– Introduction –

SOMEONE ATE ALL OUR SHEEP

Kyrgyzstan used to be a little paradise … all of our riches have disappeared. … What happened to all our factories? What happened to all our sheep?
—Turdakun Usubaliyev
Former first secretary of the Kyrgyz Republic, USSR

On the Kyrgyz Highlands

Together with several of my colleagues, I finally discovered Song Kol Lake on a beautiful summer day in 2001. The lake was located at an elevation of nearly ten thousand feet on one of the famous highlands in the north of the country. The drive up was difficult because the paved road was no longer maintained on a regular basis. We wanted to spend several weeks there observing the summer lifestyle of livestock herding, considered to be the traditional Kyrgyz occupation. After several long and hard miles uphill, our car reached the summit before immediately shooting down toward vast, empty highlands. In the distance we could make out little white dots scattered throughout the green pastures around the lake. There were a few dozen yurts sheltering several families that had come from the surrounding valleys with their small herds of sheep, goats, and horses.

My Kyrgyz colleague, Amantur Japarov, was there to help us establish an initial contact and settle in. We stopped a number of times in front of small camps of two or three yurts, to no avail. After several visibly unsuccessful conversations, Amantur went toward a camp that was better equipped than the others. There were several yurts, a caravan, military tents, and several cars parked in front. When we arrived, Amantur seemed to have found a more receptive ear. A friendly man invited us to park. We

soon spied Western trekkers drinking tea around a campfire. We were told that the camp had been freshly inaugurated and was reserved for Western tourists like us who wanted to experience the traditional Kyrgyz way of life. One of the yurts was even adorned with a sign that read "Shepherd's Life," the name of a project financed by a Swiss NGO (Helvetas) that was trying to develop sustainable tourism in Kyrgyzstan. After a quick private discussion, we got back into our vehicle, but not before asking the man, who was a bit vexed, to point us in the direction of the village chief's camp. We were, of course, astonished to discover the presence of such an NGO and the recent development of tourism but also a bit piqued at having been taken for tourists.

We finally settled a couple of miles away in Sujunali Monolov's camp. The man was obviously an important figure. We quickly found out that he was the local representative for the Akhtala district in the Naryn regional assembly and the former chairman of a kolkhoz located farther down the valley. He was not present at the camp. His brother and his wife offered us hospitality while we awaited his return.

The Monolovs' camp included several nuclear families (*tutun*) and their numerous children who came to spend the summer there. There were indeed a couple of horses around the yurts and a herd of sheep, but breeding livestock seemed to be secondary for the residents. On the other hand, we noticed evidence around the camp of recent festive activities. A big ring of ashes staining the ground and bones scattered about to the dogs' delight indicated that several animals had recently been sacrificed to prepare a *besh barmak,* a "traditional" Kyrgyz dish. Monolov eventually arrived one morning driving his official car, a white Volga with red velour seats. Everyone gathered around the car, which was filled with provisions. Over a cup of tea, he confirmed that we had unfortunately missed a major festive event that would have held the utmost interest for us. A few days earlier, the region's governor, Askar Salymbekov, had come to Song Kol Lake accompanied by the Kyrgyz president, Askar Akayev, and former Russian president Boris Yeltsin. According to Monolov, we could have taken part in a typical Kyrgyz celebration with feasts and equestrian games in honor of a local historical hero, Taylak Baatir, who had become popular again in the past couple of years.

The presence of the former Russian president, a longtime friend of the Kyrgyz president, was not insignificant and underlined the strong ties that still existed between the two nations. Boris Yeltsin and Askar Akayev met in Saint Petersburg and then sat together on the Supreme Soviet in Moscow. Yeltsin was active in Askar Akayev's rise to the head of the Kyrgyz Republic. Beyond the ties linking these two men, a strong relationship still exists today between Russia and Kyrgyzstan.

Relations between the two countries differed from traditional postcolonial situations. For example, the relations between France and her former colonies in West Africa were very different. First of all, independence was endured much more than desired by the Central Asian republics. Among the Kyrgyz, independence gave rise to complex and ambivalent feelings toward Russia. The recent celebration of Kyrgyz heroes such as Taylak Baatir was not a way of thumbing their nose at the former Russian colonizer. It was a way of asserting the country's role in history and to recall Kyrgyz warriors' active participation in liberating the people in regional political history. Taylak Baatir did not fight against the Russians; rather he fought at their side against the Khanate of Kokand's attempts at dominion in the nineteenth century.

Today, high mountain pastures (*jailoo*) are not only places of economic activity. Certain political rituals take place there, asserting the new symbols of national sovereignty. It is also, in a society that is increasingly urban, simply becoming a favorite place for summer retreats, where political ties are also created.

Monolov told us that he drove to the pastures intermittently during the summer to rest for the weekend, to get a "breath of fresh air" away from the city, to rediscover "the spirit of Kyrgyz life" (*kyrgyzchylyk*) but also to entertain friends and family. Family lineage ties (*uruh*) remain very important, and time has to be devoted to them. Therefore, the pastures are also a place for summer gatherings where social relations are maintained. Though Monolov confirmed that he owned one of the largest herds of sheep on the lake, he immediately specified that herding was not his main occupation. Our numerous questions about the organization of herding quickly annoyed him. After listening to us and making sure that we were neither diplomats nor members of an NGO that could help him in his personal and political endeavors, Monolov strongly advised us to go stay with the Manbetovs, a herder family, for the purposes of our study.

We will come across Monolov, an emblematic figure of the country's politicians, throughout the book. The former kolkhoz chairman exemplifies a new social figure mixing political and economic power. As a local elected official, he remains a civil servant now in charge of the regional forests, but he also now claims to be "in bizness," the new fashionable catchword.

After these initial peregrinations, we ended up settling in Kubanachbek Manbetov's family camp. The shepherd spends the summer on the lake with his wife, Altinaï, three of his sons, Emil, Melis and Stal, their wives, and their children. They form one of the rare extended families exclusively devoted to horse and sheep breeding that continue to conduct summer transhumance.

Our early contacts revealed a certain number of changes in Kyrgyzstan. The presence of tourists and developers on the highlands showed that the procedures of hospitality had considerably evolved in this society. The hospitality tradition generally gave the guest (*konok*) a unique status, which entailed a certain number of rights and duties. This tradition still exists without a doubt; however, a clear distinction is made between two forms of *konok*: one who is part of the host's limited social universe and one who enters into the type of social relation involving payment for accommodations in the family home.

Kubanachbek's family history embodies many of the changes over the last two decades. Outside the summer months, the family lived in a village, Togolok Moldo, located lower in the valley at an elevation of nearly eight thousand feet. Ever since the kolkhoz was privatized, the family has bred livestock and organized transhumance, lasting several months in summer, mainly to tend the herds, enabling them to graze on high-quality pastureland. Life in the pastures is punctuated by daily activities made necessary by the harsh mountain setting. It being impossible to gather firewood, collecting dried animal dung or *tezek* is an essential activity for making fires to keep warm and cook. It occupies the children, who also have to fetch water regularly for the camp by riding horses to a natural spring located on the summits, still covered with snow. Water is needed for making tea and bread and boiling food. Bread with fresh cream and butter made at the camp is often the daily staple. Milking the animals, more particularly the mares, is women's work, while watching over the herds is generally left to the men. Altinaï brought about five gallons a day of fresh mare's milk to a private company, Shoro, that had recently opened near the lake and collects mare's milk to make a very popular fermented drink among the Kyrgyz called koumiss.

At first, the daily repetition of these chores and activities in a magical setting seemed anchored in an unchanging world. Yet many things had changed for this shepherd and his family since the fall of the USSR and the closing of the kolkhozes. The yurt, often seen as a symbol of an enduring traditional way of life, actually only reappeared recently. The Manbetovs acquired one in order to spend summers at Song Kol. Work is no longer organized by the collective farm but by the family; herds are now privately owned. Personal choices now guide the way things are organized. With the closing of the kolkhoz, the Manbetovs decided to create a family business devoted to livestock breeding and farming the little arable land they were given to produce forage for their herds and wheat for their domestic use.

Kubanachbek used to be a kolkhoz member and participated in a collective economy where everyone had a specific role. He was awarded sev-

eral medals for his devotion to the system and did not hide a certain form of nostalgia for the days when herding occupied an important place in society. His wife was his assistant. Since 1995 when the kolkhoz closed, the herds have considerably diminished in size. Most of the former kolkhoz members spend the summer in the village due to a lack of means. They are now occupied with subsistence farming (growing cereals and potatoes). Others confronted with unemployment and poverty have chosen to leave the area and seek a better life in urban areas. Like the kolkhoz that closed down, livestock farming was quickly collapsing in Kyrgyzstan.

Kubanachbek and Altinaï's most valuable capital is certainly their family and their numerous children. They have seven sons and two daughters. The latter two both left the family home; one lives in a village near Togolok Moldo, while the other one lives in Bishkek with her husband. Adil, the eldest son, lives in Kant, a town in the north of the country, where he is a taxi driver. Edil has remained in the village. He used to be a tractor operator at the kolkhoz. Since privatization, he has acquired a tractor that he uses for the family farm, and he rents out his services to other peasants. Ernis also lives in the village and helps out on the family farm from time to time. The younger sons, Emil, Melis and Stal,[1] and their wives worked on the family farm full time.

The forth son, Bakit, at age 30, rarely returns to Togolok Moldo. He has chosen to settle in Bishkek. At first he worked in construction. While he was in charge of buying material for the construction sites at the Taatan bazaar, he met a Chinese man, who is now his associate. Bakit still maintains strong ties with his family and his village. For instance, it was time for him to think about marrying, and he hoped to find a bride who came from his native region. His family had, moreover, been saving money to contribute to a new matrimonial alliance.

Despite all these changes in occupations, the Kyrgyz remain associated in the regional imagination with mountain herding in the foothills of the Tian Shan. It is a specific characteristic that distinguishes them from their Kazak neighbors, who are also associated with the social universe of transhumant shepherds, although horizontally in the steppe. To the west and south, other peoples, such as the Uzbek and Tajik, are more willingly associated with the sedentary and agrarian world. These broad naturalizing classifications that make it possible to differentiate spaces and peoples are generally used to depict an unchanging Central Asia. They contribute most of all to leading us astray in regard to the contemporary reality of these societies because Kyrgyz society can no longer be reduced to its shepherds and its nomadic horsemen. Pastoral activities linked to livestock breeding are no longer dominant. The singular relationship between herding, a mountainous environment, and the Kyrgyz population has un-

dergone drastic upheaval over the past few decades. The way space is occupied is also experiencing considerable change.

In Search of a Baseline

Even though there are political entities today called Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan, these societies are not exclusively inhabited by the eponymous peoples. Before Russian colonization, these different populations did not make up isolated groups; rather, they were in contact with one another at a time when they interacted in Central Asian political spaces that were not defined by national criteria. Under Soviet rule, these populations were grouped together to form national administrative republics. The policy of nationalities and the political division of land into national republics in 1936 closely associated an ethnonational group with a territory. Beyond these political-administrative creations, several different nationalities were living at that time in the Kyrgyz Republic and other republics. That is why today, for instance, many Uzbeks live in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

Nowadays, these ethnic categories can no longer be reduced to a particular way of life or a specific economic activity. The Kyrgyz can no longer be described according to a catalog of objective defining traits pertaining to language or culture that would refer to a specific way of occupying space and a structural relationship with a type of occupation, such as herding. The population that is called Kyrgyz today now lives in an increasingly complex society in which herding has become one occupation among many. Furthermore, the vicissitudes of history provoked migrations so that at the time of independence the majority of citizens in Soviet Kyrgyzstan were not classified as Kyrgyz by the system of nationalities in effect at the time. There were Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans, and so on.

Nevertheless, the traditional activities in relation to sheep and, most of all, horses continue to occupy a choice position in people's imaginations. This symbolic preeminence has been materialized by the creation of a national ideology around the epic of the great horseman, the Kyrgyz' legendary ancestor, Manas, who will be discussed further on. It is also expressed in the country's social life by the prestige associated with horses, which is illustrated in particular during funerals, where eating horsemeat is considered an obligation. It is reflected as well by the current revival of equestrian games such as *Kok Boru*.[2]

Nowadays, the Kyrgyz are no longer nomadic, and shepherds have become a minority.

Looking Back on a Soviet Economy of Intensive Livestock Farming

After some time at Song Kol, I had the feeling that I would necessarily be confronted with boredom in such a vast expanse, which seemed, to my eyes, completely untouched by any human intervention. With the passing days, however, I realized that, in fact, there was always something going on: the visit of a neighbor or an acquaintance or the need to perform a certain number of vital activities. Furthermore, with the help of our shepherd, little by little I learned to read the landscapes and distinguish the limits and markers by which the population delimited different places. Through his stories I also learned how to identify vestiges of the Soviet system. Kubanachbek enjoyed sharing his knowledge and describing the organization of livestock farming during the time of the kolkhoz. He talked about a very different Song Kol Lake, where overabundant herds exausted the vegetation. He mentioned the imposing architecture of sheep barns used to shear the animals. In summer, the different kolkhozes from the surrounding valleys brought their livestock there. There was no collective transhumance. Kolkhoz members instead brought their animals in trucks, and shepherds exclusively in charge of tending the herds stayed on the lake while the kolkhoz members assigned to other activities remained in the valley. The former shepherd recalled the industrial and rationalized methods of the Soviet era. The population now avoided those places because the ground was reportedly polluted from the excessive use of chemicals to treat the sheepskins.

Only Kubanachbek's and his son Melis's indications enabled me to notice the few physical traces of an intensive livestock farming economy. Indeed, it required attentive observation of the landscape to pick out the few scattered, crumbling walls of the sheepfolds that used to dot the lake's shores. The herds had diminished considerably. The sheep barns had since been completely taken apart and pillaged, mostly in order to sell scrap iron to the Chinese nearby.

As this former kolkhoz indicates, the priority for Kyrgyzstan was to raise merino sheep to supply wool to the Soviet textile industry. This activity was at the heart of the republic's social life. The raising of this exogenous breed of wool-producing sheep was one of the country's main resources, and a large part of the economy was organized around its local, as well as national, institutions (kolkhoz, sovkhoz, wool mills, etc.). On the local level, the kolkhoz occupied a central role. It was not only the institution that organized production in a given territory, but it also structured power relations and determined the access to external as well as internal resources. The livestock breeding kolkhozes of the Naryn valley

have since closed their gates, causing the bankruptcy of the textile mill in the city of Tokmok.

Soviet policy led to an increased specialization in merino sheep breeding while marginalizing horse husbandry. The equally traditional occupations of trade and hunting also declined.

The First of May kolkhoz (*Prvi Maj*), where Kubanachbek worked his whole life, was similar to the other numerous livestock breeding kolkhozes in Kyrgyzstan. It was the result of a process of demographic concentration and sedentarization of the nomadic population, organized by the Soviet government after the Second World War. Kubanachbek's father, Manbet, actively participated in sedentarization and collectivization. Until well into the twentieth century, the Kyrgyz in this valley practiced transhumance (Jacquesson 2011), leading them to live in a delimited space in the winter (*kishtoo*), generally located in the foothills of mountains not far from water resources (streams, rivers, and arable land). They did not live in dense groups. Several groups of yurts (*ayil*) occupied a space defined according to a tribe's (*uruu*) use of land. In summer these groups moved higher into the mountains so the herds could graze around Song Kol Lake and in other pastures, thus bringing the people into contact with other communities. This social system (Abramzon 1960, guaranteeing rights according to affiliations with political and economic entities led by chiefs (*manap*), was gradually disappearing.

Consequently, in the Soviet system, access to resources was conditioned by a status that was no longer based on lineage but on affiliation with a social institution. Belonging to a kolkhoz determined access to land, work, education, and even the health system. The kolkhoz thus represented a *fait social total* (Mauss, 1973) because it gave access to resources and other key social spaces in Soviet Kyrgyz society.

Before the creation of the kolkhozes, which only took shape in the first half of the 1950s, the Kyrgyz population in the Naryn valley lived in an area where different groups lived together but were not gathered according to the model of a village. In the early 1930s, the Soviet government's first step was to create work associations (*toz*),[3] which often continued to group members of the same lineage together. In the second phase, these *toz* were grouped together into one single entity: the kolkhoz. The third phase consisted in regrouping small kolkhozes to create larger population and production units. The creation of Prvi Maj kolkhoz was not a copy of a traditional Kyrgyz identity system but a regrouping of individuals from various origins who had no choice but to cooperate in organizing the economy. The kolkhoz, through its modernization, asserted itself over the population as the center of economic activity. Housing and schooling helped to fashion a new way of life in the kolkhoz-village.

Electrification, the mechanization of agriculture, economic specialization, and widespread building of permanent houses gradually persuaded the Kyrgyz to become sedentary. Some left to further their education in the capital's training institutions. Kolkhozes were built on the sites of winter camps, bringing together a new population mix that created new forms of solidarity. The modification of the use of space and the organization of work and housing logically modified relationships to authority and power within the new social unit. Furthermore, the government developed new resources (agriculture, schools, universities, mines, factories, etc.) making the population's occupations more complex and also modifying the population distribution—on a local level with kolkhozes and on a national level with the creation of administrative centers in cities such as Naryn and Bishkek.

Given the importance of livestock breeding in this society, this economic activity had a major role in structuring access to power on a local as well as on a national level. Control over this resource was a factor in the organization of power relations. Up until the closing of the kolkhoz, Manbetov was in charge of the collective herd of horses (*tabun*) under Monolov's orders, in a division of labor that was highly sectored.[4]

Kubanachbek continued his breeding activities in a radically different context. The collective farm no longer existed; the herds and the land were divided up and privatized in a general context where livestock breeding had become one occupation among others in Kyrgyz rural life.

From Kolkhoz to Village

Early one morning, Emil Manbetov drove us to the village in his old Lada Niva. After several hours of driving, we came to the location of the former Prvi Maj kolkhoz. The term *ayil*[5] is now preferred to kolkhoz, and, after independence, this particular one was rebaptized "Togolok Moldo" after a local bard. We crisscrossed the mountain, going near other grazing pastures in the medium mountains (*orto jailoo*), which were characterized by the presence of conifers. We then came to a highland where there were planted fields as far as the eye could see, yellowed by the sun and filled with villagers busy harvesting. As we went by, I was surprised to see certain people working with tools from another age (pitchforks, animal-drawn plows) while others were equipped with combine harvesters and tractors. We went by the cemetery, obliging Emil to say a prayer (*omin*) as a sign of respect for his ancestors; then, in the distance, we saw small herds, tended by children, looking for shade under the few trees bordering the pastures. The car slowed down in front of a newly erected equestrian statue. Emil

told us that it was a statue of *Taylak Baatir,* the famous local hero recently honored by the Kyrgyz president on Song Kol Lake.

We finally spotted the village, an oasis of poplar trees nestled between a barren mountain piedmont and the Naryn River. We sometimes spied groups of bicycles and donkeys on the sides of the road, waiting for their owners. In the suffocating heat, young boys swam in the irrigation canals crisscrossing the parcels, allowing themselves a couple of hours' respite before heading back to the fields. We entered the village on one of two main roads that ran through it. Emil slowed down to give us our first guided tour. At the entrance to the village, we came face to face with a big building that was the hospital and maternity ward. The main avenue was a dirt road lined with reddish-orange wooden fences, behind which we caught glimpses of low white houses with corrugated metal roofs. The houses were set in small, well-kept gardens. These little kitchen gardens had taken on great importance because they provided self-subsistence, producing potatoes, carrots, apples, and raspberries.

In the village center, imposing public buildings were recognizable by their color, the telltale white and sky-blue buildings found all over the ex-USSR. The school, with its hard-packed dirt playground and its gymnasium, occupied an important place. Over seven hundred students were enrolled in the school. Across the way, a statue of Lenin stood in an unkempt square; there was also a neglected monument for those who died in the Second World War and in the Soviet War in Afghanistan. Not far from there, the administrative seat of the kolkhoz had become the administrative center for the new local authorities (*ayil okmoti*). The building stood in the middle of the public garden, which was choked with weeds. The importance of all of these buildings, architectural traces of the secular Soviet world, was dwarfed by a more recent building that was practically adjacent, the mosque,[6] with its imposing minaret built right in the middle of the public garden. Across from the mosque, the former kolkhoz store had been turned into a private grocery store. Flour, oil, rice, pasta, and canned goods imported from China could be bought there, but also American cigarettes, Mars bars and other candy bars, Coca-Cola, and, most of all, vodka. Another small store sold a variety of foodstuffs, but also DVDs of American war and karate films that were very popular with the young Kyrgyz. A little farther away, an old warehouse had been reconverted. The lighted sign awkwardly nailed above the door indicated that it was now a restaurant and bar where one could drink sodas, beer, and vodka.

After this first short tour, we settled into the Manbetov family house, where two of Kubanachbek's sons had stayed in order to take care of the family's several acres of farmland and make hay for the winter. I decided

to make a quick trip to meet the local administration chief (*ayil okmotu*), Zamir Kachkanbaev. He greeted me with a mixture of surprise and curiosity at the idea of speaking to a foreigner. For several days, he would be my guide and explain everything to me.

He suggested we leave his rundown office and invited me to get in his old green *jigouli* so he could show me around the village. He immediately brought my attention to the fate of the former kolkhoz buildings. Among the ruins, he gave me a straightforward presentation of the situation: "Here, we were one of the best livestock breeding kolkhozes; we provided one of the best wools, and since the fall of the USSR and privatization it has been a disaster. The kolkhoz livestock went from seventy thousand to six thousand head in just a few years."

Togolok Moldo's situation illustrated the economic crisis the country had been experiencing overall since 1991. According to national statistics, livestock had been decimated, going from twelve million head at the end of the 1980s to two to three million in 2008, no longer occupying such a dominant role in the Kyrgyz economy. Over several days, various discussions with the villagers invariably led to the description of a devastating period—from independence to privatization (1990 to 1995). It was characterized by widespread plunder of existing resources. Certain former kolkhoz members described it as a strange period when, little by little, resources disappeared. They mentioned lots of waste and remembered ostentatious celebrations during which several sheep and horses were sacrificed and eaten. Others spoke of small operators taking advantage of the chaos to dismantle collective infrastructures (sheep barns, garages, warehouses, storehouses, farming implements, etc.) and tools of production (tractors, trucks, trailers, etc.) that they then sold as scrap to neighboring China. Still others denounced a small group of people that apparently took advantage of privatization to claim the best farmland and the collective farm's most modern tools and implements for themselves.

Zamir explained to me that farming had taken on greater importance now; most men and women worked in the fields to ensure a near self-subsistence production. Forage for the animals was needed, as well as wheat for making bread. The Manbetov family embodied the spread of small patriarchal family businesses.

My first impressions of Togolok Moldo were echoed in a conversation I had much later with the former first secretary of the Soviet Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Turdakun Usubaliyev. The ninety-two-year-old man lived in the suburbs of the Kyrgyz capital in the presidential residence reserved for political eminences of the regime. He reigned over the former Soviet Republic for several decades. Our conversation started with a long litany of figures and statistics similar to those of Zamir:

> Kyrgyzstan was a little paradise. We completed the electrification of the whole country; all of the children were schooled; we built thousands of miles of roads and dozens of bridges. Water was our main resource and we built dozens of dams and hydroelectric power stations. There was an industrial network with dozens of factories. The torpedo plant had 8,500 employees and the Lenin factory had 20,000 workers; there were cotton mills in Osh. We worked with the biggest textile complexes in the USSR, in particular with the town of Ivanovo, and we produced 38,000 tons of wool. We were one of the best wool producers with more than ten million head of sheep. … We recently fell to under two million head; all I have just listed for you, sir, well, all of our riches have disappeared. Young man, if you want to write a book about our country you will have to explain where this has all gone. … What happened to all our factories, what happened to all our sheep?

On his own level, Zamir gave me just about the same speech, adding an extra dimension, asking, "What happened to all our kolkhoz members?" emphasizing the scale of rural exodus.

The Anthropologist in the Face of Social Change

This situation is relatively unsettling for an anthropologist, who can be tempted to describe a social world where the relationship between humans and their environment is relatively stable. In this case, I was confronted with major upheavals. Anthropologists can no longer rely on the organization of a world structured by regularity. Reinhardt Koselleck (2004), who conceptualized historical change, perhaps provides one key to understanding by simply defining change as something that is no longer repeated. It can be seen here through the villagers' daily activities that a whole set of activities are no longer repeated. People no longer take care of the statue of Lenin; they take care of the mosque. People no longer go to the kolkhoz; they take care of their family's land. They no longer expect the kolkhoz to provide certain services; they rely on help from their families. People no longer expect the kolkhoz to take care of their needs; they must earn money on their own to buy goods, to be able to buy a car or a television. An anthropologist must therefore describe the activities that are no longer repeated and describe others that are emerging.

Some Local Authority Figures

During my first stays in the Naryn valley, the villagers from Togolok Moldo constantly repeated how crucially important the period of privatization in the 1990s was. This period corresponded to the implementation

of the shock therapy advocated by international institutions. The state needed to disengage massively from the economic sphere and launch a political process of democratization, which, in particular, implied electing local authorities.

The kolkhoz was not the object of a sale, resulting in the exclusive appropriation by a single person as occurred elsewhere. In the region of Togolok Moldo, the inhabitants were hostile to the dismantling of the kolkhozes.[7] Temporary organizations (*ayil komiteti*) were in charge of reorganizing the kolkhozes. The organizations were chaired by the kolkhoz chairmen who were to oversee their liquidation. The alternatives available to them were to maintain a collective structure in the form of a cooperative or to privatize by dividing everything up among the kolkhoz members.

Like the majority of kolkhozes, Togolok Moldo opted for liquidation. Dismantling started with dividing up the land resources among the people born within the kolkhoz. This principle of birthright entitled people to a share of land (*ulush*)[8] equaling a little over an acre. This method of division favored a family concentration of land. The division of renewable resources such as livestock was determined according to the number of years spent working (*staz*) in the kolkhoz.[9] The livestock was distributed to the people, who, little by little, replaced the exogenous wool-producing sheep with a local race (*Kyrgyz koi*) that was better adapted to the natural environment and to local meat consumption. A few key resources were not privatized and remained under state control (arable land) or under local authority control (pastureland) through the intermediary of a state fund (*gosfond*) that granted land leases to the new peasants.

Kolkhoz members criticized the local authorities for waiting until most of the livestock were seriously decreased before organizing the distribution of the herd.[10] They also accused the former leaders of having taken advantage of their positions to satisfy their personal interests by accumulating capital, allowing them to buy certain strategic means of production (warehouses, sheepfolds, mills, combine harvesters) during the privatization process.

In a situation of penury (a shortage of fuel and means of transportation), the area of the kolkhoz shrank and the more distant pastures were abandoned. The heated sheep barns, a vestige of Soviet folly, quickly fell into disuse due to maintenance costs.[11] The technical equipment was not privatized until 2000, and ownership was partly transferred to the *ayil okmotu,* who organized a rental system before finally selling it off.

The land privatization process was, therefore, not a complete liberalization of private property. It could even be said that the Kyrgyz government strongly resisted international injunctions. Consequently, the new forms of social distinction are essentially unlinked to land ownership and

flow more from the development of new activities that are unrelated to either land or livestock. Privatization has altered the relations of interdependence between individuals on a local level and marked the end of the predominance of the kolkhoz chairman.

The Former Kolkhoz Chairman: The Bashkarma

Sujunali Monolov, the former kolkhoz chairman, nevertheless remains one of the central power figures. He no longer occupies an official position in the village but his mark is to be found everywhere. The villagers voluntarily speak of him as the true village chief. He gave up his position as kolkhoz chairman in 1996 when the kolkhoz was liquidated and remained a civil servant by being named regional forest manager. He sits on the regional assembly as the elected representative for the Akhtala district and therefore occupies important political and administrative roles locally. His civil servant status gives him control over a key resource, forest exploitation. Lumber for construction has become a valuable resource.[12] Monolov has considerable social capital within the Kyrgyz regional administration. He continues to live in the village and has even become the largest private farmer by the size of his farm. A villager explained, "Even if he's not here, he is never far away. He entrusted his farm to his brothers. During privatization, he took a number of things from the kolkhoz and now he rents out farm equipment and the use of his mill. Many of us are dependent on him." Monolov owns two mills, two combine harvesters, tractors, trucks, sheepfolds, and also sells fuel. Members of his family manage the farm, and many ex-kolkhoz members work for him. This situation has allowed him to create social relations of dependence with the villagers. Even if he is physically absent from everyday life in the village, his presence is unavoidable.

The New Official Local Authority: The Ayil Okmotu

The second figure in the village is the local administration chief, the *ayil okmotu*. Zamir was appointed to the position of *ayil okmotu* by the district administration (*Rayon*) after privatization. His predecessor, who had also been kolkhoz chairman for a time, has taken advantage of his position to take over the state store, which has since become the main private grocery store. The local authorities basically inherited nothing but debt. However, they have played a decisive role in attributing long-term land leases that are dependent on the *gosfond.* Their importance has evolved somewhat after the dismantling of the kolkhoz. In a region like Naryn,[13] the village council chairman has become a central figure in local society. The admin-

istration thus nominated Zamir as representative in charge of the local implementation of the new legislative measures regarding the state's disengagement from the economic sector. Little by little, he has replaced the kolkhoz chairman, the *bashkarma,* though without having as much economic power as the latter.

Zamir is a native of the village but never worked in the kolkhoz. After studying agronomy in Bishkek, he worked in Baetov as an agricultural sector manager and held an office in the Komsomol. After independence, he was no longer a member of the party, which had fallen into decay, but he took advantage of his position within the politico-administrative machine to obtain attractive bank loans and, in 1993, bought a fertilizer plant. His private company failed quickly. The *Akim* thus offered him the position as council chairman in Togolok Moldo. His wife, a doctor, became the director of the village hospital and maternity ward. He has considerable capital in administrative resources[14] at his disposal, mainly stemming from the former system, which allowed him to reorient his career despite his business failure. However, Zamir cannot depend on a large family capital to concentrate enough land. He is limited to his activities as village chief, knowing all the while that he lacks economic power.

His role as *ayil okmotu* consists in managing the village's debt, levying taxes, controlling the *gosfond* land leases, overseeing the distribution of water, organizing military conscription, managing the registry office, and taking care of social issues (retirement, aid for large families, disability pensions) but also in paying school, postal, and hospital employees. He represents the central government on the local level and therefore acts as an important intermediary role between the population and the state for a whole array of services. His role is founded on a dual legitimacy: local because the central government systematically appointed individuals who were from the village they are supposed to administrate, and external because of his experience and his relations with the administration.

The "Biznessman": Economic Power

Another social figure recently emerged in the village. Although Zamir embodied the continuity of power, his authority was contested, not by political or administrative authorities but from within the village. Some of the inhabitants condemned his passivity. Talapai Iskenderov was one of the main detractors. In his forties, slim and lean, he immediately contrasts with Monolov and Zamir's easygoing attitudes. He told me right off that he was a busy man because he was in business. This notion of "business" had a very vast and vague meaning depending on whom I talked to. Talapai explains, "'Business means that I make deals, I buy and sell things—

anything. So I travel a lot. … I don't sit around like the village chief who spends all day twiddling his thumbs! The world has changed; the age of parasites is over. You can't expect everything from the government." Talapai immediately posed as the opponent of Monolov's and Zamir's local power. He wanted to embody a new type of entrepreneur who is different from the Soviet era. During the time of the Soviet Union, Talapai was a civil servant in the justice ministry. After the law breaking up the kolkhozes passed, he took his share of land where he was born in Togolok Moldo and grouped it with the shares of his father, his wife, and his children into seven and a half acres. He decided to return to his native village and settle there as a farmer. He drew on the strength of his family (father, brothers, and brothers-in-law) to start a new career. During privatization, his personal capital allowed him to start a small business with material bought mostly from the kolkhoz. He quickly found himself in conflict with the *ayil okmotu* and the kolkhoz chairman, who also aimed to appropriate the village resources. He wanted to obtain a little over sixty acres of irrigated land, and the local authorities refused. He put his legal knowledge to use and won his claim, securing a lease for the irrigated land from the *gosfond.* His financial success is fairly visible in the village and came from multiple business activities that he developed alongside his farming activity.

It is always busy around his house, which boasts a mill and a sawmill, both greatly coveted by the villagers. When I arrive, several workers are watching their new boss perched on top of a stack of hay shouting into his mobile phone. He jumps down: "It's the only place I can get any mobile phone reception. It's not good for business!" His financial success has made him eager to gain political influence and to chase the "Soviets" from city hall once and for all. He means Zamir, of course, but he also mentions Monolov's lurking presence and declares, "What a coincidence, [Monolov] got his hands on the best land, he has the largest herd, he also got the mill, and still, that's not enough for him. He became regional forest manager. I can tell you that he really takes advantage of this situation because lumber has become one of the most valuable construction materials here. He helps himself to local timber for his personal gain at the expense of the people." Talapai explained that he had bought a sawmill and a mill to put them, so he said, at the people's disposal: "People come to me to cut wood or to use the mill and all that for almost nothing. Everything is at the people's disposal. They only have to pay a few kopeks."

Talapai rejects forms of identification based on lineage, considering this "a thing of the past." He denounces the way certain people used it politically, trying to push him aside because he is not Sayak.[15] He says, "I am Munduz, so more from the south, but that doesn't mean anything to me." Talapai has gone beyond the local area for his business and refers to the

relations he has with the Kyrgyz state machinery and the regional governor's brother. On the wall of Talapai's living room hangs a picture of him next to the Salymbekov brothers, the owners of the Dordoy Bazaar. He talked to me with feeling about his personal relationship with the governor's brother, who was recently assassinated: "It was a hard blow for me because we were friends and we did business together. He was supposed to be my son's godfather."

Talapai is above all a merchant who travels often to Bishkek but also to Turkey and China. Mobility has become an important element characterizing social status in a society where highway robbery was an obstacle to the development of trade. According to Talapai, his business, which started out as a family business, now has more than twenty workers on payroll. His farm is a permanent hive of activities that go far beyond regular farming. Talapai runs his business with an iron fist and is paternalistic toward his workers, providing them with protection and advantages (access to certain consumer goods, housing, bonuses, etc.).

In just a few years, Talapai has become one of the main suppliers of labor. The emergence of this type of small, versatile businessman is a common feature in post-Soviet Kyrgyz society and also illustrates an emerging form of social relations. The boss heads a business that is, in a way, an economic territory. Employees owe allegiance to the new boss's venture beyond the economic aspect. It is a form of group belonging characterized by relations of clientelism mixing family, economic, and political ties. The emergence of this type of group foreshadowed new political relations. In Togolok Moldo, Talapai was certainly eager to fight it out with his opponents on the political stage. He had been waiting impatiently for the chance to run in the next local election because the *ayil okmotu* would no longer be appointed but elected. The village awaited the local elections with a certain apprehension as tension and social distinctions grew increasingly perceptible.

The Shepherd: A Prestigious but Powerless Figure

Kubanachbek Manbetov did not hide his nostalgia for an era when there was only one village chief and the kolkhoz was more unified. This shepherd exemplifies a figure of prestige that fit in with the continuation of Soviet order as well as with the return of a renewed family tradition. He worked in the kolkhoz his whole life and did not speak Russian like the other authority figures discussed above. The shepherd (*chaban*) embodied a role model to follow during the Soviet era. Kubanachbek's photo was hanging on a bulletin board celebrating certain people from the village who had been decorated several times. A street had recently been named

after his father, and Kubanachbek incarnates a continuation of current national ideology centered on Kyrgyzness (*Kyrgyzchylyk*). Local officials rely on figures like Kubanachbek embodying authority and respect for a timeless Kyrgyz social order. This gives him a solid social position with a hint of prestige but with no power. He typifies one of the fairly widespread ways of adapting to the new social and economic situation. He perpetuates an economic model based on livestock breeding without going beyond subsistence production. Kubanachbek's principal wealth is his herd, which is growing little by little but could be decimated at any moment by disease. He owns about sixty sheep, a few goats and cows, but most of all mares to produce milk. His authoritarianism has prevented his sons from imagining other strategies for developing the family farm differently. The specialization of labor in the kolkhozes and the development of education had led to autonomization and the diversification of occupations within family units. The current process tends to promote new logics of domination within the family.

However, Kubanachbek's son Emil spends the winter in the capital doing construction work. In high mountainous areas where it is particularly cold, farming activities slow down and many villagers go down to Bishkek to look for work. Emil explained to me that Joldosh, his adoptive brother, had found work for him. Emil's father had solved the problem of a lack of relations outside the village by creating fictitious relations of kinship. During the summer, many children native to the region living in Bishkek come to the lake for vacation. Joldosh was born in the neighboring village of Kurtka before leaving for Bishkek and then Moscow to study. He then worked in Baetov and later for the prestigious state-run gold-mining company in Kazarman. When I met him, he held a managerial post at *Kirgiz Altin*[16] in the Kyrgyz capital. Joldosh had lost his parents, he had no brothers, and his two sisters lived in the village. He no longer had any family capital and was looking for strong local ties. This also corresponded to a need to return to his roots. Joldosh explained to me how it was necessary for him to create this relationship for his children so they could spend summers living like true Kyrgyz. In a society where the importance of local attachment is essential, Joldosh was also trying to legitimately establish his local roots. By creating this fictitious kinship, the people involved were using a cultural resource to overcome a reciprocal social deficit that was indispensable for being assimilated in Kyrgyz society today.

The Moldo, or the Affirmation of Religious Authority

Power does not only control material life. In a context of de-Sovietization, Islam occupies a new position. Religion plays a very marginal role in daily

life in Togolok Moldo. The best example is perhaps the Manbetovs' behavior. Kubanchbek called himself a Muslim but did not pray daily. During my many stays, certain rituals had obvious importance. On my arrival, for example, he said a short prayer before sacrificing a sheep. Kubanachbek claimed to be strongly attached to Islam, but his knowledge remained very rudimentary. He did not drink vodka, unlike many villagers, but offered koumiss ritually. He drank probably more than a quart a day during the summer. In a context of reinterpreting the precepts of Islam, new preachers condemn drinking this fermented alcoholic beverage, which is thus considered forbidden for Muslims to consume. Certain practices are therefore affected by current changes that transform relationships to what is sacred according to the development of a new Muslim mindset purged of local traditional beliefs. Drinking koumiss, however, is strongly anchored in social habits and is resisting these new interpretations.

Nevertheless, the new position Islam occupies in society is reflected by the mosque built in the center of the village in 1993. Its location in the former public garden, a secular space, is the expression of a radical change in the role given to religion in public life. It would be difficult for someone to claim that they were not Muslim or were atheist. The building of mosques was the most visible and spectacular phenomenon in the country; every village has built its own mosque since the declaration of independence, thanks to community action (*ashar*) and the generosity of many Saudi Arabian foundations.[17]

I raised the question of religion several times while speaking to people in the village, and their answers were often contradictory. Islam is important to them on special occasions in their lives but does not really dictate their everyday behavior. Others described the *moldo* (mullah) to me as a reformed alcoholic with no authority whatsoever in the village. So I decided to meet him. Koshkonbai welcomed me into his humble home. An old broken-down bus filled with chickens was parked in the yard. The man wore a short beard and a kalpak. The decoration of his home was different from other houses. There were several posters, including one of Mecca, suras hanging on the wall, Islamic calendars, and bookshelves with some books in Arabic. Koshkonbai has several children. Two of his sons are named Moldobek (little mullah) and Mohammed Ali (after the boxer who converted to Islam), and one of his daughters is called Medina (after the Muslim holy city). The choice of names reveals traces of a new influence and the Arabization of the local language. Following this same logic, the mullah often uses the expression "God willing," preferring the Arabic *Insha'Allah* over the standard Kyrgyz expression *Kuday buyursa.* During the Soviet era, Koshkonbai was a driver. He found religion while he was at the hospital in Bishkek undergoing alcohol rehabilitation. Later,

he returned to the village, where an old man who was the acting mullah taught him how to read Arabic in a year. He confided, "I began to feel light and to pray, and my mentor progressively left me his position in the village. Since independence, people have come back to the mosque little by little, and there are more and more villagers at Friday prayers."

Koshkonbai set about contacting Arab patrons to build a new mosque. Saudi Arabia and certain Emirates provided enormous financing for the construction of mosques through their religious foundations (*Rabita*), which are very active in the region. The mullah told me, "We need another mosque so we can welcome everyone, women too, and we need heating and a room for ablutions in winter."

He, too, was looking for connections to an outside resource to confront the new social reality and to earn social authority. However, he had no political aspirations and did not want to contest the local authorities' power. Togolok Moldo is part of a region in the north of the country where Islam remains a religious activity that does not enter the political arena, unlike in the south where there are attempts to politicize Islam. The reference to Islam, moreover, is often an important way to differentiate people within Kyrgyz society. It is sometimes used to condemn the excesses of others—*juzhanin*,[18] for example, are too Islamic. In the south, Islam is used to condemn the excesses of the Uzbeks, who are considered Islamists.

New figures, Monolov's younger brother, for example, claimed to dispute the mullah's religious monopoly and openly proclaimed their ambitions to gain political power. Furthermore, the village had recently experienced a new phenomenon: recurrent visits from proselytizing pilgrims. One day, a villager invited me to come to the mosque: "Come, there are pilgrims who will be at the mosque. They wear Arab and Pakistani clothes and all that."

The young pilgrims agreed to meet me. Their discourse was very different from the Muslims I had met before in Central Asia. They showed no wariness and explained their devotion to Islam. For several weeks, these young urban men were sent on the roads to re-Islamicize the country. Their leader told me, "We are *Dawadchillar*; (missionaries) we go to villages to talk and to explain the beneficial role of Islam; we try to bring young people with us at least to the next village so they understand our approach and are open to something other than what they have heard in their own village. Some continue the journey with us."

Their presence fascinated some young people in the village, while others wanted nothing to do with them. Melis told me, "I don't like them because they come here to tell us what to do, they tell you what is good and bad, what is Muslim and what's not. For the most part, they are city people who want to explain tradition to us."

The revival of Islam fits into a vast movement of re-Islamization in the region but also into an international context of unprecedented tensions, particularly after 11 September 2001. Kyrgyzstan has since become the focus of international attention, along with neighboring Afghanistan. The kidnapping of Japanese tourists in 2002, allegedly by Islamist groups in the south of the country (in the Batken region), contributed to creating an international image of a potential Islamist hotbed.

Islam has thus become an immaterial resource of growing power but also of financial means through local fundraising (*zakat*) and especially through connections made to the outside world to tap into money from globalized Islam. No one could claim to have power over Islam, and heightened competition exists among several religious figures to embody "true Islam." This situation has also increased conflict within villages.

In spite of Islam's supremacy, other types of beliefs also coexist. Many villagers visit their *koz atchik* (seer) for various misfortunes (physical and personnal).[19]

The Rise of NGOs and the Development of Private Enterprise

Lastly, the emergence of another relatively recent social figure on the local scene must be mentioned. In the village of Togolok Moldo, the presence of NGOs was still fairly discreet in 2001. The process of NGOs taking root in the society began with the privatization of water use. In each Kyrgyz village, an association of water users was supposed to take over from the state to distribute water to farmers. Like everywhere else in the country, the Kolmo association functioned following a market model where users had to pay the *Murab*[20] to have access to water to irrigate their land. The *Murab* talked to me while flipping through a small handbook entitled *Managing Water Resources*: "We received a grant to create this association, and I went to a training seminar with David from California, who came to explain to us how we should organize things." The *Murab* received training through an American cooperation program (USAID) run by an NGO, Chemonix. The association had also responded to a World Bank program to restore the small dam on the stream that supplied water for the fields in the valley. The *Murab* described the situation in the village with a touch of humor: "The system used to be very centralized; now I'm in charge of water in the village, but Washington decides! [Laughs] Because, without aid, how could we build and maintain infrastructures?"

The *Murab* had become particularly important in the village since farming had taken on a greater role. His official vehicle, a Lada Niva, which

came as part of the aid granted by the World Bank, attested to his new status. He explained, "I try not to act like an apparatchik, and people respect me."

He conveys a new ideology encouraging individual initiative and responsibility in contrast with bureaucratic action, which was necessarily parasitical. His office, which he was rarely in, was near the mayor's. A computer with a USAID sticker sat conspicuously on his desk. The new object, symbolizing change, was still wrapped in plastic, and the *Murab* preferred to use his old accounting notebooks and his abacus.

Zamir, the chief of the village, for his part complained of a situation where the local authorities did not have the means to maintain collective infrastructures and confided, "At the town hall, I inherited debt, and we don't have any NGOs helping us. Frankly, it is becoming a problem because I don't have the necessary budget to do things because all the money goes through the hands of the NGOs. They don't trust us, yet I'm the one who knows everything that needs to be done here. Look at the Murab who has a computer even if he doesn't know how to use it … and a car … and I don't have anything, just a secretary with her old typewriter."

I decided to go to the neighboring village, Kurtka, to meet the people in charge of the local NGO Shepherd's Life, working to develop tourism around the lake. I arrived in front of a large house bustling with activity and people. A young boy guided me to a courtyard, where women were sitting weaving rugs. Narguiza, the owner of the house, was giving instructions. She stopped to explain to me that she had created her association in 1995 with help from the Swiss NGO Helvetas: "We had several types of activities, and I took many training courses for women's activities. First there was the 'vegetable' activity, where Helvetas taught us to develop small private productions and to draw up a business plan. Then they helped us develop cheese production, but that didn't work very well. Next we developed local crafts by making traditional rugs (*Shardak*) or kalpaks that we sold through an NGO's commercial network based in Kochkor." This group of women, called Umut, was financially successful to a certain extent. Narguiza repeated the arguments given in the Helvetas brochure showing the importance of developing activities for Kyrgyz women. This group of twelve women gathered at her home to make traditional objects. They received a microloan for developing arts and crafts. Umut was part of the Altyn Kol NGO network based in Kochkor, which was handling marketing and distribution of the objects they made. During our first trip to Song Kol Lake, it was Narguiza and her husband's tourist camp we had come across. They started their Shepherd's Life tourism activity in 2000, in the framework of this network organized by Helvetas. She explained, "I have six yurts on the lake, and we have more and more tourists, especially

Europeans. We work with other NGOs who organize a complete circuit for Western tourists who want to go trekking."

Narguiza talked about activities uniting women in an egalitarian manner, but I noticed that she was the only one talking and there was clearly a hierarchy among the different actors. Her house was not merely a place to get together; it was truly the territory of a new female Kyrgyz entrepreneur. She put forth the women's activities, which were one of the Swiss NGO's main priorities. However, although she talked openly about the idea of an egalitarian group of women, her house was above all the place of a family business. The couple ran their multiple businesses together in close collaboration. Her husband was omnipresent in the women's business. He too had converted to the new market economy. He was in the midst of supervising the unloading of water conveyance pipes that would be used by his private company in the village when he joined our conversation, taking over from his wife to explain the way he managed their new activities. His wife's role was emphasized in the relations they had with the Swiss NGO, but he felt just as involved in her activities. He was particularly proud of the tourism development partnership with Helvetas and invited me to accompany him to the pastures to see how the camp had evolved.

So I was off to the pastures again to observe the development of tourism. When we arrived, a man with a long mustache and a woman in her fifties came out of a yurt when they heard our car arriving. As soon as the couple saw me parking my vehicle, they quickly ducked back into the yurt and came back out a few minutes later dressed up in traditional Kyrgyz garb. In light of the comical situation, Narguiza's husband explained that the tourists needed to have the impression that they were living with and as Kyrgyz shepherds. They then showed me the setup inside the yurts, which had been adapted to a certain level of Western comfort. On a low table, there was a menu in English proposing traditional Kyrgyz dishes. In collaboration with the Swiss NGO, everything had been made to fit Western norms and standards to ensure service corresponding to Western travelers' criteria. We sat down around the table and continued our discussion over a good meal. After dinner, I went outside to smoke a cigarette. The mustached man taking care of the camp was visibly pleased to find a fellow smoker and came to smoke with me. As we smoked together, he took a bottle of vodka out of his *Chapan* (long coat) and offered to share it with me. He then started to question me in Russian, thrilled to be able to talk directly to a Westerner. He asked me to explain certain things that he could not understand about European tourists. He said, "You know, you people are strange! Sometimes I don't understand what you come looking for here. For example, we have a generator, but a Swiss asked me not to

use it because it wasn't traditional. So I can't really let it be seen because the tourists want to live like it was in the past—to live in the wild. … You'll see that if you stay here a couple of days with me, you'll be happy to have a generator; it's freezing here, and it's nice having electricity!"

I jumped at the occasion to ask him why he had gotten dressed up when we arrived and he said, "That's the way it is; I didn't write the script. I just follow the procedure for welcoming tourists. … And when I saw your blond head I thought you were another one of those Germans or Frenchmen who come here to go walking! When they arrive, we have to greet them in traditional costumes."

"Don't you find that a little ridiculous?" I asked him.

"I do, but I just do what I'm told. I earn good money and everyone is happy. Want some more vodka?"

These attitudes were not limited to putting on a show for tourists but also had implications on the perception individuals had of their own identity. Through these new contacts with tourists, certain tour guides changed the way they spoke about their identity (Pabion 2010).

Logics of Power: Appropriation, Plunder, and Capture of Resources

This local panorama makes it possible to draw up an initial inventory of the resources mobilized in Kyrgyz social life. In the Soviet system, most of the resources were inalienable. It was through a position in state institutions that certain individuals were granted positions of power. The chairman of a kolkhoz, the manager of a factory, warehouse, or store, temporarily appropriated the use of resources under their control. They had to respect the obligations of the State Planification, but they had room to maneuver and to dabble in various activities that were illegal but that everyone knew about. It was in these interstices that the social relations that made Soviet society function were developed. Positions of power were precarious in this system and could be revoked at any time.

The same logics of appropriation continued within state institutions in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. On the local level, certain sectors remained under state control. The role of Monolov, the former kolkhoz chairman, was exemplary in illustrating this socially internalized appropriation logic. By becoming forest manager, his position entailed duties toward the state, but it also granted a certain number of implicit rights, allowing him to exploit this resource for his personal use. He could recruit staff and redistribute or give access to this resource. Resources were subject to plunder before they were privatized. The so-called transition phase allowed indi-

viduals to accumulate capital within public institutions so that, when the time came, they could buy privatized companies. On the national level, former company chairmen were thus able to buy the means of production (cement works, factories, etc.) in the form of shares. Others received mining permits (in particular for coal). On the local level, different forms of plunder led to people getting rich quickly. In Togolok Moldo, nonrenewable resources, such as the means of production, were dismantled, then sold in China. Renewable resources, such as herds, went mainly to individuals who could reinvest their capital in new activities, such as commerce. This logic of plunder was decisive in preparing the following steps: privatization and the appropriation of resources.

In the mid-1990s, most of the resources were thus privatized at the local level. A whole set of flows reorganized social life, and material and immaterial resources circulated between Kyrgyzstan and the rest of the world. Movable and immovable property thus became alienable resources. It was an unprecedented phenomenon given its scope, and it took place in a society in which few resources could be mobilized. It was then, essentially, that the logics of capturing external resources developed, such as the various commercial activities related to importing goods from Russia, China, and Turkey. Locally, the most visible aspect was the development of little shops sprouting up in villages everywhere.

The liberalization process did not only entail the privatization of local resources. Certain forms of activity were related to ties formed outside the country. Everyone was trying to get a finger in the transnational pie. Resources, which had become decisive elements in the reorganization of social hierarchy, were up for grabs. On the local level, people attempted to tap into resources that had suddenly become available. The *moldo* goes looking for Saudi Arabian support to build his mosque, the *Murab* appeals to USAID and the World Bank to maintain his irrigation network, new businessmen come on the scene and organize various forms of trafficking and trade with China. Former kolkhoz members create local NGOs and launch projects to reel in international aid. The recent proliferation of local NGOs, of which there are apparently more than fifteen thousand, is probably the phenomenon that best illustrates this logic of resource appropriation.

All of these logics have significant repercussions on the organization of power. So far, I have deliberately spoken about authority figures in the broad sense of the word, with the intention of insisting on how embedded the different compartments of social life are. This is not only a local issue; it also depends on a more general political context. It is time to jump back in time to a founding moment in the Kyrgyz national political order.

Notes

1. His full name is Stalin.
2. It is a variation of Buzkhazi described by Joseph Kessel in *The Horsemen.* Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, 1968, London.
3. Acronym meaning an association for working the land collectively (*tavarishchesvo po sovmestnoi obrabotke zemli*).
4. Few Russians settled in this region. In 2000, there were still a few Russian fishermen during the summer. In the village, people recall two Russians sent to develop pig farming. They have since left the village, and pigs have disappeared from the local landscape.
5. The term means "camp" in Kyrgyz and has now taken on the sense of "village."
6. It was built in 1993.
7. Articles published in 1995–96 in *Ayil turmusho* (Village Life), a regional weekly newspaper.
8. Equaling half a hectare or 1.24 acres per person.
9. One sheep for three years of work; one head of cattle or one horse for six years of work.
10. There were 30,000 sheep in 1990, and 13,000 in 1995.
11. Merino sheep were ill suited to the climate conditions at high elevations, requiring costly infrastructures, such as heated sheep barns and considerable veterinary care.
12. Fifty percent of the Kyrgyz forests have allegedly been cut down in the last 20 years.
13. More than 80 percent rural.
14. In the post-Soviet space, it is common to speak of a form of social capital in "administrative resources," given the role of bureaucracy.
15. Majority tribe in the Aktalaa region.
16. A public company with a monopoly on gold mining.
17. In particular the Muslim World League (MWL) and Rabita, a foundation with strong ties to the Saudi kingdom. Its goal is to spread Islamic teaching and participate in uniting the Muslim world.
18. Southerners.
19. They are generally women. Furthermore, a whole set of therapists drawing from different registers (astrology, bioenergetic extrasens, etc.) have developed throughout the country.
20. Name referring to the irrigator's traditional role.

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