. For example, in the 1880s, Lieutenant General N. I. Grodekov (1843-1913), Governor-General of the Syr-Dariya *oblast'*, wrote about the Kirgiz (Kazakh) and Karakirgiz (Kyrgyz)[94] in the region. He quotes Mulla Asan, who he calls a *manap* (but from which *plemya* is not clear) that:

> A manap has rank, a kind of Russian prince. No manaps came from the house of Chingiz Khan. Those who became manaps were chosen from the people (yurtan ozyb), distinguished themselves in bravery and generosity and leadership of the people at times of anarchy. During enemy invasions they collected all the people and led them (el bashlagan[95]) those, who themselves were divided amongst the manaps (uzi ozyb chykkan). They did not elect them; but if they were to be elected, they would be elected (Grodekov 1889: 6).

Grodekov, possibly adding to what Mulla Asan may have said, clearly puts this description of the role of *manaps* in comparable terms for European sensibilities. Semenov provides another account of the role of *biis* in Kyrgyz society:

> I was greatly interested in the personalities of these *biys*, especially as I did not see in them hereditary dignitaries, but elected representatives of

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[94] Until the 1920s, today's Kazakhs were called Kirgiz or Kirgiz-Kaisak, and the Kyrgyz were called Karakirgiz in Russian and Soviet documents. The division between the two was that the Kirgiz (Kazakhs) lived in the steppe region, and the Karakirgiz (Kyrgyz) lived in the mountains and were thought to be darker skinned due to their exposure to the sun at high altitudes ("*kara*" in Kyrgyz means "black"). However, "*kara*" can also mean "majority", therefore indicating that the Karakirgiz may have been considered to be a larger population than the Kirgiz.

[95] Yudakhin (1999: 946) has described "*el*" as a "tribal union" (Russian: *plemennoi soyuz*), "tribe" (Russian: *plemya*), "clan" (Russian: *rod*), and even "the people" (Russian: *narod*). However, Peter Golden (2003: 50) has suggested that the notion *el* eventually became associated with "polity". Although it would be difficult to ascribe a formal notion of political unification to nomads, this can be understood as a loose description for those dependent upon a *manap*. Perhaps this could also refer to Borombai's description of the importance of the "people" among his group. Polity does not suggest kinship, which is often assumed when discussing *plemya* leaders. The connections to the *manaps* and *biis* show little evidence to support kinship theories.

> the people. However, it transpired that in the middle of the nineteenth century no-one either elected or appointed *biys*. They were simply identified by public opinion as people to whom all those in need of justice turned of their own free will to settle disputes, people who were experienced and who had secured a universal reputation by their fairness, intellect and other qualities, but especially by their intimate knowledge of popular customary law. Among such persons were both noble people of blue blood, and also quite often common people, but in any case individuals who were renowned for their indubitable personal virtues. The residences (nomadic encampments) of these people were known to everyone, and the more fame they enjoyed, the more clients they had (Semenov 1998: 130-131).

In contrast to Valikhanov's account, these reports suggest that *manaps* and *biis* are dignified, well-respected leaders. They are chosen by their peers to lead the people.

Another account by Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff (1837-1918) argues that the *manaps'* and *biis'* power relied more on external support.[96] In his "Observations sur les Kirghis", he notes:

> Each of these biis have direction of a certain number of families over which they exercise administrative and judiciary functions. They can meet in assembly, but only to treat the business which concerns the subjects of different biis, or that of general interest. These assemblies are presided over by the Aga manap (the chief manap), who, according to national law, has no authority himself and can do nothing without the assistance of the biis and manaps. The nomination of all these [biis and manaps] is sanctioned by the Russian government, which gives them, after several years of service, either medals or an officer's rank in the cavalry. The Aga manap is ordinarily a major (Radloff 1863: 322).

Here, Radloff provides a different account of *manaps*. They are nominated by their own people and later approved by Tsarist authorities and do not lead the people without the support of other elites. Furthermore, there is no indication as to whether they are the relatives of the people they oversee.

Nevertheless, these different accounts describe Kyrgyz society as divided into different *plemya* and *rod*. The "Sarybagysh" and the "Bugu", for example, are presented as corporate groups under the leadership of a powerful *manap* or *bii*. Whether or not these elites actually represented the interests of those under their control is unclear, but

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[96] Radloff was born in Germany and later moved to Russia. He is well known for his analyses of southern Siberian, Turkic languages, which were mainly conducted during the Tsarist colonial expansion into Central Asia.

the elites were regarded as the leaders of those groups. In fact, little is known about these people, as most attention was concentrated on the position of elites and their struggles with one another. These descriptions served as a starting point for later Soviet ethnographic accounts.

### *Soviet (re)interpretations of* manaps *and* biis

Soviet interpretations of society, similar to Tsarist views, were based on notions of evolutionist theories. These were largely based on the work of Marx and Engels. In the preface to the first edition of *Origin of the Family*, Engels remarks on evolutionary development, and notes Morgan's contribution of the subject (Engels 1940). However, while Engels used Morgan's work as a basis for is own analytical critique, he concentrated on the characteristics of social evolution which formed notions of class consciousness.

The focus on evolutionism and the development of class relations led many scholars to return to the themes described in Valikhanov's work.[97] For example, Abramzon, in his main work on the ethnogenesis of the Kyrgyz, comments at great length about *manaps* and *biis*. When talking about the social structure of the Kyrgyz he notes:

> Various groups of the population were under the leadership of a feudal-patrimony[98] known as biis and manaps. Exploitation of the workers by manaps and biis occurred by penetrating the social life ideologies of 'clan unity' and 'clan solidarity', in which was located their expression of various phenomena of patriarchal-patrimonial life. Manaps and biis widely used the enduring patriarchal-patrimonial traditions in order to mask these feudal relations by the maintenance of the forms of exploitation, but they also actively promoted the preservation of these traditions, acting as 'keepers' and 'interpreters' of patrimonial customs and of the common law of *zang* and *nark* (Abramzon 1971: 157).[99]

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[97] There is much literature which focuses on illustrating hierarchies within *plemya* and *rod*. See Abramzon (1971), Asanov (2002a; 2002b), Bartol'd (1996), Dzhumagulov (1990), Khasanov (1968), Nurbekov (1999), Valikhanov (1985) and Vinnikov (1956).

[98] For Abramzon, "feudal-patrimony" represented a feudal class society, which divided the people into patrimonial domains.

[99] *Zang* is a word which in Kyrgyz describes forms of "custom" or a kind of "law". *Nark* has several meanings in Kyrgyz. It can mean a "common right" or "custom", but it can also mean the "cost", "value" or "worth" of an object. I think in this particular case, the best interpretation of these words in the context of the quote is to highlight the duty of the custom in question, or the value of performing the custom. For a more detailed examination of the legal culture among the Kazakhs in the nineteenth century, which can inform our understanding of other nomadic groups, e.g. Kyrgyz, particularly regarding *nark*, see Virginia Martin (2001).

Moreover, Soviet researchers demonstrated that there were even hierarchical divisions between *manaps* (Figure 2.3)[100]:

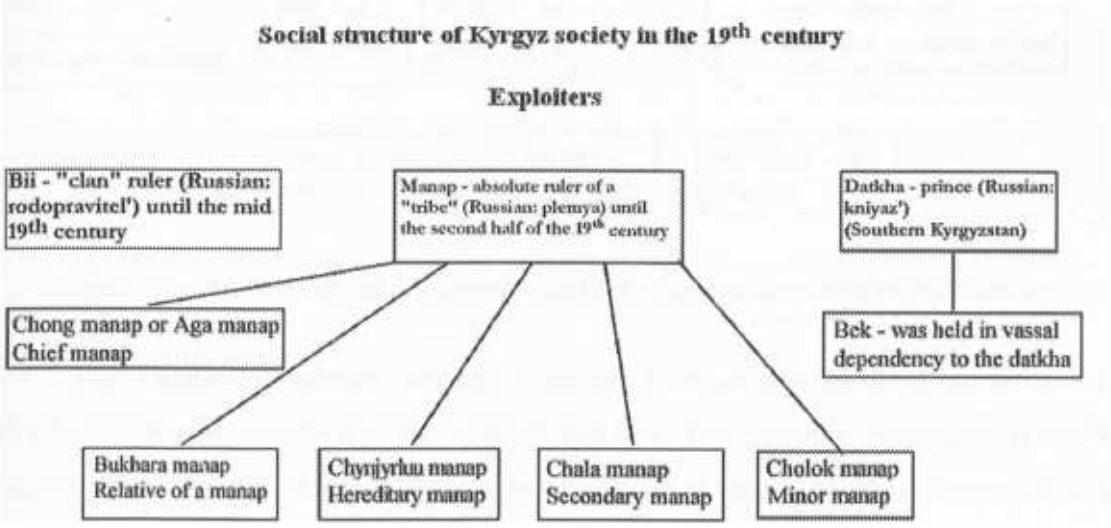


**Figure 2.3** – Hierarchical positions among the Kyrgyz elite in the nineteenth century

These *manaps* were all recognised as forming the elite among the Kyrgyz. However, Soviet research also found divisions among the "commoners" (Figure 2.4)[101]:

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[100] The diagram of the "exploiters" was translated from a Russian diagram at the Kochkor Regional History Museum, which I visited on 10 September 2003. See also Abramzon (Abramzon 1971: 159), Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen (1999), Nurbekov (1999: 38-40), Radloff (1863), Yudakhin (1999). *Datka* was a title given to members of the aristocracy of the Kokand Khanate.

[101] Again, this diagram of the "exploited" was translated from a Russian diagram at the Kochkor Regional History Museum, which I visited on 10 September 2003. See also Abramzon (1971: 159-160) and Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen (1999: 95-96). It should also be noted that for one category "*koichu*", in addition to the description that was given, this term translates from Kyrgyz as "sheep herder". Other classifications of the poor class were: *jylkychy* (Kyrgyz: herd driver) and *kongshu* (Kyrgyz: those that tended to the cattle of the *manaps* and *bais* during the movement between seasonal pastures) (Tolstov *et al.* 1963: 172). *Kongshu* usually were economically dependent on *manaps* and *bais* (Abramzon 1971: 160; Yudakhin 1999: 404).

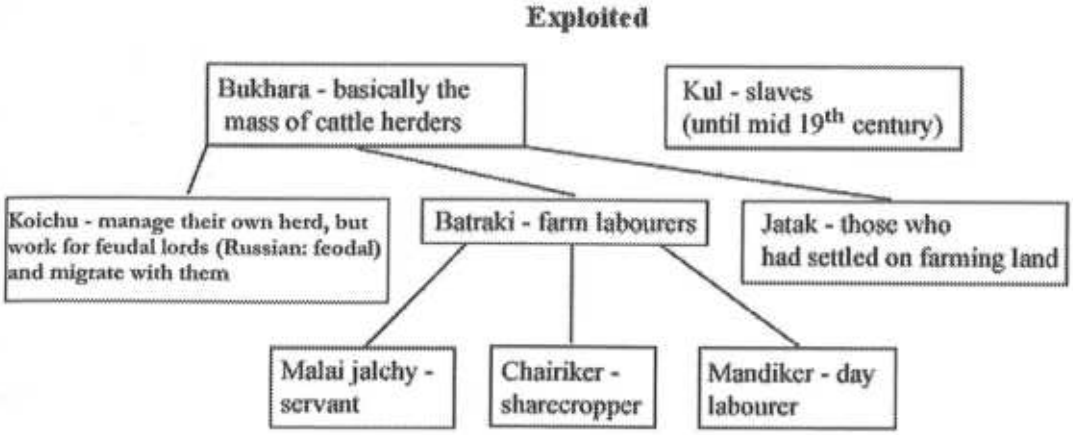


**Figure 2.4** – People identified as being exploited in Kyrgyz society in the nineteenth century

The increasing contact between Russians (settlers and colonial administrators) helped to change the position of the *manaps* and *biis*. For example, Abramzon notes that between the 1850s and 1870s, the time when the Kyrgyz were coming under the influence of Russian colonialism, the social organisation of *manaps* and *biis* transformed. With the introduction of Russian capitalism, the patrimonial and feudal relations in the Kyrgyz villages and herding groups began to fall apart. The *manaps* and *biis* regrouped: "The new type of manap – the manap-bai – appeared first of all in regions where they had been drawn towards relatively developed points in economic relations; brought elements of capitalistic exploitation into the system of feudal relations; and created a distinctive system of oppression of farm labourers and poor peasants." (Abramzon 1971: 171, and for a distinction between bais, see p. 160, n. 8).[102] Here again, the Kyrgyz elites have been presented as developing their positions through capitalist practices, which helped to create class elements for the Soviets to target.

These depictions of *manaps* and *biis* contribute to an understanding of the Kyrgyz as a "tribal" society and its organisation. In Soviet ethnography, the influence of Russian capitalism encouraged the development of stratified social relations. The Kyrgyz are still depicted as acting as corporate groups. This is an important distinction for contemporary "clan" politics (see Chapter 1). This is supported by Soviet archive records of the infiltration of *manap-bais* into the Party and displays of favouritism.

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[102] Israilova-Khar'ekhuzen (1999: 94-95) also notes that there was stratification among the *bais*.

### *The Soviet administration's view of* manap-bais[103]

The Soviets classified the *manap-bais* as: "a type of dealer, entrepreneur, and capitalist" (Abramzon 1971: 171), the problems they presented for the Party and possible solutions on how to overcome them. The late 1920s and the 1930s saw other state campaigns targeting rich land-owning peasant (Russian: *kulaks*). The *kulaks* were construed as a social class, which the Soviets could target and eradicate. Similarly, in the context of Kyrgyzstan, this class was extended to include *manaps* and *bais* and other "tribal" elements. The Soviets investigated and noted these social positions very carefully. In the state archive there are many documents from the Soviet era. In one document the Soviet administration defined a *manap* as:

> The so-called manap is a family, who since the time of their ancestors have been in one volost', settlement or encampment, [and] are the administrative managers of the economic and political life of the people of the encampment, settlement or volost'[104], where this one family continues until now to manage at their own discretion. There are manaps who are rich in cattle; and there are poor manaps who do not have any cattle whatsoever. Only one successor of a father, who is a powerful descendant, will go into the arena of public life. The rest [of the sons] remain faithful to him, but are a level with the remaining mass. They are called bad manaps. However, this category of manaps differs sharply from the common mass as they are relatives of manaps and are therefore not oppressed.[105]

In the eyes of the Soviet administration *bais* were another threat as they had about as much influence as the *manaps*. As Abramzon (1971: 171) described, the word had come to be used for a new class of rich people who benefited from the capitalist economy that the Russians brought with them during the Tsarist era. *Bais* are described in a similar way to *manaps*:

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[103] This section is comprised of findings among materials in the Central State Archives of the Kyrgyz Republic. The translations of the passages that follow were quite difficult to interpret mainly because of the obtuse grammar that was used. In my opinion these documents were written by Kyrgyz whose first language was not Russian and in some cases these documents were translated from Kyrgyz, so there must be some elements lost in translation. Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, a fascinating study could be conducted of the grammar and language usage in these documents in comparison with today and how ideas are expressed.

[104] A *volost'* is a Russian word which was used by Tsarist colonisers indicating the smallest administrative division of a territory.

[105] This is a reference from the Central State Archives of the Kyrgyz Republic. The citation is: f. 10, op. 1, d. 32, l. 35. I have kept the citation as it appears in the archive documents and all references appear in a separate bibliography.

> Strong [bais] are closely connected to those powerful manaps, who they are forced to obey and manage their economy by means of using exclusive wage labour 'malai'[106], but they personally do not touch the work of their economy. They help influential manaps with their own wealth. And [because of] all their expenses, flowing out in connection with this help, [and because] they are closely linked to manaps; they force the population to pay double. When they come to get their debts from the population, they always finish with an advantage on their side.[107]

From these two examples, we can see that this set of elites had been characterised as exploiters and had become the target for Soviet administrators in Kyrgyzstan.

The *manaps* and *bais* had so much influence among the Kyrgyz that the Soviet administration was concerned they might dominate local party organisation. Many documents examine the extent of the influence of *bais* and *manaps*, which were called *baistvo* and *manapstvo* in the documents.[108] In the run-up to the Party elections in 1927 a report was issued explaining the extent to which *bais* and *manaps* influenced not only local people, but also Party members.[109] In a report for the Kyrgyz *Oblast'* Party Conference, covering the period from November 1925 to December 1926, it was stated:

> [Those engaged in] manapstvo and baistvo [practices] started preparatory work for the re-election in the councils for some months prior to the official announcement of the re-election campaign. Long before the elections the question of the structure of the council was predetermined by means of persuasion, bribes, namys [Kyrgyz: shame] and violent fights. In this way, [those engaged in] manapstvo and baistvo found allies among some sections of communists, not only the rank-and-file, but for example such "responsible" [Russian: "*otvetstvennyi*"] people, like the responsible secretary of the Kyrgyz oblast' committee [Kyrgyobkoma] Babakhanov, like the member of presidium Oblast' executive committee [Oblispolkoma] Khudaikulov, like the responsible secretary Karakolskii district committee [okruzhkoma] Sukhanov, etc. It seems it enough (though the list can be increased considerably) to judge the difficulty of the work in general, and in particular on re-elections in the Soviet.[110]

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[106] A *malai* is a Kyrgyz word which refers to a farm labourer or a hired worker, and often connotes a person who is a domestic servant (Abramzon 1971: 160; Yudakhin 1999: 513).

[107] f. 10, op. 1, d. 32, l. 35

[108] *Baistvo* was the Russian term used to describe the social position and privileges associated with being a *bai*. Similarly, *manapstvo* was the term used to describe the social position and privileges associated with being a *manap*.

[109] Such reports often contained much information about the people, including their *rod*, e.g. f. 10, op. 1, d. 32, l. 2-8 and f. 10, op. 1, d. 33, l. 17-23.

[110] f. 10, op. 1, d. 74, l. 111

In a tone of anxiety, another 1926 report stated: "Under the guise of an authority (an agent, or a farm labourer, or even a communist), bais and manaps are already involved in the Soviet and Party networks".[111]

Reports by the Soviet administration noted further frustration with those *manaps* and *bais* who had become Party members. In a "Draft resolution by the Central Committee Bureau on the report on the investigation of Kyrgyz organisation" in 1926, point Number 5 states the problem clearly:

> [...] the presence of internal stratification within the party organization, and confrontation between different factions within the party, this situation is a consequence of the influence of communists who were originally from bai and manap groups, struggling between themselves for authority and the possibility of exploitation of the labour population.[112]

In the same report Party members were warned and given instructions on stopping the influence of *manaps* and *bais* in society and again in the Party ranks. Party members were told:

> 2) To lead a campaign of explanation to the local population of the harm, especially about those remains of social customs used by bais and manaps for the exploitation and enslavement of the poor class. In particular, it is necessary to expose the bai and manap elements which practice the robbery of the poor and middle classes under the guise of "hospitality". The Communist Party organisation should also lead a resolute struggle against the widely practised bribery which is presented in the form of "gifts" to officials.[113]

During this time, the Communist Party also had to contend with local opposition groups and individuals who they deemed to be anti-communist and reactionary. This reveals a moment in the history of the expansion of the Communist Party in Kyrgyzstan where there were struggles between groups within the Party. In particular, one group was the focus of a heavy suppression. The "*Tridtsatki*" or "The Thirty", a group of thirty Kyrgyz workers of the *Oblast'* Committee and the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), were opposed the Communist

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[111] f. 10, op. 1, d. 30, l. 8
[112] f. 10, op. 1, d. 38, l. 54
[113] f. 10, op. 1, d. 38, l. 56

dictatorship. In the summer of 1925 the *Tridtsatki* openly criticised the direction of the Communist Party in an address to the Central Committee Party, the Central Asian Bureau, the Nationalities Council of the USSR and the Kyrgyz *Oblast'* Committee parties (see Dzhumanaliev 2002; and Kurmanov 1997).[114] In archival documents, biographies (including place of birth, previous occupations and activities, and even *rod*) were written about each of the members of the *Tridtsatki*. The investigation immediately draws connections with the *Tridtsatki* and possible "*manap* and *bai* elements".

In the investigations, two men came under intense scrutiny from the Soviet administration: Sadykov and Khudaikulov. Sadykov was a member of the Communist Party (although he had been excluded four times from it). He was one of the original *Tridtsatki*, and even more damagingly, he had fought with the Tsarist troops in 1917 against the Soviets. He was described as a strong *manap* from the Solto *plemya*. Khudaikulov was another Party member who was also seen as a counter-revolutionary who conspired with others in the Party to protect fellow *bais* and *manaps*.

The followers of Sadykov and Khudaikulov, known as Sadykovshchina and Khudaikulovshchina, respectively; were also described in the archive documents. For example: "A Sadykovshchin has intellectual, nationalist and bourgeois trends, [who also] has the tendency to penetrate our party, [and who] tries to lead our party on a course against the interests of the [...] working public".[115] The followers of Khudaikulov were described as: "A Khudaikulovshchin is also a [member of an] anti-party group, which masquerades as farm labourers, but they are against the labouring public in the interests of baistvo and manapstvo".[116] These reports supported the view of corporate groups still present among the Kyrgyz, and having broken into the Party ranks. For political scientists such as Collins, such descriptions are a clear demonstration of the "clan" factionalism within the native cadre, which eventually became the leaders in independence. While there may have been factions, I argue that these were strategically organised groups, drawing on a number of various identities.

The Soviet administration also implemented a number of social and economic reforms which were partly directed towards eliminating any "classes" in the society. For

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[114] An official investigation into the *Tridtsatki* can also be found in the archive documents: f. 10, op. 1, d. 27, l. 46-79. Further descriptions of *Tridtsatki* members can be found in f.10, op. 1, d. 46, l. 153-155 and f.10, op. 1, d. 143.

[115] f. 10, op. 1, d. 42, l. 9-10

[116] f. 10, op. 1, d. 42, l. 10

example, to stop the influence these opposition groups and other *bais* and *manaps* could have on the Party, Soviet administrators devised a number of solutions. Party members discussed ways of uniting the poor and middle classes against the *bais* and *manaps* in order to reduce their position in society. Descriptions and programmes were to be put into action among the working class. One report on this topic read as such:

> The malicious manaps, bais and atkaminery [Kyrgyz: strangers masquerading as Soviet activists][117], are keeping to their [groups], and under their influence only the middle class will be punished ruthlessly. In order to fulfil this task [of liquidation], it is necessary to lead a [dissemination campaign] among poor and middle class men, by way of conducting [...] organisational and propagandist works verbally and through the press about the harm of manaps and others [...]. When the poor and middle classes of encampments, settlements and volosts can stand against their oppressive, malicious manaps and bais, only then is their unification against their enemies possible.[118]

Plans were also created for a publishing campaign to criticise *manaps* and *bais*. This was facilitated by a low publishing cost for books which encouraged people to read and educate themselves (and spread the Russian language), and helped to accelerate the dissemination of Soviet propaganda.[119]

Additionally, administrators saw collectivization as an effective method for combating the influence of *manaps* and *bais* and dissolving *plemya* and *rod*. Collectivization in Kyrgyzstan began in 1928 and was aimed at "[...] bringing together small, mainly subsistence farmers and sheepherders, eliminating wealthy feudal lords and landlords (*manaps* and *bais*) and sedentarization of pastoral nomads as well as establishing the Soviet local administration and Soviet political system in the rural areas of the republic" (Abazov 2004: 106). A report in 1930 on issues related with collectivization outlined important areas of attention. Point 7 stressed: "The liquidation of kulakchestvo as a class is only completed in areas of continuous collectivization, and in the remaining areas is carried out by a policy of severe restriction and supplanting the tendencies of the exploiters [engaged in] kulakchestvo and baistvo".[120] Another Communist Party report in 1931 stated the extent of the struggle of collectivization

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[117] *Atkaminery* have also been described as people engaged in election propaganda (Kyshtobaev 2004).
[118] f. 10, op. 1, d. 32, l. 38-39
[119] Benedict Anderson (1983) has noted the effects that "print capitalism" has had on building nationalism. In this context, perhaps it is better to describe this as "print state-socialism".
[120] f. 10, op. 1, d. 244, l. 99

against "feudal" elements: "On the basis of continuing collectivization we are carrying out the liquidation of kulaks, bais and manaps as a class; to root out the rest at the centre of capitalism, [and to] liquidate the rest of the feudal-patrimonial ways".[121] However, more recent reports have argued that the collectivization helped to maintain *plemya* and *rod* groupings (Collins 2006; Yoshida 2005).

In a number of former *kolkhoz* that I visited, I did not find sufficient evidence to suggest that collectivization preserved *plemya* and *rod*. In several places in Naryn *oblast'* I was told that the *kolkhozes* were created from two or three villages. There was no suggestion that people lived in different sections of the *kolkhoz* depending on the *rod*. The Soviet mixed people together in an attempt to displace any *plemya* or *rod* identity. In some places I was told that a local leader was appointed as *kolkhoz* manager. However, since many *kolkhoz* were made up of two or more villages, it is unlikely that any kind of corporate model would have been preserved. Numerous conversations had confirmed this view. In a former *kolkhoz*, I met Erkin, a dentist and respected *sanjyrachi* (Kyrgyz: a specialist on genealogical descent and the history of particular *rod* and *plemya*). One day over tea, I asked him whether people from the same *rod* had been gathered into the same *kolkhoz*, therefore preserving its formation. He emphatically stated: "A kolkhoz bears no relation *rod* and *plemya*, none whatsoever". A similar answer was given to me by an *aksakal*, Arstanbek Dyikanov. In our discussions, he noted that a *kolkhoz* was not based on *plemya* or *rod*, they were made up of mixed groups of people. He stated, any suggestion that they were based on these categories was "absolutely not correct".

The Soviet administration continued to pay close attention to the influence of *manaps* and *biis* in Kyrgyzstan. In 1934 the head of the Kyrgyz *Oblast'* Committee Party, Belotskii, made a report in which he claimed: "In the Kyrgyz Communist party organization there continues to be influence of feudal-patrimonial remains and group struggle that impedes the bolshevization of the Kyrgyz party organisation".[122] He focused on a number of issues, including Party member Jusup Abdrakhmanov, who had successfully advocated for the establishment of a Kyrgyz Republic within the Soviet Union. Abdrakhmanov was accused of maintaining connections with *manaps* and *bais*. Furthermore, Belotskii argued that *plemennoi* (Russian: "tribal") elements were still active in Party members' regions in Kyrgyzstan, suggesting that they had not done

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[121] f. 10, op. 1, d. 308, l. 43
[122] f. 10, op. 1, d. 527, l. 108

against "feudal" elements: "On the basis of continuing collectivization we are carrying out the liquidation of kulaks, bais and manaps as a class; to root out the rest at the centre of capitalism, [and to] liquidate the rest of the feudal-patrimonial ways".[121] However, more recent reports have argued that the collectivization helped to maintain *plemya* and *rod* groupings (Collins 2006; Yoshida 2005).

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[121] f. 10, op. 1, d. 308, l. 43
[122] f. 10, op. 1, d. 527, l. 108

enough to eradicate the feudal elements.[123] This caused many Kyrgyz Party members to respond quickly to his report in the following days. One was Tokbaev who claimed: "On the basis of collectivization we have beaten kulaks, bais and manaps in Kyrgyzstan, but have not yet finished. All our actions, which will be directed towards the improvement of the position of the working mass, on strengthening the collective farms, [which] will be resisted by kulaks, manaps and bais".[124] In another statement regarding Belotskii's report, Ail'chinov reported on fellow Party member Chonbashev[125], who he claimed was guilty of maintaining ties with *bais* and *manaps*:

> Comrade Chonbashev was sent on business to the Karakol'skii area to conduct important political work. He then carried out his old policy – protected the bais and manaps, was engaged in counter-revolutionary affairs, he protected his brother and other class enemies from eviction out of Kyrgyzstan; and when the rural party activists insisted on the eviction of bais, Chonbashev persecuted the rural party activists and dismissed party activist workers. Chonbashev has not told the party about this.[126]

These examples demonstrate the attempt by the Communist Party and its members to transform Kyrgyz society from what they perceived as a society with feudal characteristics through social evolutionary stages to socialism. While the Kyrgyz never fully experienced the economic changes associated with capitalism, Soviet social sciences did define Kyrgyz national identity as having traces of capitalist influence. Nevertheless, the Party actively sought to limit the influence of *manaps*, *biis* or Party members with suspected feudal or patrimonial relations during the formation of a Kyrgyz identity in connection with socialist ideology. These views have contributed to the current view of "tribalism" in Kyrgyz politics.

In 1937, G. G. Kuranov, a Party member, compiled a number of archive documents into a book to demonstrate the transformation of Kyrgyz society from before the Soviet revolution, which dealt with a number of aspects from agriculture, internal republic divisions, and Party organisation. This was done in order to show the ways in

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[123] f. 10, op. 1, d. 527, l. 108-111

[124] f. 10, op. 1, d. 527, l. 12

[125] This transliteration is in keeping with the spelling of the name in Cyrillic. However, it would follow Kyrgyz grammar more closely for this name to be written as "Chongbashev". The difference in spellings may be due to the continued development of the Kyrgyz Cyrillic alphabet at that time.

[126] f. 10, op. 1, d. 527, l. 76. Without confirmation of first and patronymic names it is not clear, but this may also be the same Chonbashev that was investigated in earlier archive material (f. 10, op. 1, d. 27, l. 46-79) due to his connections with the *Tridtsatki*.

which both Lenin and Stalin "[...] personally helped and supervised" the success of socialism in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, he praised the Soviet influence for liberating the people from their colonial, feudal and patriarchal servitude: "The great October socialist revolution has freed the Kyrgyz people from the severe oppression of Russian autocracy, bourgeoisie, kulaks, bais and manaps" (Kuranov 1937: 3). These, of course, were not sensitive archive documents, but displayed an apparent victory of the Soviet administration in eradicating *bai* and *manap* elements in Kyrgyz society. Furthermore, not only had the leaders been weakened, their *plemya* and *rod* groups had been displaced and mixed through collectivization and other social engineering projects.

***The dissolution of a discursive reality***

The Soviet accounts outline the perception of and struggle against patriarchal and "tribal" elements in Kyrgyz society. This view constituted an official discourse which defined the characteristics of society based on an evolutionist approach to social development. Subsequently, theoretical discussions developed around these main ideas. The effect of this discourse continues to shape interpretations of the Kyrgyz and other nomadic societies in the former Soviet Union.

In the many interviews I conducted, I became aware that people were not describing formal groups, but they were discussing various identities imagined through their personal ancestors. This was clearly illustrated in my meetings with Adylbek, an old *aksakal*. In our lengthy conversations he described the history of his *rod* and the influence of the Soviet era. He was not speaking about the adaptation of formal groups to different political regimes, but that the idea of relatedness had been maintained through these concepts. The group itself was an elaboration of particular ideological models, but the concepts of *rod* and *plemya* have continued these categories are important ways of constructing relatedness. In other words, the Soviets created groups out of concepts of relatedness. Although they were successful in targeting and implementing policies against these groups, the identities remained as they were not based upon the formal organisations. In the following chapter I explore this construction of relatedness further by focusing on the role of genealogy.

which both Lenin and Stalin "[...] personally helped and supervised" the success of socialism in Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, he praised the Soviet influence for liberating the people from their colonial, feudal and patriarchal servitude: "The great October socialist revolution has freed the Kyrgyz people from the severe oppression of Russian autocracy, bourgeoisie, kulaks, bais and manaps" (Kuranov 1937: 3). These, of course, were not sensitive archive documents, but displayed an apparent victory of the Soviet administration in eradicating *bai* and *manap* elements in Kyrgyz society. Furthermore, not only had the leaders been weakened, their *plemya* and *rod* groups had been displaced and mixed through collectivization and other social engineering projects.

***The dissolution of a discursive reality***

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*CHAPTER 3*

# Identity, History and Genealogical Imagination: The Construction of Relatedness

In this chapter, I argue that genealogical conceptions of descent provide a way to imagine the construction of kinship relations which overcomes the evolutionist assumptions of previous theories. My analysis also describes the oscillations between different scales of representation. Here, I use scale to refer to conceptualisations of various levels of representation; for example, how a genealogy, can refer to (personal) patrilineal descent, but can also be manipulated to underline connections between other people who share more distant ancestors on an inter-regional or even national level. Scale concerns the extent of inclusiveness and exclusiveness of their representations and the ways in which they are deployed.[127]

Connected to this issue of scale is the deployment of temporality. The meaning and representation of time on various scales describes many experiences between the citizens and the state. Caroline Humphrey (1992) has related this to what she describes as the "deep past". In her examination of the Mongolian government's establishment of moral authority after the fall of socialism, Humphrey notes that the "deep past" is a reified historical era which is used to inspire the nation in order to overcome the discontinuity with the recent (Soviet) past. She notes that there are two types of enactments through which people refer to the past: historical mimicry and embodiment. Historical mimicry is the attempt to reproduce events, i.e. through re-enactments or commemorative ceremonies, which demonstrate the "symbolic capacity" for the present and future of the nation. Embodiment refers to the "self-identification" of people or people's actions with those of the past. Humphrey summarises these points as follows:

> The first mimics facts and appearances from a time attributed with greatness and genuineness, but constructs the likeness as an analogy,

[127] My use of scale is separate from that of Marilyn Strathern (1999), who examines how actions and mobility are cast on different scales. In short, she notes that in an era when increasing technology and mobility are enabling us to do more, we seem to be reproducing the same social habits. My concern, however, is to stress different ways people frame their experiences, and yet how people imagine they are tied to one another.

> which allows the 'copy' to symbolise an idea about the present and future. The second transforms present intuitive haphazard activity into 'sacred actions' by giving them an identity as bearers of an idea, such that, whatever they are, these actions are held to represent the idea in just the same way as it was done in the past (Humphrey 1992: 387).

Although these can be distinguished as separate ways of evoking a "deep past" they are often combined in invented traditions. This is particularly evident through the use and representations of genealogy. In the case of Mongolia and other former Soviet regions, temporality is collapsed; the chronological timeline is usurped by social amnesia and political objectives. Temporality is a resource and past events can be made directly relevant to current circumstances. As Rubie S. Watson has argued: "In creating shared memories we construct visions of the past rather than chronologies. Time itself may be collapsed or made inconsequential as the memory of visions are evoked, shared, transmitted, and continuously altered—while remaining ostensibly the same" (Watson 1994: 9). As I will argue in Chapters 4 and 5, scales of meaning and temporality are demonstrated through the memories of ancestors, evoked by the erection of monuments in their honour as part of the nation-building campaign.

Spatiality entails another important notion of scale. Monuments transform public space, reflecting narratives linked to local and broader, national ideas and issues. For example, local monuments can easily be connected to nation-building campaigns, while public monuments in the centre of Bishkek can also have regional or even personal meanings. The ancestors represented in monuments and narratives also connect groups of people that are spread out over the country. These projections of scale demonstrate ways in which people create connections with each other between different sets of relations, e.g. local and national.[128] For example, Janyl Abdyldabek kyzy, a civil servant in Bishkek, unveiled a statue to her ancestors in her home village (see Chapter 5). This not only had local importance but, she argued, was an attempt to teach Kyrgyz people about their past and ancestry.

Together with these notions of scale, I focus on narratives of genealogy in Kyrgyzstan. I will begin this chapter by returning to Moteuv's tirade against the editors and publishers of the book which translated the name of his *plemya*, Sayak, as "vagabond". His articles provide an opportunity to understand kinship as constituted by genealogy, and in relation to individual and broader scales of reference. I term this notion

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[128] I will return to the theme of spatiality and temporality in Chapter 5.

of kinship *genealogical imagination* – relatedness constructed through the dialectic between personal and collective forms of memory and representations of history, and expressed through various deployments of scale (temporality, spatiality, local and national, etc.) and (politicised) formations of descent. Memory refers to the act of remembrance, of people, places, etc., and the commemoration of their images and ideals; but is cast through different filters of historical representation. The forms of memory elaborated in the genealogical imagination are aided by two mnemonic devices – *jeti ata* (Kyrgyz: a person's seven patrilineal ancestors, literally "seven fathers"), and *sanjyra* (Kyrgyz: genealogical information combined with an account of the past). These concepts also constitute forms of genealogical knowledge, charters of shared descent. A general awareness of these charters contributes to a shared assumption as to the significance of the image of the ancestors to broader understandings of their ethnic identity.

The first part of the chapter examines the issue of memory. I illustrate ethnographic examples from popular Kyrgyz literary sources and the work of contemporary *sanjyrachi* (Kyrgyz: specialists on genealogical descent and the history of particular *rod* and *plemya*) that engage with this theme. Their descriptions of the importance of genealogy to people's lives suggest that it is an essential aspect of identity. I examine this through two ethnographic accounts of people who are currently collecting information on *sanjyra*. Kalen Jetimishbaev has established his own *sanjyra* museum, and Marat Chanachev is creating an Internet resource to assist people in exploring their genealogies. Both of these men are united in their desire to underline the importance of genealogies for the Kyrgyz people. Through these examples, I employ the notion of relatedness, based on the work of Janet Carsten (2000a), to analyse the construction of kinship relations in the past and present.

Nevertheless, many people do not know much about their *jeti ata* or their *sanjyra*. This was made clear by Arstanbek Dyikanov, an *akasakal* in Naryn, whom I met with to discuss his *sanjyra* and *jeti ata*. We stopped when we were served dinner. We cleared his files of genealogies away and laid the *dostorkon* (Kyrgyz: tablecloth). As we ate our fried potatoes, Arstanbek was embarrassed and apologised for not serving meat with the potatoes, explaining that they did not have enough money to buy meat, and they were not expecting visitors. He said that his *rod* and *plemya* are not very important to him. During this time, when the economy is weak, salaries are months in arrears, and there is little employment, he said that he needed people for support (Kyrgyz: *koldoo*), whoever they

are. *Rod* and *plemya* are not corporate groups which can support its members; they are categories of genealogical relatedness. The acute economic shortages in Kyrgyzstan have forced many to create various networks to manage during this difficult time.

The second part of the chapter analyses the use of history and its relation to memory. Relatedness created through genealogical imagination involves not just an interaction between different forms of memory, but is framed by the hegemony of certain historical representations. As Edward Said has argued: "the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain" (Said 2000: 179). In the post-Soviet era there have been continuous attempts by President Akaev to orientate memories of historical figures and past events to support the construction of a national identity. One example of the government's construction of national history and its influence on memory is elaborated through such historical figures as Lenin. Not only does Lenin occupy a place in the popular consciousness, but is articulated through Soviet forms of historiography (a topic I will examine in Chapters 4 and 5). I discuss the reactions to the removal of the Lenin statue in central Bishkek which leads into a more in-depth examination of the construction of a Kyrgyz history in the following chapters. The memories of "ancestral" figures, including Lenin, are also reflected in an academic discussion of "Kyrgyz mentality" by academics. In the official representation, coherent forms of local and national identities are supported by discussions of Kyrgyz mentality which is presented as a subconscious knowledge on which identity is based, and in academic discussions, history is used to fill the gaps that may be present in memory.

This chapter opens a larger discussion on the discursive construction of a "Kyrgyz" people united through their common descent from a set of officially recognised ancestors, which will be explored over the next three chapters. I suggest that there are at least two scales on which people project notions of genealogy. In this chapter, I provide an account of one scale in which personal or local conceptions of common descent appear. In the remaining chapters, I explore another scale, which analyses how concepts of genealogical connectedness are employed to construct a nation out of "related" people. The local and the national are not polar opposites, but are two scales on which people project their experiences. They are linked to one another and in many cases create a possibility within narratives for each other's reproduction. However, let us now return to

Motuev's narrative to examine the ways in which memories of ancestors are evoked and the importance they lend to the constructions of *plemya* and *rod*.

### *Knowing your* plemya

In the previous chapter, I argued that Motuev's defence of his *plemya*'s dignity and reputation provided an insight into the evolutionist conception of development that lies behind Tsarist, Soviet and some Western conceptions of kinship and how they have shaped interpretations of social organisation. Here, I focus on several more articles that Motuev wrote about his *plemya* and Kyrgyz history. In his later articles, he continued his tirade against the editors and publishers of the book which contained an offensive translation of his *plemya* name. However, in this series of articles, we are presented with a more detailed understanding of Motuev's view of his *plemya*, and his claims that his ancestors made an important contribution to the formation of "Kyrgyz" territory and identity.

In his third article, Motuev (2003d) highlighted how the Sayaks have historically played a major role in Kyrgyz politics and society. Evidence of this, he remarked, was that many street names that were changed after the fall of the Soviet Union have been renamed after prominent Sayaks.[129] Another example he cited was over half of the banknotes of the Kyrgyz currency, the som, bore portraits of Sayak members. The five som note bears the portrait of Bürüsara Beishenalieva (1926-1973), a highly renowned ballerina. On the ten som note is Kasym Tynystanov (1901-1938), a linguist, poet and political activist who was killed during Stalin's purges for alleged anti-communist activities. On the twenty som note is Togolok Moldo (1860-1942), a great poet.[130] The one hundred som note has a portrait of Toktogul Satylgan uulu (1864-1933), who was a very talented *komuz* player.[131] On the five hundred som note is Sayakbai Karalaev (1894-1970), considered one of the finest and most eloquent *manaschis* (Kyrgyz: those who

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[129] Since independence in 1991, the government renamed a number of streets in Bishkek. This was a trend that was repeated throughout the former Soviet states. Although some of the new names are used, some are unknown as the residents still prefer to use the old Soviet names.

[130] Togolok Moldo is also known as Baiymbek Abdrakman uulu. "Moldo" is a Kyrgyz word meaning an "educated person" or "literate". It is also the Kyrgyz term for an Islamic "mulla" or "imam". In this case, it is possible that its meaning is close to what Yudakhin described as: "A word, [used] before the [Russian] revolution, as a component of literacy in men's names in Arabic (which shows the weak distribution of literacy among the Kyrgyz at that time)" (Yudakhin 1999: 530).

[131] *Komuz* is a Kyrgyz word referring to a small, three-stringed guitar often used as an accompaniment during folk songs.

recite the epic poem *Manas*). He had his version of the epic recorded, but later had it denounced amid accusations that it contained anti-communist elements.[132]

Motuev also reminded the readers that Jusup Abdrakhmanov (1901-1938), another famous Sayak, was made the first Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars from 1927-1933, after vigorously arguing for the establishment of the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Kyrgyz ASSR).[133] By recalling the importance of Abdrakhmanov to Kyrgyz statehood, Motuev made a strong critique of the official presentation of history, as Abdrakhmanov did not receive the same recognition through state celebrations or the dedication of monuments that other "national" ancestors had received. This was a very provocative remark to make especially during the national celebration of "2,200 Years of Kyrgyz Statehood". Although this seemed a minority view, according to the Kyrgyz I knew, many praised Abdrakhmanov's efforts. In short, Motuev stressed that without "the Sayaks" there might be no modern-day Kyrgyzstan.

Motuev was attempting to establish his own political career by attacking Akaev and strategically deploying the notion of his own *plemya* and gaining support through it. Motuev made further attacks. He acrimoniously suggested that if the Sham publishing house wished to provide such a rude translation of name "Sayak", then perhaps he could help in the translation of a few other Kyrgyz *plemya* names. His rough translations were: Sarybagysh (red elk), Karabagysh (black elk), Saruu (yellow venom), Azyk (food), Cherik (Chinese frontier guard), Sart (red dog), Boston (grey fur). These are by no means accurate definitions that people from these *plemya* would like to have attributed to them, but Motuev wanted to highlight the misconceptions that can arise when translating such names from Kyrgyz to Russian.

Finally, Motuev again defended his position as "leader of the Sayak" and stated that he was invited to represent his *plemya* by the "Sayak elite". He concluded his article

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[132] The other som notes which are not mentioned are the one som note with a portrait of Abdylas Maldybaev (1906-1978) – a composer; the fifty som note with Kurmanjan *datka* (or Kurmanjan Mamatbai kyzy) (1811-1907) – a dignified and strong leader of the southern Kyrgyz in the Alai region, under the influence of the Kokand Khanate, and at the time of the Russian tsarist colonisation spread into the region; the two hundred som note has Alykul Osmonov (1915-1950) – a poet; and the one thousand som note with Jusup Balasagyn (11th century) – who wrote *Kutadgu Bilig* in 1069. While I am uncertain precisely which *plemya* these people are said to have belonged to, we should question whether we can (or should) accurately attribute *plemya* identities to certain figures, such as Balasagyn (see Chapter 4), who is claimed by a number of different ethnic groups, and if they are attributed to certain *plemya* what this would mean. For more detailed biographies on all these people, please see Abazov (2004), Tolstov *et al.* (1963) and Urstanbekov and Choroev (1990).

[133] In 1938, after years of speculation between Party members, Abdrakhmanov was accused of anti-communist activities and executed.

by stating: "By right I bear the rank of leader [Russian: *lider*] and I shall struggle to the end for the honour of my plemya" (Motuev 2003d: 8).

Although no letters of complaint were published in the newspaper, Motuev was forced to issue a direct apology in his next article because of his crude translations. However, he only apologised to some of his readers, foremost to the Saruu *plemya*, which he characterises as a "broad-shouldered people" (Russian: *narod plechistyi*): "from the leaders of the Saruu tribe I ask for your apology, and I sincerely admire this proud, courageous, independent [and] heroic Kyrgyz plemya" (Motuev 2003c: 3). Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that this apology comes at the end of his short article. At the beginning he acknowledges that while some were offended, his rough translations into Russian were only to demonstrate that they can be offensive, and was not intended to cause any injury to other Kyrgyz *plemya*.

He continued by extolling the virtues of the Saruu *plemya*, but only after he has first recounted the previous accomplishments and victories of the Sayak:

> [...] the militant Sayak, led by Tailak baatyr, dispersed the Kokand regime from northern Kyrgyzstan, and also did not allow the Chinese to come near (for example, they crushed the campaign of the Chinese general Bayan batu [who was moving towards] Kyrgyz land), and the Kalmyks. [T]he Aksy people, from which the majority of inhabitants are made up of [members] of the Saruu tribe, conducted military campaigns against Kokand twice and replaced the khanate, putting there an administrator from their own people. So from all the Kyrgyz plemya the most militant and freedom-loving are the Sayak and the Saruu (Motuev 2003c: 3).[134]

In this article, Moteuv argued that the Sayak and Saruu are two marginalised *plemya*. Furthermore, he stressed how each are engaged in a struggle with the government.

Motuev's commentary reflected further political criticism. While he recounted the valiant military campaigns of the Saruu against the Kokand Khanate, Motuev also alluded to a contemporary struggle. By highlighting the Saruu from Aksy, he recalled the events of the "Aksy tragedy" (see Chapter 1). At the time this article was published, people from Aksy continued to demand justice for the death of six demonstrators the previous year. Although this may appear to be a poorly written apology, it is actually another attempt to establish political connections by appealing to a distinct, historically-

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[134] Although Moteuv does not make any specific reference to it, the description given here may also allude to the Kyrgyz land that was transferred to China.

minded corporate idea of *plemya*. In short, Motuev's apology was an appeal for the "Sayak" and "Saruu" to join in opposition against the government by establishing a base of support through their *plemya*.

Representations of *plemya* and *rod* are deployed for particular purposes. Motuev has touched upon historical events and people that are important to the constitution and dignity of the *plemya*. It must be stressed that Motuev's views are polemical and that he attempted to establish "moral authority", in Humphrey's (1992) terms, through his evocation of the "deep past". Not everyone takes their *plemya* and *rod* identities so seriously; they do not represent practical relationships through which they can seek assistance. Nevertheless, many of my friends and colleagues do have an awareness of their *plemya* and *rod*. This awareness can be understood through: *jeti ata* and *sanjyra*.

***Genealogical imagination***

*Jeti ata* (Kyrgyz: a person's seven patrilineal ancestors, literally "seven fathers") represent personal genealogies. Many Kyrgyz that I spoke with stressed that, especially before the Russian colonisation of Central Asia, knowledge of the *jeti ata* was quite important, which Motuev has also expressed (see Chapter 2). For example, as I sat with Kalen Jetimishbaev, the director of his own genealogy museum, discussing his work, he told me that *jeti ata* were "very valuable". He said, even at his advanced age, he felt very strongly that it was important to continue the deeds of his ancestors, and to defend their image and convey their ideas and actions to people today. In his opinion, the knowledge of the ancestors is the vital to the identity as a Kyrgyz person.

One reason some consider it important to know their *jeti ata* relates to marriage proscriptions. I was told on a number of occasions by village elders that a bride and groom had to be separated by seven generations in order to marry.[135] A bride or groom would have to prove that they do not share any of their seven forefathers with the prospective spouse. In the village of Kyzmatchy, Esenbai Medetbekov showed me his personal records of his *plemya*, Tynymseiit. He said that couples would come to meet him to make sure that their *jeti ata* do not coincide before they were to get married. He

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[135] Grodekov (1889: 27-28) remarks on these marriage proscriptions, but notes that it is not so strict. He quotes Mulla Asan, who states that: "formerly between the Karakirgiz, like the Kirgiz, they took a bride from the seventh generation. Now they take from the third, they have even begun to take from the second generation, as according to the Shariat. In this, manaps and the simple people do not differ."

stated that he had been keeping genealogical records and advising couples on this for many years, even during the Soviet period, but had not discussed it at that time.

These personal genealogies, however, are enmeshed in a much broader set of genealogical relationships which are recounted through a *sanjyra* (Kyrgyz: genealogical information combined with an account of the past). *Sanjyra* is described in Chüi *oblast'* encyclopaedia as: "The oral history of Kyrgyz people, in which they have found a reflection of the legend about the source of the people and their customs" (Zakirov 1994: 657). In other words, this is a description of the genealogy and history of such categories as *rod*, *plemya*, several *plemya*, or even of the whole Kyrgyz people. Furthermore, *sanjyra* is regarded by *sanjyrachi* as an ethnic trait. It is important to note that while the Soviets targeted the categories of *plemya* and *rod* as examples of patriarchal relations in their campaign against "tribal" social customs, the genealogical information which constructed them did not come under the same scrutiny. These genealogical and historical records do not determine people's identities. It does, however, give them an awareness of their social customs and family background.

Historically, there have been several depictions of Kyrgyz *sanjyra*. In the sixteenth century, Saif ad-din ibn damullo Shakh Abbas Aksiketi and his son Nurmukhammed (1996) compiled a document which contained some information about the Kyrgyz. This was a predominantly a history of the religious elders, elites and places of the Fergana Valley. One of the earliest genealogies written by a Kyrgyz was in 1913 by Osmonaaly Sydykov, who wrote a *sanjyra* in Arabic script. Today it has been translated into Kyrgyz Cyrillic script (Sydykov 1990). Many other books have been published examining individual *plemya* and *rod* (see Kaziev 2000, who examines the Bugu plemya). Some books examine much larger categories, for example, the *plemya* and *rod* in southern Kyrgyzstan (Törökan uulu 1995b).[136]

Some are pocket-size booklets of *sanjyras* containing information on many of the Kyrgyz *plemya*, which people have started to use as quick reference guides, for example Turdubai Umar uulu's (1991) pamphlet. In villages where I enquired about *plemya* and *rod*, people often double-checked their genealogies with these books. In the village of Tashtak, my assistant Bakyt and I met with Mirlan on a number of occasions. He had hurt his back during work and resting at home. We spoke with him often about his *rod*

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[136] Thomas Voorter (1999) has also written about *sanjyras* in Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s. While his work does not explore many issues in great detail, he provides an overview, see: http://www2.fmg.uva.nl/asia/webdocumentary/heroes/index2.htm (accessed 18 July 2006).

and *plemya*. He had just as many questions as we did. We continually debated ancestors and genealogical descent. This was a regular experience in many places that I visited in Kyrgyzstan. People may not have known much about their ancestry, but they were often interested to learn more. In this context, it could be argued that this kind of social memory performs a type of "commemorative ceremony", to draw on Paul Connerton's (1989) work, of the relations they are said to represent. Here, I am referring to the performative aspect of examining texts and genealogical charts, and the lengthy discussions people have over them, reminding people of their identities.

These two charters – *jeti ata* and *sanjyra* – represent mnemonic devices and forms of genealogical knowledge. They are constitutive elements of what I term *genealogical imagination*. This term was previously used by Andrew Shryock (1997), based on his fieldwork in Jordan. He examines local attempts by Bedouin "tribes" to document and publish histories that were, until recently, orally transmitted, and which also have significant political implications. Shryock notes that a couple of Bedouin "clans" stated that their "genealogical knowledge was not simply a model of social topography, it was a way of articulating past and present, a way of transmitting and talking about history" (Shryock 1997: 22). In Shryock's discussion about the way in which the Bedouin describe their history, he notes that "genealogical and nationalist images of community are merging to form new modes of identity that, among Jordan's tribal and Palestinian population alike, give the modern nation-state a familiar, patriarchal shape" (Shryock 1997: 8).

Shryock's description of the genealogical imagination in Jordan shares many similarities with the way genealogies are expressed in Kyrgyzstan. I propose that the notion of genealogical imagination can be extended on at least two different but interconnected levels. Firstly, how relevant are these genealogical categories in people's everyday lives? Secondly, in what way does history contribute to the elaboration of genealogical imagination?

Firstly, we cannot assume that genealogies are important to everyone. Shryock, for example, does not address the issue of the significance of these concepts to people in their everyday lives. In Kyrgyzstan, not everyone knows about their genealogy, but most do have some awareness of their *jeti ata*. In other words, people know something about their ancestors, but for many it is not an important feature of everyday life. This is true for both urban and rural communities, although there is greater awareness amongst those

living in villages who are surrounded by family and others who could chart similar genealogical connections.

Moments when people gather with their close and more distant relatives are to fulfil obligations to others. For example, a friend in Naryn, Amanbai Saraev, told me about the last time he gathered with his relatives. At the funeral for one of his distant relatives, members from his *rod* gathered. His use of *rod* referred to his family, close and distant relatives, some of whom he had never met before, but not a corporate group. He did not know the person who had passed away, but out of "duty" (Russian: *obyazannost'*) and "respect" (Russian: *uvazhenie*) to the deceased and other members of his *rod*, he attended the funeral with his father. He explained that for members of the *rod* that live in the village where the man died, there is a "system of help" (Russian: *skhema pomoch'*) in which they all (theoretically) participate, especially in helping each other carry out the requirements of certain life-cycle rituals. When people come to the funeral, they give money towards the carrying out of funeral rites. A list is compiled of all who attend the funeral and the amount of money they contribute. The money set aside to contribute towards the expenses of the funeral (Kyrgyz: *raja*) is an important aspect of their assistance during this period. Families must prepare for the burial by buying and cooking food for the guests. Also, according to Islamic customs, they must hold special events on the fortieth day after the death, and a one year commemoration. Amanbai described the difficulties with carrying out these proper funeral rituals with a small budget. The money received from relatives is essential.

In another discussion I had with Erkin, he stated that "tribal regions play a very small role in my life". However, he noted that when there was a funeral, the help he received from his relatives was extremely valuable. He said that not long before one of his older brothers passed away. The funeral continued for three or four days, and many of his relatives helped him to pay for the funeral expenses, rituals, and duties. It is at this point that his relatives are very important. However, other than for the help during funerals, families do not play a significant role.

In this way, the close and distant family members are gathered for particular events, such as funerals, and sometimes weddings. This is a category which is evoked at certain times and does not act like a corporate group. These people are part of a network of largely kin members who gather at these life-cycle events. This is only one such network activated at a certain time. People enter into different networks at various times for help and assistance of their friends and family, in their place of work, etc. These

networks do not correspond to corporate groups, as Collins (2006) and other have construed as a "clan".

At the funeral, Amanbai explained that people are obliged to go as part of relationships partly based on mutual help and their absence could cause them to be excluded from any future help, whether in life-cycle ceremonies or for personal reasons. It is at these moments, particularly in the participation in life-cycle ceremonies, that their interaction with other members of their *rod* becomes important, while in everyday experiences, it does not determine people's actions.

People construct images of their *jeti ata* through interacting with them and hearing stories about previous generations. This partially informs them of their relatedness to their *rod* and *plemya*, which can be understood as "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983). As Bohannan states in her discussion of genealogy as charter: "Genealogies validate present relationships; these relationships prove the genealogies; and the form of the genealogy is modelled on the form of present relationships" (Bohannan 1952: 312). Furthermore, genealogy as a charter not only validates both past and present relationships, but acts as a mnemonic device for constructing connectedness. People who research *rod* and *plemya*, such as Kalen Jetimishbaev and Marat Chanachev (who I will discuss in greater detail below), describe the history and past and present relations of these imagined communities and validate their formation through their knowledge of *sanjyra*.

Secondly, the historical examination of *sanjyras* contributes to another aspect of the genealogical imagination; it politicises *rod* and *plemya*. This does not signal the division of Kyrgyz society along "tribal" or regional lines. Different historical schools construct or destabilise relations between these "groups". Shryock comments that in Jordan the manipulation of history in the genealogical imagination is used by government and opposition parties. In Kyrgyzstan, I suggest that discussion about genealogies has achieved such wide recognition not only because it contributes to people's understanding of relatedness, but also because it complements the government's nation-building project, which resembles a genealogical organisation of historical figures (see Chapters 4 and 5). Motuev also employs a narrative, which can be analysed as a part of this genealogical imagination, in an attempt to create a political support base. The manipulation of history which ultimately informs memory and the way people understand their *jeti ata* is profoundly political.

Genealogical imagination is a construction of relatedness through the dialectic between memory of ancestors and representations of history. Fundamentally, this

dialectic is diffused through various scales of temporality, spatiality and conceptions of personal and national identity. These various scales are present in the memories attached to *jeti ata*, which also serve as a way for people to form general notions of relatedness to a *rod* and *plemya*, through *sanjyra*. The dialectic is not a process which arrives at a true identity, but is a process which is constantly changing the representation of identity.

Furthermore, historical examinations of genealogies serve different political purposes and influence the way in which the memories of genealogical ancestors are understood. Genealogies are in part (politicised) representations and claims to the past. "History," as John and Jean Comaroff note, "lies *in* its representation; for representation is as much the making of history as it is consciousness speaking out" (Comaroff 1992: 176, original emphasis). The dominant historical narratives shape memories and the way they are described. Memory and history are inextricably linked.

Some authors, such as Pierre Nora (1996), however, have argued for a separation of these two categories. Nora describes that what is conceived of as memory today is in fact history. Nora argues instead for *lieux de mémoire* (French: "realms of memory") which:

> are fundamentally vestiges, the ultimate embodiments of a commemorative consciousness that survives in a history which, having renounced memory cries out for it. The notion has emerged because society has banished ritual. It is a notion produced, defined, established, constructed, decreed, and maintained by the artifice and desire of a society fundamentally absorbed by its own transformation and renewal (Nora 1996: 6).

In other words, *lieux de mémoire* are the "trace" of memory which resides in history. Memory is the continual attempt to capture moments and to keep them in a continual present. Nora notes that this is most evident in modern countries, such as France, where there is a sense of a loss of national memory. This is now being replaced by "historiographical consciousness": "Historiography begins when history sets itself the task of uncovering that in itself which is not history, of showing itself to be the victim of memory and seeking to free itself from memory's grip" (Nora 1996: 4). In short, history illuminates events, divested of memory.

However, in the Kyrgyz case history has not taken over the work of memory, nor can memory and history be separated, as Nora claims. The suggestion that history and memory can be separated across an imagined divide of modernity does not engage with

the ways in which representations of memory and history are closely interconnected. In certain contexts in the West, the "nation" may be contradictory to some conceptions of society, but it is not one that is wholly disregarded and it is a notion that continues to be evoked at certain moments. As Michael Bilig (1995) has noted, the nation is reproduced through banal recurrence of events and images (see Chapter 5). Memory of events and people are constantly changing through the reinterpretation of history, but it does not replace the concept of memory. This is evident in the post-Soviet re-imagination of the past and "Kyrgyz tradition". This can be seen particularly clearly in the story of the *mankurt* (Kyrgyz: slave), in which we see a continual interplay between notions of memory and "traditions".

### *The* mankurt – *the dangers of not remembering your past*

When speaking with *aksakals*, I was often told that genealogies should not be forgotten. Yrysbek, a widely respected *sanjyrachi*, told me that *sanjyras* were people's histories, and they must know it to know where they came from. People, such as Motuev and others, claim that to forget, or not to know, your genealogy disassociates a person from the relatedness that constructs the Kyrgyz (national or ethnic) identity. Similarly, Chingiz Aitmatov, one of the most famous Kyrgyz authors during the Soviet era, has described a person who does not know their family or origins as a *mankurt*.[137] The importance of remembering social customs forms a central theme in Aitmatov's novel, *I dol'she veka dlitsya den'* (Russian: *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years*).[138] In addition to the high esteem for Aitmatov's literary work, the themes dealt with in his books are so important to some people's notions of identity and respecting ancestors that I was once questioned by a drunken university lecturer how it was possible that I could have graduated from school without having read any of his novels. This novel deals with a remote settlement at a train junction, Boranly-Burannyi, on the edge of the Sarozek Desert in Kazakhstan, where the junction manager, Yedigei Zhangel'din (or Burannyi Yedigei) had to bury his old friend and workmate, Kazangap. As Yedigei and several

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[137] In contemporary Kyrgyzstan this term is used broadly as a derogatory word for someone considered dim-witted or stupid.

[138] Chingiz Aitmatov is one of the most celebrated Kyrgyz authors, not just in his own country, but throughout the former Soviet Union. Fittingly, a national celebration was thrown in his honour in December 2003 (during the "Year of Kyrgyz Statehood") for his seventy-fifth birthday. His works, many of which were written during the Soviet era, still find resonance today and are often praised in Kyrgyzstan.

other men travelled to bury his friend, he relived many painful and happy memories of his life, of the landscape and environment. One of these memories was connected to the Naiman "tribal" cemetery they were travelling to, Ana-Beiit (The Mother's Resting Place). Here, he remembered the story of the how the cemetery was founded.

Yedigei recalled that many centuries ago the Juan-juan controlled this area.[139] It was said that when the Juan-juan captured enemies, they would turn them into slaves, or *mankurts*, thus depriving them of their personhood. The slaves had a *shiri*, the udder of a nursing mother camel which had been cut off, put onto their heads and were then left out in the sun, without food, shackled and fitted with wooden collars so they could not remove the *shiri*.[140] The *shiri* would slowly dry and constrict the head. The slaves' heads were shaved and when the hair grew again, it could not penetrate the *shiri*, so it was driven back into the skull, causing yet more pain. "The man who was subjected to the ensuing torture either died because he could not stand it, or he lost his memory of the past forever. He had become a *mankurt*, or slave, who could not remember his past life" (Aitmatov 2000: 125). Fatefully, "[t]he *mankurt* did not know who he had been, whence and from what tribe he had come, did not know his name, could not remember his childhood, father or mother – in short, he could not recognize himself as a human being" (Aitmatov 2000: 126).

Aimatov recounts in the story that once a man was caught by the Juan-juan, his relatives and "tribe" members assumed that he had become a *mankurt* or had died. However, one mother from the Naiman "tribe" did not give up hope for her son after he had been captured. She heard from a group of passing travellers that they had met a *mankurt* tending a herd of camels in the desert, and set off, hoping to find her son. She eventually found the *mankurt* in the desert, and it was her son; however, he could not remember her. She tried to remove the *shiri*, but her son would not take it off. In fact, to take the *shiri* off was the worst punishment of all as it had become part of the man. During this interaction between mother and son, the mother was forced to flee several times by her son's Juan-juan masters coming to check on him and to give him food. The Juan-juan had seen the woman and ordered their *mankurt* to shoot her with an arrow if

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[139] The Juan-juan controlled parts of Inner Asia from roughly the fifth century A.D., but internal strife slowly caused the disintegration of the group and their control of the region. The Türk people dominated the region from the sixth century A.D. See Daniel Sinor (1969; 1990) for more on their rise and dissolution. See also Peter Golden (1992) and L. R. Kyzlasov (1996).

[140] While *shiri* has the same meaning in Kyrgyz, Beibutova (1988: 234) and Yudakhin (1999: 404) note that another term for this in Kyrgyz is "*kook*".

she should return. Obedient to his masters, the *mankurt* fatally shot his mother with an arrow. Where she lies, is the Naiman "tribal" cemetery, where Yedigei was travelling to bury his friend.

The journey was long and difficult. When the funeral procession neared the cemetery they were prohibited from going any further. The cemetery was in an area cordoned off for Soviet military use. The guard on duty, also a Kazakh, refused to let them enter and seemed completely unaware of the significance of the burial site. He only spoke to the men in Russian, not his native Kazakh. Instead, the men had to bury the body nearby, and Yedigei was the only one who could remember the Muslim burial rites.

Aitmatov's novel appeared in 1980 at a time when the excesses of the Stalinist era were being criticised. It was not a reaction against Soviet ideology, but it stressed a pluralism of local traditions and Soviet ideals. For example, the story of the *mankurt* was a commentary upon the loss of social customs through the hegemony of Soviet ideology. Joseph Mozur (1987) highlighted a number of moments in the novel where there are manifestations of the *mankurt*. For example, Yedigei admonished Kazangap's son, accompanying him in the funeral procession, as he denounced his father for being stuck in the past, but in doing so, forgot the memory of the father as the man he was: "turning his back on his nation and paternity" (Mozur 1987: 24). This was a criticism of the Soviet education system, which taught the young not to respect their elders and genealogies. The guard encountered by the funeral procession as they tried to enter the restricted area could be regarded as a *mankurt* as well. Mozur stated: "The barbed wire fence which severs the characters – all of whom are Kazakhs – from Ana-Beiit, is in a sense a *mankurt's* cap which is to rob them of their right to memory, and thereby cut them off from their national heritage. Those living within the confines of the fence are by implication, arising from the same imagery, already *mankurt*" (Mozur 1987: 15). Furthermore, the loss of religious knowledge was another painful realisation of Yedigei, suggesting another way in which Central Asians were becoming *mankurts*. Aitmatov's characters make a strong political comment on the slowly changing values and the danger this will have on the people.

Nevertheless, Aitmatov was not censored for this book. Katerina Clark (1983; 1984) argued that this was because he was able to use the conventions of socialist realism to a greater extent that other authors had done previously. Furthermore, the narrative is a synthesised construction of Stalinist, post-Stalinist and village prose. The characters in the novel are accepted because in part they conform to the conventions of positive role

models that were present at that time. While Aitmatov inverts these conventions, his depiction of Yedigei is still regarded as a positive character. In this and many other novels, their positive role is based on their attempt to forge a communist future. Yedigei instead attempted to capture the past. Aitmatov and other authors have used memory "as a motivation for exploring the traditions and the sense of national identity of an author's own ethnic group" (Clark 1984: 576). Clark argued that the novel "provides a case study of the ways authors can play with the formal conventions of the socialist realist tradition to produce meanings that are highly suggestive but open to radically different interpretations and ultimately elusive" (Clark 1984: 587).

The story of the *mankurt* names the personification of the loss of social customs. This is a theme that Aitmatov has touched upon in earlier novels. For example, in *The White Steamship* (1972), some of the main characters of the story uphold and believe in the Bugu *plemya* myth of origin, while others refute this account providing Soviet modernist representations. Those that believe in the myth of origin are ridiculed by drunkards and abusive people who speak of modernism, objecting to this mythic past. Aitmatov demonstrated how those who no longer remember their customs lead a hollow life. This story articulated many similar concerns of the Central Asian intelligentsia at that time.

Today, the story of the *mankurt* alludes to several issues. Firstly, it is a lesson regarding the importance of remembering genealogies and other social customs. Secondly, it has formed a popular mode of expression to articulate such loss. The term continues to be employed by the government and others to represent such an absence.[141] Finally, the story has political relevance. The emphasis attributed to memory and history is a politically motivated narrative which employs social concepts to convey its meaning. I will explore this final point in the following chapters. However, let us return to other examples of how people have described *sanjyras* today.

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[141] For example, in parts of Central Asia, this notion has been applied to language proficiency. Bhavna Davé (1996) has written about the *mankurtization* of people in Kazakhstan and their (in)ability to speak Kazakh.



**Figure 3.1** – Kalen Jetimishbaev (Photo: Author)

In August 2003 I was told about a museum dedicated to *sanjyras*. My assistant, Bakyt, and I travelled from Karakol along the south shore of Ysyk-Köl to the village of Orgochor. Here, Kalen Jetimishbaev had opened his own historical and ethnographic museum. Out of a desire to learn more and teach people about *sanjyras* he had opened this museum with his own money in the early 1990s. When I met him, he was eighty-two years old and still researching and collecting material for his museum. Due to his work on *sanjyras* and the founding of this museum, Kalen was well known and had even been awarded an honorary professorship from the Bishkek Humanities University. When we met, Jetimishbaev explained to us his aspirations for *sanjyras*. He stated: "Starting in 1990, I collected the history of not only my *uruu*, but the Kyrgyz people. I try to spread the history of the Kyrgyz people throughout the whole world".[142]

I asked Jetimishbaev why he felt it was so important to personally collect the history of the Kyrgyz *uruu*? He said that he saw a very fundamental role in honouring his *uruu* and *uruk*: "My father and my mother are important to me, and also earth, nature and

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[142] During the interview, Jetimishbaev spoke in Kyrgyz. He purposefully used the terms *uruu* and *uruk*, however, he employed them in a similar way to *plemya* and *rod*. I have also kept these in the singular form of the terms throughout so as not to cause confusion.

water. In my lifetime I must save what [my parents] said and did, to glorify them. Then I will make my *uruu* and *uruk* famous".

In our discussion, Jetimishbaev told us about his *jeti ata*. One of the most important patrilineal ancestors was Tilekmat *ake*. Kalen explained how Tilekmat had united his *uruu* (Bugu) and stood up against the Kokand Khanate. In fact, in 1998 a statue of Sart *ake* and Tilekmat *ake* was erected across the road from the museum.[143] Both figures were described as "great thinkers" (Kyrgyz: *uluu oichul*). The plaque on the side of the monument (written in English) stated that it was erected by the descendents of these two men (those who traced their *jeti ata* from these men), the Kumtor Gold Company (a Canadian gold mining firm operating in the mountains to the south of this area) and the Tilekmat Agricultural Association. Jetimishbaev was obviously very proud of this recent recognition and there were many photographs of the unveiling of the statue. President Askar Akaev had attended and made a speech, which added special importance to the event.

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[143] *Ake* is a Kyrgyz word which means "father" or "older brother". It is very close to the Kyrgyz word "*aga*", which is used when speaking to male teachers.



**Figure 3.2** – Sart *ake* (left) and Tilekmat *ake* (right) (Photo: Author)

In October 1990 Kalen had organised a *kurultai* (Kyrgyz: congress) in Orgochor. There were photographs of people attending the *kurultai* on many walls of the museum. Many respected elders from all over Kyrgyzstan gathered in Orgochor to tell stories, recount their *uruu* and *uruk* histories and to contribute to the widening knowledge of Kyrgyz history. With the assistance of a journalist, Rashid Masyrakunov, they published a small book about this *kurultai* entitled *Wise Sayings of the Sanjyra* (Kyrgyz: *Sanjyra sanaty*). In it, Jetimishbaev noted:

> Today's descendents were created by the Supreme Being [Tengir], and the succeeding generations will merge into a consanguineous relationship and unite, even if it does not pass through seven or seventy fathers, but seven hundred fathers, they will appear as a considerable people. The individual, family, yurt, home, clan [*uruk*], tribe [*uruu*], nation and people – this is our flag, like an arrow aspiring to unite us together (Jetimishbaev & Masyrakunov 1994: 3).

Not only are *sanjyras* about the construction of a particular view of Kyrgyz history and future, but different historical narratives are evoked with the remembrance of each ancestor. As Jetimishbaev states, the people are the flag of the nation; the actions of people today, and particularly those of the ancestors, are what shape *uruu* and broader Kyrgyz identities. This is not simply a recitation of historical figures; each one that recollected is considered to have played a valuable role in the continuation and development of the *uruus* and *uruks* of the Kyrgyz, particularly in the government's view of Kyrgyz history. Jetimishbaev was not the only person to be collecting information on *sanjyra* and attributing it with national importance. Another enthusiast, Marat Chanachev, attempted to make a computer resource of *sanjyras*.

### *Internet* sanjyra

The Central Asian Historical Server[144] provides a number of articles on the history of Central Asian peoples, and also provides genealogical tables of Central Asian people, of which the Kyrgyz have several charts investigating their origins and genealogical descent. However, this is only the beginning. Marat Chanachev, an analyst at the International Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, is attempting to create the "Internet-Sanjyra" computer resource (Chanachev 2002). In Chanachev's project proposal, he states that the "Internet-Sanjyra" will become an "informational resource, which will permit people to trace the evolution of Kyrgyz nationality and statehood, which is connected with real geopolitical situations and the influence that other civilizations have had on the Kyrgyz".[145] Theoretically, any person of Kyrgyz ethnicity would be able to locate themselves in the genealogical records contained within this computer resource. Furthermore, the project intends to examine the nature of *sanjyras* further, such as to analyse their purpose and meaning. In this regard, the project is centred on five main points: social structure of society, state structure, sources of laws (collection of laws, *Shariat*, *adat*[146]), the scope of laws (whether they cover property

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[144] See http://www.kyrgyz.ru (accessed 18 July 2006).
[145] This is a description from Chanachev's project proposal.
[146] *Adat* in Kyrgyz means "customs".

rights, marriage, criminal, etc.), and various forms of industry. The project even plans to investigate the *sanjyras* of other Turkic peoples, e.g. Tatars and Kazakhs.[147]

In addition to this, Chanchev had planned to organise a *Sanjyra* Festival ("*Sanjyra mairamy*") to take place towards the end of 2003, in order to participate in the year-long national celebration of "2200 years of Kyrgyz statehood". The goal of the festival was "to reveal new genealogical resources and names, the transmission of the cultural oral heritage to the Kyrgyz youth, and to overcome prejudices about the sanjyra".[148] Chanachev wanted to teach people about their *sanjyras* and overcome the negative, backward stereotype they had been given during the Soviet era as a remnant of previous evolutionary stages. In this way, Chanachev's festival was to serve as an educational opportunity to complement the national celebration and to underline the importance of *sanjyra* to the Kyrgyz people.[149] Similar to Aitmatov's story, Soviet ideology, in Chanchev's opinion, had caused many people to forget their origins. This was a sentiment that Jetimishbaev described as well. Many young Kyrgyz growing up during the Soviet era almost became "enemies" against local knowledge practices and customs. As many people had described to me, their extended families were not important to them, except during funerals and other life-cycle ceremonies. People had forgotten their *sanjyras* as they were not practically relevant to everyday life.

The efforts of these people could be interpreted as "salvaging" social customs and knowledge, although I would argue that they are constructing new interpretations of social values. Aitmatov's story of the *mankurt* serves as a warning of what could happen if the memory of the ancestors is forgotten. The work by Jetimishbaev to preserve and chart *sanjyras* is also part of this process. The attempt to salvage them illustrates the feelings of urgency by some that these old, relatively little-used forms of identity are slowly disappearing. However, I argue that another interpretation of these attempts to emphasise the importance of *sanjyras* is to underline the ways in which to create relationships in the post-Soviet period. Unlike the figure of Yedigei, who Clark argues is trying to maintain old relationships, I suggest that *sanjyrachis* are attempting to evoke an

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[147] Kazakhs already have some similar resources on their own *shezhire*. The website: http://www.elim.kz/index.php (accessed 18 July 2006) offers some information on Kazakh *shezhires*, similar to what Chanachev had hoped to organise. This website also offers a number of links to other genealogical tables of Mongol, Turkic and Central Asian peoples, including individual Kazakh *rod*. It also contains links to Jewish genealogies and Russian families.

[148] This is a description from Chanachev's project proposal.

[149] Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, this festival never took place.

imagination of the past as a central feature (in the moral construction) of the present. It is not only what these *sanjyras* represent, but also their politicised usage in the nation-building project, which reveals *sanjyras* as a way of relating individuals to the nation and the state. Here we see the oscillations between various scales of personal, national and political representation. The construction of relatedness through memories attached to the *sanjyras* is one way in which a "Kyrgyz" identity is being created.

***Cultures of relatedness and genealogy***

These ethnographic examples demonstrate the way in which genealogical knowledge is claimed to be of contemporary importance as a characteristic of the Kyrgyz identity. In this section, I want to examine how these genealogies receive wide acknowledgement among Kyrgyz, irrespective of people's level of interest. In the previous chapter I discussed evolutionary perspectives in some kinship theories in anthropology. In order to move away from these views, some anthropologists, such as David Schneider (2004), have focused on the various "cultural" meanings invested in conceptions of kinship. Janet Carsten (1995b; 2000a) has built on Schneider's critique to argue that anthropologists need to examine the socially constructed notions of kinship, through what she terms "relatedness". The problems of previous Western and Soviet descriptions of Kyrgyz kinship, I suggest, may be partially addressed through the use of relatedness. Through the notion of relatedness we explore how memories and historical analyses, which are a part of genealogical imagination, contribute to the creation of kinship categories, such as *plemya* and *rod*.

In the 1970s, David Schneider strongly argued for a reassessment of kinship. Schneider asserted that for Lewis Henry Morgan: "[kinship] was about the way in which a people grouped and classified themselves as compared with the real, true, biological facts of consanguinity and affinity" (Schneider 2004: 258). Schneider's view was that "the prevailing view since Morgan has been that the fictive or presumptive or indemonstrable biological relationship, the social aspect itself, is modelled after, or is a metaphorical extension of, or is a social accretion to, the defining and fundamental biological relationship" (Schneider 2004: 259). His own method was to abandon the predominant "Eurocentric" view of kinship encompassed in the emic/etic approach (Stone 2004: 244). Instead, following Talcot Parsons, he argued for a cultural system of kinship, focusing on symbols and meanings. He argued: "the biological elements which previous

theories took as merely defining features, 'givens' in the state of affairs, could be understood better as symbols for kinds of social relationships, and probably these did not derive from, nor stand for, the biological material they purported to order functionally" (Schneider 2004: 271). The "cultural level" attempted to investigate the ways in which kinship could be symbolically constituted. For example, in America, Schneider (1980 [1968]) argued blood is a biological trait, but it is also conceptualised symbolically as a characteristic of the strength of certain relationships. This led Schneider to claim: "[...] it is apparent that 'kinship' is an artefact of the anthropologists' analytic apparatus and has no concrete counterpart in the cultures of any of the societies we studied" (Schneider 2004: 271).

This reinterpretation of kinship studies encouraged others to follow in a similar vein. Janet Carsten took Schneider's critique as a starting point and developed a notion of "cultures of relatedness" through her fieldwork experiences of everyday practices of Malays on Langkawi Island. By looking at the construction of houses and hearths, the sharing of food, birth and death, Carsten noted that these everyday practices constituted a large role in the construction of relatedness:

> 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 1995b: 224).

A key aspect of Carsten's analysis is to use the local terms in understanding how relatedness is constructed. She argues: "the term 'relatedness' [can be used] in opposition to, or alongside, 'kinship' in order to signal an openness to indigenous idioms of being related rather than a reliance on pre-given definitions or previous versions" (Carsten 2000b: 4).

However, Carsten is also the first to admit that there may be problems with the concept of "relatedness". It could be used in a restrictive way to describe only a certain set of relations, or, conversely, it could be used in a broad sense, therefore employing the term would not have any analytical value (Carsten 2000b: 5). Moreover, if kinship studies focused on the cultural level specific to the social group in question, then comparative studies could no longer take place (Carsten 2000b). Carsten notes, however, that through her use of relatedness, she does not rely on the "arbitrary distinction between

biology and culture, and without presupposing what constitutes kinship" (Carsten 2000b: 5), there is still space for such comparisons. The potential drawbacks of this approach should not discourage our use of it, but make us aware of the limits of its applicability.

I argue, therefore, that the different forms of genealogical knowledge, on both local and broader (national) levels, contribute to an understanding of relatedness. Memories connected to ancestors and their deeds provide a strong narrative through which individual and larger group identities can be expressed. In Motuev's articles, he recounts the brave and important actions of his ancestors in order to foster a sense of group identity which all thought that trace their ancestry to these figures. Although many people know little about their *sanjyra*, they nevertheless are aware of it. This is the starting point for the nation-building project which emphasises its importance. Those that take an interest in their *sanjyra* complement the official view, thereby giving their implicit support.

***The role of history in memory***

Returning to Jetimishbaev's *sanjyra* museum, this is an example of an individual's attempt to help other Kyrgyz people remember their genealogies in conjunction with an exploration of national history. The act of remembrance is a central issue. In Maurice Halbwach's (1992) study of memory, he exemplifies the act of memory as finding a favourite childhood book as an adult. When we look through the pages of what used to be so familiar, now they seem quite distant, different and altered. "This is because we feel that a gap continues to exist between the vague recollection of today and the impression of our childhood which we know was vivid, precise, and strong. We therefore hope by reading the book again to complete the former vague memory and so to relive the memory of our childhood" (Halbwachs 1992: 46). Benedict Anderson (Anderson 1983: 204) also emphasises this through a similar example. His example is the gap perceived when looking at a photograph of yourself as a baby. You cannot fully remember how you began to talk, walk, write, etc. and develop into the person that you are today. Usually, a parent helps to fill the gaps when recollection alone is insufficient to connect the pieces over such a time period. In these examples, the photo or book recalls earlier memories, which are shaped by a generalised historical account provided by a parent, for example.

Jetimishbaev's museum was such a place. People would come with vague memories of their ancestry to study their genealogies further. I met Almaz, a history

student from the Bishkek Humanities University. He explained that he lived in the area and had come to investigate his *sanjyra* and learn more about the history of the region. The museum offered a place for people, irrespective of their level of interest, to explore this ancestry and history, to learn about themselves and their people.

*Sanjyras* represent a field for the exploration and examination of collective memory and remembrance. While knowledge of the *jeti ata* will help people to know a part of their *sanjyras*, the work of Jetimishbaev and others are contributing to a "collective memory" in the construction of the categories *plemya* and *rod* and enhancing its national importance. Maurice Halbwachs notes that: "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 1992: 38). There is a dialectical process taking place in the enunciation of memories and locating self-narratives in a context of the more general array of memories held by a society. Michael Lambek and Paul Antze state:

> [...] there is a dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self. As humans, we draw on our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally our identity and character are shaped by our narratives. People emerge from and as the products of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives. Through acts of memory they strive to render their lives in meaningful terms (Lambek & Antze 1996: xviii).

However, individual genealogical memories and opinions about ancestors can threaten the construction of a collective memory of genealogical knowledge. If there are gaps and ellipses in the constitution of memory, then it is the work of (a politicised) history to "fill the gaps". As Edward Said (2000) argues, history underpins memory. Memory is contingent on the various constructions of history and on the historical narratives which may be dominant at a particular moment. If genealogical imagination is to be considered a form of relatedness, then, in this case, it is reliant on a version of history which examines Kyrgyz identity as a sovereign ethnic group, underpinning the memories people recall, including representations of their ancestors.

These two mnemonic devices contributing to the genealogical imagination – *jeti ata* and *sanjyra* – are not just charters of memories, but are also interrelated forms of knowledge demonstrating an awareness of the significant contributions of the ancestors to a person's personal and broader community identities. Knowledge of patrilineal ancestors enables people to establish a connection to broader imaginations of the genealogical

construction of *plemya* and *rod*. Moreover, knowledge of personal ancestors contributes to the recognition of these figures' roles in the constriction of *rod* and *plemya*. At the broadest level a person should be able to connect themselves through their genealogies to those that "founded" the Kyrgyz nation as represented in the official history.

In their examinations of memory and history, Said, Lambek and Antze remark on the "invention of tradition"; drawing on Hobsbawm and Ranger's (1983) exegesis of the establishment and labelling of events as "traditional". The invention of tradition mobilises collective memory through the manipulation of history. Especially, Said remarks on how this is achieved in a broader, collective memory: "The invention of tradition is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way" (Said 2000: 179).[150] The organisation of history is one part of a wider logic which determines the constitution of the national identity. *Sanjyras* are woven into the national historical narrative so as not to allow division and gaps in memory to threaten its structure.

Like Almaz, most Kyrgyz do not have many memories connected with figures in their *sanjyra*. By going to the genealogy museum, he was able to learn more about his ancestry and formation of his *sanjyra*. However, through his research, Almaz's understanding of his ancestors and his conception of history will differ concerning the significance of certain events explained in the *sanjyra*. In the nation-building project, there is an attempt to create an appearance of an inclusive narrative. Therefore, these memories and views on *sanjyra* are moulded into a discourse which constant adapts new views into a general view of the history of the "Kyrgyz" people.

### *Lenin* baike[151]

The construction of history and its interaction with genealogical memories is exemplified through the figure of Lenin. The following example is significant in two respects. Firstly, through the act of delimitation in 1924, Lenin is recognised by many as establishing the

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[150] Lambek and Antze argue: "If individual experience provides idioms and metaphors for understanding collective experience and vice versa, there may be a kind of mutual validation, a reciprocal rendering real that serves to naturalize what has been imagined. However, this will not be seamless (Lambek & Antze 1996: xxii). This complements Said's argument, but also indicates that in certain cases, particularly instances of trauma which they are researching; individual and collective memories will not always support each other.

[151] *Baike* is a Kyrgyz word meaning an "older brother", "uncle", or a term of respect for an older person to whom you are speaking.

modern boundaries of Kyrgyzstan.[152] This has given Lenin a place among Kyrgyz nation builders, although he is not counted as a "Kyrgyz" nation-builder himself. Secondly, Lenin's inclusion among these figures is an indication of the influence of Soviet constructions of Kyrgyz national history (a theme I explore in Chapters 4 and 5). Through this discussion of Lenin and the place of history in Kyrgyz society, we are given a glimpse of the Soviet-influenced ideology which Akaev's government used to create a national history.



**Figure 3.3** – Lenin in Ala-Too Square (Photo: Author)

In early August 2003 scaffolding went up around the Lenin statue, which stood in the centre of Ala-Too Square in front of the State History Museum. The Lenin statue was only erected in 1984, and since independence in 1991 laws had been passed to protect all Soviet iconography. A special law pertaining to the protection of the Lenin statue in Ala-Too Square was passed on 22 May 2000. The sight of scaffolding triggered concern

[152] While the boundaries did change during the Soviet era, it was not substantial.

amongst several politicians and local residents, however, the workers claimed only to be carrying out routine maintenance work.

It came to the attention of the media (Orlova 2003) that the actual plan was to remove the Lenin statue and replace it with another (Semenyak 2003), which turned out to be true. Just before Independence Day, a new statue "Freedom" (Kyrgyz: *Erkindik*) was put in Lenin's place.[153]



**Figure 3.4** – *Erkindik* (Kyrgyz: Freedom), the new statue in Ala-Too Square (Photo: Author)

A new plinth was constructed behind the State History Museum and the area around it redeveloped. After the Lenin statue had been removed, the former leader was reduced to lying on the back of a flatbed truck, whilst his new location was being prepared. Now, the Lenin statue stands atop of its new plinth and directly faces Parliament (Kyrgyz: Jogorku Kengesh, Supreme Council). Policy makers also decided to rename the small

[153] In 1991 Dzerzhinskii Street was renamed Erkindik, and had a smaller version of the statue that now stands in Ala-Too Square at the northern end. This smaller statue has been taken down and was not replaced before my departure in October 2003.

square where the Lenin statue, Parliament and the American University of Central Asia are located to Lenin Square (previously known as Old Square).[154]

There were pleas by some newspapers that the statue should remain in its place, heavy criticism of those that made the decision, and even a protest march (see Usubaliev 2003). Turdakun Usubaliev berated the decision. As the former first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan from 1961-1985 and since independence in 1991 until the Tulip Revolution in March 2005 a member of parliament, he clearly had strong feelings about the character and honour of Lenin. However, he stopped short of blaming President Akaev, to whom he was close politically and personally. Additionally, a number of local residents demonstrated against the decision by marching through the centre of Bishkek (Orlova 2003).

A feud ensued in Parliament, with Nikolai Tanaev, the Prime Minister, acting as "whipping boy" (see also Bezborodova 2003; Sydykova 2003: 1). The cartoon below illustrates the nature of the outbursts and the lingering affinity of some with Soviet ideology:




**Figure 3.5** – Placard reads: "Hands off Lenin", and Lenin asks: "My God, when will they leave me alone?" (Sydykova 2003: 1).

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[154] This is also where Muslims gather to pray on Orozo Ait, marking the end of the fast of Ramadan.

In the end, Osmonakun Ibraimov, the State Secretary, stepped in to rescue Tanaev by stating that it was his idea to move Lenin, as he felt that the plan was more in line with the vision of a sovereign Kyrgyzstan. Many people I spoke to about this were indifferent. For example, a pensioner living in Bishkek said: "They should have left it [the Lenin statue] where it was". He and others did not share the government's feelings, that the new statue was a good alternative. Lenin is remembered as a strong leader who granted the Kyrgyz greater autonomy and increased their standard of living.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Soviet past has not been forgotten, as is evident from this example. In an article entitled: "In what way is Lenin guilty before the Kyrgyz people?",[155] Usubaliev writes that the October Revolution helped the Kyrgyz in a number of ways. In 1916, before the Soviets came to power, the Russian Imperial army came to Central Asia to force people to fight in the First World War. Many people did not want to fight other Muslims in Russia's war against Turkey. In order to conscript the Kyrgyz (and other Central Asian peoples) the Russian army forced people into service. Although few people are still alive from that period, those that I met said it was a terrible time. Sultangazy, an old *aksakal* in the village of Tashtak, told me that he remembered when the Russians came. They abused people: he said he was kicked over by a Russian guard for no reason, and that he was happy when Lenin came to power. I was also told stories of Tsarists Russians shooting people on the street. These abuses caused many people to flee to Xinjiang Province in China.[156] However, the journey over the mountains was difficult. When the refugees arrived in Xinjiang there was not much food. Many Kyrgyz died of starvation at this time. In 1917, after the Bolsheviks took power, the refugees started to come back into what had become Soviet Central Asia. Usubaliev comments that in the years after the October Revolution the Soviets gave 435 million roubles to the refugees so that they could have bread and rebuild their facilities. He claims that: "Only during the Soviet period did the Kyrgyz people acquire their statehood, having created the most important conditions for its national consolidation, political, social and economic and spiritual development" (Usubaliev 2003: 1). He notes that the wisdom of Lenin was his national politics. To forget this would be a fatal mistake for the Kyrgyz.

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[155] This article was reprinted in Usubaliev's local region of Kochkor, Naryn *oblast'*. The article was first published on 22 June 1998, in the pro-government newspaper, *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*.

[156] This is known as "*Urkun*" or the exodus. The Kyrgyz government unveiled a small monument in 2003 on the Bishkek-Balykchi highway, commemorating the deaths of an estimated 100,000 people who died in 1916, who were killed by the Russians and those who died as they fled to China. The new Bakiev government is also planning on erecting another monument. See also M. A. Chekirov (1991).

I was told frequently that without the Soviets, the Kyrgyz would probably still live in yurts and there would be no Kyrgyzstan. One *aksakal*, Esenkan, told me: "If the Kyrgyz remembered the role of the Soviets in1917, there would be a portrait of Lenin on every corner". Lenin's policy of national delineation is recognised as fundamental to the establishment of the Kyrgyz political state. Accordingly, Lenin has taken a special position in Kyrgyz society. Although in the official history only "ethnically" Kyrgyz are credited with contributing to the official construction of the nation and state, the uproar that ensued from the removal of the statue from Ala-Too Square demonstrated that Lenin had taken a place amongst the Kyrgyz state-builders. On the other hand, an image of Lenin was firmly lodged in people's memories. Through his actions, he had created the possibility of a "Kyrgyz present". This interplay between the past and the present has been reformulated in the light of new social and political contexts (cf. Rausing 2004).

This account contrasts with examples from other parts of the former Soviet Union where people have found it necessary in certain cases to encourage the forgetting of the communist era. For example, Elena Zdravomyslova and Ol'ga Tkach's (2004) research suggests that families in post-Soviet Russia are retracing their genealogies, and in some cases searching for different, more impressive origins to offer themselves and their children better futures.[157] In another example, Sigrid Rausing, discusses how Estonian Swedes are attempting to forget or suppress gaps in their Soviet constructed identity accentuated by the sudden change in society since independence. To forget enables them to change the past in their construction of a new present:

> It became evident that there was a complex interplay between representations of the future, the present, and the past, which might be described as an alliance of consciousness between the past and the future against the experience of the present, or an alliance of the 'normal' against the 'not normal'. The past, consequently, had to be reconfigured in various forms of myth and precedents. It follows that, to understand the tensions and desires of the present, we need to re-examine materials that relate to the past both as history and as a resource for constructing an image of a potential future (Rausing 2004: 93).

In selecting memories that Estonian Swedes used to construct this new present they forgot many other aspects of their lives under communism. Rausing notes: "Thus the revolution

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[157] See also the edited volume by Robert Humphrey *et al.* (2003) on new biographical research conducted in Eastern Europe.

that caused the end of the Soviet Union has also brought with it a temporary amnesia about the Soviet years, an amnesia that ironically makes perfect sense within the cultural logic of the Soviet system" (Rausing 2004: 144-145). Similarly, Bruce Grant (1995) argued that when the Soviet Union collapsed, not just the economic and political structure that characterised it fell apart, but also, suddenly, the ideological backdrop for the construction and crystallisation of ethnic (i.e. national) identities became apparent, as they were no longer reinforced. Furthermore, the local concepts of ethnic identity had also been, to a certain extent, bolstered by the Soviet notion of ethnicity.

In the context of Kyrgyzstan, there are no strong notions of "social amnesia" as in Estonia (Olick & Robbins 1998; Rausing 2004). In all the cases presented, selective memories are taken from the past and integrated with the present and goals of the future. The difference is that in Kyrgyzstan, the recent Soviet past is actively included in memories. Lenin's act of delimitation formally grouped the Kyrgyz and forced them not just to imagine personal forms of genealogical relatedness including *plemya* and *rod* categories, but also to construct relatedness nationally as well.

### *The mentality of relatedness*

I have argued that there is a continuous exchange between personal and collective forms of memory which contributes to the construction of identity. By taking genealogy as a basis upon which to establish a national history and identity for the Kyrgyz people, the government has, in part, appropriated a form through which alternative notions of identity could be created. Personal and collective (including on a national level) memories mutually reinforce each other, so that with the introduction of a politicised history the gaps that could emerge from memory are filled. The construction of history with genealogical qualities gives it a doxic quality so that it resembles people's understandings of their own ancestors and therefore their own history (Lambek & Antze 1996). Genealogical imagination creates the possibility of investigating forms of relatedness on a number of different levels. On a broad scale, some Kyrgyz social scientists expressed to me that the particular categories of *plemya* and *rod* are not just parts of self-descriptions, but "part of our mentality" (Russian: *mentalitet*). Mentality, I suggest, is part of a discourse that blurs the distinction between history and memory. It is a discourse which attempts to transcend the temporality of memory.

In the construction of a new independent history some Kyrgyz social scientists have been conscious of keeping the memories of ancestors and their honourable deeds in close connection with the aspirations of the contemporary Kyrgyz identity. For example, several Kyrgyz historians have written about "the mentality of the Kyrgyz" and its social effectiveness:

> it seems to us, no matter how certain events or persons are reflected in history, they cannot be the only thing, but are a more determining component of mentality, for they reflect only the concrete facts, the qualities of this or that person of their epoch. Mentality, obviously, includes a lasting dignity of the people, which serves not as an ornament, but 'works' on this authority (Koichuev *et al.* 1994: 5).

"Dignity" (Russian: *dostoinstvo*) attributes the importance of genealogical memory to relatedness, as well as the recollection of those memories which are valuable for present unity. Furthermore, the authors indicate that this dignity has an authority which "works" by influencing and directing certain actions and thoughts.

In the view of these Kyrgyz scholars, dignity is an essential aspect of mentality. Mentality provides a space in which the memories which complement the official history are dignified. These Kyrgyz academics see the role of history as the restoration of (or filling in the gaps in) their dignity:

> Undoubtedly, in Kyrgyz history there were virtues of lasting meaning, but some of them were not saved in people's memory. The purpose is to restore these blanks in the hope that public values again will find the shine of a precious metal. History not only helps us to leaf through the reverential pages of the past, but also to understand, that it will represent the value for the present and the future. The history of the people – this is forming the mentality of the nation (Koichuev *et al.* 1994: 5).

History is used to overcome gaps in memory through which people locate their dignity in their values and ancestors. This deliberate use of history superimposes this refashioned memory onto the construction of a national identity. What appears as an examining tool turns into a method of dictation in the formation of genealogical imagination.

This use of history serves as the referential point in wider society for the acceptance and understanding of memories. The memories of ancestors acceptable to the official historical narrative are appropriated by the government. I am not arguing that all memories must conform to this discursive style. Instead, a form of national dignity has

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been constructed as part of a discourse about knowledge of the role of genealogies in society. In nationalistic terms, the ancestors, and their respective *plemya* and *rod*, are not cause for division, but instead for celebration and unity. Today, this discursive interaction between personal and wider social memories is blurred or taken for granted. "Identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding. Explicit memory is but the self-conscious pole of a process that contains much else" (Lambek & Antze 1996: xxix). This is reminiscent of how Ernest Renan describes forgetting as an important process in the creation of a nation (see also Carsten 1995a; Renan 1990: 11). Here, the representation of the official history provides a discursive enactment of memories. Certain selective memories and details become a form of social *habitus*, or a knowledge which is regarded as a form of mentality, subconsciously shaping the actions of society. However, the current examination of history and its use of memory are only a moment in the history and future of the Kyrgyz Republic. Much remains to be seen with a new change in leadership and the emphases that will be placed upon social forms.

Many social scientists assumed that divisions between *plemya* and *rod* would resurface, as if they had been frozen since the beginning of the Soviet era, but they have not. This is partly due to the changes Kyrgyz society has undergone, but also due to the memories associated with genealogies, and the way they have been integrated into a nation-building project. Nevertheless, Motuev's attack on the political elite is a clear challenge to the unity stressed in the official form of nationalism. Previous tensions could have re-emerged. For example, in the nineteenth century, Bugu and Sarybagysh *plemya* had a number of conflicts. In one well known story, the Sarybagysh *manap*, Ormon Niyazov, was nominated khan after receiving support from most of the major *plemya* in northern Kyrgyzstan (Tokmonaliev 2002). He attempted to unite the *plemya* in their struggle against advancing Russian Tsarist colonialism and the regional domination of the Kokand Khanate. However, Borombai, the leader of the Bugu *plemya*, murdered Ormon Khan after a disagreement. These and other memories, some analysts might argue, could have had the opportunity to resurface and fracture Kyrgyz society. Yet, this has not happened. The presentation of the national history in connection with personal and collective memories is based on connecting people through genealogies and emphasising unity.

***The construction of nationalism through genealogy***

I have argued that discourses involving a notion of mentality further obscure the distinction between memory and history in the genealogical imagination. The use of history and its employment in memories which construct identity involve particular views of the self (see Chapter 6). In the following chapters I examine the construction of a national Kyrgyz history in order to fill the gaps of social memory. The Kyrgyz government is actively constructing an official historical narrative of "the Kyrgyz", particularly thorough honouring those individuals who, throughout history, have strived to create and maintain a Kyrgyz "state". The ideas of the "ancestors" – the real, mythical and appropriated figures included in the national history – have become the focus of the national historical narrative.

The existing forms of relatedness, which I have called genealogical imagination, have benefited the construction of a national history. By aligning the national history closely to the ways genealogies are expressed, the particular form it has assumed is seen to have been an always-already part of society. Through this, the new history of Kyrgyzstan overcomes the problem of having to establish an effective (constructive) social memory, and instead employs notions of genealogy to make it appear that the goal of creating an independent Kyrgyz state has continually existed since time immemorial and has subsequently played a compelling role in the direction of society. As Aitmatov described in the tale of the *mankurt*, remembering social customs, including your ancestors, is cast as essential to human nature.

The argument I present here is that the political need for a coherent national identity finds more support in appealing to that which is perceived to have always existed. This is not to suggest that the forms of genealogical memory, *jeti ata* and *sanjyra*, cannot be the subject of reflexive questioning. While people may question the importance of their *sanjyra* and its role in their life, they recognise through a general awareness and social interaction that it constitutes at least a small part of their self-narratives. In the following chapter, I analyse the ideological foundations of the government's construction of a national *sanjyra* of historical figures, which seeks to find resonance with the way in which some people imagine their ancestors.

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