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BORN KYRGYZ, RAISED AS RUSSIANS AND BURIED AS ARABS

NEGOTIATING CHILDHOOD AND PERSONHOOD IN KYRGYZSTAN



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Martin Bartelheim and Thomas Scholten

Baktygul Shabdan

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To my daughter

Kamila

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Preface

This book provides readers with an ethnography about children in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and values related to their upbringing. It approaches children and their childhoods through the prism of 'healthy growth'. This approach was not chosen in vain. In 2007, I once assisted an American scholar working on children's health in the Naryn oblast, a mountainous province in Kyrgyzstan. During the conversations, I could notice inconsistency in the perception of health between this scholar and local people who were involved in her project. As a Kyrgyz and native anthropologist, I became inspired with the idea to provide for foreign specialists, involved in health-related projects locally, what Kyrgyz people value in children's health and what they do to bring up healthy children according to their own point of view. Back then, the intention was to write about children's physical health, which later became the topic of my PhD project started in 2011. I carried out nine-month-long ethnographic fieldwork during 2012 and 2013 in Kochkor, a village in the north of Kyrgyzstan. My aim was to collect material on the values and practices of the people in Kochkor in bringing up children healthily and to find out what local people understand by healthy growth. As Lancy states: 'childhood is all about health, vitality and growth' (Lancy 2008, 7).

For people in Kochkor, ideas of healthy growth are not limited to children's physical, mental or emotional development. Healthy growth also includes bringing up a child with proper moral education, conducting culturally defined health-related rituals as well as life-cycle rituals and bringing up a culturally 'nourished' child, which means that a child should have some knowledge about Kyrgyz customs and traditions and follow them. Sometimes, it was noticeable in conversations that moral education for the younger generation, such as respect for elders or the lack of knowledge about their culture, concerned parents more than children's physical health. Accordingly, I extended my approach to 'healthy child' based on these local perceptions, which the readers can see from the structure of this book.

What intrigued me most and what I also depicted in this book was how with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of a young nation-state and subsequent drastic socio-cultural, economic and political changes, the discourses on 'healthy growth' have grown increasingly diverse among people in Kochkor. The processes such as modernisation, globalisation, westernisation, Re-Islamisation and re-traditionalisation in a post-Soviet Kyrgyzstani context brought changes in people's values. This has directly affected children and their childhoods, as parents' concerns were to bring up children to become successful citizens, proper Kyrgyz or proper Muslims. Thus, I could see inconsistency not only between 'local' and 'global', where in the latter the image of the 'Western child' is usually seen as a 'correct' type of child, which was not shared by my interlocutors. But also on the local level, among Kyrgyz people themselves, the diversity of values generated conflicts and debates on healthy growth of children.

In this sense, this book can also be seen as an ethnographic study of social changes in Kochkor that shape and re-shape local people's values, worldviews and their everyday life practices. Although this was not the main focus of my research initially, I should admit that based on my interlocutors' narratives, which did immensely direct the flow of my research and shape this book, I constantly refer to the complex social dynamics in Kochkor in order to elaborate on how these processes affect the notion of a proper childhood. I have investigated how social changes and external influences affect children's lives, and the way children are perceived, understood and discussed by older people. This often leads to discourses and negotiations about what is healthy for children and what is not. For instance, people in Kochkor welcome Western goods, Western fashion and modern technologies, but they are not happy with the introduction of children's legal rights or 'American democracy', which impose moral values that do not fit into the local context and even contradict local values. As a result, the villagers in Kochkor usually express their views that the 'Western' methods

do not work for them when it comes to bringing up children. In contrast, Islam is welcomed for bringing morality to the villagers, which is highly needed in the current period of economic hardship and uncertainty. Still, in the eyes of some people in Kochkor, Islam also brings a number of practices which are classified as 'Arabic' and this part of the religion is not welcomed as it contradicts traditional Kyrgyz norms and practices, called *salt* in Kyrgyz. The statement 'Born Kyrgyz, raised as Russians and buried as Arabs', which also is the title of this book, reflects the essence of the Kochkorian value-system, and shows that there is a complex social structure in Kochkor with a multidimensional nature. This is extensively elaborated on throughout my ethnographic chapters.

My approach to children through the notion of 'healthy growth' also revealed a tight link between the concepts of childhood and personhood. At first, one could imagine that the notion of personhood is more linked to adulthood, while children are still in the process of 'growing'. Interestingly, for people in Kochkor, who a person is and what qualities a person should have stands out as being very important already in the childhood period, even when a child is still in the womb of its mother. The notions of personhood engender hotly debated topics about how a child should grow, more concretely, what qualities should be taught and inculcated, in order for a child to become a proper member of society or a proper citizen. As I argue and demonstrate in this book, childhood is exactly the period during which the 'making of the person' becomes salient.

Five ethnographic chapters in this book demonstrate how children in Kochkor are 'constructed' in different ways: not only symbolically but also physically. People in Kochkor construct a child's healthy body, its well-being, character and future life. For example, a child's health is constructed in the everyday life of people in Kochkor, which is not solely related to dealing with 'disease' or 'illness' but is also about how to stay healthy, in a narrow and broad understanding. The local notion of *yrym* (ritualised cultural practice) demonstrates how people transfer certain desired qualities to children through food, blessings

and performative acts in their life-cycle as well as everyday rituals. Another way of constructing a child is examined in the local notion of *tarbiya*, which can be translated as 'purposeful socialisation' or 'cultural nourishment'. I also demonstrate the construction of children in school settings as part of the Kyrgyz national curricula that are heavily based on the Soviet legacy.

Finally, in this book, I elaborate on my approach to the concepts of 'child' and 'childhood', which is through the notions of 'person' and 'personhood'. This has theoretical and methodological significance. Most of the Childhood Studies scholars look at a child through the prism of an individual. In this case, a child as an analytical category is taken away from the socio-cultural context and juxtaposed to the analytical category of an adult. In Kochkor, it is not the child-adult opposition, but instead other local categories, which play a much larger role in the perception of a child and in the shaping of its childhood. This book suggests that the local categorisations of a child can open up a debate on childhoods (in plural) with multiple identities. If we take into account the idea that a human being has an 'individual' as well as a 'person' side, then it is equally important to study the aspect of the child as a social person, which is usually ignored in Childhood Studies scholarship. I argue that this approach would give a more complete analysis of children, not only in Kochkor but also beyond it.

So far, the world knows about children in Kyrgyzstan only from the reports of international development organisations which depict only negative aspects of Kyrgyzstani children's childhoods for the purpose of tackling them. The scholars of the Childhood Studies discipline and most anthropological works concentrate on children in South Asia or Africa. Thus, we do not know much about children's lives in the post-socialist Central Asian space. This book illustrates rich ethnographic case studies on Kyrgyz children and their healthy growth from local people's own perspectives. They are accompanied by discourses on the meanings of life, social orders, local values, cultural templates as well as negotiations between normative values and real practices, continuity and change,

the past and the present and traditions and modernity in Kochkor.

This ethnographic work contributes to the general fields such as Childhood Studies, Anthropology of Childhood, Anthropology of Values, Central Asian Studies, Developmental Studies and Personhood Studies. It may also be of interest to students (both undergraduate and graduate) and scholars who do comparative studies on religion, rituals, education, morality, medical anthropology and on the historical perspectives on social and cultural changes. It is suitable not only for academic

scholars but also for policy-makers as well as for people from non-academic circles who would like to learn more about contemporary issues in Kyrgyzstan or within a wider post-Soviet Central Asian context.

This book is based on my doctoral dissertation submitted to Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main in May 2017; more recent literature was not added for publication.

Baktygul Shabdan
Frankfurt am Main, Germany

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their help to polish this work technically. I would also like to express my deepest *Chong Rahmat* to Andrea Luithle-Hardenberg for giving me support and warm encouragement throughout my work.

Back then, when I first stepped into my PhD studies in 2011, I had not even realised that I was actually stepping into the phase of 'liminality'. During this phase, I was neither a proper mother, nor a proper wife; neither was I a proper *kelin* (daughter-in-law), a proper daughter, a proper sibling nor a proper relative. I would like to thank my family and relatives for understanding my social absence and supporting me and, mainly, believing in me.

I owe a very important debt to my parents, Radish Tulebaev and Mayram Tulebaeva, for raising and educating me and for their spiritual support and moral mentoring throughout my life. Thank you to my siblings Aida, Jarkynay, Nurgül and Sultanbek for being with me, even remotely, and updating me on news and happenings in my extended family back in Kyrgyzstan. I am whole-heartedly grateful to my mother-in-law Nurila Kojotaeva, who, as an educated journalist herself, understood how important education is for girls and supported my study abroad. I would like to thank Gulbara Burukova, who accompanied me to my field site and looked after my child, who was then one year old, while I was busy studying other people's children.

Finally, but most importantly, I express my endless thanks to my husband Almaz Shabdan and my daughter Kamila Shabdan. I thank my husband for patiently walking together with me along my PhD path and cheering me up throughout this process. When we moved to Germany to start my doctoral studies, our daughter was four and a half months old. Despite my strong attempts to balance my personal and academic life then, still, as a mother, I always felt and until now have a feeling of owing my daughter a debt of gratitude. Kamila, *kyzym*, I am very much grateful to you for being such a clever girl and understandable child and for allowing me to complete this work. I dedicate this book to you.

Abbreviations and Notes

Abbreviations

ADK	Kyrg. <i>Aiyldyk Den-Sooluk Komiteti</i> , Village Health Committee
BT	Baktygul Tulebaeva (author, maiden name)
CRC	Cultural Research Center
DFID	Department for International Development
FAP	Feldscher Accoucher Points
GAI	Rus. <i>Gosudarstvennaya Avtomobil'naya Inspektsiya</i> , Traffic Police
GIZ	German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation
GSV	Rus. <i>Gruppa Semeynyh Vrachey</i> , Group of Family Doctors
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KUZ	Rus. <i>Komitet po Ukreplenyu Zdorov'ya</i> , Health Promotion Committee
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WHO	World Health Organization

Notes on Transliteration

For Kyrgyz and Russian words I have used the BGN/PCGN Romanisation system. In the Kyrgyz language the letter ж is pronounced in two versions. I used j=ж (e.g. with ж pronounced as in 'jam' or 'journal' in English) and zh=ж (e.g. when ж is pronounced soft like in the English word 'measure').

Notes on Naming Places and People

Kochkor is the actual name of the place where I conducted my fieldwork and the names of other locations are also retained in my work. I decided to use the actual names of the members of my host-family, because I considered that changing their names would not guarantee full anonymity when I use the terms 'my host-parents' or 'host-family'.

As a result, I have not included in this book any information that would jeopardise their reputation or dignity. To ensure their anonymity, I have changed other interlocutors' names.

Notes on Terms and Wordings

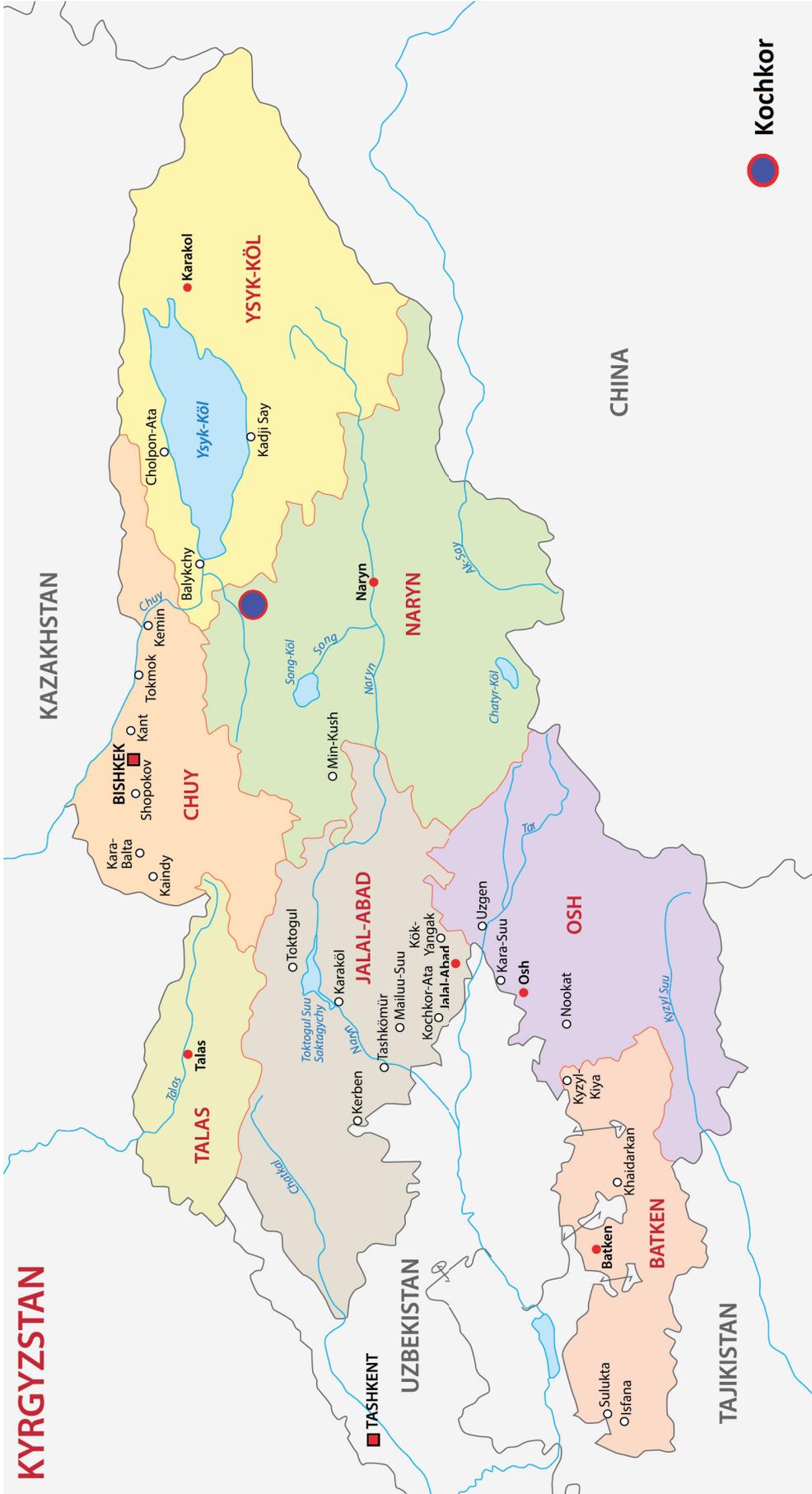
I have used many local terms in this book. First of all, this is aimed to deliver original meanings of specific Kyrgyz words. For instance, some culture-specific local phenomena such as *kirene*, *salt*, *yrym* do not have a direct English equivalent or, on the contrary, have many alternatives in English. In such cases, local terms were used and a description of what they mean based on the context of their usage was provided.

The reader will also come across the Kyrgyz words 'Ata', 'Apa', 'Eje' and 'Bayke' along with some proper names. This is the local Kyrgyz practice used for addressing people who are older than oneself. On their own these words mean 'father', 'mother', 'sister' and 'brother', respectively. When used with proper names of people, they indicate respect being shown by the person who is speaking.

I communicated with my interlocutors mainly in Kyrgyz. Some informants included certain Russian and Arabic words in their conversations with me. When this occurred, they are also italicised, using 'Rus.' or 'Arabic' to specify from which language these words come.

I have used some English words in bold; this is for the purpose of underlining their importance or drawing the readers' attention to those words or phrases. Some concepts such as the 'person' and 'individual' are also indicated in bold in some places. This is mainly done to differentiate the concepts of 'person' or 'individual' from person and individual as actual people where both versions come together.

I do not impose any gender to the term 'child'. The 'child' that I refer to belongs to both sexes and that is why I decided to address the child with 'it'.



Map of Kyrgyzstan (source: <<https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/kyrgyzstan>> ; modified by the author).

1. Introduction

1.1. From a 'Western' Child to a 'Kyrgyz' Child

It was early spring of 2007 when I joined the Swiss Red Cross for a short period as a Kyrgyz-English interpreter. The Swiss Red Cross was intensively working on a project called 'Sprinkles'. The latter was a Canadian micronutrient supplement powder developed to eliminate iron deficiency in children, which was and continues to be one of the main child-related health problems in Kyrgyzstan. Research conducted by UNICEF during the mid-90s in Kyrgyzstan showed that almost half of the nation's children under the age of 36 months were anemic due to iron deficiency (see UNICEF 2013). In Naryn, one of the seven provinces of Kyrgyzstan where this pilot project was launched, the Swiss Red Cross distributed the 'Sprinkles' product free of charge to families who had children between six months and two years old. Later I learned that the dose they gave to children in Kyrgyzstan was four times higher than the dose given to children in Bangladesh, where a similar project had been carried out. Still, in comparison to the cases in Bangladesh, the results that the Kyrgyz 'Sprinkles' pilot project showed were comparatively poor.

Two years later, I met the coordinator of the 'Sprinkles' project. With excitement she spoke about significant transformations going on with the product in Kyrgyzstan. She was American, in her mid-30s and cheerful by nature. But that day I noticed additional excitement and positive emotions when she was talking about this transformation. From her purse she took out a small package. I recognised it as a package of 'Sprinkles' that had been distributed to people in Naryn in 2007. On closer inspection, I noticed that the packaging had changed (*fig. 1*). First, instead of the child that used to be depicted on the old package, there was a 'Kyrgyz' child. I would not have identified the face on the picture to be Kyrgyz immediately, but the coordinator explained, 'We took the picture of the child from the children's cartoon 'Aktan and Akylay''. She noted how children loved this cartoon. Aktan and Akylay are the names of personages (a boy and a girl, respectively) in the

famous cartoon named 'Keremet Köch' produced by UNICEF in Kyrgyz language. These two children are identified as 'Kyrgyz' children because they wear Kyrgyz national costumes: the boy wears an *ak kalpak*, a national hat worn by men, and the girl wears a Kyrgyz traditional dress and a hat. At that time this was the only cartoon that was colourful, interesting and of good quality in Kyrgyz language. Additionally, parents also liked this cartoon for being educational.

Second, the product name 'Sprinkles' was replaced by the Kyrgyz name 'Gülazyk' which has a deep cultural meaning for Kyrgyz people. Historically, *gülazyk*¹ used to be the food that warriors ate and got strength and power from as it was rich in proteins. This was also a part of food that Kyrgyz nomads used to have in their diet. The head of the Swiss Red Cross in Kyrgyzstan, in his report, also explained the choice to use this particular word by referring it to an 'old tradition' (Schüth 2011). What Kyrgyz people label as 'tradition' becomes attractive and obligatory. Thus, the attempts of the Swiss Red Cross had a significant result: the Canadian product 'Sprinkles' had become **localised**.

'Gülazyk' became well-known and its use has also been expanded to reach other parts of Kyrgyzstan. It has shown good results as anemia levels have decreased among children in the country by 25% (UNICEF 2011; 2013). It appears in the annual reports of development organisations and on their websites as one of the 'success stories' in the healthcare of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. In families, what is mostly remembered about 'Gülazyk' is the song called 'Ay-ay Gülazyk'² that was published as a small children's book with colourful pictures and distributed among families with small children free of charge.

The efforts of the Swiss Red Cross and other development organisations to transform the 'foreign' product to its 'localised' version can reveal the

¹ *Gülazyk* consisted of either dried meat, cereal or dairy products.

² *Ay-ay* is the term used by children to describe something as good and nice.



Fig. 1. From Sprinkles (left) to Gulazyk (right) (source: Lundeen 2010, slide 6 and 10).

importance of local people's perceptions and practices relating to children's health and the notion of healthy growth. I found this idea interesting, and this was what made me decide to study for my doctoral research. I wanted to find out what Kyrgyz people themselves think of children's healthy growth and what they do to ensure it.

In 2012, I returned to Kochkor, one of the villages in Naryn province that I visited with the Swiss Red Cross five years ago, but this time for my own doctoral research. I caught up with the 'Gulazyk' project and saw how successfully other health-related developmental projects had been implemented since my last visit many years ago. The 'foreshadowed problem' (Hammersley/Atkinson 1995, 24) that I put in front of me as part of my doctoral research project was derived from the 'Sprinkles' experience that I described earlier, as well as my past work experience at Aigine Cultural Research Center (CRC) in Bishkek between 2005 and 2008. The Swiss Red Cross took as a baseline the biomedical aspect of health, while Aigine CRC, on the contrary, carried out projects on alternative medicine. Particularly, they studied sacred sites and traditional healing and closely worked with local healers which had allowed them to collect an immense amount of material on indigenous knowledge relating to health and health-seeking practices. Still, in their massive collection not much could be found specifically relating to children's health and well-being, which only

strengthened my interest to concentrate on children's health in Kyrgyzstan.

Although I was not trained as a medical anthropologist at that time, my experiences in two contrasting areas such as biomedicine (the case of the Swiss Red Cross) and alternative medicine (the case of Aigine CRC) had given me a chance to observe the diversity of ideas, values and practices related to health. On the one hand, I got interested in the idea of studying local perspectives on what constitutes a healthy child and the local practices that are used to ensure the healthy growth of children. On the other hand, I wanted to find out how successfully the health-related projects, similar to 'Sprinkles' (of which there are a good number in Kyrgyzstan), had been working in the country and what kinds of notions of healthy growth of children they pursue. With these questions in mind, I started my fieldwork in October 2012 in Kochkor.

The very first site that I visited was the village hospital where I interviewed doctors and observed doctor-patient interactions. I got contact details of the parents who brought their sick children to the hospital and interviewed them in their home settings. It was very interesting to observe how the further away I went from the hospital setting, that is, from the 'biomedical realm' of health, more and more complex aspects related to the healthy growth of a child started to emerge.

'Healthy growth' and 'healthy development' are the concepts that I have taken as a prism to study

children in Kochkor. One cannot come across the straight equivalents of these terms in local speech though. The word 'health' is translated in Kyrgyz as *den-sooluk*. Unlike the English term 'health', defined broadly by the World Health Organization as 'a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity',³ the Kyrgyz term *den-sooluk* is very narrow. It relates to the physical condition of a person and means a physical body without illness. Contrary to the notions of *den-sooluk* or health, the idea of healthy growth both in Kyrgyz as well as in English does not refer to a particular notion or a state of being. For example, for the people in Kochkor, healthy growth and healthy development of a child is not only limited to a physical, mental or social well-being, but also means the development of a child with proper moral education, the conduct of culturally defining health and life-cycle rituals and a child who is 'culturally nourished', that is, a child as a proper member of the Kyrgyz society.

Moreover, there were not only varying and incompatible views regarding health on 'local' and 'global' levels that one usually comes across in medical anthropological discourses, but also the vernacular ideas of healthy growth were diverse and incompatible. Some interlocutors mentioned living in a village and eating an eco-product as healthy, while for my practicing Muslim interlocutors, eating *halal*⁴ food was considered healthy (chapter 6). For some, health implies one's own health; for others, being healthy involves the health of their social circle. Even such abstract concepts as 'freedom' which would be accepted as positive can be analysed in the light of how much freedom is healthy for children (see Mostowlansky 2013). The local views of healthy growth and healthy development have varied due to the dynamics of social and economic processes and situations that people in Kochkor have been experiencing since Kyrgyzstan gained independence in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet

Union. The social dynamics are influenced by the Soviet legacies as well as presently experienced processes such as re-traditionalisation, modernisation, globalisation and Re-Islamisation.⁵ I argue that the tendency of the simultaneously developed multiple, and at times contradicting, values in contemporary Kyrgyzstan has shaped the notions of healthy growth of children differently.

First, the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the new nation-state of Kyrgyzstan increased the interest of Kyrgyz people, as a titular nation, in their national values. This scenario, which is called 'traditionalisation' or 're-traditionalisation', is relevant not only to Kyrgyzstan, but equally to other Central Asian, post-Soviet and post-colonial countries (Avruch 1982; Gilman 2004; Kandiyoti/Azimova 2004; Koroteyeva/Makarova 1998; McCormick/White 2011; Mould 2005; Werner 2009; Yadgar 2009). With a growing interest in one's own past, many folk healing practices in Kyrgyzstan and in Central Asia in general have increased.⁶ In Uzbekistan, 'traditional' medicine was considered as part of the construction process of Uzbek identity (Hohmann 2010), while in post-Soviet Kazakhstan the government supported 'folk' medicine as part of their national heritage (Penkala-Gawęcka 2013). It was the same in Kyrgyzstan. As my experience at Aigine CRC has shown, the cases of people turning to healers increased. During the Soviet time people were aware of folk healers in their own neighbourhood and villages and healing practices were practiced in an intimate and closed circle away from the gaze of the Soviet state. This changed with independence. The number of traditional healers increased, and even a state-recognised healing centre 'Beyish' ('paradise') with traditional healers was established. According to the decree No. 592 of the Government of the

³ World Health Organization, WHO Child Growth Standards. Background 1, <http://www.who.int/childgrowth/1_what.pdf> (last access: 17.06.2012).

⁴ *Halal* means 'lawful' and 'permissible' according to Islam.

⁵ By the term 'Re-Islamisation' I refer to the growing Islamic influence in Kyrgyzstan which started to become visible from the 1990s and especially since 2000 in Kochkor, as most of my interlocutors had noted. See chapter 6 for some changes brought about by this process.

⁶ On traditional healing in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan see Aitpaeva 2009; Aitpaeva et al. 2007; for Kazakhstan: Penkala-Gawęcka 2011; 2013; for Uzbekistan: Hohmann 2010; Rasanayagam 2006.

Kyrgyz Republic of 2011,⁷ the ‘Beyish Scientific and Production Centre of Traditional Medicine’ was renamed to the ‘International Academy of Traditional and Experimental Medicine under the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic’.⁸

Second, Islamic values and practices, which were suppressed during the Soviet era, revived and got strengthened after independence. These new religious influences are not limited to the topics of religion and politics, but have immensely influenced people’s everyday life practices. In the first instance, this touches on the issue of health and healthy lifestyle. Along with visits to folk healers, the number of visits to mullahs (Islamic specialists) has also increased. According to my interlocutors, before (this revival), people had visited mullahs specifically for mental illnesses, called *jin ooru*⁹ in Kyrgyz; now people also turn to mullahs for other health-related concerns. Many pious Muslims started to criticise the traditional practices of visiting sacred sites such as holy springs, trees, caves or mountains. Those who visited such sites are condemned for invoking the names of other spirits and worshiping them, which is against Islamic values. I also came across many pious Muslim families who promote the idea that any lay person can become healthy by directly turning to God without using healers, or even going to Islamic religious specialists. Thus, many religious families have started the practice of reading *suras* (verses) from the Quran on their own to cure illness and stay healthy (chapter 6).

Third, similar to the activities of the Swiss Red Cross, there are many international organisations working on development projects in Kyrgyzstan

where the healthcare reform is one of the main areas of focus. Such organisations include the World Health Organization, United Nations Development Group agencies, international financial institutions (such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund) and many governmental agencies (such as USAID, DFID, GIZ and JICA to name but a few).¹⁰ These organisations have brought significant changes to the state healthcare system in Kyrgyzstan starting from the 1990s. Their programmes have promoted the idea of ‘self-help’ and empowered families to take responsibility for their own well-being. For example, the Swiss Red Cross together with the Aga Khan Foundation initiated a project through which they introduced greens into the diets of local people in Kochkor village and other mountainous regions of Kyrgyzstan, where the diet mainly consisted of meat. They taught the villagers to prepare preserved salads for winter so that the locals, who originally did not consume many greens, had a source of some vitamins in winter. Many families were eager to learn these new skills. There were also people who were reluctant to make some changes in their already established diet, which is heavily based on bread, tea, noodles, potatoes and meat and less on greens. In fact, one man refused to plant greens stating that ‘he is not a cow to eat grass’.

Finally, recent social dynamics concerning migration, democracy, market economy and technological developments have contributed to discourses about the proper development of children. These influences have broadened the understanding of people on the notion of healthy development, but at the same time have raised their concerns about an increasing ‘unhealthy environment’ where the main victims are children. I also observed how concerns about ‘unhealthiness’ of the environment are linked to current insecurities in post-Soviet young Kyrgyzstani state which are contrasted to what children used to experience during the Soviet era. The latter, according to my interlocutors in Kochkor, promoted a healthy development of children which was based on a secure life for people in general, including adults,

7 Decree of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic 2011: Постановление Правительства Кыргызской Республики, No. 592, September 23, 2011, <<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/preview/ru-ru/95228/10?mode=tekst>> (last access: 02.02.2023).

8 A similar case was also observed by Penkala-Gawecka 2013 in Kazakhstan. She argues that the involvement of the state in the establishment of such state-recognised institutions was to regulate and control the healing practices to avoid non-acceptable practices that might result in more harm than good.

9 *Jin ooru*, the local term for mental illness, should not be confused with the affliction related to *jinn* (‘evil spirits’) that are commonly referred to in Islam. For example, in Kyrgyz the term *jindi* (which is translated into English as ‘insane’) does not necessarily have a connection to evil spirits (*jinn*).

10 USAID, DFID, GIZ and JICA are the governmental development agencies of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany and Japan respectively.

as there was a clear goal that Soviet people had in front of them.

On the other hand, current social and economic insecurity in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan was mentioned as one of the ills that negatively contribute to the understanding of healthy growth of children, as noted by Asel, a woman in her 40s:

BT: ‘What do you understand by the term ‘healthy child’?’

Asel: ‘A healthy child is one who is raised in a complete family, where both a mother and a father are present and guiding the child. But now there are many divorces. We see how parents leave for Russia to work and leave their children behind.’

Asel’s statement highlights that current issues such as labour migration have started to engender new concerns with impacts on the notions of a healthy child. Mass labour migration from Kyrgyzstan to Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkey and Europe has varying effects on children. On the one hand, these migrants send an enormous amount of money back to Kyrgyzstan to support their families economically and improve their life conditions (World Bank 2017; see also Isabaeva 2011; Reeves 2012). On the other hand, as noted by a worker at a local Social Protection Institution in Kochkor, there are also negative aspects of labour migration which lead to an increasing number of ‘social orphans’ who are left behind by their parents and who are looked after by their grandparents or aunts and uncles.

Asel’s statement also indicates that the healthy growth of children is tightly and directly related to ills of the society, where one talks beyond the physical health of children or healthy nutrition. In this book, I will present more detailed descriptions of discourses on the notions of ‘healthy growth’ in relation not only to physical health but also to upbringing, moral values, child-related rituals, technological development, Islam, democracy or children’s rights (chapters 5–8). I will show how such concepts and phenomena are discussed among local people and carry different connotations and values that circle around the issues of what is healthy and what is not. Thus, I will explore diverse perceptions about children’s healthy growth

and the way parents in Kochkor strive to bring up their children healthily, which have resulted in the reflections on current socio-cultural changes and discourses between the past and the present as well as the ideal and the real.

1.2. What is a Child and How to Approach It?

‘We are born Kyrgyz, think and live as Russians, and are buried as Arabs. This is what I feel sorry about. Why is it so? We are born Kyrgyz and are given names in a Kyrgyz way, but as soon as we are born and start to be involved in life, we copy the Russians. [Turning to me] As you have noticed, we copy the way Europeans dress. We try to find out what they do, and with great zeal we try to insert that into our lives. And when we die, the Quran is read in an Arabic way and we are buried according to the Arabic *salt* (‘customs’). Why cannot we be Kyrgyz?! I feel sorry about this. What will we bring to the future? (*Biz kelechekke emneni karmap barabyz?*) What will we leave for our children?’

The first short sentence of Mayram Eje,¹¹ a single mother of two in her mid-40s, can give us a glimpse into the history of Kyrgyz people who lived for seventy years under Soviet socialism and experienced ‘Russian’ and ‘European’ influences and have been exposed to an excessive ‘Arabic culture’ with the revival of Islam in the post-Soviet independent Kyrgyzstan. Mayram Eje further expressed her regrets that all these influences were being absorbed into the blood of Kyrgyz people and was concerned about the way children should be raised with such diverse influences.

The statement above was brought up when we were discussing children and their healthy growth. This and many other statements of my interlocutors indicate that the topics on children and their childhoods cannot be studied out of a broader socio-cultural, economic and political context and that children are very much the product of diverse influences. Like Asel, my interlocutor mentioned earlier, who made a link between

¹¹ *Eje*, a Kyrgyz word for sister, is used also when addressing a female person older than oneself.

the social phenomenon of labour migration and children's healthy development, Mayram Eje also started to reflect on broader societal issues when discussing children and their proper development. Her above-mentioned words were expressed with bitterness and her regrets implied that she holds the idea that a Kyrgyz child should be raised according to certain culture-specific values and practices.

The image of the person that Mayram Eje talks about is tightly connected to the identity of being Kyrgyz. The main idea of the passage is about values and practices that create out of a child a Kyrgyz person, since the practice of copying Russians and Europeans, in the eyes of Mayram Eje, erases in children the identity of being Kyrgyz. For example, Russian and Arabic values and practices have been adopted by some Kyrgyz who have departed from their own traditions (*salt*) and cultural practices that are believed to be transmitted from generation to generation. From this perspective, it can be argued that Kyrgyz people's ethnic identity is culturally loaded which becomes especially salient in issues related to bringing up children. We can infer this from Mayram Eje's interrogative statement 'Why cannot we be Kyrgyz?'

Anthropologists have argued that ethnicity is constructed by linking social groups with special cultural value standards (see Barth 1969). Similarly, Mayram Eje's judgement on how one is Kyrgyz and how one can lose his or her Kyrgyzness is related to cultural practices. In his classical work 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries', Barth argues for the idea that ethnic groups should not be seen as culturally isolated groups. He notes that there are some persisting labels and characteristics according to which people will judge and will be judged against. This statement aptly captures Mayram Eje's conviction that Kyrgyz are a certain kind of people to be judged according to a certain set of values they hold and practices they follow. Accordingly, children, as young growing members of such groups, are inculcated with core societal values that will help them develop certain characteristics and identity.

As a result of the various social and cultural processes following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of an independent

Kyrgyzstan in 1991, the issue of this core value of the society started to become a huge topic for discussion among Kyrgyz people. How should a Kyrgyz person behave? What kind of family should a Kyrgyz family be? How should a Kyrgyz person practice religion? How should a Kyrgyz child be raised? How should Kyrgyz life-cycle rituals be conducted? How should a Kyrgyz person perform burial rituals or organise feasts? These and many other questions on being Kyrgyz and leading the life of a Kyrgyz are mentioned in everyday discourses. These discourses have become very topical not only because of the establishment of a nation-state with Kyrgyz people being a titular nation making up 72.8% of the population as of 2016,¹² but also due to many newly introduced values that are considered to be in conflict with local cultural practices, which I will demonstrate in ethnographic chapters.

Values and practices directly shape children's lives and determine what is important for children's healthy development. Following Robbins and Siikala, by the term 'values' I am referring to 'culturally given judgements about what is most important in life; about what people's actions should struggle to produce and reproduce' (Robbins/Siikala 2014, 123). As for 'practice', I am adopting the definition of Catherine Bell (1997), who suggests the very term as a substitute to the concept of 'structure'. For her, structure is static, while practice gives more room for human beings to 'continually reproduce and reshape their social and cultural environments' (Bell 1997, mentioned in Blevins 2005). The practices that people in Kochkor are engaged in are diverse due to current socio-cultural changes taking place in the village. What caught my interest is how diverse values and practices of people in this village construct a diverse set of notions about a child and childhoods.

When discussing children, people in Kochkor did not talk about a child as a general or timeless being, but usually underlined them as

¹² National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic 2017: Национальный Статистический Комитет Кыргызской Республики, <<http://www.stat.kg/en/statisticheskie-perepisi/>> (last access: 08.05.2017).

‘present-day children’, such as *azyrky baldar* (‘current children’), *azyrky jashtar* (‘current youth’) or *azyrkylar* (‘current people’), who are definitely different from the children of the past. By comparing childhoods of present-day children to their own childhoods, parents and especially the elderly, often mentioned many good qualities of Kyrgyz people but in the past tense such as ‘The Kyrgyz used to be...’ (*Kyrgyz degen ... bolgon*). They usually condemned modern day children’s behaviour, their ways of thinking and attitudes to others and showed their dissatisfaction with current children by stating: ‘When has a Kyrgyz person ever been like this!?’ (*Kachan Kyrgyz ushunday ele!?*). This gave an impression as if the notion of being Kyrgyz can be erased by the complex social dynamics that people in contemporary Kochkor experience. This, in turn, urges us to ask: ‘Is there such a notion of a Kyrgyz child at all?’

There are many ethnographic works on children and their childhoods that refer to a specific society or a group of people (Kramer 2005; Mead [1928] 2001; Morton 1996; Raum 1940; Whiting 1941) that give a general image of a child in a particular community. In the same way, one could also talk about ‘Kyrgyz childhood’ or ‘becoming Kyrgyz’ where a set of characteristics and qualities can be easily pointed out. In this work, even though I provide culturally set characteristic that can be generally assigned to Kyrgyz children, I want to show that Kyrgyz childhood is not homogenous. Kyrgyz children in Kochkor experience different kinds of childhoods. This is mainly due to the fact that Kochkorians themselves do not hold homogenous values as a result of current socio-cultural, economic, political processes that will be extensively discussed throughout this book.

I adopt the logic of my interlocutors in looking at children in connection to, and in no case separate from, a broader society. In this way, I would like to suggest that there is a tight link between the notion of ‘**healthy growth**’ of children and the concept of ‘**the person**’ as a socio-historical product in a Maussian (Mauss [1938] 1985) and Radcliffe-Brownian (Radcliffe-Brown 1952) sense (see chapter 2). Usually, the notion of personhood is more linked to adulthood and not childhood. This is because children are depicted as ‘incomplete’

beings who will only reach the state of being a ‘full’ person when they reach adulthood (see discussion in chapter 5). According to my observations in Kochkor, especially in the context of life-cycle rituals or local values of upbringing, I can say that the notion of personhood (i.e. who a person is and what qualities a person should have) is of major importance in the period of childhood and not adulthood. Thus, childhood is a crucial stage where parents and the whole community try to instil all desired qualities and expected characteristics in a child. This is directly exhibited through hotly debated issues of how a child should grow up in order to become a proper member of society or an upright citizen. I argue that the notion of a ‘childhood’ mirrors the notion of a ‘personhood’ and that the significance of childhood is in the period when society actively participates in the ‘making of the person’, of the child, both through discourses and in practice. It is during childhood when local values, cultural templates and other matters such as normative values and real practices or *sollen* and *sein* (see Parkin 2003), past and present, tradition and modernity are encountered.

Thus, one of the main focuses of this research was to look at locally set values and the values that are created by social dynamics in the geographical area of the study and how these processes affect the healthy growth of a child. Particularly, the concept of the ‘making of the person’ (see Berger et al. 2010; Markowitz 2000) is useful to argue that not only is a child or childhood constructed as a notion, but also a child’s health and education of any sort (such as moral or school education), its behaviour and even fate are constructed by the community. I have been inspired by the notion of ‘the making of the person’ from the volume ‘The Anthropology of Values’ (Berger et al. 2010), where one of the sections is titled: ‘Holism, Individualism and the Making of the Person’. It presents the notion of personhood, particularly the construction of the person, by taking into account different local socio-cosmological orders and values. In this volume, Platenkamp (2010) discusses how a child’s personhood is constructed, how a child is socialised through rituals and how a society invests in the making of the person (see also Iteanu 1990). Fortes mentions a similar account on how

the community invests in the child the ‘capacities of personhood specific to defined roles and statuses’ (Fortes 1973, mentioned in La Fontaine 1985, 132). These actions, which are made in ritual contexts, do not only have social significance, but are also believed to contribute to children’s physical growth and development (see La Fontaine 1985).

Based on these arguments, I raise several theoretical questions which frame the scope of this book. First, I ask: How are the notions of a ‘child’ and ‘childhood’ linked to specific socio-historical ideas and values? And how do social dynamics shape the conceptions and understandings of a child and what kind of childhood it should have? Second, how do people in Kochkor ‘construct’ a child and how does a child, according to local ideals and values, shape its society? Third, if the notion of ‘making a child into a person’ is salient in Kochkor, then what values and practices are involved in these processes and how are they connected to the perception of the healthy growth of a child? Fourth, if we perceive the concept of child as a socio-historical idea, then how has the value of healthy growth of children changed over time in Kochkor and how do people negotiate these changes?

By looking at these questions, my main aim is to look at existing anthropological knowledge about the ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ from different angles. At first, one might say that ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ are the same. So why should we be concerned with this at all? Nonetheless, we should keep in mind two different perspectives such as (a) ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ as analytical categories versus (b) ‘child’, ‘children’ and ‘childhood’ as local categories or lived realities. Here, one realises that these terms do not fully represent each other and therefore they require some clarifications. Let me first start with the notion of ‘childhood’.

First, childhood is a generational stage which any person encounters between their birth and adolescence or over the period from birth to adulthood, as adolescence might not exist in certain societies. According to Qvortrup and his colleagues, ‘the childhood’ has common characteristics irrespective of time and space and cross-cultural variations (Qvortrup et al. 1994).

This was the reason they argue for ‘the childhood’ in **singular**, rather than ‘childhoods’ in **plural** (see also James/James 2004). Second, unlike ‘the childhood’ as ‘the **structural space**’ that is occupied by children as a collectivity (James/James 2004, 14), we also deal with ‘the childhood’ as an **idea, notion** or **concept**. For example, Ariès’ (1962) work shows how childhood is not universal, because childhood is experienced in different societies and in different times differently. His statement that ‘in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist’ (Ariès 1962, 125) is highly cited, debated and criticised. But at the same time, it has encouraged many scholars to study children cross-culturally and across time.¹³ Despite much criticism, many scholars share Ariès’ idea that childhood as we know it now is a modern invention as children in the medieval past were seen as small adults. The third angle to the understanding of childhood is related to the idea that childhood is seen as ‘**a product of discourses**’. According to Wyness, ‘[d]ifferent discourses produce different childhoods’, in this sense, childhood is ‘pluralized’ (Wyness 2006, 22). For example, childhood, characterised in discourses, can be defined based on people’s past childhood experiences who compare and contrast their childhoods to the childhoods of their children or grandchildren. This perception was very common among my interlocutors in Kochkor, most of whom experienced a Soviet childhood but raise their children in the post-Soviet context. Thus, it is important to differentiate between childhood as a **concept** or a **lived experience**. A similar approach can be applied to the concepts of the ‘child’ and ‘children’.

Throughout this book, I will introduce my readers to childhood both as a lived experience and as a notion. The reader should be able to understand from the context which meaning I am implying. Still, there remain some problems that I would like to clarify in this introductory chapter when it comes to my use of the words ‘child’ and ‘children’. The first is the matter of **categorisation**, the second is the matter of **wording** and the

¹³ On the history of childhood see also Cunningham 2006; DeMause 1995; Heywood 2001.

third is the matter of **approach**, that is, how we as researchers study children and their childhoods.

Like any other concept, the term 'child' carries 'the double nature' (Harris 1989, 599): (a) the child as an analytical category and (b) the child as a native category, as I mentioned earlier. Local categorisations, that is, how people in Kochkor define a child, might differ from the analytical categorisation, in some aspects. For example, a 'child' is usually defined as a person who is not yet an adult and there are certain indicators such as age which is usually taken into account when defining a child. Age is used by the people in Kochkor in bureaucracy or in some rituals. Still, there are other local ways of categorisation which are more important than age. For example, I came across many families where the eldest child, irrespective of its age, would not be considered as a 'child' anymore. More about local categorisations will be provided in chapter 4. What I want to emphasise here is that, in this book, I mainly deal with local people's perceptions and categorisations. I will be also referring to analytical categories of a child in order to tease them out in the local context for the purpose of cross-cultural comparisons.

The second aspect which I want to highlight when it comes to employing the words 'child' or 'children' is related to the English terms and their equivalent in Kyrgyz, which is *bala*. Allen brings up this common issue by noting that terms like 'law', 'religion' or 'kinship' become ambiguous because they are understood differently in '(i) what they are ordinarily taken to mean in English, (ii) the nearest equivalent in some alien society or group of societies, or (iii) what is common to both usages' (Allen 2000, 22). Allen's third point echoes Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1953) philosophical account on 'family resemblances' (cited by Needham 1975, 350), that is, how the English term 'child' has things in common with the Kyrgyz word *bala*.¹⁴ For example, both child and *bala* mean (i) a young person who is not yet an adult, (ii) an offspring, where a 40-year-old man will still be the child (*bala*) of his parents, (iii) the same 40-year-old man can be

referred to by, let's say, an 80-year-old woman as 'my child' (*balam*). In this sense, I will be using the English word 'child' to describe children in Kochkor. Nonetheless, I would like to add (and will demonstrate later) how the Kyrgyz term *bala* has much broader connotations and characteristics than the term 'child' in English has.

The third aspect is the matter of approach. What interested me most in my research was the approach that we, as scholars, use when we study children. For example, scholars of the Childhood Studies discipline approach the child differently from what people in Kochkor do. Childhood Studies scholarship approaches a child as an **individual**, who is usually defined in contrast to an adult. In the context of Kochkor, a child is usually approached as a **social person** who is either somebody's son or daughter, a sibling, a co-villager or a citizen who has certain roles, rights, social responsibilities and obligations. The taken for granted 'child/adult' juxtaposing approach by most Childhood Studies scholars was not prominently highlighted by my interlocutors.

This argument also has a methodological implication and here I find it relevant to mention Abu-Lughod's statement about studying women in Bedouin society:

'In Bedouin society, one can hardly talk about 'women' in general. Every woman is a sister, daughter, wife, mother, or aunt and it is the role and relationships that usually determines how she will be perceived and treated' (Abu-Lughod 1988, 152).

This implies that the way women are treated as sisters, daughters, wives, mothers and aunts has an effect on the image of a 'Bedouin woman' in general. I share Abu-Lughod's viewpoint in my study about children whereby I argue that in Kochkor village people do not talk about a child as a general analytical category, but talk about a child as a '**social person**', that is, as a member of society with a certain status. All these diverse pictures about a child as an eldest or youngest, male or female, or a social orphan will also contribute to the construction of a general image of a Kyrgyz child. This, in turn, leads to the understanding that

¹⁴ I would like to thank Roland Hardenberg for raising challenging questions on this issue during our discussions.

a child cannot be studied on its own but only in relation to others in the society.

Thus, studying children in Kochkor requires that one should take the family, community and broader social circle and their values and practices into account. The importance of taking the familial context into consideration in the study about children has already been mentioned. James and Prout argue that scholars who study children looked at children outside of the family setting, while studies on the family concentrated not on children, but on the topics around children such as child rearing, socialisation or education. They note that a family is ‘a[n important] social context within which children discover their identities as ‘children’ and as ‘selves’ (James/Prout 1996, 42) and they advocate for the idea to take family aspects to the study of children. Especially now, in the post-Soviet context, when the responsibility to raise children has shifted from the state towards individual families, it has become important to study children in Kochkor within a family setting. Since parents are seen as the main agents in their children’s upbringing, I argue that values related to children whom I observed in Kochkor could be studied through the prism of **childhood** as well as through the prism of **parenthood**.

Finally, I would like to underline that a child, as a person, is a social and cultural being who is better defined through its social roles and obligations in the society. That is why the notion of a child should be analysed within the social and cultural contexts. Especially when a child is seen as the future generation who should continue the accepted set of culturally-specific value standards, the study of children in Kochkor requires an understanding of, in Parkin’s term, ‘the fundamental values of a society’s ideology’ (Parkin 2003, 42). At the same time, as Sholkamy (1997) rightly notes in her research about children in Upper Egypt, through the study about children and their lives, one can also understand much of family life, marriage, kinship, social relations, social status, economic production and power. Below I will introduce my readers to Kochkor, my fieldsite, which will be followed by an introduction to the complex social dynamics of the village that have directly affected the children in Kochkor and their childhoods.

1.3. Kochkor – The Centre of Civilisation¹⁵

Kochkor village, with a population of 22,000 people,¹⁶ is located in Kochkor valley in Naryn, the mountainous province in northern Kyrgyzstan (fig. 2). The village lies 200km southeast of the capital city of Bishkek which is about a two and a half to three-hour drive away. Among local people it is known as ‘black Kochkor’ (*kara Kochkor*) because of its strong wind and because this region does not usually get snow in winters. In fact, some people believe that the name of the village came from the Kyrgyz words *kach kar* which literally means ‘go away, snow’. Etymologically, the word *kochkor* is translated into English as ‘ram’. Akin to other places, this area also has its legends of origin. One of the many legends about Kochkor I learned from a local school director, Askar Bayke,¹⁷ who narrated it as follows:

‘This place was a crossroad, the intersection of nine roads (*toguz joldun tomu*). In order to go to Jungal, Toguz-Toroo, Naryn, At-Bashy and Kashgar [in China] or to Köl and Chüy,¹⁸ people had to pass this place. In summers, people of other regions came to this place with their livestock because of the good summer pastures. Later they noticed that in this region there was no snow in winter. Thus, some of them stayed to overwinter here. In autumns, through this place traders went to Kashgar with their livestock and other goods. They sold their livestock and exchanged it

¹⁵ The notion that Kochkor is the centre of civilisation was mentioned by my interlocutor who remembered the opening day of the Dom Kul’tury (House of Culture) in Kochkor. Chyngyz Aitmatov, a famous Kyrgyz writer, was invited to the opening ceremony in 1987 and, according to my interlocutor, when Aitmatov made his speech, he stated that Kochkor was the ‘ferment of civilisation’ (*tsivilizatsiyanyn köröngösü*). In my opinion, it could be that Chyngyz Aitmatov referred by this not to Kochkor village but to the House of Culture itself. Still, this was proudly mentioned by this interlocutor who wanted to emphasise how their village was the centre of civilisation.

¹⁶ According to statistics received from the local village government in 2013.

¹⁷ *Bayke* is translated as ‘elder brother’. Similar to the term *eje* (‘sister’), it is used when people address men older than themselves as a sign of respect.

¹⁸ These (except for Kashgar) are the names of districts and provinces in Kyrgyzstan that lie on different sides of Kochkor.

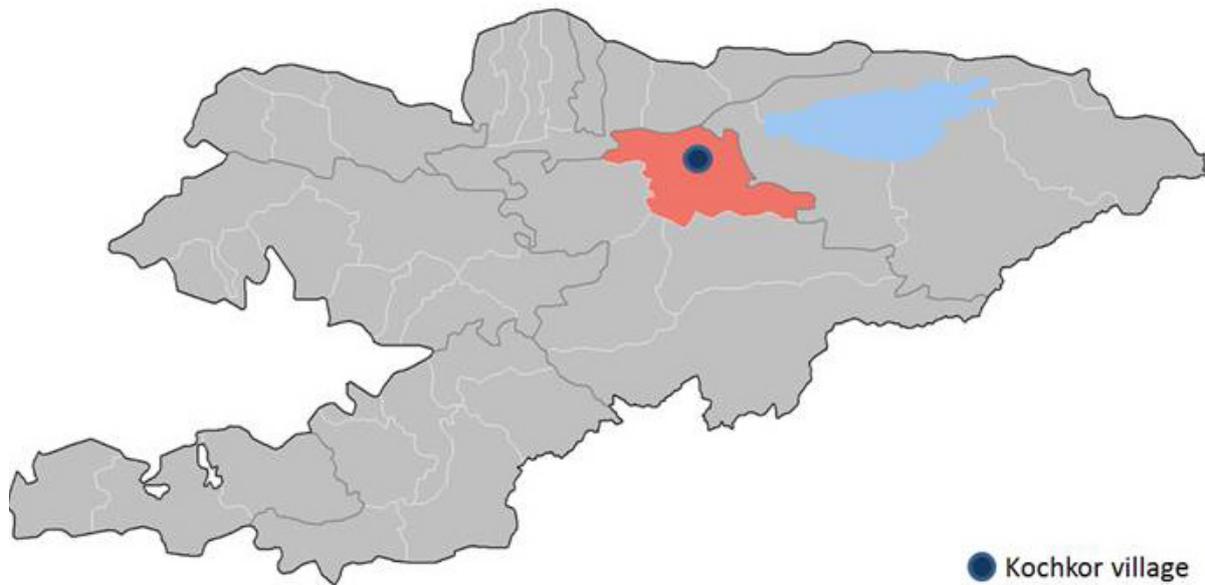


Fig. 2. Kochkor village in Kochkor rayon (administrative district, indicated in red on the map) (source: <<https://en.wikipedia.org>>; modified by the author).

for sweets and cloth-materials. One day, traders stopped at one old lady's house to spend overnight. This lady told the traders that she had a ram (*kochkor*). She asked them to sell it and instead bring sweets and goods for her children, as local people could not produce such things as sweets and tea. The traders agreed. When the traders finally arrived in Kashgar with their livestock and the lady's ram, the locals – the *sarts*¹⁹ – were organising a ram fight. Seeing the ram of the traders, the local people asked the traders to take part in the ram fight. The old lady's ram won and beat all the rams in Kashgar. Kashgarians were very interested in this ram. They asked the traders to sell it to them and the price they gave for the lady's ram was much higher than all the traders' goods taken together, which they had brought to Kashgar to sell. That was a good price! The traders sold the ram and brought back to the old lady [the owner of the ram] what she asked for and with many presents on top of it. 'My ram was not worth that much!

the old lady said. 'Your ram was worth much more than all our goods put together', answered the traders. The next year when these traders came to Kashgar, the locals recognised them as the people who had sold that [famous] ram. Since then, people coming from this region had been called people from Kochkor (*kochkorluktar*).'

Indeed, Kochkor village is located at an intersection of main roads which stretch to different parts of Kyrgyzstan. The location at the intersection of 'nine roads' allows people in Kochkor to engage in trade even today. According to the locals themselves, people in Kochkor are described as good traders. Despite its small size, Kochkor has two bazaars, one big department store and numerous wholesale and retail shops located in the centre of the village. These serve not only the residents of the village but also many other small villages located around Kochkor. In fact, the centre of the village is busy every day and especially on Saturdays when a cattle bazaar (*mal bazar*) is organised.

The location of Kochkor in a mountainous area allows its owners to engage in animal husbandry. Livestock (*mal*) are an indicator of wealth for people in Kochkor. Wealthy people are usually recognised according to the 'heads' (*bash*) of sheep,

¹⁹ The term *sart* has shifting meanings. It refers to settled people in Central Asia and the Middle East, town-dwellers and traders depending on who is defining the term *sart*. Mostly it is related to Uzbeks and Tajiks who are engaged in trading.

cows and horses they own. Whenever people have an opportunity to collect savings, they usually convert it into livestock. As Kochkor village is the centre of the Kochkor *rayon* (the district and also the administrative unit which comprises several villages) and is located in the centre of Kochkor valley, one would not usually see much livestock being tended in Kochkor village itself. I learned that almost every family in the neighbourhood of my host-family in Kochkor had livestock of a certain number which were looked after by shepherds or relatives in neighbouring villages closer to pastures. The owners can sell a few animals if they need to buy a television, a refrigerator or a car. They also sell their livestock to pay the tuition fees for their children or for funding wedding feasts. The cattle bazaar in Kochkor is usually busy, but it becomes especially lively in autumn which is the high season for harvesting and having feasts.

Being at the intersection of ‘nine roads’ also enables men in Kochkor to work as taxi drivers and drive passengers to neighbouring villages, or other *rayons* and *oblasts*²⁰ of Kyrgyzstan and mainly to Bishkek. In the time of higher unemployment that has prevailed since the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is trading for women and taxi driving for men that have become the most common occupations. This kind of division of labour can be found in other parts of Kyrgyzstan too, where people, be it a doctor or a teacher or an accountant, have stopped working in their professions due to low salaries and instead have chosen to work in bazaars or as taxi drivers due to the greater potential to earn and support their families.

In the post-Soviet context, not high education or a profession, but one’s ability to ‘get on one’s feet’ (*butuna turuu*) and ‘build their lives’ (*jashoosun kuruu*) is seen as a sign of life success. The people of Kochkor described themselves as skillful in leading their lives (*jashoosuna tyng*) as they claimed that whatever change occurs, Kochkorians adapt very easily. Even though Kochkor administratively belongs to Naryn oblast (‘province’), the residents of Kochkor do not want to admit that

they are from Naryn and differentiate themselves from the rest of the people in Naryn. Naryn is a mountainous province of Kyrgyzstan which is distinguished from other provinces by its relatively ‘pure Kyrgyz culture’, which has not been exposed to outside influences much. Kochkorians noted that they are more advanced than the people from Naryn. According to one of my interlocutors, ‘Naryn people are a bit backward (*karangyraak*), while Kochkor people are close to civilisation’.

Tsivilizatsiya, the Russian word for ‘civilisation’, was used by my interlocutors, which, I would say, is closer to the notion of modernity rather than civilisation in a sense of great civilisations which were characterised by advanced culture. Kochkorians claim to be modern and advanced, in other words, ‘close to civilisation’ which is explained by their closeness to Bishkek. The capital of Kyrgyzstan, in turn, is characterised as a centre of modernity and development. ‘We are only a two and a half hour drive away from Bishkek. Whatever comes first to Bishkek, comes also to Kochkor’, was what one of my interlocutors said about how news, novelties and city fashions made their way to Kochkor and made Kochkor modern and the centre of civilisation in Naryn. Below, I will look at those outside influences in order to demonstrate Kochkor as a village with a range of diverse ideas, values and practices.

1.4. Social Dynamics and the Processes of ‘-isations’

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Kyrgyzstan experienced a ‘forced independence’ (International Crisis Group 2003). This period was called a ‘transition period’. According to Robinson, the term ‘transition’ during 1980s and 1990s was associated with ‘two different but related processes around the world’ (Robinson 2003, 56 f.). The first transition was the shift from authoritarian regimes to democratic or ‘polyarchic’ regimes. The second was the transition from non-capitalist to capitalist systems. Central Asia fell under both. However, scholars studying Central Asia were right to criticise the concept of transition ‘for its empirical failings and dubious teleological assumptions’ (Féaux de la Croix/Ismailbekova 2014, 2).

²⁰ The Kyrgyz Republic is divided into seven administrative *oblasts* (‘provinces’). Each consists of several *rayons* (‘districts’) which are smaller administrative units comprised of a group of villages.

Hardenberg and Fehlings, in their work on the notion of informality in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus, discuss the characteristics of these post-Soviet independent countries and describe their conditions grimly using terms such as “Dark Years’ [in the context of Armenia], ‘political vacuum’, ‘era of total decline’, ‘struggle for mere survival’ and ‘shock’ [in the context of Central Asia in general]’ (Hardenberg/Fehlings 2016, 2). Even after 25 years, one cannot clearly see the results of the transition in the post-Soviet Central Asian context. Maybe a quarter of a century is not enough for such transitions to be completed, as according to Robinson, transition is characterised as ‘a prolonged period’ in the context of the Third World. He writes:

‘By ‘transitions’ in the Third World, I mean a prolonged period of change in the social structure of particular nations and regions, reciprocal to and in dialectical interplay with changes at the level of the global system. Each country and region enters global society on the basis of specific national histories and structures, and therefore the worldwide transition has taken a myriad of different forms and specific dimensions in each region’ (Robinson 2003, 57).

Robinson defines transition as ‘change in the social structure’ (Robinson 2003, 57) and underlines the importance of history and local structures which affect the forms of transition. One can notice many similarities of transition within the post-Soviet countries that share a common Soviet history. A similar account on the importance of history and events in the ‘system-change’ or ‘structural transformation’ was developed by Sahlins (1985, vii). The main idea that he conveys is that historical relationships ‘reproduce the traditional cultural categories and give them new values out of the pragmatic context’ (Sahlins 1985, 125), which I will illustrate further in the example of Kochkor.

Sahlins’s approach to cultural change was further developed by Robbins (2004, 6–11), who proposes three models of cultural change. For Robbins, culture is defined as a set of values and categories (Robbins 2004, 6). The first model of change he calls a ‘model of assimilation’. This can be applied when new circumstances are assimilated into

an old category without changing it. The second model he calls ‘transformation or transformative reproduction’ which can be used when there are new circumstances and the relations between categories change. In his third model, which he calls the ‘model of replacement’, people adopt a new culture and to some extent abandon their old one. All these models can be usefully applied in my ethnography where I extensively consider cultural changes in Kochkor that came out as salient during the transition period. Since all of Robbins’ three models work in different settings to describe the complexity of socio-cultural processes in Kochkor, I have decided to use the term **social dynamics** rather than social or cultural change.²¹ This is mainly due to the fact that I will not investigate the nature of changes *per se* but rather employ the idea of changes in order to study how people express these changes in defining their environment as healthy or unhealthy.

The term ‘social dynamics’ also allows me to refer to changes without giving a fixed characterisation, since societal changes in Kochkor are understood by different people differently. Some people eagerly accept the changes, while others reject them fully, and some are selective in accepting certain aspects while rejecting other aspects.²² I will explore how people unpack new influences (will be explained below), sort through them and then selectively decide which to embrace. Especially when it comes to children, Kochkorians are very selective of new ‘outside values’ that in the first instance affect their children, the younger generations. Individual cases provided by my interlocutors on social dynamics have revealed many scenes of negotiations, restrictions or reproach,

²¹ In scholarly work one comes across terms such as ‘social change’ or ‘cultural change’, which are sometimes used interchangeably. Robbins states that the phrase “cultural change’ is not really an established one in the anthropological lexicon’ (Robbins 2004, 327). He argues that even though anthropologists are committed to studying culture, they tend to use the term ‘social change’ rather than ‘cultural change’. For me both terms are the same and it depends on how I approach an area: either through Kyrgyz society or through Kyrgyz culture. In this work I will use the term ‘social change’ to describe general changes in a society, but specifically for changes in cultural practices I will be using the term ‘cultural change’.

²² I thank Roland Hardenberg for suggesting that I consider the term ‘social dynamics’ instead of ‘social changes’.

which will be also considered further between new and old values and practices.

It can be said that the social dynamics in post-Soviet Kochkor as a whole is triggered by diverse processes of ‘-isations’. For instance, the cultural revival in post-Soviet Central Asia is labelled as ‘re-traditionalisation’. The religious revival after Soviet atheism in Central Asia is discussed in the context of ‘Re-Islamisation’. The economic transformations from the old planned economy to a new market economy are characterised as ‘privatisation’. People in Kochkor did not state it directly as ‘individualisation’, but many interlocutors of mine mentioned this aspect with the increasing role of market economy, when everybody has to be responsible for his or her life and well-being. Although it is not my aim to study these processes, I will still extensively refer to the social dynamics of post-Soviet Kochkor and Kyrgyzstan in general in order to show how diverse social processes of ‘-isations’ are discussed, resisted, adopted or adapted in discourses and in practices related to healthy growth of children.

It should be highlighted that the processes of re-traditionalisation, Re-Islamisation and modernisation, which are the driving forces of socio-cultural changes in Kochkor and in Kyrgyzstan in general, should not be seen as new phenomena, as if they only started since independence. People in Kochkor have always highly valued their cultural practices by claiming that they have been carried down from generation to generation. They were Muslims before becoming part of the Soviet Union and this identity was carried by them throughout the Soviet period of atheism. Similarly, Kochkorians also claim that they have been modern as they were part of the Soviet empire.²³

It is important to consider these processes of ‘-isations’ in the context of post-Soviet Kochkor because they have created many conflicts related to values, cultural practices and way of life. Local people do not use the generalised labels of ‘-isations’. For example, they refer to the process of modernisation with concrete characteristics

such as democracy, the market economy, Western influences or the increase of individual values over social values. The process of Re-Islamisation is highlighted with the excessive influence of ‘Arabic’ culture and how such processes lead to the loss of Kyrgyz traditional practices. Below I will give some examples from local interpretations of such ‘-isations’ in Kochkor.

The process of re-traditionalisation will be explained with the notion of *salt*, which can be translated as ‘tradition’ or ‘customary practice’. The cultural norms, rules, values and practices that make up *salt* are seen as a necessary part of Kyrgyz people’s present everyday life. People in Kochkor refer to *salt* as coming from their ancestors (*ata-babalarybyzdan kele jatkan salt*) or that *salt* is absorbed in their blood (*kanybyzga singip kalgan*), which highlights that *salt* has continuity. Poliakov notes that Central Asians have a strong sense of traditionalism and they would state that ‘they live as their fathers devised’ (Poliakov 1992, 3) and I would not exclude Kochkorians from this view.

Here I am not looking at the characteristics of tradition as being ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’, ‘genuine’ or ‘spurious’ or its nature as being stable or changing (Handler 2003, 355).²⁴ Neither do I wish to look at ‘invented’ characteristics of culture and tradition (Hobsbawm 1983; see also Gilman 2004; Robbins/Wardlow 2005). Instead, I will give examples from Kochkor on how tradition is manifested in the present (Handler 2003, 355; Largey 2000, 241). Similarly, for the elaboration of the concept of re-traditionalisation it is important to consider the function of the practices accepted as ‘traditional’. Hymes, who coined the very term ‘traditionalisation’, states that the notion of the traditional is rooted not in time, but in social life. For him, ‘the traditional is a functional prerequisite of social life’ (Hymes 1975, 353). This is nicely elaborated in the work of Beyer, who studied the court of elders in Talas, a northern part of Kyrgyzstan. She defines *salt* as the ‘righteous, appropriate and

²³ See Eisenstadt 2002 and Preyer 2007 on the notion of ‘multiple modernity’.

²⁴ See Handler who notes that ‘culture cannot be objectively discovered, but must be “constructed” (Handler 2003, 258 f.). He argues against the idea of seeing culture as a property, and states that it is impossible to preserve culture as ‘captured and frozen in objects’ (Handler 2003, 363).

customary behaviour in a given situation’ (Beyer 2009, 4). Her examples show how situations were not limited to the resolution of disputes by the court of elders (*aksakaldar sotu*), which was the main focus of her research, but that this customary behaviour was expected in the everyday lives of people in treating their elders, attending feasts and funerals, or in other public events. Beyer observed how people invoked the term *salt* all the time and stated that it is considered to reside in people’s blood and in people’s mentality, and that people act according to *salt* to justify or condemn other’s behaviour. According to Beyer, ‘invocations of and interactions according to *salt* draw on shared knowledge and embodied practices and help people achieve a sense of normativity, continuity and orderliness in their lives and their relations to one another’ (Beyer 2009, 4).

When I asked what constitutes *salt*, people in Kochkor immediately mention life-cycle rituals, especially child-related rituals such as *beshikke saluu*, a ritual of putting a child into a traditional cradle; *tushoo kesüü*, a ritual that marks the first steps of a toddler; circumcision, an Islamic tradition, conducted for small boys; marriage or taking a sick child to *apalar* (a local term for healers). These rituals constituted a part of Kyrgyz people’s lives also during the Soviet time, which were conducted in a simplified form and within a family setting. After independence, increased interest in Kyrgyz traditional values elevated the importance of these rituals and people started to organise big lavish feasts and to mark these life milestones in bigger social circles.

Salt can also be tightly related to identity formation. In Kochkor, I witnessed how the notion of *salattyk* (the adjective of *salt*, meaning ‘cultural’, ‘traditional’ and ‘customary’) went hand in hand with the notion of *uluttuk* (‘national’). Now one can meet many people wearing Kyrgyz traditional costumes in the street. There are several women’s handicraft cooperatives in Kochkor specialised in felt products such as rugs, clothes, shoes, bags and many other souvenirs with Kyrgyz national embroideries. They were initially made for touristic purposes, but later started to be much-sought by local customers as well. Kyrgyz national food, national dress with Kyrgyz national embroideries

and national games are not only a part of the nation-building processes in Kyrgyzstan, but also have penetrated the everyday life of people and are taught to children in schools as part of the national curricula (see chapter 8).

The process of Re-Islamisation in Kochkor, which I will extensively discuss in chapter 6, should also be understood within the context. Islam in Kyrgyzstan and also in other Central Asian countries has specific forms. Kyrgyz people are often called ‘cultural Muslims’, those who accept themselves as Muslims by ethnicity and not necessarily through their religious beliefs (Akiner 2002; Ruthven 1997). This tendency started to change with independence. The Re-Islamisation process in Kochkor, which I consider elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2017), is concluded in the gradual shift from ‘cultural Muslims’ into the direction of ‘religious Muslims’. The increasing role of Islam since independence is observed in the rising number of mosques being built in villages, in the establishment of *madrasas* (religious educational institutions), in the increasing amount of ‘Islamic’ goods being sold in local bazaars, in people’s outfit, especially women’s veiling, and in local discourses, be it in the family circles or in the old and new media.²⁵

Despite these visual manifestations I consider that people’s increasing interest in Islam is still more expressed in the private sphere rather than in the public. When I was in Kochkor in the years 2012 and 2013, there was a central mosque and another one was about to be finished. I visited the local mosque several times and in all of these times the mosque stood deserted.²⁶ Even if people came to the mosque, they came not for praying but for getting *dua* (healing spells) from the local mullah who received these patients in a small two-room house next to the mosque. This increasing religiosity,²⁷ from what I observed, was more freely

25 See Hölzchen 2017; Louw 2007; McBrien 2009 regarding the increasing role of Islam in other parts of Kyrgyzstan.

26 I have not visited the mosque in Kochkor during the Friday prayer, thus I cannot comment on attendances then.

27 By ‘increasing religiosity’ in Kochkor I mean, first, the ‘revival’ of religion after the period of Soviet atheism and, second, how people in Kochkor have started to practice Islam in a stricter way than before. By before, I mean both the pre-Soviet and Soviet eras.

expressed in home settings with many people conducting their daily prayers not in the mosque but at home. Many people's eating habits changed, starting from consuming *halal* food to using proper Islamic utterances such as *bismillah*. Both men and women, the young and the old, were found to have started to attend religious teachings called *taalim*, which also took place in private homes.²⁸ In addition, many people started to read *suras* from the Quran at home as healing practice instead of going to public sacred places or hospitals.

I would say that the Re-Islamisation process in post-Soviet Kochkor can be mainly characterised through Robbins' (2004) 'model of replacement'. Current reformed Islam has brought new cultural practices which contradict some local cultural values and practices that I mentioned earlier. Accepting a new lifestyle of a pious Muslim implies that this person abandons certain old practices that might contradict Islamic norms. It is not an easy task and in practice it engenders more discourses on what is right and what is wrong and how a Kyrgyz should live.

People have welcomed Islam for it is perceived to bring morality (*yiman*),²⁹ good manners and good life to people, which are highly needed and valued in Kochkor in the contemporary period of insecurity. With more people turning to a strict form of Islam, which I also call 'new Islam'³⁰ this has resulted in some people rejecting

old customary practices. Local pious Muslims used the words *shirk* ('sin of idolatry') or *bid'at* (Arab. *bid'ah*, 'innovation, not mentioned in Islamic scriptures') in order to justify their abandoning of certain practices categorised as Kyrgyz *salt*. As I have argued elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2017), the reason that people abide by the regulations of the 'new Islam', even if they contradict their local values and practices, is rooted in their desire to find a healthy and happy life in religion.

Interestingly, the people, who are more 'cultural' Muslims rather than 'religious' Muslims, state that too much devotion to Islam is binding Kyrgyz people to 'Arabic culture'. For example, women wearing *hijabs* and men wearing 'Arabic' outfits and growing beards are the practices that are said to contradict Kyrgyz *salt*. The villagers who are against Arabic outfits mention some knowledgeable local mullahs who follow Islamic tenets without adopting Arabic outfits. These knowledgeable (in the view of my interlocutors) local mullahs do not wear Arabic outfits, but wear the Kyrgyz national costume. They further mentioned that these mullahs do not grow a beard, which is usually done, in the words of my interlocutors, by 'fanatics', who are less knowledgeable and even practice a wrong version of Islam. More on the social dynamics of Re-Islamisation in Kochkor will be mentioned later in the context of local life-cycle rituals and health-related practices (see chapters 5 and 6).

Now I come to a third process of '-isation', which is modernisation. Here, too, I claim that this concept and process should be contextualised. Akin to Ferguson's classification of modernity as a 'native category' (Ferguson 2005), I hold the idea that people experience modernity in their own ways.³¹ The past had its own modernity, the present has its own modernity and the future will have its own modernity, each being defined with certain characteristics in the local context. In the case of Kochkor it was the Soviet modernity that people came across in the past (see also McBrien 2008; 2009). The Soviet meaning of modern

28 The place of *taalim* (religious teachings) shifted from one house to another after a certain time.

29 This should not engender the idea that before Islam was introduced, Kyrgyz people lacked morality. Two matters should be clarified here: First, those who support the obedient fulfilment of Islamic values claim that Islam brings *yiman* ('morality'). This kind of morality is seen in women wearing the *hijab*, praying five times a day, and following rules mentioned in Islamic texts. This has attracted criticism from their opponents who do not consider that Kyrgyz people lack *yiman* without this kind of Islam. This debate is linked to my second point: the Kyrgyz term *yimanduu* ('moral') is different from the Islamic version of someone who is *yimanduu*. The local term includes certain Kyrgyz values such as an *yimanduu* person being one who respects his/her parents, looks after them when they get old, and follows cultural practices of where to sit at the table (where a strict hierarchy is followed). These two perceptions engender a continuous debate about who is considered *yimanduu* – moral (see chapter 8).

30 By 'new Islam' I mean a stricter form of Islam that started to be followed in Kyrgyzstan after the 1990s.

31 See Klocke-Daffa 2008 on the diverging understanding of modernity between 'western societies' and Khoekhoe of Namibia.

was associated with ‘culture’, the Russian word *kul'tura* (but not Kyrgyz *salt*) and was synonymous with meanings such as ‘civilised’, ‘developed’ and ‘cultured’. Reynolds (2013), who also did her fieldwork in the Kochkor *rayon*, notes how city people were seen as ‘cultured’ in comparison to villagers who were seen as ‘uncultured’. This Soviet legacy of modernity could be the reason for why, in my case, Kochkorians called themselves ‘close to civilisation’, as they are relatively close to the capital Bishkek which is seen as the centre of modernisation with modern things and modern thoughts.

Nowadays, modernisation in the context of post-Soviet Kochkor can also be seen as an equivalent to ‘westernisation’.³² The shift from socialism to capitalism itself, in the words of Silova, was the ‘monumental replacement of the Soviet system by Western political, economic and social institutions, reflecting the principles of market economy, democratic pluralism, and human rights’ (Silova 2010, 4 f.). I discussed the processes of marketisation, democratisation and human rights with my interlocutors in Kochkor. Based on their explanations, as I will discuss below, I argue that (a) such processes should be contextualised and local people’s understandings of these processes should be taken into account; (b) the perception of such processes may differ from their original meaning and c) these processes are morally loaded.

Kyrgyzstan is claimed to be ‘an island of democracy’. Yet, people in Kochkor confess that democracy is being misused locally. They claim that ‘[democracy] does not suit Kyrgyz people at all’ (*bizge jarashpayt*) and that they are not ready for democracy. Villagers noted that people shout about democracy only in demonstrations, which are organised by ambitious politicians who use the mass (mostly kin members) to achieve their own personal purposes or in everyday life when people breach social norms and regulations (see chapter 8 on the local notion of democracy). People’s misuse of

freedom of speech and expression was also mentioned in the context of deteriorating relationships between children and adults. When it comes to children, it was mentioned many times how democracy or children’s rights oppose the Kyrgyz mentality which, on the contrary, glorifies respect to seniors. Parents whom I interviewed commented on children’s rights seeing it as ‘Western values’ that have given ‘voices’ to children to talk back to adults (Bahbahani 2012; also chapter 8).

Market economy was another local example of modernisation. Here, too, one can see how this term is very much ‘morally loaded’ (Reeves 2005). Reeves notes that “‘market’ in post-Soviet contexts constitutes much more than simply a specific, contemporary set of economic relations’ (Reeves 2005, 6). Referring to Sampson (1996), Reeves demonstrates that ‘market economy’ in its Western sense, might take a different meaning in Kyrgyzstan and differ from its original meaning. In Kochkor, I could clearly see this distinction. For example, the shift from the Soviet centralised state economy to market economy and privatisation is characterised by the people of Kochkor in the local notion called *peyil ketti*.

Many people in Kochkor mentioned the phrase: ‘*Azyrkylardyn peyili ketti!*’ (*Peyil* of the current people has gone). This can be interpreted that current people have lost their old good qualities as a result of market economy. The Kyrgyz word *peyil* can be translated as ‘character’ or ‘nature’ and is usually understood in word combinations such as ‘white *peyil*’ (*peyili ak*), meaning a kind person with good intentions, while a person with ‘black *peyil*’ (*peyili kara*) is an evil person with bad intentions. One with ‘full *peyil*’ (*peyili tok*) means a person who is satisfied and does not have any worries, while a person with ‘narrow *peyil*’ (*peyili tar*) is a stingy person. A person whose *peyil* is spoiled (*peyili buzuldu*) is seen as a person who has lost their morality or has bad intentions. People also talk about how one has ‘lost *peyil*’ which implies how someone has started to lose their generosity, good intentions to each other and willingness to share what they have with others. *Peyil* is used to describe a person’s inner characteristic, but it can also be used as a generalisation of the character of all the people, as one of my interlocutors shared:

³² Hannerz mentions how the First World globalisation, which was shared by the Third World, ‘made globalisation seem in large part synonymous with westernisation’ (Hannerz 1996, 18). After the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the introduction of Western values, modernity in Kochkor, to some degree, started to become synonymous with westernisation.

BT: ‘Why do you think that *peyil* is being lost today?’

Interlocutor: ‘Now it is the market economy. People want to give **one som** [the currency of Kyrgyzstan] and earn **two** instead. It has spoiled people’s attitudes to each other. Many people have become stingy. They are not generous as they were before.’³³

In Kochkor, where one hardly feels the presence of the state, it is families that are responsible for the well-being of their family members.³⁴ The absence of the state was mentioned by my interlocutors who compared the current situation, when people work for themselves without waiting for any support from the state, to the Soviet time, when they worked for the state and, in return, got support and social packages by the state. I also noticed how every household in Kochkor was responsible for their own health, welfare and economic prosperity, without harbouring any hope for the state support (see also Feaux de la Croix 2014). In the time of hardship, it is more the neighbourhood, kinship or friendship that serves as a source of support. My interlocutors brought several Kyrgyz proverbs such as ‘*Ishtegen – tishteyt*’ (‘Who works, bites’), which means that a person who works also has something to eat, or ‘*Araketke – bereket*’, which means who labours gets abundance. These proverbs perfectly describe contemporary Kochkor in terms of how people face economic hardships and they strive for a better life without hoping for the support from the state. From a moral perspective of my interlocutors, striving for oneself or for the

well-being of one’s own family prosperity is seen as ‘unhealthy’.

I have given these examples of current processes of ‘-isations’ in Kochkor such as re-traditionalisation, Re-Islamisation or modernisation in order to introduce readers to the historical context of the village and its complex social dynamics which is concluded not only in terms of diverse and sometimes contradictory processes, but also in terms of how these diverse processes also get interpreted and perceived differently by different members of the same community. It is, therefore, important to look at how people themselves perceive, understand, define and categorise social or cultural changes. The examples that I have brought up also hint at the importance of looking at changes in various dimensions, such as on the macro and micro levels, on individual, community, or national levels, and also by taking into consideration inter-generational perspectives. People in Kochkor do not hold homogenous values. I will consider this in more detail in the ethnographic chapters (chapters 4–8). These chapters will reveal the tight link between broader societal values and lifestyles and the construction of the notion of ‘healthy growth’ of children. This notion not only touches on the idea of physical, mental or spiritual health in relation to the young growing body of a child; I will also illustrate how the idea of healthy growth itself is strongly shaped by the changing environment and complex social dynamics of Kochkor village.

1.5. Organisation of Chapters

The organisation of the book is based on the aims that I pursued in my doctoral research. My first aim is to look at ideas and practices concerning healthy growth of a Kyrgyz child, which covers the topics of physical development, symbolic development, cultural development and moral education, and results in the symbolic and discursive construction of children in Kochkor. The second aim is to show childhood and everyday life of Kyrgyz children from local people’s own perspectives. I take the concept of **healthy growth** as the window through which to study children and their childhoods in Kochkor. It is important to highlight

³³ See Klocke-Daffa 2016 who also notes the challenges of individualism that the Khoekhoen people face today and on the increasing pressure on their traditional exchange system.

³⁴ My statement that in Kochkor one can hardly feel the presence of the state is also based on the work of Gupta (1995), who notes about the prevalence of informality in formal institutions in rural areas. Indeed, the state officials who are based in rural areas are actually in-between the state and the local people. They are considered less like state officials, but more the members of the rural mass. This was also clearly highlighted by Roland Hardenberg, who shared his observations from rural Kyrgyzstan by mentioning that state officials such as doctors and teachers in rural areas were actually one’s neighbour, friend or close relative and were hardly seen as ‘state representatives’.

that since I look at healthy growth of children, I take the account of the views of more senior members of society who are involved in the child-care process rather than children themselves, although I also interviewed many children on this account. Third, I look at how social changes and flows affect children's lives, and the way they are perceived, understood, discussed and evaluated in everyday life of people. By taking these aims into consideration, I have divided my work into nine chapters. Chapter 1, this introductory chapter, is followed by two chapters (chapters 2–3) that cover theoretical and methodological aspects respectively. The ethnographic materials are covered in chapters 4–8, followed by the concluding chapter 9. Below I will elaborate on each chapter more in detail.

Chapter 2 deals with the theoretical framework of my research and my approach to a child through the notion of **person** and **personhood**. By critically looking at the existing theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of children, I argue that most childhood studies scholars approach a child as an **individual**, which is entrapped in a 'child-adult' dichotomy. The **social person** side is usually neglected. I consider that anthropology as a discipline can contribute to the study of children by looking at this neglected aspect, which I argue has also a methodological implication. The first two sections in this chapter deal with this issue extensively.

The next two sections of chapter 2 are devoted to the notion of 'person' itself. By elaborating on the notion of 'person', I aim to show how a child, as a social actor, is constructed based on social relations. The analytical categorisation such as 'child-adult' is not that prominently exercised in Kochkor. Instead, I show how the notion of 'person' is helpful to extend the idea that a child is a social and cultural construct. My decision to keep the theoretical part of my initial dissertation in this book is also related to the fact that Childhood Studies as a discipline is underdeveloped in the context of Central Asia. I hope that this work will provide a basis for further anthropological research on children and childhood in this region.

Chapter 3 solely concentrates on the methodology of data collection. Methodology covers not only the tools and tactics that a researcher uses

in the field to obtain and extract information. It is also about an adaptation of existing tools and tactics in a particular field setting and, if necessary, coming up with creative ways for collecting information based on given circumstances. Methodology is crucial as one should take a researcher's status, knowledge and expertise as well as outside factors into account in order to determine the best possible way of collecting data in a particular setting and presenting the results. In this chapter, I share my trajectory and personal experience on how I collected data in the field, by particularly emphasising my status as a local researcher (including being a native Kyrgyz speaker), the condition that has immensely affected the structure and flow of the research. I mention both advantages and disadvantages of it. There is a growing number of native anthropologists in Central Asia who do anthropology 'at home'. Yet we usually do not get methodological reflections of doing research at home in those works. I tried to contribute to that aspect in this chapter and this is one of the reasons for keeping the methodology chapter in this book. Since I conducted research with children, I found it worth elaborating more extensively on the ethical aspect at the end of this chapter.

The ethnographic part starts with chapter 4 and discusses the concept of a 'child'. The emphasis is made on local categories of a child and how they can contribute to the understanding of the concept of a child as an analytical category. By following the suggestion of James and James, I look at 'what features of the child are highlighted as important and attributed with significance' (James/James 2001, 30) in the local context. Since I approach the notion of 'a child as a social person', and not much 'a child as an individual', the child I talk about is either an offspring, a brother or sister, the eldest or the youngest child in the family, a social orphan or a child with many other social statuses. The main contribution of this chapter is to suggest that the concepts of a 'child', 'children' and 'childhood' should not be limited to a 'child-adult' juxtaposition. Instead, I highlight that local conceptions and discourses can reveal more categorisations that directly shape the childhoods of children and contribute to the understanding of who a child is. My research has revealed that it is not the question 'What is a child?' (as a notion),

but rather the question ‘What is it **to be** a child?’ (as a lived experience) that can open more doors and perspectives for understanding diverse notions of a child.

This chapter also deals with the concepts of age and maturity, which are usually used to differentiate a child from an adult. I demonstrate how in Kochkor the child-adult categories, as well as the transition from child to an adult, are not considered that prominently. Local categorisation is rather based on the concept of seniority and juniority which reveals a child as a relative category. I introduce case studies in which a child is seen as a **relative term** and **relational term** and possesses **multiple identities** which also results in children experiencing multiple childhoods. At the end of the chapter, I show how childhoods experienced by children in Kochkor village are not homogenous and they greatly vary based on social, economic and cultural factors.

Chapter 5 is focused on the symbolic construction of a child, which highlights efforts and the long life journey that parents and the community make to shape strong health, fate and a successful future for the child. This chapter is mainly based on Platenkamp’s concept of the ‘objectification of social qualities’ (Platenkamp 2010, 187), where the desired qualities of the community are transferred to a child through certain rituals. By concentrating on scenarios of *yrym*, the Kyrgyz term for rituals, life-cycle rituals and other everyday practices, I show how a child is literally constructed. I argue for the importance of the *yrym*, which transforms a child from its early age into a person and a proper member of society. The main idea of this chapter is to show how a child, even before being born, is exposed to practices that are believed to ‘make this person’ by bestowing certain desired qualities. Although this chapter consists of descriptive explanations of rituals, it mainly concentrates on values that local people hold as important and thus contributes to the understanding of local notions of healthy growth of children.

Chapter 6 is about children’s physical health. Here, I explore the local perceptions of health and healthy growth and also trace the Soviet inherited medicine, Western medicine, the development of local traditional healing practices and Islamic medicine in Kochkor. The chapter starts with the

interrelationship between ‘health’ and ‘culture’ where I concentrate on some works on medical anthropology. This will be followed by a historical account of the development of the healthcare system in Kochkor as well as local practices towards maintaining a healthy body. I argue that in comparison to adults, a child’s healthy body is actively ‘constructed’ and negotiated through various institutions, programmes, policies and interactions. Through the concepts of ‘mother-doctors’ and ‘mother-healers’, which have not won much attention in medical anthropology, I discuss the important role of domestic health experts and underline the assumption of the ‘everydayness’ of children’s health. Finally, I show how the strengthening of Islam in Kochkor has drastically changed people’s notions about health and ideas of leading a healthy lifestyle. The current Re-Islamisation process has brought changes in health-seeking practices and increased the role of a domestic sector in healthcare. All these examples highlight the blurred boundary between biomedicine and alternative medicine in Kochkor. I claim that people in Kochkor do not categorise biomedicine as the main and the other non-biomedical options as alternative. Instead, I show how people skilfully navigate among these sectors, with having the boundary between ‘conventional’ and ‘alternative medicine’ blurred.

Chapter 7 discusses the local concept of *tarbiya* which is translated as ‘upbringing’, ‘moral education’, ‘purposeful socialisation’; all of which lead to a ‘cultural nourishment’ of a child. Giving proper *tarbiya* is one of the main aspects of the ‘healthy growth’ of a Kyrgyz child, as without *tarbiya* a child may be considered ‘semi-Kyrgyz’, ‘like Russians’ or ‘neither Kyrgyz, nor Russian’. The first part of this chapter will discuss this local concept in detail. What is ‘good *tarbiya*’ or what makes ‘a good child’ usually circles around the values and practices that people in Kochkor accept as socially and culturally important. The practices that contradict local ideals are seen as foreign and not suitable, which will be discussed in the section called ‘Western Does Not Work for Us’.

The second part of chapter 7 is devoted to the concept of work. It demonstrates the way work is perceived in the local context and what kinds of work people, and mainly children, in Kochkor are

involved in. In the section called 'Good Life Spoils Children', I underline the statement of some of my interlocutors, who drew a direct and strong connection between work and good *tarbiya*. Similar to the previous chapters, in this chapter too, I show how a child is an inevitable part of the significant and lengthy project of constructing a moral person. Here the notion of 'moral' makes part of healthy growth of children, the process that is highly contested and negotiated due to complex social dynamics in Kochkor.

Chapter 8 continues the discussion on moral education, but within the framework of schools in Kochkor. Having inherited the Soviet legacy, schools as institutions have taken on a crucial role in the 'making of a person' and instilling cultural values in children. As a transformation agent, it is schools that bring together all sorts of values and practices related to various ideologies. Through examples from the national curriculum, I show how the 'construction of a child' is, in fact, undertaken through a planned school programme which is promoted by the state. This chapter starts with the idea that 'a teacher is a child's second parent', which has strong roots back to the Soviet era, when Soviet paternalism resulted in the absence of parents, especially fathers, from children's childhoods. This I contrast with the current time when

the responsibility has now mainly shifted from the state to households. Despite the fact that the importance of families has moved centre stage, still much is provided by teachers and schools, even under the conditions of scarce resources. This chapter considers an important role of schools in bringing up a 'healthy child'. I demonstrate how schools take a responsibility for children's physical health, moral and cultural education and they make sure that children meet the requirements of the modern day demands. I specifically concentrate on a school event called 'Kyrgyz cultural practices' (*Kyrgyzdyn kaada-salty*) and a school course called *adep* ('ethics'), which aim to construct a moral cultural person. I also take the notion of democracy and consider how it is interpreted and practiced in Kochkor schools. All these illustrations will contribute to my statement that schools play a big role as a mediator between continuity and change and help children adapt to social circumstances and negotiate their values.

In the concluding chapter 9, I bring up the main points of the ethnographic chapters and summarise these within the theoretical framework of my research. These are followed by suggestions for further research where I strongly urge to develop studies on children and childhood in the context of Central Asia.

2. Childhood through Personhood

‘In fifty years a people is new,
in hundred years a place is new’
(*Eliüü jylda el jangy, jüz jylda jer jangy*)
Jarkynay Apa, interlocutor

2.1. Introduction

How differently would current studies on children and their childhoods have developed, if a child as a subject were approached not as an **individual**, with its own rights, but as a **person**, a social being who is defined in relation to others? These two words – ‘individual’ and ‘person’ – are usually interchangeably used in our everyday language. Still, it is important to identify the difference between these two. My idea behind this suggestion is concluded not in their differentiation or exclusion, but on the contrary, in their inclusion. In other words, I claim that it is important to acknowledge the mutual co-existence of the ‘person’ side and the ‘individual’ side of the child, similar to the two sides of the coin.

By acknowledging this mutual co-existence, in this chapter, I critically look at the existing theoretical and conceptual approaches to the study of children and their childhoods, mainly framed by the discipline of Childhood Studies. In my view, the discipline of Childhood Studies is deeply entrapped in the ‘child-adult’ dichotomy, both theoretically and methodologically. I think it is mainly because children are approached exclusively as ‘individuals’ and their ‘social person’ side is usually ignored. This, in my understanding, broadens the gap between ‘the theoretical child’ that is discussed in scholarly circles and ‘real live children’ (Alanen 1988). It hinders a proper understanding of the complexity of children’s lives and identity constructions. Therefore, in this book, I take the concepts of ‘person’ and ‘personhood’ as the main theoretical approach for studying children in Kochkor. I argue that the ‘person’ aspect of children, that is a child as a social person defined in relation to others, should be taken into equal

consideration in studies on children and their childhoods.

To understand the question how to socially construct a person, Shweder and Miller refer to three general theories of category formation: realist theories argue that ‘people categorize the world the way they do because that’s the way the world is’; innatist theories, on the other hand, argue that ‘people categorize the world the way they do because that’s the way people are’; and social construction theories argue that ‘people categorize the world the way they do because they have participated in social practices, institutions, and other forms of symbolic action (e.g. language) that presuppose or in some way make salient those categorizations’ (Shweder/Miller 1985, 41). The main idea of the social construction theory, which I adopt and develop further in this work, is that it is people who constitute different realities and that there are ‘as many realities as there are ways ‘it’ can be constituted and described’ (Shweder/Miller 1985, 41). These categories, the authors note, are not individually invented, but are socially constructed and ‘tradition-bound, and thus transmitted, communicated and ‘passed on’ through symbolic action’ (Shweder/Miller 1985, 41). The ethnographic material that I present in this book will clearly demonstrate how the construction of a child as a social person by taking into account local perceptions, values and practices is crucial for the study of children and their childhoods in Kochkor.

A child is an individual. As an individual, it has rights to be healthy, educated, cared, protected, heard and treated equally. A child is also a person. As a social person, it is a member of a family, it is somebody’s offspring, it is an elder child or a younger child in the family, or it might be an orphan. As a member of its family, the child might adhere to certain cultural or religious values or experience certain economic or political advantages or disadvantages. Different personal backgrounds, including diverse social, economic, cultural and political settings, determine that child’s

rights, responsibilities, obligations and opportunities. Thus, looking at both ‘individual’ and ‘person’ aspects in childhood studies opens the door for more discourses and debates on how this small person comes into being and how its childhood is constructed.

Childhood is the very period of construction and intensive making of the person. This was clearly seen in the way Soviet children were supposed to be raised into a new Soviet Man with Soviet values. These values were inculcated since early ages of children who were proud to undergo life-cycle rituals from ‘Little Octobrists’, ‘Young Pioneers’ to ‘Komsomols’. All of this disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Instead, the current processes of modernisation, re-traditionalisation, or Re-Islamisation that develop concurrently in post-Soviet Kochkor, which I mentioned in chapter 1, pose questions on what kind of person a contemporary Kyrgyz child is being raised to be. This is not only the concern of the state, but of each family, who want to raise their children into successful members of society. The notion of ‘person’ is helpful in my work on children in Kochkor, especially in my intention to underline diverse childhoods that children in this village experience due to broader socio-cultural transformations.

Before I discuss the concept of ‘person’, I will introduce my readers to existing studies on children and their childhood first. I will mention important theoretical stances in Childhood Studies and argue that anthropologists should create a balance in Childhood Studies discipline by providing more ethnographic works on children as social persons. For that I will broadly elaborate on the concept of ‘person’ in anthropological scholarship and show how this concept will be useful in studying children.

2.2. Contemporary Childhood Studies

The 20th cent. is said to be the ‘century of the child’ because of the high interest in the study of children both in academic and applied research (James/Prout 2015). From the 1970s onwards, social scientists and practitioners have been particularly interested in studying children in their

own right by approaching them as full-fledged social actors rather than as ‘objects primarily being acted on’ (Alanen 1988, 60). Children started to be accepted as active participants who shape not only their own lives but also the lives of those who surround them and the society they live in (James/James 2001; 2012). They have been provided with agency and the capacity to act independently (see James/James 2012), that is, independently from adults. More ‘child-focused’ and ‘child-centred’ research started to provide children with voices, which means that more emphasis started to be given to children’s statements about their own childhoods in comparison to old practices when it was adults who were asked about this (Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007). In addition, it is also acknowledged that without including children’s views, the researched subject on any topic (not necessarily childhood-related topic) would be considered incomplete (Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007). All these aspects seem to be positive, but if we look back to the development of Childhood Studies discipline and the topics that have been dealt with, we will come across many tensions which need further discussions.

First, tensions are visible in dichotomies which are mutually acknowledged as important, such as: universal–culture specific, natural–socially constructed, or global–local. Tensions can even be detected between the ‘theoretical child’, that is how we imagine a proper childhood, and ‘real live children’, who actually experience diverse, even abnormal childhoods. Even if we turn to the question of what a proper childhood means, then what is set in research as good and necessary for children may not always be shared by the people in certain cultures, which I consider in further chapters.

Second, similar to Women’s Studies, Childhood Studies is based on tensions in power-relations, where both children and women were labelled as ‘muted groups’ which needed to be given voices (see Alanen 1988; Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007; James/Prout 2015). If in Gender Studies women are considered equal to men, in Childhood Studies children are considered as equals to adults. For instance, a child is argued to be a ‘complete being’ on its own and not as a ‘becoming’ which should grow into a full being only upon reaching adulthood.

The last point of tension, as some scholars rightly note, indicates the child being ‘imprisoned within the notion of difference’ (Alanen 1988, 56; see also Buehler-Niederberger 1998). In other words, children are always seen as being different from adults. In my understanding, not only are the definition of a child and the interpretation of childhood entrapped in this ‘child-adult’ juxtaposition. Also, the whole conceptual, methodological and ethical approaches to the study of children, employed by educationalists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians and psychologists, are based on the child-adult difference.

One of the obvious examples of the ‘child-adult’ juxtaposition can be observed in socialisation theory, which is one of the dominant approaches in theory and research on children and childhood. This approach was initially developed on the basis of the developmental approach in psychology and was until recently adopted ‘uncritically’ by Childhood Studies discipline (see James/Prout 2015 for details).³⁵ According to some scholars, the classical socialisation theory espouses an ‘adultist’ view (Denzin 2010, 7) and ‘negatively defines’ children (Alanen 1988, 56), that is, a child is given the status of ‘not yet’ or ‘incomplete’ in comparison to an adult, who, in turn, is given a ‘complete’ human status. Similar to the Piagetian model of the evolutionary developmental stages, children are seen as immature, irrational, incompetent and asocial in comparison to adults who are seen as mature, competent and social (Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007; James/Prout 2015).

Contemporary Childhood Studies scholars criticise the classical socialisation theory which characterises childhood ‘as a preparatory phase only and ignores children as actors’ (Buehler-Niederberger 1998, 62). For example, James and Prout (2015, 6–8) have come up with several paradigms to be taken into account in further research with children among which were the points such as: children’s cultures should be studied in their own right; children are active in constructing their own lives and the lives of their surrounding world; children should be given voices through

ethnographic work; and scholars should concentrate more on child-focused research. These attempts elevate a child’s role and position in a society, but still the child vs. adult juxtaposition cannot be avoided in discourses.

In line with Denzin’s view below, I would argue that we should look at the socialisation theory from a different angle by avoiding the ‘child-adult’ juxtaposition. By giving examples from the policies of ‘Americanising’ the immigrants who started coming to the New World in the 19th cent. AD and turning them into good citizens, Denzin proposes that socialisation is far from the developmental approach framed by psychologists, who claimed the shift from a child to an adult. Instead, Denzin urges us to look at the process of socialisation as an ongoing process without limiting it to a certain age, as he formulates it below:

[Socialization] is not a process that ends on the completion of adolescence, as Freud and the neo-Freudians would have it. Nor is it a structurally determined process whereby the values and goals of social systems are instilled in the child’s behavior repertoires. Socialization is a never-ending process that is negotiated and potentially problematic in every interactional episode that appears between two or more individuals. It is a process that cannot be separated from the demands of social situations, from the restrictions of language, and from the self-definitions of the persons involved’ (Denzin 2010, 2).

Denzin’s statement is useful for my work, particularly in explaining the socialisation as a process which equally affects both children and adults in Kochkor.³⁶ I argue that the concept of socialisation should not be limited to childhood as an early stage of one’s life, but it should also concern adults who are socialised in their adult life-stage (see secondary socialisation by Berger/Luckmann 1966). I suggest the notion of ‘ageless socialisation’ which is not concerned with the shift from a child to an

³⁵ See LeVine 2007 for the similar account on confrontations between developmental psychology and anthropology on the topic of child development.

³⁶ See also Morton who refers to the developmental research and how it is recognised that socialisation is a life-long process; it continues throughout life. She adds: ‘although the period of life prior to socially recognized adulthood is a period of particularly intensive and influential socialization’ (Morton 1996, 7).

adult, but affects both children and adults who face diverse values which are negotiated every time by any social interaction. In Kochkor, socialisation is an important aspect of the everyday and cultural life of the people. For example, a young woman is first socialised into becoming a daughter-in-law upon marriage, then into being a mother with the birth of her children, and after that into a mother-in-law with the marriage of her children and later a grandmother. These are considered important successive stages in an adult woman's life. This applies similarly to men in Kyrgyzstan, who are respectively socialised into acquiring the status of an *aksakal*, a white-bearded wise man in their old age (see Beyer 2009). As I mentioned in chapter 1, with the rapid changes and diverse values in Kochkor, socialisation of adults is as important as the socialisation of children.

If we look at the socialisation process from this prism, then we can conclude that a child is socialised not into being an adult, but into being a proper member of its society that is loaded with moral and cultural values and practices. More anthropological examples will be mentioned in the following two sections below. They will outline some studies of children and their childhoods that are conducted without the child-adult juxtaposition as analytical concepts which have dominated Childhood Studies.

2.3. The Anthropology of Childhood: Holism, Relativism and Local Perspectives

James and James (2012) underline how childhood is a complex phenomenon and that is why it requires complex understandings. The original intent behind this statement is to propose that childhood, as a complex phenomenon, should be understood not through a single disciplinary lens, but interdisciplinarily. As an anthropologist, I pose the question on how anthropology, as a discipline, can contribute to the study of children. Anthropology is known for its specific approaches such as taking into account local systems of knowledge, holistic approaches (see Ingold 1992; Spradley/McCurdy 1980 for a detailed account), and cultural relativism among others. Below I will develop my ideas on studying children by reflecting on these

anthropological approaches. These reflections will help me to argue that the Anthropology of Childhood can approach children from a 'social person' perspective and contribute to the notion of multiple childhoods.

One of the important nuances in the study of children is that one does not only study the nature of children and childhood, but also has to consider from which perspective to study children. Hirschfeld (2002) acknowledges that anthropologists had done a good deal of research on children. However, he notes that this is not specifically child-centred research that takes into account the voices and thoughts of children. He claims that in anthropological studies, children's roles are underestimated in comparison to adults' overestimated roles. I share the idea that anthropologists should do 'child-focused' research. Here ethnography is seen as a particularly useful methodology (see James/Prout 2015) because it can make the voices of children heard and children can be involved in the production of data.³⁷ Still, the uniqueness of an anthropological approach is in its complex and holistic analysis about the concept of childhood and the way it shows local perspectives and extensively introduces the local reasoning based on that particular context. Context should not be understood in terms of physical space, but, as Hammersley and Atkinson put it, 'in terms of which people in the setting act, recognizing that these are social constructions' (Hammersley/Atkinson 1995, 52; see also James/Corbett 2009).

This leads to my second point on global and local or universal or culture-specific perspectives. There are studies by sociologists and anthropologists that undermine the idea of a unitary 'global child' (Boyden/Ennew 1996). They state that a child is neither a universal nor natural phenomenon (Alex 2009; Jenks 2005; Montgomery 2009; Prout 2000) and that childhood is negotiated (Solberg 1996). In consequence, there is no single childhood, but rather childhoods (Behera 2007; James/James 2004; Jenks 2005). My research promotes the idea that the child is socially constructed and that

³⁷ Ethnography as a research method can be easily used by non-anthropologists as well. At the same time, using ethnographic methods does not necessarily indicate that it is an anthropological research.

every culture has their own understanding of what a child is and, consequently, what children experience in their childhoods will also vary (see James/James 2004), not only cross-culturally, but also within the same culture.

Despite the statements that '[c]hildhood [...] always related to a particular cultural setting' (Jenks 2005) and that childhood is best understood when looked at local diversities and cultural variables (James/James 2001), still, from my observation, a picture of the 'universal child' dominates in Childhood Studies. For example, there are attempts of 'giving voice to children' (James 2007) and accepting children as agents on the same level as adults and debating on the length of childhood and rights of children. These pictures are taken as part of an ideal childhood. There are anthropologists, who, on the other hand, 'resist the universal definitions of children and childhood' (Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007, 242) and note that the notion of an ideal child, 'which has been exported from Western context', has little relevance to other countries (see Boyden/Ennew 1996, 59). A similar account was given on the notion of 'normal development' of a child, which has been critiqued as a Western construct. Penn (1998) points out that the criteria for the 'normal' development of a child, especially promoted in psychology, cannot be applied in cross-societal settings. She quotes Burman who negates the idea of a 'normal child' and an 'ideal type' by referring to it as a myth and fiction:

'The normal child, the ideal type, distilled from comparative scores of age-graded population, is therefore a fiction or myth. No individual or real child lies at its basis. It is an abstraction, a fantasy, a fiction, a production of the testing apparatus that incorporates, that constructs the child, by virtue of its gaze' (Burman 1994, 17, cited in Penn 1998, 136).

The bias for the 'Western child' to be seen as a 'correct' type of child is still present (see Jenks 2005; Waterson/Behera 2011). Therefore, children in non-Western societies, whose lives are estimated according to Western standards, are usually depicted in difficult circumstances as suffering beings. Waterson and Behera rightly note by stating that 'it has left a huge gap in our knowledge about

'normal' childhoods' of the children in non-Western societies (Waterson/Behera 2011, 419).

For example, if one searches on the internet for information about Kyrgyz children, one first comes across articles on street children, children as workers, children suffering from child abuse, neglect and poverty.³⁸ Usually these kinds of topics circle through many international development organisations such as UNICEF, USAID, WHO, Save the Children to name but a few. They deal with issues such as: children's health, children's rights, education, working children, street children and children in difficult conditions. Consequently, their reports, with policy-making agendas, focus on problematic aspects of children's lives in Kyrgyzstan. These reports raise global awareness, so that people take action to improve life in the country, which is good. Due to the lack of scholarly, including anthropological, works on children in this region, one usually gets information mostly from these reports that depict problematic aspects of children's lives in Kyrgyzstan. As a result, one might not know about their 'normal' childhoods. Childhood Studies scholars themselves have noticed how the normalness of children in non-Western societies is absent. This urges us to do more anthropological research on the 'normalness' of childhoods and how natives themselves understand it.

Some points should also be mentioned on cross-cultural comparisons. Waterson and Behera warn of the danger of 'constantly drawing unrealistic comparisons between 'problem' childhoods in the south and 'normal' middle-class childhoods in Europe and America' (Waterson/Behera 2011, 419). The problem that we face today in Childhood Studies lies in the direct comparison of children with different socio-cultural and economic backgrounds by using certain standardised norms. Ensuring a healthy development of children, providing education, giving voice and rights to children – all these characteristics of 'normal childhood' do carry a normative moral judgement, but the value attached to them varies cross-culturally. Similarly, if we take child labour as an example, then usually scholarship is preoccupied with depictions of

³⁸ Here I mainly talk about sources in English.

working children as children at risk, hence, not 'normal'. In my ethnographic chapters, I bring up examples on local value systems which embed the working child in a web of 'normal' and positive social relations (see chapter 7). Then these kinds of contradictions raise another question: How can we know what is normal for children and what is not? And who decides this?

Anthropological work on children in Kyrgyzstan is very scarce. There are a few works by Kyrgyz ethnographers, such as Akmatalliev (2000; 2002) or Murzakmetov (2011), which make statements about what a Kyrgyz child should be according to local customary practices. Such works usually emphasise the idealised version of Kyrgyz children rather than the real life that a Kyrgyz child lives, which in practice is diverse. Sadly, these works are written in the Kyrgyz language and as such they do not reach a broader audience. I came across a non-anthropological doctoral work written on children in Kyrgyzstan in English by Rasulova (2013). This work is not on children in general, but specifically looks at how family economic status affects children's agency. If we take international journals, then there are a few scholarly journals dedicated to Central Asia, such as *Central Asian Survey*, *Central Asian Affairs*, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, *Europe-Asia Studies* or *Ab Imperio*. By scanning through the publications, I could not come across articles on the topic of children.³⁹

From internationally renowned anthropological works, I only know one source which mentions a child in Kyrgyzstan (Lancy 2008, 264). Even then the author includes just a single sentence about a twelve-year-old Kyrgyz child who left for the city of Osh to earn money and send it to his parents. First, Lancy takes this information from the online newspaper called 'The Times of Central Asia' (issued on June 15, 2007) and places it in his book in the section titled 'Poverty and Children's Labour'. Without analysing the Kyrgyz child's case from an anthropological perspective, that is, without approaching such cases in a holistic way,

Lancy continues on giving more examples on how parents in non-Western countries make children work. By a holistic approach I understand the approach to a particular issue within its environmental, socio-cultural, economic and political context. For example, a holistic view would explain what this work means to the twelve-year-old Kyrgyz child, to his parents and to the wider society, and this might encompass a myriad of interconnected notions varying from economic necessity and despair to moral and emotional values such as pride, a child's self-esteem, interest and feelings of success and achievement. As I will discuss in chapter 7, in Kochkor, child labour is not seen in the negative light. On the contrary, it is perceived from 'the native's point of view' very much positively, both by children themselves and the community.

By digging into it more deeply, one can understand that there are even more values attached to child labour. For example, in the same book, Lancy also discusses working children in Liberia who contribute to the household economy and this is what he provides from his small ethnographic account about the Kpelle people of Liberia:

'When I asked Kpelle parents what constitutes a 'good' child, one mother answered, without hesitation, 'What makes a child good? If you ask her to bring water, she brings water. If you ask her to cook, she cooks, if you tell her to mind the baby, she does it. When you ask her to plant rice, she doesn't complain' (Lancy 2008, 103).

What is the connection between 'work' and the notion of being a 'good child'? Some mothers in Kochkor, with whom I talked, also made similar statements. Such statements, which I will also discuss in chapter 7, are underpinned by deep cultural meanings such as respect for elders and not going against what elders say, or characteristics such as being diligent and love to labour were mentioned. Drawing similarities between Kpelle parents and parents in Kochkor, I would suggest that what the Kpelle mother mentioned above should not be immediately criticised, but could have been elaborated more by taking into account 'local reasoning'. For the Kpelle mother, this 'working child' might be seen as an ideal child, who is involved in work,

³⁹ Some of the mentioned journals contain a small number of articles written on Central Asian youth: for example, see Kirmse 2012.

who helps parents and who does not argue back at parents. To this point, I would mention Toren's statement who notes that 'to understand what the other person is telling us [...] we have to understand the history out of which they speak' (Toren 2012, 404), and this history is usually (or should be) taken into account in anthropological works.

The value of the contribution that anthropology can make to studying children lies in its analysis of any phenomenon by taking into account local folk models and contexts (see Montgomery 2009), as I have already noted earlier. Otherwise, the combinations such as a good child and labour will seem odd and not comprehensible 'without detailed knowledge of the socially and culturally organized contexts that give them meaning' (Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007, 242). The importance of understanding local contexts in any anthropological enquiry is perhaps best described by Sahlins through a concept of 'cultural relativism':

'Relativism in this methodological sense [...] does not mean that any culture or custom is as good as any other, if not better; instead, it is the simple prescription that, in order to be intelligible, other people's practices and ideals must be placed in their own context, understood as positional values in a field of their own cultural relationships, rather than appreciated in terms of intellectual and moral judgements of our making. Relativism is the provisional suspension of one's own judgements in order to situate the practices at issue in the historical and cultural order that made them possible' (Sahlins 2000, 21).

By insisting on the relevance and importance of taking account of local historical contexts or local categories, I try to distinguish the significance of an anthropological approach to studying children, which, in my view, differs from how scholars of Childhood Studies approach the study of children. In other words, my anthropological approach to studying children in Kyrgyzstan will not be limited to the analytical categories currently prevalent in Childhood Studies, but will focus mainly on local values, local concepts and their categorisations within their own cultural, social, political and

economic contexts. Local perceptions of children mostly deal with a child as a social person and not an 'individual', which I develop in the following section. My intention to highlight the peculiarities of the anthropology of childhood is not meant to invalidate current works on children produced under the Childhood Studies discipline. On the contrary, I feel indebted to the Childhood Studies discipline for having pioneered contemporary studies and debates on children. My whole work remains informed by these debates, especially since I intend to test these analytical concepts in the context of children in Kyrgyzstan. Alternatively, I aim to bring Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia within the purview of Childhood Studies, which have hitherto neglected these regions.

2.4. Why Childhood through Personhood?

Why do I insist on the inclusion of the 'person' perspective in the study of children? This is mainly because the 'person' aspect of children has not been given a proper and equal consideration in childhood studies scholarship. As mentioned in the previous section, Childhood Studies, with their preoccupation with studying children as individuals in their own rights, or giving children a voice with the intention of treating them the same way as adults, all the time fall into the trap of the analytical concept of 'child-adult' dichotomy. Even socialisation theory is grounded in this dichotomy, where a child is socialised into an adult who is perceived as a full member of society.

Tonkin notes: 'We are half *social* and half *individual*. Only the first half is the social anthropologist's/sociologist's concern' (Tonkin 1982, 244, emphasis is original), while the second half (the individual) she refers to psychology. A similar view was already mentioned by Malinowski who suggested that 'as sociologists we are interested in not what A and B may feel *qua* individuals [...] only in what they feel *qua* members of a given community' (Malinowski 1922, 23, cited in Sokefeld 1999, 428), which is concluded in the notion of a social person. According to Tonkin, the theory of socialisation, which was developed based on psychologists' developmental theory, does not look at the everyday

life of children, and thus, it ignores the side of a child as a social being, as a member of society:

‘It is clear that concepts of socialization have been dependent on the dichotomies I have noted here, that is, that the individual is a species instance and the person is an instance of society [...] Socialization then is the grafting process, by which the individual acquires personhood’ (Tonkin 1982, 245).

On the one hand, through different disciplinary approaches, Tonkin makes this individual-person dichotomy bold. On the other hand, the socialisation process that she describes hints on interdependence of this dichotomy. This supports my argument to consider the personhood notion in the study of children and not only concentrate on the child as an analytical category. Second, Tonkin’s approach to a person as an instance of society and socialisation as a process of making a person definitely urges us to look at how the society where a child grows up defines a child and person. For example, in the ethnographic chapters, I will show how for people in Kochkor the main socialisation target was based on making a good child or a good person according to Kyrgyz mentality. On the contrary, the practices that did not correspond to local cultural values were not welcomed and seen as inappropriate. What is important to note here is that, in the course of my research in Kochkor, I realised that I was actually studying Kyrgyz people’s cultural values through the topic of children. People in Kochkor reflected not on ‘Who is a child?’ or ‘What is a child?’ as a general concept, but reflected on a **Kyrgyz child**. Here the notion of ‘Kyrgyz’ contained more cultural implications, where the emphasis was made not on the ethnic but cultural identity. The way I was entrapped in the cultural aspect of ‘Kyrgyz child’ was not because I lost track of my initial research plan, but because, for Kyrgyz people, **children** and **childhood** are notions that are tightly connected to the notion of **personhood** where a child is socialised or enculturated according to local values.

Similar to Allen’s approach to the concept of person which might ‘stimulate exploration of particular cultures in all sorts of ways’ (Allen 1985, 26), my approach to the study of children did also stimulate the exploration of Kyrgyz culture

in every possible way. The topic of children also stimulated discourses of cultural and traditional values in an idealised form that sometimes did not really correspond to everyday reality. In other words, the encountered discourses about children not only raised the issues of who a child is and what kind of childhood current children are actually experiencing, but also how a child ought to be and what kind of childhood a child should have according to Kyrgyz people’s values.

Another reason for studying a child through the notion of ‘person’ concerns a methodological issue. The methodology that anthropologists use does not allow any research about children to ignore broader aspects like family, community, social and cultural settings, social relationships and social changes. I follow the argument that the subject of study of anthropologists is not an individual, but a person who is ‘a complex of social relations’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 193; see also La Fontaine 1985; Tonkin 1982). In this case, a child, whom anthropologists study, is also considered within the framework of social structure and social relations, otherwise a child would be seen as ‘a residual, self-contained isolate’ in Ingold’s (1992) term. Studying children in a certain social setting already implies that a child is not an isolated individual, but a member of a family and society with certain social roles.

Studying diverse social roles of children was a natural turn in my research based on my ethnographic methods that concentrated in home settings. This can be explained by the notion of ‘a hierarchical integration of roles’ stated by Avruch. He writes that ‘[a] hierarchical integration of roles implies that some roles are invested with more salience by self and others, than are other roles’ (Avruch 1982, 101 f.). As an example, he takes a chemist, for whom at home playing a role of a father is more important than playing the role of a chemist. In a similar way, children whom I studied and observed in a home setting played the role of offspring, an elder sibling or a younger sibling rather than an individual on its own. In the community, a child played the role of a junior member. In other words, in a home or community setting, a child’s role as a person of all sorts is salient, depending on its relation to other members, which can vary cross-culturally.

For example, Holden and her colleagues conducted an interesting comparative study among children aged between ten and twelve in England, Kyrgyzstan and South Africa about their hopes and fears on global issues concerning their personal, local and global communities. The scholars state that, '[e]ven though the Kyrgyz children appeared to mention families and friends less often, it was evident from their comments that many were very concerned to meet the expectations of their parents' (Holden et al. 2009, 16). The authors conclude that Kyrgyz children are least active as global citizens and that their optimism is reflected in their conviction only, but that they are very active as family members, since families put a lot of hope in children. This once again proves the importance of looking at the 'person' aspect in the consideration of children, which does actually shape these children's lives also as individuals. Developing Tonkin's notion how one is half individual and half social, I argue that we have both an 'individual' side and a 'person' side in us, like two sides of the coin. Therefore, both sides need to be equally considered.

I make more emphasis on the 'person' side of children in my work. First, because the 'individual' side of a child has been already given much attention in Childhood Studies while the 'person' side was not much. Second, because the concept of 'person', formed within a certain society in a certain historical period, as I will develop below, helps me to concentrate on the **diversity** of childhoods in Kyrgyzstan, which has experienced drastic socio-cultural changes in the last decades.

2.5. On the Notion of 'Person'

'Personhood' is a broad term with multiple meanings. For example, it is widely discussed in the disciplines of theology, history, psychology, philosophy and anthropology. The topics within the framework of personhood range from the difference between humans and non-human beings, the beginning and the end of a person, the relationship of body and soul, body and mind or the 'moral person', especially in regard to Christianity.

The notion of 'person' is usually discussed along with the concepts of the 'self', 'individual',

'human being' or 'man' and various categorisations and differentiations are made among these concepts. Some sources emphasise the interrelatedness of these concepts, which are sometimes seen in hierarchical order (see Harris 1989), while in others these concepts are differently defined (Cahill 1998). For example, in some sources 'person' and 'self' are used interchangeably (see Chaudhary 2008; Mauss [1938] 1985; Rasmussen 2008), while in others 'self' is distinguished from 'individual' and 'person' (Sax 2002), or 'individual' is opposed to 'person' (Soekefeld 1999). For example, La Fontaine makes a distinction between 'self' and 'person' by noting that '[i]f the self is an individual's awareness of a unique identity, the 'person' is society's confirmation of that identity as of social significance' (La Fontaine 1985, 124). This statement can be interpreted along the lines of Tonkin's (1982) statement that the notion of 'self' (individual) is a psychological perception of identity, while the notion of 'person' is social. Both clearly express how a person is created and shaped by society. Moreover, the way a person is accepted is confirmed by that society.

In social sciences, particularly in anthropology, theoretical work on the person dates back to Mauss.⁴⁰ According to Launay, this French anthropologist 'was the first to bring the idea of the person to centre stage' (Launay 2005, 1741). In his essay, published in 1938, Mauss discusses the concept of 'person' or 'self' from an evolutionary perspective. The subject of the person/self that he discusses is related to social history. Mauss looks not at the sense of self itself, but at the concept of self that evolved or transformed over the centuries in different societies. For him, the concept of 'person' and 'self' are 'categories of the human mind' and he is particularly interested in 'how human thought 'moves on'' (Mauss [1938] 1985, 22). He starts with the notion of 'role' or 'role-player' ('*personnage*') in primitive societies where people

⁴⁰ For later examples see Marriott 1976; Dumont 1985; Carrithers et al. 1985; Strathern 1988; Iteanu 1990; Busby 1997; LiPuma 1998; 2001; Robbins 2007; Rasmussen 2008, to name but a few. In relation to Kyrgyzstan, I am familiar with only one study which considers the notion of personhood in details. This is the doctoral dissertation of an anthropologist who looks at the concept of personhood in relation to humans and places (Reynolds 2013).

who are given certain names or masks as in sacred dramas played a 'role' in their communities. Then he continues with the notion of 'person' (*personne*) and of 'self' (*moi*). For him, the notion of 'person' that we understand now became prominent with the rights in Roman law, the idea of a moral person and the influence of Christianity on the perception of an individual person. His examples demonstrate how the notion of 'person' is not static, but 'imprecise, delicate and fragile' and has an 'unstable nature' which, as he puts it, changes according to the 'systems of law, religion, customs, social structures and mentality' of the society (Mauss [1938] 1985, 1).

Despite the historical remoteness of Mauss's theoretical development, it has topical importance today, especially when we witness a mixture of systems of law, social structures, customs and mentalities. Thus, it is not only about how people of different times and cultures construct the notion of 'person' differently, but also how the notion of 'person' changes within a certain timeframe and certain society according to various social factors as Mauss mentioned above. Such views can explain the construction and re-construction of the notion of 'person' in societies like Kochkor which are experiencing multi-directional dynamics of social changes with independence.

The contributors of the volume of Carrithers et al. 1985, which is dedicated to Mauss's essay on the notions of 'person' and 'self', are also pre-occupied with the idea of how the notion of 'person' is formed by 'different men in different age according to their systems of law, religion, custom, social structure and morality' (Lukes 1985, 285). A person, as object of their discussion, is seen as a 'culturally specific and historical product' (Lukes 1985, 293). However, here too, the scholars dealing with the notion of 'person', including Mauss, think through dichotomies between individualism and collectivism, individualism and holism or 'the West' and 'the rest' which are distinguished from each other with certain fixed characters. Let me elucidate with several examples.

Dumont, in the contribution dedicated to Mauss, pictures an individualism-holism dichotomy based on **value-systems**. According to him,

there are two types of societies: the first one is individualistic, where the individual is a paramount value, and the second one is holistic, where 'the paramount value lies in society as a whole' (Dumont 1985, 94). Similar to Dumont, Lukes in the same volume categorises individuals according to two types, based on their 'modes of thought' in relation to their roles, aims and purposes (Lukes 1985, 298). According to him, the person of 'an individualism mode of thought' is characterised as an autonomous, self-directing and independent agent (Lukes 1985, 298). On the contrary, for the members of the opposing group, qualities such as 'self-discovery, mutual understanding, authority, tradition and the virtues' are of central importance (Lukes 1985, 298 f.). In the latter group, decisions are made not based on individual choice, but rather influenced by one's role and status in a society. This implies that people are expected to possess specific qualities that are relevant to that society. Otherwise, an individual whose actions oppose the society will be considered in a Dumontian sense as an 'outworldly individual' (Dumont 1985, 96).

Similar to the above-mentioned analysis, there are also dichotomies in relatively current works such as: 'the Western individual' versus 'non-Western individual', 'egocentric' versus 'sociocentric' and even 'partible person' versus 'permeable person' which can be found in the works of many scholars (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988; LiPuma 1998; 2000; Robbins 2007; Chaudhary 2008; Rasmussen 2008; Hess 2009; Hemer 2013). For example, Strathern (1988) discusses the notion of 'person' in a cross-cultural comparison and juxtaposes it with the notion of 'individual'. For her, Western society is seen as a 'unifying force that gathers persons who present themselves as otherwise irreducibly unique' (Strathern 1988, 12). As persons, they are seen as part of these relations, however, as individuals, 'they are imagined as conceptually distinct from the relations that bring them together' (Strathern 1988, 12). This analysis comes from her study of Melanesian people, who are seen as 'dividuals', the term that Strathern adopted from Marriott (1976), and juxtaposed to Western individuals.

Her work on Western individuals compared to Melanesian persons (or individuals) lately started to raise the interest in academia on the individualistic and collectivistic modes of personhood and to what extent they should be seen as separate and dichotomistic. For example, scholars studying non-Western societies in contemporaneity observe the increasing values of individualistic types of thoughts and actions in contemporary non-Western societies. This contributes to an anti-dichotomistic view of personhood. LiPuma's work on Papua New Guineans is a good example that tries to erase this clear-cut dichotomy. Similar to Allen (1985), LiPuma argues that any society has its individual and dividual aspects, depending on the emphasis that the society places on each of them, and states that:

'[P]ersons emerge precisely from that tension between dividual and individual aspects / relations. And the terms and conditions of this tension, and thus the kind (and range) of persons that is produced, will vary historically' (LiPuma 1998, 57, emphasis is original).

LiPuma observed how in Melanesia, which was exposed to colonialism, Christianity, capitalism and other commercial cultures, the increasing notion and values characteristic of individualism started to be influential. He concludes that a stereotypical Western notion of person as 'wholly individual, as an autonomous, self-contained, self-moving agent' (LiPuma 1998, 59; see also Fowler 2004) is a product of capitalism and not the natural characteristic of those people. All the above-mentioned works on the unstable and changing nature of the notion of 'person', also with its dichotomistic and anti-dichotomistic views, are helpful to demonstrate how diverse social dynamics in Kochkor, with its processes that I described in chapter 1 such as re-traditionalisation, Re-Islamisation or westernisation, shape the lives of the children whom I studied.

I started this chapter with an interrogative statement, that is, how differently current studies on children and their childhood would have developed if a child as a subject were approached not

as an individual, who is on its own and separate from others (more concretely from adults), but as a person, a social being who is defined in relation to others, more concretely, to other members of society. In this section, I have extensively introduced the readers to the notion of 'person'. My aim is to highlight the social aspect of a child based on relations that directly affect the child's identity, life and its childhood. Indeed, social relations and a person, in my case it is a child, is a complementary combination. For Strathern, a person is imagined as 'a social microcosm' and it is the relationships that a person is engaged in that produce a person and not the other way around. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) defines a person as 'a complex of social relationships' and emphasises the multiple identities of a person based on existing or newly evolved social relations, as stated below:

'Every human being living in society is two things: he is an individual and also a person. As an individual, he is a biological organism, a collection of a vast number of molecules organised in a complex structure, within which, as long as it persists, there occur physiological and psychological actions and reactions, processes and changes. Human beings as individuals are objects of study for physiologists and psychologists. The human being as a person is a complex of social relationships. He is a citizen of England, a husband and a father, a bricklayer, a member of a particular Methodist congregation, a voter in a certain constituency, a member of his trade union, an adherent of the Labour Party, and so on. Note that each of these descriptions refer to a social relationship, or a place in a social structure' (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 193 f.).

The main idea of Radcliffe-Brown, the father of structural-functionalism and one of the main figures in early British social anthropology, is that he clearly focuses on social structure and an important interconnectedness between society and persons. He states that human beings are connected by a 'complex network of relations' and this network of relations is what constitutes 'social structure'. According to him, 'morals, law, etiquette, religion, government and education are all parts of

the complex mechanism by which a social structure exists and persists' (Radcliffe-Brown 1952, 195). Radcliffe-Brown suggests that these things should be studied in accordance with social structure, as they affect the social relations between persons and groups of persons. The main conclusion he draws is that one cannot study people apart from social structure and similarly, social structure cannot be studied without taking into account people.

In sum, what can the thinking of these scholars tell us about the notion of 'person'? Despite differences in their approach to the concept of the person, all these scholars have many things in common. First, they tell us that the notion/concept of 'person' is the product of a society, which is created through relations in a society. Second, society and social relations within it are not static; the relations change, society evolves, which also affects the multiple or shifting identities of a person. Third, from a methodological perspective, one cannot study the person outside the context of society and social relations. Similarly, as Allen (1985) notes, the study of a person triggers the study of cultural values and practices. This logic opens the door for broader topics to be mentioned within my research such as social organisation, social relations and transformations brought to these relations by socio-cultural, political and economic changes.

2.6. Local Rationalities: *Zaman*, *Koom* and Values

Before concluding this theoretical chapter, I would like to take an opportunity to reflect on how my anthropological approach to the study of children through the concept of 'person', which is a socio-historical product, will help me to describe children in Kochkor and their childhoods. Local concepts of a child, childhood or personhood can be well described through local people's understanding of the notion of healthy growth of children which are defined and re-defined based on societal changes that people face.

My interlocutors use the terms *zaman* ('time/period/epoch') and *koom* ('society') when they talk

about children; children not in a general term, but about the children of the current time. Especially in conversations, my adult interlocutors used the terms '*azyrky zamandyn baldary*' ('children of current time'), '*azyrky zamandyn jashtary*' ('the youth of current time') and '*azyrky zamanda adamdar ...*' ('at the present time, people ...') who are usually defined in comparison to the children/youth/people of the past, be it the past connected to the Soviet time or the past with idealised Kyrgyz values. That depends on what aspects they want to underline. But this comparison is usually accompanied with what is good or bad, healthy or unhealthy in comparison to the past.

They talk about how time has changed and how society has changed, and how these changes affect their children, their childhoods and the way their values are formed. Values are adopted, adapted or forgotten through the changing processes of *zaman* and *koom*. Consequently, these changes produce a new person, a new generation. For example, Jarkynay Apa,⁴¹ my interlocutor in her mid-50s, stated: 'In fifty years, a people is new; in hundred years, a place is new' ('*Elüü jylda el jangy, jüz jylda jer jangy*'). This is a Kyrgyz saying. However, Jarkynay Apa uses this statement to hint how societal changes affect children and their lives. And I would also interpret it as how with societal changes, the way we perceive children also changes.

The diagram (fig. 3) illustrates how a child, as a notion and as a living being, is defined, perceived, imagined, or interpreted according to the combination of 'time-society-values'. Time, society and values are non-static and ever-changing, which also affects the changing perceptions of children and their childhoods. 'Current [children] are different. Nowadays, youth puts material values in the first place' ('*Azyrkylar bashkacha. Azyrky jashtar materialdyk baaluuluktardy birinchi orunga koyot*'), this is how people of the older generations in Kochkor talk about the young generation. These generational differences, similar to the example of *peyil ketti* (the loss of old good qualities due to

⁴¹ The Kyrgyz word *apa* is translated into English as 'mother'. This term is used by younger people when they address older ladies. In my case it is 'Mother Jarkynay'.

market economy and increasing sense of individualism) which I described in chapter 1, are felt and evaluated by local people mainly through people's changing values, attitudes and relations to each other.

The social space in a certain period of time with certain values that children as well as adults occupy is defined by certain characteristics. These characteristics contribute to framing children (but also adults) into a certain generational space. The term 'generation' is defined as a "cohort group" that is born over a span of years – typically about twenty years – and that shares characteristics, including some shared childhood and coming-of-age experiences, a set of common behavioral and attitudinal traits, and a sense of common identity' (Dictionary of American History). Indeed, the difference between generations is based on shared values, experiences and identities. However, rapid social and cultural changes that people in Kochkor face today have shortened the life span of one generation which is definitely less than 20 years. Any significant momentum such as the introduction of a market economy in Kochkor, the arrival of cell-phones or the Internet, or the revival of Islamic values – all these changes in the society contribute to the frequent creation of a new generation, which is somewhat different from its predecessor.

The statement 'Current children are different. Nowadays, youths put material values in the first place' clearly indicates that a child is defined in the intersection of the past and present values as well as in the intersection of idealised forms and real practices. I would argue that a child as a **notion** and a **being** is defined in constant expectations, discourses and negotiations. I have stated in chapter 1 that the notion of childhood is the mirror of the notion of personhood and that the significance of childhood is in its period when the society actively participates in 'the making of the person', of the child or out of the child, both through discourses and in practice.

The juxtaposition between the notions of childhood and personhood and the mutual analysis of the theoretical ideas developed within these studies not only help us to understand childhood studies in a new light, but they also have the reverse

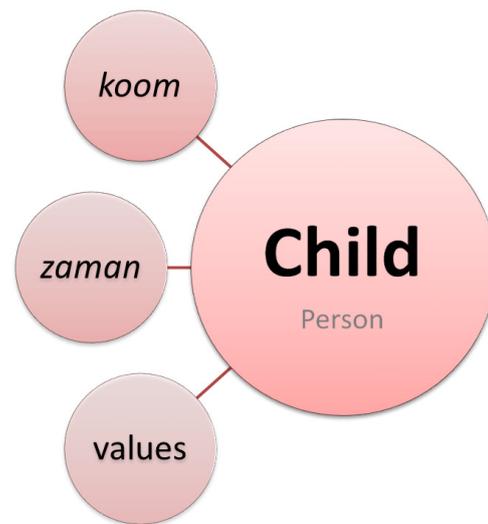


Fig. 3. Child/person 'constructed' based on three aspects: *koom* ('society'), *zaman* ('time') and values.

advantage. The ethnographic material on children and their childhoods in Kochkor and their detailed analysis within the framework of **healthy growth** and **making of the person** that I take as the core in my research on children will help us look at the **process** of how this person is made, moulded and produced. In a society like Kochkor, where there are diverse and multiple norms, values and morals, the processes of making a person take on different forms. The ethnographic chapters 5–8 that touch upon the local notions of healthy growth and practices of making a person will clearly demonstrate this.

2.7. Conclusion

My aim in this work is to approach the study of children through the concept of 'person'. I argued that this 'person' side of children, which is usually ignored, should be studied in order to get a complete analysis of children in any society. After having looked at the theoretical and historical background of Childhood Studies and the theoretical development of the concept of 'person', I highlight the following reasoning in support of my suggestion to study children and childhood through the concepts of 'person' and 'personhood':

- (1) Following Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and Tonkin (1982), I share the idea that a child has both a 'person' and an 'individual' side, similar to two sides of a coin. Anthropologists study the 'person' side of a child, which is constructed based on a child's relationship to the surrounding people and environment. It is relationships which define a person, a social being, in my case a child, who is part of the community and has a certain role, status, rights, responsibilities and obligations in the society.
- (2) Following Mauss, I claim that a child is a socio-cultural and historical product. The concept of a child is not static. It also changes according to the 'systems of law, religion, customs, social structures and mentality' of the society (Mauss [1938] 1985, 1). Thus, we cannot study children out of context. This means that the notion of a child should be studied within broader social issues such as family, work, education, rituals and other social values that shape children and their childhoods. This shifts local perceptions and categorisations of a child and child development to a central role and urges us to turn to them in our analysis.
- (3) The concept of the person helps me think beyond the 'child-adult' juxtaposition and its power relations, and to look at the child as a social being, with its own role and status in society, defined and determined by the society itself.
- (4) The notion of 'person' as a social being raises the issue of reconsidering the classical socialisation theory that was based on psychological development theory, which unnecessarily triggers the child-adult juxtaposition. Instead, I look at socialisation as the process which

imparts 'major value-oriented patterns' to a person, not only to a child (Jenks 2005, 12). Moreover, it is not adults who shape a child, but children as well as adults are shaped by values and norms of a given society of a certain period of time as I demonstrated on the Kyrgyz terms *zaman* and *koom*.

- (5) The notion of 'person', as a socio-historical product, inspired me to look at the dynamics of social changes and how these processes affect the lives of children, the way they experience their childhoods and the way the notion of childhood is constructed.

I conclude that the study of personhood is intimately related to the study of childhood. The way a child is pictured is sensitive to the influence of environmental, socio-cultural, economic and political factors. Those factors shape and re-shape not only the child as a notion or as a social construct, but also influence those child-related norms, values and policies. I have come up with a diagram which explains how a child **as a notion** is defined, understood, interpreted, and also how a child **as a being** is shaped based on the interaction of these 'society-time-value' dimensions. This diagram will serve as a background template when I consider children in Kochkor and their healthy growth in my ethnographic chapters, which will touch upon topics such as children's physical health, upbringing, work, rituals, religion, education and many other aspects from a child's life in Kochkor. In other words, children in this book will be defined and described based on local categorisations, local values and worldviews and socio-cultural changes. These issues will be explored in detail after the methodology that I consider in the next chapter.

3. Anthropology at Home

‘The sooner and the more completely is Orientalism recognised as equal to Occidentalism, the more complete will be the science of humanity’

V. M. Alekseev (cited in Kadyrov 1999, 5, translated by the author)

3.1. Entry to the Field

Gülnara Eje: ‘Where are you heading?’

BT: ‘I am going to the hospital to interview doctors.’

Gülnara Eje: ‘One of my best friends works there. Maybe I will call her so that she makes sure that the doctors there welcome you well and answer your questions? (*jakshy kabyl alyp, suroolorunga joop bersin?*)’

BT: ‘No, there is no need for that. I will do it on my own.’

This was the conversation between me and my host-mother, Gülnara Eje, on the second morning after my arrival in Kochkor for fieldwork in 2012.⁴² She was concerned as I was new in the village and she wanted to help. Finding key interlocutors through a ‘snowball’ sampling is one of the tactics that anthropologists use in their research with it being advisable that one uses such connections (see Bernard 1994; Fetterman 2010; Schensul/LeCompte 2013). This method was used many times during my fieldwork. However, that morning I rejected the offer of my host-mother. Although, on the way to the hospital I was preoccupied with the concern whether the head physician (*glavrach*) would grant me permission to be present in the clinic and allow me to observe the doctor-patient interactions. After reaching the office of the head physician, I stood in a short queue. At last, my turn came and I entered the office.

⁴² In Kochkor, I lived with a Kyrgyz family consisting of a couple in their 50s and their three children: two boys at the ages of 19 and 16, and a girl at the age of five. At the time of my field research, the eldest son was studying in Bishkek, so I was mainly in contact with the other four family members.

I introduced myself and explained the purpose of my research. One of the first questions that the head physician asked was: ‘Where are you from?’, meaning which province (Rus. *oblast'*) of Kyrgyzstan I was from. It is a normal practice among Kyrgyz people when strangers ask which part of Kyrgyzstan one comes from as soon as they enter into a conversation. If two conversers come from the same region, this creates a sense of relatedness, which greatly affects the attitudes and the flow of the conversation. I come from Talas, another region of Kyrgyzstan; however, I told the head physician that my mother was from Kochkor. Even though he did not know my mother personally, learning that we have some relatedness pleased him and the conversation continued further about my personal background.

After having learned that I came to Kochkor to do research with my one-and-a-half year old daughter, he noted ‘Oh, you are married!’ which was immediately followed by: ‘Is your husband Kyrgyz?’ This enquiry constantly came from many interlocutors of mine throughout my research, who were curious whether my husband was German, as I studied and lived in Germany at that time.⁴³ The patriotic head physician was pleased to find out that my husband was Kyrgyz and not a foreigner, which indicated that even though I had been living outside Kyrgyzstan for several years, I was ‘loyal’ to my people. He noted with a hint of sadness: ‘It is such a pity that our nice (*tatynakay*) girls marry foreigners and not Kyrgyz!’

Only after clarifying some personal background about me did we move on to the topic of my research. I told him that I wanted to study what Kyrgyz people do to raise their children healthily and added that along with biomedicine, I would

⁴³ Asking young ladies and young men whether they have a boyfriend or girlfriend and whether they are married is a normal part of getting acquainted in Kyrgyzstan. If young people study abroad, they are asked this question out of curiosity. In case they are married to a foreigner, then asking people will refer to these foreigners as ‘*kelin*’ (‘daughter-in-law’) or ‘*küyöö bala*’ (‘son-in-law’), even if they do not have a direct kinship tie.

also look at alternative medicine in Kochkor. It reminded him of the case of his son many years ago who, after unsuccessful help from biomedical doctors, got cured from one old Russian lady through folk medicine. He said: 'I did not believe in healers before, but after my son's case I started to believe in their power'. We talked about his son and also about other topics for about 25 minutes. Then he picked up the receiver and made a phone call to his assistant and asked her to take me to somebody else, presumably to the unit where I would conduct some clinical observations. The head physician gave his permission for me to study the clinical environment. Based on our conversation, which was purely on personal issues, I had a feeling that it was not only the nature of my research but also my personal background that served as the key factors influencing him to grant permission for me to do my research in 'his' clinic.

Most foreign researchers come to a field-work site and spend the first days, weeks or even months getting acquainted with the new environment (see Beyer 2009), or learn the language and get socialised. Unlike them, I, as a native Kyrgyz researcher, could immediately start my research. Language, which is taken as one of the most important aspects in conducting ethnographic research (Murchison 2010), was not an issue in my case, as I speak both Kyrgyz and Russian, which are national and official languages of the country.⁴⁴ Me being 'native' (which will be discussed at length later in this chapter) and the way the locals accepted me have affected the flow and quality of my research project, the quantity of the collected data, as well as the length of my data analysis at the end. In short, my status as a local researcher predetermined the theoretical and methodological approaches in my research and the overall design of my research project, starting from choosing the research topic, framing the research questions,

⁴⁴ In villages like Kochkor, Kyrgyz is the dominant language and used in everyday life. In Kyrgyz language, there are no dialects, but instead there are accents and some wording nuances, according to which people can easily identify which part of Kyrgyzstan a person comes from. This, however, does not create an obstacle for people to communicate and understand each other.

through to the data collection process and writing the ethnography.

I have decided to dedicate this whole chapter to methodology for several reasons. Ethnography – the final product that anthropologists come up with at the end of their research – is what gives readers an impression and background knowledge about the people whom anthropologists take on a responsibility to represent. The shape of ethnography strongly depends on research methodology. Methodology as a research strategy helps to approach and tackle the researched issue. Thus, much depends on a researcher, more concretely, how well she or he uses certain methods and approaches. At the same time, by and large, the way a researcher is perceived by their interlocutors also plays an equally important role (see Bernard 1994). Here it is necessary to underline that being accepted as a native in many cases left its mark on the ethnography that I present in this book. Thus, the first part of this chapter will mainly reflect on doing anthropology at home. Anthropology is a young but growing discipline in Central Asia (see Reeves 2014). Along with the increasing interest of foreign researchers in the Central Asian region, one can witness a growing number of native Central Asian researchers who do anthropology at home. Still, despite increasing scholarship on Central Asia, the methodology of doing anthropology at home is usually left out without being discussed. My aim in this chapter is to narrow this methodological gap.

The second part of this chapter will deal with another underdeveloped aspect of research methodology in the context of Central Asia, which is doing research **about** and **with** children. My approach to children through the concept of the person, which has been extensively discussed in the previous chapter, allows me to look at a child in diverse local contexts. Here I want to make it clear that my interlocutors were mostly adults who are directly involved in the development of their children. This is mainly because of my approach to the study of children through the concepts of 'healthy growth' and 'making of the person'. Still, even though children's voices were not much represented in this book, I did deal with my little informants

by interviewing them and making observations of their lives in an extended way. My research with children required different methodological tools than the ones used for adults and I find it worth elaborating more on some situations from the field. At the end, I will share my reflections on research ethics of working with both children and adults. Unlike methodological approaches that require that ethics should be age-sensitive, I argue that ethics relating to research with children does not, and should not, differ from ethics of research conducted with adults.

3.2. Native Anthropologist

Mainstream anthropology,⁴⁵ which was largely based on ‘the study of others’, is now being undertaken by scholars who study their own society, as I do. These anthropologists are termed as ‘native’ or ‘indigenous’ anthropologists or just ‘insiders’, and their works are called auto-ethnography⁴⁶ or endo-ethnography⁴⁷ (Jahan 2014; Kempny 2012; Narayan 1993; Peirano 1998; Strathern 1987). It has also been given the name ‘anthropology at home’, which has become common to use since the 1960s (see Eriksen 2001, 29 f.). Should ‘anthropology at home’ be seen differently from ‘established anthropology’ (Fahim 1982, xii)? There

45 It is interesting to observe the tendency that ‘native anthropology’ or ‘anthropology at home’ is opposed to ‘real’ or ‘mainstream’ anthropology (see Narayan 1993; Lien/Melhuus 2008).

46 Ingold (2014) defines the term auto-ethnography as a work written by an ethnographer who reflects and writes on his/her own experience.

47 In this section, I will not look into the meanings of the terms themselves. The authors who refer to ‘anthropology at home’ agree that being ‘native’ or an ‘insider’ or even the term ‘home’ could also be interpreted differently, that is why they should be seen as a relative idea (see Jackson 1987; Kempny 2012; Narayan 1993; Peirano 1998; van Ginkel 1994). Eriksen (2001) rightly notes that the distinction between ‘self’ and ‘others’ can be experienced between countries as well as within the same heterogeneous society. Also ‘going native’ is the term that is popularly used in anthropology in relation to researchers who study a foreign society. In my case, I will be using the term ‘native’ or ‘local’ interchangeably and it is based on the idea that I share the same ethnic identity, language, culture and citizenship with the people whom I studied.

were many organised symposiums where ‘anthropology at home’ was closely discussed in relation to methodological and ethical assumptions. In one such meeting in 1983, Marilyn Strathern raised a very interesting question about whether anthropologists who go and study their own home cultures would see their own society differently from how outsiders would see them (see Jackson 1987). I would be reluctant to answer this question with ‘yes’ or ‘no’ because there are many other small nuances that play their role in research besides being an insider or an outsider. One of them is how a researcher is trained.

My approach to studying children in Kyrgyzstan was different, in my view, from those local scholars who were not trained abroad. I studied at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek for my bachelor’s degree, in the United Kingdom for my master’s degree and in Germany for my doctoral degree. During my studies abroad, I was supervised by English and German scholars, familiarised myself with the works of international scholars and have been involved in broader academic debates on children and childhood which are dominated by ‘Western’ standards.⁴⁸ From this perspective, I can be called a ‘cultural outsider’ as Schröter (2013) terms it. On the one hand, being a local, I could ‘feel’ the people whom I studied and grasped the ideas that they conveyed, which might be invisible to a foreign researcher at the start. This allowed me to bring the ‘theoretical child’ and the ‘real live child’ (Alanen 1988) into discussions objectively. On the other hand, being a local with a Western educational background has helped me to come up with my own way to approach my research topic on local perceptions and values related to the healthy growth of children.

The community I studied was approached from two perspectives simultaneously. Under the first perspective, ‘universal’ analytical concepts and categorisations such as child, adult, age, work,

48 Diawara (2011) notes how non-Western researchers, who are trained in the West, write according to the standards of Western learning. As for local Kyrgyz scholars, due to the lack of English language proficiency, they do not have access to existing scholarly debates on the concepts of children and childhood which are usually produced in English.

child's agency and children's rights, to name but a few, were extensively and intentionally utilised. With that I aimed to see how local people understood and perceived such concepts. My second perspective comes as a response to the argument made by Lett (1990), who notes that anthropological research should consider both 'emic' (local people's) and 'etic' (a researcher's) perspectives; but in reality, it is dominated for some reason by mostly etic perspectives. Thus, I, on purpose, made a great deal of emphasis on local people's perspectives and categorisations with the aim to demonstrate to what extent 'universal' values would fit or not fit into local contexts.

At the same time, as a local, I cannot deny that I had access to certain types of knowledge that an outsider would not have noticed without 'going native'. I do not take the insiderism or nativism perspective here, which claims that only natives can understand their own society (see Kuper 1994; Merton 1972; Peirano 1998). Rather, by taking into consideration the 'double nature of concepts' (Harris 1989, 599) where often native categories do not coincide with analytical constructs, I emphasised the importance of being able to feel local categorisations in order to write about how studied people themselves view their own society and interpret social phenomena. I used the opportunity of being a local to explore 'cultural themes' (see Spradley 1980, 140) and folk models (see Holy/Stuchlik 1981), and made them explicit. For example, the concept of a child, as seen from the native category, which will be discussed in chapter 4, triggers discussions on social relations, social expectations and many local values, and scarcely touches on the child-adult division, which is dominant in the scholarship of Childhood Studies.

I believe that being native helps to combine both local perspectives and the perspectives as a researcher and offers 'new angles of vision and depth of understanding' in Childhood Studies (Clifford 1986, 9), especially, considering that anthropological and general scholarly works on children in Kyrgyzstan and in Central Asia are relatively scarce. In this sense, I also tried to be a more 'cosmopolitan anthropologist' in the Kuperian (1994) sense and write this work also by aiming at academic circles.

3.3. A Status Set: Approach to the Interlocutors

I started this chapter with the conversation between my host-mother and myself, where I refused my host-mother's offer to introduce me to her doctor friend who would help me get permission to study the local clinic. This is because I remembered my host-mother saying that even every dog in Kochkor knows her. This meant that she had a big network in the village that I could use. Still, due to ethical reasons, I refused that. I did not want my interlocutors to spend time with me and answer my questions only because my host-mother would ask them. Moreover, I was not sure how my connection with my host-mother would shape the attitude of my potential interlocutors towards me and influence the information they provide (see Murchison 2010 on the role of gatekeepers). For these reasons, I wanted to be introduced to the people in my field as an independent researcher and not through being a 'close person' to my host-family. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in my encounter with the head physician and also experienced many times afterwards, it was impossible for me to avoid my status as being a 'close person' to the whole community that I studied.

I gained special status in the field which helped to ease the process of approaching interlocutors and was beneficial for studying my research topic intensively and effectively, both timewise and in increased quality. This was mainly due to a number of reasons. First, I was seen by local people as a young Kyrgyz lady who, after having lived several years abroad, came back to her own country to write about Kyrgyz children. Second, as the topic of children directly raises local cultural values, I was seen as a person who wanted to write about Kyrgyz culture. Writing down cultural values and practices equals, in the eyes of local people, to an attempt to immortalise and thus preserve Kyrgyz traditional values, which, according to the elderly, 'the current youth was not keen to preserve'. Third, the topic I studied was a topic that most parents were pleased to discuss. Telling life stories, especially by the elderly, also created a suitable atmosphere for them to discuss contemporary children's childhoods and compare them with their own childhoods, which they described

as ‘clean’ and ‘pure’ in comparison to current children who put material values first. Fourth, I entered the research field as a mother with a small daughter which only positively affected the way I gained mothers’ trust. It helped a lot when we touched upon the topics of birth, mothers’ and children’s health and illnesses, and the topics of cross-cultural upbringing (see also Morton 1996). The last and the most important reason for being accepted by the community was my status as a ‘child’.

Similar to the head physician, many interlocutors of mine asked the question where I was from, meaning which part of Kyrgyzstan I came from. Earlier, it has been noted that people ask each other this question not necessarily to find out from which part of Kyrgyzstan a person comes from, but to construct relatedness between the people conversing. If two women find out that they are from one region, be it a village or an administrative unit such as a district or province, they consider themselves as ‘sisters’ by saying: ‘*Ii, sen menin singdim turbaisyngby!*’ (‘Oh, you are my sister!’).⁴⁹ Even if it is not a direct relatedness, which is usually defined according to a person’s paternal side, people may still relate to each other in other ways. For example, if the conversation goes on, then one may ask about the marital status of the person and might get related through affinal ties or through the maternal side, as it was in my case in Kochkor.

In Kochkor, I was seen by local people as their ‘*jeen*’ (a grandchild from their daughter’s side), since my mother was from Kochkor and was ‘the daughter’ of the village. The fact that my mother had not lived in that region for the last 35 years and that nobody knew her (except for some neighbours of the older generation) did not seem to bother anybody. I was still their *jeen*, a grandchild. The status of *jeen* is interesting from kinship perspective. In a patrilineal society such as Kochkor and Kyrgyzstan in general, grandchildren from a daughter’s side are not considered to be a part of the people (*el*) and do not belong to the ‘us’ category. There is a proverb that states that ‘*jeen* will

never become a part of a people (*jeen el bolboyt*), or part of a tribe. Nevertheless, there is an interesting cultural perception according to which *jeen* is highly respected. A daughter is usually seen as a guest in her birth family, since she will marry out and, according to a patrilocal logic, becomes a part of her husband’s community. Thus, the children of the daughter will also be guests when they visit their mother’s kin members. This local cultural perception has played a significant role during my stay in Kochkor as a researcher. My status as their *jeen* eased my getting access to some people, even if initially they did not have any particular desire to spend time with me, as Chyngyz Ata’s⁵⁰ case shows at the beginning of my interview with him:

Chyngyz Ata: ‘Where are you from?’

BT: ‘From Talas [my place of origin, which is in the northwest of Kyrgyzstan].’

Chyngyz Ata: ‘Then what are you doing here?! Why don’t you go to Talas and study them?’

BT: [At first I was dumbfounded and started to formulate an appropriate reason for why I chose Kochkor village. What first came into my mind in this particular situation was the following] ‘Well, my mother is from this region.’

Chyngyz Ata: ‘Oh, you are our *jeen* then! [His mood changed and we started to discuss my background and my research and then shifted to his life. After a while, closer to the end of my interview with him, he called his wife and said, turning to her] Come! Tell your autobiography to your granddaughter! (*Kel jeeninge tarjymalyngdy aityp ber!*)’

Was I perceived by Chyngyz Ata as a local, as an insider? The answer is yes and no. Being an insider and outsider, especially regarding researchers’ status, is correlated to cultural identity (see Abu-Lughod 1988; Narayan 1993). Both authors describe themselves as ‘partial insiders’, who conducted their research in the country of their own parents. However, being local or native, in a direct sense, does not immediately imply that one is an

⁴⁹ This was noted by personal experience and also observation.

⁵⁰ The Kyrgyz word *ata* is translated as ‘father’. People use this term when they address an old male person.

insider. Correspondingly, you are not an outsider if you study a totally foreign culture (see Ellen 1984; Kempny 2012). What about the anthropological notion of 'going native' which usually transforms foreign anthropologists into insiders? The reason for raising this issue here is that, when it comes to the concepts of 'going native' and 'becoming an insider', I, on the contrary, worked hard on 'going foreign' and being 'detached' from the culture I was studying. I tried to be as much an 'outsider' as possible. This was done, first, in order to escape a 'taking for granted' assumption (see Kempny 2012) or 'homeblindness' (Eriksen 2001) which is usually ascribed to an indigenous anthropologist. Second, I wanted to draw a line between my native view and background knowledge and what I collected from the people in Kochkor about their native views.

Being a native concerned me so much that I got prepared for it even before I started my fieldwork and tried to keep a red flag to be aware of these nuances during the fieldwork. In the field, I was so much engaged with the 'going foreign' idea that sometimes I asked questions about local cultural practices even though I, as a local, had knowledge of these areas myself. Luckily, Kochkorian's reaction to my 'going foreign' was not similar to what Altorki, who conducted her research in her community in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia, had faced. By commenting on her way of asking questions, Altorki (1988) notes how her interlocutors shamed her and reproached her for being Muslim and not knowing how to pray. In my case, I also asked many questions related to Kyrgyz traditional lifestyle, which, in fact, had to be obvious to me. For example, a woman from the Health Promotion Committee in Kochkor, locally known as KUZ (Rus. Komitet po Ukrepleniyu Zdorov'ya), that tightly worked with the Swiss Red Cross on the Sprinkles project (see chapter 1), remarked that I behaved like her curious foreign boss, a Swiss man, who would always ask detailed **how** and **why** questions about Kyrgyz people's lives. The comparison between her boss and myself was raised not in the form of reproach, but the KUZ woman underlined how I had become a 'foreigner' also. Sometimes the fact that I had lived and studied abroad for

quite some time rescued me from such uncomfortable situations, as my extended absence from the country served as an excuse for me not knowing all the nuances about my own culture. Moreover, there had been rapid societal changes during my absence from Kyrgyzstan which had enlarged my 'cultural distance' (Diawara 2011). In my opinion, my interlocutors must have perceived that, upon my return, many things had been new and strange to me, so I was not knowledgeable in all aspects of the village life.

'Anthropology at home' sounds very easy. I heard this opinion among my foreign colleagues in Germany who noted how local researchers did not have to learn a new language, would easily be accepted to the studied community or understand the local way of thinking. Yet, there are also challenges that indigenous scholars might face in certain situations. For example, Jahan (2014) writes how, as a Muslim woman, it was not easy for her to talk to male interlocutors being aware of gender segregation. Sometimes local people can close their eyes to some cultural blunders by foreign researchers, and see it as an unforgivable mistake if it is done by local researchers. This was also one of the reasons for my attempt to 'go foreign' within the community that I studied rather than present myself as 'one of them'. My attempt to distance myself from the community also helped me to get access to the private lives of people who shared their family issues and health-related cases with me without fear that this can get disclosed among the community.

What I want to underline is that in the local context, the way a researcher is seen is much more complex than simple 'insider' versus 'outsider' or 'being native' versus 'being foreign' dichotomies. As Merton puts it: 'individuals have not a single status but a **status set**: a complement of variously interrelated statuses which interact to affect both their behaviour and perspectives' (Merton 1972, 22, emphasis by the author). For Chyngyz Ata, I was an outsider, as I was from another region of Kyrgyzstan. However, after a minute, I became an insider to him, because I turned out to be his *jeen* due to my mother's relatedness to Kochkor. His case also shows that the way researchers are

perceived depends on both (a) how researchers introduce themselves, and (b) how their interlocutors want to perceive them (see Bernard 1994). At the same time, I was having shifting identities based on my gender, age, religion and other affiliations. For example, when I introduced myself to people in Kochkor, I told them that I was a student studying in Germany and was writing my doctoral thesis about children in Kyrgyzstan. At first, I introduced myself as an anthropologist. This discipline was not that familiar to people, since very few seemed to show the sign that they understood what anthropology was. Those who indicated that they knew what anthropology was associated my work with digging and excavation. That is why I changed my approach and started to call myself an ethnographer, reminding people of Soviet ethnographers who came to Kyrgyz people in the early 20th cent. AD to write books about them, their lifestyle and culture.

Even more, I opt for the assumption that it is not how a researcher introduces himself/herself that counts, but more how people perceive or want to perceive researchers (see also Schröter 2013). For example, in my conversation with mullahs in the Kochkor mosque, it was my status as a Kyrgyz, and thus a Muslim, that played its role. This became clear in one of my conversations when I thanked a mullah and his comrade for spending a long time with me. They openly expressed their intentions that they wanted me to learn more about Islam, as I was considered in their eyes as a Muslim who was not that 'knowledgeable' about her religion. In addition, they also mentioned that by explaining to me (and also to others) what the true way to Islam was, they would be receiving *soop* (reward from Allah). At the same time, my status as a researcher played favourably in my access to mullahs in the Kochkor mosque who perceived me as a means through which they could show to the outer world, be it on a village level or broader level, what true Islam was, which was a highly-debated topic among villagers at that time.

In sum, I had many statuses and images in the field, beyond insider-outside notion, which played their role in the way I accessed people and collected data. In the hospital, where I conducted

a clinical observation on the very first days of my fieldwork, I was seen by some doctors as an official coming from Bishkek to check up on the hospital and its compliance with requirements (see chapter 6). In the eyes of small children and their parents, I was seen as a person who could teach English and help them achieve success in the future. For the local workers of the Dom Kul'tury (the House of Culture) or school, I was seen as a person who could help them with getting grants and funding to solve their financial problems. For others, I was seen as a journalist with a Dictaphone who could deliver the people's concern to the government. Yet, for many, I was seen as a Kyrgyz student studying abroad who would make them and Kyrgyzstan known to Europe and to the world through my work. All of my statuses served in a certain way in my research process, be it positively or negatively, and affected the outcome that I present in this book. Mutually, the status set in the field has also re-shaped my identity and moral obligations to the people whom I studied during my fieldwork and thereafter.

3.4. Constructing a Cultural Image through Writing

Writing is one of the most important parts of research as it is through writing that one engages in knowledge production and in scholarly debates. It is scholars' written research outputs which create the ideas about people and culture that they study. In the end, it is not the actual tedious research process but what they have produced which counts, when, for example, a doctoral dissertation is graded by supervisors and when it gets published to a broader circle. Some foreign scholars encounter complications in writing due to insufficient material they have collected in the field, which may be related to the language barrier or some cultural analysis. In my case, I experienced complications due to the opposite reasons. Sharing the same language and culture is an advantage, but it can also be a disadvantage. When it comes to language, I ended up with the collection of an enormous amount of material, especially recorded

interviews. It took me longer to go through them and decide which material to include in my final work in order to respond to the questions I have been seeking to answer in my research.

Another disadvantage of doing anthropology at home is that a native researcher may face additional effort and challenges during the data-analysis process. At least it was the case with me. Whenever I interpreted something from my field material, I was trapped with anxiety over whether I was not mixing my own interpretation or background information with the views of my interlocutors. Sometimes, when I started to develop an idea, I had to consciously ask myself and double-check whether I was concluding something based on what my interlocutors told me or whether it was based on my own views as a local. Thus, for whatever idea I was developing, I started to dig into my notes as well as transcribed and non-transcribed interviews for exact words that my interlocutors had said. This led me to become a 'word-to-word freak' with heavy dependence on my recorded data.

Sensing the strong disposition for mixing my own back-brain knowledge with what I would freshly gather in the field, I tried to put a line between my knowledge and that of my interlocutors by recording what I got from them in full and heavily relying on the recorded material later. I used a Dictaphone a lot and I tried to make records of ideas, phrases, proverbs and anything that my interlocutors said in order to highlight that these were their views and use that material in my work with confidence. I also designed my research in such a way that even in observations, be it of the village, people, discussions, or events, I purposefully asked people to describe and interpret what they were involved in. It is noted that in data analysis, one should not 'go native' but retain an outsider's perspectives in order to sceptically approach local practices and be objective (Bernard 1994). By taking into account my perception of how Childhood Studies scholarship is heavily dominated by the etic views of scholars, I decided to use the opposite approach and reflect more on local people's definitions, categorisations and classifications.

Even though I made records of many observations and participant observations, I decided to give greater space to the 'cultural poetics' in my work and less to the interpretation of my own visualised views as a researcher. By focusing on the notion of 'cultural poetics', Clifford (1986) notes that Western imagination of reality is very much based on visual observation and suggests that in writing ethnography, one has to consider people's voices and discourses. The idea of 'ethnography of experience' is also influential as the quote below demonstrates:

'[...] experiments recognize more profoundly that feelings and experience can never be apprehended directly, and certainly not conveyed across cultures, without careful attention to their diverse, mediating modes of expression. Such experimental ethnographies are especially interested in theories and constructions of the person, derived from indigenous discourses and commentaries' (Marcus/Fischer 1986, 46).

Especially nowadays, when it is almost impossible to find any isolated culture that is not a part of the globalised world, the ethnography of experience becomes topical. Discourses and commentaries of people regarding their feelings and experiences of the rapid changes that they face in their everyday lives due to globalisation processes do not only handle with generalisations, but also engender more discourses on diversity. I believe that it is easier to talk about differences and diversity in Kochkor village rather than come up with generalisations. For example, the topics on Kyrgyz traditions and cultural practices (*salt*) are usually represented in a single generalised form which is also usually perceived as an idealised version. Even then, elderly people, who are seen as local cultural experts, argue, discuss, and negotiate differently about what Kyrgyz traditions and cultural practices are and how they should be perceived and practiced. Thus, it is fascinating to analyse native perspectives and experiences that lead to a better and deeper understanding of cultures, which are 'historical and actively contested' (Clifford 1986, 18).

3.5. The Scope and Methods of Investigation

‘If you want to learn about Kyrgyz culture, go to Naryn!’ is how people in Kyrgyzstan would talk about the Naryn region, where the village of Kochkor lies. Local people believe that ‘authentic’ Kyrgyz language and traditions are preserved in this mountainous area of Kyrgyzstan, which was less exposed to external cultural influences. Due to its mountainous status, Naryn province became one of the regions that received the most support from International Development Agencies during the post-Soviet period. The Sprinkles pilot project, which I mentioned in the Introduction (chapter 1), was first launched and implemented in Naryn. I chose Naryn province for my research mostly due to this reason, as I wanted to follow up the Sprinkles case and observe the changes brought by international development projects since then.

The first thing that anthropologists should determine is the scope of their investigation (Spradley 1980). Kochkor was an ideal place for my research as it has institutions such as kindergartens, religious and secular schools, a hospital and institutions working on international health-related projects. All of these played an important role in children’s lives in the village. As I planned to look at children in the local cultural context, I decided to focus purely on Kyrgyz families which make up a considerable majority of the village and did not study Uighurs, Dungans,⁵¹ or representatives of other ethnic groups. I conducted in-depth interviews with family members: both adults and children from the age of four upwards. Although, due to the topic of my research, which was on the healthy growth of children, my interlocutors were mostly adults, as I noted earlier.

I also interviewed doctors, healers, mullahs, people from the *madrassa* (Islamic school), teachers in secular schools, caregivers in a kindergarten in Kochkor as well as an orphanage in a neighbouring village called Cholpon and conducted observations in their institutions. I also approached people

from the local library, press-house, police force, social protection institution, a musical school and any other institutions in Kochkor which, in my view, had connections to children’s lives. Among these, the most frequently visited institution was the KUZ (Health Promotion Committee) which worked on the Sprinkles project in 2007 and has been implementing other projects since then. I once accompanied them for home visits within the framework of the projects on healthy pregnancy. I also paid several visits to neighbouring villages by accompanying my host-family and got a chance to interview people there.

Within the total of nine months of fieldwork, which lasted from end of September 2012 to March 2013, and then continuing from September to December 2013 for the follow-up research, I held and recorded over 100 interviews. The length of interviews (unstructured and semi-structured) varied from half an hour to several hours. In most cases, I visited families in their homes. Alternatively, we sat in front of their house on the street and talked. Some interlocutors, who did not want to be disturbed by their children, would also come to my place in the evening where we talked over tea.

Besides in-depth interviews and observations that I made, I participated in village get-togethers, religious teachings, child-related ritual ceremonies and *madrassa*-organised events. Usually, I accompanied my host-parents to social get-togethers in the village, such as the holy feast of Kurman Ait (a Muslim celebration), *tülöö* (‘sacrifice’), and many other feasts organised for life-cycle purposes. My host-brother, who was then a pupil, invited me to the events happening at his school. I also personally visited the deputy principal in the school and got her permission to attend school events. In most cases, I happened to know about such events by chance or through word of mouth. For example, once a neighbour of ours, who knew that I was studying topics about children, came to me and told me about an upcoming ritual ceremony that was about to take place in the neighbourhood. Depending on the event, my status constantly shifted from participant-observer to observing participant (Bernard 1994) and from complete

⁵¹ *Dungan* is a term used for an ethnic group of Muslim people with Chinese origin who live in the post-USSR territory.

participation to 'detached observation' (Spradley 1980, 32).

I also collected life stories and health-related case studies from my interlocutors (see Ellen 1984; Hammersley 1992 on these methods). Closer to the end of my stay in Kochkor, I invited several people from the village and conducted a focus group discussion to clarify some points I had identified as useful for my study (for details on focus group discussions, see Schensul/LeCompte 2013; Stewart/Shamdasani 1990). I also visited libraries in Kochkor and in Bishkek for local newspapers and looked through secondary material on the topics related to my research. Furthermore, I collected proverbs related to children, families and social relations and asked some of my interlocutors to interpret them for me.

For a deeper insight, I decided to select several case studies from the families whom I visited more frequently and interviewed most members with more in-depth and longer conversations. I chose four families with various backgrounds. The first family owned a shop and ran a small business. Their life was interesting for me because running a business, keeping up with busy social networks, leading a family and bringing up children is not easy for parents to do all at the same time. Their son, too, had to allocate time between school, his own personal life and the family business. It was interesting to observe how this child was involved in work, how he matured, how he felt a sense of responsibility and carefully dealt with money. Moreover, it was interesting for me to observe the parent-child interaction when it came to working in the family business.

The second family used to have no formal employment. The wife was 30 years old and had four children; all girls. The eldest was eleven, and the youngest was four years old. When I came to Kochkor the second time, this family had started a business and they had a small shop (*pavil'on*) where they sold everyday products. Both the father and the mother worked in that shop. They left their house early in the morning and came home late at night, around 10 or 11 o'clock. The whole day the children stayed alone. I observed how these children led an independent life in the absence of their parents. I paid several visits to their

house and witnessed the interaction between siblings in the absence of their parents: how they got ready for school, did their homework, helped each other, scolded each other and the way they obeyed or disobeyed each other.

The third family was unique in that it was an extended family: a husband and wife with three children who all lived together with the parents of the husband. The two elder grown-up sons left home and studied in Bishkek, while the youngest one was small and attended kindergarten. The wife used to be a doctor but later got actively involved in projects introduced by international organisations. The mother-in-law has become a 'true' believer in Islam and cured her grandchildren by reading *suras* (verses) from the Quran. She stopped performing Kyrgyz traditional healing rituals which she used to perform before becoming a pious Muslim. This family possessed multi-faceted views about health, lifestyle and upbringing which have been influenced by the Soviet school of thought, traditional and modern knowledge on healthcare and Islamic values.

The fourth family consisted of a grandmother and her three grandchildren, children of her divorced daughter. The daughter has gone to Russia to earn money. This family was interesting in that the children were brought up and disciplined not by their own parents but by their maternal grandmother and uncle (the mother's younger brother). Their uncle was married and had his own family, but they lived very close to each other. He was involved in the lives of his sister's children and in their upbringing. It was interesting to observe how life without parents made children independent, but at the same time, fragile and sensitive.

One of these four families that I took as a case study was my host-family. It was in this family that I collected more data through observation, participant observation and conversations, in comparison to the other three closely observed families. Still, by sharing a similar reason with Pfeffer, expressed in one of the interviews he gave (Berger/Hardenberg 2010), I decided not to take my host-family as a case study, since they were too close for me to write about. The readers will be introduced to the representatives of the other three families in my ethnographic chapters.

3.6. Junior Informants

Even though Fortes (1970) notes that ‘the social sphere of adult and child is unitary and undivided’, still it has always been interesting to look at the social phenomena happening around through the eyes of adults as well as children. Similarly, it has been suggested that the study of children should be approached from ‘dual viewpoints’ (Denzin 2010, 1). Lately, activists appeared who promote the idea of studying children, their childhood and their culture in their own right. One of these ideas argues that children are active shapers of their own social lives, and not only of their own lives but also of the ones who surround them, and that they actively shape the society in which they live (Heywood 2001; James/James 2004). That is why it is believed that the study of childhood through the eyes of children would provide a unique contribution to the ‘understanding of and theorizing about the social world’ (James 2007).

Due to such pioneering thoughts, the amount of research with children has increased in the last decade. James notes that many recent scholars cite children not for the sake of revealing the ‘collaborative production of ethnographic knowledge’ but for the sake of ‘getting children’s voices heard’ (James 2007, 265). Although my goal for paying special attention to children in my own research was not driven by this idea, still I was influenced by the recent ‘fashionable’ ideas in academia of involving children in research, giving voices to children and studying their agency. Particularly, I became curious to what extent these initiatives would be applicable in Kyrgyz children’s context, and I wanted to see to what extent children in Kochkor were capable of exercising this agency.

The reviewers of my doctoral dissertation posed a question why I have not depicted children’s voices much. Sharing the view of Boyden and Ennew (1996), I hold the idea that ‘child-focused’ research does not mean research that exclusively studies children. The authors suggest that the study of children takes into account two things: (a) how children understand childhood, family, community and nationality and (b) what values adults hold about children and childhood. As I wanted to explore what local people

understand by the healthy growth of children in times of drastic socio-cultural transformations, my research was mainly based on the perspectives that covered the past and present. Thus, it is more adults’ accounts rather than children’s accounts of their own childhoods that the reader will mainly come across in this book. Nevertheless, in my research, children were not only the object of my study but also subjects, social actors and, to a certain extent, research participants. Thereby, I find it relevant to write specifically on my methodological tools of working with young interlocutors of mine and reflect on the ethical aspect below.

Working with children was the most enjoyable part of my fieldwork. My goal in involving children in my research was to hear children’s own views regarding their lives. I conducted in-depth interviews with children on an individual basis. I also gathered children for English lessons and had a chance to converse with children during those classes. The ages of children in my class ranged from six to 13 years. This age category was not set by me but depended on the children who turned up in my class. Giving English classes to children gave me an opportunity to engage with children more. I discussed with them what they understood by a healthy lifestyle and where they learned about health-related matters. I also wanted to learn about their education, cultural knowledge and their lives in schools.⁵² The lessons consisted of two parts: in the first part, we learned songs in English and played games. In the second half of the lesson, I asked them questions related to my own research. The classes were held once a week and took place in each of the students’ houses, each taking turns hosting it. This practice also gave me an opportunity to access more families and made it easier to build a rapport with them as I was teaching their children. The lessons were sometimes followed by *chay* (drinking tea with their families), where I had a chance to make more observations and be engaged in further conversations.

⁵² I thank Andrea Luithle-Hardenberg for suggesting this approach.

The personal interviews that I conducted with children were on similar topics that I asked adults. Of course, the level of difficulty of questions was determined by the age of the child and their level of 'understanding'. Also, I followed a similar procedure for gaining informed consent from children to the one that I used for adults, just that I explained it to children in simpler language depending on their age.

I tried to adopt a range of strategies used by scholars who work with children (Alex 2009; Christensen/James 2008). For example, in order to find out the knowledge that children have of their bodies, I asked them to draw pictures of a body and locate organs in it. In order to find out about the habitat that children lived in or to estimate how far children travelled within the village and which places mattered to them, I asked them to draw a map of their village. I also gave cameras to children and asked them to take photos.⁵³ The purpose of this was to gain an understanding of children's life-worlds, thoughts and imaginations of their surrounding environment. This photo project did not end with the children taking photos; they also explained to me why they decided to take those photos and what those meant to them (see Pink 2007).

The case of the camera revealed an interesting observation about children in Kochkor on the topic of agency. First, I gave cameras to children for several days and asked them to take photos by giving only general instructions on what topics to take photos of, such as 'Please, take two photos related to health', 'Three photos related to your village', 'Maybe two to three photos on Kyrgyz *salt*' etc. The aim was to see what creativity the children would themselves come up with. I should acknowledge that the children were very diligent and responsible, and worked hard to try and take interesting photos. Still, I realised that they were reluctant in coming up with their own fantasies and choices, and they preferred that I gave them instructions on what kind of photos to shoot. For example, at the beginning, I mentioned some examples for each topic, such as a bottle of vodka

which could indicate alcoholism as a problem in the village, or a package of cigarettes which highlights that smoking is dangerous for health. I noticed how in many cases children limited themselves to similar examples that I mentioned, which showed passive self-creativity and more diligence in fulfilling what an adult instructor says.

Another thing I experienced while working with children is that they were very shy in formal situations. For children, the formal situation is created when they interact with people who do not belong to their age circle, such as elderly kin members, school teachers, or adults like myself. They open up only in their own circle, which is among peers or among siblings without parents being present. I argue that despite familial and intimate relationships, child-parent situations in Kochkor still create a kind of formality due to culturally valued notions and practice of hierarchy among juniors and seniors. In such cases, group interactions such as my English language course or my constant visits to the siblings who were on their own at home without adult supervision helped me to break the ice and create a more or less informal atmosphere, which allowed children to reveal themselves more freely.

3.7. Ethical Researcher⁵⁴

Relatively recent streams on children's rights and giving voice to 'muted children' (James 2007) have resulted in children taking an active part in research starting from research design, through methodology and onto the dissemination of research findings (Boyden/Ennew 1996; Fargas-Malet et al. 2010; Thomas/O'Kane 1998). This has led to ethical reconsiderations in scholarly works where child-adult differentiation is significantly underlined. In contrast to the methodology stated above, where I made an emphasis on the differences in approaching children and adults, I argue against such differentiation when it comes to research ethics. In my view, ethical issues related to

⁵³ I thank Uwe Skoda for suggesting this method.

⁵⁴ This section was extensively elaborated in Tulebaeva 2014.

research with children are overemphasised in theory. I argue that the ethical principles in research with children should not be distinguished from ethical principles in research with adults. There are several reasons for this.

First, children are accepted as 'vulnerable, incompetent and relatively powerless' in society (Morrow/Richards 1996, 90). I believe that in a research setting, any trained ethical researcher should be aware of any vulnerable groups, which is a relative understanding, and take action accordingly. For example, the competence, power and vulnerability of a 17-year-old child will differ from that of a five-year-old child, although both are included in 'the child' category (see Fine/Sandstrom 1988). Moreover, one can come across vulnerable groups of people among adults, too, based on their disability, literacy, or level of 'understanding'. I argue that such nuances should be taken into consideration by researchers equally, without differentiating researched people into children and adults.

Second, ethical principles in research regulate, control and monitor only the activities of the subjects that conduct research, such as an individual researcher or a research institution. Therefore, it depends solely on the researching party to make sure that in the end, the research has not caused any direct or indirect harm to the researched community or individual persons, be they children or adults. Indeed, in practice, researchers undergo complicated documentation procedures within Ethics Committee's requirements, especially when they deal with vulnerable groups, including both children and adults.

Still, despite well-planned research design and careful consideration of research ethics, usually researchers do face some ethical dilemmas. This happens not only in research with children. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) state that ethical guidelines are criticised by some scholars as being 'unrealistic' or 'too lax'. I have developed this statement further by arguing that the nature of anthropological fieldwork itself creates a suitable environment for anthropologists to unwillingly 'skip', 'ignore', or 'breach' some parts or nuances of ethical principles. For example, researchers collect information through observation, particularly

participant observation, without interlocutors being aware of it, even if they get their informed consent on a regular basis (see Hammersley/Atkinson 1995). It should be made clear that it is not the matter of getting information secretly. Even if my interlocutors knew that I was a researcher, still, during participant observation, my interlocutors could not fully control the flow of the event and the information that was visually displayed in front of me. This raises an issue of privacy.

Privacy has been defined as 'the claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how and to what extent information about them is communicated to others' (Kimmel 1988, 86). This means that it is up to the people who are being studied to decide where the line between private and public will lie. Interlocutors can control the privacy line when they give information verbally, for example during interviews. However, through observation and participant observation, researchers get information additionally to what people themselves give consciously. How to interpret ethical considerations in such cases? Does it mean that ethical breaches occur in any ethnographic study where participant observation is the main data collection method? Here one can see the vulnerability of all researched subjects, including adults.

Ethical dilemmas related to informed consent also rose in my work with children. Before inviting children to my English language class, I asked permission from their parents and told them that after each class, I would talk to their children about topics related to my research. During the classes, I also obtained consent from my young interlocutors. Each time, I faced ethical dilemmas because at each class I would see more and more new faces. Parents of these 'new' children would hear from their neighbours about my English class and they sent their children without informing me and requesting my permission. I included those children in my English lessons, which was dilemma-free. Yet ethical issues arose when I shifted to the discussion part of the class, that is, when I asked children questions related to my research. I had to ask myself whether I should include these new children in the discussion as I had not received consent from their parents. I even did not

know whose children they were. Still, I included these new children in my research, since, on the contrary, I would consider it unethical and even more hurtful if I had excluded them from the rest of the group.

Does this particular case show that I was an unethical researcher as in my research I involved children whose parents' consent I did not seek? I would not say so, because I felt that I had acted ethically by including them and had not hurt their feelings. I knew that I would either seek consent from these children's parents afterwards or leave out what those new children told me in group discussions. There was a third option to solve my ethical problem: to accept those children as 'key people' and consider their own consent as enough without seeking their parents' consent, as some researchers suggest

(see Fargas-Malet et al. 2010). This would also be accepted as ethically right.

What I discussed above were some of the many personal ethical dilemmas that I faced in the field. The purpose of mentioning them is to show that it is not always possible to follow ethical principles exactly as they are written in codes of ethics or handbooks that are designed to prepare scholars for their fieldwork. Moreover, I have discussed the points of privacy and informed consent in ethnographic research on purpose with the aim to show that it is not only children but also adults who can be equally considered vulnerable in research. Therefore, I come to the overarching conclusion that it is the responsibility of every individual researcher to determine ethical ways of conducting research on any circumstance and in front of any researched group of people.

4. Being a Kyrgyz Child

‘A father is a rocky mountain,
a mother is a spring in that rocky mountain
and a child is the light that shines to both of them’
(Kyrgyz proverb)

4.1. Introduction

By taking into account the ‘erratic evolution of the image of childhood and its changing modes of recognition and reception’, Jenks argues that it is more profitable to look at childhoods not as having ‘a singular and mono-dimensional status’ (Jenks 2005, 5), but a plural form. His statement is directed towards comparative perspectives where the notions of childhoods differ in different societies. In chapter 2, similar scholarly views have been mentioned, that is, how childhood is not a universal, but rather a social and cultural construct. Aiming to contribute to those theoretical debates, I have titled this chapter ‘Being a Kyrgyz Child’. With this, two questions can be raised. First, what can be understood by ‘a Kyrgyz child’? Second, can there at all be such a thing as ‘a Kyrgyz child’? In other words, can one make such a generalisation? There cannot be only one image or type of Kyrgyz childhood which serves as a standard for all children living in Kyrgyz families. In this chapter, I will show how childhoods in Kochkor are formed based on economic factors, dynamics of local social processes and global influences, which can lead to variations within one culture, within one community, within one family, and even within a single child who may have different childhood experiences. At the same time, I will also demonstrate the existence of local understanding of personhood, of what it is to be a Kyrgyz, and culturally-set practices which directly affect child upbringing and ways of forming ‘the Kyrgyz child’.

In this chapter, first local categories for child, age and maturity will be discussed. It will be followed by illustrations of three children’s life stories: two boys and a girl aged ten and eleven. These cases will highlight that a child and

childhood, both as a notion and a phenomenon, are constructed based on cultural norms, individual perceptions and interpretations, family situations and economic constraints. I shall suggest that: (a) a child is a relative term, where it is not the actual age, but the ‘social age’ (see Solberg 1990) that defines a child and its maturity (for examples of maturity in other cultures see Peoples/Bailey 1991; Lancy 2008); (b) a child is not an isolated individual, but rather is defined in relation to somebody, which results in a child having multiple identities; and (c) it is not only social relations but also the socio-economic environment, such as the presence or absence of parents, the family’s economic situation, or religious background which affect the way a child experiences its childhood differently. The final section of the chapter, before conclusion, is devoted to the values of children in Kochkor, which cannot be, and should not be, explained without taking into account the local context.

4.2. *Bala* – Local Notions of a Child

The Kyrgyz word for child is ‘*bala*’. *Bala* has much more meanings than its English equivalent. Interestingly, the analysis of their use in speech and their implications can tell much about local people’s perceptions of a child as well as local cultural values. First, *bala* is a child: a person who is not yet an adult. In Kyrgyz language, the word for ‘adult’ is *chong kishi*, which is literally translated as ‘big person’. As it will be explained later, *chong* (‘big’) also applies to children, which affects their status and role in their families. Second, a child is seen as an offspring of their parents, where both a daughter and a son will be called *bala*, or specifically ‘*erkek bala*’, meaning male child, and ‘*kyz bala*’, meaning female child. In addition, the child carries the label of *bala* not only in front of their parents, but also for senior members of his or her community. I was also a *bala* (‘child’) of the elderly people in the community that I studied (see chapter 3). Third, *bala* specifically refers to a male child

in terms of a boy and a son. A young man will be called *jash bala* (*jash* meaning young), a small boy will be called *kichinekey bala* (*kichinekey* meaning small). To the question: ‘Do you have a *bala*?’ one can answer, for example: ‘No, I do not have a son, I have three daughters’. Here it remains unclear to what extent the immediate association of the local term *bala* with a male child is related to Kyrgyz values indicating that in families it is highly preferred to have at least one male child who will continue the blood and name of his father. Another example of the term *bala* being used for male members of the kin group is on a cultural practice of taboos related to naming.⁵⁵ A daughter-in-law addresses all her husband’s younger brothers and younger male members of his family not by name but with the term ‘*bala*’. This shows respect to her in-laws. Fourth, *bala* is used as part of words such as *kelin bala*, which means a daughter-in-law or *küyöö bala*, which means a son-in-law. Fifth, *bala* carries a connotation of being childish. That is, if a child is capricious, speaks or behaves inappropriately or does not meet social expectations, still the child would be forgiven with a referral to being a *bala*.

The way the word *bala* is used in everyday speech in its diverse forms shows how the notion of a child is not as simple as the division between child-adult as analytical categories. In the local context, *bala* carries different personages, social persons that are defined by and also determine one’s social status, social roles and social expectations. From the above-mentioned classifications, this chapter will look at the first two notions of a child: (a) a child as a person, who is not yet an adult, and (b) a child as an offspring of its parents and a junior member of its community. In chapter 2, it has been mentioned how a child can be approached as an individual and as a social person, and argued how these two aspects should equally

⁵⁵ In Kyrgyz culture there are naming taboos. Even if they are not that strictly followed nowadays, there are still families who follow the naming taboo practices. For example, *kelin* (a bride, a daughter-in-law) cannot pronounce the first names of her parents-in-law, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, or even the children of her brothers-in-law. This is why a *kelin* will call all her younger brothers-in-law ‘*bala*’. In order to distinguish among many brothers-in-law, they might add certain adjectives to characterise the feature of those ‘*bala*’, such as *kara bala* (‘black/dark skinned boy’).

be considered as the two sides of the coin. In other words, the way a child experiences its childhood as an individual is shaped by its social role as an offspring, sibling, or young member of his or her community. Following the suggestion of James and James, in this chapter, I aim to look at ‘what features of the child are highlighted as important and attributed with significance’ in the local context (James/James 2001, 30). People in Kochkor emphasise the aspect of a child as a social person (such as offspring, elder or younger sibling), while the perception of a child as an opposite of an adult category was not that prominently highlighted.

I argue that the local categorisations of the concepts of a ‘child’ and discourses around this notion should be taken as the core in the study of children and childhood in various societies. This is because local categorisations of children based on local contexts open up a debate on the multiple identities of the child and a child being seen as a **relative term**, a **relational** or a **kindred term**,⁵⁶ which will be considered in three case studies later in this chapter. I believe that this approach will contribute to a broader understanding of the concept of ‘the child’ and further approaches to the study of children in the scholarly circle and productive implementation of policy-making projects. Below, I continue this chapter further with another local reasoning on the concepts of age and maturity.

4.3. Age and Maturity

When I was living in Edinburgh, in the UK, I remember how Carolyn, a young colleague of mine, ‘loudly’ celebrated her 16th birthday with us. It was a big milestone in her life and she mentioned, ‘Now I can leave home without asking my parents’ permission and I can buy (alcoholic) drinks myself’. I will not elaborate here on what other priorities Carolyn had in her life, but what

⁵⁶ By ‘relative term’ I mean that, irrespective of age, the children whom I observed in Kochkor could be classified as a child or, on the contrary, not a child anymore, in comparison to somebody else. Examples of this ‘relational’ or ‘kindred’ aspect of how a child is defined in relationship to somebody else includes how a child is a son or a daughter, a brother or a sister, an elder sibling or a younger sibling.

was interesting to me was that this young woman waited for the day when she officially had reached a certain age which gave her certain legal rights and freedom from parental control. Why did Carolyn impatiently wait for her 16th birthday and why didn't I notice such longing or excitement from Kyrgyz children in Kochkor who were coming up to the same age as Carolyn?

Age does not only have a biological but a social and cultural meaning (Nieuwenhuys 1994). In the West, age is an indicator of the process of growing up and a key factor for differentiating a child from an adult (James/James 2012; Montgomery 2009). James and James (2012, 8) argue that in the West, 'adulthood, and the accompanying notions of personhood and citizenship, comes not through achievement or competence, but through aging'. It is exactly one's age that determines when a person can drive, vote, participate in public activities (such as demonstrations), and even when a person can buy alcoholic drinks on their own. Kochkor illustrated a different picture about this, which did not correspond to age at all. As my host-parents run a small shop, I witnessed many times when a small child was sent by their parents to buy cigarettes and vodka, while in Germany one is strictly asked for an ID. Even the case when a ten-year-old boy was driving a car, which will be discussed further below, shows how age-related notions do not work well in Kochkor. Of course, these examples could be developed further within the framework of ignorance of legal regulations or parents' trust in small children. Alternatively, it can remind how the same practices were part of Western children's childhood earlier in history (see Cunningham 2006). It is not my aim here to discuss these points, but what I want to analyse with Carolyn's case is that in Kochkor, especially in the social context, people are more relaxed in terms of age. Neither would children claim certain rights upon achieving a specific age. On the contrary, this practice would mean that a child was not brought up properly (see chapter 7).

Hardenberg, who did research among the Dongria Kond in India, notes that the age of a child may not even be mentioned or even remembered. A child is defined according to the sequence of birth, not only of siblings but the broader kin group (Hardenberg 2007). Similar to Hardenberg's

case, in Kochkor, I usually heard who is older and who is younger among siblings, or which grade a child is in (will be developed further below). Even though people do ask for the age of a child, I never observed people following an age category, such as 16, which was an important milestone for Carolyn, or 18 which legally ends childhood.

This, however, does not mean that age as a category is not employed in Kochkor. Age is used for all bureaucratic administrations. For example, children get vaccinations according to their age. Upon reaching either the age of six or seven, a child goes to school and according to a Kyrgyz law, should be in school at least until grade nine. A child gets an ID card upon reaching the age of 16. Young men between the ages of 18 and 25 are conscripted into the army. Many other legal regulations such as early marriage or rights to vote are also determined according to age.

Age is also taken into account in local categorisations of a child. For example, the ages of nine and twelve are important milestones for girls and boys, respectively. This could be linked to the local notion of '*balagat*' ('maturity'). In the Kyrgyz language, people say that a child 'reaches *balagat*' ('*balagatka toluu*', '*balagatka jetüü*'). Soviet ethnographers, who wrote about Kyrgyz and Kazakh people, mention certain age categories. For instance, Abramzon (1949, 131) states that for a Kyrgyz girl living in At-Bashy (Naryn oblast') in the early 20th cent. AD, the childhood continues until the ritual of braiding her hair which is conducted in the ninth to tenth year of the girl's life.⁵⁷ Fjelstrup, who also studied Central Asian people during the early 20th cent. AD, mentions that among Kazakhs, upon reaching twelve to 13 years, a male child breaks the dish which he has been using since young age (if the dish has been preserved) by stepping onto it. This symbolises that his childhood has ended (Fjelstrup 2002, 207). I did ask my interlocutors about the local notion of *balagatka toluu* and related rituals such as the one mentioned above. Even if they were aware of this notion, none of them practice any similar ritual today.

⁵⁷ This must be an old practice, since I have never heard of a ritual of braiding a girl's hair, nor about any ritual which would end a girl's childhood.

The shift from childhood to the next stage is defined differently in different societies. On the one hand, the end of childhood does not necessarily mean the beginning of adulthood as it is usually adolescence that comes in-between. There are also societies where adolescence is absent or experienced differently due to different cultural patterns (Mead [1928] 2001). In the context of Kyrgyzstan, Ismailova (2007) uses the local concept of *balagatka toluu* to denote a transition from childhood to adolescence. This transition, she states, 'implies that from this age on, boys and girls must be taught appropriate norms of social behaviour, which are informed with cultural and religious beliefs' (Ismailova 2007, 573). Based on Soviet literature and post-Soviet media publications, Ismailova strongly argues for the existence of adolescence in Kyrgyzstan which is between ages twelve and 17. Interestingly, Bolot Bayke, an interlocutor of mine, who had a Soviet childhood, stated that the notion of 'adolescence' that they used to have during the Soviet time is now absent, because now children immediately shift from *bala* ('child') to *chong kishi* ('adult') which is defined by one's consciousness. According to him and his wife, as it will be later discussed in detail, children are involved in work, in money and they mature in their early ages.

The ages of nine (for girls) and twelve (for boys) as a period of *balagatka toluu*, a period of maturity according to Kyrgyz understanding, might have a direct connection with an Islamic tradition. As Kyrgyz people perceive themselves as Muslims, they believe that their cultural practices are based on Islamic traditions. In the field, I came across the notion of '*amal kitep*' (the book of deeds), which was mentioned by some practicing Muslim interlocutors when we discussed important milestones in a child's life.

One of the local mullahs in Kochkor mentioned that in Islam, the age of nine for girls and the age of twelve for boys are the periods when girls and boys should start praying five times a day, which is one of the five pillars of Islam. These ages are an important milestone in a child's life as it is when both a girl's and a boy's books of deeds (*amal kitep*) get opened. The mullah stated: 'Before [before those ages] whatever a child does will be written in his or her parents' *amal kitep* (*ata-enelerin in üstünö jazylat*). As soon as girls become nine and

boys twelve, children will be responsible for their own deeds.' This book is believed to be opened for every Muslim and his or her good and bad deeds will be recorded in their books. It is believed that this book will be used when a person dies and that they will have a 'trial' in the afterworld where their good and bad deeds will be mentioned. One woman in Kochkor laughingly noted that she frightens her children, who were over the age of twelve, with this *amal kitep* notion. She warns her sons that if they do not listen to her and commit bad deeds, they will be responsible for their own bad deeds in front of God in the afterworld.

I learned that some of the practicing Muslim interlocutors now send their children to the *madrasa* (Islamic school) for education.⁵⁸ In addition, small boys join their elderly brothers or fathers to go to mosques to pray. I also witnessed small girls, aged ten or eleven joining their mothers for religious lesson called *taalim* that took place once a week in Kochkor. As a young Kyrgyz woman, who experienced her childhood during the Soviet period and post-Soviet *perestroyka*, it was unusual for me to see such small children being involved in religious activities. In my view, they were seen still as small children, but for their parents, they were already seen as mature and responsible Muslims with their own *amal kitep*. Both examples of *balagatka toluu* and *amal kitep* do not indicate the shift of a child into an adult, but instead they show how a child will reach a certain level of maturity which makes a child responsible for abiding with certain social norms.

Coming back to the topic of age, age does have a cultural importance in Kyrgyz society, mainly for the regulation of social relations. Even adults ask each other for their age which is a common practice when people who do not know each other meet for the first time. I was impressed when I first met a German colleague, who at that moment had recently returned to Germany from her long-term fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan. She immediately asked how old I was in a Kyrgyz language without any accent. I could feel how she, as an anthropologist, absorbed this cultural practice of the people she

⁵⁸ Children are sent to madrasas in addition to their secular schools. Religious schools do not substitute secular school education in Kyrgyzstan.

studied, as according to German logic, asking women for their age would usually be considered inappropriate. It is important for people in Kyrgyzstan to find out ages of the people with whom they are conversing in order to use the correct respectful terms when addressing each other. Younger people address older people with 'Siz', a respectful form of 'you'.⁵⁹ In addition, younger ones are expected to address the older ones with 'eje' (for females, also translated as 'elder sister') or 'bayke' (for males, also translated as 'elder brother'). Here, age as a category is used more in its relative sense to regulate social actions, rather than used in its absolute sense to serve as a category which identifies a person's status or legal rights as it was in the case of Carolyn, whom I mentioned earlier.

In this sense, it would be right to state that it is not a specific age, such as the age of 16 or 18, but the notion of **seniority** and **juniority** that matters in the local context. For example, the local terms for an adult are *chong kishi* ('big person') or *uluu kishi* ('senior person'). These local terms would not substitute for the English term 'adult', which is usually defined through contrast to child. Instead of using the terms child or adult, people in Kochkor use concepts such as: *kichüü-uluu* ('junior-senior') and *kichine-chong* ('small-big') which are used not only between adults and children, but also among children as well as among adults, in

case of junior-senior.⁶⁰ Here, the local concept of seniority and juniority has a relative value. For example, A might be senior in relation to B, but junior in relation to C. This means that A (be it a child or an adult) will act differently according to his/her status in relation to B and C. Thus, we see (a) the lack of a clear-cut period differentiating a child from an adult in Kyrgyz society and (b) the use of seniority and juniority as a cultural value for both children and adults in their self-perception and in the regulation of social relations. All these aspects hint to the notion that the way childhood ends and adulthood begins is not that significant in the context of children in Kochkor.⁶¹

Nevertheless, there are certain indicators according to when a child is considered *chong*, which does not necessarily mean that a child is now an adult. In the local context, a closer translation of the word *chong* would be 'grown-up' or mature person. These indicators change with time and are different from family to family. For some parents in Kochkor, a child becomes *chong* when it finishes school and leaves for the city to study, where a child is beyond the control of their parents. For others, it is when the children get married and have their own families. Also, similar to Bolot Bayke, many people mentioned the 'development of consciousness' ('soznaniyesi östü', closer in meaning to the skills of reasoning) due to income generating work as a sign indicating a shift from a child to a more mature stage. It is believed that due to paid labour and the possibility of earning money, children today mature earlier than before.⁶² This is clearly demonstrated in a conversation between a middle-aged couple, the parents of four children. Jyldyz Eje (in her mid-40s) is a housewife and stays at home with her one-year-old son. Bolot Bayke, her husband, is a school teacher who teaches lessons on drawing and labour (Rus. *trud*):

⁵⁹ Unlike the English 'you', which is used in addressing anyone, the Kyrgyz *Siz/sen* (Сиз/сен) can be classified in the same way as Russian *Vy/ty* (Вы/ты) or German (*Sie/du*) depending on age, status, relatedness and context. For clarity, I will distinguish this difference in English as 'You' (Сиз/Вы) - 'you' (сен/ты). What is common among the Kyrgyz, Russian and German languages is that *Siz/Vy/Sie* ('You') is used in formal situations irrespective of age. For example, when one visits official places such as the post office, bank or the university, people address each other as 'You'. However, in informal situations, such as among family members, friends and colleagues, the Kyrgyz way of addressing others differs from Russian and German. In informal situations, the Kyrgyz *Siz/sen* (Сиз/сен, You/you) is strictly followed according to seniority-juniority, that is, according to a vertical hierarchy. In German and partially in the Russian contexts, the way of addressing depends on 'closeness'. Relatives, friends and other people who belong to a close social circle address each other with 'du' or 'ty' (ты) form of you, which does not follow a seniority/juniority vertical hierarchy. Correspondingly, in the German context, parents and children will address each other as 'du' (you), while in a Kyrgyz context using 'sen' (you) to one's parent would be seen as a sign of discourtesy and poor upbringing.

⁶⁰ See Hardenberg 2007 for a similar case on the importance of senior/junior in the context of India.

⁶¹ Cunningham (2006) notes that the beginning and the end of childhood is a problematic notion in the 21st cent. The argument above, which underlines that in Kochkor the shift from a child to an adult is not clearly marked, mostly refers to age categories, such as 18, which are fixed and indicate the shift to adulthood in other cultures.

⁶² See Behera 2007; Fronès 1998 on childhoods getting longer or shorter due to study and work.

BT: 'Some say that a child is someone who has not yet reached the age of 18. How would you define a child?'⁶³

Bolot Bayke: 'We say that adulthood starts from the age of 18, because now consciousness is better. Before [meaning during the Soviet time] it was the age of 21, after a [male] person came back from the Army. Only then could we talk [be given a voice] and be included in the circle of adults (*chong kishilerdin kataryna*; literally means 'joining the line of adults'). Before being in the Army, we were *bala* (child). Now the consciousness of children is better than ours [meaning his own childhood].'

Jyldyz Eje: 'Now children understand everything (*baaryn tüshünöt*), including what they watch from television.'

Bolot Bayke: 'Now children work starting from the age of 15, right? Starting from grade three [which is around age nine] a child helps her/his mother, is involved in trading and earns money. They see that if they work, they earn money. A child who works has better consciousness. [Referring to his Soviet childhood] When I was young, everything was sufficient. The only chores that I did were looking after sheep (*sakmal*). It was my parents who bought me clothes. That time, there was no work for children. We did house chores, such as cleaning the house, tending the sheep, mowing grass, making [mud] bricks. When I was like them [pointing at his daughters who were eleven-year-old twins], I did not know what money was. But now children calculate everything saying that this shop is more expensive, that shop is cheaper. Children know things that even we don't know.'

Jyldyz Eje: 'It is my daughters who give advice to me saying which shops are cheaper and which ones are more expensive and suggest where I should go shopping.'

Bolot Bayke's and Jyldyz Eje's comparison between their own childhoods and current childhoods shows how, in comparison to the Soviet time, children of today mature earlier. It was interesting to observe how their notion of a child is bound not to a fixed age (as in their conversation they mentioned different ages such as 21, 18, 15 and nine), but more related to levels of maturity. In this case, maturity is related to how a child's consciousness grows (i.e. how far their reasoning has developed), such as earning money or understanding many things by watching television.

Maturity, as an analytical concept, is an important indicator of the shift from childhood to adulthood (Middleton 1970; Montgomery 2009). Anthropologists have always been interested in the shift from childhood to adulthood or from immaturity to maturity both as a universal progression and a culture-specific perception (see Bluebond-Langner/Korbin 2007). In some societies, it is biological maturity, such as puberty, which shifts a child from childhood to adulthood. Still, most studies agree on **social maturity** as an important indicator. For example, Montgomery (2009) defines a child as the one who has not yet reached social maturity. Similarly, La Fontaine (1986, 19) states that '[a]dulthood is always a matter of social definition rather than physical maturity'. In which cases can one say that a child has reached social maturity? Bolot Bayke and Jyldyz Eje have demonstrated that it is very much related to a certain context.

One of the aspects that the above-mentioned conversation on maturity highlighted was a child's involvement in work. It is important to emphasise that not any work can be perceived as an accelerator of maturity. According to Bolot Bayke, it is work from which money can be earned and not household chores. Moreover, Bolot Bayke did not consider household chores, like those that he did in his childhood, as work at all by stating: 'That time there was no work for children'. This example correlates to Solberg's emphasis on 'doing' rather than 'being'. Solberg (1990; 1996) argues for ignoring age⁶⁴ and instead highlights the importance of looking at things that children are involved in. She

⁶³ I sometimes constructed my questions in such a way in order to make an emphasis on a child as a generational stage, rather than as offspring. This is due to my observation that people in Kochkor, in the first place, tend to consider a child (*bala*) as offspring. I also made an emphasis on obtaining my interlocutors' own opinion, because many also tended to talk not about a child in general or their children, but about children of Kyrgyz people, by stating '*Kyrgyz üchün ...*' ('For a Kyrgyz ...').

⁶⁴ This view is contrasted to Keith/Kertzner 1984, 19, who argued for age to be seen as 'the principle of social organization'.

states that it is the 'big' and 'small' tasks that children undertake that define whether a child is seen as big or small.⁶⁵ But what are the big and small tasks? Should the tasks that Bolot Bayke fulfilled in his childhood, such as house cleaning, sheep tending, grass mowing and mud brick making, which he does not perceive as work at all, be interpreted as 'small' tasks? In comparison to those tasks, is the work that involves earning money and analysing which shops are cheaper seen as something 'big' that makes a child grow in consciousness and be considered 'big'? In any case, all these categorisations and explanations are based on local reasoning.

Three case studies below will circle around the concept of social maturity and emphasize the importance of 'doing' rather than 'being'. They will also highlight the significance of local markers of seniority and juniority that determine the tasks a child is involved in. All these cases will indicate that the notion of a child is not a fixed term, but a relative term. The **socially constructed child** approach, mentioned by James and her colleagues (1998), will be developed further with ethnographic materials from Kochkor. The main point of this approach is to provide a relativistic and particularistic view and conclude that childhood as a notion and as a phenomenon is not fixed. The authors write that 'within the 'socially constructed child' mode of discourse, there is no essential child but always one that is built up through constitutive practices, in either a strong or a weak sense' (James et al. 1998, 212).⁶⁶

In a strong sense, a child is seen as a 'product of time and material conditions' (James et al. 1998, 212 f.) where it is different ideologies and social realities that construct diverse notions of a child (see also James/James 2004). In a weak sense, childhood is defined and created in discourses and thus 'humanely constructed' (James et al. 1998, 212 f.). In other words, different discourses create different notions of a child and childhood, 'not only as sets of academic knowledge but also in social

practices and institutions' (James/Prout 1990, 25). Below I will look at these constitutive practices both in their strong and weak senses. It should be noted that the 'child' and 'childhood' that are to be discussed in this chapter will be both a notion/concept and a phenomenon/lived experience. The overall aim is not to come up in the end with a concrete image of what is a Kyrgyz child and childhood but rather to stress the diversity, fluidity and relativity involved. In short, the purpose is to underline how childhood, both as a notion and lived experience, is socially and culturally constructed.

4.4. The Concepts of Seniority and Juniority

Anara Eje's eldest daughter Ayday had already left for Bishkek in the previous year, after finishing school. Maksat (14) is the second oldest child in the family. Ideally, he would be the main person helping his parents run household activities and be responsible for his younger brother Talant (ten) and younger sister Nurzada (seven), but he is disabled, the diagnosis being cerebral palsy. He can walk and speak, although with difficulty. Despite that, Maksat is positively 'tuned' to study and wants to become a policeman (*militsiya*) in the future. Anara Eje is very pleased and relieved that her son can walk on his own and does not create much work for them compared to other children with a cerebral palsy diagnosis. Maksat stays with his parents in winters, and in summers, he lives in Bishkek and attends a special school for disabled children. Most of the home tasks Anara Eje does herself: cooking, cleaning the house, doing laundry, looking after chickens and turkeys and preparing *bozo* (a Kyrgyz national beverage) which she sells at her neighbour's shop. If she needs help, she always turns to Talant.

I mostly saw Talant in the street when he went to or came back from school or *krujok* (after-class courses). He studied well and Anara Eje also invested in him through paying for his after-class language courses in Russian and English. Sometimes I saw him in the street with a small group of boys playing in the evenings or when he went to the bazaar for shopping. I often recognised him by his bright orange bike. When I went to their house to top up my mobile phone balance, Talant

⁶⁵ Solberg (1990) conducted research among children of the same age and noted that some of the twelve-year-olds were already accepted as 'big' and others still as 'small', depending on the big and small tasks they fulfilled at home.

⁶⁶ Their statement is similar to Goffman's 'momentary person' (mentioned by Cahill 1998) in chapter 5.

usually did this for me, as he did for other villagers as part of their family business. Anara Eje and her husband Ishen Bayke already accepted him as *chong* ('big'): 'Taku [his nickname] is already big, while Nurzada is still a child' ('*Taku uje chong, Nurzada ali bala ele*') was Anara Eje's answer to my question on how she would define her children. Anara Eje's comparison of 'big' versus 'child' here did not mean that Talant was already an adult (as noted before, *chong* is also translated as 'adult'). Rather she meant that he was more mature than Nurzada. His being *chong* was defined in relation to his younger sister, who had just started primary school.

The first important milestone in childhood that applies to all children in Kochkor is when a child starts school at either the age of six or seven. Going to school is compulsory in Kyrgyzstan that sometimes one's grade can be successfully used to determine a child's age. In other words, instead of age, people may ask which grade a child is in and that information is usually enough to reveal a child's approximate age. The educational system in Kyrgyzstan is inherited from the Soviet era. During the Soviet time, children and youths joined clubs, each of which was for a different age range, and these were known as 'Little Octobrists' (about seven to nine years), 'Pioneers' (about ten to 14 years) and 'Komsomols' (about 15 to 28 years), which served as a ladder according to which a child would grow and develop into a proper Soviet citizen (see Kirmse 2013). Even though this Soviet child development ladder is now eliminated, the compulsory education in Kyrgyzstan still makes entering school an initiation for a child who will start to move from one step of maturity to the next. In fact, both the time when a child enters school and the time when a child leaves school are considered to be important milestones in a child's life which characterises its maturity.

When asked to describe a child, the characteristics noted by interlocutors in Kochkor for a child was being childish, *oyunkaraak* ('a child who loves playing games') in comparison to *estüüröök* ('one who has more understanding'). Several times it has been mentioned how before attending school, a child is still childish and thinks of play, but after starting school, a child gains more 'understanding' and becomes more reasoned even if play continues

to constitute some part of his or her daily life. Nurzada had recently started school,⁶⁷ so for her mother, she was still in a transition phase between the pre-school childish period and being a real school pupil, while Talant, who was in 4th grade, had already gained 'understanding'. Lacking understanding does not necessarily mean that a child lacks reason or that she or he is stupid. Rather, understanding is related to abilities such as a child taking things seriously and a child on whom parents can rely. Therefore, recognising 'understanding' in one's child allows parents to trust a child more and place more responsible tasks onto the child, which are mutually inclusive.

Once, I went to Anara Eje's house to make my next mobile phone balance top-up. I saw a purple-red Honda Step WGN leaving their house. From the back I saw a woman sitting driving which I assumed was Anara Eje. To my surprise, I found her in the yard of their house after the car had left. The following conversation ensued:

BT: 'Oh, I thought it was you who had just driven off.'

Anara Eje: 'No, it is my sister. Talant went to give her a lift to her village.'

BT: 'Talant? No, I saw a woman driving.'

Anara Eje: 'No, it was Talant who was driving [laughs]. My sister was sitting next to him. It is a right-hand wheel drive and of course Talant cannot be noticed [as he was small].'

BT: 'What will happen if the GAI (Traffic Police) stop him? [that was my first concern, as Talant was only a ten-year-old child].'

Anara Eje: 'Nothing will happen. He is taking her to that village [pointing to the direction of the neighbouring village] and will come back soon.'

I then considered a number of things. First, I started to imagine the scenario of the traffic police stopping them and what would then happen. I also worried about the safety of Talant and his passenger because it was difficult for me to imagine a ten-year-old boy driving, particularly given that

⁶⁷ School year in Kyrgyzstan starts from the 1st of September, so it was only a few months since Nurzada had started school when I interviewed her mother.

Talant was physically a short boy for his age. Finally, I wondered how they trusted this small boy and gave him their family car which they bought recently. Even if it was a second-hand car, the family had bought the car with the money they had earned working for the whole summer by selling strawberries and blackcurrants in Tokmok (a two-hour drive away from Kochkor) and by selling some of their cattle in the mountains to make up the purchase price. Furthermore, this car was used by Ishen Bayke, the father, to earn money for the family as he worked as a taxi driver taking passengers between Kochkor and Bishkek. The calmness of Anara Eje and the high level of trust that she placed on Talant surprised me and even confused me. A few days earlier, when I had asked Anara Eje for permission to interview Talant, she had said that he did not know anything and would not be able to tell me much. More concretely, she was not sure whether Talant would be a suitable interlocutor for me. One can also interpret it as, when it concerned doing tasks, Talant being seen as already mature, but when it concerned speaking or being interviewed, being seen in the eyes of his mother as not mature and not 'knowledgeable enough'.⁶⁸

Talant's case can be interpreted in many ways which contribute to the concept of a child beyond age limits. I will start with the local notion of 'seniority-juniority' and underline that this case shows how the concept of a child is a relative and kindred term. Even if Talant's elder brother Maksat was around, it was Talant who was seen as the senior child in the family at that moment. Due to his brother's disability, it was Talant who was responsible for fulfilling the 'big' tasks (more 'serious' and not childish tasks) in his family, such as assisting in running the family business. On the one hand, his status as a relatively senior child in the family itself could be the reason for him being accepted as no longer a child and for being given such serious tasks, including the responsibility of

giving a lift to his aunt to a neighbouring village. On the other hand, it can be also the 'big' tasks that Talant fulfilled which determined this ten-year-old boy's status as big and mature. As noted earlier, Talant's mother commented that 'Taku [Talant] is already big, but Nurzada is still a *bala*'.

4.5. Multiple Identities

It was one of the days when my English language course was to take place in one of my students' home. I requested that the children hosted English lessons at each other's home in turn as it also served as one of the ways for me to access other families (see chapter 3). Children took the initiative and determined who was going to be the next host. Before offering their houses as the next place for the English language lesson, they always said that they would first ask permission from their mothers.⁶⁹ Usually mothers did not object as it was in their interest to have the English language course go on.

It was Perizat's turn to host. I knew that she had a small sister, Jibek (eight), who came with Perizat (twelve) to my class a couple of times and participated in games. It was only after going to her house that I found out that Perizat also had a brother, Askat (ten) who was younger than her but older than Jibek. The English language lesson contained many games. Askat also became interested and joined us that day. As we just started playing, his grandmother suddenly called him, saying: 'Askat, go to the mosque!' After hearing his grandmother's command he quietly left us.

These three siblings live together with their maternal grandmother, Salamat Apa. The children's parents had gotten divorced when the youngest one, Jibek, was still a baby. I learned that two years ago, their mother left for Russia to work, leaving them with their maternal grandmother. The absence of these children's mother strongly affected all of them, but especially Askat, who had become very shy and quiet and lost interest in his study.

⁶⁸ I was usually referred to elderly people who were categorised as 'knowledgeable' about local cultural values related to bringing up children. Even some young parents first refused to be interviewed by stating that they did not know much, in other words, they could not provide the information that I could use in my research. Anara Eje's statement that Talant did not know anything could be related to such reasoning.

⁶⁹ '*Apamdan suraiyn*' ('I will ask from my mother'), this is how children usually replied before deciding on something. It also shows how female members are usually responsible for house-related matters.

'We call him *'mamen'kin synok'* (mother's darling). Our mother used to take him wherever she went', Perizat said, who was only two years older than Askat but seemed mature for her age. She was tall and played basketball in school with girls older than herself. Maybe she seemed mature to me also because of the 'big tasks' that she accomplished. As the eldest child, she controlled the homework and the behaviour of her two younger siblings. Her grandmother always underlined that she was the eldest of the siblings and was responsible for the younger ones, especially for their studies.

As I observed from the field, progress in study was one of the indicators of a good upbringing for parents. Academic progress was monitored through children's individual school journals. Consequently, Salamat Apa's and her son's (the children's maternal uncle) responsibility was to make sure that the children studied well while their mother was away, which would provide evidence for the children's mother how these adults back home were working hard to bring up her children well. Both the grandmother and the uncle checked the children's school journals for marks and praised or scolded them depending on the mark the siblings received.⁷⁰

Salamat Apa and Perizat noted how Askat 'went into himself' after their mother had left. His studies had gotten worse. Salamat Apa went to school and talked to Askat's teacher and explained the situation with his mother and begged the teacher to pay special attention to him. For both Salamat Apa and Perizat, Askat was a vulnerable boy, who needed help and protection. Perizat paid special attention to her brother's studies and she was proud to emphasise that to me:

Perizat: '[turning to me insistently] Please ask him who does his homework. I do all his homework for him.'

Askat: 'No, I only come to you sometimes.'

Perizat: 'Not sometimes, always!'

⁷⁰ Indeed, it was one of the habits of parents to check their children's school journals and boast of their children's good marks to their guests and visitors. It was also the children's habit to count how many '5's (the best mark) they got which turned into a kind of competition among classmates. In the Kyrgyz education system, marks are given on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the best.

Perizat teased Askat that he did not study well and boastfully underlined that it was she who did his homework for him. But her concerns and acts of support implied that, as the eldest child in the family, she cared for her younger brother. In the eyes of Jibek, the youngest in the family, Askat was not seen as a fragile boy who needed care and protection. On the contrary, Jibek turned to Askat asking for his help with her own homework. Alternatively, for these children's uncle, who is a pious Muslim, Askat was seen, first of all, as a Muslim, who should attend mosques and learn to pray before he reached the age of twelve. According to the *amal kitep* logic, which I discussed earlier, by reaching this age, Askat will be responsible in front of Allah for his own deeds. The children's uncle took Askat sometimes with him to the mosque so that he could learn from others how to pray, which was seen as one of the stages to become knowledgeable (*ilimdüü*) according to Islam.

This ten-year-old boy was seen and accepted in different ways by different people. Askat had multiple identities, such as a vulnerable boy, a helping brother and a Muslim who should attend the mosque and know how to pray and learn Islamic values. These diverse perceptions constituted Askat's childhood. His case, similar to the aforementioned case of Talant, shows how a child is a relative and a relational term. Askat's status as a child is defined in relation to the characteristics such as being older or younger, being a Muslim and being a social orphan who was pitied by Perizat, his grandmother and the teachers in his school. All these examples indicate how a child as a social person is constructed based on social relations.

Jenks (2005, 37) points out that 'childhood always speaks of a relationship', for example, the adult-child, parent-child and teacher-child relationships. In the scholarship on childhood studies, the notion of childhood is 'imprisoned' in the juxtaposition of adult-child (see also Buehler-Niederberger 1998). Indeed, as discussed earlier, most anthropological sources on childhood look at the 'child-adult' relationship which is 'taken for granted' in research (Christensen/Prout 2002). The cases of Talant and Askat show the importance of taking into account further categorisations, such as juniority and seniority among siblings, or how

other members of the community (the young and the old) perceive these children, which indicate the multiple identities of children.

4.6. A Single Child with Many Childhoods

This last case is about eleven-year-old Sezimay, who within half a year had changed from a small girl to being the 'head of the house'. I met Sezimay for the first time when I went to her house to interview her mother, Kanykey. Kanykey, who was 30 years old, was already a mother of four girls. The family moved from a small village to Kochkor in search of work. They lived in an apartment not far from my host-family's house. The flat that they were staying in belonged to Kanykey's husband's distant relative. She and her husband earned some money for living by assisting this relative in baking bread in a clay oven (*tandyr*) early in the morning. In the afternoon, Kanykey worked for several hours a day in her neighbour's shop assisting in cleaning the shop and prepacking products such as sugar, rice and pasta. But most of the time she was at home looking after her daughters.

When I went to Kochkor the second time, for my follow-up field research in autumn of 2013 after half a year, I learned that the family had moved to another part of the village. The neighbour for whom Kanykey had worked had helped her open her own shop. Now both Kanykey and her husband worked the whole day in their own family business. In the absence of parents, it was Sezimay, as the eldest child, who stayed at home and looked after her three younger sisters. She made sure that her sisters stayed clean, secure and were not hungry. She controlled her two siblings' homework, who were in the 1st and 2nd grades, braided their hair for school and looked after their school uniform. When they were running out of bread, Kanykey prepared dough and it was Sezimay who baked the bread. She also cooked complicated dishes, which she had learned since her mother had started the family business. Sezimay noted how she mastered cooking with the help of her mother, who would instruct via a mobile phone what to use first and second and so on (see chapter 7).

As this family was one of the four families which I studied more thoroughly, I paid several visits to their house and spent extensive time with the girls, mostly when they were alone. I also visited them when their mother was at home and made an interesting observation: In the absence of her parents, Sezimay acted as an independent and mature family member, as the 'head of the house', and supervised her siblings. She not only fulfilled tasks that were expected from her by her mother, but also took the initiative and allocated tasks among her two younger sisters through commands, sometimes using a tone of authority. When her parents were at home, especially her mother, Sezimay seemed to be a totally different person. Once, Kanykey stayed at home and got prepared for the *Kurman ayt*⁷¹ feast with her daughters. They were about to set the table as any time neighbours could show up for a cup of tea and food. Sezimay was very quiet that afternoon. She received commands from her mother which she silently fulfilled, without taking any initiative on her own.

Similar to other cases mentioned earlier, Sezimay's case shows how a child's experience of 'childishness', 'maturity', 'independence' or 'autonomy' is affected by their environment and circumstances. For example, the changing lifestyle in Sezimay's family, in this case the family business, took both parents away from home and resulted in Sezimay reaching social maturity at the age of eleven. It was astonishing to observe how Sezimay matured during a six month period. The way she started to be involved in household chores, cooked complicated dishes (as she boasted), looked after her younger sisters and made decisions independently in the absence of parents were the very factors that shifted her 'childish childhood' to a 'mature childhood'. At the same time, when her mother was around, Sezimay turned back to same old Sezimay whom I used to see at first. The case of Sezimay, like other cases, demonstrates that a child may have several fragments of childhood, depending on the circumstances that have developed around the child.

⁷¹ This is a Muslim celebration when people pay visits to each other's houses.

I have illustrated these three cases to demonstrate childhoods (in plural) that the children in Kochkor experience. I approached these children as persons, who are ‘a complex of social relations’ (Radcliffe-Brown 1952; see also Tonkin 1982). In this relation, I agree with the statement:

‘[w]hen a child is born, she or he is born into a complex web of social, economic and political duties and responsibilities. While individual children may not be aware of these for many years to come, it is impossible to understand childhood as an anthropologist without acknowledging and examining these issues’ (Montgomery 2009, 78).

Montgomery’s statement clearly shows that anthropologists should study children holistically, and that they cannot ignore local social, economic and political contexts. In one of her chapters titled ‘What is a Child?’, Montgomery (2009) mentions different cross-cultural perceptions of a child: as ‘incompetent and subordinate’, as ‘equal’, as ‘a means of forming families and giving status’, as ‘an economic investment’ and as ‘unwanted and nonhuman’. Do local people come up with these characteristics themselves or are they purely formed based on the researcher’s observations and generalisations? I also asked people in Kochkor a question: ‘What is a child?’ The following section will illustrate what interlocutors mentioned as important features and significant attributes.

4.7. Local ‘Pyramids’

‘A father is a rocky mountain, a mother is a spring in that rocky mountain and a child is the light that shines to both of them’ (*‘Ata – askaluu too, ene – boorundagy bulak, bala – eköönö tiyip turgan sham chyrak’*), Farida Eje used a Kyrgyz proverb in response to my question of how she would define a child. She continued:

‘Only because of children one lives looking into the future. If a couple wants to get divorced, they do not do it only because of their children, while a bride is sent back to her birth family if she is barren. A kidnapped bride stays only because of

children, even if her life is not satisfying to her.⁷² For Kyrgyz people, a child is in the first place. We live looking into the future only for our children. Life without children is *körksüz* [meaning dull, not interesting, not beautiful, meaningless], if there is no child to greet you when you come home, or if there is no child to cry when you die.’

Farida Eje (45), a mother of two children, was widowed at the age of 24 and since then she had not remarried. She said that as a mother, she had lived for her children by bringing them up, marrying them off and helping them to bring up their children. She came to Kochkor for her daughter to baby-sit her newly-born second grandchild. The way Farida Eje defined a child as ‘how it is in the first place’, ‘how parents live looking into the future only because of children’ and ‘how life without children is meaningless, dull and not interesting’ were kinds of definitions of a child that were shared by many interlocutors of mine in Kochkor.

‘What is a child?’ is how my interviews with my interlocutors started. Irrespective of gender or age, parents came up with similar answers such as: how highly a child is praised, how important a child is in their lives and how pure a child is. These were then followed by the more or less ‘fixed’ cultural characteristics that a child should have. Almost all of these cultural characteristics were not about ‘who a child is’, but more about ‘what values a child holds’ or ‘what it means to have a child’, which were also periodically contrasted to what it means to not have a child. In such answers, the view of the word ‘child’ as an ‘offspring’ was expressed extensively. These people’s expressions about a child could be interpreted as self-explanatory natural human affection to one’s own offspring. In addition, my interlocutors also commented on the social importance and the social role of children as junior members of society.

I never came across any negative characteristics of a child in my interlocutors’ narratives. Mostly, they were positive which were usually

⁷² Bride kidnapping (*ala kachuu*) is one of the forms of getting married among Kyrgyz people. See Kleinbach et al. 2005; Kleinbach/Salimjanova 2007 for Kyrgyzstan; Werner 2009 for Kazakhstan.

complemented with sayings and proverbs, and some of my interlocutors even retold legends that they had heard about children (not a child as an offspring, but as a junior member of society). The first legend was as follows: One king, who was on a journey, stopped at one family's house. The family, according to Kyrgyz culture, received the travellers with hospitality. The king, as the most respected person, was offered the most respected part of the cooked meat (*ustukan*). The king said that there was even a more respected person in the room and handed the meat over to the child of the family. According to the second legend, told by another interlocutor of mine, once, a king stopped by at one family's house during his journey. This king and his companions received a warm and hospitable welcome and food from the house. During the meal, the toddler of the house crawled to the king and fell asleep on the hem of his clothes. The time to continue their journey came. In order not to disturb the sleeping child, the king cut off the hem of his clothes on which the child was sleeping and continued his journey.⁷³ Both narrators turned to me after they had told these legends and stated, 'See how a child is highly valued!' and concluded about the important role of a child in Kyrgyz society.

A child as a stage of life is a universal phenomenon, but the understanding of what a child is and what values circle around a child are not universal. The value of a child is discussed in many scholarly publications. For instance, Lancy (2008) shows how the value of a child is depicted in two contradicting pyramids labelled as 'gerontocracy', where adults are most valued and respected, and 'neontocracy', where children are valued for their own sake (*fig. 4*). The pyramid representing neontocracy shows how a child is located at the top of the pyramid that represents a society, and the bottom of the pyramid is occupied by parents, grandparents and pets. In-between, one can see institutions related to children, such as pre-schools, pediatricians, babysitters, famous brands such as Disney, Toys

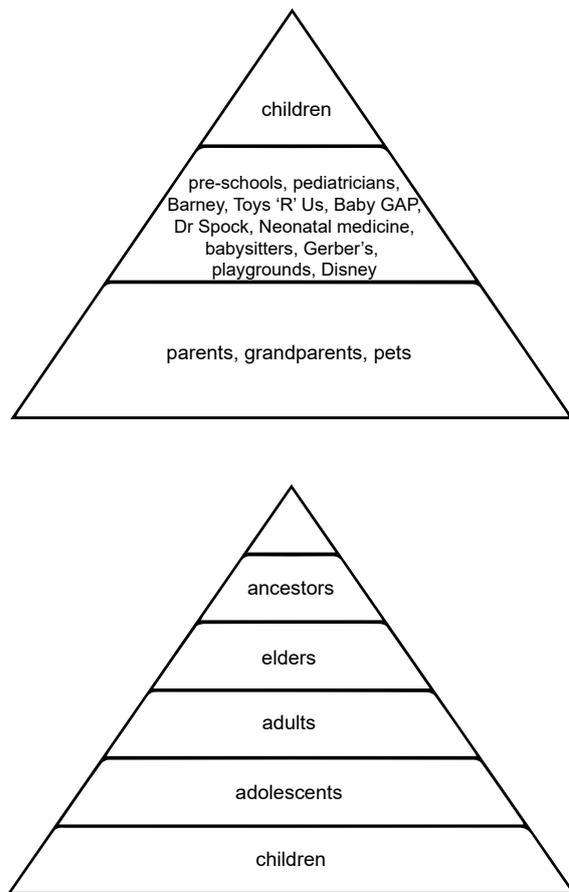


Fig. 4. 'Neontocracy' (top) versus 'gerontocracy' (bottom) (from Lancy 2008, 11, re-designed by the author).

'R' Us, Baby GAP and many more indicators. This pyramid is called the 'US mainstream neontocracy' and is contrasted to the second pyramid which is called the 'Agrarian societies gerontocracy'. This second pyramid, contrary to the first, locates a child on the very bottom of the pyramid. The hierarchy ladder which goes up continues with adolescents, adults and elders, and stops with ancestors at the very top. In the former, a child is 'the most wanted child', while in the latter, a child is unwanted, starved to death, involved in hard work and seen as a commodity (see Lancy 2008). These two pyramids show how the worth of a child varies in different societies even today and how a child ranges from being a useful child, who works and contributes to the household economy, to a 'useless but also priceless child' (Lancy 2008, 13).

⁷³ The same legend was also told by one of the local mulahs in Kochkor.

In which of these pyramids would a child in Kochkor be located? In Kochkor, respect for seniors is one of the important social values. By ‘seniors’, I do not only mean elderly people from the older generation, but anyone who is senior to a child or an adult in terms of age and status, as I have discussed earlier in this chapter. Veneration of one’s ancestors is also part of Kyrgyz *salt*. These values are inculcated by persistent instruction into a child since his or her early age. According to Lancy’s categorisation, would Kochkor be in the gerontocracy pyramid? Farida Eje’s earlier description of a child and how other interlocutors defined a Kyrgyz child in terms of values, as illustrated in their narratives, would challenge such an assumption. Farida Eje earlier noted how a couple who wants to divorce does not get divorced only because of their children, how a kidnapped woman who is not happy with her husband still decides to live with him only because of their common children, and how a barren woman is sent back to her birth home because she cannot give birth to a child. These sayings generate an idea that what Lancy shows with those two pyramids is only one of many possible categorisations for locating a child within value-systems. There are even more local categorisations which one can come up with.

Despite the absence of ‘Disney, Toys ‘R’ Us and Baby GAP’, which in the Kyrgyz context would be replaced by the names of cheap and low-quality Chinese products, which some children even cannot always afford, one could still interpret that there is a kind of ‘neontocracy’ in Kyrgyz society as a child is labelled as ‘the most wanted child’. In the example of Mostowlansky (2013), who wrote about well-being among the Pamiri Kyrgyz, one can observe two important things about children, even though the author does not indicate it explicitly. First, a family without a child is not considered a family and thus a couple without children cannot fulfil certain obligations in society. Second, having children is one of the ways of achieving a ‘good life’. Of course, it can be also interpreted that a child in these examples is in service of his or her parents so that the latter achieve something in society. However, the local logic on values of children does not completely support this notion.

People in Kochkor always underlined the importance of a child itself, similar to Farida Eje who noted: ‘We [meaning Kyrgyz people] live looking into the future only for our children’ or ‘life without children is meaningless’.

It could also be argued that the worth of a child described by Lancy and the people in Kochkor is based on two different value-ideas, in a Dumontian sense.⁷⁴ The cases from Kochkor regarding the worth of a child that I have brought up earlier are more about a child as an offspring, a social person, whereas Lancy’s statement is based on the child, as an individual, who is juxtaposed to an adult.⁷⁵ This means that actually one can come up with many pyramids and not only the one that Lancy uses to highlight the worth of a child in different societies.

The following example from the field, even though not specifically related to a child, will serve to show that even within one society, a locally fixed pyramid might have a different structure based on different contexts. One of the cultural practices that are strictly followed in Kyrgyz culture is the sitting arrangement around the table, locally termed as *dastorkon*⁷⁶. People are seated at the *dastorkon* based on their status, which is determined by seniority-juniority and gender. For example, elderly people sit in the most respected place, which is at the end of the table that is the furthest away from the entrance. Younger ones sit after the elderly, also according to from a senior to a junior order, which is not only based on the biological age, but also on kinship status. Usually, among the elderly people of the same age, the males sit higher than the females. If the female is older or senior based on the kinship status than the male, then she will sit higher.

Seniority-juniority is also important in determining who gets served tea first, who is served

⁷⁴ See Dumont on the notions of the term ‘value-idea’ or ‘idea-value’ in societies where there exists ‘the ranked nature of things’ (Dumont 1986, 249–253).

⁷⁵ People in Kochkor also mentioned the worth of children not only as offspring but also as the new generation. I will discuss this further in chapter 7.

⁷⁶ *Dastorkon* is a tablecloth which is laid on the ground or on a wooden table either with short or long legs. People in Kochkor usually sit on the floor on thin mattresses around a *dastorkon*, a table with short legs.

food first and who gets the most respected parts of cooked meat (*ustukan*). Usually, the youngest daughter-in-law of the family, whom I will call Nazira, sits at the very ‘bottom’ of the table and serves tea to others (see *fig. 5*, ‘A’ stands for Nazira). When Nazira goes to her natal family, the above-mentioned hierarchy of sitting based on age and gender will not apply. She will be seated in a respected place, at the *tör*, even much higher than some of her elderly male relatives, such as elderly brothers or uncles (*fig. 5*, ‘B’ stands for Nazira).

The way a woman is seated at two opposing places is related to her social status in that particular context which is culturally constructed and determined according to local cultural values. ‘A daughter is a guest in her natal family’ (*‘Kyz atasynyn töründö konok’*) is a common saying. In Kochkor, and in other parts of Kyrgyzstan, when a young woman gets married, she leaves her natal family. If she marries the youngest son of a family, then she will live in her husband’s parents’ house, as it is usually the youngest male child who stays with his parents and looks after them, especially into their old age. When the bride visits her natal family, she is considered to be a guest. Guests, according to Kyrgyz sayings, are compared to *kut*, a Kyrgyz word for good fortune. This is why guests are always respected and, irrespective of age and gender, they are seated in a respected place, that is, ‘*tör*’.⁷⁷

If we transfer Nazira’s case with her shifting locations at the table into a pyramid, we get two different pyramids. In the one, Nazira will be located at the bottom, and in the other, she will be located at the top of the pyramid. If one takes the cultural logic of Kyrgyz people’s being seated at the *dastorkon* according to seniority-juniority, then similar to Nazira’s case, a child as a junior member of society will be located at the bottom of the pyramid. As an offspring, a child is highly valued and will be located at the top of the pyramid. Here it is

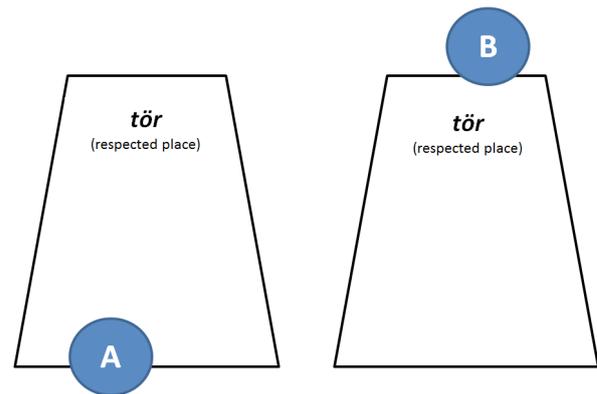


Fig. 5. The hierarchy of being seated at the table (*dastorkon*). A – the ego (female) in her husband’s family, seated closer to the entrance, B – the ego in her natal family, seated at a respected place.

important to take into consideration local values, categorisations and local reasoning. This is especially important in case of a researcher who might study other societies through the prism of his or her own values and practices. For instance, the absence of Disney, Toys ‘R’ Us, Baby GAP, babysitters and many other neotocracy-based indicators in Kochkor should not immediately put a child into the light of being less valued. It is equally critical not to limit one’s observation to the ‘ethnographic gaze’ only (Clifford 1986), but extend it to the ‘ethnographic ear’ and let local people interpret certain practices, by delivering their own logic of reasoning. I collected opinions of many people in Kochkor who state that what is seen as negative by an outsider would not be classified as such by local people themselves, which will be also illustrated in further chapters.

4.8. Conclusion

This chapter discussed the concept of a child and its values in the local socio-cultural context and analysed how it can contribute to the understanding of the concept of a child as an analytical category. The local perspectives of defining, conceptualising, categorising and approaching the notion of a ‘child’ as a social person differs from its analytical construct. The cases of children in Kochkor demonstrated that childhood is not homogenous but varies even within a small society

⁷⁷ Many Kyrgyz people also mentioned that if a married daughter does not sit in a respected place when she visits her natal family, her natal family will become poor or not be able to get rich (*kedey bolup kalat*). This may be related to an understanding that a married daughter is a guest and guests are associated with a local notion of *kut*, which means good fortune, goodness and abundance.

based on different socio-economic factors, religious understandings about personhood, sibling-ship or the presence or absence of parents. These aspects greatly affect the way a child experiences its childhood.

I tried to show that in the local context, it is not ‘What is a child?’ but rather ‘What is it **to be** a child?’ that seems to be more relevant. Even to my direct question ‘What is a child?’, I did not get a clear-cut, short and to the point answer, such as a child is the one who is not yet an adult or who is under 18 years old. People in Kochkor contemplated on more contexts and provided more interpretations on what it is to be a child in Kyrgyz society, to have a child or not to have a child. Further discussions engendered even more interesting understandings of what it is like to be a child in post-Soviet Kochkor in comparison to the Soviet past; what it is like to be the eldest child or the youngest child; what it is like to be a child in the family where parents are around, or, on the contrary, absent; what it is like to be an orphan or a social orphan; what it is like to be a Muslim child; or what it is like to be a child of a family which is suffering economically. In fact, this ‘What it is like to be a child of ...’ could continue endlessly and this would give different versions and interpretations of children in Kyrgyzstan and their childhoods.

My approach to tease out the analytical concepts of ‘child’ and ‘adult’ in the conversations with local people showed different social realities

and discourses through which a child is imagined in different ways. For Bolot Bayke and Jyldyz Eje, in the Soviet past, a child was included into an adult circle after service in the army, but today, the possibility to be involved in income-generating work or gaining information through the television raise a ‘consciousness’ in children in earlier age. Such reasoning hints on different boundaries between the categories of a child-adult as a historical product. I introduced the readers to local understandings of maturity based on the notions of *balagatka toлуу*, *amal kitep* or school-related milestones. I also demonstrated the local categorisation of juniority and seniority, which greatly affects the concept of a child and the way a child’s life is shaped, especially through the type of work and tasks a child is involved in and the level of parents’ trust in their children.

The main aim of this chapter was to look at a child and childhood as a notion and phenomenon and the way they are constructed in local contexts. I will continue the rest of the ethnographic chapters on the same note, that is, by considering how a child’s health, well-being, fate and the way how a child is made into a moral citizen are all constructed by individual families, by the community and through national and international policies. In the following chapter, I will look at the local perspectives of the ‘making of the person’ which is brought about through cultural practices known as *yrym*.

5. Yrym – Rituals of ‘Making the Person’

5.1. Introduction⁷⁸

It was an afternoon of January 2013. The weather outside was chilly, but the sun was shining brightly. There was no snow, which is typical for Kochkor.⁷⁹ I was at home helping my host-mother in the kitchen to prepare our lunch. Anara Eje, our neighbour, came and told us that Nurgül Eje, another neighbour of ours, will ‘cut the *tushoo*’ of her grandchild in half an hour time (*‘Neberesinin tushoosun kesip jatypyr’*). This meant that she would be organising a *tushoo kesüü* ritual for her grandson, a life-cycle ritual which is conducted for a child who is around one year old.

In about half an hour, Anara Eje and I headed over to Nurgül Eje’s house who lived three houses away around the corner. When we turned into her street, we could already see several children in front of Nurgül Eje’s house who were waiting to participate in the ritual. Nurgül Eje (54), her one-year-old grandson for whom the ritual had to be conducted, and his parents (Nurgül Eje’s son and daughter-in-law) were also outside waiting for some more children to join. This was an interesting observation because in Kochkor and in other parts of Kyrgyzstan, one usually waits for elderly people who perform the rituals. But in this particular ritual, it is children who are the main participants and who have a special role.

It was astonishing to see how the children, especially boys of around ten to twelve years old, were actively inviting other young participants. Through word-of-mouth, they quickly gathered the children in the neighbourhood to take part in the ritual. A couple of young housewives, mothers who were at home with their toddlers, also joined. Even some passers-by stopped to watch the event out of curiosity. Nurgül Eje’s daughter (around 20) came out from the house with a big plate full of *boorsok* (small fried pieces of bread), sweets and

biscuits. Children were especially happy because they would not only eat these sweets but would also take part in a competition and get presents at the end.

Nurgül Eje’s grandchild was placed on an upside-down basin. I assume that was done to give him some height.⁸⁰ Nurgül Eje tied a black and white plaited cord around her grandchild’s feet, while the father of the child was holding him so that he did not fall down (*fig. 6*). According to my interlocutors, the cord is made from white and black strands on purpose, meaning that life consists of both white (good) and black (bad) parts.⁸¹ While Nurgül Eje was preparing the child for the ritual, around eight to ten boys ranging from ages nine to twelve walked away from the child and waited at the end of the street in a line for the sign to start. Along with these children, there was another young man in his mid-20s, who made sure that all boys stood on the same line.

After Nurgül Eje tied the black and white cord around the child’s feet, the child’s father raised his hand and then dropped it to signal for the children to run. The children ran tooth and nail towards the child and it was Talant, a nimble ten-year-old boy (whom I also mentioned in chapter 4), who reached the child first. He tried to tear the cord with his hand in a hurry. It did not work as the cord was thick. Nurgül Eje quickly handed him a knife, which was lying in front of the child, and Talant used it to easily cut the cord around the child’s feet. Talant and two other boys who came in after him, took the child’s hands and helped him to walk a short distance. The child, for whom this ritual was conducted, was crying because of witnessing all this chaos and rough actions of the people around him, but his parents and other people witnessing it were happy.

⁷⁸ Some parts of the introduction were published in Tulebaeva 2022.

⁷⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, Kochkor is called ‘black Kochkor’ for usually having no snow in winter.

⁸⁰ In my opinion, this did not have any particular meaning, as it was my first encounter when I witnessed a child being placed on something during this ritual. Usually, a child stands on the ground.

⁸¹ People use the word *kara* (‘black’), but in reality, the cord can also be of brown or dark brown colour.



Fig. 6. *Tushoo kesüü* ritual (photo by author).

Nurgül Eje opened the red plastic bag, which was in her hands at that time, and distributed presents to the boys, such as small cars and plastic pistols. Even smaller boys and toddlers who did not participate in the running competition got some small presents. In addition to his own present, Talant, as a winner, was awarded the knife with which he cut the cord. Awarding the knife is a part of the ritual that is scrupulously followed. Anara Eje, Talant's mother, was very happy and proud of her son.

Now it was the turn of the girls to run. The child was taken back to the upturned basin where the father held him. This time he was without the rope, as it is believed that the rope implies the 'fate' of a child and that is why it should be cut only once. The girls who were participating in the running competition differed in age, which is why that young man again served as a referee and made sure that the smaller girls stood a few steps in front of the older girls to ensure fairness.

The girls also ran as quickly as they could, but for them, it did not matter if they came first. Unlike the boys, they would not cut the cord but all of them would be given presents equally at the end. Nurgül Eje handed these girls small pocket mirrors, handkerchiefs and small dolls. While the girls were observing who got what kind of present, Nurgül Eje's daughter approached all participants and witnesses with a plate full of *boorsok*, biscuits and sweets. Both adults and children stood in the street for a while sharing their impressions. I took a group photo and after that people started to disperse.

On the one hand, this ritual is accepted as a part of *salt*, a traditional Kyrgyz cultural practice which, as my interlocutors stated, is in the blood of Kyrgyz people.⁸² In other words, people conduct

⁸² '*Kanybyzga singen*' ('it is absorbed into our blood'). People say this when they talk about certain cultural practices which they perceive as part of their tradition.

this ritual by claiming that it is their tradition which they should also follow. On the other hand, this ritual has a deep meaning. It is believed that physically from this point in time, a child will not stumble and will start to walk strongly. Also, in a figurative way, it is believed that a child will not stumble in his life and will develop successfully. The aim of this ritual is to ‘open the child’s way’ (*jolun achuu*) and wish him a good future.

The purpose of having the cord cut by the winner who comes first in the race is that the child for whom this ritual is performed would become as fast and successful as that winner. Also, it is cut by a child and not by adults because it is believed that children’s thoughts are good and their intentions are clean.⁸³ Purity and cleanliness were mentioned as the qualities of small children. This occasion is one of the ethnographic snapshots noted from the series of rituals, in Kyrgyz called *yrym*. In the previous chapter, I discussed the concept of child and childhood as a socio-cultural construct. In this chapter, I shall look at the ways in which people in Kochkor ‘construct’ a child’s health, well-being, character and future life through *yrym*, such as *tushoo kesüü*, as illustrated above.

The term ‘construction’ does generally appear in topics about children and childhood. Traditional studies of the concept of ‘the construction of childhood’ are usually about childhood as a notion, concept or idea (see chapters 2 and 4). In this chapter, the very term ‘construction’ or ‘making’ will be used in its direct meaning to demonstrate how parents and the whole community invest in the physical, social and spiritual development of a child through local practices called *yrym*. Through *yrym*, people try to build a strong and healthy body, a moral person, a hard-working person, a wealthy person and instil other good qualities in children. I will illustrate that a child in Kochkor is indeed constructed and made into a social person this way.

By the term ‘making’ one should not consider that a child is like an artefact or thing, such as a final product that is made out of raw materials.

For this notion, I would refer to the work of Ingold and Hallam who elaborate on the concepts of ‘growing’ and ‘making’ (Ingold/Hallam 2014). They note that growing a beard and growing potatoes are not the same thing. The same is about ‘making’. For example, making a bed at home would have a different meaning than making a bed during a journey. By this, they want to show that the notion of ‘making’ should not be considered in isolation, but looked at in a certain context.

Continuing the debates from the previous chapter on the blurred line between a child and an adult in Kyrgyz understanding, it will be argued that the construction of a child through life-cycle rituals should not be understood as a ceremony that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. In other words, child-related rituals in Kochkor are not adult-making rituals. Nor are they aimed at transforming a child from an incomplete to a complete person (see chapter 2), as I never heard people in Kochkor talking about the notion of a ‘full person’. Rather, through rituals, people construct a member of society with certain desired qualities. The understanding of such rituals reveals the local notion of healthy growth and who is involved in this process. This chapter is mainly based on Platenkamp’s concepts of the ‘objectification of social qualities’ and ‘transfer of social attributes’ through rituals, which will be developed further and demonstrated with ethnographic examples from Kochkor.

The aim of this chapter is two-fold. First, it should be made clear that I will not discuss the topic of a ritual itself (for classical studies on ritual see Geertz 1973; Bell 1992; 1997; Tambiah 1985). Rather, by using rituals conducted by people in Kochkor, I will pay special attention to the functions of child-related rituals and their roles in the ‘making of the person’. With this, I will elucidate the local values that circle around children’s healthy growth. Second, through ethnographic examples of *yrym*, I will indicate how this local concept and practice of *yrym* is much broader than rituals in the purely religious sense. I claim that *yrym* has a character of ‘everydayness’, as being part of daily life. This ‘everydayness’ of *yrym* is important in achieving certain desired qualities, which are concluded not only in actions, such as ritual performances, but also in avoidance of

⁸³ When this ritual is performed as part of a big feast, given in the honour of the child, the same kind of running competition is also performed among adults, when men and women run separately and receive presents at the end.

certain actions.⁸⁴ Below, *yrym* will be approached from three different angles, but in three interrelated contexts which I find important in the ‘construction’ of a child and in ensuring its healthy development. These are: (1) *yrym* as a ritual, (2) *yrym* as a practice which has the power to transmit and embed desired qualities and (3) *yrym* as shared cultural norms which have a collective importance for Kyrgyz people as part of Kyrgyz tradition.

Based on the above mentioned points, this chapter is structured in the following way: First, a short ethnographic snapshot will reveal the local meanings of *yrym* and underline its importance in the making of the person. Second, I will explore the analytical concept of ‘the making of the person’ by turning to some existing scholarly works on this topic that will help me explain the logic of *yrym*. Third, it will be discussed how, with the help of *yrym*, people transfer and embed desired qualities in their children. These will be illustrated through ritual performances: actions, utterances (see examples of *bata* below) and food (see examples of *keshik* below). After that, I will look at how *yrym* is further employed in the lives of Kochkori-ans as part of their *salt*, where changing tendencies in these cultural practices will be mentioned, which also contribute to the discourses on the healthy growth of children.

5.2. *Yrym* as a Ritual

Sezimay was born a *jeti aylyk* (‘premature baby’ born after seven months)⁸⁵ and her family did not name her for two months because, as I was told, *yrym* required this. This is how Kanykey (30), the mother of Sezimay, explained:

⁸⁴ Heidelberg University’s collaborative research centre ‘Ritual Dynamics’ (SFB 619) views rituals ‘as vital elements of everyday culture’. Between 2002 and 2013, SFB 619 researched ‘the dynamics of ritual practices in various historical and contemporary cultures and the development of basic theoretical approaches in ritual studies’, last updated 05.08.2008, <<https://www.uni-heidelberg.de/presse/news08/pm280806-1sfbe.html>> (last access: 02.02.2023).

⁸⁵ In Kyrgyz language, premature babies are classified according to the number of months of gestation, for example *jeti aylyk* (‘seven months from conception to birth’) or *segiz aylyk* (‘eight months from conception to birth’).

Kanykey: ‘We did not name Sezimay for two months, until she had to be born as a ‘normal child’. We did not show her to people.’

BT: ‘What was the reason?’

Kanykey: ‘Because a child had not yet been born! And if a child was not born, one should not give it a name. Only when one follows this *yrym* will a child grow healthily. There is an understanding that when a child is still in the womb, one should not name it. The *yrym* is so (*yrymy oshondoy*)! Before a child is born, some parents say: ‘If it is a boy, I will call him like this and if it is a girl, like that.’ That is not right! One should not give a name until a child is born. In our case, we had to take our daughter’s birth certificate when being discharged from the delivery house and that is why my mother-in-law registered her as Sezimay. But we did not use that name for two months.’

That was one of many *yrym* that Kanykey followed for her children. Kanykey was the eldest child in her family. Thus, she was given to her grandmother, as giving the eldest child to his or her paternal grandparents was a commonly practiced custom among Kyrgyz people and also among other Central Asians (see Bekmuratova 1978). Kanykey’s grandmother was an *yrymchyl* person. This means that she performed many rituals (*yrym*) and was ‘knowledgeable’ of some customary practices. By growing up next to her grandmother, Kanykey learned many *yrym* from her. Remembering her past days, Kanykey said: ‘My grandmother died when I was 18, one year after I got married. If she had lived longer, I would have definitely become a *mastan*⁸⁶ (witch) by now’ and she laughed. Kanykey’s laughter implies that it is usually elderly women who are believed to know and follow many *yrym*. This could be the reason why the common local term for healers is *apalar*, which translates as mothers or grandmothers, who usually conduct more healing rituals than young women. My interlocutors noted that ‘Kyrgyz people practice many *yrym*’ (‘Kyrgyz *eli yrymchyl*

⁸⁶ *Mastan* is a witch, a demonic creature in the image of an old woman. Here, my interlocutor means that she would be knowledgeable about different types of rituals.

kelet). Indeed, in Kyrgyzstan, one can often hear the word ‘yrym’ being used in different contexts.

What is *yrym*? In the Kyrgyz-Russian dictionary, *yrym* is translated as ‘religious rites, religious prejudices, spells and beliefs in omens’ (Yudakhin 1965, 439). As one old man in Kochkor explained to me: ‘Every phenomenon had its own *yrym*’ (*Ar bir körünüşkö özünchö yrymy bolgon*). These are a few examples of *yrym* that I collected during my fieldwork from the people in Kochkor: one should not leave children’s clothes outside after sunset; one should not show a child’s face or breastfeeding mother’s breast to the moon; one should not lend white drinks, such as milk or yogurt, to others in the darkness; if one had bad dreams, that person should tell them to running water; if a family member returns from a long journey or from the hospital, then a cup of water should be circulated over his or her head and poured away and the cup should be left there upside down for several days; and if a woman cannot become pregnant then she should visit sacred sites. There exist many *yrym* related to children, food, nature, clothes and relationships with do’s and don’ts that regulate people’s lives including the behaviour of both children and adults. Thus, *yrym* can be understood as a set of values and practices that predetermine people’s intentions and actions. *Yrym* include taboos, health-related rituals and life-cycle rituals and make a significant part of people’s daily practices.

People in Kochkor provided explanations to some *yrym*. For example, a child’s clothes are not left outside after sunset because in the darkness, many *shaytans* (‘demons’) wander, which can affect a child’s health. White drinks, such as milk and yogurt, should not be borrowed and lent in the darkness because if the moon sees this white drink, the breast of the cow from which this milk is taken will hurt and it will not produce much milk. If a person had bad dreams, they should tell it to running water so that the running water will take away the badness the dream might foretell. There are also *yrym* which do not have an explanation and people do not know their meanings. Still, they follow these *yrym* noting that they should do this because it is *yrym* (*yrymy ushunday*). In other words, people blindly copy what they have heard, seen and learned from others what is perceived as *yrym*.

Abramzon (1949) notes that already in the 1920s and 1930s, many of the meanings of rituals were forgotten by Kyrgyz people and they were practiced only as nice traditions (see also Karmysheva/Gubaeva 2006). During the Soviet time, such rituals were seen as a sign of backwardness (Abramzon 1949; Fjelstrup 2002; Keshavjee 1998) and those rituals which were labelled as ‘religious’ were eliminated and those ones labelled as ‘folk’ and ‘pagan’ were ‘rehabilitated’ (Kandiyoti/Azimova 2004). Lane, who studied rituals in Soviet times, emphasises that many rituals lost their religious character and got secularised. She also gives examples of many newly created and adopted rituals which held communist values (Lane 1981). My argument is that when it comes to children’s rituals, the meanings of *yrym* are clear and they have been preserved due to their importance for children’s healthy growth. The following section will demonstrate how people know why certain *yrym* are done for children and why certain items are used for particular *yrym* because the main purpose of the child-related *yrym* is directed towards constructing a person with certain desired qualities.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Kyrgyz Republic as an independent state, *yrym* started to be glorified as part of Kyrgyz *salt*, customary practice and traditional knowledge that is transferred from generation to generation both orally and in writing. For example, there are books and websites on Kyrgyz *yrym* titled ‘Kyrgyzdyn Yrym-Jyrymdary’⁸⁷ (‘Kyrgyz Cultural Norms and Practices’), the purpose of which is to preserve Kyrgyz traditional wisdom as part of Kyrgyz culture. One example of these activities is the work of the Aigine CRC in Bishkek, which has the goal to preserve Kyrgyz traditional knowledge. This is described in their slogan ‘Moving forward with Tradition’.⁸⁸ There are many other local centres such as the Kyrgyz Cultural Centre (Kyrgyz Madaniyat Borboru) and many online forums and newspaper rubrics where Kyrgyz cultural norms

⁸⁷ In Kyrgyz word combinations such as ‘yrym-jyrymdary’ the last part *jyrym* is a parallel word for *yrym* and does not have any meaning on its own in this context.

⁸⁸ See the website of the Aigine cultural research center for more details, <<https://aigine.kg/?p=11083&lang=en>> (last access: 02.02.2023).

and practices are intensively discussed and their importance is highlighted. In such contexts, *yrym* becomes ‘a model of’ and ‘a model for’ reality (Geertz 1973, 93 f.).

Nowadays, child-related life-cycle rituals, such as the 40-day-ritual after the birth of a child, the *beshikke saluu* ritual (cradle ritual), the *tushoo kesüü* ritual (mentioned above) and the circumcision (only for boys), have become so ritualised that it would be more correct to say these informal practices have become ‘formalised’.⁸⁹ These life-cycle rituals gained popularity by being a part of Kyrgyz tradition and serve as a marker of Kyrgyz cultural identity.⁹⁰ Gilman states that in order to be a part of tradition, the practice ‘not only has to have the symbolic meanings and values associated with tradition, but it also has to play an important role in [people’s] lives’ (Gilman 2004, 34). If one looks into *yrym*, one can see this ‘important role’ aspect in child-related rituals.

All of the mentioned *yrym* consist of objects, symbolic acts and utterances through which it is believed that a child gains certain qualities such as health, well-being and success. As one of my interlocutors said: ‘*Yrym* did not appear on their own; they were created with a good intention, so that they give a good effect and so that one gets blessings’. None of my interlocutors noted a negative side of *yrym*. *Yrym* can be characterised as shared ritualised and formalised cultural practices that have an individual as well as a nationwide and collective importance. Reflecting on the debate of a child as a social person (chapter 2), the following sections will deal with the processes of the making of this person. Before turning to a more detailed examination of these ritualised *yrym* in the context of Kochkor, first I will look at the analytical concept of the ‘making of the person’ discussed in scholarly works.

⁸⁹ Hardenberg, personal conversation.

⁹⁰ To the question ‘What constitutes Kyrgyz *salt*?’ my interlocutors mainly named these child-related life-cycle rituals, including the marriage ceremony.

5.3. The Rituals of ‘Making the Person’

‘When an Orokaiva child is born, he is said to be an image (*ahihì*). He does not have, people say, a *hamo*, [...] ‘social person’. His parents, his family and the other villagers, by performing numerous childhood rituals (adoption, naming, giving of the first taro and so forth), gradually construct his social person, materialised in the growth of his body and in his first kinship relations with fathers, mothers, namesake and others’ (Iteanu 1990, 40).

Iteanu, in the quote above, stresses the contrast between the Orokaiva people in Papua New Guinea and Western individuals, where the former reach the ‘state of completeness’ through rituals. Here it is worth mentioning the debates between foundationalist (natural) and anti-foundationalist (cultural) approaches on the finished and non-finished state of body. According to foundationalists, despite cultural variables, a human body is something material, real, that it is constant and does not depend on social changes. On the contrary, anti-foundationalists argue that there is no such thing as a ‘material body’. For them, a body is something that we understand and interpret. There are also scholars who try to bridge both views. Prout, recalling the work of Shilling (1993), states:

‘[Shilling] attempts to synthesize the two approaches, and in so doing develops a position that is of great potential importance for studies of childhood. The essence of his suggestion is that the human body is socially and biologically unfinished at birth. Over the life course – and childhood would seem to be a crucial stage – it changes through processes that are simultaneously biological and social’ (Prout 2000, 4).

Iteanu’s example of Orokaivan rituals contributes to this debate in the sense that through rituals, the unfinished state of the body of a child, which is seen as an image first, achieves the desired full ‘social person’ status. In other words, a child’s parents, family and other people contribute to the ‘making of this person’.

The notion of ‘making the person’ through rituals is not only characteristic of Orokaiva people.

Rituals that shift a child's status are studied by many scholars. Most of them mention initiation rituals, especially those that mark the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood (Fass 2004; Karmysheva/Gubaeva 2006; Lancy 2008; Spradley/McCurdy 1980). Some rituals are directed towards the socialisation of a child, marking a child as a 'social person' (Alex 2009; Barraud 1990; Iteanu 1990; La Fontaine 1985; Lancy 2008) by highlighting its 'social birth' (Barraud 1990). Similar kinds of rituals can also be observed in Kochkor. It could be argued that the rituals that people in Kochkor conduct are not directed toward making a full social person out of a child. Rather, *yrym* are performed to ensure the proper development of children by bestowing certain qualities on them through ritual performances. Unlike the Orokaiva case introduced above, people in Kochkor never mentioned 'complete person' or 'incomplete person' ideas about full-term newborns (I do not include here Kanykey's case above with a premature baby), neither did they say how a newborn child is seen as an 'image' or how they are not yet a 'social person'. However, similar to the Orokaiva practices, it is a child's parents, family and other villagers who contribute to the 'making of the person' in Kochkor.

Platenkamp (1998; 2010), who studied people in Luang Prabang in Laos, presents identical cases when close relatives, neighbours and more distant bilateral kin of a child transfer certain social attributes to the child through rituals. There are many regulations followed in order to 'shape' a person's health, well-being and even their features. For example, a pregnant woman cleans dishes properly so that her child is born good-looking and healthy. This giving of good qualities to a child also continues after the child is born. For example, water is used in rituals because it is believed to be a medium for transferring good qualities to a child. People put gold, silver or crystals in water, so that a child also becomes rich or obtains a good job. They also present jewellery or coins as gifts so that a child becomes prosperous, or present school notebooks and pencils so that a child gains knowledge and can read and write. By introducing the concept of 'objectification of social qualities', Platenkamp argues that Lao people believe that a child's life is embodied through these gifts.

I will further develop Iteanu and Platenkamp's ideas on how society contributes to the development of a child. Unlike Iteanu, I claim that in Kochkor, the 'social person' is constructed not only within the framework of rituals, but also in everyday practices such as preparing and eating food, certain actions and utterances such as blessings (*bata*). These are not aimed at making a person 'complete', as was the case with the Orokaiva people. Instead, following Platenkamp, I argue that these rituals are aimed at making a person with certain desired qualities. Here, the person I talk about is, as Goffman calls it, a 'momentary person' formed through everyday activities, and not necessarily through rituals. This 'momentary person' is created 'on an actual occasion of social interaction only to be recreated on the next occasion' (Goffman 1967, cited in Cahill 1998, 135 f.).

This chapter will also present changing ideas about the 'making of the person' among practicing Muslims in Kochkor, and mention their perceptions of children's healthy development. It will be demonstrated that the notion of person is deeply bound to the values and practices of a certain society (*koom*) within a certain period of time (*zaman*). In other words, multiple values that exist simultaneously in a certain 'society-time-value' dimension create diverse notions of a person (see chapter 2). The analysis of these *yrym* can be used to illustrate the qualities that are valued in bringing up children in Kochkor and what people do in order to introduce these qualities in children.

5.4. Transfer of Desired Qualities through *Yrym*⁹¹

The idea of ensuring healthy growth of children through *yrym* is very strong in Kochkor. This could be one of the reasons for having more *yrym* conducted for children than for adults, as the purpose of conducting these *yrym* is to contribute to a healthy physical, moral and cultural development of a child and its well-being.

⁹¹ Some parts of this section and the section below on *bata* were published in Tulebaeva 2015.



Fig. 7. *Beshik* – Kyrgyz traditional cradle (photo by author).

When a child is born, parents in Kochkor slaughter an animal, usually a sheep, as a sacrifice for their child and invite relatives, friends and neighbours to celebrate the arrival of the baby. When the baby is 40 days old, mothers conduct a 40-day-ritual. Usually, this ritual is not conducted with a big group of people but in an intimate circle, that is, within the family or only in the presence of the mother and some women close to her. The mother bathes the baby in 40 spoonful of water, cuts the baby's nails and shaves the baby's hair for the first time. Some people cut only the tips of a child's hair symbolically, which implies that a child's womb hair (*karyn chachy*) has been cut.

After the 40-day-ritual, the next ritual is putting a baby in a traditional cradle called a *beshik* (fig. 7). The cradle is made of wood with a hole under it to remove any urine the baby may pass, which helps keep the baby clean and dry

throughout the day. It has specially made mattresses, blankets and covers which keep the baby warm in winter. A child sleeps well in a swaddled position in a *beshik* and gets used to a certain sleeping routine, which gives time for the mother to do things about the house or to have a rest. As a result, many people still use these cradles in villages, not because of the nostalgic feeling but because of its practicality. Although some people prefer to not put their children in a *beshik* and instead use modern wooden cribs, some of them still decide to conduct the ritual of putting a baby in a *beshik*, which will be described in detail later.

When a child is around one year old, the ritual of *tushoo kesüü* is conducted (as described at the beginning of this chapter). For a female child, the next ritual after the *tushoo kesüü* is marriage when, according to my interlocutor, a girl's 'fate is determined'. Marriage is not a mere event but

a milestone in a person's life. This chapter will illustrate only the aspect of marriage as an event that comprises in itself many *yrym* (symbolic acts), which are directed towards shaping the newlywed's health, well-being and success. Marriage is also considered to be the last ritual conducted for a child. The reason, according to practicing Muslim interlocutors, is that marrying off a child is parents' last responsibility to fulfil towards their children. More on marriage-related rituals will follow.

Unlike girls, after *tushoo kesüü* but prior to marriage, boys have to undergo circumcision around the age of three or five. It should be an odd number such as three or five but not four or six. I was told that the age of seven is too late because a child will be considered old enough to 'understand' (*'akyl-esine kirip kalat'*) and the practice of circumcision would be mentally and physically challenging for a seven-year-old boy to take. I have not had a chance to witness the circumcision ritual myself during my fieldwork. From what I heard, mullahs come to the house of a child and perform this ritual or alternatively, parents take a child to the hospital where the procedure is performed by a doctor who performs the operation with a laser. Some interlocutors mentioned that now sometimes a group of children to be circumcised gather in a mosque and a knowledgeable doctor, who is also a practicing Muslim, comes to conduct the circumcision for all the gathered children on the same day.

All these rituals (*table 1*), except for the naming ritual and the 40-day-ritual, are usually complemented by feasts. The scale of the feasts depends on the economic conditions of the parents and their social networks. Some families organise big parties by sending specially prepared invitation cards to their relatives and friends and they can organise these parties in restaurants due to the huge number of invited guests, which might be more than 300 people. But some, like Nurgül Eje, conduct the ritual in a very small group of people just for the sake of conducting the symbolic part of the ritual. As Nurgül Eje's son later explained, it was the financial condition of the family which did not allow them to organise a feast after the *tushoo kesüü* ritual:

<i>tülöö</i>	Sacrifice
<i>at koyuu</i>	Ritual of naming a child
<i>kyrkyn chygaruu</i>	40-day-ritual
<i>beshikke saluu</i>	Putting a child into a <i>beshik</i> (traditional cradle)
<i>tushoo kesüü</i>	Cutting the <i>tushoo</i> ('hobble') of a child
<i>sünnötkö oturguzuu</i>	Circumcision (for boys only)
<i>üylönüü</i>	Marriage

Table 1. *Yrym* – rituals conducted for a *bala* (child).

'I wanted to organise a feast by inviting my classmates and friends. Due to financial difficulties, we had postponed our child's *tushoo*. I thought that I would collect some money for the celebration. It has been already several months since my son had turned one year old, but he has not given any sign of intention to make his first steps. This could also be related to his time in the hospital, in the reanimation unit, as a baby. He took strong medication and this could also be the reason for his slow development. So, we decided to conduct the *tushoo kesüü* ritual without the feast in the hope that he would start to walk soon.'

When I described the *tushoo kesüü* ritual at the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned how, while the child was crying, the other people were very happy. This is because by conducting the ritual of *tushoo kesüü*, the family wished health and an 'open way' (*achyk jol*, meaning life without hindrances) for the child and they believed that the child would start to walk soon after having conducted this ritual. The execution of the ritual itself was seen as a good sign for the development of the child.

If one analyses this ritual according to Platenkamp's 'objectification of qualities', then the life of the child, which consists of good and bad moments, is objectified as a black and white cord tied around the child's feet. That cord is cut to make the child's feet free and open for his steps. Symbolically, it also means that a child's life will be wide and open (meaning without a hobble). Platenkamp's concepts of the 'objectification of

social qualities’ and ‘transfer of social attributes’ are visible in other child-related life-cycle rituals mentioned above. In the context of Kochkor, it will be correct to name it as ‘the transfer of qualities’ because people try to transfer desired qualities to children not only through objects but also through actions and utterances, which make up a big part of *yrym* in Kyrgyz culture.

As in the case of *tushoo kesüü*, in all other rituals associated with children, the concept of ‘transfer of qualities’ is not only clearly noticed but it is openly expressed on purpose. By the word ‘transfer’, I cover all Kyrgyz words that are used within the context of *yrym*. These include the local terms that my interlocutors used when they tried to explain how with *yrym* qualities are transmitted to a child or a person. These are: *ooshuu* (movement of qualities from a person A to a person B); *berilüü* (the process when the qualities are given); *ötüü* (passing on of qualities); and *juguu*⁹² (transmission of qualities). If one analyses the elements in these rituals, the most commonly asked questions would be: ‘Why is the ritual conducted in this way and not in another?’ or ‘Why is this particular item used in the ritual?’ The answers are usually around the notion of ‘transfer of qualities’, which are sometimes openly announced, but sometimes it is intended but not openly expressed. This is clearly seen in the explanation of one of my interlocutors:

‘In *yrym*, one wishes to inherit good qualities of others (*shybagasy juksun deshken*). For example, one buys an animal (*mal*), let’s say a cow, from a rich person or one buys a cow or sheep from a person who owns much livestock. This is done on purpose. This is because a person who buys the animal wishes to get rich or have much livestock similar to the person who sold the animal.⁹³ One buys a young tree from a person who has a good garden, in the hope to also have a good garden like that person has [meaning for good luck]. This

is *yrym* (*yrymyn kylyp*). One gets blessings (*bata*) from good people, so that s/he [that is, the receiver of the blessings] also becomes like those good people. Imagine that there is a kind and clever lady. In order to wish the same qualities to our child, we tell our child to take a small piece of that person’s food or a sip from her drink. We ask good people to give a name to our child and we give the names of good people to our children, so that our children also become good.’

As it is seen in this example, *yrym* can be practiced on different occasions and in different forms with the intention to acquire some desired qualities (also as a good omen) which may or may not be openly expressed (as the above quote shows). This reminds us of ‘the Law of Contact’ or ‘contagious magic’ (Frazer 1966). In the context of Kochkor, *yrym* as ‘contagious magic’ usually pursues a positive constructivist goal which is achieved with the presence of good intentions of the person who performs it. For instance, buying a sheep from a rich person who owns a large number of livestock is normally a plain action without any effect. However, the same action will be considered as *yrym* if a person takes this action with a certain intention behind it, such as an intention to inherit some qualities. At the same time, buying a sheep from a poor person is usually not avoided because the process of selling and buying as a simple action would not make a person who buys the sheep from a poor person also poor. For the sake of this chapter, I will further concentrate on those *yrym* which are aimed at constructing a child by adding desired qualities through life-cycle rituals. This is similar to Arthur Hocart’s ‘creative syllogism’⁹⁴ which points to the rationality and logic of rituals and ritual beliefs (discussed in Schnepel 1988). Developing this idea further in the context of *yrym* in Kochkor, I will focus on those aspects of the life-cycle rituals when people transfer desired qualities from ‘good sources’ to children with the aim to instil these qualities in them.

92 ‘*Juguu*’ is mainly used to describe the spread of contagious diseases or when one accidentally gets ‘dirty’ for example with paint.

93 In the northern part of Kyrgyzstan, and especially in Naryn, people have a lot of *mal* (livestock: horses, cows, sheep) and the number of *mal* they have indicates how rich a person or family is.

94 By following the principle of syllogism where A=X and B=X, then A=B, Hocart argues that through rituals, one thing can be turned into another or that rituals produce resemblances for a ‘practical purpose’ (see Schnepel 1988, 172 for more details).

5.4.1. *At Koyuu – Naming a Child*

People in Kochkor pay great attention to names.⁹⁵ Each name has a deep and positive meaning. It is believed that the name of a person affects his or her fate. That is why they choose names carefully and with purpose. When they give names, they say ‘let the child be like the moon, like a ray (of sunlight or moonlight), like a flower, like a king or be rich ...’ and they give a name which contains these words. It is common to have words such as *gül* (‘flower’), *nur* (‘ray’), *ay* (‘moon’), *bek* (meaning strength and king) or *bay* (‘rich’) as part of a name. Examples would be: Baktygül (which means a happy flower or a flower of happiness), Nurgül or GÜlnur (which means to bloom and shine like a ray), Aysuluu (‘to be beautiful like the moon’), Ayday (‘be like the moon’, also meaning beauty), Nurbek (shine and be strong, healthy), Baybol (‘be rich’). The purpose of giving such names with positive meanings is to wish qualities such as beauty, radiance, strength, health and prosperity. Children are also named after famous and important people so that the children would also inherit qualities such as success from those people.

Lancy (2008) briefly mentions Turkmenistan under the topic of parents’ gender preferences for their children and notes how a girl can be given names such as Songky kyz (translated as ‘the last daughter’) in the hope that a future child will be a boy. The same practice is observed in Kyrgyzstan, in families where a number of girls are born in a row and the family does not have a boy yet. As it is important to have a male child in patrilineal societies, such families give to their newly born daughters names such as Uulbolsun (‘may it be a boy’), Burul (‘turn’) or Jangyl (‘get mistaken’), in the hope that the next child would be a boy. The practice of giving such names itself shows how people believe in the power of names to shape the fate of the owner.

5.4.2. *Beshikke Saluu – A Cradle Ritual*

‘A *beshik* is a child’s world’ is what one of my interlocutors stated about the Kyrgyz traditional cradle. Traditionally, there were three types of cradles: hanging, rocking and one that could be tied around a mother’s belly, as mentioned by my interlocutor. During the Soviet time, there was an attempt to stop the practice of using a *beshik* as medical doctors claimed that it can lead to brain injury in babies (Murzakmetov 2011; also my interlocutors).⁹⁶ Elderly people often do not believe in that view. They take themselves as an example and say that they were put in a *beshik* and had grown up as normal children without ‘their brains being shaken’ (meaning they did not receive any brain injuries). It was noted that in cities, people prefer a cot to a *beshik*, while in villages people use a *beshik*.

Many people use *beshik* in Kochkor for their practicality, with many mothers confirming that a *beshik* keeps a child clean, warm and quiet. In fact, when it comes to cleanliness, people praise the *beshik* and talk negatively about disposable diapers like ‘Pampers’.⁹⁷ Mostly elderly people stated: ‘*Azyr Pampers degen balyaa chykyt*’ (‘Now there has appeared distress and misfortune called ‘Pampers’). The negative side of disposable diapers is related to the traditional practice of Kyrgyz mothers to toilet train their children from a very young age, from babyhood. According to them, when a child wears disposable diapers, both the child and mother can forget about it for a long time, and thus a child will not get used to giving a sign of the urge to urinate and will not allow the mother to toilet train them. Despite that, disposable diapers are popularly used by young mothers in Kochkor, whom the elderly would call ‘lazy mothers’ who do not want to do much laundry. At the same time, they call young mothers ‘lucky mothers’ as they do not have to do so much laundry with disposable diapers.

⁹⁶ ‘*Balanyn meesi chaypalyp kalat*’ (‘a child’s brain will get shaken’) is how some of my interlocutors talked about the shaken baby syndrome.

⁹⁷ People in Kochkor call all brands of disposable diapers ‘Pampers’. It could be due to the popularity of this brand of disposable diapers in Kyrgyzstan, which is often advertised on television.

⁹⁵ For more details see Hvoslef 2001 who studied the social use of personal names among the Kyrgyz.

The decision of raising a child in a traditional *beshik* varies among parents. Even if parents do not want to use a *beshik* in their everyday life, some of them still decide to conduct the ritual of putting a child into a *beshik*. First, it is because they accept this ritual as a ‘child’s *yrym*’ (*balanyn yrymy*), a Kyrgyz customary practice that they also have to follow. I even know a Kyrgyz family in Germany who got a traditional Kyrgyz *beshik* brought to them by their parents when their first child was born. Second, people conduct the ritual *beshikke saluu* with the aim to transmit good qualities to their children and contribute to their healthy growth. *Beshikke saluu* is literally translated as ‘putting a child into a *beshik*’. This ritual is conducted before a child is put into the cradle for the first time.

This is how the ritual is performed. Three, five or seven respected old women of the village are invited to conduct the ritual.⁹⁸ They must be respected women who gave birth and raised many children successfully so that the child’s future will be as successful as that of these women’s children. When these women prepare the cradle, the first thing they do is to purify the cradle with the smoke from the leaves of the juniper tree. Then they put certain objects into the cradle that imply certain qualities, such as an axe, so that a child becomes strong, a hoe so that a child becomes hard-working (Murzakmetov 2011), bread so that a child’s life be in abundance and sweets so that a child’s life be ‘sweet’.⁹⁹ One old woman mentioned that previously, Kyrgyz people covered the cradle with a sack so that the child sleeps well. Others mentioned that shirts of people in the village who liked to sleep were used for covering the cradle so that a child would get into the habit of sleeping for long periods. These are examples of a symbolic act, the aim of which is to transfer desired qualities to a child.

⁹⁸ I was told that the number of women should be odd. However, there are also cases when a ritual is conducted by two women. I would like to thank Svetlana Torno for sharing her experience on observations of similar child-related rituals in Kyrgyzstan.

⁹⁹ ‘So that a child’s life will be sweet’, this is how an old lady explained the practice, which I interpret as a wish for a good life.

5.4.3. *Tushoo Kesüü* – Opening a Child’s Way

The Kyrgyz word *tushoo* is translated as ‘hobble’ both as a noun and a verb, usually in the context of hobbling a horse (tying their legs together so they can’t move far) or a hobble (the rope used for hobbling the horse). Literally, *tushoo kesüü* would be translated as ‘cutting free someone hobbled’. Cutting the hobble of a child as a ritual is believed to directly affect the development of a child, both physically and symbolically. Remember Nurgül Eje who conducted this ritual for her grandson. When I asked my interlocutors why people perform this ritual, I got answers such as: ‘A child’s steps will not be tied and it will be smooth’; ‘A child’s path will be open and the child starts to walk quickly’; ‘A child’s future will be broad’; ‘A child’s path will be smooth and the child will not stumble, it will have a good life and have a good future’; ‘So that there are no hindrances in the child’s life’ and ‘Of course we did, otherwise a child would stumble!’

Further analysis of this ritual indicates many acts of the transfer of desired qualities to the child. For example, if we come back to Nurgül Eje’s case again, then Talant’s skill of running fast and coming first as a sign of success is wished to be transmitted to Nurgül Eje’s grandson. Therefore, it was Talant who was allowed to cut the thread tied around the child’s legs. Similar to the example of the ritual of putting a child into a cradle, the distribution of *boorsok*, sweets and biscuits in this ritual also represents abundance. Moreover, the ritual itself is accompanied by blessings (*bata*), which have a great power to bestow some desired qualities, which will be discussed in more detail later.

5.4.4. Marriage – The Last Ritual¹⁰⁰

On the one hand, marriage contains many rituals, each having a deep meaning and good intentions and wishes for the newlyweds. On the other hand, I would say that marriage as a wedding event itself has become ritualised. For example, young Kyrgyz people dream of having a wedding ceremony

¹⁰⁰ As noted earlier, marriage is considered to be the last ritual conducted for a child since marrying off a child is parents’ last responsibility to fulfil towards their children.

in the European style in which the bride wears a white dress and the groom a dark suit which is followed by a lavish feast in a restaurant in the presence of a *tamada* (toastmaster). I will not dwell on that part of the wedding (see Provis 2015 on Kyrgyz weddings). Rather, I will look at the set of rituals conducted during the marriage with the purpose of symbolically transmitting certain qualities to the newlyweds, especially to the bride.

As per one interlocutor, in some regions of Kyrgyzstan, when a bride is brought to the family of her future in-laws, women sprinkle flour in front of the bride so that her life will be white (meaning good) and pure (without hindrances and badness). They also throw *chachala*,¹⁰¹ a mix of sweets and *boorsok*, so that the couple's life will be sweet and they will live in abundance. When a bride comes into the house of the groom, the first person who puts a scarf onto her head should be a respected elderly woman who has many children. This woman uses a white scarf, not of any other colour, so that the life of the bride be as white (good) as the white scarf. The woman who is putting a scarf on a bride's head should not be divorced, a widow, a woman who married more than once or a barren woman, so that the bride will not face a similar fate.

All of the above-mentioned *yrym* with their cultural elements have become a part of Kyrgyz life-cycle rituals. According to the material collected among Kyrgyz people in the Naryn region in the 1930s, one can state that the practiced rituals are multifunctional and ensure protection, initiation and fertility (see Karmysheva/Gubaeva 2006; also Abramzon 1949; Fjelstrup 2002 for detailed accounts of Kyrgyz life-cycle rituals). The *yrym* that I observed in Kochkor were directed more towards protection and fertility in its broader sense, which include health (*den-sooluk*), goodness (*jakshylyk*), abundance (*molchuluk*) and wealth (*baylyk*), but did not contain any initiation character (see La Fontaine 1985 for studies on initiation).

As mentioned earlier, *yrym* as a medium of transmitting desired qualities is not only limited to life-cycle rituals. They are also used in everyday

life such as ordinary eating habits. For example, some parts of sheep meat are forbidden to be eaten by children, while other parts are encouraged to be eaten. Girls are not given the tip of a sheep's tongue so that they do not become quarrelsome. Instead, they are given the roof of the mouth of the sheep so that they will become skilled embroiderers. Sometimes food, irrespective of its type, can also transfer desired qualities. Here the food serves as a medium to transfer qualities, similar to Platenkamp's (2010) case with water. For example, the philosophy of the local concept called *keshik*, which will be discussed below, holds this idea.

5.4.5. *Keshik* – Shaping a Child through Food

The concept of '*keshik*' will be explained in this section to illustrate another way of 'constructing' a child and transmitting qualities, the process of which is also called *yrym*. As mentioned earlier, if a person sees some good qualities in another person and wishes the same qualities for his or her child, he or she will ask the child to take a small piece of that person's food or to sip from that person's drink so that the child inherits the good qualities of that person (see Abramzon 1949 for a similar account of Kyrgyz people of the 1930s). That small piece of food and drink taken by a child is called *keshik* and the process of doing it will be *yrym*. My host-mother brought home food after some special occasions, usually big feasts (*toy*), which is also *keshik*. As my field research fell into the autumn period, which is the season of many celebrations in Kochkor and Kyrgyzstan in general, I had a chance to try many *keshik*.

Usually, parents bring *keshik* to their children. As a rule, parents bring confectionery after attending social gatherings such as feasts and funerals. If the event was special, parents make sure that they bring something for their children to taste. For example, if it is a birthday party of an old person, parents bring some confectionery from the party to their children in the hope that their children also reach that person's age. If it is a wedding anniversary of an elderly couple, the *yrym* of bringing *keshik* (usually meat, bread, *boorsok*, biscuits and sweets) from that wedding implies that parents wish that their children may also have a long and

¹⁰¹ *Chachala* consists of sweets, small fried pieces of bread (*boorsok*) and biscuits which are used in rituals to 'invite' abundance, goodness and a 'sweet' life.

happy marriage. If it is a party organised by successful and rich people, then children should try *keshik* from that feast so that their life may also be successful and wealthy. Mothers also bring *keshik* after the funeral of those who have died in their 80s or 90s, hoping that by tasting food from these people’s funerals, their children will also live long. By bringing their children things that have connections to good or desired qualities, parents mention where the *keshik* is coming from and openly wish for their children to have those qualities by saying: ‘May you also give such big feasts!’ (*Siler da ushunday chong toy bergile!*) or ‘May you also reach that [old] age!’ (*Siler da ushunday jashka jetkile!*).¹⁰²

A similar notion of ‘dividual’ (Marriott 1976), which describes a permeable person constituted of substance-codes received from others, can be applied in the case of *yrym*. Through *yrym*, a child gains some desired qualities. The transfer of these qualities, as it has been shown, may be through food (*keshik*), objects (such as axes, hoes, sweets, bread used in the cradle ritual) or through people themselves who are invited to conduct these rituals. It is believed that these *yrym* have a result, be it immediate or something that happens later in the child’s adult life.¹⁰³ Usually, *yrym* consists of elements that are followed by utterings of wishes to a child. Each word and each item used in the ritual, as well as the ritual itself, is a process that shapes the child. The wishes that people utter are also called *bata*, blessing, which actually constitutes one of the roots of *yrym* and are accepted as part of Kyrgyz culture (*salt*). The following section will extensively discuss the local concept of *bata*, which is believed to have a strong power in constructing a child into a proper person.

¹⁰² Ismailbekova (2011, 287) also briefly mentions *keshik* as *yrym* (she uses the word *geshik* but this is just a different transliteration for *keshik*) given to children which she interprets as ‘a sign of success’. She also mentions how *keshik* is given to the people who could not come to the feasts and underlines the important role of *keshik* to unite people, including those who could not attend the event.

¹⁰³ By focusing on *yrym* as a cultural notion and phenomenon, I have described only those contributions from parents that are related to *yrym* specifically and I have not mentioned other forms of parental contribution to children such as formal education, the maintenance of physical health (chapter 6), moral education (chapter 7) or parents’ contribution in satisfying children’s personal needs and desires.

5.5. *Bata* – A Local Concept of Blessing

Once, during my fieldwork, I went to Bishkek to spend some time with my daughter who was being taken care of by my relatives. We had a small get-together of relatives and after having a nice meal at the *dastorkon* (‘table’), my grandfather, who was at that time at the age of 92, gave his *bata* (‘blessing’). My grandfather is not with us anymore for several years now, but I will remember his blessings given to us and his voice, which was recorded in my Dictaphone that evening:

‘Live long! Be happy! Be far from different kinds of trouble! Be conscientious! Never experience any badness, and always experience goodness! Be scientists! Be knowledgeable! Be well-mannered! Be disciplined! May there always be goodness in your houses! May the hearth in your houses always burn! May goodness never leave your heads and may badness never catch up with you! May you all reach your goals, may your ways be smooth and you get accompanied by *Kydyr*!¹⁰⁴ Wherever you go, may your white way be always wide, may it be bright! May your golden heads be safe! May you reach your goals and be safe together with your relatives!’

(*‘Ömürlüü bol! Baktyлуу bol! Türdüü kyrsyktan tyshkary bolgula! Yimanduu bolgula! Ech jamandyk körbögülö jana ar daiym jakshylyktyñ üstündö bolup jürgülö! Okumushtuu bolgula! Ilimdüyü-bilimdüyü bolgula! Adeptüyü bolgula! Tartiptüyü bolgula! Ar daiym üiüngördö jakshylyk bolup, tütünü bulap tursun, ochogu janyp tursun, ordosu bulap tursun! Ar biringdin bashyngan jakshylyk ketpesin, jamandyk kuup jetpesin! Ar biring maksatyna jetip, jolungar shydyr bolup, joldoshungar Kydyr bolsun! Kaida barbagyla, ak jolungar achyk bolup, jarkyragan jol bolsun! Altyn bashyngar aman bolup, oilogon maksatyngarga jetip, aga-tuugandaryngar menen aman bolgula!’*)

When my grandfather was giving this *bata*, all the people sitting around the *dastorkon* opened their

¹⁰⁴ People say *‘Jolung shydyr, joldoshung Kydyr bolsun’* (‘May your way be smooth and you get accompanied by *Kydyr*’). *Kydyr* is a patron that grants successful journeys.

palms and attentively listened to his blessing. After he finished, the people ‘washed their faces with his blessings’ by moving their open palms from their forehead to their chins. This is how *bata* is accepted. My dear grandfather’s *bata* is one of the examples of blessings that every child in a Kyrgyz community will grow up with.

Bata has a very important meaning for the development of a person. There is a Kyrgyz proverb saying: ‘*Bata menen el kögöröt, jamgyr menen jer kögöröt*’ (‘People ‘get green’ [develop] with blessings, the earth gets green with rain’). People seek out blessings as much as they can because they strongly believe in the power of blessings. *Bata*, as the example of my grandfather above shows, is not a compilation of sentences but should be understood as the ‘performing of an action’ or ‘a performative utterance’ (Austin 1962, 6). These performative utterances have the power to affect the people who listen to these blessings.

Giving *bata* is a culturally ingrained practice. Especially elderly men – *aksakal* (literally ‘white beard’ which stands for wisdom) – are expected to know how to give *bata*. If there are both an old man and an old woman at the table, it is usually the man who gives *bata*. Learning to give *bata* is also a kind of **socialisation** and knowing how to give blessings is a highly prized skill. On the contrary, in case an *aksakal* does not know how to give *bata*, it is considered a big disgrace. Sultan Bayke, my interlocutor, remembered the following case, which underlined the skills of giving *bata* as an important part of cultural knowledge and practice of Kyrgyz people:

‘Last time, when we asked a man who was in his late 50s to give *bata*, he did not know how to properly do it! We asked him because he was the eldest among all of us. He could not utter *bata* properly. When the group started to dissipate, I approached him and told him: ‘Eee, Bayke, you are now a senior and if you do not know how to give *bata* it is shameful. You are Kyrgyz and as a Kyrgyz, you should learn to give *bata*!’ [laughs].’

I read Sultan Bayke’s laughter as a sign of mocking that person who did not know how to properly give blessings. This case serves as an example of ‘ageless socialisation’ (chapter 2) when,

irrespective of age, a Kyrgyz person is socialised in order to play a certain role in a society in a certain expected way (more will be discussed in chapter 7). Otherwise, as Sultan Bayke emphasised, the person will be shamed.

Although *bata* is translated almost in all sources as blessing, it should be underlined that it is a special form of blessing. Blessing can be received from God, for example, among the Bartang people of the Pamir mountains, the divine blessing coming from God is called *barakat* (see Kicherer 2017, 193–196). Practicing Muslim interlocutors in Kochkor called the blessing from God ‘*yrysky*’. Other scholars, who mention *bata* in their works, also note that *bata* is received by ancestor spirits and saints (see Dubuisson/Genina 2011; Kushkimbayeva et al. 2014; Sarsambekova et al. 2015; Schwab 2012). In my field, I did not come across such notions. My interlocutors mentioned *bata* as an act of receiving blessings from living people, especially from the elderly male members of the society called *aksakal*.¹⁰⁵

In Kyrgyz language, the word *bata* has different meanings in combination with different verbs. For example, at the table, an *aksakal* gives *bata* (*bata beret*) and other people, who attentively listen to the speech, receive *bata* (*bata alat*). There is also another word combination with *bata*, which is ‘*bata kyluu*’ (doing *bata*), and it has two meanings. The first meaning of *bata kyluu* is to read the Quran for a deceased person, usually during or after their funeral.¹⁰⁶ The second meaning is a gesture of symbolically ‘washing (down) one’s face’ with their hands before or after every meal as a sign of gratitude. The second one has become a habit that people sometimes do it automatically without going deeply into its underlying meaning.

As an inevitable part of Central Asian culture, giving *bata* as a phenomenon is mentioned in many scholarly works. There, *bata* is noted as a part of tradition, a ‘national cultural value’ or a ‘wise custom’ (Kushkimbayeva et al. 2014, 95) and is valued for granting happiness and prosperity.

¹⁰⁵ Usually, it is the eldest and the most respected among the present, be it a female or male, who gives *bata*.

¹⁰⁶ In the Kyrgyz-Russian dictionary, along with other meanings, *bata* is explained as the first *surah* of the Quran (Yudakhin 1965, 116).

The important role of this tradition, in my view, has not been well studied. Only in the work of Hardenberg (2016), the local concept of *bata* is elaborated ethnographically. He makes a special emphasis on the power of *bata* and the opposite of it, *kargysh* (curse), which determine the fate of the whole family line in either becoming ‘fertile’ or ‘stopping to prosper’.

Since *bata* plays one of the most important roles in the ‘transfer of qualities’, it is impossible to leave out *bata* from the lives of children as well as the life-cycle rituals conducted for them. As noted earlier, the rituals are not solely voiceless actions but are symbolic performances combined with utterances of *bata*. In addition to its qualities of granting health, success and well-being to a child, *bata* also has an educative character (Tulebaeva 2015; see also Abisheva 2012).¹⁰⁷ While giving *bata* to children, the community and the elderly people openly stress those desired qualities which they wish to see in children. This is clearly noticeable in the example of my grandfather’s *bata* above, which is expressed in an instructive tone, such as ‘be well-mannered’, ‘be disciplined’ or ‘be knowledgeable’. Pointing at the influential power of blessings on a person, one interlocutor mentioned:

‘*Bata* is a psychologically influencing power and energy. If all people sitting in a group give *bata* together, and if all of them give it from the bottom of their hearts, then the person who is listening will be in such an aura that the thoughts and intentions mentioned in the blessings will be absorbed by the listener and she or he will psychologically prepare herself/himself for that. The person unconsciously, intuitively and psychologically will be ready to achieve the points mentioned in the blessings. If the person believes in it, then the energy can direct that person’s will to do that. That is why people respect *bata* and that is why they are also afraid of *bata*.’

Sultan Bayke provided an interesting comparison between the act of *bata* and the act of promotion:

‘*Bata* has a wonderful meaning. The earth gets green with rain, and people get green with *bata*. [Turning to me] You can write this down. *Bata* affects without fail. It is very influential. A child hears what he is asked to be and if he is clever enough (‘*meesi ishtese*’, directly translated as ‘if his brain works’), a child strives for it. As per the wishes of the elderly, the child will be *tarbiyaluu* (with good upbringing) and *tartiptüü* (be disciplined). The same is the case for *agitatsiya* (promotion). When a person is given information constantly, it is ‘absorbed by her/his brain’ (*meesine singip kalat*) and the person will adapt to that path and follow that direction. It is the same with *bata*.’

Both of these interlocutors’ perceptions of *bata* imply that blessings have an educating character as well as the power and energy to ‘programme’ a person. Furthermore, I would interpret that *bata* affect not only the person towards whom the *bata* are directed, but also others sitting around (usually at the table) learn about the values of the community and what the community expects from its members, be it a child or an adult. In short, *bata* provides a kind of moral lesson for all. If *yrym* is a medium that ‘transfers desired qualities’, then *bata*, which can be also classified as *yrym*, serves as an instrument to promote those socially and culturally desired qualities.

It is important to note that blessings are given not only on special occasions, but are used in everyday life, especially when young people do something good for the elderly such as pouring water onto their hands, giving seats to them on public transportation or helping them to carry their bags. Pouring water onto guests’ hands prior to a meal and receiving their *bata* is especially a culturally important practice. One interlocutor noted that although nowadays every house has a sink, she still sends her son to pour water onto their guests’ hands so that her son receives *bata* from them, which, she believes, would positively affect his future.

Through *bata*, people wish to impart strong health, long life, happiness, fertility and *yiman* (moral values) to their children in order to shape their character, behaviour, their health and bestow success on them. On the one hand, similar to *yrym*, *bata* is valued for bringing prosperity to the

¹⁰⁷ Abisheva (2012) states that *bata* ‘contains provisions that regulate human behaviour in society’ (translation by the author).



Fig. 8. Invitation card for a *sünnöt toy* (circumcision feast) (photo by author).

person or family whom *bata* is directed towards; and people usually seek any suitable moment to get a *bata* from elderly people. On the other hand, similar to *yrym*, *bata berüü* (giving *bata*) stays as a commonly exercised practice that constitutes Kyrgyz *salt*.

5.6. Changing Tendencies in *Yrym*

Once, when I went to a photo studio to print out some photos for my interlocutors, my attention was drawn to sample invitation cards with photos of small children on them. These were sample invitation cards for feasts organised for children. The photographer told me that previously, he prepared such invitation cards for weddings or other big anniversaries. Now many parents order such kinds of invitation cards for their small children's life-cycle celebrations as well (fig. 8). Organising

these festivities on a high level has become a kind of fashion, I was told. I heard many times my interlocutors noting that people copy each other and try to make their feast more splendid than others. Another shared opinion was that giving feasts for children is a Kyrgyz tradition but the exceeding lavishness of these festivities is something new.

To the question: 'Why have people started to organise big feasts for their children as part of life-cycle rituals?' one interlocutor mentioned: '*Baylyk köp jerde kaada köp*' ('the more wealth, the more celebrations take place'). People in Kochkor admitted that life in Kyrgyzstan has improved in comparison to the *perestroyka* time and that due to economic improvements in the country, many people started to organise feasts very often. The number of labour migrants leaving for Russia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Europe or neighbouring Kazakhstan has increased lately. Many youths specifically go abroad to earn money

for their wedding or other life-cycle celebrations, or to buy cars and houses.¹⁰⁸

Aydar, a resident of Kochkor, shared another perspective behind the increasing number of celebrations in local cafés and restaurants. The family of Aydar recently organised a big feast in the local café to celebrate the *tushoo kesüü* of his child. He invited his relatives and friends and the number of guests reached up to 200 people. Aydar’s wife explained this by saying that their house was small and the number of guests was large. If they received their guests at their house, they would have spent several days preparing *boorsok*, salads and food. However, in a café, everybody can be invited in one day and everything is organised at once. She claimed that now it was cheaper and easier to organise such celebrations in cafés and restaurants rather than having to slaughter several sheep and prepare food and salads for guests at home over several days.

Nurgül Eje (mentioned at the beginning of this chapter), on the contrary, performed the *tushoo kesüü* ritual for her grandchild in the street, without having any feast. Their initial plan was to organise the ritual of *tushoo kesüü* together with a feast. This required a lot of money which they could not manage to collect. In their case, they did not want to wait with the *tushoo kesüü* ritual anymore, as they wished to accelerate her grandchild’s development. Their concern was that the child did not walk and they hoped that maybe after the *tushoo kesüü* ritual is performed, the boy would start walking.

In contrast to Aydar’s child and Nurgül Eje’s grandson, Meerim’s daughter had to wait for her *tushoo kesüü* ritual for an indefinite period of time. When I visited Meerim, a young mother, her daughter was already one and a half years old and she was already walking. Meerim and her husband decided to postpone the *tushoo kesüü* ritual for their daughter until they had collected enough money for a feast (*toyчук*) to which they planned to invite their neighbourhood and kin-members. I came across many similar cases where parents could not conduct a certain life-cycle ritual for

their children or postponed it due to financial situation (*shart jok boldu*). With the presence of social pressure to organise feasts as part of the life-cycle ritual and the lack of an opportunity to organise them, some parents fail to conduct life-cycle rituals for their children at all.

Another notable change in child-related life-cycle rituals is related to the current Re-Islamisation process in the country. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned that with independence, life-cycle rituals started to be glorified as part of Kyrgyz *salt*, the Kyrgyz tradition. At the same time, along with the revival of old Kyrgyz traditional practices, Islam began to revive in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, which contributed to a different view on certain traditional practices of Kyrgyz people. In Kochkor, several practicing Muslim interlocutors mentioned that they stopped performing some *yrym* as they do not correspond to Islamic values. For example, they do not perform the *tushoo kesüü* ritual for their children, since in their understanding, only God can reward a child with a good life. As one of my interlocutors put it, ‘those two small pieces of black and white plaited cord do not decide the fate of the child’. They characterise such *yrym* as *shirk* (‘sin of idolatry’) or *bidayat* (‘innovation, not mentioned in Islamic scriptures’, see also Tulebaeva 2017). Moreover, Islam is against the manifestation of ‘extravagance’, expressed in the organisation of lavish feasts. This tendency is intensifying with the strengthening of the role of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan.

5.7. Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the local concept of *yrym* as a shared cultural norm, a ritualised act and even a driving force that is seen as part of Kyrgyz *salt*. I have demonstrated how *yrym* underlies the notion of healthy growth of children and practices conducted to achieve it. Examples would be: Kanykey’s refusal to name Sezimay who was born as a premature baby, Nurgül Eje’s effort to conduct the *tushoo kesüü* ritual for her grandchild who had delays in physical development or mothers who bring *keshik* to their children in the hope to transfer some good qualities. All these examples of *yrym* are directed towards ensuring health, proper

¹⁰⁸ See Reeves 2012 for more details on the increasing amounts spent on feasts in Kyrgyzstan.

development, certain desired qualities in children and their well-being and future success.

I have placed special emphasis on the life-cycle rituals that I myself observed in Kochkor as well as the ones about which local people talked frequently. Through these ritualised performances, which are observed in the rituals of naming a child, the 40 days after a child's birth, putting a child into a *beshik*, *tushoo kesüü* or marriage, local people transfer desired qualities to children. Similar to Lao people studied by Platenkamp (1998; 2010), people in Kochkor also practice the 'objectification of qualities' and use objects through which the community can transfer certain qualities to children and participate in the construction of their personhood, that is the 'making of the person'.

The term 'making of the person', in this case, should not be understood in the sense that a child is made out of an image into a full social person, as it was in the example by Iteanu (1990), or from non-human into human, or from a biologically and socially unfinished body into a finished body debated by foundationalists and anti-foundationalists (see Prout 2000). Neither does it highlight a shift from a child to an adult. *Yrym*, in the case of Kochkor, is directed at the acquisition of certain desired qualities and it is a never-ending life-long process. This may be the answer to the question of why people in Kochkor do not make a clear-cut distinction between a child and an adult.¹⁰⁹

In the last section, I introduced several changing tendencies in *yrym* that I observed in Kochkor due to the increasing value of the 'toi economy' (Botoeva/Spector 2013), the processes of Re-Islamisation and re-traditionalisation in Kyrgyzstan. I did not scrupulously trace these changing tendencies

as that was not my aim and neither would it be possible to fully cover it in my research. Still, I decided to mention these changes with the aim to show that the *yrym* that I have discussed in this chapter is not something that is fixed, despite its strong attachment to Kyrgyz tradition. It supports my argument that the idea of what is 'healthy' is diverse and changes according to 'zaman-koom-value' perceptions, which I discussed in chapter 2.

I want to close this chapter with a confident statement of my interlocutor Yrysbek Bayke (in his late 50s) on the importance of *yrym* for the people in Kochkor. Referring to the common practice of *yrym* as part of Kyrgyz tradition, Yrysbek Bayke said to me: '*Yrym* took place in our life before and will continue to take place. It is absorbed into our blood. You will practice *yrym*, and your child will also do it [referring to me and highlighting it, even if I permanently live in Germany]!' He assured me that *yrym* is a part of Kyrgyz childhood with continuing implications. By taking into account 'the growing of Islamic identity' (Banuazizi/Weiner 1994, 7) in Kyrgyzstan and in Central Asia in general, I started to challenge Yrysbek Bayke's confident statement. Even if the notion of *yrym* had been strengthened with the re-traditionalisation process in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, his prediction is not considered possible to generalise due to the strengthening of Islam in Kochkor. I will not touch on this last changing tendency here, but I will consider this phenomenon more in the following chapter, where, on the example of health-related rituals, I will discuss the changes brought by Islam on the local perceptions of health and treatment practices.

¹⁰⁹ I thank Roland Hardenberg who contributed to the further development of this idea.

6. Everydayness of Being Healthy

‘The first wealth is health’
 (‘*Birinchi baylyk – den-sooluk*’)
 Kyrgyz saying

6.1. Introduction¹¹⁰

After receiving permission from the head physician of Kochkor hospital to observe hospital life and conduct a clinical observation, I left his office with his assistant who showed me the way to the clinic. We crossed the big yard of the hospital from one corner to the other. We entered a small two-story building where a sign read: ‘No.1 Kelechek Family Medical Practitioners Group’.¹¹¹ The narrow and dark corridor inside was full of patients, some occupying a few benches, but most of them just standing. After passing several doors, we reached the one where the queue was the longest. We entered the room. The room was bright and the first thing that caught my attention were several posters about a breastfeeding campaign¹¹² and child growth charts promoted mainly by the World Health Organization and UNICEF. Although the room was meant for patients of all ages, the presence of only child-related posters indicated that the promotion of the development and improvement of children’s health was the target no. 1 of international organisations locally. The doctor was sitting near the window and giving a patient consultation. However, to my surprise, this was not an intimate atmosphere, where normally a doctor sees one patient only. The benches on two sides of the room were also filled with about five or six patients, young and old, who, while waiting for their turn to be seen, were also witnessing how other patients shared details of their health concerns with the doctor.

‘This girl is conducting research on child health, and X [mentioning the name of the head physician] asked me to take her to you’, said the assistant to the doctor and then promptly left. It seemed that those words of the assistant were enough for the physician; she nodded. With a short introduction about myself and my research, which the doctor did not even properly listen to, I took a seat on one of the benches, which were full of patients a few minutes ago, but were now deserted. Maybe the doctor thought that I was one of the ‘officials’ who usually come from the capital Bishkek for inspections. Anyway, with my presence as an outsider, the clinic environment immediately transformed into its ‘ideal’ state. The patients sitting inside the room were scolded and chased out by the doctor who loudly stated that it was not right to wait inside the consultation room which had to be an intimate area for doctor-patient conversations and check-ups.

Janara Eje, specialised as a pediatrician, is now a general practitioner since the hospital was transformed into a ‘general practice’ healthcare system at the beginning of the 2000s. She now sees both children and adults. She was not happy with the transformation in the medical system of Kyrgyzstan, considering that each specialist should deal with the areas that they specialised in. Nevertheless, she obediently followed it as it was a nationwide health reform.

Although she dealt with patients of any age, during my clinical observation, I paid extra attention when she dealt with young patients. Every time when a small child was brought to her (usually by their mothers), Janara Eje distributed a yellow brochure containing information on children’s development from birth up to two years old. ‘Are you only breastfeeding? Do not give additional food until your child is six months old.’ ‘Why do you give sheep tail fat (*kuyruk*), this is what our mothers did in ancient times (*ilgeri*), now you should not do that!’ ‘Are you playing with your baby? Your baby can see already. Put something colourful in front of it. A baby can see it. See this chart!’ By asking these questions, Janara Eje

¹¹⁰ Some parts of this chapter were published in Tulebaeva 2017; Shabdan forthcoming.

¹¹¹ In Kyrgyz: ‘*No.1 Kelechek üy-bülölik darygerler tobu*’.

¹¹² The presence of such breastfeeding campaigns in the region tells us that Kochkor is receiving these posters as part of global healthcare campaigns.

was eagerly following the guidelines indicated in the brochure, which was produced with the help of international organisations and distributed by the state. This yellow piece of paper, designed based on the Growth Chart of the World Health Organization, showed at which age the kinds of developments are to be expected from a child and what parents should do to support their children's proper growth.

Later, when I interviewed this doctor, I learned that as a biomedical specialist, Janara Eje does not negate the use of alternative medicine. She mentioned that she also sends her young patients to healers.¹¹³ She explained that when she diagnoses no pathology, but the child keeps crying and showing anxiety, she advises the parents to take the child to a healer, locally known as *apalar*, which literally means 'elderly women'¹¹⁴:

'I believe there is *kirene* [culture-bound affliction similar to evil eye, which I will explain below]. A child can be exposed to *kirene* (*kirene kirip kalat*; literally '*kirene* can enter'). Then I advise my patients to try healers (*apalar*). Before, I never believed in healers, but after my own child's case [which was many years ago], I started to believe in them. ... Now I do not visit healers myself and do not take my children either. ... My husband performs daily prayers [meaning that he is a pious Muslim] and he says that they [*yrym*, rituals] are *bidayat*.¹¹⁵ So we do not follow them, we do not follow the ancient things of the Kyrgyz. Sometimes, I want to, but my husband is strongly against that. He says it is *bidayat*.'

Although Janara Eje believes in this culturally rooted 'ill health' called *kirene* and sends her patients to healers to treat it, she herself does not use their service. The only reason for her not turning

to healers is due to her faith as a Muslim which is heavily influenced by her husband.¹¹⁶ In other words, the avoidance of healers is due to her pious lifestyle which has grown in Kyrgyzstan lately. This Re-Islamisation process has brought changes in the perception of acceptable health practices and an understanding of what is healthy and what is not. More specifically, with strict adherence to Islam, now many pious Muslim interlocutors have started to sharply criticise some local healing practices and healers. Janara Eje's case brings together biomedicine, local traditional healing and Islamic ideas of what is healthy and what is not in an intertwined form. I will take this as a starting point to illustrate how the healthy growth of children in Kochkor is negotiated around these. I will argue that especially when it comes to the health of children (and not adults), there are many institutions involved, both local and international and at the macro-level (state) as well as micro-level (family), which actively influence the 'making' of the child's healthy body.

This chapter can be perceived as the continuation of the idea that I hold throughout this book where I illustrate how a child is constructed in all sorts of ways. Unlike the previous chapter about rituals, blessings and local practices which shape a child's well-being, character and fate, this chapter will concentrate on the topic of physical health and local health-related practices. In addition, it explores practices that are not 'cyclical' as demonstrated in the previous chapter on the example of life-cycle rituals, but have the notion of 'everydayness' or 'domesticity'. It looks at how the health of a child is understood and constructed in the everyday life of people in Kochkor, which is not exclusively related to disease or illness but can also take into account the notion of being a Muslim as it was in the case of Janara Eje.

I want to highlight that the everydayness of a child's health and well-being is particularly salient in the domestic sphere where the main

¹¹³ This is also practiced among medical doctors in other Central Asian countries (see Keshavjee 1998 for Tajikistan; Tursunova et al. 2014 for Uzbekistan).

¹¹⁴ A similar account can be found among the people in Russia, when practitioners of alternative medicine are referred as '*babki*' (knowledgeable old women) and non-traditional medicine is characterised as 'grandma's methods' (see Brown/Rusinova 2002; Iarskaia-Smirnova/Romanov 2009).

¹¹⁵ This is a Kyrgyz version of the Arabic word *bid'ah*, which means innovations which were not mentioned in Islamic scriptures.

¹¹⁶ Many men go to *daavat* (proselytism), while women usually stay at home and look after the children. I have observed among devout Muslims that it was first their husbands who started practicing Islam and then their wives followed later on. This is only my observation from Kochkor and I do not intend to claim it as a generalisation all over Kyrgyzstan.

gatekeepers of children's health are lay people, especially mothers. Therefore, in this chapter, I will be mainly dealing with female members of the household, whom I introduce as **mother-doctors** and **mother-healers**. Another message that will be conveyed in this chapter is how each treatment source occupies an important role in the lives of villagers, without people seeing biomedicine as the main source and traditional medicine as an alternative. I will argue that lay people smartly navigate between these sources, therefore blurring the boundary between 'conventional' and 'alternative' medicine.

I have structured this chapter in the following way: First, I will look at the interrelationship between culture and health by focusing on some works on medical anthropology which are relevant to the cases that I observed in Kochkor. Then, I will introduce the historical development of the health system in Kochkor by underlining two types of biomedicine used by locals. Finally, I consider the popular arena, defined by Kleinman (1978), which is underestimated and understudied in medical anthropology. By this, I want to highlight the importance of the popular sector in ensuring children's healthy growth.

6.2. Health and Cultural Practices

'The first wealth is health' (*Birinchi baylyk – den-sooluk*). This is a saying that Kyrgyz people extensively use in their talks. Health is usually the first thing that Kyrgyz people ask when they meet each other and want to know how they are doing. It is one of the first things that people wish each other when they make toasts. And it is the main thing that elders mention when they give blessings (*bata*) to both children and adults. Good health is what people wish to have. Understanding good health and achieving it is another issue. A United Nations Development Programme report (UNDP 2010) indicates that among the main priorities of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), the health-related MDGs are the most difficult ones to achieve for Kyrgyzstan. How can one explain this? Kyrgyzstan, as a member of many global organisations and groupings, actively implements health development programmes and works towards

achieving the MDG targets, along with other countries. The project on Gülazyk (formerly 'Sprinkles', see chapter 1) and the active control by Janara Eje over young mothers to check if they are following the instructions in the yellow brochure promoted by the WHO can serve as good attempts. Yet, that is only one aspect of health-related practices, which for some locals even do not seem to be of that much importance. The notion of being healthy is diverse and much broader in Kochkor, which is beyond physical and mental health. Local socio-economic conditions are also to be taken into account when analysing the health of the population.

Dixon and his colleagues come up with several complex factors that affect health outcomes, such as 'socioeconomic factors (income, education, occupation), area-based factors (quality of water, sanitation, shelter, transport, nutrition), sociopolitical factors (gender, race, ethnicity) and socio-cultural factors (values, rules, norms, behaviors)' (Dixon et al. 2013, 2). There are also publications that define 'social determinants' such as poverty, housing, maternal education and many others that affect the healthy growth and development of children (Denny/Brownell 2010; Lancy 2008). Among these factors, Bilton and his colleagues make a special emphasis on the cultural aspect of this by stating that 'poor health has more to do with cultural practices and norms than material disadvantages' (Bilton et al. 2002, 373). Indeed, the role of culture in understanding health and illnesses as well as the health-seeking behaviour of people is what constitutes the core of medical anthropological discourses (see Dixon et al. 2013; Harkness/Super 2002; Helman 1984; Pelto/Pelto 1997; Winkelman 2009).

While talking about the role of local knowledge and practices in understanding health and ensuring the healthy development of children, one should consider two perspectives. On the one hand, local cultural practices of a particular society are not 'exotic' anymore and they do not develop in isolation from the 'global' healthcare system. Good (2010) notes that it would be even 'artificial' to speak of local perspectives in isolation from the global system. A worldwide active international developmental programme on children and their healthy growth is a good example of it.

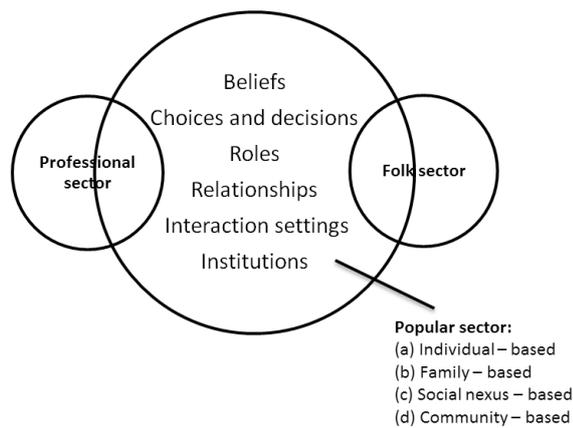


Fig. 9. Kleinman's diagram: popular, professional and folk sectors (Kleinman 1978, 86; re-designed by the author).

In comparison to adults' health, a significant global emphasis has been made on the standardisation of children's healthy development and the way it is assessed worldwide.

On the other hand, irrespective of the global standardisation programmes, it is important to look at local practices by paying special attention to cultural factors, as mentioned above. Health is not a purely biological condition and is not only about the absence of disease; it is also a positive state of physical, emotional, mental, personal and spiritual well-being (defined by the WHO; Winkelman 2009). Health is a cultural construct. Similarly, illness is also a cultural construct. By differentiating illness from disease, Kleinman states that disease is a 'natural process' but the experience of illness is a 'cultural or symbolic reality' (Kleinman 2010, 86; see also Sobo 2004). Thus, what is perceived as illness in one culture may not be considered illness in another. With social dynamics in Kochkor, such as the deterioration of the national healthcare system, the revival of local healing practices, the revival of Islam and Islamic medicine and the introduction of international health-related developmental programmes, people's ideas of what is healthy and what is not have become very complex and even contradictory. Therefore, it is worth looking at the health-related behaviour of people more closely in order to understand 'local rationalities', as Dixon et al. (2013, 2) put it.

Kleinman (1978) already attempted to look at local rationalities for understanding health and

health-related practices with his following categorisations (fig. 9; see also Baer 2004; Helman 1984; Sobo 2004). He divided the health system into professional (biomedicine), folk (traditional healers) and popular (lay people) arenas.

The diagram clearly illustrates the important role of the popular arena in healthcare practice. According to Kleinman, the popular arena 'comprises principally the family context of sickness and care, but also includes social network and community activities' (Kleinman 1978, 86). He notes that both in Western and non-Western societies, about 70% to 90% of sickness is handled in this popular domain. The same idea is shared by other scholars on the importance of the household as 'a key unit in therapy-seeking' (see Sobo 2004, 5 f.) or on the use of home remedies which is the first source to turn to before one seeks help from indigenous curers or medical doctors (Foster 2010).

By analysing medical anthropological sources based on Kleinman's categorisation, one can conclude that medical anthropology has mainly studied professional (biomedicine) and folk (traditional health experts) arenas under the topic of 'medical pluralism'. Indeed, most of the sources on medical pluralism operate with a dichotomy such as 'biomedicine' versus 'traditional medicine' (see Hörbst et al. 2017).¹¹⁷ Usually, it is folk health experts such as traditional healers, shamans, magicians, herbalists and many others designated local specialists who possess extensive health knowledge that are studied within traditional medicine, which is also called 'complementary and alternative medicine' (CAM). The popular arena, which deals with non-professional (lay) people, has been understudied.

In Kochkor, I observed hospital settings and interviewed doctors (professional arena). I also attended healing sessions and interviewed several healers, including mullahs (folk arena). Due to the nature of my research, I also extensively observed lay people and their health-related practices (popular arena). What interested me most was their perception of the healthy growth of

¹¹⁷ Biomedicine is also referred to as conventional medicine, scientific medicine, cosmopolitan medicine, Western medicine, allopathic medicine or simply medicine (Baer 2004; Gains/Davis-Floyd 2004).

Professional arena (designated experts)	Folk arena (designated experts)	Popular arena (lay people)
Biomedical doctors	Traditional healers Mullahs	'Mother-doctors' 'Mother-healers' Grandmothers' wisdom Other family members who read <i>dua</i> or <i>suras</i> (verses from the Quran) in order to cure illnesses

Table 2. Three main health arenas in Kochkor, based on Kleinman's categorisation.

children and the activities they undertake when their children get ill or the actions they take to prevent illnesses. In the table 2, I have illustrated the sources of health treatments in Kochkor which I classified according to Kleinman's (1978) categorisation.

Based on the material that I collected on local health-related practices, I claim that the popular arena (lay people) is indeed very popular in Kochkor. It is generally the first stage people use before turning to biomedical doctors or folk healers. I further argue that there is additional importance in studying the popular arena or 'lay medicine' for understanding the idea of healthy growth of children in Kochkor. First, this is due to the fact that the family, as an institution, has become a central actor in the lives of children with the end of Soviet paternalism not only in healthcare but in other sectors too (see Kirmse 2013). Second, the reduction in the quality of the state healthcare system in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan has contributed to the increasing role of local people taking care of their own health and the health of their children. For example, the concept of **self-help** or the health policy that prioritises preventive to curative actions, which are promoted by the current state and international development programmes, build a ground for creating knowledgeable subjects within the family circle. Third, the revival of Islam in contemporary Kyrgyzstan has changed people's perceptions of health and illness. Similar to Janara Eje, many pious Muslims in Kochkor challenge the local ideas of health and being healthy. The Re-Islamisation process has also contributed to the increasing role of lay medicine in Kochkor, as

I will discuss later in this chapter. By taking these points into account, I will show through discussion how the boundaries between professional, folk and popular arenas have started to become significantly overlapped in Kochkor. Before extensively elaborating on the popular arena in my ethnography, first, I will give an overview of the development of the public healthcare system in Kochkor in the section below.

6.3. From Soviet Paternalism to Self-Help

The hospital in Kochkor village is a regional hospital, which not only accepts patients from Kochkor village but also from neighbouring villages. The hospital is located in a big yard on the outskirts of Kochkor in the direction of Tengdik village to the west. The yard contains several buildings which were constructed during Soviet times and include the out-patient and in-patient clinics, (baby) delivery suite, the Centre for Family Medicine and two pharmacies. At the turn of the millennium, this hospital experienced a shift from specialist care to family general practice through the nationwide health reform programme Manas (1996–2006). The hospital is now split into two main parts, one being the Centre for Family Medicine and the other being the area hospital. Patients within the Centre for Family Medicine (*fig. 10*) are treated for a range of health problems by the Group of Family Doctors (Rus. *Gruppa Semeynyh Vrachey*, GSV) that Janara Eje is part of.

Despite significant deterioration in the public healthcare system in Kyrgyzstan after



Fig. 10. No.1 Kelechek Family Medical Practitioners Group in Kochkor (photo by author).

independence, biomedicine remains one of the most common treatment sources. This was evidenced by the local clinic in Kochkor village always being full of patients and my interlocutors' referrals to this hospital and the use of medical doctors in their sickness-related narratives. Access to biomedicine is not a problem for people even in remote villages in the region. International agencies such as the Swiss Red Cross, UNICEF, USAID and many others, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic, have helped to build medical points (FAPs, Feldscher Accoucher Points).¹¹⁸ These FAPs provide people with medical equipment and vitamins and distribute material

for health education purposes with a focus mainly on the care of pregnant women and children.

Significant transformations made by the post-Soviet healthcare reform programmes led my interlocutors to differentiate biomedicine with two different labels: the old 'Soviet' and new 'Western'. The new approach is called 'Western' because mothers mentioned in their talks how 'the West', meaning international organisations and international development projects, introduced those changes. One could also feel the presence of 'the West' through medical equipment brought from Western countries. For example, when I visited the delivery suite, one nurse was proudly showing me the beds, infant incubators and other equipment in the rooms. But she particularly pointed at the equipment brought from Germany, the country where I live and work. This equipment was labelled as 'Western', having resulted from the

¹¹⁸ Here I do not refer to the quality of the medical service. Usually, for a better quality, people in Kochkor travel to Bishkek, the capital, as they do not trust local doctors when it comes to serious medical intrusions such as a surgery or extracting water from the spinal cord.

development in the West with such advanced types of equipment not existing during the Soviet time.

The newly introduced healthcare system, including preventive care methods, significantly differed from the old Soviet ones. As an example, a local doctor mentioned maternity and childcare programmes, such as ‘Kangaroo’ mother care and breastfeeding campaigns, which brought significant changes to the inherited Soviet system. The ‘Kangaroo’ system was categorised as ‘American’, although several mothers including some doctors stated that many of these methods are not new but are principally traditional Kyrgyz methods, which were abandoned during the Soviet time as ‘ancient’. One of the doctors in the delivery suite explained:

‘In the past [referring to the pre-Soviet period], we gave birth standing up, clenching a *bakan*, [a strong wooden pole that is used in the yurt to hang kitchen items]. Our babies were put on our breasts as soon as they got delivered. Only later, during the Soviet time, our babies got separated from mothers and the nurses brought them to mothers only for breastfeeding ... Before [until the Soviet policy of ‘time-based breastfeeding’ was introduced], we used to breastfeed our babies on demand, whenever they got hungry, similar to what is being currently introduced through breastfeeding campaigns [by international organisations like Kangaroo].’

Despite its historical existence in the pre-Soviet time, the re-introduced breastfeeding on demand is called today ‘Western’ (although it can be global) as opposed to the old Soviet ‘time-based breastfeeding’. This is how the discourse on ‘Soviet’ and ‘Western’ came up in this particular case.

Historically, there was a strong Soviet policy on regulating healthcare practices. The Soviet lifestyle was accepted as ‘healthy’ (see Michaels 2003) and it was promoted to eradicate ‘unhealthy’ lifestyles of Central Asian people. The Soviet state referred to some local health-related practices as backward or dangerous (Keshavjee 2006; Penkala-Gawęcka 2013). The system provided free medical healthcare and established kindergartens, schools and healthcare institutions. With the development of such institutions locally, the health-related

rituals that Kyrgyz people practiced in the 1940s were believed to have disappeared, as the Soviet ethnographer Abramzon (1949) writes. There were also forceful actions by the Soviet state to eradicate some local health-related practices. At those times, both traditional and religious practices were carefully scrutinised. Those religious practices, both Islamic and pre-Islamic, that had nationalistic elements or were characterised as a sign of ‘backwardness’, became the target of eradication (Bacon 1980; Michaels 2003). The state prohibited religious healing practices such as visiting sacred sites and performing healing rituals. Despite its strong efforts, the Soviet state only partially achieved its goals as religious and cultural practices were kept alive in private and were conducted by women in home settings (see Dragadze 1993; Kandiyoti/Azimova 2004; Rasanayagam 2011 on the ‘domestication’ of religion during the Soviet time).

Comparative research indicates the visible growth in the use of alternative medicine in some of the post-Soviet countries after the collapse of the USSR (Stickley et al. 2013; see also Brown/Rusinova 2002). The authors note that the use of alternative medicine was also facilitated by ‘a revival of traditional culture, a growth in out-of-pocket payments for conventional medical services, and in some former Soviet republics, the collapse of the earlier system offering universal coverage’ (Stickley et al. 2013, 2). Indeed, once Kyrgyzstan became an independent country in 1991, along with the increasing interest of Kyrgyz people in their tradition, language and identity, one can notice a revival of traditional healing practices and rituals (Aitpaeva et al. 2007; see Hohmann 2010 for Uzbekistan; Penkala-Gawęcka 2011; 2013 for Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). More people started to turn to traditional healing by visiting local healers. The latter treat patients by performing rituals with the support of patron saints or by visiting holy places known as *mazars*, the practice which was prohibited during the Soviet period. Since 2000, the massive growth of Islam in Kyrgyzstan also contributed to an increasing practice of turning to mullahs, religious specialists, for treatment purposes. Alternatively, lay people themselves started to recite *dua* (verses from the Quran) at home (see below).

By giving examples from Kazakhstan, Penkala-Gawęcka (2013) argues that the term ‘revival of folk medicine’ is not relevant, as despite prohibitions, traditional healers still existed and performed healing practices during the Soviet era (see Michaels 2003 for a detailed account; Kozikowski 2008 for a similar case about Czech people). I fully share this statement, but I want to underline that during the Soviet time, these practices were conducted secretly and in a private sphere, while in the post-Soviet context, these activities are open and not a target of prohibition by the state. Since Kyrgyzstan gained independence, the ‘revival of folk medicine’ started to become visible in the public sphere on a national level. The establishment of a National Centre of Folk Medicine in Kyrgyzstan called ‘Beyish’ (‘Paradise’) evidences the growing number of healers and their higher profile in the public sphere. In addition, more research has started to be done on traditional healing, for example, by the local Aigine CRC.

Based on the Government Decree dated 23 September 2011, the Centre of Traditional Medicine ‘Beyish’ was renamed into the ‘International Academy of Traditional and Experimental Medicine under the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic’. Even so, the establishment of official centres on folk healing should not be interpreted solely as support of the government for this type of alternative medicine. On the example of the centre of the ‘folk’ medicine founded under the auspices of the Ministry of Health of Kazakhstan, Penkala-Gawęcka argues that its main goal was to institutionalise traditional medicine and differentiate the ancient knowledge of healers from what was perceived as harmful practices of ‘charlatans’ (Penkala-Gawęcka 2013, 46). In other words, the main obligation of the centre was to monitor the healers.

Hardon and her colleagues suggest that ‘where formal health services fail, informal practices become prevalent’ (Hardon et al. 2001, 30). Factors such as lack of money, incompetence of doctors and long distances to get to medical treatment points are mentioned as important in many sources on health-seeking behaviour (UNICEF 2009). These external factors did not seem to significantly affect the people whom I studied. None of my interlocutors raised accessibility, affordability or

incompetence of health practitioners when justifying their turning to healers or mullahs. On the contrary, I witnessed several cases when, even given the existence of the regional hospital in Kochkor, people from far away villages travelled to the centre of Kochkor in order to be seen by healers and mullahs rather than by medical practitioners. For people themselves, the treatment methods offered by local traditional healers and mullahs were not seen as alternatives, and similarly, biomedicine was not seen as the main source of help either.

Thus, from local people’s health narratives, I came up with four main categories of health treatment in Kochkor (*fig. 11*). The first is biomedicine (*fig. 11 top*: doctors), comprising both the old Soviet and new Western forms. The second one is healers (*fig. 11 left*). The third is mullahs (*fig. 11 right*). Each of the mentioned treatment sources has its own specific use. For example, several of my interlocutors mentioned that for *jin ooru* (mental illness), people turn to mullahs. Whereas when there are health disturbances such as *kirene* (disbalance; discussed further below), noted earlier by Janara Eje, or *jürök tüshüü* (when a child gets frightened), it is traditional healers to whom people turn. For body-related illnesses, such as *synyk* (‘broken or dysfunctional parts of the body’) or colds, it is biomedical doctors. I noticed this tendency is also changing with the Re-Islamisation process that I will explore later.

In the diagram, one can also see another circle in the middle. This is the fourth category of treatment, which is a popular sector mentioned by Kleinman (1978). Similar to the diagram offered by Kleinman (*fig. 9*), in this diagram, too, the popular sector overlaps with the other three sectors. In the field, I observed that *kirene* and *jürök tüshüü*, which are usually treated by local traditional healers, are also widely treated by lay mothers who are not categorised as healers at all (see ‘mother-healers’ on *fig. 11*). These lay mothers also perform treatments called ‘*kyrgyzcha*’ (‘in a Kyrgyz way’) to cure colds, coughs or fever (see ‘mother doctors’ in the same diagram). The popular sector also overlaps with the sector of Islamic medicine, specialised by mullahs (see ‘reading *suras*’ in the same diagram). These are lay people who read verses from the Quran and turn to Allah directly by asking for treatment if they or their children

get sick. I will discuss these points at length in further sections.

I also see a direct connection between the popularity of the popular sector (middle circle on *fig. 11*) and the healthcare reform in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, which is heavily based on the philosophy of ‘self-help’. The Manas programme (1996–2006) and its successor health reform programmes, such as Manas Taalimi (2006–2010) and Den Sooluk (2012–2018), were aimed to ensure ‘a more active involvement of the population in the [healthcare] process’ (Ibraimova et al. 2011, xix). Educating the population about health and encouraging them to look after their own health is one of the main targets of the new system. When I joined the Swiss Red Cross in 2007, I learned about the existence of ADK (‘Aiyldyk Den-Sooluk Komiteti’, translated as ‘Village Health Committee’). Every village has its own ADK, which consists of influential people, who are elected by villagers. Influential in this sense of the word means not *aksakals* (traditionally respected white-bearded wise and authoritative elderly men), but rather those who can promote health-related education well, such as female teachers and active housewives without any medical background. These people work on a voluntary basis and visit houses in their locality to make sure that the health development programmes promoted by the Swiss Red Cross or UNICEF are being followed by their co-villagers, including programmes dealing with a range of health issues such as anemia, pregnancy, nutrition, brucellosis and alcoholism.

I participated in the ADK and KUZ (Rus. ‘Komitet po Ukrepneniyu Zdorov’ya’, translated as ‘Health Promotion Committee’) meetings on pregnancy and child nutrition programmes and accompanied committee members when they visited homes. When visiting a pregnant woman, these active volunteers asked questions and gave instructions such as: ‘Are you having enough rest?’, ‘Are you eating fortified flour?’, ‘When will you get running water installed inside your house?’, ‘Are you following the instructions in the brochure on a healthy diet? Do that!’ The user-friendly brochures that young mothers received on healthy nutrition, types of contraception or the first signs of illnesses during pregnancy or babyhood give these mothers additional proxy and freedom to act, as well as

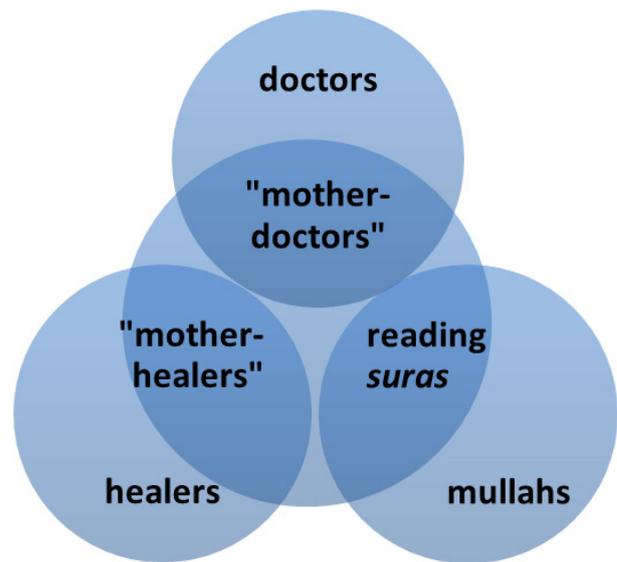


Fig. 11. Four sources of treatment in Kochkor with the popular sector in the middle.

strengthen their obligation to ensure the health of their children and other family members.

In Kochkor, due to the obedience of young mothers and thanks to the hard work of the local volunteers of the ADK and KUZ, the health projects of international organisations seemed to have been implemented successfully, as shown in the remarks of my interlocutors.¹¹⁹ ‘Now consciousness [Rus. *soznanie*] has grown. Now parents bring their children for vaccinations themselves. Before it was not so’, said Janara Eje. This could be the result of successful educative health programmes where the promoted idea of ‘self-help’ urges local people to rely on themselves in the first place. This doctor’s statement ‘Before it was not so’ confirms the findings of other scholars, who noted that before, during the Soviet time, people were not expected to take responsibility for their own health and heavily relied on the state for their healthcare (Field 2002; Sheahan 1995).

¹¹⁹ However, my interlocutors noted that the idea of a ‘healthy diet’ promoted by international organisations has not been successfully integrated locally due to poor economic conditions. It is also noted that culturally constructed diet-related habits are less prone to changes. In this account, Helman argues that ‘[b]ecause of the central role of food in daily life, especially in social relationships, dietary beliefs and practices are notoriously difficult to change, even if they interfere with adequate nutrition’ (Helman 1984, 23).

According to the sources on Soviet medicine, if health problems arose, the Soviet state took immediate action since people in the workforce had to be brought back to work as soon as possible. It was in the interest of the Soviet state to have a healthy population and healthy workforce (Field 2002; Keshajvee 1998; Michaels 2003), which resulted in an ‘ultimate manifestation of paternalism’ (Kornai/Eggleston 2001, 62). As a result, the state had great authority over people’s health and constantly monitored their health by paying regular home visits with biomedicine being the main treatment source and promoted as the only source of treatment. Some of my interlocutors noted that if people missed their vaccination or did not want to be hospitalised, then doctors would come to their homes and forcibly take them for treatment or vaccination. Aida Eje, in her 40s, remembered her young motherhood in the Soviet time:

‘After I gave birth, the pediatrician constantly came for check-ups and would always scold me. Once, I postponed my child’s vaccination for one day, deciding to go the following day, as it was very windy and cold outside. Despite the wind, the doctor came with her nurse and made me put my child in a buggy. They took us to the hospital to give the vaccination. After that she scolded me again before letting me go [...]. But they would work very hard (*ayabay ele ishteshchü*) and would also do their job very well (*ayabay karachu da*).’

Aida Eje and other mothers, who had the chance to experience Soviet healthcare, appreciated the quality of the health system based on the strong control by the Soviet state. Iarskaia-Smirnova and Romanov note that the state and its agents ‘carried out this double-faced task of care and control at all levels of social life’ (Iarskaia-Smirnova/Romanov 2009, 1). At the same time, sources on the Soviet medical health system mention that despite its universal access to basic healthcare across the entire Soviet territory, almost half of the population received ‘poor or substandard care in the countryside and low-density areas’ (Davis 1979, cited in Field 2002; see Gagoshashvili 2008; Kornai/Eggleston 2001 for Eastern Europe; Lawson/Nemec

2003 for Czech Republic and Slovakia). For example, in 1990, only 3% of the national budget was used for healthcare. In terms of quality, it lagged far behind Western countries (see Schecter 1992). Despite that, the Soviet healthcare system satisfied the people in Kochkor, in comparison to the current time. In fact, many interlocutors of mine in Kochkor, especially from the Soviet generation, reported that the current healthcare system is worse (*‘Azyrkylar nachar!’*). This could be also due to the increasing demand by the population. Ladbury (1997) indicates that ‘independence and the new market economy have brought with them a demand for better healthcare’ (cited in Savas et al. 2002, 82). My research suggests that the dissatisfaction of the Soviet generation with the post-Soviet healthcare system is partly due to nostalgia about the old healthcare system based on paternalism, which was considered better, as a statement from one of my interlocutors below shows:

‘In ancient times [meaning during the Soviet time] they [doctors] chased us home, asking why we did not give a medical test. Now they do not chase. Now it is bad. (*Ilgeri üygö cheyin kubalap kelchü, izdep emne analiz tapshyrbaysyng dep. Azyr kubalabayt. Azyr nachar*).’

The new system works using the philosophy ‘prevention is better than cure’ and targets the healthy population by conducting educational activities to help make these people feel responsible for their own health. This seems to not satisfy the elderly generation who got used to be ‘chased by Soviet medical doctors’ (see Foster 2010 on curative/preventive programme implementations in other countries). This has led the senior population to assume that now doctors are indifferent to people’s health and they do not fulfil their duties properly. This and many other narratives of disappointment contribute to the negative image of the current healthcare system in Kochkor and Kyrgyzstan in general. Such kinds of discourses and reforms in the contemporary healthcare system that I discuss above contribute to the common practice when mothers keep their children at home and try to treat them themselves, which I will consider in more detail below.

6.4. Mother-Doctors

Once, during my clinical observation in Kochkor hospital in autumn 2012, a small five-year-old child was brought to Janara Eje. The carer stated that the boy was slack, inattentive and had no appetite. Janara Eje examined the boy's eyes, throat, stomach and feet. She suspected that it was jaundice, of which there was an outbreak in Kochkor that autumn. The boy, in fear of the doctor, said that he was not feeling sick anymore. Janara Eje asked the carer for how many days the child had been in that condition and learned that it had been like that for already three days. I also found out that some parents brought their sick children to the hospital several days after their children fell ill. This lack of seeking timely medical attention annoyed Janara Eje, who blamed Kyrgyz people for keeping their ill children at home for several days with the hope that God would save them by using phrases such as '*Kuday saktasyn!*' ('May God keep you from harm!' or 'May God protect you!').

Several mothers whom I interviewed later confessed that they take their ill child to a doctor only when their treatments did not help the child, when they felt that they could not treat the illness or when the illness developed into a more severe stage which was beyond their ability to cure. Some mothers, especially those who have had children previously, consider themselves somewhat as 'health experts' which results in them keeping their sick children at home for the first few days before determining what source of treatment to pursue. In response to my question about why they did not take their ill children immediately to the doctor, the replies of some of my interlocutors were: 'After raising so many children, we ourselves have become doctors!', 'After experiencing so many deaths, I myself have become a doctor!' and 'I used to ask for advice when I gave birth to my first child, but for the rest [following children] I have myself become experienced.'

Lay people's, especially mothers' involvement in the treatment of their children is such a normal experience and a part of normal life that people do not even stress that this is a treatment practice at all. This could be due to the common perception that the way mothers maintain the health of

the household members is a 'natural expression of womanhood' (Clark 1993, mentioned in Amuyunzu 1998, 490). It is normal for mothers in Kochkor to know some healing rituals and conduct them when their children are ill. They keep their children at home and apply all the knowledge they have and any new knowledge that they have learned from their neighbours and relatives. I also observed how mothers use their non-medical network to diagnose the illness of their children and obtain not only advice but also medication to treat their children. Before visiting biomedical practitioners, mothers make a great effort to cure their child on their own. Active involvement of mothers, who do not have medical knowledge but still extensively rely on their knowledge and experience, gives me a reason to call mothers in Kochkor 'mother-doctors'.

In the first instance, I relate the phenomenon of 'mother-doctors' to the nature of 'everydayness' of children's health conditions, which allows mothers to gain a certain kind of expertise and authority to navigate their children's healthy development. Sholkamy, who studied children's health and well-being in the village of Rihan, Egypt, states that in comparison to adults, 'there is an everydayness about early childhood ill-health' (Sholkamy 1997, 38). She argues that the potential of danger in everyday life determines the local people's definition of child ill-health, their health-seeking behaviour and their strategies for preventing illness. In the case of Kochkor, this 'everydayness' is related to local perceptions of a child's body, a healthy diet or local environment which keep mothers alert on the healthy development of their children, and not necessarily during times of ailments. I want to develop this idea by sharing my observations of health-related practices of my host-mother Gülnara.

During the stay with my host-family, in the nine-month period of my fieldwork, family members were ill several times with different symptoms, and I only once saw the family turning to a biomedical doctor. This was when my host-sister Nuray got ill with a cold and had a fever. Even then, the doctor, who was a friend of my host-mother, paid an informal visit to the family's home after Gülnara Eje's telephone call. The rest of

the time, it was Gülnara Eje who looked after the health of the family, especially the children, both during times of ailments and in everyday life to prevent future ailments. Making them eat healthy food was one of the ways to ensure health.

Kyrgyz people, in general, consider themselves meat-eaters. This varies from region to region. People from Naryn region, where I conducted my research, are known to be eating more meat in comparison to the people from other regions. Gülnara Eje usually prepares *bashbarmak* (a Kyrgyz national dish of meat with noodles) or *shorpo* (broth) for dinner. To prepare these types of food, she boils a big chunk of sheep or cow meat, including the bones, for about two hours. After that she adds noodles, potatoes, onions and various spices at will. Even if the process of cooking takes up to three hours, this type of food does not require much work. From what I noticed, it was handy for Gülnara Eje to cook these types of food that do not require much work regularly, as she was very busy with running their shop. To my question why they have *shorpo* and *bashbarmak* very often, she replied: 'We live in a mountainous place. Especially in Kochkor in winters, when it is windy and cold, we need broth (*shorpo*) and we need meat. If we do not eat meat, then we will be having runny noses (*murdubuzdan suu agat*).'

Usually, meat is not served as lean meat, but has fat attached to it. In fact, fatty meat is considered to be of good quality. In this case, meat with fat is considered to be 'strong' food which provides strength to endure cold and windy winters in Kochkor. It helps to maintain health. When Gülnara Eje's youngest child Nuray was five, she was not a good eater and it was considered unhealthy. This concerned Gülnara Eje. Pointing at her daughter's appearance, she said to me: 'Look, she is very thin'. Indeed, not only for her, but for other mothers in Kochkor as well, a healthy child was associated with a chubby child. Therefore, an indication that a child ate a lot and had a good appetite was a sign of healthy growth that made parents happy.

As Nuray did not eat well, Gülnara Eje made sure that her daughter took some vitamins. She was a constant client of her relative, who delivered medications and vitamins to the local

pharmacies in Kochkor. Nuray got used to the vitamin taking habit at this young age. She usually took a spoonful of the vitamin syrup herself, as it was always on their dining table. Also, from time to time, Gülnara Eje gave Nuray half a spoonful of white powder in a small jar, which was kept in the refrigerator. I later learned that it was finely ground shell of a hen's egg which was believed to be a rich source of calcium. 'Old egg is not suitable; it should be a freshly laid egg which is still warm', Gülnara Eje explained to me when I asked how she prepared this powder. She had read about this folk medicine (Rus. *narodnaya meditsina*) in a newspaper which she had read while sitting in her shop. The knowledge of the 'mother-doctors', to whom I would also include Gülnara Eje, is also complemented by articles in newspapers and from health programmes on Russian-language television channels such as 'Zhit' zdorovo!' ('Live healthily!') and 'Malahov +' where advice is provided on a range of topics such as how to live a healthy lifestyle and how to make home-made herbal remedies.¹²⁰ A similar account was mentioned by Chudakova (2016), who notes how people of older generations in post-Soviet Russia heavily consult health magazines or health-related rubrics in newspapers and even pass these on to their relatives and friends to read.

Tong may (tallow, directly translated into English as 'frozen fat') is another 'universal' remedy that my host-mother used when her children were 'exposed to cold' such as flus or coughs. This method is categorised as '*kyrgyzcha*' ('in a Kyrgyz way').¹²¹ *Tong may* is mutton fat which is rendered first in a heated pan, separated from any impurities and cooled down. When it cools down, it becomes hard, as if it was frozen. It has a capability to 'heat up', which is a perfect remedy to use when a person is exposed to the cold. There exist beliefs about some vulnerable parts of the body among

¹²⁰ See Briggs (2003) on how the state and media create dominant conceptions of health and disease.

¹²¹ Applying *tong may* on a child is classified as a Kyrgyz way of treating a child: *kyrgyzcha*. When I asked mothers about their treatment methods for their children, many started their treatment narratives as follows: '*Kyrgyzcha ele kylam*' ('I do it simply in a Kyrgyz way').

Kochkorians.¹²² For example, keeping warm the head and feet, and especially the soles of a child's feet, is carefully followed. Similar to the 'germ theory of disease', in Kochkor, people follow a 'cold theory of illness' which I state is different from the 'hot-cold theory of illness'.¹²³ For example, if a child starts to cough, they say '*öpkösünö suuk tiydi*' ('a child's lung¹²⁴ has been exposed to the cold') and they apply *tong may* to heat them up. If a child has a runny nose, *tong may* will be applied on and in their nose. If a child urinates constantly, people believe that his or her (usually it is girls who have such cases) bladder has been exposed to the cold and they apply *tong may* to heat it up. If a child has problems with his or her digestive system and vomits, mothers believe that the child's tummy has been exposed to the cold and they heat up the tummy by applying *tong may*. They massage the tummy and wrap it warmly with a *jooluk* (head scarf). *Tong may* is accepted as a strong remedy that some mothers avoid for their newborn and small babies, stating that it is too 'heavy' for them.¹²⁵ Even though *tong may* already has a strong 'heating up' effect, some mothers add garlic when they prepare *tong may*, in order to make its 'heating up' capability even stronger. *Tong may* has a very specific, strong and unpleasant smell. But this does not prevent mothers from using it as an effective remedy.

When Gülnara Eje's second son Askar (16) got a cold, she steamed his feet in a basin of warm water and gave him hot milk with clarified butter (ghee). She also gave him some medications from her home medicine chest, which did not help. When her son's condition persisted for a couple of days without any sign of improvement, she decided to consult her neighbours. At that time, I was

¹²² See Helman (1984) for more information on vulnerable parts of the body from medical anthropological perspectives.

¹²³ Although it is mentioned a lot that Kyrgyz people follow the notion of 'hot-cold' and how a person's health condition is affected by this, in Kochkor, I came across this idea very rarely. There were two mothers who mentioned how a boy is hot and a girl is cold and that is why girls need more *shorpo* (broth) which is believed to heat them up.

¹²⁴ In this context, people use the word lung in singular.

¹²⁵ I heard from mothers that for small babies, instead of *tong may*, they use the fat which is formed on the surface of *shorpo* once it has cooled down.

in the centre of the village on my way to conducting my next interview. My mobile phone rang. It was Gülnara Eje. She told me that her neighbour suggested that she try black cumin (Rus. *chernyi tmin*) and said that it was good for treating colds. She asked me to buy it on my way back home. Her neighbour even told her where she could find this medication: in Islamic shops. I knew one such shop, which was owned by Altynay Eje, whom I had met at a *taalim* lesson (see below) and whom I had interviewed about the notion of health in Islam. Altynay Eje confirmed the power of the black cumin by stating, 'It cures all illnesses, except for death!' ('*Ölümdön bashkasynyn baaryna shyfaa'*) and suggested that I buy one for myself, too. I bought the medication, which was in the form of liquid in a small bottle, and brought it home. Askar took this medication. It is difficult to tell which of the treatment sources actually worked. But with all of the treatment efforts of Gülnara Eje, Askar rested in bed for a couple more days and then recovered.

Gülnara Eje also used her 'medical' knowledge and helped her neighbours and relatives when their children got ill. Once, she went to her neighbour and helped this young mother to treat her four-year-old child's fever. Gülnara Eje took the child's clothes off and rubbed the girl's whole body with vodka, which was a common practice in Kochkor for bringing the temperature of a child down. The second time, she shared the leftover medication that she had in her medicine chest with her sister, whose son was ill with the same diagnosis as Gülnara Eje's daughter Nuray had been several months prior. The 'life of medication', which is circulated among neighbours and relatives and easily purchased (including antibiotics) over the counter can tell much about local people's health-seeking behaviour as well as their reluctance to go to health experts. Nowadays, people in Kochkor go to a pharmacy and get medication, including antibiotics, without requiring a doctor's prescription (see Ibraimova et al. 2011). Once, I went to one of the local pharmacies to buy medication for my daughter, who accompanied me to the field in that period of time. The pharmacy in the centre of the village was not that big and people queuing could actually hear the conversation

of the pharmacist and her clients. A woman before me approached the pharmacist and explained the symptoms of her child's illness. Based on her description the pharmacist advised her to buy one medication.

It is a normal practice for parents to turn to pharmacists to get medication just by describing their child's symptoms. Pharmacists also sell them pharmaceutical products without even seeing the ill person or considering their overall health condition. Such practice might be facilitated due to the increasing number of pharmaceutical companies in Kochkor, and in other parts of Kyrgyzstan, along with the pharmacists' personal motivation to sell more medicine, especially expensive medicine, with the aim to earn more money. Not only is it over-the-counter medications and antibiotics that mothers get, they also get medical advice over the telephone from both medically trained and non-medically trained relatives, friends and neighbours. In my view, such practices also contribute to mothers' perceptions of themselves as 'mother-doctors'.

I agree with Sholkamy (1997) on the 'everydayness' of a child's ill-health, which can be threatened by the cold and harsh environments or the lack of vitamins in the body, as the case of Gülnara Eje showed. At the same time, as Backett-Milburn argues in her work on the construction of a healthy body, the 'healthy body is a dynamic and life-long project which was never truly 'finished' (Backett-Milburn 2000, 80; see also Prout 2000). And this is what Gülnara Eje and other mothers are constantly engaged in with their attempts to keep their children healthy.

6.5. Mother-Healers

In Kochkor, many families conduct healing rituals for children. Local people understand that due to a child's bodily development almost all children experience some common ill health conditions. One such children's health condition, which is of concern to most mothers in Kochkor, is when a child cries continuously, becomes weak (*shaldyrayt*) and vomits. At this point, this health condition does not yet have a specific name, with the name

only being determined by the carer of the child who will make a diagnosis after considering the events of the day happening around the child. The symptoms of the child may express three different local conceptions regarding harms to children's health. The first one is *kirene*. This happens when a child is exposed to a 'heavy' atmosphere or negative energy. The second one is *jürök tüşhüü*, which literally means a child's 'heart falls down' (see Rasanayagam 2011 on a similar local disturbance in Uzbekistan). It occurs when a child is frightened, for example, by barking dogs or sudden loud noises. The third one is *köz tiyüü* ('the evil eye').¹²⁶ The order in which I have mentioned these 'illnesses' corresponds to how often they are diagnosed among children in Kochkor. In this chapter, I will discuss the first one, *kirene*, which is most commonly encountered.

I would not call *kirene* an illness, because my interlocutors from Kochkor never classified it as *ooru* (the Kyrgyz term for illness). Instead, they describe it as '*kirene kirdi*' ('*kirene* has entered'). *Kirene*, as a cultural phenomenon, can be understood as a 'disbalance' or a 'disorder' in a child's health, caused by a certain strong and sometimes negative energy. *Kirene* affects mostly babies and small children. Mothers suspect that a child is exposed to *kirene* because of the environment a child has been in, such as a crowd. Usually, it is when parents have guests at their home or pay visits to others' homes.

The presence of many people does not mean that they can send evil eye on a child. None of my interlocutors mentioned evil eye when talking about *kirene*. Rather, there appears a strong aura¹²⁷ created in a crowd where adults can admire the child, which the child's fragile body is unable to withstand. Most of my interlocutors used the phrase '*bala kötörö albayt*' ('a child cannot withstand') or how it becomes 'heavy' for a child. A child is believed to be clean and pure and this is why it is considered fragile and vulnerable.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ See Maloney 1976; Spooner 1976 for more information on evil eye in South Asia and the Middle East, respectively.

¹²⁷ This was the term used by my interlocutors, which has a similar translation in Russian.

¹²⁸ Similarly, Spooner (1976, 80) states that '[b]eauty is always vulnerable'.

It is only when a child grows older and develops enough 'strength' that it will be able to endure that kind of atmosphere. Another reason for me not to call *kirene* an illness is that it is seen more as a 'normal' part of a child's health as all children are believed to experience it in their childhood. *Kirene* is what a child will grow out of over time, but before that, it will stay as a part of the child's coming of age.¹²⁹

Correspondingly, many mothers know rituals against *kirene*. The practice of healing seems to be culturally embedded among people in Kochkor. Similar to the notion of 'everydayness', *kirene* denotes the 'normalness' of this practice. The most popular treatment that I heard from my interlocutors was to take some ash into a tea bowl (*chynty*) and add seven kinds of 'tastes' (*daam*) such as sugar, salt, pepper, flour and other tastes. The combination of seven tastes may differ based on what products are available in the home. After adding seven tastes to the ash, the person who is conducting this healing ritual then covers the bowl with a napkin and touches twelve parts (*müchö*) of the body of the affected child with that bowl.¹³⁰ If there appears a hole in the ash in the bowl after the ritual is conducted, it is believed that a child has got *kirene*. Through the size of the hole in the ash, one can also see how strongly a child has been exposed to *kirene*. The deeper and the bigger the hole, the stronger the *kirene* is. After the ritual, the ash is thrown out of the house. This ritual is performed three times. My interlocutors noted that as the ritual is repeated, one can notice how the size of the hole decreases and by the end of the treatment there will be no hole on the surface of the ash, which indicates that *kirene* has 'left' the child.

The performer of the ritual is also required to utter some phrases and wishes such as: '*Kirene chygyp ket*' ('*Kirene*, come out and go away') or

'*Menin kolum emes, Umay ene, Batma-Zuura apaynyn kolu*' ('This is not my hand, but the hand of mother Umay, mother Batma-Zuura'). Umay and Batma-Zuura are the patronesses of children and health. Umay¹³¹ is a female deity which is considered a patroness of hearth and home and a keeper of progeny (see Abramzon 1949).

Mothers described the condition of their children after they conducted the ritual as follows: 'My child immediately stopped crying' ('*Balam typ basyldy, srazu toktodu*'), 'My child calmed down' ('*Balam tynchyp kaldy*'), 'My child was immediately relieved' ('*Srazu es alyp kaldy*') and 'As soon as I performed the ritual, my child got better' ('*Jasap koysom ele jakshy bolup ketti*'). Among these women, none of them said that the ritual did not work or that they did not believe in the effects of the ritual.

Even as a Kyrgyz person, I was surprised to find out that the majority of mothers whom I interviewed knew how to perform this healing ritual for their children. Some of them used, instead of ash, seven pieces of bread which are given to a dog after the ritual, in the hope that a child's *kirene* (negative energy) will pass on to that dog. I was told that dogs can handle *kirene* easily. Some people used seven pieces of paper which were burnt at the end. Some people apply the ash onto the forehead of the child. Those mothers, who do not perform this ritual, usually have mothers-in-law who conduct this ritual at home. Those whose mothers-in-law have passed away confessed that they copy the practice that they had seen or heard from their female relatives or neighbours. Even those older women, who accepted themselves as Soviet women and stated that they did not know much about traditional healing, in practice, conducted the ritual of *kirene* for their grandchildren.

Conducting a ritual against *kirene* is not seen as religious healing. It is not necessary for a person to possess any sacred knowledge or power to conduct this ritual. Rather, it is perceived as a normal everyday life phenomenon which can be seen in the way Burul Eje, my interlocutor, expressed it:

¹²⁹ See Michaels 2003 who mentions the same about evil eye and evil tongue in Kazakhstan, which are strongly associated as childhood diseases.

¹³⁰ The idea of 'twelve parts' is common among Kyrgyz people. This example about the twelve parts of the body is based on the demonstration and narratives of one of my interlocutors only. When asked which twelve parts she meant, she noted: the head, two shoulders, two arms, the areas around the heart, the back, the stomach, two knees and two legs.

¹³¹ For a detailed explanation of patroness Umay see Abramzon 1949; Aitpaeva et al. 2007; Potapov 1972.

BT: 'Which rituals do you conduct when your children are ill?'

Burul Eje: 'Various, I conduct a ritual against *kirene* with bread, paper, juniper (*archa*). I 'lift the child's heart' [against *jürök tüshüü*, when a child gets frightened] as we do in a normal way (*kadimkidey ele*).¹³²

BT: 'How do you do that?'

Burul Eje: 'I lift the heart from under the chest [demonstrates gently by inserting fingers of her right hand under the centre of her ribs and pushing them upwards].'

BT: 'What other rituals do you perform?'

Burul Eje: '[laughs] That's it. In order to conduct more, one has to be a *bakshy*, healer.'¹³³

I heard the local phrase '*Kadimkidey ele yrymyn jasaybyz*' ('We conduct a ritual as normal/as usual') from many mothers. The normalness of performing some healing rituals is seen as a kind of obligation for mothers, especially for elderly women, to know. Not in vain is the Kyrgyz term for 'traditional healers' *apalar*, which means 'mothers' (usually elderly women). For Burul Eje and many others, the knowledge of two to three rituals is seen as normal and not as a magic skill or superficial power which would normally belong to traditional health experts.

At the same time, there is a fine line between ordinary people and healers (traditional health experts), who possess some special spiritual power. According to the local Kyrgyz worldview, even an ordinary person may possess some unique healing capabilities based on certain indicators. For example, there are groups of people such as a young widow, an only daughter, people with a wart on their tongue (*tilinde söölü bar*) or with a mole in their eyes (*közündö kaly bar*). Such people

¹³² When a child gets a sudden fright, it is believed that its heart falls down (*jürök tüshüü*) and is treated by the ritual of lifting a heart. The way this ill-being is handled by lifting this fallen heart echoes the statement of Nichter/Nichter 1996, who underline that the perception of how the body works shapes the way the illnesses are handled.

¹³³ Burul Eje used the word *bakshy* and laughed. She had used the word *bakshy* because I had used the term *büü-bakshy* earlier in our conversation when I meant healers. Later I learned that for local people this word had a negative connotation. *Büü-bakshy* for my interlocutors meant clairvoyants or charlatans who would usually sit in bazaars and try to deceive people in order just to get money.

are believed to be *kasiyttüü*, a person who possesses certain spiritual power. They are accepted as special and it is believed that what they say, wish or curse might come true. Women who give birth to twins are also included in this group. Jyldyz Eje (in her mid-40s), who is a mother of twin girls from my English language course, became a healer due to giving birth to twins. When I first visited her house, Jyldyz Eje was sitting with her neighbour and having tea. Both of them had children of about one year old. During my conversation with them, I asked Jyldyz Eje about her experiences with healers:

BT: 'Have you ever visited *büü-bakshy* (healers)?'

Jyldyz Eje: 'I am myself *büü-bakshy* [laughs].'¹³⁴

Neighbour: 'When my daughter gets ill and constantly cries, I bring my daughter to her [meaning to Jyldyz Eje].'

Jyldyz Eje: 'They call me *Umay-ene* [*Umay-ene* is a patroness of children and health]. Those who give birth to twins are *büü-bakshy* [laughs]. I conduct a ritual against *kirene* (*kirenelep koyom*). If adults have a headache, I conduct a ritual against that (*tengdep koyom*). If children get frightened, I lift their hearts [by conducting a ritual] and they get well (*jüröktörün kötörüp koyom*).'

Earlier I argued that mother-doctors' active treatment practices in a home setting blur the boundary between biomedicine and alternative medicine. Similarly, the cases of ordinary lay mothers who conduct two to three healing rituals against *kirene* or *jürök tüshüü*, which they themselves accept as a normal practice, or the way some mothers are perceived to be *kasiyttüü*, a person who possesses some unique power, blur the boundary between 'designated folk health experts' (healers from the folk sector) and normal lay mothers (from the popular arena). The normality of being knowledgeable and performing healing rituals by ordinary mothers, in turn, allows me to call them 'mother-healers'.

¹³⁴ Jyldyz Eje also used the term *büü-bakshy* because I myself used this term at the beginning of our conversation. Like Burul Eje, she also laughed because of this term's negative connotation.

6.6. Islam and Changing Perceptions of Health

Before starting my field research, I assumed that health-related rituals of Kyrgyz people had a stronger and more persistent character than other rituals. This assumption is mainly related to the fact that during the Soviet time, despite prohibitions, many folk healing practices continued to survive, such as visits to sacred sites by women and healers, where they conducted healing rituals secretly (see Aitpaeva et al. 2007). Furthermore, I held the belief that health-related rituals for children should be even more stable given their important role in ensuring their proper development and well-being, as I discussed in chapter 5 on *yrym*. Evidence from my fieldwork proved that my assumptions were only partially true. In Kochkor, I met several Muslim families who, since they began to strictly follow Islam, have stopped to perform some traditional child-related and health-related rituals. *Kirene* and many other commonly practiced healing rituals became the target for eradication by such families. The idea of *kirene* is preserved, but the methods of treatment of *kirene* have altered according to Islamic values.¹³⁵

Islam prohibits the invocation of the names of patrons or goddesses such as Umay or Batma-Zuura. Similarly, using objects such as ash in a healing ritual or using special amulets to ward off the evil eye are considered to be not right. Such rituals are eliminated either by being classified as *shirk* ('sin of idolatry') or *bidayat* ('innovation, not mentioned in Islamic scriptures'). Some of my interlocutors also classified them as *eski salt* ('old traditions'). These pious Muslims justify their decisions to stop practicing certain traditional healing rituals, as well as some life-cycle rituals, by saying that they are forbidden according to Muslimness (*musulmanchylykta*, in the practice of Muslims), in the Quran (*kuranda*), in sharia law (*shariatta*) or in religion (*dinde*). For example, the healing ritual against *kirene* has been replaced by the practice of reading verses from the Quran. This does not mean that pious Muslims are also against

biomedicine. On the contrary, they, especially the followers of the Tablighi Jamaat, often refer to biomedicine in order to legitimise Islamic medicine or other health-related practices mentioned in Islamic texts.

The revival of Islam in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan clearly demonstrates that people's perception of health and illness, as Bilton and his colleagues put it, is 'culturally vulnerable, highly context-specific, dynamic and subject to change' (Bilton et al. 2002, 358). Ideas of health and illness, for devout Muslims, are influenced by ideals of being a proper Muslim, as defined in the Holy Scriptures. Following Islamic tenets obediently is seen as the source of good health, which is accepted as a reward from Allah. One old Dungan woman, aged about 60, explained to me the role of Islam for health:

'Using things in the Quran itself is good for health: If you read the book of Quran (*Kuran kitep*), Allah will give light to your eyes and your eyes will see well. If you read the Quran with good intentions (*niet menen okusang*), your heart will be clean. If you read it with devotion (*jürökkö koyup okusang*; literally 'by applying it to your heart'), your heart will not hurt and your hands and legs will not hurt.'

This Dungan woman, who speaks perfect Kyrgyz and teaches Kyrgyz girls at the local *madrassa* in Kochkor, was one of many who believe in the power of the Quran and that it is only Allah who 'gives cure' to people of any illness and ill-being. I noticed from the words of my devout Muslim interlocutors that being healthy or ill is tightly connected and strongly depends on the level of being a 'good Muslim', being a person who is following Islamic rules written in the Quran and being devoted to God (see also Laird et al. 2015; Rasanayagam 2011; Sinky et al. 2015; Tursunova et al. 2014). Similar to the Dungan woman, these people relate Islamic rules to a healthy lifestyle such as reading the Quran or praying five times a day, which are followed by eating *halal* food or uttering '*bismillah*' before taking a sip of tea or starting to eat. The notion that 'Islam is not a religion, but a way of life' (see Laird et al. 2015) can be well demonstrated in every step and action of a pious Muslim in Kochkor.

¹³⁵ For a detailed historical account of Muslim medical culture in Central Asia covering the periods from the 16th to the 20th cent. AD see DeWeese 2013.

As I have shown elsewhere, health is strongly linked to the quality of life (Tulebaeva 2017). The ‘quality of life’ for practicing Muslims is encapsulated in their piousness. To be a good Muslim implies that one follows the norms written in the Islamic texts, such as doing ablutions, praying five times a day and eating *halal* food to name but a few. Each activity, dedicated to the fulfilment of such norms, ensures physical health and beauty. Several times, I heard my devout Muslim interlocutors mentioning that praying five times a day is itself exercise, while ablution keeps a person fresh, fit and clean not only physically but also in their inner world (see also Rasanayagam 2011).

Remember Altynay Eje, who owns an Islamic shop in the centre of Kochkor, from whom I bought black cumin for my host-brother when he was ill. In 2000, following her husband’s path, Altynay Eje started to perform *namaz* (pray five times a day) and wear a *hijab*.¹³⁶ I first met her at a religious lesson called *taalim*, which takes place once a week. She was the one who once led this religious lesson. During the *taalim* lesson, which is attended by young and old women of the village, and my interview with her, Altynay Eje underlined the importance of Islam in leading a healthy and happy life:

‘Praying five times a day is physical exercise in its own way. When you do ablutions, you rinse your nose and throat, so, you will not have sinusitis (*gaymorit*). Your face will be shining and you will be radiant, you will be beautiful. If you wash your face and become radiant, your eyes will see well. If you wash your ears, you will hear well. You will not have high blood pressure; it [praying] is physical exercise in its own right (*özünchö ele fizzlyadka*, see Rasanayagam 2006 for a similar account).’

Just as health is considered to be a gift from God for following the norms mentioned in the Islamic scriptures, including praying, illness is seen as a punishment by God for the sins that one commits

(see Laird et al. 2015; Rasanayagam 2011; Sinky et al. 2015; Tursunova et al. 2014). Especially children’s illnesses are seen as a straight result of the sins committed by their parents (see Keshavjee 1998 for similar cases among Tajik Muslims). ‘Parents do deeds which would not please God’ (*Kudayga jakpagan ishtherdi jasashat’*), was noted by a female healer in Kochkor, who cures with the help of the Quran, which is also called ‘Prophetic medicine’ (Tursunova et al. 2014, 48). Sins are believed to be committed usually when one does not follow or goes against the norms mentioned in the Holy Scriptures. Emir, a young *daavatchy*¹³⁷ (propagator of Islam, a follower of Tablighi Jamaat) at the age of 27 and a father of two children, confirmed this idea:

‘Whenever I stop my regular performance of *namaz*, I encounter a problem. Even if it does not affect me, my son gets sick, my wife gets sick, my daughter gets sick or my sister gets sick. Whenever I miss prayers, I expect such problems. My wife once got sick and doctors suspected that it was *saryk* [Hepatitis A]. Before going to see the doctors, I laid my wife in front of me and read *suras* [verses from the Quran] and I pleaded God to forgive me and my wife for missing some prayers. There were times when in order to collect *dünüyö* (‘wealth’; meaning to improve material condition), I could not perform *namaz* in time, as I had to work [meaning to earn money].’

The Kyrgyz word *dünüyö* is translated into English as ‘wealth’ or ‘material well-being’. In my understanding, this young pious Muslim used this very word in an ironic way, because in his case, he worked not to collect wealth, but to earn for their basic living, as he was the only breadwinner in his family. With the Re-Islamisation processes in Kochkor, the Arabic meaning of the word ‘*dunyā*’ (the temporal world with its earthly concerns and possessions) began to enter the lexicon of Kochkor people. Because of *dünüyö*, be it the material well-being or earthly concerns, Emir skipped *namaz*, which, in his understanding, caused God’s

¹³⁶ A *hijab* is a long skirt or dress with long sleeves and a scarf that is tied in the front to cover a woman’s hair and neck. This way of wearing a headscarf is a new practice among young women. I did not come across any women in Kochkor who also covered their faces.

¹³⁷ A *daavatchy* is a follower of the transnational movement of Tablighi Jamaat, who conducts *daavat* (preaching, summoning) and calls others to follow Islam.

disappointment. That is why, as he interprets, his family has encountered this health problem.

Apart from Emir, I met many devout Muslims for whom the process of healing also included pleading for God to forgive their sins. Janara Eje, the doctor mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, believes in the power of healers, but she herself does not and cannot use their services, because the rituals that these healers use are *shirk* or *bidayat* according to Islam. She stated that she does not use their service, which is also prohibited by her husband. It is clear now why she herself refrained from the services of healers. Turning to *apalar* would mean that she commits a sin which will not be liked by God. This can bring trouble and illness as a punishment from God for such misdeeds.

I noted earlier that the Re-Islamisation process in post-Soviet Kochkor has contributed to the strengthening of the practice of healing at home with the help of *suras* and the growing role of the popular arena defined by Kleinman (1978). Islam is entering the private life of families and has reconstructed their notions of health, healthy lifestyle and health-related treatment practices. Pious Muslim women, like Janara Eje and Alтынay Eje, are abandoning some old local traditional healing practices in favour of Islam. By referring to Saudi Arabian women's breast cancer narratives, Sinky et al. (2015) emphasise the sincere trust by these women in Allah. They noted that if affliction is sent by Allah, then God's will cannot be contested. Similarly, they cast no doubt in Islamic healing either. In the context of Kochkor, too, the power of *suras* is unchallenged by practicing Muslims in the same way as a traditional healing ritual used against *kirene* is not questioned by mothers who perform such rituals.

Strong belief in healing practices consisting of reading verses from the Quran has increased the number of cases when religious lay people have begun to be involved in the healing of their children. If, before, it was mullahs, religious specialists, whom parents turned to for healing, then today, with the Re-Islamisation process in Kochkor, any ordinary practicing Muslim can heal by reading *suras* from the Quran. This has led some parents to consider themselves as 'health experts'. To my question about whether he knew any cases

where one had kept reading *suras* but the ill person's condition worsened, Emir replied:

'Fatiha sura, the most powerful *sura* of Allah, never makes things worse. *Paygambar* [Prophet Muhammad] cut his hand and it was divided into two. He connected them with the help of a *sura*. There is not any doubt in the *suras*!'

In Emir's view, even biomedicine can become ineffective if an ill person does not keep in mind Allah before taking any medication.¹³⁸ According to him, one should say before taking a pill: 'Oh, Allah, a cure will not occur from this pill, but only from you!' This implies that the medicine will work upon the ill person only with the will of God.

On the one hand, *suras*, *hadith*, *sharia* and everything related to the norms written in Islamic texts are seen as an 'authoritative and internally persuasive discourse' in Bakhtin's sense (Bakhtin 1981, discussed in Prior 1995, 291), where every message stands unquestioned and people strongly believe in it and follow it. On the other hand, as seen in the examples mentioned above, and as I indicated elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2017), Islam serves as a resource, as a means through which one can achieve health, well-being, beauty and a good life. Islam, especially the idea of being a proper Muslim, not only makes people more devout and alters their inner spiritual wealth and worldview. It also directly affects the everyday life of people: their thoughts and feelings, behaviour and attitude towards each other, their relationship within the family as well as the community and, as has been illustrated above, health-related knowledge and practices.

¹³⁸ See Hughes (2011) who challenged the idea that Islam conflicts with biomedical ideology in relation to reproduction, and also Amuyunzu (1998, 495) who notes that 'Islam is known for its flexible and accommodating stance regarding the use of various healing beliefs and practices, and seeks to integrate them'. In my case as well, one mullah stated: 'If one has a headache and is weak, I ask him or her to go to a doctor and have his or her blood pressure measured and blood tested. One should look for any cure (Arab. *shifa*), be it a doctor.'

6.7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed that there is a diverse and complex understanding by people about health and illness, which they experience with dynamics of social change. These processes affect the construction and re-construction of the idea of a 'healthy body', be it of a child or an adult, in different ways. Especially the last examples related to Islam showed how the strengthening of this religion in Kochkor has drastically changed people's notions about health and what kind of life they should lead.

Through the case studies of my host-mother's treatment methods and a local ailment called *kirene*, I explored the concepts of 'mother-doctors' and 'mother-healers' and showed that female members of the household are the main gatekeepers of children's health. These mothers, who are not medically trained, skilfully use their knowledge and experience to ensure their children's healthy growth. The increasing role of Islam only adds to their skills. If in the sections on 'mother-doctors' and 'mother-healers' I have extensively discussed the prevailing role of female family

members in their children's health, then, with Re-Islamisation, it is worth noting the increasing role of male members not only in their children's healthcare but also in their upbringing in general.¹³⁹ All these examples of diverse and mixed practices by lay people in Kochkor indicate a blurred boundary between biomedicine and alternative medicine in the popular arena.¹⁴⁰ In my work, the cases that I brought up clearly show how, according to the local categorisation, all existing sources of treatment have their own importance without being categorised as main or alternative.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a statement that warns that child health is a field of study which 'requires an understanding of not only disease and therapy but also of society and of the family' (Sholkamy 1997, 36). The examples that I brought up in this chapter contribute to my conclusion that the healthy growth of a child is a large arena, where various norms and policies are imposed and where what is healthy and what is not is highly debated and negotiated. The next chapter will continue this debate, but within the framework of moral education.

139 A similar idea regarding the active role of Muslim men in children's healthcare is also mentioned in Inhorn/Sargent 2006.

140 Gibson, who studied Islam in Indonesia, points out that '[f]or a couple of centuries, a fairly stable compromise seems to have been worked out, in which the spirit cults increasingly became the 'religion of women' and Islam the 'religion of men' (Gibson 2000, 62). This statement is affirmed in Kyrgyzstan by the categorisation of folk healthcare sources where healers who support spirit cults are *apalar* (translated as 'mothers'), and mullahs who read *suras* from the Quran to heal are men. I never heard a woman being called *moldo* (mullah) in Kochkor. Only once I came across a woman in Kochkor who healed with the help of the Quran. Her way of healing would not fall into the 'spirit cult' category but more into the Islamic way of healing.

7. *Tarbiya* – A Kyrgyz Way of Upbringing

‘A good child is obliging, a bad child is naughty’
(*Jakshy bala elpek, jaman bala tentek*)
Kyrgyz proverb

‘What you do is for me,
what you learn is for yourself’
(*Jasaganyng men üchün,
üyröngönüng özüng üchün*)
Kyrgyz saying

7.1. Introduction

‘My husband says that children should not be left without any work, they should always be working. When he arrived home, he never let his children sit. He constantly asked them to do this and to do that. At that time, I felt sorry for my children. But now I think that he was right. Previously, I always defended our children; I let them play when my husband was at work. Later, I noticed that my children started to disobey me, but when their father was coming, they feared him and respected him. Then I started to believe that one should be a bit strict with one’s children. Once, my friend approached me and told me how her son and husband fought the other day. This was because they do not scold their children. They are not strict with them! She [meaning her friend] underlined that my husband is giving the right *tarbiya* (‘upbringing’) to our children. Her children have now ‘come up onto her husband’s head’ [meaning that their children are disobedient] [laughs sadly]. My children did not like their father earlier, saying that he always made them do things. But now they have grown up and they are very grateful for their father, acknowledging that he has given the right *tarbiya* to them. My eldest son now also scolds his younger brother sometimes. It is good when a child is brought up strictly. Those children who are spoiled do not listen to their parents. My husband’s brother is so soft that his son, who is now in the 9th grade, does not do any work. His father does the work himself saying that his son does not listen to him. But I think that not all youth are

like this. It depends on *tarbiya*. Maybe it is the influence of the current time?! On TV, children fight with adults. Now children see it from American films and copy that, thinking that they can also do so and that they can also argue back to adults.’

The narrative above was given by Aida Eje (in her mid-40s) while sharing her thoughts on the right way of upbringing. Together with her husband, she is raising three children: two boys and one girl. The older two have already finished school and left for the capital Bishkek to study at university. The youngest daughter is in the 8th grade. When I visited their house, I had a chance to meet her husband in person. To my surprise, he seemed to me a soft father and not the strict man that I had previously pictured from Aida Eje’s description above. This man confirmed that *tarbiya* starts with respect for parents. According to him, children with good *tarbiya* should obey their parents and not oppose them. Aida Eje’s husband takes work as a means to raise a child in the ‘right way’, as work instils certain skills and desired qualities in children.

In chapter 2, I mentioned a Kpelle mother in Liberia, who defined a good child as the one who, if asked, fulfils the tasks such as bringing water, cooking, minding the baby or planting rice without complaint (Lancy 2008). Having understood what Aida Eje and her husband meant by a good *tarbiya*, which has a tight link to work and respect for elders, I dare to interpret also the statement of the Kpelle mother not critically. This does not mean that a good child is one who is always in work and fulfils instructions of parents silently, without any complaint, or that it is about a mother who is exploiting a child. In fact, it would be correct to consider that the main point here is not about work at all. Rather, it is about culturally constructed social relations, where it is expected that a child respects the elders and does not argue with them. Aida Eje’s narrative also echoes what Fortes (1970) writes about the Tallensi children in Ghana for whom ‘respect’ was interchangeable with ‘fear’.

I would like to warn that we deal with two types of translations here. The first is a direct translation of words, phrases and concepts from a vernacular language to English. The second is a cultural translation of meanings with the aim to accurately communicate vernacular ideas and values. For example, Read makes an interesting observation among the Ngoni of Malawi, who in order to protect their society and preserve their cultural identity, exercised a rigid social control over the upbringing of their children. She writes: ‘Ngoni adults, and especially the senior men and women who were in control of the training of children and themselves deeply conscious of the traditional values of their society, summed up the aims of the upbringing of children in one word ‘respect’ (Read 1968, 15). By stating this, Read notes that in order to convey its full meaning, it is difficult to translate vernacular terms and ideas into a single English word or phrase. So far, based on Aida Eje’s case, the readers have been introduced to the terms such as work, respect, fear and obedience as part of children’s upbringing in Kochkor. It is important to look closer at these words in the local contexts in order to understand local reasoning behind their use in child upbringing.

This chapter discusses the notion of good upbringing, which is considered a very important aspect of children’s proper development in Kochkor. Similar to *yrym* that I discussed in chapter 5, *tarbiya*, which can be translated as ‘purposeful socialisation’, is an inevitable part in Kyrgyz children’s childhoods. I examine this local concept which my interlocutors in Kochkor mention as significant in their lives, especially in the period of the ‘socialisation crisis’ that they face today with socio-cultural transformations.¹⁴¹

Tarbiya is one of the ways of forming a social person. By underlining the strong relationship between local values and the construction of the person, who is a culturally specific and historical

¹⁴¹ My interlocutors did not use the term ‘socialisation crisis’. I adopted it from Mayer (2004), since it perfectly describes the concerns of the people in Kochkor. By this term, Mayer refers to changes in the traditional way of living when people do not know what to expect from the youth due to uncertainties brought by urbanisation or industrialisation processes which require new skills and new roles.

product in a Maussian sense, I will set out that the socialisation process should not be looked at as a process which prepares a child for adult life (see Denzin 2010; Tonkin 1982). Neither should the socialisation process be seen as what transforms a child from ‘becoming’ into ‘a being’, from an ‘incomplete’ into a ‘complete’ full adult, or from a barbarian into a civilised man (see Buehler-Niederberger 1998; Jenks 2005). Rather, it should be looked at as a never-ending process which prepares a **social person**, be it a child or an adult, for certain social roles. It also re-socialises him or her at any time due to social changes and societal demands that meet the requirements of a particular time (*zaman*) and society (*koom*). Unlike socialisation as a general process, I will demonstrate how *tarbiya* has a cultural significance related to ‘Kyrgyzness’ which has a strong cultural, national and moral connotation. On the contrary, the practices that do not fall into Kyrgyz cultural norms may be judged negatively and not be seen as correct behaviour (see Markowitz 2000), which I will discuss extensively in the section called ‘Western Does Not Work for Us’. After that, I will elaborate on the local concepts of **work** and **labour**, which are seen as a positive factor influencing good *tarbiya*, while good life without work is believed to spoil children. Before turning to ethnographic illustrations, first, I will discuss the analytical concept of *tarbiya* below.

7.2. What is *Tarbiya*?

‘A child is like a harvest: what you plant, you will receive back in the end’, was how one of my interlocutors described *tarbiya*. But what really is *tarbiya*? *Tarbiya* is an incredibly important concept in bringing up children in Kochkor which teaches them how to navigate a complex web of relationships. *Tarbiya* can also be translated as ‘purposeful education’ in a broader sense.¹⁴² From

¹⁴² Here I differentiate *tarbiya* (moral education) from the formal education given at school. As I will discuss more in detail in chapter 8, in the context of post-Soviet Kochkor, secular schools, which have inherited the curriculum from the Soviet system, also aim at giving *tarbiya* to children.

an anthropological point of view, **education** is ‘the learning of culture’ and it includes ‘the inculcation and understanding of cultural symbols, moral values, sanctions, and cosmological beliefs’ (Middleton 1970, xiii). This is what would be called *tarbiya* in Kyrgyz. It is full of wisdom, proverbs and rules that set out what is allowed or prohibited to do in Kyrgyz society in order to teach a child what is good and bad, right and wrong.

How do people in Kochkor know if a child is given or has received *tarbiya* or not? A child who has received *tarbiya* knows its place and its role in society and acts accordingly (this will be discussed further below). There are sets of characteristics which indicate that a child has *tarbiya*. These are usually estimated in social relations. *Tarbiya*, in the form of socially expected norms and behaviour, is inculcated from a small age and is usually instructed by elderly family members until a child learns and independently starts doing those culturally desired practices themselves. Parents do not get tired of repeating those things until a child masters them. For example, Kanykey always instructed Sezimay to bring a thick mattress (*jer töshök*), so that I sit comfortably on the floor when I visited them.¹⁴³ Providing a *jer töshök* for guests is a sign of respect. Even in the absence of Kanykey, Sezimay brought a *jer töshök* for me. That day, I bought Kanykey’s daughters some sweets and sweet popcorn. Jazgül, the first younger sister of Sezimay, who was then eight years old, immediately opened the popcorn pack and offered it to me first. Even if I did not ask anything, she said: ‘My mother always tells us that we have to offer first to elders’ (*Apam daiyma uluularga birinchi ooz tiygizgile deyt*). Only after I took one piece, Jazgül put some into her mouth enjoying the sweet popcorn.

Providing a *jer töshök* for guests (what Sezimay did), letting elderly people sit in a respected place (*tör*, discussed in chapter 4), serving the elderly first (as Jazgül did) or offering bread (*nan ooz tiygizüü*) to people who stop by for a short time, the hospitality shown by my young interlocutors

in Kochkor – these are some examples of good *tarbiya*, which children usually are carefully instructed by parents to follow. Interestingly, the way children meet or fail to meet these social expectations affects the child’s parents’ reputation, in the first place, and not the reputation of the child. Parents are praised, in the first case, or on the contrary, judged for not being able to fulfil their roles as good parents by failing to inculcate in their child culturally formed knowledge and skills. In Kyrgyz language, people say: ‘this child has received *tarbiya*’ (*‘tarbiya algan’*) or ‘this child has not received *tarbiya*’ (*‘tarbiya algan emes’*), which means that it is parents or the community that have to ‘give *tarbiya*’ to a child. Alanen discusses the importance of a triangularity where it is (a) childhood, (b) the family and (c) socialisation that are ‘moulded into one piece and cannot be broken into parts for separate consideration’ (Alanen 1988, 54 f.). This can serve as a model for understanding *tarbiya* and approaching childhood socialisation in Kochkor.

If we turn to the etymology of the term, ‘*tarbiyah*’ in Arabic means ‘development’, ‘growth’ and ‘cultivation’. Many sources dealing with the Muslim population in Central Asia translate *tarbiya* as ‘moral education’ (Borbieva 2012; Stephan 2010b; Suleymanova 2015) or ‘moral conduct’ (Beyer 2013). I argue that this ‘moral’ aspect is very much culturally constructed. In other words, *tarbiya* is a process of enculturation, which is the learning of a culture where the understanding of ‘cultural symbols, moral values, sanctions, and cosmological beliefs’ (as noted earlier by Middleton 1970, xiii) is a key factor. Similar to the Ngoni people, who rigidly control the upbringing of their children in order to maintain cultural identity and certain cultural values (Read 1968), to the people in Kochkor, *tarbiya* is perceived as a resource that is aimed at preserving this Kyrgyzness aspect of the people who link it to Kyrgyz cultural values and practices (more on this will follow later in this chapter and in chapter 8).

In chapter 2, I argued that anthropology should approach a child as a social person, a member of a particular society with its own values, worldviews, expectations and roles, and not as a mere isolated child who is juxtaposed to the

¹⁴³ Usually, people in Kochkor use a table with short legs and sit on the floor on thick mattresses.

opposite category of adults. Here it is important to talk about the concept of *tarbiya*, which I translate as ‘purposeful socialisation’. I use the definition by Mayer who notes that ‘[s]ocialization may be broadly defined as the inculcation of the skills and attitudes necessary for playing given social roles’ (Mayer 2004, xiii). Unlike ‘*vospitanie*’ in Russian, ‘upbringing’ in English or ‘*Erziehung*’ in German, which I understand more as a general neutral process of raising and educating a child by instilling social moral values and skills that would help a child in its adult life, *tarbiya* as a purposeful socialisation aims at raising a child into a proper **Kyrgyz person**. Thus, the concept of *tarbiya* urges us to understand not only the process of socialisation itself but also local cultural values, symbols and local rationalities for the construction of personhood, which may vary cross-culturally. One such example of cross-cultural differences can be found in Lancy’s work:

‘Qualities we value, such as precocity, verbal fluency, independent and creative thought, personal expression, and the ability to engage in repartee, would all be seen by villagers as defects to be curtailed as quickly as possible. These are danger signs of future waywardness’ (Lancy 2008, 168).

By ‘we’ Lancy means modern Western societies and ‘villagers’ are categorised as ‘others’. Lancy brings up some qualities such as a sense of shame, politeness, obedience, listening and observing and not talking, that is, ‘being seen and not heard’ (Lancy 2008, 6), and states that they are highly valued in bringing up children in societies that he categorises as ‘others’. I wanted to see which category people in Kochkor would fall into and I asked for the opinion of the parents in Kochkor on this matter. They highlighted the qualities such as respect for elderly people, politeness, obedience, similar to Aida Eje and her husband’s statement earlier.

In my view, Lancy’s classification of ‘we’ versus ‘others’ with their consequent characteristics imitates the dichotomy such as the Western individual and non-Western person that I mentioned in chapter 2. For me, precocity, verbal fluency, independent and creative thought, personal expression and the ability to engage in repartee are

the qualities of **individual** competence. These are qualities that do not describe social relationships. While qualities such as a sense of shame, politeness, obedience, being seen and not heard, on the contrary, are characteristics that describe social relationships and not individual competence. Thus, the latter are qualities that describe a **social person**, who is made of social relationships. I argue that both categories of qualities exist in both ‘we’ and ‘other’ societies but with different salience and levels of expression. For example, schools in Kochkor work towards developing verbal fluency, independence and critical thinking in children, while my German colleagues, like any parent, expect from their children politeness and obedience of some sort. Below I will illustrate what the people of Kochkor understand by ‘we’ and ‘others’ and what qualities they associate with both of them.

7.3. Western Does Not Work for Us

Once, I found a brochure in the Kochkor library which was titled ‘Raising a Child with Endearment’ (*meerimdüülük*) (fig. 12). The brochure appealed to parents to support, approve and praise their children and stated that parents should listen to their children and respect their opinion. It also advised that if a child does something negative, then parents should try not to pay attention to it because sometimes children would do bad things just to attract attention. It also recommended that parents should not beat their children as violence can cause even more difficulties in a child’s development. If parents frighten their children, later their children would not respect them.

This brochure was published by the Presidential Administration of the Kyrgyz Republic and was sponsored by international developmental organisations within the framework of the project ‘Child Development on a Community Level’. This and many other brochures included important points on the healthy growth of children. The brochure, as was indicated on the cover page, was distributed for free. I later saw the same brochure hanging on the wall in one of the kindergartens in Kochkor. I cannot tell if this brochure was distributed

en masse or limited to children's educational institutions. It was interesting to hear the opinion of the librarian of the Kochkor library who had read this brochure and reflected on it as a mother:

'Western does not work for us! [Western methods do not work for Kyrgyz]. If we start talking to children like that [meaning that parents listen to their children and respect what they want to do] then children will get onto our heads. When I read it, first I said 'Well, it is true' [meaning that she agreed with the points in the brochure]. But when I tried to use it [the methods mentioned in the brochure] on my son, it worked to the contrary. My child's behaviour visibly changed so that even my husband noticed it. He asked what I had done with our son. My son had been spoiled and had started to disobey me and my husband (*bashybyzga chygyp ketti*; literally: 'he got onto our heads').'

Disagreement with the points mentioned in this brochure does not mean that the librarian is not an affectionate mother. Love and care towards a child were demonstrated by mothers in Kochkor in many ways. First, the point that I want to bring up here is that the qualities that would seem to be considered positive, such as listening to children and respecting their opinion, are seen as Western and inappropriate from a Kyrgyz cultural point of view, where hierarchy and respect for elders are valued. Second, it is important to look at a local rationale on what is meant by a proper upbringing then. Let me bring some more examples from the local logic on what is appropriate and inappropriate for the healthy growth of children. For that, I will again turn to the local concept of *tarbiya*. Kyrgyz people are contrasted not only to the West or to the Russians, who, as I will discuss later, are seen as 'another individualistic Other' (Kirmse 2013, 169), but also among the Kyrgyz, rural Kyrgyz are contrasted to urban Kyrgyz who are described as lacking *tarbiya*, a proper way of upbringing.

My research among Kyrgyz families on the comparison between village and city children has revealed interesting results on *tarbiya*. Many of my interlocutors expressed their view that good

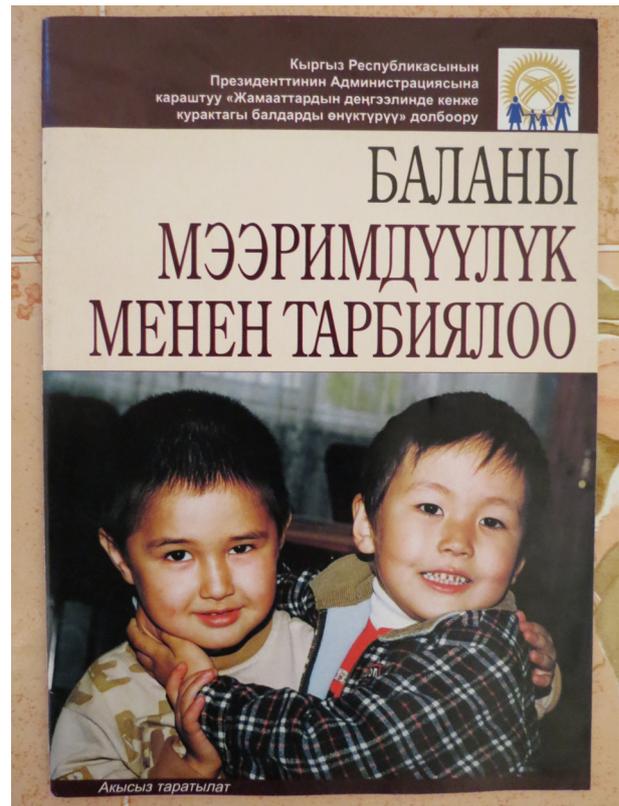


Fig. 12. The brochure title reads: 'Raising a child with *meerimdüülük*' ('kindness', 'endearment') (photo by author).

or proper *tarbiya* is given in villages and not in cities. City children are sometimes called 'like Russians', due to more influence of Russian culture and language in cities. Some city children attend Russian schools and cannot speak Kyrgyz properly, which does not correspond to the 'ideal' version of *tarbiya* that people in Kochkor expect from their children. There are also other qualities that villagers find negative in children brought up in a city. This is what Mayram Eje said:

'City children are *'ak kol'* ('white hand'; the term which describes a person who is not involved in physical work or hard work). They are neither Kyrgyz nor Russians. Some of our city relatives give good *tarbiya* to their children by involving their children in village life.'

Mayram Eje shares this idea of the connection between a good *tarbiya* and work with Aida Eje and her husband, which, in their opinion, is practiced more in villages than in cities. Indeed, in order to

give good *tarbiya* to their children, many parents in cities and towns send their children during summer holidays to their relatives or grandparents in rural areas. Their aim is to involve their children in village life so that they learn how to grow potatoes, water land and crops, tend sheep, cows or horses and be involved in general physical work. This idea is also maintained, interestingly, by some of those Kyrgyz families who live abroad and raise their children in Europe. Once, I came across a Kyrgyz family in Zurich. The parents sent their 16-year-old child to a summer camp on a farm in one of the villages in Switzerland so that their child could get involved in some kind of work which was seen by them as a positive way of upbringing.

I asked many interlocutors in Kochkor about the role of city life and village life in children's healthy growth. On the one hand, they noted how in cities, there are more possibilities for children to be engaged in extracurricular activities such as sports and entertainment and more facilities for children's cognitive development. In this regard, village children lack far behind as there are no recreational centres in the village. On the other hand, in comparison to the city, village life was seen as 'healthier' due to clean air and ecologically clean and natural food. Even the dust in Kochkor, according to one of the mothers, was seen as healthy for her child's physical development. This woman stated that it is good if a child grows up having been exposed to dust. This is because a child's organism will get used to the dust and their body will grow stronger and will have more resistance to germs and illnesses as a result. She noted that in comparison to village children, city children can get immediately ill if one only 'blows on them' (*'iylöp koysonq ele oorup kalyshat'*).

But most importantly, village life was praised for preserving cultural (*saltyk*) practices: both traditional and national. Here the notion of 'traditional' has similar connotations with 'ethnic purity' and 'rural location', as Werner observed in the case of Kazakhstan (Werner 2000, 130). Once, Sultan Bayke and I discussed the topic of *tarbiya* and I asked him to make a comparison between city and village children. Sultan Bayke noted:

Sultan Bayke: 'Villagers have *tarbiya*. They let the elderly sit at the *tör* [respected place at the head of the *dastorkon* or table]. They also know how to distribute meat properly.'¹⁴⁴

BT: 'How about city boys?'

Sultan Bayke: 'A boy in the city does not have *tarbiya*, because he does not know these things.'

BT: 'Why are you connecting *tarbiya* to cultural things?'

Sultan Bayke: 'But it is so (*Oshondoy ele da*)! Russians do not have that. A Russian child goes and sits at the *tör*, a respected place, without offering that place to its parents.'

For Sultan Bayke, good *tarbiya* is related to the local notion of respect and awareness of Kyrgyz cultural practices. Local people judge the respect of children towards others not only in terms of politeness or obedience but also through cultural practices such as letting a senior person sit at the *tör*, the respected place at the *dastorkon* or table that regulates social relations. In Sultan Bayke's view, a city boy may be very polite and kind, which is a sign of a good *tarbiya*. Yet, if he does not know Kyrgyz cultural practices, such as the hierarchy of being seated around the table, then he lacks *tarbiya* as the breach of the cultural norms is a sign of disrespect.¹⁴⁵

During our conversation, Sultan Bayke compared Kyrgyz and Russians. His implication that Russians lack *tarbiya* does not mean that Russians lack manners or are not cultured. On the contrary, when it comes to being cultured, Russians are often praised for being 'civilised', 'cultural' (Rus. *kul'turnyi*) and 'well-mannered' (Rus. *vospitannyi*), as Jangyl Eje's quote below shows:

'I notice a big difference between Russian and Kyrgyz ways of giving *tarbiya* to children. If a Russian child is in the bus with his mother or grandmother and out of curiosity by pointing at something

¹⁴⁴ Knowing how to distribute different cuts and pieces of meat according to the status of recipients is crucial cultural knowledge. It is carefully observed when guests are served meat. Allocating meat pieces among guests wrong can be a sign of 'cultural illiteracy'.

¹⁴⁵ See Reynolds 2013 on the role of places in the construction of human personhood in Kyrgyzstan.

asks them: 'What is that?', the Russians explain everything to the child with full patience. But what does a Kyrgyz mother do? When a child asks its mother: 'Apa (mother), what is that?', the mother immediately silences the child by saying [Jangyl Eje raised her tone, imitating such mothers]: 'Sit still (*Jön otur*)! Keep silent (*Tynch otur*)! You do not need to know about it, you will not understand it!' [...] When I go to the museum, I see many Russian adults who take their small children or grandchildren with them and explain everything to them. Kyrgyz people do not do that with their children.'

Here Jangyl Eje shares another cross-cultural perspective on *tarbiya* and parents' role in it. Both Jangyl Eje and Sultan Bayke talk about upbringing from the prism of 'cultural development'. Yet they differ in a sense that Jangyl Eje's example focuses more on the cognitive development of a child as an individual. In her narrative, Russians often take their children to museums and galleries and introduce their children to art and history. Alternatively, a Russian mother in the bus tirelessly explains to her child what is what. These practices help develop children's horizon and bring up 'cultured individuals'. According to the report by UNICEF (2011), Kyrgyz parents pay more attention to the physical development of a child than to its psychological development. They explained this by the lack of parents' attempts to teach a child to draw, distinguish colours and the fact that they did not read books to the children. Reading a book to children is not a habit of Kyrgyz parents. The culture of reading books to children has not been promoted and supported by the state either. For example, in Kochkor, there are no good bookstores and libraries where parents can borrow or buy books. There are some books sold in bazaars but they are expensive. The number of good children's books in Kyrgyz language is practically zero, which makes it difficult for parents to get into the habit of buying or lending books for children in Kochkor.

Sultan Bayke was also talking about the 'cultural development' of a child. Unlike Jangyl Eje, the 'cultural' aspect that he is referring to is related to a child's awareness of Kyrgyz *salt* (customary practices) and their observance as part of good upbringing. A similar account was mentioned

regarding the Uzbek way of upbringing during the Soviet time. Medlin and his colleagues bring up an example of a Soviet Uzbek man who behaved like a Russian, dressed as a Russian, his eating and drinking habits were like a Russian's and he himself was proud of speaking the Russian language. This man valued and followed all these patterns. Nonetheless, he was against the Russian methods of child-rearing, in which he found 'too much indulgence' (Medlin et al. 1971, 155). The authors write that 'in regard to practices of child-rearing and to family relationships [the Uzbek man's] emotional attachment was obviously on the side of the old customs' (Medlin et al. 1971, 155). Like in Uzbek families, the *tarbiya* in Kyrgyz families is based on local cultural values and practices that regulate relations.¹⁴⁶ Even if people in Kochkor eagerly follow a modern lifestyle, the idea of giving *tarbiya* to children tends to be based on old customs, deeply rooted in local traditional practices and 'Kyrgyz mentality', as I will discuss extensively in chapter 8.

The Russian way of raising children was praised by some of my interlocutors, who underlined factors such as how Russian women give birth to only one or two children maximum and provide as much comfort to them as possible. As an example, they mentioned how Russian children have their own rooms at home. In comparison to them, Kyrgyz people often give birth to five or more children who sleep in one room without much comfort. It was interesting to hear the opinion of Altynbek Bayke, who supported the latter and disagreed with the former:

'Russians and the people in the West separate children when they are still small. Their children sleep alone and not with their parents. That is why children grow up indifferent (*kaydiger*) and do not look after their parents in their old age (*kayrymduu emes*). A child should sleep with its mother and see the mother's kindness (*meerim*), so that the smell of the mother's breast is soaked

¹⁴⁶ Schlesinger (1964) states that the Soviet Union imposed its own set of values from above in relation to moral education, which were not based on native traditions and conflicted with traditional norms and practices.

into a child. Only then will children grow caring (*kayrymduu*) and look after their parents when they get old.’

A strong mother-child bond which Altynbek Bayke is concerned about is not only a one-sided psychological process.¹⁴⁷ First, it has a social value based on Kyrgyz mentality. Being *kayrymduu* (‘caring’) to one’s parents, as Altynbek Bayke mentions, means that a child will look after its parents and will not send them to care homes when they get old. This is one of the indicators of respect of children towards their parents and a sign of a good *tarbiya*. Second, it also has a cultural value. According to Kyrgyz *salt*, it is the youngest son who stays at home and takes care of his parents in their old age. This practice is firmly grounded in the local tradition that not being able to look after parents in their old age and sending them to care homes is considered to be shameful.

When I asked one of my interlocutors to reflect on the cases when in practice Kyrgyz elderly appear in care homes, this woman answered: ‘This means that they [these elderly people] do not have children to take care of them. If they have children and still end up in care homes, then this indicates that those children do not have good *tarbiya*’. The increasing number of cases when Kyrgyz sons and daughters leave their parents in care homes was mentioned as an example of how current children are now being brought up in the wrong way. One of the reasons for that, as my interlocutor stated, was how children are influenced by other cultures.

In the local context, the perception of ‘being affected by foreign influences’ usually carries a negative connotation. And it is usually children who are exposed to outside influences. What they have learned is judged by whether or not that corresponds to Kyrgyz mentality. The following is a conversation I had with Marat Bayke, the director of one of the secondary schools in the Kochkor area. It was interesting to learn that he was preparing

a grant application to be submitted to an international organisation for funding, but in the course of our conversation, he emphasised some negative influences of international projects on local *tarbiya*:

Marat Bayke: ‘I studied in school during the Soviet time. In our times, *tarbiya* was different. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, money from abroad started to come in through grants and projects and be given to schools. And now we started to repeat the words that come from abroad (*Chet eldin sözün süylöp jatabyz*). We are fulfilling their instructions, doing what they ask us to do. For example, now the children’s rights convention has been introduced. It is foreign to our mentality. We have to give *tarbiya* to children according to our Kyrgyz *salt*. They [meaning foreign organisations] say that they have given rights to children. But it does not mean that children will become cleverer than their parents, or become higher than their parents! A parent will never beat a child to death, right?! They have given voice to our children (*Baldarybyzdyn tilin chygaryp saldy*) and our children have started to argue back. Now a child argues with its teacher demanding that it [meaning the child] has rights.¹⁴⁸ Some parents want their children to know their rights and now their children have started to argue with them too, saying that they have reached the age of 18. Our Kyrgyz people look after their children their whole life! We raise our children, marry them off, we try to ensure that they do not lag behind other people (*elden kem kalbasa deybiz*). After we marry them off, we want them to have children and then we look after their children [laughs]. We, poor parents of Kyrgyz, Muslims, we are born to say ‘my child, my child’ (*balam, balam dedirtip koyuptur*). And our children also say ‘my child, my child’. Why? Because we look after children all of our life. That is why our children also

¹⁴⁷ See Lancy 2008, 122 noting how ‘Playing with, talking to, and stimulating the infant are all considered by Western development psychologists as essential in order to promote the mother-infant bond’.

¹⁴⁸ ‘*Menin ukugum bar!*’ (‘I have rights!’) – This phrase is usually used in negative situations such as during heated arguments between children and adults. In this particular context, Marat Bayke was also referring to conflicts between teachers and school students.

look after us. Kyrgyz parents take good care of their children and look after them well and that is why children also take care of parents by letting them sit in *tör* [respected place]. We talk about Russians, about other people. When their children reach the age of 18, parents say 'I have raised you for 18 years, and now it is time for you to look after yourself.' But how can that child look after itself? In the current time (*azyrky zamanda*), reaching 18 does not mean that a child has got everything in sufficiency. Maybe it does not have enough money? Maybe it does not have a place to live? But, we poor Kyrgyz, we keep supporting our children (*butuna turguzaly*) until we make sure that they can look after themselves. We build a house for them, marry them off, look after their children. We try to make out of our child a successful person (*kishi kylaly deybiz*). So, in return, our children will also think of us by asking: 'Did my father drink tea, did my mother drink tea [which in this case indicates a sign of concern], or what are they doing?' And they [children] let us sit in *tör* [which is a sign of respect]. They do this because we take care of them. Others [meaning non-Kyrgyz] do not do that (*bashkalar antpeyt*). When I was a student, we had a Russian teacher called N. P. who taught Russian language lessons. She would always invite me home for tea. Once when we were drinking tea and chatting, she said: 'You [meaning Kyrgyz people] have a good quality: you respect your parents all your life'. She offered many times: 'Be my son and take this house'. I said: 'Eje, I also have a mother like you. I need to take care of her.' So, after that she said that we, the Kyrgyz, have a very good quality: the sense of responsibility of taking care of our parents.'

BT: 'Did she have her own children?'

Marat Bayke: 'Yes, one son and one daughter. Her husband died many years ago. Her children left for Russia and the old woman was left behind alone. Look! What kind of life that is!'

BT: 'What happened to that woman?'

Marat Bayke: 'I do not know. After I finished my studies, I left and then I did not go to her anymore. Then I arrived in Kochkor and have worked here since then.'

This director has raised many crucial points that can be discussed under the topic of good *tarbiya*. He was critical of the suitability of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in the context of Kyrgyz children. His criticism, first of all, highlights his view that what is mentioned in the UNCRC does not actually work for Kyrgyz children and that Kyrgyz parents do not support it. His negative perception of the UNCRC also clearly shows how local people interpret newly introduced concepts such as 'democracy', 'children's rights' and 'civic education' in a negative way. They noted how children started to argue with adults, which is an unacceptable practice in a hierarchical society like Kochkor. In chapter 8, I will give an example of how a civic education project in one secondary school was perceived as contradictory to the Kyrgyz mentality and was discontinued.

In the conversation above, Marat Bayke compared parent-child relationships by contrasting the Kyrgyz way of child-rearing to Russian or Western ways. He and other interlocutors mentioned many Russian and Western values and practices which are considered inappropriate as part of *tarbiya* and can negatively affect children's behaviour in terms of being *kayrymduu* and taking care of parents through their whole life, letting them sit in the *tör* and serving them tea.¹⁴⁹ These examples sound 'Kyrgyz-centric' where the Kyrgyz way of upbringing is seen as an ideal way of raising a child. My goal is not to praise or criticise the Kyrgyz way of bringing children up, which I, as a researcher, especially as an anthropologist, would not dare do. Rather, by capturing the voices of my interlocutors, I focus on showing that the healthy growth of a child, be it Kyrgyz, Kpelle or Ngoni, is strongly bound to local moral values and cultural models and, therefore, should be evaluated using local rationale.

Peoples and Bailey mention that '[t]he socio-cultural system influences how adults raise their children, and child-rearing practices, in turn, influence **modal personality**' (Peoples/Bailey

¹⁴⁹ Rasulova (2013, 112) conducted her research among school children in Kyrgyzstan and mentions children's views on a happy childhood which also included having parents and being able to 'drink tea' with them.

1991, 321 f., emphasis by author). Similarly, Chao (1995), in her article on the connectedness between parents' knowledge, their practices and child outcomes, underlines the importance of the 'cultural model' and how these aspects are taken for granted. She argues that these cultural models have a 'motivational force' which pushes people to follow these norms. In their upbringing process, parents in Kochkor also hold certain cultural characteristics belonging to Kyrgyz people as models. The lack of those characteristics can define a Kyrgyz child as 'semi-Kyrgyz' ('*chala Kyrgyz*') or even 'not Kyrgyz' ('*Kyrgyz emes*') or more 'like a Russian' ('*orustay*'). Those Kyrgyz, who are betwixt and between and described as 'neither Kyrgyz nor Russian' ('*je kyrgyz emes, je orus emes*'), become a subject of mockery.

7.4. Work as a Means of *Tarbiya*

People in Kochkor talk about an 'unhealthy society' that they have been lately living in. The 'unhealthy condition' of society is not only seen in regard to ecological pollution or 'Chinese products' that are mentioned often, but also to other changes which result in the unwelcomed behaviour of children, for example children's attitude and involvement in work. This section continues the discussion on the local concept of *tarbiya* from this perspective. Work, I argue, is a constitutive part of childhood in Kochkor and it serves as one of the main tools to construct a child and its childhood. In addition, work is linked to values and perceptions, which directly affect the way the discourses on a proper childhood are generated.

In Solberg's view, in Western societies, the child and work are seen as an unusual combination:

'In Norway, as in many other western industrialized cultures, the idea of combining children and work is relatively unusual. Concepts of work are more usually discussed in relation to concepts of adulthood, while concepts of childhood traditionally have belonged to the realms of play and socialization' (Solberg 1990, 121).

Unlike this modern Western notion that Solberg notes where adults work and children play

(see Montgomery 2009), in Kochkor, on the contrary, work is seen as an inevitable part of childhood. On the one hand, as I will illustrate later in this chapter, the involvement of children in work is engendered by life conditions. As an example, I can bring up Sezimay's involvement in work since her parents started a business and were forced to leave their children under the supervision of this eleven-year-old girl. Remember Talant, a ten-year-old boy, who was not categorised as '*bala*' ('child') anymore and was involved in the significant aspects of his family life.

On the other hand, work itself is a precondition for an idealised childhood (will be developed later). In other words, work is not only vital for survival or comfort, but it is also 'an integral aspect of the child's moral and physical education' (Fass 2004, 157). In this sense, we can form a tight link between work and socialisation (Montgomery 2009). By taking all these points into account, in this and the following sections, I will examine the role of work in the enculturation and purposeful socialisation of children in Kochkor and demonstrate what discourses the combination of work and a child engender. Before I move on to local concepts of work, first I will provide some anthropological perspectives on work.

I would like to start with the statement by Applebaum who argues that no definition of work is satisfactory. For him, 'work relates to all human activities' (Applebaum 1992, x). Anthropology, in his understanding, views work as 'a basic human activity embedded in the fabric of society' (Applebaum 1992, ix). He writes: 'Work is like the spine which structures the way people live, how they make contact with material and social reality, and how they achieve status and self-esteem' (Applebaum 1992, ix). In a similar vein, Wallman states that:

'[w]ork is not only 'about' the production of material goods, money transactions and the need to grow food and to cook the family dinner. It must equally be 'about' the ownership and circulation of information, the playing of roles, the symbolic affirmation of personal significance and group identity – and the relation of each of these to the other' (Wallman 1980, 302).

These two statements urge us to look at work in a broader sense, where work is seen rather ‘as a way of life than a section of life’ (Féaux de la Croix 2011, 188). If we relate all human activities to work, maybe it is worth approaching work through its value, in other words, why that activity is done for and its role in society. Similarly, my perspective regarding children and work is not on the economic importance that work involves. Neither is it regarding children being seen as economic resources in relation to work or ‘commodity’ (see Lancy 2008). Rather, my aim is to analyse the role of work in ‘producing cultural values’ (Wallman 1980, 308). Particularly, I will explore local notions and values on how work constructs a person and what value work has for people in Kochkor. Work that a child is engaged in or, on the contrary, not engaged in, has turned out to be a very important indicator in defining the proper development of children in Kochkor and the construction of their personhood (see Féaux de la Croix 2014 on the linked notions of personhood and values of work). The main argument of this chapter is that ‘work’, more concretely ‘labour’ that a child is engaged in and ‘efforts’ that a child tries to show, are seen as positive signs of good upbringing – *tarbiya*. For understanding local rationalities on the value of work, it is worth looking into local categorisations of work.

In the local context, the concept of work is associated in the Kyrgyz language with several words, which slightly differ from each other, such as *ish* (‘business’/‘deeds’, in general), *jumush* (‘job’, specific), *emgek* (‘labour’), *meenet* (‘burden’, in a positive sense) and *araket* (‘effort’). For example, a person can be asked what she or he is busy with or what activity a person is doing in general (‘*emne ish kylasyng*’). If one has an important issue to be discussed with somebody it is also *ish*. People say ‘*men saga bir ish menen keldim*’ (‘I have an important issue to discuss with you’). *Jumush* is specific and usually implies work that a person does, be it a job that involves remuneration, tasks that do not necessarily involve any payment or chores that one does at home. The other three, *emgek*, *meenet* and *araket* involve the action of labour.

Emgek is directly translated as ‘labour’. Unlike the English word, which has a more negative meaning, especially when it comes to children,

such as child labour or illegal labour, *emgek* is usually positive. One works hard and makes *emgek* for a better life or to achieve goals. Aida Eje, whom I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, noted: ‘The more work a child does, the cleverer it becomes’. Through *emgek*, a child gets an opportunity to try out something new and learn from it. In other words, children ‘learn by doing’ (see also Nieuwenhuys 1994). A village life, that I discussed earlier, offers an opportunity for children to work, which has been perceived as a sign of healthy growth and good *tarbiya*. Through labour, children are not only physically fit, but also grow into moral and cultured people.

The word *emgek* (Rus. *trud*) especially became much more valuable during the Soviet time when the ‘Soviet Man’ was praised for labouring for their country, for the motherland (Medlin et al. 1971). People were honoured with *gramota* (certificates) and awarded medals for their *emgek*. Labour was conceived, as Medlin and colleagues put, ‘the most esteemed contribution that the individual can make to society – the main function which determines one’s personal worth’ (Medlin et al. 1971, 188). This idea was inculcated in children from an early age. Schools in Kochkor have inherited from the Soviet period lessons called *Trud* (Kyrg. *kol emgek*), which teach girls to cook, sew, make embroidery and other household-related activities, while boys learn technical and agricultural skills. They often organise *subbotnik*, a voluntary collective work which involves cleaning activities in and around the school and the village.

I participated in the *kol emgek* lesson of the 5th graders in one of the secondary schools in Kochkor. Girls were taught *sayma*, Kyrgyz embroidery, while boys cleaned the schoolyard, as the machines in the school workshop were out of order. In general, these lessons teach children to engage in labour. The Soviet state encouraged people to love working hard and this was also instructed through Soviet sources on child-rearing. I found in the local Kochkor library a Soviet book that was called ‘The Library for Parents’ (‘Biblioteka dlya Roditeley’) from 1981. The section, which covered the healthy growth of a child, underlined the importance of instilling ‘love of labour’ within childhood so that labour would ‘become a child’s inner need’ (Zmanovskiy/Lukoyanov 1981, 12).

The authors conclude that ‘therein lies a huge moral and physiological significance’ (Zmanovskiy/Lukoyanov 1981, 12; see also Schlesinger 1964). I cannot tell to what extent these books were used by parents then, but it was noticeable that Soviet parents were influenced by these values. For example, I received negative feedback from the elderly generation (who grew up during the Soviet time) about contemporary children for being lazy. One mother, who had her childhood during the Soviet time, remembered *timurovtsy*, exemplary pioneers (children about ten to 14 years old) who worked for the benefit of their community. From such narratives, I can conclude that the Soviet state, to a certain extent, achieved its goal to instil a love of labour in Soviet children.

Meenet is similar to *emgek*, but has a slightly different meaning in that a person labours, works hard and invests a great deal of effort and time with the aim to achieve specific short-term or long-term goals. For example, the labour of raising a child is considered to be *meenet* because parents invest in the upbringing of their children with the hope that they become successful members of society. Other examples of *meenet* are when one works hard to finish one’s education and find a good job, or works throughout summer in the fields in the hope to have a good harvest in the autumn. People say: ‘May your *meenet* return’ (*Meeneting kaytsyn*), which implies that they may receive a reward for the hard work. If we turn to the school director’s examples about Kyrgyz parents, then those parents’ *meenet* in raising children, marrying them off and making sure that they become successful will be returned by their children, who will respect their parents by letting them sit in the *tör*, pouring tea or looking after them in their old age.

Araket is translated as an ‘act of showing effort’. It is labour that a person does voluntarily or shows an attempt or desire to accomplish something. For example, *araket* is often used for children and as a sign of good upbringing: an *araketchil bala* is a child who is diligent, which is a highly valued quality. On the contrary, the lack of *araket* is seen as a sign of laziness. In fact, a mullah in Kochkor linked laziness to illness. He noted that a person who does not work and who is lazy is called *kasal* in Arabic, and *kesel* in Kyrgyz, which is translated as an ‘ill person’. As the

case of Chyngyz Ata will show further below, the lack of *araket* in children means that a child is being brought up wrong. Before turning to Chyngyz Ata’s case, I will first introduce some of the conditions and pre-conditions under which people in Kochkor work or are expected to work and how they themselves comment on it.

7.5. Value behind Work

One works not only for gaining direct economic welfare and economic well-being, but for a range of other factors.¹⁵⁰ There are many different kinds of work as well as many reasons for people to work, which may only be self-explanatory in a given context. At the same time, it should be noted that the perception of work varies over time. For example, for Bolot Bayke (chapter 4), who had a Soviet childhood, household chores were not considered work.¹⁵¹ On the one hand, one could interpret that this is due to the fact that the Soviet state instilled in children a love of labour and promoted children to take an active role in communal work, as it has been stated earlier. On the other hand, he compared his own childhood to current childhoods where children nowadays are actively involved in income-generated work, which was not the case in Bolot Bayke’s generation.

What kind of work activities do people in Kochkor do? What for? And what is the value of that work? People work to earn a living and to meet their basic daily needs. This is how I would interpret the busy life of my interlocutors, who rely on themselves and do not expect anything from the state, which is almost absent in the lives of most villagers. People in Kyrgyzstan also work to collect money for a better car, a bigger house, *evroremont* (European-style renovation) or social events such as life-cycle celebrations, funerals and other get-togethers, which actually involve an expenditure of a big sum of money. Due to the high

¹⁵⁰ Reeves (2012) has clearly demonstrated this in her work, where she states how the nature of ‘economic need’ has changed over time.

¹⁵¹ See Wallman 1980, 301 who notes that the ‘boundaries between work and non-work, or between sub-categories of work, are not always drawn in the same place or with the same term’.

rate of unemployment in the country, it is not possible to earn much while being in Kyrgyzstan. This is why many people migrate to other countries and send remittances back home. Basic needs as well as values such as the improvement of one's social status in society shape the investment of people's time and energy in certain things, which constitute the nature of their work.

There are visible but also invisible aspects of work. Once, my supervisor, who did his research in Kyrgyzstan and was familiar with Kyrgyz culture, noted how impressed he was by the fact that Kyrgyz parents invest much time and energy in their children, while in Germany parents invest their time and energy in work (meaning income-generating work). He is an anthropologist, and his way of thinking differed from the majority of 'others' who state that Kyrgyz parents do not pay much attention to their children and their development. I told him that I share his view that Kyrgyz parents do in fact invest a lot of time and energy in their children, because it is children who look after their parents when they get old. I also realised that what they do is usually left invisible. Having lived in Germany for several years, I work, pay taxes and contribute to the state. In return, I receive a 'package of support' from the state. The same was also the case during the Soviet time when people worked for the state and the state in return took care of its citizens by providing free healthcare, education and other social benefits. This has changed after the breakdown of the Soviet Union when the burden has mostly fallen on the shoulders of families themselves, where both parents and children are now responsible for supporting each other.¹⁵²

For example, Kuehnast (1997) talks about Bermet, a woman who worked so hard during the Soviet time that she hardly saw her children. In the end, she was given an honourable flag as an award. In those times, being awarded a certificate, flag or medal had great value for a Soviet person.

¹⁵² Looking after parents in their old age is a traditional practice for Kyrgyz men, especially the youngest male child who should stay with his parents after marriage. Even during the Soviet time, Kyrgyz people followed this tradition. In this particular context, I am referring to how the responsibility to look after its citizens has shifted from the state to individual families (see Ismailbekova 2014; Kirmse 2013).

Even though it did not have a direct material worth (I do not mean some social benefits that might follow), it had a strong moral importance that underlined the worth of that person as a Soviet citizen who was able to contribute to the collective life.

Reeves (2012), describing the post-Soviet period, mentions how a Kyrgyz woman who had worked in Russia as a labour migrant came back to Kyrgyzstan and with the money that she had put aside, she bought 3,000 pieces of traditional round Kyrgyz bread for her brother's son's circumcision feast. This woman's actions confused my German students, with whom I discussed this article in one of my seminars on Central Asia. 'Why would she spend the money that she collected in such a way by buying pieces of bread?' my students wondered. For people who are not familiar with Kyrgyz people's cultural values and practices of maintaining social ties and an obligation to financially support each other during life-cycle events, it is not easy to understand. In fact, sometimes it is not clear even to local children themselves if they do not understand the heart of the matter, as it was with the case of Nurgül Eje's children.

Nurgül Eje (54) was unemployed and stayed at home and looked after her grandchildren. She was also involved in different kinds of work (*jumush*), besides babysitting. For example, every time when one of her neighbours or friends died, she went to those funerals and voluntarily helped with the chores involved. She noted that earlier, her children did not like this and reproached her. But her children understood the reason for her actions only later:

'They [her children] understood it only later when their own grandmother died and all those women, whom I had helped before, came and supported us in return. My husband is the only male child in his family and he is alone. As for his sisters, they are all in Russia. That is why we do not have any relatives around who would support us. There is nobody whom we can rely on in such good and bad moments (*jakshylyk-jamandykta*, which means 'feasts and funerals').'

Why does Nurgül Eje offer her services to her neighbours even if she is not asked to? This is one of the examples of reciprocity, social obligations

and expectations – a social capital that members of society invest in. People in Kochkor are very often engaged in work, which has its own ‘implicit value’ that might not be self-explanatory. A cultural practice called *ashar* (mutual help among kin members) is another good example of this. For instance, when a person builds a house, it is expected that kin members come and contribute to the work. Very often, in social events, relatives come and give a hand with services such as preparing *boorsok* (traditional bread, fried dough in small pieces), cleaning the intestines of a slaughtered animal, pouring tea for guests or washing dishes.

Now let me turn to children’s work. In most scholarly contributions, as noted earlier, work is dissociated from an ‘ideal childhood’ (see Wyness 2006) and those children who work are seen as passive, helpless subjects as well as victims who lack childhood (see also Boyden/Ennew 1996; Mishra 2007).¹⁵³ Especially in the light of child labour, the global notion of childhood is pictured as vulnerable and one which should be protected from the adult world. One should of course be aware of the different degrees of work, some of which indeed do cause harm and hinder the proper development of children. For the purpose of this chapter, I will not look at such extreme cases of child labour. Instead, looking at children’s work through an anthropological prism with an assumption that ‘work tells about the rest of society’ (Applebaum 1992, ix), I argue that there is usually a local reasoning behind children’s involvement in work. Below, I will discuss three cases of children’s involvement in work. They demonstrate how through work, children gain skills, experience autonomy and independence and gain self-esteem and pride.

7.5.1. Work as a Means to Gain Skills

Aruuke (eleven) is one of my young interlocutors who regularly attended my English language course and was one of my active and motivated students. When she was still a baby, her parents got divorced and since then, Aruuke lives with her

maternal grandmother. Her mother married again and now lives with her children from her second husband. Aruuke’s maternal grandmother, whom she calls ‘*apa*’ (‘mother’), teaches her about all possible household chores, which is ‘part of household’s moral economy and an essential aspect of socialization’ (Nieuwenhuys 1994, 9). Once, I discussed with Aruuke the work she was involved in at home and how she herself perceived it. After naming several activities, she concluded: ‘*Jasaganyng men üchün, üyröngönüng özüng üchün*’, which is directly translated as ‘What you do is for me, what you learn is for yourself’. Aruuke explained that this is what her grandmother tells her when she involves Aruuke in household chores. This is done in the hope that Aruuke will learn more skills.¹⁵⁴ This saying is not specific to Aruuke’s grandmother: I heard this saying more than once. This is, in fact, a saying that many mothers use, especially for their daughters.¹⁵⁵

Girls are taught from an early age to do certain house-related tasks such as cooking and cleaning the house, which can only be effectively acquired by being involved in the actual process of doing the work. As I have mentioned elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2015), it is a girl’s mother who is praised, or on the contrary criticised, for the girl’s good or poor skills in cooking or doing other household chores when she marries and starts to live with her in-laws. This cultural practice is embedded among people in Kochkor that already from early age, parents start involving their children in work as a means of providing a good upbringing and preparing them for their own independent family life.

The skilfulness of daughters also concerns fathers, as it touches the reputation of the whole family. ‘Of course, my daughters work! A girl should learn and be ready in case she gets kidnapped the following day!’ said Nazik’s father in reaction to my question. He has two daughters. The eldest daughter, Nazik’s sister, was already in the 10th grade and was reaching a marriageable age. Both Aruuke’s grandmother and Nazik’s

¹⁵³ Here severe forms of child work/labour such as children’s involvement in mining, tending plantations or prostitution are meant.

¹⁵⁴ For more examples on the work as a means to gain skills see Féaux de la Croix 2011.

¹⁵⁵ See Berezhnova et al. 2013 on proverbs which highlight the importance of work as one of the highest moral values that defines the purpose and conditions of a person’s existence.

father perceive work as a means of gaining skills that are measured and judged by 'moral criteria' (see Wallman 1980, 302). It not only determines parents' expectations who usually promote the value of work, but it also forms children's expectations (see Spittler 2012). Neither Aruuke nor Nazik complained about the work they were involved in and they supported the idea that working is a sign of a good child.

7.5.2. Pre-Conditioned Work

Work has strongly affected Sezimay (eleven), whom I introduced in previous chapters, since her parents started to work. When Sezimay's mother Kanykey was at home as a housewife, it was Kanykey who cooked, cleaned the house and looked after the children, with Sezimay's tasks being relatively minor. Sezimay would help look after her younger siblings, tidy the house and assist her mother in cooking by doing things like peeling potatoes or bringing water. Since the family opened a business and Kanykey had to leave home early in the morning and come home late at night, most of the house chores have become Sezimay's responsibility to do. But most importantly, this eleven-year-old girl took over the full responsibility of looking after her three younger sisters in the absence of her parents.

Even though Nieuwenhuys criticises the perception of children's work as a means of socialisation, which in her opinion has been 'clouded by moral considerations' (Nieuwenhuys 1994, 10), she agreed that it is important to focus on the setting in which work is undertaken. Usually, when scholars talk about children's involvement in work or child labour, they bring up the topic of economic disadvantages related to the unemployment of parents. In many cases, what parents do or do not do significantly affects the life of a child and the work a child gets involved in (see Spittler 2012 for the relationship between work and family). In the case of Sezimay, it was not parents' unemployment, but on the contrary, their employment and being away which increased the level of Sezimay's involvement in work. Consequently, the absence of parents affected Sezimay's childhood. For her, and for many other children in Kochkor,

work has become very much 'a way of life than a section of life' (Féaux de la Croix 2011, 188; see Applebaum 1992; Wallman 1980). Children's involvement in household chores is a normal part of their lives. They bring water from a communal water source, clean the house and go to the bazaar to buy, for example, sugar or onions or go to a neighbour to borrow bread, eggs or household utensils.

Sezimay and her siblings (aged seven and eight) had a long list of tasks that they completed before their school started at noon. They had to make their beds by folding away the mattresses used for sleeping on and stacking these up, because in the same room they did their homework, ate their meals and spent most of the rest of the day (excluding the time they spent in school). The house they rented had three rooms, but they lived in one room only. As it was expensive to heat all rooms in cold weather, they used a heater in one room and that room served also as the bedroom, living room, study room and dining room.

I once paid a visit early in the morning. Sezimay was stacking the mattresses up. Then she took a broom and started to sweep the carpet. After that, she cleaned the floor in that room and in the corridor. To my question whether she swept and cleaned the floors every day, Sezimay replied: 'Yes, otherwise the house would be *'botko'* (meaning very dirty)'. The Kyrgyz term *botko* is translated into English as 'porridge'. Indeed, the dusty and muddy roads in and around Kochkor made any house dirty very quickly, especially on rainy days. This is why people clean the floors very often. I also saw Sezimay ironing her clothes. Every morning, she tirelessly ironed her school uniform that she had worn the previous day. She did the ironing every day because they do not have a wardrobe at home to hang clothes. She folded them after she returned from school, which then required ironing the following day. Her younger siblings used a hanger each on which they hung all their school uniforms, one over the other, and hung this on a nail in the wall, which served as a hook.

Here the work that Sezimay and her siblings are involved in is pre-determined by their living conditions or 'setting', such as muddy village roads and lack of good infrastructure in Kochkor, the absence of a heater and running water in the house



Fig. 13. Eight-year-old Jazgül washing dishes in the yard (photo by author).

and even lack of wardrobes create extra work for these girls, who need to iron their clothes each time before wearing them. These disadvantages are integrated into these children's lives and the work engendered by such disadvantages is perceived as part of their normal life. Despite being busy every day with school and chores, I never witnessed any moaning, complaints, unwillingness or tiredness from Sezimay and her siblings. They sometimes turned work that they did at home into play or more exciting activities. For example, the distribution of certain tasks (fig. 13) among girls was copied from adult's social gatherings called *chernaya kassa* (from Russian, 'black cashbox'):

Sezimay: 'We pick numbers when we distribute tasks.'

BT: 'Why do you pick numbers?'

Sezimay: 'In *chernaya kassa* one picks numbers, don't you know?'

BT: 'How do people pick numbers?'

Sezimay: 'For example, when women gather. They take a piece of paper and divide it into small pieces. They write numbers on each in series and jumble them up. Then they pick the pieces of paper. The numbers on those pieces of paper determine the turn by which women will pay visits to each other for *chernaya kassa*.'

Kanykey, Sezimay's mother, takes part in *chernaya kassa* when a group of women meets every month or so at each other's house in turn. There they eat and over the meal they entertain themselves. The main reason for this gathering is that each participant gives a fixed amount of money to the host of the event. The order of hosting and receiving money is based on the sequence of numbers that they pick, Sezimay explained. Sezimay and her siblings imitate the adults and distribute the household chores among themselves by

‘picking up tasks’ written on small shuffled pieces of paper, like in *chernaya kassa*.

On another occasion, Sezimay was proud when she said that now she can cook any food, which she could not do before (when her mother was around). This point was raised when I visited them one morning and found a big pile of dirty dishes on the table left from the previous night. She proudly stated:

‘Yesterday I prepared a salad and a pie. Before, I could fry only potatoes. Now I can make other food. If I do not know how to do it, I call my mother and she explains everything over the phone what to put in first and what comes second. Like this, I have learned to cook many types of dishes.’

Mishra (2007) also writes about similar cases when children in India enjoy and get satisfaction from selling the leftover products which their trader parents had left after their day. The money they earned was theirs, they fixed and negotiated prices which was not supervised by adults. A similar case on the connection between work and autonomy is mentioned by Solberg (1990) who notes the likelihood of greater autonomy of children not only when they do much work, but also when they stay at home alone for a long period of time and do work without their parents’ supervision. I am sure that the work that Sezimay and her two younger sisters were involved in would be perceived differently if Kanykey had been around at home all the time and constantly instructed the girls what to do. It would definitely not be according to the children’s own rules and entertainment.

7.5.3. Comfort Work

Aida Eje’s son, Kuban, also worked, as she recalls. That time, Kuban was in the 10th grade. He went to Bishkek to work during the summer holidays. The family was not rich, but also not poor. Nevertheless, Kuban spent his summer holidays in Bishkek where he assisted his relatives in running a small business in order to earn some money for himself. ‘He earned a reasonably good amount of

money,’ Aida Eje said. With that money, Kuban bought branded T-shirts, jeans and a tablet.¹⁵⁶ Aida Eje was very proud that her son had worked and provided for himself that summer. Even though her son did not share his earnings with his family, Aida Eje and her husband were still very proud of him and thankful as Kuban’s contribution to himself gave a significant relief for his parents. It showed that their child was able to provide for himself, was independent, and this also increased his self-esteem.

This last case shows that children in Kochkor can be involved in work not only to satisfy basic material needs, but also to gain things that satisfy their emotional comfort and desires. Firth once stated that ‘[s]o much happened on the consumer front that the phrase ‘standard of comfort’ is now tending to replace ‘standard of living’ (Firth 1964, 178). Life conditions and developments in Kochkor also shape children’s desires and longings. I saw many children aged between 14 and 16 (9th to 11th grade school students) in the village, who, similar to Aida Eje’s son, worked in the field in autumn during the harvest time. They worked not to contribute to their family or to buy clothes or school utensils that were necessary, but to buy mobile phones and other delights. The fact that children see how their peers carry expensive mobile phones or fashionable items increases their interest in work to earn some money to buy their own mobile phones.

Thus, many factors play a role in one’s involvement in work. For example, investment in economic and social well-being, acquiring knowledge and skills, the presence or the absence of parents, temptations and an attempt to satisfy one’s desires and even cultural factors such as girls who are about to finish school and could be kidnapped any time may pre-determine the conditions in which a child is involved in work. The same can be said about the way one, on the contrary, does not work. Each of the cases above has an appropriate reason for a child’s involvement in work, which does not

¹⁵⁶ T-shirts with faked brands such as Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana, Adidas and Nike as well as many other famous brands are brought from China to Kyrgyzstan and are easily accessible and affordable because of their relatively cheap prices.

always have a negative implication. In the following section, I will continue the discussion on local perceptions of work, but this time, I will focus on the lack of children's engagement in work, which negatively affects their images and their *tarbiya*.

7.6. 'Good Life Spoils a Child'

Chyngyz Ata: 'The youth do not respect the elderly and they do not give up seats in public transport. Now they are being brought up in the wrong way.'

BT: 'What do you think the reason for that is?'

Chyngyz Ata: 'What reason?! It is 'life in sufficiency' (*barchylyk*). Children do not work as we worked during the war time. They have not suffered. Food is enough. Parents dress them. Everything is ready for them. They [children] put *beker akcha* [money that they have not earned themselves] into their pockets, go to school and say that they study. But they do not study well, either. Now, children do nothing.'

Chyngyz Ata (83) recalled his childhood, which was during the Second World War. He remembered how he helped his mother to collect wheat stalks left in the field after the harvest. He also did many other chores that current children do not do. I heard similar statements also from other elderly people, who in their childhoods used to bake bread in a clay oven (*tandyr*), wash laundry by hand, look after their younger siblings, as both parents were often at work, or they themselves were involved in the collective work organised by the state. In fact, today, clay ovens have largely been replaced by electric ovens. Many people use washing machines for doing laundry. There is a high level of unemployment, which resulted in parents staying at home and looking after children themselves. The collective farms were dissolved with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Consequently, current children do not experience much of what Chyngyz Ata and other elderly people experienced during the Soviet time, especially during the war. Still, the stories of Soviet childhoods are narrated and contrasted to current children's childhoods in which current children are usually reproached for not working. Scholars working in

the post-socialist countries argue for a strong generational difference in how work is perceived and valued (see Féaux de la Croix 2011). The nostalgic accounts of the previous generations in many situations serve as an indicator to negatively judge the present.

When my elderly interlocutors talked about their childhoods during the Soviet time, almost all of them mentioned work that they were involved in. They brought up work not to underline the types of work they did previously, which was to some extent different, but rather how they laboured (*meenet*), how they made efforts (*araket*), the local concepts that I discussed earlier. According to some members of older generations, this is exactly what current children lack. Labour, in contrast to work, is defined as non-creative, non-satisfying, and thus, 'nothing more than an instrumental activity' (Arendt 1958, cited in Applebaum 1992, 586). On the contrary, people in Kochkor approach labour from a different prism. They value labour because children have a chance to experience *araket* (effort). Chyngyz Ata thinks that now children are being brought up in the wrong way due to 'life in sufficiency', as he put it, which does not create a necessity for children to work.

At the same time there are some elderly people, like Temir Ata (in his 60s), who refrains from blaming current children as they are a product of the current time (*zaman*) and society (*koom*). On the contrary, he approaches children with pity, because the latter lack all good opportunities of the past:

'Now there are no multiplication tables in schools. There is a machine (Rus. *mashinka*; meaning calculator). There is Internet. Students press buttons and what they want comes out. Easy work, what blessedness! (*jyrgal*, in an ironic sense) We would search for Pushkin [meaning Pushkin's poems] and learn them by heart. Now we [meaning current children] do not do that. Doing laundry is by *avtomatika* today [meaning that now washing machines are used]. We now do not know how to wash laundry by hand. Bread, noodles (*kesme*). [Turning to me] Do you know how to cut noodles? The children of today do not know! The food called *jarkop* [shows a sign of delight], it was wonderful! Now we do not know how to prepare it. One can

buy even *lagman* [a dish with noodles which is usually prepared by hand] at the bazaar. We have gotten used to a life where things are ready for us and do not want to do anything. On the one hand, I admire our current life, on the other hand, I admire that in which I was born into before.’

These comparative perspectives on work show how the involvement of children in work changes with ‘historical and social contexts, and also with personal circumstances’ as Wallman (1980, 302) rightly notes. Still, people from the previous generation judge children based on their personal moral criteria, which characterise children in different ways. Temir Ata mentioned the practice of searching for the works of Pushkin in the library in the past, which current children do not do. The beauty of visiting libraries was shown through a person making an effort (labour) by searching for a source, reading, taking notes or learning the works by heart, which is no longer the case. My interlocutors mentioned the practice of visiting libraries many times. For them, the lack of this practice today depicts children automatically as lazy, lacking efforts, and that they are being brought up in the wrong way.

Most of the times when I visited libraries in Kochkor, they stood empty without any visitors. Only once I saw an old man who came to read newspapers and two girls who came and ordered a book which they needed for school. Otherwise, it was only the librarians themselves, who sat near the heater in cold weather, ate their lunch in line with their schedule and chatted amongst themselves. School children did not visit libraries, but they were often clients at the Internet café in Kochkor. They made a chaotic queue in front of the café manager, who searched on the Internet for biographies and the works of writers and other famous historical figures, which the students’ teachers had asked them to write a *referat* (essay) about. The manager of the Internet café downloaded ready-made essays for the students and nicely decorated the cover page by adding students’ names to prove that it was their own work. In fact, as it was sadly noted by one of the school teachers, most of the students did not even look through the content of the essay that they submitted to their teacher.

When I talked to people in Kochkor about physical and psychological developments that they noticed in current children, they provided contradictory opinions. They admired the current children’s cleverness by remarking that now children know things that adults did not know in their childhoods. An example of this was how current children can easily figure out how mobile phones and computers work, even if they are not taught by anyone. After a while, the same people will also mention how current children are dumb because they do not know how to make calculations in their mind and cannot solve mathematical tasks without a calculator. For example, the Internet, where one can find ready-made essays, mobile phones, television and even new technologies to make ‘home-made’ noodles (*lagman*) that are sold at shops and bazaars are believed to negatively affect children’s development. It was interesting to come across diverse views regarding the development of a child starting from their physical and mental development through social skills. Here are some of the statements of my interlocutors on this matter:

- ‘Previously, children were calm, but children of today are very mobile. There is much mobility. They develop quickly, I wonder!’
- ‘Current children start to speak earlier than children did before.’
- ‘Current children are forgetful [...], [followed later by] now children’s brains work well. They grasp things quickly.’
- ‘According to the requirements of the time, current children’s views differ from ours. They are now close to technology. They are capable of using it even if they have not learned it.’
- ‘Pediatricians are saying that current children are already clever when they are born. Before, I used to see children; they were dirty, they would run around and play with a runny nose and dripping saliva. If you go out now, you will not see such children on the street. Parents dress their children nicely and cleanly, even if it is only with cheap Chinese clothes.’
- ‘Current children’s consciousness is high. They understand everything. They easily deal with computers. They know who a deputy of the parliament is (*deputat*). They ‘grasp words from your mouth’ (*Oozungdan julup*)

alat; meaning that children interrupt elderly people's conversations) and say that they also want to say something. [The last sentence is said with a negative connotation].

- 'Current children are brave. If I scold my grandson [points at her five-year-old grandson], he interrupts me by saying that if I scold him, my leg will hurt. But *ilgeri* [meaning the period of her childhood] a child would keep silent even if you scolded him.'
- 'There is a big difference between the generations previously and now. Our childhood was clean and pure. Current children put material wealth in first place.'

These examples above do not clearly state that before it was good and now it is bad, or the contrary. Such comparisons are present in discourses, which perfectly lines Firth, who rightly notes that '[d]evelopment not only gets prizes for efficiency and industry; it also gets moral approval' (Firth 1964, 184). Parents wonder, admire, criticise or feel pity over different developments they observe in their children and their behaviour. But one thing that most of my interlocutors agree with is that a child is a product of the society (*koom*) which is created according to the demands of the current time (*zaman*) and its own values.

7.7. Conclusion

The examination of the local concept of *tarbiya*, which I describe as purposeful socialisation as well as cultural education based on Kyrgyz mentality, brought up several interesting aspects of child upbringing in Kyrgyz families. First, a child who has received *tarbiya* is believed to know its role in society and behaves accordingly, especially in relation to parents, by contributing to a healthy social environment in the community. This view confirms Dunstan's statement that moral education, in this case *tarbiya*, is 'holistic and strongly society-oriented' (Dunstan 1981, 193).

Second, *tarbiya* is closely connected with Kyrgyz cultural values, norms and customs. It is not about upbringing in a general sense, but an upbringing that ensures the assimilation of cultural values by the child. A Kyrgyz child, who does not know the etiquette of being seated at the meal table, how to treat guests by offering bread or laying a mattress underneath, or even how to tend sheep will be considered as lacking *tarbiya*. Such a child will be mocked and called a 'semi-Kyrgyz' (*chala Kyrgyz*).

This chapter also covered the concept of work, which I looked at through local people's categorisations and interpretations. Work is one of the main aspects of giving a good *tarbiya* to children and helps to shape the notion of an 'ideal child'. I set out three cases to show different reasons for children being involved in work and the local rationalities behind them. I highlighted how work as a means to gain skills is important for girls like Aruuke and Nazik and her sister and for their future life. Sezimay's case showed that work is influenced by conditions such as the absence of parents at home due to their work or the lack of infrastructure and good living conditions at home. The third case, the case of Kuban, revealed another aspect about children involved in work, which is influenced through the 'temptations' of the current time.

In the last section, I have provided some of the views of local adults of different ages who commented on current children and their development. It can be concluded that children are manifested as a socio-cultural and historical product. Similar to the previous chapters, I have demonstrated how the notions of a moral child, childhood and good upbringing are constructed, with the notion of what is 'moral' or 'good' being highly contested and negotiated depending on local changing contexts. The next chapter will continue the discourse of bringing up a moral child through schools which have been heavily influenced by the past Soviet legacy as well as the present traditional values.

8. The 'Soviet Past' and 'Traditional Present': School as an Agent of Transformation

'Nothing should be learned in school for its own sake, but rather for its social value in life'
(Jan Amos Comenius mentioned in
Medlin et al. 1971, 5)

8.1. Introduction

On one of the mornings when I visited Sezimay (eleven) and her younger sisters Jazgül (eight) and Ayzada (seven), both of their parents had left home early in the morning for their *pavil'on* (shop), a small business that they had opened few months ago. It was typical for the girls to spend the whole morning doing homework, which they immediately started after making the beds and cleaning the house. They did these activities even before having breakfast, which they sometimes skipped. When I asked why they did not eat breakfast, the girls noted that they would eat in school later. The second president of Kyrgyzstan, Kurmanbek Bakiev, who ruled the country between 2005 and 2010, renewed the practice of giving snacks to elementary school pupils, something which had stopped with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990s. Even if it was only a biscuit with a glass of hot tea with milk and sugar, parents were happy that their small children could eat something for free at school. This is the one positive thing that people remembered about Kurmanbek Bakiev.

Sezimay, who was already in secondary school, did not fall into the group who received free snacks at school. She said, 'Ayzada and Jazgül will have some biscuits and tea at school. I will ask for money from my mother and buy something at school to eat.' Sezimay as the eldest had been serving as the head of the house for the last three or four months while both parents were away working from the early morning until late at night. They kept their business open until almost midnight because late evening was a good time for business when people came to buy vodka and cigarettes. Kanykey, the mother of these girls, said there were two groups of permanent clients who came to their *pavil'on*: school children who come

in the day time during their break to buy colourful Chinese sweets and 'unhealthy' soft drinks, and men who buy alcohol and cigarettes. On the one hand, these unemployed men were constant clients of Kanykey and her husband. On the other hand, they caused inconvenience in their business, as Kanykey stated:

'Before, I used to come home late in the afternoon and look after the girls, prepare food and bake bread and my husband worked in the evenings. But now I am staying with him in the shop till late until we close it. When he works alone, other men come and take vodka, promising to pay for it later, but they do not pay for a long time. We have had many debts and this has not been good for our business. When I am there, I demand that they immediately pay for the goods that they take.'

In this way, Kanykey had to stay away from her children and it was Sezimay who had taken over the household responsibilities and look after her younger siblings (see chapter 7). Taking care of siblings also meant that Sezimay had to help with their homework. This is one of the main tasks of older siblings in a Kyrgyz family, from what I have observed. Girls especially make sure that their younger siblings do their homework. After having done her homework, Sezimay, who is in the 5th grade, helps Jazgül, a 2nd grader, and either of these two elder sisters helps Ayzada, a 1st grader.¹⁵⁷

After several visits to Sezimay and her sisters, I found my presence did not disturb the girls and they were engaged in their usual morning activities such as doing housework and homework. Even if there was a low table in the room, which was used for eating, the girls found it more natural to sit on the carpet, put their books and notebooks

¹⁵⁷ I also witnessed how mothers helped their children with homework, especially when they were still small. If there were older sisters and brothers, then usually the younger siblings turned to their older siblings rather than to their parents.



Fig. 14. Girls are preparing their homework (photo by author).

on the ground and write by leaning forward (fig. 14). One such morning, without any purpose, I took one of the books lying near the youngest one, Ayzada, who was in the middle of doing her homework. The book that I took was the 1st grader's ABC book: the primer that initiates a child into school education. I started to look inside the book and my attention was caught by the words on the first pages: *'Mugalim – menin ekinchi ata-enem'*, which translates as 'A teacher is my second parent'. Even in formal institutions like a school, which is a representative of the state, one can feel more informality (Gupta 1995). This is especially true in villages, in small communities, where usually one's teacher is also one's kin: either a close or distant relative or a neighbour (Hardenberg, personal conversation). In these girls' case, their teachers certainly served as their second parents, while their own parents were working from morning till evening and were almost completely absent.

In my further research, I came across a similar saying in Russian: *'Roditel' – moy vtoroy uchitel'* which I found in the 'Encyclopedia of Folk Wisdom' (*'Entsiklopediya Narodnoy Mudrosti'*) containing Russian proverbs, sayings and aphorisms from the second half of the 20th and 21st cent. AD. The origin of this proverb is not known, but judging from the indicated dates, it seems that this phrase was heavily used during the Soviet time when the image of a teacher was highly glorified. Teachers were equated to parents when it came to authority and moral education. Still, in post-Soviet Kochkor, the role of teachers and schools in children's lives remains to be important.

The aim of this chapter is to look at the role of schools in Kochkor in constructing children and shaping their identities and, more importantly, bringing up proper members of society. Through analysing schools as a space for discourse, both of the past and the present as well as traditional

and modern, I will also explore how different values and perceptions of healthy growth are formed, interpreted and negotiated within the walls of schools in Kochkor. I argue that current schools use the same Soviet structure for bringing up a person by emphasising physical, moral and cultural education. With independence, they also started to promote Kyrgyz traditional values, as part of the state's nation-building project, which I will extensively explore later in this chapter. I argue that promoting the 'traditional' is not opposed to the modern. Rather, schools respond to the contemporary needs of constructing a modern moral person who would be able to navigate complex social and cultural changes.

I have structured this chapter in the following way: First, I will look at the role of education in social change. This will be followed by a special account on Soviet paternalism that had the impact on Soviet parents' being absent in their children's lives due to their work commitments. I then will contrast that to teacher-parent involvement in contemporary children's lives in Kochkor. Even though most responsibility has been shifted to households in the post-Soviet context, I argue that much is still expected from teachers. After that, I will discuss a school event called 'Kyrgyz customary practices' and a lesson called '*adep*' which is actively promoted by national curricula. These will help me to analyse the role of contemporary schools in constructing a moral cultural person and a good citizen. I will then consider the notion of democracy, locally understood as a Western value, and discuss how it is interpreted and practiced in the context of Kochkor. Finally, I will discuss the role of schools as a mediator between continuity and change.

8.2. Education: Between Continuity and Change

Mead classifies two types of education: primitive and modern. While primitive education is described as a process of continuity between parents and children, modern education is ascribed a function of discontinuity. Writing about the relationship of modern education to social change, Mead notes that '[e]ducation becomes a

mechanism of change' (Mead 1970, 6). It is important to consider a school in contemporary Kochkor within the framework of continuity and discontinuity, because schools, in addition to being educational institutions, serve as mediating institutions by bringing together values directed towards both change and continuity.

According to the law of the Kyrgyz Republic, every person has to attend school until the 9th grade in order to get basic education. The origin of compulsory formal education goes back to the Soviet period when the Soviet state promoted mass education with the aim to achieve 100% literacy. In the pre-Soviet time, Kyrgyz people led a nomadic life and were the preservers of oral history. It was only mullahs who were literate, and they could read and write in Arabic. This could be the reason why any person who could read and write in Arabic in those times was called mullah (*molodo*).¹⁵⁸ Correspondingly, only those children who were given to mullahs for Islamic religious teaching by their parents had a chance to learn how to read and write while the rest of the population was illiterate. The Soviet campaign against illiteracy was a part of their project for building a modern Soviet state. Comparing the Soviet approaches to modernisation with those of modernisation processes followed in the West, Medlin and his colleagues write:

'The Soviet effort at modernization [...] took some principal exceptions to the processes followed in the West. While in the latter, educational institutions were by-and-large incidental to the main course of economic and social development, in the alternative Soviet approach the educational system appears to exercise a much more instrumental role in building new culture' (Medlin et al. 1971, xvii).

The Soviet state worked towards increasing the level of education and the level of culture. Adolescents were considered such a promising group

¹⁵⁸ The meaning of the term *molodo* is well illustrated in Yudakhin 1965. Today, the term *molodoke* (literally translates as 'brother-mullah') is also used with a negative connotation, along with the neutral one, to describe religious authorities or practicing Muslim men.

to enable cultural change that the Soviet state invested more in the younger generation than in the older generations. The Soviet state introduced educational institutions which served 'as an agency of transmission and transformation of culture' (Medlin et al. 1971, 8). With the aim of creating a 'new category of youth' (Kirmse 2013, 20), the state offered extracurricular activities at schools and a systematically planned way of raising a child through their different youth groups: the 'Okto-rist, Pioneer and Komsomol Young Communist League'. This was supposed to educate and indoctrinate children outside their families, where more conservative views might have been held. In addition, as Suleymanova states for Soviet Tatarstan, by giving moral education to children, the Soviet state also aimed to educate parents through pupils, 'so that the effect of school upbringing would reach the families and transform family life and relations' (Suleymanova 2015, 153).

Many scholars note that the Soviet educational system was heavily based on moral education. As Sidorovitch puts it, 'there [was] no academic learning (*obrazovanie*) without moral upbringing (*vospitanie*)' (Sidorovitch 2005, 482). *Vospitanie*, the Russian word for 'upbringing, moral and social training, personality development or educating for character' (Halstead 1994, 424) was a goal-oriented and planned intervention that was deeply embedded in the educational system during the Soviet time (Dunstan 1981; Elliot/Tudge 2007; Medlin et al. 1971; Suleymanova 2015). Michaels (2003), who studied the curriculum of students in medical institutions in Central Asia during Stalin's era, notes that less than half of the curriculum was about medical teaching with the majority of classes about Soviet history and the Soviet citizen project (see DeYoung et al. 2006 for a similar account on secondary schools in Kyrgyzstan). Indeed, educational institutions served as an agency of transformation and immensely contributed to the creation of a new generation of the 'Soviet Man' with socialist values. Halstead underlines the following socialist values that were inculcated through *vospitanie*. These were: 'collectivism; discipline and appropriate conduct; a conscientious attitude towards labour; patriotism and proletarian internationalism; and opposition to all incompatible ideologies, including religion,

bourgeois capitalism, imperialism and individualism' (Halstead 1994, 426; see Medlin et al. 1971; Suleymanova 2015 for similar ideas).

Schools in post-Soviet Kochkor have preserved the spirit of inculcation of the state values to children starting from early age. I argue that they still serve as agents of transformation. At the same time, I ask, 'Schools transform children into whom?' And what kind of person are schools in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan trying to create? For example, today, schools in Kochkor, apart from providing formal education, celebrate Kyrgyz language events and organise competitions on 'Kyrgyz customary practices'. Children learn about the philosophy of the Kyrgyz yurt (*boz üy*) and acquire basic skills of culture-specific handcraft. Such activities, which were promoted as part of a nation-building process, contribute to bringing up a 'culturally-nourished' child according to Kyrgyz values. Schools also invite mullahs and policemen to joint lectures on proper moral behaviour, in which they instruct children and preach on respecting elders and warn how disrespect and misbehaviour can lead to punishment in this life and the afterworld. In schools, children also learn about their rights and experience democracy. It can be said that schools serve as a place where global and universal values enter local consciousness. Moreover, it is in these schools that current children can still feel the legacy of the Soviet past. Thus, schools in contemporary Kochkor take part in 'the making of the person' which has become a huge macro-level project systematically planned by the Kyrgyz government.

This kind of approach is criticised. Scholars who work on 'traveling policies', which introduce Western education models into post-Soviet countries, blame regional education policy makers who try to 'maintain Soviet education legacies and, in some cases, revive pre-Soviet traditions' (Silova 2005, 53). Silova et al. (2007) note that the Soviet state had a clear purpose and the purpose was to bring up a 'Soviet Man', while the contemporary national curriculum in Kyrgyzstan, as in other Central Asian countries, suffers from the lack of such a clear purpose. This is the first problem. The second problem, according to Silova, is that the national curriculum 'encompasses the multidirectional flow of ideas and imaginaries about the

future world' (Silova 2011, 14). I also noticed this multidirectional flow from the school curriculum in Kochkor, as I described earlier.

The previous section mentioned three seemingly incompatible models of education: 'pre-Soviet', 'Soviet' and 'Western'. I argue that these terms should neither be taken as fixed generalised labels, nor definitely opposing ones. It is important to understand how people perceive them and what these things mean for them when raising children.

In this chapter, I will not comment on the quality of education in Kochkor. In general, it has been noted that schools in Kyrgyzstan lag behind in terms of the quality of education which is characterised as increasingly poor in post-Soviet countries (Silova 2011; DeYoung 2005). According to DeYoung, this is mainly due to 'archaic teaching methods' or 'ineffective school organization' (DeYoung 2005, 37). I argue that despite the lack of good and up-to-date textbooks and other teaching resources, mentioned by my interlocutors, teachers in Kochkor stay motivated and work hard, especially toward bringing up morally well-bred citizens. When it comes to morality, schools serve as a powerful and effective instrument for 'constructing' this moral person: the person who will be capable of meeting the demands of contemporary life. This, in my view, is what modern schools in Kyrgyzstan have inherited from the Soviet legacy.

8.3. Soviet Paternalism and the Absence of Parents

'Children raised each other' (*Baldar birin biri bagyshty*) – this statement I heard several times from mothers in Kochkor who raised their children during the Soviet time. As if they had collectively remembered this, they echoed what one of my interlocutors recalled of her Soviet past:

'We would put our children in a *beshik* ('cradle') and leave for work. We would run back home during lunch time, quickly breastfeed our children and run back to work again. Our children grew up by raising each other (*Biz baldardy beshikke bölöp koyup ele jumushka ketchübüz, churkap kelip emchek berip, kayra jumushka churkap ketchübüz. Baldar ele birin biri bagyshyp chongoyushtu.*)'

One of the elderly interlocutors, who was over 80 years old, confessed that she did not even participate in raising her children: 'We did not raise our children! How could we raise them if we were working like a *dubana* ('dervish')!' (*'Biz baldarybyzdy chongoytkon jokpuz! Kantip baldarybyzdy chongoytobuz, eger özübüz dubanaday ishtep jürsök!'*).¹⁵⁹

Children were taken under the care of the Soviet state, as both parents, especially mothers of children, were drawn to work.¹⁶⁰ As statistics show, by the end of the Soviet period, female workers constituted 46.2% of workers in Kyrgyzstan (Ilín 1991). Consequently, the state also took over the responsibilities for children's moral education and social and emotional well-being (see DeYoung 2005; Schlesinger 1964).¹⁶¹ Many kindergartens and schools were built for this purpose. Once, I visited an orphanage in Cholpon, a neighbouring village to Kochkor. Now, this institution accommodates orphans and 'social orphans'. Initially, that orphanage was built by the Soviet state as a boarding school (*internat*) for the children of shepherds. Those shepherds had to go and live in the high mountains to look after the state's livestock which they were assigned to. Their children stayed behind and lived and studied in these boarding schools. In fact, it was not only shepherds but also the whole population who were affected by this system when industrialisation, collectivisation and other campaigns drew both men and women to work. This shifted the responsibility of bringing up children from parents to schools and other state institutions.

In comparison to Soviet mothers, a few of whom I presented earlier, Soviet fathers were even less present in their children's life. This was

¹⁵⁹ By *dubana* ('dervish'), I understand in this context how they worked hard and away from home as if they did not have a home (see Borbieva 2012 for a similar case on mothers having less involvement in the care of their children during the Soviet period).

¹⁶⁰ Mothers were given three months of maternity leave then they were asked to go back to work, although in some cases they were allowed to take maternity leave for 18 months. I met many Soviet women who stated that after three months, they went back to work.

¹⁶¹ By comparing the Soviet and American educational systems, Schlesinger (1964) notes the opposite for the American educational system. Public schools in America 'do little formal teaching of moral values' (Schlesinger 1964, 72).

noted by my interlocutors who had a Soviet childhood. Those elderly people could not picture their fathers around when they remembered their childhoods. 'We did not even see our father. He came when we were already in bed and left early in the morning, when we were still in bed', one narrator explained. After learning about the absence of fathers in child-rearing during the Soviet time, it was interesting for me to see how those fathers themselves would react to such statements. I asked Chyngyz Ata (83) about his experience and the statement that he gave below supported this:

BT: '[turning to Chyngyz Ata] Did you participate in bringing up your children?'

His wife: '[laughs] No, when our children started crying, he would ask me to take the crying child and go to another room to cry there.'

Chyngyz Ata: '[objects] Yes, I did participate in raising my children. My duties were to provide them with food.'

The notion of 'being involved in the upbringing of one's child' is relative and comparative. In comparison to Soviet fathers, current fathers in Kochkor are more involved in raising their children. As my interlocutors mentioned, this is due to high unemployment in Kyrgyzstan, with many men staying at home and their wives away from home involved in trading (see Werner 2003 for the case of Kazakhstan). Men who stay behind at home are directly involved in child-rearing practices such as feeding their children and changing their nappies. In addition, the notion of a father's involvement in raising their children is strengthened with the revival of Islam in Kochkor. According to Islamic scriptures, I was told, it is an important responsibility for a good Muslim to participate in raising their children.¹⁶² Many devout Muslim interlocutors highlighted three main responsibilities of parents towards their children. First, Muslim parents should give a good name to a child. Second,

¹⁶² A similar tendency seems to be applicable to the growing role of Christianity in some cultures, too. Read (1968) mentions the similar case of changing habits that Christianity brought among Ngoni people of Malawi. With the growing Christian tradition, fathers of families were brought into closer touch with their children and they started to participate more in children's upbringing.

a Muslim should give 'ilim' (literally 'science') to their children. By *ilim* my interlocutors meant knowledge about Islam. The last responsibility of parents is to marry their children off.¹⁶³

I also noticed that fathers' involvement in their children's life is actively promoted by international development projects. The brochures and posters encourage fathers to join their wives in anti-natal lessons, in childbirth, follow the development of their babies and help their wives. Women in Kochkor, including Janara Eje, a local general practitioner, confirmed fathers' increasing presence in their children's life by comparing current fathers to fathers of the Soviet time. It has been noted how young men now accompany their pregnant wives to the hospital for check-ups or drive them to a bazaar, to see guests or to work. Fathers also bring their children to kindergarten and take them back home. If children get sick, fathers bring them to the hospital. Such acts are seen by my interlocutors as signs of a caring husband and father.

One of the indicators of contemporary parents being so caring for their children is shown by their disobedience to follow old traditions of the Kyrgyz people. In the past, there was a cultural practice among young Kyrgyz couples to give their first child to their parents, that is, to a child's paternal grandparents. Remember Kanykey (from chapter 5), who, as the eldest child in the family, was brought up by her paternal grandmother from whom she learned many healing rituals (*yrym*). The practice of giving away the first child was common and it was normal when children would call their own fathers *bayke* or *ake* ('elder brother' or 'uncle') and call their mothers *jenge* ('sister-in-law', 'aunt'). Current couples do not want to follow this practice, I was told. 'Nowadays' youth will not give their children away!' (*'Azyrky jashtar baldaryn berbey kalsyn!'*), was what elderly people said. Parents' presence in their children's life has significantly increased as well as their responsibility for their children's development, health and well-being.

¹⁶³ See chapter 6, where I discussed fathers' increasing involvement in their children's health with the revival of Islam in Kochkor.

8.4. Is a Teacher a Second Parent?

The Soviet state ceased to exist in the early 1990s. Since then, many responsibilities of the state have shifted to the private sector. Now it is individual families who are largely responsible for their own social and economic well-being.¹⁶⁴ The state seems to be absent. If we take the health sector, as discussed in chapter 6, people lament that the state does not ‘chase them’ and check on their health as was the case during the Soviet time. From what I have observed, schools are an exception. Despite current widespread educational transformation that has taken place, the schools in Kochkor have preserved some of the paternalistic approaches of the Soviet state, namely to give *vospitanie* (‘moral education’) to children. Interestingly, this role is still expected both by teachers and parents. The anxiety about an ‘unhealthy environment’ with diverse values in which current children are living directly concerns the schools in Kochkor and they have come up with a programme to promote children’s healthy development (to be discussed below).

My observations of Kochkor schools gave me the impression that the role of teachers, particularly in the moral upbringing of children, was no less important than that of parents. The question of who was more influential, parents or teachers, was highlighted because I saw how the parents of some children were not around as they left for Bishkek, Kazakhstan, Russia or even further abroad as labour migrants. Even if parents were in Kochkor, many were still involved in income-generating activities which took them away from their children, as in the case of Kanykey. Another parent confessed that she worked at the bazaar from morning to evening, so she was tired and had no time for her children. Thus, I started to openly ask if it was in school or at home where children got more *tarbiya* (‘moral education’). I received different answers, and sometimes they were contradictory. Parents usually did not agree

with the idea that children may receive *tarbiya* more from school. In their opinion, the four to five hours of school per day seemed to be insufficient time to provide moral education to children. One of the mullahs of Kochkor village held an opposite opinion. He said:

‘Parents should give *tarbiya* (‘moral education’) to children; a school should give *taalim* (‘knowledge’). But now, parents have shifted their own responsibilities to give *tarbiya* to schools.’

Such a perspective reflects the findings of Sidorovitch (2005), who looked at moral education in contemporary Belarus. Her findings reveal that some parents were ‘not equipped to morally educate their offspring without professional advice and guidance’ (Sidorovitch 2005, 482). Similarly, in Kochkor, this mullah was not the only person who noticed the involvement of schools in the upbringing of children, especially on things which are expected to be done by parents and not teachers. One such expectation of parents was to control their children’s nightlife.

Young people, especially boys, tend to have an active life at night. In comparison to girls, who are being strictly controlled, boys experience more freedom to be out in the street late at night. Usually, Askar, my host-brother, worked in their shop in the evenings. His male friends and classmates often visited him in the shop. They would come in the evening and stay late until the shop closed. Sometimes Askar would join his mates and go somewhere else late at night. But this did not seem to disturb my host-mother. According to her, her son’s friends were disciplined boys (*tartiptüü baldar*) and she trusted them. Interestingly, the main reason for these boys being called ‘disciplined boys’ and being reliable was that they came from good families, that is, they had been given *tarbiya* by ‘good parents’. These young boys might drink or smoke in their circle, but my host-mother never witnessed her son being drunk or never found out if he behaved badly late at night.

Still, the idea that children walk around and hang out in the street at night is seen negatively. First of all, parents are blamed for it. Another interlocutor of mine, who was also a salesperson, criticised the parents of the youth who knocked

¹⁶⁴ A similar observation was noted by Boyden, who leads a group that conducts research in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. She mentioned how in these countries it is more families, rather than the state, who invest in children’s education and development (from personal conversation; see also Kirmse 2013).

on the window of her shop late at night in order to buy cigarettes or alcohol. She stated, 'Why don't parents look after their children, why don't they wonder where their children could be that late at night!' Interestingly, this task, as I later learned, is partially fulfilled by teachers. Teachers take turns to conduct 'raids' to check if there are any school children wandering the streets after eight o'clock in the evening. If they meet children, they make sure that they go home immediately. This example shows how both parents and teachers themselves expect from the school not only to be an educating institution, but also a disciplining institution.¹⁶⁵ The role of the schools in Kochkor in providing moral education in a systematic way within the framework of the school curriculum should be mentioned in more detail.

Once, the educational deputy principal (*vospitatel'nyi zavuch*) opened the yearly plan and proudly pointed at extracurricular activities dedicated to topics on health, labour, respect and Kyrgyz cultural values. The plan covered the period from September to December 2012. According to that plan, children of each grade fulfilled a range of activities each week. For example, one week in September was dedicated to the topic of friendship and union under the theme '*Yntymak yryska jetkiret*' ('Friendship leads to happiness'). The whole of October was devoted to events related to respecting elders and named after a Kyrgyz proverb: 'Those who have elderly people, have happiness' ('*Karysy bardyn, yrysy bar*'). They also celebrated Teachers' Day, which has Soviet roots. As October is a harvest period, the schools also organised an event called 'A Golden Autumn' ('*Altyn küz*'). One week in November was devoted to children's rights and obligations and the rest of the month was devoted to other health activities and sports competitions. December was a period of preparation for New Year, one of the biggest events in schools, which was accompanied by discussions in each class on *tartip* (discipline). According to the educational deputy principal, all these events have a certain purpose:

'We have the '*Ene-tilim – ene sütün*' ('Mother tongue is mother's milk') event, so that children know about their mother tongue. The event '*Karysy bardyn, yrysy bar*' ('Those who have elderly people, have happiness') teaches children to respect elders. *Altyn küz* is celebrated so that children learn to love labour.'

Although one of the 11th graders later laughed mockingly saying that what was in the written plan was not fully realised in practice, I personally witnessed many cases where teachers worked hard in order to accomplish their plans.

In addition to providing formal as well as moral education, schools in Kochkor also play an active role in maintaining children's physical health. When I visited one of the village schools, I noticed in some classes a list with pupils' names and their body temperature. I was told that pupils get their temperature measured every school day to make sure that there are no sick children attending classes. Janara Eje, a village doctor, also mentioned how she pays visits to school from time to time to check on children's health. Doctors come especially during epidemic outbreaks such as hepatitis A and instruct teachers and children on how to take precautions. They also come and give vaccinations and some vitamin drops to school children.

Teachers serve as active mediators to make sure that pupils follow the instructions of visiting doctors. Once, Anara Eje laughed and mentioned how her 1st grader daughter Nurzada scarily informed her that her class teacher had warned her that if she would not bring a sample of her stool to class the following day, the teacher herself would 'pull it out from her back'. Although this case shows teachers' strict and authoritative attitude towards children, and even using some threats (which has been perceived by Nurzada's mother as a normal occurrence), teachers make sure that health-related activities implemented through the school are fulfilled properly for the sake of the children.

Once, I accompanied a US Peace Corps volunteer in Kochkor, who went to Isakeev, a neighbouring village, in order to give a talk to pupils on hepatitis A during the epidemic outbreak in the region at that time. We got a taxi and reached the school at the designated time. We were met by the

¹⁶⁵ This practice has a historical implication. See Schlesinger 1964 for more information on the important role that Soviet teachers played in moral education, including when they were involved in activities after school hours.

English teacher and one of the deputy principals of the school there. They had gathered a group of pupils from the 10th and 11th grade for the US Peace Corps volunteer to teach them about this viral disease. However, she was upset to find out that the whole school had already been given a lecture on hepatitis a few days previously. The deputy principal showed her plan to the volunteer and explained that they deliver talks to pupils on different health-related topics when they are most relevant. For example, they tell pupils about brucellosis in autumn when the livestock is brought back from summer pastures to overwinter in villages. They deliver a lecture on hepatitis A at the onset of the outbreak of this viral disease. The plan that the deputy principal in Isakeev showed to this volunteer reminded me of the plan that the deputy principal of the school in Kochkor had shown to me once. This once again indicates that schools are not purely educational institutions, but take a big responsibility for children's health as well as their moral and cultural development, which will be discussed and demonstrated in the following two sections.

8.5. Bringing Up a Cultured Person

One sunny day in October, my host-brother came up to me and asked if I would like to come to their school and watch a competition among 10th and 11th graders. He outlined that the theme of the competition was 'Kyrgyz customary practices' (*Kyrgyzdyn kaada-salty*) and that he would be taking part in it and be playing the role of a groom. Usually, I learned about such school activities from him and I especially did not want to miss this day when he would be up on the stage playing his role. I went to his school to support him.

Around one o'clock that day, I took my camera and Dictaphone and headed to Karakoo school where he studied. Karakoo was the first school that I had approached when I arrived in the field the previous year. I had made good contacts with its teachers and pupils. When I entered the building, I headed to the *aktovyi zal*, the big assembly hall, where school events and parties usually take place. At the bottom of the stairs, I met Chynara Eje, the educational deputy principal (*zavuch*).

A *zavuch* in schools is in charge of school activities such as monitoring attendance, checking for proper uniform, ensuring good behaviour from the children, organising school events, and is responsible for matters that affect the general reputation of the school. Chynara Eje warmly welcomed me by kissing me on my cheek, the way Kyrgyz people (and especially women) greet people they are close to. Together we headed to the *aktovyi zal* on the second floor. On our way, I responded to Chynara Eje's questions about my studies and life in Germany since I had left Kochkor half a year earlier. The hall was full of pupils, teachers and families of pupils who had come to see their children perform. This was a big event for both children and adults. I took a place next to Chynara Eje in the first row and joined the judges of the event. Children, who had been given roles to act, were running with serious looks on their faces between the back stage and the rehearsal room where they were practicing their acts. The stage was decorated with balloons of various colours and the words '*Kyrgyzdyn kaada-salty*' ('Kyrgyz customary practices') were attached to a big red *tush kiyiz* that was hanging in the centre of the stage (*fig. 15*).¹⁶⁶

The event started with a speech from one of the older leading teachers of the school. She mentioned the importance of knowing one's culture and noted that now children had started to become estranged from their own culture. She made it clear that such social events were taking place in order to teach children about their traditions. After her speech, the various acts were performed by the pupils from the 10th and 11th grade. Each class had been given tasks to perform re-enactments of moments of Kyrgyz life-cycle rituals and celebrations of Kyrgyz people such as marrying off a daughter, bringing a bride to a groom's family and seeing a new-born baby at *jentek toy* (a party organised for the birth of a child), followed by *beshek toy* (a cradle party) and ending with *tushoo toy*, when the first steps of a toddler are marked (see chapter 5).

¹⁶⁶ *Tush kiyiz* is a traditional velvet cloth with embroidery that Kyrgyz people use to hang on the walls of yurts and later was also used in houses. They are now replaced by wallpaper and *evroremont*, European standard renovations.



Fig. 15. Scene from a school competition 'Kyrgyz customary practices' (photo by author).

The competition opened with the scene where a bride-to-be was being prepared for her marriage in her natal family. A young girl, who took the role of the grandmother of the bride-to-be, wore an *elechek*, a traditional hat worn by elderly women, and a *chapan*, the traditional Kyrgyz embroidered coat and *maazy*, traditional shoes. The sisters-in-law were also wearing traditional dresses which varied according to their status. They took a *shökülö*, a long hat to be worn by unmarried grown-up girls, and put it on the bride-to-be's head. The latter leaned her head forward as she cried silently. Her hair was braided in small braids – *kyrk chach* (40 hairs) – which was a traditional way of wearing hair for unmarried girls.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ I have never witnessed brides wearing this traditional hair style. In the past, this hair style indicated the status of unmarried female members in Kyrgyz society.

The men of the 'family' joined wearing *ak kalpak* (traditional male hat) and traditional coats. The grandmother then gave her blessings (*bata*) to her grandchild, the bride-to-be, who was then about to leave her natal home.

The second team, which was from another class, continued the scene with the arrival of the bride at the home of the groom's family. The table was filled with different kinds of traditional breads and bowls filled with dried and fresh fruits and ghee (*sary may*). The food was set up on a table and not on the floor, on a *dastorkon*, in a traditional Kyrgyz way. One of the judges amongst the teachers near me said, 'Oh, this must be a modern (Rus. *sovremennyi*) family' and laughed. The other teachers who were sitting next to her and enjoying the scenes also laughed together. Sitting at a proper table and not on the floor as it has been traditionally practiced

by Kyrgyz people caught the attention of the teacher-jury.

Almost every team included scenes of giving blessings (*bata*), which indicated the important role of this practice in Kyrgyz tradition (see chapter 5). A fake sheep was slaughtered according to *salt* ('tradition'). Then the scenes depicted the arrival of the bride's dowry, which consisted of a big wooden chest with the bride's belongings in it and several sets of *töshök* ('mattresses') with pillows on top of them. Then a baby was born to the couple. The news was delivered in a traditional way with '*süyünchü*' (good news announced by a messenger). The bride's relatives arrived with a real *beshik*, a Kyrgyz traditional cradle. This time (as it was the turn of another team), the guests were received at a traditional Kyrgyz *dastorkon*, a tablecloth set out on the floor. Before they were served food, a small boy, around eight or nine, poured water onto the hands of the guests and received *bata*. After the guests had left, the mother-in-law of the bride came with several 'old ladies' and conducted the ritual of putting the child into a cradle for the first time, which is called '*beshikke saluu*'. For that, the cradle was smoked with burning *archa* ('juniper') leaves so it would be 'cleansed' from evil beings and the child (in this case, a baby doll) was put into the cradle.

The last team's task was to act out a moment from a *tushoo kesüü* ritual, the ritual that is conducted for a child who is around one year old (see chapter 5 for more details). Instead of acting themselves, this team came up with the idea to perform a real ritual. The pupils in this class found a family who were about to conduct this ritual for their child. Instead of the students' act, a real *tushoo kesüü* ritual took place in the assembly hall organised by a real couple. Children, who had to run as part of the ritual, were spontaneously gathered from the spectators. As for the adult runners, the team decided to involve the teachers from the school. The family of the child, for whom the ritual was to be conducted, came with many presents. The boy, who came first and cut the white and black cord (hobble) around the child's feet, was awarded a rooster in a cage. The teachers, who participated in the running competition, were indulged with presents such as carpets and blankets.

With this real ritual, the performances of students from the 10th and 11th grades ended.

The acts were performed to a high standard by each class. The Kyrgyz national costumes that pupils were wearing transformed them into brides and grooms, grandmothers and grandfathers. The *töshök* and *dastorkon* that they laid on the floor, in the way that traditional Kyrgyz people usually do, gave the setting the sense of being acts from real life. Not only school children but also their parents had been involved in the preparation for this school event.

Although one could clearly see which team had better performances than others, each class was praised equally and the jury decided not to announce 1st, 2nd and 3rd places, which they usually did in such competitions. Instead, they awarded all groups with a certificate and praised each class for fulfilling their tasks responsibly and with a lot of effort. The spectacular event was closed by the blessings of an old woman from among the spectators, who confessed that she was a bit ashamed because she came without wearing her *maazy* (Kyrgyz traditional shoes worn by elderly people), which she had lent to her granddaughter for the performance. Indeed, the 'Kyrgyz customary practices' school event turned out to be a very crucial event not only for teachers and pupils, but also for parents and grandparents, who contributed to making this event happen in a very real and traditional way.

Apart from events like this spectacular one, schools teach children cultural knowledge in other ways as part of the state curriculum. It is in schools that children are given instructions to find out about their seven fathers (*jeti ata*) so that children know their seven paternal generations back.¹⁶⁸ Children also learn Kyrgyz proverbs, are involved in making Kyrgyz embroidery and get acquainted with a detailed knowledge of Kyrgyz national characteristics. This process of traditionalisation, which could also be called, in

¹⁶⁸ For Kyrgyz people, it is important to know one's *jeti ata*, their seven fathers according to their genealogical tree. This is because through *jeti ata* a person identifies himself/herself. It is also used in defining marriage partners, as a couple should not be related to each other within seven generations back. For more information see Hardenberg 2016.



Fig. 16. The school corridor. The text reads: 'National dress, dishes' (photo by author).

this case, a **project** of traditionalisation, stands out with its systematic plans and strategic actions. For example, the whole corridor on the third floor of the Kalygul Bay Uulu school, another school in Kochkor, was devoted to Kyrgyz national characteristics (fig. 16). Wooden boards depicting Kyrgyz national food, dress, jewellery, dishes, games and musical instruments were hung along this long corridor. The school also established a historical and ethnographic museum with the help of teachers, parents and children. A relatively big section of the museum was devoted to ethnographic material depicting Kyrgyz culture, which contained traditional household utensils, tools, horse-related items, jewellery, clothes, house decorations and a fully furnished small yurt. It should be noted that such activities are not specific to Kalygul Bay Uulu school, but are included in other schools as part of an enculturation process.

As an extension of the state, schools in Kochkor follow the national curriculum, which was largely inherited from the Soviet time. For example, in the lessons on *kol emgek* (Rus. *trud*, 'labour') girls now make traditional embroidery (*sayma*) with images of *boz üy* ('yurts'). They also prepare small models of Kyrgyz yurts using felt. In one of the drawing lessons that I attended, children drew a Kyrgyz traditional container named *köökör* (a special leather flask for *kyzym*, a national drink). Such lessons have been inherited from Soviet times, but the content has been partly traditionalised. Earlier I mentioned how at the school competition event, one teacher sadly underlined how nowadays children have started to become estranged from their *kaada-salt* ('customary practices'). This echoes other adults' concern about how their children are now being influenced by global, and especially Western, values. Their fear is that children are losing their identity and culture-specific traditional

values. Here, I do not mean for tradition to oppose modernity at all (see Ferguson 2005; Mould 2005). On the contrary, by following Ferguson (2005) on the notion of modernity as a native category, I claim that people in Kochkor practice their own version of modernity. As it has been mentioned in the introductory chapter, the residents of Kochkor locate themselves in the centre of civilisation and call themselves modern and, at the same time, are proud to preserve their traditions.

Although, some sources differentiate traditional from modern (see Abdullaev 2005; Robbins/Siikala 2014), I consider that the projects of traditionalisation in schools in Kochkor aim to create a modern moral person. By accepting the Dumontian theory on modernisation in India, as elaborated by Singer, I would say that like in India, in Kyrgyzstan, ‘modernization takes the form of traditionalization’ (Singer 1971, 57). This means that the process of traditionalisation does not mean to turn away or parting from modernisation, but rather it internalises modern values introduced from outside, and similar to India, there is a ‘balance between innovation and tradition’. In my view, this is what schools in Kochkor are trying to achieve.

8.6. Adep as a Tool to Create a Moral Person

‘My dear little friend!

Do you want to be *adeptüü* (decent, well-mannered)? In order to be an *adeptüü* child, first it would be right to learn what *adep* (mannerliness, ethics) means. If so, first, respect people who are older than you. Listen to the words of your parents and your teacher and do what they say. Do not make your younger sibling cry, but play with him/her. Be clean. Keep your clothes, books and notebooks clean. One should keep one’s promise and not run away from labour.

Being clever and disciplined is also a sign of being *adeptüü*.

Be an acquaintance or a stranger, always greet seniors. If somebody greets you, learn to greet him/her back. Do not fight with your friends, be friendly. Being too boastful is not considered to be a sign of an *adeptüü* person’ (A Moral Primer, 1st grade, p. 4; translated by author).

This introductory message was written in a book that I picked up from one of the piles of books that were lying around in Ayzada’s house. The book was called ‘Adep Alippesi’ (‘A Moral Primer’). It started with a proverb about a good girl and a good boy: ‘A good girl is mink fur (*kunduz*) on the collar, a good boy is a star in the sky’¹⁶⁹ and continued with the appeal to children set out above. This book was given to children in 1st grade and teaches the basics of good manners. Two pictures follow the message above: the first depicts a boy who is offering a cup of tea to his father, while the second picture shows a girl who is helping her younger brother put his coat on. The *adep* lesson is interchangeably used with the word ethics (Rus. *etika*). While the idea of what is ‘ethical’ and also ‘moral’ is commonly contested, this school textbook seems to clearly know what ‘ethics’ or ‘morality’ for children is and distinguishes moral from immoral, ethical from unethical and good manners from bad manners.¹⁷⁰

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of a new nation-state, Kyrgyzstan had a long search for a national ideology which would include values that children would be raised based upon. The first attempts at a national ideology were through the seven testaments of the national hero Manas, which were promoted through the wave of nationalisation, revival of culture, indigenisation, primordialisation or nativisation (Ismailova 2004). Even though the responsibility for the social and economic well-being of children has shifted to parents in the post-Soviet era, as I discussed earlier, the case of *adep* lessons once again proves how bringing up an ethical child with certain good qualities still remains a concern of the state which is implemented through schools.

169 ‘*Jakshy kyz – jakadagy kunduz, jakshy uul – köktögü jyldyz*’ is a Kyrgyz proverb.

170 Suleymanova (2015, 152) notes that, ‘[w]hile anthropologists acknowledge that it is difficult to define morality and ‘to grasp, understand and explain’ moral values that underpin the actions of others [...], it is often in the education system that moral values are crystallized and transmitted in clear, unambiguous ways’.

The *adep* lessons were introduced into secondary schools starting from the early 2000s.¹⁷¹ A teacher of *adep* lessons in one of the Kochkor schools told me: '*Adep* is ethics, but ethics that correspond to a Kyrgyz mentality'. The analysis of this programme suggests that this newly introduced subject is heavily based on Kyrgyz traditional values and culture. It is not only for the nativisation process or introducing the ideal model of raising children, but it also serves as a **salvage mechanism** in the post-Soviet period of uncertainty with the aim of creating a moral person. A closer look at this programme reveals even more purposes. According to the teacher of *adep* lessons, the development of *adep* as a part of the curriculum clearly shows the emphasis on Kyrgyz culture with the aim to avoid an Islamic-oriented influence. This is what he stated:

'The *adep* lessons are taught from grade one to grade eleven. At first, this subject was taught under the name *yiman* ('mannerliness'; which is mostly discussed within the topic of Islam as the recognition of Allah). Later it was renamed as *adep* and was re-structured because mullahs had started to dominate this subject. They had started to check on us [teachers] and monitor the topics that we planned to teach.'

Both words *adep* and *yiman* have a strong meaning and importance for people in Kochkor and can be used interchangeably. A child with *adep* and *yiman* is a well-bred child who has received good *tarbiya*. Some people described a person with *yiman* as the one who takes care of his or her parents and respects elders. Children also learn values of *yiman* through the *adep* lessons. The following lines of a song which was titled 'Yiman' were taken from the *adep* textbook used for 1st graders:

'When you are on the bus
If an old person approaches you
Do not turn your face away
But give them a seat' (A Moral Primer, 1st grade, p. 21; translated by author).

¹⁷¹ See Kozukulov 2008 for Kyrgyzstan; Abramson 2010, Stephan 2010b for other Central Asian countries on similar ethical lessons that were heavily based on religious teachings.

From these four lines, one can see that *yiman* is shown through respect for the elderly by giving up places to the elderly on public transport, as one of the examples. The loss of *yiman* in the current generation was mentioned by many interlocutors. Many people brought up the example of how today, youths do not give up a place to the elderly on public transport. Instead, they wear earphones and pretend that they do not see or hear them. 'Not giving up seats on public transport' was also seen as a sign of loss of *tarbiya* (for a similar case see Kirmse 2013).

As I have argued elsewhere (Tulebaeva 2015), the meaning of the word *yiman* among people in Kochkor started to vary with time and changing values. With the current Re-Islamisation process, an *yimanduu* (the adjective of *yiman*) person is particularly related to a pious Muslim and his or her relations with Allah (see Hardenberg 2017). I was repeatedly told by my devout Muslim interlocutors that an *yimanduu* person is one who recognises God (*Allah*) and knows that God is watching him or her. They explained that if a person knows that he or she is under God's surveillance, that person will not commit bad deeds. The person who obediently follows the norms mentioned in Islamic scriptures is believed to be a person with *yiman*. Morality is seen as a cornerstone of Islam and therefore, Islam is seen as a 'moral resource' (Stephan 2010b, 52).¹⁷² This is one of the reasons for an earnest attempt by local religious authorities to inculcate Islamic values in children with the aim to bring up a moral person.

There is a girl's *madrassa* (religious educational institution) in Kochkor. *Madrassas* are believed to bring up a moral child. For example, girls from *madrassas* dress in line with Islamic rules, pray five times a day and eat only *halal* food. Moreover, their behaviour and way of talking are believed to lead to a moral and disciplined person. This means that through their 'exterior body', those girls' 'inner body' is disciplined (see Christensen 2000 for the notion of 'exterior-interior body' relations). Contrary to *madrassa* girls, who are *yimanduu*

¹⁷² The requirement of a pious Muslim to be a moral person is also mentioned by many scholars who have studied Islam in Central Asia (see Louw 2007; Rasanayagam 2011; Stephan 2010b).

(‘well-mannered’), a girl who wears a ‘mini-skirt’ or ‘tight’ outfits is seen as lacking *yiman*. The *madrasa* girls who wear a *hijab* (a scarf and long loose dress) fear that they can be an easy target for bride kidnapping because their outfit already signals that they are *yimanduu* and well-mannered girls.¹⁷³ Once, one of the girls from the *madrasa* in Kochkor had to travel to her village to see her family. Maalym Apa (in her 60s), a female history teacher from the *madrasa*, and I accompanied this girl to a taxi to find a reliable driver and make sure that she does not get kidnapped on her way to her family. On our way back to the *madrasa*, Maalym Apa reproached the girls in the *madrasa* for not being *yimanduu* at all:

‘Girls, especially the ones in the *madrasa*, are believed to be *yimanduu*, but they are not. During my lessons, they stand up without permission. They take each other’s school materials, such as pens or books, without asking permission from each other. They even argue with me [laughs sarcastically]. Once I talked about Lenin and mentioned the good things that he did for us. They were very much against him saying that Lenin did things that were not liked by God. So that is why God did not give him a plot of land under the ground for him to be buried in. And therefore, his body is still above ground [meaning in the mausoleum]. They were very critical and argued with me. My other school children [meaning children from secular schools] have more *yiman* than these girls!’

Maalym Apa remembered how during the Soviet time, children respected teachers and experienced a healthy sense of fear of teachers (see Fortes 1970 for similar cases on fear as respect). They greeted teachers, sat still and asked permission if they wanted to go out. This is what Maalym Apa defines as real *yiman*. During the Soviet time, the word

¹⁷³ It should be noted that some people experience doubt about such an outfit symbolising that one is well-mannered. For example, there were also people in Kochkor who noted that there are young ladies who wear a *hijab* and pretend to be good, but in reality, they are not good and do bad deeds. The same was mentioned about men who wear a beard and visit a mosque to pray, but are later noticed in a drunken condition. This is why such ‘religious’ outfits were not always seen credible as a means to tell if someone was indeed *yimanduu*.

yiman was close in meaning to discipline and being cultured, that is, the way one behaved himself or herself in public. As one of my interlocutors mentioned, practices such as sitting still in cinemas or in classrooms without disturbing others, like this history teacher imagined, were the signs of a moral Soviet person.

The book ‘Adep Alippi’ that children in the elementary school use describes *adep* (‘ethics’, and also ‘morality’) as the beauty of a person. A child without *adep* is compared to ‘a horse without a bridle’. The book covers subjects such as responsibility of children in front of parents, a good child and a bad child, morality of politeness and agility – all of which related to Kyrgyz mentality. From these topics, one can see how a child’s status and position in society is identified through an emphasis on Kyrgyz cultural values and kin relationships. Suleymanova (2015) and Stephan (2010a), who looked at secular and religious schools in the Republic of Tatarstan and Tajikistan, respectively, note that both religious and secular educational institutions come together in order to bring up a moral child. Unlike their statements, the case of Kochkor shows that ‘morality’ in school textbooks is based more on Kyrgyz traditional cultural values such as *salt*, and do not emphasise religious aspects. This is shown by the *adep* teacher’s explanation why these lessons were initially called *yiman* (with a more religious connotation) but were renamed into *adep* in the hope of escaping the influence of religious authorities on this national curriculum.

The only case of school activities related to Islam that I came across in Kochkor during my fieldwork was the instance when both a policeman and a mullah were invited to the school to preach about good behaviour. The contribution of the mullah was to underline the duty of children to respect their parents, inform the pupils about the afterlife in heaven or hell and advise that a person without *yiman* would end up in hell. In all other cases, the secular schools did not want religion as well as Islamic outfits to be included in school life. Personally, in 2013, I only saw one girl in school in Kochkor, a 5th grader, who attended a secular school in a head scarf. Most of the time, girls from higher grades were asked to take their scarves off when they arrived at school, which resulted in

some girls leaving secular school after grade nine to join *madrasas* where they could wear a *hijab* without any restrictions or criticism.

Thumbing through the book on *adep*, I paused on lesson 16 titled 'How I make my parents happy'. There were two pictures on that page. In the first one, a girl brought an armful of wood to her grandmother who was about to bake bread in a clay oven (*tandyr*). In the second one, a boy was showing his father his school diary where the mark '5' (the best possible mark) was in a big size and red colour, indicating how hard-working that boy was. After having looked through Ayzada's book, I took Jazgül's book ('Adep' for 2nd graders) and found a small poem about 'A good girl'. The poem was taken from the famous children's journal 'Baychechekey' ('Snowdrop') and depicted the image of a good girl in the following way:

'When I wake up in the morning,
I greet my father.
By making the bed and washing the floor,
I help my mother.
I bring my books in order
And do not scatter papers.
I ventilate the rooms
And keep cleanness.
If my father and mother order something,
I run without saying '*anyi*' (without objecting).
I become happy,
By satisfying them.
I make them happy,
By immediately fulfilling their orders.
After completing all tasks,
I continue studying'
(*Adep*, 2nd grade, p. 115 f.; translated by author).

Similar to other lessons, at the end of this lesson, there was a list of questions for children to critically think about and answer: 'What kind of girl is a good girl?'; 'What kind of work does she do?'; 'Are you a good girl?' Such questions helped children to construct an image of a good person which they would then try to follow. Through the subject of *adep*, the values of hierarchy, respect for elders and seniority and juniority notions are instilled in children's so-called Foucauldian 'docile bodies'. Medlin and his colleagues who also noted the 'docility' in children in Soviet Uzbekistan, expressed

that unlike 'obedience', docility refers to the willingness 'to accept existing rules of conduct and act accordingly' (Medlin et al. 1971, 190).

When I asked my young interlocutors (those who took my English language course in Kochkor) about what it was to be a good child, I usually got similar answers such as 'a good child is the one who listens to their parents and teachers'. Similarly, in a comparative study of children in Kyrgyzstan, England and South Africa (Holden et al. 2009), Kyrgyzstani children placed a strong emphasis on respecting parents and meeting their expectations. Another study among school children in Kyrgyzstan by local scholars also showed that rural school children's ambitions were linked to Kyrgyz identity: they wished to revive folk songs and enrich the Kyrgyz language (Joldoshalieva/Shamatov 2007). The role of schools in constructing a child into a certain kind of 'cultural' or 'moral' person is very significant.¹⁷⁴ Such culture-specific values are taught not only in the framework of the *adep* lessons but also, from what I have observed, in the general ABC book for first graders and even in Kyrgyz language books. The reason for making a strong emphasis on these Kyrgyz traditional values in the national curriculum, such as *adep* lessons or school competitions (illustrated earlier), is not in vain. The 'pre-Soviet traditions' were mentioned as an obstacle for the 'traveling policies' which promote the Western model of education (see Silova 2005). Local teachers do not share this view and, instead, see many positive aspects in the inclusion of 'pre-Soviet traditions' in school education.

8.7. Kyrgyz Democracy

When comparing Eastern and Western educational systems, Perry highlights the West as 'tolerant, efficient, active, developed, organized, and democratic' and the East as 'intolerant, corrupt, passive, underdeveloped, chaotic, and undemocratic' (Perry 2009, 177, cited in Silova 2011, 9). This classification, especially the characteristics of 'democratic'

¹⁷⁴ The above statement reminded me of Reed-Danahay (1987) who argues for the importance of primary education in France for 'the making of Frenchmen'.

and ‘undemocratic’, reminded me of my interview with Yrysbek Bayke, a local man in Kochkor in his late 50s. We were not talking about democracy *per se* but were talking about the issue of upbringing and influences coming from outside. He advised me of his understanding of what democracy was:

‘Now we have *madrassa*, taught by the Turkish. They come and teach about *yiman*, as if the Kyrgyz people lacked *yiman* before! The *salt* of Kyrgyz people and the *yiman* of Kyrgyz people are higher than in Islam. Our *yiman* is seen in the way one distributes meat. For example, an old man sits at the *tör* [the respected place at the table or *dastorkon*] and he gets a big piece of meat. The *kelin* (‘daughter-in-law’), who is pouring tea at the other end of the *dastorkon*, gets a small piece of meat. But the *kelin* does not get offended by it. She receives meat according to her status. This is democracy! In America, if a father gets 120 grams of meat and a child gets 80 grams, the child will sue his father. This is America’s democracy. Now the *yiman* of Kyrgyz people is getting spoiled [meaning the Kyrgyz people are losing their *yiman*]. Now we are not being Americans or Kyrgyz, but *chala Kyrgyz* (‘semi-Kyrgyz’; meaning not real Kyrgyz).’

In Yrysbek Bayke’s view, democracy is a culture-specific understanding. In other words, for him, local vernacular Kyrgyz democracy is tightly connected to *yiman* in a Kyrgyz way and not in an American way. He also distinguishes the *yiman* of Kyrgyz people, which is based on local cultural values, from the *yiman* in an Islamic sense. Similar to his perception of American democracy, the example of a Turkish *madrassa*, which actively promotes *yiman* from an Islamic point of view, is foreign to him. This man’s statement that the daughter-in-law does not get offended for getting a small amount of meat according to her status is an interesting example to understand ‘Kyrgyz democracy’ and *yiman* in the local context and social values that they highlight.

In the previous chapter, Marat Bayke’s view on the unsuitability of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the context of Kyrgyzstan was mentioned. ‘Giving voice to children’ was perceived negatively by him as he mentioned that now

children started to argue with their parents, which is a sign of bad *tarbiya* and loss of *yiman*. Qvortrup, one of the activists for giving voice to children, starts his article with the history of Western societies where he mentions the right to be ‘heard’ as a sign of democracy (Qvortrup 1990). If we place Qvortrup’s ‘democracy’ in the Kyrgyz context, then it will contradict the idea of ‘Kyrgyz democracy’ which was described by Yrysbek Bayke above. In other words, democracy in Qvortrup’s meaning would indicate the loss of *yiman* in children in the Kyrgyz context, at least in the opinion of Yrysbek Bayke and those who share his point of view.

The inconsistencies in the perceptions and applications of such travelling concepts are also mentioned by other scholars. For example, the case of integration in Latvia shows how foreign concepts can be understood totally differently from their original meaning (Silova 2002). Similarly, in a work on market reforms in Kyrgyzstani higher education, it is argued that foreign concepts such as ‘reform’, ‘modernization’ or ‘global integration’ can be morally loaded on ‘local spaces’ (Reeves 2005). The above example on ‘American democracy’ and ‘Kyrgyz democracy’ was one such case. This, however, does not mean that people are not aware of or do not refer to its ‘original’ meaning. The following was an interesting account that another interlocutor shared:

‘We have overused the word democracy. Actually, democracy does not suit us! We, the Kyrgyz, need order (*tartip*). When it comes to democracy, the Americans obey the law, but we cannot obey the law. In ancient times, the Kyrgyz obeyed the words of the *aksakal* (‘elderly’; literally meaning ‘white beard’). We had *yiman*. Now it is changing.’

This last statement clearly shows that the experience of democracy in Kyrgyzstan is not smooth and that there is friction. I am far from generalising that the people of Kochkor live according to ‘Kyrgyz democracy’. They understand democracy, practice democracy and, if needed, they ‘invoke’ democracy and misuse it in different ways.

There was an interesting study from 2009 by the international development project IFES which introduced ‘democracy’ in its Western term in secondary schools in Kyrgyzstan (see

Bahbahani 2012 for details). The areas of study focused on citizenship and democracy and it gave the students in secondary schools a chance to express their thoughts, build debates, defend their rights and discuss many aspects of democracy. It also attempted to promote the shift from hierarchical to democratic classrooms. The pilot study showed that the integration of 'new ideas' into traditional Kyrgyz culture created more challenges than success. Both local teachers and most students expressed that the book introduced for citizenship education could destroy their 'good traditions' or their 'mentality' such as respect for the elders. Eventually, these lessons were discontinued due to their contradiction with local cultural values.

8.8. A Salvage Mechanism

By placing a strong emphasis on Kyrgyz cultural values and practices that are fostered in schools, I do not aim to show that schools in Kochkor promote traditional values in response to modern Western influences or Islamic culture, which are seen as foreign. They also do not try to replace Soviet moral education. In my understanding, the *adep* lessons are taught in Kochkor schools in order to help children to learn to navigate their life in current times with diverse values. It is obvious that there is a strong need in this kind of teaching in secondary schools. In the explanatory note of the methodical manual for teachers, Iptarov (2012), the chief editor of the *adep* textbook, states that in a time of political instability, strengthening social inequality and a low level of juridical knowledge (by which he is referring to post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan), such lessons are vital for the preservation of humane, national and individual spiritual and moral values.

The analysis of Iptarov's reasoning suggests that *adep* lessons serve as a **salvage mechanism** in a time of uncertainty. For instance, Suleymanova (2015) writes about the 'moral breakdown' and the lack of moral orientation in post-Soviet Tatarstan and how schools try to fill this gap. According to Elliot and Tudge (2007), fear of 'the erosion of young people's morality' in post-Soviet Russia is expressed due to the breakdown of 'traditional

values and codes of behavior' which is also accompanied by economic hardships.¹⁷⁵ Similar cases can be found beyond the post-Soviet space, too. For instance, in Thailand, lessons on moral education are taught for the purpose of building citizenship and as a solution for socio-political problems (Singsuriya et al. 2014).

If we come back to the case of Kochkor, an interesting aspect is that local mullahs are also attempting to raise well-mannered children (*yimanduu bala*). Their image of an *yimanduu* person is not primarily based on social values such as respect for elders, but mainly on individual values such as each Muslim's own personal relationship with Allah, which also regulates social relations. Thus, the perceptions of bringing up a healthy citizen is diverse and exactly this diversity engenders uncertainty among my interlocutors, who showed their concern on children's proper development. One of the teachers stated it this way:

'During the USSR (*soyuz ubagynda*) all had to strictly study and work. Nowadays, children's upbringing (*tarbiya*) is worse in comparison to the Soviet time. That is why we have to follow *salt*. Children's upbringing at home plays a big role. The ideology of TV is not good and we are now under its influence. During the Soviet time, there was a uniform upbringing (Rus. *vospitanie*). Now we take it from Europe. Now we mix up everything.'

During Soviet times, there was a clear programme on how to raise a child and the state worked on this programme. This was seen as something positive and 'healthy' in the eyes of my interlocutors who experienced that in the past. The 'unhealthiness' and weakness of the current time is defined based on the lack of this uniform programme and the 'mixing up everything'. Ibold, who studied the role of culture in the identity formation of Kyrgyz

¹⁷⁵ According to Sidorovitch (2005), initially in post-Soviet schools, discussions and teachings on moral education were eliminated with the aim to 'de-ideologise' and 'de-politicise' curricula. By the mid-1990s, due to behavioural problems among students caused by 'drastic economic decline and impoverishment', the urgency to introduce some form of civic education was raised. A similar idea is given by Glanzer (2005) who notes this on the 'moral vacuum' created after the Russian government discarded communist moral education.

youth in Bishkek, states that in the ‘era of rapid media and cultural globalisation, the resources available for identity formation are less stable and much more diverse’ (Ibold 2012, 142). He concludes that identity formation in such a context will be ‘more complex, challenging and perhaps preoccupying than ever before’ (Ibold 2012, 142).

According to the local teacher mentioned above, Kyrgyz *salt* should come to the rescue. This is why schools promote *adep* lessons and culture-specific extracurricular activities. On the contrary, the project on democracy and citizenship mentioned by Bahbahani (2012) failed. It does not mean that the schools in Kyrgyzstan do not show any interest in a ‘democratic’ educational system. Schools in Kochkor try to adopt new policies by promoting the activeness of school students, as it was noted by one of the educational deputy principals in a Kochkor school under the example of ‘school students’ self-governance’:

‘Children are actively involved in the administrative life of the school. They are given authority to check on the hygiene, attendance and clothes of school students and later they select the best class in the school. We cannot demand that pupils wear uniforms. Some lyceums in cities can afford that. But we demand that all pupils wear white blouses and shirts and that girls wear black skirts and boys wear black trousers. The pupils who are involved in these administrative tasks enter each class and check on these parameters, write down their findings in notebooks and display the results at the end. We do not interfere with the decisions of these pupils. We only monitor that they realistically approach their decisions which is ensured by choosing members from different classes. This is important because every two weeks, the pupils announce which has been the best class during our common school meetings (Rus. *lineyka*). We [meaning the teachers] only help them to gather the pupils for the school meeting and they themselves make announcements. As it is the pupils’ self-governance (Rus. *uchenicheskoe samoupravlenie*) that we follow, we want it to work. There are also cases when we, the teachers, learn about the best class only when it is announced. There is also a president who is elected by pupils. One month before the election, potential candidates

start to run their campaigns and announce what they would do for the school in case they were elected. On the day of the election, pupils come during the breaks and give their votes.’

This deputy principal’s perspective reflects the intention of the authors of the *adep* textbooks for introducing a new Western methodology of teaching. These are the promotion of the cognitive and creative abilities of children, including communication skills, decision-making, logical thinking, independent thinking, self-examination and critical thinking. This educational deputy principal brought up the example of ‘self-governance’ above in response to my question on whether they use any new suggested methods to encourage children to actively participate in school life. According to Elliot and Tudge, it was also a Soviet value to develop children’s ‘capacity for self-regulation’ which provided students with a sense of agency and control (Elliot/Tudge 2007). This once again demonstrates that there are no clear-cut defined labels such as ‘Soviet’, ‘pre-Soviet’ or ‘Western’ and they should not be generalised. Neither should they be put against each other. The deputy principal of Kochkor does not see any problem in the attempt to hold both ‘pre-Soviet’ and ‘Western’ values by suggesting: ‘We should take the good sides from the West and the West should take the good sides from us’. This highlights that schools in Kochkor are open for changes and they are trying to skilfully operate between the inherited Soviet legacy, Kyrgyz cultural values and Western travelling policies.

8.9. Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to look at the role of schools in transforming children into proper citizens by shaping their identities and building their morality and cultural values. I did not look at the quality of education in schools in Kochkor. Instead, I concentrated on the important role of schools in bringing up a ‘healthy child’ by taking responsibility for children’s physical health, moral education and cultural nourishment, and by making sure to bring up a citizen who can meet the challenges of contemporary life.

Readers were introduced to some episodes from school life, such as the 'Kyrgyz customary practices' competitions, where children learn about their cultural values. *Adep* lessons teach children about what makes a good child and a bad child and also set out social values of hierarchy and respect for elders. At the same time, through the 'pupils' self-governance' system, children in schools learn to exercise their agency and actively participate in the administrative life of the school, which is seen as a new method.

It has been argued that schools in Kochkor are institutions that promote both continuity

and change. Irrespective of what kind of value is taught in school, be it modern or traditional, Western or Kyrgyz, religious or secular, schools in Kochkor are making sure that children do not get 'chewed up' between quasi-opposite values. They attempt to serve as a medium for creating a person who can meet the challenges and complexities of the current time (*zaman*) and society (*koom*). This supports what Medlin and his colleagues (by referring to Comenius) note about the role of school that 'nothing should be learned in school for its own sake, but rather for its social value in life' (Medlin et al. 1971, 5).

9. Conclusion: Small People, Large Issues¹⁷⁶

9.1. Local Notions of 'Healthy Growth'

I took the notion of **healthy growth** as a prism for studying children in Kochkor. In this book, I mainly looked at what local people understand by healthy growth and what they do to raise their children healthily. I found it important to explore these questions in more detail after the 'Sprinkles' case mentioned in the introductory chapter. The pilot project on 'Sprinkles', a Canadian micronutrient supplement powder developed to eliminate iron deficiency in children, had not been successful despite the hard work of the project team in the Naryn oblast. Later, during my fieldwork, I also learned that some people, who were told that this micronutrient supplement powder would help their children grow, tested the product out of curiosity on their flowers or sheep to see if it indeed helps their flowers grow faster and sheep grow bigger. This can indicate different aspects. First, it shows that people initially did not trust this product. They did not have enough knowledge about this product either. Moreover, taking this foreign substance was not part of their traditional diet. Therefore, much effort was made to educate the population about healthy nutrition and useful minerals and micronutrients and convince them to give it to their children. In addition, in order to make it even more convincing, the product had to be transformed by adopting a local name and character. The process of localisation, which I find as crucial as the educative efforts, underlines the importance of taking into account local people's perceptions and everyday practices related to health and healthy lifestyles, including their adherence to 'old traditions', as the project leader mentioned.

Inspired by the 'Sprinkles' case, my initial plan was to study the inconsistent views on the notions of health and healthy development of children

between the 'local' and the 'global'. During my research, this idea was challenged theoretically and ethnographically in many aspects. On the one hand, as I discussed in chapter 6, it is impossible to imagine a properly functioning national healthcare system in Kochkor without the support of international organisations and global health-related campaigns. I fully agree with the point of Good (2010) that one cannot talk about local perspectives in isolation from the global system. This is especially true when it comes to children's physical health. For example, the prevailing posters in the Kochkor hospital on children's healthy growth, such as breastfeeding campaigns, immunisation and the Growth Chart from the World Health Organization, as well as projects on healthy pregnancy, clearly indicate that local health improvement activities in Kochkor are a part of a global campaign.

On the other hand, the ethnography that I presented on diverse perceptions and practices related to children's development in Kochkor can suggest that **healthy growth is not a state of being; it is an idea**. It is very much rooted in people's cultural values and practices.

Take the local understanding of ill-being called *kirene*, which can easily enter the child's body and should be removed by a ritual containing ash and seven 'tastes' (chapter 6). Some mothers also symbolically lift their children's hearts when their children get frightened as it is believed that a child's heart 'has fallen down'. In the same chapter, I discussed how new values such as Islamic lifestyles have re-shaped the notion of being healthy. Islamic ideas related to health are heavily based on being a devout Muslim and following Islamic norms. For example, Emir tries not to commit any sins in front of Allah; otherwise, he fears that it may cast illness onto him, his children and other family members. I brought up the voices of Altynay Eje and my other devout Muslim interlocutors who stated how reading the Quran brings light to the eyes and a person can see well, ablution keeps a person clean and healthy, or how a daily prayer, which is performed five times a day, is a good

¹⁷⁶ I have titled this concluding chapter 'Small People, Large Issues' after Eriksen 2001. With this I argue that even though we accept children as small people, the issues related to children are not small, but usually large.

physical exercise. The case of Janara Eje, the local doctor, is also interesting. First, it clearly indicates how the increasing acceptance of Islamic ideas on healthy lifestyles has displaced local traditional healing practices which are categorised by practicing Muslims as *eski salt* ('old traditions'). Second, her case also shows how in Kochkor, biomedical doctors can also send their young patients to traditional healers.

Diverse and broad perceptions of healthy growth in Kochkor urged me to look further at local folk models, contexts, values and categorisations of this idea. According to 'social construction theories' (Shweder/Miller 1985), there are many realities regarding healthy growth. Ignoring all these aspects in my work would have made the analysis of the local notions of healthy growth incomplete. I have argued and demonstrated that healthy growth from a local perspective covers the topics not only of physical and mental development of children, but also symbolic development through rituals and moral education, locally known as *tarbiya*, which results in the symbolic and discursive construction of children in Kyrgyzstan. Each of the ethnographic chapters (chapters 4 to 8) of this book touched on the concepts of 'healthy growth' from these different perspectives: the local concepts of a child and its status in society (chapter 4), a symbolic construction of a child's well-being (chapter 5), its physical health (chapter 6), the way a child is made into a moral person (chapters 7) and the role of schools in bringing up moral citizens (chapter 8).

The social dynamics with multidimensional influences in post-Soviet Kochkor, such as Re-Islamisation, globalisation, modernisation and democratisation, engendered, in the view of some interlocutors, an 'unhealthy environment'. These diverse values directly affect children: the way the notion of a child is conceptualised, childhoods are defined and children's lives are shaped. These multi-faceted changes engendered discourses about what is right and wrong, what is healthy and unhealthy, what is applicable for children and what is not. For the elderly generation, the Soviet era was seen as 'healthy' due to its clear goals of making a 'Soviet Man'. The lack of such clear purposes in the post-Soviet context raises concern about the proper development of children. In chapter 8,

I extensively discussed the role of the state and how, by secondary school programmes, it constructs a moral child who will be able to withstand the challenges of the contemporary life. Here, the lessons about *adep*, offered in secondary schools as part of national curricula, serve as a **salvage mechanism** in times of uncertainty.

It was also interesting for me to contemplate on the opinion of Chyngyz Ata (83), who claimed that present-day children were raised in the 'wrong way'. He described the children of today as lazy and lacking diligence. In his view, current children are spoiled and the reason for that is a 'life in sufficiency' which does not demand children to work. I would not agree with him, because based on my own observations, children in Kochkor worked all the time and immensely contributed to the household economy. But this elderly man came to such a conclusion by comparing the lives of present-day children, which he described as 'life in plenty', with his childhood in Soviet times during World War II when he had to work to sustain himself. I also mentioned the views of my other interlocutors who found current growing up of children as 'unhealthy' only because children of today lacked certain skills, such as preparing home-made noodles or doing calculations in their head, due to the development of technology like noodle-making machines and calculators. Such changes are accepted by some parents, who refer to current children as 'children of the current time' (*azyrky zamandyn baldary*), with understanding. Others forecast the negative future of the current children, defining them as 'the lost generation'. Such actions also contribute to my statement that healthy growth is an idea, which is produced based on the past and present experiences, old and new practices and normative values and lived realities.

9.2. The Making of the Person

Let me now move on from discourses to actions that parents, the community and the state undertake in order to contribute to the healthy development of children. With the concept of '**the making of the person**' (Berger et al. 2010), this book has illustrated ethnographic material on

the construction of children in Kochkor in all sorts of ways. Family members, community and state institutions, with the use of national and international policies, shape a child's health, well-being, fate, morality and personality. The whole chapter on the local notion of *yrym* (chapter 5) was dedicated to the symbolic construction of a child. The examples illustrated how the community transfers socially desired qualities to children with life-cycle and everyday rituals, blessings (*bata*) as part of a performative act, food (*keshik*) and teachings of cultural norms of do's and don'ts. For example, Kanykey did not name her premature baby for two months because the *yrym* (cultural practice) dictated it so. Nurgül Eje's toddler grandson has been behind on his motoric development. This is why she symbolically 'cut the *tushoo*' ('cut the hobble') of her grandson in order to make him walk more quickly. Mothers bring *keshik* – food that is brought from important events – in the hope that their children will also inherit certain good qualities from the people for whom the event had been organised. Thus, contrary to the statement that Kyrgyz *yrym* consists just of nice rituals the meanings of which people have long forgotten (see Abramzon 1949), I have demonstrated that especially when it comes to child-related rituals, people know the meaning and believe that those rituals positively affect the healthy growth of their children.

The idea of constructing a moral child was also examined in chapter 7, where I developed this notion through the local concept called *tarbiya*. By referring to Dunstan's statement that moral education, in my case *tarbiya*, is 'holistic and strongly society-oriented' (Dunstan 1981, 193), I have argued for the important role of *tarbiya* in turning a child into a social person, a proper member of society. With the help of *tarbiya*, a child knows its place, role and responsibilities in society and acts accordingly. I have argued that *tarbiya* is not only a moral education, as it is translated in most sources. It has very much a cultural, national and ethnic spirit and it is heavily based on Kyrgyz mentality. Without *tarbiya*, a child may be seen as 'semi-Kyrgyz', 'like a Russian' or 'neither Kyrgyz, nor Russian'. Sometimes, certain practices labelled as foreign are considered to be 'not suitable' (*tuura kelbeyt*'), which we could see in the section

'Western Does Not Work for Us' (chapter 7.3) or 'Kyrgyz Democracy' (chapter 8.7).

According to local reasoning, it is not possible to talk about *tarbiya* without touching upon the concept of work. I argued that work is a constitutive part of childhood in Kochkor. It serves as one of the main tools for constructing 'an ideal child' both as a **being** and as a **notion**. The discussions on children's involvement in work raised many points regarding diverse perceptions of work itself. For example, many international organisations write how children in Kyrgyzstan are involved in child labour, be it income-generating labour, street work, agricultural tasks, animal tending or household chores, which takes a child away from school. When asked for their views on this account, parents in Kochkor stated that they would never involve children in work that harms them. The work that children are involved in was perceived positively by parents as well as by the children themselves. Local narratives indicated at positive qualities such as gaining skills, experiencing independence and self-esteem.

I extended the local concept of *tarbiya* to chapter 8. Here, I questioned the roles of families and schools in the upbringing of children. I directly asked my interlocutors: 'Who gives *tarbiya* to children more: parents or teachers?' This question arose because during Soviet times, it was the task of the state to build the 'Soviet Man', whereas in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, many responsibilities have shifted onto families. Still, I noticed that schools actively take part in the construction of children, supporting the statement 'A teacher is my second parent', as it was indicated in Ayzada's 1st grade ABC primer.

Based on my observations of school activities, interviews with local teachers and analyses of some education programmes and textbooks, I conclude that schools do not only give formal education, but they are also institutions that purposefully educate children with moral and cultural values and shape their identity and personhood. Having preserved the Soviet legacy, schools in Kochkor serve as transformation agents. They provide a space where children learn about their rights as promoted by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, deepen their knowledge in Kyrgyz national heritage and organise lectures by inviting

mullahs who preach about how, as a good Muslim, one should behave well and respect elders.

9.3. Childhood through Personhood

As an anthropologist, I approached a child not as an **individual** but as a **person**. What does that mean? In the theoretical chapter (chapter 2), I asked how differently the current studies on children and their childhoods would have developed if scholars approached a child not only as an individual child who is juxtaposed to the category of adult, but also as a person, a **social person** who is defined in relation to others. A child as a social person is seen as a son or a daughter of their parents, a younger or older sibling, a young member of their community and as a citizen of their country. A child as a social person is also illustrated in this book as a social orphan, the head of the house, a Muslim child, a child who was involved in work which made the child mature or a child who constantly worked as part of *tarbiya*, which is actually positively valued. These and many other factors shape not only the life of a child but also the image (or notion) of a child in different ways. The concept of healthy growth helped to reveal the local perceptions of a child. For example, a child as an offspring is the one who lets their parents sit in the respected place at the table (*tör*), as it was mentioned by Sultan Bayke and Marat Bayke (chapter 7). Alternatively, a child as a good Muslim should start visiting a mosque and learn how to pray, as it was the case with Askat, a ten-year-old boy (chapter 4). If we follow the logic of the 'Amal kitep' ('Book of deeds'), by reaching the age of twelve, Askat, as a Muslim child, will be 'mature' and thus responsible for his own deeds according to Islam. Finally, a child as a Kyrgyz child is expected to be knowledgeable of Kyrgyz cultural practices as part of their healthy upbringing, which I demonstrated by the concept of *tarbiya* (chapter 7), a school competition on Kyrgyz customary practices, or the lessons about *adep* (chapter 8).

My approach to a child as a social person was determined by the nature of anthropological research which does not ignore the local context. Consequently, my research has focused on local

values, local concepts, models and their categorisations within their own cultural, social, political and economic circumstances. The first ethnographic chapter (chapter 4) of this book was on the local construction of the child as a concept. Here, I emphasised the indigenous perspectives for defining, conceptualising and categorising 'the child' as a notion. This approach has often been overlooked in the discipline of Childhood Studies, which I extensively discussed in the theoretical chapter 2. I have argued that Childhood Studies usually deal with the analytical category of children, who are defined in relation to an opposing analytical category of adults.

Similar to Abu-Lughod's observation of Bedouin society, where one hardly talks about a woman as an analytical category, as every woman is seen either as a sister, daughter, wife, mother or aunt (Abu-Lughod 1988, 152), in Kochkor, too, local people talk about a child not as an analytical category, but as a social person: as a member of the family and community, a citizen of Kyrgyzstan or a Kyrgyz, which is morally and culturally loaded. My approach to the study of children through the prism of **personhood** has shown that a child can have **multiple identities**. I have argued and demonstrated that a child is a relative and a relational term. I developed this idea with the cases of Talant (ten), Askat (ten) and Sezimay (eleven) in chapter 4. These cases indicate that a child as a concept is constructed and re-constructed in relation to others, rather than being presented as an absolute category.

In the field, I raised the topic of the shift from childhood to adulthood, which is intensively discussed in Childhood Studies. My research revealed that for the people in Kochkor, the shift from childhood to adulthood was not that prominently marked. Instead, people operate with the local notions of seniority and juniority and diverse levels of maturity. I also raised the issue of age as an analytical concept. Again, I was convinced that age does not play any role in defining the shift from childhood to adulthood in Kochkor. Instead, my interlocutors noted how a person, be it a child or an adult, will have a shifting status based on the seniority-juniority hierarchy. For example, I mentioned Talant, a ten-year-old boy, who was senior in his family and therefore had to meet certain

expectations despite his young age, which directly affected his childhood.

Mauss's statement of the fragile, non-static and unstable nature of personhood, which changes according to the 'systems of law, religion, customs, social structures and mentality' of a society (Mauss [1938] 1985, 1), was useful in my research on the changing notions of childhood as a concept. Especially, in the context of Kochkor, where people are facing drastic socio-cultural changes, this approach opens broader opportunities for the understanding of many definitions and different categorisations of 'the child' even within small Kochkor. I have argued for a direct link between the concepts of **childhood** and **personhood** and my aim throughout this book was to demonstrate that childhood is a special period when family members, community and the state constantly work on the making or moulding of this growing person.

So far, scholars have discussed the concept of the person as 'a socio-historical product' (Carriethers et al. 1985). In my view, the approach to the studies about children through the concept of personhood will provide an opportunity to look at the very **process** of how this socio-historical product comes into existence. It is important to note here that in this case, a child should be approached in connection to a wider background by taking into consideration diverse local historical trajectories, cultural peculiarities and socio-economic circumstances. In this book, by applying this approach, I aimed to show how children and childhoods in post-Soviet Kochkor with its multi-directional dynamics of social changes are constructed in different ways.

9.4. Anthropology of Childhood in Central Asia

'We are born Kyrgyz, think and live as Russians, and are buried as Arabs', this statement of Mayram Eje, whom I mentioned in the introductory chapter and whose statement I used as the title of my book, delivers several important messages. First, it perfectly shows the history of Kyrgyz people, who lived under the Soviet Union for 70 years and adopted Soviet, and along with it, Russian values. Even today, the elderly generation

in Kochkor thinks of the Soviet past with deep nostalgia by perceiving Soviet upbringing as 'healthy'. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam revived in the country and now when a person dies, the Quran is read and the body of the deceased is buried according to 'Muslim culture' (*musulmandardyn salty*) or, as Mayram Eje said, 'Arabic culture'. Second, if we remember the regret that was expressed in the statement of Mayram Eje (see chapter 1), we can say that it was more than just the ascertaining of historical facts and subsequent socio-cultural changes. It demonstrated Mayram Eje's concern about the identity and future of Kyrgyz people who eagerly adopt 'non-Kyrgyz' values and practices. This was noted by her interrogative statement: 'Why cannot we be Kyrgyz!?'

Both in discourses and in practice, being a Kyrgyz child is integrally linked to Kyrgyz culture. Indeed, when I was studying children in the field, I realised that even when asked questions about children, my interlocutors often provided answers that directly related to Kyrgyz cultural values. I heard many times the statement how Kyrgyz people should live according to Kyrgyz *salt*. As I conducted my research among Kyrgyz families, my interlocutors talked not about a child in general, but specifically about a **Kyrgyz child** and what is expected from that child. Similar to Mayram Eje, my other interlocutors sadly noted how current external factors are influencing Kyrgyz children by contributing to their 'unhealthy' development. Thus, the children whom I studied were generalised at the level of ethnicity and carried cultural patterns and characteristics. This leads to a bold question: 'Is there such a thing as a Kyrgyz child?' to which it would be impossible to give a simple yes or no answer.¹⁷⁷

On the one hand, I have shown how Kyrgyz people in Kochkor demonstrate strong traditionalism, and it is *salt* which regulates many aspects of their everyday life. I have also argued that the notion of *saltyk* ('traditional') has a close link to *uluttuk* ('national') in the context of post-Soviet

¹⁷⁷ I am grateful to Sabine Klocke-Daffa who initially asked me this question and challenged my way of thinking on this account. I have reflected on this question in my research and asked the same question from my interlocutors.

Kochkor (chapter 8). Teachers in Kochkor are concerned that the current generation of young Kyrgyz people is losing their connection with their *salt* and that is why they organise events such as ‘Kyrgyz customary practices’ (*Kyrgyzdyn kaada-salty*). The *adep* lessons which are heavily based on Kyrgyz mentality and introduced nationwide also serve as an example. All these efforts lead to constructing a ‘Kyrgyz child’.

On the other hand, based on the complex social dynamics of contemporary Kochkor, I have demonstrated that having a certain fixed notion of being a Kyrgyz child can be contested. Today, one can very easily challenge the generalisation of the notions such as ‘Kyrgyz way’ or ‘according to *salt*’. I have discussed how some of my devout Kyrgyz Muslim interlocutors have abandoned old traditions (*eski salt*) of Kyrgyz people and adopted Islamic tradition and, along with it, practices, which Mayram Eje classifies as ‘Arabic’. In Kyrgyzstan, and in Central Asia, one cannot avoid a complex connection between Islam and local cultural practices of Central Asians. Foreign cultural aspects labelled as ‘Arabic’ are welcomed by some and opposed by others.

At the same time, scholars who write about youths in Central Asia cannot avoid other influences such as globalisation and westernisation (see Ibold 2012; Roberts 2010). Young generations in Central Asia are immersed in the global world and form a global identity. To Mayram Eje, this engenders concern. I would like to make it clear that people in Kochkor are not against anything that is Western, European or American. On the contrary, they value it. Especially when it comes to life in the West, they admire it. Once, I was asked if it was true that in Germany streets are washed with shampoo. People also make friends with Westerners and cherish their friendship. They are happy to get emails and phone calls from their old Western friends which they boastfully share with their co-villagers. One man in Kochkor proudly showed me his Swiss knife gifted to him by his foreign friend. As I have already noted, people welcome Western goods, Western fashion and modern technologies. Yet, when it comes to child-rearing, similar to the Uzbek man’s case (Medlin et al. 1971, 155), people in Kochkor tend to stick to their old

traditions. As I have demonstrated, they are not happy with children’s rights or ‘American democracy’, as part of the travelling policy, which, in their view, do not correspond to Kyrgyz mentality.

On the contrary, Islam is welcomed for its morality (*yiman*). I have mentioned how a girl in a *madrassa* in Kochkor feared that she might get kidnapped, as in her opinion, young men praise girls who abide with Islamic practices as being *yimanduu* (‘well-mannered’). Especially, in times of drastic socio-cultural transformation that lead to uncertainty, many people refuge to Islam for moral values. However, as noted earlier, not everybody in Kochkor welcomes new cultural practices classified as ‘Arabic’. Mayram Eje fears that Arabic culture can replace Kyrgyz culture soon. Still, it should be noted that the villagers experience diverse influences and they react to these influences in their own ways. Throughout this book, I showed how Kochkor is not a homogenous village. Consequently, views on what is healthy and what is good for children also vary. In short, discourses and practices generated by complex social dynamics in post-Soviet Kochkor make the study of children’s lives in the region fascinating.

In conclusion, I would say that my research on children through the concept of ‘healthy growth’ raised more questions than I initially planned to answer in this study. My attempt to understand the local concepts of a child and healthy growth of children within socio-cultural changes in Kochkor only discovered the tip of an iceberg. Throughout my research, I realised that not much scholarly work has been done on the topic of children in Central Asia. It can be argued that there is no Anthropology of Central Asian Childhood. As I mentioned earlier, the prevailing sources on children in Central Asia are the reports of international development organisations, where usually negative aspects of children’s lives, such as poor health condition, poor educational system or child labour, are mentioned. When it comes specifically to anthropological works, there are works on related topics such as family values (Roche 2017), youth in Central Asia (Kirmse 2012; Roche 2014), quality of school education (DeYoung et al. 2006) or Islamic moral education (Stephan 2010a; 2010b).

Many sources on the current dynamics of the Re-Islamisation processes in Kyrgyzstan, including public discourses, touch upon adults. It would be interesting for me to study the life of Askat further and understand how his Muslim life shapes his childhood. Childhood and Islam in post-Soviet Central Asia is definitely an understudied combination. Along with family values, the ethnography I provided also revealed that it would be useful to have more detailed ethnographic studies in order to understand the role of secondary schools in the upbringing of children. As transformation agents, schools play a crucial role in the construction of childhood and personhood in the post-Soviet space. For example, special attention should be paid to understand how new ideas and values, such as human rights, civic education or democracy, which Kochkorians call 'Western' values, are integrated into state educational institutions.

My approach to children, which was mainly on their healthy growth, was more **about** rather than **with** children. This is why I did not give

much space to children's own voices in this book. Following the social construction theory, I mainly concentrated on how parents, the community, the state, and at certain points, international organisations contributed to the construction of children in Kochkor and their healthy growth. Nevertheless, I believe that my work, which has demonstrated ideas, values, discourses and practices that circle around children, will be equally helpful in learning about the life of children in Kyrgyzstan as well as about broader societal issues. I noted earlier that people in Kochkor invoke locally vast and important cultural practices when they discuss children. Throughout my journey, the topics about children's healthy growth engendered discourses on the meanings of life, social orders, continuity and change, the past and present, traditions and modernity and many other locally defined large-scale issues, which we would not initially relate to children. This indicates that even though we accept children as small people, the issues that surround children are usually large.

Glossary

adep – ethics, morality

adep alippesi – moral primer

adeptüü adj. – well-mannered, ethical, moral, decent

ak kalpak – lit. ‘white hat’, a man’s traditional hat

ak kol – lit. ‘white hand’, a person who is not involved in heavy labour

aksakal – lit. ‘white beard’, male elderly person; used as a sign of respect

aksakaldar sotu – court of elders

ala kachuu – bride-kidnapping

amal kitep – in Islam, a ‘book of deeds’ which ‘is opened’ when a girl and a boy reach the ages nine and twelve respectively

apa (plural *apalar*) – mother; which is also used for healers

araket – effort, which involves the action of labour

archa – juniper, which is commonly used in rituals for cleansing purposes

ashar – mutual help among kin members

at koyuu – naming a child, part of life-cycle ritual

ata – father; is also used to address elderly male people

bakshy – also *büü-bakshy*; a healer

bala – Kyrgyz word for ‘a child’: both female and male; also used specifically for a son, a boy and in other word-combinations such as a young man will be called *jash bala*, a son-in-law will be called *küyöö bala*

balagat – maturity; adolescence

barchylyk – life in sufficiency

bata – blessing

bata berüü – the act of giving blessings, which is a cultural practice

bata kyluu – to read the Quran for a deceased person; gesture used before/after meal

bayke – brother; is also used when one addresses a male person older than oneself

beshbarmak – a Kyrgyz national dish of meat with noodles

beshik – traditional cradle

beshik toy – cradle ritual and related feast

beyish – paradise

bidayat – from Arabic *bid’ah*, meaning innovation not mentioned in Islamic scriptures

boorsok – small fried pieces of bread

boz üy – yurt

bozo – Kyrgyz national beverage

chachala – consists of sweets, small fried pieces of bread (*boorsok*) and biscuits which are used in rituals to ‘invite’ abundance, goodness and ‘sweet’ life

chala kyrgyz – ‘semi-Kyrgyz’; used ironically to describe the Kyrgyz who do not know their cultural practices

chapan – Kyrgyz traditional embroidered coat

chernaya kassa (Rus.) – social gatherings of a group of usually women, who meet every month or so at each other’s houses in turn, which is accompanied by giving money to the host from a common ‘financial pot’

chong kishi – lit. ‘big man’; also *uluu kishi* which means ‘an adult’

daavat – proselytism in Islam

daavatchy – propagator of Islam; usually a follower of the Tablighi Jamaat movement

dastorkon – tablecloth, usually laid on the floor

den-sooluk – health; the physical condition of a person

dua – supplication; prayer to Allah

eje – sister; is also used when one addresses a female person older than oneself

eleчек – traditional hat worn by elderly women

emgek – labour

evroremont (Rus.) – ‘European standard’ renovations of houses

gülazyk – food full of protein, usually taken during a journey

halal – means ‘lawful’ and ‘permissible’ according to Islam

hijab – veiling according to Islam; in the context of Kyrgyzstan, wearing a *hijab* means covering head (but not face) and wearing long loose clothes

ilim – science; in the Islamic context means ‘religious knowledge’

ish – work; also means business, deeds

jakshylyk-jamandyk – lit. ‘goodness-badness’, meaning feasts and funerals related to life-cycle events

- jeen* – maternal grandchild
jenge – sister-in-law, a brother's/uncle's wife
jentek toy – feasts organised to celebrate the arrival of a baby
jer töshök – thick mattress laid underneath when seated on the floor
jeti ata – seven fathers, meaning seven paternal generations back
jin ooru – mental illness
jolun achuu – lit. 'to open one's way'; the act of wishing good, successful future
jumush – work; job that involves remuneration; tasks; chores
jürök tüshüü – lit. 'heart falls down', this happens when a child gets frightened and constantly cries
kaada-salt – Kyrgyz customary practices
kasiettüü – person who possesses some unique qualities, power
kelin – daughter-in-law
kesel – from Arabic *kasal*, meaning being ill, lazy
keshik – food brought home after some special occasions, usually big feasts
kirene – culture-bound affliction, which usually affects small children
köökör – special traditional leather flask for keeping national drink
koom – society, community
krujok (Rus.) – after-class courses
kurman ayt – Muslim feast of the sacrifice
kut – Kyrgyz word for good fortune, success, abundance
küyöö – husband
küyöö bala – son-in-law
Kydyr – *Kydyr* is believed to be a patron that grants successful journeys
kyrgyzcha – this local term means 'in a Kyrgyz way'; in my case it is used as one of the ways of healing an ill person at home or by a traditional healer, without turning to biomedicine
kyrk chach – girl's hair braided in forty braids
maazy – Kyrgyz traditional shoes
mal – livestock: horses, cows, sheep
mal bazar – animal (livestock) market
mashinka (Rus.) – machine; in this case, a calculator
mastan – witch, a demonic creature in the image of an old woman
mazar – sacred sites for pilgrimage
medrese – *madrassa*; Islamic educational institution
meenet – labour; burden in a positive sense
meerimdüülük – kindness, endearment
molchuluk – abundance
moldo – *mullah*, a religious authority in Islam
nan ooz tiygizüü – local practice of offering bread to visitors
oblast' (Rus.) – administrative province
okumushtuu – scientist
pavil'on (Rus.) – small shop
peyil – 'character' or 'nature' of a person which is usually understood in word combinations such as: 'white *peyil*' (*peyili ak*) meaning a kind person; 'black *peyil*' (*peyili kara*) is an evil person; 'full *peyil*' (*peyili tok*) is used to describe a person who doesn't have any worries and 'narrow *peyil*' (*peyili tar*) is used for a stingy person
rayon – administrative district
salt – customary practice; a set of norms and values observed in life and accepted as part of tradition which is coming from generation to generation
sary may – ghee
sayma – Kyrgyz embroidery
shaytan – demon
shirk – in Arabic means sin of idolatry
shökülö – long hat to be worn by unmarried grown-up girls
soop – reward for a good deed
sovremennyi (Rus.) – modern
soyuz (Rus.) – union, in this work means the Soviet Union
sura – from Arabic *surah*, verses from the Quran
taalim – in this work, it refers to religious lessons
tandyr – clay oven
tarbiya – upbringing; moral education; purposeful socialisation
tartip – discipline
timurovtsy (Rus.) – exemplary pioneers during the Soviet time
tong may – lit. 'frozen fat'; tallow, sheep fat used for healing purposes
tör – respected place at the head of the *dastorkon* or table, which is the place opposite the door of the room
trud (Rus.) – labour
tsivilizatsiya (Rus.) – civilisation; in this context is used interchangeability with modernity

tülöö – sacrifices

tush kiyiz – traditional velvet cloth with embroidery that Kyrgyz people use to hang on the walls of yurts and later were also used in houses

tushoo – hobble; in this case, the cord tied around a child's feet

tushoo kesüü – ritual conducted for a child who is around one year old

tushoo toy – feast that contains the ritual of *tushoo kesüü*

Umay ene – patroness of children and health

ustukan – parts of meat which are distributed at the table according to the status of people

iiylönüü toy – wedding feast

vospitanie (Rus.) – upbringing

yiman – morality, moral values; in the context of Islam, means recognising Allah and following the rules mentioned in Islamic texts

yimanduu – person with moral values; well-bread person

yrym – ritual; series of rituals; performative acts

yrym-jyrym – Kyrgyz cultural norms and practices

yrysky – abundance given by God

zaman – time, period, epoch

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RESSOURCENKULTUREN 23

BORN KYRGYZ, RAISED AS RUSSIANS AND BURIED AS ARABS

This book introduces readers to an ethnography about children in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and the values associated with their upbringing from local people's own points of view. The author, who conducted her research in Kochkor, a village in northern Kyrgyzstan, approaches the topic of children and their childhood through the prism of 'healthy growth'. In the local context, ideas about healthy growth of children are not limited to their physical, mental or emotional development; it also includes bringing up 'culturally educated' members of society with proper moral values, as well as the conduct of culturally determined health-related and life-cycle rituals. Discourses on the healthy development of children are presented through the voices of the people of Kochkor about Kyrgyz cultural practices, the increasing role of Islam, modernity and globalisation in Kyrgyzstan and how these dynamics have changed their perceptions of children and their childhoods. Therefore, this book can also be seen as an ethnographic study of the social changes in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan that are shaping and re-shaping the values, worldviews and daily practices of local people.

Baktygul Shabdan, née Tulebaeva, is a social and cultural anthropologist at Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, Germany.



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