

Thesis title: Ethnic boundaries in Kyrgyzstan- the place for preserving identity, sharing memories and initiating conflicts. Case study: Kurd and Dungan ethnic groups.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the lives of two ethnicities in Kyrgyzstan, their history of evolution, territorial conditions and possibilities for inter-ethnic conflicts with the Kyrgyz majority, from the perspective of living within ethnic boundaries. For the comparative analysis I have chosen two minority groups: *Kurds* and *Dungans*. My main reason for choosing these ethnic groups in particular is their tendency to create ethnic boundary space and their involvements in inter-ethnic conflicts. (It is crucial to mention that these groups do not experience conflict with each other, but rather with other ethnic groups.) I propose that living in the village of one's own ethnicity makes family ties stronger, preserves cultural features and helps members cope with outside problems, including interethnic conflicts. Since Kyrgyzstan is a polyethnic country, the closed ethnic communities may serve as both a source of conflict and as a shelter for minorities.

My field work was conducted during the summer of 2015. I investigated why people live in specific areas, how they choose the territories they occupy, and how this relates to their everyday lives. Other questions I was interested in were: What are the particular challenges of living in an ethnically-bound community? Do community members feel discriminated against or anticipate possibilities for conflict situations among major groups and minor groups? I paid attention to these questions because closed communities and ethnic boundary space can be viewed as providing protection against possible clashes with other ethnic groups; furthermore, the sharing of culture could be seen as an advantage to living in such a community. I discovered that political and economic benefits provoke people to instigate conflict situations. However, while politics or economics are the real case for these conflicts, in the majority of cases, ethnicity functions as important kindling for causing conflict situations to flare up.

**Key words:** identity, ethnic group, ethnic boundary, Kurds, Dungans

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*From the experience of writing this thesis I learnt how to convert different strategies of collecting data and how to apply it into academic work. Moreover, I found the way of writing chapter by chapter during one year more advantageous to do, rather than writing everything at once, which is more time consuming.*

*Of course, the most important part of the work is people.*

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Finding a research topic for my thesis

Ethnicity, and all of its components, is a very sensitive topic and, at the same time, one of the first steps for triggering tension in a multi-ethnic country. Generally speaking the current situation of inter-ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan is stable, depending on the political situation in the country. Nevertheless, history recalls many terrific and considerably violent rivalries that were ethnically grounded, including the revolutions of 2005 and 2010.

Living in this multiethnic society, I have unwittingly become involved in the lives of many ethnic groups. This has shaped who I am. Since I belong to one of the minority groups in this nation (the Tatars), I have become particularly concerned over the inter-ethnic conflict situation in Kyrgyzstan.

During the dominion of the Soviet Union, many ethnic minorities' settlements were concentrated in specific areas due to several reasons, which will be outlined later in this introduction chapter. Tracing the experience of living in Kyrgyzstan and the State's position I assumed that it would be interesting to know the current situation of some ethnic groups who still live in their ethnic space and to collect historical memories about their emergence in their occupied lands. I was particularly interested in two minority groups: repressed *Kurd* and *Dungan* communities from the former Soviet Union, and a separate group of Dungans, whose ancestors previously fled from China. I would like to clarify now that my emphasis is on investigating Post-Soviet Kurds, but not those from Syria, Iraq and Iran. Thus, in this master thesis I will explore how particular deported and repressed ethnic minorities live nowadays in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and what challenges and opportunities they face while living in suburban areas.

I changed my topic twice to arrive at an issue that appeared interesting to me. The process of narrowing down my topic also took some time, because I was deciding from which perspective I wanted to investigate minority groups. I decided on a spatial perspective and its relation to an ethnic group's economic, cultural and social situation. I limited the numbers of minority groups as well. My original plan was to investigate

five, but it was too much. I then focused on three. However, I still could not grasp all aspects of each group's culture and was advised by my professors to limit it to two so, I could conduct a comparative analysis. In the end, I chose the Kurds and Dungans. Why them, in particular? Kyrgyzstan is a place where one can still find ethnic minorities who live in territories that symbolically and historically have belonged to them. These minorities have close and strong relative ties and, in some cases, economic incentives keeping them together. Kurds and Dungans are two of those ethnic groups who live within ethnic boundaries, and who have been most frequently mentioned in local newspapers and in daily life in regards to their involvement with inter-ethnic conflict. Among the ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan, these two groups are also the only who do not have their own land/republic/state. They are the most dependent and vulnerable (with the exception of Uighurs). However, even Uighurs have autonomous territory in China, calls Xin Zyan. This vulnerability made them particularly interesting as the subjects of interethnic conflict. One final factor that led me to choose these groups specifically was access in the field. I was familiar with representatives of the Kurd and Dungan minorities and I knew working with them would allow for the most trustful environment during fieldwork. Ultimately, my clear understanding of the opportunities and possibilities for doing fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan helped guide this process.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The main objective of my research is to investigate everyday life, as well as the implicit threat or risk of being an inhabitant within an ethnic boundary. Furthermore, I am wondering how the representatives of ethnic villages preserve their culture, religion and whether they feel secure living close to each other. The research question that is going to be answered in this thesis is: **Why do Dungan and Kurd minorities live in the rural areas in Kyrgyzstan? In these areas, what are the advantages and challenges minorities confront in relation to their living conditions?**

## **1.3 Structure of the thesis**

The given thesis has the following structure:

In the first chapter I provide a brief overview of my topic, including: 1) the ethnic-based situation in Kyrgyzstan, 2) research questions for the thesis which stand at the core of the study, 3) the core conditions of Kyrgyzstan's formation as a multi-ethnic state, 4)



the general historical context referring back to Soviet Union times, including the rigorous events happening during Soviet Union rule and end with 5) a description of the recent situation in Kyrgyzstan as an independent country and how it deals with the inter-ethnic conflicts. I end with this point in order to provide an impression of the current state of affairs and to be able to relate it with the data material in following chapters. Finally 6) I give small descriptions of both ethnic groups (Kurds and Dungans) in order to provide the reader with the historical and cultural backgrounds of these ethnicities.

In Chapter Two, I review the theoretical basis for this work, though the thesis mainly relies on one theory, which is Fredrik Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries. Barth perceives these boundaries as a social phenomenon. According to Barth's theory on ethnic groups and boundaries, forming discrete units of people is one way of preserving one's culture<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, ethnic boundaries with geographical and social isolation sustain cultural diversity in particular regions of the country. However, people from those ethnic units can easily move and have contact with other groups there through adopting others' norms and habits. These kinds of interaction help particular discrete groups of people to preclude acts of misunderstanding, which can easily lead to violence and conflict. Therefore the principle of enculturation is highly spread in Kyrgyzstan. Inspired by Barth, another researcher Chai Sun- Ki carried the idea of social boundaries further and developed it in more of an economic direction. Some of his theoretical ideas will be presented as well. Supplementary theories discussed in this chapter include Berghe's theory of assimilation and Ravenstein's theory of migration.

In the third chapter, I acquaint the reader with my methodology or framework for collecting empirical data. The given thesis relies on data collected during my fieldwork where methodology played an important role. Techniques such as interview, photography, participant and non-participant observation were used in order to obtain necessary information. The methodology part is based on an ethnographic approach, which became a fundamental part of my research work. Data collection involved reading secondary sources including articles from the local newspapers and books given to me by my respondents.

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<sup>1</sup> Barth, F., (1969), reissued 1998, *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc p.11.

The fourth chapter contains reflective analysis of the empirical data. In this part the empirical data will be linked to the theoretical framework and discussed. That will be done in order to see to what extent theory corresponds to the current situation in Kyrgyzstan.

Finally, the conclusion chapter provides the reader with an overview of the whole thesis and underlines its main points. It is again addresses and discusses the research questions and gives a final assessment of my findings.

## **1.4 Overview**

As was mentioned above, Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic country. All people apparently live in tolerance and friendship. Nevertheless, behind that external tolerance we can observe anger, jealousy and biased attitudes toward different minority groups. Multiethnic Kyrgyzstan has different places where particular ethnic groups are concentrated. For instance Uighurs and Uzbeks call their territory *Mahallya*, others by the name of the village itself. Dungans and Kurds both live in the closed spatial territories, usually in the suburban areas.

These ethnic groups are minorities, while the ethnic majority is spread all over Kyrgyzstan. However, peaceful situations among the minority and majority groups vary. Different cases of interethnic violence and clashes have occurred during different periods. An example is the revolution that took place in April 2010, which started with governmental instability, riots and looting and ended with interethnic conflict between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz ethnic groups. Other ethnic minorities later became involved. Many people suffered from both sides.<sup>2</sup> We can observe significant cases of violence between other ethnic groups but they find rare reflection in mass media and insufficient attention from law enforcement authorities. In some cities of Kyrgyzstan it is possible to find a place where a particular ethnic minority has been living for a long period of time. Usually, these territories include villages or streets highly populated by one minority group. Such villages can be possible sites for intergroup rivalries and interethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Putz, C., (2015), "Remembering Kyrgyzstan's Revolutions, Two revolutions in ten years, is Kyrgyzstan any better off?" <<http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/remembering-kyrgyzstans-revolutions/> Accessed: 09-02-16.

conflicts. The reason for these conflicts is easy access to each other's territory, which becomes targeted because aggressors know where each particular ethnic group is located. On the other hand, ethnic boundaries can also provide shelter and a secure community during a conflict situation. It is interesting to investigate how a territorially closed space helps people preserve and sustain their cultures and traditions.

The concept of the "segregated area" or "boundary" is usually associated with a territory surrounded by walls or fences. However, in Kyrgyzstan one can find villages or streets where a particular ethnic group is allocated, but there are no walls. In Kyrgyzstan the concept of a boundary is more symbolic. If in Israel's case the Palestinian border is demarcated with a physical wall, then ethnic borders in Kyrgyzstan are more figurative.

During different periods of time, including World War II, repressions, rebellions and other revolts, Kyrgyzstan became a shelter for many ethnic groups. Those groups became deeply attached to the ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan. Most of the closely concentrated groups who live in particular territories are Dungans (Hui Zu), Kurds, Uzbeks, Uighurs, Dargins and some others.

## **1.5 Background**

The Soviet Union was one of the most international empires in the world. More than twenty-eight ethno-administrative units co-existed with varying cuisines, costumes, music, dance, languages, religious backgrounds, though they all called themselves "Soviets"<sup>3</sup>. Movement from republic to republic was very easy, because there were no borders or police control between borders. Everyone was mixed and there was no particular homogeneous republic. After the collapse of the Soviet Union while borders were randomly marked, many people who belonged to certain ethnic groups may have ended up displaced from their original ethnic state.

Kyrgyzstan is situated in Central Asia and has borders with China in the East, Kazakhstan in the North, Tajikistan in the South and Uzbekistan in the West. The

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<sup>3</sup>National geographic, (1976), Peoples of the Soviet Union Map,  
< <http://www.natgeomaps.com/peoples-of-the-soviet-union-map>>

country is surrounded by mountains and has seven regions (oblast). They are Naryn, Talas, Osh, Chu, Batken, Issyk-kul and Jalal- Abad. Each region contains its own valuable natural resources. Kyrgyzstan is one of fifteen republics that received independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Since then, statistics shows that Kyrgyzstan became home to more than 100 minority groups by 2012 and considers itself a multi-ethnic republic.<sup>4</sup> On the surface, this republic appears harmonious; however, when people of different ethnic groups live in close proximity and develop sufferings toward each other, conflict emerges. Usually it happens at the local level, starting with a simple fight between two representatives from different ethnicities. However, these fights can escalate, as occurred in cases such as the great massacres between the Kyrgyz majority and the Uzbek ethnic group which is considered to be the most numerous among minority groups. Conducted in Osh city in 1990 and 2010, these events involved conflict on a governmental level.<sup>5</sup> In most situations government does not pay meaningful attention to small-scale conflicts, which happen in the local settings like villages. Many people from minority groups have returned from Kyrgyzstan to their ethnic lands and changed their citizenships in order to avoid discrimination or experience conflict. Still the majorities of people has their families in Kyrgyzstan and are not ready to move yet.

One of the strong reasons for the high number of non-mixed and closely-knit ethnic groups is clannish, closed and sometimes marked communities. In Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, there are different streets and villages associated with each particular ethnic group. In 2012 the State Committee of National Security (SCNS) recorded 147 clashes of inter-ethnic conflicts, twenty-nine of which were particularly dangerous. The head of SCNS accused local authorities, of not engaging in conflict prevention and of lacking dialogue with the local population.<sup>6</sup> Many clashes took place as a result of a poor economic situation and political instability.

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<sup>4</sup> Abdykalykov, (2009), *Population and Housing Census of the Kyrgyz Republic of 2009*: Book I, "Main social and demographic characteristics of population and number of housing units," Bishkek, p.10, 18.

<sup>5</sup> Sidorenko.A, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan: Initial Coverage of the "Osh Massacre"  
<<http://globalvoicesonline.org/2010/06/13/kyrgyzstan-uzbekistan-initial-coverage-of-the-osh-massacre/>> Access date: 05-09-2015

<sup>6</sup> Shustov,A., "Kyrgyzstan: new wave of inter-ethnic conflict", 2012,  
<<http://www.fondsk.ru/pview/2012/02/21/kirgizia-novaya-volna-mezhetnicheskih-stolknovenij-12944.html#>> Access date: 05-09-2015

### 1.5.1 Soviet Union time: Repressed and deported

Governments, law and authority agencies play an important role in regulating most civil societies. During Stalin's regime, the Soviet Union suffered a terrible loss of more than two million people who were deported by NKVD-MVD (Peoples Commissariat of Internal Affairs- Ministry of Internal Affairs). Stalin was the leader of the Soviet Union from 1920 until 1953. He occupied the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Moreover, he is well known as a dictator. Stalin's regime of 'massive repressions' lasted from 1937 – 1953. During this time, Stalin was able to deport thirteen ethnic minorities to Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Siberia, and the Urals. The decrees of the Soviet Union Government cleansed these ethnicities from the most strategic areas. Most of the repressed people were followers of Islam. As mentioned above, the main concept of the USSR was to be equal and create unified belief by encouraging citizens to abandon previous faiths. Besides Karachays, the regime also deported Kalmyks, Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Georgian Kurds, Khemshils (who were Muslim Armenians) and Pontic Greeks. Soviet Koreans, Finns and Germans were deported, as well. No one paid attention to these deportations; instead the authorities concerned themselves with personal/individual and national rights, following the decrees of Stalin. In the *Journal of Genocide Research*, Pohl J.O recounts the reasons for repression and deportation of those minority groups:

“The Soviet leadership justified these mass expulsions by claiming that the deported nations were inherently treasonous and disloyal to the Soviet state. The true motivation for the deportation, however, was ethnic not political.”<sup>7</sup>

The phenomena of repression and deportation left deplorable stamps on the history of the USSR. In my work, these terms are core concepts. The two minorities underlined in my thesis suffered much from being repressed and deported. Even if the historical diasporas of Kurds and Dungans happened during different time periods, the psychic condition and life after deportation remain partially common.<sup>8</sup> From my point of view,

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<sup>7</sup> Pohl, O. J., (2000), “Stalin's genocide against the ‘Repressed Peoples’”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2:2, p.267, < <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713677598>> Accessed: 19-01-2016 08:58 UTC.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the interviews with ethnic groups conducted during summer 2016

investigating common features and suffering processes of two absolutely different minority groups creates a possibility to see that time and space does not influence behavioral features of the ruling elite, as well as the people who were subjected to suffering.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term “repression” means to “suppress someone against ones will, and to use force in order to control acts and consciousness of people.”<sup>9</sup> By repressing both Kurds and Dungans, the country’s authorities forcefully deported people without any rational reason from their home country to Central Asia. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term “deportation” means “forceful exile from the country.” Sources state that first deportation of Kurd people from Armenia and Azerbaijan dates back to 1937, and from Georgia, to 1944. J.Otto Pohl gives his opinion on Stalin’s regime:

“Stalin’s regime deprived these people of their ancestral homelands and the right to publish and receive education in their native language. Stalin aimed to destroy these ethnic groups as viable and distinct cultures through a combination of mass exile and forced assimilation.”<sup>10</sup>

Millions of people lost their homes, were forced to leave, and experienced tremendous suffering.

Nevertheless, Stalin was not the only leader to impose harsh elements in his regime. While the Kurds suffering is mostly connected to Stalin’s deportations, Dungans were deported during the Chinese oppression of 1871. It was a challenge for me to find proper sources for investigating this case of oppression, because not all Chinese sources are translated into English. From the found sources, I discovered that the Dungan minority (Hui\*), was negatively branded by the Han majority in China. Dungan people were repressed by the Han and after being defeated in 1871, fled to Kyrgyzstan in this same year. (Further details regarding this account will be clarified in the succeeding paragraphs.)

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<sup>9</sup> Brown, L., (1993), *The new shorter Oxford English dictionary on historical principles*, New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

<sup>10</sup> Pohl O. J., (2000), “Stalin’s genocide against the ‘Repressed Peoples’”, *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2:2, p.268, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713677598>> Accessed: 19-01-2016 08:58 UTC.

Both ethnic groups were separated from their relatives and spread to empty lands in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. Most of the families were lucky to be hosted by Kyrgyz or Russian families in rural areas. Rural areas of Kyrgyzstan are usually concentrated close to mountains or fields. Specific territories were very suitable for the lifestyles of both minorities. Kurds are more pastoralists. Living in the mountainous areas was advantageous for the Kurds' cattle breeding, which produces milk, sour cream, cheese and meat for consumption and trade. In contrast, Dungans are agriculturalists and after being settled in the center of Bishkek City, they asked for permission to move to territory with more fertile soil. Nevertheless, Dungans being professionals in the field of agriculture turned empty lots into productive villages with huge rice fields.

The places with compact settlements for Dungans and Kurds are approximately 50 – 70 km from the city center. Though the Soviet Union was proud of having multicultural and multiethnic republics, it still had a violent attitude towards many ethnic minority groups like Meskhetian Turks, Balkars, Ingush, Crimean Tatars, Chechen, and Kurds. Stalin labeled the majority of these ethnicities “enemies of the nation.”<sup>11</sup> After being deported, those ethnic minorities remained together in communities, thus preserving their language, culture and religion. Historically, deported ethnic groups formed their ethnic spaces in Kyrgyzstan, which can be easily recognized by compact settlement of a specific ethnic group until present day, taking into account globalization and high migration.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, minority groups already settled and existed in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Particularly in Bishkek and its sub-urban areas, one can immediately recognize Turkish from Dungan, Uzbek, Uighur, Russian, German and also other groups of ethnic minorities who settled or were deported during the Soviet Union's regime. However, after the Soviet Union had collapsed, ethnic rivalries started to develop. Various reasons were responsible for this, including groups wanting to have higher positions in society and some others aiming to occupy more territories. Those who managed to assimilate with local people were less likely to be intimidated or

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<sup>11</sup> “Enemy of nation,” or “vrag naroda,” was an expression used during the Soviet Union time when government saw a betrayer in the face of a nation or a person.

discriminated against. However, even those who assimilated were subjected to involvement in conflicts.

Violent conflicts between ethnic groups took place in Kyrgyzstan during the Tulip Revolution in 2005<sup>12</sup> and in June of 2010.<sup>13</sup> These events suggest that ethnic minority groups are strongly rooted to their ethnicities, likely triggering the majority population to attack them. Even if the official reason was politicized, the ethnic hostility toward one another churned below the surface during these events.

### 1.5.2 Recent inter-ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan

I will now discuss the recent inter-ethnic conflicts that have taken place during the last twenty-four years in independent Kyrgyzstan. I will focus on the ethnic conflict happening on the governmental level and then will quickly review ethnic violence directed at minority groups.

In his work, Melvin looks back on ethnic tensions that developed in Kyrgyzstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He emphasizes the main causes and consequences of these violent situations. Melvin's article threads through the political timeline of the country and how politics, in a way, brought ethnic violence to the surface.<sup>14</sup> Since the USSR had a weak attention to the national recognition, cultural dignity, and other forms of inclusivity, which could keep its multi-cultural society strong, a complex and contradictory process of systemic transformation, modernization and reconstruction began of the soviet society, which intensified in the second half of the 80s.<sup>15</sup> That was a result of the strong wave of national formation in most post-Soviet Republics like Moldova, Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan among others. Isajiw mentions that after 1945 many countries experienced economic

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<sup>12</sup> Melvin, N., (2011), "Promoting a Stable and multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence", *Open Society Foundation*, New York, p.12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.25.

<sup>14</sup> Melvin, N., (2011), "Promoting a Stable and multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence", *Open Society Foundation*, New York, pp 8-54.

<sup>15</sup> Omukeyeva, D., (2003), "Ethnonational politics of the modern Kyrgyz State," (*Etnonatsionalnaya politika sovremennogo Kirgizskogo gosudarstva*), Moscow, <<http://www.dissercat.com/content/etnonatsionalnaya-politika-sovremennogo-kyrgyzskogo-gosudarstva>> Accessed: 07-02-2016.



and political discrimination, which led to inter-ethnic conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Later, in 1990, the wave of revolutions and nation recognition, which concerned former Soviet Union nations, flamed up again. Each nation state had a majority of people who belonged to a particular ethnic group. In that sense, Kyrgyzstan proclaimed indigenous people of the country a “titular” nation.<sup>17</sup>

From 1991, Kyrgyzstan headed by its first and former President Askar Akaev started to rise up to reclaim personal ethnic identities. Due to the unifying force of Soviet identity, people had omitted their own culture, history, language and religion while under occupation. All of these aspects of identity had previously been under governmental control. Independence gave people freedom and self- recognition. Ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan started in the southern part of the country. In Osh, the second largest city where the majority of the population is made up of Uzbeks, the Kyrgyz population demanded land, which triggered local authorities to declare the Uzbek language as the official language of the country as contra step. This steered the “titular” population to attack the Uzbeks. Moreover, Uzbeks were unhappy that the vast majority of high positions in the government and even seats in the local administration were given to the Kyrgyz people. Observing these conflicts happening in the South, other ethnic minorities like Slavic and other Russian- speaking communities (the majority of the population by 1990), emigrated from the country.

In the aftermath of these conflicts, Askar Akaev’s goal was to establish balance and decide how to protect minority groups. However, even the creation of the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan did not stop ethnic minorities from fleeing the country. Due to repression of the Kyrgyz identity during USSR period, the Kyrgyz language was stated to be the state language in 1989 and its popularization spread intensively. Speaking the Kyrgyz language became a major requirement for people to take up high positions, so minorities who could not speak Kyrgyz could not apply for presidential chair or other positions in the government. However, in 2001 through the constitutional amendment, the Russian language became official as the nation’s most

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<sup>16</sup> Isajiw, W., (2000), “Approaches to ethnic conflict resolution: paradigms and principles”, *International journal of Intercultural relations*, Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, p.106, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Melvin N., (2011), “Promoting a Stable and multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence”, *Open Society Foundation*, New York, pp 8-54.

widespread and used language. Still, privileges were given to the ‘titular’ nation. In 2005 Kyrgyzstan experienced the Tulip Revolution, which removed Askar Akaev’s regime.<sup>18</sup> As Melvin claimed: “Many of the new political leaders who had overthrown Akaev were from the south and openly advocated strongly Kyrgyz nationalist views, causing considerable disquiet amongst, national minorities.”<sup>19</sup>

The revolution did not reveal its consequences related to ethnic violence until February of 2005. This time the clash happened in the Dungan village of Iskra. News reported that almost 30 homes were destroyed and more than twenty people were injured. Several incidents based on ethnicity involved Kurdish, Meskhetian and Uighur communities as well. Later that year in April 2005 in the town of Tokmok “anti-governmental protests took place and turned into pogroms against ethnic Dungans and Uighurs.”<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately, there was no reaction from the government side regarding these protests. Security and police services were highly corrupted and became instruments for suppressing minority concerns. Escalation of inter-ethnic conflicts remained the same until 2010.

In April of 2010, Kurmanbek Bakiev (the former president of Kyrgyzstan) was overthrown because of his clannish corruption and crime. Bakiev did not continue to develop the peace-building avenues between ethnicities begun by Akaev. Therefore, in June 2010 after the second revolution ethnic conflict reached its full scale of violence centralizing in the Southern region of the country. The clash happened between Kyrgyz and Uzbek ethnic groups. The data given last August 2010 by the General Prosecutor's Office which was published by the Central Asian informational agency <[www.fergana.com](http://www.fergana.com)>, stated that in Southern Kyrgyzstan, the damage and destruction of properties exclusively belonged to ethnic Uzbeks. Surprisingly, with this incident, only 29 Kyrgyz people were imprisoned compared to the 213 Uzbeks.<sup>21</sup> Perpetrators

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>20</sup> Melvin, N., (2011), “Promoting a Stable and multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence”, *Open Society Foundation*, New York, p.16.

<sup>21</sup> Official figures released in August indicate that of the 368 dead who had been identified up to that point, there were 93 Kyrgyz and 204 Uzbek, one other nationality and 59 unaccounted for. “Kyrgyzstan: Genprokuratura v pervye sobshchila ob etnicheskom sostave pogibshikh vo vremia “oshskikh sobytii”, a takzhe arestovannykh posle nikh,” [www.ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghana.ru), August 16, 2010.

targeted people, properties and settlements to indicate ethnic identity by daubing graffiti on the doors of the houses. It is important to mention that not all districts were destroyed; some were only slightly damaged in order to escalate fear and demonstrate control over land. Therefore, it appears as if this violence was carefully planned, since the actions appear to have been organized.

In my opinion, ethnic settlements or boundaries played a crucial role as an indicator for attack. However, they also served as a marker for developing a collective defense. Such cooperation was used among the neighbors of the victims in the neighborhood. At their own risk, they hosted and accommodated suffering people who were critically injured.<sup>22</sup> Unstable and unexamined ethnic policy may be a central cause in the violence toward ethnic minorities. Starting from 1990 the government did not pay proper attention to reducing ethnic tensions. To support the majority, politicians promised lands, leaving minorities behind who in fact were also citizens of Kyrgyzstan and had all the laws to claim recognition of lands and rights. I understand why Kyrgyz-positive nationalism continues to be promoted since it is crucial in maintaining the Kyrgyz state. Nevertheless minorities form almost 50% of the whole population, so the majority needs to be aware that the land, power and other domains should be divided equally.

Isajiw suggested several solutions for overcoming ethnic conflicts. One of them is to offer territorial autonomy to...each ethnic group<sup>23</sup>. Under this solution, special consideration is taken to ensure that autonomy is offered to citizens and not illegal immigrants. A similar case happened in Kyrgyzstan when Uzbeks demanded autonomy, but this only influenced a further grudge from Kyrgyz side. Also, Isajiw mentioned recognition of language and culture as legitimate subjects to be implemented in the educational plan at schools. I want to emphasize the author's next point most.; he defines recognition as: "recognition given by redress of historical

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<sup>22</sup> Pannier, B., "A Hero in Osh," [www.rferl.org](http://www.rferl.org), August 20, 2010, [http://www.rferl.org/content/A\\_Hero\\_In\\_Osh\\_/2133354.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/A_Hero_In_Osh_/2133354.html). The story of how one Kyrgyz man in a mixed area protected some 30 Uzbeks in his house "Geroi Osha," [www.freedolina.net](http://www.freedolina.net), July 9, 2010, <http://www.freedolina.net/hero/95-geroi-osh.html>

<sup>23</sup> Isajiw, W. (2000), "Approaches to ethnic conflict resolution: paradigms and principles", *International journal of Intercultural relations*, Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.

injustice done to a group”<sup>24</sup> . No doubt, the exact nature of recognition depends on a country and its political and economic situation. Still, removing ethnic violence and creating peace can lead to prosperity and high economic and cultural growth. Self – determination and legitimate approach to all actions must be strictly appreciated.

In contrast, Melvin highlighted a way to solve the problem through integration. Integration can play a crucial role in inter-ethnic relations. The government needs to give minorities a possibility to participate in public affairs and follow human rights.<sup>25</sup> It also needs to promptly prevent any ethnic tensions. Thus ethnicity should not be taken into the consideration while solving ethnic conflict, but rather attention should be paid to law obedience. If the police start to suppress conflict immediately after it happens, and their actions are influenced by biased attitude, the conflict can easily go unnoticed and will not be recognized nationally,

From the above-mentioned examples we can clearly see how politics influences the way people think and how it can easily influence people in the country. Isajiw referring to Gurr said that “out of 127 countries in the world that Gurr examined, 75% had at least one, and many had more, highly politicized minorities.”<sup>26</sup> Isajiw, drawing from historical analysis of multiethnic countries, stated that a country to be ruled by only one dominant ethnic group. This domination creates ethnic stratification where people perceive one group to be superior to others.<sup>27</sup> For example, the superior group in Kyrgyzstan is called the “titular” nation as written above. That phenomenon suggests that the rules and norms of the dominant group are superior, creating implications for the way educational, political and other national institutions are run. This may lead to a serious split in society and inter-ethnic tensions. This situation describes Kyrgyzstan who is still grappling with its past.

## **1.6 Dungans**

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p.121.

<sup>25</sup> Melvin, N., (2011), “Promoting a Stable and multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence”, *Open Society Foundation*, New York, p.46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.106.

<sup>27</sup> Isajiw. W (2000), “Approaches to ethnic conflict resolution: paradigms and principles”, *International journal of Intercultural relations*, Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, p.120.

In the following sections I will give brief descriptions of the Dungan and Kurd ethnic groups, the target communities examined in the given thesis. To understand the situation, it is crucial to not only know the background of the country, but also of the people, their culture, and history.

At the present time the largest percentage of the Dungan population lives in Kyrgyzstan. Statistics show that in 1999 there were 51,766 Dungan people living in the territory of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>28</sup> Compared to the statistics presented in 2015 by the Assembly of Nations of the Kyrgyz Republic, the number of Dungans in Kyrgyzstan has increased to 66,140 people. Others are settled in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and the rest still live in China.

Dungans are people from Central and Middle Asia. In the 19th century the area of Turkestan became a refuge for other peoples who sought security. At that time the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan became a shelter for thousands of Dungans (Chinese Muslims). The name “Dungan” came from the Turkic word "Dungan", which means “the one who turns”, and in Chinese means “going back home” Dungans fled from a failed uprising against the Qing authorities in north-western China. The revolt was connected to the oppression of China’s Muslim minority. (The majority of China’s population belonged to the Han dynasty and professed Buddhism.) The Muslim population lived mainly in the territory of today's western China (Province Sintszyan). The Chinese government often oppressed these Muslims, which led to riots. In 1862, another uprising occurred against the Chinese government. In 1867, “Ili” independent Sultanate, was established which then followed the unification of Uighurs<sup>29</sup> and Dungans in uprising. The Chinese government violently suppressed all revolts. On the suppression of the uprising, Przhewalski, who visited the region in ten years, says:

“Old people have told us that when the Chinese tired of killing people, they gathered a crowd of men, women and children, and threw them down from the mountains into a deep abyss. It is said that approximately 10,000 people were killed. Only those rebels were pardoned who abandoned Islam and embraced the new religion, Buddhism.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Alle, E., “The Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) of Central Asia: A Case of Multiple Identities in a Changing Context,” *Asian Ethnicity*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Uighurs refers to the Muslim ethnic minority in China, and in other Central Asian countries.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Kokai sl, Amirbek Usmanov, 2013, *Istoria Kigrizstana glazami ochevidcev*, “The history of Kyrgyzstan from witnesses” “Pereselenie Dungan i Uighurov iz Kitaia” - “The

In 1877-1878 one of the Dungan groups fled from China to the Seven Rivers / Jeti-Suu (from the Chinese province of Shan-Si). Others fled to the territory of contemporary Kyrgyzstan (from Kang Su province).<sup>31</sup>

The Dungans call themselves descendants of Afghan, Arab, Turkish and Iranian merchants who traded in China, and took Chinese women as wives. Dungans speak Chinese (Gansu dialect) and profess Sunni Islam. China used the Arabic alphabet at the time; now, in modern Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan people use only the Cyrillic alphabet.<sup>32</sup>

Now, there are more than 110,000 Dungan people. Of these, about 60,000 live in Kyrgyzstan and a bit more than 52,000 in Kazakhstan. About one thousand Dungan people live in Uzbekistan, and about the same in Russia. The Dungan language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language family. It is also spoken in Russian and other languages of the countries where they live. In the 20th century Dungans have become more in touch with the neighboring nations, which contributed to the development of society, consumer culture and art. There was a class of intellectuals who developed and began writing Dungan literature, which was later incorporated into the curriculum in special Dungan schools.

During tsarist times Dungans were highly appreciated in Russia. They were excellent farmers and gardeners and engaged in trade, and agriculture. Dungans contributed to the development of agriculture in the regions they lived and their irrigated fields often served as an example for others.<sup>33</sup> Today, they are still engaged in cultivation of vegetables and rice and many are also involved in cattle breeding. However, their recent adherence to a different kind of food production has also made them famous for their

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migration of Uighurs, and Dungans on the territory of Kyrgyzstan from China,” p.44-45, Prague

<[http://kghistory.akipress.org/unews/un\\_post:1857](http://kghistory.akipress.org/unews/un_post:1857)>, Accessed 07-03-16.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.44-45.

<sup>32</sup> Alles, E., (2005), “The Chinese-speaking Muslims (Dungans) of Central Asia: A Case of Multiple Identities in a Changing Context”, p.122, *Asian Ethnicity*, Volume 6, Carfax.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p.124.

restaurants. Some families follow the traditional agricultural economy; others are engaged with trade or have become industrial workers.

## 1.7 Kurds

I will now talk about another ethnic minority group, the Kurds, also known as the largest nation without a state. Kurdish ancestors include the Scythians and ancient Medes. Scientists have proved the genetic closeness of the Kurdish people with the Azerbaijani, Armenian, Georgian and Jewish people due to their similar geographical origins.<sup>34</sup> Most are scattered across the territory of at least four Middle Eastern countries (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria), though they also have a large European diaspora and many live in the post-Soviet Republics as well. Two percent of Kurds living in post-Soviet states constitute an important part of the Kurdish diaspora.<sup>35</sup> Kurds are a very diverse ethnic group. Those Kurds who live in the territory of The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) are divided into 4 branches. These include:<sup>36</sup>

- 1) Turkmen Kurds;
- 2) Armenian, Nakhichevan and Georgian Kurds;
- 3) The branch which formed due to the migration process in the USSR and CIS; this includes Russian, Belarus, Kazakh, central Asian, Moldovan and Baltic Kurds.
- 4) Azerbaijan Kurds

I will not go into the details and discuss about all types of Kurds, but rather focus attention on Central Asian Kurds and particularly the Kyrgyzstan Kurds. I will further elaborate on their Georgian and Armenian roots in the Analysis chapter.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the problem of Kurds without their own land was ignored. Consequently, Kurds stayed in those Republics where they settled. In 1937, the first flow of Kurds to the Kyrgyz SSR resettled from Armenia and Azerbaijan. During Stalin's repressions in 1944 considerable population of Kurds of Georgian and the Adjarian Soviet Socialistic Republic (SSR) were deported to Central Asia. The Kyrgyz

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<sup>34</sup> Babakir, H., (2004), "The Kurdish question," *Millennium*, Institute for the Study of Israel and the Middle East, p 2551.

<sup>35</sup> Diaspora: a community of people from one ethnic group who are removed from their country of origin, but preserve their heritage in a new land.

<sup>36</sup> Askerov, G., (2007), "Kurd diaspora in CIS" [Курдская диаспора в странах СНГ], Madiya, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, p.15

SSR received 1533 Kurds.<sup>37</sup> We see that Kyrgyzstan had two flows of repressed Kurds. The first flow was settled in different villages, which also served as a shelter for newcomers in 1944. However the state settled 5-10 families apart to each village and gave a stigma of “special settler,”<sup>38</sup> which already was acquired by previously arrived Kurds. This stigma did not allow them to cross the territory of their village to get to another village without first receiving permission from the military administration. The conditions for Kurds were very harsh until 1956, when the stigma of the “special settler” was abolished.

The current population of Kurds in Kyrgyzstan is 13,166 people. The number was updated in 2015 by the Assembly of Nations of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>39</sup> The world’s whole population of Kurds is estimated at 20 – 40 million. Kurds used to have a semi-nomadic way of life. Their main occupations are agriculture and cattle breeding. Women produce products such as wool, goat cheese and milk from their stock and sell it to markets or to neighbors. From the wool, women often knit socks, which are very popular among locals. Most of the Kurds are Sunni Muslims; some of them are Shia Muslims. Among Kurds one can also find Christians and Yezidis.<sup>40</sup> An important difference between Soviet times and the present is that the Ministry of National Education and Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic gave permission for introducing Kurdish language into school curriculums in places where compact settlements of Kurds exist. Nevertheless, I see a paradox in the fact that there are no books in the Kurdish language in Kyrgyzstan and not enough educated professors who can teach the Kurdish language. The state does not give money for purchasing books or writing books. Therefore, the only possibility for learning the Kurdish language is at home.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p.179.

<sup>38</sup> “Special settler” is translated from [спецпереселенцы].

<sup>39</sup> Kurds in Kyrgyzstan, <[http://joshuaproject.net/people\\_groups/12877/KG](http://joshuaproject.net/people_groups/12877/KG)> Access date?

<sup>40</sup> Assembly of Nations of Kyrgyzstan, 2004, “In unity and mutual consent” [В единстве и согласии], “We are- Kurds” [Мы- Народ Курды], p.101-104.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.106.



## Chapter 2: Theory

### 2.1 Overview

This chapter defines the terms society, ethnic group, ethnic boundaries, assimilation and migration in the context of a multi-ethnic country such as Kyrgyzstan. Fredrik Barth's framework from his theory regarding ethnic groups and boundaries serves as a fundament for my research, and will be further applied in Chapter 4: Analysis. Wimmer's theories of boundary-making; Chai's theory of ethnic group boundaries; and Furnival's Plural Society, assimilation, and migration theories accurately provide the fundamental theoretical background for addressing the current problems of an ethnic minority's existence in relation to territory. This theoretical chapter aims to address questions such as: Why and how do ethnic boundaries emerge? In what conditions do they change? Do ethnic boundaries depend on environmental or political circumstances? The chapter also tries to provide reasons for how these ethnic boundaries lead to assimilation and migration processes. In order to answer each of these questions we need to start by discussing and defining society.

### 2.2 What is society?

The term "society" must be defined since the particular figures that constitute society have influenced the country throughout its history. There are a variety of terms that include the word society, such as 'preindustrial society', 'information society', 'industrial society', and 'civil society'. Leaving those definitions aside and moving toward a definition based on the history of state-building (which is significant in my case), the following description of the term 'society' will help form a good basis for my work.

According to the Collins English Dictionary "society" is a group of people who share the same territory, interact with each other, and are joined together through culture, interests and norms.<sup>42</sup> To some extent it coincides with the term ethnicity, which can

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<sup>42</sup> Hanks, P., (1986), *Collins dictionary of the English language* (2nd ed.), London: Williams Collins Sons and Co. Ltd.

also be defined as a group who share common culture and norms.<sup>43</sup> Besides, “pure” society can be divided into groups and sub-groups according to economic status, class, marital status, interests, gender, etc. A country’s society can be multi-ethnic and/or multi-racial. Colonization, wars, nomadic peoples and other factors can transform a homogenous society into a heterogeneous or multi-ethnic/racial society. There are several examples of multi ethnic/racial societies. For instance, in 1982 China had fifty-five officially identified minor nationalities. All of these nationalities had strong roots in Chinese history. During this time, the Chinese also distinguished people based on religion. Gladney mentioned in his book that out of these fifty-five minor nationalities, at least ten were official Muslim nationalities.<sup>44</sup> The United States of America (USA), with their popular claim to being a “melting pot,” claims to be richer for being a home to so many diverse races. The term “race” is usually associated with African-Americans, a term used during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries for differentiating between who was ‘white’ and who was ‘negro.’<sup>45</sup> Fortunately, Kyrgyzstan has rarely been engaged in serious problems with race; however, the issue of religion is now becoming a very sensitive topic.

The great functionalist Émile Durkheim saw “society” as a big organism divided into many different parts that are connected to one another. In his view, integration, common beliefs and a strong sense of belonging to one social group make the social organism “live,” so to speak.<sup>46</sup> In reality, social connections and involvement in a social group does not always ensure individual safety. Usually it depends on where a person lives, and which of the several world regimes one faces. Especially, when a society is not homogenous but multi-ethnic, rivalries and disconnections between social groups happen more frequently. J.S Furnivall called multi-ethnic or multi-racial societies “plural societies.”<sup>47</sup> Rabushka and Shepsle quote Furnivall, who defined

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<sup>43</sup> Yang, P. Q., (2000), *Ethnic studies: issues and approaches*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, p.40.

<sup>44</sup> Gladney, C. D., (1998), *Ethnic identity in China: The making of a Muslim minority nationality*. Orlando, Florida: Harcourt Brace & Company, p.1.

<sup>45</sup> Wimmer A., (2013), *Ethnic boundary making: Institutions, Power, Networks*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.8.

<sup>46</sup> OpenStax College, Introduction to Sociology. OpenStax College. 21 June 2012, p.86, <<http://cnx.org/content/col11407/latest/>>, Accessed on Jan 20,2015.

<sup>47</sup> Rabushka, A., & Shepsle. K., (1972) *Politics In Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability*, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, p.15.

plural society as ‘comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit’<sup>48</sup>. Different authors consider the following countries to be plural societies: the United States of America, Malaysia, Canada and Pakistan among others. In contrast to Furnivall’s definition of a plural society, M.G Smith gives a sharpened definition of cultural pluralism. He said that the plural society can only be united from a political perspective, where one society is ruled by a single government. Politics aside, inside a pluralistic society’s social community one can identify any number of small units, each with their own rules, traditions and institutions.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, we can re-imagine a pluralistic society as an organism with several layers.

In this society, power is unequal as well. In pluralistic societies, someone tends to get less opportunities, and someone else gets more. Elke Winter offers as an example a Canadian case from the 1990s, with the existence of a dominant group of English males that have historical and institutional power over other groups.<sup>50</sup> She suggested a triangular theoretical model to frame the concept of relationships in pluralistic societies. By positioning pluralism as a negotiated compromise within unequal power relations, the recognition of unequal power relations is important. That means that the multicultural “we” is equal to “us + others”, but is unequal to “them.”<sup>51</sup> However, a plural society which can be multi- ethnic and culturally pluralistic is also presented as:

“two or more different cultural traditions in a given population, each possessing a distinct form of the institutions of marriage, the family, religion, property, and the like.”<sup>52</sup>

A good and clear example of the given definition is the case of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1922-1991). The USSR possessed and ruled huge territorial lands. The distinctive feature was that the USSR obtained fifteen republics which made it one of the largest empires in the world. It became the most multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. Critically speaking, the real

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, p.10

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p.15

<sup>50</sup> Winter. E., (2011), “Us, Them, and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies,” Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p.426

<sup>51</sup> Winter. E., (2011) “Us, Them, and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies,” Toronto: University of Toronto Press, p.136

<sup>52</sup> Rabushka. A., & Shepsle. K., (1972) *Politics In Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability*, Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, p.15.

challenge of achieving assimilation was confronting the norms of each ethnic minority. One of the main goals of the empire was to unite everyone and to make people speak one language, to believe in socialist system, obey government above religion and to have equal rights regardless of one's social status. Many people were exiled and killed for keeping up their faith and beliefs that contradicted “*bolsheviks*” rules.<sup>53</sup>

The empire collapsed in 1991 and randomly demarcated territories initiated an onset of territorial and ethnic problems. Throughout the conflict, different ethnic problems led to forced assimilation, integration and immigration. The notions of ethnicity and ethnic groups were kept suppressed rather than celebrated. After the independence many republics suffered from inter-ethnic tensions. The problem is that each state wanted to praise and glorify the majority ethnic group.

### 2.2.1 Ethnic group

It is essential to clarify what I mean by ethnic group. The terms “ethnicity” and “ethnic group” are usually used interchangeably. The descriptions of ethnic group and ethnicity, which I am going to use in this text, were developed by the primordialist school of thought. It's idea was that an ethnic group is a social group whose members share the same ancestry, cultural norms, and national origin, whereas ethnicity is deeply rooted and is derived from affiliating yourself with a particular ethnic group. Therefore, I assume that ethnicity is a primary level which leads a person to associate himself with his own ethnic group. Members of ethnic groups often share cultural and biological origins. Lineage and cultural ties also determine the make-up of ethnic groups; therefore members of the same group often stick together.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.3 Ethnic boundaries by Fredrik Barth

The idea of ethnic boundaries can be conceptualized from different perspectives. One perspective is that the territory of a people can emerge naturally through division by

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<sup>53</sup> Pohl, O. J., (2000), Stalin's genocide against the “Repressed Peoples”, *Journal of Genocide Research* 2(2), p.267, < <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/713677598>> Accessed: 19-01-2016 08:58 UTC.

<sup>54</sup> Yang, P. Q., (2000), *Ethnic studies: issues and approaches*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, p.42.

rivers, mountains, etc. It can be considered to be the result of geographical determinism, formed many years ago. Nevertheless, with time people began to alter and transcend environmental boundaries constructing houses, factories and states. Thereby, ethnic boundaries changed with the development of productive forces of society.<sup>55</sup>

Another perspective to view ethnic boundary formation is to see it as a social phenomenon. In this perspective, the social group or individual organizes “ethnic boundaries,” a term which underlines several features by which one ethnic group remains bounded from “others.”<sup>56</sup> The term was coined by a Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth. First, he understood ethnicity as a category of ascription and identification by the people belonging to a particular ethnic group. Ethnicity acts as a source of commonality for those who belong to the same group as your own. Secondly, Barth found dynamism in the phenomenon of ethnicity. He saw a vibrant energy in the processes of ethnic groups constructing and maintaining their identities. Third, Barth’s study of ethnicity focused not only on the internal structure and history of a particular ethnic group, but also that group’s communication and integrational processes. As was mentioned above, the primordialist school suggested that ethnicity is static, ascribed and biologically and culturally shared.<sup>57</sup> However Barth claimed that characteristics of ethnic communities are not fixed and constant, and ethnicity can include moments of spontaneous change. Focusing more on ethnic boundaries and how these boundaries are maintained, he emphasized that demarcation is attached to every social organism. An ethnic community demarcates and isolates itself from others. Similar situations occur at the individual level. Self-defining involves the converse process of an individual being defined by others. Therefore, the schema of demarcation and identification brings up the idea of ethnic boundaries. Barth’s ideas have defined our modern understanding of ethnicity, in which ethnicity does not describe only natural human characteristics, but attributes defined either by the

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<sup>55</sup> Kozlov V., (1971), “Ethnos and territory” (etnos i territoriya), *Soviet ethnography*, (Sovetskaia etnografiya), p.89.

<sup>56</sup> Barth. F., (1998), *Ethnic group and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, p.9.

<sup>57</sup> Yang, P. Q., (2000), *Ethnic studies: issues and approaches*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, p.42.

individual or others, as well.<sup>58</sup> Besides being defined by ethnicity, scientists put forward the idea that ethnic groups are also defined by geographic boundaries. Barth first of all, acknowledges the existence of social boundaries. At the same time, the author acknowledged that these bounds can be territorial, because ethnic groups are necessarily localized in a certain area. Such an approach inevitably leads us to understand the boundaries of ethnic groups as being predefined by birth, as well as socialization processes or external cultural influences. In one way it can also depend on subjective factors.<sup>59</sup>

Allocating ethnic identity as the main sign of an ethnic group, Barth claimed that the cultural signs that define borders can change, and the cultural characteristics of members in the ethnic groups can transform. The organizational structure of a group can also change. According to Barth, only socially-relevant factors play a role in defining ethnic origin. However, Emberling emphasized that the external distinctions such as kinship and biological factors can also define ethnic origin.<sup>60</sup> . In other words, if a member of one ethnic group claims that he or she belongs to a certain culture or ethnic group, regardless of the extent of his or her behavior, it is necessary to analyze and perceive their behavior as a behavior which corresponds to this particular ethnic group.

Those identities that are manifested during times of conflict have a tendency to be perceived as "ethnic."<sup>61</sup> It would be relevant and interesting to investigate whether conflict precedes the emergence of interethnic boundaries, or, on the contrary, ethnic conflicts develop between already existing groups. The use of the term "latent,"<sup>62</sup> as proposed by Coser, can be used to describe a "latent conflict" where tensions may

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<sup>58</sup> Barth, F., (1998), *Ethnic group and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, pp.9-39.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp 11-14.

<sup>60</sup> Emberling, G., (1997), Ethnicity in Complex Societies: Archaeological Perspectives, *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 5(4), p.302.

<sup>61</sup> Barth, F., (1998), *Ethnic group and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, pp 13-15.

<sup>62</sup> Coser, L., (1957), Social Conflict and the Theory of Social Change, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 8(3), pp. 197-207. Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/586859> , Accessed: 14/11/2013 12:31.

evolve in a hidden environment and develop until being converted into vulnerable and negative consequences.

In summary, the development of ethnic boundaries is a diverse process, which can be fluid, stable or even crossed. Crossed boundaries are created as a result of cultural assimilation according to Fredrik Barth. Crossed boundaries emerge due to individual or group mobility inside and outside of their own boundaries. Chai, whose idea will be introduced further in the chapter, suggested a similar view on group mobility.

## **2.4 Ethnic boundaries according to Wimmer and Chai**

One ethnic boundary can exist alongside another ethnic boundary. These adjoining neighborhoods can lead to inter-ethnic marriages and networks. Within a bounded community, there is a probability of classifying people based on their power or prestige. In her book *Ethnic Boundary Making* author Andrea Wimmer referred to the Herderian claim that ethnic groups have more unique cultural features, shared values and norms if differences in the cultural origins and boundaries are emphasized between differing communities.<sup>63</sup> Wimmer explains an alternative perspective, pointing out:

“The theory of boundary making argues that value differences result from social closure along ethnic lines rather than from ethnic differences per se. Therefore, two ethnic groups should differ in worldviews and values only if the boundary between them is marked by high levels of exclusion and closure”<sup>64</sup>

In fact, the farther ethnic groups are from each other the stronger the preservation of their identity and values. Ethnic boundaries may also be the result of inner and inter-fusion within and between ethnic groups.

Another scholar, Sun-Ki Chai, also showed interest in ethnic boundaries. Inspired by Barth’s research, he developed his own theory of ethnic group boundaries. Chai wrote

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<sup>63</sup> Wimmer A., (2013), *Ethnic boundary making: Institutions, Power, Networks*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.3-14.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, p.14.

how Barth's productive work influenced others to explore ethnic boundaries and led to debates which divided the concept of ethnic boundaries into two separate types: "primordial," which are ascribed; and "circumstantial," which are established according to political and economic reasons. Recent scholars have recognized both kinds of boundaries as equally important. Chai was eager to know the exact way in which ethnic boundaries are determined. Subsequently, he developed the concept of "ethnic collective action;" in other words, ethnic mobilization in terms of territory. Chai defined ethnic collective action as

"...the cognition that common ascriptive characteristics are shared among a set of individuals, without any salience necessarily being placed on these commonalities."<sup>65</sup>

Hence, from the definition above we see that ethnic collective action is relatively close to the cultural and organizational features of a community where individuals share common labor and a common ideology. The author equated it with the phenomenon of solidarity, which determines collective action.

Nevertheless, Chai acknowledged that boundaries could also be tightly linked to economic and political factors. This led him to explore another issue based on contradicting existent theories. Chai acknowledged that some theorists believe that groups consist of egocentric individuals acting based on self-interested preferences inside ethnic boundaries, while others believe that individuals are altruistic and will work in cooperation with other members for the good of the group. Further Chai referred to Rogowski's theory focused on individual profit within one ethnic group.

Chai raised the important question of whether structural factors can determine ethnic collective action. All structural features like ethnic competition in the economic sphere, or political barriers cannot occupy the same position as ethnicity. Chai argued that if one pure ethnic boundary relies on pure economy, then why can't representatives of different ethnic groups unite under a common economic interest? On this topic, Hechter discussed the issue of communication and the importance of language in inter-connected networks and how cultural differences build a barrier of

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<sup>65</sup> Chai. S., (1996), "A theory of ethnic group boundaries," *Nations and Nationalism*, Tucson: ASEN, p.282.



communication between different ethnic boundaries. Physical appearance is also included in this issue because it allows people to easily recognize one's ethnicity. Accordingly, it is crucial to start with a conceptualization of ethnicity in order to understand the crucial features of it and how one individual can influence the mobility of the group.. Summarizing all definitions given by Chai with reference to other scholars like Bell, Rothschild and Nagata, ethnicity can be defined as a combination of common interests and collective action using a calculated strategy.<sup>66</sup> This definition diverges with the one I have mentioned above, by moving beyond self-interest. Rather it is more applicable to altruistic preferences which promote growth of economy inside a community through peaceful, cooperative means. The strong side of altruism suggested by Chai is confirmed through "cemented" boundaries of an ethnic group.<sup>67</sup> Even though an individual can cross a boundary and try to find a job in population centers, his altruistic preferences will lead him to build a bridge to cooperate with other members within his ethnic group. Of course, conflict may also happen during the interaction and cooperation between group members inside the community Therefore, if a member of any community is engaged in a conflict, the entire community will suffer because of that. Thus, altruistic members of a society choose to follow altruism in order to avoid failure. Cooperation between different groups can also imply ties with population centers, as written above. When moving to an industrialized and commercialized environment, the competition for a job, education and residential space takes the lead. When a member succeeds in the center of population, he can come back to his place of origin. Accordingly assimilation and emergency migration can be also considered as significant factor affecting how ethnic boundaries expand or vanish. The concepts of migration and assimilation will be elaborated further in this chapter.

## **2.5 Assimilation and Migration theories**

We may see migration and assimilation as examples of symbolic or structural violence. Bourdieu claimed that symbolic violence is a violence that is used upon a social agent with his or her involvement. In other words, a person becomes unconsciously victimized, because they are not aware that they are being influenced

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<sup>66</sup> Chai. S (1996), "A theory of ethnic group boundaries," *Nations and Nationalism*, Tuscon:ASEN, p.285.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.292.

by control or pressure. From a different perspective, this could demonstrate self-recognition and acceptance of participation within social norms.

On a societal level, a dominant group may unintentionally oppress certain groups of people through forced assimilation; if they are unable to assimilate, they may decide to migrate inside the state or abroad, which is also an example of violence. For example, Van den Berghe claimed that "ethnicity may increase or decrease in response to external conditions,"<sup>68</sup> including harassment and persecution faced by ethnic groups. When Europeans migrated to North America in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the notion of assimilation was seen as the final step to achieving racial peace. For migrants who flee to developed Western countries, rapid assimilation is an essential condition for their successful social and economic adaptation. However, it is often insisted upon and enforced by the majority group overpowering those whose norms they do not accept. Consequently the results of assimilation can be negative. In most cases, people obey in order to avoid problems, conflicts and discrimination.

In his book *The Ethnic Phenomenon*, Van den Berghe emphasizes why majority groups have considered the assimilation process positive. He claims:

“For a wide variety of reasons, assimilationism seemed a convenient and ostensibly liberal way of solving "minority problems" for the ruling classes of centralized, bureaucratic states, whether capitalist or socialist”<sup>69</sup>

Berghe suggested a view for why the majority group wants to be dominant. He emphasized that the dominant ethnic majority can argue that the reason for conflict is not to maintain their own ethnic priority, but is simply in accordance with "democratic" principles. This statement leaves a minority with little choice; nothing remains but to eventually join the majority through assimilation. We can see how this notion of power ruins yearly constructed interethnic peace. For instance, when a state receives independence, its territories are often automatically demarcated. Such separation of people and land affects the future interaction of those living outside of the new borders, with those living within. . Nonetheless, those who manage to survive

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<sup>68</sup> Berghe, V., & Pierre L. (1987) *The ethnic phenomenon*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press Inc. p.3

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

the processes of ‘selection’ and assimilation stay, while those who face obstacles make the decision to migrate.

The concept of migration is a multifaceted phenomenon that may be interpreted from different perspectives. Migration occurs due to a wide range of reasons, usually related to socio- economic or cultural aspects. The concept of "migration" has been examined differently by many researchers. Each has assigned his/her own meaning to the concept. One of the first scholars to investigate the concept of “migration” was E. Ravenstein. He formulated migration as a temporary or permanent change of residence.<sup>70</sup> Even though the author’s work was devoted to examining inner migration - or simply put, movement of people inside the state, it can also be applied to migration between countries. He used Great Britain as a primary example. One of his findings was that during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, natives of towns were less migratory than those from the rural parts of the country.<sup>71</sup> Based on his findings, Ravenstein formulated eleven laws of migration. Here, I will briefly mention Ravenstein’s laws, which were clearly collected and explained by Grigg (1977) based on Ravenstein’s (1876), (1885), (1889) articles:

- 1) Redistribution of the population happens inside the territories
- 2) Adults typically make the decision to migrate; families usually settle in their homeland
- 3) Most migrants move only a short distance
- 4) Migration occurs gradually for each individual
- 5) Each migration flow corresponds to a reverse flow
- 6) Migrants move for long distances to be closer to centers of industry and commerce
- 7) City dwellers are less mobile than those in rural areas
- 8) Mobility of women is more active inside the country, while men are more mobile over long distances
- 9) The population in the city grows faster because of migration, rather of the natural birth
- 10) Migration helps to increase and develop industry, trade and transport

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<sup>70</sup> Datta, A., (2003), *Human migration: A social phenomenon*, New Delhi, India: Mital Publications, p.21.

<sup>71</sup> Ravenstein, E., (1889)., “The Laws of Migration,” *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 52(2), 241-305, Wiley for the Royal Statistical Society, URL: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2979333>> Accessed: 02-02-2016 19:12 UTC.

11) The main reasons for migration are economic<sup>72</sup>

Out of the eleven laws mentioned above, laws 4, 6 and 11 are most relevant for the situation in Kyrgyzstan which will be further discussed in the analysis-chapter.

Modern migration has acquired slightly different characteristics. For example the collapse of the Soviet Union precipitated the increase of statelessness and disputed nationality, in turn leading to massive displacement. Martin wrote about the stateless phenomenon, stating:

“Stateless persons generally enjoy fewer rights than those who are citizens of a sovereign state. When they are also distrusted minorities within the country in which they reside, stateless persons often experience discrimination and may be the targets of violence and repression.”<sup>73</sup>

Many large-scale, forced movements in which millions people are relocated occur due to war; a conflict situation in one’s home country; human rights violations; or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or gender. Martin defines forced migration as a voluntarily act undertaken in order to escape life-threatening situations. Refugees are one example of forced migrants who can receive aid from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Refugees can find assistance and protection under the UNHCR. More than 11.5 million refugees are under UNHCR mandate and most of them are war-affected peoples.<sup>74</sup>

The aspiration of stateless ethnicities to seek for themselves political self-determination in various forms (a state or autonomy) leads people to migrate to their ethnic territory. Consequently, wars and political conflict in the state are often the causes for this decision.

## **2.6 Final remarks**

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<sup>72</sup> Grigg, D quoting Ravenstein, E., (1977)., *Journal of Historical Geography*, 3(1), pp.42-43.

<sup>73</sup> Martin, S. F., (2000), “Forced migration and the evolving humanitarian regime” Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA, p.7.

<sup>74</sup> Martin, S. F., (2000), “Forced migration and the evolving humanitarian regime” Institute for the Study of International Migration, Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA.

This chapter about the theoretical framework for my thesis gives a substantial overview of the concept of ethnic boundaries, its preconditions and consequences. According to Barth, ethnic boundaries should be viewed as a form of social organization rather than as the complex of cultural characteristics. He also suggested that ethnicity as well as ethnic boundaries are not fixed and have the potential to change. Chai, in his work, contributes theories about ethnic mobility, which are relevant in modern times when migration and assimilation have become two of the essential factors responsible for ethnic boundary creation.

I expect to apply the above-mentioned theories to the case of Kurds and Dungans. I expect to lay emphasis on the invisible ethnic boundaries that exist in the context of Kyrgyzstan and the applicability of Barth's ideas regarding ethnic boundaries to this situation.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Study area**

My research paper used in this paper is based on fieldwork conducted in Kyrgyzstan during summer 2015. The main focus of this chapter will be devoted to discussing the methodology used in my research, with specific emphasis on how I conducted the interviews which were the main choice among possible methods, with observation as a supplement. Methodology is a strategy, in most cases directed at developing a practical approach to researching a particular subject. I changed my topic twice to arrive at a final one that appeared interesting to me. The process of narrowing down a topic also took me some time, but was mitigated due to my clear understanding of the opportunities for how I could most successfully complete fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan. In this chapter, I am going to describe one main and several supplementary ethnographic techniques I used while conducting fieldwork. I will describe the questions I asked during the interviews. Finally, I will write about challenges and opportunities I experienced during my field work, including my experiences with respondents, ethical issues and strengths and weaknesses of the interviewing process.

There are more than eighty ethnic minorities living in Kyrgyzstan today. Some of them moved to Kyrgyzstan by their own will, however others were forcefully sent to Kyrgyzstan from their homelands during different periods throughout history. After repressions, people tend to settle in one place and take root there. After a while, these settlements develop into villages, and are recognizable as belonging to certain minority groups. Kyrgyzstan has quite a large number of mono-ethnically compacted villages. As stated in my introductory chapter, the main focus for my research was to find out how deported and repressed ethnic minorities live nowadays in contemporary Kyrgyzstan and what challenges they face while living within their segregated areas. I chose to investigate the current situation of two ethnic minorities, Kurds and Dungans.

The first reason for choosing these specific groups was based on their frequent appearance in the news in relation to inter-ethnic conflicts. The second reason was that both of them have a large number of compact, settled villages. The last reason was my existing contacts within these communities made it easier to establish a relationship

with these minority groups and initiate fieldwork. Moreover, Kurds and Dungans are those ethnic groups who have neither a republic nor state. Consequently, they are the most dependent and vulnerable among other minority groups in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, all reasons mentioned above pushed me to investigate the real nature of their living conditions in contemporary Kyrgyzstan.

### **3.2 Research question**

To arrive at the final version of my research question I generated several ideas that could allow me to investigate the broad relationship between ethnic minorities, space and challenges. My goal was to see and analyze the present situation of two minority groups who were exiled and repressed many years ago and who, until present time, have lived in compact, populated villages in Kyrgyzstan. In accordance with my research question, I made an attempt to get information through my fieldwork about the daily lives of Kurds and Dungans, and also discovered possibilities and reasons for interethnic conflict situations involving each of them. Therefore, my research question became: Why do Dungan and Kurd minorities live in the rural areas in Kyrgyzstan and which are the most important advantages and challenges connected to this? My fieldwork required as deep immersion into the local community as possible. Ethnographic research demands at least one year of being in the field, according to anthropological norms. In my case, due to the limited time my studies allowed for field research, I was limited to two months of immersion in the local community.

### **3.3 Research strategy**

Several elements from ethnographic methods were chosen in order to develop an in-depth investigation of people and the territories they live in. In studying people, one needs to be aware of how best to gain valuable and desirable information. I chose to employ qualitative methods over quantitative ones because the second one seemed to be more suitable for my project. This is because my purpose for this study was not to test or compare, but rather to explore people's realities and concerns. If my objective were the first, numbers, graphs or tables generated through quantitative methods would have been very useful; since it was not, qualitative methods seemed more appropriate.

A qualitative approach allowed me to investigate my research participants and their spaces from an etic point of view. According to Bryman, qualitative methods involve collecting information in an open format, which does not involve statistical measurements (as with quantitative methods), but is instead based on the understanding, explanation and interpretation of open-ended empirical data<sup>75</sup>. Qualitative methods differ from quantitative methods in that those using qualitative methods tend to work with words but not with numbers. The core actors in that process are respondents or participants.<sup>76</sup> Mason gives an explanation for why researchers often choose a qualitative method and how it can help them. He writes:

“If you choose qualitative interviewing it may be because your *ontological* position suggests that people’s knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which your research questions are designed to explore”<sup>77</sup>

During data collection, I used semi-structured interviews as my primary information-collecting technique. Supplementary techniques employed included: participant and non-participant observation, recording field notes during observation, and analyzing visual objects, such as photographs and videos. In the appendix, I provide a brief description of the supplementary techniques mentioned. Collectively, all techniques employed helped me to construct a visible and detailed picture of the issues I researched.

### 3.4 Interviewing

The fundamental technique I used during data collection was semi-structured interviewing. Basically, the semi-structured interview takes the form of a dialogue and usually consists of a one-on-one, in-person interview; dialogue through the Internet or a telephone; or interaction with a group of several people in a focus group.<sup>78</sup> In my case, interviews were divided into one-on-one, individual interviews as well as group interviews. O’Reilly suggests that in individual interviewing, the researcher may

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<sup>75</sup> Bryman, A., (2012), *Social Research Methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.380.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p.380

<sup>77</sup> Mason, J., (2002), *Qualitative Researching* (2nd ed.), London: SAGE Publications, p.63.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.64.



approach an individual and ask him questions so he reflects or shares and reports from his own experience. However, occasionally the researcher may find a group of people to interview in place of conducting an individual interview. In this case, it would be inappropriate to speak to only one person, and ignore the others. Though this situation requires the researcher to redirect from an already prepared technique of one-to-one interviewing, it also has its advantages. In group interviews, it is possible to observe the dynamic of the group or of a couple, how they share ideas and give cues to each other. That being said, it is also harder to extract deep, individual reflections on a subject during group interviews, especially if a high-positioned or respected person from a particular society is there; this can create additional tension amongst subordinate people being interviewed.<sup>79</sup>

There were two special cases when I intended to conduct a one-to-one interview and, instead, ended up conducting a group interview. In both cases, Imams<sup>80</sup> unexpectedly joined the interviews as guests of my respondents. Having particular thoughts and prejudices about an Imam as a religious leader, one would perceive him as someone close to God and, I assumed both my respondents and I would try to construct our speech or questions according to the situation. Indeed, Imams used their own vocabulary. For instance, in their normal speech they regularly included expressions from the Quran like “*Alhamdulillah*”, “*In shaa Allah*,” etc.<sup>81</sup> However, I behaved normally and continued to follow my questions as written. Moreover, the other respondents (in both cases, Kurd families appeared) to also behave naturally in the presence of the Imams. Therefore, I must say that notions of prejudices about how certain people may affect the dynamic diminishes during a dialogue or an interview. Reflecting upon this we may observe that sometimes the presence of a high-ranking leader in society does not unsettle other respondents or encourage them to act with

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<sup>79</sup> O’Reilly, K., (2012), *Ethnographic Methods* (2nd ed.), USA and Canada: Routledge, p.132.

<sup>80</sup> Imam- leader (from the Arab language), the head of the Muslim community. Translation retrieved from <<http://global.britannica.com/topic/imam>>. Accessed on 8/10/2015.

<sup>81</sup> “*Alhamdulillah*”- *All praise belongs to Allah*, “*In shaa Allah- If Allah wills*” translation retrieved from <<https://www.alislam.org/books/pathwaytoparadise/LAJ-chp5.htm>>, Accessed on 8/10/2015.

restraint. In both situations I encountered, I believe it invoked a deeper and more conceptualized discussion.

Semi-structured interviews demand sub-topics or specific, topic-based questions which can help to answer the research question. Before holding interviews, I constructed several questions in a specific order, so it was easier to follow the topic and could gradually arrive at the research question itself. I tried to structure the questions in such an order to fit the situations of both ethnic groups. I prepared thirteen questions. These are all to be found in the appendix of the thesis.

In order to not interrupt my respondents and not lose his or her attention, I tried to avoid looking at my list of questions frequently. Experience helped me realize that using a semi-structured interview was also helpful in silent situations. There were cases when interviewees finished their story, but I did not realize it. As I waited for them to continue, I sometimes forgot what I wanted to ask further. Therefore, the list of prepared question was useful in silent situations because it allow me to navigate myself my next step. On the phenomenon of silence during semi-structured interviews, researchers have suggested that if silence is used strategically and appropriately, it may also allow interviewees to clarify or elaborate on particular issues and talk more about the details they may have missed.<sup>82</sup> Sometimes I had one-on-one interviewing; sometimes an entire family was present during the interview. On this issue Bryman says that while doing individual interviews, it is possible to ask a respondent to wait until you write something down, however when you interview a group of people it would be extremely disruptive<sup>83</sup>.For that reason, I preferred using a voice recorder. Another reason for using voice-recording was that I could attentively listen to what people said and how they said it.

My research was registered and approved by a Data Protection Official for Research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD), therefore all data is protected and I am responsible for preserving the anonymity of my respondents. Before each talk I asked permission from the respondent to record our interview. Only after receiving consent from my respondents about data protection and recording the interview did I

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<sup>82</sup> Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., Chadwick, B., (2008), Methods of data collection in qualitative research: interviews and focus groups, *British Dental Journal* 204, 291 - 295, published online: 22 March 2008, Accessed 28/10/2015.

<sup>83</sup> Bryman. A., (2012), *Social Research Methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.504.

assuredly use my voice recorder. Moreover, when my respondents asked what I intended to do with those recordings, I assured them that all recording would be eliminated. Since I used a tape recorder, I must mention that I cannot be completely sure that my respondents talked as freely as they would have done without taping. Even their assurances to the contrary cannot fully eliminate the possibility that they talked with more restraint as a result of the recorder. After each conversation with my interviewees I asked them if they would like to remain anonymous or if they consented to me publishing their name in my research work. The majority of respondents confirmed their consent to be named as they are. However due to NSD rules, publishing the identities of my respondents are not allowed.

#### 3.4.1 Research Participants

The process of selecting and finding my interviewees was very random and challenging. Finding an appropriate person who can freely tell you about his or her life and about the history of a whole group of people is not an easy task. The aim was to conduct the interviews with ordinary, local people who I considered proper sources of significant and valuable information. I wanted to hear the voice of the common people. The main requirement was that all respondents had to be representatives of either the Dungan or Kurd minorities. I first attempted to find some respondents through my friends. Unfortunately, some of my friends prolonged their promises or disappeared without any follow-up. Therefore, I decided to employ more professional connections. Through the enormous help of my gatekeepers who included friends, advisors, and people acquainted with my contacts, I was able to reach most of all my informants. Overall I gathered seven interviews from the Dungan community and seven interviews from Kurd community. In the Dungan's case, there were four group interviews and three one-on-one interviews. In the Kurd's case I had six group interviews and one one-on-one interview. In sum I interviewed twenty people, taking into account group interviews, as well.

There were several challenging instances when during group interviews people started to interrupt each other, or argue that their version of a story or history was "more correct." For instance, while interviewing the biggest Dungan family in the Milyanfan village I experienced the disadvantages of conducting group interviews first-hand. The first issue was connected with an unexpected increase of participants. Each member of

the family had become curious about the interview, and so came to observe and talk. The second issue centered around the way in which people joined the conversation. Their interruption of one another created a chaotic expression of opinions and answers.

I was able to contact and find mostly all of my Kurd respondents through the Assembly of Nations of Kyrgyzstan. I am a representative for Tatar Youth of the Tatar Diaspora, which is located in the Assembly of Nations of Kyrgyzstan in Bishkek. This position helped me find a contact in the former president of the Kurd diaspora through the president of the Tatar diaspora. I explained my goals to the former Kurd diaspora president and asked if he could give me an interview. The conversation took place in his office. He agreed and was very glad to hear that someone is still interested in investigating Kurds in Kyrgyzstan. As a result he gave me contacts of one well-known and respected man in the Petrovka village, who later became my interviewee. Moreover, the former president called the current president of the Kurd diaspora in Kyrgyzstan, and asked to connect me with Kurds in the Talas region. Thus, gatekeepers were very useful in helping me reach my informants. Mason (2002) suggests that negotiations with gatekeepers may give you access to informants, but one must always have a contingency plan in mind if that will not work.<sup>84</sup> During the first half-hour of interviewing with a Kurd family in the Kyzyl Adyr village in the Talas region, though I felt welcomed by my interviewees, I also sensed tension. Interviewees started to ask me how I managed to find them and about my connection to the gatekeeper, who is the current president of the Kurd diaspora. Respondents were curious about who advised me to visit and conduct an interview with them, and how I managed to get in contact with the president of the Kurd diaspora. One thing which alarmed and pleased me at the same time was their clear claim that if I had not been sent to them by the president of Kurd diaspora in Kyrgyzstan, they would not have likely given me any significant information.

An alternative technique to applying gatekeeping in semi-structured interviewing is the “snowball technique.” Mason describes this as asking anyone you know ‘to put

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<sup>84</sup> Mason, J., (2002), *Qualitative Researching* (2nd ed.), London: SAGE Publications, p.143.

you in touch with others of a similar or known type'<sup>85</sup>. By using this particular method, I found representatives of the Dungan minority living in Dungan villages. A friend of mine knew that I do fieldwork concerning the Dungan minority. That friend has a Dungan friend, who suggested that I interview his family who live in the Milyanfan village in the Chui region. After, that family suggested visiting the local administration of their village in order to gain detailed information about the village itself. My mother discovered that she has a friend from this village and his daughter works in local administration there. Consequently, I reached my respondents through using the web of contacts mentioned above.

### **3.5 Ethics during the interviews**

During interviewing, the researcher should also be concerned about framing questions and talking to people in an ethical manner.<sup>86</sup> When conducting qualitative research, the researcher should keep several things in mind related to how to behave during the interview. First, one should not harm an interviewee. No harm emphasizes that respondents have to be sure that they will not be involved in any harmful situations, for instance violation of rights. A second issue is privacy and anonymity. Any group or individual has the right to privacy and the protection of personal information, their voice, and their image. One must ensure respondents that private data given to the researcher will remain anonymous. Nevertheless, a converse case may happen where an interviewee may ask for their name to be acknowledged so they may be shown and heard. That can give the researcher a chance to input more precise information into the project such as personal data, respondents' occupations, or pictures of respondents. My research incorporated two different ethnic minorities that was constrained by clear identification of interviewees' ethnicities. Thus, they were previously informed what kind of research I would be conducting. Finally, one should consider how best to receive informed consent, which I considered throughout the process of coming to the field and choosing respondents, and was required to obtain before beginning interviewing.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p.142

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.41.

<sup>87</sup> *Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research*, Part 4, pp.54-56, Retrieved from < [http://www.uk.sagepub.com/upm-data/27011\\_4.pdf](http://www.uk.sagepub.com/upm-data/27011_4.pdf)>, Accessed: 31-10-2015.

I was concerned about ethical issues in my research, specifically because it dealt with very sensitive topics related to grievous periods in people's history. I had questions for respondents that could have been received poorly, such as whether they remember how their ethnic group moved or appeared in Kyrgyzstan or, for example, are they engaged in inter-ethnic conflicts with representatives of the Kyrgyz majority? I did not know how respondents would respond to these questions asked of them. But I took the risk of asking them, and received very polite and ordinary answers in most cases. Of course, I was aware of "going too far" and did not push respondents to answer if I saw they do not want to talk about a particular subject. I usually started with neutral questions so as not to upset any of my interviewees from the very beginning.

One of the main factors of good interviews and ethical norms is to be open, polite, and realize your position as the outsider or guest.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, there could be situations when the researcher themselves may be the subject of interviewees' questions; the ethical way to handle these situations is to always answer any question truthfully, otherwise participants may feel distrusted by the researcher. I received questions about myself from both Kurds and Dungans. Both groups of interviewees showed their curiosity about my purpose and my future plans. I did not hesitate to answer their questions honestly.

### **3.6 Insider and outsider**

One of the issues of fieldwork that I took into consideration is the position of the researcher as both insider and outsider. As I mentioned above, I conducted my fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan. I was born in that country and am more or less familiar with the economic, cultural, political and social situations of the country. The official language of Kyrgyzstan is Russian and Kyrgyz. I am fluent in Russian, and therefore all interviews were conducted in Russian, except a few cases when I received help from interpreters. One case was with a Dungan family when I interviewed an older lady who could only speak the Dungan language. In this case, her daughter served as interpreter. During an interview with a 101-year-old Kurdish man who barely spoke Russian, I received help from the man's son, who translated his speech from Kurdish.

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<sup>88</sup> Family Health International, *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*, Module 2, Participant Observation, pp.16-17, Retrieved from <<https://assessment.trinity.duke.edu/documents/ParticipantObservationFieldGuide.pdf>>.

Another factor to consider is religious differences between researcher and interviewees. The fact that I am Muslim and all my respondents adhered to Islam was advantageous; I did not have any misunderstandings and controversial moments during our dialogues related to religion. Thus, from the viewpoint of the country, language and religion I was an insider for my interviewees. Nevertheless, I was an outsider from the perspective of ethnic culture, place of living (site, village), ethnic origin and history of arrival of my ancestors in Kyrgyzstan. For instance, I could have researched my own ethnic group, the Tatars. Fieldwork could have been finished faster and access to the respondents would have been easier. However, in order to avoid bias and to investigate people as an observer, I decided to investigate two ethnic minorities different from my own, and who are both similar to and different from each other. Despite being Sunni Muslims, both Dungans and Kurds have distinguished cultural features which are particular to them only. As citizens of Kyrgyzstan, who also both feel distant from their ethnic homelands, Dungans and Kurds are also united.

### **3.7 Challenges**

One of the challenging aspects of my research was fitting into each community and finding a common language for interviewing. My personal preconceptions of how to behave based on the research context led both respondents and me to act in a specific manner. It takes some time before respondents behave and talk in a natural manner around a researcher. Also, as a researcher, it takes time to get used to the surrounding atmosphere and for respondents to get used to being under the interviewing process. That leads to another challenge that I faced which is a time limitation. Having more time to gain access to informants and sites in two different ethnic groups would have been desirable. I also ran into time limitations during interviews. Sometimes people find themselves in a rush, even though they agreed to give an interview for several minutes; this creates tension. As a researcher, I always had to be aware of time control. This happened when I interviewed one Dungan lady. She was a director of a Dungan school and I interviewed her on a busy day. Even though she gave consent to talk with me, it was the shortest interview I conducted. It lasted for twenty minutes, and due to the lack of time we could not set normal conditions for the interview. I saw her moving while giving me the answers, heard some voices in the corridor, and became

aware that people were waiting for her. Reflecting upon the issues mentioned above I would say that time likely influenced the truthfulness of her answers and my ability to build a peaceful bridge between myself as interviewer and the interviewee. Another challenge – and one of my weaknesses - was that I did not have a contingency plan in case of lack of follow-up from gatekeepers or friends. I relied only on my gatekeepers and friends to attain access to respondents and to the field.

### **3.8 Supplementary techniques**

To fulfill and to grasp different sides of my research question, I used some other techniques to see my work from additional dimensions. Each of the methods supported one another and helped to provide a complete picture of the researched material.

#### **3.8.1 Participant observation**

One of the supplementary techniques, which helped me gather additional relevant information, was *participant observation*. When I entered each community, I identified various possibilities for how I could become involved in the daily lives of each family so I could see them from an emic perspective. I experienced cooking with Dungans and milking a cow with Kurds. These small immersions into interviewees' daily lives helped me understand the real story of their existences and convinced me of the veracity of their interviews. I systematically wrote down what happened to me and how I felt during each experience. I often did this during the evening when families were preparing beds for sleeping and I had a free time to reflect upon the things I observed and in which I had participated.

#### **3.8.2 Non-participant observation**

I also experienced *non-participant observation* in my fieldwork. Non-participant observation involved detailed analysis of the people I interviewed. I tried to see how they dressed, how they talked, behaved, listened, reacted and felt. Exploring each site also required detailed observation. Each village I visited had a certain style, street order and level of cleanliness. Furthermore, each respondent's private houses and homesteads varied in appearance and decoration, which I observed. Life in the villages also varied. In some villages I noticed how people always worked, other villages were crowded with children playing outside, and some were just silent. Each non-participant observation gave certain information about people and sites that could not be gained through interviews only.



### 3.8.3 Visual object analysis

Another technique involved analysis of visual objects and documents. Photographs played a particular role in my research. Some of my respondents felt excited when they saw me using a camera, while others asked directly to not be filmed, though these cases were very rare. Bryman differentiated between the three roles photographs can play in social research. They are (1) illustrative, (2) as data and (3) as prompts.<sup>89</sup> In my situation, I used photographs for “illustrative” purposes and “as data.” Sometimes I photographed random actions of my respondents, or asked them to gather with the whole family to take a family portrait. There were cases when interviewees gave me their very old photos, so I snapped photos of them. Although I knew that I can only insert a few pictures into this thesis, I tried to capture as many interesting moments as possible related to the daily lives, villages and people in the Dungan and Kurd minorities.

I was able to gather relevant documents for my work, as well. Documents included a brief informal history, daily life of Kurds in Kyrgyzstan written by one of my respondents, and the annual reports about the economic and social life given to me in the administrative center in a Dungan village. I partially used these documents afterwards in Chapter 4. Information which was written in the documents confirmed and proved data I gathered from personal talks with respondents. Additionally, the book by Hejare, *Kurdish Diaspora in CIS*, became one of the most important sources for my analysis chapter to support my empirical data.

### 3.8.4 Field notes

Making *field notes* during interviews and scratching down important information was another procedure that allowed me to record valuable information. Usually, I wrote down contact information for respondents or names, addresses and dates of important events. Sometimes field notes acted in my benefit, because I could pretend to journalize all information my interviewee said in order to redirect their attention from the voice recorder.

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<sup>89</sup> Bryman, A., (2012), *Social Research Methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press p.547.

### **3.9 Summary**

In summary, by describing how I gathered empirical data for my Master's thesis, I would like to admit that my interviewing techniques had their strengths and weaknesses. In scrutinizing my methods, I realize that my preparation for the fieldwork played a crucial role in the actual fieldwork. Being an insider (in certain ways) allowed me to be constructive and confident when facing challenges such as finding a common language with the respondents, awareness of the best times for accessing the respondents and other concerns about behavioral and ethical norms. However, one needs to be aware of the scrupulous structure of the research question and interview questions. There were moments when I caught myself thinking of switching the topic or questions while interviewing. That uncertainty impacted my interviewing process. Eventually, after conducting three to four interviews I became more experienced. The confidence navigated me to ask more specific questions and after analyzing, to realize the value of interviewees' answers. Interviewing Kurds and Dungans who live in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan gave me valuable information for further elaboration and analysis.

## **Chapter 4: Empirical Data and Analysis**

This chapter attempts to analyze empirical data gathered during fieldwork. As was mentioned in the Chapter 1, in the former Soviet Union repressed and deported minority groups formed their ethnic boundaries on their lands of deportation, which further became their static residences. Here I give a detailed overview of my findings related to two peoples and their ethnic boundaries and discuss whether such boundaries have allowed them to unify and preserve their ethnic identities, or not.

Here, collected data and secondary source material are discussed in relation to the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I emphasize the particular incidents of interethnic conflict in which Kurds and Dungans in Kyrgyzstan were involved, focusing on their reasons and consequences. Hence, the chapter introduces several informants from each ethnic group and discusses their point of view on the given research question: *Why do Dungan and Kurd minorities live in rural areas in Kyrgyzstan? In these areas, what advantages and challenges do minorities experience in relation to their living conditions?*

### **4.1 To live or to survive**

Recalling the history of Kurds and Dungans, political oppressions during the Soviet Union period and events that have already occurred during the twenty-first century, we undoubtedly see that these two ethnic groups have suffered. They have suffered being repressed and discriminated against, living in a foreign country and existing as a minority group under the majority's rule. Besides being minorities without a state who deal with many social and economic problems, they are also settled in the specific territory (as I call it in my thesis "ethnic boundary") where they live compactly with their "ethnohood."<sup>90</sup>

From the examples mentioned in Chapter 1, we can see how deported Kurds and Dungans emerged artificially and/or by force in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. In his work, Barth also raised the problem of mobility of the boundaries of ethnic groups,

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<sup>90</sup> "Ethnohood" is defined as neighbors who live within the same ethnic boundaries and belong to the same ethnic group.

and pointed out that this is due to social mobility.<sup>91</sup> Economic and social factors are intertwined here and play crucial roles in the formation of the ethnic boundaries in Kyrgyzstan. Now I will present examples of how social mobility has occurred inside the boundaries of Kyrgyzstan and how it has influenced the emergence of ethnic boundary space.

In 1936, due to a lack of natural resources, a considerable amount of the Dungan population asked the local government for permission to move from the capital, Bishkek (previously Pishpek) to the rural areas close to fields. One respondent from the Dungan ethnic group in the Milianfan village shared her memories with me about this relocation: She said that after the Chinese uprising in 1881, Dungans were divided into three groups in order to escape the Chinese persecution. Her ancestors belonged to those who came to Pishpek and settled in the current center of the city. The street today called “Kievsakaia,” was at the time of this resettlement called “Dungan Street.” As was mentioned in the introduction chapter, Dungan people were farmers, and today, still participate in this occupation. For the purposes of farming, the land in the city was not arable, and so, they started to search for a better place to work. Representatives from the Dungan community sent a request to the city administrative about this concern. Finally, after some time they founded the village of *Milianfan* which is located 40 minutes from the capital. From the Dungan language, this translates into English as “The Valley of Rice.” Before the village was established, the land was a bog. However, Dungans were able to establish fertile fields and build many houses alongside. Crops did, and still do, provide the main economical profit for many Dungans.

In contrast to Dungans, Kurds suffered from the forced move away from their established boundaries.<sup>92</sup> In 1997, greedy, disputed claims to natural resources initiated by the majority ethnic group became a major tool used to oppress the minority Kurd population in Kyrgyzstan. In Kok-Yangak, a city in the Djalal-Abad region of Southern Kyrgyzstan, huge territories belonged to Kurd people. These territories were close to mountains, where Kurds could breed their cattle. However, the major population of the city started to oppress Kurds, which led them to flee from their

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<sup>91</sup> Barth. F, (1998), *Ethnic group and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc.,.

<sup>92</sup> Basing on the interviews with representatives of both Kurds and Dungans from fieldwork conducted in July 2015 in Kyrgyzstan.

territories in the region. The oppression was not violent, but Kurds were forced to leave their houses. Some even migrated to the other countries, primarily Russia.<sup>93</sup>

## **4.2 Other reasons to leave ethnic boundaries**

Independent Kyrgyzstan started to experience the problem of migration after the first revolution in 2005, and then again in 2010. Both revolutions featured an inter-ethnic conflict hidden under the political reasons. Many ethnic minorities migrated to their original ethnic lands. Jews fled to Israel; Russians and other Slavic ethnicities, to Russia; Uzbeks to Uzbekistan, and so on. As Ravenstein emphasizes in his fourth law of migration, migration occurs step by step. I will now highlight and trace these steps in the example of ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan.

In the first step in migration, people tend to move from a small village to a bigger village, then from that big village to a small town until they, once again, reach a big city. In Kyrgyzstan, families or individuals who cannot afford to flee to another country try to escape using the particular scheme mentioned above. Hence, I would like to sum up several underlying reasons for why migration has occurred in Kyrgyzstan. The first reason for why ethnic minorities migrate from ethnic boundaries in Kyrgyzstan to Russia or neighboring countries is the fear of experiencing ethnic violence. Secondly, it is influenced by the economic situation in the country. Here Ravenstein's eleventh law can be applied. For instance, since 2009, when economic crisis began in Kyrgyzstan, there has been a high and rapid movement of minorities leaving the country. The final reason for migration, which is often rare but still very important, is oppression. Usually oppression is inflicted by a few people who, in most cases, belong to the major ethnic group. While living in the compact ethnic territories or ethnic boundaries, majority group members may heckle the minority with nationalistic expressions and threats, for example, "Kyrgyz land is only for Kyrgyz" or "We give you 2-4 days to move out of here." This was more obvious and rampant right after the Tulip Revolution in 2005. With the high flow of people migrating from place to place, those who belonged to the "titular nation" took an opportunity to grab

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<sup>93</sup> Basing on the interviews with the representatives of both Kurds and Dungans from fieldwork conducted in July 2015 in Kyrgyzstan.

abandoned land, feeling entitled to it. Melvin notes that lands held by Meskhetians and Dungans were “particularly vulnerable to seizure.”<sup>94</sup>

Though Ravenstein did not mention the issue of forced migration, this can also be a considerable factor in causing migration from certain nations, depending on the ethnic and political tensions within the country. We may trace the effect of this in the example of Kurds forcibly “asked” to leave their territories in Kyrgyzstan. From an interview with one of the representatives of the Kurds, I found out that the territory of compact settlement of Kurds was named *Kurdistan* (even though Kurdish state does not exist) among local people. This fact tells a lot about how compact and segregated this settlement was.

### **4.3 Fomenting of inter-ethnic strife**

Two unpleasant events captured my attention and served as a starting point for exploring the topic of conflict situations during my data collection. Kurds were the victims of one event, and Dungans, the other. This is not coincidental. This is rather an indicator of how tense the ethnic problems can be in Kyrgyzstan. One of the conflicts goes back to 2009, another to 2006. I believe that if the conflict occurred once, it can reoccur, perhaps under different conditions or circumstances. Citizens retain vivid memories of these conflicts. Here, I will summarize what happened during each conflict. I will then analyze my respondents’ feedback to better understand how these conflicts influenced their ways of living and their thoughts about ethnic conflicts in general.

#### **4.3.1 Kurdish case in Petrovka village**

“Events in Petrovka,” this expression was very prominent in the news headlines during April 2009. Petrovka is a village located forty minutes by car from the capital, Bishkek. It is an ethnic boundary space for Kurds. Living beside the Kurdish community one can find Kyrgyz, Russian and other ethnicities. However, Kurds dominate. Most of them moved to this village fifteen years ago from the Southern part of Kyrgyzstan after the forced migration. Interviewee said that fellow villagers were discontent with the Kurd’s behavior in daily life, and with criminal incidents related to

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<sup>94</sup> Melvin, N., (2011), “Promoting a Stable and multiethnic Kyrgyzstan: overcoming the causes and legacies of violence”, New York :Open Society Foundation, p.20.

them. Villagers were also discontent with what they believed to be “welfare misbalance.” People outside of the Kurdish community considered some Kurdish families to be wealthier than their own, and accused Kurds receiving government support of having an unlawful advantage. Nonetheless, the reason why fifty Kurdish families had to leave their houses in three days was related to one incident. Media reported that at the beginning of April 2009, a 22-year-old local Kurd was accused of attempting to rape a four-year-old Russian girl. The authorities managed to reduce public outrage and promised to provide the defendant with a fair trial. Yet, on April 26 several hundreds of inhabitants of the Petrovka village gathered for a meeting where it had been decided that within twenty-four days, all Kurds had to leave the village. Later, Kyrgyz, Karachays and Russians began to destroy houses and cars of fellow Kurdish villagers. As a result, several people were cruelly beaten and several were wounded from gunshots.<sup>95</sup> In my fieldwork, I asked about this topic. One of my respondents, who is highly respected among Kurds said:

*“I witnessed that terrible event. All Kurds went out their homes and protected themselves with any tools or guns they had. However, even though the guns belonged to us, it provoked and induced doubt and distrust from the government”.*

I was also wondering about the migration process and was curious about whether or not a large number of Kurds want to move out of the country. The same respondent, without any hesitation, answered:

*“I know that approximately 15-20 families from Petrovka village moved to Russia, specifically to Tambov and Saratov Oblast. They sold their houses and usually its Kyrgyz who buy them. Twenty families of Kurds from the Osh region and specifically from Jalal Abad oblast also moved to Saratov, Russia. In my opinion, they made the right decision. Those who were not wealthy enough got down to Chui valley.”*

With unexpected honesty and reality, he added:

*“We are an unlucky nation, because we do not have our own Republic. Therefore, no one cares and do not want to arrange contact. You can meet many poor and uneducated Kurds, especially in Talas Oblast. They often have quarrels with locals. It’s a different world there. You can find scandals either in Petrovka village or in Talas”*

In 1994, several ethnic communities asked the government to convene a general meeting of ethnic minorities. The outcome was the creation of the Assembly of

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<sup>95</sup> Kyrgyz Committee for Human Rights, (2009) “In the Chuj area of Kyrgyzstan there was a collision on ethnic reason,”

<<http://www.kchr.org/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=32>>. Accessed: 15-03-2016

Nations of Kyrgyzstan. Each diaspora deals with problems of their own ethnic group. Taking into the consideration the passivity demonstrated by police and governmental structures, the only body that can somehow solve inter-ethnic problems is the Assembly of Nations. Usually, after conflict has occurred, aksakals or Imams have taken care of maintaining peace in an area.

I was wondering, as well, where complaints related to ethnicity, in direct relation to the conflict, were addressed. The man used his own experience as an example, saying:

*“Usually we receive complaints to the Assembly of Nations. For example: when in 2010, the “Petrovka event” happened I was the vice-head of Administration of the Alamedin District. I was sitting in my office, and suddenly the head of the administration came and despondently informed me about that event, saying that Kurds have been beaten. After that there was a huge meeting with different head representatives of the administrations. I wanted to go and look at what was happening, but my colleagues, Kyrgyz, they didn’t let me go, claiming that many Kurds were beaten.”*

Later, I asked about other conflicts involving Kurds. The answer was short. The same respondent said that there are other cases, but most have been solved in a short time with the help of the current president of the Kurd diaspora in Kyrgyzstan. He added that most of the conflicts happen among members of the younger generations. My concern was this: why should little cases flare up into huge, interethnic problems, when only one person can be prosecuted and the case be done?

The *Independent*, a newspaper in Kyrgyzstan, reflects upon this and other inter-ethnic events, writing that the reason for evoking such widespread public outcry related to otherwise isolated incidents lies with local authorities. When locals have no opportunities to solve problems in a lawful way, conflicts and disputes start. Another serious cause is stress placed on natural resources. Shortage of water and land, poverty and a high birth rate can trigger conflicts. Kyrgyz political scientist Alexander Knyazev also suggests that the self-recognition of Kyrgyz ethnos has created tension among other populations in the state. The event in the Petrovka village is a serious problem for the authorities, he underlined.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Mikhailov, G., (2009), “Pogroms of Kurds have been started in Kyrgyzstan” [ В Киргизии начались погромы курдов], < [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2009-04-28/1\\_kirgizia.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/2009-04-28/1_kirgizia.html)>. Accessed: 15-03-2016



### 4.3.2 Dungan case in Iskra village

As in the first case with Kurds where the conflict was triggered by a supposedly singular case, the case that I will discuss related to Dungans does not differ much. In 2006, the conflict took place in a computer club. Representatives of the Dungan ethnic group allegedly fought with a group of Kyrgyz because one man kicked another out from the club. The fight was serious enough that two teenagers (one Kyrgyz, and one Dungan) had to be transported to the hospital. Since the village is not big, everyone knows the place of residence of their fellow villagers. After this incident several hundreds of Kyrgyz residents of the village demanded six Dungans who participated in the fight to move out of the village. Houses belonging to Dungan people were stoned and burned. In all, seven houses were burned and six representatives from the Dungan ethnic group were taken to the hospital with various injuries.<sup>97</sup>

As stated in the previous chapter, among my respondents were Imams, local religious authorities. One of the Imams I interviewed shared his knowledge of the situation that happened in the Iskra village. He is from a different village situated in another region; however the effects of that conflict appear to have reached them in their village, as well. The Imam replied as follows:

*"Yes, after the incident in the Iskra village, people came to us and started to demand tribute. Since we live in Kyrgyzstan we had to pay them some amount of money. Sometimes it happens that "black people"(people doing shady business) come and collect money from us. Kyrgyz who come to us call local Kyrgyz as Dungans. For Kyrgyz it is easier to make friends and become "as a single whole" with us, because we live here in majority. In Dungan culture we have a proverb: "with whom you eat, from that person you are gaining."*

Thus, we can observe invisible connections between ethnic boundaries, even if they are situated far from each other. However, the nature of these connections differs from community to community. Another interviewee from the Milianfan village which is situated 40 minutes by car from Bishkek, mentioned the event in Iskra village in

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<sup>97</sup> Tolkunova, N., (2006), "The ethnic conflict erupted in Iskra," [В Искре вспыхнул межнациональный конфликт], <<http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/130799.html>>. Accessed: 16-03-2016

response to my question about whether they had experienced any inter-ethnic conflicts. Luckily they did not feel any consequences in their village, only rumors and discussions. Nevertheless, after the revolution in 2010, intimidations occurred in several Turkish, Dungan and other ethnic boundary settlements. During this time, youth in Milianfan gathered to stand guard and protect their village from pogroms. One interviewee recalled that defenders saw several black cars full of loud people passing by their village, but not entering it.

Even though these conflicts appear somewhat outdated now, in reality inter-ethnic conflict can never be outdated. Any small spark can evoke flashbacks of previous conflicts, causing conflict to flare up once again, sometimes in an even more intense way. These historical and tragic incidents have affected the current lives of these two ethnic minorities.

#### **4.4 To be isolated or integrated**

Barth wrote: “Boundary maintenance is unproblematic and follows from isolation which itemized characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, spontaneous and organized enmity.”<sup>98</sup> Boundary maintenance could be seen as a result of pure culture transforming, even within the confines of a closed community. People can feel dichotomization inside themselves, because on the one hand you need to feel connected to your own ethnic group, but on the other you also need to interact with others, to establish social networks. Therefore, integration with outsiders is inevitable in such kinds of communities.

Another concern separate from communication and interaction of minority groups with outsiders, is adaptation in a foreign environment. In other words, displaced groups must accommodate their way of living within the ecological frameworks of a new region. For instance, Dungans cultivate a special herb called “djusai”. The knowledge of how to take care of this plant is particular to them, because this practice is transmitted from generation to generation. Cultivators of “djusai” live in wealth and are respected among the communities where they live as well as nationally. However, that can also be an incentive for ‘others’ to obtain control of the territories where they

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<sup>98</sup> Barth. F, (1998), *Ethnic group and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Illinois: Waveland press Inc, p.11.

live. In a poly-ethnic society there is always competition for dominance of the marketplace.<sup>99</sup> In these societies, those who dominate have more privileges and control, which usually leads to rivalries. It is even more dangerous to live in a diverse community with one major ethnic group, who has more privileges than others. Why? The answer, according to my respondents, is because the ethnic majority in Kyrgyzstan are historically owners of the land. To stave off conflicts, one solution is to engage in mutually beneficial interconnection with potential competitors. Barth called it “interdependence” or symbioses. He claimed: “...while in the field there is no complementarity there can be no basis for organization on ethnic lines – there will be either no interaction or interaction without referring to ethnic identity.”<sup>100</sup>

The analysis presented below is also based on empirical data material. In each of the following sections, I provide subsections with deeper information on separate topics which are related to: the memories of the people about the time they or their ancestors emerged on particular territory, information about the villages as ethnic spaces, everyday life and its obstacles, the way ethnic minorities were able to preserve their culture and how and where they see themselves living in the future. To avoid confusion, I separated my discussion of Dungans from my discussion of Kurds and will talk about each one individually.

## **4.5 Dungans’ case**

Overall I conducted interviews in three Dungan villages. They were situated far from each other and had their own differences and similarities, though all were considered to belong to the same ethnic boundary within the Dungan “ethnohood.”

### **4.5 1 Yrdyk village**

#### **Memories from the past**

One out of three groups of Dungans who escaped from China settled in the Yrdyk village. Their ancestors who continue to live in that village have never changed their ethnic boundary. The first place of their residence was China. However, most of those who I interviewed were not old enough to recall their memories about the repression.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, pp. 9 – 39.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p18

### **Ethnic boundary space**

The Yrdyk village is situated in the Yssyk-kul region near Karakol City. It is a well-known Dungan village and easily recognizable as such due to its large Dungan population as well as its famous mosque in the Dungan style. The village itself does not have any fences, only signs that announce the village's name. Roads in the village are in very bad condition. Inside the village there are several shops, one mosque and one school. On the day I visited this place, the territory of the mosque was under reconstruction. People have built medrese<sup>101</sup> and some other buildings near the mosque. Yrdyk is considered to be the first, and the only village, which has preserved Dungans' indigenous and historical culture that was brought to Kyrgyzstan from China after the Chinese oppression of minorities 150 years ago. In the words of one of my respondents, Yrdyk means "*second gorge*." Yusuf Hazret, a founder of this village, was the great-grandfather of one of the women I interviewed. During one of our conversations she tells how Yusuf Hazret saved his people after the Chinese oppression, mobilizing them in their move through the Tian-Shan Mountains to Kyrgyzstan.<sup>102</sup> Even though she possessed much valuable information due to her high position in society (she is a director of the local school), she seemed to exhibit a skeptical attitude toward my questions, which touched on the history of her family and background information about her great-grandfather. However, she politely responded to other questions.

According to this informant, after reaching Kyrgyz land, Yusuf Hazret sent a petition to Moscow asking for land for the Dungan people in this territory in Kyrgyzstan. Moscow offered them two territories, and asked that they choose one. Since Dungans are sedentary people and used to working in the field, they chose the one with perfect soil for cultivation and irrigation channels. The community now known as Yrdyk was founded in 1877, after which approximately 1300 Dungans escaped from China. The local population welcomed Dungans hospitably and treated them as their friends.

The Yrdyk village symbolically makes people unite through marriages. We can see, in this way, that the ethnic boundary not only provides space to preserve culture, share common history and ancestors, but also keeps people together. Another respondent from the Yrdyk village said:

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<sup>101</sup> A "medrese" is an Islamic religious school.

<sup>102</sup> Iusupova Z.K, (2009) <[http://traditionalknowledge.org/?page\\_id=4229&lang=ru](http://traditionalknowledge.org/?page_id=4229&lang=ru)>, Bishkek.

*"I have many relatives here; all of them already have intermarriages with each other. We all communicate with each other and all of my relatives live in the same village.*

*We have one Dungan proverb: "10 Dungans out of 9 are namesakes."*

While visiting the village, I noticed that most of the gates to the houses are left open, offering a sense of trust and mutual help considering that during the day, most people are away from home, busy working in the field. Some children sacrifice their study to help their parents. The director of the local school mentioned that during the harvest season the most common reason for skipping classes is harvesting, which is a very unusual phenomenon among other schools in Kyrgyzstan.

### **Ways of living, everyday life, and conflicts**

Daily life for the majority of villagers is almost the same. Most of the families depend on cattle, field cultivation, and the environment to survive. From the early morning adults go out to work in the field. Children play outdoors. There is one school in the village where children are able to learn the Chinese and Dungan languages. One of the famous places in the Ysyk-kul region is the mosque, which is situated in the center of the village. The Imam for that mosque lives nearby. He is a very influential person and is respected among all the villagers. He became an Imam when he was eighteen years old and still occupies this position. Under his influence, alcohol became banned in the shops inside the village. People started following a more sober path and criminal activity declined. The Imam accomplished this through hosting conversations and meetings on the topic of what is good, and what is bad.

One of the questions I posed to him was: "Can you please describe the interethnic situation in the Yrdyk village?" He replied:

*" I know many conflicts and it is a usual phenomenon. Certain people come and purposefully incite and create tense situations. Everyone knows that this place is densely populated with Dungans and it's not a city, so no one cares about the conflicts. Our officials do not check up on the situation and do not pay serious attention even if anything happens. Sometimes I see how unfairly our officials behave and based on their actions I can see clear notes of nationalism. We've got a densely populated group of Kalmyks, but they have changed the graph in the passport from Kalmyk to Kyrgyz in order not to have ethnic problems and to merge with the community."*

Despite being an Imam who may otherwise try to appear impartial, the honest manner in which this man spoke about the interethnic situation is telling; it makes the

dominant perception of the real ethnic situation appear much stronger. I asked about the major population of the country and how they behave in the Dungan village. In response, the Imam said:

*“Those people who live in the city, capital or close to the city territories do not divide others on ethnicity and moreover they do not raise the issue of interethnic conflict. Those who came from the provinces beat their breasts saying, ‘We are Kyrgyz.’ Those uncivilized people create problems. I, personally, divide people by religion. Most of the villagers are Muslims and even Russians go and make prayers in the Mosque. Pure Muslim is a person who should not deceive, kill, steal, and if he did anything wrong then he is not considered as Muslim anymore.”*

The village has its court of Aksakals, the elder people in the village. When locals have problems or need advice, Aksakals are the first people they contact. Dungans in the Yrdyk village are also united by their respect for and adoration of their founder and their protector, Yusuf Hazret.

One of the representatives from Yrdyk said that they have very good relations with all the neighbors. During 150 years, she cannot remember any interethnic conflicts happening inside of their village. Each family in Yrdyk appears to know each other, which may help them to avoid conflicts and support each other during tough periods.

### **Preserving culture**

In analyzing interviews from Yrdyk, I found out that the villagers strictly follow Dungan traditions and customs. One respondent said:

*“We celebrate holidays together, help each other in wicked and happy moments of life and as for me, I do not want to move anywhere from my village.”*

The director of the local school named after Yusuf Hazret claimed that the village often welcomes Chinese guests. Many scholars from other countries have visited the village and expressed astonishment over how well old traditions have been preserved. Language and religion are most important in villagers’ upbringing and educations. The local school has five languages in the academic program: Dungan, Chinese, Russian, Kyrgyz and English. This is a very bright indicator of students’ knowledge of their mother tongue. One of the strong statements concerning preservation of the culture and religion came from the Imam. He claimed:

*“As for me, I always say that if a nation does not use their own language, does not follow and respect their culture and customs there, that nation is not considered a nation anymore. At weddings, I do not read the prayer, if it takes place in a cafe, I forbid my villagers to do so. While I have authority, I will preserve the order and traditionally Muslim and Dungan customs.”*

In Dungan families, religion comes from the father, but culture and way of life comes from the mother. Traditional food is eaten with chopsticks, and faith belongs to Allah. Since the ancestors of Dungans came from China, some Dungans still have relatives in China. Unfortunately, many do not maintain contact with them either because there is no possibility to go and meet these relatives or because contact with their relatives was lost long ago.

### **The future**

Although ethnic boundaries are just a symbolic phenomenon, the sense of community and belonging to one's ethnic group unites people and makes them more conscious about mutual aid. These are the advantages of being a member of a community who lives in a spatial territory. The majority of Dungans settled in Kyrgyzstan 150 years ago. It is astonishing to see how strongly Dungans have been able to preserve their identity, religion and traditions over a long period of time. I want to underline that they have more or less successfully avoided the process of assimilation. The only slight hint of assimilation is shown in Dungans' fluency of Kyrgyz and Russian languages, which I witnessed in the Yrdyk village. Moreover, being tightly connected to the land and having profit from it, the possibility of migration is very low.

However, I was interested in knowing if any Dungans want to move out of the village. The director of the school in Yrdyk offered the following strong statement:

*"If my great-grandfather chose this territory and settled us here, I am very happy to be here now, and I have never regretted it. We have everything we need to live: fresh air, clean water, good soil, etc. Moreover, everyone lives peacefully without any conflicts. Even if someone will offer me to move to my motherland (China), I will say, "No, I will stay here!"*

Another opinion about why Dungans are fine with staying in Kyrgyzstan and in their villages is their hard-working nature. The Imam from Yrdyk said: -

*"Due to the fact that for centuries Dungans were sedentary people and worked hard in the fields makes them live in compact territories in a particular area. Many villages are poor, but because Dungans are used to work, their villages prosper from year to year."*

As an aside, I will note that here, we can see how social status appears to affect the answers respondents give. Due to the first respondent's position as director of the local school, she hid many things; however, the Imam openly answered any and all seemingly provocative questions.

The Yrdyk village appears to be a very culturally, spiritually, and labor-oriented place. People feel safety and support by living near neighbors and relatives who also live in that village. Nevertheless, villagers still experience interethnic conflicts, which in most cases develop as a result of financial stress and occasionally, ethnic differences. That creates challenges for living here.

#### 4.5.2 Milianfan village

The Milianfan village is the second Dungan village that I investigated. It is one of the most popular based on its name, which is immediately associated with the Dungan ethnic group. I was able to meet one of the largest families in the village, who bears the village's historical memory and whose family members even have several streets named after them. Moreover, I had an opportunity to conduct an interview with the head of the local administration and local deputy for land issues. They kindly shared with me information about the village and its inhabitants and introduced me to the head of the local museum, which is situated in Milianfan. There, I had a chance to get more precise information about the village and its historical past. This village differed from the former in that its Dungan identity was very clear, being represented on posters on the front of the local shops or on tablets hanging from the doors of houses. The Dungan's regional dominance is obvious from market signs written in Dungan language as well as the ready availability of Dungan cuisine.

#### **Memories from the past**

Any memories members of this village retained about the past were mostly connected to China, because the majority of respondents connected their history with the Dungan legend of "how the first Dungan was born." Knowing their history and specific details about their ethnic past indicates their awareness of who they are, and why they possess certain habits, attitudes, and beliefs.

#### **Ethnic boundary space**

As stated previously, "Milianfan" means "Rice Valley". From 1910-1920, several families from Frunze moved here to grow rice. As mentioned, Dungans spend much time cultivating crops in their fields. In 1920, a small collective farm was formed in Milianfan. In 1928 it was converted into a big farm or *kolkhoz*. Now the village has three main streets: Frunze, Lenin and Gagarin and numerous sub-streets. There are three mosques, one school and one kindergarten. Not long ago one new mosque was constructed.



Milianfan is considered to be the most Dungan-populated village. Ninety-five percent of the population is Dungan and the remaining are Kyrgyz, Russian and Tatar who also speak the Dungan language. In exploring the particular challenges and advantages of living as a large ethnic minority in a rural area, I found the notion of security to be significant. I asked the deputy if he feels more secure living in the village of his own ethnic group. He replied:

*“We cannot live without each other. Compared to other Dungan villages where you can meet a large percentage of other ethnic groups, Milianfan village is different. If you noticed, the houses here are built very close to each other and often we suffer from lack of space. Ages ago most of the houses were common. Now you can see some fences and land demarcation, but still it’s rare.”*

The reflections of the villagers about how they feel living in an ‘ethnohood’ are more positive than negative. Most of my respondents said that mutual respect and help prevail. Relatives live close to each other, which creates stronger family ties as well as economic, social and cultural bonds.

However, there is a disadvantage from the point of view of land. From the deputy’s words they have a land problem. Recently a moratorium on acquiring new land has been imposed. During the rule of the Soviet Union each person was given 18 – 29 acres of land, which is more than twice the seven to eight acres per person allotted nowadays.

### **Ways of living, everyday life, and conflicts**

People of the village are engaged in animal husbandry and agriculture. Of the nearly 3000 hectares of land, 546 belong to farms. Recently poultry farming has become very popular. People have now started to build small poultry farms at home and to develop small businesses based on that. After joining the Customs Union, people began farming poultry with the expectation to export.

I was interested in learning more about examples of daily obstacles experienced by the villagers. With an overwhelming Dungan majority, I was interested in why inter-ethnic conflicts have still flared up here. The deputy answered:

*“Because 95% are Dungan and the remaining 5% are the representatives of other ethnic groups. However, we consider them as Dungans. We are boiling in one pot. Unless someone comes from outside to interfere with us, we maintain good relationships with them. Of course I am not denying that it might be that they have something on us inside them. Nevertheless, we do not offend them or discriminate.”*

One can find Dungans in the State Parliament. There is even one deputy in the State Parliament who used to live in the Milianfan village. Therefore, it appears as if there is

no political discrimination toward Dungans. Moreover, Milianfan receives support from the Dungan diaspora which is located in the Assembly of Nations of Kyrgyzstan. The government does not pay attention to interethnic conflicts in the village. Representatives from the government leave all the decision-making and generation of conflict solutions to the relatives of the conflicting sides. Said the head of the local administration:

*“For example, if there is a fight between Kyrgyz and Dungan, the law enforcement will protect and stand on the side of Kyrgyz person. I want those agencies to be impartial and penalize the one who was indeed wrong.”*

On whether there are agencies or people who victims can contact if the conflict situation had happened within ethnic boundary space, the deputy for land issues commented:

*“If an outsider will not interfere, for example, if Kyrgyz who lives in Milianfan, speaks Dungan and by any chance got involved into the fight with people of neighboring villages or locals and if he is an outsider and will not bring his friends, then local administration will deal with such a situation.”*

However, another respondent said that often the Imam or an elderly person is asked for advice or help in solving problems. I assume the solution chosen depends on the seriousness of a problem and the willingness of both the victim and the aggressor to peacefully resolve the situation.

### **Preserving culture**

Dungans in the Milianfan village strictly follow Islam. One indicator of this is the huge amount of villagers whom I observed regularly visiting mosques. Another indicator is the Islamic pictures hanging on the walls inside their houses. Moreover, I conducted my fieldwork during the time of Ramadan when Muslims fast and pray, and observed many villagers participating.

Beside religious practices, I heard daily communication in the Dungan language. This native language is taught in schools and at home. Even families of other ethnic groups who live in Milianfan and have studied at the local school have been integrated into the Dungan community and speak the Dungan language. Besides language, such families are also enculturated through cooking traditional Dungan cuisine and through celebrations such as weddings. Family ties are very strong. For instance, one man I interviewed had fifteen children. Each of them now has their own family. On average, one family contains seven to eight members. The man already has thirty nephews. Nevertheless, while marriage is important, youth have the freedom to choose when

they marry. No one forces them to marry or insists that they stay in the village. If a young couple decides to move to the city, the elder generation will not interfere. However, the majority of relatives stay together in the village.

The Milianfan village is home to outstanding people who have devoted their lives to the development and preservation of Dungan culture and identity. Two of them are Iasyr Shivaza and Iakub Khavaza, who first wrote and introduced an abecedary for children. This important step influenced both the educational level and knowledge of the native Dungan language. Since under the Soviet Union, schools were Russian-language-based, the government has allowed Dungans to embed the Dungan language into their educational system, though Kyrgyz-language schools only offer the Kyrgyz language to their pupils. Many academicians like Djon Ali Alievich, Djumaza Ismar and others, who work in the Academy of Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, are from the Milianfan village, as well. Finally, every Saturday, for fifteen minutes, a radio broadcast is performed in the Dungan language; this plays a crucial role in uniting people of the village under one identity. The weekly broadcast features discussion of different topics like Dungan news, people, music, culture and daily life. Though time is limited, even fifteen minutes of broadcast time enhances the preservation of culture and awareness of identity amongst those who listen to it.

### **The future**

It is rare for inhabitants of Milianfan to leave the village or the country, despite currently experiencing a lack of space for accommodating people. One of the respondents said that he does not even think about migration. He also mentioned that the community usually accepts migrants instead of producing them, as Dungans from China come to live in the village. Another important factor encouraging inhabitants to stay in the village is agriculture. The art of cultivation has been passed from generation to generation. The majority of Dungans are eager to continue the way of living practiced by their ancestors who previously lived in the Milianfan village.

### **4.5.3 Aleksandrovka village**

The third village where I conducted my fieldwork was one of the largest Dungan settlements, the Aleksandrovka village. I was able to meet two people from this village with different knowledge about the village and the identities of its inhabitants. One of them was a man who kindly guided me around the territory and explained what life in Aleksandrovka is like. The second respondent was an older matron. She

primarily described her memories and narrated stories about deportation and village life during Soviet times.

### **Memories from the past**

Dungans, for many years, moved back and forth between China and Kyrgyzstan. Their life path was neither easy nor straight. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Dungans were oppressed in China and after the October Revolution in 1917, were also dispossessed in the Kyrgyz Soviet Republic. As mentioned above, Dungans were divided into three groups in their movement from China. The first group settled in Frunze, the second in Tokmok city, and the third stopped in the Yssyk-Kul region. However, this division was not the last. Within these groups are two more divisions. The first group consists of those families which were dispossessed and escaped back to China. The second group consists of those families who stayed in Kyrgyzstan. In order to accurately the process, memories and feeling of this event, I want to present a real story told by my respondent:

*“Initially my grandfather is from Alexandrovka village. After the revolution, his wealthy family was dispossessed. They fled to China through the mountains by foot. They settled in the city of Kuldzha (Chinese-Yining). Grandfather’s parents died in Kuldzha city, and his two little brothers were left with him. Grandfather had twelve children, but only four survived. Those who left grew up and started to study. I studied Arabic, and still read and write in the Arabic language. My grandfather, after moving to China, retained his Soviet passport. He considered the Soviet Union as his homeland and saved his passport just in case. After the war, great amounts of people suffered and the country experienced many losses. Stalin agreed with Mao Tse-Dung to return all his people who had passports back to Soviet Union. The reason was a lack of people, and lack of workers to cultivate land. Thus Stalin asked those who had passports to return. My grandfather already had his relatives left in Aleksandrovka, so he took his family and moved back to Sokuluk to Aleksandrovka village. My youngest brother is left in China. He did not want to move here with his family.”*

This story tells us how connection to an initial ethnic settlement can influence one’s life path. Even though the person was deprived of his property and forced to leave the country, he was nonetheless called back to the place where he was born. Hence, ethnic neighborhoods can be a strong tool in assembling people together despite trying circumstances.

### **Ethnic boundary space**

The village has always been inhabited by the Dungan ethnic group. According to Durkheim’s theory, people of different statuses, ages and genders can still come together to create a society. This was the case with Dungans, when groups of people who shared a common past, but kept different positions were able to gather into one

community in order to create a stable society for sharing, supporting and negotiating. Controversially, Dungans divided themselves into 'sixes' and 'nines' to differentiate those who were not dispossessed, and those who stayed in the country. I asked my respondent to explain why that division happened and what it means. She said:

*“‘Eight’ were those who remained local and never left Kyrgyzstan. Those who left were called ‘eight’ because the sound of the name of Chinese army associated with eight. Such mocks were used only in domestic settings. ‘Eights,’ in retaliation, called others- ‘nines’, and if we flip over a ‘nine’ we will get “sixes”. Though in case of ‘eight’ nothing can be changed no matter how you flip it”.*

However, these terms are only used in local settings, and are not widespread. Another name for Dungans is "Luo Hui Hui," which is how local people refer to each other. The Chinese called Dungans “Hui Zu”. The literal translation of this means "going/returning home". This can be interpreted as a father dragging his family to their home. If the community represents one organism, division in the community can easily ruin the whole system. Unless things happen on the local level, the community may not even notice the division, but if outsiders see this division or little defects in the community it becomes more vulnerable to attack.

Those Dungans who stayed in the Soviet Kyrgyz Republic continued to cultivate watermelons, onions and beets, leading agricultural activities in their communities. While fieldwork skills were passed informally from generation to generation, institutionalized education has rarely been part of Dungan's life style. That being said, part of those who were exiled received formal education in China. Those who managed to finish school in China chose to stay and live there.

The Aleksandrovka village was previously a collective farm as is common in other rural areas. From morning to evening residents plowed in the fields. Each family had three hectares of land, which they were given to process for little money. However, due to lack of available land, many villagers moved to the city. Local migration is common among villages in Kyrgyzstan.

Now all the lands are divided. Dungans, who did not manage to buy land take it for rent because agriculture is still their most profitable occupation based on their ancestry and experience. In one man's words, Tsar Aleksandr allowed Dungans to settle in that territory precisely because of the fertile soil.

The youngest generation of the village is lucky to have three schools where they can study the Dungan language, but unfortunately, as is also the case in the Yrdyk village,

there is no kindergarten. Preschool knowledge is often received at home or in kindergartens in other villages. Nevertheless, there are four mosques and medrese. Therefore, the majority of children go to medrese to gain religious knowledge. The other reason why Aleksandrovka village has remained populated by Dungans is strong family ties. Recently, the number of Dungan families in the village has reached 15,000. The territory of the village is about 6 km<sup>2</sup>. The village has fifteen main streets and many sub-streets. Most streets are named after an outstanding Dungan authority. I noticed that houses are not surrounded by fences. That symbol eliminates the division of land. It seemed that everything is commonly owned. That could probably be explained from the viewpoint of close family ties. The respondent also said that relatives usually live together. If someone gets married, and the family of the husband has space in their garden, they can select a dale for the new family and build a house for them nearby.

#### **Ways of living, everyday life, and conflicts**

Generally speaking the way people live in Aleksandrovka is not very different from the two previous villages. The only feature that appears to differently influence villagers' lives is that the head of the village is a representative of the titular nation. Compared with the Milianfan village, which differs considerably with its state of peace, the Aleksandrovka village suffered from the spring revolutions in 2010. From the interview given by one man, the tense inter-ethnic relationships are clearly visible. The respondent recalls:

*“During the spring revolution Kyrgyz guys from the neighboring village drove on a truck into Aleksandrovka village. They said to all Dungans to move out from their houses, otherwise they will rob them. Fortunately, Dungans did not attack them in revenge. To avoid a conflict situation they asked for help from a respected person. The Imam from the local mosque in Aleksandrovka village peacefully negotiated and solved a problem. After this event, Dungans patrolled day and night in the streets of their village”.*

Another unpleasant example related to the interethnic conflict is extortion. There are many cases when Dungans rent land in another neighboring village for field cultivation. After the harvest the locals extort money from Dungans when the latter exports the crop from the territory, even though Dungans have already paid for the land in rent. Nevertheless, Dungans do not change their identity and purely assimilate with Kyrgyz for the sake of political and economic benefit as Barth brought up in his

work saying that circumstances have possible incentive to acquire and change identity<sup>103</sup>. When Dungans were newcomers on Kyrgyz land, fewer conflicts happened, because Kyrgyz people took up their residence in their 'ethnohood', while Dungans stuck together. Therefore, there was not much interaction between both ethnic groups. I wondered how these groups interacted when they encountered one another in Bishkek. Were Dungans affected by discrimination? The matron said:

*"No, there was not any discrimination toward us. No one separated. We learned how to communicate in a common language. At that time, it was mostly Russians who lived in the city. The majority of Kyrgyz people lived in the mountains. Therefore, we gradually learned the Russian language."*

This woman compared conflict during two time periods: before independence, and after independence. From her observations she concluded that before independence, people were kinder to one another and therefore did not experience any inter-ethnic conflict. Their only concern then was to provide sustenance for living and survival.

One of the features of compact living is close proximity to relatives. Relatives in the village typically live next to each other, or at a maximum distance of one street over. All villagers are familiar with each other, because most of them are relatives. For instance the surname *Davuzov* belongs to majority of the villagers. If one were to dig deeper into the village's family tree, one could find many relatives living in the village.<sup>104</sup>

The areas of land for cultivating are vast, and so can feed a whole family. The land is very fruitful. From the gathered harvest the last part goes to the market, which allows Dungans to make money in the village. From an economic perspective, having vast territory and sufficient agricultural skills can provide you with money, so it is not necessary to leave the village or country for a better life.

I was also eager to know about the sense of security, if any, that accompanies living in the ethnic boundary. The lady proudly said:

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<sup>103</sup> Barth. F., (1998), *Ethnic group and boundaries: The social organization of culture difference*, Illinois: Waveland Press Inc, p.25

<sup>104</sup> That being said, not all families with the *Davuzov* surname are close relatives. When Stalin asked Dungans to come back from China, he allowed only those who had Soviet passports and were from the Soviet Kyrgyz Republic to do so. Consequently, since many of those who wanted to move did not have passports, many changed their surname to *Davuzov* and quietly moved back. Therefore, not all *Davuzov* families are related to each other.

*“Of course I feel that I am secure here. Even if we are not relatives but simply neighbors someone can help me. We always support each other and stick together.”*

The sense of belonging among Dungans plays a great role in economic, social and cultural development. A supportive atmosphere creates symbolic walls of protection, and a sense of calmness about the future. Even though the ethnic boundaries have symbolic meaning, they still maintain a sense of actual security with the support of elderly people. Elderly people are able to solve evolving problems on the spot at the local level before they spread out from the village settings, ensuring, for example, that the event which happened in the Iskra village did not reach Aleksandrovka.

### **Preserving culture**

In terms of cultural preservation, the Dungan ethnic group is very strong, as observed in the two previous examples. It is rare that an ethnic minority is able to insert their own language into the school curriculum. However Dungans, being citizens of Kyrgyzstan for a long period of time, have managed to integrate into the society without losing their own identity. They do this by speaking three languages: Kyrgyz, Russian and Dungan. Boundary space and family ties also play significant roles in culture preservation. Based on interviews, it appears that girls in the Aleksandrovka village get married at the age of 16-17, as it was traditionally. Boys are usually 18-19 years old at the time of marriage. Parents usually agree, however, that the downside to early marriage is lack of education. Once a girl gets married there is little time left to study as she becomes occupied with other tasks such as raising children and cooking,. On domestic duties, one interviewee said:

*“This is something that the girl should be able to do. Basically, here in the villages it is practiced a lot until now, especially in the rural hinterland.”*

Family traditions are strictly preserved in Aleksandrovka village. After marriage, many couples stay to live with the husband’s parents. When a family has only one son, he (or in the case of multiple sons, the youngest) stays with his parents. Older sons separate, but still buy a house nearby. On the other hand the closed community space can be seen as a threat to descendants. As a result, consanguineous marriages are practiced. A bride price, or dowry, costs 100000 soms.<sup>105</sup> If you marry someone from your kin ties, the family’s bride price will not be paid to strangers. Thus, it is preferable to marry a person who is already trusted and approved by the family.

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<sup>105</sup> Som is the national currency of Kyrgyzstan.



One of the advantages of Kyrgyzstan is that the state does not have a child policy, unlike neighboring nations like China. On average, Dungan couples have between three to four children. Of course this number is smaller than in previous generations. Having more children is considered better, because most families have land that needs taking care of. In that way, having more children creates confidence in the future. Since skills are transmitted from generation to generation, often children adhere to their parent's businesses or fieldwork. Communal economic activities also make way for a mutually helpful social community. Villagers help each other during different social occasions such as funerals, weddings and child birth.

### **The future**

Nowadays, a significant number of Dungans have migrated to Australia, Belgium, and Denmark. Their destination depends on the budget of each family. It is important to mention that Dungans do not sell their property when they move. A sale happens only if there is no one to take care of the house in their absence. However, if a sale does happen, it is crucial point that they not sell their property to "others." I was wondering if my elderly matron respondent wants to move back to China. She replied:

*"China is always in my mind, memories pull me back. After my family returned, I have never been there again. I want to see how everything has changed, what is new. I have my nephew in China who came once to Bishkek to visit us, but has no desire to stay in Kyrgyzstan longer. Many people of my generation travel to China only for visiting purposes."*

The only concern keeping many from migrating is the potential for unemployment.

## **4.6 The Kurds' case**

I managed to conduct interviews in two Kurd villages, which are considerably dissimilar in terms of their economic and social statuses and manner of historical emergence. Moreover, I also conducted a special interview with a person who is the former president of the Kurd diaspora in Kyrgyzstan. He kindly provided me with contacts for other respondents. I will first discuss information I gained from my interview with him.

### **4.6.1 Overview from the expert**

#### **The memories**

All Kurds who live in ethnic boundaries in Kyrgyzstan were either repressed from Georgia in 1944 or from Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1937. Since the state of Kurdistan is divided into four geo-political states (Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria), the Kurd ethnic group is by nature spread all over the world and usually forms ethnic boundaries in its place of residence. Having already established ethnic space in Georgia and Armenia they were forced to move to another state where they created ethnic boundaries once again, in both empty territories as well as those populated by another ethnic group. If others already populated the place of settlement, as occurred in Azerbaijan, then according to local norms, the repressed people were forced to assimilate. Now in Azerbaijan most Kurds have lost their national memory. They have separated from their roots and have almost forgotten their mother tongue.<sup>106</sup>

This kind of assimilation was forced. According to historical data, assimilation began during the twelfth century after Seljuk Turks destroyed the Kurd's state of Sheddadit. The second assimilation dates back to the seventeenth century. In that time people in Azerbaijan intentionally mixed the Kurd and Azerbaijani languages with the further purpose of forcing the Kurdish language to disappear.<sup>107</sup> I assume that there were several reasons for this, one of them being ethnic boundaries. Fortunately, for Soviet Kurds who ended up in Kyrgyzstan, the problem of a vanishing mother tongue is not paramount. Kurds living in one "ethnohood" can easily communicate and practice their ethnic language, which allows them to preserve their culture for future generations.

The former president of the Kurd diaspora in Kyrgyzstan was foremost among my informants. I wanted to know more about why Kurds had been moved to this or that particular village and why they chose specific territories. The former president claimed:

*"You should not ask a "WHY?" question in this context. Kurds were forced to move, they were expelled, deported from their homes, we were repressed against our will. Some Kurds live in Osh region, some in Talas region and another part in Chui region. We adapted to any place we were settled."*

In contrast with Dungans, Kurds have a very different history. Unlike Dungans, they are considered to be an "enemy of the nation." Their ancestors were not able to attain

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<sup>106</sup> Askerov, G., (2007), *Kurd diaspora in CIS* [Курдская диаспора в странах СНГ], Midiya, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, p.16.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

an education, as they were banned from attending schools and institutes. After Stalin's death when Khrushchev exculpated Kurds from the stigma associated with repression, Kurds were allowed to get involved into educational sphere. More people began to attend schools and colleges.

### **Ethnic boundary space**

Overall there are six Kurdish villages in the Chui region. The Petrovka village is situated in the Chui valley, the Chat-Kul village belongs to the Sokuluk district, the Leninskoe village is in the Alamedin district, and the Karl-Marx and Vasil'evka villages are located in the Vinsovkhozkombinat area. The largest number of Kurds live in the Talas region. The population of Kurds in Talas region is approximately 14,000 people with two large Kurd villages located in the Karaburinsky and Manasskiy districts. In the past, one could find compact settlement of Kurds living in Osh oblast. However, after some time as living conditions in that region became worse, all Kurds moved to the Chui valley.

### **Ways of living, everyday life, and conflicts**

Generally speaking, everyday life for the majority of Kurds occurs inside their boundary space. In terms of economics, this typically involves trading in a local bazaar or breeding cattle. Most of the families I interviewed had their own livestock. This allows them to produce milk, cheese, sour cream and cottage cheese, which they can either sell to neighbors or deliver for to the market for sale. Therefore, one can hardly find a Kurd representative in a position of ministries and president apparat. The government can offer them a position as the director of a school or as manager of a farm, but no higher. Consequently, if it comes to conflict situations Kurds do not have any support from the authorities. Here applies Berghe's theory of assimilation, in which he suggests that occupying high rank positions is not a consequence of ethnicity, but rather of "majority rules."

In my fieldwork, I observed that Kurds are not hiding the fact that they are victims of interethnic conflicts and attacks on their villages. Respondents from the Petrovka village quickly pointed to interethnic conflicts in the Talas region, which they considered to occur there more frequently, because of different factors like unemployment, and densely populated areas of Kyrgyz people around the Kurdish village of Kyzyl Adyr. When I asked who helps to suppress the conflicts, the former head of Kurd diaspora said:

*“We write the letters to different ministries trying to achieve something, but it is rare when we get a solution. Take Talas as an example: there was a big fight, even though offenders have pretended that nothing had happened, that we are neighbors and everything is fine. They just closed that issue, and did not want to discuss it.”*

### **Preserving culture**

Kurds have been repressed, but have still have managed to preserve their own culture, language and live in compact settlements close to each other. I wondered, was it always like that? The former president replied:

*“We tend to study at home to speak the Kurdish language. The Kurdish language was learned at home, Kazakh or Kyrgyz in the streets and Russian, at school. I am very thankful to our ancestors that they preserved our language”*

Compared with Dungans, Kurds unfortunately do not have Kurdish schools or access to Kurdish language classes at the local schools in the villages. In Kazakhstan, however, there are schools in the villages where compact settlements of Kurds are present. Here, they study the Kurdish language until 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Kurds in Kyrgyzstan have received permission to incorporate the Kurdish language into the local schools, however they lack of specialists, teachers and books that would allow this wish to become realized.

### **The future**

According to empirical data the number of Kurds migrating from Kyrgyzstan is considerably higher in contrast to Dungans. I asked the former president about this issue. He said:

*“I know that approximately 15-20 families from Petrovka village moved to Russia, specifically to Tambov and Saratov Oblast. They sell their houses and usually Kyrgyz are those who buy them. Kurds who were from the Osh region, specifically twenty families from Jalal Abad oblast, also moved to Saratov, Russia. In my opinion they made the right decision. Others from the Osh region got down to the Chui valley.”*

We may here apply Ravenstein’s suggestion that migration frequently occurs because of economic reasons and/or to be closer to an industrial center. Moreover, forced migration, as suggested by Martin can be also applied to the Kurd’s case; those who migrated from the Osh region to Chui valley were forced to move out as a result of discrimination.

#### **4.6.2 Petrovka village**

My first destination for conducting interviews with members of the Kurd minority was the Petrovka village. The former president of the Kurd diaspora suggested that I visit.

The Petrovka village is known for its interethnic conflict that was mentioned previously in this work. I had an opportunity to meet the most respectful and well-known person of the village who kindly invited me to have tea at his house, allowing me the opportunity to interview him. I arranged a meeting with him one day before I arrived in the village. However, when I arrived for the interview, I soon discovered that I was not the only guest in his house. After some time, the Imam of the Petrovka village also came to visit his uncle – my interviewee - and joined our conversation. The combined presence of the religious leader and the high-ranking community member made me nervous. Surprisingly, the Imam was very open to me, mixing jargon with religious sayings. This mixture was incongruous with my image of the Imam from mosque services. I appreciated his honesty.

### **Memories from the past**

The collective memories of both respondents were from after the time period when Kurds were already citizens of Kyrgyzstan. Nevertheless, they mentioned that those Kurds who live in the Petrovka village were deported from the Northern Caucasus and Armenia in 1937. From 1993-1994, they migrated locally when they moved from the Kok-Yangak area which is located in the Jalal-Abad region in Southern Kyrgyzstan. After the Soviet Union's collapse, Moscow stopped employing mines in that area. Kok-Yangak was very famous for its mine where many people were involved. After unemployment increased, some fled to Russia, particularly to Voronezh. Others moved to the Chiu region, specifically to the Petrovka village. Recently in 2010, Kurds were forcefully evicted from Kok-Yangak due to camp construction on the place of their residence which used to be called "local Kurdistan."

### **Ethnic boundary space**

The village is 12 km long, and inhabited by 11,000 people, the vast majority of whom are Kurds. There are three main communities in the village: Zavodskaia, Sovetskaia and Lugovaia. Petrovka was originally founded by Ukrainians in 1800 and was named Svininovka. The Petrovka village was later populated by Russians. When they returned to Russia, Kurds moved into their houses. Ethnic boundaries, in the case of these Russians, are "primordial;" further boundaries became "circumstantial" after Kurds' settlement in the region. Thus, ethnic boundaries twice served as a space for preserving ethnicity, even though in both cases, it was influenced by ethnic mobilization. Now the village has one kindergarten, two mosques and two schools.

Kyrgyz people occupy high positions in the village. Thus, those with seats at the top of local administration do not allocate specific land to Kurds, therefore relatives are spread around the village and live in different houses. Still, one of the features of the Petrovka village is that houses do not have fences for demarcating the territory.

### **Ways of living, everyday life, and conflicts**

After 2009, when the Petrovka events took place, fifteen Kurdish families left the village. Witnesses claim that police triggered tension. During the event, twenty-two houses were exterminated, and many fights and lootings took place. As one of the respondents said:

*“The National Security Service was too late to suppress the situation.”*

After all had happened no material support was given by local or governmental administrations to victims. Beside events in 2009, more clashes are happening every day, none of which have been suppressed. Respondents talked openly about conflicts occurring inside the ethnic boundaries.

### **Preserving culture**

As I observed the interiors of my respondents' home, I immediately noticed how well their culture has been preserved. Petrovka Kurds came a long way before settling in that village. The deportation from Armenia to Kok-Yangak, which can be referred to as global migration, and from Kok-Yangak to Petrovka village did not result in the vanishing of their culture, particularly language. At home, many speak only the Kurdish language. Women cook mostly traditional food from natural products. Most of the products come from the cattle which they house in their yards. For instance, the family I interviewed has fifteen herds of cattle. Part of their budget comes from selling milk, cheese, sour cream and meat to local markets or neighbors.

### **The future**

Moving from one ethnic boundary to another sometimes generates more willingness amongst a group to return back to their initial homeland. It is especially hard for those who have no state. One of the Kurds' dreams is to have their own independent state. But for now, there are no possibilities to move out of Kyrgyzstan.

#### **4.6.3 Kyzyl Adyr village**

Data collection amongst Kurds was possible only with the help of the snowball technique and gatekeepers. I got to know and was advised to visit Talas Kurds by all previous respondents. Kyzyl Adyr, which is translated from Kyrgyz language as “red

hill,” was previously called “Kirovka”. It is a village, situated 1.5 hours from Talas city. It is well-known for its Kurdish population and inter-ethnic conflict zone. Kurds are the second-largest ethnic group after the Kyrgyz. The reason for this demographic is the close border with Kazakhstan, one of the first destinations for many Kurds during the deportation period. Thus, many Kurds from Kazakhstan moved to Talas either to find their relatives or to make use of the fertile soil.

I did not have anybody here who I could interview, so the current president of the Kurd diaspora contacted representatives of the Kurd association in Talas region to help me and host me for several days. When I arrived, my host family was curious about my connection to the president; they implied that if I was sent by non-governmental organizations or political parties they would not give me any relevant and true information about the current situation regarding Kurds in Talas. Talas Kurds have a fear of being attacked, which accounts for their silence and suspicion. People in that village are aware that the Kyrgyz people have the power to disenfranchise them. This problem can be found inside the village and among the villagers. Ethnic groups are built upon common beliefs, language, ancestry and a notion of unity. If Dungans have a strong sense of unity and mutual support, then Kurds are the other way around. One of my interviewees said:

*“The fear is so strong that a neighbor being in a trouble or conflict outside would not urge him/her to come to rescue.”*

Kurds are not friendly toward each other. If there is trouble in the district, they will not assist. Them being friendly would contribute to the violence. Currently, they do not support each other; however there has recently been an improvement in group relations.

My respondents were the representatives of the Kurd diaspora in Talas: Zemfira and her husband Ismail, who is a former employee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and aksakal of the Kyzyl Adyr village. Through the family I lived with, I got the chance to interview other Kurd families in the village. Among them was the Imam of the local mosque, a family who grows and export haricot beans, and a woman who wears traditional costume. Moreover, I was able to interview people of different ages. One of the most precious things I encountered were two long-lived respondents. One woman was 70 years old, and one man, 101 years old.

### **Memories from the past**

One of the most fascinating stories I gathered during my fieldwork in Kyzyl Adyr was told by the 101-year-old man. At 4 am, on a morning in 1944 when the man was 25 years old, his family was forcibly moved from the Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia (which was a federal part of the Georgian SSR) to Shymkent, Kazakhstan. After one year of living in Kazakhstan, he moved to Kyrgyzstan to look for his relatives. From his memories, the life he had known in Georgia could never be experienced again. In Georgia, he had a big house and a huge number of cattle. While the Kurds were crammed into the stock car on the morning of his relocation, he heard the cry of his cattle, as if the horses, cows and other animals understood that they were being left alone.

When Kurds were made to move to Kazakhstan, Kazakh families hosted them. The same happened with those Kurds who were forcibly moved to Kyrgyzstan; Kyrgyz people hosted them. Since this mobilization was happening during war time, Kurd men were not allowed to fight in the army, as they were considered potential betrayers, unworthy of trust. The same happened with all other Caucasus ethnicities. Therefore, the majority worked in the cotton fields during the war. They were offered no reason for their forced relocations. Hundreds of Kurds died, many from typhoid fever, on their way to Central Asia. Dead bodies were thrown from the carriages en route.

Despite the fact that my respondent was already more than 100 years old, he was very cheerful, had a great memory, and was even smoking. The interview was partially conducted in the Kurdish language. The local Imam, who was also one of my respondents, helped me interpret his speech. In the end, the old man started to ask me about my ethnicity and religion. After getting an answer he started to make jokes about Tatars and even scolded me for not covering my head with a scarf. This underlined and justified my suspicions about the norms and strictness of Kurdish culture.

Another respondent was an old lady who recalled the history of her parents' deportation to Jambul, Kazakhstan in carriages. From Jambul they moved to Talas by britzka, or chaise. At that time, Kirovka was populated mainly by Russians and each family was said to have set one room aside for the repressed families. That is how Kurds survived that movement. However, another respondent recalls that authorities intentionally were trying to leave Kurds in the direst places with no facilities to live. Consequently, to survive, Kurds started to work in the fields and breed cattle, the same occupations in which they had participated back in Georgia.



During the Soviet period, Talas Kurds worked in tobacco fields. Mostly women were involved with such work. In independent Kyrgyzstan, wealthy Kyrgyz hire Kurds to take care of their fields. In one interview, one woman said, referring to Kyrgyz:

*"When it comes to conflict they kick us out, but when it comes to work they need us."*

These situations, which we can observe during the modern era, have their roots back in time. The reason is that during the privatization period Kyrgyz people privatized most high positions, buildings, and factories. Kurds could not occupy those positions, because Kyrgyz were considered to be the governors of the country and land. Moreover, Kurds knew that if only one of them attempted to occupy a higher position, all would suffer after not long. Therefore, today, Kurds have no positions in the governmental arena, in business or in any other high status jobs. The one exception is that one can find a significant number of Kurds working as police, but only in the capital. In the villages, Kurds are mostly occupied with cattle breeding and agriculture. The following citation from the interview provides an opinion of why Kurds do not intervene in Kyrgyz territory:

*"If we would only have the same power or business as the local authorities, then the same situation as with Uzbeks could happen. Even if we are living in the closed space, Kyrgyz will haunt us. We do not have a future. We need to speak up about inter-ethnic conflicts."*

The history of Kurds is one of endless suffering. Those Kurds who were deported from Caucasus were under special control, as was mentioned before. They previously had to apply and receive certain documents in order to be able to travel from one village to another inside the region. Only in 1956, when this curfew was eliminated did a considerable number of Kurds move back to the Caucasus.

The following memory recounts life during this time:

*"When we got repressed a lot of cattle were left in the house. Soldiers came and ordered us to pack our stuff as quick as possible and said that we were leaving. We were only able to take children's clothes and bed linens. Empty houses then got inhabited by others"*

Nowadays only 10% of the repressed Kurds in Talas are alive. As compensation, they receive 1500 soms in addition to a pension. Most were six to seven years old when the repression took place. From the memories they remember how they were promised by the authorities to be away from their home only for couple of days. However, this was a lie.

### **Ethnic boundary space**

The frontal and interior views of the village are noticeably different from the previous one. There are three schools in the village and several mosques. One of the distinguishing features is fences; each house is separated from one another. This feature eliminates the notion of strictly symbolic boundaries within ethnic boundary space, which may be one of the critical steps for eliminating ethnic separation. According to the answers of my respondents, previously there were no fences at all and the doors were open to everyone in the village. For Kurds in this village, it is not important to live in a relative's house space. More often this happens due to lack of land. However, it is important to buy a house for a child if he gets married. It is significant to mention that those who go to work or live abroad maintain ethnic boundaries. The most common place to go abroad for Kurds is Russia. When they move from one ethnic boundary, they create a new one abroad or settle within an already existing one.

My interviewee Ismail claimed that on the one hand, ethnic boundaries help Kurds to preserve their language, religion, and respect for elderly people. Moreover, ethnic boundaries teach neighbors to be tolerant toward each other. As long as ones live in a neighborhood with Russians or Kyrgyz, one needs to speak their languages. On the other hand, ethnic boundaries can create extremely closed structures for maintaining one community in one place. This leads to intermarriage between blood relatives. The reason for that is a sense of trust toward people Kurds know and the sense of shame that accompanies marrying a representative of another ethnic group or religion. However, there are cases of girls marrying in Kazakhstan, as well as cases of mixed marriages. Talas Kurds consider consanguineous marriage to be a disease to the nation.

However, even for those living in ethnic boundaries where the majority belongs to the same ethnic group, Kurds are frequently harassed in the streets. I bore witness to one such situation. When arriving at the place where I was supposed to stay, I saw a kid carrying a heavy bag. He was Kurdish. On one side of the road, three or four children of the Kyrgyz ethnicity were sitting, shouting and tossing stones at this boy as he passed by. The young boy did not pay any attention to them and kept walking, but I was desperately shocked by such behavior and attitudes. Villagers say that "our children have a fear of playing or walk out of their house," because violent situations may occur. Twenty percent of Kurdish youth abuse drugs as a result of societal

pressures, family and boredom. This particular case is only relevant to Talas Kurds who feel “cut off from the world,” as one of my interviewees said.

One of the positive sides of living in Kyrgyzstan and particularly in the village is clean water, fresh air, nature and a good climate. Only these facilities help Kurds to survive.

### **Preserving culture**

It is fascinating how well a group of people can maintain their culture when they have no state, and have experienced continuous relocations, loss of relatives and other factors which can cause cultural habits to vanish. Nevertheless, Kurds have managed to preserve their ethnic identities inside and outside of ethnic boundaries. Cultural features such as language, costumes, cooking skills and ways of living are being passed from generation to generation despite trying circumstances. Language is Kurds’ strongest cultural element that has not been abandoned or forgotten. The head of the Kurdish diaspora in Talas wanted to open a class on the Kurdish language at the local school. Unfortunately, he faced resistance on this issue, particularly because it would cost the government additional funds. Therefore, language is mostly taught at home.

I met several people inside the village wearing national costumes. From the interview I found out that only the older generation still wears traditional costumes. Only some of the women wear a special head shawl. I asked one of the young girls if she would wear her traditional costume. She replied:

*“If my parents would accustom me to wear it from my childhood, then probably I would do so. But since they do not wear it, I also do not see the necessity of wearing it.”*

As an alternative, the wearing of traditional costumes has been replaced with traditional sock-knitting. Knitting skills are widespread amongst the younger generation as well, which shows their attachment to their roots. Unfortunately, now the Kurdish pattern is lost, but most of Kurd women knit socks, for which they are very famous.

The majority of children attend school, but not all of them manage to finish it. During bean harvesting season, many Kurds and their children work intensively in the fields. Therefore, many children skip classes for the sake of supporting their family’s income. Bean-planting is the most popular and profitable agricultural activity in this village. Villagers said that beans appeared in Kyrgyzstan during periods of repression. Those

who were repressed took some seeds with them from the Caucasus and brought them to Kyrgyzstan to plant. That is why this activity is common among Kurds in Kyrgyzstan. It continues to transmit from generation to generation. Here, we can see a similarity with the Dungan culture, in which children often help their parents in the field during the harvest. This type of activity is inherent for both groups.

To acquire money for further studying, children look for agricultural jobs. Sometimes a family has no money to pay for a child to attend school. People in rural areas situated far from the industrial centers often suffer more economically than those in the industrial centers, and therefore must sacrifice needs such as education in order to survive. In 2013, the largest number of Kurdish girls ever in the history of Kyzyl Adyr graduated from school and entered university. Those who get married do not pursue study; others can be kidnapped. Bride kidnapping usually happens because parents of the bride do not give an agreement to a groom. There are other cases when a groom bribes a bride's relatives with gifts to assist him with the kidnapping process. Later, elders from the groom's side meet with the bride's for reconciliation, which often ends on a positive note, because the word of elders is law.

Due to the fact that Kurds often live together within the ethnic boundary, the process of transmitting beliefs and norms from generation to generation is very high. This sense of cultural preservation can create seemingly extreme situations, such as employing children, or a pregnant woman in the field, because their ancestors did the same.

### **Ways of living, everyday life, and conflicts**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, conflicts began to develop that did not exist before. During my interviews, the primary blame for clashes was directed toward Kyrgyz. Kurd respondents from Kyzyl Adyr mentioned Russians several times, as well, but in a positive way. One woman said that when Russians inhabited the village, everyone obeyed the law, but when they left the country or moved to the capital, the new ruling Kyrgyz stopped obeying the law. Now, Kyrgyz people think they can do everything and are the owners of the whole Kyrgyz land. Unequal power relations in a pluralist society, as suggested by Elke Winter can be observed in the case of Kurds and Kyrgyz.

The following story concerning ethnic clashes in everyday life was told by another respondent:

*“Imagine such situation Kurds are returning from the fields and meet Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz say: Hey Kurd, you have to go and buy cigarettes or vodka for me, because you live here among us”*

Such seemingly small teases can cause big conflicts. Those Kurds who do not want to cause greater trouble often follow orders from the majority. Elder Kyrgyz often force young Kurds to labor in their fields and, gardens. Fights flare up even among girls. One girl who graduated school in 2013 recounted that Kyrgyz girls in her school frequently taunted Kurd girls by yelling “stinky,” “gypsy,” or “You are getting married so early.” No teachers or parents attempt to suppress this bullying because doing so would mean taking sides in an ethnic battle. Those who cannot bear such insults fight, resulting in big quarrels in both ethnic communities. Usually brawls happen among young people. However, there are regular cases when conflicts take place in the bazaars over a sense of place.

*“Kyrgyz might say: “Go away, this is not your land”*: expressed one of my respondents.

Kurd women bring plants from their gardens, which they cultivate by themselves for selling. Both Kyrgyz and Kurd pay for a place in the local bazaar, however Kyrgyz complain that mostly people buy products from Kurds, since theirs are fresher. To avoid clashes, the head of the bazaar has removed Kurds from their previous booths, and moved them to ones usually worth less than the one she gives to Kyrgyz. Complaining would result in monetary consequences. Therefore, Kurds who are victims usually do not complain; when they do, it results in being threatened. The concept of inequality is significant here and not hidden. Inequality can be suppressed by people who can influence change with their power and reputation, but Kurds are missing such community members. During clashes, these disadvantages become more visible. This is magnified by Kyrgyz knowing the location of Kurds’ compact settlements, so when conflicts do occur, Kyrgyz vandalize Kurdish homes. However, with only two to three Kurd families on any given street, there is no chance for retaliation. Thus, the phenomenon of ethnic boundaries creating “others” is only relevant when the number of families who belong to one ethnic origin exceeds a certain number. This raises a question: how many people from an ethnic group must occupy an ethnic boundary for it to be called as such?

I found it surprising that Kurds are often honest to themselves and about themselves. One of the respondents said that Kurds’ suffering during the deportation period has

left an indelible mark on their personalities. Inner fears encourage them to lie, hide and criticize others. Even still, Kurds recognize that they are also very adaptable. They often acquire needed features, such as language, of the lands they occupy.

Kurds still live in a fear that one day military authorities can come and order them to leave their houses, giving them only minutes to pack. People say that this kind of inner fear passes from parents to children through stories about the past.

### **The future**

Inside the ethnic boundary, the first thing that catches the eye are the signs on the front doors which say “For Sale.” Most of all houses in the village have been on the market for a long time, but no one wants to buy them, creating greater tension. One of my respondents said:

*"Kyrgyz tell us that as a result we will leave all our houses and will go away"*

Despite this, Kurds consider Kyrgyzstan to be their motherland, because they are used to living in this country. Even if Kurdistan were to be reestablished and gain independence, only a small number of Kurds have expressed their willingness to move there. The 101-year-old respondent who was deported to Kyrgyzstan at an older age said that he does not want to leave this country, even though Georgia always comes to him in his dreams. Others want to ask Russia or Kazakhstan to grant them refugee status.; however, being unable to sell their houses makes them stay in the Talas region.

The Imam said:

*"If we will leave the country no one will replace us, and in a while the place will simply disappear. For us, at least it would be better to move to the capital."*

Historical factors can help us understand why or why not certain groups relocate. After 1990 many ethnic minorities relocated to their ethnic states from Talas, including Greeks, Germans, Slavic people, and some Caucasus ethnic groups. Since Kurds do not have a place to go and their houses in Georgia were privatized, destroying their former ethnic boundary, the only viable decision was to stay in Kyrgyzstan. Now, only wealthy families can move to the capital or another country, which many in the Kyzyl Adyr village are ultimately unable to afford.

## **4.7 Summary**

This chapter presented narratives, historical facts and data provided by informants from two ethnic groups living in ethnic boundary space in Kyrgyzstan. The collected

data demonstrates the realities of life within the ethnic boundary and reveals fragile cultural elements hidden within.

Firstly, my evidence demonstrates that ethnic boundaries can play a double role: as a secure space and as a target of violence. The Dungan's case demonstrates how the ethnic boundary functions as both a target of violence and place of security. In the example of Iskra, the village became a target for attack; in Milianfan, however, people stood behind the fences surrounding their ethnic boundary to protect their village from passing threats.

Secondly, since Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic country where integration is an inevitable process, ethnic boundaries help ethnic groups to safeguard and preserve their cultures, histories and ethnic identities. Both Kurds and Dungans have strongly preserved their cultures despite being stateless and repressed ethnic groups. However, the sense of unity is not similar and apparently is not always dependent on living within the ethnic boundary. Unity and mutual support between neighbors varies from village to village. The Yrdyk and Kyzyl Adyr villages provide strikingly different examples of degrees of unity. While Dungans in Yrdyk village support and help each other in all sorts of occasions, Kurds in the Kyzyl Adys village only help each other in the event of illness or death, but rarely during conflict. Certainly, there may be exceptions to this rule, but this is the general situation in the village. Other cultural features like language, norms, religion, and respect toward elderly people and family ties have been maintained in both communities from the time of repression and even before. Thus, ethnic boundary positively affects preservation of cultural feature. Historical background was also well-discussed by the respondents of both ethnic groups, which shows their awareness and respect of their ancestors and ethnic history.

Furthermore, all conflicts which flare up inside the boundary space are mostly caused by newcomers. Imams or elderly people within a particular village advise and try to solve inter-ethnic conflicts or small problems. In the event of serious conflict, the diaspora of a particular ethnic group gets involved.

## **Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusions**

This thesis is set out to explore the lives of two post-repressed ethnic minorities in modern-day Kyrgyzstan, Kurds and Dungans, with particular emphasis upon the places where they live. Both minorities live within ethnic boundaries, which can also be described simply as ethnic villages, which became their homes after deportation. Ethnic boundaries are a widespread phenomenon in multi-ethnic Kyrgyzstan.

The diversification of Kyrgyzstan started during the Second World War as a result of repressed people being forcefully exiled to Central Asian regions from their homes. Belonging to an ethnic minority group, I often hear news about inter-ethnic clashes. Concerned about the future I unintentionally started to think about moving out of the country. I then began thinking about other ethnic groups; what about those who do not have an ethnic state to call home? Where would they move if they were to do so? Alternatively, as in my case, Kurds and Dungans, have established homes within ethnic boundaries inside the country, which can to some extent replace a non-existent ethnic state. I became interested in how those ethnic boundaries emerged, why and how particular people inhabited these territories and whether these ethnic spaces in fact help to keep ethnic groups unified. Those points served as motivation for writing this thesis. This study has also explored what causes one ethnic group to bond together and maintain cultural habits without being forced to fully integrate and assimilate.

The general theoretical and analytical discourse on this subject was specifically based on ethnic groups rather than social groups, who can also be considered part of an ethnic boundary. The study sought to answer this specific research question: Why do Dungan and Kurd minorities live in the rural areas in Kyrgyzstan? In these areas, what are the advantages and challenges confronting the minorities' living conditions?

My key findings clearly indicate the reasons why particular ethnic groups have formed their ethnic boundary in the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Dungans who were repressed in China in 1881 and ended up in Kyrgyzstan also suffered during the Second World War due to dispossession of the kulaks. Nevertheless, once created, an ethnic boundary kept them united and attached to their land and people. Able to partially assimilate without losing their own ethnicity, Dungans have managed to climb the business sphere in Kyrgyzstan. However, their profit is always limited. Hence, even having an ethnic boundary and a united ethnic group cannot entirely keep a people secure. Nevertheless, Dungans have a very developed system of family business, which allows them to retain monetary stability and support in case of an economic crash.



Dungans also have the advantage of schools where children are able to learn their mother tongue. In all three villages I visited, there was a school with the Dungan language in their curriculum. This is a strong indicator of how well their culture has been preserved since the establishment of an ethnic boundary.

Kurds were deported to Kyrgyzstan twice, first in 1937 and then in 1944. Both times, they had no say in choosing where they lived. A location was chosen for them. Thus, an ethnic boundary appeared in an unoccupied territory and was maintained until recent times. In theory, relocated Kurds could have moved back to Armenia or Georgia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, poor financial circumstances prevented them from doing so. Another issue, which is quite dichotomized, is routine and habit. Many Kurds believe that the only possible way to live is the way their ancestor's used to live. Such thoughts prevent cultural adaptation and change. According to Barth, embracing new forms of behavior, as well as physical and social relocation evokes fears of behaving inappropriately. Consequently, adopting new ways or settling in new places may be associated with reconstructing commonly accepted social and cultural norms of the dominant ethnic group. On the other hand, ethnic boundaries positively influence preservation of ethnic identity, language, and historical background.

Moreover, the advantages of living in an ethnic boundary space can be analyzed from economic and demographic perspectives. Finances often are concentrated inside the boundary. For instance, in the Kurds' case, working on cotton or bean fields, and selling products to the local market or exporting to Turkey or Russia generates income. Still, there is always a risk of environmental problems suspending business temporarily. Those ethnic minorities forced to move to Kyrgyzstan were forced to adapt to other ethnic groups, and to the natural environment. Kurds and Dungans faced minimal competition for resources, which led them to maintain their occupations, reciprocity and trading.

The main empirical findings are group-specific and were summarized within their respective empirical chapters: 4.5 and all its sub-headings addressed the Dungan's case, and 4.6, addressed the Kurd's case with all its sub-headings.

The theoretical perspective for this thesis was generally based on Fredrik Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries and supplementary theories about ethnic boundary-making by Wimmer and ethnic boundaries by Chai. Empirical data proved that Barth's idea of the boundaries of ethnic groups is consistent with my findings in both the Kurds' and

Dungans' case. The complex organization of social and cultural relations, behavior, and sharing of the same values entails interaction and maintenance of the social units people belong to. In this way, ethnic boundaries can be identified as not only territorial demarcations, but also as social boundaries. Moreover, the nature of continuity, which was proposed by Barth, indicates that ethnic boundaries in Kyrgyzstan have been well preserved and maintained by both the Kurd and Dungan minority groups from the time of their settlement. Taking into account the possibility of social changes inside the boundary, and possible economic pressure from outside of the boundaries makes ethnic boundaries either flexible or stable. However, according to analyzed data I discovered that cultural characteristics as well as partial denial of assimilation in both ethnic groups have allowed both groups' ethnic boundaries to remain stable. Additionally, in a multi-ethnic society like Kyrgyzstan, it is possible to have one dominating ethnic group who dominates. Nevertheless, I might agree with Barth that separate structural systems do not have to be adequately appreciated. From the other hand such attitude and hidden ranking system results in more unity among ethnic groups, which allows them to maintain ethnic boundaries and preserve cultural features.

The results demonstrate that an ethnic group living within an ethnic boundary can long maintain their linguistic and cultural identity, while living among other ethnic groups and periodically experiencing interethnic conflicts.

The study has offered a critical perspective on how stateless, repressed ethnic groups manage to preserve their ethnic identities and how they see themselves in relation to the "titular nation." The interview data suggested causes, effects and outcomes of interethnic conflicts. Moreover, the way data revealed how people have overcome these conflicts as well as possibilities for preventing them. Nevertheless, there appears to be a lack of assistance from the government and little awareness amongst other ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan who are rife with prejudice and reluctance to accept people without division in social status, economic status or ethnic enmity.

As a direct consequence of the methodology I used, the study encountered a number of limitations, which need to be considered. I noticed that the opinion from the ethnic majority is crucial as well, which can put assumptions and observations about the titular nation's behavior toward ethnic minorities into perspective. In spite of what is produced by media and reported in official web pages, observing debates and conversations where local and state governments can hear the voice of people and see

the conditions they live in is significant to know, especially for the local and state governments.

This study suggests that the emergence and maintenance of ethnic boundaries is much more significant than what is visible on the surface. Being an ethnic minority inside of an ethnic boundary in Kyrgyzstan is economically difficult; however it gives people a space and possibilities to safeguard their own identities, which can be very difficult in an increasingly globalized society. I hope that people can be more tolerant to each other, not only during celebrations, but also during revolutions and parliamentary elections, for instance. Moreover, it is important to support those who live in the rural areas of the country, because they are vulnerable. If not, a country can lose many ethnic minority groups who are now eager to migrate. Therefore, in order to maintain the richness of a poly-ethnic country, with multi-ethnic friendships, unity, and reciprocity, we need to be aware of our preconceptions and prejudice and also investigate interethnic conflicts thoroughly. Further research, with greater elaborations on the nature of interethnic conflict could provide a framework for understanding the possible ways to empower people inside ethnic boundaries.

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## Appendix

### Questions from semi- structured interview

1. Can you tell me about the formation of your village?
2. How long have you been living here and where did your ancestors live?
3. Do you know the history of resettlement of Dungans/ Kurds to Kyrgyzstan?
4. Does your family have ties with your neighbors? Do you communicate with them?
5. Can you please tell me about your family?
6. Do you follow your customs and traditions? Where do you usually celebrate weddings and other holidays?
7. Is there a head of your village?
8. Do you feel secure living in a Dungan/ Kurd village?
9. Have you ever thought about moving to another village/country/city?
10. Have you ever been faced with harassment or discrimination? Do you know any cases of this that have happened with your friends or relatives?
11. Are there any advantages of living in a village with compact settlement of Dungans/ Kurds? Can you name them?
12. If conflict happens, where is the first place to report it?
13. How do people usually solve interethnic conflicts

In order to come up with the answer for the research question I also used the following supplementary questions:

- What are the particular challenges of living in closed community?
- Do ethnic groups want to leave the country or to change their ethnic boundaries?
- Do the groups preserve culture? In what ways? Do they speak their own language at home?
- Can they remember the time when their group moved to this place?
- Do they know the history of the village's emergence?
- Do they feel any discrimination toward them and can they sense possibilities for conflict situations between major groups and minor groups?

**Visual Objects**



Pic 1: Kurd children playing outside, Talas, Kyzyl Adyr village, Kurds



Pic 2: Packaging beans, Talas, Kyzyl Adyr village, Kurds



Pic 3: Woman in traditional costume, Talas, Kyzyl Adyr village, Kurds



Pic 4: Respectful man of Petrovka village, Kurds



Pic 5: Members of four Kurd families in Kyzyl Adyr village with 101 year old man



Pic 6: Wise advise, Talas, Kyzyl Adyr village, Kurds



Pic 7: After interview, Petrovka village, Kurds



Pic. 8: Gagarin Street in Milyanfan village, Dungans



Pic. 9: Center for studying Chinese language and culture of secondary school in Yrdyk village, Dungans



Pic. 10: Entrance to Milyanfan village, Dungans



Pic.11: Advertisement of Dungan traditional dish “Shi”, on the front side of the shop in Milianfan village, Dungans



Pic. 12: Memories, Aleksandrovka village, Dungans