Jan Briffaerts – When Congo Wants To Go To School. Educational Realities In A Colonial Context

Playground Girls School Sainte Thérèse in Coquilhatville, 1950s.

The education system in the Congo was widely considered to be one of the best in colonial Africa, in particular because of its broad reach among the Congolese youth. At independence however, the wake-up call was brutal as soon it became clear that the colonial educational system had neglected to form an educated class of people able to cope with administrating one of Africa's biggest and economically most important countries. To be able to understand the mechanisms and effects of missionary education it is most enlightening to go back to the classroom and investigate the everyday reality of school. What did missionary education do exactly, how did it work, what did it teach, and how did it relate to its subjects, the children of the Congo?

This study gives clear insights into the everyday realities of colonial education. It is the result of historical research into educational practices and realities in catholic missionary schools in the Tshuapa region, located in the south of the Congolese province of Equateur. It is based on a rich array of historical source material, ranging from missionary archives and mission periodicals through to contemporary literature and interviews with missionnaries and former pupils who experienced colonial education themselves. The title, "*When Congo wants to go to*

school… " refers to one of many articles published in Belgian mission periodicals on the subject of the education and civilisation work carried out by missionaries in the Belgian colony.

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When Congo Wants To Go To School – Introduction & A Few Preliminary Remarks
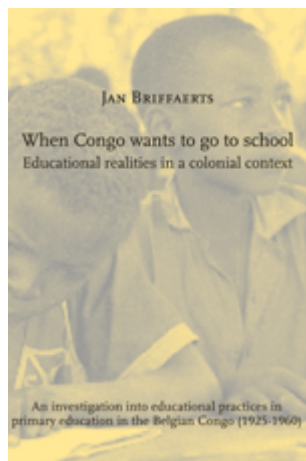
The research project that formed the foundation for this study grew from a few existing lines of research. On the one hand it relates to research on the so-called Belgian civilisation project in the Congo, on the other to research into the micro-history of education in Belgium. Both my promoter and I have some experience in research into colonial education. Marc Depaepe's work on the colonial phenomenon grew out of a representative, personal connection to it. As with many Flemish people, the colonial past was a part of his family history. The letters from his great aunt, Sister Maria Adonia Depaepe, a missionary in the Congo between 1909 and 1961, which he later published, are a testimony to this.[1] Her personal documents were published as part of a project on the history of education, more specifically the missionary action of the Belgians in the former colony. The result was a general study at a macro level based on the theory of historical education, focussing in on the educational policy and institutional development of colonial education.[2] At about the time this book was published I was writing an extended paper in the framework of the "Historische kritiek" (tr. Historical criticism) lectures in the history department at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels. The subject of my paper was the "school struggle" in the nineteen fifties in the Belgian Congo. This paper really related to a part of political history and the political players behind colonial education, particularly in Belgium and to a limited extent the Belgian Congo.[3] Some years later the content of the paper was presented at a colloquium on 50 years of the school pact (2nd and 3rd December 1998, V.U.B.) and published in the resulting conference notes.[4]

The second line of research that forms the foundation of this project relates to the more fundamental concepts on the execution of research in the field of the history of education in general. The research group concerned with the history of primary education in Belgium is a cooperative relationship that grew around the universities of Leuven (Marc Depaepe) and Ghent (Frank Simon) with support from the professional association COV. The research from this group was usually concerned with structures, institutions and curricula, with ideas and ideologies, innovative concepts and theory, with little emphasis on finding out what happened to these in practice. Within the framework of the group, the decision was made to carry out large-scale research into the reality in the classroom. One of the central research questions was whether everyday practice in (primary)

education was actually rather resistant to modernization and whether there was a "grammar of schooling", a set of formal practical rules and structures that continue to survive with exceptional persistence in the classroom, against all desire and attempts at modernization. The most important result of this line of research was the publication of *Orde in Vooruitgang*, in 1999. This book, of which an English translation was published in 2000 (Order in Progress) contains a theoretical framework for further research relating to so-called "classroom history", as complementary to "curriculum history". It also offers an overview of the classroom reality in Belgian primary schools in the period 1880-1970.[5] It used contemporary educational periodicals as the principal source. Extensive documentation was collected on events in classroom life and the relevant research and interpretation methods were also considered in more depth.

The importance of the concept of "classroom history" stems from the fact that this provides the space to fill the gaps into research in the history of education (as an exponent of historical research, theoretically based on sociological ideas). It does this by shifting the attention of the historian to a level that had not previously been considered. Instead of radically directing the focus of the study from institutions, curricula and theories to the people who were the object of them, the focus was on the way the subjects functioned within a specific context and the way in which these related to the "macro phenomena" through interaction with direct environmental factors. I say, "related" because it is not *necessarily* an active reaction on that macro level. The concrete behaviour and interaction in the classroom may not be compatible with the standards produced, they may run parallel with them or be entirely separate from them. In practice, that means that the researcher must try to discover what happened exactly, insofar as possible. We can also formulate this in another way, applied to the field of research concerned, by stating that we must try to penetrate the educational meeting of missionaries, teachers and pupils. [That poses a number of practical problems, as we will consider in more detail below, especially in relation to the selection of sources and the way these sources can or must be handled. We must also confront the question of the extent to which you can truly penetrate the reality of the past.]

Progress of the research
The original title for the project (in fact this relates to two separate projects for which financial support was obtained from the Research Council of the K.U.Leuven and the F.W.O.- Flanders respectively) was "*Indigenism and*

colonialism in Congolese primary education. A case study of pedagogical mentality and reality in Belgian Congo (1908-1960), based on the analysis of schoolbooks and focused on the Mbandaka region." In order to understand what follows it may be useful to consider the progress of the project. Due to circumstances the composition of our research team experienced fundamental changes during the first year. Originally I started working in the framework of a sub-project researching colonial schoolbooks. As a result of the changes mentioned above the project was reviewed and the central part was passed on to me. Instead of concentrating on schoolbooks I would now concentrate on the reality research of the history of education in schools and classrooms. A second, specifically anthropological research question into post-colonial effects was unfortunately also dropped, although it was partially recovered in my research (see part III).

However, the research question relating to schoolbooks was revived to a great extent and integrated into the wider framework of the research. This is mainly thanks to the involvement of a new researcher, Professor Pierre Kita Kyankenge Masandi, former professor at the University of Bukavu (Congo), and, to my knowledge, the only Congolese person ever to have written a coordinated study on the history of education as regards colonial education in the Congo.[6] The results of his participation in the project must undoubtedly be called meaningful: Together with Marc Depaepe he not only published an anthology of song texts used in the colonial schools together,[7] but his main contribution undoubtedly consisted in transforming a number of papers into a rounded monograph on the nature, educational meaning and social content of school songs and books in the Belgian Congo.[8] This work not only reflects the lines of research mentioned above but also forms a first step in a study into the reality in schools and classrooms in the colony. Nevertheless, as also explained in the work, school songs and schoolbooks as artefacts of the educational past can only inform us *indirectly* of the mentality (or mentalities) and reality (or realities) of the time and this must be constantly borne in mind with regard to interpretation. For people wanting to form an image of the reality, such artefacts should not be used as the main source, but at most as one of numerous lines of inquiry. After all, no matter how interesting the schoolbooks may be for a better understanding of certain linguistic, anthropological, historical, ideological and even educational aspects of the colonial context, they cannot themselves have functioned outside a specific context and this specific context cannot be found in the schoolbooks

themselves.[9] This corresponds to the criticism that for a long time schoolbook research relied too exclusively on quantitative research methods, following the methods developed in sociology and communication sciences (more specifically "content analysis").[10] Consequently I tried, as Jan Van Wiele suggests in his studies, to reveal the rather artificial dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research methods in the framework of a comparative study of the schoolbooks which were used by the various congregations.[11] To do this, I integrated both approaches.

Consequently, with regard to the use of this type of source in the framework of this research, we must also withdraw from the perhaps too rigid formulation of the original research project as "starting from the analysis of colonial textbooks".[12] There seems to be a consensus that a schoolbook is not in itself a witness to the educational past and certainly not with regard to educational effects (moreover, the authors differentiate this in the text of the research proposal mentioned here). As a result, the schoolbooks were not used as the main source in the development of this thesis. They were one of a number of relatively widely varied sources, in which mission periodicals and mission archives had an important place but in which other types of written and oral sources also played a part.

Aims and feasibility
A person wanting to study *classroom history* is immediately confronted by a number of problems relating to the type of sources and how these can and must be used. Depaepe mentioned this in the methodological considerations in *Order in progress*: "*The writings of educationalists, with their instructions and tips for everyday practice, are a veritable goldmine for the micro-history of pedagogical reality. It would be worthwhile investigating this official discourse in terms of its internal consistency and combining it with some of those rare documents that describe an actual situation or a specific feeling. (…) What are we to do, however, if the possibility of combination with other sources is more or less excluded? May the periodicals still be considered reliable in that case? Or will they inevitably give rise to a one-sided interpretation of school life in terms of control and coercion?*"[13] I was naturally also confronted by this type of problem, and to a much greater extent, because the source material seems sparser and especially as it relates to a meeting of two different "cultures", squeezed in a pre-eminently "constrained" relationship. However, in my opinion it is beyond question that the

main emphasis should be placed on the way in which the sources are read. The only way to withstand the criticism of representativity and subjectivity of our research is by approaching the sources we have in a consistent and critical way.

For this I further used the concept set out in *Order*. So-called "thick description" is needed to approach these sources. This concept, originating from the anthropological writings of Clifford Geertz and Gilbert Ryle, places the emphasis on the contextual nature of conferring meaning and the responsibility of taking the context into account when describing and passing on information. "*The difference, however unphotographable, between a twitch and a wink is vast.*"[14] In my opinion, the "thick description" that is presented here as the methodological point of departure mainly consists of trying not to see something you read or are confronted with solely as a "flat" fact but always in its context. That presupposes taking the intention of the protagonists into account, even if they belong to a different culture and consequently integrating the conferment of meaning given to the act concerned in those other cultures. For clarity: "thick description" seems fundamental to me in the sense that it relates to an approach, a way of handling material and data, which is universal and which must be unique to all research. This is an opinion that I have also found elsewhere: "*Not only 'alien tribes' are eligible to Clifford Geertz' 'thick description', for example variants of contemporary 'western' youth culture bear careful approach. If the teacher, the keeper, the curator want to teach the youth of today something, then they must approach the pupils, students, public as anthropologists. As long as we fail to recognise the alien in ourselves, we remain victims of exoticism: the alien is sought far from here, that which is close should not need an explanation, should be obvious.*"[15]

In my opinion this statement says two things. Firstly, the "careful approach" is a perfect description of what this concept is actually about. The principle may be obvious; its application in practice seems much less so. The consciousness of one's own position certainly does not make it easier for the researcher to study the subject. In my case it relates to the very fragile balance which confronts a researcher. Geertz formulates this as follows: "*Finding our feet, an unnerving business which never more than distantly succeeds, is what ethnographic research consists of as a personal experience; trying to formulate the basis on which one imagines, always excessively, one has found them is what anthropological writing consists of as a scientific endeavour. We are not, or at*

least I am not, seeking either to become natives (a compromised word in any case) or to mimic them. Only romantics or spies would seem to find point in that. We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them, a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognised." [16]

This truly relates to the balance between the empathy required in an alien context to reach understanding (and conversation), and one's own context and background, which must, by definition, be the point of departure. Returning to the first quotation (from Asselberghs and Lesage), the logical consequence is that this balance, situated by Geertz in the framework of anthropological research, is as acutely present in all other human sciences. In my opinion, the combination of both quotations clearly indicates that this relates to a view of the world rather than a research method. Consequenty, it also explains why we chose to study the environmental factors the missionaries "took with them" within the limitations already mentioned. All too often we start from specific hypotheses, from certain beliefs, in which colonialism is given a purely negative connotation without adequately taking account of the historic attitude – often idealism – that formed the basis of the mission despite all the possible negative effects. I often catch myself thinking while reading contemporary documents and testimonies from the colony: "It's unbelievable that people dared write or say such things."

In this we are actually touching on questioning our cultural self-image, something that is expressed in numerous works on cultural history and conceptualisation.[17] After all, the need to understand something can only be explained from a person's own context of ideas and own position. The act of understanding relates to a personal determination, not to lose or disavow but rather to be able to situate and distinguish that which we want to understand. I would like to consider this more deeply because my own experience over recent years has made me truly conscious of the difficult nature of the position of the scientist in this debate and in relation to this subject. I would like to mention two concrete experiences here. In January 2002, I was present at a colloquium in the Africa museum in Tervuren. The reason for the colloquium was the presentation of a book on the flight of Belgian colonists from the Congo in 1959 and 1960.[18] Former colonists were present both among the speakers and the large audience. When an account was made at one point about the general background to colonialism, it could be observed that a number of these people found this

difficult. Afterwards the speaker, who talked about the system of de facto apartheid as a part of the colonial regime amongst other things, was subjected to strong criticism from these people. [19] The existence of websites for associations of former colonists like the one mentioned by Asselberghs and Lesage also indicates that a strong position is still taken by certain people who experienced the colonial period.[20]

I experienced the opposite phenomenon myself at a conference in the United States. I gave a lecture on this research project in which I apparently made a strategic mistake by stating that I did not believe that the missionaries who were active in the Belgian Congo had a conscious strategy of oppression in their minds through which they approached their daily activities. The commentator, a Congolese researcher living in the United States, tried to convince me in a polite but very insistent way that he rejected my *standpoint* on the moral qualification of the behaviour of the colonisers. He thought – and said so in so many words – that colonisation should be rejected in the strongest terms and be qualified as reprehensible in the name of all the suffering done to the Congolese. And I had apparently not done so. Nor had that been my intention. It may be advisable to refer back to the position I was defending at that time, not to defend it again but because this also clarifies my position here.

"It seems to me that talking in terms of a strategy behind an educational program, as has been done regarding colonial education, is a bit confusing and to some extent falsifies the image. A strategy not only presupposes the existence of certain ideas or principles living in certain groups of society, it needs explicit formulation of certain goals to achieve. I do think that if a general educational strategy is to be found, it will be in the school programs developed by the colonial administration in co-operation with the leading representatives of Catholic missions. It is indeed interesting that the missions had a decisive say in the creation of government regulations on education, but it is not hard to explain given the fact that it was almost entirely left in their hands.

I don't think that we can qualify the general attitude or behaviour of the missionaries working in Congolese villages as belonging to a strategy. The question to be raised is rather whether there was an attempt at or a habit of making people do things in a certain way, with a purpose to obtain a certain result. When asked what they thought they were going to do over there, individual missionaries will generally respond: "To go help the black people in

Africa" or *"to let them know about God"*, the two obviously having different meanings as to their content, but perhaps not differing so much regarding their underlying intentions." [21]

Even if now, almost five years later, I would formulate my opinion differently (and undoubtedly in a more subtle way), I still maintain the point I wanted to make. More specifically, this does not mean condemning anything or any person but neither does it mean that one can take a "neutral" or purely "objective" standpoint. However, understanding and contextualising takes priority.[22] That fits with the remarks above with regard to "thick description". This understanding may also be explained in another way: *"The West and otherness relate not as polarities or binarisms in postcolonial discourse but in ways in which both are complicitous and resistant, victim and accomplice."*[23] I am not so much interested in the label used but the practice behind it and the way it is approached. Peter Pels considered this in more detail in his doctoral thesis. The introductory considerations that he presents as essential in the beginning of this thesis make me think that one should really take great care in the way in which one posits arguments. In any event, that carefulness does not stop him from telling a good tale. However, somewhat to my surprise he argues against the practice of "thick description" (not against the practice in itself but against its unilateral use or overemphasis). *"A plea for tactility suggests that we should not let the thick description of webs of significance obscure the thin description of the events, objects and performances that (partly) escape these webs of significance."* I disagree with him in this.

He states that his *"plea for tactility"* is a defence or reaction against objectifying "meaning" in accordance with Geertz. Here, I cannot agree in the first instance: it is as though you assume that you can convey your information, a story, a history to others (because the intention is surely to share the scientific conclusions gained?) without creating a meaning in it, without making any interpretations, without causing any distortion, no matter how slight. Can all meaning (or lack thereof) implicit in a specific gesture, touch, presence be conveyed? No, that is impossible. You can talk about it, you can draw it, even film it but that does not necessarily reflect what happened exactly at that moment. He also mentions this himself: *"The latter argument connects up with a last, maybe obvious, but extremely important point: that tactility is impossible without perceiver and perceived being co-present."*[24]

What do I infer from that for my own research? Pels states that knowledge is acquired through contact between the scientist (anthropologist) and the object of the research, a fact that is not, or only insufficiently, taken into account in the final communication of the results of the research. It is negated. By focusing on the nature of that contact he comes to the conclusion that this is very often a non-verbal event. This finally leads him to the conclusion that *"decisive developments in the construction of colonial society are often not, or only partially, experienced consciously by the participants."*[25] In my opinion this statement is valid both for the people who were present and involved in the event (at the time) and for those who subsequently go in search of these events. These conclusions are certainly not new for a historian, but they are still very important. This kind of thinking may lead to excessive relativism (or, if one prefers, pessimism), insofar as it may be concluded that it is not really possible to write history. Of course, this can also be looked at from another angle, claiming that "the construction of colonial society" and more specifically every society, is finally the result of many forces, of which one is directed more consciously than the other by individuals or institutions. Johannes Fabian defines this problem very accurately when he talks of the nature of our knowledge in relation to colonial dominance: *"We have gotten used to looking at colonialism in Africa in retrospect, that is, from the point of view of fully established rule and clearly differentiated institutions. ... Even the most critical historical studies suffer sometimes from the burden of perceived results; the factual outcome of colonisation tends to overshadow the precariousness of the enterprise and the massive ideological support that was needed in order to get pragmatic results"*[26]

And what does that then mean for a person wanting or having to write about it? In essence, this is about giving an account, telling a story about certain events, situations in a particular place, in a specific region at a given time in a defined period. No matter how deep you try to dig through sources and testimonies about that past, you will never be satisfied if you want to represent everything. I have noticed that these conclusions correspond to a great extent with a statement by Marc Depaepe on the position of the educational historian in the academic and by extension the social field. Instead of "a plea for tactility" we might be able to suggest "a plea for modesty". In Depaepe's opinion this would not necessarily result in nihilism or immobilism, on the condition that some kind of intellectual "ascesis" is implemented: *"Such an intellectual ascesis is not based on a philosophical, religious, and/or political dogmatism and fanaticism, which always*

wants to demonstrate its own correctness in a power struggle, but on a realisation of human dignity."[27] This ascesis relates to the consciousness of the fact that historiography as an activity has two faces: on one side is the knowledge of the past enriching the contemporary public and on the other side it always remains an impoverishment in relation to the original reality, the complexity of which can naturally never be caught in a representation *post factum.*

Structure of the thesis
The question "how can one give a proper representation of what happened in that education?" also plays a part here. Modesty implies circumspection and consequently a clear indication of the boundaries within which the story is enacted. In other words, delimitation is important in the representation of reality. Consequently, the delimitation of the subject has clearly been a decisive element in structuring this thesis. The different "themes" involved while considering what is truly important in the composition of "a colonial educational reality" were brought together in the diagram below *(Diagram One)*.
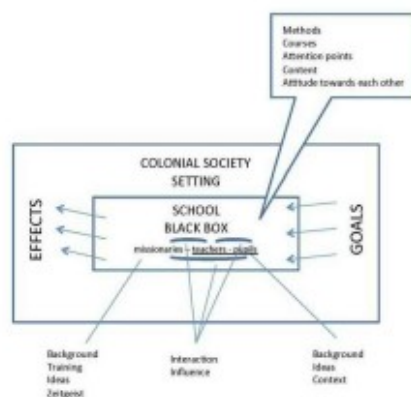
Diagram One

This diagram represents what is involved, both internally and externally, if we want to penetrate the *black box* of the classroom. It has been established in the meantime that the reality we are studying here is far from monolithic. Consequently, we had to try to find a way to disentangle both the educational reality "per se" in all its components while simultaneously taking account of the fact that there were very many different realities, even if we restrict ourselves geographically to one specific area. There were different types of education, different congregations, different levels of professionalism, different recipients, etc. and all these developing over a period of approximately fifty years...

In order to be able to create a practically feasible description of this reality, it seemed advisable to continue working within the regional delineation given above (Mbandaka/Coquilhatville region, or more precisely: the mission region of the Sacred Heart Missionaries). The intention was to descend to the micro level step by step. I have tried to show this clearly in the structure of the account. The thesis has been subdivided into three parts. The first part considers the wider contexts or outlines within which the education was given. This covers three chapters. Firstly, the colonial education policy and teaching plans are analysed so that the official educational aims are clearly put in context (*Chapter 1*). The second chapter then forms the link from the Belgian context to the colony, focussing on the training and ideas given to the missionaries. Finally, an outline of the development of the educational structures in the Vicariate of Coquilhatville gives a concrete framework of reference. This chapter also discusses in more detail the education given in different places and by different congregations (*Chapter 3*). This was also an important stage in the research itself: it gave us insight into which places had enough fundamental information available to allow a description of concrete educational practice.

Here, the issue arose as to the shape that description should best take. In the first instance I considered basing the work on a number of case studies. These would be based on the place in which the education was provided and also include a number of themes that could be defined in advance and which would then be considered in each of the cases. In this I started from the assumption that comparisons could be made with regard to specific themes between different locations but that complementariness would have to be sought between other themes. In time, however, it became clear that the information was undoubtedly too fragmented to be able to make properly supported comparisons. Therefore, it seemed more meaningful to structure the issue on the basis of the various protagonists and their respective angles and experience.

An obvious criticism of the latter method was that this would give an excessively polarised image of the reality, divided between two neatly delineated groups. Peter Pels described this as follows: "*Studies of colonial curricula and education policies are very useful, but tend to concentrate, due to the nature of their subject matter, on colonial policy on the one hand, and African motivations for or resistance against European education on the other.*"[28] In my opinion, the implementation of this structure is not necessarily reflected in the fragmentation

of the reality we are trying to represent. After all, the intention was precisely to avoid an excessively bipolar view of reality. The following statement must immediately be made here: it seems obvious to me that there was certainly a very explicit case of two clearly distinct groups in the Belgian colony and that this was also generally experienced by people present at the time.[29] Nevertheless, as stated by Pels, there is the risk that the two groups will each be pushed into a stereotypical "role" ("oppression" versus "opposition", for example) and that more "positive" or "creative" attitudes in relation to the existing social structures would not be considered as a result, i.e. the fact that despite the forced nature of colonial dominance people still lead their lives, allowed for the given situation, as well as possible and "just got on with it".[30] We do want to take this into account, as should be apparent from the following paragraphs relating to another problem that arose during the development of our research questions, namely the problem of examining the effects of the educational, training or civilising process.

It seems especially difficult to estimate the influence of the colonial educational experience on the Congolese. We may assume that there was an effect in the short term, but how can we reconstruct that now? We could of course formulate a number of hypotheses or take these from existing scientific research on this theme. It seems likely that the conflicting but simultaneously causal connection between the paternalistic attitude of the colonists on the one hand and the colonised striving for emancipation on the other is a recurring motif. From the perspective that "opposition" was always present in the colonial project itself and specifically in the colonists' establishment of dominance, we should be able to find a way to allow our sources to say something about that. The long-term traces left behind may be slightly easier to grasp on the basis of testimonies from people who experienced the colonial period. Whether we can grasp the result of it better is not at all as clear to me. After all, contemporary anthropological approaches to colonialism and post-colonialism tend to place rather great emphasis on the feeling of confusion, complexity and diversity.[31]

In one of our conversations, Pierre Kita told me the following: People say in the Congo that, although the Belgian education did not found any universities, it did give a greater consciousness of society to the people, a sensitivity for the common good, for dignity and responsibility, perhaps you could even call it a "national feeling". However, that must also be treated with the necessary circumspection, as Kita himself immediately added.[32] It is undoubtedly true that the effects of

colonial education can still be found today in those aged fifty, sixty or older, in the framework, the context and the society in which contemporary Congolese education must attempt to organise itself.[33] Despite this, little can be found in the literature on colonial education concerning the testimonies relating to this period and the after-effects of it, whether negative or positive.[34] We have tried to complement this literature with a number of interviews with people educated in that system. However, these interviews must be interpreted very carefully. After all, the reality of that education was experienced in different ways, including by the pupils and it is consequently very dangerous to start generalising here.

I tried to reconcile these different considerations in the structure of the thesis. This resulted in a further division of the structure into three parts. After the first part, which I have already discussed and in which I bring the contexts together, there are two more parts. Part II is entitled *"Realities"* and part III is entitled *"Effects"*. Four chapters in the second part give a description of the reality (realities) of missionary education. Each chapter starts from a different angle. Together they should provide an image of the way in which the missionaries practically approached the educational project. In general,it may be stated that the "missionary" source material predominates in this image. This does not mean that the Congolese voice disappears completely, but I cannot deny that it's part is limited. Partly because of this I chose to conclude the study with a third part, which considers in more detail the effects of the education in the short and long term through an analysis of the reactions to and memories of colonial education.

NOTES
[1] Depaepe, M.A., Depaepe, M., Lefebvre, R., & Aziza Etambala, Z. (1992). Tot glorie van God en tot zaligheid der zielen: brieven van Moeder Marie Adonia Depaepe over haar leven en werk als Zuster van Liefde van Jezus en Maria in Belgisch Kongo 1909-1961. Antwerpen: Standaard Uitgeverij.
[2] Depaepe, M. & Van Rompaey, L. (1995). In het teken van de bevoogding. De educatieve actie in Belgisch Kongo (1908-1960). Leuven: Garant.
[3] Briffaerts, J. (1995). Over Belgische politiek en Congolese scholen: de schoolstrijd in Belgisch Congo (1945-1958). Unpublished paper in the framework of the seminar "Toepassing van de historische kritiek op de hedendaagse periode", supervised by Els Witte and Jeffrey Tyssens.
[4] Briffaerts, J. (1999). De schoolstrijd in Belgisch-Congo (1930-1958). In E. Witte, J. De Groof & J. Tyssens (eds.). Het schoolpact van 1958. Ontstaan,

grondlijnen en toepassing van een Belgisch compromis – Le pacte scolaire de 1958. Origines, principes et application d'un compromis belge (pp. 331-358). Brussel/Leuven:VUB Press/Garant.

[5] Depaepe, M. et alii (1999). Orde in vooruitgang. Alledaags handelen in de Belgische lagere school (1880-1970). Studia Paedagogica 25. Leuven: Universitaire Pers. The English publication is: Depaepe, M. et alii (2000). Order in progress. Everyday Education Practice in Primary Schools – Belgium, 1880-1970. Studia paedagogica 29. Leuven: University Press.

[6] Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. (1982). *Colonisation et enseignement. Cas du Zaïre avant 1960*. Bukavu: Editions du Ceruki.

[7] Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Depaepe, M. (2004). *La chanson scolaire au Congo Belge. Anthologie.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

[8] Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H. (2003). *Manuels et Chansons scolaires au Congo Belge*. Studia Paedagogica 33, Leuven: Universitaire Pers.

[9] Van Wiele, J. (2001). The necessity for a contextual approach in the methodology of religious school textbook analysis. A case study on the basis of the theme Islam. In *Paedagogica Historica,* XXXVII, 369-390.

[10] Van Wiele, J. (2001). *l.c.*

[11] Briffaerts, J. (2003). Etude comparative de manuels scolaires au Congo Belge: cas des Pères Dominicains et des Missionaires du Sacré Coeur. In Depaepe, M., Briffaerts, J., Kita Kyankenge Masandi, P. & Vinck, H. (2003). *o.c.* Leuven: Presses universitaires. p.167-196.

[12] See the complete title of the research proposal at the beginning of this paragraph.

[13] Depaepe, M. et alii (2000). *Order in progress*. p. 40-41.

[14] Geertz, C. (1993). Thick description: Towards an Interpretive theory of Culture. In id*., The Interpretation of Cultures*, London: Fontana.

[15] Asselberghs, H. & Lesage, D. (1999). Globalisering als neokolonialisme. Inleiding bij een catalogus voor een mogelijk museum. In id. (ed*.), Het museum van de natie. Van kolonialisme tot globalisering*, Brussel: Gevaert.

[16] Geertz, C. (1993). *o.c.*

[17] With regard to "colonial" conceptualization in the Belgian context I would here like to refer to Ceuppens, B. (2003). *Congo made in Flanders? Koloniale Vlaamse visies op "blank" en "zwart" in Belgisch Congo.* Gent: Academia Press.

[18] Concretely this relates to Verlinden, P. (2002). *Weg uit Congo. Het drama van de kolonialen*. Leuven: Davidsfonds.

[19] Moreover the speaker, Bambi Ceuppens, describes this herself in the introduction to her book *Congo made in Flanders?* (XIX – XXVI)

[20] For example www.urome.be the website of the "Union Royale Belge pour les Pays d'Outre-Mer", which, according to its own description, groups associations of former colonists, co-operators and Congolese residents in Belgium and has around ten thousand members.

[21] Briffaerts, J. (2002). *What was it like in the colonial classroom?Ongoing research on the reality of colonial education in the Mbandaka region, Belgian Congo, 1908-1960*. Paper presented during the annual conference of the American History of Education Society, Pittsburgh, PA, 30 November 2002. Unpublished.

[22] For the definition of standpoints and the scientific study of the history of education, albeit in a more polemic context, also see: Depaepe, M. (2002). *Gesplitst of gespleten? De kloof tussen wetenschappelijke en praktische kennis in opvoeding en onderwijs*. Leuven: Acco.

[23] Giroux, as quoted in Novõa, A. (1995). On history, history of education, and history of colonial education. In Novõa, A., Depaepe, M. & Johanningmeier, E.V. (eds.). *The Colonial Experience in Education. Historical Issues and Perspectives*. Paedagogica Historica. International Journal of the History of Education. Supplementary series, 1. Gent: C.S.H.P.

[24] Pels, P. (1993). *Critical matters. Interactions between missionaries and Walguru in Colonial Tanganyika, 1930-1961*. Amsterdam: School of social research. p. 7.

[25] Pels, P. (1993). *o.c.,* p. 307 (original quotation in Dutch)

[26] Fabian, J. (1991). *Time and the work of anthropology. Critical essays 1971-1991.* Chur: Harwood academic publishers. p. 151.

[27] Depaepe, M. (1993). History of education anno 1992: 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'? Presidential Address ISCHE XIV. In *History of Education. The journal of the History of Education Society*, XXII,1, p. 1-10.

[28] Pels, P. (1993). *o.c.* p. 7.

[29] The examples of this are legion. The term "apartheid" is never included in official discourse and not even used by critics of the colonial regime, insofar as there were any, but the position that there was a very strongly enforced de facto form of racial segregation in the Congo cannot be negated today. For a good example of a detailed study relating to geographical segregation see: De Meulder, B. (1994). *Reformisme, thuis en overzee. Geschiedenis van de Belgische planning*

in een kolonie (1880-1960). Leuven, Unpublished doctoral thesis. 3 vol.

[30] Pels, P. (1993). *o.c.* p. 197.

[31] De Boeck, F. (1996). Het discours van de postkolonialiteit: de problematiek van identiteit en representatie. In J. Vlasselaers en J. Baetens (eds.), *Handboek culturele studies. Concepten-problemen-methode.* Leuven: Acco. p.139-149.

[32] Briffaerts, J. (2002). 'De last van het verleden'. Een bevoorrecht getuige aan het woord over onderwijs in Kongo. In Basis / Christene School, CIX, 14 September 2002, p. 27-30. The work of Marie-Bénédicte Dembour, "Recalling the Belgian Congo" on constructing and consciously manipulating memories in the context of research and the strategies implemented by the interviewer and interviewed gives a very interesting and subtle vision of this. Dembour, M.-B. (2000). Recalling the Belgian Congo: Conversations and Introspection. New York: Berghahn Books.

[33] Briffaerts, J. (2002). l.c.

[34] A few examples from literature that do partly consider this: De Lannoy, D., Seda Diangwala, M. & Yeikelo Ya Ato, B. (1986). Tango ya ba noko (Le temps des oncles): recueil de témoignages zaïrois, Les cahiers du CEDAF / ASDOC-studies, Série 2, 5-6, Bruxelles: CEDAF. This book contains the results of a number of interviews with people from various parts of Zairian society and is certainly not restricted to education. Berman, E.H. (ed.) (1975). African Reactions to Missionary Education. New York/London: Teachers College Press limits itself to education, but does so in a much broader geographical perspective (Africa) but is much less recent.

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A Few Preliminary Remarks

Names and spelling of Congolese/Zairian places
I have used the colonial name of the places mentioned in this text. A few Congolese cities had a bilingual name in that period, analogous to the parent country. This was not generally true for smaller places, although there were differences in spelling for a number of place names depending on whether the text was being used in a Dutch language or French language context (the most frequent instances in this thesis are Bamanya-Bamania and Wafanya-Wafania). In my own writing I have opted for use of the Dutch name insofar as possible. In quotations I have naturally adhered to the author's spelling.

The modern names of the most frequently mentioned cities are given below:

Coquilhatstad(/ville) = Mbandaka

Thysstad (/ville) = Mbanza Ngungu

Leopoldstad (Léopoldville) = Kinshasa

Elisabethstad (/ville) = Lubumbashi

Abbreviations

The majority of abbreviations are indicated in brackets on first use. A few common abbreviations are:

AAFE: Aequatoria Archives, School Fund

AAVSB: Aequatoria Archives, Reports of Diocesan Schools (see p. 106)

MSC: Missionaries of the Sacred Heart

FEC: Brothers of the Christian Schools

Ben Petersen ~ A Story About The Garifuna

A rich Central American culture is fast disappearing in the wake of immigration and integration. This film chronicles the challenges and struggles of the Garifuna people to preserve their identity. The story serves as a microcosmic example of the loss of time-honored customs in a world that is increasingly becoming one homogenous international culture.

A Ben Petersen Film

A Brigham Young University Communications Department Production

Produced, directed, and edited by Ben Petersen

Additional footage provided by: Jared Johnson, Dale Green and Jorge Zuniga.

Funding Provided by the BYU Office of Research and Creative Activities, BYU Communications Department and the B&A Trust Fund.

Music by Michael Bahnmiller. "Ba-ba" by Aziatic.

Kyrgyzstan ~ A Country Remarkably Unknown

Kyrgyzstan is a remarkably unknown country to most world citizens. Since its conception in the 1920s, outside observers have usually treated it as a backwater of the impenetrable Soviet Union.

There was little interest and even less opportunity to gather information on this particular Soviet republic. But even within the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan was relatively unknown. It is as likely to meet a person from Russia or the Ukraine who has never heard of Kyrgyzstan as someone from the Netherlands or the USA. As one of my informants who has a Kyrgyz father and a Russian mother said:

I was raised in Kazan in Russia and went to school when the Soviet Union still existed. The kids in school did not understand that I was Kyrgyz. I sometimes explained, but they still thought I was Tatar, or from the Caucasus. We were taught some facts and figures about Kyrgyzstan in school, but that was it.

Kyrgyzstan briefly became world news in March 2005, when it was the third in a row of velvet revolutions among former Soviet Union countries. President Akayev, who had been the president since 1990 (one year before Kyrgyzstan's independence) was ousted, to be replaced by opposition leaders who had until recently taken part in Akayev's government.

A few years before that, Kyrgyzstan had become a focus of interest in the War on Terrorism, because of its majority Muslim population and its vicinity to Afghanistan. The country opened its main airport Manas for the Coalition Forces, who all stationed troops there.

The lack of a solid general base of background information gives the study of Kyrgyzstan a special dimension. Researchers and audience do not share images of the country that are based on a large number of impressions from different sources. Thus, every morsel of new information becomes disproportionally important in the creation of new images, and may be taken out of perspective. It

also means that the researcher does not have an extensive body of knowledge to fall back on. Questions that are raised can often not be answered, as there is no corpus of data and general consensus. This can give the researcher a sense of walking on quick sand, but it also keeps the researcher, and hopefully her audience as well, focused and unable to take anything for granted.

In this paper I will give an overview of images of Kyrgyzstan as it is portrayed in journalist reports, travel guides, and works of social scientists. This will provide the reader unfamiliar with Kyrgyzstan with a framework of background information that cannot be presupposed.

Kyrgyzstan Located

Map of Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan, a country of 198,500 square km, is about the size of Great Britain. Its population of 5 million is considerably less than that of the UK, however, because of the mountains that cover the larger part of the country. Kyrgyzstan's impressive mountain ranges, known as the Tien Shan, Ala Too and Alay ranges, are extensions of the Himalayas. Ninety per cent of Kyrgyzstan's territory is above 1,500 metres and forty-one per cent is above 3,000 metres. Perpetual snow covers about a third of the country's surface. Large amounts of water, in the form of mountain lakes and wild rivers, are a consequence of this landscape.

Kyrgyzstan is landlocked and bordered by four countries, three of which are former Soviet Union republics. Kazakhstan lies to the North, Uzbekistan to the West and Tajikistan to the South. The Eastern border is shared with China, or more precisely: with the Chinese province Xinjiang, home of many Turkic and Muslim peoples.

Administratively, Kyrgyzstan is divided into seven provinces (oblus, from Russian

oblast) and two cities (shaar). The two cities are Osh city and the country's capital Bishkek. Bishkek was known as Frunze during Soviet times, named after Red Army hero Mikhael Frunze. In 1991, four months before independence, the city was renamed Bishkek (Prior, 1994:42).

Kyrgyzstan is commonly divided in the North and South. The South consist of three provinces: Jalal-Abad, Osh and Batken. Batken was separated from Osh after the invasion of Islamic guerrillas in August 1999. The North consists of the Chüy, Talas, Ïssïkköl and Narïn provinces. Looking at the map, it is clear that 'North' and 'South' are not so much geographical indications, as Ïssïkköl and Narïn are at the same latitude as Jalal-Abad. A mountain ridge with very few passages, however, separates the North from the South, making them far apart in people's experience. If one travels from Osh to Narïn, for instance, one usually takes a triangle route through Bishkek. There is a road that traverses the mountain ridge that separates them, but snow often renders it impassable. Until 1962, there was not even a road between Osh and Bishkek (then: Frunze), the railway that connected the two cities ran by way of Tashkent.

The term 'Kyrgyzstan' is a choice out of a number of names for the country. Presently, the official name in the Kyrgyz language is Kïrgïz Respublikasï. In English, it is 'the Kyrgyz Republic', after the 'h' in Kyrghyz was dropped in 1999. One year before independence, shortly after Akayev's appointment as president, the Republic of Kyrgyzstan became the official name for the republic after it announced its sovereignty (Rashid, 1994:147). In May 1993, this was changed to the Kyrghyz Republic. Another often-heard name for the country is Kirgizia, which is based on Russian, who substituted the ï (usually transliterated as y) by an i to fit Russian grammatical rules. Popular in the country itself is the word 'Kyrgyzstan'. This term is not new, but was already in use in the early days of the Soviet Union. In this dissertation, I will join with popular habit and refer to the country as Kyrgyzstan.

History of Kyrgyzstan

The actual history of Kyrgyzstan begins in 1924, when the territory was first plotted to a map. Within the larger framework of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was drawn up as a separate political and administrative unit. By 1936, this unit had become a sovereign Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), one of the eleven (later: fifteen) SSRs that made up the Soviet Union (Rashid, 1994:143). Of course, this delineation was not contrived in a historical vacuum but was built upon existing ideas of a certain population living in a certain area. However, the

demarcation of the Soviet republics was based on choices that took certain ideas into account and left others out. A historical account of Kyrgyzstan that pre-dates 1924, then, easily falls prey to teleological reasoning. Taking Kyrgyzstan as a unit for historic research about times when the idea of 'Kyrgyzstan' did not exist means placing a contemporary concept which is meaningless at the time of study, as the focal point. One may begin to look for the word *'Kyrgyz'* in historical documents and project the findings onto the group of people who are presently called Kyrgyz and who live in a Kyrgyz nation-state. Or alternatively, it is possible to project the boundaries of the territory back into the past and see coherences and connections that would not have made sense at the time. This is exactly what has happened in Soviet and post-Soviet historiography, as a part of conscious or unconscious 'community imagining' (Anderson, 1986). It led to a division of history into two tiers: the history of the Kyrgyz ethnic group and the history of the territory. The two do not come together until the sixteenth century, when the Kyrgyz are believed to have moved to the Tien Shan Mountains where they live today.

In a similar way, historians have projected the concept of the contemporary State back into the past. They have attempted to describe Central Asia's history as a succession of nation-states or their equivalents. The aspiration to bring order to thousands of years of human interaction has time and again led authors to look for names of ethnic groups who formed a political unity that arose, defeated another unit and was replaced in time by yet another unit. The situation in present-day Central Asia, Siberia, China and Mongolia, however, is far more complex than that. Political units changed constantly, they covered different territories at different times, merged with other groups at one time and fought them at another time. Various ethnic groups could be part of a certain political unit or ethnic groups themselves could deal with temporarily important divisions. Furthermore, it is by no means clear how individuals perceived their ethnic, linguistic, religious and political identities. Nomadic groups especially would organise their political structures quite differently from present-day nation-states. The attempts of different authors to compile a chronology of ethnic states, then, inevitably led to differing and often conflicting time lines.

Another confusing factor is the fact that political and ethnic groups were known under numerous and varied names, and in turn other names were shared by a number of different groups. L. Krader speaks of '*a pool or reservoir of ethnic identifications, or ethnonyms, upon which peoples could draw*' (Krader, 1963:81).

Although this observation makes the use of ethnonyms seem random and arbitrary, it is indeed striking how ethnonyms continue to appear in differing contexts. The reasons that people had for using certain ethnonyms at certain times remain obscure.

The process of producing a historiography for Kyrgyzstan is further hampered by the fact that data on both the history of Kyrgyzstan's territory and the history of the Kyrgyz people is scarce. A number of externally written sources (mostly Chinese, Persian and Arabic) have been discovered, in addition to some internal Turkic runic inscriptions and numerous archeological excavations. The lack of a firm historical framework for the analysis of these data leads to varying and differing interpretations. As most historians focus on providing a neat, complete and readable narrative, they omit confusing and conflicting data. However, when one attempts to align the pieces together in a neat and concise manner, the confusions reappear.

I will not burden the reader here with the perhaps frustrating chore of struggling through masses of foreign names belonging to ethnic groups with obscure status and abstruse interconnections. Instead, I will specify a number of historic patterns and mention those anecdotes that have become symbolic markers of entire historical periods for my informants. I will follow the method of periodisation which forms an obvious thread in this book: the periods before, during and after the Soviet Union.

Before the Soviet Union
It is within this period that a distinction between the history of the Kyrgyz and the history of Kyrgyzstan should be made. I will begin with the latter, as it is traced back further in time than the former.

History of the territory of Kyrgyzstan
Historians who concentrate on the history of Kyrgyzstan's territory regress as far back as the Paleolithicum by identifying archaeological findings of stone artefacts and rock paintings in the Tien Shan, Ïssïkköl and Ferghana areas. These have been dated to the Palaeolithic period of 800 thousand – 10 thousand years BC (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:5). The first people to have been identified by name are the Sakas, also known as Scythians. The Sakas are said to have arrived in the area in the sixth century BC (ibid.:14). They were a nomadic people who inhabited various places in a vast area from South Siberia to the Black Sea. They have been identified as being speakers of an Iranian language. According to Mokrynin and

Ploskich, the North and South of Kyrgyzstan were inhabited by two different Sakas tribes (ibid.).

Three elements of this depiction of the Sakas recur in descriptions of the history of Central Asia and Siberia: they are either nomads or settled peoples, they are Turkic or Persian/Iranian, and they inhabit Kyrgyzstan's North or South. First of all, the inhabiting groups are characterised as nomadic or settled peoples. This feature is often singled out as the driving force behind the interaction dynamics in the area. Historians discern a pattern of a continuous struggle between nomads and settlers. Nomadic groups are seen to form federations with the aim of conquering and subjugating settler groups. These nomadic federations advance over large stretches of land, looting and destroying towns and cities, until the nomads settle down themselves, form settled civilisations that are destroyed by new nomadic federations in their turn.

This meta-analysis has given rise to stereotypical images of nomadic peoples that are violent and freedom-loving versus settled groups that are industrious, religious and sustain high culture. When put to the test of the data on present-day Kyrgyzstan, however, the pattern fails. Nomadic groups often forced each other out of their territories, living peacefully alongside settler groups at the same time. Generally, the Tien Shan mountains are seen as cradles of nomadic groups, whereas the Ferghana valley gave rise to a number of urban civilisations. In 130 BC, for example, a Chinese diplomat who travelled Central Asia found a settled group, the Davan, in the Ferghana valley and a nomadic state of Wu-sun in the mountains (ibid.:34, 44). These groups are both remembered in Kyrgyzstan by compelling anecdotes. The Davan were the owners of the legendary 'Heavenly Horses'. The Chinese were keen on obtaining these to use them in their battles against the Xiong-nu (probably the Huns). They sent two armies to fight the Davan, in 103 and 101 BC, and only obtained the desired horses when they defeated the Davan in the second campaign (ibid.:46). Of the Wu-sun, a seventh-century Chinese writer wrote the following: *the Wu-sun differ greatly in their appearance from other foreigners of the Western lands. To-day the Turks with blue eyes and red beards, resembling apes, are their descendants* (Barthold, 1956:76).

During my fieldwork, I found that this comment had been modified into my informants' frequent assertion that 'the Kyrgyz used to look like Europeans, with red hair and blue eyes'. Interesting is the difference in assessment of the physical features – ape-like to the Chinese, which was probably a low-status qualification,

and European-like to present-day Kyrgyz, that they generally regard as a high-status qualification. Also interesting is that in this case, my Kyrgyz informants traced their ancestry back to the early inhabitants of present-day Kyrgyzstan. Commonly, the ancestor Kyrgyz are considered to be a people that migrated from Siberia. It is possible, of course, that in popular historiography the comment on the Wu-sun is taken entirely out of context and transferred to the Siberian ancestors.

In later years, the area was inhabited by members of the nomadic federation of the Juan Juan (ibid.:81), and other nomadic empires such as the Kök-Türk (Kwanten, 1979:39), the Karluks (ibid.:59) and the khanate of Chingiz-Khan's son Chagatai (ibid.:249). The urbanbased Karakhanid state was the first Islamic state in present-day Kyrgyzstan. In the tenth century it had power centres in Talas and Kashkar, and later also in present-day Uzbekistan's cities of Samarkhand and Buchara (ibid.:61).
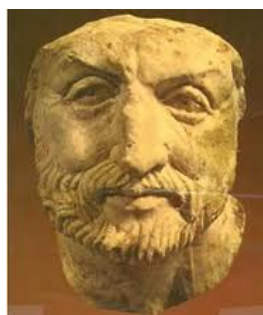
However, not all empires that held power over the area can easily be defined as nomadic or settled. A second distinction has therefore been brought forward. The early inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan's territory are also identified as Iranian, Turkic or otherwise, usually by a reference to their language. As I have mentioned, the early Sakas were said to have spoken an Iranian language. The first Turks appeared on the scene in the sixth century AD. They are referred to as the Kök-Türk (Blue or Celestial Turks). Their khaganate gained momentum in 552, when the last Juan Juan khan was defeated (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:58). Present-day Kyrgyzstan fell under the Western khanate when it split in 581 (ibid., Barthold, 1956:82). The Kök-Türk are remembered by my informants because of their so-called Orkhon Inscriptions. In 1889, a Russian expedition to Mongolia uncovered two monuments to Bilge Khan and his brother Kül Tigin in the valley of the river Orkhon. These monuments were adorned with runic inscriptions that are important to the present-day Kyrgyz because they mention a Kyrgyz people at the Yenisey River. At the Yenisey River itself, similar runic inscriptions have been found.

Other Turkic states have been formed by the Seljuk, a branch of the Oguz Turks (Kwanten, 1979:65) and the empire ruled by Timur, also known as Timur-i-leng or Tamerlane (ibid.:266). However, most of the empires that extended their influence over present-day Kyrgyzstan cannot be identified by one clear ethnic background. The Kara-Kitai, for example, are described by Kwanten as the

refugee descendants of another empire, the Ch'i-tan empire (ibid.). He explains that scholars still debate whether they were Tungusic, Mongol or Turkic (ibid.:71). In many versions of the Manas epic, the Kara-Kitai are mentioned as Manas' main enemies (Manas Enstiklopediasy I:276). According to B.M. Yunusaliev, the Kara-Kitai are also known as Kidan in the epic (ibid.), which appears to be the same word as Ch'i-tan. Nowadays, the word Kitai is used for China and the Chinese, but considering the above, care should be taken in identifying Manas' Kara-Kitai enemies as a group of ethnic Chinese (ibid., see also chapter four). The Kara-Kitai were ousted by the Nayman, another name that occurs in Manas versions, and whose ethnic affiliation is obscure. They were on the run from Mongols, but later referred to as Mongols themselves (Barthold, 1956:106-110). The subsequent Chagatai khanate is described as a loose coalition of Türks, Uighurs, Kara-Kitais, Persians and others under the leadership of a tiny Mongol minority (Kwanten, 1979:250). After Chagatai's death, the khanate became politically unstable and was ruled by eighteen subsequent khans, until its division in 1338 into Transoxiana and Mogholistan (ibid.:250-251). Most of present-day Kyrgyzstan fell under Mogholistan, Moghol being the word used by the Mongols to denote Turkic peoples (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:135). The previously mentioned Timur, who was born in a Turkic family, came next. When he died, present-day Kyrgyzstan went back to being Mogholistan and was ruled by Mongol leaders who had to deal with Turkic coup attempts (Barthold:146-158). All of this clearly indicates that the population was not reducible to one single ethnic group.

The third recurring element in the description of Kyrgyzstan's history is the division between North and South. This division, that is so important today, is recovered in past epochs. The situation of the urban Davan in the South versus the nomadic Wu-sun in the North is paralleled in the eighteenth and nineteenth century by the Southern Kyrgyz who were part of the Khanate of Kokhand and the Northern Kyrgyz who fell outside of Khokand and were either independent, or under Russian and Chinese rule.

In the sixteenth century, the occupation of this area was taken up by the Kazakh and the Kyrgyz (ibid.:158). This is where the two story-lines – the history of the territory of Kyrgyzstan and the history of the Kyrgyz people – collide. Before returning to this point, I will summarise the historiography of the Kyrgyz ethnic group.

History of the Kyrgyz

The Kyrgyz are traced back to the third century BC, when Chinese annals speak of a people called the Hehun. Kyrgyzstani scholars argue that these must be the Kyrgyz, because they are also referred to as Hyan-hun, Kigu or Chigu (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:29). These people lived in Southern Siberia, along the River Yenisey (ibid.) or one of its sources in the Altai mountains (Krader, 1962:59), over 1,000 km north-east of presentday Kyrgyzstan. According to Barthold, the Hehun people were not originally Turkic but Samoyedic (ibid.), just like the Uralic peoples who live along the Yenisey River today.

Around the sixth to eighth centuries AD, Greek, Chinese, Arab and Uygur sources mention a Kyrgyz state halfway along the Yenisey River (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:68). According to Mokrynin and Ploskich, the names used in these sources closely resemble the word Kyrgyz. Greek sources speak of Kherkis and Khirkhiz, Arab sources of Khyrgyz or Khyrkhyz, Chinese Syatszyasy or Tszilitszisy, and Uygur and Sogdi texts speak of Kyrgyz (ibid.). However, most of the available information about this group comes from a number of Chinese sources, which use names that can be transliterated in various ways.

Liu speaks of Ki-ku, Chien-k'un or Hsia-ch'a-ssu (Liu, 1958:175), Wittfogel and Chia-Shêng add Ko-k'un, Chieh-ku, Ho-ku and Hoku-ss (Wittfogel and Chia-Shêng, 1949:50). They remark that according to Barthold, these terms are a crude transcriptions by the Chinese of the original word best transcribed as ki-li-ki-si (ibid.). The variety of ethnonyms indicates that the contribution of specific information to the ancestors of the present-day Kyrgyz is problematic, to say the least. Furthermore, there is no conclusive evidence that the people who are called Kyrgyz today are descendants from these 'Kyrgyz' in Siberia.

Still, present-day Kyrgyz feel related to these 'Kyrgyz', and base their history on secondary information from the Chinese sources. In this interpretation, the Kyrgyz were the people who fought a fierce battle with the Uygurs in 840 AD. The Kyrgyz won and destroyed the Uygur capital Karabalghasun (Barfield, 1989:152-160). They were not interested in trade, and after having turned Orkhon into a backwater they were driven away from it by the Khitans fifty years later (ibid.:165).

In Suji in present-day Mongolia, a text has been found that was written in 'Kyrgyz letters' (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:93), a rhunic script similar to the above-mentioned Orkhon Inscriptions. It is dated to the ninth or tenth century and contains eleven verses, the first of which are translated as: *'I have come from Uygur ground, called Yaklagar-Khan. I am a son of the Kyrgyz.'* (ibid.).

The Kyrgyz are mentioned again in connection to the conquest of a Karluk town in

982. Barthold writes:

At that time the Qirgiz lived in the upper basin of the Yenisey, where, according to Chinese sources, they were visited every three years by Arab caravans carrying silk from Kucha. [...] It is possible that the Qirghiz, having allied themselves with the Qarluk, took the field against the Toquz-Oghuz and occupied that part of Semirechyé which is their present home. In any case, the bulk of the Qirghiz migrated into the Semirechyé considerably later. Had they lived in the Semirechyé at the time of the Qarakhanids, they would have been converted to Islam in the tenth or eleventh century. As it is, they were still looked upon as heathen in the sixteenth century (Barthold, 1956:91-92).

In a later work, Barthold cites a manuscript from the tenth century in which the Kyrgyz are located near Kashkar, where they live now. He adds, however, that most of the extant sources, such as the Mahmud al-Kasghari, do not mention them (Barthold, 1962:76).

Barthold maintains that at the time of the Kara-Kita Empire (which in the twelfth century reached from the Yenisey to Talas), the Kyrgyz still lived near the Yenisey River (Barthold, 1956:92). The Kyrgyz were heavily embroiled in the continual warfare that went on until the sixteenth century (ibid.:152-158).

The Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan

During the second half of the fifteenth century, the Kyrgyz moved to the Tien Shan area (Mokrynin and Ploskich, 1995:144-149). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Kyrgyz fought heavy battles against the Kalmaks of Jungaria (also known as Kalmaks, Kalmïks or Oyrats) (ibid.:161-3). These struggles are often seen as the inspiration for the battles in the Manas epic.

In 1757, the Jungarian empire was defeated by the Chinese (ibid.:167). The Kyrgyz now entered into a political relationship with China and had ambassadors in Beijing (ibid.:169). In the 1760s, the Southern Kyrgyz came under the control of the khanate of Kokhand (ibid.:192), one of the three city states (Buchara, Khiva and Kokhand) that ruled Central Asia. However, the Kyrgyz tribes in the North were not conquered before the 1820s, and even then they remained in opposition to the khanate (Prior, 1994:14). In the 1860s, a number of Northern tribes accepted aid from the Russians in their revolts against Kokhand, and managed to break free from it permanently in 1862 (ibid.). According to Prior, 'the locals went back to nomadizing and farming, and the Russian army continued to pound Kokand' (ibid.:16).

In spite of this, the Northern tribes were not all at peace, as the Bugu and

Sarïbagïsh were at war with one another. In 1854, a fierce battle between the tribes had led to the defeat of the Bugu, even though the manap Urman of the Sarïbagïsh had been killed (Semenov, 1998:73). The Bugu left the shores of Lake Ïssïkköl and went to the Santash region to the East. Here, they became subject to Chinese rule (ibid.).

The Southern Kyrgyz tribes remained linked to Kokhand until the end of the khanate. They fought the Tsarist armies and only fell into Russian hands when Kokhand surrendered in 1876 (Temirkulov, 2004, Prior, 1994:16). A famous name from this era is Kurmanjandatka, vassal to Kokhand and leader of the Southern Kyrgyz since 1862. She was the widow of the murdered Alimbek-datka, and is said to have commanded an army of 10,000 soldiers (jigit). When Kokhand fell, Kurmanjan-datka urged her people to give up their resistance to Russia, and she established good relations with Russian representatives. She retired from public life when her favourite son was executed under accusation of contraband and murdering custom officials. Her role of either heroine or traitor is debated until this day. Nevertheless, her picture adorns the 50 som banknote of independent Kyrgyzstan.

Under the Russian Tsarist administration, present-day Kyrgyzstan fell under various administrative units. The biggest part of the area fell under the Semirechye Province, which was part of the Steppe Governorate from 1882 until 1899, when it became part of the Turkistan Governorate (Murray Matly, 1989:93). From 1891 onwards, waves of Russian colonists came to the Steppe Governorate to settle. After the abolition of serfdom in Russia, landless peasants were attracted by the so-called Virgin Lands of present-day Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. In 1916, revolts of the Muslim population against the Russians broke out all over Central Asia (Carrère d'Encausse, 1989:210-211). The direct cause was a decree that mobilised the Central Asians into workers' battalions to replace Russian workers who fought in the first world war. Relations with Russian settlers had been tense, especially amongst the Kyrgyz of Semirechye, and as a result the revolt was fierce (ibid.). In Semirechye, 2,000 Russian settlers were killed, but far more locals perished. One third of the Kyrgyz population fled to China (ibid.).

The Soviet Union
The Socialist Revolution of 1917 was largely a Russian concern in Semirechye. According to Daniel Prior, the general Kyrgyz population did not take active part in the revolution (Prior, 1994:29). A number of educated young men took the

opportunity to make a political career within the new communist structure, which sustained an active policy of indigenisation, or as Terry Martin terms it: affirmative action (Martin, 2001). By the end of the 1930s, all of them had perished in the purges. In the years of civil war (1917-1920), famine ruled daily life in Central Asia (Brill Ollcot, 1987:149-152). After the civil war, once Soviet rule was firmly established, the construction of a socialist society began.

Martha Brill Olcott speaks of the Kazakhs when she writes: *those who could afford it migrated part of the year and stalled their animals in winter, while those who could not support themselves solely through livestock breeding practiced subsistence farming as well. [...] Clan, village, and aul authorities simply reconstituted themselves as soviets* (ibid.:162).

During the years of the New Economic Policy, the economy gradually recovered.However, in 1929, a programme of collectivisation was initiated which caused another horrendous famine. People preferred to slaughter their animals rather than see them becoming communal property, even though each household was allowed to keep a few animals (ibid.:176-187). This did not prevent collectivisation to be implemented and becoming the basis for the economy for the following sixty years.

Another restructuring process of the first Soviet years is known as the national demarcation. The former Tsarist empire was radically reorganised on the basis of national autonomy. A number of ethnic groups were recognised as nations and were awarded republics or autonomous regions. The Kyrgyz were among them, and by 1936, the Kyrgyz SSR became one of eleven (later: fifteen) Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR). The status of SSR proved most important in 1991, when all fifteen SSR became independent states, in contrast to areas such as Chechnya, Dagestan and Tuva, which remained under Moscow's control as autonomous republics within the Russian Federation.

By the time collectivisation and national demarcation had been completed, the Purges began. In 1934, the first wave of purges swept over the Soviet Union. 'Bourgeois nationalism' was regarded as the evil that needed to be eradicated. The second wave in 1937 was even more lethal, and many Central Asian leaders were executed. The second world war, known as the Great Patriotic War in the USSR, left deep traces in Kyrgyzstan. Every village has a monument for the sons that fell in battles far away. By this time, the policy of indigenisation had shifted towards a Russian-oriented governance. Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone explains:

Local nationals were required to occupy the highest hierarchical positions and all

posts of representative character. Invariably, however, a local leader was either seconded by a Russian or backed by a Russian or Russians close to him in the hierarchy. [...] The lower executives were almost always Russians, especially in the central Party and state agencies. While not in the public eye, they actually formed the backbone of the republican bureaucracy (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1970:96).

The death of Stalin in 1953 was lamented all over the Soviet Union. The statues and pictures of Stalin remained in place until Krushchev's famous 'secret speech' of 1956, in which he denounced the personality cult surrounding Stalin and accused him of crimes committed during the purges. But even today, many people in Kyrgyzstan speak highly of Stalin, praising his strong leadership and recognition of national culture and downplaying the scare of the purges.

The stretch of time between the end of the second world war and the beginning of perestroika in Central Asia is often characterised as the period of stagnation (Prior, 1994:38-41). Most historic overviews brush over these forty years as if nothing much happened. Politically, the scene was dominated by conservative party secretaries who stayed put in their positions for decades. In the Kyrgyz SSR, Turdakun Usubaliev was First Secretary from 1961 until 1985. In the areas of industry, agriculture, education, health care, infrastructure and culture, however, massive achievements were accomplished. Contrary to the image of the Soviet Union as a hated, totalitarian regime, the people I met in Kyrgyzstan looked back upon the Soviet period as a prosperous and pleasant era. Although they did appreciate the openness of the new times, they were not particularly relieved that the Soviet Union was over. The people I encountered had found means to get by and function within the framework of state socialism.

In November 2007, a news report on Dutch television drew parallels between the present NATO presence in Afghanistan and the Soviet Afghan war of the 1980s. An interviewed Russian general concluded: *We should never have tried to implement socialism in Afghanistan. It never gained foothold, just as it failed in Mongolia and Uzbekistan and Kirgizia.*

From my perspective, this seems a misinterpretation of the influence of socialism in Kyrgyzstan. In the life stories of my informants, socialism was deeply integrated into their social world. Their economic activities took place in socialist collectives, socialist world views were taught at schools and accepted by the pupils, children were active in organisations such as the Komsomol (Communist Youth Union), arts were celebrated in festivals with a socialist tinge, and so forth.

The stereotypical image of a socialist state that forced itself upon the people, who kept their true convictions and expressions secret, also seems false in the light of what my informants told me. My host father in Kazïbek village, for instance, was a fervent Muslim and socialist at the same time, and he saw no contradiction in that. I do not know if he would have expressed his adherence as vehemently during Soviet days; perhaps the demise of socialism had created room for a new assertion of his Muslim identity. However, he was so at ease with the combination of the two convictions that I deem it likely that this was not new for him. In a similar way, Manaschï Talantaalï Bakchiev had combined becoming a Manaschï with active socialist networking. He told me he had been an active and ambitious member of his local Komsomol department in his teenage years. These were also the years when he began to explore his Manaschïhood.

In 1987, as the perestroika and glasnost policies gave room for critical thought and discussions, a few debating clubs consisting mainly of young Russian-speaking intellectuals arose in Frunze (Babak, 2003) . By 1989, these political clubs had ceased to exist, partly because of harassment by the authorities, and partly because their position was taken over by groups that united over certain issues, such as ecology or culture (ibid.). In this climate, a political action group called Ashar became popular because of its standpoint on housing issues. There was a growing shortage of housing in the capital, and when young Kyrgyz people started to move to the city they built illegal dwellings outside and inside the city centre (Rashid, 1994:146). A group of young Kyrgyz intellectuals formed Ashar (litt: mutual help, solidarity) and managed to obtain land from the city authorities for legal home building (ibid.).

A few months later, in June 1990, riots broke out in Osh oblast. These evolved into a week of extremely violent clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the area between Osh city and Özgön. According to official numbers, 120 Uzbeks, 50 Kyrgyz and one Russian were killed and over 5,000 crimes such as rape, assault and pillage were committed (Tishkov 1995:134,135). As with any violent conflict, opinions on the culpability and the causes of the conflict vary enormously. In his study '*Don't kill me, I'm a Kyrgyz*!', Tishkov points to a wide range of factors that led individuals to commit their atrocities.

Poor living and health conditions and rivalry over land between the ethnic groups were structural causes. At the heat of the moment, fury seemed to be fuelled by rumours of Uzbeks killing Kyrgyz, by strong individuals who stirred up the youth, the absence of authoritative peace keeping and by alcoholic intoxication. Tishkov

names another element of the frenzy of that week, which is of specific interest for this study: Young Kyrgyz on horseback were trying to demonstrate their strength and superiority by lifting up an opponent by his legs and smashing him down on the ground – exactly in the way the legendary Kyrgyz heroes supposedly overpowered their enemies. '*We have read about it a lot, but this is the first time it's been possible to try it out for ourselves*!', they said (Tishkov, 1995:148).

The unrest of the housing and the Osh riots led to the dismissing of First Secretary Absamat Masaliyev. When none of three candidates managed to get a majority vote from the Kyrgyz SSR Supreme Soviet, Askar Akayev came into the picture, and after winning the vote he was installed as President. Akayev is often portrayed as the first non-Communist president of Central Asia. This is true to the extent that he was not on the top list of Communist leaders at the time of his election by the Kyrgyz SSR Supreme Soviet. His career was in mathematics and physics, and in 1989 he became the president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. However, Akayev did also have a political career within the Communist Party. In his 1999 biography Askar Akaev, the First President of the Kyrgyz Republic, his position of Head of the Department of Science and Higher Educational Institutions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1986 is boasted, as well as his election as Deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and his positions of member of the USSR Chamber of Nationalities and the Supreme Soviet Committee on Economic Reform in 1989 (Rud, 1999:21,23). Be that as it may, Akayev was an unexpected face at the head of the Kyrgyz SSR, and he brought with him an atmosphere of change and reform.

After the Soviet Union
Less than a year after Akayev's installation as president, conservative communists in Moscow staged a coup d'état against Gorbachov's government. Akayev was the only Central Asian leader who immediately condemned the coup. A few days later, the fifteen republics of the Soviet Union had all declared their independence, and the Soviet Union ceased to exist. His early denouncement of the coup gave Akayev the aura of a brave, strong and democracy-loving leader in the eyes of western observers. This was important, as Akayev took the standpoint that Kyrgyzstan, with very few natural resources of its own, was dependent on the outside world for economic security. The Kyrgyz government put enormous effort into building up good international relations, looking in many directions.
Western countries were charmed by his interest in economic reform and democracy. Japan was honoured by becoming the model for Kyrgyzstan's road to

development as was Switzerland, South Korea and Turkey. Turkey was especially enthusiastic as it looked forward to forging alliances with the new Turkic republics. Ties with Russia had loosened rapidly, but Akayev went at great lengths to keep good relations with Russia. Border disputes with China originating in Soviet times were resolved as quickly as possible and trade opened up immediately. Canada provided a gold mining company that in a joint venture with the Kyrgyz state started the exploitation the Kumtor goldmine.

The biggest sums of money obtained from diplomacy were the loans by the IMF and the World Bank. The introduction of shock therapy led to quick reforms of the economy, but did indeed leave the population in a state of shock. Over time, the position and power of the president changed, both in relation to the parliament (Jogorku Kengesh, litt: Supreme Soviet) and the population. As Akayev heeded the parliament less and less, most of the population started to regard him as a corrupt leader who enriched himself and his family, and who had proved unable to secure a strong international position for Kyrgyzstan. The presidential elections of 2000 also made international organisations such as the OSCE critical of Akayev, and when at the 2005 parliamentary elections the attempts at manipulation cropped up again, Akayev had fallen out of grace by almost everyone. The elections were followed by protest marches. To the surprise of many, these led to a true velvet revolution, known as the Tulip Revolution. President Akayev was ousted and escaped to Moscow.

A new era started with Kurmanbek Bakiyev as president and Felix Kulov as prime minister. Bakiyev and Kulov started off as political rivals for the presidential elections. Their campaigns increased precarious tensions in the country, because Southerner Bakiyev and Northerner Kulov both capitalised on long-standing antagonism between the North and the South. The escalations came to a halt when the two opponents proclaimed their unexpected alliance: if Bakiyev was chosen as president, Kulov would be his prime minister. This is what happened, but the tensions between North and South did not diminish. In 2007, a Kyrgyz informant wrote to me in an email that 'we have a big North-South problem at the moment, an invisible war is going on'.

The new government renewed ties with Russia, allowing Russia to intensify its influence in economic and military spheres. In October 2005, the murder of two parliamentarians, who were also well-known businessmen, gave much unrest within the government and led to a sense of disappointment with most of the population in their new leadership. People felt unsafe, and rumours about

criminal infiltration of the government became louder. The Tulip revolution had turned into disillusionment very quickly. Bakiyev faced numerous street protests against him, mostly on the issue of the promised new constitution that would transfer some of the president's powers to the parliament. In April 2007, Bakiyev finally signed amendments to the constitution that would diminish presidential powers. Five months later, however, the new constitution was invalidated by the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan. In response, Bakiyev called a referendum to be held in October, at which the new constitution was approved by over 75% of the votes. The referendum was heavily criticised by Kyrgyzstani and international organisations. Bakiyev then called early parliamentary elections in December 2007. With the help of new rules that made it exceptionally difficult for parties to pass the two established thresholds, these elections were won by Bakiyev's newly formed Ak Jol party, who thus gained control over the new parliament.

Economy
In the late nineteenth century, the Kyrgyz practised transhumance animal husbandry. Their livestock consisted of the 'four cattle' (tört tülük mal): camels, horses, sheep-goats and cows. Radloff adds that they herded yaks too (Radloff, 1893:527). My informants claimed that before the revolution, the Kyrgyz diet was made up mostly of meat and diary products. However, Radloff reports that the Kyrgyz (Kara-Kyrgyz) practised agriculture on a wider scale than the Kazakhs (Kasak-Kyrgyz) (ibid.:528). According to Radloff, they grew wheat, barley and millet, for which they used a carefully maintained system of artificial irrigation (ibid.).

Shahrani notes of the Pamir Kyrgyz, a group of Kyrgyz who fled the communist regimes in the Soviet Union and China, that hunting and collecting were marginal economic activities in the 1970s (Shahrani, 1979:108). It seems likely that the same counted for the pre-revolutionary Tien-Shan Kyrgyz. Radloff writes that the Kara-Kyrgyz only practised hunt for amusement (Radloff, 1893:528). In the time of my fieldwork, my informants mentioned ibex (gig) hunts, and I saw many fox and wolf skins decorating the walls. Still, hunting does not appear to have been vital for survival. Collecting of berries, herbs and wild onions was practised during my field research, and presented by my informants as part of the Kyrgyz way of life. Goods such as tea and guns were purchased through trade with settled peoples. Semenov, who travelled in Kyrgyz lands in 1856-1857, tells that the tomb of a hero named Nogay was built by craftsmen from Kashkar, for which his family paid two iamby of silver, two camels, five horses and three hundred

sheep (Semenov, 1998:167).

Shahrani describes how the Pamir Kyrgyz traded their animal products for grain from their agricultural neighbours, or directly through itinerant traders (Shahrani, 1979:110). The traders very often cheated the Kyrgyz by asking high prices or never coming back for payments. The nineteenth-century Tien-Shan Kyrgyz had an additional way of purchasing goods: they raided merchant caravans. Explorer Semenov Tien-Shanski mentions an encounter with a group of 'Karakirgiz bandits' of the Sarïbagïsh clan who were pillaging a small Uzbek caravan, which was going to Vernoe (presently Almatï) (Semenov, 1998:92).

In summer, the people and their livestock lived in mountain pastures up in the mountains. In winter, they moved down to lower fields where temperatures were higher. The people lived in round tents they called boz-üy (grey house, depending on the colour they could be called ak-üy (white house) or kara-üy (black house) as well) in Kyrgyz. In English, these tents are called yurts, an adaptation of the Russian word yurta. The following information about yurts was provided by my informants, based on present-day habits that they regarded as unaltered since time immemorial. The frame of the tents is made of fir wood, the cloth of thick felt. The tents are warm and comfortable and large enough for families to stand, eat, cook and sleep in. They are easily taken down and transported to the next camp site. The lay-out of the yurt is subject to a number of rules and traditions; the right side is for the women (epchi jak), the left side for the men (er jak) and the place opposite the door, the tör, is the place where the most respected guests are seated.

The fireplace is in the middle so that smoke can get out through a hole in the roof (tündük, now the symbol on the Kyrgyz flag). Decorations play an important part in the interior of the yurt. Usually, there is a decorated chest used to store things in and on, the walls of the yurta are adorned with patterns made of coloured wool curled around reeds, and the felt carpets on the floor are made in various designs. The carpet called shïrdak is made of a patchwork of coloured felt and the ala-kiyiz carpet has the design worked into the carpet during the felting process. Designs are usually abstract forms that resemble the French lily, representing a magic bird.

Wealth was not equally distributed among the nineteenth-century Kyrgyz. Radloff compares the wealth of the Kyrgyz to that of the Kazakh, and implies the existence of the category 'rich':

In general it can be said that the black Kirgis {Kyrgyz} own less cattle than the

Kirgis of the Great Horde [Kazakh]. People who have 2000 horses and 3000 sheep already count as extraordinarily rich (Radloff, 1893:527).

In the travel journal of Semenov, we read that he has encountered both impoverished and wealthy Kyrgyz. The poor Kyrgyz were often deprived due to the war between the Bugu and Sarïbagïsh clans. Once, Semenov and his group met a group of captives from the Bugu clan who had been abandoned by their Sarïbagïsh capturers. They were: *… dragging themselves along, hungry, emaciated and half-clothed, so that we had to share our food with them, in order that they should not starve to death* (Semenov, 1998:149).

The wealth of the clan leaders where he stayed as a guest was not so lavish that he spent any words on it. He was more interested in the appearance and character of the people he met than in their wealth and possessions. Semenov does write that when he tried to befriend Umbet-Ala, the manap of the Sarïbagïsh clan, to secure a safe passage through the Tien-Shan, the manap reciprocated his gifts with three excellent horses (ibid.:97). This transaction proved to be successful and Semenov did indeed travel the Tien Shan safely. It is not unlikely that traders for whom the Tien Shan was a part of their trading route engaged in similar contracts with the leaders of Kyrgyz clans. For these agreements to work, it was vital that the leaders exerted a degree of control over their subjects. The case of Semenov's agreement suggests that Umbet-Ala did have the necessary amount of authority. Previous to the agreement, Semenov and his party feared the Sarïbagïsh and avoided them where they could. Later, the bond of friendship (called tamyr by Semenov) with Umbet-Ala even helped Semenov to persuade the Sarïbagïsh to let go their Bugu captives (ibid.:179).

In the Soviet period, Kyrgyz pre-revolutionary society was typified as feudal, which made the richer Kyrgyz into feudal lords who extorted their serfs and slaves. This image can be nuanced, however, if we remember that wealth was counted in livestock – a highly perishable good in the harsh mountain climate. The richer Kyrgyz were therefore highly dependent on the poorer for their labour to keep the livestock intact and flourishing.

Shahrani explains that among the Pamir Kyrgyz in the 1970s: *… this stratification has not caused any serious confrontation or conflict between the very rich and the very poor. On the contrary, the existing ties of kinship, friendship, and affinity in many cases have been strengthened through herding arrangements between rich and poor relations, while new ties based on economic interdependence have*

developed (Shahrani, 1979:182).

It seems likely that among the nineteenth-century Tien Shan Kyrgyz, a similar mechanism was at work. One informant said to me that there were rich people among the Kyrgyz, but it depended on the person himself. Whether you were rich or not was determined by what kind of person you were. On the other hand, he also knew of the existence of slavery among the Kyrgyz, and assumed that people were slaves by birth, for the suffix -kul in personal names indicated their status as slaves.

The main basis for Kyrgyzstan's economy is still animal husbandry. Transhumance is still part of the herding technique, but nowadays it is not the entire clan or village that moves to the summer pastures. Most people remain in the village, and a number of shepherds take the livestock into the mountain pastures (jailoo). Next to herding, the cultivation of vegetables, fruit, nuts, cotton, hemp and tobacco is an important source of income. A large part of the industry is made up of agro processing and mining. Kyrgyzstan has a number of gold, coal, uranium and other mineral mines. Most of the mining sector has declined dramatically since independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. The exception is formed by gold mining, which attracted foreign investment. The Canadian Cameco gold mining company obtained a 33% interest in an agreement with the Kyrgyz state company Kyrgyzaltïn to exploit the Kumtor goldmine in the Tien Shan range, south of Lake Ïssïkköl.

The government remains an important source of employment. The informal economy is another important pillar of Kyrgyzstan's economy, accounting for almost 40% of the GNP in 2000, mostly in street vending (Schneider, 2002). Kyrgyzstan very rapidly became a poor country when the infrastructure of the Soviet Union suddenly collapsed. Collective farms and factories were no longer supplied with fuel and other raw materials and the market structure fell apart. The government under president Akayev opted to apply the so-called 'shock therapy' method for economic reform that was promoted by the IMF and the World Bank (Abazov, 1999). Shock therapy has as its main goal a quick implementation of economic reform, in a concentrated period of less than two years, with a focus on reaching a macroeconomic equilibrium. In Kyrgyzstan, this meant that the system of central planning and state-controlled prices and subsidies was abandoned. State property such as houses, factories and land was privatised. Although after a free-fall of six years the economy did indeed show signs of recovery in terms of GDP, the effects on the standard of living for most of the population was negative, according to Abazov, a Kyrgyzstani political scientist

at the Columbia University (ibid.). He explains that the Soviet state had used overstaffing as a means to hide unemployment, and had used price control to maintain a good standard of living.

When this state-controlled system was abandoned so quickly, unemployment, economic passivity and poverty were the immediate results. Next to this, as Abakov puts it:

Withdrawal of the state from playing an active role in economic development and maintaining law and order led to the growth of the so-called 'robber-capitalism' and created a chaotic business environment (Abakov, 1999).

Many of my informants spoke approvingly of Uzbekistan, that had rejected the shock therapy, and wished that Kyrgyzstan's government had chosen a similar route of gradual and controlled reform. Outside observers may find it difficult to estimate the true extent of poverty in Kyrgyzstan. A Dutch OSCE election observer who had stayed in Naryn for three months for the 2000 parliament elections asserted to me that there was hardly any poverty in Kyrgyzstan. Everywhere she went, the table was loaded with food. She seemed not to realise that the rules of Kyrgyz hospitality require an excess of food, and that people had probably drawn on their entire social network to feed their esteemed foreign guests properly. It was not until my second year in Kyrgyzstan that I began to witness glimpses of the true effects of the crumbling economy. One day, a befriended couple confided that they did not have any money left to buy food. It was days away until the husband's salary was expected, but the cupboards were empty. I gave them some money and stayed home to baby-sit for the two children. When my friends came home from the market with a bag of flour and some sugar, the children burst into singing and dancing in a way I had not even seen Dutch children rejoice over a beautiful birthday cake.

A factor that makes poverty hard to deal with for most Kyrgyz is the shrill contrast with the relative wealth and security they had experienced in the Soviet era. Basic needs such as bread, health care and education, but also pleasures such as an evening at the cinema and eating ice cream had been available to everyone. Now, daily life has turned bleak and a struggle to survive. In the late 1990s, the time of my fieldwork, people often mentioned the loss of simple pleasures. For villagers, it was no longer enjoyable to go to Bishkek, because the attractions of the city had become unaffordable. One day when my German friend and I were laughing out loud, a Kyrgyz old man sighed: '*Such a long time ago that our Kyrgyz girls could laugh like this*!'

The increase in prices, inflation and loss of sources of income has fuelled corruption. Those who maintained a position with relative power often find only one way to make ends meet: capitalise on that power in a downward direction. A policeman or a school teacher who does not receive enough wages from the government will extract money from those who depend on him or her. This way, the burden for public services falls on the very poor rather than being shared through a tax system. Generally, however, there is a lot of tolerance for this petty corruption. If people do not make enough money to live on, what are they to do? The corruption of high government officials who put foreign loans into the refurbishment of their luxury homes is mostly regarded with resignation – it is seen as annoying and offensive, but that is what the rich do. In 2005, this resignation quite unexpectedly turned into action when the president was ousted. Unfortunately, nothing seems to have changed with regard to corruption. The system of all-pervasive corruption and nepotism paralyses many people in their personal initiative and upward mobility. On the other hand, this system also provides social survival and advancement in Kyrgyzstan. It may not be easy to find one's way in this web of dependency, but it is the game one has to play.

Social Organisation of the Kyrgyz: Family Structure and Politics
At the time of my fieldwork, the Kyrgyz traced their descent patrilineally. Surnames are based on a person's father, in that a person inherits either their father's surname (for instance, president Akayev's son is called Aidar Akayev and his daughter Bermet Akayeva), or their surname becomes the first name of the father followed by uulu (his son) or kïzï (his daughter) (for example the son of one of my Manaschï informants, whose name is Kazat Taalantaalï Uulu). Furthermore, descent is based on knowing one's seven fathers (jeti ata), that is the patrilineage up to the seventh generation. In enumerations of a person's seven fathers, the seventh father is often primal father. An informant once listed his seven fathers for me, with the name of his seventh father coinciding with the name of his family's sub-clan. When I asked what the seventh father of his son was, he became slightly confused and was not sure whether he should skip a father or make the sub-clan's name the eighth father of his son. Every Kyrgyz person is supposed to know his or her seven fathers, first of all because it is proof of being 'a good Kyrgyz', and secondly it is needed to maintain a marriage taboo. The Kyrgyz consider marriages between people from the same fathers up to the seventh generation out of bounds. Marriage with a person from one's mother's line is allowed, even if he or she is a first cousin. A number of informants told me

that this is because 'blood goes through the father'. Although the family of a daughter-in-law (kelin), the kuda, are treated with high respect, children belong to the family of the father and should stay there in case of separation or death of the mother.

Figure 1.3   Kyrgyz kinship terms
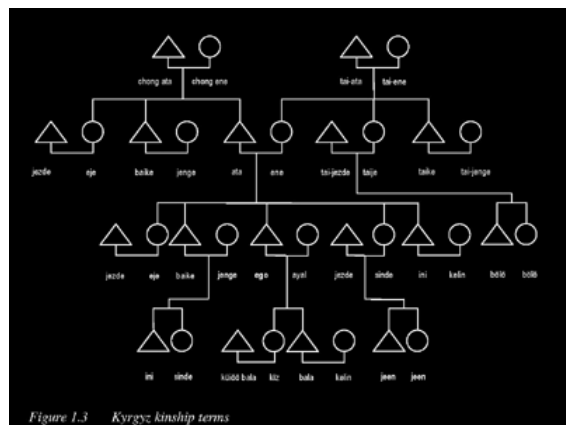
The Kyrgyz observe patrilocality: generally, the bride moves to the household of her husband's parents after (or during) the wedding. After a few years they may move out to a home of their own. Ideally, the youngest son and his family never move out but remain in the house of their parents, taking care of them in old age.

Figure 1.3 presents a genealogy of Kyrgyz kinship terms as I found them in the village Kazïbek in the province Narïn. Most noticeable is that terms for relatives on the father's side differ entirely from the terms for relatives on the mother's side. Furthermore, relative's age is a distinguishing factor: one's older sister is addressed with a different term than one's younger sister. People address one another by their first names followed with the appropriate kinship term – whether they are actual kin or not. Implicit in these terms is a high respect for older generations. This carries far: older siblings are addressed with the polite sïz (you) instead of the informal sen (you). I encountered a number of situations where an older brother had demanded to adopt a younger brother's child when he remained childless himself. Family relations that were out of the ordinary, such as adopted children, second wives, or illegitimate children were a source of shame and embarrassment, and not openly spoken of. However, after staying with a family for a number of weeks, I was often told – in a low voice – about the true nature of relationships.

Political leadership among the Kyrgyz was traditionally family and clan based. Ideas on leadership among the nineteenth-century Kyrgyz has been subject to the Soviet political tunnel view, which made the term bi-manap stand for a group of despotic tyrants. Saul Abramzon, a Soviet historian and ethnographer, wrote that at the end of the nineteenth century, the Kyrgyz already had a society with patriarchal-feudal characteristics (Ambramzon, 1971:155). He explains:
Before the Great October Revolution, the mass of the Kyrgyz population owned comparatively small herds. At the head of certain groups of the population stood

feudal-tribal nobles personified by bis and manaps. The exploitation of the workers by manaps and bis occurred in the framework of the penetration of social life with the ideology of 'tribal unity' and 'tribal solidarity' which found its expression in many forms of the patriarchal-tribal mode of life (ibid.:157).

The ideas of exploitation and despotism of the bis and manaps may not have come totally out of the blue, for Radloff reported that: *The division of lineages is entirely as among the Kasak-Kyrgyz. In stead of Sultans, however, they had lords elected from the black [i.e. ordinary] people, that they called Manap. The Manaps, I was told, had exerted almost despotic authority over their subjects* (Radloff, 1893:533).

Daniel Prior describes the situation as follows: *There is no doubt that the institution of manaps was brought on in part by the fragmented Kirghiz tribes' craving for security, yet the tyrannical power of these chieftains amounted to despotism and became an extra burden on the population. There was much to bear in their lot: while attempting to live as they were being squeezed politically, militarily, and economically by Kokand, China, the Kazakhs, and later Russia, most tribes existed in a state of constant movement and readiness for battle* (Prior, 2002:50).

Semenov, however, only mentions one instance of a despotic ruler, namely Vali-khan of Kashkar, saying that he was noted for great brutality (Semenov, 1998:197). Shahrani describes an entirely different version of leadership among the Pamir Kyrgyz in the 1970s. Of course, it is impossible to extrapolate their society directly to the nineteenth-century Tien-Shan Kyrgyz. Although the Pamir Kyrgyz faced a lot less interference from a larger state than the Tien-Shan Kyrgyz, their permanent migration to the high summer pastures of the Pamirs, as well as the loss of ties with the other Kyrgyz groups, must have had an impact on the political sphere as well. However, their case does bring into light a different possible political organisation among the Kyrgyz, which opens the mind to new readings of the role of nineteenth-century leaders. Furthermore, Shahrani's descriptions of leadership coincides strongly with the position of elders (aksakal) and heads of the family during my fieldwork, although these had a less clear political position vis-à-vis the state of Kyrgyzstan.

The Pamir Kyrgyz were headed by a khan in the 1970s. The term khan was known in the Tien Shan in the nineteenth century, but it was hardly ever used for (or by) a Kyrgyz leader17. The headmen of different clans (uruu) were called manap. Other titles for public functions were bek (a military rank) and bi (judge). The

dispersion of the various Kyrgyz clans under different states (Khokand, China, Russia) probably prevented the rise of a single khan. The Pamir Kyrgyz, in their isolation from a larger state, had located the upper authority amongst themselves. Shahrani describes three layers of leadership: the headman of a camp (qorow) is called a be, the headman of a clan (oruq) is an aqsaqal, and the khan heads all of them (Shahrani, 1979:164). Of the aqsaqal (litt: white beard), Shahrani writes:

The aqsaqal is expected to be a man over forty years of age, known for his impartiality and good judgement. The position is not elective or hereditary. Rather a man is acknowledged by the members of a group as they turn to him for help, advice, or the mediation of conflicts. Therefore, the position is attained through public approval and maintained as long as such consent continues without public challenge from another member. The aqsaqal is treated in public gatherings with such special attention as seating him in the place of honor. He acts as the spokesman for his group in all matters of public or private concern, and represents the interests of his membership to the khan, and through him to the local government (ibid.:156).

Shahrani does not elaborate on the position of the camp elder (be). About the khan he says the following: *The office of the khan is the single vehicle through which the unity of the Kirghiz community is achieved. (…) The rank of khan is nonhereditary in principle nor is it elective or ascribed. Instead, it is generally assumed by the most obvious candidate, usually the aqsaqal of one large and powerful oruq, and is legitimated through public consent by the Kirghiz and/or recognized by external forces – local government authorities or outsiders such as the neighbouring Wakhi, traders, visitors, and so forth. (…) strong and effective leadership qualities in Kirghiz society entail bravery (military prowess in the past), honesty, abilities in public persuasion and oratory, sound judgement, being a good Muslim, membership in a large oruq, and of course success as a herdsman, with a large flock and wealth in other tangible goods. (…) what is important in this instance is not the possession of goods and animals, but how they are used to help the community. Hospitality, generosity, and the offer of help to one's relatives and to the needy and poor, stand out as the signs of being a good Muslim and are personal qualities desired among the politically ambitious in Kirghiz society. (…) His role is very often reconciliatory and mediational (…) He does not have a police force and does not bring individuals to trial* (ibid.:164, 165).

If we compare the ethnographic study of Shahrani with what we know of the nineteenthcentury Kyrgyz, we find that first of all, the leaders of the different clans played a central role in the reception of guests. Valikhanov, Semenov and Radloff were all fed, entertained and given a place to sleep in the households of the chiefs. Semenov mentions a night spent at the camp of the nobles of the Bugu of Boronbai's clan. They were received by Baldïsan, a Bugu of 'blue blood', who was 'peace-loving by nature', did not participate in the bloody strife, never went on a raid, but busied himself with music (he played the dombra) and listening to 'the songs of folk-tale narrators and improvisers' (Semenov, 1998:181). The night that Semenov stayed at his camp, Baldïsan played the dombra for him and called on the bards to recite poetry for his guests.

Semenov also elaborates extendedly on the war between the Sarïbagïsh and the Bugu that was in full swing during his travels in the Tien Shan. He assigns an important role to the leaders (manap) in these wars by focussing his descriptions of the motives and effects of the war on the leaders personally. He speaks of the leaders as if they singlehandedly decide on the fate of their subjects, as in the following passage: *One of the powerful Bogintsy [Bugu] clans, the Kydyk, led by Biy Samkala, and bearing the same relationship to Burambai [Boronbai] as the appanage princes did to the grand princes in ancient Russia, had quarrelled with the chief Bogintsy manap and having detached himself from him, decided to move with his whole clan, numbering 3,000 men capable of carrying weapons, beyond the Tian'-Shan', across the Zauka Pass. The Sarybagysh, who already occupied the whole southern littoral of Issyk-kul' (Terskei), insidiously let the rebellious Kydyk go through to the Zauka Pass, but when the latter with all their flocks and herds were ascending the pass, they attacked from both sides (…) and completely routed them. (…)*

However, old Burambai grieved not so much for the losses of the Kydyk, who had wilfully defected from him, as for the loss of all his territory in the Issyk-kul' basin, of his arable land and small orchards on the river Zauka and for the female captives of his family (ibid.:145).

Whether this view on the position of the leaders as all-powerful reflects the actual situation, or whether Semenov projected an ethnocentric view on the Kyrgyz, remains a question.

There appears to have been a certain sense of unity among the different Kyrgyz clans in the nineteenth century. Russian observers speak of the Kara-Kyrgyz or the Dikokamennye-Kyrgyz as distinct from the Kasak-Kyrgyz. It is unclear what

the basis of this distinction was, however. There appears to have been no political form for unity or federation in the nineteenth century. At some point, the different clans that are known as Kyrgyz today even fell under three different states: the Southern Kyrgyz were ruled by the khanate of Khokand, most Northern clans were subjected to Russia and the Solto fell under Chinese rule. Two of the Northern clans, the Bugu and Sarïbagïsh, were involved in a bloody feud. Still, they are presented as one group by outsider contemporaries and presentday historians.

The clan structure appears to have been fluid and flexible. Although according to legend, the name Kyrgyz may have come from 'kïrk ïz', meaning forty clans, there is no conclusive enumeration of precisely forty clans. Kyrgyz genealogists (sanjïrachï) provide very detailed family trees, but none are the same. Subdivisions of clans can become important units in their own right, others lose their importance over time. Although there is a distinction between ulut (people, the Kyrgyz), uruu (clan, e.g. Bugu, Cherik) and uruk (sub-clan, e.g. Sarï-Kalpak, Akchubak), these divisions are not as clear-cut as the terminology suggests.

It seems likely that clan membership was patrilineal in the nineteenth century, as it is today. However, Daniel Prior quotes G. Zagriazhskii, 'an observer in 1873', who gives an entirely different account of clan membership: *The membership of a Kirghiz to one tribe or another is not permanent and unchanged. One of them has merely to move from the Sarïbagïsh lands to the Solto, and he will not be called a Sarïbagïsh, he becomes a Solto. Moving to the Sayaks, he becomes a Sayak [...], but this may only be said of the common people, the bukhara [...] Manaps preserve the division into tribes, and strictly maintain them* (Zagriazhskii in Prior, 2002:70).

It has become fashionable to describe contemporary Kyrgyz politics as tribal, with clan members favouring each other. A joke I heard on a bus, told by a Kyrgyz passenger, makes clear that region overrules clan in this respect: *A bus driver walks up to a passenger and asks him: 'Are you from Kemin?' (Kemin is the birth place of Akayev)? The passengers replies: 'No.' 'Are you from Talas, then?' (Talas is the birth place of Akayev's wife) The passengers replies: 'No.' 'Then take your feet off the chair!'*

Ethnicity, religion and language
Three important markers that characterise a country are ethnic composition, religion and languages of the population. These markers are especially strong because they link up easily to global images and patterns in an individual's world

view. Islam in Kyrgyzstan will be linked to Islam in one's home country, the Islamic states in the Middle-East and nowadays almost inescapably to Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism. The ratio of ethnic groups and its meaning for ethnic relations will be compared to those at home and elsewhere and fit into one's understanding of global settlement and migration patterns.

Knowing what languages are spoken falls into the jigsaw image of the languages of the world and their attached ethnic affiliations. However, Kyrgyzstan, together with the other post-Soviet countries, has a particular history in these three aspects that need to be kept in mind if one wishes to understand the meaning of ethnicity, religion and language for the people who live in Kyrgyzstan. For the purpose of introduction, a general overview will suffice.

Ethnicity

At the end of the Soviet era, the Kyrgyz republic proudly claimed to house more than eighty ethnic groups, or 'nationalities'. In Soviet terminology, the Kyrgyz were the titular nation of the Kyrgyz SSR, meaning that they were the name-giving ethnic group of the republic. Political power was reduced to a minimum, as well as the sense of ownership of the republic. The right of all nations for self-determination was an important communist slogan, but it was placed second to the socialist project. This led to a dynamic of different freedoms and restrictions at different times. The Kyrgyz SSR was inhabited by people from many other ethnic groups, most notably Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik and Russian. These groups already inhabited the territory at the time of the border demarcation. Over time, more people from all over the Soviet Union settled there, some out of free choice, some with forced migration as punishment and some professionals such as doctors and teachers who were sent to peripheral areas to perform socialist duties. The Kyrgyz SSR, like the other soviet republics, was proud to house over eighty nationalities.

In the years since independence, there has been a significant shift in the ethnic make-up of the country. Most notable is the halving of the percentage of Russian inhabitants. The rapid decline of economic and emotional security led Russians, Germans and Jews to move 'back' to Russia, Germany or Israel. Apart from these push factors, there were pull factors for the migrants as well. The governments of Germany and Israel offered preferential access to their 'compatriots' from the former Soviet Union, who were regarded as finally having the chance to come home. Although the entire population of Kyrgyzstan was well educated, it was the Russians and other Europeans who often held high positions, and their exit caused

important shifts in the labour market. In the 1989 population census, a slight majority of the people claimed Kyrgyz ethnicity. Russians formed the second largest group, and together with other Slavic groups they formed almost a third of the population. In the 1999 census, almost two-third of the population claimed Kyrgyz ethnicity, and the Uzbeks had become the second largest group (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1 Ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan according to the 1989 and 1999 population census.
Source: UNDP LIFE project[20]

Ethnic group	1989 census	%	1999 census	%
Kyrgyz	2,229,663	52.4	3,128,147	64.9
Russian	916,558	21.5	603,201	12.5
Uzbek	550,096	12.9	664,950	13.8
Ukrainian	108,027	2.5	50,442	1.0
German	101,309	2.4	21,471	0.4
Tatar	70,068	1.6	45,438	0.9
Dungan[21]	36,928	0.9	51,766	1.1

Table 1.1 Ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan according to the 1989 and 1999 population census.

In the Soviet Union, ethnicity (natsionalnost) was registered in individual passports. After independence, the passport entry was removed, but soon re-installed. Natsionalnost (Kyrgyz: ulut) had become an important identity marker, and both the population and administration did not want to do without it.

Outside of Kyrgyzstan, there are a number of Kyrgyz communities. In China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan and until recently Turkey, there are groups of ethnic Kyrgyz who settled there after they fled the Soviet regime, or who found themselves outside when the borders were drafted. Nomadic movement and transhumance were not taken into account when the national boundaries were determined.

Religion

After 70 years of Soviet governance, it seems odd to find religion so much alive in Kyrgyzstan. However, the Soviet Union was officially committed to freedom of religion, although it also agitated against the anti-class interests of organised religions (Stalin, 1948:77). Thus in Soviet times, the republics of Central Asia and several others were referred to as the Muslim Republics without a problem. There had been campaigns to open up people's eyes to the backwardness of Islam and other religions. Many Muslims abandoned habits of wearing headscarves, praying and visiting mosques. But being Muslim remained a part of the identity of most Turkic people, entangled with their ethnic identity. So even today, being Kyrgyz is

being a Muslim, and when one asks a Kyrgyz if he or she is Muslim, the answer will often be: *'Of course, I am Kyrgyz!'* From that same perspective, a Kyrgyz friend sadly shook his head when we passed a group of Christian converts, saying: *'And that is five less Kyrgyz...'* Other Turkic groups such as Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Tatars also combine ethnicity with (Sunni) Islam. There are also a number of non-Turkic Muslim groups in Kyrgyzstan, such as the Tajiks and Dungans.

A Muslim identity in Kyrgyzstan is more than just a derivative of ethnicity, however. Muslim practices, behaviour and believes also play a role. 'Reading the Kuran', an expression for the recital of the first sura of the K'uran, followed by personal prayers in Kyrgyz, is a recurring ritual through which Kyrgyz people experience and express their Muslim identity. In these prayers, the arbaktar (spirits) of one's ancestors or of Kyrgyz heroes are often called upon. This, in combination with the importance placed on the divinity of nature, leads many observers to think of the Kyrgyz as 'superficially Muslims with shamanistic beliefs'. As Bruce Privratsky points out in his study on Islam in Kazakhstan, however, ancestor spirits and the forces of nature play a significant role in many Muslim belief systems all over the world (Privratsky, 2001). Thus there is no need to deny the Kyrgyz claim that they are Muslims. The need is rather in adjusting the image of Islam.

Most of my informants stated that Uzbeks are 'more Muslim' than Kyrgyz, and Southern Kyrgyz are 'more Muslim' than Northerners. With this, they refer to the way people keep to the rules of Islam. Northern Kyrgyz often spoke of the way the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks of the South keep their women subordinate. Also the rules of not eating pork or drinking alcohol are kept more strictly in the South. However, although very few Northern Kyrgyz refrain from drinking alcohol, knowing that one is supposed to still reminds them of their Muslimness.

Mosque attendance is not a heavy obligation for most Kyrgyzstani Muslims. Since independence, the number of mosques has grown rapidly, however. According to the head of the State Agency for Religious Affairs Toigonbek Kalmatov there were 39 mosques in Kyrgyzstan in 1991, and another 1,000 without official status. In 2007, the Spiritual Directorate of Kyrgyz Muslims unites over 1,725 religious objects (seven regional administrations in Osh and Bishkek cities, one university, six institutes, 45 madrasahs and Koran classes, three missions of foreign Muslim faith, 26 centres, foundations and unions and 1,619 mosques). The popularity of the Turkish-Kyrgyz Lyceum is an important factor in raising a new generation of more or less devote Muslims. During my research I met very few Muslims with an

interest in fundamentalist ideas of Islam. However, there is a process of rediscovery of Islamic values and practices, and many people have a keen interest in learning the right ways of doing things. I can therefore not exclude the possibility that fundamentalism will gain a hold among Kyrgyzstan's Muslim population.

Other religions that are practised in Kyrgyzstan are Russian Orthodox Christianity and Judaism. The Russian Orthodox Churches that can be found in Kyrgyzstan's cities are experiencing an increase in church attendance, especially with festivals such as Easter. In Bishkek there is a small synagogue, but no rabbi. Since independence, missionary groups of different Christian persuasions, Jehovah's Witnesses, Bahai and other faiths have come to Kyrgyzstan to acquaint the population of the former Soviet Union with their beliefs (Pelkmans, 2007:881-899).

Language

The state language in Kyrgyzstan is Kyrgyz. This is a Turkic language that is categorised in various families by different linguists, such as the Chagatai, Nogai and Altai language families. Kyrgyz was standardised in the early Soviet years on the basis of the Northern dialect (Korth, 2005:78). Soviet scholars first used the Arabic script, the then-current script for Turkic languages. In 1925, a transition to the Latin alphabet was set in, and in 1937, this was replaced by Cyrillic (ibid.:78-81). After independence, there were repeated calls for changing the script back to Latin. Although in Uzbekistan this idea was turned into a policy, in Kyrgyzstan the discussion did not surpass the question whether the new alphabet should be based on the English or Turkish transliteration of phonemes such as ü, ï and ö. These sounds occur in Turkish, but are absent in English. The Turkish alphabet is thus far better equipped for Kyrgyz. Politically, however, most Kyrgyz would rather connect to the Anglophone world than the Turkophone.

Although Kyrgyz is the state language, a large number of Kyrgyzstani do not speak it. Non-Kyrgyz only rarely speak the language, as this was not necessary nor promoted in Soviet times. Since independence, attempts to teach Kyrgyz to non-Kyrgyz have started enthusiastically, but over time have ceased to be popular. On top of this, many urbanised, Russified Kyrgyz also do not speak 'their own language'. They were educated in Russian and ceased to speak Kyrgyz. During Soviet times, the lingua franca was Russian, and has remained so after independence.

In 2000, Russian was awarded the status of '*official language*' of Kyrgyzstan. This

decision emanated from the acknowledgement of the lingering importance of Russian, and from the wish to keep peace with the Russians inside and outside of Kyrgyzstan. Next to the state language and the official language, many other languages are spoken in Kyrgyzstan. Only Uzbek and Tajik are used as languages of teaching next to Kyrgyz and Russian. In the year 2000 there were 138 Uzbek and 2 Tajik schools (UNDP, 2000). There were 1259 Kyrgyz and 133 Russian schools.

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[Nienke van der Heide – Spirited Performance – The Manas Epic and Society in Kyrgyzstan](#)
Rozenberg Publishers 2008 – ISBN 978 90 5170 883 2

In the heart of Asia, straddling the western Tien Shan mountain range, lies the former Soviet republic Kyrgyzstan. The country prides itself in an age old oral epic tradition that recounts the mighty deeds of the hero Manas.

When explorers first encountered Manas performers in the late nineteenth century, they hailed their art as a true representation of the heroic age, and compared it to masterpieces such as the Kalevala and the Iliad. Today there are still many excellent performers who can keep their audiences spellbound. They are believed to draw their inspiration from the spirit of Manas himself.

This book portrays the meaning of this huge work of art in Kyrgyz society. Based on extended periods of anthropological fieldwork between 1996 and 2000, it explores the calling of its performers, describes the transformations of the oral tradition in printed media and other forms of art, and examines its use as a key symbol for identity politics.

It deals extensively with the impact of the Soviet period, during which Kyrgyzstan became an autonomous republic for the first time in history. The tremendous changes initiated during these years had far-reaching consequences for the transmission and reception of the Manas epic. The specific Soviet approach to ethnicity was also elementary in the decisions to assign the Manas epic the role of national symbol after 1991, when Kyrzygstan was thrown into the turnoil of a post-socialist existence.

University Of Pennsylvania Museum Of Archaeology And Anthropology Films

In its 120-year history, the *University of Pennsylvania Museum* has collected nearly one million objects, many obtained directly through its own field excavations or anthropological research. Three gallery floors feature materials from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Bible Lands, Mesoamerica, Asia and the ancient Mediterranean World, as well as artifacts from native peoples of the Americas, Africa and Polynesia. This collection on the Internet Archive represents a portion of the motion picture film collection housed at the Museum. *Please note that cataloging and identification of subjects will progress over a period of time*

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Savage Minds | Notes and Queries in Anthropology

Savage Minds is a group blog devoted to 'doing anthropology in public' — providing well-written relevant discussion of sociocultural anthropology that everyone will find accessible. Our authors range from graduate students to tenured professors to anthropologists working outside the academy.

Savage Minds was founded in 2005. In 2006 Nature ranked Savage Minds 17th out of the 50 top science blogs across all scientific disciplines. In 2010, American Anthropologist called Savage Minds "the central online site of the North American anthropological community" whose "value is found in the quality of the posts by the site's central contributors, a cadre of bright, engaged, young anthropology professors." In 2014 we hope to have our blog deposited into the National Anthropological Archives at the Smithsonian.

The title of our blog comes from French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's book The Savage Mind, published in 1966. The original title of the book in French, *Pensée Sauvage*, was meant to be a pun, since it could mean both 'wild thought' or 'wild pansies,' and he put pansies on the cover of the book, just to make sure readers got the pun. Lévi-Strauss was unhappy with the English title of his book, which he thought ought to have been "Pansies for Thought" (a reference to a speech by Ophelia in Hamlet). We liked the phrase "savage minds" because it captured the intellectual and unruly nature of academic blogging. As a result, the pansy has become our mascot as well.

Go to: http://savageminds.org/